

# Governing Through Aid

A Biopolitical Analysis of Swedish Development Policy



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## **Abstract**

This paper employs a biopolitical framework to critically analyse *Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's* (Sida) development and humanitarian policies, focusing on how these align with broader biopolitical strategies aimed to shape the lives of populations in recipient countries. Through a critical discourse analysis of four key policy documents, the study addresses the central question of how Sida's policies reflect biopolitical governance. It reveals that Sida's interventions and aid recipients are framed in ways that reinforce a hierarchy of populations, reflecting Sweden's interests and values. The study also highlights the conditional nature of Sweden's official development assistance, where aid is tied to recipients meeting criteria aligned with Swedish priorities. The research further explores how these policies are intertwined with broader neoliberal strategies, for example by promoting resilience and controlling global movements. Ultimately, the analysis suggests that Sida's policies serve not only humanitarian purposes but also Sweden's security and economic interests, positioning Sweden as a moral and essential actor in global development while exporting Swedish norms and values. Altogether, the research contributes to discussions on development and humanitarian efforts, power dynamics, control and governance.

Key words: Sida, Sweden, biopolitics, development discourse, critical discourse analysis, security

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# 1. Introduction: Sweden's Development Cooperation

Sweden is renowned for its substantial contributions to official development assistance (ODA), consistently ranking as one of the world's leading donors (OECD, 2024; OECD, 2023). The formal inception of Swedish ODA began in 1962 with the first bill drafted. The goal was to “raise the poor people's standard of living” and “abolish hunger and mass poverty, eliminate epidemic diseases, reduce child mortality and create opportunities for tolerable living conditions” (Prop. 1962:100, p. 7). This period witnessed a significant expansion of the Swedish development cooperation efforts. Bilateral collaborations grew, ultimately leading to the establishment of the *Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency* (Sida) (Wohlgemuth, 2012, p. 5). Sida became the central body responsible for managing and channelling Swedish development assistance around the world. Sweden was the first country to meet and exceed the United Nations' target of dedicating 0.7% of its gross national income to development assistance during the 1970s and has since consistently remained above this threshold (OECD, 2024).

Sida's primary mission is to create better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression (Sida, n.dc.). The agency's initiatives span across various sectors including health, human rights, migration and democracy, aligning with international agreements and principles such as the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG) (Sida, n.dd.; Sida, 2024, p. 8-9). According to the Swedish government, “(d)velopment cooperation is one of the most important foreign policy tools for pursuing and protecting Swedish interests and tackling the challenges that Sweden and the world are facing.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2). This underscores the centrality of development aid in Swedish politics and its broader interests.

Contemporary development discourse is shaped by the notion that effective states have both a moral obligation and a self-interest in enhancing the well-being of populations in less effective states (Duffield, 2007, p. 2). Crises such as famines and regional instability can lead to conflict, mass migration, and extremism, ultimately impacting global security (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4). Therefore, there is a perceived moral imperative for developed nations to engage in development efforts to mitigate these risks and bolster their own security (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4). This interlinking of development and security reflects a liberal governance rationale focusing on securing population, economic, and societal processes (Duffield, 2007, p. 4).

Development is thus deeply intertwined with the regulation and management of populations, intersecting with the concept of *biopolitics*— theorised by, among others, philosopher Michel Foucault to describe governance strategies that regulate populations and manage life processes (Lemke, 2012, p. 41-45; Duffield, 2007, p. 5; Foucault, 2002, p. 137-143). For biopolitical governance, it is crucial to control processes like birth rates, disease, and behaviour through scientific and statistical methods (Foucault, 2003, p. 243; Duffield, 2007, p. 5). Biopolitics treats populations as biological and political entities, using disciplinary tactics and large-scale strategies to enhance public health and well-being, ultimately strengthening the state's vitality (Foucault, 2003, p. 241-244; Hellberg, 2020, p. 188-189). The Swedish ODA can be seen as a biopolitical tool, employing techniques to manage and improve health outcomes and well-being to stabilise and stimulate economic growth. Ultimately, reinforces global power structures.

### **1.1 Statement of Purpose and Disciplinary Relevance**

This essay analyses Sida's development and humanitarian assistance discourse using a biopolitical lens. The study includes a critical discourse analysis of four policy documents that guide and set the frame for Sida's development cooperation. By adopting this approach, the essay will examine how Sweden constructs and perceives its aid initiatives, recipient populations, governing

rationales, and ultimately, power dynamics within its aid policies.

Development studies gain valuable insight by incorporating a biopolitical lens since it can provide critical insights into the mechanisms of power and control over life itself (Hellberg, 2020; Duffield, 2007; Mezzadra, Reid & Samaddar, 2013). Biopolitics examines how power is exerted through the regulation of populations, shedding light on how development discourses shape and influence communities and recipient populations. This perspective reveals the subtle ways in which development practices, such as health initiatives, population control measures, and environmental regulations, can serve as tools of governance (Duffield, 2007; Mezzadra, Reid & Samaddar, 2013). Additionally, development narratives often construct certain populations as threats, e.g., through disease control, environmental concerns, migration, and conflicts (Foucault, 2009, p. 42-43:108-109; Hellberg, 2020). Who determines what is healthy, productive, or sustainable? (Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 172:181-184) These constructions can cause potential biases in the way development discourses classify and potentially govern communities.

This study does not aim to fully explain how Sida, and by extension Sweden, controls populations or employs biopolitical strategies in practice, as this would be beyond the scope of this paper. Additionally, given the recent implementation of the new Reform Agenda, Sida has not yet had the chance to update and produce new strategy documents for all its geographical areas and themes or evaluate its efforts comprehensively. Therefore, the analysis is limited to four relevant and updated documents, including the Reform Agenda itself - a document that sets the frame for Sweden's development initiatives and activities, which will be discussed in detail later in the text. While this study may not demonstrate how governance occurs in practice, a critical discourse analysis of these policy documents can reveal how Sida and Sweden frame and construct their development assistance. By examining the development discourse from a biopolitical perspective, this study can enhance our understanding of how development discourses construct

knowledge about bodies and populations, identify who is positioned as a threat to development and in need of management, and uncover potential biases and power dynamics inherent in these narratives.

### **1.1.2 Research Questions**

The main research question is:

- How do Sida's development and humanitarian policies reflect biopolitical governance?

To answer this question, I will seek to address these sub-questions:

- How does Sida construct its interventions and aid recipients?
- How do these constructions align with biopolitical notions such as governance of populations and regulation of life processes?

## **1.2 The Swedish International Development Cooperation**

### **Agency**

This section will present the *Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency* (Sida) and its mandate. I will also recount the key thematic priorities of the Reform Agenda that guides Sida's activities.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency operates under the mandate of the Swedish Parliament and Government. While ultimately falling under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sida functions as the primary distributing body for government-allocated development funds. The Swedish government determines the overall distribution strategy, but Sida manages the operationalisation and monitoring of the aid process (Sida, 2024, p. 8-9; Sida, n.dd.). Sida has the authority to allocate SEK 26.5 billion in funding for development projects in 2024 (Decision UD2023/01838 / UD2023/03165 / UD2023/09127; Sida, n.da.).



The Swedish government establishes comprehensive strategies that guide the focus of Sweden's development cooperation, including the target countries, thematic areas, and overarching goals (Sida, 2023, p. 10). These strategies fall into two categories: geographical strategies and global thematic strategies. Geographical strategies focus on specific countries or regions, outlining tailored approaches and objectives. Global thematic strategies, on the other hand, address broader issues or actors, such as climate change and environmental protection or humanitarian assistance (Sida, 2023, p. 10). Sida's website lists 38 active strategies, 22 of which are bilateral, 7 regional, and 9 thematic. Sida's primary mission is to improve living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression. In doing so, Sida supports the implementation of Sweden's policies for global development, such as Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement (Sida, 2024, p. 8-9; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 14). Additionally, the agency is guided by international law, agreements and frameworks (Sida, 2024, p. 8-9).

On December 14th, 2023, Sweden's development cooperation strategy saw a reform outlined in the document titled *Aid for a New Era - Freedom, Empowerment and Sustainable Growth* (Sida, 2024, p. 8-9). This 30-page document produced by the government replaces the previous frameworks. In the Reform Agenda it is stated that “In a world where needs are extensive and the funding gap is growing, prioritisation is necessary. The Government will therefore set thematic priorities” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 4). These priorities are as follows: 1) Combating poverty through job creation, trade and education; 2) Improved health for the most vulnerable; 3) Promoting freedom and fighting oppression; 4) Expanded and more effective climate aid; 5) Strengthening women's and girls' freedom and empowerment; 6) Strengthened synergies between development assistance and migration policy; 7) Enhanced humanitarian assistance to save lives and alleviate suffering (Sida, 2024, p. 8-9). The Reform Agenda serves as a comprehensive policy framework, outlining the government's overall goals and desired outcomes, and does not provide specific implementation

strategies or solutions. It rather emphasises key priorities and impact areas that the government wants to focus on.

## 2. Previous Research

The chapter explores the intersection of biopolitics and development research. It will begin by introducing the concept of biopolitics followed by its specific application within the Swedish context of international aid. However, there is limited research done specifically regarding Sweden, therefore the chapter will draw valuable insights from the prominent scholar Mark Duffield, whose work explores biopolitics in the broader development landscape.

### 2.1 Biopolitics, Development and International Aid

Michel Foucault (2002, p. 138) intertwines the concept of biopolitics with a liberal governance rationale, arguing that it is a tool used to manage the divide between different populations. His analysis of biopolitics has generated an extensive and diverse body of research. The influence of biopolitics extends beyond its philosophical and social science roots, with growing fields like legal studies, international relations, medicine, and biology (Wallenstein, 2013, p. 6-7). Foucault's theorisation on power, discourse, governmentality, and biopolitics will be presented more in detail in *Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework*.

Within a Swedish context, this extends to encompassing topics such as Sweden's management of Covid-19 and the elderly (Nilsson et al., 2021), refugees and border controls (Brännström, 2015; Skaarup, 2021), nursing homes (Holmgren et al., 2014), feminist resistance (Johansson & Lilja, 2013), irrigation and groundwater (Bertilsson, 2024), and security and crisis management (Rådestad & Larsson, 2020). However, while these studies utilise a biopolitical lens, they do not focus on international development or aid, which aligns more directly with the focus of my research.

In the exploration and familiarisation with biopolitics in relation to Swedish development assistance, no peer-reviewed research on the specific topic was found. However, a relevant student thesis was found titled *Swedish Aid as a*

*Biopolitical Instrument* written by Ljubomir Love Fredenman in 2012. Employing a theory-testing methodology, the thesis analyses strategy reports of ten African countries, produced by Sida to evaluate Swedish development assistance. The theoretical framework used is based on Mark Duffield's work, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* published in 2007. The study's findings confirm Duffield's theoretical approach concerning development, security, liberalism, and biopolitics, and conclude that Sida's development cooperation may function as a tool for biopolitical control (Fredenman, 2012).

While there are similarities between the present study and Fredenmans, this paper departs from the idea that development assistance is biopolitical. Consequently, the study explores how this perspective manifests in Sida's strategies and policies, and thus how it is reflected within the Swedish development discourse. Furthermore, this paper distinguishes itself by adopting a broader theoretical framework incorporating the perspectives of additional scholars, in contrast to relying solely on Duffield's work. It is also noteworthy that Fredenman's study was completed in 2012 and based on strategy reports, not the strategies themselves. Additionally, Sida's strategies and policy frameworks have undergone multiple revisions since then. Given the temporal gap and methodological difference between the studies, it is relevant to explore this subject further.

## **2.2. Mark Duffield: Setting the Stage**

A general account of Mark Duffield's arguments, described in his book *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*, is included since it lays the basic premise on which this essay is based. Duffield is a prominent scholar whose research has explored issues of development, security and liberalism by analysing and framing them in terms connected to Foucault's notion of biopolitics. In his work, Duffield (2007) challenges the prevailing belief that global interconnectedness necessitates international stability and security to protect the West's way of life. He explores this through case studies from

Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan, and issues of migration, sustainable development, and human security.

Duffield's (2007, p. 17) main argument is that development and humanitarian efforts function as a technology of control and governance to promote security, rather than a tool for improving lives. This approach entails a biopolitical division between “developed” and “underdeveloped” populations, where development aims to contain and manage the destabilising effects of underdevelopment on the global political economy (Duffield, 2007, p. ix:1). To understand development as a technology of security and securing the liberal order. Duffield (2007) draws from Cowen and Shenton (1996) and examines the problem of “surplus population”. He (Duffield, 2007, p. 13-14:216-218) traces this to the abolition of slavery and the rise of capitalism, which created surplus populations or “non-insured life”. Development here is seen as an external and educative control over those left behind by the growth of capitalism, aimed to assist the populations to adapt to the challenges brought by progress in the new economic system (Cowen & Shenton, 1996, p. xi; Duffield, 2007, p. 9-10). According to Duffield (2007, p. 218), this connection between development and biopolitics has persisted from the expansion of capitalism to the present day.

Duffield’s approach is critical towards liberal society at large and focuses on negative aspects of development. In his conclusion, Duffield (2007, p. 227-232) discusses whether development can influence “non-insured” lives and populations becoming “insured”. He raises questions about alternative development but argues that it is complex and questions whether it would work since these approaches could be used to “recapturing and bolstering the West's own security” (Duffield, 2007, p. 231). Development, while seeming well-intentioned and emancipating, is still based on trusteeship, making it paternalistic and a reinforcer of power imbalances (Duffield, 2007, p. 227).

### **2.2.1 Duffields Alternative to Contemporary Development**

Duffield (2007, p. 232), drawing from Foucault, argues for solidarity among all governed people. He sees this notion resonating in contemporary anti-globalisation, and global justice movements which emphasise “mutuality and reciprocity between provider and beneficiary while blurring the differences between them” (Duffield, 2007, p. 233). Global solidarity focuses on the interconnectedness and shared grievances of people worldwide, emphasising political struggles against the overarching effects of global neoliberalism (Duffield, 2007, p. 233). Duffield (2007, p. 233-234), argues that this entails learning from marginalised communities and engaging in unpredictable, unscripted interactions, rejecting the security-driven mentality that seeks control. This approach could challenge the power structures influenced by race, class, and gender (Duffield, 2007, p. 233). However, this shift could carry a potential risk, and thus a fear of the West losing the control it currently holds over the development of the “non-insured” lives, which is a perceived threat to the “insured” populations (Duffield, 2007, p. 233-234).

### **2.2.2 Criticism of the Book**

Mark Duffield’s work can be a challenging read due to its dense presentation of concepts and arguments, which sometimes makes it difficult to fully grasp his line of reasoning. While he does not explicitly outline his methodology, it is clear that he relies on discourse analysis. Scholars like Tara McCormack (2008, p. 488-489) and David Chandler (2008, p. 268-272) take issue with Duffield's use of Foucault's concept of biopolitics and biopower and argue that Duffield simplifies it. In Foucault's framework, biopolitics describes population control and governance techniques specific to modern liberal societies, and McCormack (2008, p. 488-489) and Chandler (2008, p. 268-272) criticise Duffield for misinterpreting biopolitics and biopower as a general theory of power applicable across the international sphere. Furthermore, Chandler (2008, p. 268-272) criticises Duffield for offering a weak alternative to the current security-development framework. Duffield's suggestion of "solidarity with the

governed" lacks a clear path for implementation. While his work effectively critiques existing structures, his proposed solution remains vague (Chandler, 2008, p. 268-272).

These critiques highlight potential shortcomings in Duffield's approach. The structure of his work can be challenging, and his use of biopower requires further refinement and while his analysis offers valuable insights, a more concrete alternative solution would strengthen his overall argument.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The chapter establishes a foundation for analysing biopolitics within Sida's development discourse. Centred around the main research question: *How do Sida's development and humanitarian policies reflect biopolitical governance?* as well as the two sub-questions: *1) How does Sida construct its interventions and aid recipients? 2) How do these constructions align with biopolitical notions such as governance of populations and regulation of life processes?* To address these questions and examine how development discourse constructs knowledge about life processes and populations, identify who and what is categorised as a threat to development and in need of management, and reveal underlying power dynamics and biases, a theoretical framework has been developed.

Initially, Michel Foucault's foundational concepts of power, discourse, governmentality, and biopolitics are explored. This provides a foundation for understanding the core principles of biopolitics. Following, the focus shifts to how biopolitics intersects with development, drawing from scholars like Mark Duffield and Julian Reid. Here, the connection between liberalism, and security, and how these concepts intertwine with development discourse and biopolitics, are explored.

#### **3.1 A Foucauldian Understanding of Power**

Michel Foucault has had a significant influence across various disciplines and research domains. Much of this influence comes from his unique theorisation on *power* (Axelsson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 9). This section will first provide a comprehensive overview of Foucault's understanding of *power* and *discourse*, setting the stage to explain his conceptualisation of governmentality and biopolitics. Foucault's concepts are central to this essay, as they form the foundation for the analysis of Sida's development cooperation.



### **3.1.1 Power**

Foucault argues that power is everywhere - everything and everyone can serve as an instrument and a source of power (Foucault, 2002, p. 103; Axelsson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 133). This differs from the traditional view of power as something A can compel B to do against their will. According to Foucault, power is not binary, but rather manifests in daily interactions among various actors, both on micro- and macro-levels (Axelsson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 127-129). It is versatile, distributed, and relational where e.g., subordination is viewed as another form of power rather than a lack of it (Foucault, 2002, p. 103-105; Axelsson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 127-129).

In his work, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault (2002, p. 107-111) describes four principles of power. Firstly, power produces knowledge, which means rejecting the idea of impartial knowledge and emphasising the intertwined nature of power and knowledge production. Secondly, power and knowledge are constantly changing, highlighting the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of power relations. Thirdly, Foucault (2002, p. 109) emphasises the interaction between macro- and micro-level power, suggesting that micro-power dynamics contribute to the formation of the broader organisational power structures, i.e. the power is not top-down, but a complex interplay between everyday interaction and larger structures. Lastly, discourse and speech contain and can produce power, as well as undermine it, power is relational, dynamic and resistance is always present (Foucault, 2002, p. 110-111).

### **3.1.2 Discourse**

Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2000) explain that discourse can be understood as "a specific way of talking about and understanding the world (or a section of the world)" (p. 7). Within the overarching field of social constructionism particular emphasis is placed on the role of language in shaping our perception of reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 11:16). Here, the key assumption is that language actively constructs the social world around us,

and that discourses themselves are fluid, thus changing across time and space (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 16).

Foucault's view on power and knowledge as interconnected, results in his conceptualisation of *power/knowledge* - where power both generates and perpetuates knowledge, while knowledge, in turn, influences and sustains power dynamics (Foucault, 2002, p. 35:107–108; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 20). Thus, the accepted forms of *knowledge*, *science*, and “*truth*” are not only shaped by power but also shape it, which, as previously mentioned, reflects on the absence of neutral or impartial knowledge (Foucault, 2002, p. 35:107–108; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 11:20-21). For Foucault, discourse, seen as a process of power/knowledge, is viewed as an institutionalised social practice that constructs perceptions of “reality” based on specific knowledge systems, shaping ideas of what is normal, abnormal, desirable, and undesirable (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 12:20). Discourses thus define the boundaries for what is considered reasonable, which, in turn, shapes the subject's capacity to act and engage in the social world (Dean, 2010, p. 36; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 19). Understanding this relationship between power/knowledge and discourse can enhance our insight into the factors governing subjects' behaviour.

### **3.1.3 Governmentality**

In his work, Foucault discusses how the rise of liberalism led to a distinct approach to governance, an approach which he calls *governmentality* (Axelsson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 93). The concept refers to a specific way in which societies and individuals are managed. Unlike earlier approaches that relied on coercion, governmentality emphasises freedom as a central principle, encompassing a set of strategies and processes intended to regulate and oversee human life (Axelsson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 90-93; Shani, 2012, p. 106-107; Lemke, 2012, p. 40). The subjects are perceived as having freedom of choice, yet the governing body effectively regulates these options (Repo, 2015, p. 12-13). Tania Murray Li (2007, p. 18) describes governmentality from a Foucauldian perspective as “the liberal

art of governing the polity in an economical manner—intervening in the delicate balance of social and economic processes no more, and no less, than is required to optimize them”. This demonstrates the dilemma with the liberal government rationale: how to govern without governing too much (Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 178).

Foucault (2009, p. 108-109) describes the main characteristics of governmentality as; a) *a complex system of institutions, procedures, and calculations using political economy and security apparatuses for governance*; b) *prioritises population management over traditional forms of power, by e.g., using specific bodies of knowledge*; and c) *the state has a regulatory role*. This transformation reflects a growing emphasis on governing populations rather than simply enforcing laws.

This perspective on the rationale of government starts from a premise of human freedom and agency, where elements such as social norms, behaviours, and attitudes serve as fundamental prerequisites for governance (Axelsson & Qvarsebo, 2017, p. 95:98; Dean, 2010, p. 18). It is connected to notions regarding rationality, where the production of knowledge determines what is considered sensible, “true”, and rational, guiding individuals in their everyday lives (Dean, 2010, p. 18-19). These control techniques indirectly operate to influence behaviour and enhance both individual and population capacities (Murray Li, 2007, p. 5; Dean, 2010, p. 17-19). Individuals experience a degree of “freedom” as long as they adhere to established social norms. This fosters a sense of self-governance where adherence to societal expectations makes individuals manage their own behaviour without explicit external control (Duffield, 2007, p. 5-6; Murray Li, 2007, p. 5). Mitchell Dean (2010, p. 17-19) further explains that this idea is intertwined with morality and ethics, as self-governance presupposes individuals' responsibility for their actions - with knowledge production shaping appropriate behaviours for both individuals and communities.

### 3.1.4 Biopolitics

Biopolitics is a crucial component of liberal governmentality: “(t)here is no liberalism without biopolitics” (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2012, p. 53). It can be understood as a technology (e.g., strategies, techniques) of power within the broader framework of governmentality (Repo, 2015, p. 11). Here, liberalism can be seen as constituting the broader framework, where biopolitics is functioning as a tool (Lemke, 2012, p. 41-45).

Biopolitics breaks away from the traditional focus on governing territories and states. Instead, it focuses on regulating and controlling the very processes of human life across the entire population (Duffield, 2007, p. 5). Since the 19th century, governments have increasingly used biopolitical strategies to support processes of life as well as enhance the population’s overall productivity (Duffield, 2007, p. 5). This concept marks a shift in how power operates. Previously, the sovereign held the ultimate power - “to take life or let live” whereas biopolitics focuses on managing and optimising the lives of entire populations or “to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Duffield, 2007, p. 5).

The rise of biopolitics has placed a greater emphasis on "normative and regulatory power." This power relies on scientific knowledge and expertise, shifting the focus away from legal constraints and law enforcement (Axelson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 63-64; Duffield, 2007, p. 5). The approach encompasses regulation and disciplinary control of populations, intertwining human biology with governance objectives (Hellberg, 2020, p. 188-189; Duffield, 2007, p. 5-6). Foucault argues that the biopolitical approach emerged with liberal societies, when governments began managing populations as living beings, concerned with their health, lifespan, reproduction, productivity, and overall well-being (Repo, 2015, p. 11-12; Foucault, 2002, p. 137-143). This process includes educating the population regarding their own health and the establishment of healthcare institutions, centralising power and standardising and normalising knowledge (Foucault, 2002,

p. 137-143; Foucault, 2003, p. 241-244). Duffield (2007, p. 6) explains: “(b)iopoltics attempts to rationalize the problem of governing groups of humans represented in the form of population. Such problems are manifest in a variety of locations, including the family, health, housing, education and longevity”. Issues like these are of central focus as they are vital for economic progress (Repo, 2015, p. 11-12; Shani, 2012, p. 106; Duffield, 2007, p. 6; Foucault, 2003, p. 243).

Foucault (2009, p. 42-43) argues that the focus on the population as a subject, rather than just a collection of individuals, grants it a distinct identity. This allows for the analysis of collective phenomena as characteristic of the population, such as disease outbreaks, mortality rates, and birth trends (Foucault, 2009, p. 42-43). It introduces a new way of thinking about populations, where the collective patterns of individual behaviours come together to define the population's identity (Foucault, 2009, p. 42-43). The notion that populations have distinct identities also means that it is possible to separate them categorically (Hellberg, 2020, p. 189-190; Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 177-178).

### **3.2 The Liberal Problematic of Security**

In *Development, Security and Unending War*, Duffield (2007, p. 2) explores a dominant notion shaping contemporary development discourse: effective states are morally obligated and have a self-interest in enhancing the well-being of people in less effective states. Crises like famines, and instability in distant regions can have far-reaching impacts, leading to conflict, mass migration, and extremism, ultimately affecting global security (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4). Thus, there is a perceived moral imperative for developed nations to engage in development efforts to address these risks and to enhance their own security (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4). Here development and security become interlinked and mutually reinforcing goals for Western interventionism (Duffield, 2007, p. 2). Their linkage is connected to liberal theories of governance, which have long focused on securing the essential processes of life associated with population, economy, and society (Duffield, 2007, p. 4). This rationale of government seeks to

protect and enhance these processes in the name of individual rights and freedoms and has come to dominate contemporary discourse in development and humanitarian efforts since the Cold War (Duffield, 2007, p. 4). Development and security are thus intertwined based on a liberal governance rationality.

### **3.2.1 The Linkage Between Development and Security**

The notion that development and security are intertwined becomes increasingly apparent after the 1990s and the onset of the 21st century (Stilhoff Sørensen & Söderbaum, 2012, p. 7; Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 8-9). However, this connection has roots that stretch further back in history. For example, in US President Harry Truman's inaugural address where he framed underdevelopment as a security issue, urging development efforts because those in poverty pose a threat not only to themselves but also to more affluent regions (Duffield, 2012 p. 25; Pupavac, 2010, p. 47).

Jens Stilhoff Sørensen and Fredrik Söderbaum (2012, p. 10) argue that post-World War II, international development aimed to modernise and transform former colonies into nation-states, integrating them into the global economic order dominated by the industrialised West. These efforts were motivated by Western geopolitical interests, and aimed to foster development and security in newly established states to prevent them from aligning with the opposing bloc (Stilhoff Sørensen & Söderbaum, 2012 p. 10-11; Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 5). This state-centric security paradigm emphasises the reproduction and survival of the state, alongside the development of institutions and security apparatuses for territorial control (Duffield, 2010, p. 32; Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 9; Stilhoff Sørensen & Söderbaum, 2012, p. 9-10).

Stilhoff Sørensen and Söderbaum (2012, p. 11-13) elaborate on the liberal rationale for development. In the 1980s, neoliberal reforms were implemented through *Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAPs) (Stilhoff Sørensen & Söderbaum, 2012, p. 11). These policies emphasised privatisation, trade

liberalisation, and a focus on primary commodity exports. However, these policies often led to increased poverty, unemployment, and social inequality (Stilhoff Sørensen & Söderbaum, 2012, p. 12; Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 9). While international development institutions like the World Bank acknowledged the failures of SAPs, they attributed the problems to poor governance in developing countries rather than questioning the programs themselves (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 9). This shift in focus toward governance paved the way for the promotion of *good governance* as crucial for development. Particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which presented an opportunity for democratisation (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 9; Duffield, 2001, p. 7-8). Neoliberalism thrived on the notion that democracy and free markets were mutually reinforcing, with development emphasising the establishment of states aligned with neoliberal principles. Terms like *fragile* and *failed* states reflect the view that transparent and accountable state institutions are essential for achieving development (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 10-11).

### **3.2.1.1 The End of the Cold War and the Rise of New Wars**

At the end of the Cold War, the concept of *new wars* emerged (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 2:31). Unlike traditional state-centric wars, new wars involve intra-state dynamics, diverse non-state actors, and motivations ranging from economic gain to connections with global criminal networks and terrorism (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 2:31). Especially after the start of the *war on terror*, fragile and/or failed states and these new wars were seen as threats to both development and security, potentially leading to war, violence, and instability. Where the international community increasingly viewed weak states as breeding grounds for terrorism and a danger to global order (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 10; Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 2:11). The notions surrounding the war on terror, new wars, failed and fragile states were all facilitated by globalisation (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 2:110). Contributing to ideas regarding insecurity originating from distant regions could have a significant impact on the security at home. The alignment between development and security after the Cold War is often portrayed

as a shift toward a broader conception of security, expanding beyond military threats to encompass societal challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and well-being (Duffield, 2007, p. 3). This shift and the connections between liberalism, security, development and biopolitics are explored further in the next section.

### **3.3 Linking Development, Security, Liberalism, and Biopolitics**

This section will demonstrate the connections between development, security, liberalism and biopolitics.

#### **3.3.1. A Holistic Approach**

Sandro Mezzadra, Julian Reid, and Ranabir Samaddar (2013, p. 4) argue that understanding liberalism's global dominance requires examining how the concept of *life* has shaped its governance practices. This includes recognising the shift from a human-centred view of "life" to a biospheric one, which is key to understanding the characteristics of neoliberalism and its contemporary biopolitical practices (Mezzadra, Reid, & Samaddar, 2013, p. 4).

In the book *The Biopolitics of Development: Reading Michel Foucault in the Postcolonial Present* from 2013 the authors examine the connection between development and liberalism through the concept of biopolitics. The authors highlight how liberalism and development are biopolitical and fundamentally concerned with managing and regulating life (Mezzadra, Reid & Samaddar, 2013, p. 3). For Foucault (2002, p. 140-141), biopolitics describes a form of power that actively shapes life, as it aims to optimise, control, and administer populations. The authors Mezzadra, Reid, and Samaddar (2013, p. 3) argue that liberalism has spread through promoting development. A process that has involved the commodification of resources and the reconstruction of societies, often leading to negative consequences like increased urbanisation, displacement, and deprivation (Mezzadra, Reid, & Samaddar, 2013, p. 3). Neoliberalism, they argue, intensifies



these principles, emphasising free markets, entrepreneurship and individual liberty as the path to human well-being (Mezzadra, Reid, & Samaddar, 2013, p. 3).

Liberalism has traditionally been understood as a form of humanism, while neoliberalism focuses less on promoting human prosperity and more on the well-being of the entire biosphere (Mezzadra, Reid, & Samaddar, 2013, p. 4). This shift entails a new biopolitical framework where the economy, well-being, freedom, security and the biosphere are intertwined.

### **3.3.1.1 Human Development and Security**

Danielle Beswick and Paul Jackson (2015, p. 11-13) argue in a similar vein that the understanding of security underwent a significant expansion after the Cold War, as the focal point for security shifted from the state to encompassing all aspects of human life. This broader perspective, often referred to as *human security* or *human development*, prioritises the well-being of individuals over state security (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 11-13; Duffield, 2007, p. 3). This goes beyond the absence of war and encompasses health, environment, food, and freedom from violence, both physical and structural (e.g., poverty, oppression) (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 11-12; Stilhoff Sørensen & Söderbaum, 2012, p. 12-13). This blurs the lines between domestic and external threats, recognising that internal problems can destabilise entire regions. Consequently, biopolitics and notions of human security introduce a perspective where external and domestic security concerns intersect (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 2:110). This shift expands the scope of security policy and strategies, making it borderless, domestic, and personal (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2012, p. 60; Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 11-12).

### **3.3.1.2 Liberal Peace and Stability**

Duffield (2001, p. 15-16) argues that there has been a radicalisation of development, which reflects a new understanding of security threats. This landscape is shaped by the notion of *liberal peace*, which promotes liberal values

and institutions as a path to peace, prosperity and international stability (Duffield, 2001, p. 16-17; Alt, 2013, p. 93).

Liberal peace involves restructuring society based on democratic principles and establishing a market economy to address poverty, seen as a security threat linked to violent conflict (Alt, 2013, p. 93). Duffield (2001, p. 15) argues that the liberal peace approach focuses on transforming societies to prevent future conflicts, shifting from the traditional development focus on economic improvement. Hence, development strategies have evolved to address underlying issues and to transform societies, which acknowledges the need for direct intervention to shift power dynamics and reshape attitudes, and beliefs (Duffield, 2001, p. 15).

### **3.3.1.3 Sustainable Development and Resilience**

Furthermore, as discussed above, the emergence of *sustainable development* and aspects of *human development* challenged the traditional models that prioritised macroeconomic growth and argued for a focus on human well-being and environmental preservation (Reid, 2013, p. 107; Reid, 2012, p. 67-78). Reid (2013, p. 108) argues that this shift to prioritising well-being and the biosphere's life-support systems over economic imperatives could serve as a critique of economy-centred development theories. However, according to Duffield (2007, p. 67-69) and Reid (2013, p. 108), neoliberalism has succeeded in aligning economic and ecological rationalities, claiming to secure the biosphere's life through economic means. Thus, sustainable development and neoliberalism, while distinct, intersect in their rationalities of security (Reid, 2013, p. 108; Reid, 2012, p. 68-69).

Sustainable development has adopted neoliberal economic frameworks of governance through institutions, behaviours, and ways of thinking aligned with economic growth and prosperity (Reid, 2013, p. 113). A key concept in this process is *resilience* which originates from ecology and refers to the capacity of living systems to adapt to threats and absorb disturbances without changing their

structure (Reid, 2013, p. 114; Reid, 2012, p. 71). Promoting resilience requires not only a diversity of life forms but also a diverse range of human opportunities, especially economic ones (Folkes et al. 2002, p. 438). This empowers people to adapt and build the capacity to learn, making them more resilient (Reid, 2013, p. 115). This biopolitical approach is primarily a tool for shaping individuals into entrepreneurial subjects who adapt to a changing world by embracing resilience. This process is seen as crucial for the stability of the neoliberal system (Mavelli, 2017, p. 496; Duffield, 2007, 8:115).

### **3.3.2 Biopolitical Dichotomies and Trusteeship**

While Foucault primarily explored biopolitics within a European context, his ideas can be applied to understand discourses surrounding international development. Biopolitics has expanded to encompass broader security concerns, including a focus on universal or global security technologies (Duffield, 2007, p. 16). This expansion has led to development becoming a biopolitical regime that categorises humanity into developed and underdeveloped populations, closely intertwined with racial discourse (Duffield, 2007, p. 16; Reid, 2013, p. 107).

Duffield (2007, p. 16-24) exemplifies this through the two binary positions of *insured life* and *non-insured life*. He discusses the Asian tsunami of 2004 and argues that despite causing massive destruction and loss of life, reinsurers faced limited financial exposure compared to Hurricane Charley in Florida the same year (Duffield, 2007, p. 16). This difference is attributed to fewer insured individuals in the areas affected by the tsunami, highlighting distinct biopolitical strategies for developed and underdeveloped populations respectively (Duffield, 2007, p. 17).

Duffield (2007, p. 17) argues that insured life, often overseen by a government, provides safety nets and various social benefits concerning welfare. However, neoliberal ideologies are reshaping this social landscape, emphasising individual responsibility over collective support. This fosters an environment where

individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their well-being (Duffield, 2007, p. 17). Duffield (2007, p. 17-18) argues that, while industrialised nations have extensive social insurance coverage, populations in Africa and Asia have minimal coverage, leaving many reliant on self-support during crises. This disparity in biopolitical systems forms the basis of a critique of development. Duffield (2007, p. 18) argues that the notion of contemporary development and its policies is often based on the assumption that self-reliance is a viable strategy for underdeveloped nations. When self-reliance fails, humanitarian assistance serves as a last resort (Duffield, 2007, p. 18). For Duffield (2007, p. 19) development aims to contain the destabilising effects of underdevelopment, rather than bridging the divide. Disasters expose the limitations of self-reliance, perpetuating cycles of emergency interventions. Meanwhile, aid and development actors attribute emergencies to lacking self-reliance, prompting renewed efforts to rebuild and enhance resilience (Duffield, 2007, p. 18-19).

Duffield (2010, p. 27-28; 2007, p. 6-7) discusses the fundamental contradiction within liberalism, which he calls the *liberal paradox*. This is due to liberalism's dual nature, where it would promote liberty, equality, and democracy on one hand, and on the other still accept illiberal forms of rule in underdeveloped or ineffective nations (Duffield, 2010, p. 27; Duffield, 2007, p. 7-8). He explores this paradox through the 19th-century colonial order where early liberal thinkers and practitioners, saw representative government as unsuitable for non-European societies "justifying varying degrees of despotic, paternalistic or ameliorative rule abroad" (Duffield, 2010, p. 27; Duffield, 2007, p. 7). These biopolitical dichotomies resonate with postcolonial perspectives, where the construction of a marginalised and underdeveloped *other* inherently defines a dominant and developed *us* (McEwans, 2008, p. 152-155:182).

Duffield (2007, p. 7) drawing from Cowen and Shenton's (1996) work on trusteeship, sees development as a potential solution to this paradox. Cowen and Shenton (1996, p. ix) argue that intentional development is linked to the concept

of trusteeship where “(t)rusteeship is the intent which is expressed, by one source of agency, to develop the capacities of another”. Development is thus linked to an “enlightened, gradualist and educative trusteeship over life” or a moral trusteeship (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4:7), where effective and developed nations are responsible for enhancing the capacities of less effective and developed ones. Trusteeship is understood as embodying development and its initiatives - there can be no development without a trustee (Cowen & Shenton, 1996, p. ix).

### **3.4 Summary**

This essay is grounded in Foucault's theorisations regarding power, discourse, governmentality, and crucially, biopolitics. These concepts form the foundation upon which the analysis is built and include notions about freedom, life processes, power/knowledge, rationality and governance. The connection between liberalism, development, biopolitics, and security provides a core theoretical framework for the essay. Additionally, the conceptualisations of human development and security, liberal peace, sustainable development, resilience, trusteeship, and biopolitical dichotomies will be instrumental in addressing the research questions.

## **4. Research Design and Methodology**

The chapter presents the methodological approach. Firstly, it introduces critical discourse analysis, which forms the basis of my analysis. Secondly, the research process is outlined, encompassing a research design and framework inspired by Dianna R. Mullet's article, *A General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework for Educational Research*. Finally, the chapter contains limitations and reflections on the author's positionality.

### **4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

A *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) approach was employed to explore the research questions. While CDA offers a flexible framework without a rigid set of methods (Mullet, 2018, p. 117-118), it does share some characteristic features. CDA is typically inductive, allowing researchers to move fluidly between data and theory, rather than following a strictly linear process. Furthermore, it rejects the notion of neutral language and acknowledges the inherent subjectivity of research (Mullet, 2018, p. 118). CDA focuses on how power dynamics are embedded in language use and how it can be used to maintain or challenge existing social structures (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 356:376; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 69:76; Mullet, 2018, p. 119).

In essence, CDA examines the role of language as a power resource and how it shapes and legitimises certain types of social practices and unequal power relations (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 356:376; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 69:76; Mullet, 2018, p. 119). Discourse is here viewed as language in speech and writing, it is a form of social practice, and every practice serves as a means of representing the world (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 67-68; Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 356). This aligns closely with Foucault's view of discourse, where language and text are not neutral descriptions of reality. Instead, through language, we construct an image of the social reality we inhabit, thereby

simultaneously creating and influencing that reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 67-68).

From a CDA approach, the social structure we live in encompasses both discursive and non-discursive practices (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 71). Practices that are primarily non-discursive include “physical activities like building a bridge whereas practices such as communication planning are primarily discursive” (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 71). The distinction allows one to examine the two separately and map the connections between the use of language and text with socio-cultural structures and phenomena (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 374-375; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 71). However, discursive and non-discursive practices are interconnected and mutually dependent (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 356-366). The assumption is that discourse can be seen as a specific form of social practice in the use of language in speech and writing (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 71-73). At the same time, this social practice has a dialectical relationship with a certain discursive context, event and social structure that shapes and frames the social practice (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 71-73; Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 374-376). Power can thus be revealed through language and its meaning-making, as language constitutes (and is constituted in the extension) knowledge systems, social relations and identities (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 379-380). By critically examining discourses, we can heighten awareness and challenge existing power dynamics and become more aware of the constraints imposed by language and discourses (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 69). The following section offers a more in-depth discussion of the analytical methodology employed in this study.

## **4.2 Sampling Strategy**

For this study, a *purposive sampling* approach is employed. Thus, documents are deliberately selected, most relevant to the research questions, rather than relying on random sample selection (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Purposive sampling may

provide an in-depth understanding of a strategically chosen sample of data over the generalisability achieved through random sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). This means that my findings cannot be generalised. Since the selection is based on judgement rather than on a random basis, the sample may not be fully representative (Bryman, 2012, p. 418; Babbie, 2004, p. 204). Despite this limitation, the findings, while not generalisable, may offer valuable transferable qualities. In other words, the knowledge gained from this study could apply to similar contexts (Bryman, 2012, p. 391-392).

Sida is an administrative and expert agency that implements international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance on behalf of the Swedish government. Their function is to support activities in accordance with the government's decided strategies (Sida, 2024, p. 3-4). Sida has several active strategies, for example, there are currently 27 bilateral strategies and seven regional ones (Sida, n.db.). Sidas's strategies typically encompass specific support areas, e.g., "Promote freedom and fight oppression". These support areas then include strategic goals, for example, "Strengthened conditions for democratic transition" (Sida, 2024, p. 9; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, p. 2). Currently, Sida has 358 distinct goals, which are translated into over 1,800 ongoing development initiatives spanning over 120 countries (Sida, 2024, p. 9).

However, only three of the geographical strategies are based on the new Reform Agenda that came into force in December 2023. The new Reform Agenda replaces the older policy frameworks *Policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance* (Govt communication 2016/17:60) and the *Strategy for multilateral development policy* (UD2017/21055/FN). To gain a thorough understanding of the Swedish government's vision for development cooperation, the analysis will focus on three newly developed geographic strategies for Myanmar between 2024-2026, Zambia 2024-2028, and the Middle East and Northern Africa region (MENA) 2024-2027, available on the



government website. Additionally, to achieve a comprehensive perspective, the new Reform Agenda will be included.

#### **4.2.1 The Selected Material**

The following materials were chosen for analysis:

- The strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with Myanmar 2024-2026
- The strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with Zambia 2024-2028
- The strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation with the Middle East and Northern Africa 2024-2027 (MENA)
- Development assistance for a new era - freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth (Reform Agenda)

These four documents consist of 57 pages in total. The strategies encompass 11 support areas and 29 strategic goals. Additionally, the Reform Agenda comprises seven thematic priorities that provide direction for Swedish development cooperation, and each thematic priority has a multitude of strategic goals. The Reform Agenda's thematic priorities are as follows:

- 1) Combating poverty through job creation, trade and education;
- 2) Improved health for the most vulnerable;
- 3) Promoting freedom and fighting oppression;
- 4) Expanded and more effective climate aid;
- 5) Strengthening women's and girls' freedom and empowerment;
- 6) Strengthened synergies between development assistance and migration policy;
- 7) Enhanced humanitarian assistance to save lives and alleviate suffering (Sida, 2024, p. 8-9).

The Reform Agenda outlines seven key thematic priorities, but individual country and regional strategies do not necessarily address all of them. This is because each strategy is tailored to the specific needs and context of its target area. While the overall goals remain aligned with the Reform Agenda, the way these goals are expressed and prioritised will differ.

Myanmar's strategy focuses on three thematic areas:

- Promoting freedom and fighting oppression
- Strengthening women's and girls' freedom and empowerment
- Improved health for the most vulnerable, with a special focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues.

Zambia's strategy addresses the following focus areas:

- Human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law
- Economic development and livelihoods
- Environmentally and climate-sustainable development

The Middle East and Northern Africa regional strategy consists of several focus areas, these are:

- Economic development, education, trade and green transition
- Promoting freedom and combat oppression
- Strengthen the freedom and empowerment of women and girls
- Migration and return
- Regional peace and security

### **4.3 Coding and Analysis Process**

The research started with a contextual exploration of the selected material, e.g., a familiarisation of Sida and its governance structure as outlined by the Swedish government. A variety of resources, including reports, policies, and documents, were accessed through Sida's website, the government office website, and Openaid, which is a web tool managed by Sida that promotes transparency in

Swedish aid practices (Sida, n.db.). Following material selection, an exploration of specific documents was undertaken, considering factors such as authorship, target audience, and purpose (Mullet, 2018, p. 122). Key findings include that Sida implements the government's aid policy by executing strategies, the strategies are developed and refined through collaboration with the government, the documents are finalised and published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Sida is financed through tax funds (Sida, 2024; Sida, n.dd.). Simultaneously, an exploration of publications related to biopolitics and development literature was carried out to gain a broader theoretical context.

#### **4.3.1 Software and Matrix Queries**

A qualitative data analysis software named *NVivo* was employed to facilitate the organisation and structuring of the data and codes. NVivo enabled tracking and control of the coding process, allowing for refinement and adding of codes and categories, annotation, and query development. A key analytical function utilised was NVivo's *Matrix Queries*. This feature enabled the identification of patterns and relationships between codes by examining their intersections and divergences (NVivo, n.d.). Through a visual representation of code and category connections, the tool offered a comprehensive overview of Sida's construction of various development issues.

#### **4.3.2 Coding Process**

Before the coding process began, a thorough familiarisation with the material was undertaken, involving a comprehensive reading of all documents and jotting down initial impressions. Subsequently, open coding was employed, where the data was carefully and thoroughly coded sentence by sentence. This approach allowed for the emergence of codes directly from the textual material, ensuring their alignment with the data's language and meaning (Rubin, 2021, p. 189; Charmaz, 2006, p. 47-48). This means, for example, that the code "freedom" was applied when the text explicitly mentioned the word "freedom" or stemmed words or synonyms (free; freedoms; liberty).

The initial coding phase resulted in over 720 unique codes, which was too high a number to manage and make sense of. Duplicate codes, patterns, and potential areas of interest were identified and revised (Rubin, 2021, p. 189). The codes were organised into larger categories through a process of merging and categorisation based on theoretical and empirical insights. This is an important process for analysing and understanding the data, as well as for structuring and organising the codes (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 37-38). There is no given way to categorise codes. Our personal perspectives shape how we categorise things, this subjectivity defines which code goes where, and this is something that we need to be aware of both when processing the data and as readers (Babbie, 2004, p. 120-121). Categories were developed and designed to align closely with the codes and thus the text. Following this initial categorisation, codes and categories underwent further refinement and merging before proceeding to closed coding, which involved re-coding the data based on established themes and categories (Rubin, 2021, p. 189-190). Throughout the entire coding process, continuous refinement of codes and categories was done.

The data consists of 12 categories and 83 codes. See the attached codebook (Appendix - Code Book) for more details.

#### Categories:

- Climate and Environment
- Economy
- Education
- Freedom and Rights
- Gender Equality
- Good Governance
- Health and Well-being
- Humanitarian
- Migration

- Peace
- Resilience
- Security

### **4.3.3 Limitations**

As noted in section 2.1 *Biopolitics, Development and International Aid*, a limitation of the study is the lack of previous research on Swedish development discourse and biopolitics. Another limitation of this essay is the scarcity of data directly aligned with the new Reform Agenda. This limited the selection process, resulting in only three documents available for analysis alongside the Reform Agenda itself. As mentioned in section 2.1, Fredenman (2012) utilised strategy reports, something that has not been available as the Reform Agenda and the chosen strategies are new. Strategy reports are generally more detailed and contain accounts, analyses, and assessments of the results of strategy implementation in relation to stated strategic goals. These reports might be preferable given their greater depth of data and Sida's more specific assessments of their activities. The Reform Agenda and the strategies selected for analysis set an overarching framework and guide for the thematic priorities that Sida should focus on. However, they do not demonstrate the specific work being done, or rather how Sida frames their specific initiatives and contributions.

Furthermore, the Reform Agenda places a strong emphasis on Ukraine and the consequences of Russia's invasion. However, section 1.4 *Increased focus on Ukraine and the surrounding area* in the Reform Agenda is excluded (approximately one page in the entire document). Prior to the invasion, less than 1% of Sweden's ODA was allocated to Ukraine (Openaid, 2021). In contrast, in 2024, 12% of the budget is directed towards Ukraine, surpassing aid to any other country (Openaid, 2024). However, a larger portion of aid is allocated to "developing countries", which is the focus of my bilateral strategies (Openaid, 2024).

Additionally, the documents analysed are in Swedish, which requires additional processing and interpretation of the text when translating quotations, texts, concepts, etc. This can potentially impact the original meaning. To mitigate this, an English version of the Reform Agenda as a reference is utilised when translating quotes for the analysis and discussion sections. The bilateral and regional strategies used for analysis are all translated by me.

A potential limitation is that I chose not to use positive and negative codes, such as “democracy” and “lack of democracy”. Instead, all similar instances are coded with “democracy”. This means that the coding cannot reveal the connotations by simply looking at the number of codes. Thus, it is challenging to grasp the nuances of the data without looking into each code or category and examining the individual references. This approach, while more time-consuming, has facilitated the organisation of the data.

#### **4.4 Reflexivity and Positionality**

Reflexivity is crucial in social sciences and refers to the critical self-awareness employed by researchers throughout the research process. This involves acknowledging how my own background, biases, and experiences can influence the study at every stage (Bryman, 2012, p. 393-394). My background as a white Swedish woman with experience at Sida undeniably shapes my perspective. Interning at Sida in a low-income country provided me with practical experience in the development aid cycle. Additionally, growing up in Sweden has given me an understanding of the political processes that shape and set the framework for Swedish aid. These circumstances have contributed to my prior knowledge and insights into the Swedish development discourse, which has been helpful throughout this process. Furthermore, I hold a generally critical view of development, aligning with many of the theorists I reference in this study. This critical approach is largely influenced by my academic background, where I have become familiarised with critical theories through my studies.

While striving for objectivity, I recognise that it is not fully achievable. However, I have made a conscious effort to be aware of how my background shapes my approach to the topic. Additionally, by employing critical discourse analysis, I acknowledge that language and text are not neutral; rather, they are social activities influenced by the contexts in which they are used, with language having the power to create identities and relationships (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 356:376; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 69:76; Mullet, 2018, p. 119).

## 5. Results

The chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of Sida's development discourse utilising NVivo. Matrix Queries were conducted on the coded data, focusing on codes aligned with Sida's thematic priorities to gain an understanding of their construction of various development issues. Before presenting the Matrix Query results, an overview of the data is presented.

Among the 12 central categories identified, "Good Governance" stands out with 263 references, followed by "Freedom and Rights" with 196 references. Other key areas include "Economy" (181 references), "Security" (158 references), and "Health and Well-being" (119 references).

While these themes dominate, the data also reveals discussions on "Migration" (90 references), "Climate and Environment" (75 references), and "Gender Equality" (61 references). Additionally, topics such as "Humanitarian" (39 references), "Resilience" (32 references), "Peace" (29 references), and "Education" (23 references) contribute to the overall picture.

### 5.1 Summary of the findings

This analysis examines the relationship between different categories used to code Sidas documents. Here is a summary of key findings structured around Sida's thematic priorities, highlighting the three most significant overlaps with other categories and codes. In some cases, several codes (or categories) had the same number of overlaps, therefore in the results - some show only three codes while others have six codes. In addition to the Matrix Queries, a shorter summary of each thematic area is produced, to give the reader an overview of Sida's strategies.

An example of the approach - in analysing the thematic priority "Combating poverty through job creation, trade and education", a Matrix Query is conducted, where the x-axis represents the codes "poverty" and "prosperity", and the y-axis includes all other codes and categories.



### **5.1.1 Matrix Query 1: Combating poverty through job creation, trade and education**

The codes "poverty" and "prosperity" show the strongest connections to:

- **Economy:** economic development; trade; livelihoods; private sector.
- **Freedom and rights:** oppression and discrimination; freedom; empowerment; human rights; ownership.
- **Good governance:** corruption; democracy, international law; rule of law; transition; accountability.

This thematic priority outlines a two-pronged approach to tackling poverty and fostering development in partner countries: supporting market economies and prioritising education (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 9-10). Market-driven growth is seen as a key factor and needs a foundation of strong institutions - the rule of law, functioning financial systems, and frameworks for trade and investment. Local businesses, agriculture, and entrepreneurship also play a vital role. Sida recognises education as a human right and a cornerstone of a healthy society, making the issue crucial for their development strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 9-10; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 2-3; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 3).

### **5.1.2 Matrix Query 2: Improved health for the most vulnerable**

The category "health and well-being" shows the strongest connections to:

- **Economy:** economic development; markets; trade.
- **Freedoms and rights:** oppression and discrimination; SRHR; freedom.
- **Security:** conflict; crises and disasters; hunger.

Priority number two outlines the government plan to improve health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations. It emphasises the importance of strong healthcare systems, disease prevention, and access to sexual and reproductive

health services. Additionally, Sida wants to focus on women's empowerment and combating violence against women (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 10-12; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, p. 3).

### **5.1.3 Matrix Query 3: Promoting freedom and fighting oppression**

The category "freedom and rights" shows the strongest connections to:

- **Good governance:** democracy; rule of law; civil society.
- **Gender equality:** gender equality.
- **Health and well-being:** health; poverty; gender-based violence; basic community services.

Priority number three focuses on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. A core focus is on strengthening democratic institutions and practices. This includes supporting free and fair elections, and fostering democratic political parties, civil society organisations and independent media. The thematic priority also focuses on vulnerable and marginalised groups and their rights, support to human rights defenders, fighting corruption, promoting good governance, and bridging the digital gap (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 12-14; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 3; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, 2-3; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 3).

### **5.1.4 Matrix Query 4: Expanded and more effective climate aid**

The category "climate and environment" shows the strongest connections to:

- **Economy:** business; economic development; mobilising additional finances; livelihoods.
- **Security:** security; crises and disasters; global and regional impacts; hunger,
- **Resilience:** resilience; adaptation.

Priority four outlines Sweden's plan to expand its climate aid efforts and accelerate the global green transition. This involves increased support for major emitters with a focus on local solutions and private-sector involvement. Sida views protecting biodiversity as a key element, as healthy ecosystems are crucial for carbon capture and sustainable food systems. Sweden wants to promote energy efficiency and phase out fossil fuel dependence in partner countries, increase and streamline aid, promote innovation, and mobilise private capital. Additionally, Sweden wants to contribute to green solutions by promoting collaborations with Swedish businesses and universities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 14-15; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 3).

#### ***5.1.5 Matrix Query 5: Strengthening women's and girls' freedom and empowerment***

The category and code "gender equality" show the strongest connections to:

- **Freedom and rights:** empowerment; freedom; human rights.
- **Good governance:** democracy; participation; rule of law.
- **Economy:** economic development; livelihoods; entrepreneurship.

Priority number five focuses on gender equality, and empowering women and girls, particularly in securing their rights and freedoms. This includes increasing access to SRHR information and services, challenging social norms that restrict women's choices, and promoting women's equal participation in decision-making. Sida wants to promote women's economic empowerment through supporting entrepreneurship by providing access to finance, training, and markets. They also advocate for women's equal property rights and work to bridge the digital gender gap. Additionally, the priority mentions issues like child marriage, genital mutilation, and sexual and gender-based violence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 15-17; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 3; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, p.3; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 3).

### **5.1.6 Matrix Query 6: Strengthened synergies between development assistance and migration policy**

The category "migration" shows the strongest connections to:

- **Security:** global and regional impacts; conflict and war; trafficking and smuggling.
- **Economy:** livelihoods; economic development; trade.
- **Freedom and Rights:** human rights; freedom; empowerment; minority rights.

Priority number six outlines the Swedish government's plan to address irregular migration and forced displacement, return and repatriation issues through development assistance. This includes supporting the return and reintegration of migrants, and addressing the root causes that push people to leave their homes. Sweden will use development aid to encourage other countries to manage migration responsibly. This may involve making aid conditional on development cooperation on issues. Sida wants to protect the rights of migrants and refugees and strengthen host communities and their capacity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 17-18; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 3-4).

### **5.1.7 Matrix Query 7: Enhanced humanitarian assistance to save lives and alleviate suffering**

The category and code "humanitarian" show the strongest connections to:

- **Security:** crises and disasters; conflict; global and regional impacts; hunger; stability; terrorism.
- **Economy:** mobilising additional finances; economic development; livelihoods; debt; private sector.
- **Good governance:** international law; civil society; democracy; monitoring.
- **Climate and environment:** climate and environment.

Priority number seven aims to improve humanitarian aid and save lives. It focuses on people affected by conflicts, disasters, or emergencies. Sida will prioritise funding efficiency and have a focus on the most vulnerable. They aim to reduce the gap between needs and funding, especially in disasters. This involves increasing Swedish aid for disasters, strengthening sexual and reproductive health services in refugee camps, and promoting peace efforts. Additionally, Sweden will encourage more countries and institutions to contribute to humanitarian assistance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 18-20).

## 6. Analysis and Discussion

The chapter presents the analysis and discussion regarding Sida's development and humanitarian assistance discourse through a biopolitical lens. The chapter is structured around the seven thematic areas outlined in the Reform Agenda (see 4.3.1 *The Selected Material*). The thematic priorities often overlap and intersect, this is also true at the coding level where categories frequently recur across the different themes (see 5. *Results*). Hence, the analysis does not always address the three most significant overlaps in the Matrix Query. This is to avoid excessive repetition and maintain focus on new aspects relevant to my research questions.

### 6.1 Combating Poverty Through Job Creation, Trade and Education

Analysing Sida's coded data through Matrix Queries reveals a focus: poverty is most frequently mentioned in relation to the economic category, and the categories for "Freedoms and Rights" and "Good Governance". These connections are further highlighted by a quote stating:

*Swedish development assistance should focus on achieving change and working for free and well-functioning democratic societies that raise their standard of living through economic development and trade, and thereby create better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2).*

This quote demonstrates the notion of how freedom, democracy and economic development are positive forces to reduce poverty and oppression. Central to this idea is the framing of poverty as a security threat, which can fuel conflict and instability, thus, eradicating poverty becomes a key objective (Alt, 2013, p. 93). Historically, poverty has been framed as a security problem that can disrupt the liberal order (Duffield, 2010, p. 25-26). It is seen not only to weaken governance and hinder a state's ability to provide basic services but also to fuel instability by increasing the risk of conflict and making individuals more susceptible to

extremist recruitment and criminal activities (Alt, 2013, 93). An example of the connection between security and poverty is demonstrated in the Reform Agenda, where war and conflict “prevent people from reaching their full potential and cause suffering and poverty” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2) which can constitute a “breeding ground for criminality, terrorism, violent extremism, irregular migration and organised crime such as smuggling of arms and drugs and human trafficking in various forms.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2).

Section 6.3 *Promoting Freedom and Fighting Oppression*, further explores the relationship between poverty and notions of good governance through a biopolitical perspective. The focus will now shift to the intersection of poverty and the economy category. The Reform Agenda emphasises promoting synergies between trade and aid, as demonstrated by the quote:

*No country has been lifted out of poverty through international development assistance alone. Global development cooperation – with its limited resources to reach the ambitious goals and targets agreed upon in the 2030 Agenda – can only be a small component of a country’s journey from poverty to prosperity (...) Development assistance can make a valuable contribution, but significantly more needs to be done to reduce poverty. Trade, private investment, loans and domestic resource mobilisation are necessary for countries to be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Stimulating economic growth and trade in our partner countries is thus a significant aspect of the Government’s efforts to tackle poverty in the world.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 6).

This quote illustrates the government’s belief that trade and economic growth are essential components of development and Swedish aid. This focus on free trade aligns with contemporary neoliberal globalisation, a system prioritising the unrestricted movement of capital and trade (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 12). In this context, biopolitics becomes a crucial aspect of liberal governance. It facilitates

the promotion, control, and security of certain global flows, while managing and restricting others, such as uncontrolled migration, trafficking, and terrorism (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 12).

## **6.2 Improved Health for the Most Vulnerable**

The second thematic priority of Swedish official development assistance focuses on improving the health of vulnerable populations, which aligns closely with the concept of biopolitics. Hence, it explicitly concerns processes for the management of human bodies to optimise a population's health, well-being and overall productivity (Duffield, 2007, p. 5; Hellberg, 2020, p. 188-189).

The data suggests a strong correlation between issues of economy, health and well-being. Economic development, markets and trade, appear to be essential for good health and achieving a higher quality of life. The analysis also reveals overlaps with the categories of “Freedom and rights” and “Security”. The quote below illustrates these connections:

*The COVID-19 pandemic caused the largest global increase in poverty – for both states and individuals – in several decades, and its consequences for health, education, economies and societies around the world are still tangible. This illustrates that functioning health and medical care is a prerequisite for local economic development and provides protection against future health crises. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 3)*

The Reform Agenda identifies Covid-19 and its consequences as multi-level threats to both individuals and states. Emphasising pandemic preparedness and the strengthening of health systems reflects a biopolitical concern with security, and underscores Sweden's perceived moral imperative to contribute to development efforts that mitigate these risks, thereby enhancing their own security (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4).



Furthermore, the focus for Sida's contributions must be prioritised on "Better conditions for good health and strengthened health systems" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 11), and "Prevent and combat health threats, including pandemics and antimicrobial resistance" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 11) and "Sexual and reproductive health and rights" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 11). Specific examples include supporting recipient countries' capacity to manufacture vaccines and medicines, mental health support, combating the global threat of antibiotic resistance, and integrating SRHR into education and health systems (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 11). This reflects Sida's commitment to shaping health outcomes and the necessity of intervention to ensure healthy populations. Furthermore, the Reform Agenda states that:

*Good health and education are prerequisites for people to reach their full potential. Investments in health and education are essential for a society's development and prosperity. The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of protecting and promoting health. This requires a combination of functioning health systems, measures to prevent and combat health threats, improved conditions for access to good health and promoting everyone's full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 10-11)

The quote suggests education and health are crucial for both individual well-being and maximising human potential. From a biopolitical perspective, the Swedish investments in these areas can be seen as tools for shaping a population's life chances and capabilities. By prioritising these areas, the government essentially manages the population towards a state of high productivity and well-being. This approach exemplifies a biopolitical strategy of optimisation, where the government sets standards and norms for health, well-being, and sexual and reproductive health rights (Duffield, 2007, p. 5; Hellberg, 2020, p. 188-189; Foucault, 2002, p. 138).

This further aligns with biopolitical governance which utilises statistics, forecasts, and various measurements to intervene in matters of health and well-being, ultimately shaping these outcomes (Repo, 2015, p. 12). By collecting and analysing data on demographics, life processes and the human body - these issues become of political concern and subject to regulation by the state and various institutions (Axelson & Qvarsebo, 2017, p. 63; Foucault, 2002, p. 137-158). This justifies interventions aimed at securing life, mirroring Sida's approach to improving health systems. This technology of biopolitics links power with rationality and knowledge production. Foucault (2002, p. 35:108) argued for a mutually constitutive relationship between the two, where power shapes what counts as legitimate knowledge, science, and even "truths". This has significant implications for governmentality and thus biopolitics. By producing and maintaining specific "truths" the governing can influence what actions seem rational and sensible (Dean, 2010, p. 18-19). In this case, the production of knowledge within the development discourse influences the construction of "truths", prioritisation, and the approaches to development efforts and goals.

One such "truth" may be the view of resilience within the Swedish development discourse. Sida's Reform Agenda prioritises building resilient healthcare systems, which is also addressed in the Zambia strategy and the MENA strategy. The MENA strategy specifically highlights the importance by constructing the objective that Sida's operations must contribute to "(r)esilient health care systems, especially health care skills provision and education, and improved access to sexual and reproductive health and rights" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 4). Sweden's aim to contribute to resilient health systems, skills development and education in health and medical care reflects a biopolitical strategy to ensure populations are robust and capable of withstanding health threats (Reid, 2013, p. 114-115). The emphasis on fostering resilience within populations means equipping individuals and communities with the resources and knowledge to adapt to threats like pandemics, natural disasters, and economic hardship (Folkes et al. 2002, p. 438; Reid, 2013, p. 114).

### 6.3 Promoting Freedom and Fighting Oppression

Priority number three focuses on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, this focus is often presented as the key to achieving global stability (Alt, 2013, p. 91). One example of this focus can be found in this quote:

*Respect for democracy and the rule of law is key to the enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. Democracy is crucial for freedom, peace and security, and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Free elections are the foundation of democracy. Development cooperation plays an important role in efforts to counter the democratic backsliding in many parts of the world. Sweden will be a strong voice and actor for democracy, human rights, freedom and the rule of law, in order to increase people's freedom and combat oppression.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 12).

Within each strategy and in the Reform Agenda, objectives relating to democracy and freedoms and rights are addressed. The Reform Agenda more specifically expresses the objectives of working with "prioritising support to institutions and vital societal functions in partner countries that implement reforms in a democratic direction", "promote freedom of religion or belief, including the right not to have a religion, secular legislation and application of the law (...)", and "supporting activities that strengthen democratic political parties and multi-party systems" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 12-13).

This aligns with the conceptualisation of *liberal peace*, where liberal and/or democratic institutions are believed to create the foundation for peaceful coexistence and prosperity (Duffield, 2001, p. 16-17). A liberal peace approach promotes liberal values, democratic principles and institutions as the foundation for peace and prosperity (Duffield, 2001, p. 16-17). The aim is to promote stability by fostering cooperation through partnership and inclusion within global networks, and thus managing economic, political, and social processes (Duffield,

2001, p. 34). Poverty reduction, for example, is addressed through promoting free markets (Alt, 2013, p. 93), as elaborated above in section *6.1 Combating poverty through job creation, trade and education*. The liberal peace approach can be seen as a biopolitical strategy since it aims to promote specific norms and behaviours deemed beneficial to optimise the population's capabilities and address issues that could destabilise a region (Duffield, 2001, p. 15-16).

The data shows that freedoms and rights are closely linked to the category of "Good Governance," particularly under the codes "Democracy" and "Rule of Law." The Reform Agenda emphasises that "Development cooperation is one of the most important foreign policy tools for pursuing and protecting Swedish interests and tackling the challenges that Sweden and the world are facing" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2). Thus, aid is a crucial element of Sweden's foreign policy and interests. The documents portray Sweden as a voice for democracy, human rights, freedom and the rule of law. The Reform Agenda also asserts that "Swedish development assistance should not support states or actors that are non-democratic or obstruct the rules-based world order and thus undermine Swedish interests" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 5). Moreover, the agenda stresses "clarifying to the governments of partner countries that Swedish assistance to states or actors working closely with states comes with clear expectations of reforms aimed at achieving common objectives. Otherwise, cooperation may be reprioritised" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 27).

This implies that Swedish development assistance is conditional, distributed by Sida with the expectation that recipients meet certain criteria, arguably framed from a Western perspective (Duffield, 2007, p. 1-31). Additionally, the emphasis on "Swedish priorities" and "Swedish interests" within the official guidelines for selecting development cooperation partners also suggests a degree of conditionality (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c). The notion of liberal peace can be seen as a system of incentives and

disincentives, where cooperation leads to development aid and access to global markets, while non-cooperation risks isolation and aid restrictions (Duffield, 2001, p. 34). This dynamic is reflected in Sida's strategies, e.g.: "(w)hen Sweden cooperates with other countries through development assistance activities, there is a clear expectation of a mutual willingness to engage in constructive cooperation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 4). Another example is when Sida states "Development cooperation only works when the parties share common interests and values" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 9). Additionally, Sida's strategies are called "development cooperation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c) with recipient countries and regions, indicating a mutually beneficial relationship. However, since the data shows that the aid is conditional, it raises the question of how much negotiating power recipients truly possess.. The emphasis on shared values as the basis for partnership and development assistance can be interpreted from a biopolitical perspective. In this framework, certain populations are excluded, while others are allowed to participate in the community that Sida represents.

Furthermore, liberalism as a governance rationale seeks to empower individuals through freedom itself while maintaining order, constantly balancing between freedom and control (Duffield, 2007, p. 6-7). Development is presented as a potential solution, involving a gradual, educative trusteeship over life (Duffield, 2007, p. 7). Contemporary notions of trusteeship focus on securing freedom by supporting households and community organisations through strategies that foster economic autonomy (Duffield, 2007, p. 8). This support for local autonomy promotes self-reliance and self-realisation, aligning with sustainable development discourse (Duffield, 2007, p. 8), and will be addressed in section 6.4 *Expanded and More Effective Climate Aid*. This intersects with biopolitical notions, where development, or the liberal governance rationale addresses socio-economic crises by managing life processes at the population level (Repo, 2015, p. 11-12; Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 12; Duffield, 2007, p. 5; Dean, 1995, p. 113). Trusteeship and

biopolitics address the challenge of determining the appropriate scope of governance: excessive regulation suppresses freedom, while insufficient regulation can cause social disorder (Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 178; Duffield 2007, p. 6).

If development is linked to an “enlightened, gradualist and educative trusteeship over life” (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4:7), where effective and developed nations are responsible for enhancing the capacities of less effective and developed ones. It entails a biopolitical dichotomy, determining which populations align with the liberal framework’s conception of what is deemed good or bad (Duffield, 2007, p. 6-8:217). Ultimately, dividing the world’s populations into *developed/underdeveloped* and *insured/non-insured* groups or *effective/ineffective*, each managed by different sets of institutions and interventions (Duffield, 2007, p. 6-8:28:217). Aid-dependent populations are considered underdeveloped within a capitalist framework, representing the surplus and the uninsured life, thus, in need of trustees to become self-reliant (Duffield, 2007, p. 13-14:216-218; Cowen & Shenton, 1996). These biopolitical dichotomies align with a post-colonial understanding of the concept. In this framework, the construction of the *other* simultaneously constructs an understanding of *us/we* (McEwans, 2008, p. 152-155:182). This construction of binary opposites linked to populations reinforces the liberal understanding of development as a technology of security (Duffield, 2007, p. 13).

Within the data, Sweden is portrayed as “generous” and as shouldering the responsibility that comes with being a major donor, acting as a strong voice for democracy and human rights, and promoting a rules-based world order (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 4:12:28; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, p. 1). Additionally, Sweden is constructed as “world-leading in various fields” and capable of offering sustainable solutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 8; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). In contrast, aid recipients are often attributed as suffering from widespread corruption, increased poverty, weakened education

and health systems, vulnerability to climate change, weak democratisation and having a lack of respect for human freedoms and rights and not following international law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c). This underscores the government's construction of Sweden, its capability and competence, and simultaneously framing the characteristics and needs of recipients.

#### **6.4 Expanded and More Effective Climate Aid**

The thematic priority regarding climate and environmental issues shows a clear overlap with the category of “Economy”, as well as with “Security” and “Resilience”. As demonstrated earlier, economic development, markets, and trade are crucial for improving the living standards of the world’s poor populations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c). This focus on the economy extends beyond reducing poverty and is also acknowledged as crucial to addressing climate and environmental issues (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 13-15; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 3; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c). Development assistance should be strategically directed towards resource mobilisation, promoting local capacities and infrastructure, the advancement of technological innovation, and ultimately, contributing to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 13-15; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 3; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 6). These two quotes support this notion:

*(D)evelop local capacity and conditions for financial markets, resource mobilisation and an attractive investment climate to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.*  
(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 15).

and:

*The synergies between development cooperation, promotion and trade policy are part of the reform to promote sustainable development and economic growth.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 6).

These quotes emphasise economic growth, markets, local capacity, resource mobilisation and trade as strategies to reduce poverty, achieve the SDGs, and address climate change. Additionally, environmental and climate issues affect security. Climate change, for instance, is linked to an "increased risk of infectious diseases" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023 p. 3). It contributes to greater conflict risks, security threats, and a rise in refugees (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 5-6). Meaning that environmental and climate issues do not only affect the country or region in question, but can contribute to risks that can have global or regional consequences, and thus, potentially affecting Sweden.

Furthermore, the concept of, or notions regarding *resilience* recur across all of Sida's thematic priorities. The concept originates from ecology and describes the ability of systems to adapt to threats and absorb disturbances while maintaining their core functions (Reid, 2013, p. 114). Resilience extends beyond the field of ecology and environment and has become a central concept within the discourse of sustainable development (Reid, 2013, p. 114). Consequently, resilience plays a crucial role in Sweden's development discourse and international commitments. Through regulatory and disciplinary interventions, sustainable development aims to diversify people's capabilities so they can manage risks and maintain a state of self-reliance (Duffield, 2007, p. 114-115; Stilhoff Sørensen, 2012, p. 60). This narrative also fits the main reference point for liberal governance: *freedom* (Duffield, 2007, p. 7; Axelsson & Qvorsebo, 2017, p. 95). Where individuals, communities, and households seen as resilient and capable of self-reliance are viewed as exercising fundamental freedom, aligning with the neoliberal stress on individual responsibility (Reid, 2012, p. 70-71). Duffield (2007) argues:



*(A) neoliberal political agenda that shifts the burden of supporting life from states to people. It is a population, however, reconfigured in risk-management terms as social entrepreneurs or active citizens, in this case operating at the level of the household, community and basic needs. (p. 69).*

The framework aims to discipline and conform subjects through the notion of self-governance, where subjects seen as resilient are viewed as exercising fundamental freedom, and responsible for their own well-being (Reid, 2012, p. 70-71). The biopolitical approach aims to produce entrepreneurial subjects accepting the rational of resilience as the ultimate way of life for “developing” populations (Mavelli, 2017, p. 496; Duffield, 2007). One quote from the Reform Agenda that illustrates this notion is:

*The activities shall contribute to securing livelihoods for the poorest to strengthen their resilience and enable them to make their own investments in health, education, and entrepreneurship. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 6).*

Furthermore, the data emphasises, as mentioned before, “(t)rade, private investment, loans and domestic resource mobilisation are necessary for countries to be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 6). This highlights the potential of neoliberal economic principles to contribute to human and biospheric well-being. Sida's focus on connecting economic approaches with sustainable development exemplifies how neoliberal economic rationality has permeated ecological concerns (Duffield, 2007, p. 67-69; Reid, 2013, p. 108). Neoliberalism presents itself as a solution, claiming that economic strategies can be used to ensure the well-being of the biosphere. Reid (2013) states that:

*Alleviating threats to the biosphere requires improving the resilience of the poor, especially, because it is precisely the poor that are most 'ecologically ignorant' and thus most prone to using 'ecosystem services' in non-sustainable ways. (p. 115)*

Global development institutions target the resilience of the poor, arguing for neoliberal frameworks and policies that aim to reduce this ignorance and ensure sustainable use of ecosystems. This involves extending property rights to ecosystem services, promoting market participation, and building governance systems to monitor resource use (Reid, 2013, p. 115-116). Quotes like: “(w)idespread use of wood and coal burning poses significant health risks, climate impacts, and deforestation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 4), and “(r)ights related to the ownership and use of land and natural resources are crucial for several areas within the strategy's objectives” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, p. 6), and finally “(c)apacity and knowledge for sustainable management and use of natural resources that are fundamental to people's livelihoods should be supported, and biodiversity should be protected, conserved, and restored” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 6), can be seen as illustrating Reid’s argument.

## **6.5 Strengthening Women’s and Girls’ Freedom and Empowerment**

The Reform Agenda emphasises two key focus areas for advancing gender equality in aid policy: "Promoting women’s and girls’ ability to freely decide over their lives and bodies" and "Strengthening women’s and girls’ economic empowerment" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 16). The first focus area includes initiatives to enhance women's and girls' control over their lives and bodies. This involves improving their sexual and reproductive health and rights, combating violence and discriminatory norms, and promoting education and political participation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 15-17). The second focus area is dedicated to strengthening women's and girls' economic opportunities through e.g., entrepreneurship and access to markets.

This thematic priority intersects with the category of “Freedom and Rights”, which is demonstrated by this quote:

*Gender equality is a matter of freedom and a Swedish core value. It is both an end in itself and a means to achieve other ends. The starting point for the Government’s work on gender equality is the equal value of each individual.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 15).

Biopolitics as a form of power seeks to manage the population's health and well-being. This involves shaping individuals through the regulation of their thoughts and actions to produce particular outcomes and behaviours (Repo, 2015, p. 12). The quote above highlights Sweden's self-perception of moral superiority, where gender equality is presented as freedom and thus central to the principles of liberal governance rationale. This framing necessitates intervention to promote normalisation.

As argued in section 6.3 *Promoting Freedom and Fighting Oppression* regarding biopolitical dichotomies, biopolitics entails that populations have distinct identities, which means that it is possible to separate them categorically (Hellberg, 2020, p. 189-190; Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 177-178). Biopolitics influence manifests through creating and maintaining different living conditions for various demographic groups. It applies to lifestyles and certain populations since the premise is that people and populations should self-govern based on established knowledge. Consequently, those who diverge from this framework of perceived rational behaviour are distinguished from the rest (Hellberg, 2020, p. 189-190; Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 177-178). Recipients of aid are often framed as discriminatory against women and girls (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c). A clear example of this is found in the Reform Agenda, the MENA strategy, and the Zambia strategy, which all specifically

mention the importance of challenging norms and practices that restrict women and girls (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 16; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 3:9-10; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c, p. 5). Thus, the importance of development cooperation is emphasised, where "Swedish development assistance will be a clear voice and force for gender equality, with a particular focus on strengthening women's and girls' rights and freedoms, empowerment and opportunities." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 15).

Economic development, entrepreneurship, and livelihoods are recognised as crucial elements in promoting gender equality. The data reveals that women in recipient countries face a range of discriminatory barriers and restrictive social norms (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c). The Reform Agenda further states that:

*Women's and girls' freedom to decide over their own lives and their opportunities to participate in society in the same way as men and boys are not only goals in themselves, but also contributing factors that promote the development of society as a whole.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p. 16).

This is linked to the importance of strengthening women and girls' economic empowerment (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p.16). Sida wants to:

*(P)romote women's entrepreneurship, including market access, micro-loans, education and training and entrepreneurship in local business sectors, as well as women's equal legal rights of ownership, inheritance and possession, in order to strengthen women's economic empowerment.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p. 17).

Sweden aims to empower women and girls as effective and independent economic agents by working to eliminate barriers that hinder women's economic

empowerment (Duffield, 2007, p. 105). This aligns with previous discussions emphasising neoliberal economic principles as a means to achieve sustainable development and overall well-being (Mezzadra, Reid, & Samaddar, 2013, p. 3; Alt, 2013, p. 93; Duffield, 2007, p. 69).

## **6.6 Strengthened Synergies Between Development Assistance and Migration Policy**

The new Reform Agenda emphasises that “Sweden should speak with one coherent voice” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 5). The agenda further states:

*By ensuring coordination and coherence between various policy areas – such as development policy, foreign policy, security policy, trade policy, climate policy and migration policy – we promote a long-term perspective, effectiveness and results in Swedish development assistance policy, and increase the impact of Swedish interests globally, but also bilaterally with other countries.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 4)

The government wants to strengthen the synergies between development cooperation and other policy areas. This approach is demonstrated throughout the analysed data and aims to simultaneously advance and safeguard Swedish interests within the framework of development initiatives. The Reform Agenda explicitly recognises development cooperation as a crucial foreign policy instrument for advancing Swedish interests and addressing challenges (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2). The agenda emphasises Swedish self-interest and explicitly connects development cooperation to security concerns, framing aid as a strategic instrument to mitigate threats to Sweden's stability and prosperity. Two quotes that exemplify this notion are:

*War and conflicts both in and outside our neighbourhood affect Sweden's security and prosperity. They prevent people from reaching their full*

*potential and cause suffering and poverty, which forces people to flee. At the same time, they provide a breeding ground for criminality, terrorism, violent extremism, irregular migration and organised crime such as smuggling of arms and drugs and human trafficking in various forms. This has negative effects on democracy, due process, the rule of law and respect for human rights and freedoms. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2)*

and:

*Tensions and societal problems that have resulted from very extensive illegal migration are also putting a strain on Europe and our part of the world. Effective development assistance will help relieve that strain. To achieve sustainable development, development assistance should not only be focused on effective measures to reduce the root causes of irregular migration, but also serve as a tool to counteract irregular migration, increase return and contribute to effectively promoting voluntary repatriation. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2)*

The government's framing of security and development as connected also aligns with the notion that developed nations have a moral duty and incentive to improve the lives of people in less developed countries (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4). This incentive comes from the need to safeguard one's own prosperity, and as a result, development and security have become intertwined and mutually supportive objectives driving Western interventions (Duffield, 2007, p. 2). The data reveals multiple aspects framed as potential security concerns that can affect the stability, including war, climate change, terrorism, crime, and lack of freedoms as well as poverty as discussed in section 6.1 *Combating Poverty Through Job Creation, Trade and Education*. Additionally, migration emerges as a crucial security issue for the government. Strengthened synergies between development assistance and migration policy are highlighted as one of the thematic priorities for Swedish aid

policy. The opening statement on thematic priority regarding migration clearly outlines this point:

*A particular priority is to safeguard Swedish interests in countering irregular migration and its risks, promoting return, voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, and mitigating the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. Development cooperation has a key role to play in strengthening the positive contribution of returning and repatriated migrants to development in low- and middle-income countries.* (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 17)

Swedish development cooperation has placed a strong emphasis on combating irregular migration. This involves addressing root causes, facilitating repatriation, and preventing illegal immigration, framed as crucial for Sweden's security and the achievement of SDGs (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 17). The government wants to make aid conditional on recipient countries taking back their deported citizens, hence, linking development assistance to migration control (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 16). This approach aligns with the issue of conditional aid and power dynamics, brought up in section 6.3 *Promoting Freedom and Fighting Oppression*, as well as the discussion regarding how biopolitics facilitates beneficial global exchanges while simultaneously regulating undesirable flows made in section 6.1 *Combating Poverty Through Job Creation, trade and education* (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 12). The MENA strategy states that:

*The MENA-region has given rise to the world's largest refugee and migration flows, and many have tried to make their way from the region to Europe, not least to Sweden, which has put a strain on the EU.* (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 5)

Global circulation has given rise to a complex security landscape, blurring the lines between internal and external borders (Beswick & Jackson, 2015, p. 2:110). In response, Sweden wants to control and restrict various movements. This entails that Swedish development assistance should enhance migration and asylum management capabilities while fortifying border controls in transit countries (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 17; Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2024a, p. 4). This approach necessitates differentiating between desirable and undesirable flows, such as investment, trade, and skilled labour versus irregular migration, crime, and terrorism (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 12; Duffield, 2007, p. 30:187). The aim is to reduce the number of migrants, and control irregular migration - employing various biopolitical strategies that frame them as a threat to the stability in “our part of the world” (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 2).

## **6.7 Enhanced Humanitarian Assistance to Save Lives and Alleviate Suffering**

The last thematic priority concerns humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian aid, as with development aid, can be seen as a governance tool aimed at promoting security, rather than simply improving lives (Duffield, 2007, p. 17). The category “Humanitarian” overlaps most frequently with the category for security and concerns, e.g., disasters, crises, and conflicts which can have far-reaching consequences on both regional and global scales, highlighting the need for intervention (Duffield 2007, p. 2). Additionally, the data emphasises the need for coordinated humanitarian and development response to promote resilience. This is highlighted by the Myanmar strategy, which states:

*The overall support within the strategy should contribute to supporting democratic actors in Myanmar and reaching people in the most vulnerable situations with the aim of promoting individual and societal resilience. A crucial component to achieving this is strengthened cooperation between humanitarian aid and development efforts. Development cooperation plays a vital role in addressing the root causes of crises and in strengthening the*



*resilience and recovery capacity of poor and vulnerable people.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, p. 5)

Fostering resilient populations is viewed as a viable strategy for the non-insured, underdeveloped and ineffective populations and states, as discussed in section 6.4 *Expanded and More Effective Climate Aid*, where humanitarian assistance serves as the last resort when self-reliance fails (Duffield, 2007, p. 18). However, disasters often reveal the limitations of resilience, leading to cycles of emergency interventions, where aid and development actors attribute these emergencies to a lack of self-reliance, which drives renewed efforts to rebuild and strengthen resilience (Duffield, 2007, p. 18-19). Furthermore, the Reform Agenda states that:

*Humanitarian needs are increasing globally. Humanitarian assistance differs from development assistance and is based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. (...) The objective of Sweden's humanitarian assistance is to save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold the human dignity of people in need who have been, or are at risk of being, affected by armed conflicts, terrorism, natural disasters or other emergencies.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 18-19)

The main objective of Swedish humanitarian aid is to alleviate suffering, save lives, and uphold human dignity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 18-19). This approach emphasises that humanitarian aid is distinct from development cooperation, focusing primarily on addressing basic needs with impartiality and neutrality. However, as previously mentioned, the push to "strengthen cooperation between humanitarian aid and development efforts" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b, p. 5) could suggest that humanitarian assistance is more politically motivated than it appears, potentially serving to enhance and safeguard Swedish interests. The Reform Agenda also calls for "clearer prioritisation in humanitarian assistance" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 20), details on these priorities are lacking, making it difficult to assess. But by providing humanitarian aid,

organisations and states are not just offering relief but are also exerting a form of power over the populations they help. This assistance can determine, based on e.g., prioritisation, who receives aid, under what conditions, and for how long, thereby controlling not just the physical survival but also the social and political life of affected populations.

## 7. Conclusion

Through this paper, a biopolitical lens has been adopted to analyse Sida's development and humanitarian discourse. By examining Sida's policies through the developed theoretical framework, the study has explored how these policies align with broader biopolitical strategies that aim to shape the lives of individuals and communities in recipient countries. Through a critical discourse analysis of four policy documents, the research has answered the central question: *How do Sida's development and humanitarian policies reflect biopolitical governance?* And the two related sub-questions: 1) *How does Sida construct its interventions and aid recipients?* and 2) *How do these constructions align with biopolitical notions such as governance of populations and the regulation of life processes?*

Biopolitical analysis examines how power is exercised over populations through the management of life itself (Repo, 2015, p. 11-12; Foucault, 2002, p. 137-143). The analysis clearly demonstrates that development and security are interconnected and mutually reinforcing objectives, contributing to Sweden's overall prosperity. Notably, the analysis has highlighted the construction of biopolitical dichotomies, determining what and who are perceived in a positive or negative light. This includes distinctions between developed/undeveloped and effective/ineffective populations (Hellberg, 2020, p. 189-190; Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 177-178; Duffield, 2007, p. 6-8:28:217).

The analysis suggests that certain groups may be deemed unworthy of support or inclusion based on their perceived values, beliefs, or behaviours. This can lead to the exclusion of these groups from access to resources, opportunities, and the broader global community (Duffield, 2007, p. 1-31; Hellberg, 2020, p. 189-190). Sida's policies suggest a strong alignment with Sweden's own interests and priorities, and frames Sweden's role in development as crucial and having a moral obligation to help the vulnerable peoples of the world (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4). However, there is also a clear self-interest in development aid, as it promotes

Sweden's own security and interests by fostering stability and order (Duffield, 2007, p. 2). Sweden presents itself as a generous donor, committed to promoting democracy, equality, human rights, and a rules-based international order. At the same time, aid recipients are often framed as having weak democratic institutions, lack of respect for human rights and freedoms, having customs and norms that hinder equality and widespread poverty and corruption. Sweden's policies implicitly constructs certain norms and values as desirable, creating a hierarchy that aligns these values with developed populations, while those lacking them are viewed as less developed (Duffield, 2007, p. 1-31). This distinction could challenge Sweden's way of life, underscoring a perceived moral responsibility to intervene and promote values aligned with Swedish interests and priorities. From a biopolitical perspective, this can be seen as an effort to normalise certain values and norms, trying to align recipient populations with what Sweden considers sensible and true (Duffield, 2001, p. 15-17; Dean, 2010, p. 18-19; Axelson & Qvarsebo, 2017, p. 63-64).

In order to protect and promote Sweden's interests and priorities, the government wants Sweden to have a coherent voice, aligning its aid policies and efforts with other policy areas such as foreign affairs, migration, trade, and security. Although Sida frames its aid as a cooperation, implying mutual benefits, the analysis shows that Sweden's ODA operates as a conditional relationship, where aid is distributed based on recipient countries meeting specific criteria aligning with Swedish interests and priorities. Sweden's emphasis on its own interests, priorities and even values as essential for ODA can be seen as a biopolitical strategy, potentially excluding certain populations while privileging others within a framework constructed by Sweden (Duffield, 2001, p. 15-17:34). Recipients may feel pressures to comply in order to secure aid, thereby limiting their bargaining power and creating an asymmetrical power dynamic. As the donor nation, Sweden holds the authority to decide who receives aid and under what conditions. Consequently, Swedish values, norms, and knowledge may be seen as being exported, potentially reinforcing existing power structures and stereotypes (Duffield, 2007, p. 1-31).

Sweden's coherent voice will also influence the conditional nature of Swedish aid, particularly in relation to migration. Sweden seeks to use aid as a tool to influence the migration policies of recipient countries, effectively linking development assistance to migration control.

Swedish aid is also directed towards health and education initiatives which underscores the government's aspiration to optimise population health, well-being, and ultimately, productivity. The use of data, statistics, and forecasting to guide health interventions is central to biopolitical governance and the optimisation of human capital. The analysis shows that Sweden's development strategy is closely linked to knowledge production, where power dynamics shape what is considered legitimate knowledge and, in turn, guide development initiatives (Foucault, 2003, p. 243; Duffield, 2007, p. 5; Dean, 2010, p. 18-19; Repo, 2015, p. 12).

The focus on trade, markets, economic development and entrepreneurship recurs in the data. Not at least, is it seen as a central part of achieving Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, and thus central to Sweden's work to create better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. This focus goes hand in hand with neoliberal globalisation where biopolitical control over various movements becomes central. Intended to manage and promote good movements and hinder bad ones such as irregular migration (Stilhoff Sørensen, 2010, p. 12). The connection between migration policy and aid policy constitutes a clear biopolitical mechanism for managing and controlling populations in order to protect Sweden, and "our part of the world".

The analysis reveals that neoliberal principles are constructed as a solution to achieve sustainable development and to ensure the well-being of the biosphere (Mezzadra, Reid, & Samaddar, 2013, p. 3; Alt, 2013, p. 93; Duffield, 2007, p. 69). Not least through the focus on freedom, and the ultimate freedom of resilience and self-reliance. By focusing on individual and community resilience, responsibility for addressing systemic challenges is shifted to individuals. Consequently, those

deemed "resilient" and capable of self-sufficiency are celebrated as embodying a fundamental freedom, aligning with neoliberal ideals of individual responsibility (Reid, 2012, p. 70-71; Mavelli, 2017, p. 496; Duffield, 2007, p. 67-69).

Sweden wants to educate, build capacity and promote resilience against economic hardship, health crises, natural disasters, climate change, and conflict. This biopolitical approach constructs individuals as self-reliant entrepreneurs forced to adapt to an unchanging world of hardships and by normalising resilience as the only rational response. This process not only integrates individuals into this system but actively shapes their identities to conform to its values, ultimately reinforcing its stability (Mavelli, 2017, p. 496; Duffield, 2007, p. 8:115; Reid, 2012, p. 70-71). The analysis also shows that resilience is one of the biopolitical strategies that target aid recipients, that is, those who are constructed as possessing norms and values that can threaten developed ways of life. This is the strategy of the surplus and uninsured lives (Duffield, 2007, p. 13-14:216-218).

In short, Sweden presents itself, its ODA, and development work as generous, significant, morally justified and desirable, in order to create better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. Recipients of the aid are seen to lack many of the values and norms attributed to Sweden, who need guidance to set up the goals that are presented as sensible and true according to prevailing knowledge production (Duffield, 2007, p. 2-4:7:227; Cowen & Shenton, 1996; Foucault, 2003, p. 241-244). The interconnectedness of development and security reflects a liberal governance rationale that focuses on securing population, economic, and societal processes. This is further linked to biopolitical strategies, which employs data and forecasting to manage populations (Foucault, 2003, p. 243; Repo, 2015, p. 12; Duffield, 2007, p. 5). By defining what constitutes legitimate knowledge affects how populations are perceived, classified, and managed (Hellberg, 2020, p. 189-190; Hellberg & Knutsson, 2018, p. 177-178). This extends beyond health issues to encompass all life processes and

involves making decisions about where resources are allocated and how lives are improved or sustained, which is a core aspect of biopolitical governance.

## 7.1 Reflection

This paper has examined four of Sida's policy documents through a biopolitical lens, demonstrating and exemplifying biopolitical discourse within Sweden's development discourse. I believe my findings can contribute to a broader understanding of contemporary development discourse, revealing power imbalances and self-interest in what is often perceived as altruistic and moral initiatives. Additionally, I realise that I may have addressed too many aspects in this study. Recognising the breadth of this analysis, future research could benefit from a more focused exploration of specific biopolitical strategies, such as dichotomies, health statistics, or resilience. However, I did choose to exclude the part of the Reform Agenda that deals with Sweden's focus on Ukraine, which I believe was a good choice since it would fragment and broaden the analysis even more. While an analysis of Sweden's ODA and biopolitical strategies linked to Ukraine is warranted, it is probably a topic that demands its own research and paper.

Throughout the process, I encountered several challenges, particularly in coding the material. In hindsight, I believe a more streamlined approach could have been adopted, e.g., conducting a thematic qualitative analysis informed more by theory initially. While there can be a strength in that the data have been processed excessively, I think it led to unnecessary complexity and that similar conclusions could have been reached through a different method. I also acknowledge that my essay has a consistently critical stance, influenced both by the theoretical framework and my personal perspectives. While I have mentioned this in section *4.4 Reflexivity and Positionality*, I believe that the inclusion of more nuanced viewpoints could have strengthened the overall analysis.





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## Appendix - Code book

Category	Codes	Summary descriptions	Examples
<b>Climate and Environment</b> (75 references)	Biodiversity (6) Climate and environment (32) Emissions (7) Fossil free energy (7) Green transition (19) Sustainable management of resources (4)	Refers to elements that can be linked to the environment, natural resources, ecosystems, climate change etc. I have incorporated energy issues since they connect to the Green transition and emissions.	<p>“Biodiversity is under serious threat and needs to be protected, both on land and in the oceans.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“The activity shall contribute to increased access to fossil-free energy.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c)</p> <p>“Capacity and knowledge for the sustainable management and utilisation of natural resources that are fundamental to people's livelihoods should be supported, and biodiversity should be protected, conserved, and restored.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c)</p>
<b>Economy</b> (181 references)	Business (16) Debt (1) Economic development (48) Entrepreneurship (8) Flexible financing (7) Formalisation (2) Livelihoods (26) Market (11) Mobilise additional finances (24) Private sector (17) Sanctions (1) Trade (20)	Refers to elements that can be linked to the economy, finances, market, trade and business.	<p>“Stimulating economic growth and trade in our partner countries is, therefore, a significant part of the government’s work against poverty in the world.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“Market economies and trade have driven a global rise in living standards, surpassing anything achievable through aid alone.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“Economic development, improved</p>

			infrastructure, and job creation, including entrepreneurship and economic empowerment of young people and women.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)
<b>Education</b> (23 references)	Education (23)	Issues of education and skills development.	<p>“Education in the region should be strengthened to combat poverty, as well as to enable employment and entrepreneurship.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“Support efforts that improve access to comprehensive and accessible sex education.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“Support vocational training and capacity development in sectors that are in demand in the local economy.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p>
<b>Freedom and Rights</b> (196 references)	Child marriage (5) Decent work (4) Empowerment (22) Freedom (36) Freedom from religion (4) Freedom of expression (6) Freedom of religion (5) Human rights (43) LGBTQ-rights (2) Minority rights (15) Oppression, discrimination (23) Ownership (4) Privacy (1) Right to natural resources (1) Self-determination (7) SRHR (18)	<p>This category encompasses various types of freedoms and rights. It can be freedom from something or freedom for something. I have also chosen to include self-determination as a form of freedom, as well as empowerment since it signifies the ability of individuals to make their own choices and control their lives and bodies.</p> <p>Note: This category shares some similarities with the category “Resilience”, in that both touch on elements of self-reliance.</p>	<p>“Freedom of expression, including artistic freedom, and access to information are severely restricted.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b)</p> <p>“Good governance, democracy, the rule of law, and accountability are essential for increased freedom and empowerment.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“Support initiatives that strengthen women and girls</p>

			through self-determination, economic empowerment, and educational opportunities.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)
<b>Gender Equality</b> (61 references)	Gender equality (61)	<p>This category refers to elements relating to freedom, opportunities and rights linked to gender, eg., women, men, and non-binary.</p> <p>Note: Gender equality could be incorporated into the category of “Freedoms and Rights”, but it is such a big category that I have chosen to keep it separate. Sida must incorporate gender equality into all its activities since it is a Swedish “core value” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).</p>	<p>“Enhanced enjoyment of equal rights and equality before the law, as well as countering norms and customs that restrict girls and women.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“The activity should also contribute to strengthening women’s political representation and participation.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c)</p> <p>“There is growing global awareness of the importance of green transition, digitalisation, and gender equality as drivers of economic development.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p>
<b>Good Governance</b> (263 references)	Accountability (16) Agents of change (11) Building institutions (7) Civil society (18) Corruption (20) Democracy (64) Free elections (6) Good governance (13) Independent media (10) Information flows (9) International law (9) Monitoring (37) Participation (9) Rule of law (25) Transition (9)	This category refers to elements that can be linked to governance, primarily in relation to issues of democracy and components for democratic transition.	“Effort to create the conditions for free and fair elections, including in conflict and post-conflict environments, by, for example, strengthening the work of electoral authorities, protecting electoral processes from undue information influence and other misleading information, and promoting free and independent media.” (Ministry of Foreign



			<p>Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“Activities that counteract corruption and promote democratic and transparent governance should be prioritised.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“The strategy's goals aim to support long-term institution building, including support for reforms that respond to the country's needs and priorities and leverage Sweden's added value as a donor.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c)</p>
<p><b>Health and Well-being</b> (119 references)</p>	<p>Antibiotics (2) Basic community services (11) Family planning (2) Gender-based violence (9) Health (39) Maternal health (4) Poverty (36) Prosperity (12) Vaccines (4)</p>	<p>Refers to various elements connected to physical and mental health, and well-being. Poverty and basic community services are included. Since they both refer to the minimum or lack of minimum resources and opportunities to meet basic needs.</p>	<p>“Contribute to the development of local capacity in developing countries to manufacture vaccines and medicines.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“A lack of access to clean water, an insecure food supply, and poor energy access pose serious health risks, and in some countries, even a security risk.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“The objective of Swedish international development assistance is to create conditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b)</p>

<p><b>Humanitarian</b> (39 references)</p>	<p>Humanitarian (39)</p>	<p>Refers to when humanitarian needs, aid and crises are mentioned.</p>	<p>“The humanitarian needs have escalated dramatically and continue to increase.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b)</p> <p>“Increase the proportion of Swedish humanitarian aid within the existing aid budget to alleviate the suffering of people affected by disasters, armed conflicts, displacement, food insecurity and hunger.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“A nexus approach between humanitarian aid and development cooperation is essential to support local initiatives and parallel structures that provide basic community services.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b)</p>
<p><b>Migration</b> (90 references)</p>	<p>Illegal migration (15) Migration (23) Refugees (21) Reintegration (6) Returnees (16) Voluntary re-immigration (9)</p>	<p>Refers to issues of migration and refugees. This can involve capacity building to manage migration processes such as asylum, refugee management, and reintegration.</p>	<p>“The conflicts and social problems that have resulted from large-scale illegal migration are also a strain on Europe and our part of the world.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“Enhanced conditions for return and repatriation, as well as voluntary re-immigration.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“Zambia is a host country for refugees from neighbouring conflict-ridden countries, but the number of refugees is relatively small compared to other</p>

			countries in the region.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c)
<b>Peace</b> (29 references)	Peace (29)	Refers to peace and peace processes, conflict prevention and resolution.	<p>“Democracy is essential for freedom, peace, and security, and for achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p> <p>“Enhanced capacity to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts peacefully, with flexibility to address in a changing context.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“Efforts aimed at reducing tensions between different groups are crucial.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b)</p>
<b>Resilience</b> (32 references)	Resilience (13) Adaptation (15) Recovery (4)	<p>The capacity of e.g., individuals, households, communities and institutions to withstand crises, recover from them, and adapt to enhance future resilience. Notions of self-help and self-reliance are incorporated.</p> <p>Note: This category shares similarities with the category of “Freedom and Rights”.</p>	<p>“The contributions aim to ensure a secure livelihood for the poorest individuals to strengthen their resilience and enable them to invest in their health, education, and entrepreneurship” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c)</p> <p>“Resilient health care systems, especially health care skills provision and training.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p> <p>“Strengthen resilience against climate change.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a)</p>

<p><b>Security</b> (158 references)</p>	<p>Conflict, war (53) Crisis, catastrophe (16) Extremism (7) Global or regional effects (21) Hunger, food security (11) Security (24) Stability (10) Terrorism (5) Trafficking and smuggling (6) Violent ideologies (5)</p>	<p>Security could be an overarching category for all my codes in this study. However, I have chosen to use a main code called "Security" and specifically code dimensions of security related to war, conflict, food, various forms of crises, and crime.</p>	<p>"Regional tensions and geopolitical interests influence both the ongoing conflicts in the region and the conditions for regional cooperation and sustainable development." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024c)</p> <p>"The military's actions against the civilian population violate the most fundamental principles of international law." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b)</p> <p>"At the same time, it creates a breeding ground for crime, terrorism, violent extremism, unregulated migration, and organised crime, such as through the smuggling of weapons and drugs, as well as through various forms of human trafficking." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)</p>
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