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Integrating the Environment

A strategic framework for Diakonia's development cooperation

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1. Introduction

The environment is increasingly integrated in projects, programmes, institutions and organisations within the Swedish development cooperation. This is in line with the Millennium Development Goals, The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, as well as the Swedish Policy for Global Development. However, experience shows that there are obstacles for organisations to integrate the environment. There is for example a risk that the environment is integrated in policies, but do not permeate development interventions. Tools such as environmental assessments and environmental management systems may at times be used as a ‘quick-fix’, to avoid more thorough organisational changes. Many organisations also share queries on how and where to start.

This report is intended to offer ideas on how to coherently and efficiently integrate the environment. It is based on the organisation Diakonia. It does not provide a ready recipe; instead the focus is to clarify certain key challenges. The three following chapters form a framework that can be used as a starting point when discussing integration. Chapter 2 examines concepts as ‘mainstreaming’, and ‘environment’. Chapter 3 reveal potential benefits of the integration. And Chapter 4 provides ideas on how to structure the integration process. This report can be used internally in Diakonia or by other similar organisations working with development cooperation in Sweden.

Diakonia

Diakonia is a Christian development organisation working together with local partners to achieve sustainable change for the most vulnerable people of the world. Diakonia has a vision of a world where all people live in dignified circumstances in a just and sustainable way, free from poverty. To contribute towards this vision, Diakonia work in over 30 of the world's poorest countries, through more than 400 local partners, to change unfair political, economical, social and cultural structures. With a rights based approach, Diakonia works with five different themes: Democratisation, Human rights, Social and economic justice, Gender equality, and Peace and reconciliation. Diakonia has a strong advocacy and policy section, mostly working towards the public, media and decision makers in Sweden. Diakonia has developed an environmental action plan for a more effective and environmentally friendly use of resources in the offices and by staff. Diakonia has also continuously integrated the environment within the communication and advocacy section. This report focuses on Diakonia's continuous strive to integrate the environment within country programmes and development activities. The report points out possible ways forward for Diakonia, highlighted in these boxes.

2. What does integration of the environment mean?

An organisation can integrate the environment in several different ways. Sometimes the focus has been to include new environmental components in the development activities. Two examples are solar energy in rural development projects and an environmental education component as a part of a programme. A common focus is also to reduce the negative environmental impact, for instance when flying and in the procurement. At times are tools as Environmental Assessments used to meet demand from funding sources. These measures and understandings of 'integration' have many positive effects, especially for the environment. But since 'the environment' is not incorporated in an organisation's core strategies and understanding of the world, the main development approach is not affected.

Instead of 'adding' environmental friendly practises, this report suggests that an organisation should integrate the environment by understanding and building on the environmental dimensions in current activities. This is a challenge because the reality is complex and holistic while we humans often think in boxes and sectors. The environment is not an isolated phenomenon, it affects and is affected by for instance gender equality, democratisation, rural development, social justice, politics, the economy and conflicts, etcetera. It is therefore vital to analyse and build on the relevant linkages between the environment and the organisation's development themes, programmes, projects, internal processes, worldview and so on. Such perspective on integration potentially leads to a more holistic and efficient development approach, in which the environment plays a natural part.

Organisations working with a rights based approach may apply this when integrating the environment. By combining human rights with the struggle for environmental sustainability, the organisation's advocacy for a just and equal world is strengthened. The climate change debate is a good example. By focusing on people's right to development it is possible to argue for global emissions control and funds for local adaptation. A rights based approach on the environment also puts focus on the structural reasons for a problem, not only on the immediate needs. Structural problems can be about participation, equal rights, gender equality, and democracy, which all can be combined with the environmental perspective. An example could be a marginalised minority group fighting for legal rights to their own land with the help of a partner organisation. Such work often indirectly decreases the environmental impact on the land. When a farmer have the rights to her/his own land it is possible to make more long term investments, as digging erosions trenches that protects against soil erosion.

Diakonia

Diakonia and Diakonia's partners often focus on strengthening democratic structures and the civil society through a broad qualitative participation. Using the discourses in Figure 1, this could be translated into an environmental position of Democratic rationalism – 'Leave it to the people'. Diakonia does also have a more radical side by emphasising the unequal power relation between actors. Diakonia's policy states; 'Diakonia has chosen to side with marginalised people and work for their right to determine their own lives'. By putting the focus on new rules for the politics this fits with Green rationalism – 'Change the world through new politics'.

The discourse analysis and Diakonia's rights based approach to development, implies an understanding of the environment that focus on unequal political and societal structures, such as lack of participation and gender inequality. Such structures hinder women and men to equally access the environment and therefore affect their possibility to live a dignified life. Environmental problems such as soil destruction and pollution can also be hindering structures, since they may affect gender equality and the possibility to participate in the democratic life. Environmental problems are often most acute for the most discriminated – for example does climate change often affect the poor the most. This bad circle can be broken by building local and global support for issues concerning the unequal distribution of natural resources, as well as bringing forward the perspective of the rights-holders.

Mainstreaming the environment

This report uses the concept of ‘mainstreaming’ when describing integration. Mainstreaming is that a certain issue should be considered in all line of work, within the whole organisation and by all staff – where relevant. Mainstreaming of the environment can be understood with two different approaches. These two approaches are complementary and reinforcing, but have different focuses.

The **‘no harm’** approach is based on finding the linkages between the organisations activities and the impact on the environment. The focus is on practical measures that quickly reduce the organisation’s impact. In many organisations the most negative direct impact comes from the emissions from flights as well as the support of some projects. An organisation can also work more indirectly to reduce the general societal impacts on the environment, for instance, to advocate for changed consumption patterns due to climate change.

The second approach is to view environment as a **‘development issue’**. The focus is to understand how the environment interconnects with other development issues. The mainstreaming process is used to formalise and understand the environmental dimension in the current activities, not primarily to change direction and focus on the activities. It is in other words not necessary to start new ‘environmental projects’. The environment is not necessarily top priority; instead the focus is to understand unknown connections through a proactive approach. It is therefore of vital importance to build on what the organisation is already doing. Many organisations do already have partners that are working with the environment. There can also be natural thematic connections – many different areas have an environmental dimension.

Diakonia

Diakonia is not an environmental organisation, it has its core competence within other areas. The two environmental approaches ‘no harm’ and ‘development issue’ point out two directions on the organisation’s environmental work.

The ‘**no harm**’ approach is about decreasing the negative environmental impact of Diakonia’s activities and partner projects. For instance, the flight travels of Diakonia’s staff contribute to increased levels of greenhouse gases and thus to global warming, and the papers used in the offices create wastes. The projects of Diakonia’s partners may also – directly and indirectly – contribute towards changes in the local surroundings and the global environment.

The ‘**development issue**’ approach is about understanding how the environment interconnect with Diakonia’s core thematic areas, the programmes and within the projects. Many of Diakonia’s country programmes have an environmental dimension. For example is the environment connected with human rights abuse in many Latin American countries. In other countries, environmental destruction and conflicts over resources are closely intertwined. One of Diakonia’s Kenyan partners, the NCCK (National Council of Churches) is working with conflict resolution by acknowledging the scarcity of resources. Global warming and changed weather pattern affect both projects and staff in India and Bangladesh through flooding. The focus is to work proactively towards a deeper understanding of the connections between different development perspectives. It is also about equipping people with tools and knowledge that lead to more sustainable and better projects and programmes.

3. Why should the environment be integrated?

Many international and national policies state that the integration of the environment leads to more sustainable and holistic development interventions. Such general understanding does however not fully answer the question of why the environment should be mainstreamed within a specific organisation. An organisation should consider costs and benefits of the integration as well as alternative options to optimise outcomes. The integration of environment is about making better and more holistic programmes and projects as well as contributing towards a more sustainable use of the environment.

Based on the 'no harm' approach

An increased awareness of the degrading environment affects the behaviour of many organisations. Environmental problems such as climate changes, erosion, loss of biodiversity, over-fishing, and pollution have a huge impact on humanity and nature. The most extensive investigation of the world's ecosystem (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment) states that two thirds of the world's ecosystems are managed in an unsustainable way. Climate change through human emissions of greenhouse gases are feared to amount to an increase of temperature with several degrees causing more extreme weather phenomena and rising sea levels, especially affecting already vulnerable groups.

By decreasing the negative environmental impact and enhancing the positive ones, an organisation contributes towards the general societal change needed to meet environmental challenges ahead. This can be done by reducing business travels by flight or by considering the environmental effects when planning a project. These kinds of

environmental considerations might also lead to several positive indirect effects for an organisation. Effective use of resources can for instance lead to lower costs in travelling and heating. Ambitious environmental policies can be used to meet donor demands and in marketing. Since there is a strong moral dimension in the reduction of environmental impact, such measures can give increased weight in the advocacy work. However, this type of mainstreaming does sometimes take funds and time from other tasks without directly strengthening the projects and the programmes.

Diakonia

Diakonia Head Office in Sweden has developed an environmental action plan, focusing on a more effective use of environmental resources at Diakonia's offices and by staff. Possible areas of improvement are travelling, copying and procurement. Many of those measurements, such as decreased travelling, will lower costs and reduce the negative ecological impact. The action plan will give credibility to Diakonia's advocacy campaign for 2009, as it is focusing is on climate change.

Based on the "development issue" approach

The approach is about understanding that the environment interconnects with and affects the organisation's activities. Environment should be integrated where it adds value. By understanding the complex reality, both the environment and other development issues can be simultaneously strengthened. In other words is the environment not only a goal, but also a resource.

There are a multitude of general potential benefits that derives from such a mainstreaming process, here follows a few examples:

- The integration of the environment can strengthen the understanding of complex relationships, resulting in better and long-term sustainable projects and programmes. A gender project can be improved by the understanding how reduced soil fertility affects the income of women and men differently, leading to a changed power balance within the families.

- Environmental problems, especially climate change, add to the vulnerability of many groups. Flooding, polluted air, and environmental degradation affect the participation in the projects. This needs to be considered and dealt with properly or it may affect the results.
- Working with environmental problems can be seen as an area of intervention with possibilities for funding. It is not necessary to be an 'environmental organisation' to work with such issues, since the solution to environmental problems often lies in working with political, economically, social, and cultural dimensions.
- The environment can be used as a part of a rights-based approach. By including livelihood perspectives together with human rights, the perspectives of the rights holders are more accurately reflected, which is good in the advocacy work.

Diakonia

One argument for mainstreaming is that Diakonia's strategies and policies do not acknowledge that partners are already carrying out projects with strong environmental dimensions. Diakonia's partners are involved in sustainable agriculture, protecting the rights to access natural resources, and disaster management. One example is WELCOMES (Community Welfare and Enrichment Society), in India. The organisation works with 3000 women in the project "Fostering entrepreneurial abilities and self-employment in productive activities among women of weaker section through women cooperative in Astaranga", 2007 to 2011. The area is prone to cyclones and floods that potentially can erode the women's livelihood. Hence, beyond improving entrepreneurial skills and self-employment, the project also includes disaster preparedness due to climate change.

The policy, the strategy plan, and some of the country programmes, fail to acknowledge how the environment is an important and natural part of Diakonia's partners' work. The environment is, in other words, treated inconsistently within Diakonia, which might have three negative effects. Firstly, the approval of a project with an environmental dimension may depend on varying circumstances – not on a well thought general strategy in line with Diakonia's profile. Secondly, partners may not find a way to include a relevant environmental dimension within their project applications, since the environment is not integrated within Diakonia's problem analysis. Thus, the partners may not use their optimal 'toolbox' in their development approach. Thirdly, there are few possibilities for Diakonia to help with capacity building related to the environment, even when it is relevant.

Another argument for mainstreaming is that the integration of the environment strengthens Diakonia's understanding of political, economical, cultural, and societal processes. The environment connects to all of Diakonia's five thematic areas. With the theme Peace and reconciliation Diakonia works to "create peaceful environments where women and men can live their lives in dignity". The climate change and societal trends make conflict over natural resources increasingly threatening and affect the possibilities to peace and reconciliation in many parts of the world. The total amount of natural resources is decreasing due to unsustainable use. The natural resources are also depleted due to the population growth and increased living standards. Additionally, the resources are unequally divided. The fight over resources creates clashes in many countries. Those trends strongly affect the societal and political landscape both globally and locally, and therefore the work of Diakonia's partners and the outcomes of the programmes.

4. How can the environment be integrated?

This chapter offers ideas for an organisation on how to formulate an effective and workable mainstreaming plan. However, the definition of mainstreaming used in this report makes it hard to produce a detailed plan for a ‘full integration’. Mainstreaming is not primarily about ‘adding’ external and predefined components; it’s about understanding and working with relevant environmental dimensions in current activities. To understand what is relevant is an ongoing learning process towards more efficient and holistic interventions. As outlined in the previous chapter, the potential benefits for the organisation and the environment should be the guiding principle on where and how to integrate.

One of the greatest challenges in the integration process is to understand the structure of an organisation. An organisation can be understood from many different perspectives. If an organisation, for instance, is its staff, culture, methods or its policies – where should the environment be added? Experiences show that focusing the integration effort to policies and planning documents, is not enough. It may be better with a more a holistic view on organisations, in which the environment is integrated in different parts of the organisation simultaneously. To understand organisations from such a holistic perspective, the Web of Institutionalisation (the Web) can be used.

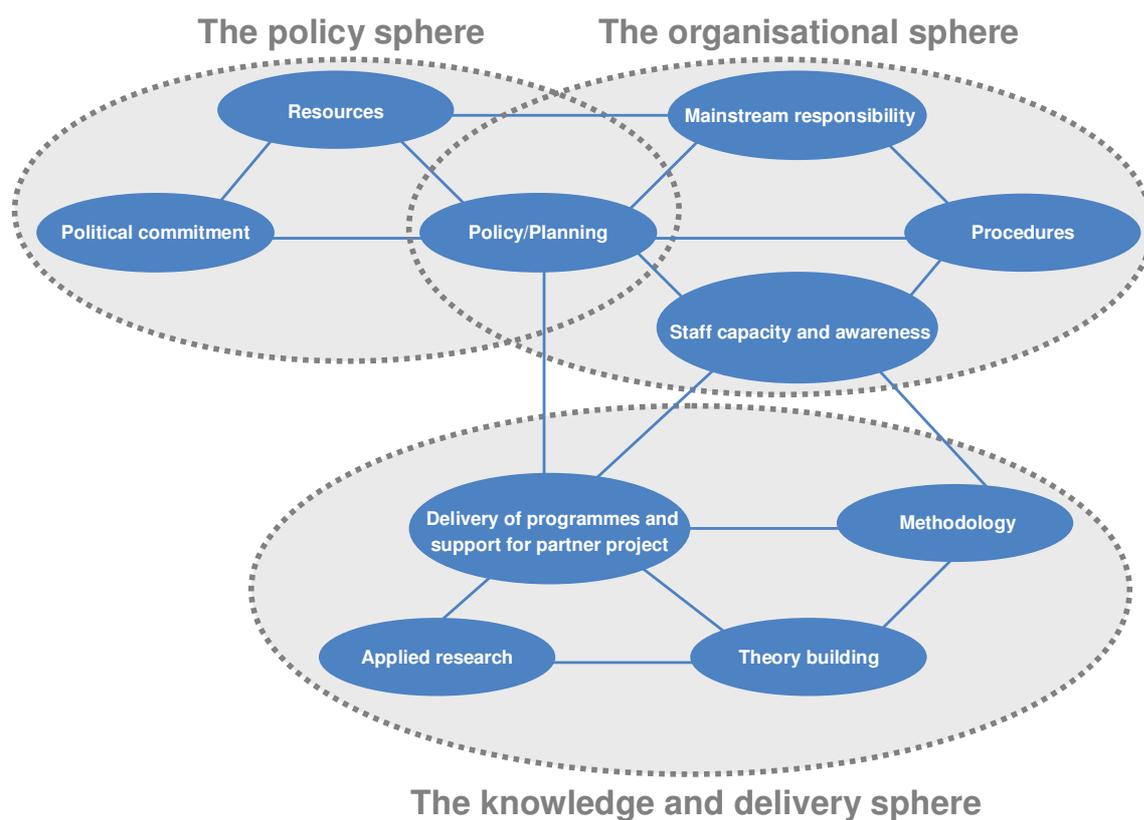


Figure 2: The web of institutionalisation adapted for environmental integration within the development sector (Levy, C.)

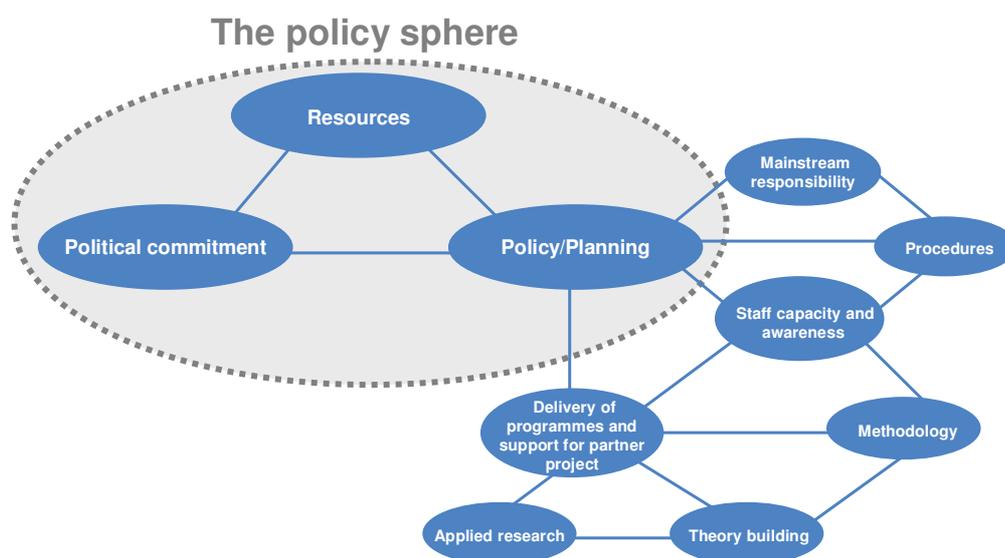
The Web is a mapping method used to structure and understand how any crosscutting issues can be integrated. Ten elements represent interlinked sites of power in organisations, both visible as well as underlying motivations and values. Those ten elements are clustered in three spheres: the Policy sphere, the Organisational sphere, and the Knowledge and delivery sphere. The Web makes it possible to analyse the room for manoeuvre in each element and plan activities and actions to integrate the environment. It can also be used as a graphical map of the organisation when discussing mainstreaming. The linkages between the elements clarify how different parts of the organisation are dynamically affected. Experiences using the Web points out that all ten elements need to co-exist for a sustained organisational change.

Mainstreaming means that both internal processes and ways of thinking need to be reconsidered or adapted. This takes time and effort. It is therefore important to be strategic about where to integrate and scale up successful pilot projects. The integration process should be in line with the organisation's planning cycle and other processes to avoid extra work. Each part of an organisation can be strengthened in different ways. For example can the environmental dimension in 'Staff capacity and awareness' be built

making Climate change a part of the introduction for new staff. The element ‘Resources’ can be strengthened by designating funds for environmental mainstreaming in the budget. Many of the elements can also be strengthened with approaches and methods already used by different organisations.

The policy sphere

The Policy sphere is a good starting point for analysing and initiating a mainstreaming process. The Policy sphere consists of three elements: Political commitment, Resources and the Policies – i.e. the decisions made, the resources spent and how this is integrated within policies and strategy documents.



By systematically analysing the present organisational state, it is possible to build on what is already there. Policies and strategy documents may for example already have an environmental dimension. A simple and informal baseline could be done to understand how the organisation currently is working with the environment. Such a baseline is made by listing how the environment today is represented within the elements in the sphere. This could be done by a person or in a group using brainstorming methods.

- **Political commitment:** The extent to which the organisations top management and board explicitly support integration of the environment.
- **Resources:** The extent to which resources are available for the integration of the environment.
- **Policy:** (A shared element with Planning in the Web). The extent to which the environment are integrated in policies and strategy documents.

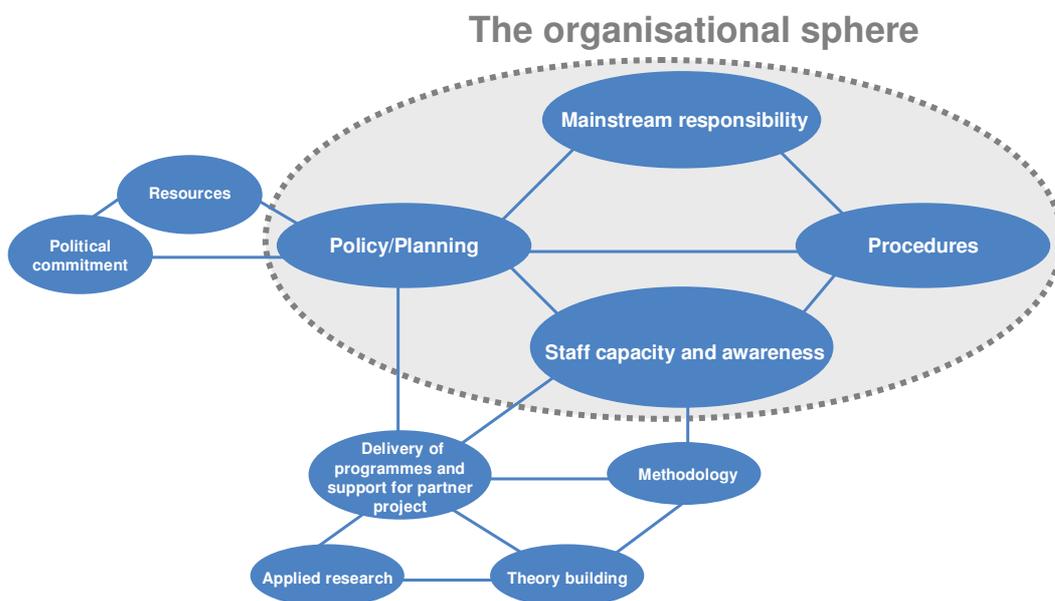
The next step is to discuss and plan further integration of the three elements in the sphere. Organisations often initiate their mainstreaming process by decisions of the board or the management team. Such decisions are obviously made in competition with other important tasks – an integration process do take some effort. It is therefore important that a group has started analysing why the environment should be integrated – as outlined in Chapter 3. By clarifying the benefits for an organisation as well as any external environmental effects, it is easier to prioritize with other processes. Designated funds should follow any decisions. The integration into policies and strategy documents can be built on discussions similar to those outlined in Chapter 2.

Diakonia

Diakonia's policy states that 'environmental issues should permeate all the work of Diakonia'. There is also a political commitment from the board and support from the management group to integrate the environment. Nevertheless, it is a long process of allocating new resources since the new strategy plan replaces the present one around 2011. Some funding could however be decided by the executive managers and the board on a shorter basis. The main challenge is to lift forward and clarify the environmental dimension in Diakonia's country programmes. A position paper on environment and climate change with a focus on a rights based perspective could be a way forward in the later stage of the integration process.

The organisational sphere

The elements in the Organisational sphere touch upon the core in an organisation's work. The sphere consists of four elements: Planning, Mainstream responsibility, Procedures, and Staff capacity and awareness. The interlinking elements in the Organisational sphere represent how the long-term planning is translated into the day to day procedures and administrative routines. It is also about the employees' responsibility, and their willingness to implement the planning and use routines/procedures in the daily work.



A simple and informal baseline could then be prepared to understand how the organisation currently is works with the environment by discussing the questions below. Further discussions concerning how the environment can be implemented within the Organisational sphere can then originate from this baseline.

- **Planning:** (A shared element with Policy in the Web.) The extent the environment is considered in the planning.
- **Mainstream responsibility:** The extent to which the environment is the responsibility of every staff.
- **Procedures:** The extent to which administrative procedures include the environment. Procedures can, for example, be the structure of a project database or the routines for ordering office material.
- **Staff capacity and awareness:** The extent to which staff considers and has the capacity to work with the environment.

It can be challenging to translate policies and decisions into workable procedures and approaches to be used by all staff. Hence, it is vital to build support, knowledge and awareness. This can be done with a workshop that connects to experiences of staff; for example by analysing the environmental dimension in a partner project, or the environmental impact from office activities. Values and attitudes can also be challenged in workshops where the participants have to take an own stand about statements about the environment.

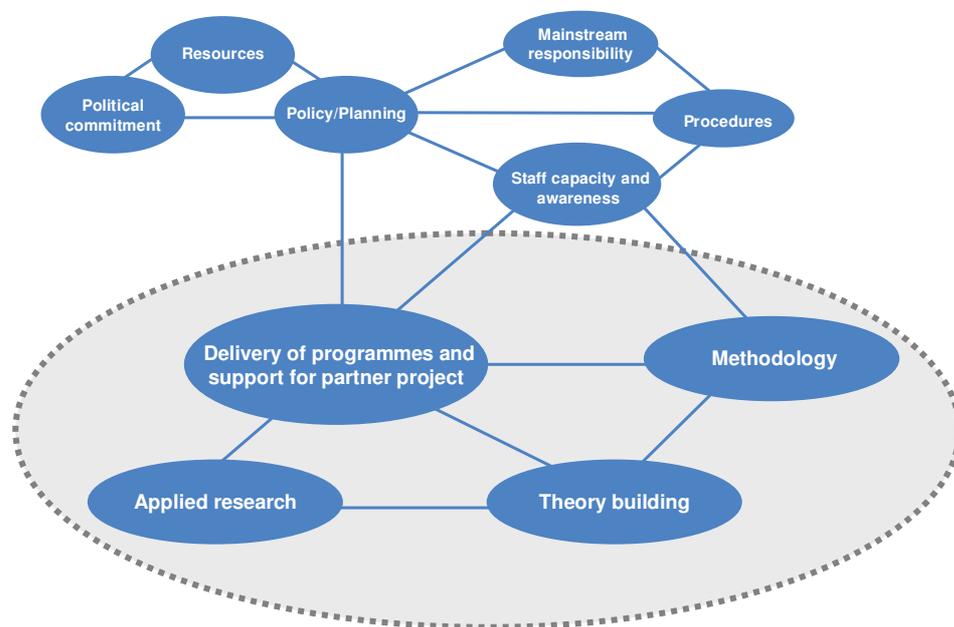
Organisational planning is clearly a complex process where the environment may stand against other interests. One should therefore keep in mind that integrating the environment foremost is a process of lifting forward and clarifying what is already there. The integration into country programmes can for example be to clarify how the environmental problems affect other areas such as gender equality or contribute towards conflicts. It is for instance often possible to find synergies with other processes. Other mainstreaming areas, for example gender, fit thematically very well with the environment and can be worked with simultaneously. The planning process should also clarify who is responsible for the integration on different levels in the organisation.

Diakonia

The opportunities to integrate the environment within Diakonia strongly depend on staff knowledge and awareness. Diakonia's organisation is increasingly decentralised and organisational change is often achieved through an open process. It is important with an open discussion starting with the programmes, Diakonia's partners and the experiences of the rights bearers. Lessons could also be learned from Diakonia's work with mainstreaming gender and HIV/Aids. Procedures and administrative routines can be changed at a later stage and can be about adding a column about the environmental dimension in the project database.

The knowledge and delivery sphere

The Knowledge and delivery sphere is the interface where an organisation meets the surrounding world through research, the implementation of programmes, and the use of methodologies. One of the four elements is the ‘Delivery of programmes and projects’ that represents the actual implementation in the cooperation countries. The sphere also represents how the research/experiences from the implementation build an organisation’s theoretical understanding of the world.



The knowledge and delivery sphere

A simple and informal baseline could be done to understand how the organisation currently works with the environment. Such a baseline is made by listing how the environment today is represented within the elements in the sphere. This could be done by a single person or with brainstorming methods in a group. Further discussions concerning how the environment can be implemented within the Knowledge and delivery sphere can then originate from this baseline.

- **Delivery of programmes and support for partner projects:** the extent to which the delivery of projects and programmes includes environmental dimensions.
- **Methodology:** The extent to which the organisation's methodology integrates the environment.
- **Applied research:** The extent to which the environment is integrated in the organisation's research of the effects of projects and programmes and organisational performance. This could, for example, be project evaluations and indicators.
- **Theory building:** the extent to which an organisation's formalized and informal knowledge and theoretical understanding of the world includes the environment.

The Delivery of programmes and projects is where all the integration effort is manifested. All positive results and outcomes depend on a diverse range of organisational and external factors. Organisational factors may be about the planning processes, policies and strategies, but also the staff's willingness and competence to address relevant environmental dimensions. Another important factor is the actual usage of the methodologies and tools. To continuously improve the activities it is important with feedback from research and evaluations, especially focusing on the 'rights-holders' and their understanding of the world.

A key challenge in the Delivery of the programmes is the reciprocal knowledge transfers between the organisation and their partners. The integration of the environment should strengthen partners and target groups' own capacity to reduce environmental degradation, as well as to increase their understanding of the relevance of the environment. It means that any methodologies/tools/approaches concerning projects primarily should be used by partners, not by the funding organisation. The partner's motivation to integrate the environment can depend on the type of project, target group, culture and the place in question etc. There is also an increased external demand to consider the environment from funding sources. Partners do however closely observe the effects of both climate change and environmental degradation and understands the importance of those issues very well.

There can nevertheless be differences on how to describe environmental problems and how to define 'environment'. Many partners focus on the 'defence of the livelihood', the effects of environmental degradation, and the inequality of accessing environmental resources. Funding organisations on the other hand focus a bit more on global issues, often connected consumption patterns and inequality. It is therefore important to find a

common ‘environmental language’ to facilitate a reciprocal transfer of knowledge between partners and the funding organisation. A common understanding can be reached by using the discourses in Chapter 2 (Figure 1), workshop exercises and strategic planning with partners.

A desirable long-term outcome of the implementation may be that the cooperation countries general capacity to work with the environment is enhanced within areas such as legalisation, civil society, nation wide networks, and societal institutions. Many countries worldwide treat the environment as an isolated sector that is not well integrated in the general planning and implementation. A ‘non-environmental’ organisation may advocate for an increased understanding of the linkages between the environment and other development issues. An example is that HIV/Aids may increase due to changed migration patterns caused by climate change. By working with the civil society on democracy, participation, rural development, and gender – but with an environmental touch – the programmes contribute towards a more long-term sustainable society. This can be achieved by including a strategic partner with environmental competence or by putting focus on the negative consequences for women in a society affected by the environmental degradation, in the advocacy for gender equality.

To be able to learn from all experiences, the research loop from the ‘reality’ back into the organisation needs to be structured. Green indicators can be used to monitor and evaluate the organisation’s work to integrate the environment. Environmental mapping of partners may clarify in which way the environment is an important part of the projects. Mapping also facilitates the reciprocal learning process for partners and the funding organisation. For the programmes it is also possible to do an environmental country assessment. This clarifies specific conditions and challenges in a region and makes it possible for an organisation to develop the problem analysis and choose suitable partners.

Methodologies and tools can be used to systematically strengthen internal processes and the programmes and projects. Any methodology or tool should generally be followed by pedagogical guidelines of how and when to use it. There are advantages in choosing methodologies that are commonly used, since there are well-developed guidelines to relay on. But tools and methods should be used with care. They need to be adapted to the situation, but also to the type of organisation and the development approach. If, for instance, an organisation has a rights based approach on the environment, methods should be used that are in line with that argument.

A common tool used to strengthen projects is the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA). An EIA aim to reduce negative impact and enhance positive impact on the environment. Properly used it can also strengthen a project by analysing alternative ways to reach the goal, clarifying risks and opportunities. When a project only have a minor impact on the environment – which most projects concerning democracy, gender, health and education have – the EIA consists of a few questions used by partners in the project planning process. Organisations can group similar projects and only do a few EIA's for each group – which reduce the effort.

There are also tools that can be used to integrate environmental considerations into policies, planning and programmes. The Strategic Environmental Assessment is a way to analyse both positive and negative consequences on the environment due to a programme or a plan. It should, as the EIA, be used early in the planning process. There are also other strategic tools more focused on the specific processes such as the 'Green Logical Framework Analysis' and tools concerning climate change and vulnerability assessment.

Diakonia

Diakonia has started to find the linkages between the environment and the five thematic areas. One remaining challenge is to identify those linkages more systematically. This could be done with an environmental mapping of partners, aiming to understand the environmental dimensions in their projects as well as their environmental competence. It is vital that Diakonia use partners experiences. The task to integrate the environment is made easier by the PME-handbook. This extensive document affect and control monitoring, reporting, evaluation, and planning of projects and programmes. It would for instance be possible to 'green' Diakonia's Logical Framework (LFA) analysis especially in identifying the cause-effect links. The PME-handbook can also include tools such as Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which may help to integrate environment within the country programmes. The environmental impact of projects could be reduced by the distribution of a pedagogical description of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for partners. In the later stage of the integration process, it is important to develop Green indicators to monitor the integration efforts.

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