

# THE SWEDISH OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN

## MORE EFFECTIVELY MANAGING PUBLIC RESOURCES

### IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

## 1 Introduction

By joining the Open Government Partnership, Sweden reaffirmed its commitment to open government efforts both in principle and practice. Sweden, with its long tradition of transparency, citizen engagement and efforts to build an effective and accountable government, embraces the ideas of the initiative. Sweden's Action Plan and engagement focus on the challenge of *More Effectively Managing Public Resources* in development cooperation.

Sweden is a leading aid donor with a long tradition of openness. Democracy and human rights are priority areas in Swedish development cooperation and in Swedish foreign policy in general. Sweden therefore has particular reason to meet the requirements for transparency that have recently gained attention in international development cooperation. In 2010 the Swedish Minister for Development Cooperation launched a transparency guarantee. The main rationale behind this was to open up aid to scrutiny and to solicit ideas from a broader range of people. The promotion of a transparency guarantee in Swedish development cooperation is also in line with the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), both highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability. In this context, Sweden –along with other donors – has undertaken to increase transparency in development assistance. These commitments take concrete form in the *International Aid Transparency Initiative* (IATI), which Sweden and many other donors have signed.

Openness and transparency are fundamental prerequisites for democratic accountability. The Swedish Government therefore emphasises the importance of transparency and access to information about central government administration, which is also laid down in Government Bill 2009/10:175: Public administration for democracy, participation and growth. In today's digitised world, the principle of public access can be applied to official documents to make information readily accessible and available, and not only upon request.

## 2 Open government efforts to date

### 2.1 Open government – current policy

Sweden has long used information technology to develop public services, and today ranks among the leading eGovernment nations in the world. The current policy is expanding earlier generations of eGovernment policies. The first generation policy saw citizens as taxpayers and focused on productivity. The second saw citizens as customers and broadened the focus to efficient delivery of services over the internet. The third and current policy initiative presented in the Digital Agenda for Sweden views citizens as potential co-creators and calls for “smart and open government supporting innovation and participation”. Currently, work is ongoing to define the next generation strategy for

open data and public services. Government innovation will be driven by external partners in combination with open data. Citizens will be empowered by eGovernment services designed around users' needs and developed in collaboration with third parties, and by increased access to public information, strengthened transparency and effective means to involve stakeholders in the policy process. The Digital Agenda for Sweden and the Malmö Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment (approved by the EU MS, and the European Free Trade Area countries) are important foundations for the current open and transparent strategy process. Before formal negotiations on the strategy begin in the Government Offices, the strategy proposal – prepared by small but representative groups of civil servants – is examined by the different executive levels of government and finally circulated for comment among diverse external groups for a period of three months using the internet, Facebook and Twitter.

## **2.2 Open Aid – transparent Swedish development cooperation**

In 2009 Sweden launched Open Aid, a reform agenda for Swedish development cooperation. The initiative aims to better adapt development cooperation to today's realities and the opportunities created by globalisation and technological development. The goal is to achieve as effective poverty reduction as possible by opening up development cooperation to transparency and ideas from others.

Open Aid builds on the need for greater transparency (i) through *active transparency* to promote greater knowledge of Swedish development cooperation and create possibilities for accountability, (ii) to promote fresh thinking and harness knowledge from different sectors of society, and (iii) for increased cooperation and greater involvement of more actors in Swedish development policy.

Every aspect of Open Aid is underpinned by transparency, participation and cooperation. Its implementation has been divided into five parts and projects:

- 1) *A transparency guarantee*: As part of efforts to improve aid effectiveness and apply the principle of public access to official documents in a more modern way, a transparency guarantee has been introduced into Swedish development assistance. The guarantee means that everyone who is interested can follow the entire aid chain, from overall decisions on the direction and distribution of development assistance to specific decisions, payments, implementation and monitoring. The guarantee has been made more tangible with the launch of the Openaid.se information service (see section 2.3 below).
- 2) *Active anti-corruption*: Poverty and corruption often go hand in hand. Corruption is both an expression and a consequence of bad governance. It is a fact that most countries receiving aid are also at the bottom of the Transparency International list of the world's most corrupt countries. To reduce corruption we must design development assistance that can contribute to better transparency and accountability.
- 3) *Courage to speak out*: Responsible aid must set standards and demand accountability. It requires the courage to speak out and say 'Stop!' and to slow down, freeze and, as a last resort, terminate initiatives and cooperation when they do not meet standards or expectations.

- 4) *More actors and more knowledge:* Development cooperation needs many different actors. In this area, it is important to make effective use of the skills of different actors and also ensure that the right actors do the right things. This entails, for example, enhanced transparency in development procurement, increased knowledge about forms of development cooperation other than grants, and increased interaction with the public on development issues.
- 5) *Freedom, women and the internet:* Opportunities for creating genuine added value are strengthened when people do what they are particularly good at or experienced in. As one of the world's freest, most gender-equal and digitised countries, Sweden has good reason to do its utmost to stress the important role of freedom, women and the internet in development.

### 2.3 A Swedish transparency guarantee

On 1 January 2010, a transparency guarantee was introduced into Swedish development assistance. The guarantee means that all public documents and public information will be made available online. The information must explain when, to whom and why money has been made available, and what results have been achieved.

The transparency guarantee applies to all public actors who have been allocated funds under the international development cooperation expenditure area. These are primarily the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Since 1 January 2010, these actors – together known as 'the aid administration' – are required to make available all public documents and all public information relating to development assistance. This includes all documents and data from a chain leading from decisions on the direction and distribution of aid, via decisions, payments and implementation of specific projects to monitoring of projects also at an aggregated level. The aid administration will account for *when*, *to whom* and *for what purpose* money has been paid, based on which decision-making information, which conditions and with which results. The information is available to all, free of charge and without licensing or registration requirements. It is searchable and structured so as to make data processing possible, and it is published promptly.

The transparency guarantee in practice:

- The Swedish aid administration shares information generously.
- Aid information is subject to the principle of public access to official documents and is available online in an open format.
- It is possible to follow the whole chain of aid information, from overall decisions to implementation and monitoring.
- Tax revenue used for development cooperation will be traceable.
- Sweden encourages other development actors and partners, including multilateral and civil society organisations, to increase transparency.
- In the long term, aid information will be made available in each partner country and published, whenever possible, in both Swedish and English.

## 2.4 Openaid.se

The most important component of the Aid Transparency Guarantee is the web-based platform OpenAid.se, launched in April 2011 to make the transparency guarantee tangible. Openaid.se is a democratic initiative, facilitating accountability to Swedish taxpayers and people in our partner countries by opening up development cooperation to the public. It is a data-hub providing Swedish aid information on disbursements in an open format. This means that the format allows citizens, CSOs and entrepreneurs to use, refine and develop the data provided. The aid information is provided on a global scale, at country level, per sector or by implementing agency. It contains aid information from 2007 to 2012. It also contains historical data from the 1970s to the 1990s, in so far as it is available electronically. Data from 2000 and onwards becomes more and more detailed. Openaid.se primarily shows data at contribution level, which makes it possible to follow different contributions and their component parts at both country and sectoral level. Openaid.se is a prototype, and its content and functionality will be further developed by Sida to include all actors handling Swedish development assistance funds. Openaid.se is not a regular website; data is available in an open format called an Application Programming Interface (API), which makes it easier for those who want to use the data for their own specific purposes.

The information is also published with an open standard for publishing digital information on development cooperation, called The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). The main advantages of this open standard are that the information is more current and prospective, and comparable to that of other partners and donors. It contains past, present and planned activities of major international organisations and national development cooperation agencies, and of small civil society organisation projects. Publishing aid data according to the IATI registry opens up the development of systems and solutions that can display and visualise the information. This is of interest to actors in development cooperation, donors and partner countries that need tools to plan, review and follow up activities. However, in the end, this benefits those who pay for the assistance, i.e. the taxpayers, and those who are reached by the assistance.

## 2.5 Current national and international challenges for enhanced aid and fiscal transparency and accountability in development cooperation

To achieve development effectiveness, increased transparency is essential in itself as well as a prerequisite for development results, in aid resources as well as in partner countries' budgets and public financial management. Aid transparency and fiscal transparency are therefore intrinsically linked. Budgets in partner countries cannot be made fully transparent without aid transparency. In addition, transparency of aid flows and transparency of partner countries' own resources are both prerequisites for better accountability, leading to sustainable and locally owned development results. The possibility for citizens to scrutinise the use of resources and government actions creates incentives for results throughout the aid chain. Horizontal accountability both within and between public institutions is needed to enable parliamentary oversights and audit institutions to improve the effective use of resources. Vertical accountability between the government and its citizens, civil society and the media is also needed. Governments need to support an enabling environment for parliaments, audit institutions, civil society and

the media to access information and engage in development processes in their own countries.

Aid transparency is a priority commitment arising from the 4<sup>th</sup> High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. It is enshrined in the Busan Partnership document and the EU Council Conclusions from November 2011. These new commitments now need to be implemented by all the actors behind the agreements. Focus is needed on the implementation of actionable initiatives and the fulfilment of the commitments. Driving forces such as the Building Block on Transparency, a coalition of the willing, are pertinent to ensure the agenda is taken forward, as are potential ‘game changers’ such as the IATI, the OGP and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT).

### **3 OGP commitments**

The Swedish Government is committed to continuing its implementation of the transparency guarantee. Sweden is continuously developing the [openaid.se](http://openaid.se) platform in line with the ambition to broaden our reporting in accordance with the IATI standard and meet the indicators set by the Publish What You Fund 2011 Pilot Aid Transparency Index. Further, Sweden will implement internationally agreed commitments and act as a driving force, for example through our engagement as co-chair of the Building Block on Transparency, and encourage the implementation of the EU Transparency Guarantee.

More specifically, to ensure increased transparency in Swedish development cooperation, Sweden is committed to:

#### **➤ Continuing the development of the Openaid.se platform**

By continuously developing the Openaid.se platform, transparency and openness will increase and facilitate accountability to Swedish taxpayers and people in our partner countries. Continued development will include (i) further quality assurance, (ii) monthly updated information from all public actors allocated funds under the international development cooperation expenditure area, (iii) an expanded range of published documents explaining when, to whom and why money has been made available, (iv) enhanced visibility of the aid chain/activity structure displaying the linking between e.g. a policy decision and a disbursement, (v) a spotlight on results and evaluations, (vi) enhanced use of the open format (Application Programming Interface, API), which enables consumers to reuse the data, (vii) data from CSOs, and (viii) a focus on Sida’s recently developed whistleblower function. Those who use the data are able to contribute to the development of the platform by proposing improvements through the customer service function on the website.

#### **➤ Ensuring full implementation of the IATI standard by 2015**

To further broaden Sweden’s implementation, measures will be taken to extend and improve the data, conduct investigations of the efforts needed to report on some of IATI’s optional components (including publishing information on results, conditions, activity-level budgets and future flows, and all documents in machine readable and accessible format) and improve the coverage of planned disbursements. Improvements to the data contained in Openaid.se will result in improved IATI reporting and vice

versa. Through consultations and dialogue with CSOs, Sweden continuously receives input to the process and reviews how to publish more data in response to feedback from CSOs and to move closer to complete fulfilment of the IATI standard.

➤ **Implementing the commitments in the Busan Partnership document**

Implementing the commitments in the Busan Partnership document includes contributing to the agreement on a common, open standard for the electronic publication of aid information by December 2015, making the full range of information publicly available, focusing on transparent public financial management and aid information management systems, and making development cooperation more predictable. A common standard is essential to enable access to information about aid flows and activities in both donor countries and partner countries; a common global standard can enforce transparency throughout the chain of aid information and provide timely, comparable, detailed and accessible data.

➤ **Playing a leading role in the Building Block on Transparency**

Sweden will continue to act as a driving force to secure implementation of the *Building Block on Transparency* through its role as co-chair. We will support ongoing multi-stakeholder partnerships on accountability, predictability and transparency, and different actors' work on effectiveness, results and transparency. Further, it will be done by ensuring involvement of a wide range of actors including donors, partner countries, multilateral organisations, civil society and the private sector. We will ensure that work is carried out in a coordinated and effective manner to ensure the transparency agenda is taken forward the best way possible to accomplish steady progress. A comprehensive approach to existing initiatives is essential. Sweden will promote the inclusion of *comprehensiveness* in the work of the Building Block.

➤ **Contributing to further define the work towards an EU Transparency Guarantee**

This will be done by working towards the establishment of an appropriate forum for EU Member State and European Commission transparency specialists to hold technical discussions and share information, and that EU MS work towards a clear and common goal for increased transparency and accountability. Further, Sweden will contribute to the process by sharing its experiences of implementing a national transparency initiative, ensuring leverage from its role as one of the key actors in the ongoing international discussions on how to deliver on the Busan commitments. Where appropriate, Sweden should also promote dialogue on technical issues with non-EU entities involved in transparency with a view to fostering informed EU discussions.

➤ **Engaging in the Open Aid Partnership and promoting ICT4D**

Innovative technologies, such as geocoding aid activities is a powerful way to show what donors are doing and where, and therefore also helpful in increasing transparency and in the debate on the division of labour. Recognising the significant

impact that these innovations can have on improving development effectiveness, the World Bank Institute and bilateral donor partners, foundations and civil society have formed an Open Aid Partnership. Further, support to initiatives related to open data and information and communication technology (ICT) that create opportunities for increased participation from a broader spectrum of the population. Exploring and investing in ICT is key for enhanced accountability, increased openness and transparency worldwide. The Swedish agenda for ICT in development cooperation includes Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) with the purpose of contributing to improved prospects for poverty reduction, Business for Development, accountability, increased democratic participation, inclusive economic growth, freedom of expression and knowledge development, ICT for enhanced accountability and eGovernment.

➤ **Broadening open government commitments**

Sweden intends to broaden its OGP commitments in the ongoing process of defining the next generation strategy for open and smart government. The upcoming strategy will broaden the initial focus on effectively managing public resources in development cooperation to include the government as a whole. The upcoming strategy will thus provide a coherent policy framework for a smart and open government supporting innovation and participation. Under the current timeframe, the strategy will be launched in autumn 2012.