Filling in the Blanks

Framing and Interpreting the Environment in Swedish Development Cooperation

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Independent project • 30 credits
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Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development
Environmental Communication and Management - Master's Programme
Uppsala 2022

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Credits: 30 credits

Level: Second cycle, A2E

Course title: Master thesis in Environmental science, A2E

Course code: EX0897

Programme/education: Environmental Communication and Management - Master's Programme

Course coordinating dept: Department of Aquatic Sciences and Assessment

Place of publication: Uppsala

Year of publication: 2022

Online publication: https://stud.epsilon.slu.se

Keywords: Environment, Communication, Development, Cooperation, Framing, Natural Resources,

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the understanding of such an ambiguous concept as “the environment” can be communicated in Swedish development cooperation by the Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in a way that reconciles the need to deliver on policy goals while still allowing for an interpretative and participatory project design. The central research problem studied was thus how to communicate environmental understandings without explicitly doing so.

The thesis sought to address this issue by exploring how the environment is framed in Swedish development policy and how that framing is then interpreted and negotiated when development policy is implemented by actors lower down in the development hierarchy. Research questions sought to discover how the environment was understood by each actor, how such understanding was manifested through interaction with development partners, and how the Government’s original environmental framing compared to the other actors.

Framing was chosen as a conceptual tool to make such an environmental understanding clear by focusing on what aspects of reality were made visible obscured and what was considered problems and solutions. Document analysis and interviews provided the empirical material, and the frames found were compared to four different environmental narratives to better situated them into a conceptually cohesive whole.

While the Government’s framing focused on new more environmentally friendly technology, SIDA amended this by highlighting the role of structures and power relations and emphasis the need for more equal access to land and decision-making fora; the NGO was shown to have a strong farming focus and framed both environmental problems and solutions through individual actions to make livelihoods more resilient. Environmentalism for Profit was a narrative which all of these actors seemed to adhere to in different degrees,

The thesis concludes that the Government and the other actors can communicate the obscure and more explanatory part of their frames through a “communicative shadow” which is the indication of arguments or viewpoints that are not expressed but whose existence, can still be recognised by other parties in the exchange. This allows them to make their framing clear enough to follow while simultaneously leave them without the need to make normative and ideological stances motivating the frames. It thus becomes a method for filling in the blanks.

Keywords: Environment, Communication, Development, Cooperation, Framing, Natural Resources,

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Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DGDEA	Doing Good Deeds Eastern Africa[1]
DGDSE	Doing Good Deeds Sweden
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SHG	Self Help Group
SHECC	SIDA´s Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
WB	World Bank

[1] The name Doing Good Deeds is an alias made per request by the NGO in question to protect their anonymity.

1. Introduction

Because international development cooperation brings together people from various classes, ethnicities, countries, and interests, communication becomes an essential part of the whole process, from contextual analyses and project planning to administration and evaluation. In recent decades, development cooperation has started moving from top-down project implementation to more bottom-up and participatory strategies (De Vylder, 2002). However, development donors still carry practical and symbolic power over project design and implementation through their control over funding (Power *et al.*, 2002).

Parallel to finding ways to establish greater inclusivity and decentralisation in development cooperation, increasing attention has been paid to environmental issues (Robb, 2004). When the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were launched in 2015, the Swedish Government were one of the initiators of a high-level group that should "*contribute to a far-reaching and genuine commitment to implementing the global goals and the 2030 Agenda*" (Lundqvist Dahlin, 2015, p. 1).

While environmental issues are highlighted explicitly in goals such as #13 (Climate Action) and #15 (Life on Land), all goals should be seen as "*integrated and indivisible, and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental*" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015). However, the concept of the environment can be understood in different ways, all with their embedded normative connotations and assumptions (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018). It is therefore not given what it means to integrate environmental issues or operationalise them in development work.

Choices need to be made regarding what is deemed as drivers behind environmental degradation and climate change, and solutions developed to deal with these accordingly. However, part of the reason development has become a successful concept is the air it has achieved of being universal and apolitical (Cornwall & Deborah, 2010). This interpretative ambiguity allows donors to create consensus because it helps hide ideological and normative stances (Groves & Hinton, 2004). One way to understand how such choices are manifest in communication is through frame analysis, whereby certain aspects of reality are brought into focus and others excluded; it might be explicit and used to convince others or internalised and made invisible (Entman, 1993).

Working with environmental integration in development cooperation thus creates a particular challenge: how to communicate an inherently ambiguous concept – the environment – in a manner that is 19 understandable and clear enough for partners to implement projects in line with international commitments while 2) still being seen as apolitical and allowing more voices and interpretations into the discussion.

In short, the research problem becomes **how to communicate environmental values in development cooperation comprehensibly without explicitly mentioning or explaining them**. This problem is not unique to any single actor. The Government is interested in ensuring that their policies are enacted in accordance with their representative responsibilities; implementing agencies like the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) need to make sure that the projects they support help solve the problem identified by the Government; finally, NGOs want to show their projects align with their donors' wishes.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

This thesis aims to explore how the environment is framed in Swedish development policy and how that framing is interpreted and negotiated when said policy is implemented by other actors in the development sector. The study will address the following research questions:

- How is the environment as a concept understood at the following levels of the Swedish development hierarchy: government policy, development aid agency and NGO?
- How do the different actors in the development hierarchy characterise their relationship with each other?
- How does the Government's original environmental framing compare to the other actors in the development cooperation hierarchy?

Serving as a case study for the thesis is the Swedish based international development organisation Doing Good Deeds Sweden'[2] (DGDS) and their local division DGD Eastern Africa (DGDEA), headquartered in Kenya. DGD provide a suitable case study to understand the interpretation and transference of the Government's environmental framing for two main reasons.

First, while they have no formal collaboration with SIDA in Sweden, there is a collaboration between DGDAE and SIDA's local office in Nairobi, making them

[2] The organisation and all their sources and interview subjects have been given aliases to protect their anonymity. All empiric material will be stored and saved for five years and be available in a redacted format upon request.

part of the "Swedish resource base". This umbrella term encompasses "*Swedish actors in the public and private sector, as well as civil society, who can contribute to the implementation of Agenda 2030*" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018, p. 6, translation from Swedish). DGD can thus illustrate the indirect ways in which environmental framing is transferred. Second, previously established personal connections to DGDS and its employees in Sweden meant the possibility of accessing both verbal and written resources. Third, DGD doesn't self-identify as an environmental NGO, meaning they can exemplify the degree to which environmental frames are understandable for actors unfamiliar with working actively with these issues.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Development as a concept – changing while remaining the same

Language is not the property of individuals but of the community in which the language is used (Long, 2004). This situation creates conditions for a discursive struggle where "*Language can confer the power to name, to set out the boundaries of what is thinkable; it can also be used to expose and therefore challenge such power"* (Eade, 2010, p. ix). The development concept is no exception, as it has seen different foci throughout the decades.

As donors' linked the development concept with other ideas that were seen as positive, it changed from being "*a social construct or the result of political will, but rather the consequence of a 'natural' world order that was deemed just and desirable* (Rist, 2004, p. 20). As a result, it also became treated as "apolitical", obscuring its geographical and historical situated origins (Cornwall & Deborah, 2010).

Due to criticism of top-down approaches to development, donors went from primarily financing major infrastructure projects to "needs-based" approaches and including environmental aspects in project designs. However, top-down project cycles and conditioned aid, with Northern experts making project plans for the South to follow, continue to cause unequal power relations between givers and receivers (De Vylder, 2002; Robb, 2004). For example, the World Bank (WB) portrays itself as a "knowledge bank" and when recognised as such, its viewpoints get more influence as they are copied and replicated in policy and plans of development organisations worldwide (Broad, 2010).

Semiotics and definition prerogatives have continued for development, with English being the working language for many international aid agencies. Since local languages might lack counterparts to English terminology, underlying ideas and symbology can be misinterpreted or hidden when translated (Cornwall & Deborah, 2010). In short, meaning is always under contestation, and ambiguities can be used for actors to "package" their views into words and help justify their roles.

2.2 Non-Governmental Organisations: roles and considerations for cooperation

To understand how the different actors in development cooperation relate to one another, reviewing the role and relations of NGOs become central as they, together with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), have become increasingly prominent actors in international development cooperation.

The overarching narrative which facilitated their rise can be found in the modern era of political and economic globalisation, starting with the fall of the Soviet Union. The 1990s saw strengthening ideological pushes to minimise the state's role to primarily administrative functions, ensuring competition in the allegedly free-market (Murray, 2006).

However, as with development, "*agreeing upon a definition is not an easy task, as it is an inherently political process*" (Schuller, 2007, p. 97). The word is reductive in nature: i.e., it is **not** a government organisation, as opposed to what it **is.** Thus, their role and functions can vary widely between countries, and there is no commonality regarding size, the scale of operations or available resources. Adding to this confusion is the modern variant of non-profit (or not-for-profit) organisation (Renee, 2022).

As the state's role in the public sphere decreased, non-governmental actors, from businesses to charity organisations, saw a new function in providing (previously) public services. In development circles, this meant that support to civil society increased compared to previous direct budgetary support to states. With the spread of modern Information and Communication Technology, faster and more frequent lines of communication with local affiliates of partners abroad were possible (Chandhoke, 2010). However, the rise of NGOs was and still is not a simple affair. Challenges relate to the normative dimension of their work and the associated practices that affect and contribute to it.

At its core, NGOs gain their symbolic power and legitimacy from whom they claim to represent. According to O'Neill (2001), legitimacy in representation is often the result of three arguments: authorisation, shared identity, and epistemic value. That being said, an essentialist quality to representation can be problematic when a person/group/object is simplified to a single (or a set of) element(s). The resulting homogenisation risks obscuring or neglecting the differences within a group or an individual, leading to, for example, token representation of minorities

Because NGOs often act as intermediaries between donors and project participants, they might represent both depending on the context. Meanwhile, they are still entities with their own agendas. The shifting representation role poses challenges in communication, accountability, and power. Table 1 illustrates the different groupings and interests involved in international development cooperation with potentially conflicting interests. These interests make it challenging for all

development-oriented organisations to decide where they decide to operate on the individual–structure spectrum.

Responsibility towards	Main challenge
Taxpayers in the donor country	A highly heterogeneous group whose political representatives have varying abilities to lobby and push for specific foci and methods for development aid
The Government in the donor country	Blurred lines between the "Government" as in the State and the "government" as in the ruling political party.
The Government in the recipient country	Potentially conflicting interests between rich "elites" in the city and disenfranchised people in rural areas.
"Poor people" in the recipient country	Close collaboration with CSOs can be viewed by the Government as challenging their authority, while keeping a distance to them can be seen as being out of touch with the people.
Human rights and other idea-based frameworks	Potential of being hypocritical if these are seen to apply only the global South and not the North or the NGO itself

Table 1 – Types of responsibility and the challenge thereof (Source: Eyben and Ferguson (2004))

As Standing (2010) points out, part of the globalisation processes has been a shift toward providing social security as a charity instead of rights. Thus, NGOs must decide whether their work should be focused on alleviating individual poverty or addressing broader societal structures. In relation to the reasoning of Eyben and Ferguson (2004), this could involve a balancing act regarding their relationship to the state they act in and whether they should go into open criticism or not.

2.3 Communication and power

Communication theory postulates that communication cannot be avoided since all actions are inherently communicative; even internal monologues are based on an imagined response between two parties, and even the absence of active dialogue sends a message. Furthermore, communication is not a linear transmission of data but a communal act in which all parties involved shape and create meaning (Joas & Knöbl, 2009; Irwin *et al.*, 2018). Dual meaning-making, however, does not mean

that all parties always have equal ability to get their point of view across or convince others.

Marsden (2004) identifies several factors in international development projects which create unequal conditions for influence. First, English is often the primary or sole language in oral and written communication. Second, written reports are favoured over verbal interaction. Third, communication in these projects is based on a linear and Western understanding. The prime example of this view is the logframe – a schematic tool to visualise and monitor an organisation's actions. Marsden argues that mastering the logframe becomes a specialised skill "*solidifying hierarchical power relations and presenting a barrier to more holistic communication"* (ibid, 102).

As such, rather than enabling different types of knowledge, systems like logframe seems to increase the likelihood of the donors' understanding of concepts (like the environment) becoming embedded into the project design. Simultaneously, it might also limit the kind of feedback, views and results acceptable to put back into the communication system. Different ways to understand the environment in a development context are examined in chapter 2.4.

Communication methods are thus intrinsically linked to dimensions of power through the way they can create more opportunities for those able to adapt and use these while excluding those who do not. Another way that power is linked to communication is through what Gaventa (2006, p. 29) refers to as visible, hidden and invisible forms of expression in terms of agenda-setting and influencing the world-views and ideas of people: "*By influencing how individuals think about their place in the world, this level of power shapes people's beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo".*

Within development jargon, actors such as the WB have engaged in a subtle change in the meaning of words like "empowerment" and "participation". Originally used by progressive social movements to clarify differences in power between donors and the local populace, such words became individualised and structural critique was transformed into addressing more isolated problems rather than root causes. Solutions were not to be imagined or achieved by people themselves but through donor assistance, thus maintaining the status quo (Cornwall & Deborah, 2010).

Such changes in meaning point to a discursive struggle over different meanings inherent in development communication. In particular, the invisible power referenced by (Gaventa, 2006) points to how ideas and world-views can be influenced without explicitly being the topic of the communicative exchange. The same general topic of poverty reduction gets markedly different solutions depending on who gets to formulate the problem.

2.4 Environment in development

From a constructivist perspective, observations of reality reflect more about the meaning derived from social interaction than any objective qualities inherent in the phenomena (Schwandt, 2000). While critique has been raised against the more relativistic tendencies of constructivism, especially from a more materialistic perspective (Prowse, 2010), there is semiotic importance to connotative meanings ascribed to symbols and their persuasive qualities (Barthes, 1977). As such, words related to the "environment" are not only descriptions of observable phenomena like water or forests; they are used both to understand the world and impart that understanding to others through, among other things, associated meanings.

In its broadest sense, the environment can encompass everything external to a person and be narrowed down into subcategories like "social" or "physical". While "nature" is often used as a synonym for the environment, what is deemed natural usually has normative connotations to desirable states of "normality". The pairing, nature/environment, can also have cultural and spiritual connotations (Cutter & Renwick, 2004). Humanity's relation to nature has long been a topic for philosophical debate and a study topic within anthropology (Lotz, 2005). One can see a modern example of a non-materialistic value of the environment in the supposed psychological benefits of nature and green areas in cities (Knez *et al.*, 2018). In the case of development projects, the environment has historically often been conceptualised and understood from a materialistic viewpoint and external to the main topic of interest (Lee & Barrett, 2000).

For example, while some of the consequences of "natural disaster" phenomena are directly linked with material damage following the event, these are often social components to them as well. The disaster attribute requires proximity to humans, and problems like segregation and unequal access to economic and social resources might be equally important as "root causes" behind the disaster (Wisner *et al.*, 2014). Part of the reason why climate change became a "wicked problem" is not disagreements about climate and environmental research or substantial knowledge gaps but differences in socio-political views and related normative connotations of climate change (Hulme, 2009).

Regarding environmental human-nature interaction, one could consider two broad starting points for how to conceive it. The first is a binary view between humans and nature arguing for separation, like natural parks off-limits to people. The other view would be arguing for some kind of symbiosis or mutual co-existence (Campbell, 2002). One method to further break this down is to view this interaction through different narratives, where Nygren (1998) distinguishes between four categories:

Narrative	Issue	Way forward
Environmentalism for Nature	Humans inherently exploit and destroy the environment	Separation between people and nature, coupled with knowledge dissemination to persuade and educate
Environmentalism for Profit	Externalisation of the environment leads to deterioration	Environmental values must be internalised into the economy, where eco-tourism and certification can help market mechanisms achieve this
Alternative Environmentalism	Western modernism leads to both exploitation and subjugation of local cultures and nature	Increased local independence from international markets and systems will lead to more harmony with nature
Environmentalism for the People	Ownership inequality and large-scale land use schemes lead to environmental degradation	Locally sensitive and participatory solutions and mixed land use strategies such as agroforestry leads to harmony and incentives to protect

Table 2 - Four environmental narratives (or frames) based on Nygren (1998)

While the narratives Nygren (1998) describes are more generic regarding land use, agriculture often becomes part of the discussion as the predominant alternative to "nature". Alternatively, it is seen as a suitable way to integrate environmental and human needs.

The linkage between the environment and development-related issues such as food security can, for example, be seen in the importance that IPCC gives to agriculture and forestry (Shukla *et al.*, 2019). There are varying opinions regarding the extent to which synergies exist between the environment and farming, where development projects have seen various ways to address them, like Integrated Conservation And Development Projects (Lee & Barrett, 2000). As indicated by Table 2, some of Nygren's narratives can be translated more easily into different agricultural practices and development project designs. While these might appear similar on a surface level, there can be underlying ideological assumptions and contradictions between such practices as Climate Smart Agriculture and Regenerative Agriculture (Codur & Watson, 2018). For example, Chandra *et al.* (2017, p. 538) argue that Climate Smart Agriculture "*is underpinned by scalar relations, networks of power and affiliation of institutions framed by western ideologies of science and technology."*

In summary, understanding what the environment is and how society and humans shall relate to it means making choices. As Nygren’s narratives illustrate, these choices shape the logic that informs the environment's ontology and normative views about how humans ought to act; should we anthropomorphise nature, objectify it, internalise it or deify it? This combines with a political question if and how growth-oriented economics is aligned with people and nature or whether there is a fundamental opposition between the two. Other questions relate to what is considered resources, their distribution and access.

3. Research Design

As chapter two illustrated, narratives on the environment in international development are varied and contain both descriptive and normative elements: the environment can be seen either as something separate from human activity or an integrated part of human society and culture, where the difference between environmental and societal issues is not given.

Frame analysis is one approach for understanding how we humans compartmentalise the world through language and symbols, enabling sense-making. Because framing both occurs in people's minds whilst also being expressed through discourses and language use, it can be studied through text, both text analysis and interviews (Daub, 2010). If compared to the different traditions found within communication studies (Craig & Muller, 2007), one could argue that frame analysis combines elements of the rhetoric, semiotic and sociocultural tradition. Apart from understanding world views, framing can also be used to explore the nature of disagreements and conflicts and the type of persuasive tactics used to enforce different agendas (van Hulst & Yanow, 2014).

Both Entman (1993) and van Hulst and Yanow (2014) describe the logic of framing to include similar steps: *selecting* some aspect of reality to bring into the frame, *defining/diagnosing* the phenomenon to understand what it is and how it relates to other phenomena, and finally present some form of normative ideal regarding what should be done as a logical action based on this understanding.

These authors point to the fact that framing is not only about what is included but what is excluded as well; this is important since it will lead to certain understandings and actions not being taken. As a result, there is a normative element of what *ought* to be; a phenomenon called *action bias* (Westin, 2019). The normativity of frames aligns with a Marxian understanding of the power of language in world-building: "*For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones*" (Marx, 2000).

Thus, seemingly "apolitical" or "neutral" framings can be seen as such because they have been normalised and internalised to such a degree that they seem

invisible; nevertheless, they still carry normative weight and is the expression of interest and intents of particular classes or groups in society.

In summary, this thesis will utilise frames as a conceptual tool for understanding and exploring the interaction and the means through which an understanding of reality is co-created through mutual interpretations. Based on the writings of Entman (1993) and van Hulst and Yanow (2014), four aspects will be identified as being part of the frame: 1) what is made visible, 2) what is obscured – corresponding to the *selection* component of the frame, plus the 3) problem(s), and 4) solution(s) – corresponding to the *diagnosis*.

To use an art exhibit as a metaphor, the frame is understood as the boundary which limits the size (scope) and type of communication possible, while the canvas (language) is used to visualise and describe the world. The description is inherently normative; through colour choice, composition, and other techniques (defining problems and solutions), the painter conveys a preferred way to understand and respond to the painting by drawing attention to some parts and not others. This understanding might be passed along as intended, become challenged, or possibly leave the observer in a state of confusion. Thus, framing is not understood as deterministic or linear but as an evolving conceptual tool for making sense of the world and transferring that understanding to others through problem and solution selections and definitions.

4. Methodology

The thesis is done within the field of environmental communication, using a qualitative methodology. Such an approach is well suited for exploring the people's lifeworlds and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), and thus helps to understand how they perceive the environment. However, as this thesis studies organisational viewpoints, it is important to mention the relationship between individuals and organisational structures. As pointed out by Taylor *et al.* (2007, p. 402) "*Only when, through whatever interactive means, the organization has cognitively recognized its circumstances and transformed them into a situation can we say that the organization has a view*". In other words, organisational views and communication practices, while partly collective affairs, are made up of and expressed through individual viewpoints. Thus, interviewing individual people is still a viable method for exploring perspectives on environmental understandings from organisations. While acknowledging the mutual impact between human society and nature, this study will not cover nor discuss the validity or merits of any land-use schemes or development project designs.

The thesis approach falls under the umbrella of flexible research design (Robson & McCartan, 2016). It started with a general aim to explore how the environment is interpreted through the development hierarchy levels. Multiple conceptual frameworks, like dimensions of power, were considered and eventually disregarded as the research problem became clearer. The methodology employed was thus an abductive and iterative, inspired by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), alternating between deductive and inductive reasoning. In theory, this allows for greater reflexivity while decreasing the chance of assumptions and actions being done uncritically by adhering to some previously established form.

A research journal was kept throughout the process, logging changes in approaches. It allowed for reflections regarding two areas:

1) **Conceptual understanding.** Part of the abductive process meant that lines of inquiry and research questions were noted as they evolved and changed. For example, initial approaches included practice theory to provide insights into how understandings of the environment are manifested, recreated and resisted through interaction (Nicolini, 2012). While ultimately not used as a method for the thesis, this *understanding* of the communication situation resulted in the inclusion of research question two to emphasise the importance of relations and interaction for

how environmental understandings are manifested. Similarly, political ecology or different strands of gender research also proved useful for drawing attention to dimensions of power inherent in environmental communication. While these theoretical viewpoints were ultimately not chosen as part of the research design, the research journal made their exclusion an informed choice rather than a self-imposed intellectual limitation.

2) **The role of DGD**. The NGO serving as the case study for the thesis made it clear early on that their willingness to participate was conditioned on their anonymity, i.e. **no information which could be used to identify them should be** included Otherwise they would withdraw their consent and all their information. As such, the research journal became one way to keep track of what was purposefully left out and make sure that it was not the kind of data that would change or compromises the results. As a result of the need for strict anonymity, a section describing the organisation in greater detail, including their Theory of Change, was omitted. The benefit of adhering to this strict anonymity was that the organisation was willing to participate, reflect and share information on topics they otherwise would not have done. The drawback of anonymity is a general lack of context and information for the reader, making it harder to situate their work and better understand their choices. A short general description of the NGO is given in chapter 5.2.2 when describing their relationship with donors and partners.

4.1 Methods for data collection

To answer research question one, regarding how the environment is understood at different levels of development cooperation, i.e. from more generic policy to implementing practice. Insights were sought from the written empirical sources listed in Table 3. It should be emphasised that this is not a complete representation of all the actors that could be included in the communication network, such as Swedish voters, the United Nations, and different universities. Instead, Table 3 mainly illustrates how the Government's framing, articulated through policy, is stated on higher levels and then translated into either explicit demands or more indirect recommendations as NGOs relate to them.

Actor	Sources	Type of information provided
Policy level		
Swedish Government	Policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance (2016)	A world situation analysis and overview of general principles to inform Swedish development aid.
Allocative level		
SIDA	Gender and the Environment (2016) Gender Equality, Environment & Climate Change (2021)	Two policy briefs providing insights into SIDA's insight into how environmental issues are framed in direct relation to people and power.
	Environment and climate change integration in Sida's development cooperation (2019) Reporting on Letter of Appropriation - Sida's analysis and lessons learned for additional measures to increase alignment of Swedish bilateral development cooperation with the Paris Climate Agreement (2020)	One internal evaluation, and one internal report, showcasing how environmental understanding is transformed into organisational practices
	Interview "Ashley"	A source from SIDA's helpdesk on the Environment, providing science-based inputs on SIDA operations
Fundraising/Strategic level		
DGDS	Capacity statement on environment (2021) *	General description of DGDs position on environmental issues

	The Green Economy as a tool in poverty reduction (2020)*	Presentation given at internal kick-off in Sweden
	Interview #1: "Emery"	Part of DGD's Communication
	Interview #2: "Kim"	The focal point between DGDS and DGDEA
Operational level		
DGDEA	Climate resilient opportunities for women in rural Kenya (2020) *	Project report written by third party evaluators
	Building Climate Change Resilience (Kenya) (2021) *	Educational material used to instruct farmers on climate mitigation and adaptation measures
	Foundations for Sustainable agriculture (2020) *	Project proposal
	Waste as a source of income (2021) *	Project report written by third party evaluators
	Waves of Change (2021)	Project plan

Table 3 - Description of document and interview sources for the frame analysis. Names followed by an signify that the name has been altered to avoid identifying the organisation. The source is saved and is available in redacted format if requested.*

The Government policy document was chosen because SIDA (2019) directly references this document as guiding their work. SIDA's material, in turn, was chosen partly through consultation by the interview source and partly by searching through SIDA's Green Toolbox for samples that could represent how the agency reflects on its environmental work and the choices that inform it; material from DGD was provided upon requesting examples of their environmental policy and projects.

To answer research question two, regarding how the actors relate to one another, three semi-structured interviews were conducted. The purpose of these interviews was to go beyond the theoretical, idealised descriptions found in the documentation and supplement them with personal reflections on how environmental communication works in practice at these organisations. This reasoning is in line with the idea that frames carry an interactive and social element (Daub, 2010) and the notion of practice theory that ideas and structures are manifest in, negotiated and maintained by practices (Nicolini, 2012), frames need to be conveyed through actions.

Individual interviews can facilitate the participants sharing personal opinions, bringing up topics of their choosing, and elaborating on their thoughts (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The possibility of having a focus group discussion within DGDS was brought up but was ultimately not possible because of a lack of available time. Such a discussion would have provided a more interactive session where the participants could have explored their frames.

All interviews were done via the video conference tool Zoom, recorded and manually transcribed immediately after their completion, taking on average two days to listen through. To safeguard the anonymity of each respondent, a gender-neutral name was given to each one, in addition to gender-neutral pronouns, i.e. “they”, “their”, “them”, and so on.

The interviews with Ashley and Emery were done in Swedish, while Kim’s interview was done in English. The Swedish interviews were translated into English to enable direct quotation. Pauses, laughs and emphasis on specific words were noted as signifiers of potential hesitation and emotional weight. A follow-up meeting was held with each interview respondent, allowing them to comment on their perceived framing and make known if they recognised themselves in it.

Research question three combines all the data from Table 3 to pinpoint framings and supplement them with explanations for how they were used in the organisations communication work.

Several **ethical considerations** were relevant to the data collection. Writing the thesis in collaboration with an organisation meant having discussions about the purpose and potential scope, areas where it became essential to emphasise the independent nature of the thesis. An effort was made to clarify how the thesis was not an evaluation of the organisation and that no individual would be named.

The concepts of reciprocity (Gosovic, 2019) was used in the research diary to reflect on any ties and feelings of gratitude toward DGDS for their assistance in being the case study for the thesis. For example, whether questions or topics that could be perceived as inferred criticism were avoided or lines of inquiry not raised to make the organisation appear in a better light.

4.2 Methods for data analysis

The basis for the data analysis was the four environmental narratives of Nygren (1998) described in chapter 2.4. The analytical process consisted of the following steps. First, the transcribed interviews and the documents in Table 3 were analysed to identify problem formulations and solutions that would indicate which (if any) of Nygren’s narratives they best corresponded with. Paragraphs describing or explaining what environmental problems are, were marked in red, and proposed solutions were marked in green. In addition, topics and keywords were marked to signify possible narrative ques, like a focus on technology or trade. These sentences

and keywords were put in a table to provide a quick overview. This data is compiled in chapter 5.1 and provides the empiric material for research question one – by reviewing how each actor understands the environment, research question three is also addressed by noting how the identified framing compares to that of the other actors.

Having established how the environment is understood – the "what" of framing, it is important to also pay attention to the "how" (are the frames transferred and made concrete through interaction with partners), corresponding to research question two. Some document texts, though mainly interview data describing the organisation's relation to partners and how projects are carried out, were marked in yellow and provided the material for chapter 5.2.

After summarising how the environment is understood and the means through which that understanding is relayed and taken from, the discussion chapter serves as the main way of answering research question three, since comparing frames in depth requires more analysis and deduction than there is room for in the results section. The identified framing is juxtaposed and compared to Nygren's (1998) environmental narratives.

5. Results

5.1 How the environment is explained and conceptualised by each development actor

5.1.1 The Swedish Government

In its policy paper from 2016, the then coalition Government consisting of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party specified their contextual analysis and framework for development aid and humanitarian assistance to be approved by the Swedish Parliament. While newer policy documents have been produced since this policy was chosen partly because it was 1) written shortly after the launch of the SDGs, being a first concrete example of its influence over policy, and 2) because of the importance of SIDA (2019) places upon it to form the basis of their work, and 3) because many of the DGD's projects were conceptualised in the years immediately following the policy's release.

While focus was paid to problem descriptions and solutions about environmental issues, it is difficult and problematic to completely separate environmental and social topics (Wisner *et al.*, 2014), Thus, when reading through the document, attention was also paid to how the Government perceive issues of poverty and inequality.

Problem definition

The policy states that poverty "*is rarely caused by one single problem but is the combined result of the deficiencies and limitations experienced by people who have fallen into poverty. Poverty is multidimensional. The deficiencies are founded in an inequitable and gender unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunities*" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016, p. 14). Reasons for why inequality exists seems mainly expressed through descriptions like *"Societies are characterised to differing extents by unequal power relationships between women and men*" (ibid, p. 10).

Demographic factors serve as a bridge between poverty and the environment by establishing a narrative of population growth: "*in the last half-century Asia was*

responsible for the majority of the global population increase (…) *There is an ever greater need to create employment and further young people's opportunities to enter the job market, while the aging population is creating new challenges"* (ibid, p.8). The link to environmental issues then becomes explicit where "*higher standards of living and population growth bring increased demand for food, water, energy and consumer goods. This increases the pressure on natural resources, with major changes in land use and water consumption as a result*" (ibid, p. 11).

Building on this narrative, it seems like environmental problems are related to how: "*Biodiversity is under threat on land and in the world's seas and oceans. Natural resources are being exhausted and the functions of ecosystem services are deteriorating*" (ibid, p. 10).

In summary, what is made visible is the distribution of material resources and demographic and behavioural reasons for their depletion. This pressure is apparently exacerbated by norms which create unequal power relations between people. What remains more obscured are the reasons behind these circumstances, such as historical context, societal structures, geopolitical relations and so forth.

Solutions

If unsustainable resource use is the main problem in the Government's policy paper on development aid cooperation, the solution appears to be making consumptive behaviours sustainable: "*To safeguard ecosystem services, it is vital to gather knowledge, carry out analysis and implement initiatives targeting the underlying causes of their depletion"* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016, p. 26).

This knowledge is mainly transferred through international cooperation: "*Trade creates more productive jobs, higher incomes and greater access to goods and services, as well as technology transfer, more efficient production and incentives for innovation and investment*" (ibid, p. 34). By extension, solving environmental problems becomes an issue of making trade and related economic growth a reality: "*Sweden will work to mobilise additional public funding to be used as a catalyst to encourage private sector investments to support a fossil-free and climate-resilient development*" (ibid, p. 24).

The Government's policy paper emphasises a missing link between this investment and the benefits it can bring to the environment and economic growth alike: "*If technological development is to be transformed into investments that benefit citizens, cooperation is needed between different actors, such as universities, business, civil society and government agencies* (ibid, p. 7).

The exact nature of this cooperation seems unclear. On the one hand, "*It is essential that we draw on the knowledge and the experience that development cooperation actors represent for effective implementation and learning."* (ibid, p. 52). On the other hand, while: "*Swedish agencies (...) are often requested as partners in development cooperation due to their expertise"* (ibid), there is no

explicit mention of this among local partners. In addition, "*Monitoring and reporting procedures must build on existing systems as far as possible and be harmonised with those of other donors to minimise the reporting burden on the partner countries*" (ibid, p. 56), signifying whose knowledge systems should harmonise to whose.

In summary, the framing of the solutions seems to fill in some blanks in the problem formulation. More specifically, more subjects are introduced as the solutions to environmental degradation are framed through technology and information; environmental degradation is apparently not the result of intent but either lack of knowledge or the physical means to change practices. The solution seems to lie in facilitating changes in those behaviours that currently lead to unsustainable resource extraction. This is achieved through trade and international knowledge cooperation, which musters capital for private actors to develop and spread the technology necessary for this change. What remains obscure is what responsibilities private sector actors have to deliver on their solutions and why this sector and not any other is given priority.

5.1.2 SIDA's frames

Problem definition

SIDA bring up several problems in their documentation (SIDA, 2019; SIDA, 2020), some more conceptual, some more on the operational side. Regarding the former, SIDA establishes how "*People living in poverty are often most affected by environmental degradation, pollution and climate change due to their vulnerability and high dependence on natural resources*" (2021, p. 1). This framing of environmental issues establishes a power dimension, as it points to inequality in the degree of adverse environmental effects on different categories of people, which adds another dimension to the Government's focus on resource pressure.

Regarding power, SIDA states: " *Globally women provide a livelihood for their families and simultaneously manage the environment. However, due to gender power relations, their knowledge is often overlooked and they are not counted as agents of change*" (SIDA, 2016, p. 1). There is thus both an acknowledgement of power and, to some extent, even knowledge as being relational and social constructs. From this perspective, the problem isn't a lack of knowledge as much as certain groups' knowledge being disregarded by other groups.

In line with this view, it is mentioned how "*formal and informal rules and norms form the basis and define the constraints for how organisations and individual act and interact (…) and directly and indirectly determine women and men's access to and control over resources."* (ibid, p. 2). This seemingly departs from the Government's framing of environmental problems being about lack of investments and technology, focusing more on power as expressed through social relations.

SIDA further emphasises that ”unequal *power structures and gender discrimination,* [causes] *women* [to] *face more barriers than men in accessing land, markets, capital, financial services, training, information and technologies”*(ibid). Structure would be a keyword here that also goes further than the Government in establishing the problem: the need for economic and productivity growth is to be understood within broader societal structures, including norms and access to materials and more.

Finally, there are statements about the ”*need for transformative methods and working methods to achieve the systemic changes*” (SIDA, 2020, p. 16) but that many interventions *”are 'business as usual' with increased productivity and economic growth at the core”* (ibid, p. 14). The environmental effects of this “system” are greenhouse gas emissions. Though not mentioning power per se, there are acknowledgements of the political dimensions of what changing this work would entail, at least regarding the energy sector and fossil fuels. In this case: ”*SIDA has assessed that the potential for influence and impact through bilateral development cooperation is relatively limited- The reason is that this sector is largely political and with strong regional geopolitical elements, and simultaneously in great need for reform”* (Ibid, p. 21). As such, SIDA reflects on its position as operating within a system which sometimes is currently heavily dependent on non-renewable sources.

To sum it up, SIDA seems to nuance the Government’s framing of resource depletion and population pressure by making power structures and norms more visible. What remains more obscure is what the transformation of society should be like and who the main groups are that are responsible for making it happen.

Solutions

As a government agency, SIDA’s main role is to implement rather than establish policy (SIDA, 2019). Notwithstanding SIDA’s statements about the need for transformative approaches and the potential problems of 'business-as-usual', their solutions don’t seem to show much deviance from the Government’s: ”*An environmental assessment could give an increased focus on supporting green growth through green investment and green jobs for several of the interventions under investigation”* (SIDA, 2020, p. 14). This appears to work more within the current socio-political system of international trading than paradigm-shifting.

There are also mentions of working within systems, like the UN and EU, where efforts are made towards ”*reduced fossil subsidies, energy efficiency and influence the World Bank's loan port-folio*” (ibid, p. 10). The importance of technology as a solution, which would be in line with the Government’s framing, is also present, like how ”*various environmentally sustainable technological solutions can be used in practice to significantly reduce energy needs*” (ibid p. 23)

SIDA juxtaposes this line of thinking when they argue that ”*producing more is not enough - and may harm the environment. Women's empowerment through increased productivity must therefore be combined with the conservation and improvement of natural resources*” (SIDA, 2016, p. 3). They also further emphasise a rights discourse, emphasising how part of the solution must be ”*the right to interpret, influence and participate in environmental work on equal terms* (ibid, p. 2). Access to land also seems to be a key point, which would *”enhance their* [women's'] *capacity to manage the land in a sustainable way. That could also contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services*” (SIDA, 2021, p. 3). However, they emphasise that these actions must be combined ”*by measures to strengthen in particular women's voices and agency along with substantive changes in gender norms, relations and power structures*” (ibid, p.4)

In summary, SIDA's solutions highlight the need for transformative approaches, inequality being a problem and how business-as-usual will not solve any problems. More obscure is role of the international partners like EU in achieving this change. Aligning funds towards technology and supposedly green investments seem primarily aimed at improving current systems rather than engaging in paradigm shifts.

SIDA's framing thus seems to reinforce the Government's technology and trading views, while amending them with ideas about structure and social relations. On the one hand, this might be seen as an indication that the Government's framing can incorporate more nuance since there are no passages that refute any statements in the policy document. On the other hand, SIDA indicating that factors like structures and power relations need to be considered *in addition* to the focus on financing and behaviour change could be seen as another type of framing.

5.1.3 DGD's frames

Problem definition

DGD as an NGO focuses on livelihoods and rural development, which establishes a general focus for their work. For DGD, environmental questions became something to consider because of experience, working with people who felt the effects of environmental changes, chiefly climate impacts like drought. As Emery (2022) explained: “*We (...) don't have a profile of being an environmental organisation ... it is in recent years that we see* [more of this focus] *– since we work so much with farmers (...) that it* [an environmental perspective] *has almost come the other way for us”*.

One general starting point for understanding DGD's problem framing is found in their “**Capacity statement on environment**” (2021), which explains how “*Although significant, the biggest threat to sustainability does not lie in the social*

or economic, but rather in the environmental prerequisites. In the last couple of years, we and our partners have experienced a consecutive degradation of environment and an increasingly difficult climate for small scale farmers".

Climate change is identified as one of the main environmental problems, and in DGDEA's training module "**Building Climate Change Resilience (Kenya)**" (2021) the following list is presented as examples of underlying drivers: "*1. Burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, plastics and gas) through cooking and lighting as well as in vehicles. 2. Careless use of fertilizers 3. Careless handling of cow dung 4. Soil erosion due to overstocking 5. Over-tilling land 6. Burning of crop residues 7. Deforestation"* (p. 9). Since the module aims to inform farmers on measures they can take to mitigate and adapt to climate change, the focus is on individuals rather than structures or societal processes.

Another farming-related framing is found in their report "**Foundations for Sustainable agriculture**" (2021) in a subchapter called: "*The Problem: resource intensive farming, depleted soils and low yields*". Here, "*The problem is two-fold; on the one hand current farming practices are not profitable for a lot of farmers and the continued damage to the ecosystem will make them even less so in the future"* (p. 3).

While the problem definitions so far have been on an individual basis, as was indicated by Standing (2010) and Eyben and Ferguson (2004), NGOs also need to position themselves towards societal structures and the function of the state. DGD addresses this issue in the report for their project "**Waste as a source of income**" (2021). The report states how the SHGs (Self Help Group) "*are trying to address what in effect is a large-scale governance failure with limited skills and resources. In a simplistic way, it can be viewed that some beneficiaries have not embraced waste management and disposal as a personal responsibility as opposed to a state responsibility*." (p. 10). DGD raises partnerships as a fundamental theme guiding their work, where: "*By involving local and national authorities at work, the project creates a link between power owners and rights carriers"* (ibid, p. 14).

Regarding how people are affected, the internal DGD presentation "**The Green Economy as a tool in poverty reduction**", states that "*Today natural resources are sold too cheaply, and eco system functions are consumed and depleted at no private cost; the poor typically suffer the most and pay the price".* These statements point to some structural issues, how the market works and the state's responsibilities, and why environmental problems exist.

In summary, DGD's problem formulations seem to both echo the Government's and SIDA's, while being decisively their own. On the one hand, environmental problems are framed by highlighting human activities, where environmental degradation and climate change are attributed to general practices like burning fossil fuels. The language of right carriers is similar to SIDA's frames; however, the term was only found in one document, making it seem more like an outlier than

a representative perspective. On the other hand, with farmers constituting an important percentage of DGD's project participants, their framing of environmental problems becomes very related to agricultural land use practices and how they impact profit margins and the ability to adapt to climate change. This obscures broader societal structures and the role of actors like the state.

Solutions

In their "**Capacity statement on environment"** (2021) DGD writes how *"the ecological footprint of these individuals* [project participants, mostly farmers] *are amongst the smallest in the world – yet they are affected the most. As such, our priority is not to reduce the*[ir] *already small impact (...) on the environment, but to equip them awareness and tools to have a decent life*."

Awareness-raising is mentioned in many of DGD's projects, for instance, in **Waste as a source of income** (2021)**,** which "*created awareness on how the community can see waste as an individual responsibility as opposed to a government responsibility only. Specifically, for women and youth, it achieved this by demystifying the perception that those who work in waste management are 'criminals' instead, it helped them see that proper licenses waste management is a viable business"* (Waste as a source of income 2021, p. 29). Another example from the same report mentions "*raising awareness to the people about their rights and responsibilities towards environment"* (ibid, p. 7). This would be the second explicitly mentioning rights and responsibilities in DGD's material.

When asked about whose attitudes need changing, Emery (2022) indicated a diverse and differentiated set of roles: "*For example, if you plan to start with climate-friendly farming, then it is obviously their* [project participants] *attitudes that need to change in some way*". On the other hand, "*If you want to produce biodynamic vegetables instead of something else, then the people that are going to buy them at the market need to know the difference between them".*

Regarding the source of the knowledge that will enable the changes in awareness, Emery (ibid) explained that there are sometimes external consultants and experts brought in to handle training modules with project participants, but it can also be collaborating partner organisations in Sweden that travel down to educate local government agencies.

Many of DGD's solutions are tied to their focus on livelihoods, introducing several agricultural practices farmers can engage in. In their "**Climate resilient opportunities for women in rural Kenya**" (2020, p. 10), they state how "*Adaptive measures included crop diversification; drought-resistant crops, irrigation, and rainwater harvesting. Mitigation measures included economical use of resources; eco-friendly materials, tree planting to reduce soil erosion; facilitation of organic farming groups and cultivation, and; promotion of renewable energy*". These actions would fall under what DGD labels **Green Economy**, which they in their

internal presentation **Green Economy as a tool in poverty reduction** claim "*aims at reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities, and that aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment*" What Green Economy means in practice seems a bit unclear though. DGD mention several different concepts and land-use strategies, though they not always clearly defined, such as "improved crop varieties". For example, the definitions for "Planet Friendly Farming" and Regenerative Farming appear very similar:

Planet Friendly Farming aims to	**Regenerative Farming aims to**
promote conservation agriculture, which protects soil from erosion and degradation, improve its quality and biodiversity, contributing to preservation of natural resources, water and air, whilst optimising yields (source: *The Green Economy as a tool in poverty reduction)* (2020)	continually improve and regenerate the health of the soil by restoring its carbon content, which in turn improves plant health, nutrition, and productivity (Source: *Foundations for Sustainable agriculture, 2020*)

Table 4 - Comparing two of DGD's agricultural definitions

The usage of different terms and their meanings could potentially be attributed to DGD's different branches and operating independently from one another. However, as Codur and Watson (2018) point out, there can be inherent tensions between practices like Climate Smart and Regenerative Agriculture, especially with regard to perceived problems and solutions. This makes it harder to correctly determine how DGD perceives environmental issues on a more strategic level.

In summary, DGD proposes several solutions to change farming practices that affect and are affected by a changing climate and environmental conditions. These solutions seem to highlight the role of awareness and education components (Emery, 2022) with technical and monetary assistance. Much of DGD's solutions are practical methods for individual farmers to adapt to climate change. However, the SHGs, as a collective meeting, training and organisation approach, combined with DGD's cooperation with local authorities and businesses, open for a more collective component. What is more obscure is the ownership of the technology, how introducing it might impact power relations and the underlying norms of the farming practices they advocate.

DGD does seem to have a quite similar framing to the Government, with their focus on livelihoods and practical, semi-technical solutions to resource depletion and climate change. While there are some mentions of rights holders and partnerships that would be more in line with SIDA's additional focus on structures and power relations, these don't appear in any project goals or DGDs statements on the environment; it is thus not clear that they play any major role in their framing.

5.2 SIDA's and DGD's communication of frames with partners

Having established the general framing expressed in different documentation, this chapter focuses primarily on interview information to determine how frames get meaning and clarity through interaction with others.

5.2.1 Integrating the Environment and working with partners at SIDA

As an intermediary between the Government and NGOs, SIDA is tasked with carrying out specific goals and thematic areas from the Government while also being able to allocate and manage programs and operations on their own.

SIDA's vision is that *"the environmental and climate perspective should be mainstreamed throughout SIDA's operations and SIDA is committed to protecting the environment and to proactively promote environmentally sustainable development"* (SIDA, 2020, p. 5).

In the 1990s, the demand was introduced that Environmental Impact Assessments should be part of all projects (SIDA, 2019). Thus, SIDA approached SLU and Gothenburg University as sources of expertise and knowledge to act as consultants. Ashley (2022) explains that as time passed, the demands for environmental analyses changed and that formal Environmental Impact Assessments are no longer required from SIDA's partners; there are still demands for environmental integration and analyses, however, based on three legs: risks, possibilities and vulnerabilities.

In SIDA's relationship with partners, Ashley (ibid) describes how organisations that do not have a tradition of working with environmental issues might approach these more as a list of demands: "*When push comes to shove, I don't think they are demanding to get that assistance. Instead, they* [probably] *do the minimum … what they are capable of*". In these cases, SHECC will try to foster a dialogue with them about what they can do better, though Ashley points out that "*It is not relevant for everybody to consider everything* [related to the environment] *or act on everything. This is why SIDA has this … I don't know if you should say demand … well it is a demand, it says that it shall be done; that everyone shall do an environmental assessment*".

Ashley's (ibid) hesitation seems to relate to SIDA's five perspectives. In extension, their partners need to evaluate and check for the degree to which environmental issues were integrated into the project design. These evaluations apparently require a lot of time: "*You are only one person in charge of a project* [at SIDA]. *You might have support from colleagues and superiors, but still, it is about one person that needs to … administer these things".*

Ashley (ibid) characterises SIDA's relationship with the Government as semi-independent. On the one hand, while there are clear legal documents governing SIDA's mandate, their role, in overtly simplified terms, is to carry out the policy provided by the Government. On the other hand, "*There needs to be space* [for SIDA and other government agencies] *to be experts in their fields*", making their own decision about how to carry out their work. This kind of relationship is, according to Ashely, also mirrored by SIDA themselves about their partners, where they avoid making templates.

Ashley summarises the actor/agency dilemma with the quote: "*You don't want (...) the interpretation to be same* [for every actor], *rather that is should be redone, you wish for different meanings* [to be given]. *You don't want to end up like the EU and the WB with a high bar to pass and learning* [exactly] *what is expected* [for an NGO to do in environmental work]*."*

When push comes to shove, Ashley (ibid) remarks that the best-evaluated projects at SIDA, from an environmental perspective, are those where the program managers have previous experience and knowledge of sustainability issues. On the flip side, the remainder of the managers might need to take shortcuts and refer their partners to the "Green Toolbox" – SIDA's website with information and guidance on environmental matters.

On the partner organisation's end, this might lead to question marks and unclarity regarding what SIDA's environmental instructions should be followed, as Ashley (ibid) explains: *"We could see in our evaluations that they* [NGOs without a tradition in working with environmental issues] *... could write something big about climate change globally. (...) They missed the other parts of the broader environmental perspective*. (…) *that some believe that 'climate' action per definition is good environmental action*

Uncertainty about how to operationalise environmental work is not unique to SIDA's partners but is apparently something SIDA also finds challenging. For example, they highlight how "*There is no accepted definition for activities that are aligned with the Paris Agreement*" (SIDA, 2020, p. 16)..

5.2.2 DGD's awareness and relationship to donor frames

DGD is a decentralised organisation with more funding-oriented offices in Europe and semi-independent local branches in other parts of the world. Many of their project participants work within agriculture, making many of the NGO's programmes relate to livelihoods in some manner.

DGDS distinguish between *Institutional* donors, such as Government agencies and foundations, and *Private* donors, ranging from smaller monthly supporters to those donating millions of SEK. Regarding DGDS's relationship with SIDA, there is no formal collaboration with their Stockholm office, while such an arrangement exists between DGDEA and SIDA's office in Nairobi (Kim, 2022).

According to Emery (2022), institutional donors have their own analytical point of departure and view of the world, mentioning how "*we must relate to* [the donors' views] *to a T. They have policies about everything. It is obvious that if we want to go in and try to access their wallets, we must relate to that, every word"*. They gave an example of one CSO donor requiring extensive and detailed reports. Foundations, similarly, have quite "*strict packaging*" and narrow foci for what projects they finance. These reflections seem to indicate a clear awareness of key priorities and views that DGD perceives from their donors, making them adapt and adjust to it.

However, Kim (ibid) added additional layers to this responsiveness: "*Institutional donors, like SIDA (…), will require* [adherence to themes and goals] *… very strictly. If they say: 'OK, my theme for this year's grant will be women's economic empowerment in agriculture (…),* [then] *in DGDS (…) we will use women's economic empowerment by promoting rural.* Thus, for some donors, there is an explicit communication of goals, concepts and phrases that aren't negotiable - the "why" of the frame. What is negotiable is the "how", where it seems like the donor's vocabulary is adapted and interpreted through the lens and self-perceived expertise and niche of the NGO in question.

Kim explained how some private donors "*don´t care much about … what kind of terms you use, because they themselves don´t have any specific terms*". Instead, they are chiefly interested in quantifiable results like the number of jobs created or the amount of garbage recycled.

Communication with donors is not only reactive, DGDS's fundraising team also reaches out to donors using specific angles, or as Emery (2022) paraphrased it, "*Hi, we see that you work with SDG #17, so do we, shall we meet?".* In these cases, and with private sector partners especially, Emery describes DGD work with "Packaging", which refers to how DGDS adapts, shapes, and presents its content to make it understandable and clear. Packaging occurs both when making field stories simple and understandable and when writing detailed grant submissions to donors.

In short, DGDS appear aware of donor's perspectives, but there can be differences between them regarding how strict their framing needs to be adhered to.

5.2.3 Communicating the Environment on the ground

As this subchapter will demonstrate, DGD projects are the results of both local and international processes. Emery (2022) explained how local managers from different sites will meet at the beginning of the fiscal year to share goals and inputs for the upcoming period, after which a summary and joint annual plan is produced for the whole country team

As an example, the country team might want to focus on waste management, while SIDA has already expressed the theme for their donations to be inclusive

economics. In this case, if "*the two terms do not really match", they* [the country team] *would think 'Maybe* [we can go with] *inclusive economics* in waste management? [emphasis heard in original recording]" (Kim, 2022). It might also be the case that a specific location is prioritised by a donor, in which case there is an effort to see if any projects can be done there. Kim (ibid) clarifies that "*Yeah,* [it is] *something like a balance, not always going our ways, but* [us still] *responding to the donors".*

After these less-negotiable parameters for the project are determined, meetings are held with local partners, including other NGOs, public authorities, businesses and more. The Kenya team actively seeks out these partners to determine possible avenues for collaboration. At this stage, meetings will be held with representatives from DGDS to establish budgeting, auditing, and evaluation parameters. Based on these common rules, DGDS and the DGDEA develop a logframe together (ibid).

Before the project begins, an inception phase lasting around three months takes place, including gathering inputs from focus group discussions and interviews. During this time, the country team will conduct baseline surveys to appraise the starting conditions for project participants and analyse the expected effects of the project.

As an example of the form that environmental communication can take on the ground, Kim (ibid) spoke of a meeting they had attended in Kenya and provided an example of how environmental issues like biodiversity and ecological systems can be communicated at these meetings: "*The program team had to translate* [these words] *into the local language. They also explained to the people that spoke English: 'I don't use the* [term] *biodiversity (...) because if I say so, they will not understand. So, I explain to them very specifically 'When you do the farming, and you use fertiliser, or when you use the pesticide (...) do you ever think that this will kill the birds or different animals?".*

In summary, while there is some ability to tailor details, like the place of a project, it appears as if framings regarding what should be one and why have already been established with DGDs donors before detailed project design begins; no clear evidence was provided of if and how frames could be established from the SHGs. Environmental solutions are framed as very practical techniques to mitigate climate change and decrease environmental degradation, emphasising individual action. This framing seems to mirror the Government's and shows little of SIDA's structure and power dimensions.

6. Discussion

The discussion is divided into three parts, corresponding to the three research questions. Part one is dedicated to analysing how the environment is understood by each of the three actors' (Government, SIDA and DGD) and expressed. This analysis is based on the four environmental narratives identified by Nygren (1998). Part two discusses the nuances and interpretations going on as the Government's framing is passed on from a policy to an operational level, corresponding to research question two. Finally, part three is dedicated to how the frames compare, while the final subchapter seeks to more directly address thesis central research problem.

6.1 Framing the environment

6.1.1 Swedish Government Policy – the frameless frame?

As was suggested in chapter 5.1.1, the Government's framing does describe and give generic reasons for environmental degradation – like resource usage and greenhouse gas emissions, but there are not many details about the actors involved, their motivation or any historic context to put the state of the environment into., However, while the political parties which formed the coalition Government outlined "*the direction of Swedish development cooperation*" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015, p. 1) to be approved by the Swedish Parliament, the actions of government agencies still need to be viewed not as a party political but as representing the Swedish State.

In addition, the purpose of policy documents, in general, is "pointing the way" instead of governing actions in detail. Ashely's (2022) comments about neither the Government nor SIDA wanting to control their partners' environmental analyses seem to mirror an awareness of criticism towards the top-down nature of past development efforts (De Vylder, 2002; Robb, 2004). As a result, the framing provided by the Government might be made vague on purpose to allow this interpretative space and independence. However, the apparent "silence" on specific issues could also be a way to communicate.

Using Nygren's (1998) narratives as the basis for analysis, there were no indicators in line with **Environmentalism for Nature** (EN), i.e. human activity

should be removed from nature through strict enforcement of conservation measures. Likewise, there were no indications that an **Alternative Environmentalism** (AE) narrative is at work since cultural dimensions and local independence are the hallmarks of this category. Instead, **Environmentalism for Profit** (EfP) is the narrative most in line with the Government's reasoning: they emphasise the role of trade as a catalyst for positive change, making it possible for the private sector to invest in fossil-free technology.

Even though aspects like biodiversity are mentioned, and ecosystem services might be seen from the viewpoint of supporting animal and plant life and human activities, the environment seems to be expressed in a primarily materialistic manner – resources - with an ultimately human focal point. This would be logical within the EfP narrative as measuring the environment in economic terms is assumed to be the primary/only way to create incentives for protecting it.

6.1.2 SIDA – filling in some of the blanks

SIDA provides an interesting case in that there seems to be a general agreement with the Government's views, while there are also some noticeable differences. While not being a case of going against the Government's framing of environmental problems as being about resource depletion, one important difference is SIDA's points about the structures and power relations. Their remark about producing more not being a solution without combining it with conservation actions and women's empowerment (SIDA, 2016) points toward more of an **Environment for the People (EftP)** framing, where rights and local knowledge are highlighted as part of the solution.

On the one hand, SIDA doesn't mention any norms, ideologies or actors by name that is part of creating or maintaining structures which lead to environmental degradation. On the other hand, whilst resource depletion due to lack of information and technology could be construed as a more neutral problem formulation, structures are more related to societal practices. Practices, in turn, have some degree of intent, implying that some people, somewhere, should benefit from the norms and practices that uphold them. This would change the framing of the environmental problems from "simply existing" to some form of causality. Their mentioning of geopolitical interest (SIDA, 2020) would support this interpretation.

It is logical for a funding agency to discuss environmental problems from a practical view and how they affect their project participants. However, it is worth noting that not including people in the Global north when discussing high vulnerability and dependency on natural resources (SIDA, 2021) makes it seem like they are not affected by their depletion or degradation. Global supply chain issues from lack of raw materials for electronics, for example, would emphasise that removal from immediate impact does not mean independence. SIDA mentions green growth (2020), and technical solutions would align with the **EfP** narrative.

6.1.3 DGD – framing it through farming

DGD's framing is related to their overall project model, centred on the logic of farmers increasing their production – leading to higher incomes – and the higher degree of economic and personal independence assumed to come from this. The **EfP** narrative thus fits their framing quite well.

As indicated by Emery (2022), the environment came into their cognitive horizon primarily from their dialogues with project participants, i.e. from a utilitarian and experienced-based background, where climate change and environmental degradation created problems for their livelihoods. This kind can be compared to what Ashley (2022) described as different entry points and perspectives of SIDA's partners and how some were more accustomed to dealing with environmental issues whilst it came as more external to others.

While there are mentions of rights in some documentation (Waste as a source of income, 2021), like the case is with SIDA, including such wording is not the providence of any singular narrative. However, it slightly mirrors **Environmentalism for Nature** (EN), at least regarding rights *towards* nature. DGDs focus on agroforestry practices, and, to some extent, the local governance nature of the SHG slightly mirrors the **EftP**. However, DGD's stronger market integration solution would put them more thoroughly in the EP narrative again.

Fundamentally though, both environmental problems and solutions are explained primarily from what their project participants can do (Building Climate Change Resilience (Kenya), 2021), although Waste as a source of income (2021) mentions the responsibility of the Government.

DGD's focus on awareness training is also primarily aimed at project participants more than officials and businesses. Framing the solutions through individuals rather than overarching socio-political structures seems in line with the positioning dilemma described by Eyben and Ferguson (2004); it is more feasible for an individual NGO to tackle practical problems on the ground rather than more theoretical problems on larger scales. While this local focus could be about the wish/need to remain seen as an apolitical organisation, agricultural practices carry political framings (Chandra *et al.*, 2017; Codur & Watson, 2018).

6.2 A web of relations

To effectively answer research question three, attention must be paid to establishing how frames are transferred and created through social interaction.

While the Swedish Government has no direct relationship or contact with organisations like DGD or any NGO, it exists indirectly through the tangible influence they have over SIDA's goals and missions. While not part of the material studies for this thesis, one should briefly mention that the Governments relation

with international collaboration platforms like the UN, EU and so forth. As Broad (2010) argued, actors like the WB have substantial leeway in steering the discourse (and framing) of development issues because of their financial strength as donors. When the Government utilises a seemingly open framing, it could potentially reflect keeping good relationships and collaboration with their international partners, in addition to the political climate at home; their reference towards keeping monitoring systems in line with their donor partners would be in line with this power balance.

The Government engages in framing through its policy, which sets the "tone" and direction for how Sweden should act – which carry with it normative choices. It does so primarily through its relationship with SIDA. As an intermediary, Ashley (2022) emphasised how SIDA have both explicit mandates from the Government while also being recognised as an expert in their own right; in the case of environmental issues, they lean on outside expertise from SHECC, and finally, the responsibilities of individual project managers and their relationship towards partner organisations.

As Ashely (ibid) also pointed out, the agency's communication is intentionally made open to allow for interpretation, though SIDA's self-acknowledged struggle to integrate the environment into their projects could be seen as the flip side of this strategy. It also makes it harder for the Government to completely ensure that their policy principles are followed all the way down to project levels, while simultaneously making it hard for NGOs to know what is expected of them. This seems to be one of the reasons that Ashely pointed out why environmental analyses from NGOs are often on a more generic level, as opposed to more concrete actions that the organisations themselves can take.

Regarding DGD, as an NGO, they have both institutional and private donors with different interests, and its independent branches around the world have their own networks of SHGs, local government and local collaborations. As the interviews with DGD indicated, especially institutional donors might be more inclined towards explicit framing, as both Emery and Kim seemed to be aware of their donors' wishes'. At the same time, DGD seemed able to amend more generic policy themes to solutions based on the organisation's modus operandi of independent locus branches. This relationship with donors and the SHGs creates a communicative situation where environment framing is translated into very practical methods for their project participants to understand in terms of their experiences with climate change.

In summary, framing is sometimes explicit in relations with other partners, though it is interesting how, although all actors have some form of environmental statements or policy, they all seemingly have an unwillingness to dictating exactly how partners lower done in the hierarchy should conceptualise the environment.

6.3 Comparing framings

Table 5 summarises the discussion so far and aims to answer research question three.

Actor	Made Visible	Obscured	Problem	Solution	Environmental Narrative
Government	Material resources and behaviours	Who benefits from the current socio-economic systems	Inequality and population growth create poverty and pressure on natural resources	Inclusive, sustainable economic growth based on knowledge and technology	Environmentalism for Profit
SIDA	Power as relational	The characteristic of a transformed society and whose main responsibility it is to achieve it.	Norms and structures lead to unequal access to environmental goods	Redirect financial flows and increase marginalized peoples' access to land, technology and decision-making fora	Environmentalism for Profit (Environmentalism for the People)
DGD	Climatic impacts on farming systems and individual responsibility	The role of the state and ownership of means of production	Climate change jeopardises farmers' livelihoods	Awareness and technology for a Green Economy	Environmentalism for Profit (Environmentalism for the People)

Table 5 - Summary of actors and their frames

The parenthesis used for SIDA and DGDs narratives indicated that there is rhetoric used that mirrors aspects of EftP (participatory approaches and agroforestry), but that the overall framing is more in line with Nygren's (1998) EfP narrative.

This mixing could be related to the struggle over meaning, as indicated by Cornwall and Deborah (2010), where certain narratives are so established in the

public discourse that it is difficult to openly challenge them. Amending a narrative by altering the rhetoric of another narrative could thus constitute a kind of compromise

Notwithstanding the reasons, which must be more speculative due to the limited data samples of the thesis, it seems like there is a conscious space left for interpretation by all actors. The Government's framing is mirrored by all actors though also takes on slightly different shapes, and where SIDA seem to make the largest deviation. This seems mostly to be in terms of problem framing though more than the solutions, which are still cantered on green technology and redirected finance flows. Since DGD have many other donors, a direct line of causation can't be established, though the EfP narrative and resource management framing is in with DGD's focus.

The end result is an interesting mix. On the one hand, this would indicate a presumed success of the Government in reaching down to lower layers with its framing and narrative, even with them leaving details out. On the other hand, a different case study involving an NGO with another focus might have revealed more about the room to challenge framing from above. Such a balance could be the topic of future research.

6.4 Communicative shadows

The framing in Table 5 seems reasonable as a starting point for understanding the actors' conceptual understanding of environmental issues and their logic in deciding what actions should be taken to solve any problems they identify. However, as pointed out by both Entman (1993) and van Hulst and Yanow (2014), part of framing is also what is left unsaid and what is not included. This is also in line with Gaventa's (2006) invisible power.

One might conceptualise this part of the framing, what is made invisible, as the **communicative shadow** – the indication of arguments or viewpoints that is not expressed but whose existence, while not being tangible enough to define concretely, can still be recognised by other parties in the exchange.

As Cornwall and Deborah (2010) point out, being vague makes it easier for different actors to project their explanations and definitions to other actors, making it easier to achieve semantic consensus. However, this agreement comes at the cost of possible future confusion and possible attempts at manipulation by those with the best abilities to manage the discourse. Being "apolitical" is a political stance on its own that would primarily benefit those paradigms and ideologies that dominate the political discourse at the time (Marx, 2000).

Part of the act of focusing and obscuring that makes up framing is who gets included as active, passive or non-actors in a frame. Without identifiable actors or groups whose actions, agency or agendas led to environmental degradation and

unequal distribution of power and resources, it becomes difficult to establish lines of *responsibility* or relations between environmental issues, history and ideology. A lack of causation changes environmental degradation and income inequality from being the outcomes of practices to a form of ubiquitous and natural state: they just *exist*. In other words, while symptoms are acknowledged, their causes don't seem to be clearly defined, akin to stating that "the problem is the problem".

Part of the framing exercise is also the chosen time period, as it determines how far back explanatory factors are sought. In the case of environmentally oriented development work, it becomes important as the processes of climate change and resource depletion will be conceived differently depending on the starting date.

Going further back, for instance, the industrial revolution means considering the early point of the so-called "hockey stick" diagram of greenhouse gas emissions, colonialism, and the impacts in the wake of the Green Revolution. While their inclusion would not per se lead to any particular framing, they would facilitate discussions regarding responsibilities and agency for climate change. In contrast, the framing that all actors seemingly employ seems to be preoccupied with the present and the future. This time framing facilitates discussions regarding solutions and present concerns, which seem to be what is happening. Since the purpose of the documents analysed is to guide operational work, such a time framing seems logical, though the result is a communicative shadow regarding cause and effect.

Thus, the communicative shadow functions as the part of the frame that leaves certain aspects of reality out, in this case, the socio-political and normative choices made by each actor to inform their worldview and the deeper reasons for environmental problems. Through the problem and solution framing, the "shape" of the shadow becomes visible not by what is said but by what is left unsaid. The communicative shadow could thus be viewed as a method for development actors wanting to stay apolitical to allude to a proper interpretation of their framing without explicitly making this clear. Therefore, the ability still exists, in theory, for other actors to oppose the framing, though such opposition is made harder when there is seemingly nothing to oppose.

7. Conclusion

Environmental issues are increasingly highlighted in international development work, and their integration is a prioritised goal in Swedish development cooperation, articulated through Government policy. However, "the Environment" carries multiple connotations, and its meaning is not given (Cutter & Renwick, 2004). This thesis sought to better understand how the environment is framed in Swedish development policy and how that framing is interpreted and negotiated when development policy is implemented by actors lower down in the development hierarchy.

A frame analysis based on written material and interviews with representatives from different levels of the development aid hierarchy revealed how the environment seems predominantly understood through a human utilitarian perspective as a provider of resources like energy and food. The Government frames the main environmental problem as resource depletion and human-induced climate change. Meanwhile, solutions are framed as channelling aid to support private sector investments into green energy, new technology and new knowledge that might change attitudes and behaviour. Solving the environmental problems mostly comes down to making it valuable to protect, a frame one might call Environmentalism for Profit.

While there are traces of this frame found among all actors, there are also amendments and individual interpretations done to it, chiefly more rights-oriented framing at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the investigated NGO seemed to add their own professional and utilitarian farming focus to it which mostly mirrors the Government's. All actors do share some parts of their framing which pertain to explanatory factors of why structures and behaviours exist that exacerbate or cause environmental degradation.

The apparent absence of explanations seems to derive from the Government, SIDA's and partially also the NGO's principle to create space for their partners to find their own solutions. While this might make it easier to achieve collaborations and reach a consensus, it also makes it more difficult for the Government to ensure that its worldview and ideas are transformed into projects sharing its framing or for NGOs to know what is expected of them in their environmental work.

The proposed way to understand how development actors communicate the obscure and more explanatory part of their frames, which puts their work into

context, is imagined as a “communicative shadow” - the indication of arguments or viewpoints that is not expressed but whose existence, while not being tangible enough to define concretely, can still be recognised by other parties in the exchange through the problem and solution framing. This mirrors the writings of Gaventa (2006) and Gaventa (2006) about invisible power and powerful actors interest in making their own stances invisible and apolitical. The communicative shadow is proposed to as a solution which development actors to make their framing clear enough to follow while simultaneously leaving them without the need to make normative and ideological stances motivating the frames.

Future research could investigate how the framings affect the power relations between different actors and what happens in case of overt resistance to Government framing.

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Popular science summary

If you take a photo with the sun on your back, you get a shadow of yourself in the frame. It might be distorted and look funny, but people will understand what they are looking at from the shape. While most photographers avoid such shadows because they draw attention away from the rest of the picture, imagine this kind of shadow was cast on purpose. What reason could there be behind it?

Many international development actors balance between pointing out their views and goals and being open to the opinions of others. Here's where a communicative shadow can be a quiet way to imply what they can't say aloud, like more ideological stances.

In the past, many development projects were criticised for being top-down and controlled by donors from the Global North. When the United Nations launched its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, cooperation and integration were two principles put front and centre. But how do you communicate your environmental values while being open to interpretation and discussion from your partners?

Frame analysis is a method to analyse how people understand their world and relay that understanding to others. One can think of it as a literal frame of a painting, picking a central motive and highlighting that at the expense of other motifs that will be cut out or left in the periphery. Part of the framing is also how we choose and describe problems and pick solutions.

This thesis did a frame analysis by comparing government policy with documents from the agency in charge of Swedish development and a Swedish development organisation with an independent branch in Kenya. Interviews were also carried out to better understand how the actors view their relations with each other.

Environmentalism for Profit was a narrative found in the Government's framing and that of the other actors in some form, where you seek to protect nature by giving it an economic value. While actors all saw climate change and exploitation of natural resources as problematic, inequality and different power relations were sometimes raised as part of the explanation.

Explanations for why natural resources are depleted or unequal power relations were sparse. Instead, all actors seemed to leave such reasons unsaid, knowingly leaving room for their partners to make independent interpretations. While this openness appeared to create some confusion, all actors seemed to broadly propose

the same kind of solutions. These are centred around improving access to new Green technology or practical ways to deal with drought or deforestation.

One possible explanation for this symmetry is that the actor's framing casts communicative shadows. The problems and solutions indicate an understanding of environmental problems where partners can fill in the blanks. Future research could look into how this might work when actors might have more reason to disagree.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the people at Doing Good Deeds allowing themselves to serve as a case study. Special thanks go out to Emery and Kim for taking their time to be interviewed and being available for a second session to confirm the results. Additional DGD people have also been instrumental in providing access to written material and acting liaisons between the organisation and me. A big thank you goes out to them.

A big thank you also goes to Ashley at SIDA's Helpdesk, who provided many valuable points of view and helped illustrate many of the relational aspects of SIDA's work that would not have been clear by reading only reports.

Lastly, I want to thank my supervisor, who, from the initial thesis suggestion to the final product ,provided a nuanced and respectful guidance that allowed me to furnish my analytical skills and reflect on the process while always pointing me into the important areas that needed to be considered next.

Any potential mistakes or misinterpretations of the communicative situation studies are entirely my own.

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