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Managing Uncertainty:

Results Based Frameworks During The Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This qualitative case study aims to explore how the unprecedented impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the capacity and operation of Swedish development organizations within the civil society and to what extent current results-based frameworks (RBF's) and systems have been suitable to adhere to these changes and challenges.

Eight semi-structured interviews with CSO representatives have ben conducted during early spring, 2021. The thesis operationalizes a theoretical framework based on Eyben (2010) and Lewis and Mosse (2006), examining the role of development practitioners and organizations as intermediaries within the development architecture, who inherently needs to balance a duality of demands between their local partners and back donors.

The findings suggest a mixture of responses, with a majority of respondents perceiving their own internal systems and frameworks as having been largely adjustable to the changing needs of their partners during the initial year of the covid-19 pandemic (March 2020 to April 2021). The respondents' perception of flexibility and adaptability were however linked to a few different factors, such as (1) size and internal capacities of the CSO's, (2) the flexibility and support provided by the back donors and (3) and perceptions and policy restrictions related to the so-called humanitarian borderland.

The practical and policy implications from this study are discussed in the final section, highlighting that the widespread effects of the pandemic have provided a unique opportunity for reflection, learning and innovation. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing field of scholarly work investigating the role of results and aid effectiveness during times of unforeseeable events and crises by including the perspectives of development intermediaries.

Key words: Results Based Frameworks, Covid-19, Development Cooperation, Civil Society Organizations, Sweden
Words: 9931

Abbreviations

CSO – Civil Society Organization

Sida – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

CIVSAM – Sida’s Unit for Support to Civil Society

FO – Forwarding Organization

NPM – New Public Management

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

LPO – Local Partner Organization

RBM – Results Based Management

RBF – Results Based Frameworks

ODA – Official Development Assistance

OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OH – Outcome Harvesting

ToC – Theory of Change

SPO – Strategic Partnership Organization

WHO – World Health Organization

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1 Introduction

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the spread of the SARS-COV-2 virus (henceforth Covid-19) as a worldwide pandemic which one year later, (as of May 25th 2021) have reported over 167 million confirmed cases, including 3,4 million deaths across the globe (Covid19.who.int, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has affected both high- and low-income countries and asides from it being an immediate health crisis, its impact on human development in terms of poverty increase, education and human rights has been immense. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also expects the Covid-19 pandemic to be the largest short-term challenge to global development in several decades. With its immediate effects having disrupted the capacity of international development cooperation through cancelled activities/interventions, hampered logistics and supply chains, restrictions on physical meetings and traveling as well as inability to collect project and results data (OECD, 2020).

The CSO's included in this study all operate under Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (Sida) unit for support to civil society (CIVSAM), guided by the Swedish Government's strategy for support to civil society (referred to as the CSO strategy). The stated purpose of the strategy is to foster a pluralistic and strengthened civil societies in developing countries. The strategy however does not generally cover activities of humanitarian nature, since such interventions should be included in Sida/Swedish government's humanitarian strategy (Sida, 2020a). Something which will be discussed in more depth within section 1.3, 5.3 and Appendix A.

Results-based management (RBM) frameworks and their efforts to increase aid effectiveness are today an integral part of Swedish official development assistance (ODA). However, in recent years, these have been subject to criticism by both scholars as well as development practitioners for its linearity, downward accountability and inflexibility to adhere to complex and/or fast changing contexts (Vähämäki, 2017:1-5. Shutt, 2016:14). Within the Swedish development architecture, CSO's could be considered as intermediaries, being both receivers of official development assistance (ODA) from institutional donors such as Sida as well as channeling fund to their partners (LPO's) (Billing, 2011).

The Covid-19 pandemic presents a particularly important case to investigate, since its effects span over both humanitarian and long-term development trajectories by calling for acute humanitarian responses as well as a need for transition and innovative thinking within long-term development objectives. Due the recency and unprecedented effects of the Covid-19 few empirical studies have been conducted on how aid organizations and their RBF's have coped and adapted during the pandemic. This thesis would also argue that there is a gap within research covering RBF's and the overlap between humanitarian and long-term development objectives. Therefore, this study builds on a combination of research who have examined the role and challenges of RBF's and aid organizations within long-term development as well as within humanitarian settings separately.

Since the pandemic has been identified by the OECD as one of the most significant organizational challenges for international development cooperation in decades, this thesis aims to contribute to what is expected to become an important institutional learning opportunity of how to strengthen the adaptability and flexibility of development and RBF's (OECD, 2020). By being a study based on the initial responses and experiences of development practitioners and CSO's, it will contribute to the broader research field of development effectiveness as well as being useful for additional research on long-term assessments, since the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will be dependent on its persistence and geographic prevalence in the coming year(s).

1.1 Research aim and question

The aim of this research is to obtain a deeper understanding how the crisis situations may affect CSO's and their partners (LPO's) and to what extent results-based frameworks have been able to adhere to these affects. By incorporating a theoretical framework highlighting CSO's and development practitioners' intermediary position within the Swedish development architecture, the objective is to explore the perspectives of intermediary CSO's identified as needing to balance dual internal structures of upward accountability and effectiveness, while at the same time adhering the needs and experiences of their partners and beneficiaries. The question that has guided the research is:

To what extent have results based frameworks been suitable for aid organizations to address changes and challenges during the covid-19 pandemic?

To answer the research question, an interview study was conducted to capture the experiences and thoughts of eight development practitioners working at both large and small CSO's based in Sweden. The respondents have been identified as mid-to-senior level staff within the organization, obtaining roles such as controllers, grant managers, programme officers/managers and the like.

1.2 Role of the researcher and positionality

This study, which is examining the Swedish development architecture, has been conducted "from home". Both in the sense that interviews have been conducted digitally, but also since I as researcher speak the language and perceive the CSO- and Swedish development sector as relatively familiar contexts (Willies, 2006:104-110). Prior to the research process, I have also conducted an internship (January to April 2021) at one of the CSO's partaking in this study, which should be noted in terms of transparency and positionality. The internship has provided inspiration for this research topic as well as helpful insights as to how results, dualities and brokerage may be formulated in practice within an organization. However, careful consideration has been taken to avoid any potential interests or biases from the organization to guide this research process, something which will be discussed in more depth in the methods section.

1.3 Empirical setting - The role of civil society within Swedish development

CSO's are included within the Swedish (as well as international) development architecture in various ways. As distributors/donors of publicly raised funds, as channels or receivers of official development assistance (ODA) as well as by virtue watchdogs of the public good

(Billing, 2011). CSO's receive and/or channel roughly 40% of Sida's total ODA support with majority of those CSO's being Swedish, as well as a selection of locally administered and international ones, which may be funded through different Sida strategies and/or through Swedish embassies (Wolgemuth and Ewald, 2020).

Sida has a framework agreement with several larger CSO's, referred to as strategic partner organizations (SPO's), who either work directly with LPO's in developing contexts or who subgrant funds to smaller Swedish CSO's who in turn work with local partners, referred to a Forwarding Organization (FO) (figure 1) (Sida.se, nd).

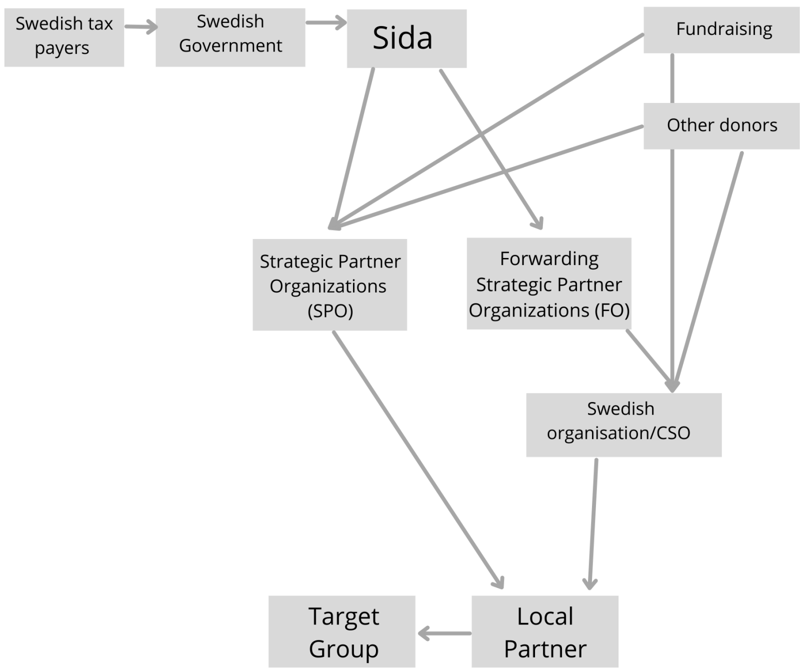

Figure 1. Flowchart of funding flows for organizations under the CSO strategy. The arrows representing the flow of funds from taxpayers to the recipients/target group (Berglund, 2020, based on Sida.se, nd).

Excluding the budget for supporting work with communication and knowledge spreading in Sweden, there are two main strategies under which SPO's receives grants from. Firstly, the CSO strategy, which covers 16[1] SPO's with the aim to strengthen a more pluralistic and

[1] Forum CiV, Union to Union, Olof Palme International Center, Swedish Mission Council, Afrikagrupperna, Diakonia We Effect, The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Save the Children, Act Church of Sweden,

enabling civil society in developing countries (CSO Strategy, 2016). The second one is Sida's strategy for humanitarian aid (hereafter the HUM strategy) which is distributed through the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and 10[2] civil society organizations. It is based on a core set of humanitarian standards, such as being unpartisan and needs-based, complying with international standards and minimizing the risk of doing harm (HUM strategy, 2017). This thesis will primarily cover the experiences and perspectives from organizations covered by the CSO strategy.

There are multiple reasons and comparative advantages for funding development CSO's and Billing argues that one of the main reasons are that CSO's often work closer to the "grass root level", by working directly in the field or through engaging with (LPO's) (Billing, 2011). Another advantage noted by Billing is that since CSO's work close to the field and in close relationships with local partner organizations, they are often able to provide faster initial humanitarian responses during disaster situations, since they already operate through local partners in the affected area. This may increase both accountability and effectiveness since local organizations are often already involved and trusted within the affected community and reduce the need for uncoordinated external actors flying in with blue printed humanitarian programmes - something which have been criticized in various post-disaster settings, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami affecting much of Southeast Asia (Daly and Brassard, 2011).

However, there are some distinctions between the Sida's HUM and CSO strategies and as mentioned in the introductory section, the latter one does not normally have mandate to cover activities within the humanitarian spectrum. However, immediate and post-crisis situations are often complex and overlap with long term development objectives and programmes. Therefore, Sida has includes a section within its guidelines for CSO's on the distinction of the *"humanitarian borderland"*, which will be further discussed in the analysis chapter (Sida, 2020a). Moreover, an extract from these guidelines have been attached in appendix A.

Plan International Sweden, RFSU, WWF, IM (Individuell Människohjälp), Kvinna till Kvinna and Civil Rights Defenders.

[2] Action Against Hunger, International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam UK, Plan International Sweden, Save the Children, Act Church of Sweden, Swedish Mission Council (SMC), Swedish Red Cross.

2 Background and literature review

2.1 The rise of the results-based frameworks and management agenda

As long as there has been aid given there have been efforts to assess and increase its effectiveness (Ramaligan, 2013:109). Moreover, effectiveness and results orientation have been an integral part of Swedish development aid since its founding, although the focus on tangible and measurable results have significantly increased in recent years (Brolin, 2016). Fostered by the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, which emerged from the business sector with an aim to increase effectiveness of government bureaucracy, results-based management (RBM) was introduced within the aid sector in the 1980s. However, its grand breakthrough wasn't until the early 2000s, induced by the current neoliberal political paradigm, widespread criticism of aid interventions as wasteful and lacking clear, measurable results during the 1980s-90s and a globally growing fear of corruption, that RBM were officially adopted by aid intuitions such as Sida (in 2006) (Eyben, 2014:133. Shutt, 2016:22-24).

RBM and efforts to assess effectiveness are motivated as a process of learning what causes and effects aid intervention, as well as increasing accountability and legitimacy towards donors, politicians and ultimately taxpaying public (Ramaligan, 2013:109). Or, as Kusek and Rist (2004) formulated in the World Bank's handbook for RBM, *if you are not able to distinguish success from failure you cannot learn from it* and perhaps most importantly, *if you can demonstrate results, you can win public support and legitimacy* (Kusek and Rist, 2004:11). Within development planning and evaluation, there are various methodologies and tools which could be utilized, however perhaps the of the most prominent one have been the logical framework analysis (shortened LogFrame or LFA) which dates back to the 1960s and was adopted widely as a development framework in the late -90's and early -00's. The LogFrame approach allows agencies and organizations to systematically organize projects and spell out clear relationships between how different activities may lead to different immediate outcomes and impacts, which together affect the formulated long-term goals (Ramaligan, 2013:111. Örtengren, 2003).

LogFrames and RBM frameworks are an integral part of the Swedish development architecture and have until recently been included as part of the mandatory reporting requirements of both Sida as well as other donors. However, critique against the linearity and lack of complexity within the framework, which will be discussed more in depth in the upcoming section, have in recent years guided Sida and other donors towards opening for alternative approaches (Vähämäki, 2017:242. Shutt, 2016:14. Wolgemuth and Ewald, 2020). These includes for example Outcome Harvesting (OH), and progress tracing which in comparison to the more traditional evaluation approaches aims at collecting evidence and results in a backward tracing manner in order to determine if and in what ways a project or intervention have contributed to the change (Wilson-Grau, 2015). The Theory of Change (ToC), which today is often used together with the more traditional LogFrame, focuses on mapping out what has been described as the "missing middle" between what a project or intervention does, and how those lead toward the desired goal to be achieved through a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context (Theoryofchange.org, n.d).

2.2 Critique against RBM

In recent years, many scholars and practitioners have started to question the NPM paradigm which assumes the use of systematized matrices and results-based management frameworks as being inherently linked with aid effectiveness, cost-effective organizations and agencies as well as local ownership and harmonization (Brolin, 2016. Sjöstedt, 2013. Fritz, 2017). The most vocal argument for this is perhaps the issue of linearity and simplification of complex problems, where it is argued that while input-output-outcome structures may fit at a theoretical level, complex realities and multitude of alternative factors affecting outcomes within many development contexts make it difficult to adopt such linear approaches in practice (Sjöstedt, 2013. Vähämäki, 2017:2-3 Murphy, 2019). This is particularly true when working with capacity building, empowerment or social change, in which quantitative indicators and measurements are argued to be difficult to produce (Eyben, 2010a).

Another issue assigned to RBM is how to ensure and balance mutual accountability between donors, implementing organizations and target group/beneficiaries. This has been particularly highlighted within many post-crisis or humanitarian emergencies, where quick responses as well as coordinated long term plans are often needed, and international NGO's have been criticized for failing to ensure accountability to the populations whom they are meant to serve (Daly and Brassard, 2011. Arroyo, 2014). Daly and Brassard note within their research on post crisis reconstruction efforts, that while RBF's is implemented with the intention of increasing effectiveness of development interventions and accountability downward to beneficiaries, too rigorous reporting systems and demands tend to also overburden implementing organizations operating in the affected area (Daly and Brassard, 2015. Ebrahim, 2003). Pressing timeframes, high internal administrative requirements and legal regulations assigned to strict RBF's thus tend to increase upward accountability towards donors, but not necessarily the effectiveness of development delivery on the ground (Ibid).

2.2.1 Defining remarks

The concept of RBM is primarily linked to more conventional frameworks and results matrices such as LogFrames and the NPM agenda. However, some of the examined CSO's participating in this study also operate under other or complementary frameworks as well, such as OH, progress tracing and/or ToC, which aim to a more or lesser extent to move beyond conventional processes of measuring and managing predetermined objectives, activities and outcomes. Therefore, the slightly more inclusive concept of results-based *frameworks* (RBF) will be adopted throughout the rest of this thesis. Defined by the OECD as capturing the essential elements of cause-effect relationships within development planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting – elements which may apply regardless of which type of framework is adopted (OECD, 2012).

2.3 Covid-19 and its impact on development

According to the OECD, the Covid-19 pandemic poses the single largest short-term challenge to global development in several decades and its immediate effects have also disrupted the capacity of development cooperation to support partner countries and organizations (OECD, 2020. UNDP, 2020). The crisis has hit hard, not only countries health systems but also on incomes levels, education and civil society and threatens to push millions of people back into poverty (ibid). Moreover, nationwide lockdowns and restrictions of movements have forced people and organizations to rethink and innovate new ways to work while maintaining social distancing, something which have hampered aid organization's ability to implement projects as well as to collect data on projects and results through commonly used methods like focus groups and field interviews (OECD, 2020). Some of the main pressures and constraints have been summarized in figure 2, as presented in the OECD 2020 report.

Pressures and constraints affecting the delivery of results-oriented development responses to the Covid-19 pandemic	
Programming pressures	**Policy constraints**
• Shifting priorities and reprogramming funds to adhere to changing needs • Conceptualizing standard approaches to streamline Covid-19 project designs (vs. locally driven, participatory designs) • Demonstrating contribution and results	• Norms regarding strategic planning and reporting cycles • Existing guidelines and regulations for project and programme designs • Procurement and fiduciary regulations
Operational Pressures	**Organizational constraints**
• Fast-tracking approvals for Covid-19 projects (vs. normal quality assurance) • Simplifying or rescheduling results measurements or reporting procedures • Need for adopting data gathering methods allowing for social distancing	• Planned schedules for results measuring and reporting. • Co-financing requirements *(own contribution)* • Limitations in available and reliable data on results • Health concerns of staff/implementers

Figure 2. Summary of main pressures and constraints within results oriented Covid-19 responses (Adapted from OECD, 2020).

In Sweden, many CSO's have also struggled financially since they have not been able to pursue fundraising activities which are normally needed to match institutional funding from Sida[3] (Giva Sverige, 2020). The pandemic has also severely impacted many of the CSO's LPO's,

[3] As part of the agreement within the CSO strategy, CSO's need to match fund applications with 5-10% of the total budget, referred to as *own contribution.* However, as a way to support CSO's during struggling financially during the pandemic, the Swedish government announced in April 2020 to temporarily remove this requirement (Sida, 2020a. Government, 2020).

whose work often relate to civil society mobilization, workshops, awareness campaigns and other activities based on social interaction (WeEffect et al, 2020. CSO strategy, 2016). Across the world, reports on rapidly shrinking civic space have increased drastically, endangering the lives of LPO's working with issues such as human rights, democracy building and social change (WeEffect et al, 2020).

This thesis is built upon the assumption that CSO's may be experiencing challenges in terms of adapting according to the likely change of needs among their LPO's and beneficiaries. This assumption is based on the reported impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, previous literature mentioned and recorded inflexible nature of conventional RBF's. Therefore, and in order to investigate this assumption, the theoretical section and subsequent analysis will focus on broadening the understanding of CSO's and development practitioners through their position within the Swedish development architecture and strategies for coping with multiple and/or challenging demands.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Challenges and dual realities within the development structure

Reporting mechanisms for CSO's are generally well established and motivated on the basis of accountability and value for money. However, critics such as Ramaligan (2013) argues that too rigorous reporting procedures may run the risk of becoming a process dominating its purpose (Ramaligan, 2013:119. Daly and Brassard, 2015). Many organizations, who either operate multiple projects/programmes with partners or who have multiple donors, often end up with multiple reporting procedures for their donors, each of which can be based on different formats and templates, to present how the money was spent, where and with what results. Ramaligan also argues that since meeting donor needs may not necessarily coincide with the internal needs of the organizations, this may lead to parallel, or dual systems in which one exists for donors and one for the organization and staff (ibid).

Most development organizations and staff have an intense commitment to the cause for global solidarity and are often aware of the ambiguities and contractual issues present within the development architecture (Eyben, 2010a). The problems of dualities and push-and-pull approaches are however embedded in larger institutional and political issues (Ramaligan, 2013:119). Coexistence of multiple objectives for aid, high rate of staff turnovers, incentivizing short term results over long-term processes as well as underlying pressures of showcasing hands-on results and successes to the general public, are all factors making it difficult knowing what should be measured and how (ibid). At a more abstract level, these issues could also be explained through the transformational ambition linked with the projectification of aid, where global problems such as hunger or gender inequality are viewed to be accomplished through a specific framework and within a certain timeframe (Scott, 2021:16). Or as framed by post-development scholar Escobar (1997), standing critical towards development as a process of rational decision making and management entrusted to a specific group (development professionals), conceiving aspects social life and development as largely a technical problem to be fixed (Escobar, 1995:193-194).

3.2 Substantialist and relational approaches to development - through the process of brokerage

Instead of resistance against these pressures, and built upon the narrative of development workers driven by an inherent solidarity rationale, social anthropologist and development scholar Eyben (2010a) argues that a delicate system of dualities has evolved within the international development architecture. Here, practitioners neither fully resist, nor conform to the often conflicting demands between back donors, implementing organizations and target groups. Building on Cassirer (1953) concepts of substantialism and relationalism (functionalism), Eyben argues that aid agencies and organizations are characterized by two cultures, where the dominant one is substantialist, linked with efforts to ensure upward accountability and emphasizing the importance of tangible, quantitative and easily measured results (ibid). Substantialism in this regard, entails seeing the world through "entities" such as *poverty, basic needs, women*, *vulnerable groups* or even *results*. At the other spectrum, the perhaps less visible yet persistent culture is the relational one, working with the messy realities, uncertainty and complexity of relationships within development contexts (Ramaligan, 2013:121. Eyben 2010a). Here, the totality is more than the sum of its parts and a relational approach to development would understand it as a pattern of social relations shaped by both context specific, historic and politically shaped configurations and which entails broad webs of power relations and meanings at both global and local level (Eyben, 2010b).

Ultimately, Eyben argues that a major part of the international development architecture is inherently substantialist. Yet, relationalism often permeates all agencies and organizations at some level, particularly within staff working closer to the field and its partners (Eyben, 2010a). These dual approaches are adopted interchangeably and at different levels within organizations and agencies. The balance and processes binding these two approaches together could be described in line with Mosse and Lewis' (2006) presentation of development workers and/or CSO's as *intermediaries*, or *brokers* when handling relations with for example back donors and

LPO’s/beneficiaries (Mosse and Lewis, 2006:9-13. Eyben, 2010a). According to Mosse and Lewis, the main task of these *intermediaries* is to translate and “fit” knowledge in ways which makes sense and is suitable for its end user. *Intermediaries* thus forms an important are part of the bureaucratic network of knowledge production and negotiation, balancing between the different objectives from “the field”, aid organizations, institutions and ultimately the politicians and tax paying public (ibid. Vähämäki et al, 2011).

Eyben concludes by stating that critics could argue that such dualities and maintenance of substantialist imaginaries and persistent “closet relationalism”, is a hinderance to for ensuring effectiveness and transparency within development. However, it could also be viewed as the very balance keeping the complex and contested aid structures afloat since the complexity and messiness of development practice and relations may be both important and prevalent within development, it may at the same time be less appealing and more difficult for politicians to present to the public (Eyben, 2010a).

3.3 Analytical tool

Theory mediates and provides explanatory perspectives of realities and this thesis aims to provide perspectives on how CSO’s and their RBF’s have been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic based on the experiences from the aid practitioners at intermediary positions within the Swedish development architecture (Eyben, 2014:163). Therefore, it is important to understand how their experiences may relate to the hierarchy of the development architecture. Often it is the development practitioners’ role within intermediary organization to operate as brokers and translators since they are responsible for following up and compiling reports, audits and results matrices from their LPO and send upwards to their back donors. The Covid-19 pandemic caught much of the world and organizations off guard, has increased vulnerabilities among many of the poorest communities as well as forced quick innovative responses in otherwise slow-paced and carefully planned development programmes and projects designs (OECD, 2020). It is therefore assumed that these dualities within the development architecture may become more visible and challenges apparent, since intermediaries will need to balance adhering the potential change of needs among partners as well as upholding maintaining current structures and approved projects and programmes.

Following the methods chapter, the analysis will be constructed in three major parts. The first section will focus on how CSO’s and their LPO’s have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic at an overarching level and in terms of activities, results, reporting and frameworks. The second section will analyze perceptions of flexibility within the CSO’s RBF structures, highlighting some of the enabling and hindering factors. Finally, in chapter six, these findings will be discussed through the conceptualizations of substantialism and relationalism and brokerage and linked to a set of highlighted policy implications.

4 Method

4.1 Research design

Crises situations provide opportunities for perspective and help to look beneath what occurs at the apparent surface of normality (Eyben, 2014:170). Since the impact from the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced so widely and extensively across the development sector (and world) it has created an important opportunity to evaluate and analyze how RBF's and CSO's operate during times of uncertainty. To answer this research question, which tries to capture the experiences and personal thoughts of development practitioners in Sweden at a particular point in time, a qualitative case study based on semi-structured interviews was deemed to be the most appropriate method (Stewart-Withers et al 2014:64-65).

4.2 Interviews and data collection

To gather data, interviews with key respondents from eight CSO's of varying size, thematic and regional specialization have been conducted. To adhere to current Covid-19 regulations and avoid unnecessary travel and meetings, all interviews were held digitally through video calls. Missing some of the visual and non-verbal cues and nuances compared to face-to-face interviews, online interviewers need to put extra efforts to assure a good rapport with and gain the trust of the interviewee (Halperin and Heath, 2017:297). This meant for example adjusting the length, number of questions, phrasings and other technicalities (ibid). However, since social distancing measures enforced by the Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly increased the usage and experience with digital meeting tools, among the respondents as well as university students in the recent year, conducting interviews online was not perceived as any major hinderance for the research. Semi-structured interviews were utilized on the basis that it allowed me to freely engage with the interviewees around a guiding set of questions as well as having the ability to ask spontaneous follow up questions based on the topic and the organization (Willies, 2006:144-145). This was important in order to build the interview more like a discussion rather than an interrogation, allowing participants to talk about their own experiences and opinions, rather than providing standardized or predetermined answers (Halperin and Heath, 2017:289).

4.2.1 Participants and preparations

The CSO's participating in this study were contacted through a semi-strategical sampling, since the research aimed at including a spectrum of CSO's from different regions and with different objectives. The final sample was however determined primarily on the availability of the CSO's as well as willingness to participate in the study. Out of the eight organizations, three CSO's have SPO agreements with Sida and are thus considered as larger CSO's, three are considered as mid-sized, with contract agreements with one of the Forwarding Organizations (FO's) (Swedish Mission Council/SMC and Forum Civ) and two are considered as smaller CSO's with contract agreements to an FO. For clarity throughout the study, all SPO's and Civil Society Organizations under the FO's will be referred to as CSO's, unless specifically stated so.

To assure anonymity of the participants, all details indicating the name of the CSO or its work have been removed in the data collection process and will be referred to as Interview 1-8 throughout the analysis. A full list of participating CSO's will however be available in appendix B. The interviewees had mid-level to senior positions within their respective organizations, such as controllers, grant managers, programme officers/managers and the like.

1-3 hours of preparatory work was conducted prior to each interview (except for the internship organization). This preparatory work was pursued as a way for me as researcher to ensure an even amount of knowledge of each to organization, to avoid unintentional biases or assumptions. It also acted as a way to limit the number of introductory questions during the interviews, enabling more time to be spent on discussing current challenges and experiences and finally it enabled me to make smaller adjustments in the interview guide depending on the organization. Many participants expressed a wish of obtaining pre-interview example questions to prepare for the interview. Therefore, as part of the consent and information form sent out in advance, an additional attachment was included with five non-reflective questions relating to the topic, please find them in appendix C and D.

4.3 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, a process which allows the researcher to concentrate on the dynamics of the conversation during the interview rather than extensive notetaking (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:179). As I moved back and forth between conducting interviews, writing memos and reflections, transcribing and pre-coding, the initial analysis was iterative (Stewart-Withers et al, 2014:76). The transcripts have been analyzed through a process of coding and deconstruction, by ascribing text segments to codes for later identification and categorization through the software NVivo (ibid). After the initial coding process was completed, the deconstructed data was analyzed and reconstructed to find common themes, linkages and contrasts within the data (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:202). Lastly, the data was conceptualized through the theoretical framework and research question (ibid).

4.4 Limitations

One primary limitation to the data, and often ascribed to single case studies, is the issues of generalizability and replicability (Flyvberg, 2006). Since the covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing when finalizing this thesis, replicating this study at a later stage could potentially give somewhat different answers depending on how the situation may unfold for the CSO's and their LPO's. However, due to the "abnormal" state the Covid-19 pandemic has presented, this thesis would argue that studies covering this initial phase will be valuable. Both in terms of providing research on RBF's and CSO's immediate responses, as well as paving the way for future research on Covid-19 and its long-term term impacts on development.

The study was conducted during early spring, 2021, where most development practitioners at CSO's in Sweden are working on and submitting annual reports for the previous year as well as new fund applications, a period which Ramaligan (2013:119) acknowledges to be one of the most time consuming and stressful processes of the annual cycle for most development organizations. This could potentially have impacted the number of CSO's feeling able to participate in this study, and or response s in relation to stress levels and so forth. On the other hand, the timing of this study could also be motivated on the same basis since many of the respondents were in the currently working on evaluating and reflecting on the previous year and their initial pandemic responses.

Another limitation important to highlight is the potential differences between the practitioners. Even though all selected respondents are considered as lower-to- upper mid-level workers within the development architectures, some respondents held positions where they worked relatively closer to the field, in direct and continuous contact with LPO's. Other respondents had more top-level positions, coordinating reports from various LPO's and maintaining communication within back donors, and some respondents, especially at the smaller CSO's, would do both. This means that responses could potentially vary, not only depending between different types of CSO but also in between interviewees in relation to their position within the organization.

A final note to acknowledge is the differences between donors. In Sweden, Sida is considered to be the largest as well as the major institutional donor, which is why this thesis will focus on CSO's relation and experiences with Sida (and the two FO's) as the primary back donors. However, several of the CSO's also receive grants from other large donors such as Radiohjälpen, Postkodlotteriet and Folke Bernadotte Akademin (FBA) who all have different systems and requirements for their grants.

4.5 Ethical considerations

As mentioned in the introduction, it is important to acknowledge the ethical considerations being a previous intern at one of the CSO's. Asides from the strategies mentioned in section 1.3. and 4.2.1., reflective memos have also been written throughout the research process, to reflect on my roles as both an outsider (student and researcher) and insider (previous intern) and how such experiences may shape the production of knowledge (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:183-184. Sultana, 2007).

Ethical consideration should also be directed towards the process of translations. All interviews were conducted with Swedish nationals and thus, all interviews have been conducted in Swedish. As I am native in Swedish and fluent in English, operating in both languages was not considered as any hinder to the research process. However, the risk of misinterpretation or unintentional biases should still be acknowledged. To reduce that risk the interviews have been transcribed, coded and analyzed in its original language, Swedish, and then only translated to English in its final stage when presented in the research findings. The translations have, like the transcriptions, been conducted in a verbatim manner, with occasional grammatical corrections and reconstructions of sentences to increase readability and making sense of the data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:181-183).

5 Research findings

This thesis has aimed to examine to what extent RBF's within Swedish aid organizations (CSO's) have been suitable for aid organizations to address changes and challenges identified during the Covid-19 pandemic. It has explored the experiences and thoughts of development practitioners within mid- to senior level management roles at eight well established aid organizations funded through the CSO strategy.

Overall, a clear majority of the respondents expressed being surprised, and even impressed by the innovativeness and adaptability of their partners and note that much of the activity plans possible to pursue despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, all respondents identified their LPO's as being able to modify activities to a digital setting, conducting workshops in smaller groups or by postponing and pursuing activities in-between lockdown periods and national restrictions.

However, in assessing to what extent CSO's and partners have been able to adapt, Eyben's notion of substantialist and relational approaches can be a helpful tool providing perspectives on how to analyze the respondent's answers. From a substantialist perspective, it could be argued that the RBF's have worked relatively well since that most LPO's have been able to fulfill working plans by adjusting activities (as long as those activities fit the frame and objective of the agreement) and reporting results back to their CSO. On the other hand, from relational approach these research findings should also be analyzed and understood from a more complex and/or holistic perspective. Here, determining success should be examined from the multitude of factors affecting the interviewees perception of flexibility within the system, such as reach and implications of adjusted activities, dialogue and flexibility provided by the back donors and assessing perceived policy restrictions, such as funding for activities bordering between the Humanitarian and CSO strategies.

5.1 Operational capacities and constraints

5.1.1 LPO level

All respondents stated that most of their LPO's had been able to adjust and adapt a large portion of their activities during last year, however that their ability to adjust also depended on factors such as size and internal capacity, what activities they normally pursue and where they are located.

> *We can see that the larger organizations are more adaptable, they have systems, and you know competency and so forth. (..)The smaller organizations have had more difficulties, and that could be both because they are operating in places where there is a lack of infrastructure to work digitally, or sometimes because they don't have the internal capacity within its staff and so on (Interview 4, 2021).*

A major factor mentioned in terms of perceived adaptability of activities at project and programme level was because activities are primarily planned and evaluated at local level within the LPO. For example, respondent 1, 6 and 8 valued their CSO's as having more of a consulting or overarching role, working with planning and evaluation of overall goals and work-plans together with partners rather than determining details in the activity plan. Similarly, two respondents noted that partners with core support funding had perceived it somewhat easier to adapt. Core support, or general budget support is a kind of partnership which organizations and/or agencies provide non-earmarked grants to support LPO's overall strategy and objectives rather than support to a specific programme or project (Wolgemuth and Ewald, 2020. Sida, 2020a). During the interviews four organizations currently had partners receiving core support funding and 5 out of 8 expressed an aim to incorporate it more in future operations. However, core support funding requires a high internal capacity of LPO's in order meet the administrative demands of Swedish back donors, something was noted as a reason to why some CSO's had not shifted towards such partnerships (Wolgemuth and Ewald, 2020. Interview 3 and 7, 2021). One respondent also noted that even though their core support partners had experienced somewhat more flexibility, due to for example their agreement including less frequent and strict reporting procedures, they were still restricted in terms of what kind of objectives and activities they are 'allowed' to work with since the funding is based on the CSO strategy. Something which had meant difficulties shifting to e.g. humanitarian responses during the pandemic (Interview 5, 2021).

The stated aim of the CSO strategy is to *promote an enabling environment* and *strengthened capacity* for civil society actors in developing countries and most of the CSO's partners work with activities focusing on mobilizing civil society, advocacy and awareness campaigns on human, environmental and social rights issues (CSO strategy, 2016). 5 out of 8 respondents state that their partners have taken a vital role in their respective societies and adjusted their activities to include information campaigns on Covid-19 related matters and utilized tools like social media, WhatsApp information chairs or radio broadcasting (Interview 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). The digital transition was also noted amongst all CSO's, as well as utilized budgets, participants numbers reached and results reported. However, there were a mix of responses in relation to the qualitative reach of partners activities. Here, relational perspectives, for example by looking at the reach of activities through a rights-based approach (RBA), in which LPO's work are usually targeting the most vulnerable communities in society, was identified.

> *From what I hear from partners, the biggest challenge is to reach out to the target group – because they work with perhaps some of the most vulnerable women in rural areas, where there are many who have limited reading and writing abilities as well as limited experience with working digitally (Interview 4, 2021).*

> *The way we see it is that we can deliver results. (…) we can say that we have completed all activities according to the agreement, but when thinking about RBA and the people we normally reach, then I am thinking that maybe we haven't been able to reach those who need it the most? (our LPO) work with indigenous groups and small-scale farmers in rural areas (…) where the internet access isn't always the best, it has meant that some of the most vulnerable groups in society have not had the same opportunity to partake in activities such as they had before the pandemic. (…) so, our partners have adjusted to digitally, but it has been pretty limited to those who have access to a computer and internet,*
> *(Interview 1, 2021)*

On the other hand, other respondents also noticed experiencing a broader reach among some of their LPO's who shifted to digital settings.

> *I would say that everyone has adjusted very well and that some of them even has had an increased engagement thanks to so much being digitally. Because in cases were there have been people with for example physical disabilities (…) in their target group (…) they have been able to participate online (Interview 8, 2021).*

> *In some cases, I know with one of our Balkan partners, they received more followers than ever before now during Covid-19. (Their work) was spread digitally in a very different way compared to if it would have been conducted 'on the ground'. (Interview 3, 2021)*

5.1.2 CSO level

At a CSO level, it was also identified that size, internal capacity and funding played a role in perceived flexibility and adaptability, since mid- to larger CSO's were identified as having a more diverse set of donors as well as high internal fundraising capacities. Smaller CSO's were more often dependent on one or a few donors, making them more dependent on following frameworks and guidelines provided by the donor.

Among the mid-to-larger organizations there has in recent years been a shift in the usage of RBF approaches like Outcome Harvesting (OH) and progress tracing to follow up their partners work, while others, particularly the mid-to-small organizations in larger extent used the more standardized LogFrames, sometimes accompanied with a Theory of Change (ToC). The type of adopted RBF is likely to have affected the perception of flexibility and adaptability, and one of the larger CSO's even described the pandemic as a "*stress test*" of their newly adopted frameworks and systems (Interview 6). However, only 3 out of 8 CSO's participating in this study had incorporated OH/progress tracing methodologies as part of their RBF's (the other 5 were using LogFrames and/or ToC's) and all CSO's operate in different contexts and have been affected by the pandemic in different ways and timeframes. Therefore, it may be difficult to single out which type of RBF's had worked better in providing flexibility. However, two of the three CSO's had experienced a relatively high level of flexibility and adaptability throughout the year and indicated that their choice of RBF had contributed to this. The third respondent expressed that they felt their RBF to have worked well overall but a major impediment for flexibility was linked to their back donor. Something which will be discussed in the section 5.2.

Finally, through the concept of brokerage, in which development practitioners act as translators or brokers of knowledge, flexibility was also noted among some of the CSO's working through LogFrame matrices. Here it was argued that CSO's may adopt strategies to work around their own structures in order to adhere to multiple demands from LPO's and donors. Something which for example was exemplified by respondent 4.

> *Some indicators in our LFA, such as getting access to decision making processes or support are normally related to things like agriculture support, but now it has been Covid-19 support. (...) the goal is not exactly formulated like that, so if we would have been strict then we would not have reached that goal, but since it is all about receiving access to support and increased access to their rights, I think that we have (Interview 4, 2021).*

5.2 Donor flexibility and reporting requirements

When asked about the respondent's perception of flexibility within their own RBF's, the most common response was to link back to their position within the development architecture – in the middle between donors (Sida and equivalent FO) and their LPO's. And while a majority of the respondents (6 out of 8) claimed Sida and their FO's to have been generally flexible and understanding from a relatively early stage of the pandemic, several also noted that the requirements, responsiveness and understanding (or lack of thereof) from their donors was one of the major factors for allowing or impeding a flexible approach.

Three CSO's noted specifically to have experienced recent shifts within the reporting procedures, in which narrative reporting requirement had become less detailed and results slightly less focused on quantitative measure and more on aspects of social change (Interview 3, 5, 6). However, and in line with Eyben's discussion on dual structures, many also noted that while requirements at a narrative level had become more flexible, financial and legal compliance and regulations were experienced as becoming stricter.

> *You know, there is a lot of talk about adaptability and 'agile' and all kinds of things but that is mostly from Sida's "programme people", one the other hand when it comes to rules and compliance it is getting worse and worse (...) it is everything from procurement rules, exchange rate rules, banking rules and procedures (...) control, control, control (Interview 7, 2021)*

> *What I think it is mostly the financial reporting… where Sida always comes with new demands. I remember one time a few years ago where we had already signed an agreement with many of our partners but then had to tear them up because of one point on the financial side that had to be added for example. So, the economic part, it becomes pretty clear (...) when it affects our agreements with partners (Interview 5, 2021).*

5.3 Policy restrictions and the humanitarian 'borderland'

A final important factor linked to donor flexibility, and as mentioned in the introductory chapter, it that the CSO strategy does not generally allow funding activities considered to be within the humanitarian spectrum, since those should be covered by the HUM strategy. However, to avoid activities and emergency responses within the so called "*borderland"* in between the two strategies to be left unfinanced, and to adhere to the increasing demands for humanitarian responses amidst the pandemic, Sida provided additional information to its SPO's (and in extension to all CSO's) with guidance on ways to adapt activities funded by the CSO strategy as well as published a guidance note in December 2020 on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus approach (Sida 2020c. Sida, 2021a. Appendix A).

The discussion on the HUM/development borderland was welcomed by all CSO's. However, many felt that the information provided was at first ambigous and two respondents also felt the information to have been arriving too late.

> *Sida's guidelines came way too late. They were so late they (LPO's) had already started with several emergency Covid-19 responses, which we had to check afterwards if "okey, are these according to the guidelines or not?" which was a lot of administrative work since it came so late. (...) there was no flexibility which would have needed to be there for our partners (Interview 7, 2021)*
>
> *We thought it was good, even if it would mean extra work for us it is good to have this alternative since we know that people in our target group often end up at the bottom of priority lists and so forth (...) so we received a request from a partner (...) which we started working on (...) but then it was rejected by (the FO) (...). We assume that they were too afraid since we aren't a humanitarian organization and that maybe it would be too much for work them to respond to Sida since it wasn't that much money, maybe 35-40,000 SEK. (...) So, we withdrew our request, but you know our LPO did a lot of work on this. They did needs assessments and criteria of who would receive and all of that (Interview 8, 2021).*

All larger CSO's (with SPO status) also noted that there had been a some ambiguities in the beginning in terms of what was allowed but experienced overall that through contact with their contact officers at Sida had been able to ask additional questions to gain more clarity. In some cases, CSO's also entered with their own internal funds to adhere to their partners humanitarian needs situations in cases when Sida had found it unfit for the CSO strategy (Interview 6 and 7, 2021).

As a final remark on this section, all CSO's noted how important it was to be able to enable LPO's to continue working even in situations of crisis of uncertainty in order to maintain credibility and legitimacy within their respective communities. It was also expressed that more discussions around synergies and overlaps between the HUM and CSO strategy are needed.

> *From our perspective, I think it is absolutely crucial to do that because if you work in a country with eg. women's rights, and your partners can't be active when society is about to crumble, then they would lose all credibility. (...) they often have a strong connection to the local society and are trusted (...) so to be able to enter and do something which is maybe*

bordering to a humanitarian intervention, it will be so important both for the local society and to strengthen women's rights in that society… (Interview 3, 2021)

It is really good to bring this up because I think there unfortunately will be more situations when we will glide between this "borderland". There is a lot of talking about this in the aid sector and that this needs to overlap but then they mostly talk about it from the other way around, from the humanitarian to development, and not from (long-term) development which sometimes may face some kind of disaster (Interview 8, 2021).

6 Discussion and policy implications

This final section will discuss, summarize and theorize the research findings presented in chapter 5 in order to answer the research question of this thesis, as well as highlighting a few policy implications.

The findings presented above suggest a mix of responses and perceptions of flexibility, however most CSO's perceived their own internal RBF structures and adaptation as overall good. One general factor identified at both LPO and CSO level was that larger CSO/LPO's, with relatively high internal capital and internal capacities seem to have experienced more flexibility, both in terms of donor dialogue and internal RBF's. In comparison, smaller CSO's with less internal capacities and/or more dependent on back donors were perceived to be somewhat more restricted in how to use their funding and thus had less flexibility to adjust.

What would be considered as the main finding from this of this study, as well as answer to its research question; *to what extent have Results Based Frameworks been suitable to address changes and challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic*, is that results-based frameworks are only as flexible as they are allowed to be by its users. Therefore, understanding these findings through the concepts of substantialism, relationalism and brokerage have been important, which identifies the CSO's as *intermediaries* within the Swedish development architecture that constantly needs to balance the demands and wishes from their back donors and LPO's and *translate* knowledge to fit different frames.

6.1 Substantialist view

From a substantialist view it could be argued that the frameworks have been largely successful in adapting to the current situation, since the CSO's state that they/their LPO's have been able to pursue planned activities to a large extent at some point during the working year, by shifting to digital solutions, smaller groups and/or rescheduling activities to periods with less restrictions. Some also indicated an opportunity of changing activities to pursue awareness and information campaigns relating to Covid-19 and/or include activities which were closer to the humanitarian borderland but still within the frame of the agreement.

6.2 Brokerage

The successful results presented in the substantialist view could also be explained through the process of brokerage, in which section 5.1.1 highlighted CSO's ability to translate and fit activities and results within the needed frames. Here it was emphasized that most LPO's and CSO's were able to report successful results in terms of being able to maintain activities and reach by for example shifting to digital settings. For some, shifting to digital solutions had resulted in an increased engagement among their target group. While others noted that they were able to present positive results in terms of participant numbers and activities but saw limitations in terms of reaching the most marginalized parts of their target groups, due to for example internet access and/or digital literacy. Moreover, as presented in final paragraph of 5.1.2, brokerage also provided CSO's with flexibility to work around their own systems, to translate results from Covid-19 responses to fit already existing LogFrames and work plans.

6.3 Relational view

From a perspective of relationalism, in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts, some inflexibilities were identified, primarily in terms of policy constraints, reach of activities and dualities within reporting procedures. Here a major issue identified was not being able to adhere to some partners wishes of pursuing activities within the identified "*humanitarian borderland*" due to policy limitations and donor ambiguity. Even if not all CSO's had experienced difficulties defining this borderland, or felt the need to make such a transition, there was consensus among the respondents over the need for civil society actors to be able to support their partners also during times of uncertainty and crisis in order to maintain legitimacy within their communities.

Based on the research findings, further discussions on the synergy/borderland between humanitarian and long-term objectives seem needed at a policy level, in order to reduce ambiguities within future crisis situations and to better support civil society actors in uncertain and complex situations. This was also noted by two of the respondents, who in recent years had perceived an increase in policy discussions and literature relating to incorporating nexus approaches, but who felt it as often focusing on efforts moving from humanitarian towards long-term development plans, but not as often from the other way around.

Moreover, many CSO's experienced issues balancing contradictory demands and ambiguities from donors, such as experiencing more flexibility at programme/narrative level while at the same time needing to provide more detailed financial and compliance reports. This finding is grounded in Wolgemuth and Ewald (2020) and Sida's (2021b) evaluation of the CSO strategy, where it was also reported that the increased financial and legal regulations felt like an obstacle for innovation and flexibility. This may also have implications at policy level, since this could lead to CSO's not having capacity or ability to fund high-risk projects or partners not conforming to the norms of internal administrative structures, such as social movements or smaller grass root organizations, something which was also noted by for example respondent 1 and 8.

> *Already in the planning stage we need to think about this; we can't go in this direction because we will get too many questions and it will be too much work follow-up work. It is not worth it because it will be too much work (Interview 8, 2021)*
>
> *In our work we try to work directly with social movements (…) but it is harder for us in terms of administration because, as I said earlier that these are organizations who does not have a lot of administrative experience, and who does not want that. (…) they should be out on the streets and not sit in an office filling in forms to our donor (Interview 1, 2021).*

6.4 Final policy remark on alternative RBF's and approaches

A final factor that is likely to have impacted the perception of flexibility is the type of RBF approach utilized by the organization, since alternative approaches like Outcome Harvesting and progress tracing focus less on predetermined outcomes and activities and more on processes of measuring progress and factors contributing to change (Wilson-Grau, 2015). Out of the three CSO's who had incorporated such approaches, two indicated that they viewed their RBF as having contributed to their perceived flexibility and adaptability during the pandemic. The third argued that their frameworks had worked well overall, but that their major impediment for flexibility was linked to the extended reporting requirements and dialogue with their back donors. Similarly, CSO's with core support partnerships were also perceived as experiencing somewhat higher rates of flexibility.

These alternative RBF approaches and core support seem promising in terms of increasing local ownership and flexibility. However, this research would also like to conclude that there is likely no silver bullet for flexibility, since the concepts of substantialism and brokerage also showed us how CSO's are able to adjust and work around also current RBF structures in order to balance dual demands. This thesis would therefore agree with Shutt's (2016) concluding remarks in her report *Towards An Alternative Development Management Paradigm* that emerging approaches provide useful tools for a more holistic, complexity and progress based understanding of results reporting. Nonetheless, if such approaches are merely systematized without also challenging some of the norms and core assumptions about the results-based agenda and dualities within the development architecture, even the most iterative and comprehensive approaches could risk becoming yet another well-intentioned, top-down initiative, merely paying lip-service to its cause (Shutt, 2016:14).

7 Conclusion

The unprecedented effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are argued by the OECD to be one of the largest challenges for international development cooperation in recent decades (OECD, 2020). It is also stated, which this thesis would agree to, that the pandemic presents a unique opportunity for learning and innovation, which has motivated the topic and guiding questions for this research.

The purpose of this thesis has been to obtain a deeper understanding of how crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic may affect Swedish aid organizations operating under the CSO strategy, and to what extent results-based frameworks have been able to adhere to these effects. The analysis is based on data collected through eight semi-structured interviews, conducted digitally during early spring, 2021. Through Eyben's (2010) theoretical concepts of substantialism, relationalism and Mosse and Lewis's (2006) brokerage, this thesis has explored the experiences of development practitioners in their position as intermediaries within the Swedish development architecture, balancing dual demands and translating knowledge between their back donors and LPO's.

The findings suggest a mixture of responses and perceptions of flexibility, within their own RBF's as well as within the development architecture at large. Most CSO's expressed being impressed by their partners ability to adapt activities, reach participant numbers and shift to digital settings relatively quickly. However, at the same time, various factors were acknowledged as allowing or impeding adaptability and perceived flexibility. These included for example policy restrictions, reporting requirements and potential implications of adjusted activities.

The major findings from study would conclude that results frameworks and systems are only as flexible as they are allowed to be, arguing that a major factor for adaptability and flexibility was related to the understanding and support from the CSO's back donors. Here the results were mixed, but a majority of CSO's perceived Sida as a relatively flexible donor. The two FO's included in this study were perceived as somewhat less flexible and demanding more detailed reporting procedures. Another major factor identified was the size of the organization and its internal funding and administrative capacities.

This study mainly covers the experiences and thoughts of mid-to-high level staff at intermediary organizations; therefore, I would like to end this conclusion with suggesting potentials for future research. Some of the CSO's had recently shifted towards more alternative RBF approaches and/or worked through core support partnerships. The research findings provide an indication towards those CSO's as having experienced higher degrees of adaptability and flexibility throughout the year. However, since this thesis includes a relatively small sample size, future research has a potential to expand on this. It could moreover benefit from for example including development practitioners at LPO or institutional donor level, or to pursue studies of more in-depth comparative character between CSO's who have adopted alternative RBF's. Moreover, a final suggestion for future research is the aspect of time. This study has mainly focused on initial reactions and responses of CSO's within the Swedish development architecture during the first year of the pandemic. The final aftermath of the covid-19 crisis is however yet to come, since the virus is still widespread, with heavy tolls in several continents. Therefore, this study may also contribute to future research around the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on development.

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Appendix A: Exert from Sida's guidelines for cooperation with strategic partner organizations

This is an exert from the document; *Sida's guidelines for application and reporting in partnerships with Swedish strategic partner organisations (SPO) within the CSO appropriation (p.13-14)*, latest updated in June 2020. The exert have included all relevant information relating the synergies between the CSO and HUM strategies.

Synergies with the humanitarian strategy

The interaction between humanitarian aid and development cooperation is important to ensure parties work in ways that are mutually reinforcing to reduce risk, vulnerabilities and humanitarian dependence. For this reason, it may be justified for funding from the CSO appropriation to be used for activities such as preventive measures, early recovery and/or capacity building in activities that border between humanitarian and development strategies.

Funds from the CSO appropriation can be earmarked for activities that border between humanitarian and development strategies in two ways: (i) as an integral part of the ordinary application to Sida; or (ii) as a reprogramming of activities under ongoing agreements through the redistribution of funds that have already been granted, typically due to a sudden onset of crisis or disaster.

(…)

Sida expects the SPO to consider the following in its assessment:

- Humanitarian assistance cannot be funded under the CSO appropriation. This must be handled under the humanitarian appropriation item because: it must be based on humanitarian needs and humanitarian principles; comply with international standards and be a part of humanitarian coordination. This is to minimise the risk of doing harm.
- An activity that is on the border between a humanitarian and development activity can be funded through the CSO appropriation as long as it does not apply to humanitarian contexts, i.e. areas or target groups covered by joint humanitarian responses led by the UN. Activities that border between appropriations could be, e.g. income generating activities (livelihoods), food security, education and dissemination of information in relation to a crisis or disaster.

Appendix B: Interview participants

This is the list of participating CSO’s in this study in alphabetical order.

Act Svenska Kyrkan
Individuell Människohjälp
Kvinna Till Kvinna
Latinamerikagrupperna
MyRight
PMU (Pingstmissionens utvecklingssamarbete)
Svalorna Indien Bangladesh
The Hunger Project Sweden

Appendix C: Information and consent form

My name is Emma Berglund and I am a student from Lund University, where I am about to graduate from the bachelor's programme in development studies with a major in political science.

As part of my final thesis, I am conducting a qualitative interview study around how long-term (non-humanitarian) development cooperation through Swedish aid organizations have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. By capturing the experiences of development practitioners/programme officers, the aim of the study will focus on analyzing to what extent results-based frameworks have been suitable for aid organizations to address changes and challenges during the covid-19 pandemic.

You are invited to participate in my thesis project within your role as development practitioner/programme officer at a Swedish civil society organization. The information I will gather from our interview session will only be used as data for my thesis and I will present the data in a way that the answers cannot be tracked down to individuals. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any point without giving me a specific reason.

The interview will be held in Swedish (or English, depending on your preference) and the final research will be written in English. Prior to our meeting I will create a Zoom room with a passcode to ensure that our discussion is confidential. The interview is scheduled to take around 45-60 minutes depending on your availability and how in depth we go into each question. I will do my best to keep the time and make sure that there is room for some discussion and for you to direct questions or thoughts to me as well. With your permission, I will record the audio from the interview (on a separate device) to help the transcription and analysis.

If you have any questions or concerns with regards to the study prior, during or after our interview, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Emma Berglund
BSc in Development Studies,
major in Political Science

Appendix D: Preparatory Questions

The preparatory questions were sent out a few days prior to each interview. These were then discussed during the interview together with approximate 5-7 questions of more reflective character. The questions were originally formulated in Swedish and have been translated.

1. How is your CSO's long-term development cooperation organized? (If you are a large CSO, you may refer to your specific department)
    a. (For example) Do you work project or programme based? Core support?
    b. What kind of partners/LPO's do you work with?

2. What framework(s) does your CSO use for planning, implementing and evaluating projects/programmes?
    a. (and) Are the projects/programmes annual or multiannual?
    b. How often does your partners report activites and results to the CSO?
    c. How often do you report results and progress to your donors (eg. Sida/ForumCiv/SMC)

3. For how long have you used this framework and why did you choose this particular one?

4. How has Covid-19 impacted the work of your organization and the work of your partners overall?

5. To what extent were you/your partners able to carry out planned activities throughout the year (2020)