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**ISP management response to the “GHD Report on the Evaluation of the International Science Programme” (Final 30 September 2011)**

The International Science Programme (ISP) at Uppsala University (including the ISP Board and Executive Committee) welcomes the report, which generally supports the current approach and operation of ISP in the broad strategic context of the role of science in development. Nevertheless, a number of areas are pointed out where improvement is needed, and which ISP will attend to. The major findings are summarized below, followed by a number of specific comments

***Summary of the major findings of the evaluation***

- The evaluators generally support the ISP approach and operation, and give seven specific reasons why capacity for science is needed and relevant to the development efforts of developing countries.
- The evaluators find that ISP objectives align well with applicable policies and strategies. In addition, it is pointed out that the World Bank finds that constraints and bottlenecks at the tertiary level are now constraining growth in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, thereby further supporting ISP’s approach.
- The evaluators find that ISP efficiently delivers capacity building activities in recipient universities.
- The evaluators find a case for using more objective selection criteria, and even competitive tendering, for more mature and capable research groups in the partner universities.
- The evaluators find that the outputs (published papers) reveal high to satisfactory levels of research work with a level of citations which is above world benchmarks.
- The evaluators find the costs of managing the programme to be within acceptable levels of overhead expenditure profiles of other programmes, although it is noted that ISP would need to invest more in monitoring and evaluation if it is to meet Sida’s requirements for “results based management”.
- The evaluators find that ISP is heavily dependent upon Sida funding.
- In several of their conclusions and recommendations the evaluators find that ISP has not kept up with contemporary approaches to development cooperation, particularly with respect to systematically demonstrating relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of Sida funding.
- The evaluators find that there are benefits/synergies to be gained by ISP Core Programme activities being undertaken in countries in which Sida also has an agreement covering research and higher education.
- The evaluators find that ISP has the potential to expand into other related fields of science, and recommend a discussion to be taken up with Sida about this.

***1) Need to further develop monitoring and evaluation***

ISP acknowledges the need for a more developed monitoring and evaluation system, as expressed by the evaluators in various ways. Such development has been commenced in 2008, and changes have already started to be introduced. ISP recognizes that the monitoring and evaluation system must be developed further, and find the recommendations given by the evaluators both constructive and useful, including those pointing at the need for a logistic framework-based results based management (RBM) system. The evaluators point out “*that would then drive up overall management and overhead cost*”. However, ISP believes that much more can be done within the present frame. Already introduced changes include:

- the implementation of a logistic framework to facilitate RBM,
- the extension of the implementation of RBM to supported activities,
- the follow up of scientific quality by recording impact factors of journals where results are published by ISP-supported activities, and
- the follow up of the impact of ISP support by expanding the request for yearly activity reporting to include:
  - Outreach: interaction with government/society/industry,
  - Application of results: impact on policy/practices, patents, industrial applications, and

- Assignments and Awards: staff members that took new positions 2010, received awards, or were assigned to government committees, etc.

Other changes under discussion are:

- the introduction of systematic impact studies in collaboration with researchers at institutions of Humanities and Social Sciences,
- the introduction of alumni follow-up retrospectively and by using the Uppsala University Alumni Network,
- the quality assessment of locally produced MSc and PhD thesis at ISP-supported activities.

## **2) *The scientific quality of the programme***

We note that the question “*What is the scientific quality of the programme and how does the quality relate to the capacity building, both regarding cooperating partners and within the university context in Uppsala and Sweden*” posed in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation has not been attended to in much depth by the evaluators. It is for example left out on Section. 2.1.1 Scope and relevance of ISP, in the listing referring to the ToR, but it is addressed to some extent in Section 4.1.3 Scientific Quality of the Programme. The limited study carried out give rise to the conclusion that *the quality of planning and research activity proposals increases with ISP support and that the outputs (published papers) reveal high to satisfactory levels of research work.*

## **3) *Possible misunderstandings***

In a few cases facts are given and statements are made that may reflect minor misunderstandings or misconceptions. These do not affect the general conclusions, but may introduce unnecessary ambiguity. (See Appendix)

## **4) *Evaluators’ Recommendations and ISP Comments***

The evaluators give 20 summary recommendations (SR), of which the seven first are directed to Sida. All are repeated briefly below, together with ISP’s comments.

**SR1.** *Sida should require that an acceptable logical framework and Monitoring and Evaluation framework be developed prior to further ISP Core funding approvals.*

ISP comment: An ISP logic framework has been developed since January 2010, and also the monitoring and evaluation framework has been further developed during the current agreement period with Sida. A number of improvements have already been implemented, and additional ones are under discussion (See Section 1, above).

**SR2.** *Formal agreements between Sida and ISP should explicitly reflect new strategic directions and intended outcomes, including greater clarity of deliverables and a timeframe.*

ISP comment: This will be addressed in the next proposal to an agreement with Sida.

**SR3.** *Sida should consider a master plan in relation to the type of research development cooperation engagement with the various focus countries, recognising that shifts and adjustments in Swedish development priorities are bound to continue. This will allow for the longer term planning required for research programs and post-graduate training. It will also allow for the negotiation of an overarching Agreement with ISP that sets out mutual expectations and*

*understandings over a reasonable period, and especially in relation to the transition to a more bilateralised programme.*

ISP comment: ISP welcomes this recommendation, which is primarily for Sida to consider, depending on future Sida strategy and preferences.

**SR4.** *Sida should reassess the prohibition of core ISP programme activities in focus countries that also have bilateral research/higher education agreements.*

ISP Comment: This reassessment has already started after the situation was evaluated at the Sida-ISP Annual Review Meeting in 2010, showing that several research groups were not funded under the bilateral programs as expected in the Sida-ISP agreement 1 July 2008. ISP activities in focus countries that have bilateral research/higher education agreements can have the following three different starting points, although in each individual case support may need to be tailored to the local situation to optimize effects. In each case, any development of ISP support need to be planned in close cooperation with the Sida responsible officer.

- a) ISP direct support to be taken up again in “bilateral countries” to research groups that were phased out from ISP support after 2008 (as requested by Sida in 2008) in cases where the these groups didn’t receive continued support within the frame of the bilateral program (exemplified below).
- b) Support taken up to research groups developed in previous phases of Sida bilateral programs but not supported in a later phase (exemplified below).
- c) Support taken up to research groups in at departments of chemistry, mathematics and/or physics which are not included in Sida bilateral programs.

Example a): ISP has restarted support to some groups in Ethiopia and Uganda, following agreement in the Sida – ISP Annual Review meeting in 2010.

Example b): As informed in the Sida – ISP Annual Review meeting in 2011, ISP has given opportunities for former projects supported under Sida bilateral programs to apply for research group development not to waste the investments made in the bilateral program with School of Pharmacy at Addis Ababa University (AAU) in Ethiopia (see also the last bullet point in the Appendix).

The evaluators note that two of the four PhD candidates trained in the bilateral program with School of Pharmacy left the program without completing their degrees, the third left for a post-doc period in USA (Annex F, Section 3.6 page 7), and that “*it is expected that only one will remain in Ethiopia to provide the country with the benefits of Sida support*”. The evaluators discuss this “*constraint to aid money for science contributing to development and poverty reduction*” (Annex C, page 2), and the risk that “*Sida money, that has been used to train a PhD student then becomes, in effect, a direct subsidy to the private (not public) gain of an individual now living overseas via that person’s income. It is also an indirect – but substantial – subsidy to the University in the USA or elsewhere that reaps all the benefits, but pays none of the costs, of training that person to PhD standard.*”

As stated in the evaluation report (page 22), “*The Evaluation Team believes there are good benefits/synergies to be gained by the ISP core programme also being provided in those countries in which Sida is providing support to research and higher education.*” Notably, this agrees well with the model ISP was asked by Sida to develop in the proposal submitted 081215 (Section 3.2,

pages 28 – 30): “A closer cooperation between Sida/SAREC and ISP comes natural because the basic aims are the same, building research capacity in developing countries in order to promote development. Sida/SAREC provides support on the university or faculty level, sometimes in programs involving several institutions of research and higher education in a country. ISP takes the starting point for support at the department level, targeting promising research groups, but making sure that the decision is supported at the faculty and university level. Thus, the Sida/SAREC and ISP modes of operation may be seen as complementary to each other. The larger framework of a Sida/SAREC bilateral cooperation program may favorably situate an integrated ISP contribution to efficient and productive implementation on the department and research group level.”

**SR5.** *While ISP is well placed, given its experience and established networks, to coordinate Sida’s bilateral programmes, Sida should consider testing the market and demonstrating value for money by having some form of competitive tendering.*

**ISP comment:** Competitive tendering of coordination of Sida bilateral programs is welcome. In such a process there should be an increased possibility to agree on terms e.g. with regard to the prerequisites for scientific coordination and quality control, in comparison with the practice to take on bilateral coordination on request in a late stage of planning.

**SR6.** *Sida should discuss with ISP the advantages and disadvantages of expanding beyond mathematics, physics and chemistry.*

**ISP comment:** This discussion is welcome, in particular with reference to the recommendations of earlier evaluations regarding biology and geosciences. It has also been demonstrated already that ISP has this potential, by successfully carrying out Sida coordination assignments e.g. in biology (with Faculty of Science, AAU) and geoscience (with CSUCA) (See also SR18)

**SR7.** *Sida should continue to keep ISP activity and administration costs and benefits under review and should encourage regular Performance Audits, and not just Compliance Audits.*

**ISP comment:** The needs and scope of future audit practices are expected to be developed to meet Sida requirements. The introduction of Annual Review Meetings, held annually since 2009, should be noted as it may be considered a step in this direction.

**SR8.** *ISP should further develop the programme logic in the form of a logical framework.*

**ISP comment:** (See ISP comment to SR1)

**SR9.** *ISP should have a more systematic, and results and outcomes focussed, means of monitoring and evaluation.*

**ISP comment:** The development of a monitoring and evaluations system meeting these requirements will continue with the aim to start the implementation in 2012.

**SR10.** *ISP should strengthen its capacity for impact assessment and results based management.*

**ISP comment:** Systematic impact assessment is planned to be part of a more developed monitoring and evaluation system. Results based management will be greatly facilitated by the logic framework when established.

**SR11.** *ISP should work with the universities it supports to more systematically monitor the geographical location, and recent professional accomplishments of their alumni.*

ISP comment: Introduction of alumni follow-up is planned, both retrospectively and by using the Uppsala University Alumni Network

**SR12.** *ISP and Uppsala University should engage vigorously with the public and government processes that establish Sweden's development policies, providing advice based on their extensive experience. Support for enabling science should remain a focus for ISP, in the context of Swedish development policy settings.*

ISP comment: The proposed, pro-active engagement in policy development is an interesting suggestion not the least for the university leadership level, the engagement of which is probably necessary for any profound impact to be achieved.

**SR 12 (continued).** *ISP should position itself to respond to other opportunities (in Sweden and elsewhere) to support development research cooperation.*

ISP comment: Following Board decisions in 2008, ISP is already engaging in responding to other opportunities to support development research cooperation, and this will be developed further. An important result in 2011 is a five-year agreement with Stockholm University to support ISP activities. The efforts to diversify the financial basis of ISP operation will be more vigorous in the future.

**SR13.** *The invitation and selection of Research Groups should be made in a more objective, explicit and transparent manner.*

ISP comment: The basic reason for the ISP practice of “application by invitation” is that support is usually directed to environments that have not yet reached a degree of excellence that will give them a chance to win grants in open competition. From 2009, the selection process has been made more transparent, by directing the invitation at the department level. The recommendations will be a starting point in further developing the practices in order to additionally increase transparency and consider introducing competition for grants where feasible. For example, it may be conceivable to open up possibilities for several universities in a focus country (where applicable) to compete for ISP support.

**SR14.** *Uppsala University should consider the benefits of broadening the skill set of the ISP board to include members with experience in development cooperation and in the politics and bureaucracy of the focus countries.*

ISP comment: This is an interesting suggestion which will be considered, although several board members already fulfill these criteria.

**SR15.** *ISP and Uppsala University should review membership, selection and performance management of the Reference Groups.*

ISP comment: It is agreed that the matter needs to be developed. A limited term for scientific reference group members, e.g. 5 years, will be considered (keeping in mind that renewal of terms may be justified in cases where long-term valuable experience is at risk). Selection can be made more openly e.g. by seeking external advice to a greater extent before nominating candidates to

be considered by the board. Performance management may include availability and quality of assessments.

***SR16.** ISP and Uppsala University can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery by adjusting the roles of Reference Groups.*

ISP comment: New roles for scientific reference group members may be considered in perspective of the further development of the monitoring and evaluation system, e.g. assigning them tasks in quality assessments of theses produced.

***SR17.** ISP needs to actively consider diversification of revenues beyond the support provided by Sida and Uppsala University.*

ISP comment: See the comment to SR12 (continued).

***SR18.** ISP has a structure, the systems and the experience to enable the broadening of scientific fields in which it supports recipient universities.*

ISP comment: See the comment to SR6. In perspective of SR12 and SR17, the possibility may be considered to find other financial contributors to open up for such a development.

***SR19.** Planning for PhD students' studies overseas should be more detailed in terms of expectations of achievements and the timeframe so as to reduce the potential for extensions and delays.*

ISP comment: In cases where this has been neglected, this is a very important matter to address. The direct responsibility, however, is with the supervisors, and should strictly follow the rules and practices of the university where the student is registered. Nevertheless, a more systematic follow-up of this matter may be introduced as a part of the continued development of the monitoring and evaluation system.

***SR 20.** ISP should develop and implement a defined exit strategy when it is to leave a country, as part of the road map to sustainability.*

ISP Comment: An exit strategy has already been proposed, in terms of phasing out support to group/network attracting sufficient financial support, other than from ISP, to ensure long-term stability. The exit strategy will be developed further and can be linked to SR13.

Uppsala 2011-12-05



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#### Appendix. Minor misunderstandings or misconceptions noted in the Evaluation Report.

- It is not clear whether there really is an “*increasing pressure for ISP to become more integrated into Sida’s bilateral programme*”. (Section 2.1.1, page 3)
- The statement “*All 33 PhD holders in Vietnam reported that they continued to do research after their ISP support. (Sida, 2009; not found in Annex J)*” is confusing because ISP has not been supporting research groups in Vietnam during the period subject to evaluation, 2003 – 2010. (Section 4.2.4 page 36) However, Sida bilateral support to Vietnam took place during 1987 – 2007. ISP documents indicate that ISP was engaged in coordination of a project on Rare Earth Metals 1990 - 2003, where 3 PhDs were graduated.<sup>1</sup> The 33 PhD holders referred to are most probably among the 40 – 45 who completed their training in the total bilateral program up to 2007.<sup>2</sup>
- Audit of fund used locally in amounts of 200,000 SEK or higher by ISP-supported activities was first implemented in 2010, after discussions with Sida as well as with independent auditors, and agreeing on a ToR for such audit. Therefore, the statement “*regular audits lead to the conclusion that there has been relatively little identifiable corruption*” is a bit confusing. Furthermore, there is an implication that a degree, albeit “little”, of corruption has been identified. This has not been shown in any auditor’s report so far, including the external audit of ISP itself. Therefore it would be of great interest to ISP to obtain knowledge of the few cases identified which the evaluators seemingly refer to. (Section 4.3, page 43)
- The ISP cost guidelines 2012 – 2014 referred to, of SEK 25,700 per month per student, includes a bench fee recommendation for the chemistry and physics programs at 10,000 SEK per month, and should be 4,000 less with the mathematics program, where the recommended bench fee has been raised to 6,000 SEK. (Section 4.3, page 43)
- An example is given, with reference to a “Prof at Makerere University, Uganda”, where “*ISP is coordinating Sida’s inputs for a bilateral programme recipient group and the group perceives ISP’s objective is too focused on development of research networks, yet their group in Uganda simply want to increase their PhD graduate numbers*”, is confusing. In ISP coordination of bilateral projects ISP have no objectives other than to carry out the coordination according to the assignment, and no “*development of research networks*” is applicable.<sup>3</sup> (Section 4.3 page 44)
- All four PhD students trained in the Sida bilateral program with the School of Pharmacy had collaborating supervisors at the Faculty of Pharmacy at Uppsala University (none at “*a university in California*”). (Annex F, Section 3.2.2 page 4) The candidate that attained a PhD was offered a post-doctoral position by his external examiner (not “*supervisor*”) from USA. (Annex F, Section 3.6 page 7)

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<sup>1</sup> Lennart Hasselgren personal communication 111128.

<sup>2</sup> Solveig Freudenthal (2009) Tracing Research Capacities in Viet Nam – Perspectives From Vietnamese Researchers, Viet Nam-Sweden Bilateral Research Cooperation. Sida Secretariat for Research Cooperation. SIDA51868en.  
(<http://sidapublications.citat.se/interface/stream/mabstream.asp?filetype=1&orderlistmainid=309&printfileid=309&filex=427866855729>)

<sup>3</sup> A case at Makerere has been described, however, in the ISP Annual Report 2010 to Sida (Section 5.4.1 page 20), where Sida’s objective of allowing only support to PhD students confronts the need of the groups to use some of the funding to train Master’s students in order to gain a recruitment base for PhD candidates.