



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet  
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and  
Agricultural Sciences

# **Exegesis of development bureaucracy**

– From text to action at Sida

*John Lund*

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**Credits:** 30 HEC

**Level:** Second cycle, A2E

**Course title:** Master's thesis in Rural Development and Natural Resource Management

**Course code:** EX0777

**Programme/Education:** Agriculture Programme - Rural Development

**Place of publication:** Uppsala

**Year of publication:** 2017

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**Online publication:** <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

**Keywords:** Swedish development aid, Sida, bureaucracy, policy, bureaucratic field, frames, Department for partnership and innovation.

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## **Abstract**

The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) is a governmental agency with the purpose to execute the Swedish international development aid. Sida plays a relatively large role in the international development scene and the governmental officials that work at Sida are representatives for the Swedish development politics. At the same time, the officials that supervise the foreign aid are individuals and thus to a degree autonomous subjects. This paper aims to explore the relation between formal bureaucratic space and subjective agency of these officials at the department for innovations and partnerships (PARTNER) at Sida. By doing extensive participatory observations, both as an intern and as an employee at the unit for research cooperation (FORSK) together with interviews and text analysis, this relation has been analysed. The analysis has been conducted with the help of Bourdieu's theoretical framework concerning social fields and capitals together with Benford and Snow's theoretical framework regarding collective action frames. The conclusion is that even though there are numerous layers of policies and guidelines to follow when working as a government official at Sida, the space for subjective agency is extensive. This space is instead ruled by unofficial, socially determined policies, which are a product as well as a producer of an office solidarity. This could very well be the result of a strong sense of togetherness sprung out of a somewhat exposed position and a niched workspace. Together the official and the unofficial guidelines create a social landscape which could help hold together and motivate the agency.

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter will give a short introduction to the thesis, formulate the research problem together with the objective and research questions and also give a short review of previous research in the area.

To live in a society is different from understanding the different building blocks that create it – to live in a society is often a prerequisite to exist but to have an overview of the entire structure might be impossible. This paper will not make any grand claims to illuminating the complex enigma that is society, but instead give an insight in how the functions of an important cornerstone for modern society can exist, namely the bureaucracy of a government, in this paper specifically governmental development aid.

To claim that governments and states are heavily dependent on bureaucracy would not be an overstatement as governments and states are dependent on structure and orderliness to maintain power and influence as well as to administer the state. (Pierre Bourdieu, et al., 1994) On every level of a modern, democratic system there is some form of bureaucracy to be found (Scott, 1998). At the Swedish international development agency (Sida) there are hierarchical structures present that could be said to be stereotypical to bureaucratic functions, such as a formal and often uptight official line of decision-making. The government officials have to fulfil their work within this rigid bureaucratic frame, and at the same time, they often have vast previous experience from development work in different sectors, from the UN to embassies to various grass root organizations, experience that could enable them to conduct their work in a more independent way. When a person with field experience and practical knowledge is assigned to a strict and sometimes narrow task in which the experience may promote a more flexible approach than regulations dictate, how much space for individual interpretation and action does a Sida bureaucrat have in the different approaches to administration?

Working in a governmental institution I quickly learned that there are certain unofficial “rules” and practices regarding how to handle contributions and

work tasks that often differ from the official approaches. Within a governmental institution such as Sida, which is regulated by political and bureaucratic policies and guidelines, the texts produced at the departments are governmental documents that are presumed to represent and underpin a governmental institution (in this case Sida). At the same time, as Sartre once stated, "Man is condemned to be free" (Sartre, 1948, p. 5). There is always an element of improvisation even in the most bureaucratic processes and there is therefore merit in researching what freedom of action the distinct actors within the bureaucratic structure have and how the transformation from a bureaucratic governmental agency towards a practical institution can take place. (Laws & Forester, 2015)

### 1.1. Context of the study

In this section I will briefly discuss texts that are relevant to this thesis and that have helped me in the process of designing a research context. Pierre Bourdieu has written about the connection between bureaucracy and the creation of the modern state and in turn, the connection between bureaucracy and the individuals that operate in the bureaucracy (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994). His work will be further discussed and used in this thesis.

*"Cultivating Development; An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice"* by Mosse mainly describes the everyday life of involved government officials, the reasoning behind decisions taken and the resulting actions in order to find out how development aid works in a project he himself was part of in the British development aid sector. In short, Mosse concludes that there is a gap between feasible policies and "politically correct" policies, policies that look good but may not be practically achievable and that the driving force behind development aid workers sometimes seems to be socially tied rather than tied by policy (Mosse, 2005). *"Aiding science: Swedish research aid policy 1973-*

2008”, studies Sarec’s<sup>1</sup> policy from a historical perspective using official documents and interviews with former directors (Gyberg 2013). Gybergs’ study uses mainly discourse theory and aims to track how the research aid policy is governed, with what motivations and how shifts take place. She claims that there are mainly two discourses continuously competing; the “localist” discourse and the “universalist” discourse. The dissertation goes through the different decades and describes the view on knowledge and development as well as the relation between them. The focus is on the discourse of research development and the overall trends and changes in policy which offers an interesting and relevant background for a study on the relation between policy, bureaucratic processes and governmental officials (Gyberg, 2013). Furthermore, a number of researchers have examined and explored the bureaucratic space of development aid. In 2000 Lewis and Gardner wrote a case study on DFID’s then recent White Paper on Development, examining the direction in policy compared to previous development policies. They conclude, among other things, that the policy paper is “strong on bold policy statements but weak on implementation detail (Gardner & Lewis, 2000). Viterna and Robertson have written a paper on how theoretical understanding of development and change is generated in contrast to how development implemented through policy decisions is carried out – comparing sociological theories with actual practices. They call for a more effective collaboration between these two sets of development and point to five different methods through which this can be accomplished (Viterna & Robertson, 2015).

## 1.2. Aim

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the relation between the formal bureaucratic policy framework and subjective agency and initiative shape the actual work by a government official at Sida.

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<sup>1</sup> A now abolished research department at Sida. The unit for research support have taken Sarec’s place.

- How are the frames that the government officials operate within constructed?
- How is the relation between official and explicit guidelines and actual social practice within the bureaucratic field at Sida and the department for partnerships and innovation (PARTNER) constructed?

## 2. Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework and how it is connected to the research problem.

The work of Sida may cause effect on a global scale, but the organization is mainly Swedish and bureaucratic. This thesis will combine two theoretic frameworks in order to explore and analyse the social and bureaucratic processes that shape both the formal bureaucratic space and the subjective agency. These frameworks are Benford and Snows' collective action frames and Bourdieu's theories of the construction and working of bureaucratic field.

### 2.1. Collective action frames

Collective action frames will be used in order to understand how shared meanings are negotiated and how individual attitudes and perceptions are aggregated in the process of reading and understanding texts. In the case of this thesis, the frame is Swedish development aid bureaucracy. Within this frame, a text may be read differently depending on the values and intentions of the actor reading the text. Even though one text is formed with a specific intention and identical copies are administrated to actors (in this case the government officials at Sida), the same text may be understood and acted upon differently depending on the conditions of the reader. An individual with a background in natural sciences and a focus on research development may perceive a document differently than a social scientist with a focus on grassroots organization in South America. (Benford & Snow, 2000).

### 2.1.1. The three stages

By using the collective action frames, the building blocks of the development discourse can be analysed and understood – by applying a frame of international development to the bureaucracy of Sida and dissect the components, the implied interpretations of texts may be brought up and analysed. In other words, by deconstructing the discourse within the frame the process of Swedish international development bureaucracy and the driving force of the collective of Swedish governmental officials will be made more visible. This deconstruction will take place through three stages that are called, in order of appearance: *diagnostic framing*, *prognostic framing* and *motivational framing*. By deepening the understanding of these three components, I may reach an understanding of how consensus mobilization and action mobilization are created in society – how agreement and decision forms shift in the discourse and lead to action (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615).

A chain of events in a situation where framing can be applied begins with the identification of a problem and the *diagnostic framing*. Sida, for example, deals with a magnitude of external problems. One aggregated common denominator at the department for partnerships and innovation (PARTNER in short) is global injustice. Global injustice can be characterized by oppression of certain groups (ethnic minorities, women etc.), by an uneven distribution of economic capital in certain regions etcetera. Often the diagnostic frame incorporates focusing on blame and responsibility of other actors and incidents as “directed action is contingent on identification of the source(s) of causality, blame and/or culpable agents” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 616).

When a common definition of a problem is set but different definitions of the source of the problem exists, the *prognostic framing* process is initiated. Two organizations or units within the same department at Sida with the same goal – for example women’s rights – can have completely different approaches to solving the same problem, from lobbying, to support to women cooperatives to holding lectures on how to engage to like-minded observers (Benford & 5

Snow, 2000, p. 616). The source of and solution to a problem defines the *prognostic frame*.

The last and third framing task, the *motivational frame*, includes the construction of agency, and can be used to clarify how subjects are motivated to engage collectively in actions. For a governmental representative at Sida for example, the feeling of solidarity with the co-workers, neighbouring units and departments may be enhanced through a commonly shared feeling of conducting urgent and efficient tasks in a global context. In this sense, the motivational framing ties together all three frames and creates a common ground for the governmental officials to meet on.

This theoretical framework can be used to clarify how PARTNER as a department forms a narrative and a unity through the framing processes. The next section will introduce the notions of fields and capitals, concepts that will be used to understand and map the social landscape and thus give an insight into the prerequisites for the construction of the collective.

## 2.2. Fields and capitals in a bureaucratic maze

In his text “*Rethinking the state: Genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field*” (1994) Bourdieu argues that the state is a producer and imposer of thought, applied to all things of the social world. At the core of the modern society and governmental structure we can find the bureaucrats, who act as both a product and a producer of said thoughts. This theoretic framework uses the concepts of fields and capitals, which can be used to understand how the social and administrative structures are formed at Sida in general and PARTNER in specific.

### 2.2.1. The bureaucratic field

This thesis will use the concept of field defined as the space in which agents and their social positions are located. The rules of the field, the habitus<sup>2</sup> of the agent and the capitals of the agent together determine the positions of the agents. Sida as a governmental institution is part of what Bourdieu would call the bureaucratic field. The bureaucratic field encompasses of course the bureaucrats, but also groups that are professionally connected to bureaucracy in one way or another and is described by Wacquant as: “*a splintered space of forces vying over the definition and distribution of public goods*” (Wacquant, 2010, p. 200). In other words, the bureaucratic field is more than just the governmental and administrative sections of society; the partner organizations, the participants in bilateral projects on grass root levels, transnational companies involved in development projects and organizations affecting the prerequisites for Swedish development aid can all be said to be part of this sector of the bureaucratic field.

The inner structures of a field are determined by the existence of different capitals. Distinct aspects are of distinct value for actors in different fields. The actors that can capitalize on these values/capitals have a larger chance of succeeding in advancing within the field and thus influence the prevailing elements of the capitals. Bourdieu for example describes the whole state as “*the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994, p. 4). In short, capital can be described as accumulated labour, which can take form both as materialized (for example money) and embodied (for example a valued characteristic) (Bourdieu, 1986). At Sida, hierarchy of power within the bureaucratic field is determined mainly by three forms of capitals: social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital.

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<sup>2</sup> The habitus could be understood as a structure of the mind and emotions characterized by a set of acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and taste. (Scott & Marshall, 1998)

Each capital holds its own set of values and importance and needs to be contextually understood in order to form a solid view of the field.

Cultural capital –With a common perception of for example culture, the notion of a common identity can be created, which strengthens and gives purpose to the upholding of a unified code of conduct and attitude towards work tasks. An effect of this may be that for example the consent to fill in all information on ongoing projects in the database, answer administrative mail on time or take heed of the comfort rules put in place at the office is reduced. The cultural capital is both normative and ideologically based. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994)

Social capital – Social capital is based upon a network of social connections within the specific field. To use Sida as an example, the more connected you are to a presumed network of likeminded co-workers the easier it is to achieve goals and influence processes that requires consensus outside of the network as you can rely on support and lobbying from allies. This implies that social inequalities exist within the bureaucratic field. The impact of critique against made decisions and the ability to participate in the prevailing interpretation of texts are examples of how social capital can be used at Sida. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119)

Symbolic capital – The term symbolic capital is one of the more abstract capitals as a symbolic capital can exist in both physical and mental properties – it is any other capital that has been given acknowledgement by pacemakers within the relevant field(s). Depending on which unit a person works at the form of predominant symbolic capital may differ – experience of banking and world economics is clearly more worth at the unit for loan and guarantees than at the unit for the civil society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994).

### 2.3. [Collective action frames on par with social fields and capitals](#)

I am to utilize these two theories so as to explore the process of understanding and executing guidelines and policies at Sida. The collective action frame is used to explain how the government officials at PARTNER may create one

shared and general or several parallel missions and meanings through the framing processes. Bourdieu's theories on the bureaucratic field and social capitals are used to highlight the inner workings of how the value systems and hierarchies existing at the department may interact with the creation of these frames. Through the use of well adapted methods, these analytical tools will make the empirical data collected more understandable and more available for an analysis.

### 3. Methods

This chapter introduces the methods, how they relate to the theoretical framework and how the data collection to the thesis was conducted.

#### 3.1. Approach

The theoretical approach defines the way empirical data is collected and processed, the precursor to the empirical analysis. The scientific enterprise can be divided into three stages – theorizing, theory and testing of theory. It is within the first stage, the theorizing, that the approach to the collection of empiric evidence and the legwork for the application of theory are made. Originating from this, there are two main so called “contexts” within social science that are imperative to understand in the scientific approach to this paper; the context of discovery and the context of justification (Swedberg, 2014, p. 4). Simplified, the context of discovery refers to “the form in which [thinking processes] are subjectively performed” and the context of justification refers to “the form in which thinking processes are communicated to other persons.” (Reichenbach, 1938, p. 231)

#### 3.2. The choice of methods

In this study, I have chosen to use primarily qualitative methods when collecting empirical data due to the character of the aim and research questions. Qualitative methods focus on a lesser number of informants/data but have a more in-depth relation to them. In opposite quantitative methods reach out to a larger number of informants but do not get as much information out of every informant. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009)

This paper will draw from three sources of empirical data: interviewing, observing and documents. Interviewing involves listening skills and the conversation may be voice recorded, and later transcribed into a text stream. Qualitative researchers also observe and personally witness what people are doing, how they deal with themselves, things and other people. These observations are often transformed into text formats. Interviewing and observation can be distinguished from documents because they are face-to-face and thus obtrusive; they are produced for the purposes of the research and interviewer and observer effects need to be considered. On the other hand, documents are usually produced independently of the present researcher in a naturalistic environment. This study is conducted through text analysis, interviews and participatory observation, where the qualitative approach to the mediums chosen gives the best output (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

### 3.2.1. Text analysis

The term “text” may refer to texts, speeches and pictures and are as that a broad category. This study originates partly from official texts such as policies, reports and instructions. At PARTNER, there are several different sorts of texts that carry different urgency to different actors. There are some general texts that concern all of Sida, some texts that concern all of PARTNER and some texts that concern a certain unit or focus area. By reading and comparing the different texts, an understanding of the official stance of policy is expressed. These texts can be said to express the cornerstone of the official frames and by comparing with findings from interviews and observations, an understanding of the framing processes and the accumulation of capitals can be obtained.

The texts that have been used in this thesis are:

<u>Document</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Publishing year</u>
Constitution	Instruction from the government	2015

Policy framework	Aid policy framework – the direction of Swedish aid	2013
Letter of regulation	Letter of regulation for the budgetary year of 2014 regarding the committee for international development cooperation	2013
	Letter of regulation for the budgetary year of 2015 regarding the committee for international development cooperation	2014
Operational plans and strategies	Operational plan for PARTNER 2016	2015
	Guidelines for result strategies within the Swedish international development aid	2013
	Strategy for support through Swedish organizations in the civil society 2010-2014	2009
	Strategy for research cooperation and research in development cooperation 2015-2021	2014
	Strategy for capacity development and collaboration 2011-2013	2010

### 3.2.2. Participatory observations

This study has been conducted during 9 months' work at Sida. Out of these 9 months, five were spent as an intern at the Unit for Research Cooperation and four were spent as a program officer at the same unit. When I first started at Sida as a government official, I had a concise apprehension of the bureaucratic field and my role in it, and as time passed I developed a bureaucratic habitus and fully mantled the role as a bureaucrat. Because of my employment and my own degree of engagement I conducted what Spradley would describe as complete participation, as I have been taking part both of the work and of the social relations at the office and have thus been able to form a very close relation to the tenure of a government employee at Sida. I have not only been able to observe and note how the meetings and administration are conducted, I have also been able to truly experience it firsthand (Spradley, 1980). By taking notes at meetings, writing down general thoughts during the day and keeping a tab on what I do, with whom I

communicate and why I perform the actions I perform, I have been able to actively separate my research and my work at the department.

### 3.2.3. Interviews

Together with the participatory observation, semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Semi-structured interviews originate from thematically structured questions. These questions leave room for further questions and discussions or even cause the omission of some of the questions depending on how the interview progresses. This works well when doing a limited number of interviews with a well selected target group, as in this case some of the key actors in the office. Thoughts and opinions of interest that have been pronounced in informal conversations during my time at PARTNER have been incorporated into the prepared questions, as I would not wish to quote a former colleague without permission. The interviews that are recorded have been done so with the consent of the informants and later transcribed. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) PARTNER consists of six units with 9 to 15 employees in each unit. The units vary markedly from each other with focuses spanning from research support to providing assurances to borrowers in developing countries. In order to present a representative image of the department, at least one representative from each unit should be represented in interview. However, the interviewees will receive full anonymity regarding unit of origin, position and work tasks and have been given pseudonyms which do not have anything to do with the interviewees real identities. The conducted interviews are coded as follows:

<b><u>Pseudonym:</u></b>	<b><u>Length of interview:</u></b>	<b><u>Interview conducted:</u></b>
Barasjkova	41 minutes	2015-12-14
Klamm	28 minutes	2016-01-08
Oblomov	52 minutes	2016-01-11
Wan	63 minutes	2016-01-12

Jeremiah	32 minutes	2016-01-15
Gisa	23 minutes	2016-01-18

### 3.3. Reflexions on method

Interviewing is a good method when it comes to learning about experiences and attitudes (Dictionary of human geography, 2009:393), especially when using qualitative and semi-structured interviews which focus on more in-depth factors (Gregory & Johnston, 2009). I chose one representative from each unit in order to get a spatial and rootedness spread of individuals. The individuals themselves were chosen randomly, which in this case could be a good thing, since I did not want to “decide” the results. As to intersectional factors, few active choices have been made when it comes to balance of gender, background etcetera, since this is difficult when randomly picking respondents. It is also important to understand which narratives become prioritized in the study, since with such a low number of respondents, each answer affects the result more than if they were a part of a larger survey (Valentine, 2005, p. 112)

It is also important with the balance between openness and control which is connected to how the questions are raised. One thing I thought about was whether my questions awoke new thoughts or influenced the respondents to answer differently than they might have done in a more relaxed situation. (Denscombe, 2009). This did not seem to be the case however, since the respondents were informed of the subjects I would bring up beforehand.

There is also a problem of “situationality”, which means that the interview may not necessarily mirror how interviewees act and think, but rather what they want me to hear. The interview is affected by the fact that both I and the interviewees are aware of the purpose of our meeting and try to affect the

outcome in a positive way. One example of critique towards this is that interview transcripts are interpreted as authentic expression of experience (Gregory & Johnston, 2009). Here a more exhaustive perspective is important, which I gained from participating at the office and observing. This ties my choices of methods together and they therefore complement each other (Denscombe, 2009).

Positionality is important when it comes to understanding my own role in this study and what experiences I bring with me, and in this aspect reflexivity is needed (Valentine, 2005, p. 113) . My knowledge of Sida as a place and a phenomenon makes the gathering of material effective and comprehensive and also entails that trust and familiarity could easier be gained in the interviews. On the other hand problematic factors such as preconceived ideas of “what it is like” and the nature of phenomena can be difficult to unhinge. This could be described as a process of exotifying what is already known to be rational for me and my personal perspectives. To be transparent, even towards myself, was important here and as I stayed at Sida for approximately 10 months, the degree of exotifying was diminished (Gregory & Johnston, 2009, p. 393).

Looking at my material in a time perspective I have conducted the interviews during a time period from December 2015 to January 2016. This correlates well to the written text materials of which almost all are from 2010 till today. It is a question of actuality and this is important to recognize when working with the material. The processes, norms and texts are varying over time at Sida, and a relevant time span regarding written texts and material is important. I do not intend to apply interview material to guidelines or framework from 1968 (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

#### 4. Empiric data

In this chapter the empirical findings are declared. This is done in three main sections: *The organizational structure of Sida*, where the official structures and levels of Sida and PARTNER are presented; *An agency founded on texts*, where the

texts that govern Sida are brought up; and *the social structure of PARTNER*, where the social workings and value systems are discussed.

During my time as a state employed official, I often pondered a dilemma. My work consisted of carrying out different assignments at the department for partnerships and innovation at the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the dilemma I had to wrestle with was how to weigh my personal opinions and values against my employers' (in a sense also the government's) opinions and values and how should this govern the decisions I made and the actions I took. At Sida, as at any governmental institution, the terms bureaucrat and bureaucratic are often used and in several different functions. It can be used in a positive way; that the bureaucrats represent and build the nation, but it can also be used in a Kafkaesque and negative way; bureaucrats do nothing but push papers and have coffee breaks.

#### 4.1. The organisational structure of Sida

Sida is a governmental institution with a total of about 650 government officials employed. Of these, around 450 are stationed at the headquarters in Stockholm, on Gotland and at their conference centre in Härnösand, the rest are spread out at embassies and consulates in countries and regions that collaborate with Sida. One aspect which is important to keep in mind is that Sida does not govern any active projects on their own – they support governments and organizations which in different ways strive for “development” with funds. The government officials' task at Sida is to ensure that the funds administrated by Sida end up where they are supposed to and that the desired effects of the project(s) are achieved. A policy document called “the development aid platform” states that:

One fundamental principle in international aid that the Government supports is for partner countries themselves to own their development and control financial flows. For this reason, Swedish aid is best placed to reach people who live in poverty and oppression once their government has the political will to put in place changes that people experience as improvements to

their lives and is aware of and able to represent people's problems. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 12)

This is easier said than done as the amounts disbursed can be very substantial and the obstacles faced when following up a project may be large as transparency, cultural differences, language barriers etcetera can be found even in the calmest of waters. There have been several "scandals" during the last ten years where different scams carried out by partner organizations have been revealed by whistle-blowers, media and government officials at Sida. These scandals and a sometimes low transparency have caused many citizens to doubt Sida as a governmental organization and misguided projects are not perceived to be the best use of tax-payers' money (Mosander, 2008). In 2006, as a result of the change in government, a major structural change was undertaken and the control and management became considerably more strictly governed.

You can put it like this: Sida is under a lot more control now than it was earlier. Before 2007. Before all the turnovers and other changes, before the conservative party. And it's for good and for bad, I think it needed some stiffening up! Then maybe it has gone a bit too far in some cases. It's like a pendulum and now it is on its way back. (Jeremiah, 2016)

I experienced myself that these bureaucratic structures worked to create a stronger unity within the organization – for those who work every day with the complexity of problems that development aid constitutes. It is understood that corruption and ineffectiveness are often impossible to avoid completely (Sida, 2004).

#### 4.1.1. An agency in three levels

Roughly, the administrative structure at Sida can be divided into three levels: the board of directors, the department level and the unit level. The board of directors consists of seven people and constitutes the highest governing body within Sida. It is the board of directors that holds the main responsibilities over Sida's actions and internal control. The next level is the department level and the department for partnerships and innovation (PARTNER for short) is

one of the departments on which this study focuses. All the departments are made up of different units and PARTNER consists of six units, namely: Research cooperation; the civil society; loans and guarantees; Sida Partnership forum; Capacity development; private sector collaboration and partnerships.<sup>3</sup> The overall official chain of command at Sida looks as follows:

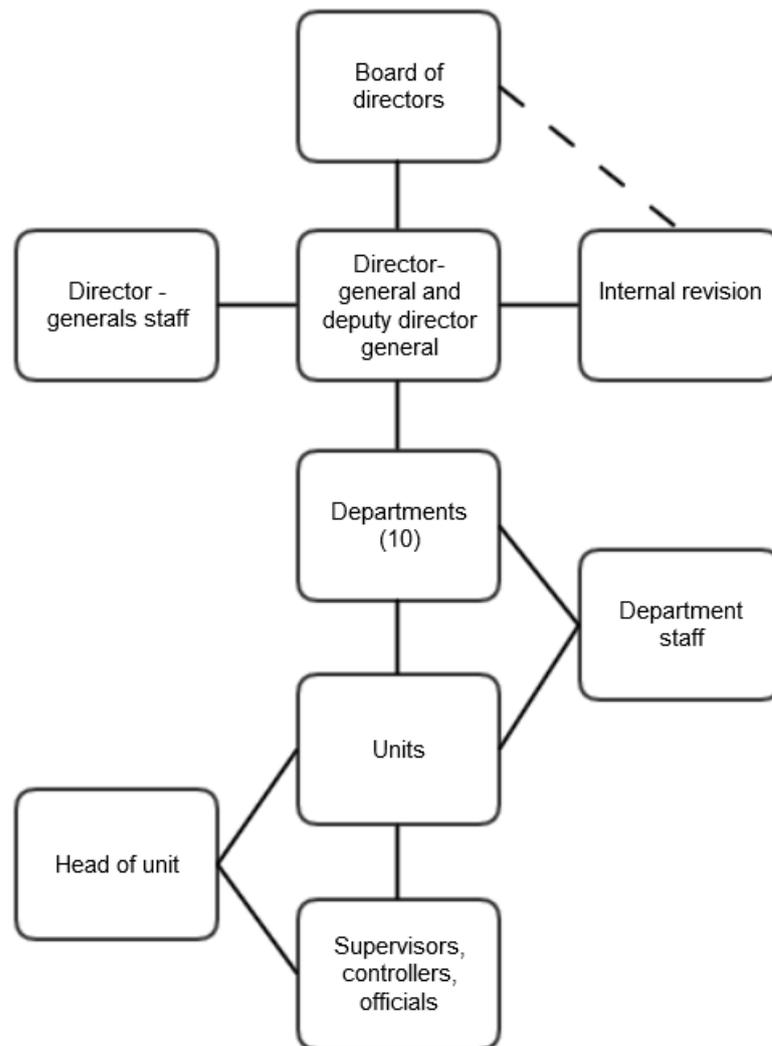


Figure 1: An organizational chart over Sida. Design: John Lund

<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations in order of appearance: FORSK; CIVSAM, LOANS, SPF, CAPDEV, NÄRSKAP

Partner is rather unique amongst the departments at Sida as it does not have a geographical focus but rather a focus on – innovations and partnerships. This may in some ways affect the cohesiveness of the department:

I think that PARTNER as a department works well considering how different the units are. There is no common denominator as I would argue there is in the other departments at Sida. /../ We have different types of actors that are very different and that makes the units chose different approaches to realize their goals.  
(Wan 2016)

Each department is governed by an administrative staff and a head of department who handles communication between the board, other departments, and between the internal units, as well as carries responsibility for general planning, implementation of guidelines and decisions etcetera.

Just as there is a head of department there is a head of unit within every one of the six units. The head of the unit is responsible for planning and implementation within the unit. As mentioned the common denominator at PARTNER is innovation and partnerships which makes a broad base of operations – everything from research support to security for lenders (and borrowers) to innovative uses of internet and cell phones. The result is not only a wide array of specializations and backgrounds within the department, but also a somewhat lacking communication between the units. Since each unit has its own specializations the immediate need to coordinate and exchange ideas is relatively low. The result of this is a segregation in the staffroom where meetings and coffee breaks often are confined to one's own unit.

We aren't that good in my opinion, which is ironical, on working beyond our own actor-limits in spite of the fact that we have, as I see it, a mission to think outside of the actor-limits, new partnerships, new constellations of actors that can work with financiers and carry out the development work. But we can't even do that in our own department. (Oblomov, 2016)

The relative isolation of each unit can in some ways contribute to diverging values of capitals and framings of common problems. At the Unit for Research Cooperation (FORSK) for example, I experienced academic background and relevance as a stronger carrier of symbolic capital than at other units. In the same way, the research support was put in the centre of the framing process, not only in the policy documents but in the government officials' individual discussions and reasoning as well. Almost all respondents agreed on the divergency of the units but had varying approaches to the source of this.

PARTNER is a very large department, so large that it may not be possible to utilize the entirety of the different strengths and groups. And the fact that we are on two floors plays a part as well in whether or not you see each other or not. (Klamm, 2016)

One exception of the territorial division within the unit is the department meeting which is held once every month. During my time at PARTNER presentations of the different units were held during these monthly meetings – one unit per month – in order for us to know what our “desk neighbours” were working with. I experienced these meetings as an important tool in the construction of shared framings. Often current issues and methods in the “international aid community” and at Sida were lifted and approaches to solutions and interpretations were discussed. Through these monthly meetings everyone could therefore be introduced to the line of thought that was steering the discourse. This was something that was needed as the general knowledge of the other units' work seemed to be scant. For example, some of our co-workers believed that the unit I was at, the unit for research cooperation (FORSK), was conducting research by itself on behalf of Sida and that the unit for collaboration with the private sector and partnership (NÄRSKAP) conducted a lot of work regarding external communication which was false as well.

All units are independent in the sense that they have their own objectives and goals and policies that they answer to. The units also have their own budgets and their own controllers who are responsible for these budgets and supervise

the internal budgetary systems. In order to make a relevant analysis of how the framing process works and how the capitals interact at PARTNER, the department's units need to be more thoroughly presented:

*Loans and Guarantees Unit (LOANS)* is together with “collaboration with private sector and partnerships” (NÄRSKAP) unique in PARTNER in that they are “supporting” units with no strategy of their own. Instead they work together with units and projects all over Sida providing expertise on their respective areas. LOANS' speciality is to implement financial support systems to organizations “in the field” which are in need of funding but cannot get a loan from their respective country's bank or government. For example, a small organization that needs funding could – if it fulfils the requirements on stability, etc, of LOAN – use Sida as a bailee to take a loan.

*The Civil Society Unit (CIVSAM)* is mainly responsible for supporting Swedish NGOs, organisations that are based in Sweden and through different networks and contacts work with and support projects and organizations in countries and regions in need of support. Examples of co-organisations which receive support from CIVSAM are Diakonia and Rädda barnen.

The goal of *The research cooperation unit (FORSK)* can be condensed into four areas, focusing on: capacity-building for research, primarily in low-income countries and regions; global, regional and national research of relevance to low-income countries and regions; the promotion of research that, through innovation, can contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development; and Swedish research of relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development in low-income countries. (Government offices of Sweden, 2014) In other word, Sida does not conduct research themselves, but work to promote science and research on international, bilateral and regional levels, through universities, governments and research organizations. Most of the supervisors have a PhD and the idea is to have competence in an as broad spectrum as possible, from natural to social sciences.

*The Collaboration with the Private Sector Unit (NÄRSKAP)* is a unit that in recent time has undergone relatively large structural changes. Its overall goal

is to “integrate” the business sector in sustainable development through market solutions and communication and to find new ways to collaborate with development actors. NÄRSKAP works as a supporting unit and does not have its own contributions. Instead it works together with other units and provides a spearhead competence in collaboration, communication and such. The main work at NÄRSKAP consists of method and competence development for private sector actors who want to cooperate with Sida. The unit is also responsible for Sida’s strategic partnership with USAID.

*The Capacity Development Unit (CAPDEV)* works with capacity development in organizations and institutions in collaborating countries as well as contributing to a larger impact of the Swedish priorities within the Swedish development aid. The unit also works with exchange programs and coordination with the Swedish authorities. It coordinates the placement of Swedish personnel in the developmental programs of for example the UN and the EU.

*Sida Partnership Forum (SPF)* is the unit that may deviate the most from the other units as it is situated in Härnösand, a couple of hours’ train ride away from Stockholm. It deals with education and seminars regarding international development for students, NGO:s and the government and it also offers conferences for Sida’s partners. It is at SPF that the education of students that are going on a Minor Field Study is being held.

Sida as an agency and Partner as a department within that agency are heavily dependent on guidelines and policies from the government when conducting their work. The organisational structure of Sida is adapted to correspond with the tasks and responsibilities laid on it. In the next section the written texts that govern Sida and PARTNER will be presented.

#### 4.2. An agency founded on texts

In understanding the bureaucratic process of a department such as PARTNER, there are a few aspects that need to be highlighted. It is the individuals and the systems that co-operate to create decisions. The making

of these decisions are influenced by the way guidelines and policies are understood and converted into praxis. What is a policy and how are guidelines meant to be used?

#### 4.2.1. Texts in square

The political steering at Sida is strongly apparent - it is the ministry of foreign affairs that creates and issues the general directives. These directives come in different forms and affect Sida on both macro and micro levels. In this section we will dissect mainly six texts:

*The constitution of Sida* – the constitution is issued by the government and consists of by-laws that state how Sida should conduct its work. It is made up of 18 paragraphs that regulate the general goals and commitments of the institution, its liberties and regulations as well as its coordination and management. The first paragraph states that:

The Swedish International Development Cooperation (Sida) has the task to support activities that contribute to meet the target for the international assistance, as part of the implementation of Sweden's policy for global development. (Governmental constitution (SFS 2010:1080), 2015, p. 1)

#### *Policies*

The government's developmental policy platform collects the government's overall development policy's alignment and priorities. The platform consolidates the agreed politics that has earlier been produced within the development aid and substantializes the orientation that was confirmed by the Swedish policy for global development (PGU). (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 5)

The quote above is the introduction to the development policy platform that frames the directives of Sida. The platform consists of 60 pages dedicated to explain and express the Swedish developmental aid through seven chapters that define the principles, the goals and the alignment of Sweden's developmental aid. The platform is a direct product of the political constellations that govern Sweden and as such, it is more specific in terms of values and political standpoints than the constitution. It is written by the ruling government. The platform is still rather abstract, presenting values and ideals rather than methods and plans of action. For a government official at Sida, the platform offers a forefront to the strategies which are specifically adapted to the scope of practices of the units. As such the platform offers an opportunity to congregate, by creating a sense of fellowship in an organization that is both diverse and sprawling. This is a very important function in many aspects, both organizationally and socially.

*Letters of regulation (LOR)* – Each year Sida gets a letter of regulation from the government in which they inform of the organization's goals, budget and distribution of funds during the coming year. In the letter of regulation, the conditions for the feedback from Sida to the ministry of foreign affairs is stated. The LOR is created by government offices and ministry of foreign aid.

*Operational Plan (OP)* – Each department has an operational plan, an outline of how operations are to be conducted, the goals and orientation of the department. In turn, every unit has its own operational plan as well, but this study will originate from the overall department plan.

*Strategies* – It is the government that decides on the strategies on international development aid which governs Sida. The strategies can be directed towards a geographical area or towards a certain scope of practices – strengthening of the civil society, research cooperation etc. Not all units have a strategy, the units that have a supporting role (NÄRSKAP, LOAN, SPF) work to support the other units and departments at Sida to achieve the goal of their strategies. The other units at PARTNER (FORSK; CAPDEV; CIVSAM) have their own, specific strategies to work with, and all strategies are created based on

the same guidelines. The strategies are developed by the ministry of foreign affairs in cooperation with the concerned units and departments. (Attachment to cabinet decision 2013-07-11, 2013)

*Feedback documents* – Feedback documents (like for example strategy and monitoring reports) are submitted to the head of the department by each unit, reflecting on the operational plan and/or the strategies. With the example of strategy reports, each unit is given a template to fill in with information about results, problems and approaches to how the unit's work has progressed and corresponds to its goals. At PARTNER, the review is then peer-reviewed by other units in the department; edited by the unit; approved by the head of the unit and sent to the head of the department; the head of the department approves and sends it on to the ministry of foreign affairs; the ministry of foreign affairs reads it and holds a consultation with each unit, discussing what has been satisfactory and what can be improved.

Through these documents that together cover the process from overall development guidelines from UD to the micro-level execution and reporting of performed tasks, patterns and rules that shape and define the bureaucratic reality at Sida can be discerned. The goal is also to create an image of what the work conducted at PARTNER is supposed to achieve and how – a mission and vision for the department. This can then be compared to the social and unofficial practicalities of the day-to-day work and the thoughts of the respondents.

#### 4.2.2. Consistent phenomenon in texts

Throughout all the documents on all of the different levels of Sida, there are certain diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framings and values discernible. These official statements then correspond to different degrees with framings and values on unit and individual levels. The social structures and the correlation between texts and individuals will be brought up in the next sections.

The all-embracing texts of Sida that carry weight within PARTNER are abstract in their nature, providing pointers in the form of restrictions and demands on how Sida as an organisation should conduct itself. Sections in the constitution and policy carry little influence over the everyday work at PARTNER, but they have one important quality in common. They all signal that the people working at Sida are representatives of the Swedish government and that they as such carry out the will of the Swedish citizens. The constitution can be said to set the boundaries for every other official text that is to be produced within Sida. The main title of the constitution is the assignment, which comprises four paragraphs, the first one quoted earlier. Together the paragraphs emphasize that the goal of Sida equals the goal of Swedish international development politics, and that these goals should be achieved through working with four perspectives which are expressed in §2:

1. A human rights perspective as well as “poor people’s perspective on development”.
2. An integrated environment and climate perspective
3. An integrated equality perspective including an analysis of women’s and girls’ as well as men’s and boys’ situation
4. An integrated conflict perspective in the development cooperation (Governmental constitution (SFS 2010:1080), 2015)

Already in this aggregated and general document, phrases that are in focus throughout the entire set of policies, guidelines and reporting are used. Furthermore, the paragraph states the commitments of Sida when working with these perspectives: to **contribute** to implementation; to **heed** to official institutions, democratic principles and long-term results; to **create** capacity for innovation aiding partnerships and sustainability; to **complement** and **facilitate** other economic resources within the international development sector and; to **gather** knowledge from both internal and external evaluations. The first two paragraphs are abstract but instrumental to the official structure. This is then reinforced in the development aid platform through statements like this:

One fundamental principle in international aid that the Government supports is for partner countries themselves to own

their development and control financial flows. For this reason, Swedish aid is best placed to reach people who live in poverty and oppression once their government has the political will to put in place changes that people experience as improvements to their lives and is aware of and able to represent people's problems. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 12)

In the development aid platform, which is also a macro-level document, the overarching objective of Sida is stated as “*creating preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression*”. (Government offices of Sweden, 2014, p. 19) This document further elaborates on the general values and objectives of Sida as a Swedish agency and the framework for collective action. Given that the formulations in these documents are agreed on by the government officials, the formulations constitute a cornerstone for how the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames are formed.

Sweden's aid is based on human rights and must be guided by a multidimensional view of poverty that takes as its starting point the perspective on development of people living in poverty themselves, and a rights perspective. Respect for human rights and for the right to live a free life is crucial to achieving socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 7)

In this quote, the lack of respect and possibility to live a free life can be interpreted as one of the major problems which Sida is working to solve. Regarding how the prognostic framing is formed on a macro level, the development aid platform dictates another general command to all the departments. The development aid platform also puts further focus on the individuals rather than the superstructures surrounding the individuals:

A greater focus on the individual means that in administering aid, greater knowledge is needed of the complex causes and dynamics of poverty, and ministries and agencies need to be better at familiarising themselves with the reality in which people in poverty live. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 12)

This is an important aspect of how the framing is created, as the limits for the diagnostic and prognostic frames are set to concern individual rights and freedom. For example, the development aid platform gainsays development support to undemocratic and ineffective governments:

One fundamental principle in international aid that the Government supports is for partner countries themselves to own their development and control financial flows. For this reason, Swedish aid is best placed to reach people who live in poverty and oppression once their government has the political will to put in place changes that people experience as improvements to their lives and is aware of and able to represent people's problems. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 12)

The Swedish international development is also motivated as a moral obligation, providing motivation and urgency to the operations, which adds a set of values for the motivational framing as well:

Sweden is one of the world's richest, most democratic and most gender equal countries and Sweden therefore has a moral responsibility to help to improve living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. An ambitious aid policy is part of Sweden's Policy for Global Development. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 8)

In the operational plan of PARTNER, the general and vague outline of the constitution and the development aid platform is fitted to PARTNER's relatively more specific area of expertise. The OP is developed within Sida, in a process that is described as follows:

Our operational plan is a part of our department's operational plan which is a part of Sida's operational plan that our director general decides upon. And when writing our operational plan, the director general has gotten instructions from the government, through letters of recommendation and other, and she puts together the OP-directives and sends them to all the heads of departments and says what she thinks they should prioritize the coming year. (Gisa, 2016)

In contrast with the constitution and the platform, the OP is written as a set of goals and objectives that the department is to strive for and fulfil within a certain period of time. It is in other words more practically inclined.

This OP has been elaborated from the general-director's planning directives. The six units' planning have mainly focused on the thematic priorities and on identifying how we can cooperate with other departments to conduct our operations. (PARTNER, 2015, p. 1)

This document uses the definitions of "we", "us" and "ours" which I perceive as communicating ownership and participation from the involved creators of the document and as an invitation to the government officials at PARTNER to feel participatory in the conducting of the objectives. Throughout the document, phrasings regarding the goals of Sida as an agency reoccur as points of origin for how the work at PARTNER should be directed. These phrasings have been made possessive and thus more relatable:

We have a high thematic **knowledge** and competence and are leading within equality, environment and climate in the development cooperation. (PARTNER, 2015, p. 1)

We choose actors and contributions based on relevant analysis of what we are to achieve. (PARTNER, 2015, p. 2)

We are known for our leadership when it comes to innovative solutions, **collaboration** forms in our contributions and financing solutions. (PARTNER, 2015, p. 3)

We are a modern and effective agency with internal processes, systems and work methods that support and **simplify** the operations. (PARTNER, 2015, p. 5)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> These phrases refer to goals and are as such not statements of how things are but rather how they hopefully are going to be at the end of the operational year.

The OP also gives more specific examples on how these statements are to be made true, for example this specification on how PARTNER will aim to help Sida as an agency to choose actors and contributions based on relevant decisions:

The department has contributed to the other operative departments' knowledge and ability to work strategically with the groups of actors that PARTNER are responsible for, i.e. scientists and research institutions, civil society, the private sector, financial institutions and philanthropists. This will be done through capacitating and support in analysis and contributions. (PARTNER, 2015, p. 2)

The responsibility of NÄRSKAP towards all of Sida regarding the actor group private sector is established and implicates responsibility for method development, partner dialogue/expertise, knowledge management, capacity building and certain strategic partnerships. (PARTNER, 2015, p. 2)

On unit level, this thesis looks into three of the PARTNER unit's result strategies – FORSK, CIVSAM and CAPDEV. These strategies are created to emphasize the goals and missions of each unit. In the guidelines for creating result strategies it says that:

The Swedish development aid is supposed to be innovative, long-term, result based and cost efficient. The government's overall political orientation and thematic prioritizations specify the contextual guidance for the Swedish development aid and should be reflected in the planning and implementation of the result strategies. (Government offices of Sweden, 2013, p. 2)

This clarifies how the relation between politics, policy and strategy should be – coherent and clear. The problem that might occur when reaching unit level is that the policies and guidelines are relatively vague and arbitrary which leaves the strategies relatively vague and arbitrary as well. All three of the studied strategies paint a general picture of the units' work, but leave the working out of the details to the government officials within the department and unit.

FORSKs' strategy states:

Support for research cooperation and research within the framework of the strategy, with a primary focus on low-income

countries, can include a range of different thematic areas and issues that are highly relevant in order for people living in poverty to be able to improve their situation within a context of sustainable societies. Relevant research issues therefore cover a very broad range that includes human rights and groups with special conditions and needs, health, gender equality, sustainable agriculture and fisheries, land ownership and land use rights, the environment, the impact of climate change, inequality, democracy, conflicts and migration. (Government offices of Sweden, 2014, p. 4)

As the quote states, the strategy covers a very broad range of subjects and areas. This is somewhat specified, for example the first of FORSKs focus areas are specified as follows:

*Focusing on capacity-building for research, primarily in low-income countries and regions*

- More partner countries have capacity to independently undertake research training and conduct high-quality research.
- More women undergo research training and conduct research.
- Strengthened conditions and capacity among national and regional research actors to participate in international research and research dialogue.
- More partner countries and regional research actors have capacity to formulate and implement national and regional research strategies.
- More partner countries and regional research actors have improved competence and strengthened infrastructure for scientific communication.
- Strengthened capacity among universities in partner countries to communicate research findings that are potentially beneficial to the development of society. (Government offices of Sweden, 2014, pp. 2-3)

These specifications still only constitute general objectives and leave the concrete and practical decisions to the government officials. The role of the strategies, policies and guidelines functions rather as pointers than as orders or assignments. And rather than to clearly specify exactly what is to be done, the documents create a template for the bureaucratic space and the framing process of the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames. Throughout the process of implementation of the development aid, there is an extensive system of control and result management. This process may to a higher degree impact the practical steering and administration of aid as well as define the bureaucratic space further than the general guidelines. In the next section this process will be examined further.

#### 4.2.2.3. Ground control

Sida is to present a collected account of the operations that have been conducted together with other Swedish agencies (other agencies development aid-financed operations and service exports). The account shall contain expenses divided per agency as well as an evaluation of the result of the operation. (Government offices of Sweden, 2014)

One increasing focus during later years, present in both policy and the 2015 letter of regulation, is on the evaluation and reporting of projects. This aspect of PARTNER's work is in my view indeed representative of the bureaucratic nature of governmental work, and it is expressed throughout the entire process of administering development aid.

The need for control and effective result management is not something new, even if the focus has increased in later years. Already in the first proposition regarding Swedish developmental aid, proposition 1962:100, states that:

The development contributions' realization and effect should be monitored. In this area some significant flaws have been found that are now under repair. /.../ A trusting cooperation between the giver and the receiver should be able to be created in order to make the aid effective. (Government offices of Sweden, 1962, p. 8)

In the operational plan, this is branded "process effectivity" and the overall goal for it is to make "*/.../ a modern and effective agency with internal processes, systems and modes of operation that support and **simplify** the operation*". (PARTNER, 2015, p. 5)

However it can be somewhat problematic to effectively balance between bureaucratic space and individual agency as the goals stated in the unit strategies are often relatively open to interpretation themselves, such as the overall objective stated in the strategy for CAPDEV:

That both Swedish and international actors, including in developing countries, have the capacity and skills to contribute

to the objectives of international development cooperation and of reform cooperation in Eastern Europe. (Government offices of Sweden, 2010, p. 1)

With general goals like these, contributions may take very different forms, concern very different actors and use very different methods etcetera. To measure results and effectiveness in regards to these goals, one has to make individual estimates of every contribution, which is both time consuming and, to a degree, has to be based on the evaluators subjective perceptions. Throughout the policy platform, the suggestive nature of evaluating aid contributions is brought up.

Thorough risk assessment and risk management are crucial if aid is to achieve the desired result and taxpayers' money is to be managed responsibly. However, risk management does not only involve minimising risk; it is also a question of weighing up risks and potential results. A certain amount of risk is often essential if the aid is to achieve its intention. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 47)

The difficulties in following up results in aid must not, however, lead those administering aid to stop trying to do so. The approach should instead be to follow up what can be followed up and make assessments of the other aspects. Nor do the difficulties mean that Sweden should focus its aid on short-term results or solely on results that are easy to measure. Nor should Sweden refrain from providing aid in unstable situations where it may take longer before the aid achieves results or where the results will be harder to measure. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 44)

All respondents interviewed for this thesis were both invested and engaged in the administration and the routines, and had opinions and thoughts about how it could be changed and improved. There were however differences in the view of ability to affect the system and how to carry out objectives:

But then you have to know how to do it, it isn't very easy for everyone to influence decision-making. So it isn't open for completely different opinions, we have a lot of consensus-

thinking, but everyone is... after all within... If someone expresses completely different opinions, it might become really weird. (Barasjkova 2015)

Three of the respondents independently expressed the opinion that each unit had a relatively large autonomy where the actions and prioritisations of the head of the unit played an important role. Furthermore, the ability to influence the different decisions and actions on unit level was rated relatively high by all respondents, but there seemed to be a difference between those who had worked there for a couple of years and those who were newly employed; the more of the hidden codes and language that you knew, the more “open” the workplace was described as.

I’ve been at Sida for a long time, so I would say that it is easy to influence decisions, because I know the codes. But I don’t know exactly what they are. So if you would talk to someone more recently hired, I think they would say that Sida is a hierarchical organization and that it is really hard to influence. (Gisa, 2016)

Another aspect which was dependent on how long the different respondents had worked at Sida seemed to be the perception of the “how”; how the decisions and policies were to be carried out. Generally, it is stated that UD decides on what should be accomplished and Sida decides on how this should be done. However, since the Swedish development aid is diverse and covering a number of different countries, regions, focuses and so on, it is not possible to have a fixed method or template. As it is now at PARTNER, a lot of responsibility falls on each supervisor to decide a plausible way of action. Hence, the possibility exists for different interpretations and “hows” depending on the supervisor. Those who had worked at Sida for a longer period of time experienced that the definition of “how” was defined and made understandable through the definition of “what” was to be done as well as through the leadership. Those who had not worked as long expressed some uncertainties about this:

It is one thing that the strategy says that you should support a certain system and when you’ve chosen an actor you should

think like this, but how am I supposed to know what actor I should choose? How should I think? How do I operationalize this? In between that we are missing a lot of support, in my opinion. (Oblomov, 2016)

I've seen that it can be a lot of uncertainty if more than one person can interpret a text, like the OP-directive we get every year. It is insanely short, it can be a very important task that concerns a whole unit and that is formulated in two sentences and then it can be fatal if two different persons interpret it in different ways. You could wish we got directives that were perhaps five pages longer or attachments that clarified what they mean. (Wan, 2016)

The dilemma of a vague method seemed to exist in all units, even though the respondents argued that there was no problem deciding how a contribution was meant to be handled, it came down to an individual understanding of the system rather than an outspoken “plan of action”.

*/.../This should be done, but there is no how, the overall directive can be pretty clear, but how it should be done and what mandate this unit should have, how much resources they should have and who is responsible for what? All this is decided by us, but we do not have the mandate for it as we speak in our own favour. (Wan, 2016)*

Throughout the whole process of decision-making, supervision and reporting, there are certain reporting systems for internal steering control (ISK in the Swedish abbreviation) that are central in the administration of the Sidait. Mainly two of them are going to be brought up here: TRAC and PALASSO.

TRAC is Sida's contribution management system, a digitalized management platform where all contributions are to be registered and continually updated. In TRAC all the decisions, important communications and decision supports are to be registered. If filled out carefully, it may take a considerable amount of time and effort, and if not filled out properly, it may create confusion when reading it. Hence conflicts may arise whether TRAC is an optimal platform for Sida.

PALASSO is Sida's salary and personnel-administrative platform, where all government officials are to give an account for time spent at work. In PALASSO, you are to choose the nature of your different assignments from a list, for example you can choose "Strategic planning" for time spent in meetings regarding strategy-related issues, or you can choose "Administration" for administrative tasks. However, there is a large number of categories and it is not always obvious which category fits which work task, and overall, it may be difficult to properly categorize all work being done. Because of this, PALASSO has received some critique.

One example of the problem with conducting developmental aid and managing concrete results is the contrast between "hard" and "soft" goals. The Swedish development aid aims to create a change in the long term perspective, creating a possibility for so called self-help – building capacity and ability for countries and organizations to be more self-reliant. At the same time there has been an increased demand (since 2006) to present results. And there is no model for how this reporting should be accomplished, how to make more or less abstract values like health, literacy and gender equality into concrete development.

Those discussions that concern what kind of activities are good and deliver relevant results? Sometimes they get lost when everyone talks about not what you do but how you do it in relation to money within the chain of decisions. This is a slight exaggeration, but it is more about delivering a clean audit-report, than to make sure that relevant results are delivered, that you are heading in a sustainable direction with the partners. And the supervisors often say that it is frustrating, they want to heed successfully both to policy, consulting, and method development on one side and supervision on the other. (Oblomov, 2016)

A lot of focus is put on result, but I think that the result that we focus on mostly concerns payments and how much money we spend, so I believe there should be a focus on results, but that we can twist it and focus more on what we achieve /.../ The reporting we do to the ministry of foreign affairs is mostly about

how much we have spent and three things in dot-shapes that has happened. It has become better, but I still feel like we write what people want to hear and it is hard to write about challenges in a balanced way. (Wan, 2016)

This brings forth yet another problematic angle – how do policy and praxis correlate? It seems as if the practical systems that are put in place do not always deliver what they are supposed to, since, if the Sidaits prioritize differently when using them, different results may be produced. All of the respondents had different approaches to the systems and had experienced different problems and solutions. Some believed that TRAC was a good tool for increasing the transparency and control and some did not bother to fill everything out as they considered it a waste of both time and resources. And almost all of them were sceptical towards the time reporting. Furthermore, some aired the idea that the internal control had a dampening effect on decision-making and risk taking, when according to the documents this should be encouraged:

We are encouraged and encouraged but I don't believe that there are that many who dare take risks. I don't believe that it is because of a low ceiling, but a logical consequence of these years of internal steering and control that we have lived through. Of course people don't dare to throw off the control-cape and support risk filled projects, they are rather careful. (Oblomov, 2016)

And at the same time we have this creative employment, because it is a creative employment, we always have to find solutions to problems, think in new ways, new manners in which to conduct our work, well... It's really interesting in that way. And then you try to put a structure on top of it. It really is a damper on the creative input. (Wan, 2016)

Some have chosen to solve the problem with the time consuming time reporting in their own way by filling out the time reporting stereotypically and in very coarse lines, others sometimes “feel as if they are drowning” and some again do not see it as a problem. However, the systems for internal

steering and control were among the most discussed issues during my time at Sida, and the issue that raised most feelings during the interviews. And the internal steering and control connect to the process of reporting results. As mentioned, the focus on reporting have been increasingly shifted towards results, and I find it interesting to explore in what manner the reporting was conducted. According to the respondents there were somewhat conflicting messages, as the leadership on director general and sometimes on department level encourages risk-taking but at the same time, it seems to be prioritised to report mainly successful contributions:

With an organization as large as Sida, and with a department and unit with so many supported organizations, you have to boil it down to a few examples. And then it mostly concerns the use of funds. You try to say something, but it is just a fraction, like saying that the creature next to me has hair, but not more than that, ha-ha. And that is a shame. (Klamm, 2016)

I think that Sida's higher officials are a bit scared to tell things to the ministry of foreign affairs, sometimes unnecessarily. To mention when things haven't worked out well. /.../ Well, at least I think that it is pretty easy to say that something doesn't work within Sida but when forwarding it to the ministry of foreign affairs it is groomed. (Wan, 2016)

Through my observations and interviews I got the impression that, because of the implications of evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of aid, a large focus landed on how well the reporting corresponded with the values and framings of the official documents. Thus the perception of the field and capitals of the government officials could come to play a large role in the reporting process – the more one understood of the bureaucratic space, the more room for subjective agency there was. A large part of the practical understanding of the correlation between what was subject to fixed bureaucratic space and what was subject to subjective agency can be found in the social landscape at PARTNER, which leads us to the next section.

### 4.3. The social structure of PARTNER

The organizational structure in many ways define the physical structure of Sida, but the social structures play an equally if not more important role as they are part of how identities and habitus are shaped and perceived and also how texts and situations are understood. Through the policies and documents as well as the organizational structure, a template for how the perception of values and capitals as well as the framings can be discerned is created, but then, within the social structure, this template becomes chiselled and fully formed by the individuals and unofficial texture of governmental operation. At PARTNER, values are formed and followed in the implementation of development aid, and depending on what the social structure is like, the resulting implementation can vary.

At PARTNER, it is almost possible to see, if you put all the units next to each other and just look at how they are dressed, you would probably be able to say that ‘these work with the private sector, these work probably more with the civil society’ and so on. But because of the trend of working more and more with development financing, there is a lot more economy in the development cooperation, we don’t go down and build roads anymore, we give guaranties for billion-sums. Other types of people are recruited today than some years ago and the leftish label doesn’t exist in that same sense anymore. Maybe still a little, but not as in the sixties anyway. (Wan, 2016)

As the quote above implies it was somewhat possible to see which unit one works at from how they dressed, each unit had a certain style based on their area of expertise. For example, the LOANS unit were prone to wear suits while CIVSAM were prone to wear more leisurely clothes. Furthermore, there has been a slight change of focus and values when recruiting new personnel.

Earlier there was a lot of talk about the fact that our thing at Sida is to disburse money, and we should be good at that, that should be our thing. And even earlier we had more people that worked with policy and such. But who are the best generalists, well, it is

the political scientists, that's what we are good at. And the competition has become grimmer, if we want someone to join us at Sida and the competition is fierce, I think that a political scientist meets more requirements than what an engineer with an interest of development aid does. (Jeremiah, 2016)

This process of shaping and reshaping priorities and values is part of the construction of social hierarchies at PARTNER, and during my time at the department, these hierarchies and how they were structured became more and more apparent.

#### 4.3.1. Hierarchies

From having been a flat organization it is now very important to firmly establish one's actions, that I establish with my boss that I'm going to speak with someone over there so that my boss and that person's boss know that. And the relations with the foreign ministry aren't free. You don't go and talk to the foreign ministry without gaining approval for it beforehand. (Gisa, 2016)

At a large organization such as Sida there is a need for understanding what kind of hierarchies exist to understand how the organization works. During my time at Sida and through the performed interviews I came to understand that there are two kinds of hierarchies in place; the official and the unofficial. These hierarchies are manifested in different ways; the official hierarchies are implemented from above and are compulsorily while the unofficial hierarchies are based on socially implicit contracts.

According to the official guidelines, Sida should be a "flat organization". This means that the organizational structure should have as few levels of middle management as possible between executives and staff. The benefits of this are in theory that it provides relative autonomy to the different parts of the organization which can increase productivity and ownership of the various projects. In the reality of Sida, there is reason to question how flat the organization really is, and if it really should be flat. Productivity and

participation are perhaps the two most distinguished values that the concept of the flat organization aims for at Sida. (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972)

At the unit level, all the major decisions and changes in the supervision of the contributions and organization have to go through the head of unit, thus restricting the acting space of each individual. A large part of the respondents stated that Sida was actually a strictly hierarchical organization with a low acceptance of diverging opinions. Even though the organization should be flat, I got the impression that it was somewhat frowned upon to skip levels of command, for example going to the director-general or the head of department rather than the head of unit. This could create a feeling of “being trapped behind the head of the unit” (Klamm, 2016). On the other hand, Sida have had experience of being a more open organization with less clear hierarchies and structure, something that damaged the transparency and effectiveness of Sida and which most of the government officials felt needed to be changed. The latest reorganization and “sharpening” of the organization started in 2009 and even though some of the employees feel that the social climate may be unnecessarily harsh, it was needed.

However, it is problematic if the pendulum swings too far to the other side rather than finds a harmonic balance. (Jeremiah, 2016)

Regarding the unofficial hierarchies that exist, they are created out of social and cultural bonds rather than organizational decrees. Often, these unofficial hierarchies are a contributor to the official hierarchies, determining who should be invited into or advance in the organization. This is not always the case however, and the values and hierarchies that govern Sida are by no means representative for every single person employed. Certain subjects can be widely debated and disagreed upon, even though the core of the work in many ways is agreed upon. To understand this, it is imperative to understand the capitals relevant to the common Sidait. As mentioned before, the prevalence and form of the social, symbolic and cultural capitals are imperative for the analysis in this thesis. There are certain capitals that are more cherished than others while working at Sida and these capitals can be said to either support or challenge the official hierarchy.

#### 4.3.2. Capitals

To begin approaching the notion of capital I would like to start by looking at whether PARTNER as a department could be said to be diverse in regards to its values. As the department in this thesis is regarded as being part of a bureaucratic field, the capitals all, in one way or another, relate to this. A broad department would mean that there is a wide variety of thoughts and preferences regarding the work being done and the structures in place, which in turn affect the bureaucratic climate. In a lot of ways, it can be argued that Sida indeed is not very diverse. The majority are constituted of ethnic Swedish middle-aged women with similar academic background.

At Sida there are pretty much the same type of people with the same type of socioeconomic status and education, ethnicity and to some degree gender as well. So it is pretty homogenous.  
(Wan, 2016)

However, the units that make up PARTNER consist of a wide variety of focuses ranging from loans and economy to capacity support. The main common denominators for the units are “innovation” and “partnership”, two pretty vague terms. The result of this is possibly a greater mixture of values and sympathies than some of the other, more clearly profiled departments have (such as the AFRICA-department which has development aid within an African context as a common denominator). Sida as an agency states on its website that:

Working to promote a sustainable and equal society is a very important part of Swedish development aid. – (Sida, 2014)

The whole notion of development aid builds on a somewhat conflicting and complex mix of altruism and politics, as the outspoken goal is to help, but at the same time is subject to the political discourse where power structures and agendas are undeniably present.

Thematically there is a large difference, and that says something about the political steering, how distinct it is. Completely different things are in focus now and it's happening very fast. Now we talk about environment to a much higher degree than

before and a lot less about the business sector and economic development. Not that the current government tells us not to deal with it but it is clear that they want to prioritize their issues and thus – just as it should be – Sida prioritizes thereafter. (Wan, 2016)

The next section will further examine a brief layout of how I experienced the social landscape at Sida and how this may form the prerequisite for interaction and interpretation of social structures.

#### *4.3.2.1. Person gallery*

At PARTNER a wide array of Sidaites are gathered. And as with all social hubs, the more individuals that gather, the larger the chance of a diversion of opinion. This was the case at PARTNER as well. When I write diversion of opinion, I do not necessarily refer to open arguments and brawls, but there are different individuals with different backgrounds, experiences, ideological points of departure and political standpoints. Even though the differences are not necessarily outspoken, they exist and as they exist, they influence the outcome of social interaction. As I first came to PARTNER, I experienced two prevalent attitudes and I could thus make a distinction between two types of employees: the retrogrades and the progressive. The retrogrades did not like the restructuring that Sida has undergone in the past few years, instead they yearn for the structure of the golden days which, according to some of them, was less restricting, more bound by ideals of solidarity and in some ways more adventurous.<sup>5</sup> The progressive group on the other hand consisted of individuals that embraced modern buzzwords like innovation, communication and collaboration with the business sector. This aggregation is an extreme standard image of two sides that often meet in the middle. And as my stay at Sida continued, this rough divide remained, but became more

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<sup>5</sup> A time when one could be a part of a movement, and the exotification of the south was still legitimate.

nuanced. In this paper I will roughly aggregate the personalities/postures towards the work being done at Sida into six categories. These categories are made up by me and will be used to clarify how different values and personalities may interact in the bureaucratic landscape:

The disillusioned – Has stayed at Sida for a long time, uses the phrase “it was better in the good old days”. Works strenuously but does not understand/dislikes the technical systems, not least why everything takes incredulous amounts of time. The disillusioned values dissidence towards the system and abides by his/her own rules rather than the agency’s.

The pragmatic idealist – Dislikes the concept of “trends” and incorporation of the business sector but quietly agrees that the world is changing and that it is better to do something than to do nothing. Values the ability to cooperate and to decide on matters collectively.

The stereotypic bureaucrat – Sees the policies and guidelines as the bible and requests an exact compliance of these document from herself and co-workers. It is not what has been done or why, it is how it was done that is important. Values obedience to the rules.

The yes-man/turncoat – Agrees with the administration most of the time and values advancement of the career over advancement of social relations. The turncoat values strong leadership and obedience.

The business zealot – Thinks that we are standing at the crossroads between the new and the old and that bigger businesses and corporations along with new technology and free markets can change the world for the better. The business zealot values involvement of the private sector and opportunities for individual action.

The achiever – With a positive attitude and an understanding of the current trends everything is possible! The achiever values imagination, innovation and risk-taking.

At Sida, different individuals and groups like the ones above value different things, but there are some more or less common denominators of what carries weight in social interaction. Furthermore, all the above groups move around within the same field and within the same department and have to interact and adapt to each other. Through interacting and gathering around shared meanings or separating due to disagreements, the collective frames for action can be more easily discerned. In the next section the creation of the values and ways of communication that shape the capitals at Sida will be further discussed.

#### *4.3.2.2. Values*

Basically, I could not discern any unbiased values and perceptions, but rather clusters of collective opinions formed mutually by congenial colleagues at Sida.

As mentioned in the theories section, field experience is an important marker for personal worth. I myself experienced that larger, international organizations such as the UN, the world bank, and CGIAR were valuable items on any CV. If one had worked at one of these international institutions, it was assumed that you knew how to handle yourself in a bureaucratic machinery and that you had an overall knowledge of current trends and events. The support for abstract values such as those expressed in the policy platform or such as the millennium development goals was overall strong and I also experienced that personal commitment in concrete, relevant issues (an organization within the field, the struggle for clean water in a specific exposed area etcetera) was welcomed to a degree.

One can always agree with general guidelines, since they are so general. Then one has to adapt them to the context of a specific partner organization or a contribution and make them fit. It is always a risk to become too involved and get blind, sometimes you have worked with an organization for a long time and you have to realize that the cooperation does not work anymore or it isn't relevant and therefore stop it. That is hard. (Barasjkova 2015)

Was the commitment too strong however, the judgment could be clouded, which was of course frowned upon – as a supervisor/government official it is important to be able to distance oneself from the personal and act on objectivity. Even though the units and departments worked relatively autonomous, the feeling of belonging as a part of Sida was strong, according to all respondents interviewed. All the respondents reinforced what I myself felt during my time at Partner, namely that the sense of working together towards a greater goal unites and creates a sense of togetherness. They did not have the same views on everything, they all experienced that there were certain problems in the organization and in the politics regarding development aid but they also uniformly seemed proud of their own work and of Sweden's role in development aid.

Yes, I believe that many people are proud. We are relatively small employment wise, compared to many other organizations, but at the same time USAID wants to work with us and DFID listens to what we have to say and that is cool. (Wan, 2016)

There exists, even if there are complaints internally, an approach that is founded on respect and not just dilly addling but with demand for respect and not every development aid organ has that. We communicate to our partners what they do well and what they do not do well and when there are too many wrongs we say thank you and goodbye. (Klamm, 2016)

It also seemed to me that there were certain organizations in which a relatively high number of government officials had worked before they came to Sida. I somehow got the impression that it carried more social and symbolic capital to come from one of these organizations as one then had a shared experience of a previous workplace. IDEA and Diakonia are two examples of such organizations.

Another quality that could accumulate capital was to effectively be able to balance between dissidence and compliancy towards the agency. Depending on the situation, skilled government officials could switch between talking about “we, Sida” and just “Sida, the agency” – between claiming ownership

over the positive work being done and expressing critique over the flaws in the organization and steering. There was a fine line between being too sceptical and too uncritical, but if manoeuvred correctly, respect from both administration and co-workers could be earned. Overall, the general distinction between Sida mentioned as “we, Sida” or “Sida, the agency” could be used to discern whether or not something was perceived as positive or negative by the speaker.

One of the more controversial subjects at Sida and PARTNER seemed to be politics. The topic of politics and political opinions at Sida during my time there was fairly played down. As a government official at Sida, it is each official’s job to carry out the decisions and strategies decided by politicians – no matter what one might think about it on a personal level. Thus, politics could be a touchy subject as there are many layers involved therein; not only the obvious personal values, but also a professional aspect of how the development aid is to be administered which perhaps makes the line between the professional and the personal somewhat blurred.

As I first started at Sida I experienced strong winds to the left in the political landscape, but I soon had to reconsider and realise that the landscape was a lot more evenly distributed. Sida has since long had a wide reputation for being leftist, something that might have influenced my first impressions and reflections of the department<sup>6</sup>. (Sida 50 år, 2015) Even though there were not many fiery political discussions, the leftist branding on Sida may be hard to wash away. As a collection of Sida trivia states:

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<sup>6</sup> There was a standing joke that Sida had recruited half a Vietnam-demonstration. The general director at Sida in the late 1970’s complained that the 68-movement was a major inconvenience at Sida.

In the sixties those who wanted to discuss international distribution were called reds. The SIDA-it was presumed to wear clogs and a velour-jacket (Sida 50 år, 2015)

It seemed as if the political rhetoric differed between those who had been working at Sida since the seventies/early eighties and those younger and more newly employed. The longer one had been employed, the more important terms of solidarity and togetherness seemed, and those who had been employed for a longer time were more inclined to see the international development sector as a call rather than a career opportunity. The younger/more newly employed similarly seemed to put their emphasis on opportunities, concrete results and career. I need to emphasize that this indeed was a general feeling rather than a fact.

A more concrete and distinctly influencing side of the politics was the official directives that were created by or given to Sida from the government – for example the strategies, policies and guidelines or the contact with involved politicians, mainly the minister of foreign aid. This discourse points to a shift from a more project and governmentally based aid towards an aid that more and more leans on business corporations, private actors and the commercial sector to develop and secure human rights. Regarding collaboration with the private sector, Sida for example states the following:

The private sector plays an important role for the development. It does not only create work opportunities and contributes to economic growth, but the private sector also plays an important role in developing sustainable solutions to global challenges. Collaboration with the private sector is important for Sida to contribute to a fairer and more sustainable development in the world and is not only a tool to increase growth. More and more countries can survive without traditional aid and several of these countries aim to develop new forms of collaborations. (Sida, 2015)

There also seemed to exist a slight friction between the department of foreign affairs and Sida. A not unsubstantial number of the sidaits expressed the

opinion that earlier ministers of foreign aid<sup>7</sup> were antagonizing and hindering the work of Sida. For example, Gunilla Carlsson stated in an interview that she would have dismantled Sida altogether and started anew if it had been up to her when she was a minister. (Bengtsson, 2015) Thus, when there was a change of government in 2014, there were high hopes that the new minister of foreign<sup>8</sup> aid would take on a different stance from the previous, a hope that seemed to be verified as one of Löwen's first moves as newly appointed minister was to visit Sida and address the sidait's directly regarding expectations and goals for the coming length of office. Many of the respondents did experience a change in the political discourse after the 2014 election and there was an improved relation with the ministry of foreign affairs.

Because of Sida's history with a number of scandals<sup>9</sup> and some opposition to the political leadership (as mentioned above), I experienced that the Sidait's sense of *togetherness* had become strengthened, that there was a great pride in working at Sida and that the governmental officials had a responsibility to help each other and to carry the mission of development aid forward together. Working in an international sector with all the challenges involved as well as being pressured by one's own government can create and in some cases have created a strong feeling of togetherness.

Furthermore, there were significant differences between the units, as each unit had different goals and methods to work with. As a member of the CIVSAM unit, experience from a civil society organization or knowledge about how NGOs cooperate in Sweden could weigh heavy, but in another unit this was more of a parenthesis. Because of the difference between the units, the

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<sup>7</sup> Mainly Gunilla Carlsson but also Hillevi Engström

<sup>8</sup> Isabella Löwen

<sup>9</sup> Jan Mosander published a book called "pengarna som försvann" in which he lists Sida financed projects that went wrong. Among other things, a lack of scrutiny and review of ongoing projects and collaboration partners is brought up.

communication within the department was important in order to establish a shared set of values. Through various ways of interaction ideas and values could be shared and discussed and this is what the next section will delve further into.

#### *4.3.2.3. Communication*

Within Sida there is a number of different supports for social interaction and the communication department is continuously working to develop and improve how the Sidait communicate with each other. There are still some chinks in the system, whereof many originate from the human nature of the government employed – disinterest, ignorance or in some cases simply laziness. Almost all respondents interviewed for this thesis phrased that the communication between the units within PARTNER as well as within Sida as a whole was limited – LOANS and NÄRSKAP had more contact with other units because of their supporting role in the development work, the other units on the other hand seemed to have little reason to fraternize with each other. One of the respondents also brought up the size of the department and the fact that it is divided onto two floors as a contributing cause for lacking fraternization between the units. This makes for an interesting setting, as the units develop parallelly to each other but not necessarily in the same direction, thus making it easier to spot and make distinctions between similarities and differences. One overall and important similarity between all respondents, and something that I picked up early on during my observations was the pride that they had in being a Sidait.

#### *4.3.2.4. Accumulation of capitals*

Through labour, decision-making, communication and interpretation of the social and practical landscape, capitals are created and accumulated by the individuals within the structure of PARTNER. In the sections above, I have discussed how different constellations and values may be formed at the department. As the different values and capitals are accumulated in different constellations, different structures of powers are created, often unconsciously. As I perceived it, certain units had certain characteristics, for example the

LOANS unit consisted of a majority of “business zealots”, and the NÄRSKAP unit consisted of a majority of “achievers”. At PARTNER, the different units are relatively isolated because of their relatively weak common denominators. The LOANS do not have many natural contact points with for example the FORSK unit, which means that the units may acquire and cultivate different values. This is why the work of the department staff and the head of the department is important. Their role is to administer and unify the efforts of the units and maintain a shared vision of the department’s goals. This was done through for example monthly department meetings where current issues were debated and explained, or through the weekly “Friday coffee break” in which all the department had a chance to come together and socialize. To execute effective arenas for gatherings and discussions, it is important that the administration is representative of, or at least understand, the individual values of the government officials and is also able to communicate and unify the department in order to live up to the expectations of Sida as an organization as well as of the government.<sup>10</sup>

And even though the priorities and values of the different units could be divided into factual questions, the overall values at the department regarding how an effective contribution should be handled and how priorities should be ranked in regards to the goals set out was openly discussed and if not always completely shared, at least agreed upon. This relation between individual, unit and department explains the process of constructing the collective action frames and can help in the interpretation of how the government officials can adapt the formal bureaucratic space to a subjective agency. In the next chapter

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<sup>10</sup> An excerpt from Sida’s constitution:

”2§ To fulfil the political development aid the agency’s operation should originate from and be imbued by:

1. A human rights based perspective as well as a perspective of the poor.
2. An integrated environment and climate perspective
3. An integrated equality perspective
4. An integrated conflict perspective in the development cooperation

of this thesis, this process, through the help of the empiric data presented in this chapter, will be analysed and discussed.

## 5. Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical data is analysed using the theoretical framework presented in the theories chapter – collective action frames and Bourdieu's theoretical framework on the bureaucratic field.

In the chapter above, I have dissected the structure of PARTNER, both regarding official structure and guiding documents and also regarding social structure and how guiding documents are perceived and used. In this chapter, I will firstly discuss how the government officials at PARTNER together create what can be called a collective action frame through their framing of issues, solutions and motivations. Secondly, using Bourdieu's theoretical framework on the bureaucratic field, I will discuss how the relation between the formal bureaucratic space and the subjective agency of the government officials at PARTNER forms a practical reality in which decisions are made and carried out.

PARTNER as a governmental agency department is somewhat torn between two realities, the official development aid politics of Sweden and the everyday office politics of the governmental officials within it. The individuals within PARTNER are a relatively homogenous group, with a shared overall mission. From afar, there might not seem to be too many divergent ideas and perceptions, but under closer scrutiny, the values and perceptions of priorities are spread out over a relatively wide area. Benford and Snow state that the framing process is an active and processual phenomenon which implies agency and in a wider sense reality construction. It is also a dynamic and evolving process, thus constantly changing. (Benford & Snow, 2000) In order to engage in an active process, a *diagnostic* frame needs to be constructed. Together with the government offices of Sweden, administrative staff at Sida and PARTNER issue guidelines in the form of policies and strategies in order to clarify the aims of the development aid that PARTNER administer. Benford and Snow argue that directed action is

contingent on identification of the sources of a certain problem and/ or culpable agents (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 616). The guidelines fill two functions whereof the most obvious is to steer the operations and offer directions for what is to be done. Another, more indirect function of the guidelines is to offer official values and attitudes around which the government officials can range. This may not always have the desired effect as the government officials are free thinking individuals and as such react differently depending on a number of factors such as relation to the work tasks, to the co-workers, academic background and so on. However, in most cases, most government officials can agree on most of the often vague values expressed in the guidelines and more importantly, on the problem formulations, thus “focusing blame or responsibility” on specific sources of problems. PARTNER as a department has a relatively complex composition as it focuses on abstract proceedings – innovation and partnership – rather than regional development. Because of this, there is no common denominator neither in what issues the units in the department are to work with nor how they are to approach their respective area. What is interesting however is that I experienced that the department did find a unity in the fact that it consisted of such diverging competences as it did. PARTNER as a department can be said to have emerged from the need of a cumulated department of units which could approach issues from outside the box. All the guidelines repeat continuously that the need for sustainable development is ever growing and that Sweden’s role in the international development is important. Within this, PARTNER can be interpreted to act as a scouting department in finding new solutions and building new bridges and this can be said to mobilize the government officials and constitute the *diagnostic framing*.

With the *diagnostic framing* as a shared ground the different units then differ from each other in how the *prognostic framing* is constructed to find these new solutions and bridges, but they still share the common denominators of innovation and partnership, and in the unit-specific strategies the same focuses are highlighted – through gender equality, a perspective of the poor, support for democracy and work against corruption etcetera. On one hand all units at PARTNER have a common value-system, a general action plan and

a tool box to fix the vaguely formulated problem but on the other hand they have different models for solution:

- The unit for research cooperation works with a focus that higher education and capacity building within schools and universities are the solution.
- The unit for civil society applies the focus that a strong and developed civil society is the solution.
- The unit for capacity development pursues the thesis that more focus on coordination and capacity development at existing organizations, collaborations and governments is the solution.

The other units (SPF, NÄRSKAP, LOANS) function as supporting units and adapt to other units' problem formulations at the same time as they, in some aspects, are expected to raise some strategic focuses of their own, established in the operational plans. In other words, here the different units differ essentially with, at unit level, different descriptions of the problem and different narratives about the "heroes and villains". Benford and Snow state that the prognostic framing usually takes place in what they call a "multi-organizational field", which in this thesis well translates to the diversity of the units focus-wise. They further argue that because of this, the agents often develop conflicting solutions, or "counterframing" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). The units within PARTNER act within realms that do not necessarily have many parallels or associations between each other, except that the departments strive for the same goal. So, each unit has its own approach to how its respective focus areas should be handled, be it research support or capacity development, but all units can be said to share a common set of operational principles – perspective of the poor etcetera. This enables the department, and even the whole of Sida, to obtain a certain level of unity. This, together with messages implemented both from the government through missives and guidelines and from within the department itself through shared perceptions of the departments' and Sida's importance for a sustainable international development, shape a socially constructed prioritization and motivation.

Throughout the missives and guidelines, the Swedish development aid is highlighted both directly and indirectly as a torchbearer for democratic rights, gender equality and with a moral responsibility to “help improve living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression”. Repeatedly, throughout my observations and throughout the interviews, governmental officials at PARTNER refer to their work as important and as being a part of the international development aid, painting a picture of a shared project with for example USAid, NORAD, the UN and others. To relate to the vocabularies that are used as a base for the *motivational frame*, they can all be found in the social motivational structures of PARTNER:

Severity – The severity of Sida’s and PARTNER’s *raison d’être* is implicit, and in both the missives and through observations and interviews this is conveyed, for example through the phrase found in the platform:

Respect for human rights and for the right to live a free life is crucial to achieving socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 7)

Urgency – Through for example the increasing demand for measurable results one can define a sense of urgency, and throughout my observations and experiences at the department I got the impression that the government officials worked with a feeling of urgency to change the existing situation. However, the fact that contact with the actual reality was relatively sparse – it was rare that the government officials experienced the environments in which their contributions were implemented – may have counteracted the feeling of urgency. The only environment most government officials experienced was the office landscape.

Efficacy – The demand on efficacy was high from the government offices, but according to some it was counterproductive and discouraging. Complicated systems and high demands on reporting and declaration of time spent and duties performed worked as an incentive for some and as an inhibition for others. Through clear deadlines regarding reporting and

conclusion of finished contributions, a relatively high level of efficacy was nevertheless maintained.

Propriety – This is also expressed clearly in the platform:

Sweden is one of the world's richest, most democratic and most gender equal countries and Sweden therefore has a moral responsibility to help to improve living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. (Governmental missive 2013/14:131, 2014, p. 8)

Throughout my stay at Sida, words like solidarity and duty reoccurred. Most of the governmental officials seemed engaged and motivated by the propriety to lend their knowledge to the cause of international development aid.

All in all, this forms a relatively unison motivational frame with which I would maintain that a majority of governmental officials at Sida would agree. Together these three frames convey a narrative that unifies and directs the work of PARTNER towards a shared meaning and goal. Within these frames, the bureaucratic space can be said to function as a firm point, offering statute, but not being explicit enough to offer a fully functioning development aid. In order to have a fully functioning international development agency such as Sida, I claim that the subjective agency of the government officials are of the utmost importance, and as the collective action frames have shown so far, there is a rather large room for subjective agency regarding how things are to be done. I would argue that the “what” and the “why”, are to a relatively high degree expressed and shared both officially and unofficially. To delve further into how the individuals at Sida interact to achieve the “how's”, we need to look at how the bureaucratic field is constructed.

Throughout the empiric data, values and capitals have been referred to. Within the framing system, these values matter as it is shared values and perceptions that form the prerequisite for a shared, collective framing of a problem. Through constructing a collective every-day at Sida, the assessment of values becomes an implicit part of social interference, thus constructing a social structure to operate within. Without this social structure, the formal bureaucratic space would have to be absolute, but as a social structure exists and is inevitable at a workplace such as PARTNER, the formal bureaucratic

structures and the social structures have to co-exist and constantly affect and reshape themselves and each other. Thus, the subjective agency, built on perceptions of how the capitals are represented, is a product and a producer of the bureaucratic space. Bourdieu argues that in order to understand the symbolic dimension of the state, which in this case can be translated to the symbolic dimension of the Swedish development bureaucracy, it is necessary to *“understand the specific functioning of the bureaucratic microcosm and thus to analyse the genesis and structure of this universe of agents of the state who have constituted themselves into a state nobility by instituting the state...”* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994, p. 16) Each unit at PARTNER has its own methods and sub-objectives to achieve, and thus values certain traits differently. However, through the position of administrators within the bureaucratic field – PARTNER finances, controls and evaluates recipients of governmental support – one of the most important aspects of a government official is to understand the bureaucracy. To understand the development aid bureaucracy could mean to obtain symbolic, social and cultural capital at once, as it can amount to the codes of correct communication, well conformed decisions and may help to find the right jargon when fraternizing. And, as there are few official pointers on “how” the Sidaites are to achieve the “what”, a strong possession of capitals – and through them understand how the system works and how they could be adapted to one’s own agenda – could mean that the room for individual agency increases dramatically. To have a strong understanding of official rules and regulations often need to be complimented with a strong understanding of social rules and regulations in order to be able to adapt to certain specific situations. I once heard a co-worker at another unit say that he/she did not like to be in a decision-making position, it was far easier to make decisions and take initiatives if one situated oneself directly under the decision makers instead.

## 6. Summary

PARTNER as a department is in many ways different from other departments at Sida, as each department has its own niche and specializations. However, many aspects of this study can be applicable on other parts of Sida as well as

on other development agencies, as the position on the bureaucratic field is similar and some of the issues, both concrete and abstract are transferable. The purpose of this thesis was to explore how the relation between formal bureaucratic space and subjective agency shapes the practical reality for a government official at Sida. Through the frames constructed by the government officials at the department, a collective concurrence on *what* the purpose of Swedish development aid should do and *why* it is needed is created. This builds on a gantry of official policies supported by and reliant on unofficial and social cohesiveness regarding what values should be heeded to and why. Thus, the official guidelines and the implied social rules are dependent on and set the tone for each other. The implied social rules must somehow respect the official guidelines, but have the ability to affect and influence the interpretation. Furthermore, a collected and shared set of social rules and apprehensions are important in the process of designing the answer to *how* the development aid administered by PARTNER should be implemented. In this process the hierarchical structures set the tone, both through official chains of command and through informal organization based on how well the individuals can navigate the bureaucratic field. To understand and utilize bureaucratic notions and social situations, the government officials may rule decision-making and discussions towards subjective goals. Thus, the subjective agency of a government official is not only possible, it is because of the vague definitions on *how* even instrumental for a functioning Swedish development aid.

### 6.1. Further research

This study examines one of many layers of development aid – a department at a national agency. This department and Sida is but a small part of an extensive system of development aid bureaucracy. A comparison between different nation state bureaucracies and methods would be able to put this study in a wider perspective by pointing out systematic similarities and structures and isolating cultural and political causes for internal bureaucratic structures. In the same way, a study on the affiliating processes would be interesting. A study on how the Swedish ministry of foreign aid conducts itself in the creation of policy documents – how the relation between

feasibility and political punching power takes form and how this is viewed by decision-makers and officials. On the other side of the spectrum, it would be interesting to follow up this study with a study on how NGO's and practitioners in the field<sup>11</sup> relate to donor policies contra practical needs and prerequisites.

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Wan (2016), Interviewed by John Lund 2016-01-12

## Appendix 1 – Pre-prepared questions

Would you like to describe the department's overall operations?

Would you like to describe your unit's overall operations?

How would you say that the unit's work adds to the strategic goals of Sida/Partner?

What documents and authorities do you experience that you and the unit proceed from when it comes to directives and decision-making?

Do you experience political steering evident in your work?

How do you use strategic guidelines and policy documents in your work?

- What frames are there that limit the acting freedom in the daily work?
- What space exists for interpretation of these? Do you have examples?
- How is the work established and controlled by bosses etc? Which instances are involved?

When compilations and reports are written, what do you experience as being prioritized?

- How is reporting conducted?
- How are preparations, follow-ups and evaluations conducted?
- Do you experience that information from contributions and projects are being used?
- Do you experience that relevant information is prioritized?

How do you experience the communication within the department?

Do you have former experience from governmental or developmental work?

Do you think your background can affect how you perform your work tasks?

Do you experience Sida as a homogenous workplace?

Do you experience that you as an individual can affect the structure of Sida?

How do you view Sida and the work the agency performs?