

Increased interest in cooperation with the EU - can Sweden have a greater impact?

During Sida's Executive Network Week, a session was held on EU cooperation, which aimed to increase Sida's competence, sharpen our dialogue and cooperation with the EU and to discuss how we will have greater impact on Swedish priorities. The EU is one of the world's single largest donors and together with its Member States, we become the largest donor globally. By engaging more in EU development cooperation, Sweden can have a great impact on both EU and global development cooperation. As many other donor countries' aid policies change, we see that the Commission has become an increasingly like-minded donor and partner. The EU is very positive about cooperation with Sweden and therefore initiated a high-level meeting with Sweden as the first country in March this year.

Working better together

Sweden and Sida are now raising their ambition when it comes to cooperation with the EU, not least when it comes to joint programming or Working Better Together as it is also called. As part of this, Sida finances the secondment of a national expert at DEVCO (International Cooperation and Development) who works specifically with this agenda. Her name is Charlotta Norrby and she was until recently the Head of Unit for CIVSAM. Charlotta was part of the EU session and we were given the opportunity to ask her a few questions.

Hi Charlotta, you are working on joint programming at DEVCO in Brussels, ie the European Headquarters. Can you tell us a little bit about how the Commission views this work and a little bit about successes and challenges?

“Joint programming is part of the EU and Member States' coordination on development cooperation at country level, but the concept joint programming is in fact a challenge in itself, as it leads your thoughts to the idea of joint programmes and division of labor. More fair would be to use the overall concept of Working Better Together (which also includes joint implementation). It will be difficult to change this now that it is established in the European Consensus and other key documents, but to the extent possible we should use the broader concept”, Charlotta says.

“When the EU has begun programming for the upcoming long-term budget, the political signals have finally come clear to many EU delegations in the partner countries that joint programming should be the "new normal". At my unit at DEVCO, we see increased demand to get support in the processes, which is why it is a very fun period to get into this work.

Today, about 40 countries out of over 120, work with joint programming as a basis in some way. Some have finalized agreed strategy documents that guide both the work and coordination of the EU and the Member States. Others have developed a joint country analysis or sector documents as a basis for the dialogue with the partner country's government and other actors.

The EU needs to be clearer that joint programming is a flexible approach to be adapted to the needs of each country; it is not about one-size fits all. For example, the processes need to be adapted to whether there are many or few Member States in place, if it is a fragile environment or if there is no functioning national development plan in the country. Another factor that can be a challenge is that the process can be resource heavy at different stages. In some countries, Member States are not so interested in participating in joint programming, and in others, the EU delegation is not active enough in the process. Here, it is important for Sweden to take an active role at country level, as you have a

well-founded trust with other players inside and outside the EU, and this is a platform for influence that Sweden and Sida must not miss! Given that the EU is moving into a major planning process, it is in the next six months that Sweden can receive particularly good payoff of this work.”

What does DEVCO do to support the local processes?

“A lot, I'm really impressed with how much time and resources my unit spends in guiding and advising on the local processes. The most important support is probably our framework agreement with an expert group who can travel to the countries at short notice and support the processes through surveys, workshops and also compile documents. This summer, for example, there were visits to Iraq and Congo, and this autumn we see Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Uganda on the list.

We also organize joint missions for representatives of the EU and Member States headquarters to learn and support a specific local process. This year the trip goes to Zimbabwe. In mid-October, a training program in Brussels will be organized in joint programming that is open to both the EU and the Member States at the local and capital levels, and in November a Global Learning Event in Uganda will be organized for the same target group. Especially the global event in Uganda, I think will be a fantastic opportunity to exchange experiences and create learning.

Over the past year we have produced several interesting studies on various aspects of joint programming, such as the work in fragile states, middle-income countries and the links to the strategic development goals. This autumn, we plan for some smaller reports on, among other things, the potential for regional joint programming and for cooperation with the private sector.

Recently, the EU launched the EU Aid Explorer, a database that provides a lot of useful information on EU and Member State aid to various countries. EU Aid Explorer: <https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu>

For those who want to know more about the joint programming processes in different countries, there is also the Joint Programming Tracker, which was launched in June. Joint Programming Tracker: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/joint-programming-tracker>

And recently, we finished a series of easily accessible information sheets on the total aid to 120 different countries. They clearly show that, when the aid of the Commission and the Member States is pooled, the EU is in many cases the largest donor at country level.

Right now we are updating the Joint Programming Guidance that came out last year. This time it will be a Working Better Together Guidance!”