

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE

Swedish-South African municipal partnerships continue under a new Sida programme

Through the partnerships, new technical and operational skills have been acquired in both countries by municipal staff and politicians. The cooperation provided opportunities, through exposure to a different environment, to reconsider objectives, approaches and methods. Participation in partnerships has also made the municipalities more attractive when recruiting new staff.

In Swedish municipalities, participants see the partnerships as ‘eye-openers’ that have developed their capacity and contributed to personal growth. The increased understanding of cultural differences has been of great importance, as Swedish municipalities need the ability to serve an increasingly multicultural society.

The response from the South African municipalities has been similarly positive regarding professional knowledge gained and experience of the Swedish municipal environment and culture. Officials see the professional capacity building component as essential to improving their work.

The Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process has been of mutual interest for South African and Swedish municipalities in terms of learning and gaining experience. Spatial planning has benefited from the exchange experience and expertise gained in the partnerships, which is reflected in the improved quality of plans and planning processes.

The Municipal Partnership North-South Programme

Though the municipal partnership project under the Urban Programme has come to an end, South African municipalities can seek funding for cooperation with a Swedish municipality from the Sida-financed Municipal Partnership North-South Pro-

PURPOSE OF THE MUNICIPAL PARTNERSHIP NORTH – SOUTH PROGRAMME

The scope of a municipal partnership under the new programme is wide.

Partners can cooperate in areas like:

- local governance and local government administration
- urban planning
- municipal services
- environment
- local economic development (including business and tourism)
- social issues like education and health care
- culture
- sports

programme. The programme supports partnerships between municipalities in Sweden and ten selected countries, including South Africa. The goal of the programme is to contribute to poverty reduction in participating countries and its objectives are to:

- facilitate meetings and value-adding cooperation between local government structures in Sweden and in partner countries.
- help create long-term relations of mutual benefit between society in Sweden and in the cooperating partner countries.

Sida has entrusted the administration of the Partnership Programme to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and its subsidiary SALA IDA. The municipal partners will jointly identify areas and joint projects that are suitable for cooperation of mutual benefit, but the partner in the cooperating country must ensure that the value added by the partnership is in line with its own priorities. Projects may not receive funding for emergency assistance or for investments in e.g. physical infrastructure or improvements.

Under this new programme the Swedish partner must submit the application for support. It should be noted that the budget only allows for a certain number of concurrent projects.

By September 2006, eleven Swedish municipalities (or regional municipal associations) had ongoing cooperation with South African municipal partners (among them Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City) and three Swedish-South African municipal partnerships were at an initial stage. One provincial partnership was also being supported under the Municipal Partnership North – South Programme.

The continued success of Swedish and South African municipal partnerships will require sustained political and staff commitment, enthusiasm and active participation in both countries. Tangible projects and results remain of the greatest importance to maintain interest and engage citizens and officials, and to involve more organisations and people in the partnerships.



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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE THREE PARTNERSHIPS

Major lessons learned:

- Although not very much stressed in the initial phase of the partnerships, the links to poverty reduction in projects/activities are of strategic importance in the cooperation. Over time these aspects became increasingly emphasised by the partners and it was evident that a municipal partnership, if properly planned, can also be an efficient tool for poverty reduction.
- Similar municipal environments and common denominators shorten the start-up period and facilitate identification of useful and realistic projects.
- Political commitment to the partnership in both participating municipalities is crucial for a meaningful and successful cooperation and the sustainability of the joint projects implemented within its framework.
- It is important to have a critical mass of departments and people involved in a municipal partnership to help maintain it over time – more people means more links and a wider base for lasting cooperation.

Other lessons learned:

Time planning

In order to build a partnership, patience is important, as it takes time to develop good working relationships and projects. The Swedish – South African partnerships show that the start-up phase can be as long as two years, and it sometimes takes up to five years before projects become fully effective and sustainable.

Partnerships provide a solid base for long-term relations and sustainable cooperation between municipalities. Ideally, partnerships should last for a number of years if capacity is to be built to implement practical projects and positive changes in a different environment.

At the start the partnerships involved broad cooperation in various areas and openness to new ideas, creating opportunities for exploration and innovation. However, partnerships can be improved over time by reducing the number of projects and focusing on those that are most effective.

Differences between Swedish and South African municipal working environments and cultures are not an obstacle but an opportunity for learning, but effort is required to create good working relationships between collaborating staff. Relationships are strengthened by exchange visits and social activities that include municipal staff, as well as politicians and consultants.

Capacity building

Capacity building must be at the core of any municipal partnership. The Swedish – South African partnership participants – individuals as well as institutions – have gained significantly from projects coupled with study tours to each other's cities and interaction in joint workshops and seminars. Partnerships that involve capacity building and projects with tangible results are more engaging and fruitful. For efficient capacity building, municipal partners need to engage sufficient staff resources with the right professional background for the implementation of joint projects. Continuity in staffing – rather than constant staff turnover – is a must for success.

Funding issues

Partnership expenses such as travel and accommodation require financing, which is not always possible from municipal budgets. However, if participants are engaged in projects in planned municipal development areas, this motivates investment in long-term capacity building, and the allocation of funds from municipal budgets.

The support of a third party, in this case Sida, as funder of the partnerships, has given the cooperation special recognition, and placed extra pressure on the municipalities to perform. The successful cooperation has been recognised by other municipalities and at provincial and national level, but it would not have been possible to maintain the partnerships without donor support. Though partnerships are recognised as important and beneficial, they often cannot compete with other municipal financial obligations and priorities.

Sustainability

The concept of partnership sustainability needs to be clarified. Which is more important – a sustainable (ongoing) partnership, or a partnership that achieves a reasonable increase of skills and capacity for participating partners? If the former is what counts, the sustainability of substantial and costly partnerships is at risk when the Sida support comes to an end. However, if the latter is more important, then the issue is how to maintain the achieved skills and capacity in the longer term, irrespective of partnership arrangements.

Since the impacts of projects tend to vary for different beneficiary groups, project preparation and planning is crucial and both municipal partners should be involved in this process. It is of utmost importance that the partner in the South, in this case South Africa, sees to it that any activity planned is fully in line with the municipality's needs and development plans.



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