

To Members of Spider's board

Management Response to Indevelop's Evaluation Report of Spider's Project and Research Performance 2011-2013

The Swedish consulting company Indevelop, expert in different aspects of sustainable and social development, has been contracted by Spider to carry out an external evaluation during April-June 2014. In the report, the consultants made a picture of Spider and the challenges Spider has faced during the past three years and make a number of conclusions and recommendations.

The purpose of this document is to complement the report with information about how Spider intends to – or already has – addressed the consultants' recommendations.

The main recommendations for the future are commented in the matrix attached.

**One finding of particular importance: Methods and Spider's international recognition**

Spider would like to emphasize that the methods used could be disputed. Some conclusions lead the reader in the wrong direction, while others though being less scientifically grounded give a picture of the present state of the organization.

One severe set of critics, where the methods lead to a weak analysis of Spider, concerns Spider's relevance. The relevance to different groups is a theme of great importance to Spider, since Spider builds a networking approach to access competent technically skilled individuals within academia and among local organizations and within the ICT business. The evaluators have asked representatives for Spider's own networks in "North" (mainly in Sweden) and "South" (mainly Spider's own partners) for example how important their interaction with Spider is to their country and how important the practical support from and cooperation with the Spider staff has been for the capacity development of their organizations. The respondents in South has generally replied positively whereas the respondents in North have replied more negatively, a result that is in accordance with the overall objective of Spider as a capacity builder in "South" using competence in "North".

Spider would like to point out, that Spider's partners in North have another function in our networks than those in South. The Swedish universities do, of course, not partner with Spider to make an important contribution to neither their country nor to their organizations. The cooperation does not provide them with an indispensable function. Uppsala University does not depend on a partnership with Spider neither does Sweden depend on such a partnership between Uppsala University and Spider. However, the respondent at Uppsala university might have responded in a very different way, if the question would have had the intention to frame how important the partnership is for the ICT4D work at his/her department or for the development of his/her ongoing research, or for his/her knowledge about social settings in the developing country in question. These findings provide a picture which is not fully representative and must be complemented by other sources of information about Spider's land winnings to give a true picture of Spider's role in the international community.

Spider will work hard for the modification of this picture, since the demand for our services are expressed to us on a daily basis in personal meetings, email requests, visits to our webpage and in telephone requirements.



Kerstin Borglin  
Director  
Spider

## Recommendations and Spider's response

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1. Spider should investigate the need for and possible cooperation with other organisations about the creation of an authoritative web-portal along the lines of the Communication Initiative Network. Spider could take the lead but should involve as many as possible of the organisations working actively with ICT4D.

Response: Spider welcomes this recommendation and has already initiated discussions with a number of organizations regarding their needs.

2. Spider must define what the organisation considers ICT for Development, and also define the type of projects that are seen as strategically important. This is essential in order for Spider to define what makes the organisation different from all other development organisations - to define its unique added value.

Response: Spider has in recent months started the development of a program approach to be presented to Sida and other funders interested in supporting our ICT4D related initiatives. The ultimate purpose is that ICT is used systematically and strategically to benefit the poorest and marginalized individuals and communities in developing countries. Spider's role is to gather and analyze knowledge on the most effective and efficient use of ICT in development and disseminate this knowledge to a wider public. The outcomes and knowledge generated will be concentrated to 1) transparency/accountability, 2) efficient learning/education and 3) the promotion of health/health information. Spider will emphasize its role and potential as an academic center with solid knowledge of both technological and social capacity building at grass-root level and disseminate research findings and lessons learnt in networks on different levels.

3. While defining Spider's unique added value and choosing strategic project types, Spider should also define how the organisation understands the concept of up-scaling. A mere continuation of existing projects as has been the case in Uganda should not be considered up-scaling.

Response: It is true that Spider has used the term up-scaling for the continuation of a seed-funding project in the past and that the up-scaling element sometimes has been vague. This does not imply that Spider is not aware of the real essence of the word up-scale in the sense using a model on a larger scale. The seed-funding model has its advantages but also several short-comings, which have led to the decision to build the new program on cooperation with project partners, individually negotiated. The term up-scale will not be used for old partners being part of the new program, since they will not be selected on old merits but on thematic grounds.

4. Spider should initiate a national dialogue on how Sweden could support development related scientific research. Stakeholders in this dialogue could be Spider, Sida, national research councils as well as other universities and relevant private companies.

Response: Spider considers writing an article related to this theme, possibly in cooperation with our partner network at Swedish universities emphasizing the need for funding possibilities for maintaining close relationship between development practitioners and academia. However, it is important to recognize that the Swedish government recently has delegated the governmental development research funding as a whole to Swedish Research Council, where there are funding possibilities accessible for Spider' research. The problem is rather finding funding opportunity of project partners' activities, something which is highly important for Spider's possibility of testing and developing methods. Here there are few public options along with Sida.

5. When initiating new projects, Spider should as a general rule have open calls for proposals. This does not exclude existing members from applying or exclude Spider from encouraging specific organisations to apply.
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Response: Spider would like to discuss with Sida different ways of improving our selection of different kind of partners. Open calls could be the best and most transparent way of conducting such a selection, in other cases it is more relevant to select partners on very specific criteria without making a call. It is important to discuss ways of financing testing periods for new partners before entering into long-term agreements, a procedure common in Sida's relationship with Swedish civil society organizations.

6. Spider should not work with standard grants but perform individual assessments of the project proposals. The budget should be adapted to the project instead of adjusting project activities to standard grants.

Response: Spider welcomes this idea and has already early 2014 decided to go forward with this working model.

7. Spider should make new procedures for disbursement of funds where payments follow agreed and well defined milestones.

Response: Spider takes the findings in this recommendation most seriously and will introduce new working procedures from the beginning of the new program period.

8. Spider should also consider revising the project management routines including the reporting requirement in order to become more cost-effective.

Response: Spider will revise the project management routines and take Indevelop's recommendations into account when doing so. The reasons for having followed the projects more closely in the past - criticized by the consultants from an aid effectiveness point of view - can be explained by the previous internal organization of Spider staff. Until 2013 two important functions have been mixed; providing technical assistance to partners for capacity building and monitoring and evaluating project results to secure the best use of funding. Since 2013 researchers are responsible for the technical assistance and the monitoring function is managed on program officer's level with the same responsibilities as POs within other similar organizations.

9. Spider and Sida should demand complete audited accounts including all income and all expenses from partner organisations in order to prevent the same project activities from being reported to several donors.

Response: Spider has taken a firm grip on its external audit management and strives to improve it step by step. The recommendation to demand complete audited accounts on each funded partner organization is welcome; to avoid double payments and gain a better insight on organizational level and will definitely be integrated in the future audit regulations.

10. Spider should revise its working procedures in order to get a project-administration ratio, which is considerable closer to 90-10, which is the norm in most international organisations.

Response: This recommendation will be dealt with in three ways: 1) Spider will revise its administrative costs for the new program and see what expenses could possibly be cut down. 2) Spider has previously both budgeted for its technical assistance and its projects related evaluation tasks as "management", which gives the impression that Spider charges a large sum for its administration. From the new period the technical assistance/ICT advisory role will be strictly linked to the project implementation budget and the administration budget will be separated. 3) Spider analyses the content of the institutional overhead and compare it to other university centers in Sweden with Sida funding, in order to assure that we are in line with our competitors. Spider also must stress the value of the in kind, which approximately today represents an extra of 60% of the present budget.

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11. The Spider secretariat should continue the ongoing efforts to implement a result based approach to project management with the aim of improving both project design and the ability to report on agreed goals.

Response: Spider agrees and has now a satisfactory in house competence on RBM on project level and a solid training in RBM on program level. Spider will provide new staff RBM and project management training as part of their introduction.

12. Spider should be more strategic when choosing project activities. Instead of funding a large number of small projects, Spider should select a few projects and implement them well.

Response: Spider agrees and is anxious to find partners with different backgrounds (academics, techies, networks and grass-roots-organizations) which complement each other and in different manners contribute to the new overall medium-outcomes of the program, since only a perfect combination of partners can lead to a knowledge generation and a further dissemination of Spider's results to implementers outside Spider's own networks.

13. In order to create long-term impact, Spider should consider increasing its exchange programs for students – both for Swedish students to work and study in developing countries and for South based students to study in Sweden. Such exchange programs are likely to have a lasting impact both in Sweden and in the developing countries.

Response: This recommendation is very much in line with our own network approach and will be considered in the new program. However, there are few funders with a holistic perspective, who are interested in how such exchange programs can be followed-up and funded when students are back in their ordinary environments or have started their professional lives. According to Spider's experiences, the results of such exchange programs are most likely to come several years after the exchange, when students are employed. The networking after such a period is important and needs additional funding to gain sustainability. To accomplish with this recommendation, Spider would be favored by a recognition of the building up of long term networks by large funders, such as Sida.

14. Spider should continue ongoing efforts to “*decrease the dependency of Sida and to diversify the sources of funding*” as stated in the contract with Sida for the present programme phase.

Response: Spider is anxious to seek funding which supports the program approach and does not lead to a further diversification of the core work being done at the center. Project funding must be strictly related to program or projects within the three thematic areas, where Spider would like to see a change for poor people in developing countries. The intention is that all staff from 2015 shall be working for common results. Spider’s dependency on Sida is in many ways problematic and due to both history and the unique combination of projects and research that Spider represents. The organization is aware of the situation and in the future Spider intends to focus strongly on fund raising from other sources.

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