

**COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN SWEDISH
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

- THE SIDA PERSPECTIVE -

A QUESTION OF ROLES AND RELATIONS BETWEEN ACTORS



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COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION - A QUESTION OF ROLES AND RELATIONS BETWEEN ACTORS.

Competence development in Development Cooperation is at the crossroads. Conceptually it has changed from a notion of transfer of knowledge towards cooperation between equals, be it between individual foreign experts and their counterparts or between institutions.

Adverse social and economic conditions in the poorest countries has made such a concept very difficult to implement. Hence the criticism against traditional technical assistance. At the same time it is important to widen the cooperation between organizations in countries where the conditions for such partnerships exist. Such cooperation should be based on mutual benefit and sharing of experience.

This paper gives an outline of how SIDA's approaches have developed over time as a result of changing conditions for competence development. Most notable among these is the redefinition of the role of the state and the market taking place in most countries with which Sweden has entered into Development Cooperation and the concurrent move towards pluralism and a multiparty system. In response to the latter there is increased emphasis on democracy and Human Rights within Swedish Development Cooperation.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

Competence development has always been an important objective of Swedish development cooperation. This is reflected in SIDA's support to education and training within the formal system of education, especially

to the primary school system. It is also reflected in the extensive support to in-service training programmes in other sectors. Such project-related training and capacity building programmes form an integral part of almost all Swedish programmes and projects. The focus in this paper is on competence development as a part of projects and programmes in all sectors. SIDA's

support to formal education will not be discussed here. Nor will the paper discuss SIDA's support to Swedish Non-governmental Organizations. They are an important resource with about 700 professionals working abroad at present.

The notion of and approaches to competence development have changed over time. There has been a shift of emphasis from competence development as a question of the transfer of knowledge between individuals towards organizational development, sometimes through twinning arrangements with other organizations. The even broader issue of interrelations between different organizations in a sector - the institutional framework - has also to be considered.

And yet, the dilemma remains. External interventions, however well intended and conceived, will succeed only if controlled by those who are the subject of such interventions. Therefore, development cooperation in this area is about roles and relationships between the different actors involved in the process. These in turn are the result of conditions which they only partly control. Any discussion about "the best practice" of competence development has to take these shifting conditions into account. They have to be part and parcel of the analysis and the planning of interventions in this area.

2. COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT - TWO APPROACHES.

Some five years ago, SIDA concluded that implementation of projects tended to be more and more in the hands of donor agencies. Donors had taken over a lot of regular tasks of the countries in which they had programmes of

development cooperation. Analyses showed that the capacity of developing countries had become weaker rather than stronger despite programmes of competence development. SIDA decided that sustainability had to be reinstated as a key concept in development. The responsibility for implementation should rest with Country of Cooperation. SIDA's role would focus more on participation in planning and evaluation. Competence development was again emphasised and a programme of action was worked out. It reflected a gradual shift from competence development as a learning process between individuals towards the development and strengthening of organizations.

2.1. The individual approach.

The provision of individual experts has been an important vehicle of competence development but their role has changed over time.

In the early days of Swedish development cooperation, individual experts were expected to fill gaps in the administration of developing countries. These "competence loans" were expected to last until local staff had been educated and trained. During this period SIDA financed university training for students from Africa and Asia in Sweden. Although there was no direct link to individual posts, the purpose was to replace the Swedish experts.

In the early 1970's, the aims of technical assistance were extended. SIDA stated then that "technical assistance personnel, in addition to carrying out essential functions in developing countries, shall transfer knowledge and skills which are lacking at present." It was understood that competence is an asset which exists in

industrial countries. In the same way as other goods it could be exported with the help of Swedish experts.

Experience showed however, that competence development is a more complex process. Firstly, competence has to be actively acquired rather than passively received. Secondly, the dynamism of this process has to come from inside an organization rather than from outside. Hence the concept of "transfer of knowledge" was replaced by "competence development" as a process of communication between equals. Swedish experts were asked to act more as catalysts in an exchange of experience.

Whatever the role of the individual expert, there was a growing realization that such learning processes would be efficient under certain conditions; conditions that were not always at hand. In most cases the individual expert was placed in closed and hierarchical organizations that were not ready for the kind of creative work that SIDA had anticipated. Experience also showed that a number of competent individuals will not necessarily constitute a competent organization if the "environment" does not allow or encourage creativity and sharing of experience.

As a result SIDA's approach gradually changed. The development of organizations was seen as a necessary condition for the development of the competence of their individual members. Such programmes for organizational development were concerned with structure, administrative practices, training and, in some cases, with the "culture" of the organization. A more detailed analysis of SIDA's experience can be found in SIDA's guidelines for technical

assistance (SIDA, Development is People, 1992)

2.2. The organizational approach.

The difference in comparison with the individual approach was that the organization was used as the frame of reference. Analyses and planning of programmes for competence development were made with this in mind. A reflection of this trend can be found in SIDA's guidelines for support to Public Administration (SIDA, Making Government Work, 1991).

The question was how SIDA as a donor should intervene in such a process. Should it continue to recruit individual experts as before or should it have a different role? The answer in most cases has been to involve Swedish or other consultants or sister organizations in a programme of long term cooperation. Organizational development is a long term process that calls for competence development in various fields. Typically there is a combination of long term and short term experts involved in such a programme.

Such twinning arrangements assume that the two organizations represent some corporate skills and knowledge which amount to more than the sum of the competence of their individuals. These corporate skills constitute the "culture" and the memory of the organization.

Experience shows that this method has many advantages. It ensures continuity compared to the individual approach where individuals replace each other without a common frame of reference or base in Sweden. The sister organization in the country of

cooperation can also be supplied with continuous information on the latest developments within its profession. In other words, it receives a free ride on the Swedish sister's research and product development.

Yet, twinning arrangements also have their limitations. A prerequisite is that two similar and stable organizations exist. This is not always the case. In periods of rapid change in the developing countries concerned, twinning arrangements may maintain the old structure rather than permit adjustment to the changing conditions. In such cases, interventions from outside may be more effective if entrusted to a management consultant with a catalytic role.

The question of roles and responsibilities should also be given continuous attention. Organizations as well as individual experts may wish to take over the process of change. If they see themselves as "the experts" - transferring skills or imposing solutions - rather than as partners in a dialogue between equals, results will not be achieved. What was said above about the role of individuals has also proven to be true for organizations.

Therefore, in organizational development arrangements, the contractual relationship has to be based on a real, experienced need, converted into a clearly defined goal for the cooperation, and has to be regularly monitored and evaluated from outside.

3. COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN A SOCIETAL CONTEXT.

Previous sections have discussed how the role of individual experts has changed and how SIDA has tried to integrate them into programmes aiming at organizational development. But

neither individual experts nor twinning arrangements exist in a vacuum. Successes and failures are also conditioned by factors external to such interventions.

The 1980s has been a period of structural change in most countries with which Sweden has programmes of development cooperation. Competence development has taken place in an environment marked by changing roles of the state and the market, declining salaries of teachers and other civil servants and a renewed focus on short term results in development cooperation. All these mitigate against long term process-oriented programmes focusing on competence development. At the same time the needs are perhaps greater now than before. Issues arising from this new situation are discussed in the following sections.

3.1. Changing roles of the state and the market.

The 1980s was a period of fundamental structural change in many countries all over the world. Reform programmes in the economic field were followed by political and institutional reforms that changed the relationships between the state, the market and civil society. Whilst few would question the fact that the state had too big a role in many developing countries there is a growing realization today that development without an effective state sector is not possible. The state and market are complementary to each other. The question is how they should interact and what should be the new and in most cases, reduced role of the State?

It is important to note that this transformation has increased the need for organizational development as Governments redefine and reduce those