Adaptability in NGO-projects

Learning’s from NGO-projects managing food security in unstable environments

Frida Kypengren
Abstract:

The shift to a human security perspective has put food security on the agenda in development cooperation. In this world private actors are increasing their presence and a larger amount of aid is channeled through these organizations. However, there are little studies made on private actors in development cooperation, especially NGOs. The purpose of this study is therefore to deal with the theoretical uncertainty of NGO assistance and develop existing theory in order to confirm or dismiss previous assumptions. Previous research stress that NGO-projects are adaptable i.e. ability to change and adjust to manage sudden challenges, such as conflict. To what extent are NGO-projects to be classified as having adaptable project structures, and how is that manifested in aid within the area of food security? An ideal type was set up to measure adaptability involving three indicators: flexible, responsive, and inclusive. The empirical material was collected through interviews with project staff and project reports. The projects showed higher levels of adaptability than expected, also when controlling for two other cases. An adaptable project is recognized by its decentralized decision-structure, flexible budget, quick response, and access to remote areas.

Keywords: NGOs, private actors, development cooperation, non-governmental aid, adaptability, human security, food security, conflict, climate change.
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<tr>
<td>CCM</td>
<td>Collective Conflict Management</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
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<td>DNGO</td>
<td>Domestic non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>ECOSOC</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Council</td>
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<td>ESRC</td>
<td>Economic and Social Research Council</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Donor Assistance</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PO</td>
<td>Partner Organization</td>
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<td>SCA</td>
<td>Swedish Committee for Afghanistan</td>
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<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
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<td>UIA</td>
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Introduction

We live in a globalized world that is more interconnected than ever. The channels can be of many kinds and go through many different actors creating a large network or global community combining people from around the world. Likewise, an emerging global concern is for example climate change. As Murdie puts it “No act of terrorism generates economic devastation on the scale of the crisis in water and sanitation” (Murdie 2014: 128). Flooding, draughts, migration, and irrigation are some examples of emerging security threats, so called soft security issues, which can result in conflict over scarce resources. Inherently, they have also begun to receive attention from world politicians. Affecting the individual security of many people the new threats is putting sustainable development on the international agenda and showing the need for adaptable assistance. The larger focus on soft security issues has shifted the focus from a traditional security perspective to a human centered approach with focus on the individual. However, states alone may not always able to provide necessities such as food and water to their citizens, especially in countries with weak institutions. When states are unable to ensure security for their citizens, the role of non-state actors becomes important. Some, Moore (2003) have even gone as far as to call them an “emerging second superpower” (Murdie 2014: 5).

“Save lives – become a monthly donor” is just one example of how private actors are reaching out to the public to increase their funding. These actors, which could be either companies wanting to make a difference beside their primary mission or civil society organizations with the prior mission to enhance the life of the poor, have gained attention. In an OECD report it is stated, “addressing the needs of the developing world represents a huge opportunity for business, the leading companies of the future will be those that do business in a way that addresses the major development challenges” (Davies 2011: 5). Year 2006 between 300 000 and 350 000 non-governmental actors were active in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and a lot speak for an increase recent years (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 41). Hence, it is important that states as well as non-state actors see to these changes when designing future assistance and policies. However, there is yet little in-depth or comparative analysis of the evolving relationship between Official Donor Assistance and the private sector (Davies 2011: 17) and very little is known about the actual effects of international NGOs across countries (Murdie 2014: 5).
From a human security perspective, this paper is therefore going to shed light on the role of non-state actors in developing and low-income countries with the intention of contributing to existing research on development cooperation. With the emerging security threats ability to adapt to different contexts are of utter importance. But adaptation will require investment, and in some cases will be suitable for private sector investment (Rosegrant & Cline 2003: 33). Thus, I argue that one possible reason that makes private actors especially successful in achieving food security is the adaptable project form of NGO-projects. Accordingly, a large amount of aid is channeled through the private sector and civil society since they are known as being adjusted to local contexts. In an article from 2016 in the Swedish news paper Svenska Dagbladet the minister of international cooperation and climate, Isabella Lövin, verify the new possibilities that comes with non-governmental aid: “Now we are strengthening the capacity of the Swedish aid so that we, through flexible means, are able to do more for the human rights defenders. Therefore, we are strengthening local ownership in developing countries as well as the dialogue with civil society and other actors involved. Only aid that is adaptable to local settings and where recipients are genuinely involved will give sustainable results” (Lövin 2016). However, there are others that are not as opportunistic as the Swedish minister arguing that there is increasing evidence that NGOs do not perform as effectively as had been assumed in terms of reaching the poor (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 251). “NGOs effectiveness has been largely exaggerated and is assumed rather than demonstrated” (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 251).

It seems like there are uncertainties of the role of NGOs in today’s discussion of effective assistance. New models of aid that support and give incentives for entrepreneurs in developing countries are needed to spur innovative and concrete solutions for how to improve people’s lives (Davies 2011: 22). The previous quote by Isabella Lövin summarizes the general thoughts of government officials on non-governmental cooperation, which is that NGOs can work as substitutes to the bureaucratic and often slow moving processes of the state. However, a lot has been stated outside the frames of science and the academic world. With that said, I want to systematically justify and perhaps also neglect some of these arguments in order to improve existing theory. The purpose of this study is therefore to deal with the theoretical uncertainty of NGO assistance in order to confirm or dismiss previous assumptions. Furthermore, it is going to examine the parts, where different actors in the development sphere are pointing at a gap between bilateral sponsored projects and NGO-
projects. A gap where NGO-projects are assumed to have a project structure that is better adjusted to emerging challenges. By developing theory the study will not only contribute to existing theory, but also to world politics when designing new development cooperation programs. Testing if NGOs are adaptable, the research question I intend to find an answer to is: To what extent are NGO-projects to be classified as having adaptable project structures, and how is that manifested in aid within the area of food security?

The introduction chapter has tried to introduce the existing debate in security politics and development cooperation. It has also emphasised why this is important to study from a theoretical point of view as well as from a political perspective. As previous section has argued the role of private actors is particularly interesting in today’s politics. The next chapter is going to give an overview of previous research within security politics and global development cooperation. The third chapter is instead outlining the theoretical framework of an adaptable project structure and how it can be measured. Definitions of private actors and adaptability will also be outlined. In chapter four the methodology is clarified, explaining case selection and limitations, data collection and the implications of doing semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, the empirical findings is presented and discussed following the analytical framework set up in the previous chapter. Lastly, a summery of the main parts of the study is made, ending with some concluding remarks and suggestions of future studies.
Previous research

Introducing a human security perspective

In order to understand the role of private actors in relation to emerging security threats and impact on international assistance, it is important to first explain the shift from traditional security to a human security perspective. A longstanding definition of security has been “a situation or condition of being free from the threat of harm” (Swain & Jägerskog 2016: 2) and it was the great state that was to ensure the safety of the people. Thus, focus was on military forces and the capability of the state to secure the nation and what lied within its borders. The enemies were those that threatened the strength of the state. The Second World War and the Cold War are two examples that highlight the ideas of this perspective. Later on, the concept was broadened to regional security meaning “the absence of a threat to the order and stability of the international or regional system, to countries, or to individuals (Swain & Jägerskog 2016: 2)”. The change of the term security meant challenging the traditional ideas of the state as the main actor, instead making way for regional and external actors and influences such as regional cooperation and social interaction (Swain & Jägerskog 2016: 3). Accordingly, security is no longer just a national issue but regional and individual centered as well. With the aim of widening the traditional security agenda away from state security to a more people centered approach UNDP launched the human security perspective (Swain & Jägerskog 2016: 4). As a result, today’s security issues, for example climate change, forced migration, resource scarcity, and health are included in the concept.

However, there are still those that claim that in resolving conflicts the structure and quality of the bureaucracy are important for maintaining domestic order (Teorell 2015: 651). Private investors in developing countries need organized help that effective states are most able to provide (Kohli 2004: 377). Others instead claim that many of today’s security challenges are increasingly diverse and generated within individual societies, spread across borders to their surrounding environment, and exacerbated by unhealthy regional dynamic (Crocker et al 2011: 39). In development cooperation the diversification of security threats means that donors must find new solutions. They need to find new ways of delivering effective aid to those whose security is threatened. It means that donors must have the ability to adapt to the
emerging challenges that these changes bring. Therefore, so forth this paper will take a human security perspective when discussing emerging security threats within a state.

Emerging security threats

To understand the work and challenges of today’s development cooperation it is important to understand the emerging security threats because it is not just military violence and conflicts that threaten individuals today. It is necessary for further understanding of why projects need to be adaptable, and what challenges they ought to adapt to.

Some argue that demographic and environmental factors have become more important as causes of conflict after the end of the Cold War (Urdal 2005: 418). For people living in poverty with limited resources, no or limited access to clean drinking water or nutrition is as much a threat to their security as military invasion. Year 2009 the total number of hungry people in the world exceeded 1 billion (Swain 2013: 6) and the new changes in climate threatens to make the already fragile states even more fragile. Climate change will combine with existing pressures on natural resources and lead in many areas to failing crops, inadequate food supplies and increasingly insecure livelihoods (Smith & Vivekananda 2008: 14). Floods or storms arising from climate change threaten agricultural production creating a lack of natural resources such as food or water, which in turn are likely to trigger military confrontation, clashes and force migration (Swain 2013: 6; Smith & Vivekananda 2008: 28).

For developing countries as well as for the people living in them, climate change is a “threat multiplier” making existing concerns even more complex (Mangala 2010: 88). However, it is not the climate related factors that directly will lead to conflict, but the poor capacity of states to adapt to such changes i.e. financial or technological resources (Stikker & Juchniewicz in Jägerskog et al. 2015: 2). Poor states are therefore the least equipped for such environmental changes and are most likely to experience conflicts, hence also in need of adaptable support.

Food Security

The common definition of food security is “when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Swain 2013: 6). It was first launched in the World Food Summit Plan of Action in 1996. From including concerns relating to
household food and nutritional security the concept has become more multidimensional, and is now referring to household livelihood security (Swain & Jägerskog 2016: 39). According to Bora (2011) this definition of food security includes four dimensions: availability, access, utilization, and stability (Bora 2011: 2). In other words, food security is not only that people have access to food but the availability of sufficient quantities of appropriate quality, utilization of food, for example adequate diet, to reach a nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met and stability where the access to food is consistent regardless sudden shocks. Lastly, food security is broadly contingent on prices and credits, climate, and water reserves (Hanjra & Qureshi in Jägerskog et al. 2015: 127).

The importance of prices became evident in the 2008 credit crises that meant less capital as well as investment in the agricultural sector (Hanjra & Qureshi in Jägerskog et al. 2015: 30; Swain 2013: 6). Also higher energy prices increase the costs of farming, through higher prices on fuel and fertilizers as well as for transporting and shipping (Hanjra & Qureshi in Jägerskog et al. 2015: 129). As a result food production decreased making food unaffordable for many, leaving millions of people with hunger. Higher prices and reductions in agricultural production and crop yield are also affected by changes in climate (Mangala 2010: 88). Higher temperatures, droughts, and flooding are all affecting agriculture and food security (Swain 2013: 85; Hanjra & Qureshi in Jägerskog et al. 2015: 128). The major drought that recently occurred in East Africa has lead to widespread famine due to unusable land for agriculture and/or death of livestock for production of milk or meat. Also critical for food production is access to water, especially in developing countries that are primarily agricultural economies. When seeking investments in the agricultural field, water is increasingly emerging as the recourse in short supply (Jägerskog et al. in Jägerskog et al. 2015: viii).

Conflicts over water access and use in agriculture between pastoralist and farmers are usual in these areas (Allouche in Jägerskog et al. 2015: 21). Therefore lack of water, and lack of properly distributed water is a threat to human security as well as food production (Jägerskog et al. in Jägerskog et al. 2015: xvii). Drops in food production undermine the economic performance of weak and unstable states and can trigger future food crises (Mangala 2010: 98). As the population increases and land degradation causes lack of food, the agricultural production will be under pressure to meet with new food demands (Alexandratos (2005); Swain 2013: 83; Urdal 2005: 418). Food security is also contingent on conflict. Conflict in Agricultural areas causes food production to decrease as farming populations decline through
death or flight, and remaining farmers do not risk returning to their fields (Smets et al. 2013: 14). Land mining and sabotages of water supplies is also consequences of conflicts that can result in food shortages (Smets et al. 2013: 14). As with climate change, countries under the greatest stress typically have the least capacity to respond successfully to conflict (Collier 2000: 4).

Achieving food security

“It is important to work collectively together, to form creative alliances and networks respecting the many different needs in harmony with out fragile planet” (Kothari & Harcourt 2004: 6). Likewise, the redefinition of security into local and regional terms has put emphasis Collective Conflict Management (CCM). The concept includes the participation of civil society groups such as NGOs, professional bodies and task-specific international agencies, as well as regional organizations, individual states and international organizations working in dedicated coalitions to deal with non-traditional as well as traditional security threats (Crocker et al. 2011: 40). The growth of these actors in the global arena makes it possible for non-state actors to have an impact beyond state boundaries of a given country (Swain 2013: 18). It is a growing network of formal and informal institutional arrangements that is important to understand and what potential they have to reshape conflict management strategy (Crocker et al. 2011:45). With the increasing number of civil society organizations, political sophistication, and effective trans boundary cooperation, civil society groups are expected to play a significant role in mobilizing stronger international policies and programs to achieve sustainable development (Swain 2013: 38).

Achieving food security, according to Rosegrant and Cline (2003), needs policy and investment reforms on multiple fronts, including human resources, agricultural research, rural infrastructure, water resources, and farm and community based agricultural and natural resources management (Rosegrant & Cline 2003: 1918). While aid can be an important tool to support stability I fragile states, predictability and quality of aid remains a cause for concern in many fragile and conflict-affected countries, particular in rural areas (Collier 2000: 10). Therefore, an adaptable project structure that can adjust to local challenges would enhance the quality as well as the predictability of the assistance. Lastly, achieving good governance in fragile states through promoting food and water security these projects should not be seen as planned and managed by outsiders (Swain 2016: 1320), which makes it crucial to engage civil society and the private sector, the NGOs.
The privatization of aid

**A new emerging second superpower**

Looking at the amount of commercial from private organizations, wanting to raise money for charity, it seems as though these actors have increased rapidly over recent years. However, this trend began much earlier. The amount of non-governmental organizations has, since the 1980s and the end of the Cold war, increased significantly (Dupuy et al. 2016: 299; Murdie 2014: 5). Examples of such organizations are the well known Amnesty International and Oxfam, which are working in multiple countries around the world.

There has also been a large growth of multilateral finance to private sector since 1990 (Davies 2011, 17). Thus, it is not just scholars that have observed this transformation but also leading international and multilateral actors, for example the OECD, have acknowledged this development implying that contributions from the private sector to the development process in developing countries are becoming more significant (Davies 2011, 3).

![Figure 1. Number of NGOs 1994-2010](image)

One suggestion by Ahmed and Potter (2006) of why there is an increasing interest in this sector is because of their claim too be able to reach the poorest groups in developing countries (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 4), groups that often do not receive government services. Others also suggest that NGOs are a crucial element of world society or world polity (Dupuy et al. 2016:

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The following figure shows that development funding from the private sector is becoming more significant. The grants by private voluntary agencies and non-government organisations are defined as transfers made by private voluntary agencies and NGOs in cash, goods or services for which no payment is required.

Figure 2. *Private agencies and NGOs*†

Grants by private agencies and NGOs 2000-2015

What is a private actor in development?

The private sector in development is a broad term including a diverse set of actors. Thus, it is a need to differentiate between actors and types of impact on development (Davies 2011: 4). In the OECD report (2011) they distinguish between the for-profit private sector and private foundations. What differentiates the two is that private foundations operate on a non-profit basis often in ways similar to donors or civil society organisations (Davies 2011: 4). Reasonably, for-profit organisations are businesses with the primary goal to make a profit. To make an example: for-profit business in retail with the production in a developing country can aim for better working conditions for the employees or when selling the finished product in the store motivate customers to round off the payment collecting money for a certain cause. They contribute to development and the general cooperation in development areas, but their main goal is to make profit. Civil society organisations and non-profit organisations on the

† This indicator is measured in million USD constant prices using 2014 as the base year
other hand, have the main goal or purpose to improve the lives of the poor. Whilst for-profit organisations finance their projects through their own private business, non-profit organisations receive funding from public sources such as governmental support or support from the public (Welle-Strand 2009). This paper will be focused on the latter.

Private actors in this study
What is included in the concept of private sector has already been explained but since the focus in this study only is on civil society organisations (CSOs) further clarifications are needed. "Civil society is an arena, separate from the state, the market and the individual household, in which people organize themselves and act together to promote their common interests" (Sida May 2014). I am only focusing on NGOs performing some kind of service\(^\d\) excluding pure advocating NGOs although it is fare to mention that most NGOs often have some elements of both. Moreover, previous research often distinguishes between organisations that only work domestically (DNGOs) and organisations that also work in the international arena (INGOs). International NGOs operate in more than one country, and often have headquarters in the global north; domestic NGOs operate in, and are often founded by, the citizens of a single country (Dupuy et al. 2016: 299). Hence, the organizations this study is focused on are those that have their headquarters in the global north, INGOS, but mainly operate in developing countries or via domestic NGOs. However, out of habit and because CSOs and NGOs sometimes are blending, I am using the simplistic term NGO when referring to the international NGO of which my study is about to explore.

Theoretical framework
The previous chapter have introduced the human security perspective, which is going to pervade the rest of the study but be discussed more comprehensively in the analysis section. An overview of recent numbers and facts on development cooperation for a better understanding of today’s situation has also been made. This section is continuing the presentation on previous theory and in so doing, providing the basis for this study’s theoretical framework.

\(^\d\) Service NGOs are performing some kind of service, for example workshops, food assistance and packages etc. See Murdie (2014) for further discussion.
Adaption of a more pragmatic and people-centred policy that emphasize the local knowledge and priorities of the poor is important for universal poverty reduction (Groves & Hinton 2004: 3). The improved cooperation between local and international NGOs has brought about a positive change where both actors complement each others knowledge and skills that different players bring (Marsden 2004: 105). However, they are already facing emerging challenges, such as climate changes. Thus, a potential goal these organizations need to acknowledge is adaption to changing environment (Dessein & Santos 2006: 957). Furthermore, as briefly outlined in the introduction todays politics as well as the changing environment yearns for new forms of development cooperation adjusted to these circumstances. To meet urgent needs development agencies have a responsibility to adopt whatever measures seem most promising for service delivering (Manor 2007: 25). An organization must be able to achieve its goals in the face of a changing environment (DeLoach et al. 2008: 14).

Adaptability and its project form

“The best organizations are adaptive systems that continuously learn, adapt and improve” (Hope et al. 2011: 1). Adaptability and flexibility is also common arguments of why aid is channelled through NGOs, but what does adaptability mean? And to what extent can a non-governmental organization be called adaptable? To be able to measure adaptability in the selected NGO-projects these questions must be answered.

The word adaptability in itself means “the ability or willingness to change in order to suit different conditions”§. It is not a very sharp definition, but it underlines another important word “change”. That tells us that in order to be adaptable, the ability to change to different conditions must be present. According to Yang et al. (2009) adaptability is “the degree to which an organization can adjust its structure and business processes and successfully achieve its goals in accordance with the peculiar characteristics of dynamic environments, a process also know as improvisation” (Yang et al. 2009). Adding this definition, adaptability is not only ability to change, but more specifically to adjust structure and processes to specific environments. It also emphasizes improvisation, which further describes adaptability as something positive when dealing with new challenges allowing for creativeness and improvised adjustments. Lastly, the definition also stresses that adaptability is not something

§ Cambridge Dictionary 2017 (online): http://dictionary.cambridge.org/
that is either fulfilled or not, but a degree of which adaptability is less or more attained. For example, bilateral aid has been accused of being immobile and bureaucratic leaving little room for adjustments whilst NGOs have been known for the opposite. Knowing the fundamental definition of adaptability, I will continue to describe the core elements in an adaptable project form.

For an organization to be adaptable to dynamic environments it must have what other scholars refer to as an *adaptive management model* or simply *adaptive management*. In this model six key principles for adaptive management can be summarized as follows:

1) Governed through shared values, not detailed rules and regulations (Hope et al. 2011: 22).
2) Support local decisions where front-line teams are trusted to make decisions (Hope et al. 2011: 22).
3) Plans are coordinated locally based on dynamic interactions (Hope et al. 2011: 17).
4) Fixed plans and budgets are usually replaced with more flexible systems, for example rolling forecasts and regular reviews (Hope et al. 2011: ix).
5) Strategy is a continuous and inclusive process (Hope et al. 2011: 17).
6) It identifies and responds to the needs and concerns of all stakeholders (Manor 2007: 118).

From these learning’s, adaptability can be visible in all stages of a project: in the planning, structure and design, and in the implementation. Contextual and local presence, indeed seem to be a persistent factor in all the principles for an adaptable management model. Flexibility in the process of planning and budgeting is another ingredient for adaptability as well as responsiveness to emerging needs. Taking these theoretical implications into consideration when developing this study’s framework of an adaptable organization, adaptability has been separated into three different fragments, which gives a more nuanced picture of the concept. Thus, included in the concept of adaptability are flexibility, responsiveness, and inclusivity. Flexible in the sense that a project in its planning and design has room for adjustments, which might be necessary later in the implementation phase. Additionally, in the implementation phase when the project is under realization it must be responsive to new demands and changes that are either external or internal. Lastly, to have a continuous development adapted to local contexts the project also needs to be inclusive. Inclusive in the sense that local beneficiaries
and targets are involved in developing the project as well as permitted to give their opinion before, during, and after project implementation.

Flexible
Since organizations and their projects often are handling disaster situations and might be faced with unexpected events that generate untraditional or unplanned strategies, wiggle room for improvised solutions is needed (Walker et al. 2011). Wiggle room such as flexibility. Flexibility can be one of the key characteristics in project implementation as well as when it comes to the process of design (Manor 2007: 217-223). There must be flexibility in order to cope with different interests, priorities and perspectives of different stakeholders (Owusu 2004: 119). According to the Cambridge Dictionary flexibility means “ability to change easily according to the situation”***. It gives another nuance of the concept adaptability. This means that not only have such projects capacity to change, but can change more easily i.e. the project structure allows to a certain extent for rapid changes, without going through time-consuming regulation. According to Manor (2007) flexibility in confronting implementation challenges, such as slow moving processes, is important (Manor 2007: 179). In the implementation process a flexible project have an action matrix that is not fixed but subject to continuing negotiation and revised on numerous occasions (Manor 2007: 76). Thus, it is room for adjustments of activities should challenges occur (Manor 2007: 8).

Responsive
Another word I also add to the concept of adaptability is responsiveness “making a positive and quick reaction to something or someone”††. This is primarily important in the implementation of a project where the project need to be responsive to internal and external demands, reactive to mismanagement, changes in the setting or critique. To be adaptable it is not enough to have a flexible project design, it must also be able to notice changes in the environment or other challenges and act accordingly. As manor puts it, “it identifies and responds to the needs and concerns of stakeholders” (Manor 2007: 118). The stakeholders in this sense would be project staff, beneficiaries of the project, and indirect beneficiaries such as people in the area or the local government. Reactivity is an agent’s ability to perceive its environment and respond to changes in it (DeLoach et al. 2008: 21). Thus, adaptability is also to respond and react. For a project to be responsive there are several criteria’s to achieve, I

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*** Cambridge Dictionary 2017 (online), word search: ”flexibility”
†† Cambridge Dictionary 2017 (online), word search: ”responsiveness”
have identified three important stages where a project can be responsive. Firstly, in the identification of risks and demands both during the planning phase and implementation. Secondly, that there are plans and strategies for mitigation of the risks or meeting new demands. Thirdly, that the project actually react and adjust to these challenges.

Inclusive

Another dimension of an adaptable organization is inclusivity. The Cambridge Dictionary describes inclusivity as “the quality to include many different types of people and treat them all fairly and equally”‡‡. Hence, inclusivity is to include all groups (Manor 2007: 54), especially targets and beneficiaries of the intended support. Planning is not a top-down event but should be continuous and an inclusive process (Hope 2011: 27). Thus, the planning should involve a bottom-up perspective with local influences and perspectives of the contextual situation. For example, an inclusive project must have the ability to reach otherwise marginalized people and involve them in the process to increase the opportunities of an adaptable project. Thus, inclusive is when there are mechanisms of influence for the beneficiaries of the project as well as a continuous dialogue to adapt project and its purpose. It requires staff to remain alert to feedback from the field in order to also learn from it (Manor 2007: 8). But lastly to include groups, the projects must have access to the areas in which they live.

Preconditions for adaptability

To know when adaptability is to be expected, there are certain preconditions that can increase the likelihood of adaptation. Firstly, a decentralized project structure allows for a greater presence at different levels than a centralized project that is top-ruled. Decentralized planning and financing strengthens the capacity and competence of district institutions by making them more effective, open, and responsive (Manor 2007: 178). Accordingly, a decentralized project structure means that strategy and key decisions are developed to front-line teams who have the scope and authority to respond rapidly to emerging threats (Hope et al. 2011: ix). Allowing for locally placed staff to make changes, which have the knowledge of the local context and challenges, the project can respond quicker to local changes. Since some of the decision-making in a decentralized system is redirected to front-line teams, greater flexibility will follow. Thus having a decentralized decision structure will set the grounds for an

‡‡ Cambridge Dictionary 2017 (online), word search: "Inclusivity"
adaptable project form. A positive factor in implementation and project design is the understanding of the development priorities of the local people (Manor 2007: 75). Working closer to beneficiaries combined with knowledge of local contexts will allow for the project to be more sensitive of the opinions of the beneficiaries, a precondition for knowing what to adapt to. Decentralization together with local knowledge, which is a second precondition for adaptability, is necessary for inclusivity.

Adaption calls for the use of local information, which is dependent on the worker assigned to it (Dessein & Santos 2006: 961). Few staff within the donor community have the cultural and social knowledge to understand the way on which these social factors operate hence leaving them without the necessary knowledge of how power is transmitted and replicated within the local aid community (Kakande 2004: 89). Contextual knowledge is important in the whole process of adaptability, you always need knowledge of local conditions to know how to design a project and what goals that are reasonable. But the kind of knowledge I am also talking about is perhaps rather described as local presence or integration, which is crucial for the acceptance of the beneficiaries. This means having staff that know the culture, religion, and traditions, speaking the language, and perhaps are born in the same area, and hence gives a great advantage. Appropriate communication, documentation, reporting and a good understanding of contextual issues are all key to building trust and good working relationships (Owusu 2004: 119).

Development takes time: but if one accepts the need for investing in relationship-building, it is more likely that development goals are achieved in a realistic time frame. Understanding power and relations will allow practitioners to move towards a more inclusive and, consequently, more effective system (Hinton & Groves 2004: 17). But to be inclusive and to build trust mechanisms for influence must be in place. Thus, a third precondition for adaptability is mechanisms for influence. Manor (2007) has studied successful projects of which almost all had consultative mechanisms to draw local preferences, knowledge, and energies into the policy process and to provide external resources to local communities (Manor 2007: 34). Mechanisms for influences is extremely important for the inclusivity of a project since having no mechanisms for influence would mean little inclusion of external perceptions of the project. Thus, making project adjustments much more difficult since suggestions of improvements might not arise in the first place.
Lastly, understanding the facing challenges is important for improving policies and adapting institutional frameworks, which build on relationships, promote trust and openness with poor people and development practitioners (Owusu 2004: 119). But to be able to have a flexible decision structure, where power is redirected to local teams, mutual trust must exist. Establishing trust depends upon a belief that other organizations have useful skills and resources as well as commitment and good faith in making and implementing agreements (Kakande 2004: 89). *Mutual respect and trust* is among the most critical characteristics of a strong partnership (Kakande 2004: 89), hence the last precondition for adaptability.

**Why NGOs succeed…**

Having described the basic preconditions for a flexible, responsive, and inclusive i.e. adaptable project, one should be able to visualize what elements in an NGO-project that makes adaptation likely. A perception by local and regional actors is that NGOs have specific and unique attributes, skills and cultural insights that more distant, external bodies, such as states, lack (Crocker et al. 2011: 56). Another study showed that local communities were better able than governments at higher levels or their representatives to rapidly develop capacity for constructive action (Manor 2007: 11). Why?

As the name tells, non-governmental organizations are not controlled by states. It means that they can receive funding from states and governments, but the organization itself does not have a decision structure that is controlled by a state (Murdie 2014: 20). The decision structure can be spread out to different levels in the organization, to what previous research call front-line teams closer to the project. These groups have been left flexibility to be able to make fast decisions when needed to adjust a project. Thus, it seems like NGO-projects indeed are decentralized, which means that project is organized around a seamless network of accountable teams, not centralized functions (Hope 2011: 23). Without the bureaucracy that follow a state, NGOs can also leave partner NGOs with flexibility in the budget to meet sudden demands. Previous research also shows that NGOs, in fact, are less constrained by bureaucratic organization and can operate more flexibly (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 106). This means that they should be able to change project specifications and purposes quickly in the face of obstacles or changes in community circumstances (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 105). Less constrained by a bureaucratic structure, a more spacious and flexible decision structure, are
promising indicators of adaptability. The face-to-face relationships at the local level allow greater scope for establishing trust, accommodation, and sense of mutuality than do the more anonymous relationships that exists at higher levels (Manor 2007: 12).

NGOs have been shown as being helpful in covering a particular geographical area (Manor 2007: 247). In the OECD report from 2011 it says that the private sector can offer effective implementation and reach for example in rural areas (Davies 2011: 13) and provide channels where bilateral aid is not possible (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 105; Tsikoane & Mothibe (2007) in Murdie 2014: 122). They are therefore able to reach and represent the poorest and marginalized groups in developing countries that often do not receive government services (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 41). In so doing, they avoid an outside perspective and avoid being seen as an outside threat, creating a forum for concerns to support individuals and groups that are closer to the actual concerns (Smith & Vivekananda 2008; Sida May 2014). These findings imply that NGOs, through their regional offices and projects, have good opportunities to be inclusive and hence creating mutual trust.

But…
There are also some realities, not to be excluded, that points in another direction when discussing opportunities for adaptability in NGO-projects. Independence is something that is valued high in NGOs, that they are independent of governmental influence, allowing for the project to have flexible budgets and decision structure. However, Ahmed and Potter (2006) mean that international security is a difficult arena for NGOs to operate in because of their submission to the superior states, which still are the primary players (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 153). Many countries still tie aid to their domestic requirements which means that funding decisions are often based on the needs of the donor rather than of the recepient and while donors continue to hold access to finances, they also maintain significant control over the agenda (Groves & Hinton 2004: 11-12). This implies that NGOs might still be controlled through financing from states, in that sense, being less decentralized and flexible as originally stated.

…And some fail
If non-governmental projects are perceived as flexible, responsive and inclusive, why are others incapable of adaption? The opposite of the adaptive management model is the command and control management model. In this model key decisions are highly centralized,
targets, plans, budgets, resources and controls flow down the hierarchy, and the annual budget coordinates all plans and resources (Hope et al. 2011: ix). It very much describes what are typical characteristics of governmental organizations and bilateral cooperation, namely as:

- Centralized
- Inflexible
- Lack of local knowledge
- Old-fashioned and uncreative
- Low trust

The management control bureaucracy can often represent several layers of management: the people who work there do little else but handle information and make decisions (Hope 2011: 8). The result is that too few people are engaged in strategy and innovation, which remain exclusive, top-down processes, which is also more difficult and expensive (Hope 2011: 8-9).

To give an example, Sten Rylander - a former Swedish ambassador, is today critical to the development of Swedish aid. The change to a more result oriented assistance 2007 led to a short-term perspective where staff working in the field, establishing contacts, instead had to prioritize reports and documenting (Rylander 2014: 144). Thus, support that is expected to lead to significant results in the long run tends to be turned down when there are more short-term interventions that requires less documenting (Rylander 2014: 144). Thus, centralized, inflexible (command and control) organizations find it difficult to compete in this world of fast adaptation, continuous innovation and customer participation (Hope 2011: 4). According to previous research, there is a so called ”red tape mentality” within governmental bureaucracies.

A red tape mentality means that certain procedures should be followed even if it takes time (Jassey 2004: 130). Accordingly, bilateral agencies are known for their standardized forms of procedures and slow moving processes. The problem is that rather than engaging in real life, much of the work centres on making project plans, writing the perfect document as well as following up these documents (Jassey 2004: 132). When it comes to budgeting of projects, governmental projects have a responsibility to its taxpayers to use their money carefully. The reason for having fixed budgets is according to an employee within the governmental sphere ”If a state bureau is working with development, it is not only gambling with the taxpayers money, but also meddling with other countries and peoples development and welfare. In that
sense, we have to be doubtly sure that our decisions are the best possible, even if it takes time and is cumbersome” (Jassey 2004: 131). Therefore there is need to have at least some regulations in place, leaving less room for flexibility. It means corresponding upward financial accountability and reports to the national audit office, which results in financial management as a top priority (Jassey 2004: 132).

Centralized and distributed planning approaches tend to be brittle and computationally expensive due to their required level of detail (DeLoach 2008: 14). A governmental organization or institution is purely state-controlled and decisions are centralized with little room for changes once a project is started since the budget often is fixed. However, creativity cannot be centrally planned and controlled, and leaders are finding that they have little choice but to devolve power and responsibility to people closer to the customer (Hope 2011: 11). If not, the distance to beneficiaries, that follow a centralized organization, will lower the trust of locally placed actors further hindering adaptation. As Hinton and Groves (2004) points out, there are language barriers to building partnerships (…) such as cultural understanding and local knowledge (Groves and Hinton 2004: 15). These barriers or distance between donors and beneficiaries will most certainly lower the mutual trust, a precondition for adaptability. An often-argued critic to bilateral aid is that it does not consider the interest of the local people (Easterly 2006). According to Anirudh Krishna (2010), the problem in today’s anti-poverty work is that it does not see to the local contexts in the different environment that exists, there are no “best practise” that is suitable in all development cooperation (Krishna 2010: 5). The problem of programme operations is that they often are based on predicted outcomes planned with only partial knowledge of the system and without constant review and reflection (Groves & Hinton 2004: 6). In that way, it is very difficult to adapt to new changes or to certain contexts. Governmental donors have often been accused of using their bilateral channels to maintain visibility and plant their flag in as many countries as possible (Gulrajani 2016: 14). Consequently, the trust of beneficiaries is unlikely.

The benefits of an adaptable project form

An adaptable project form will allow for community driven development, development from within. Use of consultative and participatory mechanism associated with community-driven development can facilitate the difficult transition from initial, quick-impact, top-down
programs to address direct emergencies to longer-term, bottom-up efforts to promote development and institutional reform (Manor 2007: 9). The use of local representations and reporting formats appears to encourage greater openness and understanding of socio-cultural dynamics (Groves & Hinton 2004: 9). Moreover, delivering aid through more flexible mechanisms reduces imbalances and *improves accountability* and transparency (Jassey 2004: 128). Procedural flexibility results in more honest reporting of success and failures and hence a more accurate assessment of programme output (Groves & Hinton 2004: 9). Consequently, improved effectiveness and responsiveness leading to *increased legitimacy* and popularity of a project (Manor 2007: 27). As already touched upon, increased ability to adapt to changing environment and new challenges enables *long-term development*. Much of the success of projects has been the result of flexibility and adaption to the context in which it operates (Manor 2007: 118), which has created *new opportunities* for development cooperation. Regional actors and cooperation, all have potential key roles in raising awareness, developing policies, generating consensus and mobilizing resources to support adaptation (Smith & Vivekananda 2008). But being adaptable themselves, they can in their project form further develop strategies for adaptability, creating new opportunities for future development cooperation.

**What does an adaptable organization achieve?**

Through previous identified and defined ways to adaptation, such as decentralized decision structure, flexible budget, and local knowledge, the results of an adaptable project form is numerous. The number of hierarchical levels in an organization affects the efficiency of it. Increasing number of levels tends to decrease efficiency and effectiveness (DeLoach 2008: 50). According to Ahmed and Potter (2006) it is the small size of NGOs that makes them more flexible than donor agencies (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 120). A “smaller size” suggests that decisions and coordination don’t need to go through as many hierarchical levels as a larger organization, for example a governmental institution, enabling for *more effective aid*. In opposite to aid bureaucracies and government counterparts, they can outperform them in many public services, carrying out development projects more efficiently (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 105; Murdie 2014: 5). Effectiveness also depends on how well an organization and project is adapted to the local environment (Dessein & Santos 2006: 961). If an organization is adaptable, for all the reasons given in previous sections for example through local knowledge, the result is more effective aid. Moreover, decentralized organizations tend to have higher performance (DeLoach 2008: 50), which implies that adaptability through a
decentralized system can result in higher performance. As previous research has shown, NGOs are responsive to local demands and quicker than governments to respond to new opportunities (Ahmed & Potter 2006: 106; Murdie 2014: 5).

Adapting to certain situations and demands do also allow for better targeting of aid incentives. Knowing the challenges, through openness to evidence from the field and flexible response resonate (Manor 2007: 9), the organization are also given the chance to deal with them. Consequently, being able to respond to changes and adapt projects, for example changing type of support or its content, result in better targeting of the support. Adapting to local contexts through decentralized structures as well as through contextual integration and knowledge, it does not only increase the chance of better targeting of the type of actions, but also better targeting of marginalized groups. NGOs can play a critical role in identifying and assisting vulnerable groups (Manor 2007: 269). These are often females, youths, and people living in rural areas.

Measuring Adaptability

What analytical tools are used when measuring adaptability? First, to be able to distinguish between what is an adaptable project from what is a non-adaptable, an ideal type was created - the adaptable project form. The Ideal type should not be seen as an empirical description, but as an analytical tool which in its pure form should not be able to exist in the real world (Teorell & Svensson 2013: 43). The benefit of using ideal types is that they make the categorization of empirical findings much easier, which is my intention with this study. Secondly based on previous sections of what defines adaptability, I have set up three indicators of an adaptable project form. Hence, for a project to reach the “ideal” it needs to be flexible, responsive, and inclusive. See table on the next page.
ADAPTABLE PROJECT FORM

1. FLEXIBLE
   Ability or willingness to change easily in order to suit different conditions.

2. RESPONSIVE
   Ability to make a quick reaction to something or someone.

3. INCLUSIVE
   The quality to include different kinds of groups.

Each indicator of the adaptable form must be measured in the same manner for each project. To help the interpretation of the findings examples of how the material where coded and what was looked for in the interviews are presented. Indicators of an adaptable project form:

Flexible

Ideal: A flexible project design that has wiggle room for improvised solutions and a flexible implementation process.

Operationalization

- To what extent is the budget flexible?
- To what extent is the decision structure flexible?
- To what extent does the project have an action matrix that is not fixed but subject to continuing negotiation and revised on numerous occasions?

Coding (from interviews)

Interpretations of flexible:

“We allow partners to change their budgets”

“Give partners the possibility to choose what they want to do according to their strategic plan”

“As long as the main changes of the project is kept, all changes in activities are approved”

Interpretations of non-flexible:
“No the budget does not allow for changes so the planning becomes important”
“The illusion is that the communities and the local organization also participate”
“Some elements that we were missing...people complained about lack of water when we were giving them food”

Responsive

Ideal: A project that identifies risks and has methods for prevention before and during implementation, project is responsive to local settings and new demands and adjusted accordingly before as well as during implementation.

Operationalization

- To what extent does the project identify challenges, risk etc. before implementation? Are there strategies for prevention?
- To what extent does the project adjust to local settings and new demands before implementation?
- To what extent does the project identify challenges, risk etc. during the implementation?
- To what extent does the project adjust to local settings and new demands during implementation?

Coding (from interviews)

Interpretations of responsive:
“In the risk matrix they have to predict all possible risks that can affect the project negatively”
“We try to have continuous dialogues with the projects to identify new problems or challenges”
“People were not appearing in the meetings because the district were suffering drought (...) project changed activities for food and alternative activities”

Interpretations of non-responsive:
“Sometimes delays in terms of, you know before the process to find release for targeting (...) drought response should be quick and on time”
“Budget is fixed and can not change activities”
“If you are giving food sometimes you also have to give water”

Inclusive

Ideal: The project is inclusive of all beneficiaries in the planning of a project and mechanisms of influence are present during as well as after implementation.

Operationalization

- To what extent does the project have access to rural areas in which poor people lack basic services for food security?
- To what extent is the project design built on the members’ own preferences and need rather than donor enforced?
- To what extent are mechanisms of influence present during as well as after project implementation?

Coding (from interviews)

Interpretations of inclusive:

“It is the access to the people living within the Israeli border the “green line”, closed off from all sides, that characterizes their support in the West Bank”

“The project is not something that is forced upon them, but they know which help and support they can get”

“Services was practical and in demand”

“Our staff goes to the field and visits them, talk to them, if there was challenges or something needed to be changed”

Interpretations of non-inclusive:

“The problem with cooperatives is that you have to own land to become a member”

“You feel like beneficiaries are saying oh we need water you are giving us food, can we change food to water. A little bit challenging”

Looking at today’s development cooperation there is a gap of what different stakeholders stress about adaptability in projects and what research actually have been able to prove. Since there are few studies made on adaptability in NGO-projects, my intention is to investigate to
what extent NGO-projects indeed achieve the criteria’s of an adaptable project form. From what previous literature has been able to tell about the adaptability in project structures I expect to find high levels of adaptability in the selected NGO-projects of my study had I compared them to bilateral support. Thus, I expect higher levels of flexibility, that the projects to a greater extent have decentralized decision structures and more flexible budgets, where the more flexibility a project are left, the higher adaptability should be measured. Because flexibility allow for the project to adjust more quickly since there should be a wider threshold were approval from higher instances to change project are not necessary. I expect higher levels of responsiveness, meaning having robust methods and capabilities to be able to react to changes without being affected by them to larger extents had a project not had the same capabilities. Capabilities such as local knowledge or presence, mitigation strategies, or organizational innovativeness. Lastly, I also expect higher levels of inclusiveness, higher frequency of dialogues with beneficiaries, adjustments of projects due to local demands, and better ability to access rural areas. When projects are showing indications of higher levels of flexibility, responsiveness, and inclusiveness they can be interpreted as more adaptable.

**Methodology**

A qualitative approach

I aim to describe what characterizes NGO-projects in development cooperation and so this study starts from a qualitative perspective. With that intention, qualitative method, through detailed data and in-depth analysis of a small number of cases, is most suitable for the task. Testing theory, comparing existing theory with empirical findings I hope to generate new dimensions in development theory.

**Case selection and limitations**

According to previous research, adaptability is a possible factor that separates NGO-projects from others, for example bilateral agencies, making them more successful. In order to
measure adaptability and be able to generalize this study’s findings the selected cases must be representative of other NGOs and their projects. Unfortunately, it is an impossible task to find a complete list of all, both domestic and international, active NGOs within the area of development, since many of them only are locally recognized. To narrow alternative NGOs for my selection, kept the sample to Swedish NGOs mainly because of the convenience of location. The population from where I drew my sample thus is the 19 Swedish framework organizations of Sida. Narrowing the sample to these organizations I knew that I would get a representative case because these are civil society organizations (CSOs) working with domestic Service-NGOs in developing and low-income countries. They have the same overall purpose to enhance the lives of the most marginalized groups through engaging the civil society, but differ in location, targets, focus area, and type of activities.

From this “typical pot” of NGOs one NGO, We Effect, with the special focus on food security was chosen in which several projects were studied. The only thing that makes this NGO different from the rest is its special focus on food security through promoting sustainable agriculture and small-scale farming. Different is also its project structure, since it is a cooperative governed by its members and partner cooperatives. As explained in the previous remark, all NGOs differ in their focus area, leading to different activities, locations, goals etc. However they are similar in their organizational structure since they are non-governmental where funding is both private and state sponsored. Thus, the fact that it focuses on agricultural activities should not affect the chances of having a representative result, nor being a cooperative. Being a cooperative and governed by its members it is easy to jump to the conclusion that all members and partners are included in project decisions and processes. However, that is not entirely certain and must be thoroughly investigated before drawing any conclusions, just as for any other organization. This sample of NGO should therefore be representative of the larger group of which it was drawn from.
Table 2. Description, We Effect

<table>
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<th>We Effect</th>
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<tr>
<td>We Effect§§ is a non-governmental organization active in 25 countries working through its regional offices as well as in partnership with local CSOs, farmer organizations, and cooperatives. The core strategy of the NGO is to strengthen cooperatives of women and men living in poverty through membership-based democracy, long-term economic thinking, social responsibility and transparency. We Effect is targeting farmers organizations for sustainable rural development including, among other things, support for sustainable farming, food production training, and adaption to climate change.</td>
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The selection of one NGO was also necessary for permitting case studies on project level allowing for more rich and detailed information about its workings, than had the study been kept at an organizational level. Since We Effect already has an overall focus on food security there should be projects targeting just that. To select a few cases from the around 160 ongoing projects I asked different Swedish and regional officers to help me distinguish those projects that clearly works with increasing food security. Lastly, I also asked them to point out projects active in insecure settings. This is because “In order to develop theory, or to generate new theory, it is useful to select a case in which one has reason to believe the manifestations of the theory will be highly visible and reasonable” (Bjarnegård 2009: 56). Already defined, an adaptable project form has the ability to change easily in order to suit different conditions. To be able to measure adaptability one must therefore see to cases where adaptability is likely to be visible and desirable. The manifestations of adaptability should according to theoretical suggestions best be measured in contexts where one can expect the environment to change rapidly and sudden.

One such context is conflict; conflict creates uncertainty about the future and can change people’s life rapidly. A conflict does not only have the risk of destroying homes, factories, or cultivable land, but can also limit the access to rivers, water basins, or other strategic areas. Natural disasters and climate change can change the landscape and environment to the extent that a river can be dried out, another area can be flooded, or an earthquake can limit the access to that area. Lastly, areas with low capacity to deal with conflicts or natural disasters are regions prone to changes. These are often poor and rural areas. Thus, adaptability is most

likely to be manifested in regions with *ongoing conflict, natural disaster or climate change*, and in regions with *low capacity* to deal with such fluctuations. In order for projects to be effective in such contexts, an adaptable project structure is necessary.

Although adaptability should be likely visible in these regions, it is in such environment one can expect the projects to have greater difficulties adapting their project structure. This could affect the results in the way that I don’t find adaptability in such contexts. On the other hand, that is also a result and other studies will then have to test if that is the case in other contexts as well. Accordingly, I was guided to three regions and seven projects. The real names of the projects have been changed with the intention of keeping the projects and respondents anonymous since their reputation can be at risk, although I do not think such information is very likely. The main argument for keeping the projects anonymous, however, is because I do not want the discussion to circle around the organization and project itself but to only work as an empirical case for measuring adaptability. Hence, the projects should be seen as separate case studies illustrating typical cases of NGO-projects. Listed below are the names of the studies projects, which all work for food security however further descriptions are found in “Appendix C”.

**East/South Africa**

1. Fruit and Coffee Cooperative, Uganda
2. Farmers Network, Tanzania
3. Dairy Cooperative, Kenya
4. Climate Resilience Project, Mozambique

**Asia**

5. Agricultural Umbrella Cooperative, Vietnam
6. Agricultural security project, Palestine

**Europe**

7. Farmers Rights Project, East Europe (Macedonia, Moldova, Albania, Kosovo)

Variation in case studies is to prefer to get a richer understanding of a phenomenon, but too much variation can instead make it difficult to distinguish causal directions. Limiting alternative variables affecting the study, I chose to examine projects within one NGO rather
than one project in different NGOs. I chose several cases, in different regions, so my findings were not limited to one context only. Another way of selecting projects would have been to instead keep to one region with either conflict or climate change, allowing for studying projects in different organizations. Both ways of studying projects are dependent on what projects and organizations that is willing to be interviewed. In my case, the responses from project officers lead me to the first option. Either way it is always important to triangulate your material with other contexts. Since I only study projects in one NGO I did however also study two projects in two other NGOs to compare my results. The first project is a Sida sponsored program via Forum Syd in Somalia called the *Drought response project*. As the name tells it was a response to the prolonged drought in East Africa threatening food security in the region. Rather than long-term assistance it was a humanitarian response of one year. The second project is implemented by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). It is implemented in the rural areas of Afghanistan and is a long-term project for enhancing rural livelihoods. SCA is not a framework organization of Sida, however sometimes sponsored by Sida as well as the private sector.

**Interviews as research method**

Then how are these projects going to be studied? Firstly, since the goal is to measure adaptability, an in-depth study of each case is necessary to contain enough amount of empirical information in order to test theory. To learn how people think or interpret an event, or what they have done or are planning to do, interviews are to prefer when collecting data (Aberbach & Rockman 2002: 673). Hence, those at the core, the employees at these organizations, need to be consulted. They are the only ones that in detail can explain what they have done or are planning to do in the projects. These are the first-hand sources when answering how different NGOs operate. In this case semi-structured questions are to prefer since the aim is to measure adaptability and how it is manifested. Thus, the questions need to capture the different layers of adaptability and cannot diverge too much without risking that information. To some extent the questions have to be open-ended too not mislead or frighten the respondent with too direct or leading questions. I also did not want to risk getting short or brief answers, which is why open-ended questions or grand tour questions giving examples are necessary.

*** See appendix C.
The construction of the interview and questions are also important for the participation of the respondent and for what answers that will be received. For example, asking a question that only indicates a yes or no answer will probably also receive such an answer. That becomes problematic if the intention of the interview is to get a more vivid image of a phenomenon or event. Thus, in the design of interview questions the previous notion has been taken into account. Moreover, the order of the questions is important for what results that are received (Leech 2002). The interview has therefore been design as follows: introduction and easy questions first to get the respondent talking, then more demanding questions are asked based on theory, which is the question that the analysis will build on, and lastly final questions closing the interview†††. Secondly, when constructing the interview it was important to make it as tangible as possible, discussing the project and only the project and its organization. Thus, I had the projects sending me descriptions of the projects beforehand to get an overview of each project and its purpose, goals, targets etc. Due to delays in some cases, questionnaires could not be specified beforehand but improvised during the interview. However, I did not find that problem to affect the chances of measuring adaptability.

Choosing respondents

To find who could discuss adaptability in NGO-projects the respondents were selected, after the recommendation of which projects to study, through recommendations from the head office of each organization. The criterions were that the either he/she is well informed about the project or that he/she had some role in the project. With these criterions I was guided to both regional and project officers. Since all of the projects are ongoing or recently finished plenty of information should be available. The respondents working with the projects should also be able to describe it well since it is newly received information, events that are currently present, not months, years, or decades old. Taking away the pressure of feeling obliged to answer according to the values of their organizations, the respondents are kept anonymous. Interviewing centrally placed people in non-governmental organizations there should be a tendency of the person to highlight the project in a positive manner. However, assuring anonymity this effect should be diminished. Anonymity also ensures safety to the participant in case sensitive information, that could damage the position of the respondent or the organization itself, are revealed.

†††See “appendix A".
Moreover, the selection of respondent permitted dialogues with people at the regional level, closer to the projects and their locations instead of talking to employees in Sweden, further away from the project locations. They are central sources to give a correct description of the project. Consequently, I feel confident to argue that these sources are of high centrality. These are centrally placed people in well-known organizations hence they should neither want to or cannot present false information without the risk of damaging its reputation. However, being centrally placed people and very busy managing ongoing projects it was difficult to find people that had the time. As a result, I had a few number of interview dropouts and in some cases also due to replacement of staff or sudden events in the regions. Consequently, I had to compliment my interviews with project documents and descriptions‡‡‡. Another contributing factor was the distance to the projects and respondents, which only allowed for communication by email and in some cases made the communication more difficult had I been able to call or meet.

The scheduling of the interviews was unfortunately also very time consuming. Due to vacation, field studies, and local events, the scheduling of the interviews went very slow and reduced my overall time for the study. Also late in the scheduling process I did not know if the contacts where available within my timeframe of conducting the interviews. Because many respondents were not placed in Sweden, and it would have been very costly and time demanding to visit them, the interviews were made via Skype. It gives you the opportunity to see body language and expressions enabling richer interpretations of the conversation as well as makes it easier to adjust and alter the questions to received reactions. Skype also enables interviews in places, which sometimes are dangerous to travel to, such as conflict zones in the Palestine case. However, even tough the interviews were not at the actual site of the projects, it did not mean that local events could affect the interview. In this case, I had to reschedule an interview due to a presidential election limiting the access to Internet connection or because of local disturbances.

**Reflexivity**

“The relationship between the researcher and the researched are always entangled with systems of social power based on gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, age, disability order

### Se Appendix D
etc.” (Ortbals & Rincker 2009: 287). Therefore one has to have knowledge of ones own identity when interviewing and how that can affect the interview. There is often a power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee that one have to be aware of. Knowing the questions in advance and being the one who is setting the rules for the conversation, the interviewer is empowered with this knowledge. However, being a student and a lot younger than the respondents, who also had high positions within their organization, rather put me in a student-teacher relationship. That might not necessarily be negative when doing elite interviews since the respondent might gain confidence and feel empowered conveying more than had he/she felt threatened. I believe this was the case in my interviews and to my advantage.

**Document sample**

To complement and support the material from the interviews I also used document reports that were sent to me by some of the respondents§§§. Other documents were accessed through the websites of the NGOs. Using different sources is also to prefer for triangulating and validating the data. In this case, the reports and strategies did agree with what was collected from the interviews validating the facts. The project descriptions that were handed to me should not be misinterpreted as something the project officer sent me to show off their good figures since I asked for a description of their work and not results. However, the officers had access to different types of documents and so they sent me the ones that were available to them, which were descriptions, evaluations, and applications etc.

§§§ See complete list in appendix D.
Discussion

To what extent are NGO-projects adaptable?

Coming back to the question of this paper – to what extent are NGO-projects adaptable and how is that manifested – the following section will discuss what has been said in the interviews with regional and project officers as well as what has been documented in project reports and strategies.

Flexibility

*A flexible project design that has wiggle room for improvised solutions, a flexible implementation process, and internal structures that support flexible solutions.*

To what extent is the budget flexible?

Discussing flexibility of the project it is important to know what options the Swedish NGO has access to indirectly, through existing structures, alter a project. As the case description conveys the cooperatives are started by its members. However, these cooperatives often lack capacity and resources to develop or continue their projects and that is why cooperation, in this case with We Effect, becomes essential. The Swedish NGO is mainly a financial partner, which means that the domestic NGO, the partner organization (PO), need to apply for funding from We Effect. This process is made at the regional/country level. We Effect can grant a project a budget that has less or more room for changes, i.e. flexibility. However, the percentage of flexibility is not always decided by We Effect but dependent on the donor terms of which We Effect receive its funding. A usual maximum is a budget flexibility of +/- 10 %, where changes more than 10 % requires approval from We Effect (Interview A). Thus, a flexible project budget should enable for quick changes when needed, important for the adaptability of the project. Faster in the sense that the allowed amount of flexibility in the project let the staff of the PO alter the budget – and activities – without filling up extra time for reporting.

An example from the East African Farmer Cooperatives was the prolonged drought in the region drying out cultivable land, hindering production, decreasing rain water for agriculture,
thus threatening the food security and income of its members. When I asked the regional officer how they react to these environmental changes, if they change anything during the project implementation, the answer was that “We are trying to be flexible, if something happens, for example the extreme drought this spring when the rain did not occur, we tried to be flexible and allow partners to change their budgets (...) move the money to a workshop about how to collect rain water” (Interview A). Having this flexibility in the budget allows the project to adjust its activities to meet with the new demands without affecting the core purpose of the project. A less flexible project would not have been able to do that. If the project had kept to its former goals that were set up before, in this case the drought, the overall purpose of the project - enhancing the life of small-scale farmers – would most likely not have been fulfilled.

In other cases, such as in the Agricultural Umbrella Cooperative in Vietnam it was also possible to make changes in the budget. The projects were postponed due to the large rainfalls and storms, which flooded large areas in the central regions in Vietnam. Even though they had not budgeted for this dramatic event, they were able to add money and adjust the support to get the projects back on track again (Interview C). For these kinds of events partners that receive core funding also have access to additional “emergency funds”, which only requires a minor application process so that the money are allocated rapidly (Interview F). However, according to the regional officer in Vietnam emergency fond is not always available since there have been agreements that We Effect should not work humanitarian. On the one hand, it seems to be a grey zone in the organization, which has decided not to give humanitarian aid, but where donors at the same time have opened up for these types of changes to be made (Interview C). On the other hand, We Effect gives a support they call “recovery funds” to projects in the aftermath of a natural disaster or other catastrophe since there is a demand of these rapid responds. However, the two types of budget allocations seem almost similar, allowing for extra funding additional to the core funding. Thus, regardless name, there are additional funding to be added if disasters were breakout, which I argue results in more options for adjusting the budget and consequently the project itself.

Lastly, of importance for the budget flexibility is the frequency of revisions. According to the regional officer in the Vietnam project, the budgets are revised continually during the project, which allow for adjustments and flexibility during implementation (Interview C). Having
regular meetings to adjust the budget during a project it gives the project the chance to be flexible in the long run, not just when challenges occur.

To what extent is the decision structure flexible?

Also the decision structure is essential for flexibility and an adaptable project structure. It is the Swedish board of directors that, in dialogue with executives, decides the universal guidelines of the support. It is then up to each region to decide how the support and activities should be designed. We Effect always work through partner organizations (POs), which implement the activities that are designed together with the Swedish NGO. The projects and activities are built on a problem analysis identified by the members in these organizations and the goal with having such cooperation is to guarantee the PO ownership of its activities and development (Effektrapport 2016). In that sense, We Effect is a decentralized organization, which means that decisions are made at project level in the areas of implementation (Ibid.). Therefore, the majority of the staff within We Effect as well as the PO is locally employed. An example of decentralized decision structure is the Agricultural security project in Palestine. It involved a new food security project that was going to be implemented. A project officer working with the food security project stated that they took the political situation and accessibility (stressed in the risk analysis) into consideration when designing the project. “We divided the West Bank into three or four categories in order to guarantee a good and strong management of the project” (Interview E). They divided the West Bank into smaller pieces cooperating with different partners in the different areas, decentralizing management to be flexible and able to respond to local events. “Here in this environment, with events coming out of the blue it is difficult to have concrete plans. Need to be flexible, know what is going on, and continuously changing. Adaptability and flexibility represent the main factors of many principles that we always have in mind for best implementation of activities” (Interview E).

According to a project officer in the Climate resilience project in Mozambique We effect is different than many donors in the way that it give partners the possibility to choose what they want to do according to their strategic plan, where they see a demand (Interview F). “Other donors don’t allow this methodology, but instead have a specific template choosing regions where the activities should occur as well as preferences for specific kind of activities” (Interview F). For the PO to receive money the only thing that is requested is that about 30 % is used for administration cost and 70 % for activities (Interview F). This means that the PO
can influence the support to a large extent in terms of what activities that would be suitable for the project. This would not have been possible to the same extent, had the activities been developed within the donor organization rather than in the project. In that sense, POs of We Effect are left flexibility. In the Vietnam project, even the targets themselves are part in selecting the subjects of training although within the frames of the support (Project evaluation). Another regional officer state the close working relation with local partners as a key in flexible support (Interview D).

A part of the support from We Effect is also directed at the POs own strategies and goals to strengthen their capacity (Interview D). “Off course we have an own agenda, but it is not pushed on the PO. Rather it does often agree with the local priorities (…) and our partners can influence the support very much” (Interview D). Thus, the support does not only leave room for a decentralized decision-making at the project-level, but also strengthen the capacity of the POs to actually make qualified decisions. Furthermore opens up for a flexible decision structure.

**To what extent does the project have an action matrix that is not fixed but subject to continuing negotiation and revised on numerous occasions?**

Reaching the implementation process, it has been pointed out that the POs seek funding from We Effect by sending in a project application containing suggestions of activities. We Effect does not interfere in the activity plans, but having a dialogue with the partners during the project (Interview F). As long as the main purpose of the project is kept, all changes in activities are approved (Interview A). Going back to the example of the flooding in the Vietnam Region, flooding caused the projects to stop or postpone many of its activities. Nevertheless, the project was still significant although the activities needed to be adjusted since “one cannot expect the people to come to a workshop when they struggle to survive” (Interview C). Thus, the activities were instead aimed at recovery as well as prevention, should similar events occur again. For example, making sure they have crops that survive flooding as well as practical training (Interview C). Having this kind of flexibility in the activities makes the project better equipped for meeting with sudden events. This characteristic was something that was manifested in all We Effect projects.
**Conclusions: Flexibility**

Different examples of how flexibility is manifested in We Effect projects have been demonstrated. Comparing these findings with the two control cases, Afghanistan and Somalia, I hope to find some interesting facts. Being a humanitarian action the Somalia drought response project is not fully comparable to the long-term support of We Effect but it gives an important nuance to the discussion. The Somalia project is a one-year sponsored program as a humanitarian response to the drought. The budget was fixed and did not allow for any flexibility, which also eliminates the option of adjusting activities – they are already set. This is described as problematic by the project officer, adding that it is too holistic: “If you are giving food, sometimes you have to also do water, and activities for recovery (…) some elements that were missing” (Interview B). Examples of complains from the beneficiaries were the lack of water when the project was giving them food. “Need to invest at an early stage in the key drivers of food security, the resilience part of it so that by the time drought comes, because we know it will come, at least the people are not as vulnerable” (Interview B).

The project officer describes what is not working in humanitarian aid, however it also gives a good comparison to what actually works in We Effects long-term projects, namely the flexibility to adjust. The Afghanistan case was on the other hand very similar to the We Effect-projects. The budget flexibility is also dependent on the donor, usually around +/- 10% with budget revisions about two times a year, and has continuous assessments of activities during the implementation. The Swedish officer in this project putted further emphasis on the importance of flexible decision-making or as they call it “a wide space approach”, meaning that the members themselves should be able to decide how the projects are best implemented. “In a country such as Afghanistan it is important that recruitments are made in the villages”, the project staff is hence ordinary people from the targeted villages, which was one of the keys for an adaptable project (Interview G).

Perhaps this could point to an important difference between NGO-projects and state-led projects. A state can never get away from the fact that it is a state, which means that is has a reputation to withhold. An NGO also have a reputation to withhold to get sponsors, however its funding is not built on incomes from national taxpayers. That sort of difference can lead to the fact that state led projects miss out on important results had projects been allowed more flexibility. Another factor when discussing budget flexibility is donor-dependency. Although We Effect grants the projects flexibility, the NGO is as mentioned dependent on sponsoring from other donors. Thus, depending on the guidelines set by these donors a projects budget,
INGO as well as DNGO, can be less or more restricted. This is naturally something that can affect the adaptability in a project structure. However, in the interviews with both We Effect staff and the regional officer in SAK they never mentioned donor guidelines as something problematic. I believe them since they did expose other challenges in the projects. The reaction was however not the same in the humanitarian drought project were the budget was fixed. The difference between the Somalia drought project and the other projects is that in the former the project design was initiated by the donor whilst in the other the project designs were made in the POs. Thus, in the last case the donors are only requiring reporting and evaluations of the project not what kind of activities that are implemented (Interview G). Allowing for local ownership and what I call decentralized decision-making, there is flexibility.

Responsiveness

In the theoretical chapter the model of a responsive project as been described as a three-stage process: 1) It identifies, 2) prevents, 3) and adjust. Having these points in mind is to suggest when continuing the analysis.

To what extent does the project identify challenges and risks before implementation?

A part of being responsive is to have plans and strategies to detect possible risks before they are realized and be able to mitigate the effects. In the Climate resilience project in Mozambique the project officer stated that they, in the planning of a project when they make an activity plan, advice the partners to also do a risk matrix (Interview F). In the risk matrix they have to predict all possible risks that could affect the project negatively as well as mitigation plans for each risk. “So when a risk appears they have already prepared a plan B” (Interview F). In the following table, I present four different risks that were identified in the Agriculture Umbrella Cooperative in Vietnam, which show what a risk matrix could look like.
Table 3. Management at project level, the Agriculture Umbrella Cooperative

| Risk A: The central and local authorities have negative attitudes towards activities of ethnic minority agricultural cooperatives |
| Solution: close cooperation with local authorities at community level and frequent policy briefing of the project achievement. |

| Risk B: The Planning of funds |
| Solution: proper planning and prioritizing activities in order to maximize funds available for the main activities of the project that directly contributes to the achievement of the expected outputs. |

| Risk C: Natural disaster |
| Solution: Designing activities to minimize risk in agriculture production. In addition, capacity building including formal training and guidance will also emphasize these issues to make targeted farmers prepared. |

* An abstract from the project report, “Agricultural Umbrella Cooperative Vietnam: Project description and results”.

The main structure of this abstraction from a more comprehensive risk analysis of the Agricultural Umbrella Cooperative project is applicable to the other regional projects as well. When talking to the different project officers and regional officers they agree that there are substantial analyses made before starting a project with a PO as well as during project implementation. The responsiveness will then depend on whether the project actually follows these plans, close cooperation with the local government for an instance. Nevertheless, good planning prepares the projects to be able to respond to sudden events and among all project officers there is a positive attitude to the risk strategies.

**To what extent does the project adjust to local settings and new demands before implementation?**

Firstly, an example from Tanzania was given. In Tanzania the word “cooperative” is badly associated due to earlier decisions of the government to force people into cooperatives in the 1960s. Therefore, very aware of the circumstances, the project did not use the word cooperative but emphasizing word such as networks or unions when starting the project. I find this a perfect example of how a project is adjusted to local settings before the implication phase. If such a problematic issue had not received attention before the project had started, it would most likely have resulted in failure.
Another example where the project is adjusted to local settings already in the planning phase is the Agricultural security project. This project is targeting farmers living in remote areas in the West Bank. In some regions the Israelis control a lot of the land and local agricultural resources, which makes resources for rural livelihood unavailable for many people threatening food security. The West Bank is divided into A, B, and C depending on the control of the Israeli forces. Area C is fully controlled by the Israelis “so if you want to do any activity you need to apply to the Israelis, need to get their approval” (Interview E). This requires awareness and responding to challenges before the project implementation. But how is We Effect managing to implement projects in such areas? Once again, the access to these areas seems to be dependent on the relationships with different societal players as well as the history of the organization itself. The project officer that I interviewed in this project emphasized We Effects long history of work in the region, 20 years (Interview E). Thus, they are well known in the region and having good relations with partners, for example the ministry of agriculture, have resulted in higher trust of the projects.

**To what extent does the project identify challenges, risks etc. during implementation?**

Through the developed plans and strategies the project should be able to identify risks and adjust accordingly, but how is that actually captioned during the implementation of the projects? The most frequent answers I got were the importance of good dialogues with the local partners as well as regular evaluations during the project. The regional officer in Vietnam stressed: “We visit the projects about three times a year, meeting with project officers and discusses challenges, for example the climate or political situations, to try to come up with a solution” (Interview C). Also the regional officer in East Europe stressed the importance of continuous dialogue and adaption to the current context. Through communication with partners, giving and receiving feedback, and paying monitoring visits etc. the project identified a challenge in a Macedonia project. They noticed that the project were not fulfilling its goals and identified the political context as an important reason. The challenge was the political crisis and weak governance within the country and its communities of where the project is located. Since this project is both a service provider as well as doing some advocating work, it was pointed out that it is difficult to influence a political institution that is barely recognized and that have no routine/standard (Interview D). It is an example of how an accurate identification of a challenge can result in changing activities, described in and thus enhanced adaptation of the support.
As stated by several project officers to deal with challenges such as conflicts in local POs or political conflicts, local presence is always mentioned as a crucial factor. “Local presence and knowledge enables for staff to be close to the conflicts, be better informed, and to get an objective picture of the situation” (Interview D). Naturally, local presence should also enable for more thoroughly grounded (contextually grounded and neutral) identifications of challenges, should the project not have had locally placed staff. These are commonly mentioned arguments by the regional and project officers and seems to be the key in a responsive support. The project officer in Palestine argue that We Effect plays a leader role having good relations with local partners: “we have a good teams who supervise the implementation of all our projects (…) they have good routines, experience, and knowledge” (Interview E). Thus, local knowledge and presence is two important factors for identifying and consequently being able to respond to sudden demands, which all projects of We Effect seem to have.

Having plans for mitigation of risks as well as a qualified system for identification should improve a projects ability to respond. However, it does still not imply that a project in fact is responsive i.e. adjusted to local settings and new demands.

**To what extent does the project adjust to local settings and demands during the implementation?**

When asking the regional officer in the East African Cooperatives what reactions or critic the projects has or is experiencing an interesting example was given. An indirect reaction to the projects was mainly coming from the men in the region. When women are invited to participate in these kinds of projects, workshops, learning how to invest their money, how to make profit, how to develop leadership skills, etc. it sometimes backlashes. Because women become empowered through these workshops the male dominance is threatened, resulting in violence towards the women. However, to deal with these effects of the project the Swedish organization started collaborating with an organization working for gender equality. That organization works closely with the Swedish partner project letting men educate men about the advantages of gender equality. Working with male role models in the local villages, they try to create dialogues discussing opportunities with female participation and reduce the violence (Interview A).
When trying to book an interview with the project officer in the agricultural security project in Palestine there were several incidents, which postpone my meetings. One reason was the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel made by US President Donald Trump. When I one week after the event was able to speak to the project officer I asked how the “Trump declaration” had affected current projects. The answer was that it caused delays in project implementation because of Israeli checkpoints was constructed on the roads preventing project staff from accessing offices and fields. Also due to the escalated security situation between Palestine and Israeli forces, project staff had to stay at home (Interview E). In conflict zones, sudden events leading to escalated security is often a great challenge for NGOs. When I asked how the project respond to such challenges I got the answer “Yes we are trying to deal with flexibility, to avoid further losses, deal with current matter” (Interview E).

Other examples of responses to challenges during project implementation was that the Umbrella Cooperative in Vietnam postponed their long-term activities in favor of more humanitarian aid due to flooding as an effect of the Cyclones in the region (Interview C). The project in Mozambique adjusted its activities sine people were not appearing in the meetings due to drought and they had to find necessities, such as food and water (Interview F). In the European case there was a demand from the beneficiaries to extend the support and include more villages and so the partner did (Interview D). Overall, there should be incitements for both We Effect and POs to alter a project to new demands. As a project officer explains, when for example a drought hits an area where projects are being implemented, it is difficult to reach the goals of a project (ex. improved agricultural production). But, for We Effect problems in project implementation is also problematic since a lot of money and time, spent in one activity, is lost. “I believe we are in the same situation (...) the difference is that the partners are working directly in the field and we make monitores, give advices, funds and technical support. If a project or activity fails, it is also a fail for us” (Interview F). Thus, there should be incitements for We Effect to be adaptable.

Nevertheless this should be an incitement for all donors and organizations to be adaptable, since all actors naturally want their aid to be effective. However, some organizations are more limited than others, already in their project design as discussed in the previous section, or when responding to challenges.
Conclusion: responsiveness

Again, the Afghanistan case further demonstrates how responsiveness is manifested in aid-projects. As We Effect, SCA always do mitigation plans to identify risks and be able to respond at an early stage. SCA also try to recruit people from the villages into the projects to increase the knowledge of the local setting and its risks (Interview G). For example, an identification made of one employee in the field was that in workshops women was suppressed by the men, suggesting a division of men and women (Interview G). As the project in Palestine, the rural livelihood project in Afghanistan has experience of working in conflicted areas. To be able to access these areas local inheritance is stressed as utterly important, “the people at the Kabul office (SCAs regional office) would not be able to access all areas” (Interview G). As We Effect in Palestine, SCA has a long history of work in Afghanistan, which is stressed by the regional officer as an advantage building a mutual trust. “People in the rural areas know about SCA” and having a good relationship with the arbab**** of a village will most certainly increase the chances to respond to challenges both before and during the implementation (Interview G). However, working in areas occupied by opposition groups comes with certain challenges. Sometimes the Taliban’s can make certain demands, one example is that they wanted to stop an education for girls because they wanted the focus to be on the boys only (Interview G). Again, the arbab became very important working as a mediator between the project and the Taliban’s. The usual response is to negotiate with the Taliban’s pushing on the factor that if the girls are not allowed education, the project will be shut and the boys will be without education as well. I believe this example gives an interesting image of both challenges and responses that occur in development cooperation.

All projects in We Effect and in the Afghanistan case seem to have good preparations for identification and adjustment to challenges. The We Effect projects dealing with climate related risks seem to be able to respond to new demands and improvise solutions when need, much thanks to the local presence and knowledge. As expected the Palestine project and the Afghanistan case have to a larger extent more difficulty dealing with larger security related challenges creating delays in the project, which the projects have to wait out. However, they still have the opportunity to be responsive in the sense that they actually are able to access and perform in conflict-ridden areas, they are able to deal with challenges at the local or project level, and able to adjust their project accordingly. The Somalia project was however not able

**** The Arabic word for leader and refers to the leader or chief of a village common in the Middle East.
to adjust to the demands of changing activities from food to water, as discussed before, since the budget was fixed.

Inclusiveness

The project is inclusive of all beneficiaries in the planning of a project and mechanisms of influence are present during as well as after implementation.

To what extent does the project have access to rural areas in which poor people lack basic services for food security?

As I argued in previous chapters, an adaptable project form must also be able to include those that others are not capable of reaching. Marginalized groups that projects can reach in order to learn their demands. To know if the project is representative of such groups, one must know if the project is randomly choosing targets and areas, or if there are more underlying plans for it. According to the project officer in the East African case both when beginning a new cooperation and when continuing a partnership We Effect make so called organization assets plans. It means that staff from the Swedish NGO set up meetings and workshops with staff in the cooperative, the board, and members to get a general view of why this area, project, or people need support. In this case, the Kenyan state and the local governments are not very active in politics for poverty reduction according to the project officer and there are not any structures when it comes to farmer cooperatives (the same is stressed by respondents in most of the projects apart from the Vietnam case). There are also a lot of false or fake cooperatives, which the state needs to be better at monitoring but does not today take responsibility for (Interview A). Thus, the lack of domestic governmental support to small-scale farmers had the project especially targeting small-scale farmers.

Another marginalized group that is targeted by We Effect is women. The motivation for targeting women and female participation is the fact that women earn less than men but it is the women that actually do the most work in farming related activities. In Kenya, 70 % of all farmers working in small-scale farming are women, but women own only 10 % of the cultivable land. That is why the main purpose is to increase women’s income in the agricultural sector and why this project can be seen as inclusive of marginalized groups.
Also the new global strategy for 2017-2021 has gender equality as a priority, requiring that in all activities with POs 50% of the support should go to women, and 50% to men (Equality First). In the Vietnam project 68% of the targeted people is ethnic minority people, poor from remote areas (Project evaluation). The East European project is targeting minorities, such as the Romani people, and focuses on their rights (Interview D).

In Palestine they are working with the resilience of the most marginalized and poor people who are living in very far communities, facing political and military challenges: for example, the occupation of the Israelis preventing people from accessing available land, and agricultural resources. According to a project officer, it is the access to the people living within the Israeli border the “green line”, closed off from all sides, that characterizes their support in the West Bank (Interview E). Through local partners and support to communities they are able to access these areas. The Palestine government does not work in the regions were the projects are located, since the Palestine government are in conflict with the Israelis occupying the areas. Instead they support the Palestine project with money to help the people with basic services (Interview G), which otherwise would not have gotten any support.

To what extent is the project built on the members’ own preferences and need rather than donor enforced?

Letting a project officer of the East Africa project summarize what the project is especially good at it highlights some of the things that have already been said, but also add some interesting facts: “We are those we try to be, we are ourselves a cooperative (…) What makes this project different is that it is doing activities and operating in areas that people already are occupied and familiar with (…) The project is not something that is forced upon them, but they know which help and support they can get (…) Although it is a Swedish NGO, the majority of the regional employees are locals familiar with the region and its people” (Interview A). In this question, all regional and project officers from We Effect agrees. Local ownership is a reoccurring phrase that refers to the understanding of beneficiaries as the local owners of a project and decision makers. An example from Vietnam is drawn to understand the sense of local ownership: “In a former project the service to farmers, for example water supply, was located very far away from the farmers and many was not able to reach the services. Taking this into consideration more cooperatives expanded their services to meet the demands of the farmers. The services thus became practical and in demand, an important criteria for sustainability, and a lesson that - we must to do what they need, not what we have
following the actual demand of the farmers. Working and monitoring at the local level beneficiaries became a part of the process” (Project evaluation).

To what extent are mechanisms of influence is present during as well as after project implementation?
There must be ways for participants and members to present critique and give feedback of the projects, hence making the demands “visible” to development actors. In the Vietnam project beneficiaries have always been shared the project information and results in annual workshops to know their rights (Interview C). An often-argued key to the positive results of the projects is the continuous dialogue with stakeholders in and outside the project. Since many of the projects and partnerships have been taken place during a long time, several years, there is a constant dialogue of how together face challenges (Interview C). It is a shared partnership with mutual cooperation (Interview D). As previously explained, We Effects projects are not directly implemented by themselves, but indirectly through its local POs. Before starting a partnership the potential partner cooperative is thoroughly reviewed, which means revising member influence, transparency, that there are regular meetings, that all members receive invitation to those, protocols, that there exists an adequate system for accounting etc. If a partnership is established, the Swedish NGO continues the monitoring of the cooperative and project. Two times a year an accountant is sent to the cooperative to control bookkeeping, and program supervisors are sent to the actual project to look at the activities and goals, visiting members and farmers to get their assessments. All the information is gathered in a combined evaluation that is discussed together with the board of the cooperative. Thereafter, a partnership can be established or a revision of the ongoing project is made. All of these activities are done in dialogue with the partner projects and its participants.

Conclusion: Inclusiveness
From these findings, and not just in this section, local presence is emphasized and it seems as the projects does include target groups and members continuously during a project. However, a dilemma brought up by the East African project officer is that the problem with cooperatives is that you have to own land to become a member of a coffee cooperative, you have to own a cow if it is a milk cooperative etc. This excludes the poorest people that cannot afford to buy land or cattle. “This is why we look at different aspects of poverty (…) what we try to do is to establish other kinds of cooperatives, for example small business and kiosks”
Another example is that they try to make the cooperative recruit youths, who get education in how to save, lend, invest, and pay back money and then receive education in business with support from successful business men working as mentors. Targeting and representing these groups have increased their income and there are lots of good examples of people being better off after joining the project. One result is that the farmers have started to take own incentives dividing agricultural income equally between men and women in the households. As in Pakistan, the Afghanistan project is able to reach the most marginalized people by having a large network of local contacts and a good sense of local ownership, for example the arbabs as discussed earlier. The “wide space approach” is meant to let the beneficiaries be able to decide how the projects can help them in the best way (Interview G). This is done already before implementation when the POs do needs assessments with different actors, often the arbab and local councils who are democratically chosen by the villagers. The neutrality of the NGO is crucial when accessing areas with conflict as this case show.

The Somalia drought response project however did not seem to create the same sense of ownership. Although it is not comparable to the projects of We Effect, since it is humanitarian support, it gave an interesting input to local participation. According to the project officer in the Somalia project “the illusion is that the communities and the local organizations also participate in terms of identifying the need (…) so we in consultation with those actors (UN, local authorities, donors) identify where exactly we have a gap and if another organization is doing the same activity” (Interview B). Going back to the example of complaints by the target groups, wanting water instead of food support, the project was not able to respond because it was the purpose of other NGOs active in the same area. What the project officer meant is that other donors often are missing the demands side and the project feel forced on the participants. In that case, the project was limited to its original purpose. In this case the project were able to access certain groups, but they did not have the same success in building their projects on the local demands.

The previous examples imply that the way in which the project can reach out to different marginalized groups, show that responsiveness, flexibility, and inclusiveness all play a role for adaptability of the project (Interview A). Although it is the targets of the project that directly are the beneficiaries, indirectly all people in the agricultural sector becomes indirect beneficiaries (Interview D).
Conclusion

Revisiting theory

All the empirical findings have now been presented and how adaptability is manifested has been shown leaving two questions to be answered: What are the theoretical implications? And what conclusions can we make?

Theoretical implications

Previous theory has been vague when it comes to defining adaptability in development cooperation. Few studies have been made on NGO-projects and development management. Thus, I have set up a theoretical framework for an adaptable project form and tried to find indicators of adaptability in NGO-projects and describe how it is manifested. The focus has been to look at NGO-projects and try to see to what extent they have an adaptable project structure. However, it is difficult to define what are the actions of the NGO and what that are the actions of other donors or partner projects. Therefore, I have also tried to show how these actors can influence each others work as it is important for the understanding of the challenges NGO-projects are facing, hence being able to adapt. Measuring adaptability one has to be aware of these influences although they are not a part of the actual NGO.

Summarizing the findings from the seven We Effect projects all of them showed indicators of adaptability. These indicators were by most regional/project officers also emphasized as key characteristics of successful aid-projects. I expected the flexibility to be high in the NGO-projects since We Effect is working through its partner organizations and the findings confirmed my assumptions. When it comes to changing activities to sudden events, the projects were more flexible than first assumed. Not only could they change activities rapidly, but also add activities and side projects (for example the gender equality organization in Kenya) had the project unintended outcomes. The project did also achieve my expectations for responsiveness. All projects have robust structures and strategies in place for responding to risks and challenges before and during implementation. What I hoped to find, but still surprised me was the projects good knowledge to the local contexts and their well thought
methods to access difficult areas and gain the trust of the people. In those cases, the responsiveness was higher than expected although some projects like the Palestine projects sometimes were delayed due to increased regional insecurity. The last indicator, inclusiveness, was also found in all projects. Overall there seemed to be a genuine belief to include all participants and stakeholders in the design and evaluations of a project to maximize the potential of a project.

When controlling these findings to the Afghanistan project and the Somalia project two important theoretical outcomes can be added. First, the Afghanistan case, which is also a long-term project, measured high adaptability similar to the We Effect projects. This outcome means that the result from the We Effect projects can be generalized to other long-term projects working with food security. An unintended result of the study was that adaptability seems to be different in the Somalia project. My intention was not to study a humanitarian project, but after being in touch with different personnel I could not dismiss the opportunity to get some contrasting facts to my findings. When comparing the Somalia project to the others it was obvious that it was different - one-year, short-term, humanitarian project with fixed budget and activities. It was not flexible, it was not able to respond to the same extent as the other projects, and it was not as inclusive as the others, hence, lower adaptability. Although this project already is different from the We Effect projects, and for that reason may not be comparable, it shows another level of adaptability. It gives some interesting suggestions of why some projects are not adaptable to the same extent as others, and what preconditions that are important for an adaptable project form. Thus, it is fair to say that different types of support seem to reach different levels of adaptability. This finding means that the overall results are not applicable for all NGO-projects, only longer-term support. Therefore, one cannot state that all NGO-projects are adaptable, when in fact one has to see to each specific project.

The core element in an adaptable project form, which is consistent for the three indicators, is the premises that the project should not have to miss some of its goals because of internal/external challenges demanding adjustments or that the overall purpose of the project should not need to be adjusted because of external/internal challenges. This means that the advantages of having an adaptable project form is that it is not limited to contextual demands. However, one dimension of adaptability needs further explanation. One need to know that there is a fine line between actually being adaptable (not changing purpose) and non-
adaptable when a project is forced to change due to contextual demands. The difference is that if a project experience flooding, an adaptable project stay in the region with preventative or humanitarian aid whilst a non-adaptive are forced to change location where flooding is not hindering the support. Although the Somalia project was a humanitarian response to drought it was forced to another location since it could not change the type of activities/aid, because other donors with the same type of support was working in the same location and the project.

The ideal type “adaptable project form” can be used in further studies to study adaptability in different projects other than non-governmental. It is a theoretical contribution to existing theory on development cooperation that I hope future studies will continue developing. However, when measuring adaptability in the selected projects it was difficult to distinguish different levels of adaptability. One reason is the varying information and mixed result I got from the interviews, where some interviews were very detailed and others more general making the comparison of projects more difficult. Another reason can be the choice of projects; measuring projects in the same organization can minimize the variance and thus the likelihood of discovering differences. However, the interviews were complemented with documents and the projects were compared with two other projects, which should minimize these effects. Thus, a third possible reason can be the operationalization of adaptability. In the theoretical framework I have tried to distinguish what is an adaptable project from what is not by having bilateral support as one example. Comparing my expectations to my findings I did find that the Somalia drought project where not as adaptable as the others. In that sense, I have been able to distinguish what is adaptable form. But when it comes to separating the other cases that are measuring adaptability to the same extent it is more difficult since the scale on which adaptability is measured only points at lower or higher measurements. This however works perfectly fine for describing how adaptability is manifested.

Implications for future development cooperation

The amount of private actors has increased thoroughly since the millennium shift and for good reason when looking at the results of this study. Having an adaptable project form, NGO-projects have a flexible project design, are responsive to sudden demands, and inclusive of all beneficiaries. That allows for closer dialogue with the local population, local ownership and bottom-up development. It means overcoming challenges more easily, accessing difficult areas and overall a more effective development. The benefits that follows an adaptable project
form is indeed a logical suggestion of why so much aid is channeled via these organizations today. However, one should be careful drawing any conclusions that it is only NGO-projects that are adaptable. The Ideal type show that long-term NGO-projects are measuring high on the scale and previous theory claim that bilateral aid is inflexible, but other projects, such as bilateral, have to be thoroughly measured to be comparable to this study’s findings. Should for example bilateral projects measure low adaptability it does not mean that the adaptable project form is not applicable to those projects. Rather, the adaptable project form should be seen as an ideal for less adaptable projects to strive for. Nevertheless, acknowledging this change in channels of aid and the adaptable project form is important to continue develop efficient strategies in the battle towards poverty.

Managing human security threats
Returning to the previous research on how to manage emerging security threats, collective action for poverty reduction is not a new phenomenon, but taking advantage of the new opportunities that an adaptable project form brings, CCM and further coordination of aid is necessary. Managing human security threats we first need to know when we should push for an adaptable project form. Two main arguments can be stressed:

• When we want to reach a certain group in remote areas.
• When the project location is insecure or when there is a risk of sudden events in the environment hindering the project from fulfilling its goals, such as conflict or climate changes.

Second, why should we apply an adaptable project form? As previous discussion has pointed out, several reasons for an adaptable project form are to be distinguished. They are best understood when added together into three main arguments. The first argument is based on the notion that an adaptable project form, not easily interrupted by sudden events, gives opportunities for long-term cooperation. It means that an organization can adapt to changing contexts and still be active in the area. As research has shown, long-term cooperation is to prefer to short-term and ad-hoc assistance when wanting to promote development in the long run. The second argument is that an adaptable project form mean that beneficiaries of the projects can get more efficient aid in terms of faster response, demand-driven, and context bound. As shown in the empirical examples of this study it allows for better adaption to local settings and represents local demands, which makes the people in these regions more
accepting of the project. The project is therefore able to use its resources and capacity where it is needed the most, to maximize outcomes, resulting in effective aid. Third, It means that the most marginalized people, the ones that are in need of serious help, are accessed. Lastly, when managing human security threats, such as food security, through applying an adaptable project form, what does it look like?

Summarizing the theoretical as well as the empirical characteristics of an adaptable project form, these are some points to remember:

- Decentralized decision-making: personnel available at the local level
- Flexible budget
- Locally employed people
- Continuous evaluations and assessments
- Dialogue with beneficiaries and mechanisms for influence
- Local ownership
- Risk analysis and identification

Recommendations for future studies:

- To use the adaptable ideal type to measure other projects in a comparative study.
- Why are NGO-projects adaptable?
- What affects the adaptability in projects?
Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Questionnaire

This is the interview guide I used for all the interviews that included semi-structured and open-ended questions. However, some of the questions were before and during each interview adjusted to suit each organization and project. Four interviews were held in Swedish, therefore in that case, the questions were translated to Swedish. If the project had sent me a project description ahead of the interview, I did not ask any questions about the project itself. However, if some information was missing or seemed somewhat incorrect further questions about the specific project were added.

BACKGROUND

- How long have you been working for …?
- What kind of contact with the project does your role as … mean you have?
- Can you describe the project?
- Is this an on-going project?
- Is … the only financer of the project?

FLEXIBILITY

- How much of the activities in the project was already planned and decided before seeking money for the project?
- Who decides where the money is allocated?
- What were the expectations of the project and is the project meeting these expectations? Why/why not?
- Did something in the project location or environment change during the project?
  - What happened to the project?
  - Did you change any activities, goals because of that change?
  - Do you often to change goals/activities during the project?
- In terms of project structure, why is … able to reach these people?
  - What is the key?
  - What is problematic?

RESPONSIVENESS

- Before implementation, was there a situation analysis or problem analysis made?
- Do you have a crisis plan?
- Were there any challenges when implementing the project?
  - Did you know about these challenges before starting the project?
  - How did you manage them?
- Is there any challenge for the project that you have not yet been able to solve, or manage in order to reach the goals?

- What critique would you say the project has encountered?
  - From participants
  - From people in the area
  - From local government
  - From staff working within the project

- How has that critique affected or changed the implementation of the project, and the goals?
  - Goals changed
  - Type of activities changed
  - The project was ended

INCLUSIVE

- Why do you think this project is operating in this area/region?
- What does the local government do in this area/region to battle these questions?
- Why do you think you are able to access the people in these areas?
- When planning activities and future operations, were there any discussions with the different actors involved for ex. members, targets, participants etc. of how to develop or continue the project?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- What is this project especially good at? Why?
- What is this project less good at? Why?
- When discussing adaptability in projects, is there anything else you think is important to mention?
Appendix B – Interviews

Below is a complete list of the interviews. Most of the interviews were made through Skype and in Swedish. The others were made at the Swedish head office, or in English. The interviews were 30 to 60 minutes in length. Transcribed through the website: otranscribe.com

Skype interviews:

A. Regional Officer, We Effect, Kenya, October 25 2017. (Swedish)
B. Project Officer, Forum Syd, Somalia, November 14 2017. (English)
C. Regional Officer, We Effect, Vietnam, November 15 2017. (Swedish)
D. Regional Officer, We Effect, Macedonia, December 05 2017. (Swedish)
E. Project Officer, We Effect, Palestine, December 14 2017. (English)

Email conversations:

F. Project officer, We Effect, Mozambique, December 15-20 2017. (English)

Interviews at the Swedish head office:

G. Swedish Officer, SAK, Afghanistan, December 04 2017. (Swedish)
Appendix C – Project descriptions

This is a complete list of the projects that were studied and brief descriptions. The names are not the projects real names.

1. Agricultural security project, Palestine, We Effect
2. Agricultural Umbrella Cooperative, Vietnam, We Effect
3. Climate resilience project, Mozambique, We Effect
4. Dairy Cooperative, Kenya, We Effect
5. Drought Response Project, Somalia, Forum Syd
6. Fruit and Coffee Cooperative, Uganda, We Effect
7. Farmers Network, Tanzania, We Effect
8. Farmers Rights Project, East Europe, We Effect
9. Rural livelihood, Afghanistan, The Swedish Afghanistan Committee

Project descriptions

Name: Agricultural security project, Palestine
Purpose: Improve rural livelihood and ensure food security
Targets: Remote villages in the West Bank.
Activities: Develop tools for natural water spring, installing pumps, construction of water reserves.

Name: Agricultural Umbrella Cooperative, Vietnam
Purpose: Reducing poverty in the project area and increase the income of the household members of ethnic minorities.
Targets: Ethnic minority groups.
Activities: Promoting handicraft industry groups that be suitable to development tendency of present market, focus on eco-tourism development, secure agricultural production.

Name: Climate resilience project, Mozambique
Purpose: Climate resilience
Targets: The local community and villages in the district
Activities: To identify and empower communities about alternative livelihoods, empowering community groups and leaders on natural resource management, to train risk management committees for the interpretation of information received through text messages using cellphones.

Name: Dairy cooperative, Kenya
Purpose: To mitigate against the challenge of immediate need for food supplies as a humanitarian effort but also some long term development.
Targets: Farmers and their families.
Activities: Supply of relief food, construction of water bans, supporting basic irrigation systems and greenhouse farming etc.

Name: Drought response project, Somalia
Purpose: Humanitarian response to the drought.
Targets: People in the local communities affected by the drought.
Activities: relief packages and food, some training in how to manage future risks.

Name: Fruit and Coffee Cooperative, Uganda
Purpose: Building resilience as well as livelihood recovery for fruit and Coffee farmers.
Targets: Citrus and Coffee farmers and their families.
Activities: Training sessions on crop/vegetable, poultry husbandry techniques, vegetable gardening etc. Provide immediate fast maturing preferred crop seeds. Develop community resilience mechanism through sensitization, training, and demonstration on different water harvesting techniques.

Name: Farmers Network, Tanzania
Purpose: Making small-scale producers climate change resilient.
Targets: Small scale farmers.
Activities: Establish climate friendly activities, training local communities on water harvesting, establishing seeding nurseries, introducing new crops etc.

Name: Farmers rights project, East Europe
Purpose: Improve rural livelihood development and farmers rights.
Targets: Ethnic minority groups and marginalized people.
Activities: Advocating for farmers rights, capacity building of local partners, workshops and other farming related services.

Name: Rural livelihood project, Afghanistan
Purpose: Improve rural livelihoods.
Targets: Poor people living in rural areas.
Activities: Creating village and loan associations, workshops, and education.
Appendix D – List of documents

Project descriptions and reports

1. Agricultural Cooperative Vietnam: Project description and results (We Effect)
2. “Application for project funds”, Dairy Cooperative, Kenya, We Effect
3. “Application for project funds”, Farmers Network, Tanzania, We Effect
4. “Application for project funds”, Fruit and Coffe Cooperative, Uganda, We Effect
5. “Project description”, Climate Resilience project, Mozambique, We Effect
6. “Project evaluation”, Agricultural Umbrella Cooperative, Vietnam, We Effect

Annual reports and strategies

9. We Effects Effektrapport 2016 till FRII.
10. Annual report 2016, We Effect.
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