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Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Strategy for Sweden's humanitarian aid provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2021–2025

1. Direction

The objective of Sweden's international development cooperation is to create conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression. The objective of Sweden's humanitarian aid is to save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold human dignity for the benefit of people in need who have been, or are at risk of becoming, affected by armed conflict, natural disasters or other emergencies.

Humanitarian aid must be based on global humanitarian needs and the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. The normative framework for humanitarian aid encompasses international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles. Based on the principles of good humanitarian donorship, the strategy provides scope for flexibility to adapt activities to rapidly changing and continuously increasing humanitarian needs.

This strategy governs the use of funds under appropriation item 1 'Humanitarian aid' in the appropriation directions for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for each budget year.

Activities will contribute to the following objectives:

Improved ability to provide protection and assistance for crisis-affected people

- Humanitarian aid and protection activities rapidly reach people in acute crisis situations

- Humanitarian aid and protection activities reach people in hard-to-reach areas
- Reduced risk of violence, threats and abuse for crisis-affected people
- Enhanced opportunities to live a dignified life for people living in protracted crisis situations

Increased capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system

- Increased effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system in line with Grand Bargain commitments
- Priorities of the global humanitarian response are based on high-quality needs analysis
- Humanitarian actors have safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to reach crisis-affected people

2. Context

At the end of 2020, the United Nations estimated that almost 235 million people were in need of humanitarian support. This figure has more than doubled in five years and the trend shows no sign of abating. In addition to the dramatic increase in humanitarian needs, the global situation is affected by another important factor, namely the constantly widening gap between needs and available resources. Humanitarian financing has also increased but not at the same rate as the increasing humanitarian needs. Consequently, in recent years, only slightly more than 50 per cent of humanitarian needs have been met. Armed conflicts are becoming more protracted, intractable and complex and, combined with food insecurity, are the main drivers of the growing humanitarian needs. At the same time, needs are also growing as extreme weather conditions due to climate change increase people's vulnerability and food insecurity. Children are particularly vulnerable during humanitarian crises. The same is true for women. Flows of internally displaced people and refugees are steadily increasing. In early 2020, almost 80 million people were forcibly displaced; this figure has doubled in the last ten years. Protracted crises, such as those in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Yemen and Somalia – and rapidly deteriorating crises in the Sahel countries, Venezuela and Bangladesh for example – place heavy demands on humanitarian actors to deal with both protracted crises and emergency situations simultaneously, but with even more limited resources.

A persistent trend is the lack of respect for international humanitarian law and other protection norms. This contributes to the massive humanitarian needs we see today. Civilians are increasingly becoming victims of conflict. Authoritarian rule and non-state armed groups are increasingly impeding humanitarian access. Hard-to-reach areas therefore remain areas where few or no humanitarian actors can operate.

However, both the will and commitment are there to find new solutions to make the humanitarian system more efficient and effective, and simplify implementation. The commitments of the Grand Bargain – the humanitarian reform and effectiveness agenda – provide an important framework for humanitarian reform efforts, both for Sweden’s own action and for governance of partner organisations. This also applies to the ambition to improve the quality and coordination of humanitarian needs analyses to ensure independent, transparent and comprehensive needs assessments for prioritised plans and appeals. Moreover, there are strong linkages between humanitarian action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. The SDG targets often have direct linkages with humanitarian action. This is particularly true for the targets under the following SDGs: no poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), sustainable cities and economic growth (SDG 11) and peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16).

3. Activities

Sida will carry out, monitor and report on activities in accordance with the Government’s guidelines for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian aid strategies (UD2017/21053/IU). The guidelines state that activities should be actively directed towards achieving the objectives and that the actual results should be monitored based on the objectives. The annual strategy report will be comprehensive and include a presentation, analysis and assessment of the results of the activities in relation to the defined objectives. Humanitarian aid will contribute to results that will be evaluated and reported based on the conditions for the activities.

In accordance with the Government’s ordinance concerning Sida’s duties (2010:480), application of the rights perspective and the perspectives of poor people must be taken into account in the activities.

Improved ability to provide protection and assistance to crisis-affected people

Activities will uphold human dignity, provide protection and contribute to rapid and effective support to women, men, girls and boys in humanitarian situations to ensure they are protected from threats and violence – and their consequences – both in conflict situations and in connection with disasters. Activities will be based on humanitarian needs and include systematic efforts to reduce protection risks.

To ensure protection for people in the global humanitarian response, activities should contribute to actively preventing violence and abuse against women, men, girls and boys in vulnerable situations, reducing their vulnerability and risk exposure, and strengthening their agency. Activities will contribute to humanitarian actors – regardless of sector – working to reduce protection risks and achieve protection outcomes. A gender risk analysis will be mainstreamed in this work. Activities will also contribute to promoting knowledge about and respect for international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles, and to ensuring the centrality of protection in humanitarian action.

Activities will enable action in areas with urgent humanitarian needs and low presence of humanitarian actors. In hard-to-reach areas, local actors often have better access than international actors. Activities will therefore contribute to deepening cooperation with relevant actors who have the capacity and ability to both operate in hard-to-reach areas and collaborate with local actors. Activities will promote innovative ways to reach these actors and strengthen their capacity.

Protracted humanitarian crises impact infrastructure, public services, living conditions, food security and the ability to live a dignified life. Sida will also enhance the dialogue with development actors on how potential synergies can be sought in contexts where protracted humanitarian crises have led to the breakdown of social structures and public services. Activities will contribute to strengthening the resilience of those who are most vulnerable and at-risk. Where possible, activities will also lay the foundation to enable more long-term non-humanitarian programmes to be put in place at an early stage; this will be done, if possible, in dialogue with development actors.

Increased capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system

Activities rely on the effective functioning of the international humanitarian system and its implementing partners. Sweden will work to ensure that the humanitarian system is well coordinated and that its actors have the capacity to identify and prioritise needs to ensure a well-financed response for those most in need. Activities will promote impartial, intersectoral, coordinated and globally comparable needs assessments.

Initiatives that aim to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system in line with the Grand Bargain should be supported. Sida has an important role to play in supporting the Government (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) in policy-driven action at international level, including the EU level.

Sida will support humanitarian actors in securing access to crisis- and disaster-affected people. Activities will also contribute to strengthening the capacity of organisations working actively to ensure qualitative, continuous and secure access to difficult contexts. This also includes working in close dialogue with the Government (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) on measures to reduce adverse effects of counter-terrorism measures and of restrictive measures against principled humanitarian action.

Thematic dimensions of the activities and multisectoral approach

The overarching objective of humanitarian aid is to save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold human dignity. Humanitarian aid will highlight the following three thematic dimensions: gender equality, conflict, and environment and climate change. A thematic or sector-specific approach to humanitarian support will be based on identified humanitarian needs. This means that not all the themes are necessarily applicable to all humanitarian action to the same extent.

Girls, boys, women and men are often affected differently in different humanitarian crisis and emergency situations. Women and girls face, above all, increased vulnerability and a higher risk of being subjected to sexual, physical and psychological gender-based violence and human trafficking. Activities will contribute to strengthening the capacity of partner organisations to gender mainstream needs analyses, response strategies and monitoring. Sida should also require its partner organisations to use sex- and

age-disaggregated data to monitor and identify activities. In the context of Sida's work to strengthen the agency of crisis-affected people, the inclusion of women and girls in consultations and decisions related to humanitarian action should be ensured. Insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services during humanitarian crises has serious adverse impacts and may – like the absence of other basic services such as food and water – be life-threatening for women and girls in particular. The need for SRHR will be taken into account in all humanitarian crises.

A conflict-sensitive approach is essential to humanitarian activities to ensure that activities do not risk exacerbating violent conflicts or causing increased tensions within or between groups. Sida will work to ensure that partner organisations integrate conflict-sensitivity and in so doing take account of both external risks and the risk of their own activities contributing to exacerbating the situation on the ground.

Accelerated biodiversity loss, exacerbated climate change and increased pollution are clearly linked to human and international security. While crises will continue to be driven by conflict, these drivers in the future will increasingly become contributing factors to humanitarian crises and conflicts. The Sendai Framework provides a basis for disaster risk reduction efforts. More and larger prevention measures that strengthen the resilience of vulnerable people will be needed. These measures should be financed mainly through long-term development cooperation; however, through its humanitarian aid, Sida should increase collaboration with development actors to create conditions for longer-term action and measures to anticipate humanitarian disasters. Activities will contribute to humanitarian actors conducting relevant environmental assessments and mainstreaming environmental and climate considerations into analysis, implementation and monitoring to reduce their adverse climate and environmental impacts.

4. Implementation

Partnerships and financing

A range of partner organisations are involved in the implementation of humanitarian aid. Sida has an important role to play in strengthening the capacity of national and local organisations, which include authorities, communities, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and civil society organisations. National and local organisations are often those that are first

to respond to humanitarian crises or disasters, that work closely with the crisis-affected population and have local knowledge and a long-term approach.

Also, national and local organisations are often able to access the hardest-to-reach areas. This creates the need to promote innovative ways to reach these actors and strengthen their capacity, including their ability to absorb increased financing and manage risks. Sida will promote innovative ways to strengthen the capacity of local actors, including through its partner organisations.

Sida will support organisations and financing mechanisms based on their comparative advantages, relevance, results and effectiveness to ensure effective response. Sida will also work to ensure that Sweden's contributions are coordinated with other relevant actors and donors.

Activities within the framework of this strategy will be monitored on a regular basis, including through the regular consultations between the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) and Sida. Consultations are held to ensure that Sweden's humanitarian actions are coherent and to provide a forum for information exchange. Planned decisions regarding the financing of humanitarian action will be communicated in writing. Sida will also consult on planned decisions for contributions in excess of SEK 200 million and contributions deemed to be sensitive and/or of a principled and strategic nature.

Sida's humanitarian activities are carried out in close cooperation with a range of Swedish actors. Promoting dialogue and collaboration with the Swedish resource base for humanitarian aid is an important part of Sida's humanitarian activities. Sida is also responsible for taking part in developing the conditions and capacity the Swedish resource base needs to operate. Cooperation with the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency should be harnessed.

Support via multilateral organisations – multi-bi aid – must be consistent with Sweden's priorities and approaches to cooperation with these multilateral organisations.

Synergies between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding

The interlinkages between humanitarian aid, long-term development cooperation and peacebuilding – the triple nexus – are central to meeting humanitarian needs, contributing to long-term development and sustainable peace. These should be achieved by seeking context-specific forms of collaboration, coherence and complementarity between the mandates of different actors. These aspects become increasingly important in relation to protracted crises and conflicts. Sida will work to strengthen collaboration between actors working in the different pillars of the nexus and in full respect of the humanitarian principles, the humanitarian actors' impartial response and independent nature. Sida will also promote catalytic and, if possible, time-limited contributions that, in the long run, will contribute to reducing dependency on humanitarian aid and enable a transition of responsibility for implementation to development actors.

Within the context of the nexus, special attention should be paid to underfunded sectors of humanitarian action; here, education is an important sector due to an increasing number of protracted humanitarian crises. When a conflict or humanitarian crisis arises, education is often the first essential public service to be interrupted and the last to be reintroduced. Girls are hardest hit and are at greater risk of interrupted education. Education plays a role in increasing the protection of children and young people. In the next stage, education also increases the prospects of employment and decent work. Sida should therefore continue to support this area and harness the opportunities for linkages between humanitarian action and development cooperation.

Governance, good organisational culture and risk management

Activities will only be conducted by organisations that have adopted internationally recognised codes of conduct for humanitarian aid.

Sida will promote efforts by all humanitarian partner organisations to prevent, deter and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) in humanitarian aid in accordance with international commitments. Sida will also work to ensure that partner organisations promote a good organisational culture that includes non-discrimination and gender equality.

Corruption in humanitarian aid reduces the quantity and quality of support, which may also prolong and exacerbate humanitarian crises. Activities will

contribute to strengthening the capacity of humanitarian partner organisations to integrate anti-corruption measures in their implementation.

Sida will promote principled humanitarian activities and seek to prevent the negative effects of counter-terrorism legislation and sanctions regimes. Due to the complex environments in which humanitarian aid is provided, Sida's monitoring also needs to be systematic and adaptive. To help achieve the overall objective of humanitarian aid – to save lives and alleviate suffering in an impartial manner – Sida may need to include a greater degree of risk in implementation and monitoring.

Innovation and digital transformation

Delivering the most effective response requires, in many cases, new and innovative solutions and, at times, joint actions with private actors. Activities will contribute to strengthened innovation capacity that can contribute to increasing effectiveness, and ensuring that humanitarian aid is better tailored to the needs and circumstances of crisis-affected people. Activities will contribute to the use of new technological solutions, for example, to minimise the need for fossil energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, Sida will support innovation, including through methodological development, and provide flexible financing models.

A growing number of organisations are developing digital strategies and using new technologies in their programming. This can contribute to delivering support in new ways and increasing transparency and dialogue with crisis-affected groups. Sida should be able to support initiatives that harness the positive effects of digital transformation.