Facing the crisis with creativity

So the idea is that here, we look back on the past year, highlight our successes and comment on some of the problems we faced. But we’ll get to that shortly. We have to start with the thing that’s dominating the news and our thoughts at the moment, namely the ruthless war in Ukraine.

At the time of writing, almost five million people have fled Ukraine. There have not been this many refugees in Europe since the Second World War. The year is now 2022, and many of us thought we had evolved beyond this, that we were better than this. All wars, however, prove just the opposite. More and more refugees are now coming to Sweden, and it is a true inspiration to see the solidarity the situation has galvanised in Sweden. We are proud of the efforts of Swedish companies and organisations when it comes to providing local support in Ukraine, receiving people as they become part of our society, and mobilising aid and support.

Even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, smallholder farmers we work with around the world were seeing higher prices for seed and food in the wake of the pandemic. It was also evident that climate change – more droughts, more floods – is making it harder and harder to produce food. We are facing the worst global hunger crisis in 50 years.

So what can we say about the past year? Well, 2021 was another tumultuous year full of challenges, but also one full of hard work and a great deal of creativity. The pandemic forced us to rethink; we learned new ways of solving old problems. We know that our work has contributed to a better life for people living in poverty. We are tremendously proud of the results our personnel and partner organisations are achieving, both individually and together.

We do wish we could say there are brighter times ahead, but we are living in an age of increasing worry and injustice. We are fighting this with our experience, but also with a deep sense of commitment and an organisation that genuinely makes a difference. We will continue working to ensure that smallholder farmers can produce crops for the needs of their own family and local population; and that poor countries too can become more self-sufficient and be better equipped to adapt to climate change.

We will also carry on working for the equal right of all people to food.

Thanks to everyone who is supporting us on this important journey.

“Almost five million people have fled Ukraine.”

We are proud too that the Swedish cooperation is also keeping its sights set abroad, and continuing to work with We Effect to fight hunger and poverty, which increased during the pandemic and are now worsening further due to the war. We are now seeing rapidly rising food prices.

In Sweden most people can afford to pay a bit more for their food, whereas in other parts of the world there are no margins to play with. In Tanzania, people spend an average of 60 per cent of their income on food. The corresponding figure in the EU is 12 per cent. So higher food prices are not just about paying more in shops – they also lead to increased hunger.
During the pandemic year 2021, world hunger and poverty increased. We can also see that the cooperative model works – and it’s needed more than ever.

At the time of writing, March 2022, the World Bank and UNESCO are releasing a report that says more about the long-term effects of the pandemic than all the excess mortality statistics: global literacy has decreased. Half of the world’s 10-year-olds risk being illiterate by the end of 2022. As usual, poor children in rural areas, and girls, are affected the most.

“Some schools have been closed throughout the pandemic, and many of the children who have been forced to leave school will never come back,” says Pia Stavås Meier, We Effect’s Regional Director Latin America. “This will have serious long-term consequences.”

Latin America has been hit hard by the pandemic. The entire region is believed to have been set back by 20 years in terms of economic development.

“The pandemic has had a negative impact on gender equality,” says Sian Morgan, Gender Equality Director Region Southern Africa. “Women work in the informal sector to a greater extent than men, and are dependent on getting to the market to sell their goods, for example.”

Although more men than women have had COVID-19, the women have had to stay at home to look after the sick – and to take care of the children while the schools were closed. “Lockdown has not only prevented women from working and making a living,” says Sian Morgan. “The safe places where women could meet and support each other have also vanished. And meanwhile, violence against women has increased.”

“The fact that savings and loan groups are now returning means a huge amount to women’s safety and situation,” says George Otynango, Regional Director Eastern Africa.

Camilla Lundberg Ney works with political advocacy, and is We Effect’s spokesperson for gender equality issues.

“The issue of violence against women is closely related to We Effect’s focus area: food security. Putting food on the table is traditionally the woman’s responsibility, and it is often she who eats last and least. As isolation has been tightened and food has been insufficient, violence has increased.”

In 2021, for the first time We Effect carried out a global initiative in the 16 Days of Activism campaign (25 November – 10 December).

“We offered a communication package, with messages and facts about how violence against women is related to food security, and disseminated it along with images and graphics,” says Camilla Lundberg Ney. “The information could be used as it was, or serve as inspiration. There was a lot of activity everywhere, with strong stories and statements from our colleagues and partner organisations.”

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The impact of climate change on We Effect’s efforts is also becoming increasingly obvious.

“In Latin America, the main problem is water: there’s either too much or too little,” says Pia Stavås Meier. “In November 2020 the region was hit by two violent hurricanes, and a lot of farmland was under water for a long time. A lot of work has gone into making the soil usable again. We Effect played a larger role in providing support.

“For example, we’re reorganising our operations in Bolivia to concentrate on Amazon regions threatened by deforestation. People who had never imagined becoming human rights activists are being forced to become just that, to defend their own land. It can be very dangerous, very dangerous indeed.”

“There are a lot of similarities between what happens in a pandemic and what happens in a natural disaster,” explains Sian Morgan. “When hurricane Ana hit Mozambique and Malawi, it was civil society’s support systems that worked best, not the governments’.

This has also been confirmed in a major global questionnaire survey,” says Nina Larrea, We Effect’s Regional Director for Asia.

“During the pandemic, cooperative and other social forms of farming have worked better and with more solidarity than privately owned or informal agriculture. Quite simply, people take better care of each other when they share responsibility. The farming cooperatives have also been more resilient to isolation and restrictions, but we have also seen the market chains being shattered, leading to poverty and hunger. Travel bans and local restrictions related to the pandemic have impacted efforts everywhere.”

“We have been forced into new ways of working, which initially felt...
boards and members can’t meet face to face? We have funded “How can we work democratically in an organisation where role of chair rotated, everyone came to realise how hard it is “They were reluctant to sit in front of a webcam. But as the A lot of people were shy to begin with,” says George Onyango not done yet,” says Veronica. “COVID-19 may have dragged me down, but I’m focusing on investing more, planting fodder crops and increasing milk production.” In Palestine, the usual restrictions on Palestinians’ freedom of movement have been tightened further during the pandemic, and there’s clearly a risk that they won’t be lifted, even though the virus is spreading less,” says Nina Larrea. “Of course it’s no coincidence that Coca-Cola want to purify water, it’s in their interests, but we can’t demand that companies take responsibility for global development while also refusing to work with them.” “In Palestine, the usual restrictions on Palestinians’ freedom of movement have been tightened further during the pandemic, and there’s clearly a risk that they won’t be lifted, even though the virus is spreading less,” says Nina Larrea. “Of course it’s no coincidence that Coca-Cola want to purify water, it’s in their interests, but we can’t demand that companies take responsibility for global development while also refusing to work with them.”

Pia Stånds Meier can see some benefits of the changes brought on by the pandemic: “How can we work democratically in an organisation where boards and members can’t meet face to face? We have funded investments in our partner organisations’ digital capability: access to computers and mobile phones, better software for communication and follow-up, digital workshops and so on.” “Thanks to technological progress, we have been able to fill in some of the gap in digital capability, and in some cases this has really shifted the balance of power. In villages where only a few people, usually men and youths, have been able to get online, we’ve been able to give women from indigenous peoples new opportunities to communicate digitally, for example.”

“Juice, jam, ajvar – we make some ‘products at the local market. When that was no longer possible, they suddenly lost a huge part of their income. The fact that a lot of Irma’s produce is grown for her own use saved her family during the coronavirus crisis, and meant they didn’t have to go hungry. Exchanging maize for beans, tomatoes for chilli, and onions for herbs are just some of the ways the women of Xesiquiu have helped each other make sure their families did not go hungry during the pandemic.”

“Of course it’s no coincidence that Coca-Cola want to purify water, it’s in their interests, but we can’t demand that companies take responsibility for global development while also refusing to work with them.” When I was elected in spring 2021 it was exciting, but also difficult. It’s hard to pick up on the essence of an organisation digitally. On Teams everyone’s so well behaved, the meetings are formalised and efficient – but you lose that spontaneous conversation. I wasn’t there when the strategy decisions were made – to focus on food security – but it was spot on for me and my organisation, so we were straight on board. Our speciality is food and farmer cooperation. I believe it’s important to disseminate We Effect’s work internally within Lantmännen, and to create wider involvement. I think we have to admit here that we could have been better at exploiting the potential for collaboration in our projects and advocacy work. Many of our co-workers’ knowledge could definitely be used in the development cooperation work.”

Veronica Musau from Machakos, who was visited on the digital trip to Kenya, is a member of the Kimutwa dairy cooperative. Her farm was flourishing, but during the pandemic she was hit by one setback after another. Sales of milk fell as hotels and restaurants closed. She got sick herself, which meant she couldn’t take proper care of her cows, and as a result she lost one of them. But she picked herself up, and got help from her cooperative in processing milk into yoghurt to extend its shelf life, for example. She’s now focusing on investing more, planting fodder crops and increasing milk production. “COVID-19 may have dragged me down, but I’m not done yet,” says Veronica.

Bahija Dedic and her family grow fruits and vegetables in Burnica, Bosnia-Herzegovina. “Juice, jam, ajvar – we make something with every fruit and vegetable we pick,” says Bahija. Life got harder when the pandemic hit. The family had to isolate and it was a new way of living. Prices are rising and the consequences are a concern; Bahija is thinking about children’s education. Even so, she is pleased to see recent changes around women’s rights. Assisted by We Effect partner organisation Dami, she has been trained in finance and equality, something that has helped her grow and empowered her to help herself more.

Anna Carlström, Senior Advisor, Lantmännen
“Lantmännen has long been a We Effect member organisation, but we were never previously on the board. When I was elected in spring 2021 it was exciting, but also difficult. It’s hard to pick up on the essence of an organisation digitally. On Teams everyone’s so well behaved, the meetings are formalised and efficient – but you lose that spontaneous conversation. I wasn’t there when the strategy decisions were made – to focus on food security – but it was spot on for me and my organisation, so we were straight on board. Our speciality is food and farmer cooperation. I believe it’s important to disseminate We Effect’s work internally within Lantmännen, and to create wider involvement. I think we have to admit here that we could have been better at exploiting the potential for collaboration in our projects and advocacy work. Many of our co-workers’ knowledge could definitely be used in the development cooperation work.”

Leif Lindén, Chairman of the Board of Kooperativa Förbundet
“Everyone’s right to good food is our core concern in Sweden, and our membership in and cooperation with We Effect expands this vision to the global perspective. Collaboration between cooperative companies is one of the seven cooperative principles, and when it comes to international aid, We Effect and Vi Agroforestry are our main priority – and have long been as we are one of the founding organisations. Many companies and organisations are now developing their operations to enable different kinds of aid and global responsibility. This is of course very positive, but it also requires that We Effect is seen as a relevant organisation among the various alternatives. We must all clearly communicate the concrete difference that We Effect’s efforts make for people, and ease the way so that more people can get involved and do their bit.”

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Maize, beans, herbs and all kinds of fruits are displayed on the table next to Irma Torres of Xesiquiu, Guatemala. “The purpose of all these crops is mainly to feed my family,” says Irma. And this has proven vital in the past year as the pandemic paralyzed the world. Before COVID-19, the women in the small farming community would sell their products at the local market. When that was no longer possible, they suddenly lost a huge part of their income. The fact that a lot of Irma’s produce is grown for her own use saved her family during the coronavirus crisis, and meant they didn’t have to go hungry. Exchanging maize for beans, tomatoes for chilli, and onions for herbs are just some of the ways the women of Xesiquiu have helped each other make sure their families did not go hungry during the pandemic.

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Ylva Wessén, President Folksam

“I’ve been on the We Effect board for three years and am deeply impressed by the organisation’s work in bringing about real change. In times of war and crisis, working with local farmers’ cooperatives may not be as exciting as sending tents and blankets to flood-affected areas, but I’m proud that We Effect is resolutely tackling the fundamental problems and not just the symptoms. Giving people their own tools to fight poverty – to earn a living, have somewhere to live, get an education...”

“We Effect is resolutely tackling the fundamental problems, not just the symptoms.”

The financial services sector can come across as dry and boring, but the collaboration with We Effect is also important from a strict Folksam point of view. Our vision is for our customers to feel secure in a sustainable world. A sustainable world is a fair world, an area where We Effect is making great efforts. It’s possible that our involvement is not that noticeable in our communication with customers, I’m sure there’s more we could do to develop our collaborations.”

Lars Ericsson, CEO

Stockholm Consumer Cooperative Society

“Our involvement in We Effect doesn’t only come from our historically close collaborations – we were one of the founders. The most important aspect is the commitment shown by our employees, members and customers. Through our deposit return scheme and by rounding off to the nearest krona, they donate 4–5 million kronor to We Effect and Vi Agroforestry in a normal year. We then add an organisational contribution of 400,000 kronor, but most of the money comes from the shop floor.

“We’re primarily active in Eastern Africa, and have run our own projects among the Maasai women of Tanzania, for instance. Right now we’re investing in a beekeeping project in Albania. Via our own fundraising activities, we get close to the actual farmer. We then spread the news via our members’ magazine, by direct mail and our members’ newsletter.

I myself have visited the operations in Southern and Eastern Africa, and Costa Rica. I’m impressed. It’s important that managers who have to make strategic decisions can see what’s going on with their own eyes.”

Jens Henriksson, CEO Swedbank

“Fundamentally, I completely agree with We Effect: entrepreneurialism will enable us to achieve a fair, sustainable world. The cooperative model has all kinds of benefits. Swedbank’s history with small, local savings banks offered poor people a chance to save and loan, which is precisely We Effect’s idea. Here at Swedbank we have a lot of deeply engaged people, both coworkers and customers. It feels good to be able to channel that engagement via We Effect, which has a sustainable concept for development.

A few years ago, I was asked if I could help open a school we had funded through We Effect in Kenya.

I said yes, provided I could travel there and back the same day as I had other work to do. I think we need to start thinking of Africa as a continent like any other.

Mozambique

The coronavirus pandemic has made work on the farm harder for Jamia Salimo and her family in northern Mozambique. Their farm is in the village of Lusanhando in the Niassa Province of northern Mozambique, and they are among the more than 70 per cent of Mozambicans who primarily make their living from agriculture and self-sufficiency. Thanks to new farming methods and savings with other people in the village, that family is getting by despite the crisis. Since the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, the family have taken care to wear face coverings and stay two furrows apart when they’re out working the fields.

“Climate change has affected farming, but we’ve never stopped working the land. We adapt to the changes,” says Jamia. “We live on the money I make from the farm and have access to healthy food from our own fields.”

Palestine

Yusra Oweidat did not finish school, but fights for women’s rights in Hebron, Palestine. She started a cooperative to enable women to contribute to the family finances. The Al-Shuyoukh Cooperative Association for Livestock now has 52 women working to produce and sell different kinds of food products, supported by We Effect. They have received training and equipment for selling their goods, and are making a great success of it!

We Effect received SEK 18 million from the Swedish Postcode Lottery’s funds in 2021. It will be used for We Effect’s work with smallholder farmers, in the fight against hunger and poverty in the world’s poor countries.

“This money will make a difference! A big thank you to the Postcode Lottery and everyone who plays. As the world is now in crisis, funding for the most vulnerable is more important than ever,” says Anna Tibblin, Secretary General of We Effect.

18 million kronor

We Effect took part in Consumer Association Stockholm’s family days at Skansen, meeting inquisitive, positive members in person for the first time in two years. CAS sold refreshments in aid of We Effect over the two days, and held an engaging 2030 Agenda activity.

“Entrepreneurialism will enable us to achieve a fair, sustainable world.”

I see our involvement with We Effect, and Kenya, as business. And it’s through our business skills and experience that we can make a difference for We Effect. Another point is that we, in We Effect, get to meet other cooperative companies. This gives us business opportunities, while we’re also doing some good for the world.”

John Mwaniki, Kenya. Photo: Anders Hansson

Radiohjälpen ran a major fundraising campaign encouraging everyone to take a walk and donate SEK 10 per kilometre. One of the projects supported by Radiohjälpen is We Effect’s “Children Behind the Separation Wall”, where we’re working with four preschools in Palestine. The now 70-year-long conflict is palpable in the country every day. The work focuses on affirming children and their right to education, development and well-being, both physical and mental.

Many children suffer psychosocial stress as they fall asleep and wake up to the sound of bullets from Israeli army exercises and nightly raids.

Yusra Oweidat. Photo: Israel21c

Anna Tibblin. Photo: We Effect

Abiola Muyiwa. Photo: We Effect

Jens Henriksson. Photo: Swedbank

Lea Mayoral, Kenya. Photo: Anders Hansson
TOGETHER AGAINST POVERTY AND HUNGER

Board of Directors

LOTTA FOLKESSON  
Chair of the Board  
Forestry and agricultural entrepreneur in Värmland, Västerbotten. Board Chair for Federation of Swedish Farmers Västerbotten and for the same federation’s Horse Delegation, also Chair of the Copa Cogecas Women’s Committee in Brussels. Elected 2015.

PATRIK SCHINZEL  
Head of Co-operative Governance at KF. EMBA with a background in leading positions at Folksam as Chief Controller, Head of Strategic Governance, Head of GRC and Chief of Staff. Previously responsible for Folksam’s international cooperation with ICMIF. Elected 2021.

HELEN PERSSON  
Consumer Association Stockholm. Member of the board of CBS (Coop Butiker och Stormarknader). Responsible for member activities, sponsorship and PR. Many years’ experience in communication, HR and project management for e.g. SSAB and Ericsson. Has managed and been co-owner of Strategic Health Consultants, a consultancy firm advising on organisation and leadership. Elected 2015.

YLVA WESSÉN  
President and CEO of Folksam. Chair of KPA AB and Folksam’s Forskningsstiftelse. Member of the board of ICMIF and its Executive Committee, and of Insurance Sweden. Previous roles include head of Risk and Compliance at Folksam, and as a lawyer at DLA Nordic. Elected 2019.

BRITTA VON SCHOUTLZ  
Communications Manager, Riksbyggen. Previous positions include Press Officer for Riksbanken and the Swedish Prosecution Authority, as well as Strategic Communication Advisor at Kreab Gavin Anderson. Has also spent many years as a journalist at Sweden’s national TV and radio broadcasters SVT and SR. Elected 2015.

PETER STRÖM  
Head of Client Coverage, Large Corporates & Institutions at Swedbank. Has held various senior positions in the Swedbank Group, both in Sweden and internationally. Elected 2019.

ANNA CARLSTRÖM  
Senior Adviser in member communication and owner relations at Lantmän. Former member manager with an extensive background in the organisation. Also works with communication in Lantmännen Lantbruk and is Association Manager for Nordic Oats. MSc Agricultural Economics. Elected 2021.

ANNA TIBBLIN  
Secretary General of We Effect and Vi Agroforestry. Previously Regional Manager in Southern Africa and Latin America, has worked in aid assessment in her own consulting company and also been a journalist for daily and trade newspapers.

ANDERS LAGO  
Vice Chair  
Executive Chairman of HSB, Deputy Chair of FUB, and board member of Folksam Sak, Berättsministeriet and the International Co-operative Alliance. Previous positions include Chair of the municipal board of Södertälje Municipality, Chair of the Board of Telge Group and of the Swedish Water & Wastewater Association. Elected 2012.

ERICA LUNDGREN  
CEO, OK Västerbotten. Previously Sales Director for Norrmejerier, Business Area Manager and Subsidiary MD within Profise Sweden. Member of the Board of OK Marknadsservice and OKQB Marknad. Elected 2017.

We Effect reaches a broad section of the public in its awareness-raising and fundraising activities via its member organisations. Representatives from the founder organisations sit on the Board of Directors and help make decisions about We Effect’s long-term work.

MEMBER ORGANISATIONS