

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF SDC PARTNERSHIPS WITH SWISS NGOS

Partnerships with Swiss non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are strategically important to the SDC in fulfilling its development mandate. The SDC therefore maintains partnerships with 37 NGOs, which include programme contributions. An independent evaluation assessed and evaluated the SDC partnerships over the past two Dispatch periods, 2009–2012 and 2013–2016. The main recommendation taken up by SDC's Senior Management is to establish a new policy framework by the end of 2018.

PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SWITZERLAND'S INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The evaluation **confirms the relevance of the SDC's programme contributions** to the participating NGOs, as they use the funds to implement their own programmes and strategies. The flexibility regarding the allocation of the programme contributions enables **rapid and innovative planning and action** by the NGOs, e.g. in fragile situations or humanitarian crises, and **increases project quality**. As partner NGOs operate in 85 countries, they can also pave the way for the SDC to participate in future bilateral cooperation. For example, an NGO was operating in Myanmar long before the SDC and facilitated dialogue between the SDC and Myanmar once the political situation had changed.

WHOSE TARGETS DO THE NGOS MEET?

The NGOs work mainly towards the SDC's strategic goals. However, **more clarity is needed in terms of goal setting**, as there is no requirement for the NGOs to align their reporting with the SDC's strategic goals. The evaluation shows that the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are used by

the NGOs to define their strategic orientation and are central to their public relations. There is an exchange of knowledge and a shared learning process between the SDC and its NGO partners. Moreover, thanks to specifically Swiss competences, for example dual vocational education and training, the NGO partners launch successful programmes.

UNCLEAR STRATEGIC FOCUS OF SDC'S NGO PORTFOLIO

The size and proven diversity of the supported NGOs are **relevant to the goal attainment of Swiss development cooperation**. In contrast to SDCs growing engagement in the humanitarian aid sector, relatively few partner NGOs work in this sector. The evaluation determined that the selection strategy for NGO partners lacks clarity.

The SDC has by far the largest partnership portfolio relative to five similar donor organisations. The SDC's contribution can cover a maximum of 50% of the NGOs' programme budget, while the rest must be financed by the NGO itself. Public sector contributions in most other donor countries amount to 75–90%. In addition, the SDC was found to be less responsive to change compared to its peers. A systematic and transparent approach is called for.

DIALOGUE IS GOOD BUT BETTER GUIDELINES ARE REQUIRED FOR MORE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT

SDC's Institutional Partnerships Division (IPD) maintains regular dialogue with NGO partners who value this customized support. At an institutional level, the IPD lacks a policy framework and, as a result, the NGOs have limited guidance. Improved guidelines regarding, for example, accountability, would enhance cooperation efficiency. **The contractual agreements for programme contributions between the SDC and NGOs contain limited reporting guidelines**. As a result, NGO reports vary in quality and formats. It is imperative that **result reporting refers to the effectiveness of programme contributions**. Many NGOs are committed to the same goals as the SDC, however they are not obliged to evaluate their activities in the context of the SDC's Dispatch goals in their reporting. A clear framework for assessing results is needed.

CLARIFY APPROVAL PROCESS CRITERIA

There is also uncertainty regarding the IPD's regulation of contribution sums. **Clear decision-making parameters are required for the allocation and amount of contributions.** The first evaluation period from 2009 to 2012 revealed a low level of transparency in the admission process. This improved in the 2013–2016 Dispatch period with the introduction of a systematic and detailed admission process. However, the criteria still need to be specified further.

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING OF NGOS AND RAISING OF PUBLIC AWARENESS

Two factors contribute to the institutional strengthening of the NGOs through cooperation with the SDC. The first factor is the dialogue with the IPD resulting, for example, in the NGOs being obliged to issue result-oriented reports in the future. Secondly, the flexible and long-term programme contributions consolidate the institutional competences, organisational structures and responsibilities within NGOs. This enables **thematic specialisation and improves knowledge management and evaluation activities by individual NGOs.** Small NGOs benefit particularly from the credibility gained by partnering with the SDC. These NGOs gain visibility and networking opportunities.

The joint learning in NGO-SDC partnerships needs to be more straightforward and broad-based in future – shared as opposed to individual. NGOs also undertake numerous initiatives to raise public awareness or educational purposes. The effectiveness of these activities needs to be evaluated in the future.

NEXT STEPS

The SDC's Senior Management has indicated its broad agreement with the recommendations by the experts. The Senior Management proposes the following action points:

*Until the end of 2018, the SDC in consultation with NGOs will elaborate a **clear, publicly accessible and transparent policy framework for institutional partnerships.** This will include setting **goals and roles for institutional partnerships in international cooperation,** application and evaluation procedures, **eligibility criteria,** selection processes, programme cycle and timeline, reporting criteria, withdrawal terms, etc. The admission processes shall take a **maximum of 12 months.** In addition to bilateral dialogue, a **strategic approach will be applied to the management of the institutional partner division's entire portfolio,** to facilitate goal achievement. Joint learning between NGOs and the SDC will remain important in the future, the SDC will integrate a **learning strategy** into the strategic framework. Moreover, **cooperation will be strengthened between the IPD and the SDC's divisions and thematic networks.** The SDC will update the **performance criteria indicators** for programme contribution allocation decisions. As regards communication, the NGO partners' results will be included in the **Swiss Voluntary National Review of the 2030 Agenda,** which is received by the UN. In addition, the SDC must ensure that the activities of the NGOs feature more prominently in **its internal and external communication.***

INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED MEASURING METHOD

The assessment of the institutional partnerships complies with the OECD/DAC criteria and evaluates the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation between the SDC and Swiss NGOs from 2009 to 2016. The evaluation was conducted by the British IOD PARC.

Link to the evaluation:

<https://www.news.admin.ch/news/NSBExterneStudien/834/attachment/de/3524.pdf>

Publication

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division
Freiburgstrasse 130, 3003 Bern
sektion.evaluation-controlling@eda.admin.ch