



Evolution of Sida's International Training Programmes (ITPs): Towards Politically Smart Support?

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Lövkrona, J., Wild, L., Awimbo, J., & Kliukina, S. (2025). [Evaluation of Sida's International Training Programmes \(ITP\) as Instruments for Supporting Effective and Inclusive Institutions](#). Sida.

A reflection by Leni Wild

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International Training Programmes (ITPs) have been one of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)'s most well-known approaches for capacity development and institutional reform since the 1980s. Sida's approach to capacity development has evolved significantly in this 40-year period. ITPs have evolved from fairly standard training approaches to broader capacity building programmes that aim to support locally driven change processes, build more systemic approaches to collaboration between stakeholders based on an understanding of power relations, and provide more adaptive and long-term support. This echoes the growing body of evidence on capacity development approaches captured by the Thinking and Working Politically network and broader developments in the field of institutional reform.

This [evaluation we undertook for Sida on ITPs](#), intended to assess the design, methodology, implementation, and impact of ITPs, thus came at an opportune moment. The evaluation adopted a theory-based approach to address the question of what has worked well and less well at both the programme and portfolio level (by assessing the contribution to change), and also why (or why not), how it worked (by examining the process that led to those changes), and to explore what might be missing. As part of this, we developed a Theory of Change and tested it during the evaluation itself.

We collected evidence from a wide range of sources. These included reports from implementers of select ITPs, previous evaluations and other supporting material, interviews and focus groups with ITP participants and stakeholders (81 in total), a field visit to Kenya, an online survey (completed by 468 respondents), and workshops with ITP implementers and Sida staff. The evaluation focused on a sample of five ITPs that Sida selected, covering a range of sectors (including urban water and sanitation, social protection, mine water and mine waste management, tax compliance and collection, and media freedom) across a variety of countries in Africa and Asia.

In general, our findings suggest that there is good evidence to support several core principles for 'what works' for capacity building – and many of these reflect TWP principles. For example, locally led change is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of effective capacity building, and across the evaluation there was clear evidence that these ITPs were indeed promoting **locally driven change**. Participants took leading roles in identifying and exploring the problems to be addressed and had the support needed to lead change initiatives within their own organisations. The training programmes encouraged participants

to identify ways of addressing local problems that were based on a 'best fit' approach anchored in their respective context, while the trainings also placed significant focus on building participants' change management skills to facilitate complex processes of change.

The building and strengthening of **multi-stakeholder partnerships and coalitions** was another prominent outcome across the ITPs we reviewed. A lack of collaboration and collective action between different groups was identified as a key driver of gaps in services or outcomes across many of the countries where ITPs were delivered. In response, ITPs often purposively aimed to bring together different stakeholders, as a way to address misperceptions and understand each other's motivations and identify where they could work together on shared problems. This was underpinned by an approach to building core competencies for change that focused not just on technical skills and knowledge but on change management, relationship and trust building skills.

Evidence was more mixed regarding the **timeframes and adaptability** of these ITPs. Training programmes were usually 12 to 18 months in length, which was relatively short given the ambitions to lead change initiatives and deliver organisational change. Overall, ITPs were stronger in supporting ongoing and within programme learning, while they were weaker in tracking longer term outcomes or following up on what happened to participants and change projects after a given training programme had ended.

Experience with explicitly recognising **power relations and political incentives**, especially in terms of reflecting on likely levels of resistance to change and how to navigate this resistance, was also more limited. Where there were strong national or local facilitators, this was often an informal part of the role; and evaluation findings suggest that these programmes could have gone further in building skills in political facilitation and negotiation and in mapping and navigating power relations.

In short, reflecting much of our broader field, Sida's efforts ITPs show that, while there are general trends towards locally led change and the recognition of the role of multi-stakeholder coalitions, the messy nature of politics and power still proves challenging for large scale capacity building efforts.

About the author

Leni is Director (Product & Service Development) at Global Partners Governance, where she advises on project quality and learning, and develops new approaches to innovation, political change and institutional reform. She has 20 years' experience as a researcher and policy adviser on political change and analysis, and on innovations in international development to ensure more politically smart and context appropriate support. This includes over a decade at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), a major international development think tank based in the UK, where she led ODI's politics and governance programme, carried out political economy analyses and evaluations of political

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The Thinking and working Politically Community of Practice (TWP CoP) is a global network of practitioners, researchers and policymakers in development and global affairs committed to promoting more effective policy and practice. The TWP CoP works to foster more politically aware approaches to understand how change happens and why, translate findings and implications emerging from political economy analysis into operationally relevant guidance, encourage more flexible and adaptable ways of working, and provide evidence-based insights that can stimulate innovation, sharing and learning in international development and global affairs.

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