



Increasing the use of research in Swedish development policy and practice

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Foreword

This study was initiated by the Swedish Development Research Network (SweDev), whose mission includes creating stronger ties between research and policy. SweDev was established in 2019 in response to fragmentation of the Swedish development research community and the weak links between researchers and practitioners. Thus, this study is part of SweDev's mandate to enhance the relevance, integration and use of development research in policy and practice.

The study builds on a previous report by SweDev (Strand et al., 2020), which sought to capture the views and perspectives from the development *research* community. By focusing on the views and perspectives of *practitioners* and *policymakers* it can be seen as a counterpoint to the previous report. This study examines how practitioners and policymakers perceive and use research-based knowledge, with the overall aim to generate more effective policies underpinned by relevant academic research. The report is based on the results of an online survey and focus-group discussions with numerous policymakers and practitioners working in Sweden on development cooperation within the global 2030 Agenda. The findings will inform SweDev's future activities and its work to help Sweden gain traction on its international development-cooperation efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The study was reviewed by SweDev's Steering Committee: Mats Björk, Jonas Ewald, Flora Hajdu, Rickard Lalander, Henning Melber, Tanya Andersson Nystedt, Elisabeth Olivius, Anders Sjögren, Cecilia Strand, Jesper Sundewall and Fredrik Söderbaum.

For more information on SweDev, please visit www.swedev.dev.

Fredrik Söderbaum

Chair, SweDev

Executive summary

This study examines how Swedish practitioners and policymakers who work on development cooperation perceive and use research-based knowledge. The study seeks to understand the factors that facilitate or hinder the use of research-based knowledge to help achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It aims to find ways to strengthen the links between two distinct communities: researchers studying development issues, and policymakers and practitioners seeking to make sustainable development a reality. The ultimate aim is to generate and implement policies that are grounded in research. The findings and recommendations are based on the results of a survey and focus-group discussions with key practitioners and policymakers working in Sweden on issues related to international development cooperation.

Key findings:

Policymakers and practitioners perceive that research-based knowledge, while important to their work, is difficult to find, understand and implement – and too far-removed from the realities of policy and practice. In contrast to previous studies, our findings indicate that the majority of practitioners and policymakers perceive that research-based knowledge is relevant and important for their work. However, at the same time, a belief prevails among practitioners that research should provide concrete solutions to specific problems. Practitioners thus have a rather narrow understanding of the role of research, which fails to acknowledge that research cannot always provide guidance or solutions for specific policy issues or targets.

Policymakers and practitioners tend to use research to back decisions that have already been made, rather than to inform decision-making. Though practitioners and policymakers in Sweden perceive research-based knowledge as relevant and credible, they typically use such knowledge *to confirm decisions that have already been made*. They largely use research to strengthen certain perspectives and arguments, and to support accuracy and communication. They tend to use research when it aligns with popular opinions. Thus, other useful but more critical research may be discounted or ignored.

The time and budget for taking research-based evidence into account are insufficient – giving rise to the view that using research in practice is not a priority in the overall communication and steering of Swedish development cooperation. Policymakers and practitioners perceive that management and donors value the use of research; yet, little funding and time are secured for staff and partners to find, digest and implement research-based knowledge, or to interact with the research community. Practitioners and policymakers argue that time is the main, limiting factor they face. They say that they do not have enough time to search for relevant research, or to read journal articles and longer research reports. They instead invest time attending internal meetings and fulfilling requests about controlling and evaluating funds and processes.

There is a communication mismatch between researchers and practitioners. This mismatch stems from both the locations of published findings and the style of communication.

There is a gulf between how and where researchers communicate their findings and how and where practitioners look for research. Policymakers and practitioners often search for research via Google, social media, and seminars. They tend to use networks and to consult with colleagues rather than to turn to peer-reviewed forums, such as scientific journals, research databases or Google Scholar. By contrast, researchers tend to communicate their work via peer-reviewed journal articles that are required to obtain tenure, progress in their careers, and, often, to win research funding grants.

Swedish policymakers and practitioners prefer internationally produced research over research from within Sweden. There is a tendency to use research-based knowledge produced in other countries, and by other, globally recognized institutions, rather than by Swedish organizations and universities. This appears to be the result of several factors. Practitioners place great value on local participation and voice; thus, they tend to defer to the preferences of partners in countries that are the focus of development work. They do not wish to be perceived as promoting a Swedish agenda per se. Certain international research organizations and institutions have established reputations for producing world-class research on certain development issues, and practitioners highly value collaboration with them. At the same time, however, practitioners within Sweden do not seem to know how or where to find research or researchers within Sweden. These prevailing preferences and networks risk weakening Sweden's development research and its future resource base.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we offer four recommendations to expand the use of research-based knowledge in Sweden, to aid the pursuit of more effective sustainable development policy and practices to achieve the 2030 Agenda:

1 Bridge the communications gap between researchers and practitioners

Communication and translation of research-based knowledge to policy and practice must improve. Research must find channels to reach the people who can benefit from its insights. Policymakers and practitioners search for research-based knowledge in one set of places; researchers, by contrast, publish their work elsewhere. This mismatch impedes the use of research in policy. Research communication styles and formats also impede the use of research in development policy and practice. For greater uptake, research must be published in places that practitioners can quickly find, and it must be written in ways that practitioners can quickly understand. A focus on key conclusions and recommendations for actions would facilitate wider uptake of findings. Researchers would benefit from writing different types of outputs about their findings, in outlets that are available to the policy community, in language that is free of jargon, and in formats that are short. At the same time, policymakers and practitioners would benefit from training on how to use search engines that are storehouses of peer-reviewed literature, and on how to quickly find and read the main takeaways of academic research. Seminars, dialogue opportunities, longer in-person meetings and training opportunities that bring researchers and practitioners together offer means to provide better communication between the two communities.

2 Co-create research and development initiatives

Today's development problems are complex, and they require co-creation of research and development initiatives – not unconnected, uninformed pursuits. There is currently a gap between policy and research. Development practitioners who participated in this study clearly expressed the need to enable the development research community to apply its knowledge and expertise more directly to the implementation of programming and policymaking. In turn, findings of previous studies show that researchers also want to be more connected to development programming and policymaking. This reciprocal desire to integrate research and policy creates opportunities. We believe that

co-creation of research and development initiatives would be a win-win for practitioners, policymakers and researchers. Directly involving researchers in the design and implementation of development projects and programmes would allow them to provide more relevant, timely and useful input. Researchers would gain a better understanding of the processes within policy and practice, and come away with greater knowledge and experience for developing research questions that help to push the knowledge frontier forward. In turn, practitioners would gain direct access to researchers and their research knowledge base – early and often – to enhance the formulation of policy and its implementation.

3 Connect development researchers, policymakers and practitioners in Sweden

The links between development researchers and the policymaking community in Sweden is weak. These linkages could be made more resilient, for example by institutionalizing support to networks and/or other platforms. Many researcher-practitioner-policy collaborations today depend on personal relationships that are vulnerable to changing personnel and governments. Many practitioners do not know where and how to find or connect with researchers. The connections that exist often emerge in an ad hoc manner – and often, with internationally based researchers. Strong international connections are vital and must be cultivated; at the same time, however, there also is a need for the research and policy communities within Sweden to engage and partner with one another. This is important for development and innovation, and for future initiatives and resource bases within Sweden and Swedish society. Greater capacity-building efforts are needed to support networks and platforms within Sweden to realize the country's international development policy ambitions around the world.

4 Change incentives and structures for funding to improve work towards the 2030 Agenda

The lack of organized research-policy-practice links seems to be an outcome of incentives and the financing picture for Swedish development research that has emerged over the past decade. There is no funding stream that supports more organized platforms for building relationships between development practitioners and researchers within Sweden. Financing has thus not been a lever for strengthening the links between development research institutions and development policymakers and practitioners in Sweden. The focus on control of projects and procurement regulations has the potential to lead to a trend; development practitioners may choose to collaborate with consultants, who can react more quickly and often have greater familiarity with the development jargon but lack the depth of researchers. Practitioners in this study say that they see a need for more in-depth knowledge produced by researchers; at the same time, they say that they do not have the time or the know-how how to tap this expertise. Therefore, we see an urgent need to establish incentives and structures for funding to support and facilitate partnerships between researchers and practitioners, and to support needed links between research and policymaking.

1 Introduction

Research and evidence are needed to improve development policies and their impact. It is widely accepted that better use of “research and evidence in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life” (Court et al., 2004, p. 1). Conversely, failure to use evidence can have devastating results for development (Court et al., 2004). Nevertheless, there is often a mismatch between research and policy. Oftentimes research is not used in policy for sustainable development.

This study examines why this is the case. It seeks to find ways to bring research into the policymaking process to a greater degree – to improve policies and their outcomes for the global sustainable development mission. To that end, the report focuses on the perceptions that development policymakers and practitioners in Sweden hold about research, and the ways in which they use – or do not use – research in their work. The report examines barriers that impede the use of research, and it looks at potential levers that can increase its use to help Sweden play an effective role in global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In this study we use the term *research-based knowledge* rather than “evidence” (a term frequently used and originating from the field of medicine, meaning that the available body of facts or information can prove or disprove something). By doing so we wish to highlight the importance of using different types of research in policymaking that can support reflection and the “gut-feeling” when making decisions. Such research can be produced by scientists, academia and professional groups. The research can include findings in articles in peer-reviewed journals, and other outputs and knowledge based on peer-reviewed research (Jones et al., 2013).

The study was guided by a set of research questions that focus on increasing the use of research-based knowledge and increasing interaction between the people who generate research and those who can implement it into policy and practice. To that end, we asked development practitioners in Sweden detailed questions about the relevance and use of research in their work. We sought to understand how they find needed research, what factors help or hinder them, and what could be done to increase the relevance and use of research in Swedish development practice and policymaking. We gathered information in two ways: through an online survey and through focus-group discussions. The online survey consisted of 16 questions focusing on how policymakers and practitioners perceive, use and access research and research-based knowledge. The questions were inspired by previous studies about evidence-based policy and practice. These include work establishing four factors of enablers and disablers for evidence-based policymaking (Punton, 2016) and a study indicating that for decision makers to use research, it must be clear, relevant, available and accessible (Oliver et al., 2014). (See annexes 2 and 3 for greater detail.)

In all, 131 practitioners and policymakers in Sweden responded to the survey. Respondents represented public agencies (44%), civil society organizations (21%) and municipalities (18%). The respondents represented the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (19%), the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) (4%), and the private sector (3%). The respondents defined their professional positions as follows: policy officer/thematic expert (42%), programme manager (23%), and head of unit or department (14%). (See Annex 4 for detail.)

Focus-group discussions were conducted to complement and elaborate on the responses from the online survey. The discussion took place with 23 programme managers, policy officers/thematic experts, directors, heads of units and departments at civil society organizations (CSOs), and with programme managers and lead policy specialists at Sida.

Certain limitations of the study bear mentioning. This study does not claim to give a representative picture of how practitioners and policymakers in Sweden perceive and use research. Biases may surface, for example because of the nature of those who chose to respond to the survey or participate in the focus-group discussions. These people may have been motivated to respond and participate because they hold more positive (or more negative) opinions about research use, and/or because they have more (or less) experience than those who chose not to participate. The survey and the focus-group discussions explicitly stated that the study was conducted by SweDev, a network aiming at increasing the use of research; this, too, might have influenced responses. The focus-group discussions were not transcribed; discussants' quotes were taken from our own notes, and they reflect our understanding of what was said. Despite these limitations, we believe that the study offers unique information that reflects perceptions and the use of research-based knowledge among those working on international sustainable development issues.

The study is organized as follows: Section 2 describes how and when practitioners and policymakers in Sweden use research-based knowledge in their work, and the perceptions they have about research-based knowledge and outputs. It examines the ways in which practitioners and policymakers access research, and the implications for the use of development research in Sweden. Section 3 presents possible enablers for increasing the use of research-based knowledge in Swedish development policy and practice. Section 4 presents conclusions and recommendations for actions that can enhance the use and relevance of research-based knowledge in Swedish development policy and practice.

2 How practitioners and policymakers perceive and use research-based knowledge

This section presents the perceptions that practitioners and policymakers have about research and its use.

2.1 Research is perceived as relevant but difficult to understand, find and implement.

In the online survey, the respondents were asked how they perceive the nature of research-based knowledge that is available to them. (The online survey and questions are provided in Annex 3). Respondents were given a series of statements, and were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the statements. Table 1 shows the results. The vast majority of respondents agreed with the statements that available research-based knowledge is relevant (89%) and credible (69%) for their work. Fewer than a quarter of the respondents agreed with the statements that research-based knowledge is easy to understand (22%), or easy to find (22%). Fewer than one in 10 respondents agreed with statements that research is easy to implement (9%), or has a good format (8%).

Table 1. Perceptions about research-based knowledge

| Perceptions about research-based knowledge | Respondents agreeing with statement (percentage) | Respondents agreeing with statement (absolute numbers)* |
|--|--|---|
| Research-based knowledge is relevant for one's work. | 89% | 106 |
| Research-based knowledge is credible. | 69% | 82 |
| Research-based knowledge is easy to understand. | 22% | 26 |
| Research-based knowledge is easy to find. | 22% | 26 |
| Research-based knowledge is easy to implement. | 9% | 11 |
| Research-based knowledge has a good format. | 8% | 10 |
| N=119 | | |

*The accumulation of respondents exceeds the total number of respondents (N) as more than one statement could be selected.

Our finding shows that a relatively high percentage of the respondents consider available research relevant; this contradicts some previous research showing that practitioners perceive research as irrelevant and unreliable for decision-making (Orton et al., 2011; Oliver, et al., 2014). Our finding could be biased either because those who chose to answer the survey may have held more positive views about using research than those who chose not to answer the survey, or because the survey was conducted by SweDev as part of a mission to enhance the use of research in policy and practice.

Our findings show that many respondents find research difficult to implement; this is in line with previous research findings (Court & Young, 2006; Orton et al., 2011). In the focus-group discussions a CSO head said,

"We are practical and want to know what works. Many researchers are looking at the problem, but we already know the problem. What we want is the solution. We need research that dares to say 'do this'".

This comment exemplifies a prevailing belief among practitioners that research should provide concrete solutions to a problem. As a lead policy specialist at Sida put it, “Research must be practically useful”.

Our findings indicate a strong belief among practitioners and policymakers that research should provide solutions to a specific problem. This represents a narrow understanding of research in the social sciences. Research is indeed intended to help solve problems, but these are not always immediate issues with a precise target. Research is also intended to provide critical thinking about issues by bringing about new understandings. Research can break new conceptual ground in profoundly important ways – but often through unexpected routes that occur years after the research itself and sometimes through entirely unexpected routes. The prevailing view among practitioners appears to be that research findings or learnings flow linearly and directly from the research sphere to the policy sphere. Reality is seldom so simple or straightforward. Policy issues are often more dynamic and complex, and the connections between policy and practice are often shaped by multiple relationships and many different reservoirs of knowledge (see discussion in Annex 2).

For decades, development has been dominated by the “what works” mission to use evidence to improve decision-making (e.g. Cohen & Easterly, 2010). This agenda often promotes the use of randomized control trials (RCTs) or other tests to measure efficacy. These methods can help determine “what works”, but they also have limitations. Thus, a combination of methods, including conceptual and theoretical development, is necessary to discover not “what works” but also “why things work” (see Deaton & Cartwright, 2018).

Research fields evolve. As a research field develops and becomes more promising, the number of results, explanations, arguments and recommendations tend to expand. As a result, the field may appear more chaotic to decision makers (Almeida & Báscolo, 2006). Keeping research simple may help researchers influence policy, but it may not promote or support research-based knowledge on a wider, more fundamental, societal level (Broadbent, 2012). Finding a solution to a problem might thus require using a combination of different types of research and methods. The combination can be invaluable support to judgements needed to make decisions.

The survey responses underscore that policymakers and practitioners perceive that research is not presented in effective formats. This conclusion corresponds with the findings of previous literature (Court & Young, 2006; Orton et al., 2011; also see Section 3.2). This suggests that communication of research could adapt to better serve the needs of practitioners and policymakers – and that those involved in policy could build capacity to better search for and use relevant research.

2.2 Research is used to confirm one's perspective.

The survey asked practitioners and policymakers about the main reasons they consult research and use research-based knowledge in their work. The respondents were again given statements, and they were asked to indicate whether they agreed with accompanying statements. They were told to select up to three statements with which they agreed. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2. Reasons to consult and use research-based knowledge

| Reasons to consult and use research-based knowledge | Respondents agreeing with statement (percentage)* | Respondents agreeing with statement (absolute numbers)* |
|---|---|---|
| To strengthen the accuracy of one's work | 69% | 84 |
| To strengthen one's perspective in reports, recommendations and/or arguments | 57% | 70 |
| To take better decisions | 57% | 69 |
| To get ideas and to be innovative | 48% | 58 |
| To increase one's credibility among stakeholders, colleagues and/or within the organisation | 37% | 45 |
| It is interesting | 19% | 23 |
| It is expected by management of one's organisation | 12% | 15 |
| It is expected by colleagues | 2% | 2 |
| Other | 2% | 2 |
| N=122 | | |

*The accumulation of respondents exceeds the total number of respondents (N) as more than one statement could be selected.

Table 2 shows that there are several reasons for using research-based knowledge, such as strengthening the accuracy of one's work (69%) and strengthening one's perspective in reports, recommendations and/or arguments (57%). Using research-based knowledge is also perceived to enable better decision making (57%), generate new ideas and innovations (48%), and support one's communication with colleagues and stakeholders (37%).

It is worth underscoring that few respondents use research-based knowledge because it is expected by the management of one's organization (12%) or by colleagues (2%). Instead, respondents seem to consult research when it supports and strengthens practical decision-making. More than half of the respondents use research-based knowledge to strengthen their perspectives and arguments, and using research in this way also surfaced as a topic in focus-group discussions with programme and policy officers from CSOs. As one CSO representative said, "Our organization encourages us to collect the latest research that we can use for a nuanced debate but it is often used to support what we already think". Another said, "That is part of the problem. We tend to just agree with everybody, and you come from the same place with the same ideas, and you listen to research that strengthen your argument".

This tendency to select research that goes hand in hand with one's already set values and understanding of the problem can lead useful knowledge to be ignored or discounted (Punton, 2016). There is in fact an emerging consensus in literature that policymakers are highly averse to shifting their beliefs and rather engage in motivated reasoning to

justify their initial policy choices (Baekgaard et al., 2017; Banuri et al., 2019). Waldman (2014) has argued that a common tactic is to use research as a “weapon” to support and generate legitimacy on a decision. However, sticking to priors and being inattentive to new knowledge may harm the implementation of good policies that might otherwise spur development (Kremer et al., 2021).

2.3 Google, networks and colleagues are important means for finding research.

The survey asked respondents how they commonly find research that they use in their work. The respondents were also given statements with which they could choose to agree. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3. Common means for finding research to use in one’s work

| Common means for finding research | Respondents agreeing with statement (percentage)* | Respondents agreeing with statement (absolute numbers)* |
|---|---|---|
| Search on Google | 69% | 84 |
| From networks and/or colleagues | 45% | 55 |
| Social media, for example Twitter, LinkedIn | 23% | 28 |
| Search on Google Scholar | 20% | 24 |
| Search on a research database | 19% | 23 |
| Other** | 11% | 13 |
| N=122 | | |

*The accumulation of respondents exceeds the total number of respondents (N) as more than one statement could be selected. **The category “Other” was an open-ended question where the respondent could provide their own answer. The answers were newsletters, conferences, commissioned research, references in other publications, and searching on universities’ websites.

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents use Google as their first option for finding research (69%). By contrast, not more than 20% access research using Google Scholar or research databases, channels largely consisting of peer-reviewed articles. Focus-group participants noted that many organizations do not have accounts that provide access to research databases. This suggests that practitioners cannot access peer-reviewed research unless it is published on an open-access site. Researchers, by contrast, face pressure to produce articles peer-reviewed journals. Promotions and salaries reward those whose work is most frequently cited and/or published in top academic journals in their field. There are seldom similar career rewards for publications that are not peer reviewed (Almeida & Bascolo, 2006; Oliver et al., 2014). Thus, there seems to be a mismatch between the sources practitioners and policymakers use to find research-based knowledge, and the publications in which researchers generally share their work.

Previous studies have found networks to be important means for enabling research-policy-practice interactions, and for speeding up the spread and acceptance of ideas in development policy (Court & Young, 2006). Researchers themselves also perceive networks as important for spreading their work (Strand et al., 2020). The importance of

networks is further supported by our findings; nearly half (45%) of survey respondents indicated that they find research via networks and colleagues.

Focus-group discussions also emphasized the importance of networks and personal connections. As a CSO programme officer said, “Of course, [researchers and research] should be relevant, but they should also be open for contact. You should know them and be able to have a relationship with the institutions”. The importance of trust and having a personal relationship with the researcher have also been stressed by previous studies. For example, Ritter describes how the type and nature of the relationships between researchers and practitioners/policymakers affect the use of research in policy and practice (2009). The quality of the relationships has also been seen to affect the results and outcomes of practitioner-research collaborations (Keller & Bender, 2020). However, relying too much on personal relationships rather than wider and inclusive networks can increase the use of research that confirms already existing knowledge and/or values. This raises the risk of limiting the use of research-based knowledge that offers alternative perspectives (Punton, 2016).

Respondents were also asked how they had interacted with the research community during the previous 12 months. Respondents most frequently mentioned means of interaction were attending seminars (82%), reading summaries or briefs of research results (69%), and being involved in networks that invite or consist of researchers (40%) (see Table 4). This further supports the importance of research being shared in channels and formats that are easily accessible to practitioners and policymakers (Table 1).

Table 4. Means for interacting with the research community during the last 12 months

| Means for interacting with the research community | Respondents agreeing with statement (percentage)* | Respondents agreeing with statement (absolute numbers)* |
|---|---|---|
| Seminars | 82% | 100 |
| Summaries or briefs of research results | 69% | 84 |
| Network with or that invites researchers | 40% | 49 |
| Consulted or contracted researchers for my work | 36% | 44 |
| Peer reviewed research articles | 26% | 32 |
| Blogs about research results | 25% | 30 |
| Research conferences | 16% | 19 |
| Social media | 11% | 14 |
| Other | 4% | 5 |
| I have not interacted with the research community during this period. | 2% | 2 |
| N=122 | | |

*The accumulation of respondents exceeds the total number of respondents (N) as more than one statement could be selected.

2.4 Time is the main limiting factor.

Respondents were asked to identify the main challenges using research-based knowledge in their work. Based on findings on limiting factors provided in Puntun (2016), the survey offered eight possible responses. Time to read and keep up with research was seen as the main challenge by far (72%). (See Table 5.)

Table 5. Challenges for using research-based knowledge in one's work

| Challenges for using research-based knowledge | Respondents agreeing with statement (percentage)* | Respondents agreeing with statement (absolute numbers)* |
|---|---|---|
| I don't have enough time to read and keep up with research | 72% | 79 |
| Finding research-based knowledge is too complicated and time consuming. | 40% | 44 |
| It is difficult to implement research-based knowledge in my work. | 31% | 34 |
| There are not enough incentives to use research-based knowledge. | 22% | 24 |
| I don't know where to find research-based knowledge relevant for my work. | 15% | 17 |
| There is not much research relevant for my work. | 8% | 9 |
| Other | 8% | 9 |
| Research is hard to understand, and I don't want to misinterpret it. | 7% | 8 |
| I can't see how research-based knowledge could help me in my work. | 2% | 2 |
| N=110 | | |

*The accumulation of respondents exceeds the total number of respondents (N) as more than one statement could be selected.

This finding about time being a major impediment is in line with the findings of previous studies (Newman, 2014; Oliver et al., 2014). As discussed in Puntun (2016), the amount of time spent on given tasks is linked to the perceived value of those tasks within an organizational culture. That is, workers spend their time on what they believe the organization prioritizes. Thus, the value of time spent on research links to whether organizational culture promotes or values research and research-based evidence.

Participants in focus-group discussions underscored the conflicts they face regarding how to spend their time. Responding to donor requests surfaced as a key issue. As one CSO director said,

"Money and time is used on evaluations and other control stuff because that is in the agreement. Perhaps we should dig deeper on problems in the programmes' reality. However, it is difficult to change (what we spend time on) if it is said in the agreement that we should do an evaluation".

Because funders often requested short-term evaluations, practitioners tended to seek out consultants rather than academics. Consultants are generally perceived as "quicker" to respond to and execute request, and thought to be more familiar with development-aid "lingo". As a CSO programme officer said, "The time we have to go outside the organization to search for research is a fragment of the time we spend on internal meetings and processes". Another key conflict raised concerned political priorities and funding. Respondents said that neither using research nor collaborating with researchers received priority – and that such work was not funded. (See sections 3.3–3.4 for further detail.)

Table 5 also shows that practitioners and policymakers perceive other constraints. It is seen as a challenge both to *implement* available research in one's work (31%) and to *use* research-based knowledge in one's work (22%). This is in line with the findings of Table 1. Some respondents indicated that they do not know where to find research that is relevant for their work (15%).

The responses also reveal that finding research-based knowledge is perceived as too complicated and time consuming (40%). Participants in focus-group discussions said that there are not many established institutional channels for working with researchers, and that initiating those channels required a time investment. As a policy specialist from Sida said, "There is no time to initiate and have contact with researchers". As a lead policy specialist at Sida said, "We don't have time to read too much detail and we can only read maybe two conclusions in the end".

2.5 Practitioners use more research from international sources than from Swedish sources.

Participants in focus groups discussed which research and researchers their organizations preferred work with and use. Many participants said they generate connections with and have knowledge of international sources rather than Swedish ones. Some of the heads and programme officers within CSOs clearly stated that collaborating with Swedish researchers is not key because the CSOs work with *international* development issues. Similarly, Sida policy specialists said that colleagues are encouraged to have contact with researchers in the region where they work. Several of the participants said that the partners in the field must be given "ownership" and that they decide who their researcher collaborators should be and what research-based knowledge should be used. Participants seemed reluctant to suggest or promote research and researchers to their partners in the field; they did not want to impose a top-down approach, or to further complicate relationships by bringing Swedish-affiliated researchers to the mix with aid-receiving partner organizations. As a CSO programme officer said,

"I am very humble to bring research to my colleagues as they have the on-ground experience. They might not agree with the research because it is not what is happening on the ground or in their reality."

This avoidance of a top-down approach is in line with Swedish policy documents on development cooperation and international agreements on aid effectiveness (see for example MFA, 2016/17). Our findings however suggest that there are potential trade-offs between supporting local ownership and promoting the use and development of Swedish affiliated research-based knowledge. In the Swedish policy ambitions it is addressed that, in order to reach Swedish policy ambitions and the Agenda 2030, Sweden should build "broad engagement and inclusive partnerships between actors in Sweden", including Swedish universities, higher education institutions and research institutions; and to ensure that such institutions "possess knowledge of complex contexts and links that partly explain the varying causes of poverty and the forms it takes" (MFA, 2016/17, p. 52).

Some focus-group participants (Sida's lead policy specialists, for example) use Swedish research resources including annual reports from think tanks such as Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), or updates from Swedish universities. However, participants of all actor groups said that they more frequently use research from international actors and donors, such

as the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), than Swedish actors. As a CSO programme officer said,

"We use the reports produced by other organizations, such as the World Bank. They are often more relevant and accessible for us compared to what is produced by Swedish universities."

Another possible explanation to why practitioners and policymakers in Sweden use more international rather than Swedish research-based knowledge might be the level of global recognition or status of the organization. Referencing research produced by an internationally known and respected actor might provide more legitimacy when supporting one's position on an issue, and people may believe the research conducted by these name-brand institutions are of higher calibre.

Another possible reason could be that the international organizations are more specialised in topics relevant to development cooperation as such, have more resources for conducting certain avenues of research and for communicating and translating research findings to practitioners. (Recall that just 22% of the survey respondents indicated that research is easy to find.) Though the survey did not explicitly focus on Swedish research, practitioners in focus-group discussions suggested that they find it easier to locate research outputs from international than from Swedish researchers. For example, a Sida programme manager said, "I am not sure where to find research from Swedish affiliated actors". Until the advent of SweDev itself, Sweden had not had a platform for translating its in-country development research to its in-country practitioners.

There is a balance to consider. People working on international development in Sweden do need connections and partners in other countries and to the wider international community. At the same time, the failure to connect development researchers and practitioners working on development cooperation within Sweden may limit the involvement and innovation of Sweden's research community, with long-run implications for Sweden's own capacity development and position on the international stage. The absence of such researcher-practitioner links could, in turn, harm the building up of competence and reputations of both development cooperation capacity of both practitioners and researchers. Moreover, a failure to involve Swedish researchers into development cooperation processes might have wider implications. In the long run, this could arguably harm the broad public support that exists for development cooperation. The implications for Swedish development education, its future resource base, and its international reputation on these issues warrant further consideration.

3 Means to enable the use of research-based knowledge

This section presents findings about measures that may enable wider and better use of research-based knowledge in development policy and practice.

One survey question focused specifically on possible ways to enable use of research-based knowledge in one's work (see Table 6). Two items emerged as key issues: More than two-thirds (68%) of respondents said they need more time to read and digest research, and more than half (57%) said they need research that is shorter and better adapted to policy and practice. Other issues that surfaced were receiving indications that management emphasizes the importance of research (28%) and having direct access to researchers (27%).

Table 6. Enablers for using research-based knowledge in one's work

| Enablers for using research-based knowledge | Respondents agreeing with statement (percentage)* | Respondents agreeing with statement (absolute numbers)* |
|---|---|---|
| If I had more time to read and digest research | 68% | 78 |
| If research papers were shorter and better adapted to policy and practice | 57% | 65 |
| If emphasized as important and used by management for decision making | 28% | 32 |
| If I had direct access to researchers who are experts in an area relevant for my work, e.g. climate change or gender equality | 27% | 31 |
| If I received more invitations to research presentations and seminars | 17% | 19 |
| If I received more invitations to research days focusing on a specific thematic area, e.g. climate change or gender equality | 1% | 19 |
| If I collaborated with researchers on applied research | 17% | 19 |
| If I had access to a network of researchers | 14% | 16 |
| If I in my work could participate in further academic training | 12% | 14 |
| I am happy with the level of research-based knowledge I use in my work. | 10% | 11 |
| If I received more invitations to research conferences | 7% | 8 |
| Other | 5% | 6 |
| If it was more important for promotion and/or recruitment | 4% | 5 |
| N=115 | | |

*The accumulation of respondents exceeds the total number of respondents (N) as more than one statement could be selected.

3.1 Adopt changes to address the perceived lack of time

Time was by far the main limiting factor that policymakers and practitioners perceived as a barrier to the exploration of research related to their fields of work. More than two-thirds of respondents said they need more time to read and digest research. What can then be done to free up time?

Various matters come into play that affect the amount of time that practitioners and policymakers devote to research-related work.

Policymakers and practitioners have many tasks vying for their time and attention, and so they must prioritize which ones to do. As discussed in Chapter 2, research-related pursuits are perceived as having a low priority. The way one spends one's time depends to a great extent on what is valued within an organization. Workers make decisions about how to spend their time in ways that respond to the signals they receive from their managers, from funders, and from the organization as a whole. No one wants to spend time on matters that are not perceived as valuable.

Policymakers and practitioners say that research-related work is difficult to read and difficult to find— suggesting that it may take an outsized amount of time. Indeed, these are difficult tasks if one does not know how to read and how to interpret academic publications. And research is difficult to find if one does not know where to find the online storehouses that contain the knowledge one seeks.

Time is also constrained by the absence of networks between policymakers and researchers that can be tapped quickly and regularly as issues arise. However, developing such networks requires investments in time and requires funding.

Thus, steps to address the wider “lack of time” issue must address the various component parts of the full picture. Taken together, a series of measures have the potential to free up time. Such steps could help address time constraints by reducing the time needed to find and read research, providing opportunities to allow researchers and practitioners to better connect with one another, and making changes that provide concrete signals from managers, funders and the wider organization about the wider value of research-related work. Subsequent recommendations (in sections 3.2–3.6) deal with these component parts in greater detail.

3.2 Adapt research communication to policy and practice

More than half of the respondents said they would be more likely to use research in their work if they were able to find shorter research papers better adapted to policy and practice. This finding is in line with those of previous studies. Presenting research clearly can enable the use of research-based knowledge in policy and practice (Newman, 2014).

Thus, the use of research-based knowledge among practitioners could be strengthened if researchers would focus on communicating short, on-point briefs or summaries of their research via open-access platforms, social media and networks rather than long scientific journal articles.

This would address two barriers. Such communication would make research outputs a “quicker read” – helping address the time constraints of policymakers and practitioners. It would also put research on platforms that practitioners use – making it easier for them to find.

Adapting research communication in such ways could expand the use of research in Swedish development cooperation. Researchers could seek support from “mediators” or “translators” of research to strengthen the outreach of their work (Broadbent, 2012). However, such a shift may also require additional funding and wider institutional changes both within the development practitioners community and research community. For example, a recent study by the Swedish Research Council found that researchers face key barriers that limit their communication with wider society; other tasks are more highly prioritized, and limited resources and funding are available for such research communication (Bohlin & Bergman, 2019). Researchers thus have their trade-offs as well, and tend to prioritize their time to push the research frontier rather than communicating to practitioners. If changing this priority, researchers need, to a greater

extent, be valued for their capacity to contribute to policy and practice (Oliver et al., 2014). If communication with wider society is a goal – as well as pushing the research frontier – then funding priorities should reflect these dual missions.

3.3 Strengthen support from management and funders

More than a quarter of survey respondents indicated that they would use more research-based knowledge if it were emphasized as important and used by management for decision-making. This is in line with the view that an organization's culture is a strong factor that can enable or disable certain practices (Punton, 2016). For example, some studies have found that collecting and appraising research is seen as "non-work" (Orton et al., 2011) or an unnecessary function (Armstrong et al., 2013). Along a similar line, our findings suggest that even though research-based knowledge is perceived by individuals as valuable, management has not signalled such value by using such research or by emphasizing the need to invest time in the pursuit of research-based knowledge.

Thus, there is room for organizations working with policy and/or implementation to further encourage staff to use research-based knowledge in their work. Such emphasis should not be tangible, not merely theoretical. Truly prioritizing the use of research means securing time for employees to find, read and digest research. As CSO thematic expert and programme officer said,

"What we are allowed to do depends on the frame that our organization is given. It is about having sufficient time to take part of existing research, but it is also about what time I have. The time I have to apply for funds or to access research depends on management allowing or encouraging it, but it also on what practically needs to be done. My management encourages me to read research and studies, but still I have other things I need to do."

As this comment illustrates, the time investment needed for exploring research conflicts with other duties and one's own prioritization – even when management encourages research use. Another respondent cited impediments linked to budgeting – for example, having sufficient funds to work more directly with researchers during project implementation. As a CSO programme officer said, "Having research being done within our organization sometimes require applying for extra funding as there are not enough funds planned for doing research". Thus, clearly, impediments to the use of research extend to organizations' full strategic vision. A greater effort should be made not only for managers to free up time in their employees' calendars but for full organizations to prioritize the use of research-based knowledge in their overall strategic plans. Management should review organizational policies, systems and procedures with this in mind. Management should seek creative solutions.

Some changes in this regard may require dialogue with the "management of management": donors, funders, and/or the board of directors. As a CSO programme officer said,

"In our case it is not just management that is the issue, but it also leads back to donors. We can only do what we are allowed to do. If Sweden wants to see a closer cooperation between civil society organizations and academia then it has to be encouraged."

This comment illustrates a perception that collaboration with academia and researchers has not been seen as a political priority among Swedish development practitioners and policymakers. This is an important observation, particularly given that the need for collaboration with the research community for implementation of Agenda 2030 is clearly stated in Swedish development policies (MFA, 2016/17).

The role of funders is critical. As a Sida programme officer said, “The emphasis on using research in dialogue with partners varies. There are a lot of things that need to be discussed with partners. It is all about priorities”. Another CSO head said that the lack of collaboration with researchers stems from a lack of resources. “There is a lack of funding to research collaborations”, the participant said.

Previous studies have shown that funders’ priorities make a difference. Donors that support and make possible the use of research can greatly impact policymakers’ and practitioners’ demand for research, and can encourage development initiatives inspired by research-based knowledge (Court & Young, 2006; Liverani et al., 2013).

Thus, funders should clarify their priorities for using research-based knowledge. They should ensure that their systems, procedures, guidelines and tools support these priorities. To avoid politically charged situations, Broadbent (2012) has suggested that funders steer clear of promoting a particular piece of research; instead, Broadbent (2012) has suggested that funders should strive to improve the ability of policymakers to engage in discussions on research and development initiatives.

3.4 Increase practitioners’ skills for finding and using research

Several of the respondents in the study said they wanted to participate in further academic training. In the focus-group discussion respondents discussed the need to increase skills on how to find, understand and use research-based knowledge effectively. For example, practitioners would benefit from understanding matters related to the citing of sources, different types of research (for example, natural sciences and social sciences), and various research methodologies (Broadbent, 2012). Thus, capacity-building efforts may be warranted. Such efforts may require investing time and resources in practitioners’ continued education.

Recent studies have shown that training can lead to positive change. For example, giving decision makers training about research methods increases demand for and responsiveness to causal evidence from research. Training efforts can thus be seen as an effective means for using research for a variety of uses, not just to back up decisions that have already been made. For example, Mehmood et al. (2021) found that training of policymakers in causal methods shifted both their demand for and their attitudes towards research.

3.5 Strengthen direct access to researchers through networks

Many of the respondents in the study said that they want to have more direct access to researchers with expertise in a relevant field. More efforts are therefore needed to strengthen the possibilities to reach out directly to researchers. Networks play an important role in providing such access.

Policymakers and practitioners already perceive networks as important means for finding research as well as for interacting with the research community. Relying too much on personal connections for policy-practice interactions can make such interactions vulnerable to changes in staff. Previous studies have described how a high staff turnover can undermine a systematic use of evidence (Clar et al., 2011; Liverani et al., 2013). Building personal connections within the function of an established network can thus play an important role in mitigating this risk. Networks have been shown to be a way to keep groups of people together despite being physically apart (Perkin & Court, 2005). The literature also suggests that one way to enhance the use of research in practice is by building personal relationships between the producers of research and users of research through “knowledge brokers”, such as networks (Garpenby, 2015).

Respondents in our study made clear that there was a demand for broader and more in-depth studies that could improve learning across different fields and individual projects. As one CSO head stated:

"We do not need more research focusing on one specific partner or field office. What we need is a larger scope studying a larger group. There are questions one could study for the development sector as a whole".

This underscores the need to connect multiple organizations to one policy research network that can make it easier to identify research gaps (Broadbent, 2012). If established networks focus on building connections between policy, practice and research, this will make it easier for researchers to produce knowledge relevant for and used by many actors rather than for one, targeted group. At the same time, this would give practitioners more direct access to researchers. Moreover, such a set-up diminishes the risks that connections will disappear when key people move to new positions and places. Focus-group discussions also raised the need to connect with researchers who have different types of expertise and different ways of communicating. As one CSO programme officer suggested,

"If we could have researchers with different thematic come visit us two to three times a year, we could prepare questions and have time to discuss issues. It would allow for us to use and not only read research. Discussing directly with researchers would make it easier to take research to a practical level".

This comment illustrates the desire for research communication to be a reciprocal process, and the potential benefits that can stem from using various means for connections. These are matters that broad networks could facilitate.

3.6 Integrate researchers in development programming

Survey respondents suggested that one way to enable greater use of research-based knowledge is to have researchers connected to the practice in development programmes. Participants in the focus-group sessions also raised the issue. As a CSO head observed,

"Civil society organizations develop hypotheses on what we can do for development. These hypotheses must be tested, something that could be done by researchers. I would like to see closer collaborations with researchers from the beginning of initiatives, in which practitioners have identified what we think will work, and researchers are involved from the beginning and also follow up the initiative over time".

Including researchers from the proposal-assessment stage to the end of an initiative could enable continuous and highly relevant inputs from researchers. This, in turn could maximize the potential impact of programme investments. Several respondents mentioned similar beneficial approaches undertaken in other donor countries. As described by a CSO Head with previous experience of such an approach, "The researcher followed the whole phase and became like a partner or a part of our own organization". For example, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) supports and collaborates with the NADEL Center for Development and Cooperation within the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Science of ETH Zurich. Researchers connected to NADEL are continuously involved in projects and programmes run by the SDC. Researchers provide courses and further education to SDC employees. The researchers also conduct analyses of development cooperation issues (Schmidt et al., 2017).

Another integration approach brings together researchers, policymakers and/or practitioners to design research and develop research questions. This approach sets the stage for practitioners to learn what they want to know from research, and for researchers to answer the research questions that they want to probe. Researchers can also use such integrated approaches to improve the scientific quality of the work, to learn about processes within policy and practice, and to improve outreach and impact (Keller & Bender, 2020). When discussed during a focus-group discussion, this approach was described by a CSO head as “a win-win situation”.

Strengthening the inclusion of researchers in the design and implementation could also mitigate other challenges. For example, it could help to generate greater understanding between the research and policy communities about the need for both long- and short-term timeframes to achieve and analyse results. As a CSO head said,

“Working with researchers can be difficult. There are different expectations for academics than for development actors. Academia has more patience and time to gather data and develop the product. Development actors have shorter deadlines, and things need to go faster”.

Such integration has the potential to lead to greater understanding between the demands that research and policy communities face throughout the lifecycles of programmes and initiatives. Such integration has the potential to benefit both camps. Researchers can gain more policy and on-the-ground insights. Practitioners can gain an understanding of the research process and the research knowledge that can inform and improve policy impacts.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

This study examines how development practitioners and policymakers in Sweden perceive and use research-based knowledge, and how they interact with the research community as part of their work. It analyses the factors that facilitate and hinder the use of research-based knowledge in policy work undertaken in Sweden to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This study shows that development practitioners and policymakers in Sweden perceive research-based knowledge as credible and relevant to their work. At present, practitioners typically use research to strengthen certain perspectives, to bolster arguments, or to confirm decisions that have already been made. Our study suggests that research is largely used when it aligns with popular opinion. This means that other useful but more critical research may be discounted or ignored.

Even though research-based knowledge is used to some extent, it is still perceived by policymakers and practitioners as difficult to find, understand and use. Research is often thought of as being too far removed from on-the-ground realities of policy and practice.

One important impediment to the greater use of research-based knowledge concerns time and budgets. Our findings show that many development policymakers and practitioners perceive that their management and funders value the use of research in principle, but not in practice. Practitioners and policymakers argue that there simply is not enough time for them to find and read journal articles and longer research reports. In practice little real funding and time are secured for staff and partners to devote to research exploration and use. They say that management and donors do not sufficiently emphasize the use of research, or back this with concrete funding. Thus, the use of research is not seen as being prioritized in the overall political communications and steering of Swedish development cooperation.

Our findings also show that a mismatch between how and where policymakers and practitioners search for research-based knowledge, and how and where researchers disseminate their work. Policymakers and practitioners often search for research via Google, social media, seminars, networks and/or colleagues, rather than turning to peer-reviewed forums such as a research database or Google Scholar. Researchers tend to communicate their work via peer-reviewed journal articles. Publication in such journals is key to their career trajectories. Researchers must publish such work to earn tenure, to gain career advancements, and, often, to generate further funding.

The study shows that policymakers and practitioners in Sweden rely to a greater degree on more research-based knowledge produced in other countries, and by other, globally recognized institutions, rather than by Swedish development research. Many reasons may account for this. For one, there are certain organizations, universities and institutions that have established reputations for expertise in certain aspects of development research. Another relates to a desire to work in a way that gives a sense of on-the-ground ownership of programmes to those who are in the many target countries in which Swedish practitioners work. Another reason may simply be that Swedish practitioners do not know where to find research produced by Swedish researchers, and do not have established connections with them. Instead, policymakers and practitioners in Sweden seem to have connected with international actors such as the Overseas Development Institute and the World Bank, and/or consultancy firms. Whilst connections and partners in other countries and to the wider international community is important, weak connections to Swedish development research risks weakening Sweden's future resource base, and profile of such research on the world development agenda.

Based on the findings of this study, we make the following four recommendations:

1 Bridge the communications gap between researchers and practitioners

Communication and translation of research-based knowledge to policy and practice must improve. This is a two-way street. Research must find channels to reach the people who can benefit from its insights, and practitioners must find ways to tap into the knowledge that is emerging to underpin effective policies. Policymakers and practitioners search for research-based knowledge in one set of places; researchers, by contrast, publish their work elsewhere. This mismatch impedes the use of research in policy. Research communication styles and formats also impede the use of research in development policy and practice. For greater uptake, research must be published in places that practitioners can quickly find, and it must be written in ways that practitioners can quickly understand. At the same time, policymakers and practitioners would benefit from training on how to use search engines that are storehouses of peer-reviewed literature, and on instruction about how to quickly find and read the main takeaways of academic research. Researchers would benefit from writing different types of outputs about their findings, in outlets that are available to the general public, in language that is free of jargon, and in formats that are short. A focus on key conclusions and recommendations for actions would facilitate wider uptake of findings. Seminars and dialogue opportunities and longer in-person meetings and training opportunities that bring researchers and practitioners together offer means to provide better communication between the two communities.

2 Co-create research and development initiatives

Today's development problems are complex, and they require co-creation of research and development initiatives – not unconnected, uninformed pursuits. There is currently a gap between policy and research.

Development practitioners who participated in this study clearly expressed the need to enable the development research community to apply its knowledge and expertise more directly to the implementation of programming and policymaking. In turn, findings of previous studies show that researchers also want to be more connected to development programming and policymaking. This reciprocal desire to integrate research and policy creates opportunities. We believe that co-creation of research and development initiatives would be a win-win for practitioners, policymakers and researchers. Directly involving researchers in the design and implementation of development projects and programmes would allow them to provide more relevant, timely and useful input. Researchers would gain a better understanding of the processes within policy and practice, and come away with greater knowledge and experience for developing research questions that help to push the knowledge frontier forward. In turn, practitioners would gain direct access to researchers and their research knowledge base – early and often.

3 Connect development researchers, policymakers and practitioners in Sweden

The links between development researchers and the policy-making community in Sweden are weak. These linkages could be made more resilient, for example by institutionalizing support to networks and/or other platforms.

Many researcher-practitioner-policy collaborations today depend on personal relationships that are vulnerable to changing personnel and governments. Many practitioners do not know where and how to find or connect with researchers. The connections that exist often emerge in an ad hoc manner – and often, with internationally based researchers. Strong international connections are vital and must be cultivated; at the same time, however, there also is a need for the research and policy communities within Sweden to engage and partner with one another. This is important for future development and innovation, and for future initiatives and resource bases within Sweden and Swedish society. Greater capacity-building efforts are needed to support networks and platforms within Sweden to realize the country's international development policy ambitions around the world.

4 Change incentives and structures for funding to improve work towards the 2030 Agenda

The lack of organized research-policy-practice links seems to be an outcome of incentives and the financing picture for Swedish development research that has emerged over the past decade. There is no funding stream that supports more organized platforms for building relationships between development practitioners and researchers within Sweden. Financing has thus not been a lever for strengthening the links between development research institutions and development policymakers and practitioners in Sweden. The increasing focus on control of projects and procurement regulations has the potential to lead to a trend; development practitioners may choose to collaborate with consultants, who can react more quickly and often have greater familiarity with the development jargon but lack the depth of researchers. Practitioners in this study say that they see a need for more in-depth knowledge produced by researchers; at the same time, they say that they do not have the time or the know-how how to tap this expertise. Therefore, we see an urgent need to establish incentives and structures for funding to support and facilitate partnerships between researchers and practitioners, and to support needed links between research and policymaking.

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Annex

Annex 1. Material and methods

This study used a mixed-methods research design. It used three complementary methods: 1) an online survey sent to practitioners and policymakers in Sweden working with the 2030 Agenda, 2) focus-group discussions with development practitioners and policymakers in Sweden, and 3) literature on the use of research, knowledge-translation processes and research-based policymaking.

Online survey

An online survey was developed and distributed using the online survey tool SurveyMonkey. The survey was inspired by previous studies about “evidence-based” policy and practice, for example, pointing out the importance for research to be clear, relevant, available and accessible for use by decision-makers (as described by Oliver et al., 2014). The development of the survey and the analysis of the survey responses were also inspired by the four factors promoting and constraining evidence-based policymaking as defined in the literature review by Puntun (2016). These are: individual, interpersonal (relationship and network), organizational and institutional factors.

The final survey consisted of 16 questions focusing on how policymakers and practitioners perceive, use and access research and research-based knowledge (see the final survey and questions in Annex 3). The majority of the questions were closed, multiple-choice questions; that is, each question was accompanied by several pre-set answer alternatives for the respondent to choose from. An “Other” alternative was added to all these questions to allow the respondent to give an answer that was not among those listed.

The target groups for the online survey were those working in development-related issues that are part of the effort to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and through endeavours funded by the Swedish government. The targeted groups included those in public agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), or the private sector. The survey aimed to include actors who influence decision-making related to issues of international development, and actors for whom development research findings could be considered to be relevant.

The online survey was distributed using a “snowballing” approach. That is, the those who received the survey were encouraged to forward the survey to other relevant people in their networks. The survey was shared directly with approximately 240 policymakers and practitioners working at civil society organizations, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), public agencies and all municipalities part of “*Glokala Sverige*”, a network coordinated by the United Nations in Sweden. The *Glokala Sverige* network also shared the survey in its newsletter. Meanwhile the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) shared the survey internally with 94 people working at its headquarters; with 43 private-sector actors who are part of the Swedish Leadership for Development Network; and with programme officers, heads and directors at Sida’s strategic partner organizations. Sida’s participation allowed for a greater reach and higher rate of response. It is possible, however, that those who received the survey from Sida were more likely to answer the survey, especially if they were recipients of Sida funding; this creates the potential for bias in the survey responses.

The online survey was open for 10 weeks, from October 2020 to December 2020. In all, 131 practitioners and policymakers answered the survey. The majority of which were from public agencies (44%), CSOs (21%) and municipalities (18%). Roughly 19% of the respondents worked at Sida, 4% at the MFA, and 3% in the private sector. Respondents

defined their professional position as policy officer/thematic expert (42%), programme manager (23%), or head of unit or department (14%). See more detailed information about the respondents in Annex 4.

Focus-group discussions

Focus-group discussions were conducted to complement and elaborate on the responses from the online survey. Sida and CSOs were target groups for these discussions. An invitation to participate was shared broadly with potential candidates. Nine focus-group discussions were conducted for 60 to 90 minutes each. There were 23 participants. They included programme managers, policy officers/thematic experts, directors, heads of units and departments at CSOs, and programme managers and lead policy specialists at Sida. All participants were informed about SweDev and the purpose of the study. They were informed that their contributions would be anonymous. In addition, a meeting was held with the Swedish MFA to discuss preliminary findings and views on the relevance and use of research

We are aware that the nature of those who chose to participate may bias the result. Those who participated in the discussions may have more positive views and/or more experiences in using research than those who chose not to participate.

The discussions were not transcribed by an external partner. Quotes were not approved by the discussants. Thus, all quotes used in this study come from the authors' own notes. Nevertheless, we believe that the quotes and descriptions used in this study reflect what was said during the focus-group discussions.

The discussions with CSO representatives were held in separate focus groups, one with directors and heads, and another with programme managers, policy officers and thematic experts. This separation was done to draw out distinctions that had emerged in survey responses among the two groups. Separate discussions also allowed for comparing the perspectives at different hierarchical levels. The heads and directors were also asked to discuss the role of donors in the use of research-based knowledge. These discussions were compared to and complemented by similar discussions with Sida staff. The Sida discussions focused on what type of research-based knowledge is used, when and how it is used, and how it is discussed with partners. Researchers, practitioners and policymakers were also invited to discuss the perception and use of research-based knowledge during a SweDev webinar, "How is development research used by practitioners?", held in November 2020. The webinar¹ presented and discussed the preliminary findings of this study and invited speakers from the MFA, Sida and Concord Sweden to reflect on their perception and use of research and research-based knowledge.

¹ The recording of the SweDev webinar is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ_YdqQ1wUQ

Annex 2. Previous studies of barriers and enablers for using research-based knowledge

What factors facilitate the use of research in policy? What factors hinder its uses? What leads practitioners to pick up some research findings and to act on them? Why do practitioners ignore other findings and ideas with potential to influence policy? What are enablers that help research transcend academia to reach the policy world? What are the barriers that prevent this exchange of information and ideas?

Extensive research has explored the enablers and barriers that surface in seeking to use research-based knowledge in development policy and practice. Many forces are at work. In a literature review of factors that promote or constrain the use of research in policymaking, Punton (2016) provides an overview. The literature review points to the risk in focusing on single elements of the policymaking process rather than considering how research-based knowledge is used within the whole policy process. It also notes that the use of research-based knowledge in policymaking involves factors that are cultural, psychological, institutional, messy and political. In the review, Punton (2016) argues that there are four factors that can be used to analyse barriers and enablers for using research-based knowledge in development. These are individual, interpersonal, organizational, and institutional factors. Individual-level factors are the individual's skills, knowledge, motivation, attitudes, commitment, values and personal incentives. All these affect how a single person uses research-based knowledge in decision-making. Interpersonal factors refer to the relationships between individuals and groups (such as an organization or a network), and how these relationships affect the use of research-based knowledge. Organizational factors are the systems, policies, procedures, practices, cultures and norms within an organization that either promote or constrain the use of research in policymaking. Organizational factors can affect individuals' motivation to use research-based knowledge. Such factors can act as barriers to changes in their behaviour. Institutional factors refer to the wider context in which individuals and organizations operate, and how these contexts influence the use of research in decision-making. Wider contexts include external actors, such as donors; and external factors, such as global events, political change, and donor influence. Institutional factors play an important role in supporting or hindering the use of research-based knowledge in a wide variety of contexts (Punton, 2016).

Barriers for using research in policy and practice

Research is needed as a source of informed policymaking. Many development researchers want to contribute to policymaking (Strand et. al, 2020). Nevertheless, a gap between research generation and research implementation exists. Previous studies have pointed to several barriers for using research in development and in other fields. Among the barriers are the complexity of policymaking and the absence of linearity in the process; the absence of organizational systems and incentives for the use of research; time constraints; the absence of strong relationships between policymakers and researchers; and misconceptions on what research can produce.

The policy process. A very common barrier concerns the perception of what research is, can do and how should be taken up in policy processes. Especially in theory, the link between policy, practice and research, or evidence, is often viewed as a linear process in which a set of research findings is taken from the sphere of research to the sphere of policy. Research is expected to come up with concrete solutions to a practical problem. The solutions are seen as directly implementable in policymakers' decisions. Reality however is often more dynamic and complex. Connections between policy and practice are often shaped by multiple relationships and reservoirs of knowledge. The process of policymaking has been described as a chaos of purposes and accidents (Clay and

Schaffer, 1984), in which actors muddle their way through to make decisions (Lindblom, 1959). Policy processes, especially in development aid, are highly complex (Ramalingan, 2013), characterized by three factors: distance, complexity and inequity (Alexius and Vähämäki, 2020). Even though research on how to solve a specific problem might exist, there often is not a clear, linear process that can be tapped to offer insight into how to use such research in decision-making.

A lack of needed processes and incentives. The absence of organizational systems and incentives for decision makers to use research (Newman, 2014; Oliver et al., 2014). Organizations value research and evidence-based decision-making in theory. However, many of these same organizations lack systems and means for processing and integrating research findings into decision-making. This is a particular concern in international development cooperation because the sector tend to have high turnover among staff – a factor that has been seen to undermine systematic use of research (Clar et al., 2011; Liverani et al., 2013). Many countries that are the target of international development cooperation efforts have weak accountability systems. This can limit the incentives for policymakers to make decisions that are evidence based, or to set up organizational systems for using available research and data (African Institute for Development Policy [AFIDEP], 2018). Policymakers' lack of research experience and capacity also limits the degree to which they access, appraise and apply research (Orton et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2014; Newman, 2014).

Time constraints and time horizons. Time presents other barriers. Policymakers say that they do not have time to read and implement research (Newman, 2014; Oliver et al., 2014). The time frames for making public policies and for producing research are very different from one another. Cable (2003) argues that policymakers face difficulties in using research in their work because of "Five S's":

1. *Speed.* Policymakers have to make decisions fast.
2. *Superficiality.* Policymakers cover a wide array of issues, rather focusing on one area of expertise.
3. *Spin.* Policymakers must stick to a decision, at least for a reasonable period of time.
4. *Secrecy.* Many policy discussions are held in secret.
5. *Scientific ignorance.* Few policymakers are scientists. They may not fully appreciate the scientific concept of testing a hypothesis.

Researcher-policymaker relationships. The relationship between researchers and policymakers present other barriers. A positive collaboration and a trustful relationship can strengthen the reading and uptake of research. A negative connection can weaken the interest in and use of research. Poor engagement between researchers and policymakers and weak communication of research limit the use of research (Clar et al., 2011; Orton et al., 2011).

Misconceptions and misunderstandings are also impediments. Researchers and policy makers often have different definitions about what good research means and what it produces. Researchers must show that their results can be proven to meet acceptable scientific standards, and that their findings are underpinned by and linked to theory. By contrast, policymakers seek practical knowledge that is clear, readily available, and immediately useful in making timely decisions (Davies, 2005). Thus there is often a mismatch between the expectations between the two groups. How we can find a good balance between research that is interesting and useful for policy makers and practitioners, without hampering the creativity, independence and innovation of researchers?

Enablers for using research in policy and practice

Previous literature has explored factors that enable the successful use of research in policymaking and practice. These factors include commitment, capacity and culture; formal and well-established interactions between researchers and policymakers; and communication of research.

Commitment capacity and culture. The first enabling factor for using research is having the commitment and culture for doing so. This means that enhancing the use of research in policy and practice requires commitment not only from researchers, but also from policymakers and practitioners. Previous studies have shown that cultures and incentives amongst policymakers and practitioners, and their organizations, can contribute greatly to the use of research being – or, conversely, the absence of its use (Orton et al., 2011; Newman, 2014). The existence of support functions such as guidelines, templates and other organizational tools and systems for using research can motivate individuals to read and digest research in their day-to-day work (Nutley et al., 2013; Yost et al., 2014). Meanwhile, charismatic leaders and high-level or local champions committing to and supporting the use of research can also enhance such use within an organization (Clar et al., 2011). An organization's level of available resources, structures and processes can also contribute greatly to determine whether research is used by the people working in the organization (Broadbent, 2012; Jones et al., 2013). Policymakers' research uptake also depends on more individual factors, such as the person's capacity to understand and use different types of knowledge (Broadbent, 2012; Jones et al., 2013) and their level of agreement with the produced research. The willingness of policymakers to use research can depend on whether the conclusions and recommendations align with, or oppose, a proposed policy change (Jones et al., 2013; Liverani et al., 2013).

Relationships between researchers and policymakers. Good and well-established interactions between researchers, policymakers and practitioners can strengthen the use of research in policy development and decision-making. Positive relationships and collaborative links between the person sending and/or producing research and the policymaker/practitioner receiving the research can strengthen the use of research-based knowledge in decision-making (see Walter et al., 2005; Ritter, 2009; Car et al., 2011; Orton et al. 2011; Oliver et al. 2014). Taking part in formal and informal networks with like-minded stakeholders and policymakers is one way to enable such positive interactions, and to speed up the spread and acceptance of new, effective ideas in development policy (Court & Young, 2006). There are different means for networks to enhance research-based policymaking. Examples include bringing key people together, to build communities that promote and sustain the values and standards of the members, and to share new knowledge and ideas (Perk & Court, 2005; Mendizabal, 2006). Networks are especially important when there exists a need to keep groups of people together in spite of physical distance from one another (Perkin & Court, 2005). This is an issue of particular concern within the sector of international development cooperation.

Communication. Well-established research communication can help foster the wider use of research in policy and practice. Previous studies have argued that if available research is to contribute to policymaking, it must be relevant, easily accessible and communicated in the best way possible (Smith & Joyce, 2012; Jones et al., 2013; Oliver, et al., 2014). The packaging, communication and distribution of research are all important. For researchers to successfully influence policymaking, they need to know what research is relevant, when it is needed, and how to communicate it to potential users. This implies that researchers must know about the processes, agendas and constraints of policymakers and practitioners for research to be communicated in the best way possible.

Annex 3. Online survey questions

1. How do development practitioners and policymakers use research-based knowledge and interact with the research community in their work?

There are different kinds of knowledge that policymakers and practitioners can use in their work. In this study we focus on *research-based knowledge*, defined as an external input of relevant research that both validates what is known so far, as well as develops new solid and reliable research approaches.

1. Name of Organisation:
2. Organisation type
 - a. Civil society
 - b. Public agency
 - c. Municipality
 - d. Region (previously "landsting")
 - e. Academic organisation
 - f. Consultancy firm
 - g. Private sector
 - h. Other (please specify) ___
- 3 Your position in the organisation
 - a. Programme manager
 - b. Director
 - c. Head of unit/department
 - d. Policy officer/thematic expert
 - e. Public official
 - f. Administrator/IT
 - g. Other (please specify) ___
- 4 Which of the below statements best describes the culture in your organisation? Choose one (1).
 - a. Consulting research-based knowledge and basing our work on evidence is crucial for decision making in my organisation.
 - b. Research-based knowledge and use of evidence is promoted and valued in my organisation, at least in rhetoric, practice however differs.
 - c. Research-based knowledge and use of evidence is very important in my organisation, decisions are based on other factors.
5. Which statement fits you best? Choose one (1).
 - a. I continuously consult research and search for research-based knowledge in my area of work.
 - b. I quite often consult research and search for research-based knowledge in my area of work.
 - c. I seldom consult research and search for research-based knowledge in my area of work.
 - d. I never consult research nor search for research-based knowledge in my work. (If d. then the respondent is taken to question 12).

- 6 What are the main reasons for you to consult research and use research-based knowledge in your work? Choose maximum three (3).
- a. To strengthen the accuracy of my work
 - b. To take better decisions
 - c. I find it interesting
 - d. It gives me new ideas and innovations
 - e. To strengthen my perspective in reports/recommendations/arguments etc
 - f. It is expected of me by colleagues
 - g. It is expected by the management of my organisation
 - h. It increases my credibility among stakeholders/colleagues/within the organisation
 - i. I do not consult research and use research-based knowledge in my work
 - j. Other (please specify) _ _ _
7. In your experience, what is the nature of research-based knowledge available in your field? Research-based knowledge...
- a. Is credible
 - b. Is relevant for my work
 - c. Is easy to understand
 - d. Is easy to implement
 - e. Is easy to find
 - f. Has a good format (length, text type, etc.)
8. How have you interacted with the research community as part of your work during the last twelve months? Choose maximum three (3).
- a. I have participated in seminars where researchers were invited
 - b. I have attended in research conferences
 - c. I have been part of a network that consists of or invites researchers
 - d. I have read peer reviewed research articles
 - e. I have read summaries or briefs of research results
 - f. I have read blogs about research results
 - g. I have interacted with the research community using Twitter, LinkedIn or another social media
 - h. I have consulted or contracted researchers to support or participate in my work
 - i. I have not interacted with the research community for my work during the last twelve months
 - j. Other (please specify) _ _ _
9. In your work, when do you normally need research-based knowledge? Choose maximum three (3).
- a. During assessment of projects and/or project partners
 - b. Prior to taking decisions
 - c. When I write reports
 - d. When I communicate with colleagues
 - e. When I communicate with the public or other stakeholders (e.g. politicians)
 - f. I do not use evidence-based research in my work
 - g. Other (please specify) _ _ _

10. How do you normally search for the research that you use in your work? Choose maximum three (3).

- a. I make a search on Google
- b. I make a search on Google Scholar
- c. I make a search on a research database
- d. I use social media, for example Twitter or LinkedIn
- e. I do not myself search for research but receive it via networks or colleagues
- f. I do not use research in my work
- g. Other (please specify) _ _ _

11. If you use research databases in your work, please name some of them here.
(Comment box)

12. What are the main challenges/reasons for you not to use research-based knowledge in your work? Choose maximum three (3):

- a. There are not enough incentives to do so
- b. Finding research-based knowledge is too complicated and takes too much time
- c. I don't really know where to find research-based knowledge that is relevant for my work
- d. I don't have enough time to read and keep up with the latest research
- e. It is difficult to implement research-based knowledge in my work
- f. I can't really see how research-based knowledge could help me in my work
- g. Research is hard to understand and I don't want to misinterpret it
- h. There is actually not much research that is relevant for my work
- i. Other (please specify) _ _ _

13. What would encourage you to increase the use of research findings in your work? Choose maximum three (3).

- a. If emphasized as important and used by management for decision making
- b. If I had more time to read and digest research
- c. If it was more important for promotion/recruitment
- d. If it was possible to participate in further academic training as part of my work
- e. If I received more invitations to research presentations and seminars
- f. If I received more invitations to research conferences
- g. If I received more invitations to research days focusing on a specific thematic area, for example climate change or gender equality
- h. If research papers were shorter and better adapted to practitioners and policy
- i. If I received research results and links to research via social media, email, newsletter or another online channel
- j. If I had direct access to researchers who were experts in an area relevant for my work, for example climate change or gender equality
- k. If I had access to a network of researchers
- l. If I collaborated with researchers on applied research
- m. I am happy with the level of evidence-based research I use in my work
- n. Other (please specify) _ _ _

14. Please select the social media channels you use to collect information and/or network in your work
- a. Facebook
 - b. LinkedIn
 - c. Twitter
 - d. I do not use social media to find information and/or network in my work
 - e. Other (please specify) ___
15. What websites do you find most useful for collecting information and news for your work? (Comment box)
16. Any other comments on the topic of using research-based knowledge or interacting with the research community that you want to share? (Comment box)

Annex 4. Online survey respondents

Table 7. Distribution of online survey respondents' organizational affiliations

| Organization | Respondents (percentage) | Respondents in absolute numbers |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Public agency | 44% | 58 |
| Civil society | 21% | 28 |
| Municipality | 18% | 24 |
| Region (previously "landsting") | 6% | 8 |
| Other | 5% | 6 |
| Private sector | 3% | 4 |
| Consultancy firm | 2% | 3 |
| TOTAL | | 131 |

As seen in Table 7, 131 practitioners and policymakers answered the online survey. Respondents were asked to state what type of organization with which they were affiliated. Three types of organizations dominated: public agency (44%), civil society (21%) and municipality (18%). The category "Other" includes international associations (the United Nations, for example), multi-stakeholder platforms, foundations, and a non-profit housing company.

Looking deeper into the respondents' organizational affiliations shows that several work at Sida (19%). Representation from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs was 4%. Only a few private-sector actors and consultancy firms responded the survey (5%), even though efforts were made to bring them into the process.

As Table 8 shows, the majority of the respondents defined their professional position as policy officer/thematic expert (42%), programme manager (23%), or head of unit or department (14%). Those who indicated "Other" said they were an organization developer, strategist, coordinator, consultant, advisor, politician or board member.

Table 8. Distribution of online survey respondents' professional positions

| Position | Respondents (percentage) | Respondents in absolute numbers |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Policy officer/thematic expert | 42% | 55 |
| Programme manager | 18% | 23 |
| Head of unit/department | 14% | 18 |
| Other | 13% | 17 |
| Director | 7% | 9 |
| Public official | 7% | 9 |
| TOTAL | | 131 |

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