

CHAPTER 1

The History of the African Regional Archaeology Programme 1986 – 2000

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Background

In this chapter I present a history of the regional African Archaeology Network (AAN) programme from the point of view of SAREC and SIDA, for whom I was a research advisor and a consultant for a long time. I was specifically responsible for SAREC's support to archaeology.

In order to provide the historical context and background to the current state of affairs, it is important that we go back to the early period of Swedish aid in the 1960s when SIDA started. This was the period when Sweden had a very high economic growth – an all time high - and when a broad social welfare system was built up in the country. The Swedish labour party was in power. Sweden became a model for an industrial country with economic growth and social welfare - a model for a “modernized” country.

When the Swedish aid programme started and expanded, the idea was very much to export our model, our solutions and our technology, among other things, to the “underdeveloped” countries or the “Third World.” When SIDA started in 1965 this was the inspiration and basic idea in our aid philosophy. However, this approach and philosophy was not without critics among researchers in Sweden and other countries. It was argued that the developing countries should be allowed the opportunity to find their own solutions to their problems of development. Third world self-reliance in research was then a key issue, an alternative way of thinking among social anthropologists and other researchers interested in the cultural aspects of development. A leading scholar who believed in this approach in Sweden was Karl-Eric Knutsson, Professor of social anthropology at Stockholm University. He had a vision of an alternative approach to aid and development.

The role of research in the Swedish aid programme was a topic for wide public debate in the late 60s and there were proposals in parliament that Sweden should have a more active role. A commission was appointed to look into this question and Knutsson was appointed as the head of the inquiry. The report and the recommendations of the commission laid the foundations of a new organization,