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Staff of the Directorate

Cooperation Strategy Evaluation

Mekong Region 2018 – 2021

Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division SDC





Cooperation Strategy Evaluation

Mekong Region 2018 – 2021

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Bern, May 2021

Why conducting evaluations of cooperation strategies/programmes?

In 2010 the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) developed an approach for evaluating cooperation programmes (formerly known as cooperation strategies) through a pilot process. The central pillar of this approach is the promotion of the exchange and the sharing of knowledge within our institution and among an evaluation team led by an external consultant. The major difference between evaluations of cooperation programmes (CoPr¹) and other external evaluations managed by the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division (E+C) is that SDC staff is involved in the evaluation team, acts as an evaluator but with an inside knowledge of the institutional issues and debates.

The goal of CoPr evaluations is to assess the relevance and coherence of the Swiss development cooperation in regard to national development priorities and the Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation (since 2021 IC Strategy). They assess the results achievement of the cooperation programme portfolio at the level of domains of intervention. In doing so, these evaluations help SDC's management in their strategic and operational steering and in improving aid effectiveness. Evaluations of cooperation programmes support the definition of new cooperation programmes strategically and stimulate learning.

Country and regional CoPr evaluations are defined as hybrid evaluations as they are undertaken by a mixed team composed by an external consultant and two peers from SDC and, if relevant, other federal agencies. E+C decided to develop this approach to valorise the knowledge and competencies of the SDC staff and enhance internal learning, while still benefitting from an outside view of an external consultant.

The E+C evaluation programme is approved on an annual basis by SDC's Senior Management. SDC mandates evaluations as instruments for organisational learning, strategic guidance and ensuring accountability.

CoPr evaluations are conducted according to the OECD DAC Evaluation Standards. The relevant department(s) responds to the recommendations with a written Management Response.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic (and the associated health risks and travel restrictions), all involved units at SDC and the consultant decided in February 2020 that a field mission to Cambodia and Lao PDR was not feasible. The evaluation was conducted remotely with one local consultant in Cambodia and Lao PDR, respectively.

Timetable of the CoPr Evaluation Mekong Region 2018-2021

Step	When
Desk study and inception report	October 2020
Evaluation on-site and draft report	No field mission. Draft report: January 2021
Final evaluation report	February 2021
SDC Management Response	May 2021

¹ Till 2020 CS was the abbreviation for the now called cooperation programmes, but for ease of reference its abbreviation has been kept in the final version of the report.

I Management Response

Management Response to the Evaluation of the Cooperation Strategy for the Mekong Region 2018 - 2021

1) Introduction

Cooperation Programme evaluations (formerly known as Cooperation Strategy evaluations) analyse the Cooperation Programmes which define the Swiss engagement in a particular country or region. The goal of cooperation programme evaluations is to assess the performance of the Swiss international cooperation and its alignment with regard to national development priorities and the relevant Federal Council Dispatch. In doing so, these evaluations help the management of the different entities involved in the Cooperation Programmes in their strategic and operational steering and in improving development effectiveness.

The cooperation programme evaluations are realized as hybrid evaluations, conducted by a mixed team consisting of one external consultant, two internal resource persons (peers) and, where necessary, a local consultant. The team for this evaluation included Geert Engelsman (external team leader, JaLogisch Consulting GmbH), Eileen Hofstetter (peer, SDC) and Markus Dürst (peer, SDC). The evaluation team was supported by two local consultants, Ms Somsanith (Nith) Mounphoxay based in Laos and Mr. Sambath Sak based in Cambodia.

The evaluation of the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 was conducted between June 2020 and January 2021. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the evaluation team was not able to visit the Mekong Region and the evaluation was adjusted to a remote format.

Cooperation programme evaluations follow a standardised matrix with evaluation questions. For the purpose of this evaluation, the matrix was adjusted during the inception phase according to the stated needs and received inputs from SDC's Asia Division and the concerned Cooperation offices in Laos and Cambodia. These changes were also discussed and agreed upon with the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division. The final matrix was incorporated and approved in the inception report.

2) Appreciation of Report and Evaluation Process

We wish first to warmly thank the consultant, the two SDC peers as well as the two supporting local consultants for the evaluation of the Cooperation Strategy Mekong 2018-2021 and their valuable findings and recommendations. As elaborated below, we will consider these for the development of the next Mekong Region Cooperation Programme 2022-2025.

On the evaluation process, we recognize that the evaluation exercise has faced some limitations due to the cancelled field mission (Covid 19 pandemic). In our opinion, this has prevented the team to fully assess key elements as SDC's policy dialogue with the Lao and Cambodian governments, its strategic alliances with other Development Partners and SDC's added value in a degrading democratic governance context. We believe that possibly a greater use by the evaluators of the analysis provided by the in-depth midterm review of the Cooperation Strategy Mekong conducted in April 2020 might have provided some of the missing information.

As for the report, we believe it provides a myriad of interesting questions to the reader, some of which raise points that are beyond the Mekong Programme. On the Mekong

Programme, we much welcome the finding that SDC's interventions in the Mekong Region have overall achieved meaningful results, positively affecting the lives of the targeted vulnerable populations. In addition, we acknowledge the relevance of the reflections provided by the team regarding multiplier effects, sustainability of projects and coherence between them, need for plausible narratives, identification of boundary partners or gender transformative action.

Yet while recognizing the relevance of the analysis provided, we note that a more concrete and precise formulation of certain observations and recommendations would have facilitated our understanding and the definition of actions accordingly. In particular, elements such as the donor landscape and niche of SDC's engagement, the choice of intervention domains, the management setup and the choice of modalities could have been analyzed more specifically.

As mentioned above, a field mission would certainly have allowed a better understanding of the context, resulting in a deeper assessment of the challenges in implementing the Strategy designed in 2017, as well as of the adequacy of the solutions found to overcome these challenges. This, and a reflection on alignment of the Programme with the relevant priorities of the Asia Division Guidelines might have resulted in a more concrete guidance for the formulation of the Mekong Region Cooperation Programme 2022-2025.

Bern, 25.05.2021

Digital signiert von Gass Thomas
PVWL0U
2021-05-25 (mit Zeitstempel)

Thomas Gass
Head of South Cooperation Domain
SDC / FDFA

3) Recommendations

For a detailed version of each recommendation, please refer to the Evaluation report.

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
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Recommendation 1		
<p>To develop a coherent, focused, and demand-driven project portfolio for the new MRCP. Instead of visions of sustainable development and democratic governance and organizing the cooperation program around domains of interventions, the evaluation recommends putting concrete development challenges – for which there exists a qualified demand¹ of support from local reform actors – at the heart of the MRCP. The SCOs can work with these local reform actors to identify possible pathways of (transformational) change and put its instruments and experience in function of bringing this change about, working simultaneously at different scales (local, national, and regional) and from different angles / domains of interventions (governance reform, skills development, private sector promotion, etc.). Of course, such a portfolio does not have to be (cannot be) defined fully upfront and instead will be emergent. The SCOs can identify the qualified demand for support on particular and concrete development challenges and then work with the local reform actors to incrementally resolve the development challenge, building up an ever-larger coalition of reform actors along the way, and addressing the development challenge from an ever more comprehensive set of interventions.</p>		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>We agree with the recommendation that the Swiss Cooperation Programme needs to address concrete development challenges and not simply derive activities from general visions of poverty reduction, sustainable development and democratic governance. The current Mekong Strategy and the future MRCP are and will address more forcefully the development challenges such as the management of natural resources (land and water), the production of agricultural goods for income generation in rural areas, the development of skills to integrate the labour market or the increased participation of citizens. For that we will analyse the root causes for poverty and exclusion. We will also take concrete actions to identify actively champions and local reform actors in the public and private sector as well as in the CSO who have an agenda close to development priorities of Switzerland and pursue partnerships. In doing so, we will have to consider a number of limitations: weak civil society that has reduced capacities to implement large programmes and struggle to operate in a shrinking space controlled by the authorities; Private sector composed up to 90% of micro-enterprises that are neither organized nor capable of developing/implementing ambitious programmes; Public authorities that are seldom actors of change. We will therefore need to take advantage of any opportunities that may arise and strongly advocate for “working at different scales and levels” to achieve transformational change, bearing in mind that such changes happen at a pace that does not always coincide with the usual four years phase of our projects.</p> <p>We consider that the formulation of the recommendation (To develop a coherent, focused, and demand-driven project portfolio for the new MRCP) could be understood as saying that the current Strategy is not coherent, not focused and not responding to a demand, a statement that we would challenge. One reason that might</p>		

¹ A qualified demand entails that local reform actors acknowledge the development challenge, have defined a reform agenda, committed (significant) own resources to the implementation of the reform agenda; proceeded – on their own initiative and volition – with the envisaged reforms; and, identified concrete and well-motivated areas for external support.

explain the perception of the evaluator is that out of the selected 9 projects on which they based their conclusions, seven had been designed before 2018 and were based on the previous strategies. When it comes to build the programme around concrete development challenges, we consider that this has been done in the current strategy at the level of domains, even if this was not formally expressed in the text of the MRS 2018-21. We agree though that the links between Swiss Portfolio Outcomes and the overall vision will have to be clearer in the results framework of the MRCP 2022-25, with a solid theory of change.

The reservation with this recommendation concerns the assumption that we should start developing: 1) a new programme with its respective portfolio from the beginning of the new regional programme and 2) we should do that following a different logic than the current strategy. This would imply dropping a number of ongoing projects that would not fit anymore in the new Mekong Region programme, when precisely SDC's longer term engagements (10-12 years) are recognised as a valuable asset by all our partners, the government, the UN, NGOs and CSOs as well as by the evaluator team (page 5 of the report). This positive dimension of Swiss cooperation would be at risk with a radical shift of the Programme. Furthermore, the needs of the local reform actors must be balanced with the principles laid in the guiding documents such as the Regional Guidelines for Asia and the Swiss IC Strategy 21-24 (Needs, Swiss interests and Swiss value added) when defining the Cooperation Programme and projects. The two last elements are not mentioned in the proposed recommendation.

Measures	Responsibility	Deadline
In preparation of the planning workshop for the Mekong Region Cooperation Programme (MRCP) 2022-2025 the offices in Vientiane and Phnom Penh will analyse the context and identify reform actors. A consultant for the regional level will do the same. These analysis will focus on the fields of intervention predefined by the IC Strategy and the Regional Guidelines for Asia. Results of these analysis will be taken into account in the choice of the Country Development Outcomes as well as the definition of the Swiss Portfolio Outcomes for the MRCP 2022-25 to increase Swiss IC coherence and impact	Ev. Studies: SCO PNH and VTE Definition of new MRCP: SCO PNH and VTE and Asia Division	Mid May 2021 December 2021

Recommendation 2

To lead less, and coach more in future development interventions. In the SCOs' interventions, implementing agencies often take the lead. In the third phase of the project, (more) attention is then given to embedding the project results and knowledge in local (government) structures. The evaluation recommends building Swiss support around local reform actors which expressed a qualified demand for support, putting them in the lead of their own and the country's / region's development whilst offering them guidance and targeted support along the way. The resolution of the targeted development challenges, the realization of the envisaged reform, then becomes a function of the political will and power of the reform actors rather than the SCOs, improving the effectiveness and sustainability of the SCOs' support.

Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>We agree to this recommendation as coaching more and the facilitation for more ownership increases the sustainability of results, even though this will take time. Some strong and legitimate local reform actors, public and private, willing and able to take the lead in development initiatives fostering an inclusive political and economic development exist, but they are not so many and they already receive support from the donor community. We are already working with some of them, and others will be identified in project or new phase designing processes. While doing so, we have to take into account that on the one hand there is strong resistance of the power holders to any major reform of the system, and on the other hand those actors keen to foster change are not well organized, face institutional and financial weaknesses as well as pressure from the government not to address sensitive issues, mainly in the governance domain.</p> <p>In view of implementing modalities, particularly in topics where strong reform actors exist and are willing to work with SDC, contributions to local initiatives will be preferred over mandates. This will leave more space for “leading less”, especially when the implementer is a strong intergovernmental institution such as the Mekong River Commission or regional body such as MRLG. Here, the programme can take the role of an advisor leaving the strategic design and implementation to the reform actor.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Deadline
In order to get a better understanding of potential actors of change, an analysis at SCO Laos and Cambodia level will be conducted. In Laos, the newly elected government for the next five years and the consequent changes at provincial and district level might provide stronger actors that will be observed. In Cambodia, an emerging private sector may present new opportunities compared to a more and more controlled and confined civil society that however will need continued SDC support.	SCO VTE PNH Asia Division on the Swiss Interest, added value vs. leading less.	Planning Workshop in June 2021 and ongoing

Recommendation 3		
<p>To formulate a clear narrative on how the SCOs will contribute to development under the new MRCP. The MRCS and most projects lack a narrative on how they will contribute to the Strategy's overall objectives. For learning, for accountability and for program steering purposes, it is imperative that both individual projects and cooperation programs include – upfront – an explicit and comprehensive narrative on how individual projects are expected to contribute to higher level objectives. This narrative, based on a purposeful political economy analysis, should include what the qualified demand for assistance is, who the boundary partners of SCOs' support are and what their potential is to affect change, how these boundary partners are expected to respond to the SCOs' support, and what the ripple- or multiplier effect is expected to be, i.e., how the selected development challenges are overcome.</p>		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>Although we consider that the current programmes do have a narrative linking them to the overall objectives of the MRS 2018-2021, we accept that there is still room for improvement for enshrining the projects in a wider programmatic approach. The recommendation to have a full political economy analysis covering the development challenges and the local reform actors mentioned in Recommendation 1 needs to be addressed bearing in mind the caveats indicated above (existing strategy and programs,</p>		

guiding documents, etc.). The narrative should reflect the three criteria of the IC Strategy 21-24 and lessons learnt of the MRS 2018-21.

The major development challenges are complex and require interventions from different angles (political, economic and social, environmental) which can be addressed at the programme level, even though individual projects themselves may not cover all the different aspects identified as necessary to foster a sustainable systemic change.

This recommendation is based mainly on the reading of the credit proposals of the projects selected by the evaluators. It has already been mentioned that the information is not always to be found in these documents- given the structure and the length authorized for EP and CP. However a more detailed analysis is available in other preparatory documents such as the project document.

Measures	Responsibility	Deadline
A clear narrative on how the SCOs will contribute to development will be defined during the planning workshop. Taking into account the future MRCP Swiss Portfolio Outcomes responding to the countries' and regional outcomes, an overall objective of the MRCP 2022-2025 will be formulated. MRCP projects shall then link to the Swiss Portfolio outcomes as well as to the countries/regional outcomes, hence contributing to the overall objective as per theory of change of the MRCP.	SCO VTE, PNH, participants at the planning workshop	Planning workshop in June

Recommendation 4

To simplify the MRCP' results framework. The MRCS Results Framework is complex, with too many results indicators that provide the SCOs too little valuable information for accountability and program steering. The evaluation recommends simplifying the Results Framework for the MRCP by only including two small sets of quantitative and qualitative indicators which can signal whether (i) the local reform actors and the SCOs are on the right track to addressing the development challenge at hand (or that operational adjustments are needed), i.e., program steering indicators; and (ii) the targeted development challenge is being overcome, i.e., accountability indicators.

Management Response

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
The results framework of the Mekong Region Strategy 2018-2021 is 25 pages long and includes 35 Swiss Portfolio Outcome results indicators. The framework is divided into three sections for Cambodia, Laos and the regional level separately. Each of these sections contains the three domain objectives with different formulations and in many cases differing indicators. Following this structure the Annual Reports were usually rather lengthy and could not avoid some repetitions. The definition of indicators will follow the SDC guidance for the elaboration and approval of cooperation programmes as well as the SDC Guidance on Results Indicators. The number of indicators shall be reduced, however, as we are dealing with 2 countries and a region, the reduction will have limits.		
Measures	Responsibility	Deadline
The definition of the results framework for the MRCP 2022-25 will be an iterative process including various SDC organisational units and consultations with the relevant stakeholders. The intention by the SCOs and the Asia division is to come up with a simplified results framework that integrates the three geographical focus areas (Cambodia, Laos and regional) as much as	SCO PNH and VTE and Asia Division	December 2021

possible. While at the country and regional outcome level differences are inevitable, at the Swiss Portfolio Outcome level as much as possible harmonised formulations will be sought. As advised by the above mentioned SDC guidance documents, in the definition of indicators the focus will be on the use of Aggregated Reference Indicators – ARI (for Swiss domestic accountability) and Thematic Reference Indicators (TRI) for steering, thematic learning and accountability. Only if no ARI or TRI cover a specific dimension of the future MRCP, context-specific indicators will be defined.	Participants in the planning workshop	
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Recommendation 5		
<p>To include transformative gender action in development interventions. The SCOs' efforts to promote gender equality focus on ensuring equal gender participation in project activities. The development interventions do not address the root causes of gender inequality in society. The evaluation recommends to also include more transformative gender action in the Swiss development interventions by contributing to changes in discriminatory gender attitudes, behaviors, and actions.</p>		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>Gender equality is mentioned as one transversal theme in the Mekong Region Strategy 2018-21 and so it will be in the future Mekong Region Cooperation Programme 2022-25. Gender focus has gone beyond equal gender participation in activities during the current strategy, because results shows that women not only have participated in activities, but have also benefitted from the effects of such inclusion. However, the changes coming along with that have not been given sufficient analysis and attention in the monitoring and reporting of the current strategy. At the project level greater attention can also be paid to making interventions more gender transformative focussing on gender attitudes, behaviours and actions. The strategy must be different in contribution than in mandate projects, as in the latter SDC has a greater influence on the design of the projects. The design of an adequate strategy will be initiated during the context analysis done for each intervention, to better understand the root causes of any form of gender-based discrimination. As we have to limit the number of IC Strategy's Sub-objectives, the future MRCP will follow the Leave No One Behind principle and include gender and good governance as institutional themes in all its projects. This corresponds to IC Sub-objective 9 on <i>strengthening and promoting human rights and gender equality</i>. ARIs and TRIs from this sub-objective will however be considered for inclusion in the results framework.</p> <p>Nevertheless, one should also not forget that behavioural change in a society requires significantly more time than what can be achieved in a project's life time with measures aiming at increasing sensitization, participation in planning and decision making and eventually accessing to the benefits of the projects.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Deadline
The analysis of gender equality challenges will be integrated in internal analysis made in preparation of the planning workshop. Local reform actors with potential for transformative gender actions will be identified and where possible integrated into future projects. At least one gender ARI or TRI will be integrated into the MRCP 2022-25.	SCO PHN and VTE	December 2021 and ongoing

Recommendation 6		
<p>To prolong the current strategy by 2 years. The SCOs note that nearly 100% of the available financial resources for the time-period 2022-2025 are already planned (basically eliminating the need for a new MRCP). The evaluation recommends prolonging the current strategy by two years and take this time to (i) do the analytical work for implementing Recommendation 1; and (ii) conducting a thorough portfolio review to determine which of the ongoing projects fit into the new strategic orientation and which projects need to be phased out (to create financial headroom for developing a coherent and more impactful project portfolio).</p>		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>Beyond the fact that we do not consider at this stage adequate to stop the whole process initiated to design the new MRCP 2022-25, we are not convinced that postponing the exercise would bring the expected results, considering our answer to the recommendation N. 1. We would be facing similar challenges in 2023 when designing a new Regional Programme while at the same time having ongoing projects planned according to the current MRS 2018-2021 (/2023).</p> <p>With an extension of the current Strategy until 2023, the Mekong Programme would not start its reorientation towards the new priorities defined in the IC Strategy 2021-24 and in the Asia Guidelines before 2023. This would delay the alignment of the MRCP to SDC key strategic documents and conflict with the decision that all Cooperation Programmes must be revised in the light of the new SDC regional guidelines and the IC Strategy 21-24.</p> <p>Rather, we consider the MRCP 2022-25 should be developed, as planned, in 2021 to start the progressive reorientation of the activities in the region by 2022. The objective will be to streamline projects/new phases starting in the coming years according to the new development priorities set in the IC Strategy 2021-24 and Asia Guidelines. Increasing SDC engagement on climate change is part of the new priorities, which require prompt response at strategic and technical level. Analytical work and portfolio review are part of the process of designing the new MRCP 2022-25. While we do not envisage short-term phasing-out of ongoing projects, efforts are already ongoing to strengthen the coherence of the Mekong portfolio along the three areas of intervention proposed in the Concept Note. The latter Note is enshrined in the orientations of SDC as per IC Strategy 21-24.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Deadline
We propose to continue with the elaboration of the MRCP 2022 – 25 along the Roadmap agreed with the Asia Division, with the objective to have a text submitted for approval by end of 2021. The current projects will be reviewed in the light of the new MRCP to decide if they should be continued, reoriented or discontinued at the end of the phase.	SDC Offices and Asia Division	December 2021

II. Evaluators' Final Report

The evaluation report for the Evaluation Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 has been elaborated in collaboration between the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division of SDC and a consultancy team constituted by JaLogisch Consulting GmbH as well as two peers from SDC.

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Covid-19

This evaluation was conducted during the Covid-19 Pandemic between June 2020 and January 2021.

The evaluation acknowledges:

1. the severe health and socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 virus, including the loss of life and livelihoods, both globally and in the Mekong Region;
2. SDC's assistance to the governments of Lao and Cambodia, both in the form of emergency assistance and an economic recovery support package;
3. the long-term socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic – its consequences will reverberate in the economies of the Mekong Region for years to come; and,
4. future SDC development assistance will need to consider and respond to these socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The evaluation has not analyzed the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Mekong Region, nor SDC's response thereto. For four reasons:

1. both the Pandemic and its consequences were still unfolding at the time of the evaluation;
2. SDC formulated, approved and started-up its economic recovery support during the evaluation making it too early and premature to pass an evaluative judgment; and,
3. the evaluation focused on the implementation of the strategy as a whole and the underlying project portfolio as a whole contributed (or likely contributed to) the MRCS' objectives (and did not focus on individual interventions);
4. the evaluation covered a wide-range of topics which were difficult to cover in-depth in the sparse time the evaluation had with its key informants, leaving no time for a substantive and meaningful discussion on the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the proper response thereto from the private sector, governments, and development partners.

The evaluation nonetheless considered the SCOs' ability to respond to new demands and emergency situations. Moreover, the recommendations have been shaped and formulated to also be relevant in a post-Pandemic environment.

The practical limitations that the Covid-19 Pandemic put on the evaluation are addressed in Section 1.4.

Use of terms

The acronym **SCOs** refers in this report to the Swiss Cooperation Offices in Vientiane and Phnom Penh, which – together – are responsible for the implementation of the MRCS 2018-2021.

The Swiss Cooperation Offices in Myanmar and Vietnam are always referred to as such, i.e., **SCO Myanmar** and **SCO Vietnam**.

The acronym **SDC** refers to the whole institution and includes all its component parts (i.e., Directorate, South Cooperation Department (including Asia Division and Swiss Cooperation Offices), Global Programs, and Humanitarian Aid Department).

The **component parts of SDC** are always referred to explicitly, for example: Asia Division, Global Program Climate Change and Environment, SDC's Humanitarian Aid Hub in Bangkok, SDC Jakarta, etc.

With the adoption of the new Swiss International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024, SDC has renamed its (regional or country-level) cooperation strategies into cooperation programmes. Consequently, this evaluation will revert to the **Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 (MRCS)** when referring to the evaluated strategy, and the **Mekong Region Cooperation Programme 2022-2025 (MRCP)** for the upcoming cooperation program.

Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of South-East Asia Nations
ARI	Aggregate Results Indicators
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CHF	Swiss Franc
CIDCA	China International Development Cooperation Agency
CS	Cooperation Strategy
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSPM	Conflict Sensitive Program Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
GP	Global Programs
GPCCE	SDC's Global Program Climate Change and Environment
GPFS	SDC's Global Program Food Security
GPMD	SDC's Global Program Migration and Development
GPW	SDC's Global Program Water
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LCM	Lancang Mekong Commission
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
NEIR	National Institute for Economic Research (Lao PDR)
MRCS	Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021
MRCP	Mekong Region Cooperation Program 2022-2025
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPOs	National Program Officers
REDD	UNFCCC Framework on the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation
SAP	Business data processing system
SCO(s)	Swiss Cooperation Office(s)
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SME	Small or medium-sized enterprise
TRI	Thematic Results Indicators
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training

Feature projects

The bulk of key informants (~75%) were in-region development partners. Many of these key informants were associated with nine, purposefully selected¹, projects from the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 (MRCS). This enabled an informed discussion on SDC's engagement in the Mekong region and the development effectiveness of the SCOs' interventions. According to the SCOs, the selected 9 projects were representative of the MRCS' project portfolio. This report utilizes these 9 projects to illustrate and substantiate key evaluation's findings and conclusions. Below table briefly introduces the projects and spells out their acronym.

Lao PDR	
Lao- Decide ²	Lao Decide Information
	Aim: strengthen data collection and analysis for evidence-based policy making at the national level
TABI	The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative
	Aim: support the conservation and sustainable economic use of agro-biodiversity by local communities and smallholder farmers
DRE	Decent Rural Employment Strategy
	Aim: promote vocational skills and value chain development and inform the National Strategy for Rural Employment
Cambodia	
ISAF	Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework
	Aim: improve local public service delivery through increased citizen participation and local government accountability
CHAIN	Cambodian Horticulture Project Advancing Income and Nutrition
	Aim: develop local horticulture value chains for smallholder farmers
SDP	Skills Development Program
	Aim: support rural poor and disadvantaged youth to gain decent employment and contribute to the TVET national regulatory framework
Mekong Region	
MRC	Mekong River Commission
	Aim: promote cooperative and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Lower Mekong Basin
MRLG	Mekong Region Land Governance
	Aim: promote secure and equitable access to and control over agriculture land and forest for small holder farmers
PROMISE	Poverty reduction through safe migration, skills development, and enhanced job placement
	Aim: support skills development and formal migration and employment

¹ See Appendix E for details on the sampling strategy.

² The third phase of this project changed the project name to Knowledge for Development. As this report mostly uses results from the previous phases, it stuck to the original project name.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- This independent evaluation encompasses a qualitative inquiry into the development effectiveness of the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 (MRCS). The purpose of this inquiry is to facilitate learning by the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division – the intended users of the evaluation – about what works, what doesn't and why in the implementation of the MRCS. The lessons learned are to inform the new Mekong Region Cooperation Program (MRCP), which is due in 2021.
- The MRCS contains 26 larger development interventions (i.e., each with a value over CHF 1 million). Together, these projects absorb 94% of the MRCS' CHF 146 million budgetary envelop. The evaluation investigates to what extent these 26 larger development interventions (likely) contribute to the Strategy's objective of promoting sustainable development, democratic governance, and inclusive and peaceful societies in the Mekong Region.
- The main report (especially Chapter 2) is learning-oriented (by consistently posing questions for the reader's reflection). In contrast, this executive summary draws out the evaluation's main findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The evaluation rests on (i) discussions with the SCOs, the Asia Division and the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division; (ii) interviews with external informants; and (iii) a document and literature review.
- The evaluation was conducted amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic. This prevented field work by the international evaluation team. The evaluation resorted to virtual interviews with most key informants. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face by the evaluation team's local consultants in Lao PDR and Cambodia.
- The lack of field mission limited, amongst others, the evaluation's engagement with high-level government officials. This prevented the evaluation to assess the SCOs' own policy dialogue with the Lao and Cambodian governments which, apart from project support, forms another important dimension of Switzerland's development cooperation.

Main findings and conclusions

- SDC in general and the SCOs specifically are considered valuable development partners. They are valued for their professionalism, neutrality, flexibility, '*auf Augenhöhe*' engagement with partners and long-term (10-12 year) project commitments.
- The larger development interventions under the MRCS do what they are intended to do: they are undertaken as planned and achieve their envisaged outcomes, e.g.: smallholder farmers and young adults raise their earning capacity, businesses gain better access to qualified (migrant) workers, new policies capture and promote new priorities and standards, and (local) governments are increasingly able to govern based on evidence and consultation. These are real and meaningful results as they positively affect peoples' lives or enhance the functioning of (local) government.
- Where relevant, the SCOs and its implementing partners apply SDC's values and concepts on LNOB, HRBA, CSPM and Gender Equity. The SCOs target vulnerable (marginalized, ethnic) populations. Farmers, citizens, and migrants are made aware of their rights and given greater voice. Government agencies and businesses are assisted to perform their ethical duties. Change processes are inclusive, binding in as much as possible all relevant government and non-government stakeholders.
- The gender focus in the SCOs' development interventions is to ensure equal participation of women in project activities. In some project, the SCOs realize a strong (up to 70%) women participation. Such participation empower women, by giving voice, knowledge, skills, and/or market access. This can change a women's standing within households

and communities. The SCOs do not address attitudes leading to unequal economic participation and gender discrimination. For this, more transformative gender action is needed.

- The MRCS seeks to contribute to sustainable development, democratic governance, and inclusive and peaceful societies. The Strategy lacks a conceptual and indicator framework to explain and evidence how the results achieved at the project level contributed (or are likely to contribute) to these overall objectives. The evaluation found that the contribution of development interventions to the MRCS' overall objectives, both individually and collectively, are not as intended, as they could be, and as they should be. For three reasons.
 1. It is unclear what the multiplier effects are of the MRCS' development interventions, i.e., whether (i) income gains for individual(s) (businesses) translate into additional business opportunities (and no losses) for others and kick-start a virtuous and inclusive development cycle; and (ii) project induced changes in governance practices change the perspective of those involved and lead to similar democratic governance practices being adopted in other administrative areas or levels.
 2. The evaluation questions the sustainability of the development interventions. Most projects appear based on the observation that something is missing and the premise that if this gap is filled, sustainable development can take place unhindered. The development interventions insufficiently (i) uncover and/or address the underlying forces (in the belly of society) which prevented the observed gaps from being filled endogenously and hamper the sustainability of the projects; and (ii) build (from the start) on existing reform actors and structures with the incentive and tenacity (as well as the potential capacity and power) to carry the initiatives forward upon project completion.
 3. The evaluation observes limited coherence between development interventions: within the country programs, between regional and bilateral projects, and vis-à-vis development interventions from SDC's global programs or other Swiss agencies. Each project stands alone, as an independent intervention. Projects are neither designed nor executed to explicitly complement another project and jointly achieve results that could not have been achieved by a project alone.

This lack of coherence was also observed between the SCOs' country and regional level projects. Whilst the nation-state remains the organizing principle in South-East Asia, regional projects with credible regional institutions (e.g., ASEAN and MRC) have value because these institutions can set standards and foster peer learning.

- SCOs' staff possess a keen understanding of the development context of the region and individual countries and have inquisitive minds, both of which they use to optimize the development effectiveness of individual interventions. At the same time, the evaluation found that the MRCS and most projects are not strategic and contain a myriad of implicit (and untested) assumptions. What is left unexplained is what the root causes of the targeted development challenges are (the political economy which makes these challenges so persistent); who the project's real boundary partners are (the people and organizations with the power, incentive, capacity and tenacity to affect change); what the actual support needs of these boundary partners are; and – importantly – how SCOs' support will change these boundary partners' attitude, behavior, and actions and – through a ripple effect – invoke wider changes that, in the end, address the development challenge at hand.

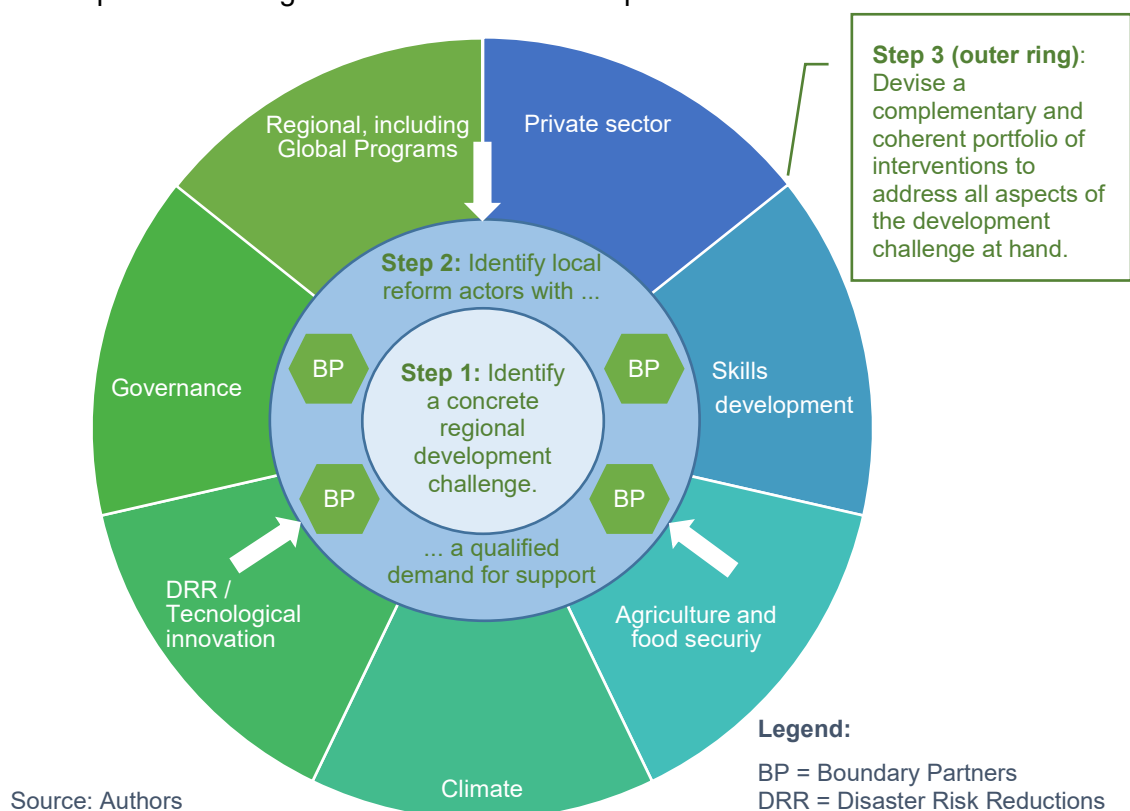
Recommendations

- Moving forward, the SCOs should continue what goes well, including solid project execution that embodies SDC's values on LNOB, HRBA, CSPM and Gender Equality. Current practice nonetheless offers room for improvement – room which, when utilized,

offers the opportunity to improve SCO's development effectiveness, learning and program steering.

– The evaluation recommends the SCOs to:

1. **develop a coherent, focused, and demand-driven project portfolio for the new MRCP.** Instead of visions of sustainable development and democratic governance and organizing the cooperation program around domains of interventions, the evaluation recommends putting concrete development challenges – for which there exists a qualified demand³ of support from local reform actors – at the heart of the MRCP. The SCOs can work with these local reform actors to identify possible pathways of (transformational) change and put its instruments and experience in function of bringing this change about, working simultaneously at different scales (local, national, and regional) and from different angles / domains of interventions (governance reform, skills development, private sector promotion, etc.). Such a focused, demand-driven, and coherent approach is shown graphically below. Of course, such a portfolio does not have to be (cannot be) defined fully upfront and instead will be emergent. The SCOs can identify the qualified demand for support on particular and concrete development challenges and then work with the local reform actors to incrementally resolve the development challenge, building up an ever-larger coalition of reform actors along the way, and addressing the development challenge from an ever more comprehensive set of interventions.



2. **lead less, and coach more in future development interventions.** In the SCOs' interventions, implementing agencies often take the lead. In the third phase of the project, (more) attention is then given to embedding the project results and

³ A qualified demand entails that local reform actors acknowledge the development challenge, have defined a reform agenda, committed (significant) own resources to the implementation of the reform agenda; proceeded – on their own initiative and volition – with the envisaged reforms; and, identified concrete and well-motivated areas for external support.

knowledge in local (government) structures. The evaluation recommends building Swiss support around local reform actors which expressed a qualified demand for support, putting them in the lead of their own and the country's / region's development whilst offering them guidance and targeted support along the way. The resolution of the targeted development challenges, the realization of the envisaged reform, then becomes a function of the political will and power of the reform actors rather than the SCOs, improving the effectiveness and sustainability of the SCOs' support.

3. **formulate a clear narrative on how the SCOs will contribute to development under the new MRCP.** The MRCS and most projects lack a narrative on how they will contribute to the Strategy's overall objectives. For learning, for accountability and for program steering purposes, it is imperative that both individual projects and cooperation programs include – upfront – an explicit and comprehensive narrative on how individual projects are expected to contribute to higher level objectives. This narrative, based on a purposeful political economy analysis, should include what the qualified demand for assistance is, who the boundary partners of SCOs' support are and what their potential is to affect change, how these boundary partners are expected to respond to the SCOs' support, and what the ripple- or multiplier effect is expected to be, i.e., how the selected development challenges are overcome.
 4. **simplify the MRCP' results framework.** The MRCS Results Framework is complex, with too many results indicators that provide the SCOs too little valuable information for accountability and program steering. The evaluation recommends simplifying the Results Framework for the MRCP by only including two small sets of quantitative and qualitative indicators which can signal whether (i) the local reform actors and the SCOs are on the right track to addressing the development challenge at hand (or that operational adjustments are needed), i.e., program steering indicators; and (ii) the targeted development challenge is being overcome, i.e., accountability indicators.
 5. **include transformative gender action in development interventions.** The SCOs' efforts to promote gender equality focus on ensuring equal gender participation in project activities. The development interventions do not address the root causes of gender inequality in society. The evaluation recommends to also include more transformative gender action in the Swiss development interventions by contributing to changes in discriminatory gender attitudes, behaviors, and actions.
 6. **prolong the current strategy by 2 years.** The SCOs note that nearly 100% of the available financial resources for the time-period 2022-2025 are already planned (basically eliminating the need for a new MRCP). The evaluation recommends prolonging the current strategy by two years and take this time to (i) do the analytical work for implementing Recommendation 1; and (ii) conducting a thorough portfolio review to determine which of the ongoing projects fit into the new strategic orientation and which projects need to be phased out (to create financial headroom for developing a coherent and more impactful project portfolio).
- The evaluation deliberately directs the recommendations to the SCOs in Vientiane and Phnom Penh. As they are responsible for the preparation of the MRCP, it are the SCOs which – first and foremost – need to accept the recommendations and lead on their adoption. In the parlance of this evaluation, the SCOs are the evaluation's '*boundary partners*'. Of course, for the recommendations to be included in and implemented under the MRCP the South Cooperation Department, the Operations Committee, and the Directorate also need to buy into and lend their support to these recommendations.

Main report

1 Introduction

This report documents the Independent Evaluation of the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 (MRCS). This opening chapter lays down the evaluation's purpose and scope, as well as its methodology and limitations. The chapter concludes with a reading guide.

1.1. Purpose and use

The SDC Directorate initiated and the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division commissioned this evaluation. The evaluation was to serve the SCOs in the Mekong Region and the SDC Asia Division. The purpose of the evaluation was to enable learning. By looking from the outside in, the evaluation was to offer a fresh look on the MRCS with the idea to generate new insights and open alternative avenues for the SCOs. The evaluation was also to inform the formulation of the Mekong Region Cooperation Program 2022-2025 (MRCP). The primary intended users of the evaluation were therefore the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division.⁴

In the course of the evaluation a tension emerged between the standard evaluation matrix for cooperation strategy evaluations (as commissioned by the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division) and the questions that the SCOs and Asia Division were interested in⁵. With the agreement of the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division, the SCOs, and SDC's Asia Division, the evaluation (report) ultimately concentrated on the evaluation team's main findings⁶ and the SCOs' and Asia Division's main questions and areas of interests.

The SCO's and Asia Division's five main questions were:

1. are the SCOs doing the right things, in the right way?
2. what works, what doesn't and why in the implementation of the MRCS?
3. how to operate in countries which at times feel either resistant to change (Lao PDR) or are moving in the wrong direction in terms of democratic governance (Cambodia)?
4. to what extent does the regional program create and exploit synergies with the national programs such that combined they are more (effective) than the constituent parts?
5. does SDC have the leeway and implementation modalities to respond to new opportunities and crises?

The SCOs and SDC's Asia Division additionally expressed interest in the feasibility of working regionally, the role of ASEAN, the influence of China, the change dynamics in Lao PDR and Cambodia, as well as SDC's flexibility, value-added and strategy infrastructure.

1.2. Scope

SDC's primary development cooperation instrument is grant funding: through (core) contributions to regional institutions (e.g., the Mekong River Commission), co-financing of development programs (e.g., the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework in

⁴ See Appendix A for more on the purpose, scope, and context of the evaluation.

⁵ This tension is described in more detail in Volume 2, Appendix E.

⁶ These findings stemmed from (i) a qualitative inquiry based on the original evaluation questions: 5 main questions from the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division (see Appendix A) and 13 questions from the evaluation matrix (See Appendix B); and (ii) inductive and deductive analysis of the collected data (see Appendix E).

Cambodia), or bilateral technical assistance with project implementation contracted out to (inter)national implementing agency (e.g., the Agro-Biodiversity Initiative in Lao PDR).

The MRCS contains 26 such development interventions with a value of over CHF 1 million each. Together, these projects absorb 94% of the budgetary envelop of CHF 146 million for the MRCS (see Appendix C, project portfolio, and Appendix J, financial portfolio analysis).⁷ These projects cover country-level activities in Lao PDR and Cambodia respectively, and a set of regional activities which also concern Myanmar and, for some, Thailand and Vietnam. The projects are organized in three domains of interventions: (i) Governance and Citizen Participation; (ii) Agriculture and Food Security; and (iii) Skills Development and Employment. This evaluation assessed to what extent this portfolio of (large) projects contributed to the objectives of the MRCS (see Appendix D for a synopsis of the MRCS' objectives).

1.3. Methodology

This evaluation encompassed a qualitative inquiry: a purposeful, semi-structured and iterative process of data collection and analysis to gain qualitative insights into the development effectiveness of the MRCS. The evaluation rests on a detailed document review (including the project-level documentation of 16 projects) and an extensive set of interviews with Swiss stakeholders and in-region development partners. This report's findings have been triangulated between data sources, data collection methods and evaluators. Appendix E details the applied evaluation process and methods. Appendices G and H list the data sources of the evaluation.

1.4. Limitations

The evaluation was conducted amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic. This prevented field work by the international evaluation team. The evaluation resorted to virtual interviews with most key informants. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face by the evaluation team's local consultants in Lao PDR and Cambodia.

On the one hand, these virtual interviews went (remarkably) well. Based on experience, many interviews would not have produced more or better insights if they had been conducted face-to-face. On the other hand, this virtual approach lacked the intensity of a physical field mission with its many more (spontaneous, informal, and longer) exchanges, both on the evaluand as well as (importantly) the political economy and development context in Lao PDR, Cambodia, and the Mekong Region. The subtleties of understanding – on context, project implementation and impacts – which one gains from such face-to-face exchanges, are missing in this report.

The lack of field mission also limited the evaluation's engagement with high-level government officials. This prevented the evaluation to assess the SCOs' own policy dialogue with the Lao and Cambodian governments which, apart from project support, forms another important dimension of Switzerland's development cooperation.

1.5. Reading guide

Inspired, but unbound by the evaluation questions, Chapter 2 shares the evaluation's main findings. It covers, in a half-way logical sequence, a wide variety of topics. It observes, reflects, and raises questions. This Chapter is meant to foster reflection and learning and as such sits at the core of this evaluation.

⁷ The remaining financial resources are allocated to smaller projects (i.e., below CHF 1 million), so-called small actions (i.e., discretionary spending by the SCOs with a value below CHF 100.000), and operational costs (i.e., office, security, and transport costs).

Chapter 3 pulls to the fore Chapter 2's main conclusions and distills the lessons that can be drawn from the underlying observations and analysis. Chapter 4 offers succinct answers to the five main evaluation questions. Chapter 5 concludes with the evaluation's recommendations for the formulation of the next MRCP and a reflection on the possible (institutional) implications of these recommendations. The appendices elaborate on the evaluation's purpose, context, scope, methodology, and data sources, and offer further evidence for this evaluation's observations.

2 Findings

2.1. Introduction

This Chapter shares the evaluation's main observations on the implementation of the MRCS. These observations have been derived through inductive and deductive analysis⁸.

This Chapter first expounds what goes well in the implementation of the MRCS. This positive assessment raises questions about the development effectiveness of the MRCS. This Chapter subsequently explains and investigates the origins of these questions, illustrated with examples from project-level observations.

Findings are consciously translated into further questions – one may say learning-oriented questions – as posing these questions can help the SCOs to reflect on their work, generate new insights, open additional development pathways and, through a process of continuous improvement, enhance – over time – Switzerland's development effectiveness.

This core set of observations is subsequently complemented with more thematic-oriented reflections on regionality, ASEAN, China, positive change dynamics in Lao and Cambodia, as well as SDC's programmatic flexibility, value-added and strategy infrastructure.

2.2. Real and meaningful results

The projects, implemented under the MRCS, do what they were intended to do. They are undertaken as planned and, more or less, achieve the envisaged project-level outcomes. Some projects slightly overachieve their targets, others slightly underachieve their goals. Where the projects underachieve, this can be linked to the tough job the SCOs set itself by working in remote rural provinces in the northern parts of Lao and Cambodia, where there is limited economic activity and sparse educational infrastructure (see also next section).

The SCOs achieve results at four levels:

- individuals: e.g., supporting smallholder farmers to raise their income (e.g., TABI, DRE and CHAIN);
- businesses: e.g., offering SMEs access to better qualified (migrant) workers (e.g., SDP and PROMISE);
- institutional: e.g., creating mechanisms to collect and analyze data, as well as norms and processes to consult, negotiate, decide and improve based on evidence, both at the community (e.g., ISAF), national (e.g., Lao Decide) and regional (e.g., MRC) level;
- policies: e.g., capturing and promoting new priorities and standards (e.g., DRE, MRLG and MRC).

Table 1 captures some of the key (intermediary) results achieved under the MRCS. These are real and meaningful results as they positively affect peoples' lives or enhance the functioning of (local) government.

Table 1 Examples of results achieved under the MRCS 2018-2021

Individuals
– 150 farmers in Lao increased the quality of their coffee beans, selling them directly to high-end international coffee roasters, and increasing their income manyfold (DRE).
– 10.200 smallholder farmers (46.206 persons, 73% ♀) in Cambodia started selling their vegetable production on local markets increasing their income (CHAIN).
– 1900 youth (53% ♀) gained access to gainful (self)employment (SDP).

⁸ Through inductive analysis, one lets the data tell its own story – identifying patterns and emerging themes. Through deductive analysis, the collected data is purposefully scrutinized for answers to the evaluation questions.

– 30.000+ households increased their income through the sale of 16 different agro-biodiversity products (TABI).
– 70 migrant workers received a skills certificate from the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute (PROMISE).
– 2,279 youth migrant (1178 ♀) gained access to improved vocational skills (PROMISE)
Businesses
– 89% of employers in Cambodia are satisfied with the skills level and job performance of graduates from SDC's supported TVET centers (SDP).
– Business (irrigation providers, seed suppliers and traders) are responding (i.e., seeing business opportunities) to the increased domestic vegetable production (CHAIN).
Societal institutions
– In 840 communes in Cambodia, citizens, communal service providers and councilors negotiated and agreed to improve primary health, education, and communal service delivery (ISAF).
– A feasibility study on land allocations to small and medium sized farms (10-30 ha) may have contributed to the Cambodia Government's decision to allocate revoked land from land concessions to such small and medium-sized farmers (MRLG).
– Created in Lao knowledge products (e.g., socio-economic atlas, land concessions data base), data sharing platforms (e.g., Lao Decide Info), data analysis capacity (e.g., NEIR), and informed political decision-making (esp. on land concessions characteristics and impacts) (Lao Decide).
– 360 villages in Lao inventoried their land use (TABI).
– The Procedures for the Notification, Prior Consultations and Agreement were successfully concluded for two envisaged hydropower plants on the Mekong river (MRC).
– MRC and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation agreed to share full year water level data (MRC).
Policies
– Adoption of the Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy, the Drought Management Strategy, and the Mekong River Basin Strategy (MRC).
– Expected adoption of the new National Rural Employment Strategy in Lao (DRE).
– Expected adoption of a new Land Law in Lao (MRLG).

Source: Interviews, SCOs' Annual Report 2020. For further results see SCOs' Annual Report 2020.

2.3. Values adhered to

SDC is a values-based organization. It promotes and seeks to Leave No One Behind (LNOB), a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), Conflict Sensitive Project Management (CSPM) and Gender Equity. These values, concepts and approaches simultaneously constitute (or represent) a goal, as well as means toward that end. This implies that these concepts and approaches should flow into the design of development interventions, be monitored on results achievement, and be applied and lived during project implementation. The SCOs implement multiple projects where they do so. For example:

- LNOB: the SCOs selected the northern, remote, provinces of Lao PDR and Cambodia for its interventions in the domains of Agriculture and Food Security and Skills Development and Employment, focusing these interventions on vulnerable (marginalized, ethnic) populations (e.g., TABI, DRE, CHAIN, and SDP).
- HRBA: the NGO Filanthrope made 150 coffee farmers in Northern Lao aware of the (potential) value of their coffee and worked with them to enable these farmers to negotiate and capture their fair share of their coffee's value (e.g., DRE). The NGO World Vision worked with communities and community service providers in Cambodia on their rights as rightsholders and duties as duty bearers, facilitating a negotiated agreement between the two to improve the quality of communal service delivery (e.g., ISAF). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) works with migrants offering them access to skills development training (and certification) and making them aware of their rights and formal migration schemes, as well as with private recruitment agencies to foster ethical recruitment practices (e.g., PROMISE).

- CSPM: both the SCOs and the implementing agencies proved acutely aware of and sensitive to the intricate societal tensions in Lao PDR and Cambodia. The application of CSPM was most apparent in the MRLG project, whose individual workstreams per country rest on a detailed stakeholder and power analysis, and where the NGOs Land Equity International and GRET seek to be as inclusive and neutral as possible – binding in all relevant government and non-governmental stakeholders – in advancing communal land tenure and promoting responsible agricultural investments.
- Gender: partly by design, partly by the realities found on the ground, the SCOs implement multiple projects with a strong (up to 70%) women participation, where women are empowered to conduct business (e.g., TABI, CHAIN), raise their voice and pursue their interests and rights (e.g., ISAF), or access vocational skills training (e.g., PROMISE, SDP, DRE). Most projects collect gender-segregated data on participation and results. As elaborated below, the SCOs' gender work comes with one caveat: whilst the SCOs strive for equal participation of women and men in project activities, they do not address the attitudes leading to unequal participation and gender discrimination. For this, more assertive and transformation gender action is required.

The evaluation concludes that – where directly relevant⁹ and with the one caveat on gender – the SCOs and/or its implementing partners apply SDC's values and concepts on LNOB, HRBA, CSPM and Gender Equity when designing, implementing, and monitoring development interventions.

2.3.1 On gender

The focus in the SCOs' development interventions is to ensure equal participation of women and men in project activities. Such participation can empower women, by giving voice (e.g., ISAF), knowledge and skills (e.g., PROMISE, SDP) and/or market access (e.g., Chain and TABI). This can lead to a change in women's standing, both within households and communities (for which the SCOs have anecdotal evidence).

The question is whether this is sufficient? Should the SCOs also address the norms and values within the Lao and Cambodian societies on the role of women in society? Norms and values which may lie at the root of unequal access and gender discrimination. If so, this would require a substantive engagement with and dialogue on gender attitudes. It would need to cover both principles (on equal worth) and practices (recognition of common responsibilities for and differentiated contributions to households and communities).

This is recognized by the IOM. As part of the PROMISE project, it has commissioned together with UN Women a study to uncover rules and regulations (e.g., unpaid maternity leave), as well as attitudes and practices (e.g., women with equal qualifications doing less skilled work in construction than their male counterparts) that hamper women migrants. The study should form the basis for a strategy for more transformative gender action.

2.4. What do these results and principles add up to?

The results and principles, referred to above, are real; meaning that they improve government's performance and/or positively impact people's lives. The subsequent question is what do these results add up to? How and to what extent to they contribute to the achievement of the MRCS' overall objective?

⁹ For some projects, such as Lao Decide or SDC's support to the MRC, which in-and-by-itself focus on (inter-agency) institution building, these value concepts have less direct application. They can nonetheless come to the fore in analytical or policy work undertaken within these projects (e.g., data collection and decision-making on land concessions as supported by Lao Decide) or by these institutions (e.g., the implementation of MRC's Procedures for the Notification, Prior Consultations and Agreement on new hydropower development on the Mekong River which seeks to map out and mitigate negative socio-environmental impacts).

The MRCS has a complex Results Framework. An overarching objective statement is combined with objectives for Lao PDR, Cambodia, and the Mekong Region. Each objective statement is formulated slightly differently. The common thread amongst these statements is that the MRCS seeks to contribute to:

- inclusive and peaceful societies;
- sustainable development; and,
- democratic governance.

The (geographic-focused) objective statements are supported by domain-level outcome statements. These, in turn, are undergirded by Swiss portfolio-level results indicators and country development level results indicators.¹⁰

The domain-level outcome statements and Swiss portfolio-level indicators are in practice equated with the project-level outcome indicators or, to put it differently, the individual project-level results simultaneously constitute the domain-level results (see Table 2 for three examples).¹¹

Table 2 Domain-level versus project-level outcome statements and indicators

Project	Domain outcome	Domain indicator (example)	Project outcome (example)
PROMISE	Better skills for migrant workers and information on safe migration practices lead to more decent working conditions, safer migration, and increased income, contributing to better social and economic conditions in sending communities	# of female and male youth gained access to improved vocational skills.	Migrant workers, especially women, can utilize decent employment and safe migration schemes; enjoy greater access to skills development and receive greater protection through strengthened policy frameworks, enhanced assistance services and safe migration information
ISAF	Increase influence and participation of citizens, in particular women and vulnerable groups to foster inclusive and accountable development undertaken by sub-national governments.	Proportion of citizens, in particular women and vulnerable groups, that are involved in local development planning and budgeting processes.	Citizens' participation in monitoring public service providers and engaging with local public service providers and in actions for improvement is enhanced.
TABI	Smallholder farmers increase their income by improved market-oriented production capacities.	# of women and men farmers in target areas with increased income.	Developed options and systems for ABD-based livelihoods are sustainably applied by upland farming communities.

Source: MRCS Results Framework and respective credit proposals

¹⁰ The result is a 3x3 results matrix, combining 3 geographical areas (Lao PDR, Cambodia and the Mekong Region) with 3 domains of interventions (Governance and Citizen Participation, Agriculture and Food Security and Skills Development and Employment).

¹¹ There is, in principle, a natural explanation for this phenomenon. The SCOs implement individual development interventions over a 10 to 12-year time-period. The cooperation strategies cover 4-year periods. This means that each cooperation strategy at least partly builds on an existing and ongoing project portfolio. As a consequence, or naturally, domain-level outcome statements are 'aligned' to project level outcomes. The question that this Chapter poses is whether they should indeed be 'equated' or that there should be a 'hierarchy of objectives and indicators'.

By successfully executing its development interventions and equating domain and project level outcomes, the SCOs effectively fulfil the MRCS' domain-level outcome statements. That is fair enough. But to what extent do these domain/project results contribute (or are likely to contribute) to the MRCS' objectives of sustainable development, democratic governance and inclusive and peaceful societies?

The country development level results were (probably) supposed to bridge this gap. These present however two challenges of their own. One practical and one conceptual. Practically, because data availability on these country development indicators is intermittent and qualitative in nature. Conceptually, because the narrative – the Theory of Change – is missing to assess, through a so-called Contribution Analysis¹², how and to what extent the project(s) (results) contribute to the achievement of the MRCS' objectives.

To cut a long story short, the MRCS' Results Framework lacks a conceptual and indicator framework to assess how the results achieved at the project level contributed (or are likely to contribute to) the MRCS' objectives.

The evaluation turned to the key informants for enlightenment on this critical question: i.e., what do the project results add up to? The key informants equally failed to provide (the beginning of) an evaluative answer. They also appeared to lack the narrative and the data to explain and evidence how the project results contribute to the MRCS' objectives.

So, what can be said about the SCOs' results at the strategy level? Before answering this question, the evaluation first reflects, in the two subsequent sections, on the MRCS' portfolio of projects. The evaluation returns to the question in Section 2.6.4 Conclusion.

2.5. Mind the gap

Having looked more closely – through the document review and the key informant interviews – at 16 of the 26 larger projects, it appears that most projects are founded on a similar logic: they are based on an observation that something is missing and on the premise that if this gap is filled, the political-economy of Lao PDR, Cambodia and the Mekong Region will function better and the people will be better off. For example:

- If there is insufficient transboundary water diplomacy and management, then strengthen the Mekong River Commission (MRC).
- If smallholder farmers and communities do not have knowledge of and access to local, national, or international markets, then establish market access (CHAIN, DRE, TABI).
- If good quality and relevant technical and vocational training is missing, then built up a better quality and more relevant TVET system (SDP, PROMISE).
- If accountability towards citizens is missing on the provision of community services, then create a model for citizen participation (ISAF).
- If formal and ethical recruitment services for migrants are too few, then expand such formal and ethical recruitment services (PROMISE).

This logic is by no means unique to the MRCS. In fact, it is inherent to development cooperation and its key instruments, namely: technical assistance and development finance. It is nonetheless difficult not to conclude that this logic rests on 'our' (i.e., development organizations') conceptions on how a liberal and market-oriented democracy

¹² A Theory of Change can be tested through a so-called Contribution Analysis. This answers the following 5 questions: (i) are the assumptions underlying the Theory of Change plausible and uncontested? (ii) did the envisaged activities take place? (iii) is there evidence that the assumed changes in behavior, decisions and actions occurred in practice? (iv) were the envisaged results achieved? (v) could other contextual factors have reasonably and significantly contributed to the results? The answers to these five questions tell whether the Theory holds up in practice and the extent to which any results can be attributed to the program. (Source: John Mayne (2008). Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect. *ILAC Brief 16*.)

should work. That is fair enough, but it raises the question whether the local (political-economic) context of, in this case, Lao PDR, Cambodia and the Mekong Region is sufficiently taken into account.

It appears worthwhile for the SCOs to ask themselves time-and-again: why do these gaps exist? Why are they not addressed endogenously? What prevents these gaps from being filled by local effort? Is it a mere lack of knowledge and money, or are there deeper forces, in the belly of society, at play? What prevents people from participating in public life, pursuing an education, and setting up a business? It goes beyond the scope of this evaluation to offer substantive and evaluative answers to these questions (especially without having conducted a field mission), but as the report will point out in the next section, these are crucial questions to ask and answer.

An exception to abovementioned project-logic appears to be the Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG) project, which puts the values-based need for secure communal land tenure and responsible agricultural investments at the core of the project. It subsequently supported a wide range of local (reform) actors to conduct research, identify entry points for reform, and initiate reforms. Instead of filling gaps, the project empowers local actors to bring about locally driven change within their countries to enable secure communal land tenure and responsible agricultural investments.

2.6. A reflective interlude

Based on above observations, three questions emerged which appear useful for the SCOs to ask themselves and reflect upon time-and-again. These questions are:

1. what is the multiplier effect of individual projects?
2. what is the sustainability of the project results?
3. what is the coherence between projects?

The next three sub-sections illustrate the pertinence of the three sub-questions through several project-level examples.

2.6.1 What is the multiplier effect of individual projects?

This question emerges from the observation that individual projects (more or less) achieve their intended project level outcomes, but that it is unclear how and to what extent these project results contribute to the MRCS' objectives of inclusive and peaceful societies, sustainable development and/or democratic governance.

Example 1: the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework in Cambodia

Under the Sub-national Democratic Development Program, the SCOs successfully contributed to the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework in 840 communes in Cambodia. In each of these communes, facilitated by volunteers, citizens scored the quality of primary communal, health and education services and engaged in a dialogue with the service providers to improve the service delivery quality. This facilitated dialogue resulted in joint action plans being agreed, which were subsequently discussed and approved by the respective communal councils.

On the one hand, this is democratic governance in action. It brings citizens and administrators together, offering citizens the opportunity to rate and provide feedback on the communal services, and commits the administrators to improve service delivery. At face value, it directly contributes to the MRCS' objective of promoting democratic governance.

On the other hand, isn't this merely the project activity, i.e., what the project is supposed to be doing? Isn't the real question to what extent these experiences change the perspective of citizens and administrators alike and have them adopt – on their own volition and initiative – similar practices in other communes and for other services at the commune, district,

provincial and national government level? Isn't that the impact, the improvement in democratic governance, that the MRCS' seeks to contribute to?

Example 2: value-chain development (e.g., CHAIN and, in part, DRE and TABI)

Through projects like DRE, TABI and CHAIN, the SCOs help smallholder farmers, amongst others, to make more productive use of their land, improve the quality of their produce and sell their products on local, national, or international markets. These projects are successful. They are able to raise the quality and volume of smallholder farmers' production and provide them access to markets. This allows groups of smallholder farmers (many of them women) to increase their income and improve their livelihood. But does it also contribute to sustainable development at the commune, district, province, and perhaps even country level? The answer depends on the response to several other questions.

- How do the smallholder farmers spend the extra income? Is it consumed or reinvested? Is it spent on local goods and services or on imports from other districts, provinces and countries? In other words, does the extra income create business opportunities for others within the village, commune, district, province or country, thus contributing to a virtuous development cycle?
- In the same vein, are opportunities created for the smallholder farmers, businessman or workers to move up the value chain and, for example, start processing some of the agricultural products, allowing the community to move up the value chain and capture a greater chunk of the inherent value of the produce?
- To what extent do the project activities create a win-win situation or is it participating in a zero-sum game, in which one group's benefit are another group's loss, either within the village or between geographies (within the country)?
- Are the supported farmer groups and cooperatives inclusive and offer equal opportunity to all or do they entrench or even exacerbate already existing inequalities?

Example 3 the Mekong River Commission (MRC)

Through its core contribution, the SCOs enabled the MRC, amongst others, to strengthen its standard-setting role in the sustainable development of hydropower on the mainstream of the Mekong River. This has led to the adoption of the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement, the implementation of these Procedures for the Pak Bang and Pak Lay Hydropower Development Plants, and the approval of a Joint Action Plan to ensure sustainable development and the mitigation of negative social and environmental impact (even though CSO participated only to a limited and only indirect extent in the procedures).

If these Joint Action Plans are implemented successfully, they would contribute to minimizing the negative social and environmental impacts of these two hydropower plants, both in the plant vicinity and downstream. On the one hand, this is sustainable development in practice. On the other hand, to what extent has the development of these procedures and their implementation for the Pak Bang and Pak Lay Hydropower Development Plants changed the perspective, attitude and behavior of government and investors in such a way that the same procedures will be applied by them – on their own volition and initiative – in hydropower developments in the Mekong tributaries? A first positive sign that the Mekong countries are opening up their perspective, and pulling in the tributaries, is that they have agreed for the MRC to develop a River Basin Strategy.

The above three examples raise many questions. Purposefully so. Reflecting on these questions should help the SCOs to think through, conceptualize and monitor the impact of its interventions, including their contribution to the MRCS' overall objectives. This, in turn, should allow the SCOs to better steer on, and account for, its results at the strategy-level.

2.6.2 What is the sustainability of the project results?

This question emerged from three observations.

1. As noted above, many projects appear based on the observation that something is missing and the premise that if this gap is filled, sustainable development can take place unhindered (at least in the realm of the intervention).
2. Sustainability appears to especially gain prominence in the third phase of a project (e.g., TABI, Lao Decide) when extra effort is spent to embed the project results – through knowledge transfer, capacity development, advocacy, and policy development – into existing government organizations or systems.
3. Government officials in Lao PDR and Cambodia reported that once SDC's support ends, they would continue the activities albeit with a lower intensity.

These observations (again) raise several more questions – do the projects sufficiently (i) build (from the start) on existing reform actors and structures; and (ii) address the underlying forces which prevented gaps from being filled endogenously in such a way that sustainability becomes feasible and automatic? Three examples may help to clarify this point.

1. In Lao Decide, TABI, SDP and CHAIN significant groundwork is being done by the implementing agencies. Instead, MRLG takes a more hands-off approach and puts local reform actors in the lead. Results will very likely be slower in coming in MRLG than in Lao Decide, TABI, SDP and CHAIN, but might they be more sustainable?
2. If government resources are sparse for the government to continue the activities (e.g., Lao Decide, CHAIN, TABI), to what extent could the SCOs have addressed this head-on and from the start helped government raise tax revenues and prioritize budget allocations for such evidence-based decision-making processes or agricultural extension work?
3. Less tangible, but no less important, how do perspectives and attitudes need to change to have the target groups continue, and go the extra mile, when direct project support ends. What are the target group's aspirations and how are these influenced for example by the political economy of the countries or outward migration and the concomitant changes demographics?

Again, these questions can help the SCOs reflect on, in this case, the sustainability of its development interventions. They further offer building blocks for a narrative on why and how the development interventions are impactful and sustainable.

2.6.3 What is the coherence between projects?

Coherence has multiple dimensions. In first instance, this section concentrates on the internal coherence between projects under the MRCS. A few words are then added on the institutional coherence (which boils down to the coherence between SCOs projects and those of the Global Programs and Humanitarian Aid Departments) and the appliance of the whole-of-government approach in Swiss diplomacy and development cooperation (in the Mekong, chiefly the cooperation between SDC, the Swiss Embassy in Bangkok and SECO).

MRCS' internal project coherence

To be clear, implementing agencies of MRCS projects do communicate with each other and, where opportune, make use of each other's knowledge, network, and products. For example:

- Lao Decide's socio-economic atlas and land concessions report were used by the SCOs' PRF, MRLG and CEGGA projects (see Appendix C for the additional project acronyms).

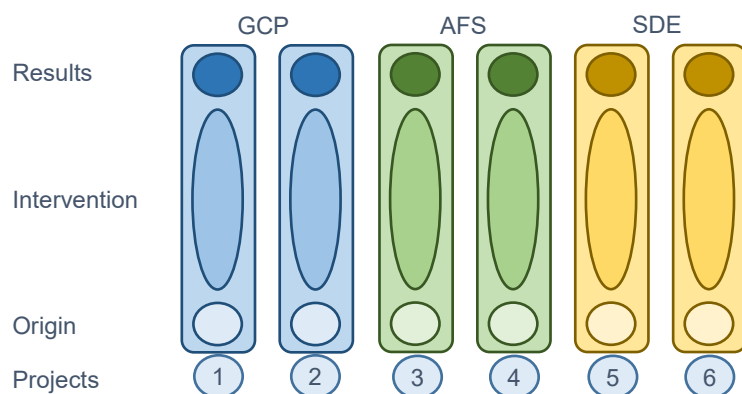
- WWF, GRET and RECOFTC use agrobiodiversity livelihood models developed under TABI. The TABI website Phakhaolao.la includes nutritious meal recipes from ENUFF.
- LURAS (Helvetas) supported TABI's value chain development work on coffee and tea.
- SDP utilizes training material developed / used by the ILO in the DRE project.
- ISAF informs the SCOs' funded and GIZ-implemented RED project on public dialogue mechanisms (to be applied at the district level).
- PROMISE works with Skills for Tourism project in Lao to identify suitable training providers for migrant workers.

Over and above such exchanges, the picture that emerged is that each project has its own origins, intervention logic, institutional set-up, and objectives. Each project stands alone, as an independent intervention. No project appears to be designed to explicitly complement another project and jointly achieve results that could not have been achieved by either project alone. This silo-approach is graphically depicted in Figure 1.

On the one hand, the SCOs recognize the multi-dimensional character of development by supporting interventions in different domains, with different local development actors, targeting different elements of sustainable development. On the other hand, SCOs' project-by-project approach raises another question: could the SCOs achieve greater development impact if it consciously and strategically pulls its ingenuity, knowledge, resources, and devices and implement a program of support, tackling in parallel multiple facets of the same development challenge?

The project-by-project approach can be explained. SDC allows only project, not program funding. It also utilizes domains of intervention to focus cooperation programs on a limited number of sectors (preventing too much of a scattered approach). But aren't these two requirements contradictory? Does project funding not lead to a scattered approach albeit within a limited number of domains, as evidenced by the MRCS?

Figure 1 Working project-by-project



Source: Authors

Institutional coherence

There is considerable exchange and coordination between the SCOs and SDC's Global Programs. For example, on:

- ensuring message alignment in the Mekong Region between MRLG and the GPFS's support to FAO's work on Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Tenure.
- implementing the GPFS' RIICE project which includes a Cambodia component (on private insurance schemes for rice crops)

- GPCCE's collaboration with RECOFTC, which is also a SCOs' implementing partner.
- labor migration on which both the GPMD and the SCOs have large projects running.

Like in the SCOs' own portfolio, there is thematic overlap between projects, but no strategic alignment or complementarity. No MRCS / Global Program project is designed to complement and enhance the results of a Global Program / MRCS project. At face value, there is potential for complementary work between, for example:

- the MRC, the upcoming Inclusive Water Governance Project and BRIDGE¹³.
- PROMISE and the Decent Work for Migrant Workers from South Asia (DWSA) project from the GPMD.
- SCOs and the GPCCE's support to RECOFTC on social forestry and climate action.

The question is: how to make it happen? Historically, SDC's global and bilateral programs were not supposed to engage with each other. The last few years, this rule has loosened, not least because staff increasingly reach out as they need each other's intelligence, networks and, for the Global Programs, access to local presence & contacts. There is a willingness on both sides to deepen this collaboration. The consensus is that such cooperation needs to be concrete (i.e., project-driven) and purposeful for both sides (i.e., contribute to both party's results frameworks).

SDC's Humanitarian Aid Department has no current program in Cambodia and Lao PDR, making coherence less of an issue.¹⁴ Both the SCOs and SDC's Humanitarian Aid Rapid Respond Unit in Bangkok attest of good communications and productive working relations. They cooperate where feasible and needed. The most prominent example is that (after the collapse of the Saddle Dam in Champassak Province in Lao PDR) the SCO Vientiane and SDC's Rapid Respond Unit in Bangkok provided the Lao Government with 5 Swiss experts for its emergency national dam safety review. SDC's Humanitarian Aid Department funded the 5 Swiss experts, whilst the SCO Vientiane agreed with the Lao government on the Swiss support.

Over and above such emergency support, SDC's Rapid Respond Unit in Bangkok provides targeted training (on CEDRIG¹⁵) and technical assistance to the SCOs on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures (e.g., it assisted TABI in including DRR measures into its land use planning work). SDC's Rapid Respond Unit also supports the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response; an area, where it can imagine complementary work from the SCOs to implement the Agreement's requirements at the national level.

The whole-of-government approach

The whole-of-government approach of the Swiss government predicates that the activities of different Swiss federal agencies are aligned and coherent to each other. In Lao PDR and Cambodia, this concerns the work of the Swiss Embassy in Bangkok (which is also the Swiss political representation to Lao PDR and Cambodia) and SECO.

The SCOs and the Swiss Embassy in Bangkok report good and regular communication. The Swiss Embassy adds to this that it can only assert itself in Lao PDR and Cambodia due

¹³ BRIDGE is a program from the Global Program Water promoting transboundary water management. At present, it supports, amongst others, the so-called 3-S Basin covering the Sesan, Sekong and Sre Pok rivers which are the only trans-boundary tributaries of the Mekong River.

¹⁴ SDC's Humanitarian Aid Department does have a program in Myanmar, where it collaborates – under the Myanmar Cooperation Strategy – with the SCO in Myanmar. The Myanmar Cooperation Strategy falls however outside the scope of this Evaluation.

¹⁵ The Climate, Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Integration Guidance (CEDRIG) is a tool to systematically integrate climate, environment, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) into development cooperation and humanitarian aid to enhance the overall resilience of systems and communities.

the SCOs long-standing and trusted relation with the respective governments. This allows the Swiss embassy to talk about politics, trade, and human rights. SDC's work is so to say a facilitator.

SECO is only active in Vietnam with one exception: its Regional Biotrade project which operates in the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot which included Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar. The latter is focused on wild collection, whereas TABI deals with agro-biodiversity cultivation. There has been no collaboration (let alone complementarity) between the two projects. In theory, there is room for complementary action in biotrade, as well as fair and environmentally sustainable value chain development. This is recognized by both SECO and SDC. Both are willing (when there is a strong case for complementarity) to work together. The question is and remains, how, in practice, to bring this about.

On coherence

In summary, communications and collaborations between projects, departments, and different Swiss agencies is good. There is however little to no complementarity of action, i.e., where projects and activities are purposefully designed to complement other projects and activities such that the whole becomes more than the sum of their parts.

2.6.4 Conclusion

The above reflective interlude purposefully raised questions. These questions can help the SCOs reflect on their work, deepen their analysis, and detail the development narrative of the subsequent MRCP. In other words, these questions are meant to facilitate reflection and learning – the purpose of this evaluation.

But what can be deduced from these reflections about the answer to the question that started these deliberations in the first place, i.e., what do the results at the project-level add up to or, put differently, to what extent do the SCOs' development interventions contribute to sustainable development, democratic governance and inclusive and peaceful societies?

No definitive answer can be given to this question. The fact that (i) questions about the portfolio's multiplier, sustainability and coherence emerged; and (ii) the SCOs lack a narrative and results framework to make the link between the development interventions and the MRCS' overall objective plausible, at best raises doubts about the development effectiveness of the MRCS and at worst suggests that the contribution of the project portfolio to the MRCS' objectives is limited.

On the positive side, it offers room for improvement. And given that the SCOs are adept in conceptualizing, designing, and executing projects; moving forward, the SCOs can concentrate on (i) making these projects more coherent, sustainable and impactful; and (ii) building a narrative and evidencing that the portfolio as a whole contributes to the SCOs' overall objectives.

2.7. ASEAN and regionality

Whilst views differ, most key informants state that ASEAN adds value (even if it does not amass the functions and power of the European Union). ASEAN's value-added lies (i) setting standards; and (ii) exposing member states to other countries' approaches and experiences. Both the standard setting and peer exchange offer national governments a hook for domestic policy making.

As to standard setting, there is no shortage of declarations, statements, agreements, frameworks and guidelines such as, by way of example, ASEAN's:

- Consensus and Declaration on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Family Members;
- Statement on the Future of Work;
- Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response;

- Professional Qualifications Reference Framework;
- Guidelines on Responsible Agricultural Investments.

ASEAN is also active, with over a 1000 meetings per year (most at the technical working level). These meetings offer ASEAN member countries to share views, approaches and experiences. Examples, mentioned in the interviews, are:

- Forum on Labor Migration;
- Working Group on Water Resource Management; and,
- Interparliamentary Assembly.

At the same time, it is recognized that ASEAN:

1. does not act politically, respecting (almost to a fault) member country's sovereignty – it is stringently non-interventionist, does not mingle in domestic governance and human rights issues and is, for example, unwilling and -able to exert itself in conflicts between China, the Philippines and Vietnam over jurisdiction over islands in the South China Sea; and,
2. nonetheless is a purely political organization (setting policies and guidelines), which cannot act as an on-the-ground implementing partner of SDC – it has neither the intent nor the infrastructure to perform an implementation role.

The nation-state rather than ASEAN (or any other regional institution) remains the organizing principle in South-East Asia. For the SCOs, this implies two things.

1. to make a difference on-the-ground, any regional activities should be complemented by country-level work; and,
2. the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division may want to reconsider their self-stated aversion against '*running the same project in multiple countries*'. A case can be made for complementing work at the ASEAN level, for example on migration, agricultural investments, or (more at the level of MRC) water diplomacy with country-level work as:
 - (most) countries in the Mekong Region face similar challenges;
 - to be effective, regional work needs to be complemented by country-level work;
 - a regional program allows for economies of scale (e.g., one implementing agencies, one steering committee, one annual report, etc.); and,
 - a regional program forces the SCOs and the implementing agencies to put local reform actors in the lead of country-level change processes (which, as argued above, should – *ceteris paribus* – enhance the sustainability of project results).

Clearly, this observation does nothing to invalidate or impede on the SCOs' and SDC's Asia Division's criteria for regional activities: that it should concern a regional public good¹⁶ and add value to country level work. In fact, quite to the contrary: it strengthens these criteria.

2.8. China

The MRCS already perceived China as an important driver of change in the region. The role and influence of China in both Lao PDR and Cambodia has further expanded over the

¹⁶ An interesting conversation unfolded during the evaluation whether agricultural investments and land governance are regional public goods. The evaluation concludes that they are. There are significant cross-border investments in agriculture serving regional (not least Chinese) markets. Responsible investments (both socially and environmentally) become a precondition for the long-term sustainable development of both the investing and recipient countries.

last few years, as observed by the SCOs and its project partners. The SCOs are now contemplating how to (strategically) deal with China's growing presence and its possible influence on the next MRCP.

China – as the behemoth next door – is a reality for South East Asia (and has been so for the ages). It is both a boon and a bane. It offers e.g., critically important (agricultural) markets and significant infrastructure investments, but also creates, amongst others, financial dependency, weakly managed foreign direct investments, and pressure on Lao's and Cambodia's social capital and natural resources. Moreover, a range of new cooperative vehicles and institutions, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Lancang Mekong Commission (LMC) and the China-Lao Economic Corridors, are challenging existing regional cooperation structures.

The impact on the SCOs' development interventions appears to be limited so far. Project-level key informants are aware of the developments. Whilst not benevolent, neither does China appear purposefully malign. Above all, China pursues its self-interests. Some of these interests may partly overlap with Switzerland's and thus offer SDC the opportunity to engage with China in South East Asia (in line with its Memorandum of Understanding with CIDCA).

Agricultural development could be an entry point, with China as the region's (fast growing) market for agro-biodiversity and agricultural products. Water diplomacy could be another. Whilst politically contentious, SDC has a strong track record in promoting transboundary water management (which is, in part, about making the contentious less contentious and making all stakeholders see their joint interests). The fact that the LMC and the MRC recently agreed to share full-year's water flow data is an encouraging sign in that regard.

Ultimately, the choice (or attempts) to collaborate with China should be a function of SDC's own strategic choices. The SCOs are right though to include the China factor ever more in its annual context analysis, as well as in its discussions within the EU Joint Programming.

2.9. Positive change dynamics

The evaluation asked most key informants where they see positive change occurring in Lao PDR, Cambodia, and the Mekong Region. This turned out to be the most difficult question to answer. This suggests one of three things: (i) the key informants do not look at their environment from a (transformational) change perspective; (ii) change dynamics are so subtle that they are hardly observable; and (iii) there are no or limited positive change dynamics in the countries and region. No key informants attested to the latter. A few key informants thought that there are significant dynamics at play in Lao PDR and Cambodia, but that these are indeed subtle and do not take place within public view. Several key informants pointed out the influx of Chinese people and (real-estate) investments in the urban centers of the region, changing these cities' dynamics.

The answer as to why it was so difficult to respond to the evaluation's inquiry into positive change dynamics in the countries therefore probably lies in between the first and second suggestion: there are change dynamics, but people are not observant of them. Without a field mission, the evaluation cannot add its own field observations. All the evaluation can do is share the sparse observations that were made on the changing landscapes in the countries and region (see Table 3).

Table 3 Some change dynamics in the Mekong Region

– Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam are becoming more open to integrated water resource management (e.g., approving the development of a MRC River Basin Strategy), instigated by nature (with the lowest water level ever recorded in the Mekong River), markets (weaker electricity demand from Thailand and electricity overproduction in China), and costs (of environmental protection measures for hydropower plants).
– The Ministers of Interior and Finance & Economy in Cambodia are proponents of federalization and support the Sub-national Democratic Development Program (including with growing budget allocations – national transfers to communes increased almost fourfold between 2014 and 2020 from US\$ 59 million to US\$ 211 million).
– Unproductive land concessions and social conflict has led the Lao Government to review its policies on land concessions through an intergovernmental Land Investigation Taskforce, and to set up Land Service Centers in each province where land titles can be issued. Similarly, in Cambodia, renationalized land from land concessions is transferred to smallholders and medium-sized agri-business.
– There are young entrepreneurs, often returning migrants, emerging which, for example, see business opportunities for processing and marketing of agro-biodiversity products.

Source: Key informant interviews.

2.10. SDC's value-added

The evaluation spent little time and effort on this topic. The well-known story line was quickly confirmed, often on key informants' own initiative. In short, both SDC in general and the SCOs specifically are deemed valuable development partners. They are valued for their professionalism, neutrality, flexibility, '*auf Augenhöhe*' engagement¹⁷ with partners and, last but not least, long-term (10-12 year) project commitments. As always, the latter is considered a unique feature of Swiss development cooperation and a differentiating factor from most other development organizations.

2.11. Flexibility

According to the SCOs, SDC's culture and instruments offer flexibility and allow the SCOs to respond positively to new requests or developments. This holds for two reasons.

1. New requests or developments generally require the mobilization of expertise and, at least initially, limited funding (e.g., the dam safety review or the fiscal decentralization workshops in Lao PDR). Expertise can be mobilized, and financial outlays covered with the SCOs' 'small actions' budget. Subsequent larger scale support can be organized through regular project funding once financial headroom becomes available.
2. SDC allows for budget-neutral changes in project scope and activities when the contexts or developments demand this.

The evaluation suggests however that this is not the full story. Equally for two (related) reasons.

1. As projects end and budget becomes available for new commitments, such financial headroom is generally absorbed by a new project with its own origins, intervention logic and envisaged project outcomes. As in most development organizations, there is pressure and custom to commit and disburse. The SCOs do not hold the equivalent of a rainy day or strategic reserve. They do not let a specific project play itself out and reveal where additional and complementary interventions would be worthwhile or needed (for example through a Market System Development approach in the SCOs' value-chain development projects or providing targeted support to the Public Financial Management reform in Cambodia).

¹⁷ This is a common German expression. It means that one engages with partners as equals.

2. Any changes within projects normally concern shifts in emphasis, with greater focus for example on capacity development, policy dialogues or investments. They do not tend to pull-in other dimensions, such as the abovementioned Public Financial Management reform or strengthening entrepreneurship and innovation in agriculture.

These are no easy observations. The evaluation is aware that they go deep into SDC's practices and procedures. The evaluation mentions them nonetheless as they may give pause, triggering reflection, generating ideas on how SDC may approach its programming differently.

2.12. The strategy infrastructure

The evaluation reviewed, what in the evaluation came to be called, the strategy infrastructure: the collection of corporate documents to conceptualize, convey, implement, monitor, steer and account for the MRCS, i.e., the MRCS itself, the project-level credit proposals, the Results Framework and the SCOs' Annual Report. The main findings of this document review were previously included in the Inception Report. This section offers a brief resumé.

2.12.1 MRCS

The MRCS describes succinctly – based on the MERV – the geopolitical, economic, development, and gender equity context, as well as the main development challenges of (the countries in) the region.¹⁸ This context analysis is general, wide-ranging, and descriptive. The context analysis is not purposeful, i.e., leading through a process of inductive and deductive analysis to a logical strategy and choice of domains. The choice of domains appears to have been a discretionary decision: a safe choice rather than a strategic deliberation. The MRCS does not explain how the choice of domains and envisaged development interventions – either individually or collectively – will contribute to achieving the MRCS' objectives of sustainable development, democratic governance, and inclusive and peaceful societies.

2.12.2 Credit proposals

The credit proposals state the targeted development challenges in general terms (as matter-of-facts). What is mostly left unexplained (or perhaps considered self-evident) are the root causes of these challenges, the political-economy which makes these challenges so persistent, the entry points for action, the people and organizations with the power, incentive, capacity and tenacity to affect change; the specific needs of these persons and organizations to be able to act as agents of change¹⁹; and – importantly – how the SCOs can support such people and organizations, how the SCOs' support will change their attitude, behavior and actions and – through a ripple effect – invoke wider changes and, in the end, effectively address the development challenge at hand. The credit proposals – like the MRCS and Results Framework – contain a myriad of implicit assumptions which, at the end of the day, are key for the envisaged interventions to work and to understand why they (do not) work. See Appendix L for some annotated examples of intervention logics at the project level.

¹⁸ SDC's country and regional cooperation strategies have a standard format and a long customary practice on how the different topics are addressed within these documents. The SCOs applied this format and practice to the MRCS.

¹⁹ The credit proposals include a stakeholder analysis. This is however a general description of relevant stakeholders. It does not highlight and explain which persons and organizations within this general group can act as boundary partner and what support these persons and organizations need to be an effective change agent.

2.12.3 Results Framework

The MRCS Results Framework includes (a whopping) 35 Swiss-portfolio-level results indicators. As explained in Section 2.4, these indicators constitute mostly outcome-indicators of individual projects. At a project level, these performance indicators are revisited four times a year and constitute one source of information to determine whether project-level adjustments are necessary. At the Strategy-level, performance is assessed on an annual basis (as captured in the Annual Report – see next section).

The MRCS Results Framework includes per domain (and per country/region) the intervention logic. This details the development challenge at hand, the development context in which the SCOs operate, the envisaged response, and the intended outcomes and impacts. Like the main text of the MRCS, the Results Framework does not explicate how, within the specific context of Cambodia, Lao PDR and/or the Mekong region, the development interventions are expected to bring about the envisaged outcomes and impacts. The Results Framework assumes effectiveness but does not explain it (i.e., make it plausible). The exact Theory (or pathway) of Change is not given. The missing links are illustrated in Appendix M through 4 annotated examples.

2.12.4 Annual Report

The evaluation undertook an in-depth review of the 2019 Annual Report and a cursory read of the 2020 Annual Report. The Annual Reports contain, per standard format, three parts:

1. a qualitative description of the key changes in the development context and the SCOs' programmatic response thereto.

The context analysis – again based on the annual MERV – is general and not contextualized to MRCS. Its usefulness for program steering is unclear. The Annual Reports do not analyze in a structured and systematic way what (possible) implications are for the orientation and implementation of the MRCS. This makes it unclear why and how the 2019 Annual Report for example concludes for each country/region that the current strategy remains adequate and the SCOs can continue to implement the project portfolio unabated.

2. a presentation of country- and domain-level results, Swiss portfolio results and the implications for program steering.

This second part offers no systematic narrative analysis on the reported results in the Results Framework, i.e., whether projects are progressing satisfactorily and collectively contributing to the MRCS' objectives. The judgments whether the Swiss portfolio results and the country results are progressing (un)satisfactorily are not explained (and cannot be straightforwardly inferred from the text).²⁰

The information on portfolio results and program steering at the domain level is process, activity and output-based, rather than results- and learning-oriented. The discussion on the implications for Steering at the domain level is mostly disconnected from the narrative on country- and portfolio level results.

3. an updated Results Framework with current data on the performance indicators.
See previous sub-section.

²⁰ Where progress at the portfolio- or country-level is discussed (e.g. in the governance domain in Lao PDR), and a range of positive and negative developments are reviewed, no weighing or analysis is given and it remains unclear how the SCOs reached the (satisfactory) rating.

2.12.5 Conclusion

In short, the evaluation observes a disconnect between:

- the context-analysis and the choice of domains;
- the choice of domains and the MRCS' objectives;
- the updated Results Framework and the narrative Annual Report; and,
- the narrative Annual Report and the MRCS' objectives.

The strategy infrastructure has a check-box quality to it. The evaluation's conversations with former and current SCOs' staff nonetheless revealed a keen understanding of the development context, as well as inquisitive minds aimed at optimizing the development effectiveness of individual interventions. The question is how to make the strategy infrastructure more interesting and useful for the SCOs. Chapter 5 offers concrete recommendations based on this Chapter's full body of evidence and analysis.

3 Conclusions and lessons

This Chapter pulls to the fore Chapter 2's main conclusions and distills the lessons that can be drawn from the underlying observations and analysis. The conclusions are written in black font; the lessons in a blue font.

1. The large projects implemented under the MRCS embody SDC's values, are implemented as intended, and (more or less) deliver on the results identified in the project-level logical frameworks. (Section 2.2 and 2.3). There is room for more transformative gender action in the SCOs development interventions.

The SCOs are adept in conceptualizing, designing, executing, and monitoring large development interventions in accordance with SDC's values embodied in the LNOB, HRBA, CSPM and Gender Equity concepts. Transformative gender action requires conscious and dedicated effort.

2. The MRCS (Results Framework) lacks a conceptual and indicator framework to assess how project-level results contribute (or are likely to contribute) to the MRCS' overall objectives of promoting sustainable development, democratic governance and inclusive and peaceful societies. The evaluation found reasons to believe that this contribution is uncertain at best and limited at worst. (See Section 2.4 and 2.6).

For learning, for accountability and for program steering purposes, it is imperative that both individual projects and cooperation programs include – upfront – an explicit and comprehensive narrative (undergirded by both qualitative and quantitative indicators) on how individual projects are expected to contribute to higher level program objectives. This narrative, based on a purposeful political economy analysis, should include:

- what the qualified demand is for assistance. In short, have local stakeholders:
 - defined a reform agenda;
 - committed (significant) own resources to the implementation of the reform agenda;
 - proceeded – on their own initiative and volition – with the envisaged reforms; and,
 - identified concrete and well-motivated areas for external support.
 - who the boundary partners²¹ of SCOs' support are and what their potential is to affect change;
 - how these boundary partners are expected to respond to the SCOs' support;
 - what the ripple- or multiplier effect is expected to be, i.e., how will changes in the perspective, rationale, behavior and actions of the boundary partners influence other actors and invoke positive change at scale?
 - how the envisaged pathway of change constitutes a contribution to the MRCP's objectives.
3. The evaluation raises doubts about the general project sustainability, as most projects appear to be stop-gaps, and spend limited time to understand and address the underlying societal forces which prevented these gaps from being filled endogenously. Moreover, domestic structures and resources in Lao PDR and

²¹ The International Development Research Center defines boundary partners as '*individuals, groups or organizations with whom a program interacts directly and with whom the program anticipates opportunities for influence*'. Earl, S., Carden, F., & Smutylo, T. (2001). Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. Ottawa: International Development Research Center.

Cambodia are often too constrained to continue the projects' best practices at the same level.

Sustainability must be built in from the start and not spring to prominence in the third phase of a project. This means that during project conceptualization and design active consideration is to be given to who the SCO's boundary partners are and what their interest, incentives, capacity, resources, and tenacity are to continue a project's best practices upon project completion.

4. All large projects under the MRCS constitute standalone development interventions. No project was designed to explicitly complement another project such that jointly they achieve greater development impact than alone. SDC's project-by-project funding modality and practice limit its flexibility and ingenuity to pull resources together and (simultaneously or progressively) tackle multiple facets of the same development challenge.

There is significant room to enhance the internal coherence of the SCO's project portfolio such that the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts. Respecting SDC's project-by-project funding modality, this requires upfront a thorough, comprehensive and explicit analysis of the root causes of targeted development challenges, as well as the formulation of a strategy on how – over-time – multiple projects can support local reform actors to tackle the root causes of the targeted development challenges.

To the extent that both the analysis and the strategy go beyond the scope of the standardized cooperation program format (or entails sensitive information which the SCO's want to keep confidential), the SCO's may capture these in an internal paper.

In addition, the SCO's may want to suppress the tendency to commit financial resources to new standalone projects as they become available and instead maintain a strategic reserve for complementary measures to existing development interventions. As development interventions play out and the full scale of the development challenge and required actions become clear, this will allow the SCO's to conceptualize, design and execute complementary follow-up projects.

5. A lack of internal coherence can also be observed between the SCO's country and regional level projects. Whilst the nation-state remains the organizing principle in South-East Asia, regional projects – which build on the standard setting capacity of ASEAN and MRC – have value-added.

Whilst country-level projects can be implemented without a regional component, regional activities need to be complemented by country-level support to be effective. Country-level projects can however gain from standards setting by and peer learning within ASEAN and MRC.

6. SDC is considered a valuable development partner in Lao PDR and Cambodia. It is valued for its professionalism, neutrality, flexibility, '*auf Augenhöhe*' engagement²² with partners and long-term (10-12 year) project commitments.

Through one's positioning (e.g., professionalism and '*auf Augenhöhe*' engagement) and/or strategic choices (e.g., ability to commit 10-12 years to an individual partners and project), one can differentiate oneself from other development agencies.

²² This is a common German expression. It means that one engages with partners as equals.

4 Questions & Answers

4.1. Introduction

This chapter answers the five main evaluation questions from the SCOs based on the observations and findings of Chapter 2.

4.2. Are the SCOs doing the right things, in the right way?

Answer: The SCOs' choice of domains and development interventions are relevant. They are aligned with recipient country government priorities and the Swiss Message on International Cooperation 2017-2020. The target groups also positively respond to the SCOs' support, which – at a minimum – suggests a latent demand for assistance. At face value, the SCOs are doing the right things.

The central tenets of this evaluation however are that (i) the SCOs are doing many right things; and (ii) it remains unclear how projects – either individually or collectively – contribute (or likely contribute) to the MRCS' overall objectives (see Section 2.4, 2.6 and 2.12). The second part of the question – considered at the level of the MRCS – is therefore, at present, the most pertinent. Could the SCOs' enhance their development effectiveness if it concentrates in the right way on a right thing? The evaluation suggests they can. The SCOs can improve their program steering and development effectiveness if they:

- develop a plausible narrative on how projects, individually and collectively, contribute to the MRCS' objectives;
- adopt a more coherent approach where projects explicitly and purposefully complement each other;
- put local reform actors in the lead of their sector, community, district, country or regional development;
- empower these local reform actors through peer learning, coaching and targeted investments.
- monitor the changes in perspective, rationale, and actions of the SCOs' boundary partners, how such changes influence other actors, and how collectively they contribute to the MRCP' objectives.

4.3. What works, what doesn't and why in the implementation of the MRCS?

Answer: This question is a variant of the first question. What works is executing projects. The SCOs execute projects which do what they are intended to do, mostly embody SDC's values and (more or less) achieve the envisaged project-level outcomes (see Section 2.2 and 2.3). What does not work is to demonstrate how these projects, individually and collectively, contribute to the MRCS' objectives, evidence the sustainability of the project results, and ensure that the whole (of the project portfolio) is more than the sum of their parts (see Section 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6). The reasons are that (i) at the strategy, domain, and project level a narrative – a Theory of Change – fails to explicate, monitor, evaluate and evidence how projects contribute to the MRCS' objectives (see Section 2.4 and 2.12); (ii) it remains unclear how existing structures within the countries can support upon project completion the best practices initiated by the SCOs' projects (see Section 2.6.2); and (iii) projects are conceptualized as standalone interventions (see Section 2.6.3).

4.4. How to operate in countries which at times feel either resistant to change (Lao PDR) or appear to be moving in the wrong direction in terms of democratic governance (Cambodia)?

Answer: This is the most difficult question to answer without having conducted a field mission and having collected our own field observations. The key informant interviews offer

little to go on (see Section 2.8). Our answer is therefore a general one, inspired by experience. The more difficult the country and development context becomes the more important it is to (i) identify and empower local reform actors that are pushing for positive change; (ii) have a clear-eyed view on the changes in perspective, attitude and behavior that are required amongst key stakeholders to bring systemic change at scale about; (iii) seek to influence such a change in perspective, attitude and behavior through targeted interventions; and (iv) take a progressive, iterative (and patient) approach, regularly evaluating whether one remains on (one of) the envisaged pathway(s) of change and adjust when necessary.

4.5. To what extent do regional projects create and exploit synergies with national projects such that combined they are more (effective) than the constituent parts?

Answer: Implementing agencies of regional and bilateral programs make, where opportune, use of each other's knowledge, products, and networks. Regional (like the bilateral) projects remain nevertheless standalone development interventions: each has their own origin, intervention logic, and objectives, as well as terms of reference and results frameworks. Regional projects are not designed to explicitly complement other projects and jointly achieve results that could not have been achieved by any one project alone. (See Section 2.6.3)

Regional organizations like ASEAN and MRC are valuable. They set standards and enable peer exchange. The Nation-State remains nonetheless the organizing principle in South-East Asia. This implies two things. First regional activities make sense – they can add value and enhance development effectiveness. Second, to make a difference on-the-ground, regional activities need to be complemented by country-level work. (See Section 2.7)

In Section 5.4, the evaluation builds on these insights by proposing a more coherent and focused approach for the MRCP. In this approach, regionality plays a double role. First, by selecting regional development challenges as the MRCP' lodestars it can insert greater focus into the SCOs' strategy and programming. Second, by consciously designing regional and bilateral projects to complement each other, it can enhance coherence and development effectiveness. The joint result (added benefit) of this proposal is that it would make the MRCP also a truly regional strategy.

4.6. Does SDC have the leeway and implementation modalities to respond to new opportunities and crises?

Answer: In principle, yes. The small actions funds allow the SCOs to mobilize expertise for new and specific demands from local development partners. SDC's Humanitarian Aid Division can, with the support of the SCOs, come to aid in emergency situations. As project funding becomes available, the SCOs can follow-up initial (emergency) support with project-scale development assistance.

At the same time, SDC's practices – project-by-project funding and project commitments as financial headroom becomes available – limit the SCOs' ability to tackle, with project-scale support, development challenges which emerge (or reveal themselves) during a project's implementation and which are (equally) critical to address to achieve sustainable development impact. (See also Section 2.11).

5 Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This chapter articulates the evaluation's recommendations. These recommendations aim to make the MRCP more realistic, purposeful, coherent, and impactful. They allow the SCOs to improve their development effectiveness, better account for their development impact, and become more explicit learning- and improvement-oriented offices.

The recommendations consciously target *'how'* the SCOs identify, conceptualize, implement, monitor, and evaluate the MRCP and individual development interventions, rather than *'where'* (i.e., in which domains) the SCOs are active. This is for two interrelated reasons. First, this is where there is room for improvement and where the key to enhanced development effectiveness lies. Second, without improving *'how'* the SCOs operate, it does not matter *'where'* the SCOs are active. The type and level of results will remain the same as they are now. The SCOs will not benefit from coherence and complementarity of action. And the SCOs will remain unable to account for results at the strategy (i.e., MRCP) level.

Finally, the recommendations are improvement focused. Of course, the SCOs should continue what goes well, including solid project execution that embodies SDC's values on LNOB, HRBA, CSPM and Gender Equality.

5.2. Target audience

In SDC, the swiss cooperation offices are responsible for the preparation of the regional and country cooperation programs. The evaluation therefore deliberately directs the recommendations to the SCOs in Vientiane and Phnom Penh. In the parlance of this evaluation, the SCOs are the evaluation's *'boundary partners'*.

Of course, for the recommendations to be adopted and included in the MRCP, the South Cooperation Department, the Operations Committee, and the Directorate also need to buy into and lend their support to these recommendations. This is all the more important as the recommendations partially go against the grain of common practice (even when they can be implemented within the current *'strategy infrastructure'*).

5.3. Recommendations

The evaluation recommends the SCOs to:

1. develop a coherent, focused, and demand-driven project portfolio for the new MRCP;
2. lead less, and coach more in future development interventions;
3. formulate a clear narrative on how the SCOs will contribute to development under the new MRCP;
4. simplify the MRCP' results framework;
5. include transformative gender action in development interventions;
6. prolong the current strategy by 2 years.

The next subsections explain and elaborate these recommendations.

5.4. Recommendation 1: to develop a coherent, focused, and demand-driven project portfolio for the new MRCP.

Proposal: To select as overall objective of the next MRCP concrete, ideally regionally relevant, development challenges (e.g., around water conflict, land governance or migration) and to devise, for each, a portfolio of projects that tackle different root causes of the challenge at hand.

The proposal is graphically depicted in Figure 2. The proposed approach is built up from the center of the graph with the identification of a core and concrete development challenge (step 1). The selected challenge should, in principle, be recognized in-country and have already triggered into action a collective of local reform actors to address the challenge. Based on these local reform actors' reform agenda and their qualified demand for support from the SCOs, these local reform actors become the SCOs' boundary partners²³ (step 2).

The SCOs can subsequently support its boundary partners with targeted interventions / projects, mobilizing – over time – its different fields of expertise (domains) and instruments (Step 3).

Figure 2 A concentric and coherent approach to development interventions



The distinguishing features of this proposal are that it (i) pulls concrete regional development challenges to the core of the MRCP (rather than some visionary statements about the 'The World We Want'²⁴); and (ii) makes SDC's thematic areas or the SCOs' domains of interventions a collective means to address these challenges. Instead of implementing only loosely connected domains of interventions, this proposal puts the domains of intervention in function of overcoming clearly defined development challenges.

Regional activities are part and parcel of this proposed approach. Regional activities should explicitly complement country-level engagements and assist (in their own small or significant way) to help address the development

²³ The International Development Research Center defines boundary partners as 'individuals, groups or organizations with whom a program interacts directly and with whom the program anticipates opportunities for influence'. Earl, S., Carden, F., & Smutylo, T. (2001). Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. Ottawa: International Development Research Center.

²⁴ This is a UN credo underpinning the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

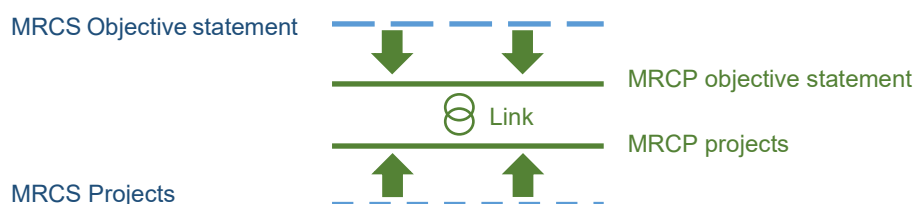
challenge at hand by taking up the same or very much liked issues at the regional level..

By selecting regionally relevant development challenges, this proposal also (i) makes the MRCP a truly regional strategy; and (ii) enables the SCOs to focus on a few clearly defined development challenges (rather than have its efforts spread over 9 different fields, i.e., in three domains in three geographical areas. Furthermore, whilst Figure 2 focuses on the internal coherence of the SCOs' project portfolio, SDC's Global Program can of course be integrated into the approach.

Figure 3 illustrates how this proposal differs from the current MRCS. The recommendation is to (i) '*bring down*' the overall objective of the MRCP to a more concrete, tangible, measurable development challenge on which the SCOs can actually make a difference²⁵; and (ii) '*link up*' project results to the impact that they have on addressing the development challenge at hand.

Finally, the evaluation recognizes that there is a tension between identifying a regional relevant development challenge and a pre-existing collective of reform actors when the development change is either not recognized or suppressed in a country. There is no easy solution to such a conundrum. At the end of the day, the SCOs need to decide whether there is enough reform momentum in a sufficient number of countries to warrant support from the SCOs.

Figure 3 The difference with the current MRCS



Source: Authors

Response to: Lack of coherence and complementarity between country-level and between regional and country-level projects.

Unclear how and to what extent projects – individually and collectively – contribute to the MRCS objectives.

Rationale: Enhance the SCOs' development effectiveness and ability to account for results.

Intended user: SCOs

Alignment The SDC Guidance for the Elaboration and Approval of Cooperation Programmes requires the SCOs to define both Swiss portfolio outcomes and country / regional development outcomes. The evaluation's proposal is, pragmatically, to equate the Swiss portfolio and country development outcome goals at the level of concrete and relevant development challenges.

²⁵ Rather than the more visionary objective statement in the MRCS.

Through a strategic and demand-driven choice of the targeted development challenges, the SCOs can ensure that there is, as per requirement, a link between the Swiss portfolio outcome and (i) the partner countries' development priorities; and (ii) a selected sub-objective of the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024.

The Guidance allows for a more purposeful context / political economy analysis, referring for the context analysis to the possibility to include '*specific context elements regarding the targeted sub-objectives*'.

Within SDC, cooperation programs are organized around domains of interventions. This recommendation would make concrete development challenges the organizing principle. Some development challenges can be (easily) linked to a particular domain of intervention (e.g., agricultural value chain development). For most development challenges, a choice would have to be made to signal to SDC headquarters the domain of intervention: for example, on land governance (agriculture or governance) or migration (governance or skills development) or water conflict (governance or water)? Better of course would be for SDC to get rid of the (artificial) focus on domains of interventions as, in reality, most development challenges require action in multiple domains of interventions to be resolved effectively. This is the whole point of this first recommendation.

Practical implications:

There will be a need to:

- define the criteria for selecting the main development challenges that the MRCP will target. The SCOs can use an adapted version of the engagement criteria of Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024, namely (i) qualified demand (see Textbox 1); (ii) Swiss value-added; and (iii) Swiss interests.
- undertake a detailed and purposeful political-economy analysis of the development challenge at hand to (i) understand the root causes of the challenge and the political economy which keeps it in place; (ii) map out the interests, incentives, capacity, and power of key actors to address the development challenge or hinder its resolution; and (iii) identify entry points for overcoming the challenge.
- develop a narrative – a detailed Theory of Change (see Recommendation 3) – on how the actions of local reform actors and the SCOs' support can effectively address the development challenge.
- devise a strategy – a premeditated plan of action – to bring this narrative about, including an initial set of development interventions.
- formulate a portfolio of projects which both in parallel and consecutively can systematically address the root causes of the development challenge and bring positive change about.
- ensure that single projects, each with their own funding and implementation arrangements, have harmonized Theories of Change and results frameworks.
- ensure that implementing agencies on parallel projects have harmonized terms of references and results frameworks.
- ensure that bilateral and global programs have harmonized Theories of Change and results frameworks.
- take a more dynamic, progressive, iterative, and results-based approach to addressing development challenges, slowly building up a portfolio of short-term and medium-term projects (rather than the current static 3x4 approach, i.e., three phases of four years).

- for the Swiss expat staff in the SCOs to work as a team, with joint responsibility for the strategy implementation per development challenge (rather than have each being responsible for a specific domain).
- to mobilize SDC in-house thematic expertise, from Global Programs or thematic networks, to help elaborate, complete and/or peer review the developed Theory of Change per development challenge.

Textbox 1 Qualified demand

A qualified demand entails that local reform actors acknowledge the development challenge, have defined a reform agenda, committed (significant) own resources to the implementation of the reform agenda; proceeded – on their own initiative and volition – with the envisaged reforms; and, identified concrete and well-motivated areas for external support. The prevalence of a qualified demand is critical as local ownership of the reform agenda is key for the effectiveness and sustainability of external support.

Textbox 2 Institutional implications

The SCOs can continue to submit individual project proposals for grant funding to SDC's Operations Committee. There is no need to introduce sector or program funding modalities (even though they could make sense). It will nonetheless help if the Operations Committee knows, understands, and buys into the SCOs strategic approach to address concrete (and measurable) development challenges in a coherent way through a portfolio of interventions. The Operations Committee must also agree to equate the Swiss portfolio and country development outcomes.

In the same vein, the MRCP will be approved by the management team of the South Cooperation Department and the SDC Directorate. They equally need to buy into the proposal to formulate the overall objectives of the MRCP at the level of '*concrete and measurable development challenges*' rather than in the form of (unmeasurable and non-contributable) visions of inclusive societies, sustainable development, and democratic governance (as well to equate the Swiss portfolio and country development outcomes).

For its own use, but also to bind in the South Cooperation Department management, the Operations Committee and the SDC Directorate, it makes sense for the SCOs to develop an internal paper (over and above the formal MRCP). This supporting paper can detail the selection of development challenges, as well as the narrative (undergirded by both qualitative and quantitative indicators) on how a coherent set of projects, led by local reform actors, are likely to successfully address the identified development challenges.

Textbox 3 Will this proposal constrain the SCOs?

During the debriefing on the preliminary evaluation findings, the question was raised whether a more coherent and complementary approach to project funding would restrict the SCOs' ability to respond to new requests for support from development partners and leave less room for new ideas. The short answer is yes. It would restrict the SCOs ability to respond positively to new requests and support the implementation of new ideas. The idea of course is that, in return, the SCOs would enhance their development effectiveness. But let us not forget: a demand for support also undergirds the coherent approach of this first recommendation.

Having said that, if responsiveness is key (and requiring resources over and above those available through small action grants), then the SCOs could consider reserving part of the budgetary envelop to respond, more opportunistically, to new and innovative ideas that could make a difference in the development of Lao PDR, Cambodia and the Mekong Region.

5.5. Recommendation 2: to lead less, and coach more in future development interventions.

Proposal: To place implementing agencies at arm's length of the actual development activities which are instead undertaken by local reform actors with interim support from international and regional peers and experts.

Response to: Questionable sustainability of part of MRCS' project portfolio.

Dominant role of implementing agencies and their consultants in project implementation.

Rationale: Sustainable development and transformational change can only be driven by local reform actors.

Intended user: SCOs

Practical implications:

It could be beneficial to:

- incorporate a regional or programmatic approach to development interventions as this will quasi automatically place implementing agencies more at arm's length of the on-the-ground development work.

There will be a need:

- for implementing agencies to (i) guide and coach local reform actors on the change processes; and (ii) make available international and regional peers for on-topic and intermittent support to the local reform actors.
- to identify a pool of peers and experts that can provide on-topic coaching support to local reform actors.
- To emphasize the use of peers (rather than consultants)²⁶, and to compensate the peers' travel, hotel and subsistence expenditures (rather than pay consultancy fees), as this forces the local reform actors to do the work.

5.6. Recommendation 3: to formulate a clear narrative on how the SCOs will contribute to development under the new MRCP.

Proposal: To uncover and explicate²⁷ the SCOs assumptions on how a (portfolio of) project(s) will affect change and effectively overcome the targeted development challenge.

Response to: SCOs and implementing agencies are unable to explain how existing project results contribute (or likely contribute) to the MRCS' overall objectives.

The ripple- or multiplier effect of individual projects is neither known nor monitored by the SCOs.

The SCOs have not formulated Theories of Change at the project, domain, and MRCS level.²⁸

²⁶ In development cooperation, a 'peer' refers to a person with a similar status (profession) and/or with relevant and more experience on a specific topic, who is willing to impart their knowledge and experience to a development colleague without monetary compensation. A 'consultant' equally brings in relevant experience, but mostly offers their services against payment. In principle, both a peer and consultant can offer guidance and coaching to another development professional. In practice, consultants are more likely to also execute work for their client, something peers are not prone to do (if only because they have their own day job to attend to). If the objective is to keep the local reform actors in the lead of their own development and still offer relevant and timely support in the process, experience suggests that the use of peers is highly (and possibly more) effective (than the use of consultants). A good example of the use of peers (instead of consultants) is the Swiss Entrepreneurship Program, which is implemented by SECO in the Balkans, Peru, and Vietnam.

²⁷ Google dictionary: *'to analyze and develop (an idea or principle) in detail'*.

²⁸ The credit proposals contain intervention logics and logical frameworks, expressing the expected outputs, outcomes and impacts of development interventions. These intervention logics constitute *'if-then statements'*. Theories of Change go beyond these intervention logics and also explicate the assumptions (for example on the behavioral change of the SCOs boundary partners which need to occur) for outputs to result in outcomes and outcomes to generate impacts. Theories of Change unpack the arrows in the classical graphical depiction

Rationale: To enable the SCOs to account for and steer on development results.

Intended user: SCOs

Alignment The SDC Guidance for the Elaboration and Approval of Cooperation Programmes defines the CPs as '*strategic documents ... [that] set out how [SDC] supports the development, transitional processes*'. It requires '*an in-country planning workshop ... to define ... the underlying theory of change*'. Moreover, '*each portfolio outcome is based on a sound Theory of Change*'.

The Guidance uses a similar definition of a Theory of Change as this evaluation, captured in the 'if-then-because statement'. The CPs are to include '*descriptive Theory of Change (If ..., then ..., because...) pinpointing lines of intervention leading to outcome achievement along the following logic: if (Swiss portfolio outcome), then (country outcome), because (rationale with main outcome/output indicators)*'. The evaluation would add to this that the rationale of the statement is about revealing the assumptions that need to hold for the outputs to result in outcomes and the outcomes to generate impacts (for example regarding changes in perspective, rationale and behavior needed amongst the SCOs boundary partners).

The Guidance foresees Chapter 5 of the cooperation program for the elaboration of the Theory of Change, although it reserves a paltry 2 pages for this. The evaluation recommends the SCOs to complement the public MRCP with an internal strategy paper, enabling the SCOs to elaborate a succinct albeit comprehensive Theory of Change, which it can use for its own learning and program steering.

Practical implications:

There will be a need to:

- explicitly identify, for each development challenge (Recommendation 1) and project:
 - the champions and agents of change within the countries and region, which can serve as SCOs' boundary partners, i.e., who have the power, incentive, capacity and tenacity to affect change;
 - what these boundary partners seek to achieve, what their real and present needs for support are, and what – within the prevailing political-economy – the potential for these boundary partners is to affect change;
 - how these boundary partners are expected to respond to SDC's support – what is the expected change in perspective, attitude and behavior?
 - how changes in the attitude, behavior, and actions of these boundary partners will likely influence other actors, creating a ripple- or multiplier effect, and invoke positive change at scale; and,
 - how this envisaged pathway of change contributes to addressing the development challenge at hand.
- To monitor and evaluate intermittently whether the explicated Theory of Change holds up in practice and steer the SCOs' intervention accordingly.
- Rather than commission an external consultant with drafting the MRCS and Results Framework, the SCOs may want to consider:

of logical framework. Theories of Change result in '*if-then-because statements*'. The because-part of these statements is critical as it reveals the behavioral and institutional changes that are in fact necessary for the envisaged changes to take place. They also offer a benchmark to monitor, evaluate and come to understand the actual reform process.

- preparing both the MRCS and the Results Framework themselves (see also the evaluation's response to the Guidance Note).
- recruit a Theory of Change expert or mobilize in-house Theory of Change expertise to facilitate the development process of the MRCS.

Textbox 4 Institutional implications

SDC's Guidance for the Elaboration and Approval of Cooperation Programmes (Version: April 2020) assigns Chapter 5 of the standard cooperation program (as well as a whopping two pages) for the elaboration of the program's Theory of Change. This is in principle sufficient to summarize the Theories of Change per addressed development challenge. An elaborate, detailed Theory of Change can be annexed or captured in a separate (internal) strategy document. The latter can also be utilized if the (detailed) Theory of Change of the cooperation program may be political sensitive in the recipient country and its inclusion in the public cooperation strategy could be counterproductive. At the end of the day, a Theory of Change serves the SCOs to understand, monitor, and steer its development interventions, as well as meaningfully account for its development results.

5.7. Recommendation 4: to simplify the MRCP results framework.

Proposal: To replace the current 3x3 Results Framework²⁹ with a separate (dedicated) results frameworks per selected development challenge (see Recommendation 1):

- including a small number of purposefully selected and useful quantitative and qualitative results indicators at the impact level, i.e., which – in due time – signal whether the targeted development challenge has been overcome;
- a narrative – Theory of Change³⁰ – detailing how, with a mix of interventions (see Recommendation 1), the SCOs intend to contribute to successfully overcoming the targeted development challenge (see Recommendation 3); and,
- including a small number purposefully selected and useful quantitative and qualitative results indicators which can indicate whether the SCOs and its local reform partners are on the right track to successfully address the development challenge at hand, i.e., which signal whether the SCOs' Theory of Change is holding up in practice or whether corrective action is needed. In other words, to explicitly differentiate between results indicators for accountability and program steering purposes.

Response to: The Results Framework does not include indicators which link project-level outcomes with the MRCS' overall objectives.

The Results Framework is not used for strategic and operational decision-making.

The Results Framework is not used in the narrative account of the MRCS's results in the Annual Report.

Rationale: To make the Results Framework useful for accountability and program steering purposes.

²⁹ The current Results Framework constitutes a 3x3 matrix, combining 3 geographical areas (Lao PDR, Cambodia and the Mekong Region) with 3 domains of interventions (Governance and Citizen Participation, Agriculture and Food Security and Skills Development and Employment).

³⁰ As noted in Footnote 28, this Theory of Change should explicate the assumptions which the SCOs make as to how both individual and the collective of development interventions contribute to successfully overcoming the development challenge at hand.

Intended user: SCOs

Alignment The SDC Guidance for the Elaboration and Approval of Cooperation Programmes requires that '*2 to 3 outcomes are defined per Portfolio outcome*'. Such outcomes need to be defined at the population, organization and institutional level, including policy dialogue outcomes. The subsequent indicators '*can be quantitative and qualitative*'.

Practical implications:

There will be a need to:

- identify concrete and measurable development challenges to whose resolution the SCOs can meaningfully and sustainably contribute – see Recommendation 1.
- purposefully select a small number of (qualitative and quantitative) indicators which can signal to the SCOs whether the implementation of a portfolio of development interventions is on track and the necessary changes amongst the SCOs' boundary partners (in perspective, attitude, and actions) are taking place or that corrective measures need to be taken.
- identify and select a small number of quantitative indicators³¹ which can signal in 5-12 years whether the targeted development challenge has been overcome.
- adopt the Most Significant Change story technique to illustrate the actual pathway of change.
- conduct theory-based evaluations to verify whether SCO's Theory of Change held up in practice and the observed results can be (partly) contributed to SCOs interventions.

5.8. Recommendation 5: to systematically and consciously include transformative gender action in all development interventions.

Proposal: For the SCOs to assess upfront how development interventions – individually and collectively – can contribute to gender equality, both through promoting equal gender participation, as well as contributing to changes in discriminatory gender attitudes, behaviors, and actions, and to incorporate such transformative gender action into the development interventions.

Response to: the SCOs development interventions do not address the root causes of gender inequality.

Rationale: To implement SDC's value and cross-cutting theme of gender equality.

Intended use: SCOs

Practical implications:

There will be a need to:

- Educate / refamiliarize all staff within the SCOs with the concept of transformative gender action.
- Analyze on the selected development challenges (see Recommendation 1) how gender inequality plays out, as well as what the root causes (in terms of norms, values, and practices) are that impede gender equality.
- To adopt both an overall and a project-by-project strategy to enable equal gender participation and transform discriminatory gender attitudes.

³¹ The evaluation suggests one, two or absolute maximum three.

- To monitor changes in attitudes, behavior, and actions of the SCOs' boundary partners, as well as the ripple effects of these changes across a wider set of relevant societal actors.

5.9. Recommendation 6: prolong the current strategy by two years.

Rationale: In response to the draft evaluation report, the SCOs noted that 90% of the available financial resources for the time-period 2022-2025 are already planned for ongoing projects and with the project ideas in the pipeline this percentage is close to 100%. From this perspective, the evaluation would argue that there is no need for a new strategy: why formulate a new strategy when the project portfolio has already been set?

The evaluation however recommends a strategic shift for the upcoming MRCP (as encapsulated in Recommendation 1). This shift requires preparatory analytical work. With 90% of the available financial resources for the time-period 2022-2025 already planned for ongoing projects, it also requires – in parallel – a portfolio review to determine which projects fit into the new strategic orientation and which projects need to be phased out (to create financial headroom for developing a coherent and more impactful project portfolio).

This recommendation creates the time to do the analytical preparatory work, conduct a thorough portfolio review, and prepare a meaningful new MRCP.

Intended use: SCOs

Practical implications:

There will be a need to:

- Submit a proposal to the South Cooperation Department to extend the current MRCS by two years.
- Conduct the preparatory work for implementing Recommendation 1, namely to identify, analyze, and select the development challenges for which a qualified demand for support exists and on which the SCOs can devise a focused and complementary program of interventions based on a plausible Theory of Change.
- Review of the current portfolio to determine which projects can be phased out to create room for a more focused and complementary program.
- Prepare the new MRCP along the lines laid out in Recommendations 1 to 5.
- Consider the appropriate time period for the new MRCP which can be either an initial period of 2 years, followed by an updated MRCP for 2026-2029 (which would align the MRCP again to the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy) or immediate agree on a 6-year time period (i.e., 2024-2029). From the evaluation's perspective, both options can work.

Annexes

to the

Cooperation Strategy Evaluation Mekong Region 2018 – 2021



February 2021

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Part 1: Scope and method

A. Purpose statement and institutional context

Purpose and use

- Through the implementation of the Cooperation Strategy, SDC seeks to contribute to (or even invoke) positive change. SDC considers positive change a move towards democracy, participation, the rule of law, open markets, inclusive and sustainable development, and poverty reduction (broadly defined, not just income poverty).
- The evaluation of the Cooperation Strategy offers the opportunity to assess how and how well SDC contributes to such change and thus answer two quintessential evaluation questions:
 1. What works, what doesn't and why?
 2. Are we doing the right things, in the right way?
- Both the SCO's and SDC's Asia Division are thereby particularly interested to learn (within SDC's available resources and capacities):
 1. how to operate in countries which feel resistant to change, *'whose demand for change is SDC meeting with the Cooperation Strategy'*, and what are entry points and who are the interlocutors for effectively contributing to positive change.

Most development programs – SDC's or others – feel donor-driven, rather than answering a local demand. The national (increasingly authoritarian) governments appear passive (engaging only perfunctory with development partners), the private sector and civil society are weak and unorganized, whilst citizen participation in development processes is limited.¹ So far, *'hopes for advancement towards more democratic societies and open markets have not materialized ... effectively challenging our relevance and effectiveness'*.

2. to what extent does the regional program (i) create and exploit synergies with the national programs such that combined they are more (effective) than the constituent parts; and / or (ii) serve Switzerland's (increasing) political interest in South-East Asia and ASEAN?

Regionalization and the concomitant regional institutions have not developed over the last 20 years as expected. This poses the question what realistically can be achieved at the regional level. Is it possible to work with regional institutions and affect positive change in the countries and the region (including on global / regional public goods)? As noted below (under institutional context), South-East Asia is a foreign policy priority of Switzerland. This can also shape SDC's regional engagement or make it relevant.

3. whether SDC has the leeway and implementation modalities to respond to (the long-term impacts and challenges) of crises, including the Covid-19 Pandemic (noting that

¹ Combined with a weak (arbitrary) rule of law, Cambodia and Lao fulfill to a large extent the three reasons which, between them, Daron Acemoglu and Francis Fukuyama identified as why nations fail: a weak state, exclusive societies, and a weak rule of law. Source: Acemoglu, D. and James A. Robinson (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. New York: Crown Business. Fukuyama, Francis (2011). *Origins of political order: from pre-human times to the French revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- in the case of the latter – continuing business as usual would be both inappropriate and negligent)?
- The answers to these questions and inquiries will be used to shape the next Cooperation Program for the Mekong Region and decide how to move forward with individual country- or regional-level projects. The evaluation's findings and conclusions will thus inform strategic and operational decision-making. The primary intended use of the evaluation is therefore to (further) improve SDC's development relevance and effectiveness (in countries with a difficult development context and a region with a limited history of regional cooperation). Neither the SCOs, nor SDC's Asia Division are thereby looking for an overhaul of the current Cooperation Strategy, but rather for ideas '*where to put stronger accents to become more effective*', within (roughly) the same budget envelop, and building on Switzerland's strength / value-added in development cooperation.

Institutional (SDC) context

- The Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation will – in its next iteration, for the period 2021-2024 – be renamed in *Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy*. The Cooperation Strategies will become *Cooperation Programs*. The purpose and content of the Cooperation Programs remain the same.
- South-East Asia is a foreign policy priority of Switzerland. SDC's engagement in the Mekong Region and with ASEAN² is consistent with this policy. A brief position paper from the Political Division of the FDFA on Switzerland's engagement in South-East Asia is due in September / October 2020.
- Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024 foresees a focus for SDC's interventions in Asia on three domains: governance, economy, and climate change & natural resources. These three domains will form the backbone of the upcoming Cooperation Program for the Mekong Region (2021-2024), whose eventual overall goal will remain poverty reduction and fostering inclusiveness for disadvantaged groups of the population. The Strategy further emphasizes sustainability. SDC's budget envelop for the Mekong Region is to stay (roughly) the same during the next Program period.
- The Whole-of-Government Approach remains important: the efforts of different Swiss agencies need to be seen and placed in conjunction with each other, bearing in mind that currently neither the seco nor the Human Security Division are considering financing programmes in Laos or Cambodia.
- There was a long vacancy (six months) of the Regional Director post prior to Jean-François Cuénod taking the position in August 2019. Moreover, there were three rotations in the senior management of the SCOs in 2019 and again three in 2020.
- The SCOs are implementing several projects which are currently in their first or second phase and which are projected / intended to last 3 phases and 12 years in total (acknowledging that development takes time). The headroom for new interventions / directions concomitantly varies between domains, countries, and the regional level. (The headroom will be estimated during the portfolio analysis).

² The SCOs have two projects with ASEAN in the pipeline: one on TVET and one on Disaster Risk Reduction. SDC's GPCCE has an ongoing project with ASEAN on social forestry.

- The Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017-2020 prescribed that 90% of a Cooperation Strategy's funds are invested in a maximum of three main domains of intervention. This left 10% of the budgetary envelop that could be invested outside the three main domains, either for piloting new (innovative) approaches or support specific demands in another domain of intervention. The Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 has not earmarked funds for piloting (innovative) investments outside the three domains. Switzerland's upcoming International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024 offers the same financial guidance as the current Dispatch regarding thematic concentration and has additionally defined that 10% of the geographic budget of the Division can be invested in other countries of the region than those covered by country programs. The SCOs will again have the possibility to earmark funds for (innovative) investments outside the three main domains in the new Mekong Region Cooperation Program.

B. Evaluation matrix

Evaluation Area 1: Context-analysis (or Responsiveness)		
Main evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Supporting / guiding questions
1. How well does the CS (implementation) reflect the development needs and priorities of the government, aid recipients and target groups, both before and after the Covid-19 Pandemic struck?	<p>The extent to which the CS' objectives, strategy, implementation, and adaptations respond to the needs and priorities of the government, aid recipients and target groups, and continue to do so if circumstances change.</p> <p>The assessment will seek to differentiate between stated needs and priorities, and those that are acted upon by the government, private sector or civil society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What were the government's, aid-recipients', and end-beneficiaries' needs and priorities before Covid-19? b. What actions did the government, aid-recipients and end-beneficiaries take to address these needs and priorities? c. What is the impact of Covid-19 on the countries, including their health, socio-economic, and political system? d. What is done by government, private sector and civil society to address these impacts? e. What are the government's, private sector, civil society's needs and priorities in response to or after the Covid-19 Pandemic? f. To what extent are national partners involved in defining the expected outcomes of the CS?
2. Does the CS (or adaptations therein) take active account of the development and political-economy context of the countries and region (in the period 2018-2020) and address key development challenges of the region and countries in a context-specific and political-economic sensitive manner?	<p>Was the context analysis in the CS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Realistic, i.e. offer a fair reflection of the state-of-affairs in the countries and region. b. Useful, i.e. offer relevant insights, sufficient detail, and differentiated between domains, for the CS to build upon. <p>Is the Results Framework and Theory of Change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Plausible, i.e. undergirded by a fair reading of the opportunities provided by the political economy of the countries and region and offer a logical and plausible pathway of change. b. Differentiated, i.e. offer tailored theories / pathways of change for the different domains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How has the development context evolved over the last 3-4 years? b. Were the context analyses in the CS and subsequent Annual Reports realistic and useful? c. To what extent does the CS (implementation and adaptations) take a context-specific and political-economic sensitive approach to contribute to change (differentiated by domain) Alternatively: to what extent was the monitoring of the context taken into account in the formulation and implementation of the CS? d. What implicit assumptions undergird the CS implementation? Does the CS include Theory of Change-thinking in how to best achieve its objectives within the given development context and political economy?

		e. Are SDC's instruments and procedures flexible enough to adjust the implementation of the CS to new dimensions? f. Are SDC's tools and implementation modalities adequate to respond to crises? g. To what extent does SDC learn and adapt from changes in the context?
3. What is the role of China in general and the (socio-economic) impact of its Belt and Road Initiative in particular on the Mekong region? – Question with lower priority. Less data collection and analysis. Still, important context.	Evaluate based on: Country and sector studies Due to lack of quantitative data, mostly qualitative assessment Views from key informants	a. What are China's key interventions in the region/ countries, both politically and developmentally? b. What is the impact of these political / development interventions? c. How is China used by the local / national stakeholders?

Evaluation Area 2: Relevance (or Coherence)		
Main evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Supporting questions
4. Was and continues the project portfolio to be coherent with the CS and the development context? – Question with lower priority. Less data collection and analysis.	Extent to which the project portfolio is consistent with the CS (both thematically and in terms of financial allocations), the underlying Theory of Change, and the evolving development context.	a. Are SDC's discourse and actions consistent with each other? b. Are country (and regional) projects complementary to each other?
5. To what extent have the following approaches CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, Gender and DRR/CCA been applied appropriately in the domains? – Question with lower priority. Less data collection and analysis.	Tools and manuals of the identified approaches Qualitative assessment whether the approaches made a meaningful difference in the implementation and effectiveness of the projects.	a. Are staff/partners familiar with these approaches? b. Have these approaches been applied in a meaningful way in the main CS' projects? c. Have these approaches been applied well: cf. best practice and the development context?

Evaluation Area 3: Results		
Main evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Supporting questions
6. Which contributions of the Swiss Cooperation portfolio became visible or recognized by local partners at the outcome level, particularly regarding the achievement of the development results in the partner country?	OECD-DAC definition of effectiveness: <i>'The extent to which the [CS] achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.'</i> Based on Results-Framework of the CS Also account for unintended effects, both positive and negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent are the identified outcomes set in the Results Framework being achieved? b. Have there been any unintended effects, either positive or negative? c. How are unintended effects turned into new strategic targets (when positive) or mitigated (when negative)?
7. What worked, what didn't and why? Which internal and external factors enhanced or hindered aid performance and results achievements? Which approaches of the Cooperation Strategy produced added value?	Contribution analysis based on the inferred Theory of Change.	<p>Contribution analysis answers the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. are the assumptions as to how the CS implementation contributes to change plausible and uncontested? b. did the envisaged projects take place? c. is there evidence that the assumed changes in behaviour, beliefs, mental models, decisions and actions of the boundary partners occurred in practice and, if not, how did SDC respond? d. were the envisaged results achieved? e. could other contextual factors have reasonably and significantly contributed to the results? <p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. Have outcomes or approaches been contested? g. Are SDC's instruments and procedures flexible enough to adjust to new dimensions? h. Are SDC's tools and implementation modalities adequate to respond to crises?
8. Which innovations generated by field experience have been scaled up, how, and with what results?	Definition of scaling-up: <i>'to increase something in size, amount, or production'</i> , i.e. the extent to which an intervention or approach has been extended to reach a larger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How have these innovations been debated, documented and put into progress-driven dynamics? b. Which projects and approaches have been scaled-up? c. What assumptions were made that this would work?

	number of beneficiaries (across a larger geographical area). ³	d. What are the results of the scaling-up? e. To what extent have the assumptions born out on how the scaling-up would affect change? f. What snow-ball effects have taken place?
9. Which actions have been taken at the country and regional level (during and/or after projects' end) to enhance the sustainability of the Swiss investments?	OECD-DAC Definition of Sustainability: <i>'The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.'</i>	a. What has been done and achieved to allow beneficiaries to appropriate, sustain and build on the achieved results? b. Is this monitored and how? c. What signs exists that SDC's interventions / projects are sustainable?
10. Is Switzerland adding value to the development of the Mekong Region, Cambodia and Lao?	Comparative analysis based on feedback from key informants	a. Which results would likely not have been achieved without Swiss support? b. What does Switzerland bring to the table that other development partners do not (or not to the same extent)?

Evaluation Area 4: Implementation		
Main evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Supporting questions
11. How effective is the portfolio management of the SCO, i.e. what are its contributions to an optimal achievement of results?	Contribution analysis based on the inferred Theory of Change. CS objectives are being achieved (see above) SDC efforts have value-added (see above)	a. To what extent does SDC learn and adapt from changes in the context? b. What personnel changes took place over the last 2 years? c. How did this confluence of staff changes come about? d. What impact did these changes have on project management and implementation?
12. To what extent is the CS monitoring (system) relevant and effective, in order to provide evidence-based data/information for accounting for results (reporting) and CS steering?	Is the monitoring system: a. Useful , i.e. produce relevant information to steer and account for the CS implementation? b. Efficient , is the data collection effort commensurate to the usefulness of the collected information?	a. How does the monitoring system work? b. Does it provide timely and relevant information to steer the portfolio? c. Does it provide timely and relevant information to account for the portfolio?

³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/scale-up-something>. Alternative: 'If you scale up something, you make it greater in size, amount, or extent than it used to be.' <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/scale-up>.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Is the data evidently used for strategic and operational decision-making? e. Is the data collection effort commensurate to the usefulness of the collected information? f. to what extent was the monitoring of the context taken into account in the implementation of the CS?
<p>13. Which role does the SCO play within the network of different Swiss agencies in charge of development cooperation (SDC – South Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid, Global Cooperation–, SECO, Directorate of Political Affairs / Human Security Division, SEM), and vis-a-vis the national government and the donor community?</p> <p>– Question with lower priority. Less data collection and analysis.</p>	<p>Capture the role of the SCO based on the key informant interviews</p> <p>Is the SCO's contribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consistent b. Constructive c. Value-added d. Commensurate with its resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do Swiss agencies / the donor community coordinate their work? b. What role do SDC and the SCOs play in the network of Swiss agencies and the donor community? c. How do other Swiss agencies, other donors, and the government perceive SDC's role and value added?

C. Project portfolio of the MRCS 2018-2021

Table 1 lists all current projects that are implemented under the MRCS 2018-2021 with a value over CHF 1 million.

Table 1 Current projects of the MRCS 2018-2021 over CHF 1 million in value

Country/region	Domain	Project acronym	Project name
Cambodia	GCP	KBH	Kantha Bopha Hospitals
		SNDD	Sub-National Democratic Development
		RED	Regional Economic Development
	AFS	CHAIN	Cambodian Horticulture Project Advancing Income and Nutrition
		HALO MNC	Mine clearance
		PaFF	Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries
	SDE	SDP	Skills Development Program
		DEYC	Decent Employment for Youth
Lao PDR	GCP	Lao-Decide	Lao Decide Information
		GPAR-GIDP	National Governance and Public Administration Reform Program - Governance for Inclusive Development Program
		PRF	Poverty Reduction Fund
		CEGGA	Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law
	AFS	TABI	The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative
		SURAFCO	Technical Agricultural Education Reform
		LURAS	Lao Upland Rural Advisory Services
		ENUFF	Enhancing Nutrition amongst Upland Farmer Families
	SDE	VELA	Vocational Training and Education Laos
		SFT	Skills for Tourism
		DRE	Decent Rural Employment Strategy
Regional	GCP	PIC	Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia
		MRC	Mekong River Commission
		REFID	Regional Film Initiative for Debate
	AFS	RECOFTC	Center for People and Forest
		MRLG	Mekong Region Land Governance
	SDE	PROMISE	Poverty reduction through safe migration, skills development and enhanced job placement
		ASEAN-TVET	ASEAN Technical and vocational education and training

D. MRCS Results Framework Synopsis

Overall goal: Contribute to building inclusive societies in CLMV through equitable and sustainable development and democratic governance			
Regional level	Regional GCP domain objective: Improved cross-border governance	Regional AFS domain objective: Responsible land and forest governance.	Regional SDE domain objective: Unskilled and low-skilled women and men enjoy safer working conditions and better access to employment
	Regional GCP Swiss portfolio outcomes: <u>Outcome 1</u> (transboundary management): Countries in the Mekong region manage transboundary issues in a more effective and inclusive manner, thanks to strengthened regional platforms and institutions.	Regional AFS Swiss portfolio outcomes: <u>Outcome 1</u> (access): Smallholder women and men farmers have secured and equitable access to and control over agricultural land and forest.	Regional SDE Swiss portfolio outcomes: <u>Outcome 1</u> (rights): Mekong region countries protect and promote the rights of unskilled and low skilled workers, and workers are able to claim their rights. <u>Outcome 2</u> (skills): Better skills for migrant workers and information on safe migration practices lead to more decent working conditions, safer migration and increased incomes, contributing to better social and economic conditions in sending communities.
Overall Goal Cambodia: Switzerland supports Cambodia to strengthen a peaceful society with reduced poverty and sustainable and inclusive growth	Cambodia GCP & H domain objective: Accountable state institutions provide accessible and affordable quality public services, in particular in health, and promote space for dialogue.	Cambodia AFS domain objective: Improved and sustainable livelihoods, food security and income of rural women and men, especially ethnic minorities.	Cambodia SDE domain objective: Better skilled women and men, in particular from disadvantaged groups, benefit from gainful and decent employment and self-employment.
	Cambodia GCP Swiss portfolio outcomes: <u>Outcome 1</u> (public services): Cambodian citizens, in particular women and vulnerable groups, benefit from affordable and quality public services, thanks to performance improvement of national and sub- national institutions. <u>Outcome 2</u> (participation): Increased influence and participation of citizens, in particular women and vulnerable groups, to foster inclusive and accountable development undertaken by sub-national governments.	Cambodia AFS Swiss portfolio outcomes: <u>Outcome 1</u> (livelihoods): Rural women and men improve market-oriented production practice, nutrition awareness and income from horticulture. <u>Outcome 2</u> (access): Rural women and men, including indigenous people, have safe and secured access to as well as sustainable control over natural resources (fisheries, forestry) and production means.	Cambodia SDE Swiss portfolio outcomes: <u>Outcome 1</u> (system): Enhanced TVET/skills development systems and government implementation, with active private sector engagement. <u>Outcome 2</u> (access): More women and men, in particular from disadvantaged groups, have increased access to skills development and employment opportunities. <u>Outcome 3</u> (quality and relevance): Private and public training providers offer relevant and quality training, equipping women and men with the necessary skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
Overall Goal Laos:	Lao GCP objective: Responsive public services for the poor, and vulnerable and enhanced citizen participation.	Lao AFS objective: Improved and sustainable livelihoods, food security and income of rural women and men, especially ethnic minorities.	Lao SDE objective: Better skilled women and men, in particular from disadvantaged groups, benefit from gainful and decent employment and self-employment.

Switzerland contributes to poverty reduction and inclusive and equitable development in Lao PDR	<p><i>Lao GCP Swiss portfolio outcomes:</i></p> <p><u>Outcome 1</u> (public services): Lao women and men in the poorest districts and villages use quality services, thanks to equitable and responsive public service delivery.</p> <p><u>Outcome 2</u> (participation): Lao women and men increasingly participate in public debate in an informed manner to shape more inclusive and responsive policies and to hold government agencies more accountable for their actions.</p>	<p><i>Lao AFS Swiss portfolio outcomes:</i></p> <p><u>Outcome 1</u> (production): Smallholder farmers improve their food security, nutrition awareness and resilience by having access to resources, services and knowledge.</p> <p><u>Outcome 2</u> (income): Smallholder farmers increase their income by improved market-oriented production capacities.</p> <p><u>Outcome 3</u> (access): Smallholder farmers have secured and equitable access to and control over agricultural land, forest and water resources.</p>	<p><i>Lao SDE Swiss portfolio outcomes:</i></p> <p><u>Outcome 1</u> (quality and relevance): Improved quality and relevance of skills provision, responding to labour market demands.</p> <p><u>Outcome 2</u> (access): Increased access to skills development and employment opportunities for women and men, in particular from disadvantaged groups.</p> <p><u>Outcome 3</u> (system): Strengthened regulatory framework and delivery systems on TVET/skills development and decent employment, with the active involvement of the private sector, and focusing on gender equality and inclusion of disadvantaged people.</p>
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E. Evaluation methodology

This appendix elaborates the main evaluation set-up, processes, methods, and approaches.

E.1. Evaluation team

The evaluation was implemented by the team leader and principal evaluation specialist Geert Engelsman (an independent consultant) with the support from two peers – senior SDC staffers Markus Dürst (senior program officer of SDC's Asia Division) and Eileen Hofstetter (head of the governance domain for SDC in the integrated Swiss embassy in the Ukraine). Additional peer review and quality assurance support was provided by Philippe de Leener, an independent evaluation specialist and professor of economics. (Geert Engelsman and Philippe de Leener were jointly commissioned by SDC's Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division with the cooperation strategy evaluations of Chad, the Mekong Region and Nepal. Philippe de Leener led the Chad evaluation, which was conducted in parallel to the MRCS evaluation).

E.2. Utilization-focused evaluation

This evaluation was use(r)-focused, based on the principles of Utilization-focused Evaluation⁴. At the evaluation outset, the evaluation team initiated and took time to (i) familiarize itself with the origin and background of the evaluation; (ii) understand the purpose and use of the evaluation, in particular by investigating the strategic and operational decisions that the evaluation was to inform and the type of information the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division needed to comfortably make these decisions; and (iii) clarify the meaning and relevance of the questions from the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division's standard evaluation matrix for cooperation strategy evaluations.

The evaluation team did so through group discussions and one-on-one consultations with the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division, current and former management and staff of the SCOs, the SCO Myanmar, the SECO representative in Vietnam, and SDC's Asia Division. This inquiry resulted in a draft Purpose and Context Statement and a draft Evaluation Design Matrix (dated 7 July 2020).

Both the statement and matrix were reviewed by the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division, the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division. Follow-up consultations were held on the background, purpose, scope and relevance of the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division's standard evaluation matrix for cooperation strategy evaluations. After some slight modifications, the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division, SDC's Asia Division, and the SCOs agreed with and confirmed Purpose and Context Statement and Evaluation Design Matrix (final versions dated 27 July 2020). The final Statement and Matrix are included in this Volume (Appendix A and B respectively).

Based on a detailed document review (see below), the evaluation offered initial (tentative) answers to all the main evaluation questions in the Inception Report.⁵ The tentative answers to the evaluation questions in the Inception Report did not resonate with the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division. For two main reasons. First, most evaluation questions stemmed from

⁴ Michael Quinn Patton (2008). Utilization-focused Evaluation. Fourth Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

⁵ This evaluation's Inception Report was rather a position, working or discussion paper, as it already offered substantive and evaluative answers to the main evaluation questions. In hindsight, the evaluation should have named the Inception Report either a working or discussion paper. The misnomer originated from a misunderstanding between the evaluation team and the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division about the intent and scope of the Inception Report (as articulated in the Terms of Reference and SDC's Toolkit for the evaluation of cooperation strategies). An Inception Report normally confirms the purpose, scope, context, intended use, questions, and methods of an evaluation. In this evaluation, these elements had been covered with the Purpose & Context Statement and the Evaluation Design Matrix (dated 27 July 2020).

the standard evaluation matrix for cooperation strategy evaluations (as previously developed by the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division). Although the scope and judgment criteria of these questions had been adapted to respond to the SCOs and the Asia Division's interests, these were ultimately not the questions that the SCOs and Asia Division were interested in. Second, the answers in the Inception Report were considered too bold, too abstract, and/or too much focused on SDC's general cooperation strategy infrastructure rather than the implementation of the MRCS.

In line with the evaluation's user-focused approach and the overriding objective of the evaluation (namely to offer the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division the opportunity to learn from past experience), the evaluation team changed tack. Instead of pulling the original evaluation question to the fore (as had been done in the Inception Report), the evaluation concentrated in the main evaluation report on the evaluation's main findings (deduced from indicative and deductive analysis) and the SCOs' and Asia Division's main areas of interests. This resulted in the reflective and learning-oriented Chapter 2 and the recommendations in Chapter 5 of the main evaluation report. In this way, the evaluation sought to connect to the lived experience of the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division and make the evaluation findings and recommendations both interesting and useful for the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division. (Consequently, most questions from the original design matrix are covered only indirectly).

E.3. Qualitative inquiry

The evaluation encompassed a qualitative inquiry: a purposeful, (semi-)structured and iterative process of data collection and analysis meant to (i) unearth common (emerging) patterns, themes, and issues in the implementation of the MRCS and the achievement of the MRCS' objectives; and (ii) respond to the SCOs' and SDC's Asia Division main areas of interest and evaluation questions.

The qualitative inquiry used document review and key informant interviews for data collection, and inductive, deductive, and comparative analysis techniques for data analysis. The evaluation also built in several quality assurance mechanisms. Each of these methods, techniques and mechanisms are briefly described below.

E.4. Document review and meta-analysis

The document review consisted of four parts or phases. First, the evaluation team mapped out and scrutinized the MRCS strategy infrastructure. This started out with a purposeful and semi-structured review of the strategy document itself, in particular the underlying context analysis, lessons learned, strategy formulation, results framework, theory of change, domains of interventions, project portfolio, budget, and implementation arrangements. Particular attention was paid to uncovering the theory of change, both of MRCS and the different domains of interventions. Second, the evaluation acquainted itself with the relevant results of the SCOs' own detailed mid-term review of the MRCS.

Third, the evaluation conducted a purposeful and structured document analysis of the main development interventions implemented under the MRCS. This so-called meta-analysis encompassed the credit proposals, latest annual reports, and the evaluation reports of 16 of the 26 larger development interventions under the MRCS⁶. The purpose of this meta-analysis was two-fold (i) to gather data on the evaluation's key evaluation questions on context, theory of change, results, coherence, and implementation management; and (ii) to incorporate in the evaluation past analysis and findings from SDC and external evaluators. The meta-analysis data sheet is included in Appendix F.1 and the resultant project fact

⁶ The original idea was to include all larger development interventions. Time-restrictions and the observation that the findings across the 16 covered projects were similar led to the decision to limit the meta-analysis to these 16 projects.

sheets are included in Appendix N. Fourth, based on the data analysis and key informant interviews, following the snow-ball principle, the evaluation followed up with further targeted document reviews to collect factual data, understand the context in which development interventions were implemented or to investigate specific areas of interest of the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division (in particular on China's role and influence in the Mekong region).

A full list of the documentation supporting this evaluation is included in Appendix G.

E.5. Key informant interviews

The key informant interviews took place in two phases. During the inception phase, the evaluation engaged in in-depth discussions with former and current management and staff of the SCOs, SDC's Asia Division, as well as the SCOs in Myanmar and Vietnam. As noted above, these exchanges enabled the proper framing of the evaluation. They also allowed the evaluation team to map, and gain these stakeholders' perspective on, the history, formulation, intent, scope, narrative, evolution and (initial) results of the MRCS.

After the document review and the (discussions on the) substantive Inception Report, the evaluation undertook a 5-week virtual field mission. The evaluation conducted purposeful and semi-structured interviews with three groups of key informants, namely:

- Swiss government representatives, from SDC (Global Programs and Humanitarian Aid) and FDFA (Political Division, Human Security Division, Swiss Embassy Bangkok, Swiss Embassy Jakarta);
- international and recipient country governmental development partners, and,
- project-level actors (SCOs, implementing agencies, international and national development partners and independent experts).

Appendix H includes the full list of key informants to the evaluation.

The discussion with the project level actors – the third and largest group – were organized, as the name already suggests, around individual projects. They enabled reflections on local demand for assistance, theory of change, positive change dynamics in the region, the coherence of and synergies between (regional and national) projects; SDC's values (HRBA, LNOB, CSPM and Gender Equality), the project's contribution – individually and collectively – to the MRCS' objectives; the lessons learned on what works, what doesn't and why; the Swiss added-value in the development of Cambodia, Lao PDR and the Mekong Region, as well as the role and influence of China and ASEAN.

The evaluation purposefully selected 9 projects around which to organize these project-level interviews (see Textbox 1). This means that the evaluation selected information rich cases based on a pre-defined set of criteria. The selection criteria were:

- 1 project per geography/domain combination;
- 6 information-rich and relatively typical projects for the MRCS / SDC;
- 3 information-rich and slightly more atypical projects for the MRCS / SDC;
- inclusion of different support types: project, core and trust fund contributions;
- inclusion of a variety of implementing partners, local and international.

Table 2 lists the final project selection. Per project, the Evaluation Team interviewed the responsible SCO's project officer(s), the implementing agency, SDC's boundary partner(s)⁷,

⁷ Boundary partners: the organization or person that the implementing agency has selected to work with and with which/whom it expects opportunities to affect change at scale in the domain of intervention.

and one or two (national and international) development partners⁸ who had knowledge of the project- and the sector-at-hand⁹.

Textbox 1 Rationale for and limitations of the purposeful sampling strategy

The project portfolio under the MRCS is too small and heterogenous to allow for random sampling. The Evaluation Team therefore resorted to purposeful sampling: the selection of information-rich cases based on a predefined set of criteria. But even with this purposefully selected sample, we needed to tread carefully. Most projects address a particular development challenge in a particular way. There is limited commonality between the projects. For example, in the governance domain, SDC's support to the Mekong River Commission, the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework in Cambodia, and evidence-based policy development in Lao under the Lao Decide project have little overlap. The same is true for SDC's support to the horticulture sector in Cambodia and enhancing the nutrition of upland farming families in Lao. This means that the findings from individual projects cannot be automatically generalized across the portfolio. Having said that, this Evaluation is particularly interested to what extent project – either individually or collectively – contribute to the achievement of the MRCS' overall objective. The Evaluation Team's inquiry therefore in particular focused on the linkage between individual projects, the portfolio and the implementation of the MRCS 2018-2021, and whether common trends could be inferred to that end from the inquiry around individual projects.

Table 2 Projects sample for the key informant interviews

	GCF	AFS	SDE
Cambodia	SNDD (Typical/Trust Fund/WB)	CHAIN (Typical/Mandate/SNV)	SDP (Typical/Combi*)
Lao PDR	LAO Decide (Atypical/Mandate/CDE)	TABI (Typical/Progr.Contr./NIRAS)	DRE (Typical/Progr. Contr./ILO)
Mekong Region	MRC (Atypical/Basket Fund/MRC)	MRLG (Typical/Mandate/LEI**)	PROMISE (Typical/Progr. Contr./IOM)

Appendix F.3 includes the (Evaluation Team's) classification of the projects per selection criteria. This table served as the basis for the Evaluation Team's selection. The Evaluation Team subsequently consulted the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division and ensured their agreement with the selection. The SCOs and SDC's Asia Division agreed with the selection and confirmed that the selection was representative for the MRCS.

As noted, the interviews were semi-structured. Based on the evaluation questions, the evaluation prepared interview guides for each group of interviewees. The evaluation team started each interview in an open, non-judgmental fashion and invited each interview partner to express their involvement, experiences and views freely. This approach provided unbiased answers, tended to cover (roughly) 30% of the interview questions and provided insight into which other questions were likely to receive informative answers (often another 20 – 30% of the questions). Gradually, the evaluation then gradually focused the interviews on the remaining relevant questions from the underlying questionnaire as well as on emerging themes from the interviews.

⁸ Development partners: organizations or persons that are knowledgeable about the project intervention and can judge the systemic impact the project may have in the country / region. This can be (local) government agencies, NGOs/CSOs, or international development agencies.

⁹ Evaluations normally also engage with target groups (formerly referred to as end-beneficiaries). This Evaluation did not do so. For two (related) reasons. First, this Evaluation was interested in the results and lessons learned at the strategy and not project level. Second, individual target group members (e.g. individual citizens, smallholder farmers, or students) will often not have the overview to judge the systemic impact of SDC's interventions.

Appendix F.2 includes the respective interview guides.

E.6. Data analysis

The purpose of the data analysis was to draw out the main patterns and findings from the collected data, as well as to solicit answers to the main evaluation questions.

The evaluation applied a variety of data analysis techniques, including:

1. inductive analysis, i.e., interacting with the collected data with an open mind: identifying emerging themes and patterns.
2. deductive analysis, i.e., scrutinizing the collected data on its potential answers to the evaluation questions.
3. comparative analysis, i.e., comparing findings between development interventions to identify common themes and patterns.

E.7. Quality assurance

The evaluation report was drafted by the team leader and principal evaluation specialist based on deliberations with the peers. The peers subsequently closely reviewed both a preliminary and final draft of the draft evaluation report. The preliminary draft evaluation report was also peer reviewed by Philippe de Leener. The evaluation team took care to triangulate all findings between data sources, data collection methods and evaluators.

F. Evaluation instruments

F.1. Meta-analysis data sheet

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal; (ii) last annual progress report; and, if available, (iii) a mid-term review or end-of-phase evaluation. The *grey questions* are guiding questions¹⁰; please delete the *grey questions* once answered.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<i>Who expressed what request for assistance to meet what need / development priority?</i> <i>What actions did / does the government, aid recipient or end-beneficiaries take to evidence need, priority and ownership of the envisaged change?</i> —
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<i>How did the project intend to contribute to change / sustainable development?</i> <i>Who were identified as SDC's boundary partners¹¹?</i> <i>How would SDC's support help these boundary partners contribute to change?</i> <i>Were the boundary partners' interests, incentives, capacities, tenacity, restrictions identified?</i> <i>How were these boundary partners expected to respond to SDC's assistance?</i> <i>How conducive was the operating environment for these boundary partners? How were risks mitigated?</i> <i>What assumptions were made about the external environment (deemed critical for success)?</i> <i>How would the boundary partners' actions to create a ripple effect and lead to the development outcomes and impacts?</i> <i>What uncertainties and controversies were identified?</i> —
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<i>How is China's influence felt (and from which specific interventions / actions by China)?</i> <i>How is China used by local stakeholders?</i> —
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<i>Most annual progress reports will probably stem from before the Pandemic. This section can then be deleted.</i> <i>What has been COVID-19's impact on health, economy, social fabrics, and politics?</i> <i>What has been COVID-19's impact on the project?</i> <i>Has the Pandemic created new needs / opportunities / openings?</i> —

¹⁰ No need to literally answer these guiding questions. They just indicate what to look out for. If no information is given on a question, it can be left blank or briefly commented.

¹¹ The International Development Research Center defines boundary partners as '*individuals, groups or organizations with whom a program interacts directly and with whom the program anticipates opportunities [to affect change]*'. Earl, S., Carden, F., & Smutylo, T. (2001). Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. Ottawa: International Development Research Center.

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<i>What are the main development results up-to-now?</i> <i>What quantitative data is reported on the domain's Swiss portfolio outcome indicators (see Results Framework Cooperation Strategy)?</i> <i>Have there been any unintended impacts?</i> —
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<i>Did SDC's support / activities take place as planned?</i> <i>How have the boundary partners responded to SDC's support – changes in perspective (mental models) / rationale (behavior) / organization (structure)?</i> <i>What were the boundary partners' interests, incentives, capacities, tenacity, restrictions?</i> <i>How conducive was the operating environment / development context for these boundary partners?</i> <i>How did the boundary partners' actions trigger ripple effects and lead to development outcomes and impacts?</i> <i>Can other contextual factors / developments explain the development results?</i> <i>What are controversies – contested development results / approaches?</i> —
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
<i>What were the core elements of the debate whether or not to scale up the project?</i> <i>What interventions / innovations have been scaled-up, how, and with what results?</i> <i>What worked, what didn't and why in scaling up the project?</i> —
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<i>What was done and achieved for beneficiaries to appropriate, sustain and build on the results?</i> <i>What signs exist that SDC's approaches, innovations and outcomes will continue after the project's end?</i> —
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<i>Which results would likely not have been achieved without Swiss support?</i> <i>What does Switzerland uniquely bring to the table?</i> —

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<i>Does the project correspond to the Cooperation Strategy's intentions in terms of:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – thematic focus – development objectives and outcomes: – strategic approach to contribute to change / sustainable development – budget allocations. —

<p>Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4</p> <p><i>Is the project complementary to other country projects, regional projects, SDC's global program activities, or projects from other Swiss agencies?</i></p> <p>—</p>
<p>How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5</p> <p><i>Are these approaches applied as foreseen and in a meaningful way?</i> <i>Do these approaches make a difference?</i></p> <p>—</p>

<p>Implementation management</p>
<p>How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11</p> <p><i>What are SDC's management strengths and weaknesses?</i> <i>What are controversies, challenges or issues that are debated?</i> <i>To what extent are changes in the development context taken into account and responded to?</i> <i>Is SDC flexible enough to adjust the project in the face of new realities?</i> <i>Are SDC's tools, procedures, and implementation modalities adequate to respond to new realities / crises?</i> <i>How are unintended effects turned into new strategic targets (when positive) or mitigated (when negative)?</i> <i>To what extent does SDC learn and adapt from changes in the context (feedback loop)?</i></p> <p>—</p>
<p>How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12</p> <p><i>The project documents may not include information on this. If so, leave blank.</i> <i>What are the controversies?</i> <i>Is the monitoring information credible, useful and used for project steering and/or accounting purposes?</i> <i>Are the data collection efforts commensurate with the use of the information?</i></p> <p>—</p>
<p>Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13</p> <p><i>How do the Swiss agencies coordinate their work?</i> <i>How does the donor community coordinate its work?</i> <i>What role does SDC play?</i> <i>Is SDC's role active, consistent, constructive, with value-added, and commensurate with resources?</i> <i>Is the Swiss Whole-of-Government approach implemented on-the-ground?</i></p> <p>—</p>

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: – Period: <i>e.g. 2018 - 2023</i> – Likely to continue: yes, for sure/likely/no/don't know
Key informants?
If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?
–

F.2. Interview guides

Inception phase

<p>Context-analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the CURRENT DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT in the country, region and SDC? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the impact of COVID-19 on the development situation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What were the immediate challenges in the countries posed by Covid-19? ○ What structural weaknesses has Covid-19 exposed in the country / region? ○ Has the Pandemic created new opportunities / openings? ○ How did the Pandemic affect SDC's development considerations, approach, plans? ▪ What was the development context / situation immediately PRIOR TO COVID-19? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What worked well, what didn't? ○ What explained the well-functioning parts? ○ How supportive is the current political economy in the country / region? ○ What are persistent political, social, economic, environmental challenges? ○ What explains the persistence of these challenges? – How has the DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT CHANGED over the last 3 years? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dimensions: country, region and SDC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What changed for the positive / negative? ○ On which development indicators has the country / region progressed / stalled? ○ What explains / triggered these changes? ○ Who were the change makers? ○ What were the incentives, motivations, and capacities to invoke change? ○ How did the change makers invoke collective action? ○ What were the driving forces behind successful collective action? ○ What are the expected impact of the changes, generally and on the CS? ▪ Do you observe an increase in AUTHORITARIANISM in the country / region? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent has this affected public reforms / sustainable development? ○ Dimensions: access to services, corruption, inequality, civil society participation ▪ What is the role of CHINA & THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE in the country / region? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are key interventions, both politically and developmentally? ○ What is the impact of these political / development interventions? ▪ What is the role & impact of ASEAN in the country / region? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dimensions: sustainable development, human rights ○ What works well, what doesn't and why? ○ How has the role of ASEAN evolved over the last 3 years? ○ What are other critical / more influential organizations / actors? – How would you describe the DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT AROUND THE YEAR 2017? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dimensions: country, region and SDC – How has SDC RESPONDED (in)formally to the changes in the development context? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dimensions: development context generally versus Covid-19 ▪ Scope: CS, portfolio, aid diplomacy, emergency response, small actions?
<p>Key dimensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Politics, welfare, economy, environment – Social, gender and regional inequality – Regional / global challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – UNDERLYING BARRIERS <p>first order (symptoms): capacity, tenacity, funding, framework conditions, <i>historical legacies</i>?</p> <p>second order (root causes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ political (dominant ideologies, vested interests, power relations, party structures, info access, property rights); ○ social (rules, norms, values, attitudes, orientations, interests, motivations, dominant social narratives, patterns of interaction, empowerment); ○ geographic (geology, topography, climate, geopolitics); ○ demography (population structure, density, urbanization rate); ○ economy (production base, growth, equitable access to resources / information).

RELEVANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does SDC respond to, including why (not) and root causes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiaries' needs, country political priorities and policies Regional / global challenges, Swiss development cooperation priorities
COHERENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is SDC's project portfolio, including why (not) and root causes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent, complementary, and synergetic vis-à-vis the development context Consistent with International Message of Development Cooperation
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What DEVELOPMENT RESULTS have been achieved over the last 3 years (or longer)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What brought these development results about? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have SDC's projects been implemented and progressed as planned? Who were the project's boundary partners? How have the boundary partners responded to SDC's support / projects? What changes in perspective, behavior and actions did SDC invoke? How did the boundary partners' actions result / trigger the development results? Can other contextual factors explain / have influenced the development results? What was SDC'S VALUE-ADDED? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What actions, concepts, instruments, projects made a difference? Why? How important have been approaches such as CSPM and LNOb? To what extent did SDC's project management facilitate / hinder the results? How has SDC RESPONDED to the development results? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What interventions/ projects have been continued, SCALED, or stopped? How have successful interventions been continued or scaled up? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dimensions: Program expansion, policy dialogue, alliances, networking, dissemination Are the scaled-up interventions / projects successful? Why? How SUSTAINABLE are SDC's interventions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is done by SDC to support sustainability? What signs exist that SDC's interventions / projects are sustainable? Have there been any UNINTENDED IMPACTS – either positively or negatively?
COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did SDC respond to Covid-19 in the country / region? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What support / ideas did SDC receive from headquarters? What support did SDC offer the countries? underlying ideas, motivations, objectives? Who were SDC's boundary partners and how did they respond to SDC's support? Did the boundary partners' response bring about the envisaged results? Can other contextual factors explain / have influenced the development results? What are SDC's future support plans? Alternatives?
Implementation Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What PERSONNEL CHANGES took place over the last 2 years? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is exact composition of management and staff and how has this evolved over the years? How did this confluence of changes come about? What impact did these changes have? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dimensions: within the SCOs, CS implementation, SCO's role in network of Swiss agencies, donor coordination, policy dialogue with government What has / can be done (lessons learned) to mitigate the impact / seize opportunities? How useful and effective is the CS MONITORING SYSTEM? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the monitoring system and process work exactly and in practice? Is this information credible, useful and used for project steering & accounting purposes? Is the data collection efforts commensurate with the use of the information? To what extent does SDC actively steer on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CONTEXT, RISKS, TRANSVERSAL THEMES, global programs, disbursements, workload. Are SDC's FUNDS DISBURSED as planned in the CS? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What changes in disbursements / allocations have been made? Why? Which ROLE DOES SDC PLAY in network of Swiss agencies, donor community, policy dialogue? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is SDC active, consistent, constructive, with value-added, and commensurate with resources?

Swiss government agencies

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brief mutual introduction
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is ... 's ENGAGEMENT / INTERESTS IN THE MEKONG REGION? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foreign policy, humanitarian, development? ▪ Activities? – What role do ... and SDC/SCO play within the NETWORK OF SWISS AGENCIES / SDC DEPARTMENTS? – To what extent do you COLLABORATE with SDC/SCO? – What NEEDS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES exists for close(r) collaboration with SDC/SCO? – What are the MAIN SYNERGIES (knowledge, experience, instruments) with SDC? – What is NEEDED TO EXPLOIT these synergies and implement the WOGA – dedicated budget, common KPIs, other? – How do you judge the COMMUNICATION between ... and SDC/SCO?
SDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is SDC's DISTINCTIVE VALUE vis-a-vis other development players? – How can SDC further improve its bottom-up and EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH to policy influencing? – What is SDC's ability to FACILITATE COLLECTIVE ACTION across different scales? – How is SDC's POSITIONING towards and coordination with national government and development partners?
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Has SDC the LEEWAY / INSTRUMENTS TO RESPOND to emerging development and crisis? – Does the MRCS offer sufficient flexibility to STRATEGICALLY ADAPT to evolving development contexts?
Room for development in the Mekong region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – WHERE can positive change realistically happen? – Who are the change makers in the country/region? – What is their POWER to affect change and their NEEDS for support? – What are PLAUSIBLE PATHWAYS of change / development? – What are the SUCCESS FACTORS for contributing to sustainable development in the Mekong Region? – Can SDC'S EVIDENCE- AND HUMAN-RIGHTS BASED APPROACH make a difference?
Geopolitics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the role and influence of CHINA and ASEAN in the Mekong region: politically, economically, socially, and environmentally? – How do Cambodia and Lao USE China and ASEAN for their national priorities? – On balance, are China and ASEAN POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE forces of change? – What ENTRY POINTS do China and ASEAN offer FOR SDC?
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is SDC DOING THE RIGHT THING IN THE RIGHT WAY? – Can SDC be MORE STRATEGIC?

Project-level stakeholders – summary version

Introduction	
Strategic impact	What are the HEADLINE RESULTS of the project and how do these results CONTRIBUTE TO THE MRCS' OBJECTIVES , and was this in line with the ORIGINAL DOMAIN-LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE ?
Theory of change	What is the project's MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY , was this in line with the ORIGINAL PROJECT-LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE and, as such, to what extent did the project respond to DOMESTIC CHANGE PROCESSES AND AGENTS ?
Impact & scale	What DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES were addressed, were the ROOT CAUSES of these challenges tackled, and did the project lead to INNOVATIONS that have been or could be SCALED UP ?
Change processes	Looking beyond the project to the sector and country, WHERE do you see positive change dynamics, WHO are the change makers, what is their POWER to affect change, and what are their support NEEDS ?
Strategic management	To what extent is the project STRATEGICALLY MANAGED / STEERED – does SDC have the FLEXIBILITY AND INSTRUMENTS TO RESPOND to evolving or emerging development contexts?
Regional coherence	To what extent and how does the project BENEFIT FROM OR CONTRIBUTE TO other REGIONAL / COUNTRY-LEVEL PROJECTS in the SDC portfolio, how CAN LINKAGES BE STRENGTHENED , and what is the POTENTIAL FOR A TRUE REGIONAL STRATEGY ?
CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, Gender and DRR/CCA	How and to what extent are the HUMAN-RIGHTS BASED APPROACH, THE LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND CONCEPT, CONFLICT SENSITIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT and GENDER EQUITY addressed in the DESIGN, APPROACH, IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING of the project? To what extent have DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION MEASURES been considered and included in the project?
Geopolitics	What is the role and INFLUENCE OF ASEAN AND CHINA in the Mekong region and how do Cambodia and Lao USE ASEAN AND CHINA for their national priorities?
Conclusion	Is SDC DOING THE RIGHT THING IN THE RIGHT WAY and what is SDC's DISTINCTIVE VALUE vis-a-vis other development players?

Project-level stakeholders – detailed version

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brief mutual introduction
Results & accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES were addressed? – Did the project respond to DOMESTIC CHANGE PROCESSES AND AGENTS? – What are the HEADLINE RESULTS of the project, i.e. at the outcome & impact level? – Do these results CONTRIBUTE TO THE MRCS' OBJECTIVES (domain, strategy and country-level)? – What would be appropriate and useful METRICS or means to capture this contribution? – Does the RESULTS FRAMEWORK contain the appropriate key performance indicators?
Theory of change	<p>Project-level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the project's MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY? – What project APPROACHES proved effective? Why?* – Was this in line with the ORIGINAL ASSUMPTIONS OR ENVISAGED PATHWAY OF CHANGE? – What CHALLENGES does / did the project face? What EXPLAINS these challenges? – Have the ROOT CAUSES of underdevelopment been tackled? – What did you LEARN: WHAT WORKED, WHAT DIDN'T AND WHY? – How did you ADAPT the project based on these learnings? <p>Strategy-level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What ASSUMPTIONS were made on how project CONTRIBUTES TO MRCS' OBJECTIVES?* – Were these assumptions made EXPLICIT in an art Theory of Change? – What EVIDENCE is there that these assumptions held up in practice?* – WHAT WORKED, WHAT DIDN'T AND WHY? – How can the LINKAGES between projects, domains and the MRCS be made more explicit and substantive – how to embed projects in a domain and STRATEGY LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE? <p>* Who were the project's boundary partners? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What was their interests, incentives, capacity, responsiveness, and tenacity? – What were these boundary partners support needs and power to affect change? – How did the boundary partners respond to the given support – change in perspective and behavior? – What ripple effects did the boundary partners' action trigger? – How were these ripple effects to contribute to the MRCS' objectives?
Program steering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Did you ELABORATE EX-ANTE a Theory of Change at a project and strategy-level? – How did you ASSESS THE VALIDITY of the project approach and tacit Theory of Change? – On what INFORMATION DID YOU STEER THE PROGRAM? What is NEEDED more? – How useful is the RESULTS FRAMEWORK for program steering? – How well does SDC LEARN AND ADAPT at the portfolio and strategy level? – Is program steering and learning done SYSTEMATICALLY? What is the room 4 improvement? – Can SDC be more CONSCIOUSLY ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ORIENTED?
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Has SDC the LEEWAY / INSTRUMENTS TO RESPOND to emerging development and crisis? – Does the MRCS offer sufficient flexibility to STRATEGICALLY ADAPT to evolving development contexts?
Scale & sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What INNOVATIONS / APPROACHES have been brought to SCALE? – How SUSTAINABLE are the benefits from the projects? Why? – What are main CHALLENGES to sustainability and HOW DOES/CAN SDC RESPOND?
Regional coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To what extent do you BENEFIT FROM OR CONTRIBUTE TO other (REGIONAL) projects?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What SYNERGIES (knowledge, experience, instruments) exist with other (regional) projects? – What NEEDS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES exists for close(r) collaboration? – What is NEEDED TO EXPLOIT these synergies – dedicated budget, common KPIs, other? <p>Regional projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does it address A REGIONAL PUBLIC GOOD, e.g. land, social forestry? – What is the VALUE ADDED to and SYNERGIES WITH COUNTRY-LEVEL PROJECTS?
CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, Gender and DRR/CCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To what extent are these approaches UNDERSTOOD AND APPLIED? – If applied, to what extent do they MAKE A DIFFERENCE? – What CHALLENGES exists in applying these concepts? – WHAT IS NEEDED by the SCOs and implementing agencies to better apply these approaches? – What are entry points for TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION ON GENDER?
Positive change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – WHERE can positive change realistically happen? – Who are the change makers in the country/region? – What is their POWER to affect change and their NEEDS for support? – What are PLAUSIBLE PATHWAYS of change / development? – Who are SDC's best potential BOUNDARY PARTNERS? – Can SDC'S EVIDENCE- AND HUMAN-RIGHTS BASED APPROACH make a difference?
SDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is SDC's DISTINCTIVE VALUE vis-a-vis other development players? – How can SDC further improve its bottom-up and EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH to policy influencing? – What is SDC's ability to FACILITATE COLLECTIVE ACTION across different scales? – How is SDC's POSITIONING towards and coordination with national government and development partners?
Geopolitics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the role and influence of CHINA and ASEAN in the Mekong region: politically, economically, socially, and environmentally? – How do Cambodia and Lao USE China and ASEAN for their national priorities? – What is the VALUE ADDED OF ASEAN for Cambodia and Lao – norm-setting, info exchange? – On balance, are China and ASEAN POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE forces of change? – What ENTRY POINTS do China and ASEAN offer FOR SDC?
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is SDC DOING THE RIGHT THING IN THE RIGHT WAY? – Can SDC be MORE STRATEGIC?

F.3. Project sampling – the evaluation team's classification of projects along the selection criteria

Country/region	Domain	Project acronym	Evaluators' judgment:		Type of support	Implementation agency	Evaluators' Comments
			Should we include project in project sample – is it an information-rich case for this Evaluation? Judged on five-point scale (with 5 the most information rich).	Is the project typical or atypical for MRCS / SDC?			
Cambodia	GCP	KBH	1	atypical	Core Contribution	Kantha Bopha Foundation	Less suitable: Atypical in every sense. Politically motivated and artificially included in the MRCS.
		SNDD	5	typical	Multi-Donor Trust Fund	World Bank	Highly suitable: decentralization considered key entry point for positive change within authoritarian regimes + flagship program + MoF and Mol possibly change agents. Typical: decentralization support also in Lao (and previously in Vietnam) Selected: decentralization + focus MRCS, Trust Fund Contribution, potential change agents in GoC.
		RED	5	typical	Program Contribution	GIZ	Highly suitable: the project links decentralization reform with local level economic development as both have potentially to positively and mutually enhance each other.
	AFS	CHAIN	4	typical	Mandate	SNV (lead) and Swisscontact	Suitable. Typical in the sense “classical approach”, with well known, professional executing agencies. Well documented (evaluation 2017, internal MTR 2019). Seem to have a good M&E system. Selected: Typical project with established implementing agencies + a mandate project
		HALO MNC	2	Tendency: typical	Program Contribution	HALO Trust Cambodia	Less suitable: This project is groundwork for development and a peace actor such as Switzerland. It is almost imperative to have it in the portfolio but at the same time, as it is not linked to a project stream that actively draws upon e.g. sustainable farming, it is less interesting.
		PaFF	3	typical	Program Contribution	WWF	Neutral: sustainable natural resource management and exploitation and value chain development is common (typical) intervention within SDC / MRCS. Alternative: both CHAIN and SDP involves Swisscontact. In CHAIN, SNV is however in lead.

Country/region	Domain	Project acronym	Evaluators' judgment:		Type of support	Implementation agency	Evaluators' Comments
	SDE	SDP	4	typical	Mandate	Swisscontact and Inbas	Suitable: The combination of capacity building and policy dialogue with link towards systems with ASEAN integration' orientation is relevant for this Evaluation. Selected for above reasons and being a combi-project: mandate and program contribution
		DEYC			Program Contribution	Cambodia Dev. Resource Institute	
			3	typical	Program Contribution	ILO	Neutral: Addresses straightforward domain objective / outcome. With ILO an atypical (lead) executing agency. However, together with the others EA (UN agencies) maybe some leverage over the GoC. Facing such a group (and "only" contributing) may limit somewhat our influence.
Lao PDR	GCP	Lao-Decide	5	atypical	Mandate	CDE	Highly suitable: an atypical (building knowledge infrastructure for policy- and decision-making) and successful project, leveraging CDE knowledge, and depending on government partners / buy in. Selected: atypical and possibly successful
		GPARGIDP	3	typical	Program contribution	UNDP	Neutral: Given its 4 th phase, sustainability question could be quite interesting, also in view of UNDP as implementing partner.
		PRF	3	atypical	Program contribution	Ministry of Finance / PRF	Neutral: Atypical in the sense that it is a kind of earmarked budget support, but fully addressing the domain objective. Could provide some answers on the interest of the GoL in "accepting" donors funds and its willingness to get engaged. 30% contribution.
		CEGGA	3	typical	Program contribution	GIZ	Neutral: Addresses with lots of optimism and even more money the tricky issue of supporting CSO in Laos... Alternative: CSO support is central to MRCS
	AFS	TABI	3	typical	Program contribution	NIRAS	Neutral: + = agrobiodiversity is current topic, project relies on government ownership, and how to scale is current issue. - = project is at end of 4 th phase. Value-chain development is typical. Results are small-scale. Question of scale only addressed head-on in 4 th phase. Selected: program contr., long-running program, and different implementing agency. All other AFS projects are alternatives
		SURAFCO	3	typical	Mandate	Helvetas	Question of impact and Swiss added value/niche could be interesting.
		LURAS	4	typical	Mandate	Helvetas	Suitable: Classical approach with classical partner
		ENUFF	4	atypical	Mandate	SNV	Suitable: atypical project (i.e. only project dealing directly with nutrition), overlap with GPFS, coherence? And how to scale?

Country/region	Domain	Project acronym	Evaluators' judgment:		Type of support	Implementation agency	Evaluators' Comments
	SDE	VELA/VTESS	3	Typical	Mandate	Swisscontact	Neutral: + = Typical TVET, link with PROMISE, and question of how to scale. - = project is small-scale and not as comprehensive as PROMISE.
		SFT	2	(atypical)	Program contribution	LuxDev	Less suitable: Atypical for its background: Switzerland helped to extend a Lux project, which "did not yet reach the scale needed to have an impact". Focusing exclusively on tourism and hospitality.
		DRE	4	typical	Program contribution	ILO	Suitable: Local implementation with link to ASEAN framework is a plus. Selected: program contribution, ILO, ASEAN link
Regional	GCP	PIC	2	typical	Core Contribution		Less suitable: Does not yet qualify as a regional project. Hence we should pick another one.
		MRC	3	atypical	Basket funding	MRC Secretariat	Neutral: Atypical in the sense that it works with a unique inter-governmental organization. Is depending to a big extent on a favorable political context which is difficult (impossible) to influence. Though very relevant regional topic. Link with SDC's GPW. Selected: Atypical, link with GPW
	AFS	RECOFTC	4	typical	Core contribution	RECOFTC	Suitable: regional project with institutional value-added, but is social forestry a regional public good? Is project coherent with portfolio? What is value added of core contribution?
		MRLG	4	typical	Mandate	LEI (Land Equity International)	Suitable: Could be interesting: in order to assess real impact and systemic change, collaboration among the offices, the interventions in the countries and the regional cross-fertilization. Selected: Both MRLG and RECOFTC allow us to evaluate the three selection criteria for regional projects. Selected MRLG because mandate and expect closer involvement of SCOs.
	SDE	PROMISE	5	typical	Program contribution	IOM (=UN)	Highly suitable: regional project on regional public good (migration) with institutional value added (?), overlap with GPM, migration is political current topic, coherence with portfolio? Selected: only regional SDE program, highly relevant approach, link to SDC's GPM

G. Documentation

G.1. FDFA

- Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation
- Bundesgesetz über die internationale Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und humanitäre Hilfe
- Memorandum of Understanding Between the China International Development Cooperation Agency and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation on Strengthening Exchanges on International Development Cooperation (2019)
- Memorandum of Understanding Between the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation and the Ministry of Emergency Management of the People's Republic of China regarding Cooperation in the Area of Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Response (2019)
- Memorandum of Intent Between the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management regarding cooperation on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (2019).

G.2. SDC

- Message on International Cooperation 2017-2020
- International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024
- Strategic Regional Guidance for Asia 2021-2024 (2020)
- SDC Asia Division Annual Program 2021
- SDC Guidance for the Elaboration and Approval of Cooperation Programmes (November 2020).
- SDC Guidance on Results Indicators (April 2020)
- Swiss Disaster Risk reduction and Rapid Response Advisory Hub for South East Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok (May 2019).

G.3. SDC Mekong Region

- Cooperation Strategy Mekong Region 2013-2017
- Cooperation Strategy Mekong Region 2018-2021
- Mekong Region Annual Report 2019 With Planning 2020.
- Mekong Region Annual Report 2020 With Planning 2021.
- 2019 MERV Cambodia
- 2019 MERV Lao PDR
- 2019 MERV Mekong Region
- Internal Mid-term Review MRS 2018–2021. Final workshop report. Cambodia
- Internal Mid-term Review MRS 2018–2021. Final workshop report. Lao PDR
- Internal Mid-term Review MRS 2018–2021. Final workshop report. Mekong Region
- End of mission report, Carin Salerno (SCO), Cambodia (August 2017 – June 2020)

G.4. SDC programs and projects

CAM – GCP: Sub-National Democratic Development (SNDD)

- SDC (2019). Credit Proposal. Sub-National Democratic Development. Phase 3.
- Particip (2016). Mid-Term Review of the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development.

CAM – GCP: Kantha Bopha Foudation (KPF)

- SDC (2016). Credit Proposal. Kantha Bopha Foundation. Phase 9.
- Stiftung Kinderspital Kantha Bopha (2020): Annual Report 2019.

CAM – AFS: Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries (PAFF)

- SDC (2017). Credit Proposal. Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries (PaFF): Support to Forestry and Fisheries Communities in Cambodia. Phase 2.
- PaFF (2020). Annual Report 2019. Partnership Program to Support Forestry and Fishery Communities in Stung Treng, Kratie, Kampong Thom And Preah Vihear Provinces, Cambodia. Debord, P. (2019). Mid-Term Review. Partnership Program to Support Forestry and Fishery Communities. Phase 2.

CAM – AFS: Cambodian Horticulture Project advancing Income and Nutrition (CHAIN)

- SDC (2017), Credit Proposal, Cambodian Horticulture Project Advancing Income and Nutrition (CHAIN). Phase 2
- SNV / Swisscontact (2020), Annual Report (January – December 2019)
- Van Keulen, SNV (2019), Internal Mid-term Review CHAIN II
- Author unknown (2017), CHAIN Project - Phase 1 Evaluation

CAM – SDE: Decent Employment for Youth in Cambodia (DEY)

- SDC (2020), Credit Proposal, Decent Employment for Youth in Cambodia (DEY), Phase 2

CAM – SDE: Skills Development Program

- SDC (2016). Credit Proposal, Skills Development Program. Phase 1

LAO – GCP: Lao DECIDE Info

- SDC (2018). Credit Proposal. Lao DECIDE Info. Phase 4.
- CDE (2019). Progress Report. Knowledge for Development. 2.7.2018 – 30.6.2021. Reporting Period: 2.7. 2018 – 30.6.2019

LAO – GCP: Poverty Reduction Fund III (PRF)

- SDC (2016), Credit Proposal, Poverty Reduction Fund III (PRF). Phase 4
- SDC (2020), Additional Credit
- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2020), Poverty Reduction Fund Phase III, Annual Progress Report (January – December 2019)

LAO – GCP: Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law (CEGGA)

- SDC (2016), Credit Proposal, CEGGA (Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law). Phase 2
- SDC (2020), Additional Credit
- GIZ (2020), Narrative Annual Report 01 to 12- 2019
- (2018) European Joint Programming for Lao People's Democratic Republic 2016-2020, Mid-Term Report

LAO – AFS: Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF)

- SDC (2020). Credit Proposal. Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF). Phase 2
- Herens, M and Khamlouang Keoka (2020). Mid-term Review Report. Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families in Laos 2016-2020. Wageningen University and Research

LAO – AFS: The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI)

- SDC (2017). Credit Proposal. The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI). Phase 4

- NIRAS (2020). Annual Report Year 3. The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI) Phase 4. 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020.
- Gonzalez, J. and Yayoi Lagerqvist (2018) Mid-Term Review. The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI). Phase 4

LAO – AFS: Lao Upland Rural Advisory Services (LURAS)

- SDC (2017), Credit Proposal, Lao Upland Rural Advisory Services (LURAS). Phase 2
- LURAS (2019), Progress Report April to September 2019

LAO – SDE: Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS)

- SDC (2019). Credit Proposal. Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS). Phase 2
- Swisscontact (2020). Progress Report 2019. Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS) Project

LAO – SDE: Skills for Tourism

- SDC (2015), Credit Proposal, Skills for Tourism / Lao 029. Phase 1
- LuxDev (2020), Results-Based Annual Progress Report 2019

LAO – DRE: Decent Rural Employment

- SDC (2017). Credit Proposal, Decent Rural Employment. Phase 1.

Mekong Region – GCP: Center for People and Forest: Enhancing Community Access to Land and Forest Resources (RECOFTC)

- SDC (2013). Credit Proposal. RECOFTC – Center for People and Forest: Enhancing Community Access to Land and Forest Resources. Phase 1.
- RECOFTC (2020) Internal Annual Report. October 2018 – September 2019.
- PaxTerra (2017) External Evaluation of the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC). Final Report

Mekong Region – GCP: Mekong River Commission (MRC), Contribution to basket fund for implementation of Strategic Plan 2016-2020

- SDC (2016). Credit Proposal. MRC — Contribution to basket fund for implementation of Strategic Plan 2016-2020). Phase 1
- MRC (2020): Annual Report 2019, Part 1 Progress and Achievements and Part 2 Detailed Implementation Progress

Mekong region – AFS: Mekong Region Local Governance

- SDC (2018). Credit Proposal, Mekong Region Local Governance. Phase 2

Mekong Region – SDE: Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement (PROMISE)

- SDC (n.d.). Credit Proposal. PROMISE: Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement. Phase 1.
- IOM (2019). PROMISE. Interim Report September 2018 – August 2019

G.5. Other

- Cambodia Development Resource Institute (2020). Study comparing EU and China Development Cooperation in Cambodia.
- Stimson Center (2020). Webinar. China and Southeast Asia. Balanced and Centered? 14 October 2020
- Stimson Center (2020). Webinar. Southeast Asia's Counterstrategy to China. 28 October 2020

H. Key informants

H.1. Inception phase

SDC Bern	
Barbara Böni-Slaats	South Cooperation Department, Asia Division, Head
Markus Glatz	South Cooperation Department, Asia Division, Deputy
Philippe Puyo	South Cooperation Department, Asia Division, Desk
Rahel Göbel-Bösch	Institutional Partnership Division, Head
SCO Vientiane	
Jean-François Cuénod	Regional Director
Barbara Jäggi Hassler	Former deputy Regional Director
Michal Harari	Former Head of Governance Domain
SCO Phnom Penh	
Markus Bürlü	Director of Cooperation Former Deputy Head of Cooperation, Myanmar
Nadia Ottiger	Head of SDE / AFS Domains
Carin Salerno	Former Director of Cooperation
Lars Büchler	Former Head of Agriculture and Food Security Domain
SCO Vietnam	
Marcel Reymond	Director of Cooperation
Nguyen Hong Ninh	SDC focal point

H.2. Implementation phase

Swiss Government

Swiss Embassies		
Myanmar	Tim Enderlin	Ambassador
Bangkok	Vicky Janssens	Deputy Head of Political and Economic Section
Jakarta	Ralph Stamm	ASEAN focal point
FDFA		
Political Division	Daniel Bill	Responsible Mekong
Human Security Division	Hubatka Pascal	Responsible Southeast Asia
SDC Humanitarian Aid Department		
Rapid Response Unit Bangkok	Pedro Basabe	Head of Humanitarian Hub
SDC South Cooperation Department		
Quality Assurance Division	Nils Rosemann	Deputy Head QA Division
SDC Global Programs		
Water	Andreas Steiner	Programme manager BRIDGE and WWF
Migration	Muriel Gschwend Caron	Programme manager
Climate Change	Pierre-André Cordey	Programme manager ASEAN Social Forestry
Food Security	Bernard Zaugg	Programme Manager RIICE
SECO		
Economic Cooperation and Development	Markus Schrader	Head of Section Countries and Global Portfolio

Lao PDR – SCO Vientiane

International development partners			
EU		Nacho Oliver-Cruz	Head of Cooperation
		Francesca Arato	Chargé d’Affaires
BMZ		Christina Seeberg-Elverfeldt	Head of Cooperation

Lao Decide			
SDC		Aur�lie Righetti	Head of GCP domain
		Anhsany Sypasong	National Programme Officer
Implementing agency	CDE	Dr. Michael Epprecht	CDE Representative in Lao PDR
Boundary partner	NIER	Latdavanh Songivalay	DG Macro Economic Research Department
Development partner	MONRE	Anongsone Phommachane	DG of Land Department
TABI			
SDC		Christian Engler	Deputy Director of Cooperation
		Chitlatda Keomuongchanh	National Programme Officer
Implementing agency	NIRAS	Kevin Kamp	Former TABI Chief Technical Advisor
		Dr. Luck Bounmixay	Former TABI staff Land Use Planning Specialist
DRE			
SDC		Christian Engler	Deputy Director of Cooperation. Head of SDE Domain
		Sonenaly Phetsiriseng	National Program Officer
Implementing Agency	ILO	Sandra Yu	Project Manager
		Khemphone Phaokhankeo	ILO Country Coordinator
Boundary partner	Ministry of Labor: Department of Skills Development and Employment	Anousone Khamsingsavath	Director General
		Vanny Keoxayyavong	Deputy Director General
		Bouasy THAMMASACK	Director of Policies and Planning Division
Implementing Agency	Filanthrope	Michael Wood	Manager

Cambodia – SCO Phnom Penh

ISAF			
SDC		Adrian Scherler	Head of Programme Governance and Citizen Participation
		March Luon	National Program Officer
Executing agency	World Bank	Benjamin Burckhart	Senior Social Development Specialist
Implementing agency	World Vision	Sotharith Ry	Senior Program Manager of ISAF
Boundary partner	NCDD	Ma On Nath	Director
CHAIN			
SDC		B�rli Markus	Head of Cooperation
		Sovannarith HEM	Programme Officer
Implementing agency	SNV	Alexandra Mandelbaum	Country Director
Boundary partner	Provincial Department of Agriculture	Tryda POEUNG	Director of Provincial Agriculture Department
Boundary partner	Natural Agriculture Village Co.,Ltd	Sieng BUN	General Manager

SDP			
SDC		Nadia Ottiger	Head of Domain
		Va Ros	National Programme Officer
Implementing agency	Swisscontact	Christian Volker Ide	Team leader, Skills Development Project
Boundary partner	Ministry of Tourism	Chuob Ratana	Director of Tourism Development Planning Department
Development partner	ADB	Mar Sophear	Senior Social Sector Officer

Mekong Region

MRC			
SDC		Christian Engler	Deputy Director of Cooperation
		Phouthamath Sayyabounsou	National Program Officer
Implementing agency	MRC Secretariat	Dr. An Pich Hatda	Chief Executive Officer
		Dr. Anoulak Kittikhoun	Chief Strategy and Partnership Officer
Development partner	GIZ	Dr. Bertrand Meinier	Programme Director, MRC-GIZ Cooperation Programme
MRLG			
SDC		Aur�lie Righetti	Head of GCP domain
		Nithsa Vongphanakhone	Senior National Program Officer
Implementing agency	LEI	Micah Ingalls	Team Leader
Implementing agency	GRET	Antoine Deligne	Deputy Team Leader
Boundary partner	Ministry of Planning and Investment LAO PDR	Phothilath Kanapanith	Deputy Director of the Project Monitoring and Evaluation Division
Boundary partner	Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment LAO PDR	Khitlaxay Kokmila	Deputy Director, Department of Land
Boundary partner	Centre for Policy Studies, CAMBODIA	Chan Sophal	
Boundary partner	Oxfam MYANMAR	Cho Thet	
Development partner	The Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development Chiang Mai University	Daniel Hayward	
PROMISE			
SDC		Nadia Ottiger	Head of Domain
		Va Ros	National Programme Officer

Implementing agency	IOM	Sally Barber	Regional Project Manager PROMISE, Thailand
Boundary partner	Thailand's Professional Qualifications Institute	Thunyamart Limaksorn	Head of Cooperation
Boundary partner	Employers' Confederation of Thailand	Siriwan Romchadthong	Secretary-General
Boundary partner	Cambodia: Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training	Ouk Ravuth	Deputy Director of Department of Employment and Manpower
Boundary partner	Cambodia Association of Cambodian Recruitment Agencies	Pin Vireak	Executive Director

Part 2: Guidance Note

I. Answers

Introduction

On Friday 13 November 2020, the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division shared a guidance note with the evaluation, containing questions which highlight the areas of interest of the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division. The Guidance Note resulted from internal consultations between the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division, the Asia Division and the SCOs. This Annex indicatively answers the main questions from the Guidance Note not covered in the main evaluation report.

The answers are indicative (or less substantiated as the rest of the evaluation report) for two related reasons. First, the Guidance Note was shared at a time when the bulk of the data collection had been undertaken (see Figure 1); and (ii) the nature and scope of some questions, as further detailed below, were different from and went beyond the originally agreed evaluation questions and, at least partly, had required different sampling and data collection techniques. Consequently, the evaluation had not collected the requisite data to offer substantive and evaluative answers to all the questions from the Guidance Note. (The evaluation did, from the outset, seek to be of interest and use to the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division. The evaluation was designed, conducted and, where necessary and possible, adapted to ensure just that – see Textbox 2.)

Figure 1 Evaluation timeline



Textbox 2 A Utilization-focused evaluation

The evaluation followed the principles of a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (as originally articulated by Michael Quinn Patton).¹² At the evaluation outset, through group and one-on-one consultations with the intended users of the evaluation, the evaluation distilled and confirmed the purpose, scope, context, intended use and users, and main evaluation questions of the evaluation. This process resulted in a draft Purpose and Context Statement and a draft Evaluation Design Matrix (dated 7 July 2020). After some slight modifications, the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division, SDC's Asia Division, and the SCOs agreed and confirmed the purpose, scope, context, intended use(rs) and main questions of the evaluation, resulting in the final Purpose and Context Statement and Evaluation Design Matrix (dated 27 July 2020).

¹² Michael Quinn Patton (2008). Utilization-focused Evaluation. Fourth Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Based on a detailed document review, the evaluation subsequently offered initial (tentative) answers to all the main evaluation questions in the Inception Report.¹³ The tentative answers to the evaluation questions in the Inception Report did not resonate with the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division. For two main reasons. First, most evaluation questions stemmed from the standard evaluation matrix for cooperation strategy evaluations (as previously developed by the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division). Although the scope and judgment criteria had been adapted to respond to the SCOs and the Asia Division's interests, these were ultimately not the only questions that the SCOs and Asia Division were interested in (as also evidenced by the Guidance Note). Second, the answers in the Inception Report were considered too bold, too abstract, and/or too much focused on SDC's general cooperation strategy infrastructure.

To ensure that the evaluation would be useful for the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division, the evaluation team subsequently changed track. Instead of pulling the original evaluation question to the fore (as had been done in the Inception Report), the evaluation concentrated in the main evaluation report on the evaluation's main findings (deduced from indicative and deductive analysis) and the SCOs' and Asia Division's main areas of interests. This resulted in the reflective and learning-oriented Chapter 2 and the recommendations in Chapter 5 of the main evaluation report. The evaluation sought as such to connect to the lived experience of the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division and make the evaluation findings and recommendations both interesting and useful for the SCOs and SDC's Asia Division.

How does SDC fit in the donor landscape in the Mekong region / in Laos / in Cambodia?

This evaluation investigated to what extent the SCOs' 26 larger development interventions (likely) contributed to achieving the MRCS' objectives. The evaluation focused on the SCOs' past performance to learn and uncover how the SCOs could unleash their future potential. The evaluation did not map the donor landscape. This is an exercise which would normally be part of a comparative review or a scoping study, something which this evaluation was not meant to be.

Under normal circumstances, with field work, the evaluation probably would have gotten a good sense of the donor landscape. This is typical a topic for elaborate discussion during the many (informal) lunches and dinners during a field mission. Without such inputs, the evaluation has little to go on. Consequently, the evaluation limits itself to two observations (both of which are well-known to the SCOs).

1. Whilst SIDA and GIZ have or are leaving Cambodia – SIDA in response to the ruling party's crackdown of the opposition after the 2017 local elections and GIZ due to a strategic (and geographic) refocus (on Africa) – other development partners remain heavily engaged in the country, including the Australian DFAT, EU, USAID, and the World Bank.
2. As noted in Section 2.10, SDC is valued – by local and international development partners alike – for its professionalism, neutrality, flexibility, *'auf Augenhöhe'* engagement with partners and long-term (10-12 year) project commitments.

¹³ In hindsight, the evaluation team should have named the Inception Report either a working or discussion paper, as it already offered substantive and evaluative answers to the main evaluation questions. The misnomer originated from a misunderstanding between the evaluation team and the Evaluation + Corporate Controlling Division about the intent and scope of the Inception Report (as articulated in the Terms of Reference and SDC's Toolkit for the evaluation of cooperation strategies). An Inception Report normally confirms the purpose, scope, context, intended use, questions, and methods of an evaluation. In this evaluation, these elements had been covered with the Purpose & Context Statement and the Evaluation Design Matrix (dated 27 July 2020).

What are the main arguments for staying engaged in the short and in the long term?

The argument to stay engaged in the short term is easy, namely, to fulfill SDC's ongoing commitments. Any departure, if done based on the principles of good governance, follows a well-communicated and organized phase-out (as, the evaluation understands SDC has done in Vietnam). This ensures, as best as possible, that local development partners have time to position themselves to either continue the work independently or reorient themselves and chart a different course.

The more interesting question is whether SDC should stay engaged in the long-term. One argument is that, through its development interventions, the SCOs contribute to better (local) government functioning and positively affects peoples' lives and livelihoods (see Section 2.2). The evaluation also suggests and points to the potential to have even greater impact if the SCOs take on more concrete and well-defined (regional) development challenges and address these together with local reform actors in a conscious, strategic, structured and coherent manner (see Section 2.7, 4.5 and 5.3).

Another argument was put forth by the evaluation's local consultants. SDC (and other development partners) offer the people of Lao PDR, Cambodia, and the Mekong Region a window to how society can be organized differently, as well as how to promote regional economic cooperation and address regional public goods. In other words, SDC's engagement and approaches form an inspiration for the people to pursue transformative change and put their countries on a different footing. And personal contacts still matter in that regard. Even in today's age of global communications and social media, nothing supersedes the experience of personal exchanges and engagements with, in this case, international development professionals. SDC's presence and engagements thus keeps, in its own small way, hope alive for a more inclusive and democratic governance of Lao PDR and Cambodia.

Ultimately, the decision to stay engaged is a political one – a decision in which Switzerland's own choices on how best to spend Swiss taxpayers' money and self-interests will dominate. The evaluation found that Switzerland's political and economic interests in South-East Asia while existent are not well-defined. Key informants had difficulty in articulating these interests. An envisaged position paper to that end from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs was delayed. As development professionals, the evaluators can only pull to the fore and agree with the implicit notion included in the Swiss Constitution (art. 54) that *'[alleviating] need and poverty in the world and [promoting] respect for human rights and democracy, the peaceful coexistence of peoples as well as the conservation of natural resources'* will ultimately contribute to and safeguard Switzerland's own welfare.

Was the choice of the three domains appropriate and coherent with the context analysis made in 2017?

The choice of domains of interventions in the MRCS was in-and-by-itself appropriate. They cover development challenges which affect poor people and vulnerable groups. Their address prioritized by recipient country governments and aligned to the Swiss Message on International Cooperation 2017-2020. The projects' success (as elaborated in Section 2.2) evidence that the SCOs addressed at the very least a latent demand for assistance. In short, the MRCS' domains of interventions were relevant.

The choice of domains is central to SDC's approach to cooperation programs. The evaluation questions this primacy of the domains (and offers an alternative approach – see Section 5.3). The implementation of the MRCS shows that a domain-oriented programming can lead to a scattered, pillarized approach, in which individual development interventions do not complement each other and the resultant whole is less than the sum of its parts. This explains at least in part – besides the rather ambitious nature of the MRCS' objectives – that the evaluation could not discern the extent to which the SCOs' project portfolio (likely) contributed to the achievement of the MRCS' objectives.

Finally, the choice of domains appears to have been a discretionary decision, not firmly embedded in the context analysis. As explained in Section 2.12, the context analysis of the MRCS was general, wide-ranging, and descriptive. It was not purposeful, i.e., leading through a process of inductive and deductive analysis to a logical choice of domains. The evaluation recognizes the value of the MERV: it offers the SCOs staff with valuable insights – at a macro-level – into the political economy and the state of development of the country. It is not a useful tool for strategic decision making and program steering. For that, a much more purposeful and targeted analysis is needed around the topics and issues directly relevant for the SCOs, for the implementation of their strategy.

What have been the specific challenges for implementing governance programmes in a political context such as Laos and Cambodia (single party dominance / authoritarian tendencies)?

A meaningful and evaluative answer to this question required a different project sampling strategy and more in-depth field work approach than applied in this evaluation.

The MRCS' project portfolio contains 26 larger development interventions (see Appendix C). Ten fall in the governance domain, of which 4 in Lao PDR and 3 in Cambodia.

A substantive and well-evidenced analysis of the specific challenges in implementing these governance programmes would have required:

1. the selection of 4-5 representative governance projects;
2. the in-depth review of each of these projects, including key informant interviews with all relevant stakeholders (including the target groups); and,
3. a comparative analysis of the project-level findings.

Instead, for reasons explained in Appendix E, this evaluation selected one project per domain-country/region combination, resulting in 9 projects around which a selected number of key informant interviews were held. The project selection contained one governance project in Lao PDR (Lao-Decide) and one governance project in Cambodia (ISAF). The interviews were held with a selected number of key informants: those with sufficient overview of the project to be able to say something about the project's (likely) contribution to the achievement of the MRCS' objectives.

In short, this evaluation concerned a cooperation strategy evaluation, whereas this question would have required a program or domain-level evaluation.

Having said that, both the Lao Decide and ISAF project feature (prominently) in the evaluation analysis. Most if not all of this evaluation's findings and conclusions also apply to these governance programs.

What are the results achieved? (What could be alternative approaches?)

See Chapter 2 and 5.

What is the potential of working regionally?¹⁴

See Section 2.7, 4.5 and 5.3

¹⁴ This question was complemented with the following sub-questions: To what degree do the current regional entry points work? To what degree do they support the achievements of the objectives of the MRS? To which extent were the assumption made in 2017 to underpin the regional approach correct? How has the potential of working regionally evolved (positively and negatively)? What could be alternative approaches? Which are the regional institutions offering a good anchorage for SDC Programmes in the light of the current MRS and the future programme 2022 – 2026?

Considering that the MRS is a regional programme, what are the findings regarding the management set-up?

The Inception Report reflected on how effective the SCOs are in their portfolio management and whether the SCOs have the leeway and implementation modalities to respond to new developments or requests. These findings are included and expanded upon in the main evaluation report in the discussions on the SCOs' operational flexibility (Section 2.11) and strategy infrastructure (Section 2.12).

This question addresses the management question from a slightly different angle, namely whether the organizational set-up is appropriate. The SCOs in Lao PDR and Cambodia are structured like any SCO. They have 4 and 3 Swiss expat staff respectively, which between them cover the three domains of interventions from the MRCS, as well as finance and human resources. They are supported by a team of National Program Officers. In terms of management hierarchy, the Swiss expat staff cover the positions of head of cooperation, deputy head of cooperation, head of finance¹⁵, and (senior) program / human resource¹⁶ officer. The difference with most other SCOs is that the head of the Lao office carries overall responsibility for the implementation of the MRCS and is assigned the position of regional director.

The evaluation had no time to discuss and review the (functioning of this) organizational set-up. At the same time, the evaluation did not come across any discord or challenges which may have their origin in the organizational set-up. The communication, coordination and cooperation between the offices and people appeared to run smoothly (something which extends to the SCOs in Myanmar and Vietnam as well). From the evaluation's perspective, all staff operated professionally.

The evaluation did receive the feedback that regional projects tended to be treated as add-ons, at risk of receiving less time and effort than bilateral development interventions. This is however only true for support functions. Project responsibilities are clearly assigned for all projects, including the regional projects. The latter however require (depend on) support from all offices. It is this support function that staff are often struggling with.

The evaluation proposes an alternative, more locally embedded, focused and above all coherent approach to the MRCP (see Section 5.3). As stated, this will also impact the way the SCOs are organized (getting rid of the domain pillarization) and how staff work (as teams). The concomitant shift from project to more program-like management should help to ensure that sufficient time can be allocated to all requisite work, whether bilateral and regional in nature.

The evaluation additionally observed a tendency to contract out substantive research work, including on the MRCP, the MERV, individual studies (on ASEAN), and project preparations. The SCOs may want to consider reprioritizing their work and engage themselves in such substantive research. Besides suspecting that this will offer (even) greater job satisfaction, it will also allow the SCOs to (i) make the MRCP purposeful, concrete, and realistic; (ii) formulate and internalize the change narrative of the MRCP; and (iii) ease and enhance the monitoring and program steering of the MRCP. All these elements will help improve the development effectiveness of the MRCP.

¹⁵ Located in Lao SCO.

¹⁶ Located in Cambodian SCO.

Part 3: Further evidence

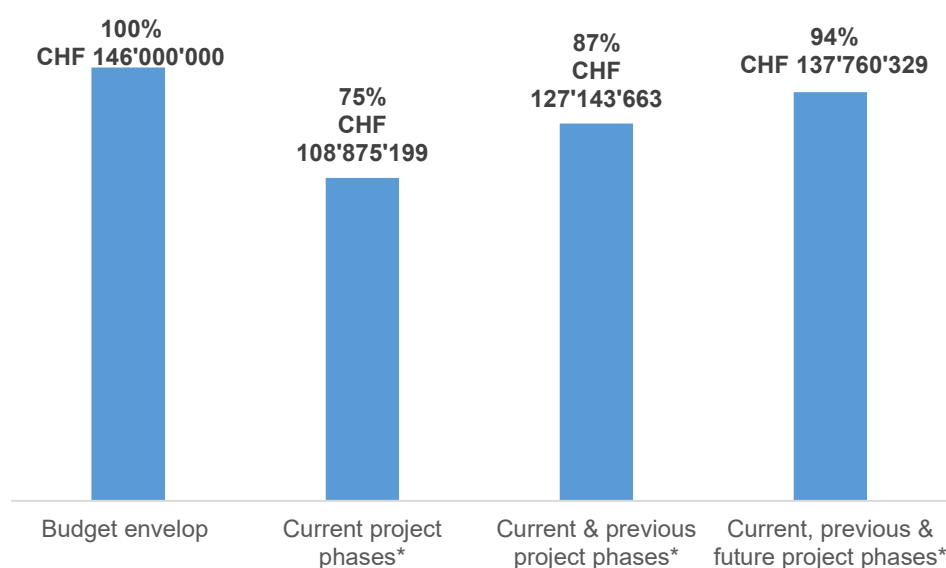
J. Financial portfolio analysis

An analysis of the financial data from SDC's SAP records on the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy's project portfolio offers the following findings.

- The planned project expenditures during the MRCS 2018-2021 – for projects with a budget over CHF 1 million – absorb 94% of MRCS' CHF 146 million budget envelop¹⁷. See Section J.1: Figure 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5)
- The relative allocation of funds between geographies and domains is in line with the envisaged allocation of the budget in the Cooperation Strategy. Overall, slightly more funds than planned are spend on governance (44% versus 39%) and slightly less funds than planned are spend on agriculture and food security (30% versus 34%). This difference stems from the Lao and regional project portfolio. See Section J.2: Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5.
- The total budget envelop and the envisaged allocation of the budget between geographies and domains differs slightly between Annex 3 (Results Framework) and Annex 4 (Allocation planning by country and thematic domain) of the Cooperation Strategy. See Section J.3.
- Under the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 26 projects are implemented with a budget over CHF 1 million. The (planned) expenditures of 21 of these projects are currently on budget (i.e. expenditures are proceeding as planned). The exceptions are (i) the Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries project in Cambodia, with an envisaged underspending of 31%¹⁸; (ii) the Governance and Public Administrative Reform project in Lao (current GDP phase), with an envisaged underspending of 14%; (iii) the Skills for Tourism project in Lao, with an envisaged underspending of 12%; and (iv) the Vocational Education and Training project in Lao and the regional Land Governance Mekong Region project which run beyond this CS period, but which on the current trend will significantly underspend on their budgets. Section J.4: Table 7.

J.1. Use of the MRCS' budget envelop

Figure 2 Use of the MRCS' budget envelop – (planned) expenditures during this CS period



¹⁷ The remaining 6% of the budget is absorbed by office costs and discretionary (small action) funds.

¹⁸ This for most part due to underspending on the project component Support to Forestry & Fisheries Communities.

Table 3 (Planned) project expenditures during MRCS 2018-2021 from previous, current, and future project phases (in CHF)

		Projects > CHF 1 million	Actual expenditures 2018	Actual expenditures 2019	Planned expenditures 2020	Planned expenditures 2021	CS Budget Allocations
Cambodia	GCP	KBH	4.563.038	4.018.586	4.250.000	4.100.000	16.931.624
		SNDD	610.436	1.464.900	680.410	1.300.000	4.055.746
		RED	87.689	1.093.650	1.425.000	1.191.000	3.797.339
	AFS	CHAIN	1.717.767	1.600.000	450.000	1.250.000	5.017.767
		HMNC	1.053.000	475.000	1.554.000	1.000.000	4.082.000
		PaFF	845.770	809.280	600.000	740.000	2.995.050
	SDE	SDP	2.224.501	3.058.401	1.746.451	2.261.800	9.291.152
		DEYC	1.000.000	70.611	1.026.800	1.000.000	3.097.411
Lao	GCP	Lao-Decide	1.221.105	630.000	1.010.000	250.000	3.111.105
		GPAR-GIDP	1.029.621	1.315.519	815.000	408.290	3.568.429
		PRF	4.326.755	4.097.484	1.945.000	45.000	10.414.239
		CEGGA	550.116	1.610.711	1.922.550	3.540.000	7.623.376
	AFS	TABI	1.724.761	981.683	1.080.000	99.150	3.885.594
		SURAFCO	1.999.289	1.093.826	660.000	49.755	3.802.870
		LURAS	- 404.250	1.600.000	1.650.000	1.650.000	4.495.750
		ENUFF	2.000.000	38.503	2.101.664	1.750.000	5.890.167
	SDE	VELA	1.676.549	1.151.508	1.500.000	1.100.000	5.428.057
		SFT	1.323.451	1.725.435	1.775.000	2.590.000	7.413.887
		DRE	600.000	475.000	100.000	-	1.175.000
Regional	GCP	PIC	400.000	826.500	1.183.333	933.333	3.343.167
		MRC	1.400.970	1.307.655	1.200.000	1.768.000	5.676.625
		REFID	-	-	100.000	1.550.000	1.650.000
	AFS	RECOFTC	508.613	944.997	860.000	885.000	3.198.610
		MRLG	1.711.330	1.688.906	2.550.000	2.470.000	8.420.236
	SDE	PROMISE	2.100.000	1.998.765	2.296.235	1.900.000	8.295.000
		ASEAN	-	38.000	62.130	1.000.000	1.100.130
							137.760.329

Table 4 (Planned) project expenditures during MRCS 2018-2021 from previous and current project phases (in CHF)

		Projects > CHF 1 million	Actual expenditures 2018	Actual expenditures 2019	Planned expenditures 2020	Planned expenditures 2021	CS Budget Allocations
Cambodia	GCP	KBH	4.563.038	4.018.586	4.250.000	4.100.000	16.931.624
		SNDD	610.436	1.464.900	680.410	1.300.000	4.055.746
		RED	87.689	1.093.650	1.425.000	1.191.000	3.797.339
	AFS	CHAIN	1.717.767	1.600.000	450.000	50.000	3.817.767
		HMNC	1.053.000	475.000	1.554.000	1.000.000	4.082.000
		PaFF	845.770	809.280	600.000	740.000	2.995.050
	SDE	SDP	2.224.501	3.058.401	1.746.451	2.261.800	9.291.152
DEYC		1.000.000	70.611	1.026.800	1.000.000	3.097.411	
Lao	GCP	Lao-Decide	1.221.105	630.000	1.010.000	250.000	3.111.105
		GPAR-GIDP	1.029.621	1.315.519	815.000	408.290	3.568.429
		PRF	4.326.755	4.097.484	1.945.000	45.000	10.414.239
		CEGGA	550.116	1.610.711	1.922.550	790.000	4.873.376
	AFS	TABI	1.724.761	981.683	1.080.000	99.150	3.885.594
		SURAFCO	1.999.289	1.093.826	660.000	49.755	3.802.870
		LURAS	- 404.250	1.600.000	1.650.000	1.650.000	4.495.750
		ENUFF	2.000.000	38.503	2.101.664	1.750.000	5.890.167
	SDE	VELA	1.676.549	1.151.508	1.500.000	1.100.000	5.428.057
		SFT	1.323.451	1.725.435	1.775.000	690.000	5.513.887
		DRE	600.000	475.000	100.000	-	1.175.000
Regional	GCP	PIC	400.000	826.500	350.000	100.000	1.676.500
		MRC	1.400.970	1.307.655	1.200.000	168.000	4.076.625
		REFID	-	-	100.000	1.550.000	1.650.000
	AFS	RECOFTC	508.613	944.997	860.000	885.000	3.198.610
		MRLG	1.711.330	1.688.906	2.550.000	2.470.000	8.420.236
	SDE	PROMISE	2.100.000	1.998.765	2.296.235	400.000	6.795.000
		ASEAN	-	38.000	62.130	1.000.000	1.100.130
							127.143.663

Table 5 (Planned) project expenditures during MRCS 2018-2021 from the current project phase (in CHF)

		Projects > CHF 1 million	Actual expenditures 2018	Actual expenditures 2019	Planned expenditures 2020	Planned expenditures 2021	CS Budget Allocations
Cambodia	GCP	KBH	-	3.768.586	4.250.000	4.100.000	12.118.586
		SNDD	-	1.464.900	700.000	1.300.000	3.464.900
		RED	-	1.093.650	1.425.000	1.191.000	3.709.650
	AFS	CHAIN	1.700.000	1.600.000	450.000	50.000	3.800.000
		HMNC	-	-	1.500.000	1.000.000	2.500.000
		PaFF	845.770	809.280	600.000	740.000	2.995.050
	SDE	SDP	-	-	1.550.000	2.100.000	3.650.000
		DEYC	-	-	1.000.000	1.000.000	2.000.000
Lao	GCP	Lao-Decide	1.190.000	610.000	1.010.000	250.000	3.060.000
		GPAR-GIDP	1.029.621	1.321.453	815.000	408.290	3.574.364
		PRF	4.326.755	4.097.484	1.945.000	45.000	10.414.239
		CEGGA	550.116	1.610.711	1.922.550	790.000	4.873.376
	AFS	TABI	1.724.761	981.683	1.080.000	99.150	3.885.594
		SURAFCO	2.066.498	1.093.826	660.000	49.755	3.870.079
		LURAS	-	1.600.000	1.650.000	1.650.000	4.900.000
		ENUFF	-	-	1.700.000	1.750.000	3.450.000
	SDE	VELA	-	1.000.000	1.500.000	1.100.000	3.600.000
		SFT	1.323.451	1.725.435	1.775.000	690.000	5.513.887
		DRE	600.000	475.000	100.000	-	1.175.000
Regional	GCP	PIC	400.000	826.500	350.000	100.000	1.676.500
		MRC	1.400.970	1.307.655	1.200.000	168.000	4.076.625
		REFID	-	-	100.000	1.550.000	1.650.000
	AFS	RECOFTC	-	860.000	860.000	885.000	2.605.000
		MRLG	1.430.000	1.967.220	2.550.000	2.470.000	8.417.220
	SDE	PROMISE	2.100.000	1.998.765	2.296.235	400.000	6.795.000
		ASEAN	-	38.000	62.130	1.000.000	1.100.130
							108.875.199

J.2. Allocation of the CS budget between geographies and domains

The figures and tables below compare the actual (planned) expenditures between geographies and domains during the implementation of the MRCS 2018-2021 with the envisaged allocations between geographies and domains in the MRC 2018-2021.

Figure 3 Envisaged and actual (planned) allocation of the CS budget between geographies and domains (in %)

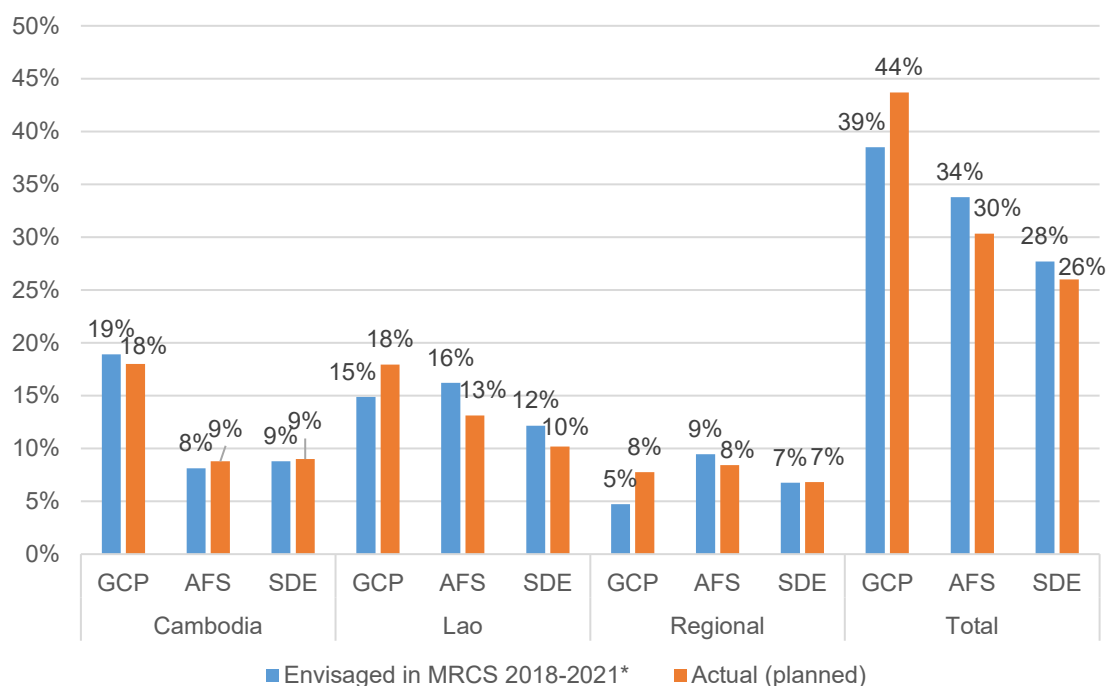
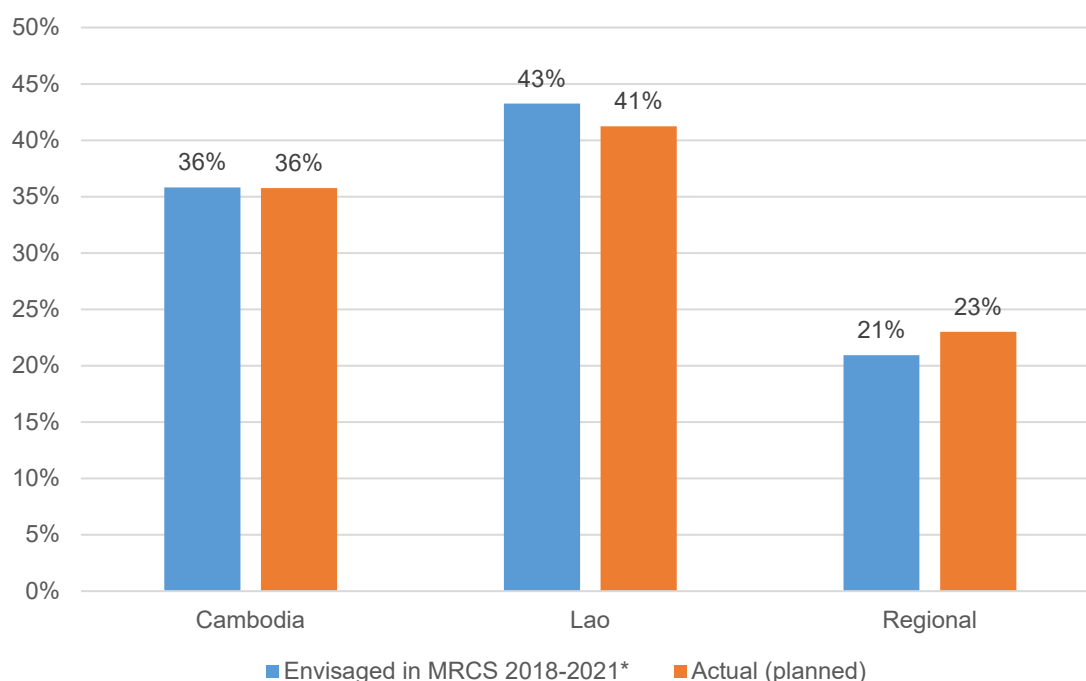
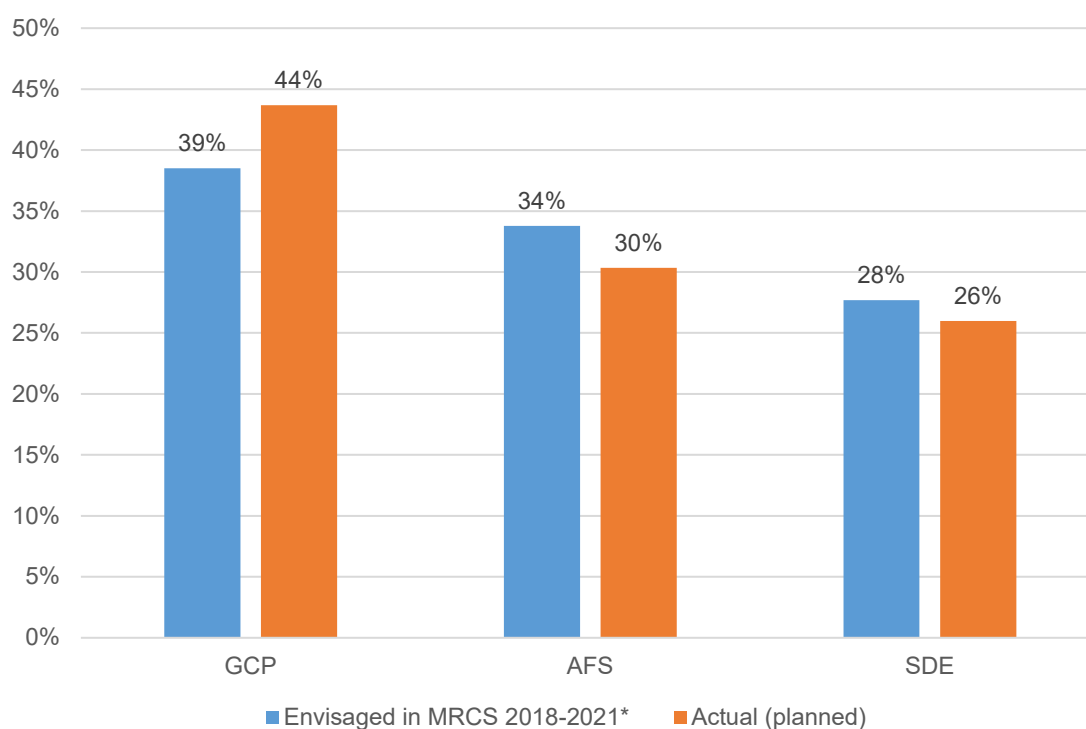


Figure 4 Envisaged and actual (planned) allocation of the CS budget between geographies (in %)



* These figures stem from the Results Framework of the MRCS 2018-2021 (Annex 3)

Figure 5 Envisaged and actual (planned) allocation of the CS budget between domains (in %)



* These figures stem from the Results Framework of the MRCS 2018-2021 (Annex 3)

J.3. CS budget envelop and allocation between geographies and domains

Table 6 shows that the total budget envelop and the envisaged allocation of the budget between geographies and domains differs slightly between Annex 3 (Results Framework) and Annex 4 (Allocation planning by country and thematic domain) of the Cooperation Strategy.

Table 6 The CS budget envelop – Annex 3 versus 4 of the Cooperation Strategy

		Annex 3	Annex 4
Geographies	Cambodia	53.000.000	50.000.000
	Lao	64.000.000	64.000.000
	Regional	31.000.000	32.000.000
Domains	GCP	57.000.000	56.000.000
	AFS	50.000.000	50.000.000
	SDE	41.000.000	40.000.000
Total		148.000.000	146.000.000

J.4. (Planned) expenditures versus project budgets

Table 7 Actual (planned) expenditures versus project budgets

			Begin phase	End phase	Current Phase Budget	Actual 2018	Actual 2019	Plan 2020	Plan 2021	Actual < 2018	Budget runs until 2022? If yes, inferred expenditure 2022	Budget runs beyond 2022?*	Deviation from budget (in CHF)	Budget Use	Deviation from budget (in %)
Cambodia	GCP	KBH	01/01/2019	31/12/2021	12.400.000	-	3.768.586	4.250.000	4.100.000				281.414	12.118.586	2%
		SNDD	01/04/2019	31/12/2022	4.200.000	-	1.464.900	700.000	1.300.000		735.100		-	3.464.900	
		RED	01/01/2019	30/09/2021	3.800.000	-	1.093.650	1.425.000	1.191.000				90.350	3.709.650	2%
	AFS	CHAIN	01/12/2017	31/12/2020	4.500.000	1.700.000	1.600.000	450.000	50.000	700.000			-	4.500.000	0%
		HMNC - phase 1	01/11/2016	31/12/2019	3.450.000	1.053.000	475.000	54.000	-	1.851.000			17.000	3.433.000	0%
		HMNC - phase 2	01/01/2020	31/12/2022	3.530.000	-	-	1.500.000	1.000.000		1.030.000		-	2.500.000	
		PaFF**	01/08/2017	30/06/2021	5.200.000	845.770	809.280	600.000	740.000	579.120			1.625.830	3.574.170	31%
	SDE	SDP - Phase 1	01/05/2014	30/06/2020	9.856.800	2.224.501	3.058.401	196.451	161.800	4.149.995			65.653	9.791.147	1%
		SDP - Phase 2	01/07/2020	30/06/2024	9.000.000	-	-	1.550.000	2.100.000			Runs until mid 2024 - on schedule		3.650.000	
		DEYC - Phase 1	01/09/2017	29/02/2020	2.050.000	1.000.000	70.611	26.800	-	950.000			2.589	2.047.411	0%
		DEYC - PPhase 2	01/05/2020	31/12/2023	4.050.000	-	-	1.000.000	1.000.000			Runs until end 2023 - on schedule		2.000.000	
Lao	GCP	Lao-Decide	01/06/2018	30/06/2021	3.100.000	1.190.000	610.000	1.010.000	250.000				40.000	3.060.000	1%
		GPAR-GIDP	01/08/2017	31/07/2021	5.000.000	1.029.621	1.321.453	815.000	408.290	750.000			675.636	4.324.364	14%
		PRF	01/10/2016	30/06/2021	17.300.000	4.326.755	4.097.484	1.945.000	45.000	7.296.940			411.179	17.711.179	2%
		CEGGA	01/06/2016	31/12/2020	5.950.000	550.116	1.610.711	1.922.550	790.000	968.048			108.576	5.841.424	2%
	AFS	TABI	01/04/2017	30/09/2020	5.300.000	1.724.761	981.683	1.080.000	99.150	1.300.000			114.406	5.185.594	2%
		SURAFICO	01/03/2017	31/12/2020	5.100.000	2.066.498	1.093.826	660.000	49.755	1.100.391			129.530	4.970.470	3%
		LURAS	01/12/2017	30/11/2021	7.400.000	-	1.600.000	1.650.000	1.650.000	2.200.386			299.614	7.100.386	4%
		ENUFF - Phase 1	15/06/2015	30/06/2020	7.000.000	2.000.000	38.503	401.664	-	4.388.947			170.887	6.829.113	2%
		ENUFF - Phase 2	01/07/2020	30/06/2024	7.000.000	-	-	1.700.000	1.750.000			Runs until mid 2024 - on schedule		3.450.000	
	SDE	VELA	01/08/2019	31/07/2023	8.800.000	-	1.000.000	1.500.000	1.100.000			Runs until mid-2023 - behind schedule		3.600.000	
		SFT	01/12/2014	31/08/2021	9.750.000	1.323.451	1.725.435	1.775.000	690.000	3.038.792			1.197.321	8.552.679	12%
		DRE	01/04/2017	31/12/2020	2.200.000	600.000	475.000	100.000	-	1.000.000			25.000	2.175.000	1%
Regional	GCP	PIC	01/05/2017	31/12/2020	1.966.500	400.000	826.500	350.000	100.000	290.000			-	1.966.500	0%
		MRC	01/06/2016	31/12/2020	7.500.000	1.400.970	1.307.655	1.200.000	168.000	3.127.896			295.479	7.204.521	4%
		REFID	01/07/2020	31/12/2024	6.200.000	-	-	100.000	1.550.000			Runs until mid-2024 - on schedule		1.650.000	
	AFS	RECOFTC	01/01/2019	31/12/2023	4.325.000	-	860.000	860.000	885.000			Runs until mid-2023 - on schedule		2.605.000	
		MRLG	01/07/2018	31/12/2022	13.770.000	1.430.000	1.967.220	2.550.000	2.470.000		5.352.780			8.417.220	
	SDE	PROMISE	01/11/2015	31/08/2021	9.250.000	2.100.000	1.998.765	2.296.235	400.000	2.309.442			145.558	9.104.442	2%
		ASEAN	01/05/2019	30/04/2024	4.150.000	-	38.000	62.130	1.000.000			Runs until mid-2024 - on schedule		1.100.130	
Legend															
On budget															
Under expenditure															
Over expenditure															
Notes															
* Estimated to be on schedule if proportional expenditures per year of the remaining budget equals either the expenditure in 2021 or average expenditures during this CS period.															
** Includes Support to Forestry & Fishery Communities, CP Budget CHF 2.000.000, with same project number as PaFF. The expenditure shortfall is almost completely on account of underspending on this Support to Forestry and Fisheries Communities component.															

K. Transversal theme portfolio analysis

Gender

- Within the current strategic framework, projects have overall gained from an increased “gender” awareness. In comparison to before 2016, the gender approach has a 60% relevance in the projects in Cambodia and Laos.
- Only one project carries a 'gender principal' which means that only one project of the entire current portfolio aims specifically in its objective at gender equality.

CSPM

- The majority of projects in Cambodia and Laos are 'not targeted'. As a post war country, one could expect more focus on CSPM in Cambodia.

Disaster risk reduction (DRR)

- There appears to be only one mentioning / DRR marker in the entire SAP data. This is surprising as we know that DRR plays a significant role in the Mekong region (dam collapse, environmental degradation, earthquake etc.).

Table 8. Relevant markers in the SAP data

	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Mekong Region
Gender	6 Significant 2 Not targeted	9 Significant (4 of them scored 'does not apply' in earlier phases)	5 Significant (of which one was targeted 'does not apply' before 12/16).
CSPM (indicated as conflict reduction, crisis prevention or Human rights)	5 not targeted Conflict reduction: 1 (Partnership for forestry and fisheries) Human rights: 2 (RACA), (Skills development program Cambodia)	All 9 not targeted	Crisis prevention: 1 (Community Forestry RECOFTC) Conflict reduction: Land Governance Mekong Region, MRC-Contribution to basket fund, RECOFTC-Center for People + Forests

L. Three annotated examples of intervention logics from credit proposal

This Appendix offers several examples from SDC's credit proposals where the pathway of change (that SDC was to contribute to) is either not explicated or made plausible. These examples stem from the meta-analysis of the credit proposals of 16 larger development interventions under the MRCS 2018-2021 (See Appendix N).

Example 1. SDC's support to safe migration, skills development and enhanced job placement (PROMISE)

Intervention logic: *'If skills development systems in CLMT are strengthened to deliver market-driven, migrant-centred and gender-responsive training while regular migration management services are more transparent, cheaper and faster, and private sector is increasingly engaged in ethical recruitment and employment practices, then migrants, especially female, will have greater opportunities to access gainful, decent employment, and will be more protected against potential abuse and exploitation at all stages of the migration cycle.'*¹⁹

The above intervention logic includes several implicit assumptions:

- the private sector and migration service providers will buy into the scheme;
- training providers have the capacity, interest, and incentive to target migrants;
- voluntary agreements or government regulations are enforced;
- migrants have the knowledge, capacity, interest and incentive to use improved services.

With respect to all these assumptions, the question is what the economics are behind these calculations: does it make business sense for the firm, training institute and migrant to invest/ make use of improved services? Moreover, what is the likelihood that the voluntary agreements and government regulations are indeed enforced? What is necessary to have them enforced? Are these preconditions in place or what can realistically be done to put them in place?

Example 2. SDC's support to the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework in Cambodia.

Drivers of change: *'The ISAF is driven by the RGC and its mechanisms are well understood, owned and accepted by SNAs and service providers.... There is a lot of pressure on local authorities to deliver good quality services to the satisfaction of citizens.'*²⁰

Impact hypothesis: *'The quality of services provided to citizens, men and women, will improve, if they (demand-side) are empowered to participate fully in local governance structures and mechanisms; if partnerships between sub-national administrations (SNAs), CSOs and citizens are strengthened; if capacity and capability of SNAs and service providers (supply-side) are enhanced and if they are responsive, committed and fully accountable towards citizens.'*²⁰

At face value these are clear-cut statements. However, if one subjects them to closer scrutiny, several questions pop up:

- Which persons and organizations within the Royal Government of Cambodia drive the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework?
- What is their power, interests and incentives to drive forward the implementation?
- Why do you need the Social Accountability Framework to improve services if there is already 'a lot of pressure on local authorities to deliver good quality services'?

¹⁹ SDC (n.d.). Credit Proposal. PROMISE: Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement. Phase 1.

²⁰ SDC (2019). Credit Proposal. Sub-National Democratic Development. Phase 3

- Why will the quality of local services improve if citizens can participate in local governance structures? What are the preconditions for this statement to hold true? Are these preconditions in place in Cambodia?
- Similarly, what are the preconditions for subnational authorities and service providers to become more responsive, committed and accountable towards citizens? To what extent are these preconditions in place within Cambodia? How can the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework contribute to putting these preconditions in place?

Example 3: The Agro-biodiversity Initiative in Lao PDR

Drivers and restrainers of change: *'drivers in terms of policy push and market pull, are severely slowed down by perceptions of ABD as 'conservation', hence limiting growth, and/or perceptions of shifting cultivation as a large driver of deforestation. Negative or poor understanding of ABD does not only reside at policy levels, but also the younger generation of farmers is losing ABD-related knowledge and skills. As a measure to mitigate this phenomenon, TABI IV will produce a wide range of materials (reports, briefs, extension material, television or radio broadcasts, etc.) targeting various audiences and strengthening communication on ABD'.²¹*

Again, this statement is fair enough, but:

- Who exactly are these drivers of change? What is their power to invoke change and what are their needs for support?
- What makes SDC believe that advocacy is the right remedy and final missing link? Can perceptions be altered solely on the basis of reports, briefs, extension material, and television or radio broadcasts? Can young farmers return to agro-biodiversity farming based on advocacy material alone?
- What is a realistic earnings potential in Cambodia and Lao (under current market conditions) with agro-biodiversity products? For which groups of smallholders can it offer a viable source of income (and, as such, attract smallholder farmers)?

²¹ SDC (2017). Credit Proposal. The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI). Phase 4

M. Four intervention logic examples from the Results Framework

This Appendix presents four intervention logic examples. They were distilled from the Results Framework of the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021. The graphical representation of the examples stems from the evaluators. They are not shown as such in the Results Framework.

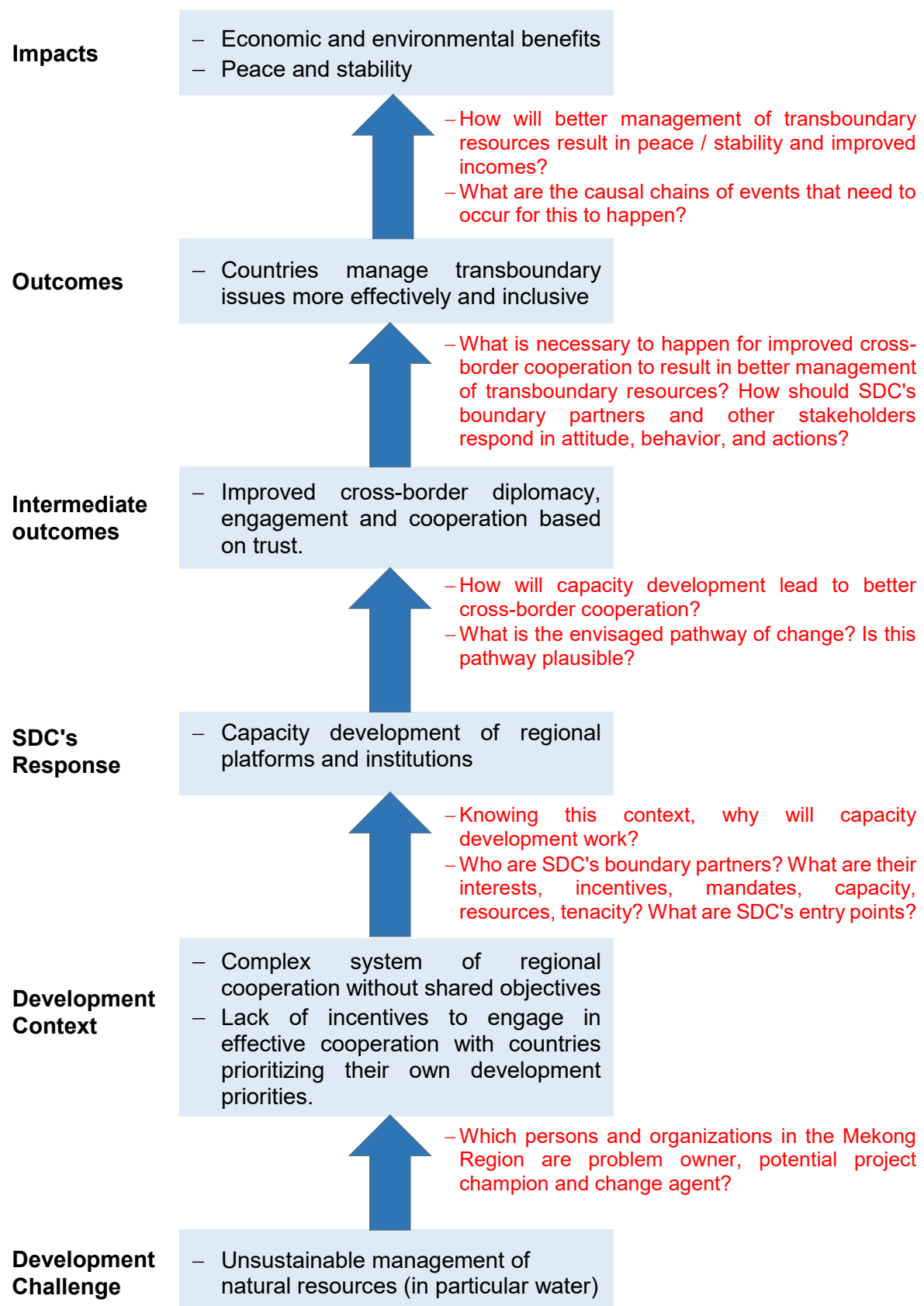
These intervention logics rest on a set of assumptions as to how SDC can affect change. These assumptions are, amongst others, about:

- with which individuals, groups or organizations the program anticipates opportunities for development;
- how these so-called boundary partners can be empowered to make use of the development opportunities;
- how these boundary partners will respond to both the support received and the development opportunities;
- the affect that these boundary partners will exert on other development agents and the prevailing political economy; and,
- how the changes in attitude, behavior, and actions of both these boundary partners and development agents will bring about the envisaged outcomes and impacts.

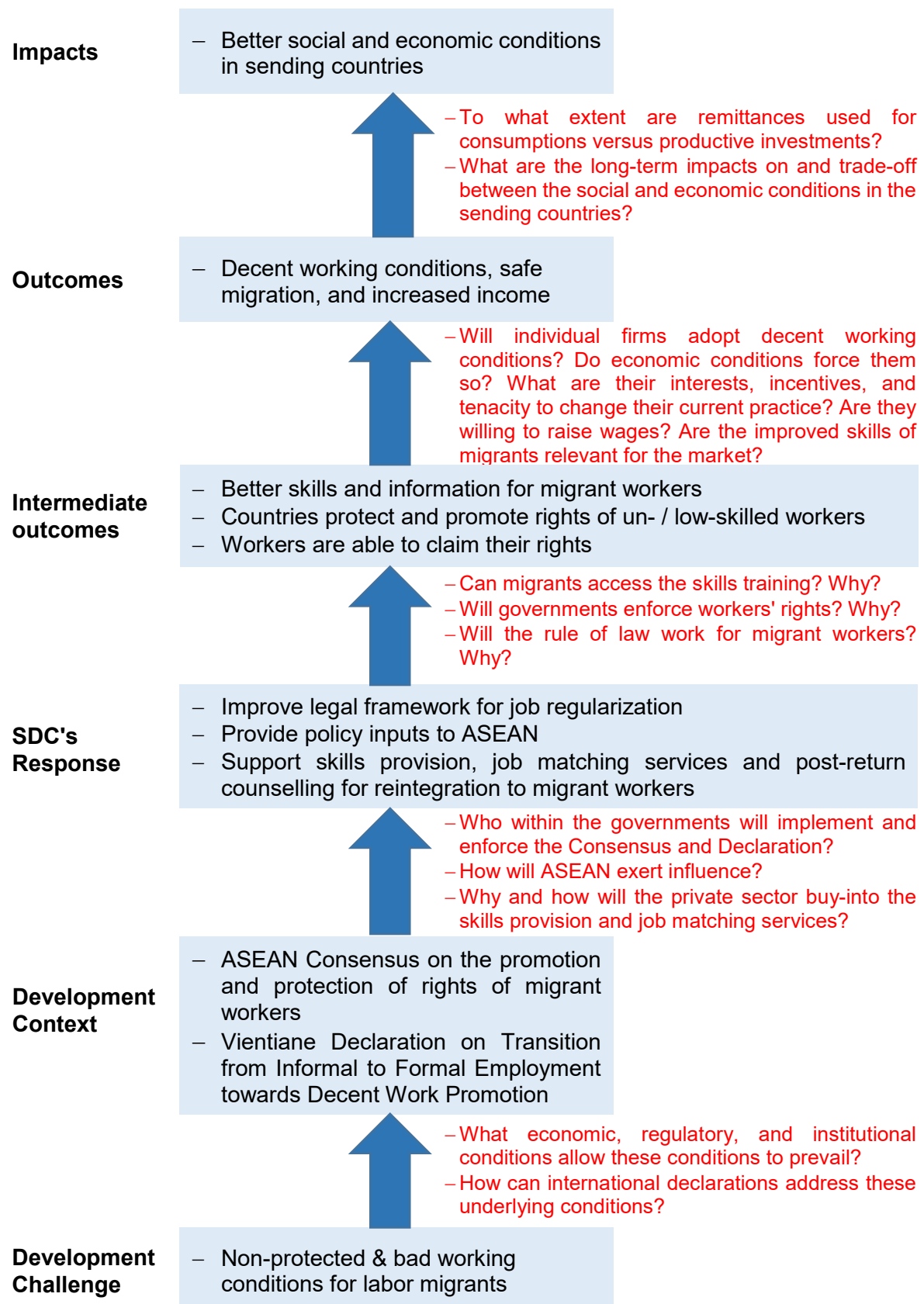
The intervention logics in the Results Framework do not explicate these assumptions. They are there (either implicitly or explicitly), but they do not show up in the Results Framework. The evaluators have sought to pinpoint these assumptions by inserting various questions in the intervention logics (see text in red font). These questions are meant to point to the type of assumptions which (again implicitly or explicitly) have probably been made. These questions (and assumptions) are illustrative. The evaluators' do not claim to be complete or exact. The assumptions that these questions point to are purely illustrative.

The questions also highlight the difference between an intervention logic and the more detailed Theory of Change methodology. The latter differentiates itself from the former by explicating the assumptions and showing explicitly the causal steps / mechanisms which need to be taken or occur for an intervention to result in the envisaged impacts. In other words, a Theory of Change reveals the detailed and presumed pathway of change from an intervention to the development result.

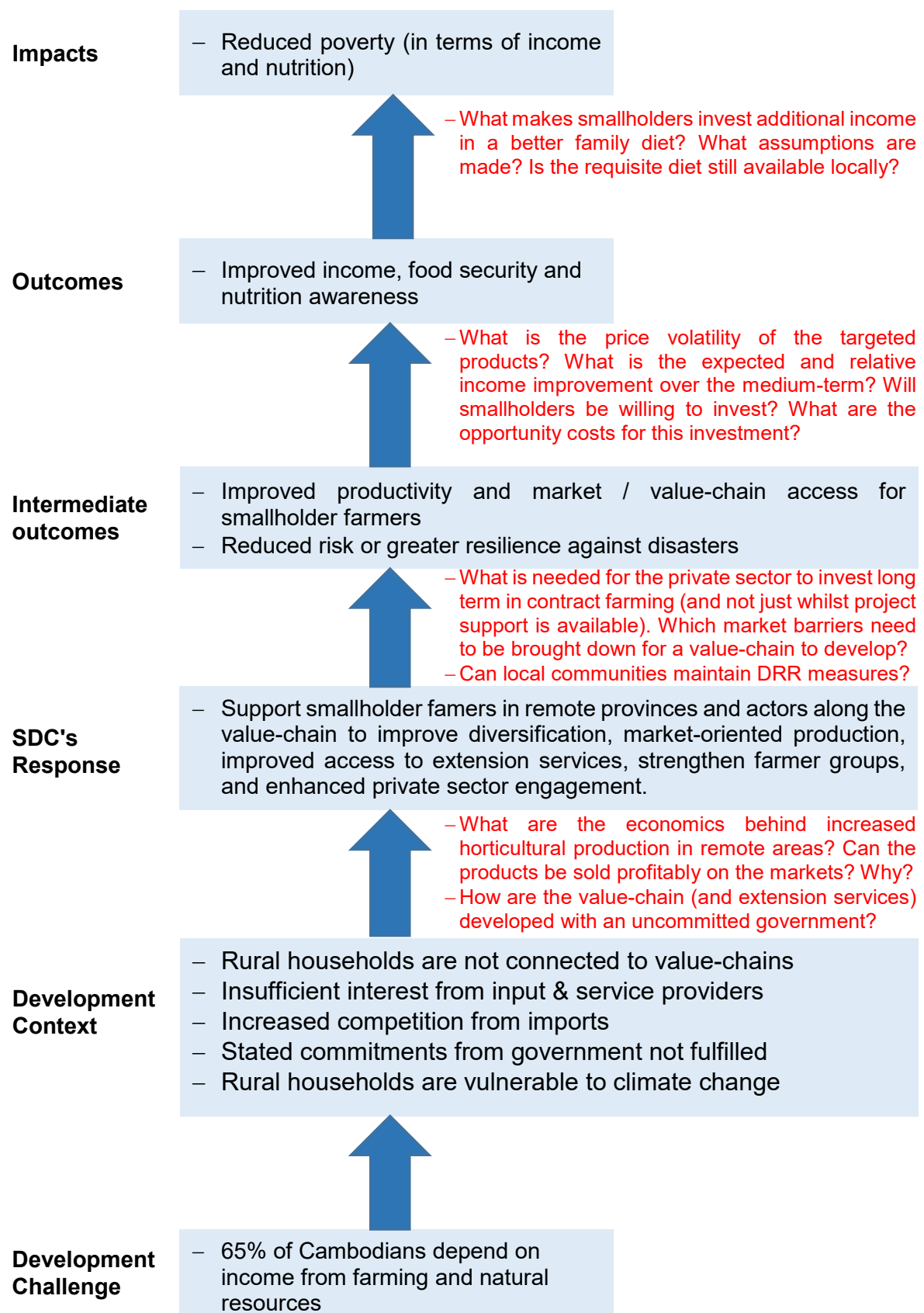
M.1. Regional – Governance and Citizen Participation



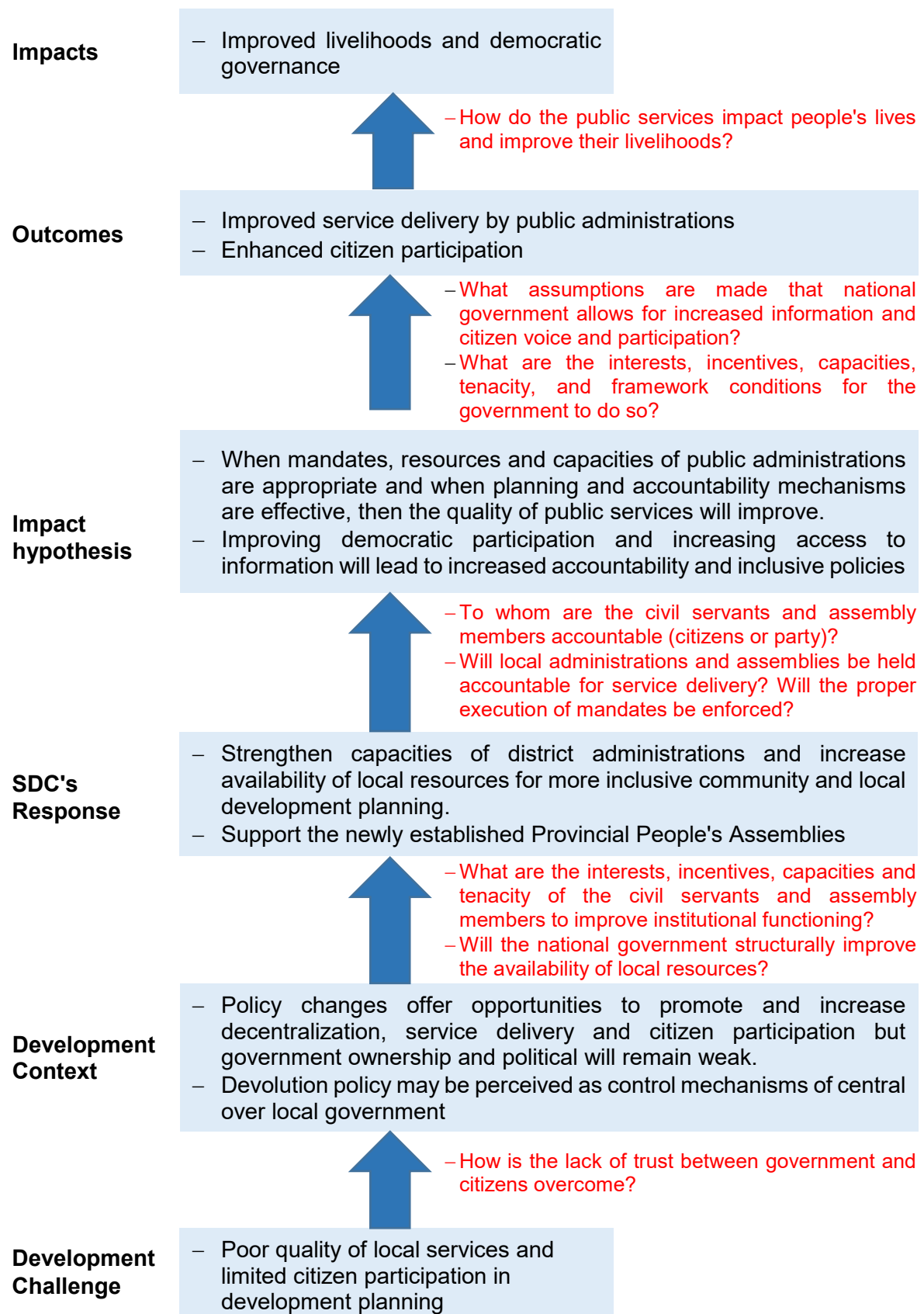
M.2. Regional – Skills Development and Employment



M.3. Cambodia – Agriculture and Food Security (Horticulture)



M.4. Lao PDR – Governance and Citizen Participation



N. Meta-analysis factsheets

N.1. REG. RECOFTC – Center for People and Forest: Enhancing Community Access to Land and Forest Resources

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal²²; (ii) last annual progress report²³; and (iii) end-of-phase evaluation²⁴.

Context analysis
<p>Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No explicit demand mentioned – SDC was founding member of RECOFTC in 1987 – RECOFTC = international not-for-profit organization, seeking to: <i>'empowering local people to obtain fair benefits from sustainably managed forest landscapes'</i>.²² – No collaboration between 2006-2012 – New single core contribution in 2012. – General observation: <i>'Unprecedented growth in China, Thailand, Vietnam, and the development process in the CLMV countries are having massive impacts on the forests and local people of the region. increasingly these forests are under threat from multi-purpose land clearing, unsustainable logging and hunting, large-scale infrastructure development, and climate change impacts. There is an urgent need to address forest policy challenges in this changing context.'</i>²² – RECOFTC <i>'is the primary institution for promoting community forestry in the Asia-Pacific region.'</i>²²
<p>Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Credit proposal does not include a Theory of Change – building blocks are: – Phase 1 objective: 'To contribute to smallholder women & men farmers in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam & Myanmar, especially those belonging to ethnic minorities, having secure access to & control over forest resources on and around village land.'²² – Indicators: (i) Number of Community Forests in focal countries; (ii) Area of Community Forests in focal countries; (iii) Number of people participating in Community Forestry in focal countries. – Approach 1: institution building of RECOFTC and local stakeholders – capacity development, policy dialogue / improved framework conditions, awareness raising: <i>'Institutions for securing community forestry are more effective; institutions are enhancing local livelihoods; Enabling conditions for local people's engagement in the context of climate change are strengthened; Institutions to transform conflict are in place and are increasingly effective.'</i>²² – Approach 2: Implement 'Community forestry and related community-based forest landscape management ... for reducing forest loss and degradation and improving forest conservation and restoration. It is a powerful approach for improving the rights, governance and fairer access to benefits of local people and smallholders, and consequently improving their livelihoods and food security.'²² – SDC instrument: core contribution – allow RECOFTC to implement its strategic plan – Development partners: policy and decision makers, NGOs, private sector, CSO, local communities, and small forest-based enterprises.

²² SDC (2013). Credit Proposal. RECOFTC – Center for People and Forest: Enhancing Community Access to Land and Forest Resources. Phase 1.

²³ RECOFTC (2020) Internal Annual Report. October 2018 – September 2019.

²⁴ PaxTerra (2017) External Evaluation of the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC). Final Report

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2017 Evaluation: need to engage with at both a broader and higher levels of governments and regional organizations, including ASEAN and Asia Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management, as well as strategic partnerships with the private sector on enterprise development and forest product marketing. – 2017 Evaluation: calls to include a Theory of Change in next strategic plan, incorporating key socio-economic drivers (digitalization, private sector growth, youth bulge, organic food, ecotourism, China's BRI initiative, ASEAN Economic Community), and 5-7 key strategic partners. – AR 2019: <i>'RECOFTC employs a rights-based programmatic and partnerships approach to develop the capacities of the various stakeholders – from communities to governments to non-governmental organizations and the private sector – to improve the policies, institutions and practices for collaborative landscape management in the Asia-Pacific region.'</i>
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not mentioned
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Documents from before Covid-19

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2017 Evaluation: 'progress [in policy and regulatory reform] has been considerably slower than had been both hoped for and expected.'²⁴ – 2017 Evaluation: RECOFTC needs help to: (i) work with the private sector on Livelihoods and Markets programs; (ii) engage with banks, other financial services organizations, investors and philanthropists; (iii) engage with sub-national governments; (iv) increase emphasis on biodiversity conservation (e.g. in Cambodia, moving from management planning for Community Forests to management planning for Community Protected Areas); (v) seek to better understand eco/nature/adventure tourism; (vi) work on culture and religion as key drivers of people's interaction with forests and landscapes; (vii) explore the water-energy-food nexus, etc. – 2017 Evaluation: RECOFTC needs to continue and expand organization reforms, including flipping organization chart around and put country programs center stage, upgrade country coordinators to country directors, transform HQ to regional support office, improved branding, expanding the donor base. – AR 2020: 'Directly supporting over 444 forest user groups (FUGs) comprising 57,000 households and 368,000 ha of forest land within RECOFTC focal countries [229 CF and 323,282 ha in Cambodia alone]. Directly supported 14 community-based enterprises [4 in Cambodia, 0 in Lao, 4 in Myanmar] and 119 smallholders [the latter all in Lao PDR]' – AR 2020: Initial outcomes: three forest landscape management plans, five improved policy and legal instruments (including revised Forestry Law in Lao PDR, and the ASEAN Guidelines for Agroforestry Development), facilitation of 15 equitable business partnerships between forest entrepreneur groups/ smallholders and private sector actors, including in Cambodia, Lao and Myanmar. (Red. These are intermediate outcomes at best) – AR 2020: outcomes: 20% increase in forest land managed by local people between 2018 and 2019 [0% in Cambodia and Vietnam, no data available for Lao PDR, and 33% increase in Myanmar].

– AR Report: = process, activity and output-based description.
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – AR 2020: <i>'the overall enabling environment and capacity levels of civil society actors to meaningfully impact forest governance remains limited in many RECOFTC countries.'</i> – AR 2020: <i>'It remains extremely challenging for communities and smallholders to mobilize resources and develop enterprise options for forest-based products. Effective linkages with the private sector still need to be established in many cases.'</i>
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
– Core contribution: Phase 2 (CHF 4,3 million) slightly lower than Phase 1 (CHF 5,6 million).
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
– Not discussed
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
– Not discussed

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'RECOFTC's Strategic Program 2018–23 aims to empower local people to effectively and equitably engage in the sustainable management of forested landscapes through enhancing capacities for stronger rights, improved governance, and fairer benefits for local people in sustainable forested landscapes in the Asia-Pacific region.'</i>²³ – This is consistent with Swiss Portfolio objective (responsible land and forest governance) and outcome statement (Smallholder women and men farmers have secured and equitable access to and control over agricultural land and forest).²⁵
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – AR 2020: <i>'During MRLG Phase I (2015-2018), RECOFTC collaborated with MRLG at both regional and country levels, and implemented one Innovation Fund project (in Viet Nam) and several Quick Disbursement Fund projects in Cambodia and also in Lao PDR (as a partner). RECOFTC has also supported the development of the Mekong Land Information and Knowledge Exchange (MLIKE) platform being incubated by MRLG. During MRLG Phase II, RECOFTC is supporting the program's Customary Tenure workstream at the regional as well as in Cambodia and Lao PDR.'</i>
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
– Not discussed. RECOFTC does take a <i>'rights-based approach'</i> supporting rightsholders and duty bearers

²⁵ SDC (2018) Swiss Cooperation Strategy Mekong Region 2018-2021.

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
– Not covered
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– Not covered
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
– Not covered

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 2 (effectively 3rd, phase 1 followed a single-phase core support in 2012/2013 of CHF 1,53 million) – Period: 1.1.2019 – 31.12.2023 – Likely to continue: likely (although Entry Proposal foresaw 'a 10 year core support', i.e. until 2023).
Key informants?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – RECOFTC (Bangkok, Thailand) – SIDA, NORAD, Thai Government, EU, Germany (International Climate Initiative) – Asia Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management – ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry – Kasertsart University, Thailand (Houses RECOFTC) – MRLG project – The Nature Conservancy – Cambodia: Forestry Administration, National Community Forestry Program Coordination Committee (NCFPCC), the National Forest Program Task Force – Lao: Department of Forests, the National University of Lao PDR, and the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Services

N.2. REG. PROMISE: Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal²⁶; and (ii) last annual progress report²⁷.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
– Stated fact: <i>'Labour migration to Thailand is a significant poverty reduction strategy for marginalised people ... [migrants face] harsh labour situations and the lack of protection'</i> ¹⁹

²⁶ SDC (n.d.). Credit Proposal. PROMISE: Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement. Phase 1.

²⁷ IOM (2019). PROMISE. Interim Report September 2018 – August 2019.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Economic demand: <i>'Thailand's aging population will lead to a labour shortage and create a shortfall of 4.7 million workers by 2020.'</i>¹⁹
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bottom line: <i>'PROMISE promotes skills development and safe migration and thus improves the livelihoods of the migrants in Thailand and their communities of origin in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.'</i>¹⁹ – Evidence-based: <i>'The joint ILO and IOM baseline survey confirm that migration contributes to higher income, asset ownership and skills development. More than 75% of migrants from Myanmar send remittances home.</i>¹⁹ – Elements of a Theory of Change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ majority of migrants in Thailand start irregularly, due to the costly and time consuming recruitment procedures. ▪ Vocational skills development (VSD) systems in CLM are not inclusive of migrant workers or responsive to the needs of the Thai labour market. ▪ Employers value soft skill, which can also be means to better protection. – Deducted strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved dialogue between employers and skills providers ▪ Enhance capacity of skills providers ▪ Integrate migrants in skills programs ▪ Enhance certification and referral mechanisms ▪ Enhanced policies / framework on labor migration and protection of migrants ▪ Facilitate opportunities for returning migrants. – Development partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Migrants, employers, recruitment agencies, training providers, ministries – Entry point: (i) <i>'the understanding [of governments] for a more comprehensive [less defensive] migration policy is growing, partly due to the public protests over evident cases of exploitation [made public by CSOs].';</i> (ii) <i>understanding [of the private sector] of the importance of the external labour force and their qualifications for the Thai labour market is increasing.'</i>¹⁹ <p>Impact hypothesis: <i>'If skills development systems in CLMT are strengthened to deliver market-driven, migrant-centred and gender-responsive training while regular migration management services are more transparent, cheaper and faster, and private sector is increasingly engaged in ethical recruitment and employment practices, then migrants, especially female, will have greater opportunities to access gainful, decent employment, and will be more protected against potential abuse and exploitation at all stages of the migration cycle.'</i>¹⁹</p> <p>The above Theory of Change presumes (i.e. includes several implicit assumptions):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the private sector and migration service providers will buy in (economics / ethics?) ▪ training providers have the capacity, interest, and incentive to target migrants ▪ voluntary agreements or government regulations are enforced ▪ Migrants have the knowledge, capacity, interest and incentive to use improved services
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Annual Report predates the Covid-19 Pandemic

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal: <i>'Migrants, especially women, from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar (CLM) have improved employment opportunities and conditions in Thailand, through enhanced skills and protection, leading to poverty reduction in communities of origin.'</i>¹⁹ – Targeted outcomes: <i>'(i) Migrant workers, especially women, are able to utilize decent employment and safe migration schemes; (ii) Migrant workers, especially women, enjoy greater access to skills development in target sectors through affirmative action, leading to improved employability; and (iii) Migrant workers, especially women, receive greater protection through strengthened policy frameworks, enhanced assistance services and safe migration information.'</i>¹⁹ – Annual Report – second year of implementation: 9.2018 – 8.2019²⁷ – key achievements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institutionalized safe migration in existing skills development programs ▪ Build relationships with private sector (individual and association level) ▪ Conducted ToT workshops ▪ Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI)—Thailand's primary certification body—has agreed to launch the first skills certification for migrant workers with PROMISE financial support ▪ develop on-the-job training for migrant workers in the areas of soft skills, decent work and ethical recruitment ▪ IOM has provided support to both regional and national policy processes on labour migration and skills development, including technical inputs to the 'Labour Migration Policy 2019-2023' and 'TVET Strategic Action Plan 2019-2023' in Cambodia, the finalization and launch of the 'National Action Plan for the Management of International Labour Migration' in Myanmar, and technical inputs to the 'Decree 68 on the Dispatching of Lao labour to Work Abroad'.
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Annual Report offers a detailed (30-page+) process, activity, and output-based overview of achievements per outcome and output area defined in the Credit Proposal. – The Annual Report offers no dedicated analysis on main lessons learned and whether the assumptions underlying the Theory of Change are holding up in practice. – Some sporadic remarks on challenges – see example under sustainability. – The Annual Report includes a chapter on encountered challenges in implementation – for example: (i) <i>'Most employers have limited understanding of ethical recruitment and employment practices. ... Discrimination and stereotypes towards migrants persist among some employers; (ii) Engagement and outreach with domestic workers to strengthen peer-to-peer networking remains a challenge as most workers work and reside in private spheres; (iii) the Lao Government is hesitant to involve UN and NGOs into its policy review and discussions ... [and is characterized by] a lack of internal coordination [and] unclear and complex administrative procedures.'</i>²⁷ – The Annual Report also lists the actions taken by IOM to overcome these challenges. These are generally to double-down and continue its advocacy, networking and capacity building work. There is no in-depth analysis of the underlying reasons for these challenges and why IOM's actions will effectively address these challenges.
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
Not yet applicable

How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The support to the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute <i>'entirely funded by the PROMISE project as the Royal Thai Government's training budget cannot be spent on foreign nationals. This is a limitation to the long-term sustainability of the intervention, which, if no significant policy changes occur, will be tied to the PROMISE project.'</i>²⁷ – <i>'IOM is ensuring sustainability through institutionalization of soft skills curricula into TVET institutions in CLM, and broadier advocacy for private sector leadership and engagement on skills development for migrant workers.'</i>²⁷
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Switzerland's strong position in TVET sector in CLM.¹⁹

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Project goal (see above) is one-on-one in line with MRCS 2018-2021: <i>'Better skills for migrant workers and information on safe migration practises lead to more decent working conditions, safer migration and increased incomes, contributing to better social and economic conditions in sending communities'.</i>²⁸
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – PROMISE is to benefit from country programs and GPMD work¹⁹: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country programs: Skills Development Programme Cambodia, VSDP Project in Myanmar, VELA and "Skills for Tourism" projects in Lao PDR; – TRIANGLE II and ASEAN-TRIANGLE implemented by ILO
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Credit Proposal: a gender-responsive approach = priority. <i>'This is reflected in an explicit gender strategy and the inclusion of UN-Women into project design and delivery. ...PROMISE has a strong commitment to poverty reduction and general equality, and will focus on vulnerable migrants, particularly women, from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.'</i>¹⁹ – Annual Report - Focus on gender participation: <i>'Beyond presenting all results to show gender composition, efforts have been made in promoting gender participation at every stage of PROMISE implementation. Some of the key actions taken include encouraging women's participation in hospitality training, facilitating women's access to community outreach sessions in consultation with local authorities, and promoting balanced participation in trainings, workshops and other relevant initiatives.'</i>²⁷

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed

²⁸ SDC (2018) Cooperation Strategy Mekong Region 2018-2021.

How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– Not applicable
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
– Not discussed

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 1 – Period: 2017-2021 – Likely to continue: yes (conceptualized as a 10 year intervention)
Key informants for field mission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – International Organization for Migration (IOM); UN-Women (subcontractor) – Migrants, employers, recruitment agencies, training providers, ministries – DFAT, Canada: TRIANGLE II and ASEAN-TRIANGLE implemented by ILO – ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor

N.3. REG – GCP: Mekong River Commission (MRC), Contribution to basket fund for implementation of Strategic Plan 2016-2020

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal²⁹; (ii) last annual progress report³⁰.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<p>“MRC is currently undergoing comprehensive strategic reform and institutional transformation”. “At 2 MRC Summits 2010 and 2014, 4 Prime Ministers decided to achieve (i) financial self-sustainability by 2030, (ii) decentralizing core River Basin Management functions to MCs; iii) Regional Roadmap for Decentralization and Action Plan. The Strategic Plan is reflecting the decisions taken at the Summit”.</p> <p>“This is coherent with regional Outcome 2 of the SDC Mekong Regional Strategy (MRS): ‘MRC member countries jointly better govern the natural resources in the Mekong River Basin to achieve sustainable management of Mekong water resources’”</p>
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unearmarked core contribution to the implementation of the Strategic Plan during its entire 5-year validity period (2016—2020) <p>Development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The 15 member-DPCG (Development Partner Consultative Group) in general and its 3-member Troika of Chair and 2 Co-chairs play a crucial role in coordination and alignment of donors.

²⁹ SDC (2016). Credit Proposal. MRC — Contribution to basket fund for implementation of Strategic Plan 2016-2020). Phase 1

³⁰ MRC (2020): Annual Report 2019, Part 1 Progress and Achievements and Part 2 Detailed Implementation Progress.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SDC is for 3 years member of the “Troika” and Chair from 2016-17. – Extensive risk assessment of the main contextual, programmatic and institutional risks of the planned intervention
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Context: The source of the Mekong is in Tibet in China, where it is called Lancang (Upper Mekong). – China is not a Member Country of the MRC, but since 1996 a “Dialogue Partner “ – China always sends delegations to all major MRC events, with supportive statements – The “Lancang-Mekong Cooperation” (LMC) initiated by China launched in 2015 “is an instrument to expand Chinese influence and interests in the region.” – Output 5.1: Partnerships with Dialogue Partners further developed and implemented, including a protocol with China on cooperation for Mekong basin development and management – Contextual risks: Potential competition by Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (China)
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<p>Main development results :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Key results and insights from previous phases for baseline for first phase): During the current strategic cycle (2017-2015), SDC has provided contributions to 3 of the Programmes, namely the Basin Development Planning, the Environment, and the Flood Mitigation and Management Programmes (BDP, EP and FMMP). While all have achieved satisfactory individual results, there was little coordination and few linkages amongst them as well as with the other 10 MRC Programmes, resulting in few synergies, high costs and slow overall progress. – “The status of implementation progress shows 77% of outputs ‘on-track’, 9% ‘delayed’, and 14% ‘not yet started’.” – Of the 282 tasks to be implemented in 2019, 67% were either fully or mostly completed, 14% of them were halfway done, 5% have completed preparatory work and 14% have not yet started. As a result, the overall performance of the AWP 2019 is considered good.”
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “External reviews and evaluations, preferably in dose coordination with the DPCG, are planned at mid-term and end of the SP period” (Documents not made available (yet) to the evaluation team)
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – At the 1st MRC Summit in 2010, the 4 Prime Ministers decided to increase political and financial ownership through (i) full financial self-sustainability by 2030;.... – MRC is a body created in 1995

What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Switzerland was part of the Development Partners Troika for 3 years since July 2015, and Chair for one year from August 2016 onwards. – Switzerland has long-standing and deep know-how of environmentally friendly hydropower development

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “MRC’s Strategic Plan (SP) 2016—2020 is coherent with the regional Outcome 2 of SDC’s current Mekong Region Strategy (MRS) 2013-2017: “MRC member countries jointly better govern the natural resources in the Mekong River Basin to achieve sustainable management of Mekong water resources“.” (No such objective in the current MRS)
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Synergies expected with some initiatives of SDC’s Global Program Water – Synergies within the MRS not addressed
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progress indicators have been established at all levels of the logical framework. 7 specific on Gender of a total of 31 – The other approaches are not mentioned

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No close link with the current MRS (was more explicit with the previous one)
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Switzerland is part of the 15-member DPCG (Development Partner Consultative Group) and was member for 3 years of its 3-member Troika of Chair assuming the role of Chair for one year – The 15 member-DPCG in general and its 3-memberTroika of Chair and 2 Co-chairs play a crucial role in coordination and alignment of donors. The Troika acts so that the relatively large and diverse group of DPs speak (and write) with one consolidated voice in supporting MRC’s reform process.

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 1 – Period: 2016 -2020 – Likely to continue: yes
Key informants?
If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chair of MRC Development Partners Consultative Group (15 members) – Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS), Vientiane

N.4. CAM – GCP: Sub-National Democratic Development (SNDD)

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal³¹; and (ii) Mid-Term Review of the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD) Cambodia.³² The Evaluation Team has not yet received the last annual progress report.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support of government program: <i>'SDC supports the third phase National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD)'</i>²⁰ – Background: <i>'Cambodia's decentralization reform was introduced in 2000... The rationale for the reform was mainly political, to draw on the historical local roots of the Cambodian People's Party to establish its rural dominance. ... In 2010, the government adopted the 10- year National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD) that defined districts/municipalities as the administrative layer between communes(rural)/sangkats(urban) and provinces. The ISAF was later adopted in 2015 as a citizen feedback mechanism between citizens and authorities to enhance the quality and availability of social services.'</i>²⁰ – Change in focus: <i>Previously, 'SDC supported SNDD ...through a government basket fund. But in reaction to the forceful dissolution by the government of the CNRP [in 2017], a major opposition party, SDC decided to ... channel [funds] to a World Bank Trust Fund financing the ISAF mechanism. This way, SDC stays engaged in the decentralization reform while reducing its support to national government authorities.'</i>²⁰
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Basics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NP-SNDD: strategic focus on district and municipality level.²⁰ This is the second of four layers of government: commune, district, province, national. ▪ <i>'SNDD reform is the pillar of all ongoing reform programs, including Public Finance Reform and Public Administration Reform.'</i>²⁰ ▪ <i>'The Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF), with technical support from WB, was adopted as a citizens' feedback mechanism to facilitate participation at commune/sangkat level.'</i>²⁰

³¹ SDC (2019). Credit Proposal. Sub-National Democratic Development. Phase 3

³² Particip (2016). Mid-Term Review of the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD) Cambodia

- **Approach:** 'SDC's interest ... is to further **strengthen confidence** between the service recipients (demand-side) and the public institutions (supply-sided) at sub-national levels, and to deepen **the understanding of democratic principles** at sub-national level.²⁰ i.e. to promote democratic governance. 'The Trust Fund will allocate around 70% to the demand side of social accountability and 30% to the supply-side (RGC)'²⁰
- **Assumption:** 'SDC's support to ISAF ... is based on the assumption that **social accountability mechanisms promote democratic governance** through increasing the voice of citizen to participate ... in service delivery and development processes.'²⁰
- **Development partners 1²⁰:** Sub-national governments (commune/sangkat and district/municipality administrations, service providers) and Line ministries, in particular: NCDD-S and Ministries of Interior, Education, and Health
- **Drivers of change:** 'The ISAF is **driven by the RGC** and its mechanisms are well understood, owned and accepted by SNAs and service providers.... There is a lot of pressure on local authorities to deliver good quality services to the satisfaction of citizens'²⁰
- **Mechanism:** '**Community Accountability Facilitators (CAFs)**. CAFs are volunteers (circa 4,000), receiving capacity building and allowances from implementing NGOs. They play a key interface role between the citizens and the SNAs and service providers, and enjoy wide spread acceptance from the demand and supply side of social accountability. They mobilize communities and help their fellow citizens to understand their rights; facilitate the actions to improve public services, and work with local officials'²⁰
- **Impact hypothesis:** 'The quality of services provided to citizens, men and women, will improve, if they (demand-side) are empowered to participate fully in local governance structures and mechanisms; if partnerships between sub-national administrations (SNAs), CSOs and citizens are strengthened; if capacity and capability of SNAs and service providers (supply-side) are enhanced and if they are responsive, committed and fully accountable towards citizens.'

To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3

– Not discussed

What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?

– Document predate the Covid-19 Pandemic

Results

What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6

- **Results** from previous phases²⁰:
 - Local Governance Survey suggests that local governments have become more accountable and responsive to citizens²⁰
 - Service users and providers reported enhanced mutual understanding and improved communication as a result of the citizen monitoring process
 - Performance and budget information was collected, posted and disseminated for all three services annually in a total of 786 communes
 - Multi-sector community scorecards (based on performance assessments by citizens/service users and self-assessments by service providers) were successfully implemented in 786 communes, with the active involvement of more than 270,000 citizens (including 75% women)

- **Overall objective Phase 3:**
 - *'The objective of SNDD is – through ISAF- **to improve the performance of public service providers (primary schools, health centers and communes³³) with improved transparency, strengthened citizen engagement and responsive action.**'²⁰*
- **Envisaged outcomes Phase 3:**
 - (i) Performance of public service providers (primary schools, health centers and communes) is improved. (ii) Responsiveness of public service providers is improved (iii) Citizens' participation in monitoring public service providers and engaging in actions for improvement is enhanced. (iv) Citizens' voice in engaging with local public service providers is enhanced.*²⁰

What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7

- Contrary to other Credit Proposals, this one includes an annex with lessons learned. The listing offers however little insight into what works and what doesn't in ISAF's theory of change, i.e. it does not contain an analysis and critical reflection (on the Theory of Change). Useful insights offered are:
- *'While more than 554,000 people participated in last phase awareness-raising activities on I4Cs, **this still represents a small minority of citizens in target communes.** Steps should be taken both to enhance the effectiveness of current awareness-raising activities and to expand the dissemination of I4C data through the use of ICTs.'*²⁰
- *'Information for Citizens (I4C) post-on data represents a wealth of information both for citizens and state actors. In addition to posting and disseminating I4C findings at local level, it is important that sustainable systems and practices are introduced **to ensure that I4C findings are recorded and analyzed over time, to glean key messages and. inform decisions regarding service delivery and policy reforms.***
- **MTR 2016 – mandates and resources is key:**
 - *'the **program is focusing on the main issues:** accountability mechanisms, providing district and municipal (D/M) Sub National Authorities (SNAs) with useful functions appreciated by the people, and thirdly providing the D/M SNAs with the required financial resources to deliver on their mandates'³² The MTR stresses that it is important to give SNA **both mandates/functions and resources:** 'D/M council have become more active once given more responsibilities'.³²*
 - *'some reasonable **level of discretionary funding is equally (if not more) important** and that it is disappointing to note that a substantial increase of the D/M fund is not to be expected before 2018, the 8th year of the NP'³²*
 - *The reform program is **emerging organically** (than being driven).³²*
 - *'given the critical need for general awareness raising and information sharing on the reform, the additional **incorporation of mass media messaging** (and other forms of social marketing) within the CD approach by NCDD-S is also suggested.'³²*

Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8

- Not covered. Although the scope of NP-SNDD is national and the SAF will eventually be rolled out across the whole country – now 786 from ... covered.

How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9

- Not explicitly covered, but rests on the fact that initiative, ownership and implementation rests with government and uses government systems.

³³ the possible expansion of the ISAF to additional sectors (garbage management, agriculture for instance) is planned subject to available resources.

What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
– Not covered.

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
– <i>'The SNDD-ISAF corresponds to MRS 2018-2021 GCP domain, for which SDC-Cambodia emphasizes "transparent and accountable state institutions provide access to quality public services, in particular health, and promote space for constructive dialogue" ... By focusing on social accountability, SDC will contribute: "increasing influence and participation of citizens, in particular, women and vulnerable groups to foster inclusive and accountable development undertaken by sub-national governments (outcome 2)"".^{20&34}</i>
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
– Statement: <i>'Coordination and synergies with other projects and actors: Regional Economic Development; Sharing with and participating to LOGIN and DDLGN events'²⁰</i>
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
– The decision to shift resources from the government basked fund to the ISAF mechanism (funded through a World Bank Trust Fund) <i>'responds to a risk mitigation strategy (CSPM)'</i> . ²⁰
– <i>'The ISAF ... uses elements of a democratic system and ensures social harmony and stability in a country still marked with post-conflict symptoms'²⁰</i>
– <i>'Gender equality is a well-reflected indicator in the results framework [of SNDD-ISAF]'²⁰.</i>

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
– Not covered
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– Not covered
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
– Not covered

Additional information
Project status?
– Phase number: 3
– Period: 2019-2022

³⁴ SDC (2018) Cooperation Strategy Mekong Region 2018-2021

- Likely to continue: No (Phase 3 considered last phase of contribution to SNDD reform)²⁰

Key informants for field mission

- World Bank (Contract partner)
- Sub-national governments (commune/sangkat and district/ municipality administrations, service providers)
- Line ministries, in particular: National Committee for Democratic Development (NCDD-S), Min. of Interior, Min. of Education Youth and Sports and Min. of Health
- NGOs and CBOs: providers of technical support (facilitation, advocacy, etc.)

N.5. CAM – GCP: Kantha Bopha Foundation (KPF)

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal³⁵; (ii) last annual progress report³⁶.

Context analysis

Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1

- "Appelé en 1991 par le Roi pour y reconstruire un hôpital, le Dr Richner a mis au point un modèle unique, fortement marqué par le contexte post-conflit: soins gratuits et modernes."
- "Le rôle de la Suisse est premièrement de favoriser une solution financière durable et responsable pour le maintien des opérations, puis l'intégration complète des hôpitaux vers le système de sante national, tout en maintenant leur modèle de gestion."
- "Notre support contribue à la cohésion nationale et une image positive de la DDC et du DFAE auprès des électeurs et du Parlement."
- "Even if KBF fulfill only partially SDC requirements in terms of administrative capacity, due to the long relationship of SDC with KBF and the Cambodian authorities as well as the positive results of KBH over healthcare, the project is considered as highly important."
- "La Fondation adoptera de nouvelles stratégies financières et de communication car, comme la DDC, elle tiendra un dialogue politique visant à ce que les contributions cambodgiennes publiques et privées atteignent 80% du budget des hôpitaux d'ici 2025. "
- "Since 2013, SDC Swiss Cooperation Office in Phnom Penh (SCO-PNH) has had continued dialogues on financial sustainability of KBH with Ministry of Economy and Finances (MEF)."

Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2

- "Our impact hypothesis is that quality healthcare, free of charge and free of corruption, along with appropriate staff salaries, hospital organization and hygiene provided by the KBH will contribute to the delivery of equitable, efficient, and responsive health services and thus to poverty reduction."
- "SDC's financial support to the functioning of the KBH (to deliver quality curative and preventive care to all sick children and expecting mothers free of charge)"
- "Supporting the KBH is to sustainably improve the quality and access to public health services and to increase domestic financial support to KBH."

³⁵ SDC (2016). Credit Proposal. Kantha Bopha Foundation. Phase 9

³⁶ Stiftung Kinderspital Kantha Bopha (2020): Annual Report 2019

<p>Development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cambodia Kantha Bopha Foundation, Ministry of Health, Technical Working Group (TWG) on Kantha Bopha financial sustainability, Ministry of Economy and Finances (MEF), Partners for Health Cambodia (P4HC+), a network of 16 development partners <p>Development partners' interests, incentives, capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) is committed to achieving universal health coverage by 2030 as indicated in the Sustainable Development Goal 3.” – “The Cambodian Kantha Bopha Foundation's and the Royal Government of Cambodia are expected to cover 80% of the total KBH expenditure by 2028 (and 46% by 2021), making them less dependent on public and private fundraising in Switzerland.” – It is a politically highly sensitive context. – Extensive risk assessment with mitigation measures.
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic. But as it is flagship project in the health sector of Cambodia it certainly is / will be affected.

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<p>Main development results :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Regular and strengthened high-level dialogue between the hospitals and Foundation with the RGC and SDC.” – “The establishment of a Cambodian Kantha Bopha Foundation (CKF) with aim to guarantees KBH's operating model and financial sustainability.” – “The raising awareness to other development partners about KBH's cost effectiveness through the active participation of SDC in health financing working groups.” – “In 2016, Kantha Bopha Hospitals treated 65% of Cambodian patients for pediatric and maternal health cases. From 2015 to 2017, KBH increased its number of patients and operations significantly.” – “The Hospitals progressed on their sustainable financing and on the upkeep of their management model.” <p>The KBF provides SDC limited (but not incomplete) annual operational and financial reports.</p> <p>These reports make no reference at all to the stated objectives or to the logframe</p> <p>Quantitative data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Monitoring of KBH's specific objectives is done according to the Results Framework of the SDC governance domain, through progress reports and inclusion in the annual reports of the Mekong Region Strategy.” – MRCS indicator: IS1.1.2
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “No external evaluation has ever taken place in the Kantha Bopha Foudation (KPF) or Kantha Bopha Hospitals (KPH).” – KBF: “we are still urgently dependent on donations from Switzerland and hope for the continued faithful support of our many donors”.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The Gov. of CAM is very determined to preserve the KBH in the manner by which they were organized” – The KBF provides SDC annual operational and financial reports, which do not comply with SDC standards and provide little relevant info.
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – From 2015 to 2017, KBH increased its number of patients and operations significantly, but no scale-up in the proper sense
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advocacy (by SDC) for the development by KBH and KBF of a financing strategy and a formalization of all contracts between KB and their partners. – “Aware of the dependence of the Kantha Bopha model over foreign actors, the Gov. of CAM and SDC have been working jointly with the KBH since 2013 to find a sustainable exit strategy, especially on the financing side.” – “Since 2013, SDC Swiss Cooperation Office in Phnom Penh (SCO-PNH) has had continued dialogues on financial sustainability of KBH with Ministry of Economy and Finances (MEF), Ministry of Health (MoH), and KBH representatives.” – “The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) is committed to achieving universal health coverage by 2030 as indicated in the Sustainable Development Goal 3 and very determined to preserve the KBH in the manner by which they were organized.”
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “SDC's financial support remains crucial until a sustainable Cambodian financing is found.”

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The support to KBF is under the Local Governance, Citizens Participation and Health domain; it anchors its program focus according to the national priorities set out in the national Cambodia's 2019-2023 Rectangular Strategy, the National Strategic Development Plan and HSP 3, which puts governance and improved access to quality social (including health) services at their core.” – “Through its financial support to the KBH since 1995, SDC adheres to the objectives of the Kantha Bopha Foundation (KBF), which aims at reducing the maternal and child mortality and training health professionals. Outside of its financial support, SDC brings key networking opportunities with development partners on KBH sustainability and model replication.”
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – no
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The KBF provides SDC limited (but not incomplete) annual operational and financial reports. These reports make no reference at all to the stated objectives or to the logframe – The project is largely politically motivated and the portfolio management, therefore, follows a political logic.
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The KBF provides SDC limited (but not incomplete) annual operational and financial reports.” – “At least once a year, a meeting takes place between SDC HQ and KBF on annual reports and plans, allowing for an increasingly constructive dialogue.” – “Monitoring of KBH's specific objectives is done according to the Results Framework of the SDC governance domain, through progress reports and inclusion in the annual reports of the Mekong Region Strategy.” – “No external evaluation has ever taken place in the KBF or KBH.”
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 9 – Period: 2019 -2021 – Likely to continue: yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Although KBH’s CEO declares the project as "open end", KBF’s President envisions a progressive takeover by Cambodian nationals. Due to the strategic relevance of KB, SDC aims a progressive phasing out but only according to political opportunities and the materialization of a responsible Cambodian takeover. Until then, SDC already declared publicly that its contribution should be maintained under the present form.”
Key informants?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cambodia Kantha Bopha Foundation – Ministry of Health – Technical Working Group (TWG) on Kantha Bopha financial sustainability – Partners for Health Cambodia (P4HC+), a network of 16 development partners

N.6. CAM – AFS: Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries (PaFF): Support to Forestry and Fisheries Communities in Cambodia

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal³⁷; (ii) last annual progress report³⁸; and (iii) end-of-phase evaluation³⁹.

Context analysis
<p>Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Problem identification: <i>'Income from farming and natural resources remains fundamental to the livelihoods, nutrition and food security of 65% of Cambodians. ... The impact of man-made pressures on eco-systems and degradation of natural resources due to mining, land concessions, large-scale exploitation of water resources (irrigation, hydropower dams), river fisheries and forests, coupled with the effects of climate change and natural hazards, threaten these communities' sources of subsistence.</i>³⁷ – Government leadership: <i>'Government has enacted environmental policy reforms, enabled multi-stakeholder dialogue with the private sector to improve value chains for forest products, fish and eco-tourism, and made international commitments to sustainably manage Cambodia's environment.'</i>³⁷ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>'Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has established National Programmes for Community Forestry, Fisheries and Protected Areas which provide the basis for the promotion of community-based natural resource management... The RGC's target is to register 1,400 NRM groups with legal status by 2030</i>³⁷
<p>Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development partners 1: <i>'the reforms are a start and implementation must be aligned to put the new schemes into practice ... Many NRM groups have not yet availed themselves of these opportunities due to complex registration procedures and inadequate capacities. ... civil society organizations ... play a crucial role as intermediaries between NRM groups and authorities to provide capacity building and to advance inclusive natural resource planning and management, while effectively addressing livelihood needs of rural poor households.'</i>³⁷ – Development partners 2: <i>'provincial NRM departments lack sufficient budget and trained staff... Due to low salaries, the provincial authorities are confronted with high staff rotation. For some in the Government, protecting NR is not a key priority, which results in the approval of mega-construction projects and land concessions with no attention to long-term effects on sustainable growth. To counterbalance these conflicting interests, continued advocacy and technical assistance is essential to support the NRM authorities at all levels in the implementation of NRM reform and law revisions.'</i>³⁷ – Intervention logic : <i>'Working with Government, private sector, civil society and rural communities, PaFF's contribution to improving stakeholders' implementation capacity, knowledge and participation in development processes at national and local level will empower rural households to claim and secure their access to NR, as well as strengthen sustainable NRM and thus improve their income and livelihood resilience.'</i>³⁷

³⁷ SDC (2017). Credit Proposal. Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries (PaFF): Support to Forestry and Fisheries Communities in Cambodia. Phase 2.

³⁸ PaFF (2020). Partnership Program to Support Forestry and Fishery Communities in Stung Treng, Kratie, Kampong Thom And Preah Vihear Provinces, Cambodia. Annual Report 2019.

³⁹ Debord, P. (2019). Mid-Term Review. Partnership Program to Support Forestry and Fishery Communities. Phase 2.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Key elements of the programme include: 1) support and training for registration and legalization of NRM groups to secure access to community land; 2) capacity building of stakeholders to increase income and food security through enhanced NR value chains; 3) capacity building of authorities for the provision of extension services and coordination; and 4) technical support to authorities and NRM groups for the implementation of NRM guidelines, laws and sub-decrees.³⁷ – Teamwork: 'PaFF operates as a consortium of four organizations. By combining each organization's expertise – WWF on landscape and multi-stakeholder platform management, NTFP-EP on livelihoods, and RECOFTC and CEPA on strengthening NRM groups.³⁷
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
– Not discussed
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
– Document predate the Covid-19 Pandemic

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Results Phase 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'the development of 30 forestry and fishery communities reaching 5,300 households (16,000 people, 48% female). There were 18 community enterprises established to process and market honey, bamboo and fish, and to promote eco-tourism.³⁷ – Overall goal Phase 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Rural and indigenous communities and households increase their incomes and improve their resilience to economic and natural shocks by engaging in sustainable community-based livelihood approaches that protect their ecosystems and reduce pressure on their communal natural resource base.³⁷ – Envisaged outcomes Phase 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ '(i) Target communities have secure rights to their natural resources and are exercising them. (ii) Households in target communities increase their income through sustainable community-based forest and fishery-related enterprises and strategies. (iii) National and local enabling policy conditions support secure community rights over natural resources and the development of sustainable community-based enterprises.³⁷ – Target Phase 2: <p>'370 NRM groups in four provinces (Kratie, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom). This represents approximately 50,500 households (205,000 people including 50% women and 10% indigenous people) over an area of 307,000 ha of NRM area.³⁷ (Note: 'The forests and wetlands in Kratie, Stung Treng, Kampong Thom and Preah Vihear provinces (PaFF target area) contribute to the livelihoods of approximately 1.5 million rural people, of which up to 10% belong to indigenous groups.³⁷</p> – Results Phase 2 (end of 2019)³⁸: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fifty six community fisheries (CFis) out of target 162 CFis signed CFi agreement with the FiA, covering an area of 34,397ha and involving 20,352 members of CFis (9,345F and 6761P), equivalent to 7,158 households (889 female-headed households). Fifty three CFis out of target 70CFis secured approved CFi management plans (CFiMP). Forty CFis have implemented their CFiMP.

- **153 community forestry (CFs) out of target 185 CFs signed CF agreements** with the FAC, covering an area of 182,160 ha and involving 19,398 (9,548F) members of CFs, equivalent to 6,369 households. **Fifty CF management plans (CFMP) out of target 64 CFMPs were approved** by the Forestry Administration Cantonments (FACs).
- **Fifteen out of 16 Community-based enterprise (CBE) groups** supported by WWF (seven chicken raising, one fish raising, four cow raising, one Koh Dambong CBET, and two rattan collection groups) were established in early 2019. 144 households (three female-headed households) with a total of 569 people (285F) and 34 IP/11F (17 Phnong IP and 17 Kuoy IP) are the members of 15 CBEs.
- in 2019, **CBEs generated profits and contributed to the conservation**, 1) 10 honey collection CEBs generated profit: USD13,977 and contributed to the conservation: USD556, 2) Five Traing Chopsticks CBEs: profit: USD703 and contributed to conservation: USD32, 3) Four CBETs profit: USD11,046 and contributed to the conservation: USD423, 4) One Fish sauce processing CBE: profit: USD620 and contributed to the conservation: USD29.
- *'The PaFF team was able to submit proposed legal text to the Fisheries law revision both in Khmer and English versions to the Fisheries Administration (FiA). The inputs were focusing on the principle of collaboration management and sustainable self-financing of CFs. ... around 80% of recommended revisions were accepted by the FiA to include in the revised fisheries law.'*⁶⁸

What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7

- *'Communities make necessary efforts to protect and manage their NR if they see a return on investment, especially in the short term.'*⁶⁷
- *'The active involvement of local authorities largely facilitates the approval process.'*⁶⁷
- *'MAFF and MOE commitment to the implementation of NRM regulations has increased in the past years. Its implementation capacity is adequate, but often depends on officials' engagement.'*⁶⁷
- *'the financial capacity to fund the implementation of CF/CFi Management Plans is still limited. A number of self-financing mechanisms were introduced to CFs/CFis such as CF/CFi credit, income contributed from CBEs, membership and non-membership fees, etc.'*⁶⁸
- The Annual Report includes a key challenges and lessons learned section. The lessons are mostly specific / technical in nature. The **Report does not offer an in-depth analysis** by testing the project's impact hypothesis.
- *'Credit schemes are developed ... to support NRM and livelihoods. A necessary impetus is given by PaFF in the form of a grant, therefore entailing the opening of a bank account by the CF/CFi. ... there is a consensus among PaFF field staff that they have the potential to be a cost-effective development strategy to generate income and contribute to NRM (i.e. patrolling). Besides, the mechanism is especially attractive to women and is a positive factor of gender balance, with a high proportion of active women members.'*⁶⁹

Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8

- Phase 2 extends the reach / scale of the project. The scaling-up / -out beyond the project is not discussed.

How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9

- *'As far as sustainability is concerned, the "chief culture" prevents proper dissemination of information and capacities from one group committee to the next. This is aggravated by: 1/ the technical complexity of official guidelines, especially of management plans; 2/ The lack of funds to implement management plans, which*

<p><i>prevents members from exercising newly gained technical and management skills and thus risk losing them.</i>⁶⁹</p> <p>– <i>' CBNRM groups systematically complain about the lack of funds for patrolling: members very rarely contribute their fee, contributions from CBEs have started but are insufficient, none of the communes visited by the MTR ever dedicated any fund to NRM, and provincial funds are also insufficient.'</i></p>
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
– Not covered

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<p>– Statement: PAFF programme is in line with SDC MRS 2013-2017 and AFS goal (and by default with MRS 2018-2021 as it kept the same focus: <i>'women and men, including indigenous people, have safe and secured access to as well as sustainable control over natural resources (fisheries, forestry) and production means.'</i>¹⁴⁰)</p>
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<p>– Statement Credit Proposal: <i>'Coordination and synergies with other projects and actors: ... SDC country programme (CHAIN, SNDD, SDP), SDC regional programme (MRLG, RECOFTC), and SDC global programme (ASF-CC)</i>⁶⁷:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>'The programme will strengthen links to SDC's TVET and CHAIN programme'</i>⁶⁷ ▪ <i>'PaFF is connected to the Mekong Region Land Governance and RECOFTC Regional Programme, cross-fertilizing SDC's Mekong Region strategy.'</i>⁶⁷ <p>– Annual Report: <i>'NFTP-EP coordinated with Swisscontact and Kratie PDot to provide a six weeks hospitality training program to Koh Samseb CBET.'</i>¹³⁸</p>
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<p>– 'Gender equality inclusion: <i>PaFF has successfully advocated for increasing the number of women in the management of NRM groups and for gender-responsive CBEs, and will continue to do so. A focus will be on female-headed households and indigenous people's inclusion, while developing livelihood opportunities and fostering networks for women to advocate for their interests.'</i>⁶⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>'The PaFF team has promoted women empowerment to achieve gender equality through strengthening women capacity, promoting women in CF/CFi/CBE management committee and CF/CFi networks, and introducing CF/CFi credits and alternative livelihoods activities.'</i>⁶⁸ <p>– Disaster risk reduction (DRR): <i>With the support of SDC/HA, the programme assessed potential disaster risks during the initial phase and has established action plans on DRR mainstreaming, which will be continued in Phase 2.'</i>⁶⁷</p>

⁴⁰ SDC (2018) Cooperation Strategy Mekong Region 2018-2021.

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
– Not covered
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– Not covered
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
– Not covered

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 2 – Period: 2017-2021 – Likely to continue: no
Key informants for field mission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – World Wide Fund for Nature, Cambodia (Contract partner) – Consortium partners: Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP); Centre for People and Forests (RECOFTC); Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA) – Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (including Fishery Administration and Forestry Administration) – Ministry of Environment – CF/CFIs – Provincial departments

N.7. CAM – AFS: Cambodian Horticulture Project advancing Income and Nutrition (CHAIN)

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁴¹; (ii) last annual progress report⁴²; (iii) a mid-term review⁴³, (iv) evaluation of previous project phase⁴⁴

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “In response to the growing demand and marketing potential of agricultural products, the Government promotes the transition from subsistence farming to modern farming systems.”

⁴¹ SDC (2017), Credit Proposal, Cambodian Horticulture Project Advancing Income and Nutrition (CHAIN). Phase 2

⁴² SNV / Swisscontact (2020), Annual Report (January – December 2019)

⁴³ Van Keulen, SNV (2019), Internal Mid-term Review CHAIN II

⁴⁴ Author unknown (2017), CHAIN Project - Phase 1 Evaluation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The Government is increasingly interested in horticulture sector development, given its economic potential and important contribution to food and nutrition security for the vulnerable population.”
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The theory of change: Building on the achievements of the first phase, CHAIN 2 will continue with its focus on market development of local and safe vegetables, the capacity of smallholder farmers to respond to the market requirements and to consolidate the synergies with and between stakeholders for inclusive sector growth and enhancement of the enabling environment.” – Development partners: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) are the main governmental stakeholders. The provincial departments (PD) of the two ministries are the main dialogue partners for advocating for an enabling environment to enhance horticulture value chains. <p>SDC's support to development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Outcome 3: Improved enabling environment supporting the development of the horticulture sector. Output: Policy issues discussed among sector actors and MAFF; knowledge effectively built and shared; MAFF and other decision makers engaged in the horticulture sector. – “At national level the project team will closely collaborate with MAFF in formulating a horticulture policy and promoting GAP and organic production standards (COorAA), and with MoWA in working on Women’s Economic Empowerment at a strategic level.” – “The institutional and financial capacities of both ministries for project management and implementation are weak, and require support and capacity building.” <p>Operating environment for development partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Agencies of line ministries (PDMAFF, PDOWA) have limited capacities and resources to completely take over after project phase out (exacerbated by high staff turnovers). Mitigation: Continue investing in capacity building” – Extensive risk assessment with mitigation measures.
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<p>Main development results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – phase 1 successfully established market links along the horticulture value chain, reaching out to 6,000 farmers and processors (68% women and 6% indigenous people) – Vegetable farmers increased crop yields and farm incomes, while households consumed more vegetables.”

- Farmers adopted the introduced production technologies, while around 70% changed the type of vegetables and the timing of production following improved access to market information and business planning
- Around 90% of the households changed eating habits due to having more vegetables available and better nutrition awareness
- CHAIN built networks of farmer groups, input suppliers and traders for adjusting production and trade to market demand
- It improved the capacity of suppliers, service providers and traders to support farmers in agro-techniques, business development and market links, while their services also became more gender sensitive
- It facilitated close collaboration between public and private sector partners, and improved their capacity to provide effective and gender-sensitive services to farmers
- It contributed to the registration of bio control agents (BAC)

Quantitative data:

- "Working with 400 farmer groups and 64 traders in four provinces, the CHAIN project reaches out to 10,000 farmers (♀ 75% / 6% IP / 7,400 farmers). 65% of farmers have adopted new technologies in production systems. Thanks to better market access the average incomes have increased to USD 276/year (baseline 2017: USD 116). Local traders are buying around 21 tons of vegetable per day from farmers during the first semester of 2019. Assessments show that market share of local vegetables has increased by 10% in the target area in the four provincial markets to 47%."
- MRCS Indicators: IS 2.1.1., IS 2.2.2

What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7

- "Efficiency is the major factor recommended for attention to ensure in Phase 2 proceeds successfully. There are two aspects of efficiency of interest to the Phase 2 planning; firstly, the efficiency of the project implementation, to ensure it meets its objectives with target budget; secondly, that the project can facilitate the development of efficient value chains in areas with special constraints." (Evaluation Phase 1)
- "Key lessons learnt: Coordination of service delivery has to be organized more efficiently in order to reach out to farmers in more remote areas for continued support and advice. Vegetable and fruit processing as a business has proven to be complex, and requires stronger support and investment from private sector actors. Facilitating gender-sensitive services by partners is essential for women to benefit from horticulture sector development. The project must provide further training on safe production (GAP/organic). Access to water and the use of appropriate water storage and distribution technologies are critical to commercial vegetable farming, as it allows farmers to produce at times of high demand and higher prices. CHAIN 2 will assess appropriate technologies for the conditions in the various project sites and promote their adoption by farmers through a market-based approach."
- "There are already some clear recommendations for CHAIN 3 based on the state of the sector, the learning to date, and what is possible in a two-year window. For example, water access and water management, year-round production, sustainable solutions for agronomic extension, and promotion of problem-solving within the system." (MTR)
- "CHAIN is on the right track: progressing against targets and effecting positive, inclusive changes in the horticulture market system." (AR 2019)

Development partners' interests, incentives, capacities:

- "The Government is increasingly interested in horticulture sector development, given its economic potential and important contribution to food and nutrition security for the vulnerable population. It promotes the transition from subsistence farming to modern

<p>farming systems with enhanced productivity, diversification and commercialization through improved access to services, partnerships with private public actors and strengthening of formal farmers' associations and contract farming."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "The institutional and financial capacities of both ministries for project management and implementation are weak, and require support and capacity building." – "Agencies of line ministries (PDAFF, PDoWA) have limited capacities and resources to completely take over after project phase out (exacerbated by high staff turnovers)"
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "Water management is one of the main constraints for farmers to scale up their horticulture activities." – "Institutionalization through horticulture policy. The current and upcoming efforts to formulate horticulture policy create an important opportunity to institutionalize strategies that will support sustainable and scalable changes in the horticulture system, based on learning from CHAIN's efforts." (MTR)
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "Sustainability is at the core of the CHAIN project as it aims at strengthening horticulture market systems and the capacity of the sector actors to provide services to the targeted farmers, establishing a network of interactions between market stakeholders that ensures access to supplies, knowledge and technologies as well as marketing of the local production. In phase 2 the project will expand its outreach to new farmers and sector actors for linking them to markets while building on the achievements of phase 1. Phase 3 will consolidate CHAIN's efforts in market development and disseminate best practices within the horticulture sector. The established market systems and networks of sector actors and farmers will continue to function once CHAIN ends."
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "The CHAIN project is in line with SDC's Mekong Region Strategy 2018–2021 and the goal of the AFS domain in Cambodia, namely to support rural women and men including indigenous people to improve market-oriented production capacities, nutrition awareness and livelihood resilience."
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – IFAD-funded programme ASPIRE & AIMS – DFAT-funded programme CAVAC II – KfW–Rural Infrastructure Programme (RIP) – USAID-funded programme HARVEST 2 – GIZ–Regional Economic Development Programme RED III/IV – SDC Country Programme (PaFF, SDP)
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aligned with SDC's introduction of the 'Leave no one behind' approach' (MTR)

- Outcome 1: Increased access for farmers to and use of gender responsive extension and business development services of private and public horticulture sector actors.
- The project aligns with the Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Framework in Agriculture 2016-2020, recognising the significant contribution of women to agricultural labour and production.
- The project has developed the Women's Economic Empowerment strategy to ensure the successful engagement of women and indigenous people in commercial horticulture as a means to increase their power over economic decisions that influence their lives.
- With the support of SDC/HA, the CHAIN team has assessed potential risks of natural disasters during the first phase. DRR mainstreaming will be continued based on established action plans.

Implementation management

How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11

- No info found

How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12

- The functioning of the project will be assessed on a quarterly basis through an internal monitoring mechanism, covering the use of funds and human resources, progress in activity implementation and output delivery. Results achievement at outcome level will be assessed on an annual basis. In 2020, SDC will commission an external end-of-phase evaluation to assess progress made, identify key lessons and inform the design of the final phase of CHAIN

Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13

- No info found

Additional information

Project status?

- Phase number: 2
- Period: 2017 -2020
- Likely to continue: yes (Phase 3 will consolidate CHAIN's efforts in market development and disseminate best practices within the horticulture sector)

Key informants?

If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?

- Consortium SNV / Swisscontact (contract partners)
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) are the main governmental stakeholders
- The project continued to work in partnership at provincial level with the Provincial Departments of Forestry and Fisheries (PDAFF) and Provincial Departments of Women Affairs (PDoWA) and five local NGO's namely: Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT), Non-Timber Forest Products Organisation (NTFP), Khmer Buddhist Association (KBA), Rural Community and Environment

Development Organization (RCEDO) and Khmer Association for Development of Countryside (KAFDOC).

N.8. CAM – SDE: Decent Employment for Youth in Cambodia (DEY)

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁴⁵;

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “TVET, youth employment and labour market challenges are high on the national agenda and not only of interest for the government, but also for the private sector and the young population.” – “The challenges mentioned above are clearly identified in the priorities of Cambodia's Development Strategy 2019-2023 (Rectangular Strategy IV), National Employment Policy 2015-2025, National TVET Policy 2017-2025, Industrial Development Policy 2015-2025 and the National Policy on Youth Development. They acknowledge the need for increased youth participation, and strengthened public private partnership.”
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The project will strengthen and improve the coordination and capacity of the government, private sector, trade union and youth associations to achieve the planned results.” <p>Development partners⁴⁶:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT), National Employment Agency (NEA), MoEYS, Ministry of Economics and Finance (MEF) and the Ministry of Tourism (MoT). – Business and employers association, such as CAMFEBA, Youth Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia, Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association, Federation of Associations for SMEs of Cambodia and Chambers of Commerce. <p>SDC's support help to these development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – MoLVT has the lead for coordination with different relevant stakeholders. There are various coordination mechanisms such as the National Sector Skills Councils and the Technical Working Group on TVET, with co-lead by SDC. Strengthen the leadership and capacities of MoLVT for a full ' implementation of the various project interventions and initiatives together with different stakeholders therefore is key.” – “The project will work closely with the National Employment Agency to identify and forecast the market demand.” <p>Development partners' interests, incentives, capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The government, especially the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT), the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) have shown commitment and actively engaged in the project design and implementation.”

⁴⁵ SDC (2020), Credit Proposal, Decent Employment for Youth in Cambodia (DEY), Phase 2 (Title of Phase 1: United for Youth Employment in Cambodia)

⁴⁶ The International Development Research Center defines boundary partners as '*individuals, groups or organizations with whom a program interacts directly and with whom the program anticipates opportunities [to affect change]*'. Earl, S., Carden, F., & Smutylo, T. (2001). Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. Ottawa: International Development Research Center.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Some initiatives such as life skills and entrepreneurship education, Recognition of Prior Learning, Basic Education Equivalency Programme are being scaled up by the government and have been included in its strategies and action plans.” – The coordination between government and private sector as key drivers of change plays a strategic and sustainable role to support youth <p>Operating environment for development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Project partners from the private sector all show interest and commitment to promote skills development. However, dialogue and coordination with government is deficient, as well as knowledge and practical experiences on how to contribute to envisaged solutions and to comply with government policies and requirements.” – “Scope of influence of youth organizations and Trade Unions is limited by government control as well as technical capacities when it comes to the TVET sector.” – “Coordination among UN agencies remains challenging.” “The role of UNRC taking a lead for the four UN agencies is crucial.” <p>Assumptions about external environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Extensive risk assessment with mitigation measures. – “Risks at programme level refer to still low levels of mutual trust and few experiences of collaboration between government and private sector to address the challenges in TVET and youth employment.” – A number of contextual and institutional risks (see risk assessment) – “The private sector may lose interest and commitment if there is no return to investment.”
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
– China is co-funding together with EU, SIDA (together 27%)
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
– Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<p>Main development results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Phase I met the needs of young women and men by providing access to TVET training, formal and non-formal education, entrepreneurial skills, soft skills, career guidance, literacy and rights at work, in line with national priorities and policies.” – “By the end of 2023, across all the 3 outcome areas the project will support a total of 168,560 (F:50%) to access training, education, employment, entrepreneurship, business development and relevant labor market information. 3400 young women and men are expected to obtain employment/self-employment with decent monthly earnings, 1000 of them in formal employment. At the policy level, the project will strengthen the implementation of the various policies toward the decent employment of young women and men.”
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
– Too early to tell
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
– Too early to tell

How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “There will be an ongoing dialogue with the RGC on prioritization of National Budget planning and allocations to progressively increase support for the various elements within existing national policy commitments which contribute to enhancing decent employment prospects for young women and men. Strategies to improve dialogue and coordination (led by MoLVT) between government stakeholders and the private sector are also key elements of the project towards sustainability.”
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “It is in line with SOC's Mekong strategy 2018-2021, and its respective skills development and employment domain for Cambodia to promote and facilitate equitable access to quality skills development and youth employment.”
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “SDC will ensure synergies with its SDP and PROMISE projects, incl. coordination with government partners, private sector and with regard to target provinces. SDC organizes 4 times per year common meetings to promote exchange, avoid duplication and identify common interests.”
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The expansion of gender-responsive and green entrepreneurship education and business training in the formal education curriculum and TVET programme is crucial as it has a long prospect.” – “The project is premised on a human-rights-based approach, gender equality and women's empowerment, environmental sustainability, including promotion of green skills and green jobs, youth participation/inclusion in societal decision-making processes and conflict sensitivity to monitor and avoid any discrimination towards a specific group. These aspects are included along the PCM.”

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The M&E activities will follow the latest UNDG guidelines.”
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 2 – Period: 2020 -2023 – Likely to continue: yes, the overall duration of the project is foreseen for 11 years (2017-2028)
Key informants?
If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT), National Employment Agency (NEA), MoEYS, Ministry of Economics and Finance (MEF) and the Ministry of Tourism (MoT). – Business and employers association, such as Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Association (CAMFEBA), Youth Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia, Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association, Federation of Associations for SMEs of Cambodia and Chambers of Commerce. – UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) will play a crucial role in leading the DEY as a joint programme of UN agencies in Cambodia (ILO, UNICEF and UNESCO).

N.9. Lao PDR – GCP: LAO DECIDE INFO

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁴⁷; and (ii) last annual progress report⁴⁸.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Problem identification: <i>'The lack of strategic coordination among public-sector agencies and the sharing of data and information ... led to a critical shortage of clarity regarding the country's socio-economic development priorities ... creating confusion and a loss of efficiency in public administration, undermining prospects for inclusive and sustainable planning and implementation. While information is increasingly shared among different institutions of the GoI, questions about data quality, information ownership, and unclear mandates for information sharing, along with persistently low capacity levels throughout the government, are hampering productive and continuous information integration across thematic sectors and administrative levels. Further, there is a disconnection between institutions in charge of data and information generation, research bodies making use of the data, and the information needs of policy-makers. This limits the usability of information in addressing pressing development challenges.'</i>⁴⁷
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development partners 1: <i>'The final phase 4, will seek for strategic engagement with decision makers, involving them in the identification of key policy issues, development of knowledge products, and incorporation of the knowledge products into national policies'</i>⁴⁷

⁴⁷ SDC (2018). Credit Proposal. Lao DECIDE Info. Phase 4.

⁴⁸ CDE (2019). Progress Report. Knowledge for Development. 2.7.2018 – 30.6.2021. Reporting Period: 2.7.2018 – 30.6.2019.

- **Development partners 2:** 'the planned partnership with NIER⁴⁹ will enhance the sustainability and long term impact of the hitherto support to the Lao PDR. ... *NIER takes up a key position within the GoL to provide concrete policy advice and guidance at highest level through scientific analysis of national information ... NIER has emerged as a key institution ... through the merger of the Lao People Revolution Party's Central Committee Office's Strategic Economic Research Unit and the Ministry of Planning and Investment's main policy research institution*⁴⁷ NIER is politically embedded and has the mandate: 'to update and modernize its information base as a basis for providing scientific guidance to national development planning.'⁴⁷
- **Development partner 3:** 'As the producer and owner of key statistical data sets compiled in the integrated platform, the **Lao Statistics Bureau** will be an important partner. ... However, LSB is limited by a **tendency toward an inward-looking viewpoint**, preferring to hold data rather than share it, and a **reluctance to incorporate data produced by other institutions**, constituting **important obstacles to cross-sectoral and multi-institutional collaboration**. ... [under phase 3, LSB produced] limited results and a rather disappointing performance.'⁴⁷
- **Demand-driven:** 'extensive complementary consultation has been carried out with key decision-makers in 13 departments representing the five ministries'⁴⁷
- **Strategy:** '**engaging with high-level decision makers** in identification of key policy issues to be addressed through research activities, and by the incorporation of research outputs into national policies and legislation.'⁴⁷
- **Impact hypothesis:**
 - Through **clarified mandates and processes**, combined with the required technical means and capacities in place, provided political will; the GoL will be better equipped to engage in and realize a regularly updated integrated national development information base.
 - **A solid and up-to-date information basis at the hands of research institutions with the relevant capacities supports the sustainable and equitable development of the country**

To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3

- Not discussed

What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?

- Report predate the Covid-19 Pandemic

Results

What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6

- **Results Phase 3:**
 - Lao DECIDE Info has fostered (i) comprehensive technical and institutional solutions (ii) the integration of information from different sectors, (iii) data analysis, and (iv) development of new policy knowledge for decision making.
 - **Capacities, processes**, and mechanisms for cross-sectoral information sharing and integration have been fostered and established.

⁴⁹ National Institute for Economic Research (NIER) is the Government's primary think tank, reporting both to the Prime Minister and the Party Central Committee. Its main mandate is to provide the GoL with specific knowledge in support of the monitoring and implementation of the country's 8th National Socioeconomic Development Plan, smooth graduation from LDC status and towards the achieving of the internationally agreed-upon Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

- **Technical and institutional solutions** for cross-sectoral information management have been realized, including a **national database** with cross-sectoral information sharing and integration in phases 2 and 3.
 - Key integrated development analysis and **knowledge products** have been developed, for example: (i) Socio-Economic Atlas (Phase 1), (ii) The National Population and Housing Census, (iii) Land concession inventory, (iv) Quality investment assessment, (v) Poverty maps (Phase 1); (vi) Socio-economic disparity map, and (vii) ODA coordination map.
- **Objectives Phase 4:**
- **Goal:** *'Policies are shaped by making use of available quality information and knowledge on the dynamics and the interplay of economic, social and ecological dimensions in support of equitable socio-economic development and ecological sustainability, while fostering the accountability of decision makers.'*⁴⁷
 - **Objectives:** *'enhance continuous cross-sectoral and vertical integration of national information from a broad range of thematic sectors and (2) develop and feed new knowledge products into the nation's policy dialogue that informs key strategic decisions and policies'*⁴⁷
 - **Outcomes:** *'(i) Thematic sector ministries and selected sub-national offices continuously share key national data and information on a common platform for integration of relevant and up-to-date information. (ii) Lao decision-makers and research institutions jointly identify strategic knowledge gaps, engage in integrated information analysis to fill the gaps, and effectively apply gained knowledge ... for reaching the 8th NSEDP and SOG targets.'*
- **Results Phase 4 – one year into implementation:**
- Example: *'The field work on land concessions conducted during the Phase III of the Lao DECIDE info project, where several key departments of four Ministries were jointly contributing to a new integrated information base, provided a solid basis for cross - sectorally integrated analysis. At the same time, the leaders of each of those Ministry were under pressure from the Prime Minister to report progress ... to have a good overview of where what kind of concessions were granted, and to be able to distinguish between investments that contributed to national growth and poverty alleviation and those that do not perform as expected. This, combined with the trust that CDE gained ... provided a good basis for active engagement of the project in policy dialogue processes related to land concessions. Throughout the first year, in particular the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, but also the Vice Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry and of Planning and Investment were actively requesting information and insights derived from the new integrated information base on land concessions. This provided the opportunity to the project to actively engage in exchanges with those leaders, and to feed key new knowledge directly in the on - going GoL internal debate on land concessions, which was then reported to the Prime Minister almost on a monthly basis.'*⁴⁸
 - *'Researchers from agriculture, environment, mining, legal and social sciences engaged in the analysis of the results of the national land concession inventory and the data of the assessment of quality of investments in land. ... the results of the analysis ... were reported to leaders of MoNRE, MAF, MEM and MPI, both proactively from the project, as well as on request from individual ministries. As a direct result ... a series of PM Notifications and Instructions were issued between December 2018 and June 2019'*

What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Lessons learned phase 1 – 3:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Increasing the confidence of data owning institutions about the usefulness of their data for shaping policies and decisions ... is critical. ▪ The quality, reliability and visibility of information and analytic products ... is fundamental to the promotion of broader data sharing and usage. ▪ The release of printed outputs (e.g. the Socio-economic Atlas) helps increasing the demand by different stakeholders for improved access to digital data. ▪ The difficulty of addressing institutional challenges of sharing data and information within a broad, multi-stakeholder setup was underestimated. ▪ Significant change of mentalities and practices towards a more progressive use of information ... is a time-consuming process. ▪ The institutional setup, with a pre-defined group of institutions, restricts a more flexible and broader participation of Lao institutions ... potentially preventing the inclusion of new progressive champions.'
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
– Not discussed
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'The relevant achievements to date are significant, although still somewhat fragile.'</i>⁴⁷ – <i>'The project will build on the established formal intra-governmental mandates, to further strengthen the necessary technical and institutional capacities of the participating partners, to continuously update, share, and integrate relevant information'</i>⁴⁷ – <i>'Key aspects for ensuring sustainability of project achievements include strengthened and clarified mandates and ownership of relevant Lao institutions, the necessary human and technical capacities, and the availability of the technical infrastructure and the necessary resources.'</i>⁴⁷
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'Building on the availability of relevant innovative Swiss knowledge and expertise, the Lao DECIDE Info project ... promotes Swiss innovations through CDE as a Swiss service provider (e.g. user-friendly spatial and statistical data and web-based open access to detailed socio-economic data and information)'.</i>⁴⁷ CDE = 'valued scientific expertise'⁴⁷

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
– Cooperation Strategy is not mentioned in Credit Proposal.
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
– Credit Proposal only lists coordination and synergies with other projects in opening Fact Sheet: ' <i>TABI, PEI, PTT, LURAS and MRLG</i> '

How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'the project will apply Conflict Sensitivity Program Management (CSPM) by conducting annual stakeholder analysis. This will serve to update information on the relevant reform champions; evaluate political risks; identify opportunities to influence public policies; identify opportunities to include individuals and groups who are important for the success for the project; identify opportunities to change stakeholders' behaviour; and finally improve project planning.'⁴⁷</i> – <i>'With regard to gender, the project will pay particular attention to aspects of gender in terms of active participation in the project, as well as development of gender-specific information and knowledge.'⁴⁷</i>

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
– Not discussed
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– Not discussed
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
– Not discussed

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 4 – Period: 2018-2021 – Likely to continue: no (final phase)
Key informants for field mission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ministry of Planning and Investment (lead national partner Phase 3) – Lao Statistics Bureau – National Institute for Economic Research (lead national partner Phase 4) – The Institute for Legislative Studies – The Lao E-Government Center – Center for Development and Environment (CDE) – Line ministries – CDE progress report includes detailed list. – National University of Laos (NUoL)

N.10. LAO – GCP: Poverty Reduction Fund III (PRF)

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁵⁰; (ii) last annual progress report⁵¹;

Context analysis
<p>Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The recent World Bank Systematic Country Diagnostics (2016) identified that about 42% of the bottom 4Q%2 in Lao PDR need tailored policy interventions. This group is predominantly ethnic minority living in highlands, generally unconnected to external markets or services and have low capital endowments.” – “Recognizing the increasing inequality and persistent rural poverty, the Government of Lao PDR through its 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020 calls for tailored interventions³ to improve the welfare of the poorest groups.” – “There have been significant changes in governance environment in Lao PDR, the amended Lao Constitution and several legal framework for local administration were adopted by the National Assembly in late 2015, for instance the Law on Provincial People's Assembly and the Law on Local Administration.” – “In 2016, the GoL decided to apply the “Sam Sang” (three builds), a decentralization policy initiative from 2012, to all 145 districts nationwide.”
<p>Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The overall goal of the Poverty Reduction Fund is to improve access to basic services for the project's targeted poor communities. The goal would be achieved through inclusive community level and local development processes with emphasis on ensuring sustainability”. – “The PRF III will build on the strengthened bottom-up processes and the institutional platforms supported under the PRF II and leverage them to further improve the rural poor's access to public services.” <p>Development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The Government of Laos oversees PRF activities through the PRF National Administrative Board composed of high level members from 10 central Ministries and 10 provincial governments.” – “At local level, the PRF III will continue to be implemented under the oversight of the District Governors.” – “The World Bank will continue to play a key role in project development and steering, and in bringing in particular expertise (technical and thematic knowledge.” <p>SDC's support to development partner :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Depuis 2008, la DDC s'est jointe au gouvernement et la Banque Mondiale pour contribuer ce fonds. “ – “La Suisse a aussi contribué significativement au renforcement de méthodologies participatives et la réorientation du projet pour qu'il bénéficie aux personnes et régions les plus pauvres du pays” – “Le suivi est assuré par la participation active de la Suisse aux missions conjointes de supervision en amont du Comité de Pilotage du programme.” – “SDC's particular focus is monitoring in the area of citizen's engagement, gender and ethnicity inclusiveness, harmonisation of bottom-up participatory planning.”

⁵⁰ SDC (2016), Credit Proposal, Poverty Reduction Fund III (PRF). Phase 4

SDC (2020), Additional Credit

⁵¹ Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2020), Poverty Reduction Fund Phase III, Annual Progress Report (January – December 2019)

Operating environment for development partners:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "Given the chronic fiscal deficit, there are unlikely to be an immediate public financial management changes that give more budget to local levels in the foreseeable future." – "Overall risk of the PRF III project is moderate." – Extensive risk assessment with mitigation measures.
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "Furthermore, PRF will also continue working with LMC countries (Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) about Joint Research Project of the impact of using Community Driven Development (CDD) approach on rural development and poverty eradication."
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<p>Main development results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "About 1,930 small-scale rural infrastructures (water direct supply systems, schools, dispensaries, rural roads) have been financed and benefited more than 655,000 rural poor (10% of the total population) in over 1,300 villages." – "About 1'000'000 villagers have participated in the PRF planning activities. Benefits include: increase of 37% in use of health services; increase of 86% in access to safe water resources; and increase of 48% in access to all weather roads in target villages." – "About half the direct beneficiaries are women, and ethnic minorities account for 75% of direct beneficiaries." – "The quality of participation of women and ethnic groups improved significantly since the Mid Term Review (Feb. 2014)." – "The Kumban Development Plans (KDP) developed based on the priorities identified by villages are increasingly recognized by GoL agencies and development partners as useful resources that include many high priority investments." <p>Quantitative data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – MRCS indicators Lao: IS 1.1.2., IS 1.21.
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<p>"The PRF III takes into account the lessons from the project implementation and main findings of the Impact Evaluation of the PRF II as following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – PRF sub-projects are generally well built and maintained, but communities face difficulties maintaining road sub-projects – PRF's bottom-up processes should be more integrated with district planning processes to address problems which cannot be addressed by Kumban block grants provided by PRF. – The Deepen Community Driven Development (DCDD) approach, piloted in 4 provinces, has successfully strengthened community engagement." – "PRF II creates the perception of greater voice for communities in decision-making. However, the perception of a stronger voice has not resulted in increased

<p>participation or active participation for women and poor households in village's affairs in general."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "SDC's particular focus is monitoring in the area of citizen's engagement, gender and ethnicity inclusiveness, harmonization of bottom-up participatory planning." – "The contribution of PRF goes beyond directly financing the improvement of tertiary infrastructure. The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) developed and endorsed a "National Participatory Planning Manual at Village level (PPM)" in 2012, in close collaboration with the PRF, based on the PRF bottom-up planning processes." <p>Development partners' interests, incentives, capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "Given the chronic fiscal deficit, there are unlikely to be an immediate public financial management changes that give more budget to local levels in the foreseeable future." – "The PRF received the 2015 ASEAN Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Leadership Award, for its leading and exemplary contribution in rural development and poverty reduction."
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "By renewing its support to the PRF, SDC can expect to obtain meaningful development results at large scale and to contribute to the scaling up of the PRF's approaches into the local government's operations, and ultimately support the country's effort to graduate from the LDC's status by 2024." – "SDC's contribution has allowed the PRF to expand its activities to new districts, to enhance the targeting towards the poorest and to promote the value of strong community participation in local development processes at community and at local and national levels of the government." – "A full-scale impact evaluation will not be carried out as the impact evaluation of the PRF II has demonstrated the validity of the PRF model." (Impact evaluation of the PRF II not made available to the evaluation team)
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – "The main challenge facing the PRF is that of sustainability beyond the intervention of donor agencies. Ensuring sustainability for a poverty reduction initiative of this nature is likely to last longer than the planned duration of PRF III." – "There are policy shortfalls that need to be addressed such as greater clarity on the GoL's decentralisation policy "Sam Sang", including institutional and fiscal frameworks for service delivery and local development; and stronger commitment and capacities of local authorities in participatory planning." – "There is however positive change in the GoL's approach to bottom-up planning and service delivery as evidenced in the revised Law on Local Administration (2015) which formally recognizes the development and implementation of Village Development Plans as the duty of village authorities." – "In view to enhance sustainability perspective of PRF's bottom-up planning approaches, pilots are currently on-going under PRF II, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and District Planning Offices, to further integrate the PRF's village planning procedure into the GoL's National Participatory Manual (PPM), and in districts' socio-economic development plans."
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The proposed contribution to the PRF is aligned with SDC’s Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2013-2017, and its goal in the Local Governance and Citizen’s Participation Domain (LGCP).”
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “SDC foresees to support the next phase of the National Governance and Public Administration Reform Programme (NGPAR). Hence, the PRF III would benefit from the NGPAR’s continued support in developing the capacity of district officials through the District Development Fund (DDF) where geographical coverage overlaps.”
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The PRF has a strong gender and ethnicity orientation, these dimensions are being fully considered in programme design and activity planning, implementation and monitoring.”

Implementation management
How effective is SDC’s portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found.
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “SDC monitoring will be based primarily on project progress reports (6 months and annual), and through participation at bi-yearly joint field supervision missions which are held ahead of the Program Steering Committee Meetings.”

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 4 – Period: 2016 -2021 – Likely to continue: “eventually support a subsequent phase until 2024.”
Key informants?
If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Contracting partner: Ministry of Finance: – Main Implementer: Lao Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

N.11. LAO – GCP: Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law (CEGGA)

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁵²; (ii) last annual progress report⁵³; (iii) a mid-term review⁵⁴

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “In light of the “European Joint Programming” process in Lao PDR, the European Union (EU), the German and the Swiss Governments are developing a joint programme in the area of good governance. All three institutions are currently engaged in good governance measures in Lao PDR and want to broaden their engagement and alliance in this sector.” – “Because of its success in keeping civil society space open, INGOs and Lao CSOs have expressed their interest in being involved in future phases of the project.” – An external review took place in July 2015, it highlighted the need for SDC to continue the collaboration with the National Assembly (NA).” – “The authorities have recognized the role of civil society in poverty reduction and in disaster relief.” – “There is a consensus among DPs that, within a difficult government context, the NA in Laos is a key institution, increasing citizens’ participation and transparency in public affairs. The NA continues to be a driver for (incremental) changes, with critical discourses on some issues such as corruption. The NA is perceived as a good avenue for support in the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.” – “Over the past decade, the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) has embarked on wide-ranging governance and public administration reforms designed to create an effective, efficient and accountable public administration, together with the requisite institutional and legal framework.” – “Through its “Strategic Governance Plan 207 7-2020” the GoL is committed to establishing a “Rule of Law State” by 2020.”.
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Increased citizens’ engagement in the national development through the promotion of good governance, human rights and rule of law.” – Development partners contribute to change: “The Project budget is 14,000,000 EUR, of which the EU will contribute 5,500,000 EUR, Switzerland (SDC) 5,000,000 EUR⁸ and Germany (BMZ) 3,500,000 EUR. There is no financial contribution from the GoL.” – “CEGGA is designed to mitigate these risks by engaging constructively with a wide range of GoL stakeholders, providing flexible and responsive support.” – Some risks (and mitigation measures) identified – uncertainties and controversies: see risk assessment
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed

⁵² SDC (2016), Credit Proposal, CEGGA (Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law). Phase 2

SDC (2020), Additional Credit

⁵³ GIZ (2020), Narrative Annual Report 01 to 12- 2019.

⁵⁴ (2018) European Joint Programming for Lao People's Democratic Republic 2016-2020, Mid-Term Report

What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
– Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<p>Main development results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “About 85 Lao CSOs have increased their technical and organizational capacities. This has enabled them to develop needs-based programs and contributed to improve the quality of services and livelihood 130'000 disadvantaged people in rural areas.” – “34 of these CSOs were supported in the development of 42 project proposals, of which 31 were successfully funded by other donors.” – “Some CSOs engaged in policy and human rights dialogue at national, regional and international levels.” – “An external review of the SDC-funded “Support to Civil Society Project in the Lao PDR” (Phase 1, 2012-2016) was conducted in November 2014.” – “According to the External Review of the Support to Civil Society Project conducted in November 2014, the project has added value to the attempts of Development Partners and international NGOs to maintain and expand the space for civil society by: (1) keeping people and organizations connected and providing space for them to talk to each other, even when the external environment has been difficult; (2) enabling conversations among CSOs and between CSO, INGOs and Development Partners to build a common understanding of issues such as capacity building, engagement with government and the capacity needs of CSOs; and (3) capturing and sharing learning and knowledge to build the capacity of CSOs but also to inform support to civil society by a wide range of actors.”
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “One of the main changes from the previous project consists in shifting the paradigm from “one-project-with-one-donor” (SDC) to a Joint Multi-Stakeholder Programme with 3 European donors (CH-GER-EU)” <p>Lessons learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “A focus on building resilient CSOs makes more sense than just ones that can survive in the funding and enabling environment that exists at the present moment.” – “Long-term intensive mentoring and coaching for emergent CSOs is the most effective form of capacity building, particularly for CSOs that are in the early stages of formal organization.” – “Lao CSOs are still nascent and this means that capacity building that is flexible and long-term is essential.” – “Enabling people to see how civil society works in other countries broadens their understanding of the potential of civil society in Lao PDR.” – “There is a strong desire for more coordination, information sharing and capacity building in the provinces.” – The intervention strategy is mostly implemented as planned
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
– Not discussed
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “CEGGA continues to pay particular attention to working closely with its partners – in order to ensure alignment of operational planning with GoL policies and partner priorities and to ensure institutional ownership, which is the basis for long-term sustainability.” – “Specific measures to ensure sustainability include leveraging existing initiatives from INGOs and local CSOs in all engagement areas of the programme to ensure that implementation structures, concepts and approaches can be retained with ODA funding from other sources after the end of the CEGGA programme.”
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The proposed contribution to the CEGGA Programme is aligned with SDC's Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2013- and its goal in the Local Governance and Citizen's Participation Domain (LGCP).” – “In coherence with SDC's Mekong Region Strategy 2013-2017 (and 2018-2021), SDC Laos focusses its support to Outcomes 1 and 2. SDC does not engage in Outcome 3 — since access to justice is not part of the SDC's Governance and Citizen Participation Domain's strategic orientations.”
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The CEGGA will be highly complementary with the National Governance & Public Administration Reform Programme NGPAR (co-funded by SDC) and the Legal Sector Master Plan Project (funded by EU).”
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Several procedures and functions of the NA will also be strengthened, these include improving NA's role in representing citizen's interests at the national political level (including the interests of women and small ethnic groups), gender-sensitive legal drafting and public consultations as well as legislative procedures, internal procedures and public consultations.” – “CEGGA will include gender and ethnicity aspects into the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its activities.” – “CSOs will furthermore receive trainings and coaching for systematic, gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation of the supported activities.”

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No info found.

Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – CEGGA will be strategically directed by a Project Steering Committee (PSC), co-chaired on a rotational basis by one of the three donors (EU, SDC, GER) and by the Lao PDR political partner, indicatively the National Assembly.” – “In the Lao context where space for the civil society has become very restricted, the new CEGGA Programme is expected to provide SDC with more leverage in policy dialogue through the alliance building with the EU and Germany.”

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 2 – Period: 2016 -2020 – Likely to continue: yes
Key informants?
If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Contracting partner: GIZ – “The main government partners/stakeholders of the CEGGA Programme will be: (i) the Ministry of Home Affairs, and MoHA provincial offices (Outcome 1); (ii) the National Assembly including the parliamentarians, NA committees and their support staff, the Women’s caucus, the Parliamentary Learning Center, the constituency offices and the Provincial People’s Assemblies (Outcome 2); (iii) the Ministry of Justice (outcome 3).” – “The main beneficiaries of the project will be the members of Lao CSOs.”

N.12. Lao AFS – The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI)

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁵⁵; (ii) last annual progress report⁵⁶; and (iii) end-of-phase evaluation⁵⁷.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Problem identification²¹: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strong economic growth (ca. 7% p/a GDP) and government focus on market-oriented agriculture (with increased intensification and specialization of mono-cropping – Agricultural Development Strategy 2025) has eroded the agrobiodiversity over the last 10 years. ▪ 70% of population remains depended on agriculture for income generation. ▪ Growing demand (domestic and international) for Non-Forest Timber Products ▪ Ethnic minorities and poor farmers in upland areas reliant on ABD resources for self-consumption – loss of ABD threatens diet.

⁵⁵ SDC (2017). Credit Proposal. The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI). Phase 4

⁵⁶ NIRAS (2020). The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI) Phase 4. Annual Report Year 3. 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020.

⁵⁷ Gonzalez, J. and Yayoi Lagerqvist (2018) Mid-Term Review. The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI). Phase 4

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How to adapt the use of ABD and provide an alternative to industrial crops?
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Statement: <i>'Maintaining high biodiversity in agro-ecosystems contributes to poverty reduction in rural livelihood'</i> – Development partners²¹: upland farmers and producer groups, Ministry of Agriculture. Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, National University of Lao, 5 national Agriculture & Forestry Colleges (supported by SURAFCO). – Development partners 2: <i>'The DoP/MAF is well positioned to motivate the provincial and district agriculture and forestry offices ...to implement field activities. It has also been key in mobilizing the attention of high ranking authorities and important policy makers, like the National Assembly²¹</i> – Concept²¹: the concept and practice of ABD allows farmers to benefit from ABD resources (i.e. generate income) while managing them sustainably. – Project hypothesis: <i>'Agro-biodiversity-based development offers a viable alternative to large-scale monoculture and concession-based agriculture development in the uplands of Laos to the benefit of upland populations, and that the use of ABD options contributes to increased food security and resilience as well as to reduced poverty and inequity.²¹</i> – ABD Approach²¹: a bottom-up, community led approach – Project approach: fourth phase: complete small projects, consolidate methods, capitalize knowledge, capacitate stakeholders – Drivers and restrainers of change: <i>'drivers in terms of policy push and market pull, are severely slowed down by perceptions of ABD as 'conservation', hence limiting growth, and/or perceptions of shifting cultivation as a large driver of deforestation. Negative or poor understanding of ABD does not only reside at policy levels, but also the younger generation of farmers is losing ABD-related knowledge and skills. As a measure to mitigate this phenomenon, TABI IV will produce a wide range of materials (reports, briefs, extension material, television or radio broadcast etc.) targeting various audiences and strengthening communication on ABD²¹</i>
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'One area of concern is the unequal relationship between Chinese buyers and the farmers for setting prices given the monopoly on Chinese markets and their support for processing [mushrooms]. ... In private discussions with Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office staff, they say that they don't even know the Chinese traders in their province because the traders avoid any contact with them.⁵⁶</i> – <i>'Undocumented reports have suggested that at least in Luangprabang Province, Chinese entrepreneurs are buying honey as well as buying bee hives.'⁵⁶</i>
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Document predate Covid-19 Pandemic

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overall: <i>'Since 2009, TABI has identified, tested and disseminated a large number of ABD livelihood models, based on specific product value chains such as crispy river weed, specialty tea, honey or traditional varieties of sticky rice. Moreover, TABI developed a participative approach for forest and land use planning and management (pFALUPAM)²¹</i>

- **Results Phase 2-3²¹:**
 - **38.000 households** benefit from 25 ABD livelihood options
 - **19,134 households** in 167 villages have participated in and are benefiting from Participatory Forest and Land Use Planning and Management process (pFALUPAM).
 - Provincial and district level government staff have improved their knowledge.
 - **Numerous databases are established**, cleaned and analyzed, containing 1800 unique species of non-timber forest products (NTFPs).
 - **ABD incorporated into National, Provincial, and District Strategies** and Plans.
- **Objective Phase 4:**
 - To contribute to poverty reduction and livelihood: *'TABl supports the conservation and sustainable economic use of agro-biodiversity in multifunctional landscapes'*²¹
- **Envisaged Outcomes Phase 4²¹:**
 - Livelihood: Developed options and **systems for ABD-based livelihoods are sustainably applied** by upland farming communities in TABl target provinces: Direct beneficiaries: 30.000 HH. *'Consolidation of small projects and documentation of methods to enable other actors to continue the support and to look for partnerships for out-scaling.'*²¹ *'This outcome...will focus on the sustainability of existing small projects as well as the out-scaling of the most promising ABD value chains.'*²¹
 - Land-Use Planning: Participatory Forest and Land use Planning and Management (pFALUPAM) procedures provide **increased production, equitable benefits, secure tenure, good land and forest governance and sustainable management**.
 - Knowledge generation: ABD data, information, knowledge, tools and concepts are **capitalized and disseminated to local, national and international levels**.
- **Results Phase 4⁵⁶:**
 - 6 villages in Houaphanh involving 46 households made an income of \$12,919 from making and selling brooms. This was 10 times as much as the year before. ... 16 villages in Luang Prabang involving 105 households (200% more households than the year before) made an estimated \$4000 from making brooms and \$12000 from collecting and selling broom grass.
 - In Houaphanh Province, 78 households in 8 villages sold \$44,581 worth of oranges, almost 100% increase from previous year despite the lower production; in Luang Prabang Province, 58 households from 8 villages sold \$147,166 worth of oranges which was an increase of 15% over the previous year; and in Xiengkhouang Province, 51 households in 5 villages made \$18,083 Kip (60% decrease) from the sales of oranges, the reduction mainly due to reduced orange production due to disease or weather.
 - there are 43 well functioning Fish Conservation Zones in Luang Prabang, 160 in Houaphanh and 56 well functioning FCZ in Xiengkhouang.
 - Based on the previous TABl work on tea expansion and wild tea collection in 4 villages involving 142 households, 909 people (50% women) benefited by a staggering \$461,943 averaging \$3,250 per household in the past year.
 - 15 villages with 7,791 people (49% women) earning \$224,856 from mushrooms collection. This is an increase of 10 villages from the previous year.
 - 17 village groups were able to sell honey to the private sector actors with 590 kg of honey processed in the Laethong beekeeper group (TABl-connected) facilities.
 - In Xiengkhouang Province, 31 primary and secondary schools have used the ABD curricula to teach 3961 students (2166 girls), and 5 non formal education schools have introduced the ABD curricula.
 - In Houaphanh Province, The ABD curricula has been used 8 primary schools to teach 959 students including 436 girls
 - 281 households are receiving an income of \$306, 453 per year from the sales of 17,570 kg of benzoin resin.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As of March 2020, P-FALUPAM has been introduced in 13 provinces countrywide; covering 31 districts, 72 clusters, 324 villages of different stages, 59 villages¹ carried out Rapid-FALUPAM and directly affects more than 25,000 families of more than 230,000 people from more than 30 ethnic groups. Approximately, P-FALUPAM covers more than 900,000 hectares.
<p>What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 'Reviewers ...find that TABI has extensive but underutilized information based on its nearly a decade of experience in Laos. During this final phase of TABI, the project and its partners will need to shift the focus from implementing more activities in the field into consolidating and generating materials for dissemination to convey the key learnings of TABI experience. It also needs to strategically engage in national dialogue on the significance of agro-biodiversity in improving forest-agricultural interface and rural livelihood. Finally, considering the importance of TABI's achievements, SDC will also need to continue to support the communication of TABI experience to further facilitate greater learning across its Mekong Programme.⁶⁷
<p>Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Both the Credit Proposal and the Annual Report emphasize work to embed the work of TABI in the government structures so that it can continue after project end. – No mentioning of scaling up. – The Annual Report mentions: 'Government staff noted that there are private sector efforts (Vietnamese?) to conduct their own surveys on TABI-supported producers and collectors of broom grass and pre-paying communities to secure supplies of broom grass, especially with prices being so high for raw broom grass. We do not know much about the information they collected and how they will use it but it does suggest a growing interest in the broom grass sector.'
<p>How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 'In order to ensure TABI's sustainability, this last and final phase will make extensive use of the government and administration systems of the Lao PDR²¹ – 'In order to ensure the sustainability of TABI, this final phase of the project will focus on inserting ABD lessons, ideas, models and approaches into national policy dialogues and advocating for ABD principles to be embedded into other projects and programs. This will allow ...to transfer all functions and knowledge from TABI to MAF line departments at national and local level (including MoNRE)²¹ – 'The sustainability of promoted ideas, models and approaches ...expected [due to] human capacities built amongst Government staff, but also farmers²¹ – 'TABI continues to work with its GoL counterparts to capitalize on the data generated during the project and arrange for its permanent home within government structures. Arrangements are being made to ensure that the information in TABI website is maintained into the future ... The PhaKhaoLao website is one of the most important sustainability and capitalization strategies of TABI.⁶⁶ – 'the Land Law and the Forest Law were passed by the National Assembly. TABI and CDE supported revisions to both of these pieces of legislation, and met with members of the concerned government agencies (MONRE and MAF, respectively), as well as with members of the National Assembly Committee on Science and Technology and Environment and the Institute for Legislative Studies.⁶⁶
<p>What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Statement: ' <i>TABI is in line with the SDC Agricultural & Food Security domain objective of the current Mekong Region Strategy 2013-2017.</i> ²¹
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ' <i>TABI will link to other SDC owned projects such as SURAFCO, implemented by HELVETAS and MAF, through ... the Integration of ABD and pFALUPAM into the college curricula. TABI will also collaborate with LURAS, implemented by HELVETAS/SNV and MAF, on the development of value chains and their links to markets. Other projects (WWF, GRET and RECOFTC) working on the sustainable production at ABD based-livelihoods like rattan and bamboo and on land use planning, will continue to work closely with TABI. TABI is being implemented in mountainous rural areas, sensible to natural disasters: this will also interlink the project with SDC Regional Humanitarian Aid Unit, in order to include Disaster Risk Reduction activities in the land use planning manual.</i> ²¹ – ' <i>GRET was a partner of TABI involved in the promotion and development of NorLoi in Huaphan Province in 5 villages for 60 participants up until the end of 2019. The main 3 activities [i.e. 5-day workshops] funded by TABI in 2019 included: (i) Introduction of Producer Group concept; (ii) Assessment and Market Linkage with target villages, and (iii) Producer Group Retraining and facilitating PG development'</i> ⁵⁶ – ' <i>TABI staff collaborated with SURAFCO to provide training on MOJO to 24 students from 5 agriculture colleges. From this collaboration the students prepared videos on cricket rearing and benefits of tamnueng vegetables</i> ⁵⁶
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ' Gender equality and social inclusion: Sensitivities to social differentiation (gender and ethnic considerations) are mainstreamed throughout the initiative. All activities include inclusiveness criteria for gender, ethnicity and poverty in order to ensure that activities are benefiting the most vulnerable groups' ²¹ – CSPM not mentioned, but: ' Conflict mitigation and resolution: Well delineated village boundaries thanks to the land use planning exercise lead to decreasing conflicts between communities where much forest products occur, laying the ground for a more sustainable use of them.' ²¹

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not covered
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not covered
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not covered

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 4 (last phase – intended to capitalize on all gained knowledge) – Period: 2017-2020 – Likely to continue: yes, for sure/likely/no/don't know
Key informants for field mission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – upland farmers and producer groups – Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (contract partner) – Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources – National University of Lao, – 5 national Agriculture & Forestry Colleges (supported by SURAFCO) – NIRAS / CDE (implementing agency)

N.13. Lao PDR – AFS: Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF)

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁵⁸; and (ii) the Mid-Term Review at the end of the first phase of the project⁵⁹.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – There is a problem: <i>'Despite a sustained economic growth of 7.7% over the last decade of Lao PDR, children under five ... 21% are underweight, 33% are stunted and 9% wasted'</i>.⁵⁸ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>'Oudomxay and Houaphan provinces have been considered among 7 priority provinces for the government to combat malnutrition. In Oudomxay province, 42.7% of children under 5 are stunted and in Houaphan province, 40.7%, which is in both cases higher than the national average (33%)</i>. – And (at face value) a problem owner: <i>'malnutrition remains high on the Government's agenda who is convinced that the continuing multi-sectoral approach will have tremendous impact'</i>.⁵⁸ – <i>'On 25 April 2011, the Lao PDR joined the SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) Movement with a letter of commitment from the Minister of Health and has been committed to combat malnutrition ever since'</i>.⁵⁸
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Approach: SDC supports the Government's National Nutrition Strategy (2015-2025) and Plan of Action (2016-2020) with its multi-sectoral convergence approach ... that integrates agriculture, nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene.... and a combination of supply-side and demand- side interventions: On the supply-side, there is a need to improve nutrition sensitive agriculture, health and nutrition services delivered by frontline health workers. On the demand-side, there is a need to scale up social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) focusing on appropriate infant and young child feeding practices, prevention of teenage pregnancy and hygiene practices.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ SDC (2020). Credit Proposal. Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF). Phase 2

⁵⁹ Herens, M and Khamlouang Keoka (2020). Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families in Laos 2016-2020. Mid-term Review Report. Wageningen University and Research.

- **Development partners 1:** ' *The target group is women, men and children of rural poor population in remote areas from 8 ethnic minorities; Laoloum, Khmu, Emien, Xingmun, Lue, Hmong, Phouthai and Yang in two provinces: Houaphan and Oudomxay*'.⁵⁸
- **Development partners 2:** ' *The primary stakeholders of the project are the national, provincial, district level authorities and villagers. The ENUFF approach is empowering these groups to implement the project activities through joint and participatory planning, capacity building, developing mutual understanding, and supporting mobility to the target villages. However, the capacity of the Government organisation at all levels particularly local level ... is still weak, due to lack of resources and skills although their interest to making the project work is high.* '⁵⁸
- **What is known on impacts:** 'The unfavorable combination of insufficiently nutritious diets, non-exclusive breastfeeding of infants, and high burden of exposure to disease and infections due to poor sanitation and drinking water, has dire consequences on the cognitive and physical development of children' (Source: UNICEF. 2019. Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) on Stunting among children under 5 years in Lao PDR. Centre for Development Policy Research, Ministry of Planning and Investment).⁵⁸
- **What is known about behavior:** ' Food consumption and feeding practices, particularly during pregnancy and post-partum, are strongly related to culture, traditional beliefs and education. In Lao PDR, women do not necessarily increase or diversify what they eat during pregnancy. They often work continuously until delivery. After delivery, many mothers follow stark food restrictions, for up to one month, and in many cases start heavy work tasks after just a few days. Breastfeeding practices have strong cultural determinants in Lao PDR and vary significantly across ethnic groups and regions. Nationally, only 55% of new mothers start breastfeeding within one day of their infant's birth. Many women are not consuming essential micronutrients and this eventually has an impact on their children. In a 2010 household survey, only 69% of respondents reported a diet rich in Vitamin A, and only 55% reported consuming foods rich in iron. Furthermore, the study found that 37% of women of reproductive age (WRA) and approximately 40% of children under five years old suffer from both moderate anaemia and Vitamin A deficiency.'
- **Approach 1 - Government-led implementation is lacking, therefore ENUFF:** 'While a lot of progress has been made at the national level on understanding the problem of malnutrition, along with **developing policies and plans** to address it, **less progress has been made in implementation** of those plans at provincial, district and community level... **ENUFF**, one of the few projects on the ground since 2016, has been trying **to fill some of the gaps** such as lack of resources, poor coordination and low capacity at sub-national level '⁵⁸
- **Impact hypothesis:** ' If Infant and Young Child Feeding practices and dietary diversity of households improve, access to hygiene and sanitation facilities increases, safe sanitation and hygiene is practiced, access to nutritious food is increased and a more conducive policy and institutional framework at subnational level for improving nutrition is achieved, then household nutrition in remote and ethnically diverse upland farming communities in Oudomxay and Houaphan will improve in a sustainable manner. Therefore, the above intervention strategies have to be implemented simultaneously'.⁵⁸
- **Intervention strategy:** ' Based on the impact hypothesis, ENUFF II intervention strategy will continue to use SNV's improved integrated Agriculture, Nutrition and WASH approach, which is based on four key pillars: Demand Creation, Behaviour Change Communication, Development of Markets and Supply Chain, and Improvement of Governance'.⁵⁸
- **Recommendation MTR – explicate the ToC:** 'we strongly recommend ... to reflect and refine the existing Theory of change ... to make explicit the pathways of change,

*the assumptions, the priorities ... and the needs for alignment with policy frameworks. The experiences and findings of phase 1 offer ample information to refine and contextualize the theory of change. In addition, the theory of change **needs to embed and identify the main constraints in the market system** that must be addressed for that system to become competitive, inclusive, and resilient. It is important that the theory of change also **reflects market actors' view of how change occurs** and will occur. Rarticulating the theory of change is **also helpful in creating a shared vision** of the project objectives, how these will be achieved, and what will be used to measure progress.*⁶⁹

To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3

– Not discussed

What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?

– Not discussed

Results

What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6

- Phase 1: *'covered 40 villages (10 in each district) targeting 4,000 households of Lao Tai, Khmu and Hmong groups.*⁶⁹
- Results Phase 1:
 - The current rate of **exclusive breast feeding is 89%** which is a significant increase compared to the rate of 53% baseline.
 - The **substantial increase in toilet use** - less open defecation and a cleaner village - less outbreaks of diarrhea and hence villagers gaining weight. 1 '042 toilets constructed, **27 villages declared open defecation free** and 80% of household have hand washing stations with soap.
 - 1'067 households (24%) in the target villages have **introduced at least 4 new food crops** in their farm.
 - *'great achievements have been made, particularly given the fact the project started with a 1.5-year delay. Particular highlights are the progress made in the agricultural domain (wide coverage home gardens, number of greenhouses in place, fruit tree farming, success of the livestock vaccination scheme and fodder production in some areas), the nutrition domain (basically all activities as planned are operational, including the household counselling and the case studies), and the WASH standing out for its well-recognized and appreciated results at the village levels*⁶⁹
- Goal Phase 2:
 - *'to **improve family nutrition** in remote and ethnically diverse upland farming communities.*⁶⁸
 - *' At the end of Phase II, ENUFF will have worked with 60 out of 283 villages in the four target districts to directly benefit a total of 6,000 household (17'600 women, 18'700 men)*⁶⁸
 - *'For SDC, this multi-sectoral approach will contribute to **reducing chronic malnutrition for children under five from 33% to 25% by 2025**, a goal set by the Government*⁶⁸
- Envisaged outcomes Phase 2⁵⁸:
 - Outcome 1: **Improved infant and young child feeding practices and dietary diversity** of households including women of reproductive age, adolescents and infants

- Outcome 2: **Improved access to hygiene and sanitation facilities** and improved sanitation and hygiene practices in target areas.
- Outcome 3: **Increased access to nutritious food** in target areas.
- Outcome 4: A **more conducive policy and institutional framework** at the sub-national level for improving nutrition is established

What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7

- 'Vertical, **top-down, sectoral governance is strongly developed** in the Lao administration and as such **driving the project implementation strategy**.⁶⁹
- '**Market development and income generation as combined strategy remains a challenge**.⁶⁸
- **Market-oriented approach is difficult:**
 - 'ENUFF targets and works with relatively poor communities. However, the project has struggled to reach the poorest households within those communities. This may be due to the market-oriented approach ... which is **unlikely to help the most vulnerable households without assets** unless additional or alternative support is provided. For instance, improved access to markets will not help families with limited land or labour; equally, incentives for toilet construction will not be useful for those households if there is no labour to build them. ... Phase II has incorporated specific strategies to reach the poorest households.⁶⁸
 - 'The key factor in working with private sector from the experience of phase I is **mutual benefit** in general, **large agriculture companies do not exist** in Laos. Due to limited volume and unreliable supply, **regional companies are not interested in the products** that the project promotes from a nutrition angle. Instead, the **project supports the development of a local market** and partners with a national food processing company to link the farmers' produces to the market.⁶⁸
 - 'ENUFF II will: 1. Continue to **build local capacity for triggering and maintaining demands for improved agriculture** and agricultural products, dietary diversity and improved nutrition, safe water and sanitation services and hygiene products. 2. Continue to **strengthen Government institutions** and market actors, including agricultural extension systems and nutrition and health services provision mechanisms. 3. **Extend and expand demand creation** for nutritious foods as well as for improved water, sanitation and hygiene services and products 4. **Strengthen behaviour change** through targeted communication on the benefits of dietary diversity and improved nutrition, and improved hygiene practices with a focus on women and children. 5. **Improve market linkages** for crops to help fund better nutrition at home. 6. Continue with multi-stakeholder engagement and facilitation of district coordination of nutrition sensitive activities to increase ownership and sustainability.⁶⁸
 - 'What works well is creating a maximum in **flexibility for farmers to choose the agricultural activity of their preference** to engage (agriculture à la carte)⁶⁹
 - 'Formation of producer groups remains a challenge, whereby the **poorer families are more often at risk of exclusion due to land, labour and time constraints**.⁶⁹
 - 'The **market development and income generating activities face challenges** in implementation. Farmers have limited or no technical skills for producing and processing ew crops, are too busy, and introducing new techniques may increase the work load, particularly of women. Market access is a main issue due to remoteness and poor road conditions. And ENUFF faces challenges with farmers engaged in contract farming for cash crops for which markets are established, secured, and farmers have the technical skills (particularly in Oudomxay).⁶⁹
 - Note: 'ENUFF, by its nature, is not aiming for poverty reduction as such, but embraces income generation as one of the pathways to address malnutrition.⁶⁹
- **Example of how difficult change is:** 'Increased awareness of the importance of exclusive breast feeding, but the messaging may require some follow up. The project

<p><i>emphasizes the need and benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months. During village visits, the MTR team found indications that this is translated as advice to women to stay at home after birth delivery, which does not align very well with existing livelihood systems and accompanying intra-family and household norms and values. This might endanger the lasting effects of the behavioural change'.⁵⁹</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'The government role in coordination of activities is key for the sustainability of the project initiatives. Hence, the management of the Nutrition Centre and other central agencies is essential. Closer planning, supervision and commitment at the District level are vital to ensure the sustainability of the Project initiatives.</i>⁶⁸ – <i>'At provincial and district level there is a lot of energy and drive to work towards ODF villages, because it fits well with the policy priorities in both Houaphanh and Oudomxay as well as national level priorities.'</i> – <i>'(Unemployed) youth was mentioned as general concern by village and district authorities. There is an upcoming concern around youth engagement. The project activities done on agriculture and market development could further be developed into a more entrepreneurial direction, involving youth involved in making the compost/bio pesticide, in food processing, or other key functions throughout the value chain.</i>⁶⁹
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The project has extended its reach from 40 to 60 villages. – Scale beyond project areas is to happen through government channels – see next point
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'The implementation approach used by ENUFF II is designed to promote sustainable change, scalability and replicability. To attain such effects the project focuses on changing behaviors of [a cluster of] entire villages altered behavior, once entrenched in a village culture, will persist beyond project duration ... eventually spilling over to non-target villages. At the institutional level the project deliberately works with national and sub-national government systems and builds the capacity of government staff at the ground level to implement activities that contribute to achieving standing government objectives. This will enable district level staff to replicate the activities outside the project intervention area.</i>⁶⁸ – At the district, provincial and national level: through capacity building
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>' ENUFF is coherent with SDC's Mekong Region Strategy 2018-2021 (MRS) - key outcome statement: Small holder farmers improve their food security, nutrition awareness and resilience by accessing resources, services and knowledge'.⁵⁸</i>
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'ENUFF has been coordinating and working with: Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service project of SDC on labour saving devices focusing on improved cook stove, WFP on</i>

<p>policy briefs, FAO on <i>climate data and forecast for agriculture</i>, UNFPA on Noi Initiative project, UNICEF on <i>Evaluation of Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) training and health system strengthening and Plan international on reproductive health approach</i>.⁶⁸</p> <p>– MTR recommendation: 'use the expertise of other actors involved in value chain development in the areas such as <i>LURAS</i> and other private sector parties'.⁶⁹</p>
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<p>– SDC involvement is argued from its 'leave no one behind value'⁶⁸.</p> <p>– A Gender Equality and Social Inclusion report has been prepared under ENUFF: 'Gender inequality remains deeply entrenched in Lao culture, and more specifically in ENUFF target areas ... women still have limited power to make decisions regarding their and their children's nutrition and allocation of resources within the household'.⁵⁸</p>

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
– Not covered
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– Not covered
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
– 'ENUFF experience and lessons are constantly shared with other development partners in different fora and meetings'. ⁵⁸

Additional information
Project status?
<p>– Phase number: 2</p> <p>– Period: 2020-2024</p> <p>– Likely to continue: no (second phase is concluding phase⁵⁸)</p>
Key informants for field mission
<p>– SNV (implementing agency)</p> <p>– Ministry of Health</p> <p>– ENUFF implementing partners at provincial and district level are the Provincial Health Department (PHD), Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO), Provincial Lao Women's Union (PLWU), District Health Department (DHD), District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), and District Lao Women's Union (DLWU). Furthermore, ENUFF implementation is supported by the Rural Development Association (RDA), and the Green Community Development Association (GCDA)</p>

N.14. LAO – AFS: Lao Upland Rural Advisory Services (LURAS)

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁶⁰; (ii) last annual progress report⁶¹;

Context analysis
<p>Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The need for pluralism in extension service provision is now acknowledged and promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.” – “The Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing (DTEAP) recognizes the growing importance of the private sector, farmer organizations and non-profit associations as service providers. The private sector agribusiness is rapidly becoming the major provider of services to small farmers, bringing a range of inputs, new technologies and market access to even the most remote locations.” – “Despite the challenging context, there have been encouraging messages and actions from the government such as a crackdown on corruption (incl. illegal logging), and greater attention given to sustainable development and to high-value niche products such as organic vegetables, traditional rice varieties, forest tea and coffee, and products from agrobiodiversity: all agricultural sectors, where SDC's projects are well established.”
<p>Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “A demand-driven pluralistic extension system, which involves various service providers including self-reliant farmer organisations, has been established to support inclusive agricultural value chains, which improve upland farmers' food security, opportunities and income in a fair, healthy and sustainable manner”. – “LURAS is strengthening management structures along with its continuous inclusion in the country systems. The project staff is continuously working with MAF line departments at local and national levels. Regular and already ongoing training and coaching of GoL staff are performed.” – Facilitating interventions in the development of specific value chains with relevant government offices, local organizations and private sector actors together with the local communities will ensure that these activities are aligned, relevant and will sustain.” <p>Development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Department of Technical Extension and AgroProcessing (DTEAP), is the government partner for LURAS, sharing responsibility for overall implementation of the project with Helvetas.” – “Farmer organizations (FOs) have a key role in representing the interests of the primary beneficiaries.” – “The largest group of non-state actors providing services to farmers is in the private sector.” – “Organisations such as the Gender Development Association (GDA) and the Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Development Association (SAEDA) have been facilitating group formation and conducting trainings for rural people for 20 years.” <p>SDC's support to development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The project is strengthening the capacity of DTEAP to act as the leading organization of the national system for agricultural extension.”

⁶⁰ SDC (2017), Credit Proposal, Lao Upland Rural Advisory Services (LURAS). Phase 2

⁶¹ LURAS (2019), Progress Report April to September 2019

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The project is also contributing and consequently influencing the policy level through its interventions.” – “Extensive risk assessment with mitigation measures.
To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed
What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Results
What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6
<p>Main development :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “5,000 households have received services on value chain development (wild tea, cardamom, organic vegetables, small livestock, coffee, indigenous rice). – A tea value chain has been developed with the private sector and smallholders. – An awareness-raising campaign “Detox” has been carried out on the misuse of pesticides. – A scheme targeting the youth in agriculture and promoting innovative business ideas was successfully implemented. – The MAF gender equality strategy from 2016-2025 and vision 2030 has been disseminated. – The “Voluntary Commitments for Responsible Agribusiness in Lao PDR” have been produced. – The support to the Lao Farmers’ Network allowed the expansion of the number of member organizations from 16 to 23. – LaoFAB on-line information service celebrated 10 years of operation (over 4’500 members, 2,650 documents in online repository.”
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<p>“LURAS has demonstrated an ability to support a wide range of knowledge-based activities including participatory extension, practical training, action research, exchanges and networking, capitalisation studies, and online platforms for a large variety of users.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “An internal mid-term review will be carried out towards the end of the second year in order to assess the effectiveness of the project’s strategy and the sub-contracting arrangements.” (Is under preparation) <p>“Some of the key lessons drawn from the Baseline Studies, the Mid Term Review, the Beneficiary Assessment and a series of notes on ‘what we are learning’ prepared by the Team Leader:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The agricultural production and marketing context in Laos continues to be dynamic, diverse and unpredictable. The agricultural production and marketing context in Laos continues to be dynamic, diverse and unpredictable. – LURAS cannot address all of the problems and opportunities that small farmers face. The mid-term review recommended that the project “should focus efforts on building a coherent portfolio of activities around a set of value chains and or issues (i.e. sustainable agriculture).” – The mid-term review also recommended that the project should adopt a more comprehensive approach to targeting the poorest

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It has also become clear that rural youth have been neglected by agricultural services, but the future of smallholder farming depends on their interest and skills. Thus the project should continue to explore ways of linking extension to rural schools and colleges, while also supporting young ‘agripreneurs’. – The local government units responsible for delivering agricultural services, namely PAFOs and DAFOs, suffer from weak technical skills but have been able to facilitate farmer-to-farmer learning and participatory action research with good results. – The project’s optimism about the possible role of Farmers’ Organisations in service delivery has been diluted by a strong dose of reality. – Regarding collaboration with the private sector, the engagement process has been most successful when it started with issues affecting communities of producers, rather starting with the interests of companies that want to buy a particular commodity. – The funding mechanism used in phase I – involving a call for proposals from local government units and farmer organisations – has not been effective. It led to a fragmented portfolio of activities and generated more frustration than ownership. – The project has been unable to establish an M&E system that quantitatively tracks the impact of the project on key indicators such as access to services and the incomes of members of FOs. – There are considerable overlaps among the many agriculture projects operating in the northern uplands, both in terms of geographical coverage and thematic priorities.” – “LURAS cannot stop the tide of young people leaving rural areas, but it can help to ensure that sufficient numbers remain with the skills and motivation needed.”
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
– Not discussed
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
– “The focus is on GoL’s capacity building during this second phase, a full-fledged transfer of the project is planned for the third and final phase of the project.”
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
– No info found

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
– “LURAS is in line with the SDC Agriculture & Food Security domain’s objective of the current Mekong Region Strategy 2013-2017 - Supporting agriculture and food security in uplands.”
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
– “LURAS has strong links with other SDC projects including The AgroBiodiversity Initiative (TABI), the Support to the Reform of the Agriculture and Forestry Colleges (SURAFCO), the Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF) project, and the Global Program’s support to the Medium Term Cooperation Programme with Farmers’ Organizations in Asia and the Pacific, Phase II (MTCP2).”
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Affirmative action is needed to bring the benefits of development to certain social groups. Women and ethnic minorities will receive special attention. Therefore, the project will take steps to get more women and ethnic speakers into the field.” – “Sensitivities to social differentiation (gender and ethnic considerations) are mainstreamed throughout the duration of this phase. All activities include inclusiveness criteria for gender, ethnicity and poverty in order to ensure that activities are benefiting the most vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households. While gender is not explicitly mentioned in the overall goal, an entire outcome (3) fully addresses gender and ethnic inclusion.” – “Conflict mitigation and resolution: LURAS is developing a set of agribusiness trainings for farmer groups, incl. market analysis, economic calculations, business planning, contract negotiations and conflict resolution under outcome 2.”

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
– No info found
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– No info found.
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
– “The overall direction and management of the project will continue to be done by the Steering Committee (SC) jointly chaired by a Vice Minister of MAF and SDC.”

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 2 – Period: 2017 -2021 – Likely to continue: “eventually support a subsequent phase until 2024.”
Key informants?
If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Contract partner: Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. – The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Department of Technical Extension and AgroProcessing (DTEAP)

N.15. Lao PDR - Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS)

This datasheet is based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁶²; (ii) last annual progress report⁶³.

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rationale: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ completion rate of lower secondary education is at 50%. ▪ School drop outs are disadvantaged, as they have much more difficulties to find (self) employment than students who have completed compulsory education. ▪ youth from poorer households, remote areas and ethnic minority groups having a much lower completion rate ▪ rural areas (> 50% population) characterized by subsistence farming and lack formal labor market ▪ economic activities concentrated around urban areas. – Voiced demand: <i>'All identified stakeholders, across government, have expressed their support for the VTESS project'</i>⁶²
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Approach: <i>'With Switzerland's support to national systems, focusing on systemic changes and piloting new approaches for facilitating employment, while at the same time reaching out to and bringing concrete changes in the lives of disadvantaged young men and women, the project contributes to sustainable changes and to the overall objective of the agenda 2030 for sustainable development of "leaving no one behind"'</i>⁶² – Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capacity development schools ▪ Develop financing modalities and facility for students and schools ▪ Establish legal basis for IVET path ▪ Awareness raising / outreach ▪ Develop multi-stakeholder driven employment support services – Lesson learned: <i>'International experience has shown that training alone is usually not sufficient to lead disadvantaged youth to employment or self-employment. Youths of the target groups need to be accompanied on their path to employment or self-employment, and this requires a variety of additional employment support services like e.g. career counselling, coaching/mentoring, placement support, generation of ideas for self-employment, access to seed money incl. match-marking with micro finance services, start-up support, etc.'</i>⁶² – Wishful thinking 1?: <i>'The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare takes the lead on establishing Employment Support Services. ADB and ILO have supported the MoLSW ... with support to establish so-called job centers (centers to link job seekers to the labor market). However, these job centers are so far only empty shells and the VTESS project with its ESS component will contribute to the establishment of effective services.'</i>⁶² Progress report: <i>'Despite investments made in supporting ESS, such as by ILO and ADB in MoLSWs' Job Centres (JCs), the foundation for developing ESS at provincial level remains limited and much investments into JCs would still be required. In order to make more investments there must be commitment and (potential) resources available from MoLSW side also beyond the project'</i>⁶³

⁶² SDC (2019). Credit Proposal. Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS). Phase 2

⁶³ Swisscontact (2020). Progress Report 2019. Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS) Project

- **Wishful thinking 2?:** 'Coordination between MoES and MoLSW is currently lacking ... these two ministries are competing for development funds. As both ministries will be part of the steering committee, the VTESS project will ensure that close coordination will take place regarding project'⁶²
- Key political economy considerations: 'The reasons for leaving school early include **access, cost and quality of education, language barriers, lack of parents' support towards education, opportunity cost** (the family farm or business requires help) **and limited prospects** when following the education path further. The project will support IVET schools in outreach to rural areas with training opportunities and will increase the reputation of TVET through successful case studies.'⁶²
- **Other challenge:**
 - 'IVET schools are chronically under-financed, and their performance depends a lot on the **capacity and motivation of the existing school directors**. It will **also have to be seen how the motivation of existing school teachers** to give additional short courses can be improved.'⁶²
 - 'The private sector's interest to participate is however sometimes only limited, because they fail to see the direct benefit for their companies when engaging with schools.'⁶²
- **Development partners:** young people (early school leavers), IVET⁶⁴ schools, teachers, job centers

To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3

- Not discussed

What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?

- Progress report predated Covid-19 Pandemic

Results

What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6

- **Results Phase 1 (VELA):**
 - **8506 students** (49% of them women and 35% from ethnic minorities) have taken C1 and C2 courses.
 - Approximately **58% of the graduates were working 12 months after the training** (self-employed or employed) or were in an advanced training measure. '*This did not meet expectations.*'⁶²
 - A total of 17 vocational schools have been supported in the introduction, organization and implementation of three to six months (C1 & C2) short courses.
 - In 6 schools, Dual Cooperative Training collaboration mechanisms (DCT) with a total of 50 companies have been facilitated. A total of **721 students (259 of them women) participated in the DCT courses**.
- **Objective phase 2:** to integrate early school leavers into technical training courses and further education.
- **Goal:** (i) 3000 disadvantaged young men and women will benefit from **improved labour market relevant training courses**; (ii) pilot the **establishment of employment support services** to help graduates find employment or self-employment; (iii) **80% of the graduates supported through ESS are in employment or self-employment** or generate additional income through enhanced family

⁶⁴ Integrated Vocational Education System in Lao PDR.

<p>business/farms (6 months after the completion of training); (iv) framework conditions for IVET Training and ESS are strengthened organizationally, institutionally and at system level with a specific focus on quality and access.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progress Report – Covers first 5 months of inception phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mostly mobilization of PIU and governance / organizational arrangements with partners ▪ Initial beneficiary needs assessment, external expert support on e.g. employment support services (ESS design mission), conduct of a CBA, review legal basis, review / exchange on IVET system & financing, study into ESS entry points
What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase 2 is to address challenges faced in phase 1, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IVET short course curricula were not sufficiently labor market relevant ▪ limited financial governmental participation in scholarship provision (see also under sustainability) ▪ Government had not fully implemented the IVET path⁶⁵ (e.g. no equivalency programs implemented) ▪ Lacking accompanying support measures into employment for students of short courses
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
– Not yet applicable
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>'In order to increase governmental ownership and financial sustainability, Switzerland has negotiated with the MoES to include C1-C3 students into the existing governmental quota system (the Government assigns a number of subsidized student places/quota to all vocational schools, thus, TVET students generally receive a stipend of about LAK 200'000/month or 23 USD/month). VTESS will top up the government stipends to its target group. Based on the experience in VELA Phase 1, a total amount of LAK 600'000/month or 69 USD/month was provided to disadvantaged students.'</i>
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
– Not discussed

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Project goal (see above) promotes SDE domain objective of MRS 2017-2021: <i>'Better skilled women and men, in particular from disadvantaged groups, benefit from gainful and decent employment and self-employment.'</i>⁶⁶

⁶⁵ the IVET (Integrated Vocational Education and Training) path, a national system which aims at bringing school drop outs back into education through an equivalency certificate of lower secondary completion or into employment through short courses.

⁶⁶ SDC (2018) Cooperation Strategy Mekong Region 2018-2021

Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Credit Proposal: 'synergies will be sought with Switzerland's co-funded projects such as "Decent Rural Employment Strategy" project, implemented by ILO, "Skills for Tourism" (co-financed with the Luxembourg Government, and implemented by LuxDev), the regional (CLMT) project "Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Job Placement" (PROMISE) implemented by IOM, the Swiss financed SURAFCO project (support to agricultural colleges) and other TVET/SD projects implemented by Swisscontact in the region.'
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 'Gender and social inclusion will be mainstreamed in all three components and in all phases of PCM, such as for example assessing specific needs of men and women, understanding labor market opportunities for men and women, flexible training opportunities, affirmative action for promoting women and ethnic graduates in employment opportunities'.⁶²

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed
How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not discussed
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Credit Proposal: 'Close coordination with these DPs will be sought in the frame of the technical working group on TVET and Skills development under the lead of MoES and in informal meetings. In addition, Switzerland leads the coordination of the TVET sector within the European Joint Programming.⁶² – Progress report: ' More donor and project coordination is necessary to better inform and coordinate regarding work that has happened and is going to be undertaken. An example of this is that it is difficult to even find out what standards and curricula have been developed and/ or are in development and to get hold of documents. Information from the government side is often fragmented or unavailable'⁶³

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 2 (of VELA) – Period: 2019 - 2023 – Likely to continue: yes, third phase (phasing out)
Key informants for field mission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Implementing agencies: Swisscontact and University of Lucern – Ministry of Planning and Investment – Ministry of Education and Sports

- Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
- 5 IVET Schools
- GIZ: phase 2 VELA
- KfW: Vocational Education Finance Facility (VEFF)", focusing on dual cooperative training initiatives in urban areas.
- ADB: Second Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- Project and the Strengthening Capacity to Develop the Employment Service System

N.16. LAO – SDE: Skills for Tourism

This datasheet is to be based on a review of the project's: (i) credit proposal⁶⁷; (ii) last annual progress report⁶⁸;

Context analysis
Whose demand for change is SDC meeting? Evaluation Matrix (EM) Q1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The project builds on the results of a successful project funded by the Government of Luxembourg over the past seven years. The project supported the creation and building up of LANITH (Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality) as an autonomous, para-statal center of excellence in hospitality skills training. An independent evaluation confirmed the relevance of LANITH and the quality of products developed. The evaluation also highlighted two key weaknesses: support provided has pilot project character and did not allow yet reaching the scale needed to have an impact on the entire hospitality sector and only very few trainees come from poor families.” – “The “Skills for Tourims / Lao 029” project has the same aim as the VELA project and shares many approach elements (TVET system development, support for dual cooperative training, affirmative action in favor of ethnic minority women). An employer survey conducted during the design phase confirms the need for a separate project focusing on hospitality skills. There currently are more than 7’000 open positions for skilled workers in hotels and restaurants, with an estimated future additional need of 5’000 jobs per year in view of high turnover and continued sector expansion.” – “A better-trained hospitality workforce is an explicit priority of the Lao Government, mentioned in all relevant national development, economic development, and skills development reference documents.” – “The new project is in full support of Government policy, and receives full Government support.”
Does the project include Theory of Change thinking in its design? EM Q2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Lao youth from disadvantaged groups increasingly find gainful employment in Tourism and Hospitality.” – “The project’s intervention strategy is to work in the first phase mostly on system change and capacity and in a second step (phase 2, starting 2021) to reach high scaling up levels for beneficiaries.” <p>Development partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “LANITH (Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality) grew out of the current Luxembourg funded project, and was transformed into a para-statal organization in 2013.”

⁶⁷ SDC (2015), Credit Proposal, Skills for Tourism / Lao 029. Phase 1

⁶⁸ LuxDev (2020), Results-Based Annual Progress Report 2019

- "The Lao Vocational Education Development Institute (VEDI) is the skills development center for vocational training, under MoES (Ministry of Education and Sport)."
- "Collaboration will be sought with civil society and the private sector in order to reach disadvantaged youth and rising people's conception about opportunity for careers in T/H."
- "Private TVET providers have so far not been very involved in offering Tourism and Hospitality skills training due to some restrictions from government. The project will negotiate with the Lao government to include these important actors and ensure that numbers of private institutes are growing."

SDC's support to development partners :

- "Both Luxembourg and Switzerland will engage centres of excellence in their own countries to support the needs of LAO/029."

Development partners' interests, incentives, capacities:

- "The strong backing for hospitality skills development by the Government is partly due to self-interest of some Lao governmental representatives, whose families are involved in the Tourism sector."
- It is expected that the government of Laos will contribute to covering LANITH operational costs, and in particular staff salaries, starting as early as October 2015."

Operating environment for development partners:

- "There is a risk of corruption in Government-controlled scholarships and affirmative action schemes through paid favors and kick-backs. The project's affirmative action scheme is planned to be sub-contracted to specialize agency in providing scholarships, and therefore placed outside of Government's direct control."
- "The project is considered low risk by SCO Vientiane."
- Extensive risk assessment with mitigation measures.

To what extent does China exert an influence on the project context, implementation, and outcomes? EM Q3

- Not discussed

What are the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic?

- Documents predate the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Results

What are the project's development achievements at the outcome level? EM Q6

Main development results 2019:

- "Over 5 000 people have completed or are currently completing project-supported tourism/hospitality (T/H) technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skills development (SD) courses (more than 80% from disadvantaged backgrounds) with above-target levels of labour market insertion."
- 28% increase in enrolment on project-supported two-year T/H diploma (C4) courses from 2018 to 2019.
- Development and roll-out of four Certificate 1 (C1) TVET courses, four non-formal basic vocational training courses, and seven SD (upskilling) courses.
- Construction of T/H practical training facility in Vang Vieng (90% complete) and refurbishment of T/H practical training facilities in other I/TVET schools/colleges.
- Revised TVET Law approved and published."

Quantitative data :

- MRCS indicators: IS3.1.1., IS3.2.1.

What are the main lessons learned – what worked, what didn't and why? EM Q7
– Not discussed
Has the project (or part thereof) been scaled-up? EM Q8
– No info found
How sustainable are the project's approaches, innovations, and outcomes? EM Q9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “LANITH as tourism and hospitality sector specialist will work together with VEDI on skills development for the tourism sector in order to strengthen the institution and ensuring sustainability.” – “Through the above-mentioned strategy of system change institutional sustainability is sought. In terms of financial sustainability, the establishment of the envisaged National Training Fund is key, the regulations of which are currently in the making.”
What is considered SDC's value-added? EM Q10
– No info found

Coherence
Is the project consistent with the Cooperation Strategy: thematically, strategically, and financially? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The relevant Lao TVET program goal in SDC’s Mekong Region Strategy (MRS) 2013-17 is worded as: “Rural women and men, mostly those belong to ethnic minorities, acquire skills and find work which allow them to benefit from economic development and earn higher incomes.”
Does the project complement other (regional) projects in the Portfolio or from other Swiss agencies? EM Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Potential for synergies are existing with various actors, such as the SDC-financed VELA project, in particular with regard to a) policy dialogue and establishing a competence-based VET system and b) improving the access of vulnerable groups to skills development.” – “Best practices of the SDC - Nepal employment fund are being integrated in the project.”
How (well) are CSPM, LNOB, HRBA, GENDER & DRR approaches applied? EM Q5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The project’s targets are disaggregated by gender (50% female participation). Equal participation by the poor and especially by ethnic minorities is a major issue.” – “The project works with both “duty bearers” (governmental institutions) as well as right holders (disadvantaged population groups), thus enhancing the Human rights based approach.” – “Various instruments of CSPM have been applied during the project elaboration phase, such as actor / power mappings.” – “The gender strategy of the project will be refined during the first year.”

Implementation management
How effective is SDC's portfolio management? EM Q11
– No info found

How useful and effective is the CS Monitoring System? EM Q12
– No info found.
Which role does SDC play in the network of Swiss agencies, the donor community, and in the policy dialogue with the national government? EM Q13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The coordination with other donors involved in skills development is important for the program. This refers in particular to ADB with its current S-TVET program and an envisaged new TVET program, and to GIZ currently implementing the SDC-co-funded VELA project and a TVET teacher-training program (TTEP)." – "There is a clear need in Laos to strengthen donors' coordination as well as multi-sectoral public/private collaboration among the key players in skills training." – "The main risk management task for SCO Vientiane will be to bring up and solve cooperation issues in the newly established TVET coordination group and through the SDC participation in the Governance mechanism of VELA and LANITH."

Additional information
Project status?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phase number: 1 – Period: 2015 -2020 – Likely to continue: yes"
Key informants?
If this project is investigated more closely during the field mission, then who are the key informants (organizations or persons) to interview (based on the documents reviewed)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Contract partner: LuxDev (Luxembourg Government's bilateral development agency) – LANITH (Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality) – Lao Vocational Education Development Institute (VEDI)

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