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Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022

Volume 2
Case Studies

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to
Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022

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List of Abbreviations

AFS	Agriculture and Food Security
AR	Annual Report
ASEAN	Vocational Education and Training Laos
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BWE	Bekaa water establishment
CDE	Centre for Development and Environment
CEGGA	Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law
CEP	Civic Engagement Project
CIDEM	Programme de renforcement de la citoyennete et de la culture democratique au Burkina Faso
CLP	Core learning parnership
CODEL	La Convention des Organisations de la société civile pour l'Observation Domestique des Elections
CRH	Citizens' Representative Hurals
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSPM	Conflict-sensitive programme management
DDF	District Development Fund
DEPAC	Le programme d'appui à la Décentralisation et à la Participation Citoyenne
DP	Democratic Party
DPA	Dayton Peace Agreement
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ENUFF	Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families
EPROR	End of Phase Report
ESLR	Enhancing Systematic Land Registration
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GBV	Gender based violence
GDP	Governance and Decentralisation Programme
GIDP	Governance for Inclusive Development Programme
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoL	Government of Laos
HJPC	High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council
ICLA	Information counselling and Legal Assistance
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
K4D	Knowledge for Development project (previously Lao DECIDE Info)
LAF	Legal Aid Forum
LATUG	Law on Administrative and Territorial Units and their Governance
LURAS	Lao Upland Advisory Services
MASAM	Mainstreaming Social Accountability for Improved Transparency and Participation in Mongolia
ME	Middle East
MEG	Municipal Environmental Governance Project
MPP	Mongolian People's Party
MUB	Municipality of Ulaanbaatar
NGPAR	National Governance and Public Administration Reform

OHR	Office of the High Representative
PHRD	Peace and Human Rights Division
PIE	Public Investment in Energy Efficiency
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PPA	Provincial People's Assembly
RPF	Rwanda Patriotic Front
RS	Republika Srpska
SCO	Swiss Cooperation Office
SCP	Swiss Cooperation Programme
SDC	Swiss Development and Cooperation
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SLP	Sustainable Livelihoods Project
SRBM	Strengthening Representative Bodies in Mongolia
TABI	The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UMIMM	Understanding and Managing Internal Migration in Mongolia
UoTM	Union of Tyre Municipalities
VELA	Vocational Education and Training Laos
VTESS	Vocational Training and Employment Support Services
WB	World Bank
WOGA	Whole of Government Approach

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1 Introduction

This case study report on SDC's country programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is one of four 'deep dive' case studies carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022*" undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). The four 'light touch' case studies and the four 'deep dive' cases, together with broader analysis on SDC's governance interventions, form the basis for the Evaluation Report.

The case study report focuses on the assessment of governance and rule of law programming in BiH from 2017 until 2022. Three *core governance* contributions in BiH were assessed, in addition to three *transversal governance* contributions. The sample of contributions covered by the Evaluation are as follows:

Core governance

- The Municipal Environmental Governance (MEG) Programme
- Support to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC)
- Support to the Associations of Cities and Municipalities (AMCs)

Transversal governance

- Strengthening of Nursing in BiH project
- Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) Project
- Response to humanitarian and health needs of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (humanitarian/ emergency response project)

The Evaluation Team are grateful for the constructive and insightful interactions we had with a wide range of stakeholders – from SDC staff and partners to government officials and civil society representatives – involved in SDC-supported interventions across Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, a special thanks goes out to the governance focal points at the Swiss Embassy, whose support with planning and setting up meetings was invaluable.
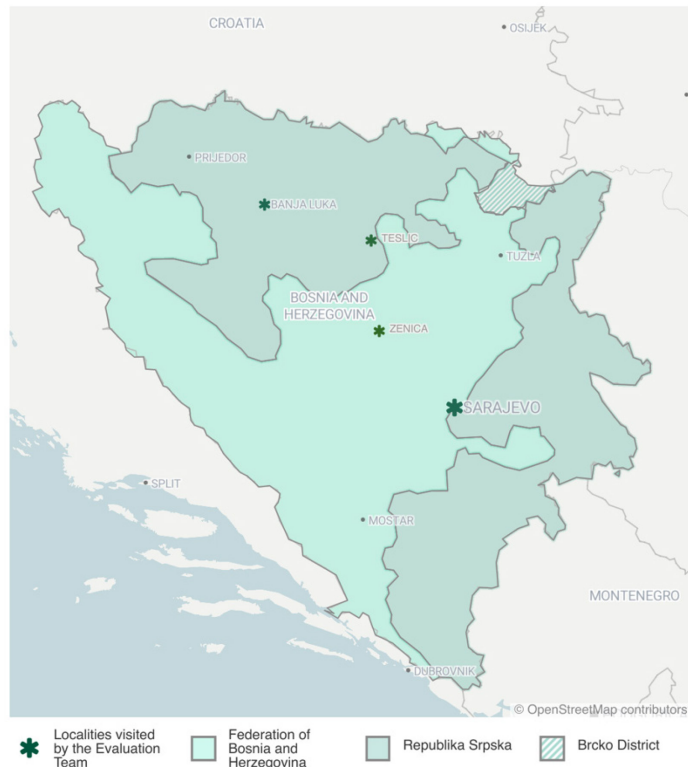
2 Context of the programme

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has one of the most complex governance systems in Europe. The country's complex and fragmented political system and constitutional framework emerged from the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), the accord that put an end to the devastating 1992-1995 Bosnian War. Completed in November 1995 in Dayton (Ohio, U.S.), the DPA, through its provisions and annexes, ended the war and created the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It divided the country along ethnic lines, creating two entities (federal units): the Republika Srpska (RS) with a Serb majority (49% of the territory), and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) with a Bosnian and Croat majority (51% of the territory). Until the decision regarding Brčko District was delivered, the Brcko corridor remained under international supervision, administered by the RS.

Home to 3.5 million citizens, BiH continues to be divided according to these two distinct entities, with the Brčko District as an autonomous administrative region. Within its intricate political structure, there exist 13 different constitutions, 10 cantons, each with its autonomous government, 14 separate legal systems, and a staggering 140+ ministries, leading to fragmented and convoluted legislative procedures.

In an attempt to create a balance among opposing interests, and to restrain disintegrative political forces, the DPA created a complex political system, with four administrative levels and veto mechanisms for the three ethnic groups. The central government is headed by the Presidency, which is held by a three- member body – one from each of the three mayor ethnic groups.

In addition, the Office of the High Representative (OHR) was established as an international observing/governing body with the ability to coordinate and supervise the implementation of the civil aspects of the Agreement. The High Representative (HR) for BiH continues to hold a mandate, through the so-called Bonn Powers, to adopt binding decisions and remove public officials from office that has led to public discontent and dispute in recent years with international involvement in BiH's political affairs.

Despite the provisions laid out in the Peace Agreement and the substantial international involvement, BiH has struggled to establish a cohesive and successful post-war state. From the outset, the nation has grappled with instability and a deficiency in its legitimacy. The fundamental dispute over the very existence of the state has escalated into a broader debate regarding the allocation of powers between the central government and its constituent entities, giving rise to centrifugal political forces that have undermined efforts aimed at fortifying the state's unity.

In 2006, a glimmer of hope for comprehensive state-level reform emerged when representatives of the three major ethnic groups reached a consensus on constitutional changes. However, these reforms were narrowly rejected in the state-level parliament, falling just one vote short of the required two-thirds majority. This setback plunged the country into a protracted political crisis, the repercussions of which continue to be felt. In recent years, the evident struggle to reach a consensus on the operational aspects of the state has persisted, marked by political leaders obstructing the prospects for meaningful reform.

In the nearly three decades following the war, macroeconomic conditions have stabilized considerably, and GDP per capita has risen, the result of the combined effects of reconstruction, renewed trade, remittances, and large infusions of external aid. But this income growth-trend has been uneven, faltering during the global financial crisis, and has only slowly recovered to pre-2008 levels. In addition, building human development capacity has proven difficult, and BiH is challenged by significant workforce migration to neighbouring European countries.

Moreover, corruption among economic and political elites remains a problem. BiH was the worst rated country in the Western Balkans in the 2022 Freedom House, which pointed to regressions in corruption, the state of the judiciary, and more general democratic capacity of authorities.

Despite democratic backslide and the weakening of central levels of government in BiH, the country was officially granted candidacy status by the EU in December 2022, conditional on a number of reforms that inter alia set out to improve conditions for democracy, human rights, access to justice, and anti-corruption, border and migration management, and media freedom in BiH. While there is a long road to EU accession for BiH, the accession process provides a sound, common framework for international engagement in the country on key governance reforms.

3 Brief programme description

During the period covered by the Evaluation, the *Swiss Cooperation Strategy (CS) for Bosnia and Herzegovina Region (2017-2020)* has been the framework for Swiss development cooperation in BiH, followed by the current *Swiss Cooperation Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021-2024)*. The overall aim of the CS (2017-20), which covers the majority of the evaluation period, was to "*contribute to the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path towards regional and European integration, fostering a democratic political system, a peaceful and cohesive society, providing inclusive access to essential services, the rule of law and a social market economy.*"

Across both strategy phases, Swiss development cooperation in BiH covers three core areas: governance, health, and economic development and employment. The governance domain has received the biggest funding volume of the three – CHF 41 million from 2017-2020, and close to CHF 27million from 2021-2024 – with financial contributions from both SDC and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

At the governance portfolio level, the objectives of the previous and current cooperation programme differ slightly, with greater emphasis on duty bearers/government (*"public authorities at all levels"*) in the previous strategy period, where the current portfolio objective statement emphasizes the rights-holders (*"citizens"*) more upfront (see table below). Nevertheless, when looking at the defined outcomes, two of three outcomes relate to changes by government, rather than citizens. Thus, the most significant evolution of the governance programme relates to the exclusion of justice engagements in the new programme. During the evaluation period, the programme included a focus on the justice sector, inter alia through support to the HJPC (covered in this evaluation), however these engagements have been phased out in the new cooperation programme.

Governance objective (2017-2020)	Governance objective (2021-2024)
▪ Public authorities <u>at all levels</u> adopt and implement more inclusive, accountable and responsive policies which constitute the base of a resilience governance system. They provide efficient, high-quality services – particularly in infrastructure – for all, and improve access to justice, thereby restoring citizens' trust towards institutions and within the society.	▪ Citizens' demand, and benefit from, democratic, inclusive and effective institutions.

Governance outcomes (2017-2020)	Governance outcomes (2021-2024)
▪ **Outcome 1:** Local Governments provide inclusive efficient quality services and improve their performance management within the public policy cycle. ▪ **Outcome 2:** Government actors on all levels harmonize their development planning and successfully participate in funding schemes including the EU pre-accession funds. ▪ **Outcome 3**: Citizens forge alliances with political representatives and civil servants, demand for reforms and engage in initiatives to improve living conditions. ▪ **Outcome 4**: The judiciary becomes more efficient and effective, thus combating impunity and better serving the needs of juveniles who are in touch with the justice system as victims or perpetrators.	▪ **Outcome 1:** Higher-level governments ensure a more conducive framework, which provides municipalities with adequate powers and resources (financial, human). ▪ **Outcome 2**: Local governments (LGs) improve their performance, are more accountable, and provide high-quality and equitable services, in particular in the water sector, in a climate- smart, disaster-resilient, inclusive and sustainable way. ▪ **Outcome 3:** Citizens, in particular women and youth, engage as actors of change in democratic processes and demand reforms.

4 Evaluation findings

4.1 Relevance

- *To what extent are governance programs adapted to the local contexts and in line with the needs and rights of local target groups?*

Throughout the evaluation period (2017 to 2022), the context in BiH has grown increasingly complex and fragmented; the country is trapped in a prolonged political crisis, with weakened State levels institutions, endemic corruption, and shrinking civic space. BiH has grown more fragile in recent years, facing deep political polarisation, and obstruction of state institutions.[1] The environment continues to be unfavourable toward undertaking necessary constitutional, electoral and rule of law reforms, despite the EU accession hinging upon these. In 2022, RS sought to dismantle or withdraw from state level institutions, to pursue key governance capacities at entity level, hereunder the judiciary, defence, security, and taxation.

The Swiss Cooperation Programme in BiH 2021-24 reflects these contextual changes, taking a less optimistic standpoint than its predecessor, with the acknowledgement that on governance "*there has been a noticeable rollback of previously enacted systematic reforms: authorities at all levels continue to disregard or reject binding decisions of the judiciary, including decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court, while corruption remains widespread.***"[2]** In the previous cooperation programme (2017-20), Switzerland made a strategic decision to focus on the local level, particularly working with municipalities to enhance accountability between public institutions at citizens. The main connection to the Entity and State level governments in the governance domain was driven by Swiss engagement with Associations of Municipalities and Cities (AMCs), to support a functional cooperation mechanism between local, regional, and national levels of governance, driven from the bottom up (i.e., from municipalities). Another longstanding national level governance engagement has focused on the judiciary,

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[1] European Commission. (2022). Bosnia and Herzegovina Country 2022 Report. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20Report%202022.pdf

[2] p. 5.

reducing the backlog of cases within the prosecution. The new cooperation programme (2021-24) reiterates the focus on the local level, as the overall portfolio refers to *Local* Governance and *Municipal* Services (previously called the Democratic Governance, Municipal Services and Justice Domain).

The Evaluation finds SDC's focus on *local* governance to be relevant, particularly in light of the EU acquis, since over 70% of mandatory EU-law-based regulations have to be applied at the local level. The view among SDC staff and partners is that the municipal level is more responsive and far enough removed from the higher-level political sphere that it is possible to enact changes on good governance. In as complex an institutional and political setting as BiH, a focus on decentralization and governance at the local level is seen as a way to circumvent the overlapping layers of bureaucracy, and to work at the layer of government that is closest to the citizens.

On the other hand, focus on the municipal level means that SDC's programs have less focus on addressing substantial national level governance challenges that BiH faces. During the evaluation period, there has been a systematic weakening the national level, as noted above, with RS' withdrawal from State-level institutions. Increasing fragmentation, polarisation, and a perceived lack of political will present challenges for SDC to engage with higher levels of government, both central and entity level. Focus on the local level (without strong vertical linkages to the national) may perpetuate fragmentation, and ultimately hinder 'transformative' results (discussed further in Section 4.1).

One engagement at national level – support to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC) – was started in 2010, based on a recognition that no international actors were engaging on the area, despite corruption and rule of law presenting major issues. Rule of law continues to be highlighted as one of the biggest governance deficits in BiH, an area that will require significant reform for EU ascension. The EU's most recent report on BiH (2022) stated that *"urgent measures are needed to restore public trust in the judiciary and strengthen its integrity. The lack of political commitment to judicial reform and the poor functioning of the judicial system continued to undermine the citizens' enjoyment of rights and the fight against corruption and organised crime."* SDC's partner, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC) is BiH's single judicial self-governance body, mandated to ensure an independent, impartial, and professional judiciary, making it very relevant entry point for SDC's efforts to strengthen the judiciary. However, the HJPC does not have a constitutional status, and its efforts to implement reforms to strengthen the integrity and efficiency have met resistance from within the judiciary, signalling the difficulty of bringing about transformative change at national level without political will (discussed further in Section 4.2).

The BiH context has also faced shrinking civic space, particularly felt in Republika Srpska, and while the ET is aware that SDC also supports civil society, this component was not visible in the selection of projects.

Access to basic public services for all people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not yet ensured. This applies to health, education and the environmental sector, in particular water. Currently, only 75% of the population has access to safe drinking water, 41% are connected to the public sewerage system, while 90% of the collected wastewater is released into watercourses without treatment, causing serious environmental contamination. Linking governance objectives to a concrete aim to improve service delivery, e.g. access to water and wastewater treatment, is seen as relevant entry point to working on governance reforms which makes improvements more tangible to citizens (as in the MEG project).

4.2 Coherence

- *To what degree are SDC's governance programs complementary and coordinated with other Swiss WOGA partners in particular in nexus settings?*

The governance programme in BiH has been developed together with SECO. The collaboration primarily focuses on the MEG project, where the complementarity and additionality of applying WOG instruments together is apparent. SDC and SECO share several key issues or priority areas, the water sector being one, where concrete examples showcase their complementarity and comparative advantages. SDC's focus within the MEG project has been to improve municipal governance through a performance-based approach, with a view to strengthening the public policy cycle, fostering quality service delivery, and increasing municipal investment. SECO's role relates in particular to the last point, increasing municipal investment, and providing advisory services to government institutions to prepare, tender, contract and implement public-private partnerships in infrastructure.

One municipality in particular is highlighted as a major success story for MEG, and the SDC-SECO WOG complementarity. The Gradiška municipality was according to UNDP among the lowest performers on governance issues in the baseline but improved significantly with the help of MEG. Following MEG participation, and the high performance of the municipality, Gradiška received a €40 million investment jointly by SECO and KfW for the construction of a wastewater treatment plant, seen as a direct outcome of the MEG project. According to UNDP and the MEG external review, KfW indicated they generally are not as quick to disburse funding of that scale, but that MEG participation is a strong indicator of municipal capacities and political will, which weighted into the investment decision.

The ET did not have meetings with SECO during the country visit, but from SDC's perspective, the WOG set-up with SECO functions well. At country level, strong communication channels exist between SDC and SECO, both at the Head of Cooperation level, as well as within the governance domain, through the Head of the Governance Programme, and Senior Programme Officers.

While outside of the formal scope of the Evaluation, the ET notes that it is unfortunate that the Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) pulled out of BiH in 2017, as many governance challenges link to issues of dealing with the past. It is evident in the context of BiH that issues of dealing with the past repeatedly resurface, and hinder governance reforms. Given that SDC engages more on the local / municipal level, WOG collaboration with PHRD would serve to enable more vertical linkages to the national level.

- *How well are SDC's governance programs (officially) aligned with partner countries' priorities? Is there political will in the partner government to implement governance reforms? Local/national ownership? Are SDC programs complementary to other donor's strategies and interventions?*

On paper, the core governance portfolio has clear alignment to BiH national priorities, particularly under the auspices of the EU accession process. For example, support to the HJPC is fully aligned with the existing policy framework of the BiH's justice sector reform, as well as the requirements and recommendations emerging from the EU accession process. Likewise, both MEG and the support to AMCs project have been aligned to the Strategic Plans of the AMCs 2016-2020, and both national and entity level Local Self-Government Development Strategies.

Generally, the credit proposals refer to how engagements are aligned with relevant policy and strategy frameworks, with analysis of relevant governmental stakeholders, taking into account the degree of political will across different levels. These analyses account for major differences in governance structures, capacities, and political will between the two entities on

issues of local governance, which in RS falls under the mandate of a designated Ministry of Local Administration and Self-Government, and in FBiH is delegated to the Ministry of Justice and cantonal justice ministries. The ET notes that the parallel systems of governance across the two entities, not to mention the national level, creates an additional level of complexity for SDC and other donors to ensure coherence and alignment across programming. In practice every governance project must be tailored to several different contexts, mirroring the fragmentation and complexity of the BiH political system. The same can be said for other sectors where SDC is engaged: for example, in the health sector, where different health policies exist between the two entities, as well as within FBiH's 10 cantons, and the Brčko District. As a result, navigating external coherence between different partners to push the nursing agenda forward coherently is a challenge.

Despite an aligned (and tailor-made) approach on paper, the reality differs; political will within the BiH national and entity level governments to implement needed governance reforms is low. Despite the existence of concrete strategy/policy frameworks on local governance (ad noted above), common across the two entity level ministries is a lack of political will to engage on substantial reforms. While the governance portfolio focuses on *local* governance, lack of responsiveness at higher levels of government presents a challenge for vertical linkages. Support to the HJPC has to a higher degree focused on the central and entity level, where cooperation with Ministries of Justice (MoJs) should have been instrumental in resolving structural obstacles to prosecutorial effectiveness and efficiency. However, this cooperation has de facto been inexistent (as will be discussed further in Section 4.3 on effectiveness), due to limited to no responsiveness from the MoJs.

The current geopolitical and national political context further complicates international engagement in BiH. In RS a small group of donors have suspended or withdrawn support, following secessionist policy and the obstruction of central levels of government. Likewise, top-down pressure has also resulted in municipalities withdrawing from engagement with international donors (USAID, UK) in RS due to perceived interference in domestic politics. Switzerland remains engaged across both entities and is seen a trusted and legitimate partner, in part due to Switzerland's 'technocratic' approach which is viewed to be more apolitical than other donors.

At lower levels of government (i.e., cantonal, and municipal), the political will and responsiveness are felt more strongly, which is part of SDC's justification for (continued) engagement at this level. For example, while the FBiH MoJ is perceived to have low capacities and limited incentive to engage on local governance, the Cantons have both concrete responsibilities for local governance, and an interest in improving services, making them potential drivers of policy and regulatory changes.[3] MEG is an excellent example, as the results of the project clearly indicate both commitment and motivation to implement political changes among decision-makers at the municipal level. The project has also included a measure of political will (understood as commitment and motivation) as a prerequisite or selection criteria in its second phase.

- *In the spirit of localisation, to what extent does SDC work with and strengthen local governments compared to other actors in humanitarian programmes in protracted crises?*

Since the Balkan migration route shifted to include BiH, migration has emerged as a key issue in the nexus between governance (i.e. migration management) and emergency response in BiH. The perpetual migration crisis that BiH faces is largely related to failures in policy coordination between the different levels of governance (central state, entity, cantonal and municipal levels), which manifests in a mutual shifting of blame and refusal to take on responsibility. Migration management is a governance issue at heart, and therefore the transversal

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[3]   MEG Credit Proposal

governance approach is both relevant and important to sustainably addressing the issue. Lack of political incentives and fragmentation have made it difficult to arrive at a point where the transition to a government-led migration response can take place.

Nonetheless, the Evaluation sees clear progress to this end in SDC's emergency response to the migration challenge, with focus on healthcare. The SDC programme in BiH applies a long-term, development approach, with a focus on systems-strengthening; this has also transferred to the humanitarian engagements that have arisen in response to the influx of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in BiH. There has been progress in working with government across both entities, more clearly felt in the FBiH, where SDC's partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has been able to engage in a contract with the entity-level MoH outlining the precise rules and responsibilities of each institution in relation to healthcare needs of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Despite the clear transversal governance perspective in the project, a valid point was raised by SDC staff, that there is a contradiction in the time and resources required to thoroughly apply the full transversal governance guidance and checklist to a project that by definition is short-term and faces pressure to react quickly in the face of an emergency. In fact, despite working with and through national actors and with the intent to support a full transition to a government-led migration response, the two short-term emergency projects funded by SDC were marked as 'non-targeted' for governance in SDC's governance policy marker system. While the SCO paid attention to governance aspects, it already took 5 months for the SCO to prepare the 6-month intervention, and applying the governance checklist would have delayed the process even further.

4.3 Effectiveness

- *To what degree can governance objectives be achieved in challenging contexts? Which approaches and strategies are the most effective? Is there a Theory of Change at programme level? Is it coherent? Is it aligned with the overall governance understanding and vision of SDC?*

The Evaluation finds that SDC's governance programme in BiH largely has been effective in achieving results, in spite of an increasingly challenging context at national and entity levels. Reporting on the three sampled core governance projects (i.e. MEG, support to AMCs, and support to HJPC) indicate that activities have been implemented, outputs are achieved as planned, and there is generally achievement of outcome-level results.

Nevertheless, **the Evaluation finds only partial achievement of the broader governance portfolio-level objective(s), because while objectives of individual contributions have been achieved, the long-term processes to create compact between state and citizen are not yet reached.** In particular, the achievement of portfolio level goals falls short when it comes to working at national level and ensuring strong vertical linkages to the work at local and sub-regional level, as well as ensuring strong civic participation, citizen engagement and trust. Nevertheless, SDC's governance objectives (articulated in the country cooperation programmes) include these aspects as part of the overall portfolio level ambitions.

The new cooperation programme (CP) for the period 2021-2024 features an improved the overall narratives and Theory of Change (ToC) at the governance portfolio level (see below). In the previous cooperation programme (2017-2020), there was no governance portfolio ToC, and therefore also a less clear narrative on how the 'sum of parts' (i.e. governance projects) would lead to the overall portfolio-level ambitions or vision SDC has for governance in BiH. While the ToC would be improved if it was linked to reflection on the risks and underlying assumptions of the

programme, it does provide a useful framework against which to measure achievement of results. For example, in relation to the aforementioned point on vertical linkages and engagement at the national level, the Evaluation notes that the ToC offers little guidance, the only reference being that as AMCs strengthened, they will influence higher-level government.

> Governance programme theory of change (CP BiH 2021-2024)
>
> - *If* the regulatory framework is reformed to support municipalities in applying standards of good governance and embracing a performance-based approach with adequate financial resources and human expertise
> - *If* investment in services is sustainable, in particular in the water sector
> - *If* citizens engage as actors of change
> - *Then* municipalities, including less developed ones can fulfil their responsibilities and provide equitable services to their citizens, in particular in the water sector.
> - *Because* the AMCs are more influential in making higher-level governments react to the fact that 70% of the EU acquis will have to be implemented by municipalities, international partners such as UNDP, the WB, the EU and other bilateral partners increase joint efforts with Switzerland to engage on strategic reforms with BiH authorities, and citizens see that their engagement through stronger CSO leads to changes in their lives.

Across the core governance portfolio, results achievement is the most evident at the local and regional level. For example, an external review (2019) of MEG highlighted that it was one of the most successful flagship projects to improve municipal administration and governance, making it more results oriented.[4] It confirmed results at the outcome level: MEG managed to improve performance of municipal administrations and democratic processes via innovative tools, such as e-governance and regular surveys showing citizens' satisfaction. In the justice sector, SDC's long-standing engagement with the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC) has proven effective in improving efficiency in the justice sector, reducing the backlog of cases. In the same vein, the support to the AMCs has led to an improved ability of the AMC Secretariats to plan and prioritise activities, and to provide channels for local governments to position themselves to advocate on issues to higher levels of government. A key achievement that for the AMCs and their members (local governments) has been the establishment of a revolving fund, which gives municipalities access to funding.

Where SDC's core governance programmes have sought to establish vertical linkages or to work at the national level, lack of incentives or political will have impeded achievement of results. This is evident in the support to the HJPC, where efforts to tie this engagement to wider justice sector reform have proven difficult: SDC's partner reports that while 30 amendments to the Criminal Code were submitted to Ministries of Justice (central/entity level) aimed at improving efficiency of investigations, trial proceedings and appellate proceedings, these were never taken up.

This is not to say there are no achievements when it comes to vertical linkages, as the support to AMCs has been partially successful in this regard. The project supporting AMCs was one way in which SDC has worked to establish vertical linkages between local, entity and national levels of government. As noted above, the engagement with AMCs has served to strengthen local governments' abilities and channels for collective advocacy and lobbying, which according to an external evaluation (2021), has led to increased recognition of the AMCs at higher levels of government. The evaluation also points to some examples of issues where AMCs were

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4   WINS Global Consult. (2019). Review Report: Municipal Environmental and Economic Governance (MEG) Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

successful in lobbying for the interests of local governments but points out that these successes often relate to stopping unfavourable legislative changes (i.e., putting out fires), rather than proactively securing more favourable changes.

While the governance portfolio also has addressed citizen participation and trust in the political system, it has only partially achieved results. In the MEG project, for example, channels for communication and exchange between citizens and municipal administrations were introduced, mainly in the form of Citizen Hours. While MEG thus successfully established mechanisms for public participation, engagement and accountability, which municipalities deem a success, it was noted that these are barely taken up by the constituency. Similarly, the justice sector project (HJPC) included a focus on strengthening citizens' trust in the prosecutorial system, results achievement is difficult to assess. In the project reporting, it is evident that engagements have been launched to improve citizen awareness and engage, but with little reflection on how these have translated into improved trust. The external evaluation (2019) of the project notes that the M&E framework of the project does not lend itself to measure whether achievement of this objective because at that point in time, no survey had been carried out to measure public perceptions. A 2020 USAID Survey, however, indicates that there has been a significant decline in public perception indicators[5] of the prosecutorial and judiciary accountability and transparency. The Evaluation notes that there are several factors that have contributed to this deterioration of public perception and trust which are outside of the project's control, hereunder public discontent with specific cases that have been featured in the media. Nevertheless, the findings highlight that SDC has met difficulty in attaining outcomes related to public trust, and relatedly civic participation and engagement in BiH.

- *Transversal governance: How effective are governance components in strengthening sector program outcomes? Can transversal governance components improve the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions?*

Due of the immense complexity of the political set-up and governance systems In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a focus on transversal governance is seen by SDC as inherently necessary when looking to work in any sector.

However, **experiences from the SVET project highlights that certain sectors (in this case the education sector) are highly politicised, making it difficult to address the 'political' aspects; here, SDC & partners can fall back to the 'technical' angle.** SDC's implementing partner GIZ stressed that attempting to work on governance of the education system / sector in Republika Srpska was impossible, due to resistance to allow external influence on the education systems in RS. Therefore, the project was forced to take a more technical focus (working with individual TVET centres), dropping the wider systems strengthening/governance aspects (which they were able to work on in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)). The nursing project also met difficulties with addressing nurses' education**,** noting that venturing into addressing education "somehow became considered a political issue", making it too difficult to pursue.

On the other hand, experience from the healthcare sector was largely positive, with clear linkages between transversal governance and healthcare outcomes. In *healthcare*, there was a sense that transversal governance strengthened outcomes since the focus was on building healthcare systems from the community level and up. The *Strengthening Nursing* project actually contributed to some (unintended) governance outcomes, more specifically to do with reducing the fragmentation of the governance of the sector. The partner organisation explained that going

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5   USAID. (2020). Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity II: Judicial Effectiveness Index of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 2020 Report. https://measurebih.com/uimages/JEI-BiH-2020-Report-Final-508.pdf

beyond the project's objectives, it was able to contribute to more collaboration across entity-lines, resulting in legally binding changes to legislation on nursing that covers the whole country.

4.4 Efficiency

- *Which modalities of cooperation – contributions, mandates, budgetary support, private sector engagement and other partnerships – are particularly conducive to achieving outcomes in governance programs?*

The governance portfolio largely works directly with government institutions and actors, but SDC does not provide direct budget support. Instead, the preferred modality in SDC's governance portfolio in BiH is to use (on-budget) contributions, often joined up with other like-minded donors. One of the core governance projects in the sample (AMCs) involves delegated cooperation with Sweden, which by all accounts has worked well. By working through contributions on this project, SDC and Sida ensure complementarity, and increase their leverage and reach as compared to working alone. Similarly, joint contributions allow for risk-sharing. The MEG project also takes the form of a contribution, although unlike the AMC project, each of the donors (Switzerland, Sweden, Czech Republic and the EU) has a separate agreement with the implementing partner, UNDP.

On transversal governance, SDC staff report using a greater proportion of mandates than contributions. For example, in the health sector and in the emergency assistance project, SDC uses mandates. On the one hand, mandates are seen to limit the flexibility for partners to adapt and adjust programmes, but on the other hand, SDC staff note that working through a mandate makes it easier to ensure the transversal governance focus or that governance principles are integrated.

4.5 Impact

- *Which effects of programs (intended or unintended, positive negative) can be observed regarding people's lives and communities' functioning changed? To what degree do SDC's governance programs contribute to transformative changes and (local) institution building?*

A key finding from BiH is that connecting outcomes on accountability to a specific sector, such as water in the case of the MEG project, makes the beneficial impacts of decentralisation programming more immediate and obvious for citizens and communities. Comparatively, the support to AMCs to establish and enable local governments to draw on funding from the revolving fund may ultimately also benefit communities and have a transformative effect; however, for the communities, the impact is more indirect. With MEG, there is a direct and tangible benefit for citizens from strengthened municipal governance, namely that local government meet their legal obligations in provision of quality water supply and wastewater management services to the citizens.

On the other hand, whether the impact of the governance portfolio is felt equally by all citizens, including the most marginalised, is unclear. The goal of MEG to improve services and job opportunities for vulnerable and socially excluded groups has fallen short in practice. Likewise, the performance-based approach to municipal governance, which has been accredited a large part of the project's effectiveness, fails to reach the worst-off, least resourceful municipalities. While the Evaluation has insufficient evidence to draw clear conclusions, it bears mentioning that there is a risk to be aware of in this approach, to contribute to growing inequalities between municipalities in BiH. It should however be noted that the SCO has taken note of the former shortcoming (related to jobs vulnerable and socially excluded groups), and the approach was therefore altered in MEG phase 2, to focus only on the water service sector.

The Evaluation finds evidence that SDC has contributed to transformative changes and institution building, most clearly at the local level, and with a focus on *in*formal institutions – i.e. norms, understandings, and patterns of interaction between citizens and local authorities – rather than formal institutions (rules, laws, or regulations). The support to AMCs, for example, which has resulted in greater recognition and involvement of AMCs by entity governments, signals an impact on *informal* institution-building, i.e. that entity governments have changed how they interact with local government through the AMCs. Transforming *formal* institutions on local governance has proven more challenging, although recent progress was made in changing the regulatory framework on local self-governments. The transformative changes to institution-building – formal and informal – are less evident at national level, but examples do exist. For example, the support to the HJPC has been able to foster ownership, with the project's implementation unit now formally anchored within the HJPC. In technical terms, they are now very well-equipped. While this signals a success in building the *formal institution,* the transformative power of the HJPC in justice sector reform and addressing big-scale corruption remains limited by *informal institutions / practices.* This suggests the importance, when trying to achieve transformative impact, of addressing both the formal and informal institutions underpinning a particular governance dynamic.

4.6 Sustainability

- *To what extent are SDC governance interventions owned by partner governments (supported through their budgets) and part of national/local systems or policy environment?*

- *To what degree can achieved program results persist under a deteriorated context? What are the factors that facilitate lasting change through governance interventions?*

In BiH, SDC has created a highly replicable and effective model for measuring and improving municipal governance. One of the strengths of the programme has been the ability to secure buy-in by local governments, ensuring that there was political will and motivation to institutionalise the prescribed changes to local governance. However, given that the performance-based approach in MEG was incentivised through donor-funded grants, it remains to be seen how much independent appetite there is for replication. On the other hand, high performance in the project has supported municipalities in leveraging external funding from outside sources, and these examples may continue to serve as motivation to continue to strengthen local governance.

Across the governance portfolio, it is evident that the political context in BiH is impacting projects all the time from the national down to the local level. The political environment and leadership not only impact SDC and partners' ability to enact change, but also the degree to which results will be sustained. For example, there is a widespread recognition within the MEG project, that results are vulnerable to reversals in the event of personnel changing (e.g., a change of Mayor). On the other hand, on the support to the HJPC, several of the project's deliverables such as strategies (communication, gender mainstreaming etc.) or rulebooks have been formally adopted by the HJPC and are thus formally anchored within the institution, even if there is changeover in staff. With the municipal governance engagement (MEG), there have been efforts to formally institutionalise results as well. One of the ways in which the project has sought to counteract allowing results to be purely person-driven is by working on institutionalising good local governance practices in legislative (entity-level) and executive (municipal level) structures within a broader legal framework on local governance. However, the external evaluation of MEG notes that the push for reform was prioritised less than other aspects of the project, and that in general, the link to the AMCs (also supported by SDC) could have been exploited better to facilitate regulatory changes.

Dependence on external funding remains a challenge for several of the engagements, undermining sustainability in the long-term. For example, the 2019 evaluation of the HJPC project's second phase reported that the HJPC was neither in a position to provide nor finance similar services (in terms of scale, quantity, quality) to the Standing Committee if the Swiss funding ended. The same was noted in the 2021 evaluation of the AMC support project, which pointed out that the AMCs are highly dependent on the Swiss/Swedish project grant to ensure staffing. Without these sources of funding, the AMCs will be unable to maintain the institutional results.

5 Conclusions

The following section provides overall conclusions on the Swiss governance portfolio in Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the sample covered by the Evaluation.

Relevance

While the Evaluation notes a less optimistic stance in the Swiss Cooperation Programme 2021-24, the governance portfolio throughout the evaluation period has remained relevant and in line with the needs and rights of citizens. Despite the rollback of certain reforms in BiH, the SCO has found relevant entry points to engage across key governance issues in the country, hereunder decentralisation, local and regional governance, and the justice sector. Linking local governance to service provision in the water sector is seen a particularly relevant way to promote decentralisation in the context of BiH.

Coherence

In terms of <u>internal</u> coherence, SDC and SECO co-developed/fund the governance domain in BiH, and there is clear indication of value addition through the WOGA collaboration, particularly evident in the MEG project. On <u>external</u> coherence, the Evaluation found strong collaboration and synergies with other development partners, particularly Sweden, and that SDC plays a valuable role in coordination, recognized by both international and national stakeholders. Political will and incentives at national level have been a challenge for SDC during the evaluation period, but SDC has found strong entry points at the local and regional level, where there is political will and traction to work on governance challenges.

Effectiveness

Overall, the governance programme has been highly effective, in spite of the challenging context in which SDC operates. Individual engagements indicate a high level or results achievement, however some of the higher, portfolio-level objectives have not been met, particularly in relation to national-level reforms. In the view of the Evaluation, strengthening reflections on the causal linkages in the governance portfolio level ToC would support the SCO's strategic thinking on how the different engagements together may contribute to higher level transformative changes.

Efficiency

The SCO's approach of working with contributions in the governance domain is sound, and offers opportunities to work jointly with other donors, to increase SDC's leverage. Mandates, within other sectors, has offered the SCO opportunities to integrate transversal governance elements more strategically into projects, because of the control that mandates offer SDC. On the other hand, SDC's partners prefer the flexibility of contributions to mandates.

Impact

SDC's governance portfolio in BiH has had a transformative impact in several ways. Connecting outcomes on accountability and good governance to a specific sector, has led citizens to feel the tangible impacts of decentralisation (in relation to water service delivery). The governance portfolio has also strengthened *informal institutions* (norms, understandings, and patterns of behaviour between citizens and authorities), both at the local and regional level. Finally, the governance portfolio has contributed to formal institution-building in the justice sector, through the HJPC, with these changes now formally anchored within the institution.

Sustainability

SDC has created a highly replicable and effective model for measuring and improving municipal governance in BiH. Across the governance portfolio, it is evident that SDC has sought to strengthen local ownership, contributing to both social and institutional sustainability. On the other hand, dependence on external funding sources remains a challenge for the sustainability of several core governance engagements, even where there is political will to continue engagements.

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Annex 2: List of persons met / interviews (available only upon request; data protection)

Burkina Faso

1 Introduction

This case study report on SDC's Burkina Faso programme is one of the four deep dive case studies carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022*" undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). The four 'deep dive' cases and five 'light touch' case studies will together with broader analysis on SDC's governance interventions form the basis for the Evaluation Report.

Burkina Faso was included because Switzerland currently is evaluating its overall governance portfolio as part of its development cooperation in the country after a long engagement, and in view of current ongoing discussions internally and within the wider international development cooperation governance community, about how to work effectively in situations affected by conflict and different forms of fragility. The central dilemma is whether or to what extent it is possible to do governance programming within situations of conflict and / fragility and achieve governance-positive results.

In view of security considerations, this 'deep dive' case study was conducted (May-June 2023) as a 'hybrid', with the lead consultant working virtually but closely with two national consultants based in Burkina Faso. A document review and a series of working sessions with staff in the SDC Bureau in Ouagadougou was followed up by one-on-one interviews with key informants in mandated implementing organisations, a workshop at local government level, interviews with donor partners and SECO staff in country. One interview with the PHRD in Bern was also conducted. A preliminary draft top line report was shared with cooperation office staff in Ouagadougo and their feedback was integrated into this final report, shared initially with the CLP as part of a preliminary findings paper, and then finalised as a case study report.

The case study report is structured according to the Evaluation Questions (EQs) of the evaluation (relevance; coherence, effectiveness; efficiency; impact and sustainability (ch4). The report addresses all EQs, however within the limitations of time and access, some sections are longer than others, because of limited access to information.

2 Context of the programme

Between 2017-2022, Burkina Faso underwent profound political transformations, spearheaded by the popular uprising of 2015 which led to the ousting of former President Blaise Compaoré (1987-2014), who was President of Burkina Faso for 27 years, following a military coup, which led to the death of former President, Thomas Sankara. Since Campaore's demise, Burkina Faso has seen a rise in jihadist mobilisation and attacks from the north of the country, mass internal population displacement and the proliferation of (often state sponsored) community-defence forces, which elected governments from 2015-2022 were unable to contain or address. The electoral process that finally brought President Roch Marc Kabore to power, paving the way for democratic reforms, did not pave the way for greater security with jihadist forces loyal to Al Qaida and Isis proliferating. By 2020 these groups controlled up to 40 per cent of the country, with the north and east of the country increasingly abandoned by ill-equipped Burkina military Forces. Since 2017, a considerable number of lives have been lost in violent attacks and conflict and internal population displacement reached unprecedented levels.

This advance of jihadist forces happened in spite of a military security agreement with France in 2018 to use Burkina Faso as the military base for special forces of Operation Barkhane – the anti-insurgency French force. Lack of tangible results against jihadist fighters and bungled attempts at security responses exposed democratically elected Kabore himself to a miliary coup. In January 2021, he was ousted by officer Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who despite his open support for the use of Wagner forces, was equally unable to seriously turn the tide on jihadist attacks. A military coup led by Ibrahim Traore, in September 2022 finally brought an end to French military cooperation in February 2023, paving the way for new military cooperation deals with Russian Wagner forces.

Today, Burkina Faso is a territorially divided country where conflict and insecurity are rife and levels of population displacement and anti-Western (particularly anti-French) sentiments are high. Burkina now has a 'transition' military regime which is only willing to cede power to an elected regime once the 'conditions' for electoral politics are ripe, i.e. once the insecurity which plagues Burkina has been addressed. Burkina Faso today is a country where the prospects for and practice of democratic governance and the rule of law have eroded considerably, despite at the level of some local government level where the central government still has nominal control and a semblance of democratic processes are still in place in the absence of elected officials. Burkina's military regime under Ibrahim Traoré continues to officially remain committed to 'transition' to civilian rule pending the right conditions and the reintegration into ECOWAS –after Burkina's suspension following the first coup – although it remains unclear whether the calendar for transition will be respected and whether ECOWAS will continue to bring pressure to bear for such.

The inability of the Burkina Faso state to guarantee basic human and physical security for the whole territory has been a critical factor in shaping Burkina Faso's political fortunes, and a key determinant in shaping attitudes and tolerance of regime change by military coup rather than democratic ballot. Today, Parliament is no longer functioning as an elected body but rather an appointed one. Local elected mayors have been replaced by appointed officials and the space for journalistic freedoms has shrunk, with the French press in particular having been proscribed. At the same time the state bureaucracy has become swollen, and its administrative effectiveness has slowed down. Yet, at the macroeconomic level, despite the economic slowdown created by the COVID-19 pandemic, growth rates remain positive, partly as a result of gold exports from the world's 14th largest gold exporting country (with Switzerland being the highest importer of Burkina Faso's gold).

3 Brief programme description

In the 2021 SDC programme documentation, the hypothesis was that Burkina was a 'stabilised crisis' where it would remain possible to 'stay engaged' and to support efforts to bring Burkina Faso back from the brink of collapse and promote conflict transformation. This was identified as Switzerland's raison d'être.

During this period Switzerland, with its long-standing relationship with Burkina Faso and presence in the country, pursued its 3-pronged strategy: 1. Democracy, Rule of Law; 2. Education and Skills Development; 3. Local Economic Development. An additional focus on Macro-Economic support and increasingly on humanitarian aid was also added during this period. This strategy operated on the basis of theories of change linked to each of its programming priorities. Rather than being overarching and externally formulated for Burkina, the theory of change was articulated relative to the evolving scenario on the ground.

Increasingly growing levels of insecurity and conflict have seen the 'integration' (at least on paper) of conflict sensitivity, more humanitarian funding and action, and an emerging portfolio around

social cohesion articulated as an interest, and a move in the direction of a nexus approach. This period eventually saw the creation of a specific post to oversee humanitarian efforts and social cohesion / peace, playing an important role in humanitarian coordination efforts. This period also saw the increasing use of intermediary organisations mandated to support the development and implementation of social cohesion / peace promotion aspects (DCAF) and to support the SDC office in Ouagadougou in the development of the new peace and social cohesion programme, which was to begin in October 2023 (Swiss Peace). There were also some efforts made to make use of the internal division specially dedicated to peace and human rights (PHRD) and ongoing plans to further reinforce PHRD involvement during programme implementation.

The main focus of Evaluation Questions were two programmes: DEPAC (Le programme d'appui à la Décentralisation et à la Participation Citoyenne - The Decentralisation and Citizen participation programme) (end of Phase 1 and Phase 2 and CIDEM 1 & 2 (Programme de renforcement de la citoyenneté et de la culture démocratique au Burkina Faso – the Citizenship and Democratic Culture Strengthening programme). We also looked at cross cutting or transversal governance, taking account of different governance approaches, most notably citizens' engagement; accountability and transparency across different sector programmes (particularly humanitarian assistance); local economic development; education and skills development. We also looked beyond SDC at SECO with respect to the macro-economic support programme. See below:

The **core governance** programmes sampled include:

- DEPAC 2 - Programme d'appui à la décentralisation et à la participation citoyenne 2 (March 2018 – August 2022)
- DEPAC 3 - Programme d'appui à la décentralisation et à la participation citoyenne 3 (August 2022 - July 2026)
- CIDEM 1 - Programme de renforcement de la citoyenneté et de la culture démocratique 1 (October 2018 - September 2021)
- CIDEM 2 - Programme de renforcement de la citoyenneté et de la culture démocratique 2 (no common programme document) (July 2022 – June 2026)

Transversal governance has been assessed through the:

- Peace and Social Cohesion / Humanitarian portfolio
- SECO Budget transparency
- Vocational and skills training programme
- Agro-forestry programme

The Evaluation was particularly interested in assessing how and to what extent governance-focused programming can yield results in these contexts and contribute to resilient, people-centred local and national institutions. The emphasis in the ToR and reasons given for selecting Burkina Faso are the trends with respect to democratic reversals in the country and the wider Sahelian region, as well as ongoing heightened levels of conflict, insecurity, and displacement.

4 Evaluation Questions

4.1. Relevance.

The Evaluation finds evidence that SDC's programme interventions align with Burkina Faso's national plan prior to and since the military coups. The programme composition is balanced in the context in terms of target group needs and identification of priorities. The focus on local authorities

emerged was consistent with national government's priority of decentralisation (since 1991) and the enabling of local authorities to become freer to administer and manage local affairs with respect to local development and governance promotion, but also adapted to changes as they happened. This is evidenced by the way the programme documents were written and updated during both phases of DEPAC and CIDEM, as lessons learned were taken into account at each new phase.

SDC has kept a long-term focus, which has been helpful in a context of instability and in this regard has shown adaptive capacity. The programme has demonstrated that it was possible to pursue governance programming in the context of a crisis.

SDC tried to pivot and innovate in the right ways by experimenting through CIDEM and introducing peace and social inclusion into the way local level governance was supported. For example, as part of the first phase of the CIDEM programme, the emergence of democratic cultures was supported via the CODEL - La Convention des Organisations de la société civile pour l'Observation Domestique des Elections - project in late 2021 (September – December). This project included activities in municipalities, including locations where there was significant jihadist activity, with political figures from majority and opposition parties, young people, men, and women of different faiths. However, despite the best of intentions, the coup that occurred a few months later in January 2022 meant that elections could not take place.

The SDC programme has also demonstrated its capacity to experiment and learn from mistakes. To illustrate, in the context of political upheavals, SDC support to citizen awareness raising around elections led to the creation of Presimetre, a project to reinforce the socio-economic accountability of elected officials, put into place by Diakonia (an SDC partner/intermediary) in 2016. The programme aligned with citizens' demands for greater governance accountability and expectations of promises of the elected being delivered. Diakonia also aligned with pre-2022 aspirations of the Burkina Faso administration for the development of strong democracy based on rights, responsible institutions, and well-organised civil society. The approach, however, was heavily criticized by the EU, particularly with respect to its capacity to reach the rural population. It was also acknowledged by the SDC governance team that the approach was too elite focused and had an urban bias – for example by concentring on Twitter-based communications for Presidential candidates, when most people were using WhatsApp or Facebook. This led to a change to supporting the Swiss organisations, such as Fondation Hirondelle which runs a community radio studio called Studio Yafa. The fact that the programme was then able to pivot and adopt a new approach in the form of FASOVEIL a project, under CIDEM 2, implemented by Laboratoire Citoyenneté and Fondation Hironelle (under a mandate), is testament to the capacity to learn and adapt. FASOVEIL formed partnerships with Burkinabe radio/TV stations through a project contributing to 'reinforcing democracy and civic-mindedness of citizens, especially young people and marginalised communities'. There were also new co-financing opportunities created for SDC after 2022, when EU could no longer disburse via government channels, so it increased support to the FASOVEIL project under the CIDEM 2 programme.

SDC engaged in a relevant civic participation and democracy strengthening programme CIDEM, with projects aimed directly at increasing the electoral preparedness of citizens. CODEL focused on specific communes to target its interventions following violence and fragility. Against the backdrop of the 2015 insurrections followed by the most transparent elections in Burkina Faso's history, CODEL played an important role providing 6000 election observers which were then universally accepted by everyone. For example, CODEL planned for similar activities in the local elections in May 2021, where 3800 observers were to help to increase confidence/trust in electoral system. Although this was necessary after violence in several communes during 2016 local elections, by 2022, the military coups brought a temporary halt to the electoral system, making the CIDEM strategy to support CODEL less relevant. It should be noted however, that the period, even

after the (temporary) suspension of the electoral process, preparatory / anticipatory support to elections was still supported by national authorities in the form of reforms (i.e. a new law on funding of political parties) and sensitisation and education programmes.

Throughout the evaluation period SDC, in order to stay engaged, maintained a focus on local level citizen's engagement with decentralised structures and continued (despite the context of democratic reversals and rising insecurity) to continue supporting democratic governance. It did so by investing in widening access to information via support to the media about the 'rights' on a variety of issues ranging from gender equity, violent extremism, conflict management, and democratic governance. SDC's desire to remain relevant by developing a human rights-based approach to security sector reform via a planned support to DCAF on International Humanitarian Law about which discussions began between 2021- 2022 (with a view to contractual collaboration from 2023 onwards) demonstrated an aspiration to adapt, as reflected in the creation of a new post on Peace and Social Cohesion. On human rights, the production of the Human Rights Report (2023) served to clarify SDC's human rights position in an evolving political context, taking it beyond the aspirational strategy articulated in annual reports to a reflection on what sustained engagement and impact on advancing human rights in Burkina Faso could look like. SDC's annual reporting during this period even prior to the publication of the Human Rights Report of 2023 did, however, continue to cite statistics on human rights ranking for Burkina Faso (UN Human Rights Council, periodic reviews).

4.2. Coherence

The Evaluation found coherence with regard to working practices internally between Swiss organisations in Burkina Faso. WOGA with SECO worked well and there is integration of governance and accountability into approaches to macroeconomic stability promotion – also in the form of citizen budgeting and accountability. Whilst advice and expertise from PHRD was used during this period, there was some interest expressed within PHRD about consolidating collaboration further.

The Evaluation also found that SDC promotes coherence amongst donors by playing an important coordination role as lead coordinator on core governance questions, not least in the decentralisation and rural infrastructure engagements. Other donors recognised the Swiss value addition in terms of working collaboratively and trying to work towards intra donor coherence.

With regard to alignment, informants suggested the importance of being nuanced in thinking about whether the programme could or should be 'aligned' in the context of 'democratic reversals'. The picture from within was not as stark as from outside. Informants agreed that it 'was' possible to work with the authorities – even with the transitional military regime - and pursue ambitions of accountable governance. The 'Prime Minister' of the transition government, launched the new civil society and media project FASOVEIL (component 2 of the CIDEM 2 programme), which is partly co-funded by the EU. SDC appears to have tried to balance its focus on civil society participation in decentralised local government (via DEPAC), with an explicit support to civil society strengthening focus (via CIDEM 1 then CIDEM2), notwithstanding the need to pull back from explicit engagement with electoral reform processes and opportunities as democratic reversals kicked in. Rather than turning a blind eye to 'democratic erosion' and rising insecurity, SDC appears to have found a way of staying engaged.

Meanwhile the number of IDPs rose considerably. Insecurity has been rising and geographical access is being restricted; the electoral cycle was interrupted after two consecutive military coups; representative parliamentary processes stalled; decentralised authorities with mayors being removed and appointees in charge. SDC continued to operate in more and more low security zones by adapting intervention approaches and introducing remote monitoring elements. The

Evaluation sees this as an interesting approach in terms of staying engaged and not having mapped out red lines beforehand.

Responding to local needs and supporting an active, well-organised civil society that is able to keep the civic space open, can arguably be seen as a successful adaptation or interpretation of 'donor-driven' concepts, and therefore of value, particularly in a period of increasingly restricted civic space and democratic reversals at both national and the local level. Nevertheless, the evaluation team were concerned that a 'needs based' approach to governance rather than a democratic-accountability-based one ran the risk of becoming an end itself rather than a means to an end (democratic transformation), given the non-conducive political environment.

The creation of an explicit peace and social cohesion programme (to be launched in 2023) – distinct from DEPAC and the development of explicit linkages between the humanitarian programme and DEPAC, discussed in the following section, were innovative adaptive SDC responses to the dilemmas their programmes faced in the changing political context.

The creation of an explicit Culture support programme (PASEC, Programme d'appui au secteur de la culture) was intended to use support to culture as a vehicle for shaping democratic values, peace and social cohesion, particularly targeting women and young people. In the contexts of conflict, this was also a means of thinking beyond the classic governance programme modality (PASEC). The support to culture programme was not, however, the focus of this evaluation.

4.3. Effectiveness

The evaluation noted results in the area of decentralisation, specifically with regard to the establishment of ADCT – an Agency for support to decentralised municipal authorities able to oversee and channel its own funds matched by Swiss funds and what has been described as a 'ring-fenced' use of country systems. Nevertheless, some other donors (KfW) challenged the approach in context of new regime – noting that a high tolerance threshold on the part of SDC in terms of procedures for disbursement, and volumes from the central government which went down throughout the evaluation period. Other donors, even whilst heralding SDC's positive reputation more broadly, suggested this approach to channelling funds through the agency, served to undermine other donors' ability to insist on procedural and regulatory standards before channelling funds via state agency – which generated fiduciary risk concerns. However purely on development effectiveness grounds, SDC's use of the agency and its systems, is a positive development that could ultimately contribute to the improvement of its procedural standards of the agency, rather than creating a parallel system that generates additional transaction costs.

Throughout the course of the evaluation period, programme documents and annual reports revealed a deep awareness of the need to adapt the programme approach to integrate more explicit focus on peace and social cohesion, conflict sensitivity, political economy analysis, and a nexus approach. The programme approach during the period also saw the explicit creation of a peace and social cohesion programme distinct from the DEPAC programme in its third phase and the creation of a special post designated to deal with humanitarian affairs. Synergies were created between DEPAC and humanitarian support programme – overseen by the double-hatted Peace and Social Cohesion / Humanitarian advisor post (notably through the FASOVEIL project (CIDEM 2) radio support programme) that specifically identified internally displaced populations as targets for information dissemination on access to social services in areas where the DEPAC programme was operating, and where IDPs were present.

During much of the period, annual reports referred to the need to re-orient the programme towards a greater focus on peace and social cohesion, and a more explicit focus on young people. However, while waiting to be able to augment the country office staff capacity in this area, it was

only in 2023 that the Social Cohesion programme was launched, before which 'backstopping' approaches were used, involving buying services on a short-term basis to conduct analysis or provide conflict sensitivity training to staff.

Whilst there was evidence of one-off events (convenings) and a plethora of initiatives to engage and support civil society actors (through CIDEM) and the culture support programme (PASEC), the activities remained quite disjointed. It was difficult to assess the effectiveness and impact of social fragmentation and significant democratic reversals (2021), particularly in a context of rising insecurity.

Interestingly, amongst all the progamme staff and implementing organisations interviewed (with the exception of the post specifically assigned to social cohesion and humanitarian assistance) discussions about the conflict and security landscape by the governance staff and the context of democratic reversal were not extensive.

The approach was heavily reliant on implementing organisations (Mandataires) with some successful partnership with local organisations in the context of CIDEM 2 (FASOVEIL/Fondation Hirondelle)– but less so within the context of DEPAC 2. This was welcomed by informants at a local level (given their capacity weakness signalled) including former mayors who, alongside SDC direct technical support through mandated organisations/contractors, were able to realise infrastructural ambitions. However, the evaluation team questioned whether this might limit the scope for sustainability and replicability, in particular beyond areas of intervention.

4.4. Efficiency

The overall programme in it is initial iteration (CIDEM 1) was dispersed in the sense that there is a multiplicity of partners, which is justified by the need to be experimental in the ways to adapt to the needs of a fast-evolving situation, but at some point became unmanageable with impacts difficult to quantify or assess. This was corrected with a reduction to 3 partners in CIDEM 2. Decentralised cooperation and local governance have been a focus and added value of SDC for decades. This is the case in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Benin, but not in Chad. Yet questions have been raised about the extent to which within this format, SDC has really been able to innovate beyond this axis, even despite adding civil society and media components to the programmes. Today 60 per cent of the resources allocated to the governance portfolio continues to focus on decentralised governance via implementing organisations. There were different views across the team between those that believe that concentrating in particular zones with municipal authorities over time enables SDC to have a clear impact (output) story to tell. Others insist on the need for national level institutional engagement. This also led to the establishment of the agency mentioned above, which evolved from a 'fund' and became an agency. Both views have their merits. One has a focus on direct support that can be seen as a steppingstone to more system-level support. This agency-centred approach and the use of budget support – in a ringfenced way – at a time when others were withdrawing support particularly in the context of fast evolving national context where insecurity, rising number of IDPs, and reduction in territory that national government controls, suggests the need to consider expanding approach geographically (beyond humanitarian assistance) to have more sustainable impact.

In the context of COVID, heightened insecurity, devaluation of FCFA, disbursing budgets was challenging but throughout the evaluation period, SDC demonstrated the ability to keep disbursing at consistently relatively high levels. Huge budgets were spent via intermediaries mandataires with a hands-off approach being lauded as a success. The evaluation team, however, considered whether mandated intermediaries were simply driving their own projects in their own rights – and how much programmes were actually owned and led by SDC.

4.5. Impact and sustainability

Switzerland has a strong reputation in Burkina Faso as a trusted and credible interlocutor. Switzerland was the 7th biggest bilateral donor in 2022, even whilst contributing just 2 per cent of all ODA flows to the country, Switzerland is clearly punching above its weight. (That said, in some sectors such as professional education, and on decentralisation, Switzerland is the second or third largest donor iin terms of levels of ODA contributions). ODA volumes aside, cautious realism about the extent to which SDC's has been able to have overall impact is needed. That said, in a context of increasingly limited space to manoeuvre and the lack of kudos or credibility of international actors by the military regime, perhaps it helps to be small and perceived as discreet.

In 2021, SDC commissioned the consulting firm District Management Conseil International (DMCI) to capitalise on the experience of the Swiss Cooperation in Burkina Faso in supporting local authority councils as part of its support for decentralisation). Local authority councils have seen their capacities strengthened and are increasingly able to deliver quality services to citizens. Indeed, according to DMCI, SDC are increasingly able to provide quality services to citizens. Furthermore, the final report DEPAC phase 1, GAC- December 2018 indicates that over the period 2015-2018, the 58 Annual Investment Plans (IAPs) submitted by all 29 partner Local authority councils in three years of support were validated by the Council executives (with an amount of more than 3,282,000,000 FCFA) on the basis of official deliberations. Several approaches and tools have been developed to support local governance in the programmes: action research, multi-stakeholder consultation, strengthening the technical and political skills of elected officials, support for the emergence of a local civil society of inquiry, etc. Despite these impacts, local governance and citizen participation beyond the target communities, throughout the country is not structured or formalized and there has been little synergy with other programmes (apart from some aspects of the humanitarian programme) which could have made it possible to share experiences and learn from those of others, as well as to pool resources. It is a positive development that in light of these observations, the SYNAD programme (2023-2026) was established, to accompany the exit phase of DEPAC 3 in leveraging its experiences beyond the directly targeted communities and strengthen system-wide approaches in the country-wide approach to local governance and citizen participation, whilst also creating synergies with other donors and the state authorities.

Governance programmes, through the implementation of the democracy and election programmes, have contributed to substantially improving the democratic culture of citizen questioning and accountability of the authorities. The organisation of citizen dialogue programmes has prompted some media outlets to include citizen questions about programmes in their schedules. RTB is one example.. Partners now seek to fund capacity building of the media to enable citizens to better monitor the implementation of commitments made by authorities. SDC has certainly contributed to building the capacity of the media. Citizens who have a better knowledge of their rights are successfully demonstrating an awareness through the traditional media and social media platforms.

The development of rural roads (public works programmes) has significantly improved the ability of women to transport their produce and improved their financial self-sufficiency and strengthened their capacities. Some women have started small businesses that are profitable enough to support themselves and their entire families. The construction of these rural roads has opened up villages and has had social, health, and economic impacts. The accessibility of villages and capitals has made it more possible for the population to access basic social services in the municipalities that are now equipped with systems and mechanisms that improve their efficiency in project management while preserving social cohesion: social project management (MOS, AGEN, Slopes Steering Committee, etc.). But do these interventions amount to governance interventions as such? And should it be SDC's role, where there is limited national government buy-in, to be supporting local municipalities in the delivery of basic social services? The positive impacts on

citizen's participation in local development issues amongst targeted communities is, however, undeniable. There has been an improvement of basic social services (civil status, school canteen, school supplies, health, drinking water, etc.) and the drilling of wells in areas affected by IDPs and the construction of a school/classroom making it possible to accommodate IDP students. Swiss involvement in supporting the national government to define and draft the policy on labour intensive rural public works, would constitute a specific governance relevant intervention.

Agility was difficult to ascertain, because it was unclear to what extent learning and feedback were integrated into programmes implementation strategies and approaches. The evaluation also noted that importance of integrating a social cohesion and peace focus with conflict sensitivity was flagged for several years in the documentation, but that it appeared to take some time before a programmatic focus was developed. The provision of conflict-sensitivity training for all staff in 2021 was followed up by the creation of a dedicated post with responsibility for social cohesion and peace in 2022, which also took over the existing humanitarian portfolio. It is unclear to what extent the regular analytical updates on risk were actually systematically integrated into programme implementation approaches and the management of programme portfolio by governance staff.

The evaluation team also noted that with the increase of the humanitarian crisis and its response, some of the reporting has become more focused on outputs and deliverables and less on impacts.

5 Conclusions

SDC appears to have an impressive track record as a donor that remains credible in the eyes of the populations that that have been the site of its programmatic interventions mainly through intermediaries and its interlocutors at the local government, national government ministry, and agency level. Amongst international donors and UN agencies with whom it collaborates in the support of civil society/decentralisation support programmes (particularly those unable to provide support through government since 2021) and within state and donor sponsored coordination architecture, SDC is a stable, long term, discreet, and engaged partner of choice. SDC's longstanding competent cohort of national staff provide a consistent ear to the ground, which is invaluable in context of high turnover and rotation of international staff. This national staff level resource, consisting of individuals who have held posts for a long time, enables SDC to project an image of continuity. Whilst advantageous in enabling SDC to stay engaged and informed, SDC's staff configuration operates in a deeply divided country and deeply divided society. SDC will need to consistently invest and ensure that conflict sensitivity is mainstreamed through its human resource planning and management practices.

Whilst the Burkina Faso case study clearly demonstrated that it is possible to operate in contexts of shrinking civic space, rising insecurity, internal displacement, and democratic reversal, it is unclear whether the SDC footprint in Burkina is of high impact in terms of governance and human rights priorities. Certainly, staying engaged and continuing to operate in increasingly territorially limited spaces in solidarity with the population is a worthy enterprise that arguably makes sense in the context of shrinking democratic space. However, the question about whether SDC is attaining its transformative potential/ambition, needs to be seriously considered.

Burkina Faso is a low-income country where the conflict risk and violence is high. Throughout the period under consideration, Burkina Faso has paradoxically achieved positive results in terms of growth levels, which is linked to gold exports. As previously mentioned, Switzerland is the main importer of Burkina Faso's gold. Although the value addition to the Swiss economy through privately owned gold refineries is limited, as noted in a number of annual reports, SDC's investment in the support programme to artisanal mining programme (which is not the focus of this evaluation) and SECO's macroeconomic development programme (institutional reform and public financial management) is an astute approach to managing any potential associated

reputational risks. Its noteworthy that SECO which has been working closely with the governance programme and is now considering closing its distinct government support programme and integrating the 'civil-society oversight on transparent budgeting' component into the SDC governance programme.

Whilst the appreciation of SDC's footprint amongst targeted populations cannot be denied, different approaches to contributing to improved or more resilient governance in an increasingly fragile context, in ways that increase the possibilities for conflict transformation,, may need to be considered. How SDC staff reinforce and leverage the interlinkages between the Peace and Social Cohesion programme, DEPAC 3, and CIDEM 2 will need to be considered carefully to ensure they all mutually reinforce each other. It is clear that there is a strong awareness, particularly at the Head of Cooperation level and HQ level about the urgency of moving in this direction (as evidenced by the annual reporting and management responses to them). There have been notable attempts to pivot the programme in this way which need to be scaled up, with staff across the board in the governance portfolio equipped to manage programmes of a different order and type.. This needs to go beyond backstopping and one-off conflict-sensitivity / political economy trainings. The consolidated use of internal resources (PHRD) could further support this evolution as well as concrete steps to institutionally incentivise the use of these resources by SDC.

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Annex 2. List of persons met (available only upon request; data protection)

Kyrgyzstan

1 Introduction

This case study report on SDC's country programme in Kyrgyzstan is one of four 'deep dive' case studies carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022*" undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). The four 'light touch' case studies and the four 'deep dive' cases, together with broader analysis on SDC's governance interventions, form the basis for the Evaluation Report.

The case study report focuses on the assessment of governance and rule of law programming in Kyrgyzstan from 2017 until 2022. Three *core governance* contributions in Kyrgyzstan were assessed, in addition to three *transversal governance* contributions. The sample of contributions covered by the Evaluation are as follows:

Core governance:

- Voice and Accountability: Citizens' Participation and Oversight of Budget Processes in the Kyrgyz Republic (VAP) - 7F-06122
- Public service improvement (PSI) - 7F-06409
- Strong & Inclusive Parliamentary Democracy (SIPD) - 7F-09435

Transversal governance:

- Rural Communities' disaster risk and climate change resilience (DRR) - 7F-10773
- Effective management & prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCD) - 7F-09476

2 Context for the programme

The evaluation period (2017-21) witnessed significant political, economic, and social turbulence in Kyrgyzstan. In 2017, the country showed commitment to reform the state governance system in a number of ways, including through strengthening civil society and promoting fiscal decentralisation. Against this background, Swiss Cooperation supported governance interventions at both municipal and national levels, with a strong focus on long-term reforms. This included finalising plans for a project to support the independence and capacity of the Kyrgyz parliament: the Strong and Inclusive Parliamentary Democracy project (SIPD).

The political situation remained relatively stable from 2017 until October 2020, albeit with limited strategic vision from Government for economic reforms, lack of transparency, high levels of corruption, and an unclear agenda for fiscal decentralisation. Notwithstanding these challenges, Swiss cooperation achieved important results during this period; in particular, improving the access of citizens to decision-making at different administrative levels, including budget hearings at the local level, and public hearings on the budget resolution at the national level.

In 2020, however, Kyrgyzstan's political settlement underwent a significant shift. The country experienced a severe economic crisis linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, in tandem with political upheaval triggered by the annulment of parliamentary elections held in October of that year. This was followed in early 2021 by the election of President Sadyr Japarov. A constitutional review was initiated, which led to a shrinking of pluralistic political space – notably a reduced role of parliament, greater concentration of power in the hands of the president, and increasingly personalised politics.

In the aftermath of this political instability, the progress of structural, national-level governance reforms, supported by SDC and other donors, has slowed down. Since 2021, there has been a lack of clarity about the reform agenda of the new leadership, and governance priorities on decentralisation, identified in 2017 (e.g. fiscal decentralisation, administrative and territorial reform, open government partnership) have either stalled, or made only sporadic progress. In addition, the governance system has become more authoritarian, while respect for human rights and the rule of law has deteriorated. Increasing pressure is being placed on human rights defenders and independent journalists, whilst the judicial system continues to be undermined by endemic corruption. Attempts have been made to shrink the operating environment for civil society, and to introduce new restrictions on freedom of expression.

3 Brief programme description / TOC

Swiss bilateral engagement with Kyrgyzstan began in 1993. Cooperation with Central Asia is an integral component of Swiss foreign policy and foreign economic policy and is based on the Federal Law on Cooperation with Eastern Europe. The overall goal of Swiss Cooperation in the Kyrgyz Republic is that "peace and social cohesion as well as responsive and inclusive institutions and sustainable development improve the population's well-being". SDC's activities in Kyrgyzstan are part of a regional programme for Central Asia, and thus the overall strategic for co framework for country programming is provided by the Swiss Cooperation Strategy Central Asia (2017-2021). This regional strategy reflects the same priorities for support as the Kyrgyz Cooperation Programme, noting that "... in Kyrgyzstan, targeted action will promote increased public service coverage at local level; support increased efficiency and transparency in public financial management; and provide support to reinforce parliamentary systems enabling citizens to hold their government and parliament accountable."

Swiss Embassy colleagues informed the Evaluation team that the Embassy did not have a Theory of Change for its activities on governance during the evaluation period. The Evaluation Team was informed that, according to the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central Asia 2017-2021, the programme has been oriented around the following outcome statement: "Public institutions deliver efficient and effective services in an inclusive way and are accountable to citizens. Civil society participates in decision making processes". Switzerland works towards these objectives through activities focused on rule of law and respect for human rights; support for democracy and a social market economy; and strengthening civil society. In addition, Switzerland works to improve the provision of public services, including safe drinking water, sanitation and solid waste management, and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Against the backdrop of the political and economic unrest described above, the emphasis for Swiss development cooperation has, over the period of the evaluation, shifted focus, and ambitions have been re-set. As mentioned earlier, the economic impact of Covid and the political impact of the adoption of the new constitution has meant that the progress of Swiss Cooperation, during the evaluation period, has slowed down in some respects. As we describe more detail below under Section 4.1. on Relevance, the ambition, in 2017, to promote systemic or structural changes at the national level, was replaced in 2020 by a renewed emphasis on local governance, and a more 'people-centred' approach. Looking ahead, the Embassy has framed the objectives of future Swiss cooperation in terms of 'shoring up' the gains made in the past, rather than making new progress on structural reforms.

4 Evaluation questions

4.1 Relevance

- *To what extent are governance programs adapted to the local contexts and in line with the needs and rights of local target groups?*

As the governance system in Kyrgyzstan has become increasingly authoritarian during the evaluation period, SDC has stayed relevant at a macro level by pivoting its strategic focus. In response to the growing centralisation of power in the President and increasing limitations on civic space, the balance of the Embassy's work has shifted away from support to the government, Parliament, and national elections, towards programming more through civil society and other non-state actors on issues of local governance. With limited entry points for working on national systems or structural policy reform, the Embassy has kept the programme relevant by taking a more 'people-centred' approach, involving a stronger focus on demand-driven change at local level, on leaving no one behind, and engaging more directly with citizens to address immediate needs and priorities.

In the absence of opportunities for supporting vertical accountability between citizens and national authorities, SDC has also ensured its relevance by building horizontal links between local self-government. SDC and its implementing partners have been skilful at finding entry points and committed stakeholders with whom to work at the local level, whilst also supporting 'intermediary' mechanisms in between the local and national, such as the Union of Local Self-Governments, and the Local Governance Academy of Central Asia. In our assessment, these are politically smart ways of representing the voices of local stakeholders in national-level fora, in the absence of more direct channels. These mechanisms and associated activities are described in more detail below under sustainability.

As part of adapting the programme to stay relevant to the context, SDC has also stopped a significant national-level governance programme. A decision was made in 2021 to stop the SIPD project, which provided support to the national parliament and MPs, and PFM at the national level. When the project began, it was relevant to the development priorities of the Kyrgyzstan Government's National Sustainable Development Plan 2013-2017 (as well as national framework documents, and SDC's strategic policies). The national plan had a number of objectives specifically related to the effectiveness and transparency of democratic governance, which SIPD was designed to help address.

However, due to political changes during the evaluation period which were noted above, the priorities of the government have shifted, and establishing space for engagement between civil society and Parliament stopped being a priority for the national government. As such, it was felt by SDC that the continuation of the SIPD project presented major risks to the overall Swiss cooperation programme. However, some interviewees felt the decision to stop the SIPD project was short-sighted, as the constitutional balance of power could potentially shift back towards the Parliament in the coming years. As such, questions were raised by some informants as to whether SDC should have maintained stronger entry points for future Parliamentary work, rather than stopping work at this level altogether.

Informants generally agreed there are pressing governance deficits at the local level, which are being addressed through SDC's activities. During site visits to VAP and PSI pilot municipalities by the Evaluation Team, informants described a number of persistent governance challenges at the local level. This included poor coverage of public services, lack of responsiveness of local authorities to citizens needs and preferences, and low levels of citizen engagement on public budgeting and service provision. As such, SDC's activities on local

governance respond to the needs of citizens for improved public service provision, and for LSGs to be more inclusive, transparent, and accountable in fulfilling their responsibilities as duty bearers.

Participants and partners in each of the projects included in the case sample confirmed that SDC's activities were designed and implemented in line with the needs and rights of local target groups. Based on information shared by key informants and contained in project documents, the Evaluation Team is satisfied that SDC undertakes extensive consultations with different stakeholders and interest groups (including civil society and community-based organisations) as part of programme design and maintains a degree of flexibility to adjust if these change, once programming is underway. Moreover, tools to identify the needs and preferences of potentially marginalised groups, which have been developed through the support of Swiss aid, have also helped ensure the relevance of SDC's work from an inclusivity standpoint. In view of the current political context in KR, where public services are not easily accessible for large sections of the rural population and where transparent, accountable, and inclusive local governance processes are weak, the relevance of SDC's activities to the needs and rights of local target groups is clear.

- *How relevant are SDC's governance programs as a tool to achieve SDC's development goals?*

As described above, the overall goal of the Swiss Cooperation strategy in Central Asia is to have responsive and inclusive institutions, as well as peace and social cohesion. SDC's governance programs in Kyrgyzstan have been relevant to achieving these goals at the local level, by increasing space for inclusive public participation in reform and decision-making processes, and supporting local governance to become more accountable, efficient, and effective in basic service delivery. While SDC does not work directly on peace objectives in Kyrgyzstan, it is reasonable, in the view of the Evaluation Team, to frame this as a second-order effect of SDC's support to responsive and inclusive institutions at the local level.

However, although the Embassy has worked usefully on mechanisms to scale up its results, SDC's programme is less directly relevant to the achievement of SDC's development goals at the national level. As noted above, SDC's parliamentary project SIPD was terminated in March 2021, as serious programmatic risks were associated with the unstable political conditions. Partly as a result, planned work at the national level to support formal elements of decentralisation (including through LSG sector reform, fiscal decentralisation, and the development of an LSG code), have not been taken forward by SDC as intended. Initiatives to improve the intergovernmental fiscal transfer system, under the VAP programme, have also found less traction, due to the prevailing balance of power at the national level.

4.2 Coherence

– *To what degree are SDC's governance programs complementary and coordinated with other Swiss WOGA partners in particular in nexus settings?*

There is evidence of complementarity across some of the programmes included in the sample for this evaluation, in the sense of a clear causal logic indicating how they are connected and designed to amplify the collective contribution of Swiss aid. For example, the VAP and PSI projects complemented one another by addressing accountability and transparency in public service provision and budgeting from demand and supply sides. Due to their scale and long-term commitment, both projects have been strategically well-positioned to pilot and upscale participatory budgeting, and to address core challenges in municipal service delivery. Complementarity between the projects has been key to this: for example, tools for

participatory budgeting that were initially developed under VAP have been strengthened and extended under PSI.

The VAP and PSI projects have also ensured coherence through systematic peer learning. At the local level, municipalities adjacent to pilot LSGs gained access to VAP and PSI methods without the grant mechanism, which allowed both projects to test their approaches and share learning. As part of SDC support under the VAP and PSI projects, the LSG Union has been involved in peer-learning at the national level, and union delegates have also benefitted from international exposure visits to post-socialist countries with more advanced experience in decentralisation and local governance, including Bulgaria and Estonia.

Transversal governance projects in the evaluation sample demonstrated synergies and complementarity with other relevant projects. NCD successfully collaborated with other health sector projects financed by SDC, including the Medical Education Reform (MER) and Health Facility Autonomy (HFA) projects. For example, according to project documents, a collaboration between NCD and the MER project proved useful for strengthening the role of nurses and facilitating e-learning for PHC personnel. An annual planning workshop with all SDC health sector projects in Kyrgyzstan proved useful for exchanging information and preparing synergies.

– *How well are SDC's governance programs (officially) aligned with partner countries' priorities?*

Alignment to (official) national priorities is not always desirable from the perspective of promoting governance objectives, nor has it always been the basis for all elements of SDC's engagement in Kyrgyzstan. At the start of the evaluation period, SDC's governance programme was closely aligned with partner countries' priorities at the national level, in the form of commitments to more open and inclusive government, and decentralisation. In 2017, Kyrgyzstan became the first country in Central Asia to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP), an international platform of 74 countries and 15 subnational governments committed itself to more transparency, accountability, and increased citizen engagement. With respect to local governance, enhancing political and fiscal decentralization was mentioned in the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040, and an action plan on optimising services provided at the local level was adopted for 2018-2023 by the Ministry of Economy and the State Agency for Local Self-Governance (LSG) and Interethnic Relations.

However, during the evaluation period, political momentum for reforms to the state governance system – and in particular, the implementation of political, administrative and/or fiscal decentralisation - has tapered away, and in some respects is now being reversed. Legal reforms and changes to the budgetary system, that would undermine decentralised governance, have been proposed or are being implemented, and the independence of municipalities has come under threat. According to SDC partners' analysis, promoters of decentralisation and local governance in Parliament and government have, during the evaluation period, come under increasing pressure to mobilise against initiatives towards more centralisation.

Lack of political will, at the national level, for decentralisation, has not impeded SDC's ability to engage on this agenda. Instead, SDC has found entry points at the local level, where political will is still present. Municipal-level officials, with whom the Evaluation Team spoke, confirmed that decentralisation remains a key priority for them. At this level, SDC continues to engage on decentralisation, despite the government's push to (re-)centralise power.

At a more macro-level, informants mentioned there is a desire across all political levels in Kyrgyzstan to avoid further instances of serious political unrest. A number of interviewees attributed the October 2020 unrest in large part to citizen dissatisfaction with an unresponsive governance system. As such, some interviewees felt that SDC's support to decentralisation, more responsive local governance, and more active citizen participation at the local level, is aligned with

this broader interest (at both national, regional, and local levels) to avoid citizen dissatisfaction and to build stability.

4.3 Effectiveness

– *To what degree can governance objectives be achieved in challenging (authoritarian, post-conflict, fragile) contexts? Which approaches and strategies are the most effective? Is there a Theory of change at programme level? Is it coherent? Is it aligned with the overall governance understanding and vision of SDC?*

Despite the serious political and economic disruption experienced in KGZ during the evaluation period, SDC's projects have performed well in terms of meeting their stated outcome-level objectives – albeit primarily at local, rather than national levels. Interviews by the Evaluation Team and a review of project documents indicates that, during the evaluation period, SDC's governance programmes have largely been effective in improving the accountability, transparency, and oversight of local government, while strengthening mechanisms for citizen engagement and participation in planning, budgeting, and assessing service provision. According to interviewees, much of the outcome-level success of the SDC programme stems from unique methodologies that were developed for responsive and accountable service provision. Joint Action Plans (JAP) and Service Improvement Action Plans (SIAP) were developed, respectively, under the VAP and PSI programmes. These are tools to help LSGs plan, manage, and provide services based on the priority needs of the local population.

Interviews with local government counterparts and project beneficiaries indicates the JAP and SIAP methodologies have played important roles in increasing accountability in municipal budgeting and public participation in decision-making processes, as well as improving the responsiveness of municipal service provision to the needs of the local population. Interviewees confirmed that, from a low initial baseline, a more trustful and cooperative environment has been built between residents, municipal civil servants and local councils, with a clearer reciprocal understanding about their respective roles, needs, and responsibilities. Moreover, monitoring data collected under VAP indicates there is a notable difference between target and non-target municipalities in terms of the quality of governance, budget management, and perception of corruption, and rates of citizen satisfaction with priority services. These results are well-aligned with the overall objective of SDC's governance work: to support institutions to become accountable, efficient and effective in basic service delivery.

In addition, these instruments have helped deliver benefits to particularly vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. For example, as a result of applying SIAP's instrument for inclusion, some municipalities are providing an enhanced level of service to children with disabilities. The Evaluation team visited a school in Bosteri, where adaptation classes for children with special educational needs have been successfully established and are functioning well, with the support of the project's grant and the municipalities' co-contributions. We discuss this example in more detail under Impact.

The capacity and knowledge of LSGs on a range of core governance functions has also been strengthened. A number of municipal civil servants and local government officials, interviewed by the Evaluation Team, said VAP had improved their knowledge and technical ability on a range of areas, including financial management, community engagement, and local needs-based planning. LSG officials also said participating in the VAP programme increased their understanding of delegated state functions, including their ability to distinguish these from local authority functions.

SIPD also delivered some important outcome-level results before it was closed. The project successfully supported committees and parliamentary working groups to adopt new M&E tools and evidence-based methodologies for their oversight work, which have apparently been used to adjust government spending in a number of areas. The project also supported the development of an action plan for an open and transparent parliament, as part of Kyrgyzstan's engagement in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) mentioned above. As we discuss further under Sustainability, interviews with key informants in Parliament during the Evaluation visit confirmed that a number of transparency measures introduced during SIPD have been maintained after project closure, including live streaming of committee sessions.

– *Which approaches and strategies are the most effective?*

Building institutions and networks beyond the state has proved to be an effective strategy for insulating project results from wider political turbulence. Creating alliances and networks between non-state institutions helped amplify the effectiveness of SDC's governance activities. For example, supporting the Union of LSG to establish partnerships with civil society groups and local community actors has reportedly helped the Union strengthen its advocacy position and legitimacy. In addition, supporting inter-municipal cooperation and peer-to-peer learning amongst LSGs has also been an important mechanism for protecting and building on gains that SDC has supported in building the capacity and independence of local government.

Engaging the existing LSG system and community structures to support local service provision and other project activities has also been an important tool for effectiveness. These structures include women groups, rural health, youth and parent committees, elder courts, and associations of water users. According to project reporting and interviews, drawing on these existing structures reduced the likelihood of creating parallel structures and improved the connections between these local networks. Using existing community structures also reportedly contributed to greater citizen participation in the decision-making process. SDC has worked to strengthen inter-municipal cooperation, to share knowledge and solve broader administrative and/or logistical issues on service provision, which also appears to be an effective way of improving governance in the absence of strong support from central government.

The use of a local partner as the lead implementing organisation for VAP came with a number of advantages. Informants felt that choosing a local organisation to lead the project, in the form of DPI, was an effective strategy. It encouraged local ownership of the programme's processes and results, and DPI's local knowledge and problem-solving ability proved to be important strategic assets. The project also helped build the capacity of DPI itself, which is seen as an important legacy and a factor that also supports the sustainability of results.

Interviewees mentioned the use of competitive grant processes for pilot initiatives as an effective strategy for enabling demand-driven change at the local level. A common observation across VAP, PSI, and SIPD, is that competitive pilot project funding is more impactful than non-competitive grants; the former is reportedly a more direct way of channelling funds to organisations (and particularly CSOs) that have a high level of motivation, capacity and expertise.

– *Is there a Theory of Change at programme level? Is it coherent? Is it aligned with the overall governance understanding and vision of SDC?*

The results mentioned above, and the mechanisms used are well-aligned with some of the core overall objectives and vision of SDC's governance work. SDC was not working to a portfolio-level theory of change for the evaluation period, but instead had the following overall outcome objective: 'Public institutions deliver efficient and effective services in an inclusive way and are accountable to citizens. Civil society participates in decision-making processes. This is coherent and well-aligned with the overall governance vision of SDC. However, it is important to note that, in the case of KGZ, SDC's results are principally in relation to local rather than national

institutions, and the outcome statement does not explicitly reflect the direction in which the programme has changed during the evaluation period. In the Switzerland-Central Asia Cooperation Programme (2017-2021) strategy, one of the objectives is strengthening parliamentary democracy at the national level: "the Kyrgyz Republic will be supported in strengthening its democratic election processes, thereby increasing the citizens' trust in the political system". As noted above, whilst some important results have been achieved at this level, direct Swiss support to the KGZ Parliament was stopped in 2021 in response to the trajectory of governance in the country, and the shifting balance of power towards the President and away from Parliament.

– *Transversal governance. How effective are governance components in strengthening sector program outcomes?*

In KGZ, the Evaluation looked at two transversal governance projects: one on disaster risk reduction (DRR), and one or non-communicable diseases (NCD). With only one year of implementation completed under DRR during the evaluation period (2022), there are only limited outcome-level results so far. However, as evidence of the contribution of transversal governance to sectoral results, interviewees and project documents mentioned several institutional and regulatory reforms supported by the project. These include:

- tailoring existing legislation to ensure integration of parametric/index insurance options in the laws for agricultural insurance;
- supporting institutional reforms related damage/loss accounting, risk rating and forecasting;
- introducing evidence-based accounting and budgeting for the disaster risk mitigation, preparedness, and response activities;
- reviewing and updating national laws on international humanitarian assistance, civil protection, and other related legal documents to increase operational efficiency of disaster risk reduction activities.
- analysis of the existing regulatory framework in the field of emergency prevention, as part of developing the basic concept of a disaster risk profile for LSGs

Turning to NCD, various activities, described as transversal governance by interviewees and in project documents, were successfully carried out during the evaluation period:

- strengthening the role of nurses and shifting some tasks from doctors to nurses;
- developing evaluation tools to improve and harmonise internal and external quality audits;
- conducting an analysis of the referral system and developing a new referral algorithm;
- improving budget transparency; collaborating with relevant line ministries to develop mechanisms to improve the transparency of the health budget and procurement processes such as equipment selection procedure.

Identifying the precise contribution of transversal governance to sector program outcomes is challenging, given that those outcomes in the aggregate rest on a wide range of factors, many of which are beyond the reach of SDC programming. However, under NCD, interviewees confirmed that, as a result of clinics following more transparent and accountable procedures for procuring supplies, there have been significant gains in terms of improving budget transparency and reducing corruption. In addition, the 'task shifting' work mentioned above appears to be associated with positive outcomes for patients; patient satisfaction surveys cited in project documents highlight an increased involvement of nurses and an improved satisfaction of patients with their work.

4.4 Efficiency

– *Which modalities of cooperation – contributions, mandates, budgetary support, private sector engagement and other partnerships – are particularly conducive to achieving outcomes in governance programs?*

In Kyrgyzstan, SDC has principally worked on local governance through on-budget grants. This has reportedly been an efficient way of delivering resources, by reducing the number of intermediary actors and transaction costs involved, whilst also avoiding the emergence of parallel budgets and systems. The grant mechanism is considered cost efficient, as giving small grants to project municipalities directly represents a higher economy of scale compared to managing funds centrally from Bishkek. The grant mechanism is associated with a number of other advantages for achieving governance outcomes:

- it provides an opportunity for residents to solve issues in a participatory way, while also pushing municipalities to mobilise their own resources;

- grants were found to be an effective mechanism for increasing LSGs' investment in management skills, and responsiveness to local initiatives. LSGs reportedly improved their skills to design, obtain funding and implement grant projects;

- as mentioned above, grants have been a useful modality for surfacing different approaches to civic and political engagement, and for identifying committed reformers at the local level;

Interviewees from across all projects confirmed that SDC projects are delivered with a strong emphasis on VFM. This includes keeping extraneous costs low, and adopting sensible cost-saving measures on transportation, per diem fees, and other expenses. Interviewees also mentioned SDC's implementing partners have made efforts to use and build the capacity of consultants and advisors from local municipalities, rather than relying on internationals or Bishkek-based professionals. Finally, VFM has been strengthened through sharing learning from pilot municipalities with neighbouring municipalities and strengthening platforms for inter-municipal cooperation. These have reportedly been efficient ways of leveraging SDC's investments to cover more beneficiaries and to scale up initial results.

– *To what extent do SDC funded programs learn/replicate from each other? And how? (added question) Is there learning from other donors?*

SDC programmes working on complementary governance objectives in Kyrgyzstan (e.g. projects working in parallel on supply-side and demand-side accountability, such as VAP/PSI) are encouraged to interact, learn from one another, and share their lessons and methods. VAP and PSI amplified their results through the systematic use of peer learning. In addition, these projects have looked for creative ways of replicating their results. For example, as mentioned above, municipalities adjacent to pilot LSGs were given access to VAP and PSI methods (albeit without the accompany grant mechanism which pilot LSGS participated in). The use of exposure visits was also reportedly a useful learning method: delegates from the LSG Union, for example, visited Bulgaria and Estonia, to learn from their experiences of decentralisation and local governance.

The extent to which SDC learns from other donors is unclear from the evidence gathered, although it is noted that SDC generally plays an active role in multilateral fora, pooled funds, and donor coordination platforms, which point to opportunities for cross-donor learning. Conversely, there is more concrete evidence of other donors and other organisations learning from SDC - suggesting the organisation often has valuable lessons to share on local governance. Tools and mechanisms on accountable service provision (JAP and SIAP), developed by SDC and introduced in pilot municipalities, have been adopted by other donors (MoF, USAID/CAMI, ARIS, GIZ, and the Soros Foundation) and in other, non-participating

municipalities. In addition, the PSI Project actively participated in the national discourse on gender equity and social inclusion through its representation on the Coordination Board on gender and social inclusiveness issues (a platform which includes partners from development programs supported by UNDP, GIZ, USAID, Aga Khan Foundation, and the World Bank). At the level of national policy, PSI also contributed to improving local governance and strategic planning processes for municipalities; the project's gender and social inclusion specialist was included in an expert group developing a new Methodology for social and economic development programmes at local and sub-national levels.

4.5 Impact

– *Which effects of programs (intended or unintended, positive, negative) can be observed regarding people's lives and communities' functioning changed? (inclusion, participation and human rights)*

The principal impact of SDC's governance work can be described as positive behavioural and attitudinal changes in how citizens and local authorities interact. This impact reflects broader changes in their awareness of their respective rights and responsibilities, and greater appreciation of the need for and value of citizen participation and local government transparency. After decades of centralised governance and upwards accountability, Kyrgyzstan has made some progress in moving towards more open and transparent LSG management, along with more participatory and equitable citizen engagement in service provision. Whilst this progress is now under threat, as noted above, SDC made an important contribution to this agenda during the evaluation period. The JAP and SIPA methodologies developed by SDC have not only led to improvements in service provision (as noted under Effectiveness), but they have also reportedly contributed to wider impact by strengthening the social contract between citizens and local government representatives. Amongst councillors and staff employed by LSGs, VAP and PSI have apparently promoted attitudinal changes, with officials now understanding that their role is to serve the public, as well as central authorities. On the demand-side, citizen participation in budget and tariff hearings is said to reflect broader changes in their understanding of the relationship between tax payment and service delivery.

The Evaluation notes that efforts have been made to extend impact to other potentially vulnerable or marginalised individuals or groups, i.e. to leave no one behind. For example, the Evaluation observed significant impact in the lives of pupils and parents resulting from SDC support to a school in Bosteri municipality for children with disabilities, which was one of the pilot initiatives of the PSI project. Improvements in the transparency of budgeting and procurement, and greater responsiveness to the needs of local parents and pupils on the part of local government bodies, has led to more useful and relevant investments in physical assets for the school. These investments, that are being purposefully used and maintained, have resulted in pupils experiencing a better quality of education and more opportunities to socialise. Interviewees mentioned that some of the challenges experienced by carers and parents in providing adequate support have also been addressed. Meanwhile, attitudes in the wider community toward those with disabilities are also reportedly changing in positive ways.

To what degree do SDC's governance programs contribute to transformative changes and (local) institution building? What is the hindering and enabling factors? NB: We define transformative change as "social, environmental and economic effects of the intervention that tackle exclusion, discrimination and inequality, in part through addressing power structures and institutions (the rules of the game)".

Based on the observations above, in KGZ, we do see SDC's governance interventions delivering transformative changes and institution-building, but at the local level, and

mainly in terms of *in*formal institutions – i.e. norms, understandings, and patterns of interaction between citizens and local authorities. At the local level, beliefs, norms, and unspoken rules about the value and processes of inclusive democratic participation and accountability have been positively impacted through SDC's governance programming, as evidenced through recurring patterns of interaction between local government authorities and citizens across a number of countries in our sample.

Some of these changes to informal institutions can be described as transformative, particularly as they start from a low initial baseline. SDC's promotion of participatory budgeting in pilot municipalities has reportedly created a positive enabling environment for participation amongst local citizens, which did not exist to the same extent prior to the implementation of the relevant projects. As mentioned above, this has led to wider impact in the form of mutual trust between local authorities and residents, and a change in attitude and behaviour on both sides.

However, on balance, SDC has made less clear impact in terms of transformative changes to national-level, formal institutions (i.e. policies, laws, and formal regulations) during the Evaluation period. SDC has contributed to positive institutional changes and has strengthened the organisational capacity of key actors at different administrative levels. However, due to broader changes in the Kyrgyz political settlement during the evaluation period, these achievements have not always been fully consolidated through corresponding changes to underlying power structures or formalised in legal frameworks or explicit government policies. For example, SDC's support to fiscal decentralisation and the local self-government legislative framework have not generated the results desired because of changes in the priorities of the central government. Under President Japarov, legal amendments have been initiated that would increase the powers of district and regional representations of the national authorities, to the detriment of LSGs. As a result, as noted in the Embassy's 2021 Annual Report, the independence of municipalities is under threat and SDC's achieved results in the area of citizen engagement in local decision-making, transparency and accountability of local authorities, may be fragile.

4.6 Sustainability

SDC has made good efforts to ensure the sustainability of results in spite of the deteriorating context for governance work at the national level. The centralisation of power under President Japarov and the weakening of Parliament clearly poses challenges to the overall sustainability of some of the results being achieved at the local level and led to some disappointment in terms of outcome and impact ambitions for SDC during the evaluation period. However, the Evaluation notes that some of the mechanisms and tools used or developed by SDC are proving resilient in the face of the shifting balance of power and priorities at central level. This includes intermediary platforms between the national and local level, such as the Union of LSGs (ULSG) and the Local Governance Academy. The Evaluation Team confirmed that the Union of LSGs continues to perform well as a collective voice for the interests of LSGs nationwide. The membership base of the ULSG is reportedly growing, and the organisation has proved successful in supporting non-pilot LSGs to adopt SDC-supported tools for responsive budgeting and service provision. In addition, the inclusive approaches of JAP and SIAP have been promoted nationally and are now being applied by national partners in government such as the Ministry of Finance, and among development partners including USAID/CAMI, ARIS, GIZ, and the Soros Foundation. The SIAP model is now reportedly the default model for the application of stimulation grants from the Ministry of Finance.

Despite deciding to stop its Parliamentary strengthening initiative SIPD, some of the initiatives supported by SDC to improve the openness and transparency of Parliamentary affairs have been made a lasting difference to the operation of Parliament and have been sustained after project closure. In particular, SIPD resulted in some parliamentary committees

adopting new, evidence-based methodologies for their oversight work, which appear to have been institutionalised. The testing of oversight procedures by CSOs and technical experts with the Law-and-Order Committee and the Social Affairs Committee resulted in the adoption of a resolution by Parliament to recognise the new methods as a standard practice. In addition, SIPD introduced a Gender Council within the Speaker's office in Parliament, providing a platform for parliament and civil society organisations to address issues around gender-based violence. Interviewees confirmed the council is still functioning as of September 2023.

On balance, the Evaluation sees stronger ownership and thus greater potential for sustainable changes at the local level. According to a number of interviewees, citizen participation on local governance, in the municipalities that have participated in SDC programming, has gained sufficient momentum and that attempts to reverse such practices are likely to be resisted. These sentiments were supported by further testimony, from LSG officials and beneficiaries in the municipalities that were visited by the Evaluation Team, regarding their ownership of SDC-supported tools. Interviewees confirmed they are still using the JAP/SIPA methodologies independently of SDC support and applying these tools to an expanding set of services areas and community activities. As described above, these processes have momentum because they have made tangible differences to people's lives (in terms of improved services) and strengthened cohesion amongst local authorities and constituents. As a result, citizens and local authorities are self-motivated to sustain and build on the progress to date.

5 Conclusions

The following section provides overall conclusions on the Swiss governance portfolio in Kyrgyzstan, based on the sample covered by the Evaluation.

Relevance

As the governance system in Kyrgyzstan has become increasingly authoritarian during the evaluation period, SDC has stayed relevant at a macro level by pivoting its strategic focus, shifting away from support to the government, Parliament, and national elections, towards programming more through civil society and other non-state actors on issues of local governance. In the absence of opportunities for supporting vertical accountability between citizens and national authorities, SDC has also ensured its relevance by building horizontal links between local self-government.

Informants generally agreed there are pressing governance deficits at the local level, which are being addressed through SDC's activities. However, although the Embassy has worked usefully on mechanisms to scale up its results, SDC's programme is less directly relevant to the achievement of SDC's development goals at the national level.

Coherence

There is evidence of complementarity across both the core and transversal governance programmes included in the sample for this evaluation, in the sense of a clear causal logic indicating how they are connected and designed to amplify the collective contribution of Swiss aid.

At the start of the evaluation period, SDC's governance programme was closely aligned with partner countries' priorities at the national level, in the form of commitments to more open and inclusive government, and decentralisation. However, during the evaluation period, political momentum for reforms to the state governance system – and in particular, the implementation of

political, administrative and/or fiscal decentralisation - has tapered away, and in some respects is now being reversed.

However, lack of political will, at the national level, for decentralisation, has not impeded SDC's ability to engage on this agenda. Instead, SDC has found entry points at the local level, where political will is still present. Some interviewees felt that SDC's support to decentralisation, more responsive local governance, and more active citizen participation at the local level, is aligned with this broader interest (at both national, regional, and local levels) to avoid citizen dissatisfaction and to build stability.

Effectiveness

Despite the serious political and economic disruption experienced in KGZ during the evaluation period, SDC's projects have performed well in terms of meeting their stated outcome-level objectives – albeit primarily at local, rather than national levels. Interviews with local government counterparts and project beneficiaries indicates the JAP and SIAP methodologies have played important roles in increasing accountability in municipal budgeting and public participation in decision-making processes, as well as improving the responsiveness of municipal service provision to the needs of the local population. The capacity and knowledge of LSGs on a range of core governance functions has also been strengthened. In addition, these instruments have helped deliver benefits to particularly vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups.

Building institutions and networks beyond the state has proved to be an effective strategy for insulating project results from wider political turbulence. Engaging the existing LSG system and community structures to support local service provision and other project activities has also been an important tool for effectiveness. Interviewees mentioned the use of competitive grant processes for pilot initiatives as an effective strategy for enabling demand-driven change at the local level.

Efficiency

In Kyrgyzstan, SDC has principally worked on local governance through on-budget grants. This has reportedly been an efficient way of delivering resources, by reducing the number of intermediary actors and transaction costs involved, whilst also avoiding the emergence of parallel budgets and systems.

SDC programmes working on complementary governance objectives in Kyrgyzstan (e.g. projects working in parallel on supply-side and demand-side accountability, such as VAP/PSI) are encouraged to interact, learn from one another, and share their lessons and methods.

The extent to which SDC learns from other donors is unclear from the evidence gathered, although it is noted that SDC generally plays an active role in multilateral fora, pooled funds, and donor coordination platforms, which point to opportunities for cross-donor learning. Conversely, there is more concrete evidence of other donors and other organisations learning from SDC - suggesting the organisation often has valuable lessons to share on local governance.

Interviewees from across all projects confirmed that SDC projects are delivered with a strong emphasis on VFM. This includes keeping extraneous costs low, and adopting sensible cost-saving measures on transportation, per diem fees, and other expenses.

Impact

The principal impact of SDC's governance work can be described as positive behavioural and attitudinal changes in how citizens and local authorities interact. This impact reflects broader changes in their awareness of their respective rights and responsibilities, and greater appreciation of the need for and value of citizen participation and local government transparency.

Based on the observations above, in KGZ, we do see SDC's governance interventions delivering transformative changes and institution-building, but at the local level, and mainly in terms of *in*formal institutions – i.e. norms, understandings, and patterns of interaction between citizens and local authorities. Some of these changes to informal institutions can be described as transformative, particularly as they start from a low initial baseline. However, on balance, SDC has made less clear impact in terms of transformative changes to national-level, formal institutions (i.e. policies, laws, and formal regulations) during the Evaluation period.

Sustainability

SDC has made good efforts to ensure the sustainability of results in spite of the deteriorating context for governance work at the national level. Despite deciding to stop its Parliamentary strengthening initiative SIPD, some of the initiatives supported by SDC to improve the openness and transparency of Parliamentary affairs have made a lasting difference to the operation of Parliament and have been sustained after project closure.

On balance, the Evaluation sees stronger ownership and thus greater potential for sustainable changes at the local level. According to a number of interviewees, citizen participation on local governance, in the municipalities that have participated in SDC programming, has gained sufficient momentum that attempts, in the near future, to reverse such practices, are likely to be resisted.

Annex 1 – Selected list of documents reviewed

- DPI. (2021). *Mid-term Review Public Service Improvement Project (PSI) Phase 2, 2019-2023*
- DPI. (2022). *Public Service Improvement Project - II Phase Annual Report, 2022 (January 1 – December 31)*
- DPI. (2022). *Strengthening Voice and Accountability - Final Report Exit Phase September 15, 2020 – June 15, 2022.*
- DPI/Helvetas (2018). *Case study: Socially inclusive and gender responsive budgeting in Kyrgyzstan.*
- GFA consulting group (2022), *Effective management and prevention of non-communicable diseases in Kyrgyzstan MAIN PHASE 2 (2022 – 2026). Project document.*
- NCD. (2022). *Effective management and prevention of non-communicable diseases in Kyrgyzstan, Phase II Annual Report 01 July – 31 December 2022*
- Salmorbekova, Z. (2021). *External end of phase evaluation: Voice and Accountability project and Public Service Improvement project.*
- SDC. (2017). *Swiss Cooperation Strategy Central Asia 2017 – 2021*
- SDC. (2017). *The Kyrgyz Republic Annual Report, 2017*
- SDC. (2018). *The Kyrgyz Republic Annual Report, 2018*
- SDC. (2019). *Public Service Improvement in Kyrgyzstan. Project Document, Phase II, 2019 – 2023*
- SDC. (2019). *The Kyrgyz Republic Annual Report, 2019*
- SDC. (2020). *The Kyrgyz Republic Annual Report, 2020*
- SDC. (2021). *The Kyrgyz Republic Annual Report, 2021*
- UNDP. (2021). *Strong and inclusive parliamentary democracy (SIPD). Final Evaluation Report*

Annex 2 - List of persons met / interviews (available only upon request; data protection)

Rwanda

1 Introduction

This case study report on SDC's Rwanda programme is one of eight case studies carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022*" undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). The emphasis is on the period from 2019 to 2022.

The evaluation would like to extend its sincere thanks to the SDC team and the partners who gave freely of their valuable time to speak to the mission.

Overview of Rwanda projects assessed.

PROJECT NO.	PROJECT NAME	" PRINCIPAL" GOVERNANCE BUDGET	" SIGNIFCANT" GOVERNANCE BUDGET	TOTAL BUDGET
7F-08819	Appui au secteur des médias dans la Région	1.883.460,49		1.883.460,49
7F-08900	Participation Citoyenne et Prév.des con	3.200.000,00		3.200.000,00
7F-09223	Multi-Donor Civil Society Program Rwanda	4.000.000,00		4.000.000,00
7F-10250	Appui au secteur de la culture Grands-Lac		1.640.000,00	1.640.000,00

For the assessment of transversal governance the evaluation team held discussions on the nutrition/food security programme, and the economic development programme including private sector -financial inclusion, the TVET project, and the urban project.

2. Context of the programme

Since the 1994 genocide against Tutsi, Rwanda has maintained its political stability, but with a tight central grip by the ruling party. While the tight and central level grip of power continues, there are in the period from 2017- 2022, changes which could be interpreted, as steps in a more democratic direction (see below).

In the parliamentary elections in September 2018, the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda, and the Social Party Imberakuri, only won two seats each while the Rwandan Patriotic Front maintained an absolute majority. President Kagame was re-elected for a seven-year term following an amendment to the constitution that allowed him to run for a third term. The ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front Party therefore continues to dominate the country with robust authority and tight control over civil society. Women filled as many as 61% of seats, which internationally is recognized as a considerable achievement. The human rights situation has been and is indeed a matter of concern. Points raised by Human Rights Watch and others note that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has continued to stifle dissenting and critical voices and targeting those perceived as a threat to the government and their family members. The space for political opposition, civil society, and media remains closed (although as the analysis will show in this report, there are some specific openings); arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture in official and unofficial detention facilities are commonplace; arbitrary detention and mistreatment of people

accused of "deviant behaviors," including street children, sex workers, and petty vendors is also common. Political opposition figures, such as Victoire Ingabire, continue to face obstruction in their work, including threats and harassment by authorities.

There is a close link between the Government's poverty reduction ambition and increased civic space. Rwanda aspires to achieve Middle Income Country status by 2035 and High-Income Country status by 2050 through a series of seven-year National Strategies for Transformation (NST1), underpinned by sectoral strategies focused on meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Decentralisation and non-discrimination are major priorities, and all regions are to be developed. However, Rwanda struggles to reduce poverty. The country has since 2016 not been able to register reduction of extreme poverty, even if growth figures lie around 8.6% (both in 2018 and 2022). Observers including the Rwandese government itself increasingly sees the limits of its economic model, which needs to become more inclusive to produce the expected gains in human development. In this regard the Government has, in the period covered by the evaluation, taken steps to enhance inclusion. Civil society has increasingly been encouraged, as well as pushed to become more involved in the implementation of social policies. New regulations applicable to civil society were evident in the 7-year strategy (National Strategy for Transformation I (adopted in 2018). However, these regulations were double-sided as the strategy removed language on citizens' rights in terms of accountability. Media and civil society organisations were only given roles related to service delivery.

3 Brief programme description

3.1. Theory of change and results framework in the strategy/programme period 2017-2020 (extended to 2021).

The programme is regional, and the evaluation is therefore assessing the selected governance interventions in Rwanda as part of the Grand Lacs programme. In the regional strategy period 2017-2020/21, the aspirations and the outcomes formulated, and the programme itself seemed to lay more emphasis on outcomes in Burundi and Eastern DRC, which are marred by open conflicts, and where SDC has had development engagements for a longer time than in Rwanda. Rwanda has been stable, and the programme after the genocide has focused on humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The "governance domain" in the strategy was termed "Dialogue, the fight against impunity and diplomacy". The strategy specifically notes that given Rwanda's influence in the region, Switzerland would intensify its political dialogue, in addition to SDC's programmes. The regional theory of change was formulated as:

- Social cohesion and participation are strengthened by improving social accountability and access to information, respecting human rights and optimising conflict prevention mechanisms. Specific themes and instruments: Media, Local governance and Human rights, dealing with the past, mediation, conflict resolution.

The outcomes, indicators, and hypothesis of the domain is kept at regional level and are less specific in terms of indicators and means of verification for Rwanda than for Burundi and DRC. The current regional programme 2022-2025 builds on the earlier strategy/programme, noting that the strategic direction for Rwanda is more pronounced than in the previous strategy/programme. The regional domain/outcome of the governance portfolio/engagement is formulated as: Governance, protection of civilians and conflict prevention, with the overall objective of *improved governance, greater protection of civilians and better respect for human rights will help to prevent recurring conflicts in the Great Lakes region and strengthen the resilience of affected communities.* Transversal governance has a specific objective (as well an amount of

CHF 5 mill has been allocated), which is an important signal and contribution to the programme. TG is cross-cutting in all engagements and improving the *quality of systems and encourage citizen participation. It will include the dimensions of accountability and transparency in all its interventions in order to combat corruption. It will support decentralised decision-making mechanisms where the context allows.*

The theory of change is still (as in the earlier strategy) formulated at regional level focused on conflict prevention and resolution and therefore more relevant for Burundi and Eastern DRC than it is for Rwanda. It is therefore of more value for this study to look at the *three outcomes* envisaged under the governance domain. These outcomes are clearly guiding the development of the new approach (as discussed elsewhere in this report). Overall, the programme sees more opportunities than risks in the Rwanda in the implementation period.

1. State and non-state institutions, at various levels, strengthen formal and informal conflict prevention and reduction mechanisms and inclusive dialogue. *In Rwanda in particular the existence of formal and informal mechanisms for conflict resolution and reconciliation will be promoting this goal.*

2. Strengthening the rule of law and protection of civilians: *In Rwanda this means that the Government remains committed to implementing the UPR recommendations it has accepted and thereby that population has better access to information and fair justice and are protected against abuses and enjoy their fundamental rights in crisis situations.*

3. Strengthen dialogue and social accountability, *in Rwanda this implies specifically that citizens are empowered, and civil society and media contribute to increased accountability and improved public services.*

The evaluation finds on the basis of this case study (see the following chapters) that the outcomes above are a strong foundation and aspiration for the governance programme, and SDC has a clear and consistent approach in the programme as it shifts to a country focus.

3.2. Recent trends in the Rwanda governance programme

At the strategic level there are considerations to turn the regional programme into three country programmes. The context in Burundi, DRC and Rwanda are very different, and the regional aspects and synergies seem to be limited, with the implication that the transaction costs are too high compared to the advantages. There is go-ahead from headquarters to move into the three-programme direction, while keeping the knowledge transfer under the regional chapeau. The move from regional to country level also comes with a deeper engagement around the use of country systems and strengthening the policy dialogue (discussed in detail below). A few programmes will keep some regional/transborder aspects including exchanges. Some of the programmes assessed in the evaluation are currently regional, but the media programme; citizen participation; and conflict resolution engagement have been adapted and are seen as country level programmes. The same counts for the gender and culture interventions.

In the current programme period evidence-based policy dialogue is seen as the lever to reach systemic changes. Interviews with staff emphasized that based on earlier evaluations it has been found that systemic changes do not happen without the direct engagement in policy dialogue with decision makers. The balance is therefore being tipped towards a broader engagement focus using different entry points and working above the project/programme level – while using projects/programmes as one element in the toolbox. The trends in the governance domain are therefore anchored around a country focus, thinking and working politically (TWP) and having the eyes on outcomes and objectives leading to transformative shifts.

A consequence of this strategic shift is to reserve more space to engage with policy makers and strengthen the links between the different sectors and programmes with the policy dialogue and coordination. Policy dialogue implies using SDC leadership and staff in direct engagement, involving the political level (ambassador), and standing ready with technical support to decision makers as requested, and being ready to shift engagement modes as the context requires (agility). In addition, SDC aims to ensure, as chair of the governance working group, that there is a constituency backing among donors for dialogues and an agile approach. By way of example of moving towards this approach SDC changed the strategy for its support to CSOs, when its contribution to a civil society basket fund came to an end. Overall, the contributing donors (FCDO, Sweden, US, SDC) to the basket fund discontinued the programme given that it failed to deliver following Government resistance to the fund. The new direction is to strengthen local civil society organisations, through a local CSO consortium approach, to build capacity and exploring and utilizing evidence-based entry points for public policy reforms with duty bearers (Never Again Rwanda coalition)[6]. The approach is that a focus on policy advocacy on socio-economic policies, will enable local CSOs to contribute to more policy inclusiveness and responsiveness to vulnerable disadvantaged groups, and foster accountable governance. The programme will also contribute to improvements in human rights by engaging with Government institutions, including through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) framework.

4 Evaluation Questions

In this section the evaluation points to overall findings underpinned by selected examples. The selection of examples implies that only some projects or initiatives will be discussed in each subsection.

4.1. Relevance[7]

- *Questions: Is the intervention doing the right thing? Are programmes adapted to the local context, in line with needs and rights of local target groups? Relevance as a tool to achieve SDC's development goals?*

SDC has changed its approach and started to work more closely with government and in this way successfully enhanced the programme's relevance in the sense that effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the Swiss engagement is increasing. A climate of increasing trust has developed in the period, and socio-economic policies and related progress have been the consensual entry point for dialogue between the development partners and the government, and increasingly with civil society. In 2017 the restrictions on political space were noted as significant and the political dialogue with the authorities on political subjects seen as possible, but complicated, also observing the self-censorship of civil society organisations and the media. With Government encouragement to civil society to engage in social policy issues and as service delivery providers, SDC has also seen opportunities for its engagement in the same direction. It was noted by SDC in 2019 that the quality of debate on public policy was improving, although happening in a small and closed circle to which it was possible to engage. One example is the adoption of a new Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy and the Criminal Justice Policy, which offer alternatives to imprisonment. SDC is successfully supporting alternative dispute resolution policy and its implementation.

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[6] Civil Society and State Engagement on Public Policies for Socio-economic Transformation CSSPST programme.
[7] In this sub-section the evaluation brings in the example of the media support and culture support.

- *The evaluation finds that the approach and engagement areas in the governance domain are highly relevant. SDC engages in areas of major significance and relevance in promoting democratic rule.*

- **The media project is relevant within the restricted media space[8], and it seeks with small steps to change the negativity around media's role to be seen as a constructive and democratic player in a society.** The media is supported through the regional programme Appui au secteur des medias dans la Région and in Rwanda specifically through the Rwanda Media Programme 2021-2026 (RMP)[9]. Suspicion of media as a political "propaganda" tool appears to be the main and accepted narrative pointing back to the genocide. The approach taken in general is to carefully promote media as a democratizing power through small steps. The media played a significant and double-edged role in the Rwandan genocide, both as a tool of war and as a source of information and a witness. It is therefore a sensitive area for SDC and others to work in. On the background of the genocide, the government has since then had a very restrictive hand on press freedom[10]. A major restriction is the media's limited role as a space for public debate, representing diverse views and opinions, and holding the authorities accountable.

- **The rationale for Sida and SDC is to support media to become a valuable player in providing information according to international ethical standards and be a medium for public engagement.** The entry point, which in the view of the evaluation is highly relevant – and possible, focuses on professionalisation of the sector. The programme works on the longer-term perspectives and although it mainly works with rights holders, duty bearers are also included. The programme aims to work both at local and national level. Supports is provided to the professionalisation of journalism (training and conferences) both inside and outside the country. The rationale for professionalisation is that journalism is perceived as an easy field to enter without the necessary education and ethics, and this must be countered by a professional cadre and the programme therefore supports university education in the field. It was noted that investigative journalism basically is non existing, partly because of lack of skills but also because of the risks involved. This approach to media development is also an "agreeable" activity for the government, which sees better standards of journalism as promoting what was termed responsible media in an interview with a government representative. Further regarding relevance, it is noted that the programme supports development of media as a business, in order to enable local media to operate and be sustainable.

- **The programme deliberately works with duty bearers, first it is important that the government "nods" to the different programme activities and sees a clear benefit in being informed.** Second, it was pointed out in interviews that the programme tries to push boundaries on good governance. The government also sees a value in the technical expertise, and the support to writing a new media policy is opening up "new doors" for engagement of both rights holders and duty bearers. Government specifically noted in the interview that they need help to understand and develop policies (to regulate?) social media.

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[8] The findings of the evaluation are in line with the observation made by the BACKSTOPPING PROGRAMME D'APPUI AUX MEDIAS GRANDS LACS PHASE 2, RAPPORT DE MISSION TERRAIN N°1, RWANDA, RDC, BURUNDI, 24 avril au 13 mai 2022. These are briefly summarised in Annex 1.

[9] Implemented by FOJO with Pax Press and the DDAG Programme supported by UNDP.

[10] According to the 2023 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, Rwanda ranks 131 out of 180 countries, with a score of 46.58 out of 1001. This indicates that the country has significant challenges and restrictions in ensuring a free and independent media, which according to UNDP counts the plurality and diversity of the media, also noting the level of economic playing field and transparency of ownership.

- *Another example of a relevant and "smart" engagement in the programme is the recent initiative in the field of culture[11]:*

- **The wide domain of culture is seen by SDC (as the only donor) to be a relevant and less monitored avenue to promote freedom of expression.** The **approach to culture** has changed from punctual actions to a strategic approach. The engagement supports 1) legal frameworks to become more conducive; 2) capacity building practitioners and institutional capacity building, (noting the embryonic character of cultural institutions and promoting diversity in the institutional landscape; 3) offering diverse artistic productions – both in cities and upcountry. For now, SDC has decided to work more with cinema, literature, contemporary dance, theatre, stand-up comedy. The evaluation team notes culture as an opportunity for supporting job creation and working with youth. Overall, the culture programme should be viewed in the perspective of exploring the few remaining spaces for some freedom of expression in an authoritarian context (so far 5 Mill CHF has been allocated for the region).

Besides the examples above it should be noted that a key approach to be considered a relevant player in Rwanda is conflict sensitivity across the board. The international community is often met with suspicion, because of the colonial past, the genocide and official policies which promote "homegrown" solutions and "value-based Governance". SDC is found to be working in a highly conflict sensitive manner, this message was conveyed by all stakeholders. SDC has also selected partners, which work in conflict sensitive way. SDC also engages with partners who in a non-partisan way works on conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

4.2. Coherence

- *Questions: How well does the intervention fit? Work with WOGA partners (not answered here)? Focus on HDP (not answered here). Aligned with partner policies? Incentives in partner government to implement reforms? Local/national ownership? Complementarity with other donors? Localisation?*

A logic by which development gains from projects would lead to systemic changes has been disbanded by SDC in the Rwanda programme. Programme coherence in the new thinking brings together different tools/modalities internally, and externally there is coherent thinking of how holistically to support all stakeholders (rights holders and duty bearers) and seek close coordination with other donors. In the process of rethinking the programme it also became clear, based on an internal learning journey and evaluations, that the earlier assumption that support to civil society (almost by default) would counter authoritarianism contexts and democratic backslide did not hold. To quote SDC staff *"we found that the shrinking space was real, and the civil society organizations we believed were change agents were not the strong actors. We then stepped up to look at how can we be effective in these contexts, and we conducted thorough PEAs".*

Coordination with the government, donors and particularly local CSOs is a cornerstone in the Swiss programme. The position as co-chair with the government institutions is given high priority and coordination, as it is resource demanding, must also yield results in terms of improving dialogue and programmes. Interviews by the evaluation team confirmed that SDC plays a key role in coordination and promotion of jointness and frank exchanges, with government the coordination and exchanges are carefully curated to avoid controversial political rights issues but keep to "invited spaces". One challenge observed was for SDC to bring partner organisations to become more than project implementers and make them work towards policy changes and reforms in subtle but consistent manners. The political climate has for long resulted in self-censorship and

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[11] Although the programme only started in 2022 and therefore outside the period of evaluation it has been included here because of the innovative approach to working on good governance in an authoritarian context.

risk aversion. SDC's strategic direction towards working through government systems; adaptive management and using PEA as a key tool, are yet to yield results in the broader community of donors and CSOs. There are however grounds to assume that this strategy will yield results based on examples such as: SDC's sector leadership role, through which SDC has managed to mobilize all governance sector members (DPs, Government institutions, and CSOs) to converge on key sector priorities basing on programmatic evidences in the area of citizen participation, gender mainstreaming, etc. SDC has also been instrumental in successfully revamping the governance sector coordination architecture into effective policy discussion spaces where CSOs and DPs can engage government on existing and upcoming policies (such as the upcoming national development strategy).

Aligning towards the government, entails matching of programme interventions to the strategic priorities of the Government; this process helps in the ongoing trust building between SDC and government partners and thereby contributes towards achievement of results. SDC contributes with technical support to Rwanda's next strategy in some technical fields. SDC aligns with government priorities, and in this way is seen as a constructive partner to the Government, but also a critical voice in the sense that Swiss democratic values are being put on the table in the dialogue. SDC also works with entry points and exploring open spaces, and offer technical advice, with a "political twist".

Working on human rights is sensitive and risky and, according to OHCHR, donors and CSOs simply shy away from an area, which should really be addressed. SDC and Sweden are the two donors which work in the area but also with modest contributions and without policy dialogue. The question discussed with regard to coherence is whether there can be a coherent approach to governance when some of the most pertinent issues receive limited attention and strategic engagement. One option could be to work on these issues through international or regional fora. The alignment and coherence raise a key question which is how far SDC should go towards aligning with a government in invited spaces and at the same time be able to maintain the Swiss principles of respect for human rights. In Rwanda the team does discuss to what extent they maintain a balance of delivering results in technical and socio-economic fields, and at the same engage in silent ways with regard to policy dialogues in non-invited spaces. Trust building across the board is seen as the key for SDC to achieve results that are transformative, and for this reason advocacy on human rights is conducted in ways that are not seen in public.

4.3. Effectiveness

- – *Questions: to what degree can governance objectives be achieved in challenging contexts? Which approaches and strategies are the most effective? To what degree can governance objectives be achieved in more stable contexts? Are Theories of change coherent with SDC vision? Which approaches are the most effective? Can transversal governance strengthen sector programme outcomes?*

The Rwanda Government is highly performance oriented and has developed a national system of performance, running from household to the highest levels in government. There are performance contracts at all levels, including regular reviews and target setting. The system calls for SDC and other donors to be evidence based and performance oriented if they want to be present and considered a trusted partner for the government. Interviewees repeatedly pointed to the need to work with government targets and areas of priority in order to achieve results. The evaluation was also informed that government seems to set unrealistic targets, which they cannot reach for example in the course of a strategy period. This creates some frustrations, especially because consultative processes which take time are cut short.

SDCs governance portfolio has in the period of the evaluation become more focused and achievement oriented and aligned with government targets at country level. The results frameworks have also become more specific, and in particular for Rwanda, which at the start of the evaluation period seemed to be given less attention than Burundi and DRC. A related point is that the Rwanda programme has had a post conflict focus, and less of a development focus up to the last two programme periods. With this in mind, and with the changes in approach discussed above in this report there have been major shifts in the portfolio in order to enhance achievements. An example is the discontinuation of the support to the civil society basket fund. The fund was never accepted by the Government, which saw it as a donor counter strategy to its created own funding for civil society.

With the above in mind the evaluation team found that the governance portfolio shows results and achieves outputs and outcomes according to the results frameworks and targets set for socio-economic reforms and social policies. However, in the area of human rights improvements there are no targets, and no progress. Some incremental changes are observed with regard to the role of the media.

- **In the citizen participation programme,** the scorecard tool to enhance local participation in planning and delivery of services is being institutionalized under the leadership of the government. A recent project evaluation found that citizens have started to influence development plans at local level. The introduction of a scorecard has brought in a new link between citizens and the local governance. This has taken a long time because of a "culture" of citizens not wanting to engage, but slowly a culture of dialogue between rights holders and duty bearers have materialized. One point to note is that this has been done without using democratic language but following the official discourse where the President asks for citizens participation and focus on service delivery. The scorecard is therefore in the process of being adopted by the Government and government created forums are instrumental in the processes of subsequent impact and sustainability.

  SDC's **co-chairing of the governance group** has been instrumental in bringing together government together with donors and together passing a resolution and agreeing to develop guidelines for citizens participation.

  A point regarding effectiveness relates to the **quality of achievements,** this issue was brought up by several stakeholders. The long-time "culture of non-engagement" by citizens, which now is changing, needs to be associated with a lift in quality. Participation simply has to take a leap forward which implies citizens being aware and claiming their rights. It was however, unclear in discussions with NGO stakeholders, how a more explicit focus on rights to services will be perceived by the Government and if this could derail some of the achievements seen in the area of citizens participation.

- Although the **media** space is restricted, and the prevailing practice in the sector includes self-censorship and risk adversity, professionalisation through trainings of journalists and support to a new media law (working with the Government) are being achieved. As a way to "protect" the sector and achieve results the implementer, FOJO, uses broadcasting experts and high-level international experts to inform government on how to build capacity and run public service and develop media; another successful strategy is to run surveys and present evidence on specific audience demands. SDC specifically provides technical assistance directly to the drafting on the new media policy, to be followed by revision of legislation.

  The example, which was narrated independently by the Government, FOJO and SDC is the joint work on the new media policy. SDC brought in international standards and public consultations into the process, and these elements were accepted by the government, but there are constant interpretations and different views of what this entails, and SDC staff noted

that this way of working requires huge efforts, reflection, and assessment of reputational risks, but achievements are expected to be more sustainable.

Working effectively and achieving results on **human rights issues** are a different ballgame. SDC works both with rights holders and duty bearers to promote Human Rights. The work is both sensitive and difficult and achievements overall are limited due to the context.

- **In the area of political rights there are no achievements and not a strong focus on these rights from the side of the organisations supported.** The approach taken by SDC is to support both rights holders and duty bearers, and have modest expectations, but as a minimum signal the importance of human rights. The Rwanda Human Rights Commission as the domestic watchdog and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as the international watch dog are supported in their key and complementary mandates on human rights; the Legal Aid Forum (LAF) monitors the human rights situation from the side of the rights holders. With regard to results the Human Rights Commission informed the evaluation team that they monitor the prisons situation and the timely delivery justice system. The two are obviously related and cannot at all cope with the caseload. The situation dates back to the arrests after the genocide. SDC supports strengthening of capacity of the Human Rights Commission to build stronger evidence of their cases and be visible. Because of the political situation the Commission focuses on socio-economic rights. Meanwhile civil society actors in LAF counterbalances the duty bearer support. Their key focus is on Rwanda's implementation of UPR recommendations. This is considered by LAF to be quite effective with regard to socio-economic rights, as the Government is focused on compliance with international standards. Nevertheless, a key message to the evaluation was that governance overall, including human rights and accountability is improving. The examples given were that the uniformed services work better and a culture of rule of law is improving.

The evaluation looked briefly at achievements through **transversal governance** in the health and TVET sectors, noting the importance and entry points for policy dialogue and reform results through transversal governance. A recognition of the importance of TG is a specific objective and funding in the programme 2021-2025 and each SDC programme has a policy document for policy dialogue. With regard to definition of transversal governance, staff noted that they were not sure if there is an official SDC definition, but the approach in Rwanda is to work with TG in a structured manner: "*How are the institutional structures in place and how do we influence these structures noting that.*" The technical projects have to be owned by the national authorities at different levels and rooted in the local systems. In this way there is always a governance element in all sectors. It is important and standard action point to assess the capacity of the partner and assess their ability to communicate with the authorities.

Among a number of examples, and high awareness of staff of both opportunities and constraints are mentioned below:

- In the health/nutrition programme it was decided to take a more comprehensive view on nutrition and engage in policy dialogue on food systems improvement and SRHR.

  Stunting was as high at 38% 2014 (DHS), and the aim of the government has been to reduce this to 19% by 2024, but there has been limited progress (the actual reduction is 5%). SDC will support government's special plan to reduce stunting. However, the implementing partners (UN organisations) do not deliver on this. According to SDC there is limited policy dialogue and limited attention to trying to work with country systems. This has led to the realisation that it will be important to reconsider partnership with UN agencies and international NGOs.

  Another TG entry point is on contraception to unmarried girls. There is a chance to change the age of consent from 18 to 15 years and SDC is currently working with the MoH on this.

The minister has asked SDC to do research on the matter: "Will there be a backlash from this kind of policy". The ministry is part and parcel of the whole process and seek external support because most of the pregnancies are in the age group between 15-17 years (more than 25%), and the acceptable age now for accessing contraceptives is 18 years of age.

- In economic development sector transversal governance is seen as central for achieving results. The entry point is to strengthen and enhance citizens role. Participatory needs assessments are used as a tool to gauge people's views on their constraints and opportunities in local economic development and financial inclusion.

- In urban development – transversal governance is seen as enhancing citizens' rights. There is considerable involuntary displacement in cities, and people have been on the streets because they object to being thrown away. SDC advocates for consultations with dwellers and a policy and a change in the law on expropriation.

4.4. Efficiency

- *Questions: How well are resource being used; which modalities of cooperation are particularly conducive; to which extent do programmes replicate and learn from each other; do programmes learn from ongoing results and changes in the wider environment;*

SDC mainly works with contributions, which has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is risk sharing and increased volume, and potential results. However, in the case of Rwanda the partnerships with UN organisations have shown to be stumbling blocks and creating inefficiencies. There is both a bureaucratic inefficiency element but also a difference in approach to working through country systems. Moreover, is the strategic vision of SDC in danger of being lost within the UN systems?

Co-funding with Sweden seems efficient as SDC and SIDA are likeminded and often cooperate. Internally, efficiency was observed to be through a joint sector plan, which looks at resources and ambitions and how to match these together which also takes learning from other projects and processes. The evaluation team was informed that the result had been to downplay activities in the conflict resolution sector, and not lead donor coordination in order to have resources and be efficient elsewhere in the governance domain.

- In the **media** programme it was difficult to gauge efficiency because the programme "moves forward and sometimes backward". Nevertheless, related to achievements and impact, even if there are efficient capacity building methods applied, there may not be outcomes in the short term, because SDC takes a longitudinal view on media efficiency, linking the support to impact and sustainability. Efficiency is looked at as long-term systems development support and, in particular, policy support, national legal and regulatory environment, academic training systems, manuals, links between universities and practitioners, and strengthening of the sustainable operation of media houses rather than providing material support (as has been done in DRC and Burundi).

4.5. Impact

- *Questions: What difference does the intervention make; which effects of programmes can be observed regarding people's lives and communities functioning changed; To what degree do SDC's programmes contribute to transformative changes and institution building, hindering and enabling factors?*

SDC has in the period of evaluation re-engineered its approach to follow routes expected to lead to more impact and sustainability. A focus on systemic change raises the ambitions and

consequently the impact and sustainability, although noting that it is early days for this approach, while impact and sustainability are long term changes with contextual changes beyond programme level. One of the key assumptions challenged was that working at local level would give influence at systemic level and the support to decentralization was actually stopped, because of lack of vertical links being established. Instead, the approach of combining technical deliveries and political/policy engagement was developed, bringing trust building with the government at the core of the programme. The point being that impact in the Rwandese context cannot happen and be sustained without active engagement by duty bearers. This approach has also tied sector work together with the governance portfolio. Entry points to working with government can be quite technical, but there is always a policy and governance reform angle to be included. The approach requires careful considerations of entry points and assessment of risks noting that the government does not have a democratization agenda aligned with SDC principles and theory of change for governance.

The shift of the programme builds on failures to achieve impact and sustainability through civil society support as the counterweight to authoritarianism and democratic decline. These internal reflections on the lack of impact include:

- Policy-influencing programmes are more likely to be effective and impactful when there is strong demand from within government and the right mix of support is provided quickly and efficiently.

- Failure to demonstrate explicit alignment and contribution to Government priorities leads to unfounded distrust and suspicion and will result in stalling of interventions.

- Working collaboratively with other sector development programmes adds value, particularly by complementing sector specialization with policy engagement capacities.

- Effective learning on policy advocacy takes place mainly when classic capacity building approaches (classroom based) are combined with learning by doing approaches.

- Overemphasis on civil and political rights can lead to suspicions from government, and hamper programme implementation/progress.

- UPR as a favourable tool/process for CSO and human rights bodies to collaboratively work on critical issues and bring change.

The evaluation finds that these internal lessons have been instrumental in guiding a TWP approach and adaptive programming in the current programme period, and the policy engagement and policy influence from a balanced approach of engagement with both duty bearers and rightsholders do show indications of impact and transformative change.

There are good examples of potential impact of projects which have been supported for a long time: these include the citizen scorecards, where results have been achieved for some time, but with the institutionalization there are opportunities for impact. The evaluation specifically asked about the programmes impact on specific target groups, below are two examples.

- Possibly the most impactful project is the achievements and impact of the "Ituze wacu" project, consisting of a consortium of local organisation working on peaceful conflict resolution (RCN Justice & Démocratie, Haguruka, Lawyers of Hope and Tubibe Amahoro). The overall objective of the action started in 2019/2020 is to help promote access to conflict prevention and alternative resolution mechanisms **between families and in communities.** There are a vast number of displacement and asset grabbing need to be settled within communities dating back from the genocide, which need, if possible, to be settled outside the overburdened justice system and by non-professional bailiffs. The project seeks to ensure that local people are well informed of their rights and can resolve conflicts peacefully within the community thanks to the conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms that will have been strengthened in so

called Abunzi committees. To this effect the government has adopted the Alternative Disputes Resolution Policy (ADR Policy), which has given the efforts of the NGOs working on this a positive response to their efforts and options to sustain the impact they have had on local peoples' lives and the functioning of communities. The evaluation team was shown a catalogue of cases resolved.

- SDC has had some support to **youth** through the Never Again Rwanda consortium which has just started to operate. In the period being evaluated there is limited engagement if any with young people as a specific target group. It was found based on interviews with local civil society organisations that youth does not engage in political issues, because there is no role and no space for engagement besides regular meetings with the President. At this point in time there is a more positive official view on youth, which the new project is capitalizing on with a view to support job creation.

With regard to **unintended impact**, the professionalisation of journalists provides an example. It was found that although there is increasing uptake of students and try are trained, after graduation only a minority become professional journalists, "they shy away from journalism practice". One reason is the risk, the uncertainty and poor pay in the sector, but also that there is a demand for communication professionals in companies and different organisations which is seen as attractive. The programme therefore included interventions to improve the working conditions for journalists, strengthening media houses financial viability and sector linkages.

Another point regarding impact is the possible **unintended** consequence of the practical training part, where there has been a case where Government does not give permission for students (issue press cards) to go into local areas to do their practical investigation and reporting. This was said to mean that first the students have limited access to "new" stories, but also that they do not see prospects in local level engagements, which limits the value of independent journalism and their interest in the same. This reduces the anticipated impact.

4.6. Sustainability

– *Questions: Will the benefits last? Are governance interventions owned by partner governments, and part of national systems or policy environment? Can programmes persist in deteriorating contexts? What are the factors that facilitate lasting change?*

Reaching sustainable results in socio-economic areas was communicated by several stakeholders as a kind of formula: build mutual trust among key stakeholders, provide sound evidence and data through surveys and research on a case (joint process with the government if possible); discuss a roadmap map for change; conduct policy dialogue and technical advice (preferably local); and the technical support to preparation of documentation.

Sustainability is possible if working with the government and in areas of government priorities, otherwise the message from stakeholders in Rwanda is that sustainability cannot be expected. This point also relates to the population being marked by the remembrance of the genocide, which has resulted in a culture of silence and acceptance, and only careful engaging in outside the domestic sphere and in non-political issues. The citizen engagement project, which has been ongoing for almost 15 years noted that it is only recently that communities engage more with some enthusiasm in local consultation and planning. It is therefore at this point not a demand from the population or civil society organisations that lead to change and reforms. Government is therefore key in this regard, but mainly accepting progression and change in socio-economic areas.

5 Conclusions

Relevance:

The governance programme is relevant and has increased its relevance in the period of evaluation. This is shown by its balanced work both with rights holders and duty bearers. The programme is conflict sensitive, which also enhances its relevance. There is shift towards working more with local stakeholders – noting the openings for local civil society to engage with duty bearers on public policies. The programme works mainly with socio-economic change, which is a government priority, and to a limited degree in sensitive areas of governance (media), the programme as innovative aspects (culture). The Rwanda case shows how a programme can be relevant in an authoritarian context and balance the principles of the Swiss development goals.

Coherence:

In the period covered by the evaluation the programme has increased its coherence, partly because it has become less regional, but more importantly the programme aligns with government priorities in some areas of common ground between Swiss values and Rwanda government strategies. This is increasing national ownership and builds trust There is local ownership and complementarity with other donors. SDC plays a strong role in coordination mechanisms.

Effectiveness:

SDC is effective and achieves outputs and outcomes, also noting that the programme operates in areas where there is government acceptance and interest. This approach does result in policy dialogue entry points and engagement in reform processes. A TWP approach is at the core of SDC's engagement and there are signs of contributions towards transformative shifts. It is also noted that adaptive management (as defined in this evaluation, is a model which enables achievements. The evaluation notes that projects, which did not reach results have been discontinued.

Transversal governance is integrated across the board in the portfolio, there is a consistent approach, although achievements are "in process" at this point. The evaluation notes that TG has an objective and a support budget. TG in the portfolio is considered to be good practice.

*Efficiency***:**

SDC seeks to be efficient and to match resources and ambitions and to learn from experience. However, contributions, the main modality in the governance portfolio, are also dependent on partners being efficient. Although SDC seeks to work with the most efficient partners there are also cases where some partners, because of their mandates, are important, yet their efficiency in the narrow sense may be questioned. In the media sector efficiency is seen as long term structural and system development of the media and linked to impact and sustainability, which so far proves successful.

Impact:

The reengineered approach discussed above provides promising entry points for impact in selected areas in alignment with government priorities. There is no improvement of the human rights situation, but trust has been built with the government which is foundational for potential future dialogues and impact. The evaluation notes impact on communities with unsettled cases from the genocide; ongoing institutionalisation of citizen consultations in local planning; of a much needed but very recent focus on youth. The media programme has problems retaining those

trained as journalists, because of a situation where communication positions in companies offer better alternatives.

Sustainability:

The governance interventions are increasingly owned by local partners, both government and civil society organisations, and part of national systems. The programme is adapted to the context and may be sustainable. The factors facilitating lasting change is the alignment with government priorities. The poor human rights situation remains a key governance problem, which SDC chose to address indirectly, for instance through the UPR mechanism, noting that there is a balance and red lines that cannot be crossed, and if done, the impact and sustainability of the main programme parts would most likely be eroded.

Annex 1. List of documents

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Annex 2 List of Person Met (available only upon request; data protection)

Laos

1 Introduction

This case study report on SDC's governance programming in Laos is one of four 'light touch' desk-based case studies carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022*" undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). Four 'light touch' case studies and four 'deep dive' cases will together with broader analysis on SDC's governance interventions form the basis for the Evaluation Report.

The case study focuses on governance programming in Laos from 2017 to 2022, through the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for the Mekong Region. The Regional Cooperation Strategy for the period covered primarily Laos and Cambodia, with regional projects also covering Myanmar and Vietnam. Three core governance contributions in Laos were assessed, in addition to four transversal governance contributions. Thus, the sample of contributions covered by the Evaluation are as follows:

Core governance[12]:

- Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law (CEGGA)
- Lao DECIDE Info (Knowledge for Development – K4D)
- Governance for Inclusive Development (GIDP) Programme

Transversal governance:

- Lao Upland Advisory Services (LURAS)
- The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI)
- Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS) & Vocational Education and Training Laos (VELA)
- Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF)

The Evaluation Team are grateful for the constructive and insightful interactions we had with SDC staff and partners involved in SDC-supported interventions across Laos, and for the support of the Deputy Director of Cooperation in sharing relevant documents and contacts.

2 Context of the programme

Laos operates as a one-party socialist republic, and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) is the only legal political party in the country. The LPRP has held a monopoly on political power since 1975, exerting control over all branches of government, with party members holding key positions within the executive, legislative and judicial. Power in Laos is relatively centralized, and the central government maintains oversight over local administrations, although provincial governors still maintain a high degree of autonomy. The National Assembly, the highest legislative body in Laos, is a unicameral parliament composed of elected representatives (with 158 of the

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[12] A significant governance project was accidentally omitted from the sample proposed by SDC, This is the Poverty Reduction Fund project, that has run from 2008 to 2022 which underpins and complements several of the other projects. The project has increased access of rural communities to public infrastructure and services, and community engagement, in particular women and ethnic minorities, through participatory planning.

164 seats held by LPRP). In addition to the National Assembly, in 2016, Provincial Peoples' Assemblies were introduced in Laos, covering all 17 districts as well as the capital Vientiane.

The Government of Laos and the LPRP maintain tight control on civic space, media, and political participation. According to Freedom House, in 2017, Laos was characterized as "not free", scoring lower than neighbouring Mekong region countries (Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar). Civil society organisations face political pressure and a highly restrictive environment, and human rights, particularly political and civil rights, remain limited. Citizen participation is likewise restricted; however social media has emerged as an important means for influencing democratic transition.

Over the last three decades, Laos has experienced economic growth that has moved the country from a low-income country to a status as a lower-middle income. The Laos economy is predominantly agrarian; however, hydropower also constitutes a notable sector, with the ambition of Laos to become the "Battery of Asia" (i.e. a major exporter of energy) raising both environmental and social concerns related to degradation of the river ecosystem, dam safety, and displacement of communities.

Poverty levels have also dropped during this period, although incommensurate to the level of economic growth, and at the same time, inequality has increased. Ineffective distribution of public investments in basic services, limited state financial resources, inadequate citizen engagement, poor responsiveness to local concerns, and inconsistent implementation of devolution policies have contributed to poor access to healthcare, clean drinking water, and sanitation facilities, particularly affecting poor communities living in rural areas. Laos has faced challenges in terms of domestic revenue collection, public financial management, and high levels of public debt. In 2022, Laos faced an economic crisis, brought on by the global Covid-19 pandemic and external debt to China, the country's largest foreign investor, which brought the country to the brink of economic collapse.

Swiss development cooperation in Laos during the evaluation period aligned to the 8th Lao Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), covering the period 2016 – 2020, which outlined priorities in terms of poverty reduction, good governance, equitable and inclusive public services, justice, and transparency. Swiss development cooperation in Laos is overseen by the Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO) that was opening in Vientiane in 2006. Swiss development cooperation in Laos is framed against the context, where fewer 'traditional' donors are active, but where an increasing number of non-DAC donors are engaging, with China at the forefront. Japan, the Asian Development Bank and South Korea were on average the top-three OECD- DAC donors in 2014–15; Switzerland ranked as an important donor overall (9th largest) and 3rd largest European development partner (after the EU and Germany).

3 Brief programme description

During the period covered by the Evaluation, the *Swiss Cooperation Strategy (CS) for the Mekong Region (2018-2021)* has been the framework for Swiss development cooperation in Laos, followed by the current *Swiss Cooperation Programme in the Mekong Region (2022-2025).* As noted in the introduction, the two frameworks cover bilateral country programming in two partner countries, Laos and Cambodia, as well as engagements at the regional level, which include Vietnam and Myanmar in addition to Laos and Cambodia.

For the purposes of this case study, the Evaluation has only looked at the Swiss county-level engagements in Laos, meaning that no regional engagements nor activities in other partner countries in the region are included. In the Swiss Regional CS (2018-21), a core area of Swiss development cooperation was the Governance and Citizen Participation Domain (which is what is meant when the Evaluation refers to the Swiss "governance portfolio"). The domain-

level objective was to reach "*responsive public services for the poor and vulnerable and enhanced citizen participation*", working to:

- Contribute to the 8th NSEDP 2016–2020 in the areas of **improving district public service delivery** and **poverty reduction**.

- Promote **citizen participation** and strengthen the **representation and oversight role of the National Assembly and the Provincial People's Assemblies** (PPAs).

- Advocate for a **strengthened role of local and national civil society organisations (CSOs)** as partners in the development process and an enabling environment.

- Facilitate more **open-access socio-economic information** and to create spaces to trigger debates, policy dialogue and **decision-making based on evidence**.

Two related outcome statements are articulated for the governance domain, underpinned by a basic 'theory-of-change', an impact hypothesis with associated risks, obstacles and trends or drivers of change (see table on following page). These highlight some of the underlying areas that will lend traction to the governance engagements and barriers that may hinder progress.

Table 1 Overview of Laos governance domain theory of change by outcome (as presented in Mekong River Cooperation Strategy 2018-21)

	Outcome Statement 1: *Lao women and men in the poorest districts and villages use quality services, thanks to equitable and responsive public service delivery.*	**Outcome Statement 2:** *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.*
Trends and Drivers	– The GoL increasingly recognizes that good governance is a condition for quality public service delivery and hence for achieving related national development goals as well as the SDGs. The opportunities to support GoL's Public Administration Reform (PAR) and the space to promote decentralisation and citizens' participation have increased. This mainly due to the revision of the Lao Constitution (2015), the changes within the Party and the National Assembly (2016), and a trend to comply with international and ASEAN standards. The internally driven state devolution policy Sam Sang ("the Three Builds") and the newly established PPAs will further support decentralisation efforts and lead to a more effective and accountable local public administration. In the longer term, successful decentralization will largely depend on strengthened Public Finance Management (PFM) completing a functioning public administration.	– The GoL's focus is on development and graduation from LDC status. Citizens' participation – although anchored in the constitution – is not a priority. Its promotion is possible but aside from international commitments / statements, there are no specific interventions, targets or indicators foreseen in the goals of the GoL. Nevertheless, several recent trends in Lao PDR promise increased channels for people's participation. Citizens perceive the newly formed government as well as the National Assembly (NA) as more open. The interaction between the NA and CSOs is growing. The rising use of social media provides more open access to information. CSOs have been recognized since 2009 and largely remain engaged in development activities; however, space and capacity for engaging in policy dialogue remains limited. Policy dialogue in Sector Working Groups and Steering meetings has also proved to be a driver of change.

Impact hypothesis	– When mandates, resources and capacities of public administration are appropriate and when planning and accountability mechanisms linking public service providers to the population are effective, then the access to and utilization of quality public services will increase and hence livelihoods of the poor and vulnerable population will improve. – Switzerland's approach to improve living standards of the poor and vulnerable (living below the national poverty line, women, ethnic minorities) through improving service delivery by the public administration (PA) (outcome 1) and enhancing citizen participation (outcome 2) reflects the continued need for support of the weak PA as well as the GoL's intention to better serve its citizens through PAR and decentralised delivery. – At the policy level, Switzerland will focus on: (1) advocating for implementation of the GoL's decentralization agenda; (2) fostering convergence of local participatory planning with the decentralization approach; and (3) promoting civil society as partner in local development. Policy dialogue is at the core of the governance domain and its projects in Lao PDR. – At the operational level, strengthening capacities of authorities at the local and provincial level (output) has been an ongoing process. Focusing on planning capacities and responsiveness will lead to better development plans reflecting the needs of the population. Therefore, Switzerland will contribute to (1) the implementation of the ongoing decentralization policy by strengthening capacities of district administration to provide better services; (2) increase the availability of local resources and capacities for service delivery; (3) more inclusive community and local development planning, implementation and monitoring mechanisms; (4) supporting PPAs in exercising their mandate.	– Improving formal and informal democratic participation, nurturing an enabling environment for CSOs as partners in the development process, and increasing access to information and knowledge will lead to more informed debate on policy issues as well as increased accountability between government and citizens. This will contribute to more inclusive and responsive policies. – Despite its international commitments to value partnerships for development, the ownership and political will of the GoL agencies to realize these commitments remain weak. Hence the engagement for partnerships and participation is and remains a main focus of the Swiss presence. – At the policy level, Switzerland will focus on: (1) fostering cross-sectoral open information and knowledge exchange by planners and decision makers; (2) building trust in CSOs as partners in the development process among the GoL and other stakeholders based on good examples/projects; and (3) reinforcing the link between local and national levels to feed local voices and experiences into policy debates. – At the operational level, Switzerland will support the efforts of GoL stakeholders (ministries, NA, PPAs) to promote citizens' representation, accountability mechanisms, and access to open information. In addition, Switzerland will strengthen CSOs as partners in development and promote a more enabling environment for their operation and collaboration with the GoL and the NA.
Risks/obstacles	– Although officially promoted, the reform agenda might lack adequate ownership by the GoL. The delegation of more fiscal responsibilities from provinces to districts may not materialize and hence jeopardize decentralization efforts. The implementation of the Sam Sang policy in pilot areas and the establishment of the PPAs suggests the political will of the central government towards decentralization. Yet they may be perceived as tools to increase undue control by the central level over the local administrations.	– The institutional support from GoL to enhance citizens' participation in the country is volatile and may not materialize. PPAs may not be able to effectively exercise their mandate and promote more citizens' participation as envisaged. The environment for CSOs may remain challenging or could become more difficult.

4 Findings

4.1 Relevance

- *To what extent are governance programs adapted to the local contexts and in line with the needs and rights of local target groups? How relevant are SDC's governance programs as a tool to achieve SDC's development goals?*

Overall, SDC's governance portfolio in Laos is grounded in a sound contextual understanding; the SCO is particularly cognisant of the restraints and risks presented by the political environment, but also follows the context closely to identify opportunities and entry points. The governance portfolio addresses key governance issues in the country that impact citizens, hereunder supporting improved (decentralised) service delivery, citizen engagement and civic space, and improved accountability and transparency by supporting knowledge development for evidence-based policymaking.

Since 2004, SDC has supported the GoL National Governance and Public Administration Reform (NGPAR) Program, the only public administrative reform program in the country. The rationale for supporting NGPAR through the Governance for Inclusive Development Project (GIDP) has been to support the GoL in strengthening its public administration ability with the aim to improve accountability and service delivery and increase citizen engagement. The focus on service delivery, which has been a central element of the project since 2007, secures a 'people-centred' approach / poverty focus to local governance, namely by ensuring that public administration and governance reform benefit the poorest in society. GIDP has focused on the <u>local</u> level, as this is where basic services are coordinated, tracked, and reported; local governance is in many ways SDC's niche, an area where SDC (across country contexts) is recognised to have significant expertise, a strong track record and comparative advantage.

In tandem with strengthening local governance, SDC has maintained a focus on expanding civic and democratic space to increase citizen engagement and participation; from 2016, this engagement has been undertaken through the joint EU/German/Swiss Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law (GEGGA) Programme. CEGGA addresses several key governance issues in Laos, with three outcomes that respectively relate i) establishing an enabling environment and strengthened capacities of civil society; ii) strengthening representative, legislative and oversight functions of the Lao National Assembly and PPAs; and iii) improving rule of law and enhancing the implementation of human rights obligations. SDC supports the first two outcomes, but not the third, related to rule of law and human rights.[13] Against the backdrop of a very restrictive environment for civil society and citizen participation (as discussed above under Context/ Section 2), a joint approach is seen as highly relevant approach to increase leverage to engage with the GoL on contentious issues. As highlighted in the outcome-level ToC (See Outcome Area 2 in Table 1 above), CEGGA has been designed to capitalise on a recent 'positive trend' toward greater openness of the GoL and National Assembly; this signals the SCO's capacity to Think and Work Politically (TWP), i.e., awareness of power dimensions, the incentives and interests at play, considering these in programming, political dialogue and/or bargaining with political elites.

While decentralisation and expansion of civic and democratic space constitute the two core areas of Swiss governance support across contexts (where Laos mirrors other case countries), land governance and management has become a Swiss niche in Laos. Laos faces significant challenges in terms of land management and land grabbing, where poor coordination and high levels of fragmentation have made it difficult for the Government to control

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[13] It was noted during several interviews that several actors are engaged on Rule of Law in Laos; for this reason, Switzerland has opted to focus on the other areas, where they have a clearer comparative advantage and niche.

and manage land concessions. The poor management and control of successions leads to substantial losses in tax revenue collection, as well as land conflicts between local populations and investors. Through the Lao DECIDE Info (later renamed Knowledge for Development – K4D) project, Switzerland has found a relevant approach to work with the Government in strengthening capacities, processes, and knowledge for improved land management. The project has developed a knowledge platform which provides consolidated, up-to-date and reliable information on large-scale investments that is available for public actors across different administrative levels and thematic sectors to draw on. The project, which started in 2006, has become a Swiss 'niche', as there are few others working on land concessions, according to SDC's partner Centre for Development and Environment (CDE).

Overall, the Evaluation has a positive view of the relevance of the Swiss governance portfolio in Laos, recognising that SDC draws on a mix of relevant approaches to engaging in an authoritarian context[14], including:

- Drawing on a mix of approaches to work with both duty-bearers (central and local government), and rights holders (civil society and citizens), both at local and national level.

- The portfolio capitalises on new entry points and opportunities that present themselves, opening for policy dialogue and governance support on 'non-contentious' issues, or where there is political will to engage.

- Building coalitions with other like-minded actors to boost Switzerland's leverage, while sharing risks and exposure associated with programming.

4.2 Coherence

- *How well are SDC's governance programs (officially) aligned with partner countries' priorities? Is there political will in the partner government to implement governance reforms? Local/national ownership?*

- *To what degree are SDC's governance programs complementary and coordinated with other Swiss WOGA partners in particular in nexus settings? Are SDC programs complementary to other donor's strategies and interventions?*

The following section covers several dimensions of external coherence, hereunder alignment, political will and coordination, and internal coherence, considering SDC's Whole of Government approach (WOGA) and collaboration.

SDC's governance programmes are aligned with the Government of Laos priorities on areas where there is basis for alignment. For example, the GIDP engagement was aligned to the (previous) Laos' national development strategy, the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), which recognised the link between devolution and local governance and achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. The project was also aligned to the government's devolution policy, the Sam Sang directive, which also was seen as a positive sign of political commitment. Likewise, the K4D project was aligned to the Government's Resolution on Enhancing Land Management[15] (replacing the former draft "Land Policy"), by supporting information sharing and knowledge management on land deals across ministries. Nevertheless, in practice, alignment to national priorities has not (always) been a strong marker of political will or commitment; for example, political commitment through the Sam Sang directive has not translated into a tangibly different approach by the GoL.

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[14] Many of these approaches are documented in SDC's (2020) *Policy Note on Governance in Authoritarian Contexts*.
[15] No.026/CC dated 03/08/2017.

In a context like Laos, political will and incentives for governance reform is a complex issue. There is a recognition among SDC staff and partners that the GoL, given the current economic downturn and significant national debt, is interested in engaging with development partners insofar that they contribute to economic development. Laos is not alone in this regard, as authoritarian regimes tend to promote economic growth ("developmentism") as a way to promote state legitimacy, as documented in SDC's Learning Journey on Engaging in Authoritarian Contexts.[16] One concern in Laos, therefore, is whether development cooperation feeds into the Government's attempt to maintain the regime's legitimacy. Similarly, it is relevant to consider whether the *apparent* will to engage on governance reforms signifies *real political will,* or rather is a form of 'isomorphic mimicry'[17]. In short, "*isomorphic mimicry conflates form and function: "looks like" substitutes for "does"*"[18]. By mimicking the "forms" of a democracy, an authoritarian state to maintain an appearance of democratic institutions or reforms that bolster legitimacy toward donors and citizens, without demonstrating any impacts of these changes.

For donors, SDC included, the challenge is thus to critically assess the underlying political incentives, will, and incentives, considering how and when to work with the State, or not to, if it maintains its legitimacy without meaningfully contributing to good governance.

SDC's portfolio has a delicate balance of 'working with the grain' (i.e. aligned with Government) and 'against the grain' (e.g. working with civil society to expand democratic space). In a context like Laos, working against the grain can have repercussions for SDC and partners, and therefore SDC applies a cautious approach when it comes to sensitive issues, where there is limited basis for alignment with Government. Nevertheless, the governance portfolio does include programming that might initially run contra to GoL national level priorities, where SDC (and other donors) opt for *strategic misalignment,* or alignment with other partners' priorities, for example to expand civic space and public participation. As will be discussed further (below) SDC's CEGGA programme encountered barriers from the Government, which required extensive and time-consuming consultations with government partners to be able to move forward.

The Evaluation has not been able to assess WOGA collaboration in Laos, apart from observing that there are instances where the SCO would have benefitted from the presence of political/diplomatic instruments (noting that while there is an SCO in Vientiane, the Swiss Embassy with associated political/diplomatic instruments is located in Bangkok). In particular, this was the case with the start up of the CEGGA programme, where it was highlighted that political dialogue by ambassadors has played an instrumental role in supporting the implementation and stopping political blockages. The Head of Cooperation engaged on behalf of Switzerland, rather than the Embassy in Bangkok. The SCO has in this regard benefitted from the joint approach, with Germany/BMZ and the EU, but would have stronger leverage with a full palette of instruments as well.

Based on its long experience in Laos and the Mekong region, SDC tends to collaborate with other like-minded donors on its governance interventions, and the programme in Laos is no exception in this regard. The CEGGA example (discussed above) is a case in point, where SDC has reduced its exposure when engaging on sensitive issues, while boosting its leverage through the joint approach with BMZ and the EU. Overall, SDC appears to be cognisant of, and programme according to its added value and comparative advantage (e.g. decentralisation, dam

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[16] Shein, W. (2021). *Topic Paper: 'Effective Developmental States: Does Authoritarian Matter?.* Bern: SDC Network on Governance and Fragility, Conflict and Human Rights. https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/SDC_WeiShen_TP_FINAL_4VII22.pdf

[17] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and M. Woolcock. (2017). '*Looking like a state: The seduction of isomorphic mimicry.'* In *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action*. Oxford Academic: February 2017. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198747482.003.0003

[18] Ibid, p. 32.

safety, land concessions), and aware of where other donors are stronger (e.g. justice sector reform).

4.3 Effectiveness

- *To what degree can governance objectives be achieved in challenging contexts? Which approaches and strategies are the most effective? Is there a Theory of Change at programme level? Is it coherent? Is it aligned with the overall governance understanding and vision of SDC?*

Assessment of effectiveness of the governance portfolio takes a point of departure in End of Phase Report (EPRORs), Annual Reports for the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy (2018 – 2022), and external mid-term or final evaluation reports, where these were available. On this basis, the ET finds the effectiveness of the sample of projects within the governance portfolio largely is positive, with some areas lagging behind, **that reflect the difficult context in which SDC is operating.**

While systemic results on decentralization are limited, SDC has contributed to improved service delivery through the engagement on local governance. In the Swiss CP for the fourth phase of the GIDP, it is noted that since the inception of the public administration reform program (1997), the implementation of the decentralisation (mainly deconcentration) policy of the GoL has been very limited. This indicates that despite many years of engagement on decentralisation and the rollout of the national devolution initiative (Sam Sang), GIDP has not been able to bring about wider systems change toward decentralized governance (discussed further in the section on Impact). Nevertheless, the end of phase report (EPROR) of the fourth phase highlights a high degree of achievement of project outcomes and outputs. The EPROR concludes that the project has significantly contributed to building capacities of district administrations to manage local service delivery, and that the population in the districts involved in the project have benefitted from small-scale rural infrastructure that was financed through the District Development Fund (DDF). From 2019 to 2020, across 8 districts measured, surveys indicated that satisfaction with public services (education, WASH, health, agriculture extension etc.) increased by 12.8 percent (from 20 to 32.8 percent). The final external evaluation of GIDP found the project to be effective, with a high degree of achievement of stated goals.

SDC's governance portfolio has also had a positive contribution toward expanding civic space and promoting dialogue between the GoL and civil society in the country. The first ever Civil Society Coordination Committee was established in 2019, under the auspice of the CEGGA program, which has come to be recognised by the GoL Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) as a key dialogue partner. As such, CEGGA has had a positive effect in expanding space and openness of the GoL to engage in dialogue with (registered) CSOs. This improvement in how civil society is viewed and approached by GoL should be seen in the context of very restricted civic space, where SDC previously has been forced to suspend its programming on expanding civic space and participation in the past.

The SDC-supported CEGGA programme has also contributed to strengthening the capacities of the National Assembly and Provincial People's Assemblies (PPA) in delivering on their respective core function of overseeing the government and strengthening citizen participation at provincial level. Through the engagement with the National Assembly, a key result highlighted in the EPROR is that parliamentarians taking on a more proactive and critical role on key issues such as the implementation of the Socio-Economic Development Plans, and in raising citizen's concerns on abuse of power in Plenary Sessions. In addition, the EPROR reports an uptake of in the National Assembly soliciting external expertise, e.g., from CSOs or international experts, as inputs on key legislative topics. Similarly, CEGGA has contributed to building

capacities of all 18 PPAs in Laos to engage more intensively with the public, thereby providing opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns to their provincial representatives.

SDC's governance portfolio has also made a positive contribution to improving cross-sector information-sharing intended to support evidence-based planning and decision-making, through the Knowledge for Development (K4D) Project (previously called Lao DECIDE Info). The project has received longstanding support from SDC, across four phases spanning from 2006 to 2022; now that the project has come to an end, the key deliverable has been knowledge products that now are owned by and anchored in government institutions. For example, the project developed a publicly available national development information platform, which was updated in the final phase (https://www.k4d.la/), before being formally handed over to Lao Government partners, hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Likewise, the project has established an integrated information-base on existing land concessions (Land Concession Inventory System - LCIS), which is hosted by the Department of Land under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Prior to this, there was a high degree of fragmentation in the GoL on land concessions, because of the many sectors and administrative levels that have the mandate to grant and monitor land leases and concessions, as documented in the K4D-funded research undertaken by project partners CDE and the University of Bern.[19] According to an external evaluation that capitalizes on results across all four phases, the LCIS has contributed significantly to reducing this fragmentation by enabling cross-sectoral data sharing among relevant public institutions, paired with trainings on how to use the information in the database.[20]

While the above signals effectiveness in terms of knowledge generation and information sharing, the project has also contributed to evidence-based planning and decision-making. In part, this is due to the fact that it is difficult to document how research is drawn into, and influences policy level decision-making. Nevertheless, the EPROR points to some indications that the knowledge development has been able to influence policies. It is noted that high level decision-makers in the GoL frequently requested information from the project as inputs to specific ongoing policy debates, i.e., on the state of land concessions in the country. This information has supported the decision on a Moratorium on land concessions (Orders no. 8 and 9 in 2018), provided inputs for revisions of the land policy, the forestry law, and the revision of the country's investment promotion law. Likewise, the previous phase of the project (Lao DECIDE Info) contributed to a Moratorium on rubber plantations in 2015, suspending land concessions to minimise environmental and social impacts on local communities. These examples illustrate the contribution that the project's knowledge products have had on high level policy decisions over time.

- *Transversal governance: How effective are governance components in strengthening sector program outcomes? Can transversal governance components improve the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions?*

Due to the desk-based nature of the Laos case study, it was difficult to thoroughly analyse and assess transversal governance engagements, and whether these strengthen sector program outcomes. However, the Evaluation recognises the work that the Laos SCO undertakes in integrating transversal governance into sector engagements, for example in sectoral programmes on land registration, agro-biodiversity, and more recently dam safety. The latter example (dam safety) highlights how the SCO uses transversal governance in sector programmes in a 'politically smart' way: in 2018, following a dam collapse in Laos, which had a severe impact on the

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[19] Hett, C, et al. (2020). Land Leases and Concessions in the Lao PDR: A characterization of investments in land and their impacts. Bern: Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, Switzerland, with Bern Open Publishing. https://boris.unibe.ch/133115/1/Land_deals_in_the_Lao_PDR_Eng_4SEP2020_LQ.pdf

[20] SDC has continued engaging in this sector (incl. through capacity building on LCIS at sub-national level) through the follow-up project "Sustainable Land Management and Investments for Climate-resilient Livelihoods", implemented by CDE since 2023.

population, SDC saw the opportunity to work with the GoL on a new a policy area, dam safety. By using a technical entry point where there is significant Swiss expertise, SDC can also engage in policy dialogue on the more 'sensitive' and governance-oriented aspects of dam safety.

4.4 Efficiency

- *Which modalities of cooperation – contributions, mandates, budgetary support, private sector engagement and other partnerships – are particularly conducive to achieving outcomes in governance programs?*

- *To which extent do SDC funded programs learn/replicate from each other? And how?*

In Laos, the governance portfolio is mainly made up of contributions, comparably more so than other domains / outcome areas, often in the form of joint programmes with like-minded donors. Working through joint contributions in the governance portfolio constitutes a strategic decision by the SCO for several reasons, hereunder that: i) it reduces the exposure and risks for SDC as a donor when working with other donors (i.e., the EU, BMZ and/or LuxDev), in a context where certain governance issues meet resistance from government (such as civic space, political pluralism, inclusion/participation); and ii) it increases the leverage that SDC has, e.g., to engage on policy dialogue, when working with a broader coalition of like-minded donors. In relation to the latter point, this is particularly important in view of the fact that there is no Swiss Embassy in Laos, only a Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO). The SCO therefore does not have the same access to the full palette of Swiss political instruments that an Embassy located in Laos would have (in terms of the scope and frequency of political interventions). The SCO therefore benefits from being able to draw on other partners.

The Evaluation has only covered Laos and has therefore not explored the full extent of regional learning and cross-over of experiences in the Regional Cooperation Strategy. Nonetheless, it appears that there has been some learning and capitalization of experiences across countries covered in the strategy. For example, SCO staff highlighted that SDC has tried to replicate and scale up some of the effective models of support that have been used in Vietnam to implement these in both Laos and Cambodia. There have also been reflections and learning as a result of the internal Learning Journey on Staying Engaged in Authoritarian Contexts, which covered Myanmar as one of the country contexts. One of these reflections has been to engage more with service delivery as a governance entry point going forward, based on learning from Myanmar, as a way to 'stay engaged' without engaging with an authoritarian government.

4.5 Impact

- *Which effects of programs (intended or unintended, positive negative) can be observed regarding people's lives and communities' functioning changed?*

- *To what degree do SDC's governance programs contribute to transformative changes and (local) institution building?*

Given the desk-based nature of the Laos case study, which primarily draws on desk review with a few supplementary interviews, a thorough and rigorous assessment of the impact of SDC's governance engagements has been difficult. Nonetheless, the document review and discussions with SCO staff and partners have given rise to some impact-level analysis and assessment.

SDC's governance portfolio has had a positive impact on people's lives and communities' functioning in the area of service delivery. As noted in the effectiveness section, SDC's engagement through GIDP has improved capacities of district administrations (617 local staff) to

manage local service delivery, linked to a performance-based, discretionary District Development Fund (DDF) for local development. By linking improved local governance capacities and performance to development grants, benefits of decentralized good governance have led to a more tangible benefit for citizens. According to the EPROR, over 140,000 people benefitted from access to different forms of small-scale rural infrastructure related to health, education, agriculture, trade, and public works.

SDC's governance portfolio has been impactful in advancing *informal institutions (i.e., norms and patterns of behaviour)* when it comes to knowledge development and cross-sectoral knowledge sharing, which to some extent has translated into an impact on *formal institutions (i.e. rules, laws and regulations)* on land concessions. As noted in the section on effectiveness, the K4D EPROR notes that the project has been impactful at the level of transforming how different agencies work and share information on land concessions through the LCIS platform. The significance of this result was highlighted by SCO staff, who explained that many other projects have been unable to strengthen integrated and coordinated cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial collaboration on land issues. In addition, project has contributed to changing behaviour of high-level decision-makers in the GoL, who through the project, have requested and accessed information and knowledge (from K4D) as inputs to specific ongoing policy debates. In this way, the project has impacted the legal framework on this topic i.e., through the Moratorium on land concessions (Orders no. 8 and 9 in 2018), inputs to the revisions of the land policy, the forestry law, and the revision of the country's investment promotion law. It is difficult for the current evaluation to ascertain, based on document review and few interviews, whether the project has had a *systemic* impact i.e., that it fundamentally has shifted how decisions are made by government stakeholders, or if the impact has been more *sporadic.*

The governance portfolio has also contributed to expanding civic space, and creating a more trustful and conducive environment for Lao CSOs to operate in. In other contexts, expanding civic space and building trust can be interpreted as too 'low' a level to signal an impact, but that is not the case in Laos. SDC and other donors have in the past (2012-onward) had to suspend civil society support in the country because of an increasingly restrictive environment, with significant risks incurred to both local and international partners. Therefore, even to arrive at the establishment of the CEGGA programme with the GoL has been an achievement, through a negotiation process and political dialogue which took around 2 years. Here, political dialogue through ambassadors and having a joint voice and position among the three CEGGA donors was instrumental and fruitful. Contrasting to when the CEGGA programme was conceived of, there is a tangible difference in space for technical cooperation with the GoL, and a legal basis for civil society to operate. The Near-End Evaluation of CEGGA (from mid-2021) found that engagement between Lao CSOs and the GoL has been steadily increasing. The LCCC (which is the first CSO's representative body, established in 2019), has been recognized as a key interlocutor of MoHA. In 2020, for the first time, selected local CSOs were consulted in drafting the National Report for the "the United Nations Universal Periodic Review".

On the other hand, the degree to which the governance portfolio has had a transformative impact on decentralisation in Laos appears limited. While the GIDP has been a relevant initiative to reinforce decentralisation, particularly through the DDF, the EPROR points out that the scope of GIDP alone has been too limited to impact decentralization reforms significantly. The ambition to pilot the Laos devolution strategy (the Sam Sang Directive) through GIDP does not appear to have informed "*a coherent and balanced policy framework for decentralized public administration, public finances and public services*", leaving the end of phase report after four consecutive phases of GIDP to conclude that "*At the end of GIDP, basic questions about decentralization (such as who does what, how and with what resources) remain largely unanswered*". Thus, the Evaluation concludes that the impact of GIDP at an institutional level has

been limited, despite the aforementioned impacts on people's lives in terms of service delivery and infrastructure (financed through the DDF).

4.6 Sustainability

- *To what extent are SDC governance interventions owned by partner governments (supported through their budgets) and part of national/local systems or policy environment? To what degree can achieved program results persist under a deteriorated context? What are the factors that facilitate lasting change through governance interventions?*

The context in Laos, where there is a high reliance on external funding due to a government budget deficit, financial sustainability is a central issue for development cooperation, including in the governance sector. Given the economic downturn the country has faced due to COVID-19 and the challenges faced by the government in revenue collection, the likelihood of the government having the fiscal space to provide discretionary grants for service delivery infrastructure (i.e. through the DDF) to local government is low. The programme sought to counter this issue by introducing a cost-sharing modality, stipulating state budget co-financing of the DDF service district investments as a way to promote greater national ownership and sustainability; however, the EPROR notes that "there is no concrete evidence to confirm that the government will continue to finance the DDF from the State budget". On the other hand, the DDF structure does provide an opportunity for other donors to contribute earmarked ODA that can be blended with public sector finance to help stimulate socio-economic development in rural economies whilst simultaneously targeting the most vulnerable. While the financial sustainability of decentralisation support has been difficult to attain due to the current economic situation and limited State budget, SDC has continued supporting Laos in the field of decentralisation/access to infrastructure and public services through the project "Local Development and Governance", co-financed by Luxembourg and implemented by LuxDev.

Similar issues have been raised in the evaluation of the K4D project, regarding the financial burden of maintaining and updating the public information platforms that were developed (e.g. the K4D and LCIS platforms), even though these have been handed over to the GoL. With government institutions being important users of the integrated information platform on land concessions (i.e. the LCIS), the commitment of funds and human resources for up-to-date information integration and analysis for policy and practice needs to come from the GoL. While GoL buy-in for the project appears positive, allowing for changes to how government actors work, this is no guarantee that efforts will be sustained when support is phased out.

Improvements in the quality of interaction between government agencies and civil society (through the CEGGA programme) are not contingent upon external funding and are therefore likely to last insofar that civil society plays a 'constructive role' in the perspective of the State. However, without donor support through CEGGA, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the GoL will continue to allow the expansion of civic space, particularly for civil society to play a role beyond service delivery.

5 Conclusions

The following section provides overall conclusions on the Swiss governance portfolio in Laos, based on the sample covered by the Evaluation.

Relevance

SDC's governance portfolio in Laos is found to be a relevant, and the SCO has been able to find 'politically smart' ways of addressing specific governance challenges in Laos (both through core and transversal governance engagements). The context in Laos is authoritarian, which presents certain challenges and sensitivities; nevertheless, SDC draws on a mix of relevant approaches to overcome these challenges, including balancing work with government and rights-holders/ civil society, identifying new entry points and less contentious issues to engage on, and working with like-minded development partners to reduce risks and exposure, while strengthening the leverage of the Swiss funding envelope.

Coherence

Reiterating the points made above, related to working in a 'politically smart' way, the Evaluation found that the SCO navigates the delicate balance between alignment with government priorities (i.e. working with the grain), and pushing on certain issues to expand democratic space and institutions (i.e. working against the grain). In a context like Laos, the need for ongoing critical assessment of political incentives and will is paramount, paired with consideration and analysis of when and how to work with the government (and likewise when and how not to). While the Evaluation has a positive view of the SCO's ability to 'think and work politically', having a Swiss Embassy in Laos would add value in terms of the frequency, scope and depth of political dialogue that is linked to governance programming.

Effectiveness

On the effectiveness of SDC's governance portfolio, positive contributions are evident across several areas. SDC's programmes have improved local service delivery capacities, enhanced rural infrastructure and have led to improved public satisfaction with service delivery. In addition, SDC and development partners have made considerable contributions to expanding civic space and strengthening the relationship between GoL and civil society. SDC has made a significant contribution on land concessions, contributing to evidence-based planning and decision-making. Notably, knowledge products from K4D influenced high-level policy decisions, emphasizing the impactful role of SDC's governance interventions in Laos. Finally, by using a technical entry point where there is significant Swiss expertise, SDC has found ways to engage in policy dialogue on the governance issues, signalling the value of a transversal governance approach.

Efficiency

SDC's preferred modality in the governance portfolio in Laos is contributions, often to joint programmes with like-minded donors. The Evaluation sees the value of such a joined-up approach in a context like Laos, as a way to reduce the exposure for SDC and increases the leverage of Swiss programming.

Impact

SDC's governance portfolio has demonstrated positive impacts, particularly evident with regard to improved access to service delivery for citizens, and informal-institution building. Local

governance support has delivered the most tangible impacts when related to the delivery of key services, but less impact was felt on shifting power to the local level, and reforms for fiscal decentralisation, etc. With regard to reform of more formal institutions, Switzerland has also been impactful, with long-term achievements in supporting evidence-based policy on land concessions.

Sustainability

The Evaluation recognises that SDC (and partners) have worked to ensure that the governance interventions are owned by partners, and have become a part of national systems, which enhance the potential for social and institutional sustainability. However, financial sustainability is challenging in Laos, due to the current economic situation and limited State budget. As such, the sustainability of several of the changes that have been brough about by SDC's programmes are dependent on external financial support.

Annex 1: List of documents reviewed:

- SDC. (2022). *Credit Proposal: 7F-07082.03: Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law (CEGGA)*
- SDC. (2022). *End of Phase Report: Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and Rule of Law (CEGGA).*
- SDC. (2018). *Credit Proposal:7F01297.04: Lao DECIDE Info (Knowledge for Development – K4D).*
- SDC. (2023). *End of Phase Report: 7F01297.04: Lao DECIDE Info (Knowledge for Development – K4D).*
- Janne, S., and K. Keoka. (2020). *Final External Evaluation and Capitalisation of Experiences of the Lao Decide-Info Project.* https://www.aramis.admin.ch/Default?DocumentID=68285&Load=true
- SDC. (2020). *Credit Proposal: 7F-09364.02: Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF).*
- SDC. (2020). *End of Phase Report: Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF).*
- SDC. (2021). *Credit Proposal: 7F-10705.01. Enhancing Systematic Land Registration (ESLR).*
- SDC. (2021). *Additional Credit: 7F-10705.01.04. Enhancing Systematic Land Registration (ESLR), Component 4 on "Public Information and Awareness Services for Vulnerable Communities (PIASVC).*
- SDC. (2017). *Credit Proposal: 7F-03181.04. National Governance and Public Administration Reform (NGPAR): Governance for Inclusive Development Project (GIDP).*
- SDC. (2022). *End of Project Report: National Governance and Public Administration Reform (NGPAR): Governance for Inclusive Development Programme (GIDP)*
- DeFaria, C., and T. Nanthanavone. (2021). *Final Evaluation of the Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) – Governance for Inclusive Development Programme (GIDP).* https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/19678
- SDC. (2021). *Credit Proposal: 7F-08846.03: Lao Upland Advisory Service (LURAS).*
- Helvetas. (2022). *End of Phase II Report: Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS).*
- SDC. (2017). *Credit Proposal: 7F-05450.04: The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI).*
- SDC. (2021). *End of Phase Report: The Agro-Biodivesity Intiative (TABI) Project Phase IV.*
- SDC. (2019). *Credit Proposal: 7F-08592.02: Vocational Training and Employment Support Services (VTESS).*
- SDC. (2018). *End of Phase Report: Vocational Education and Training Laos (VELA)*
- Engelsman, G. et al. (2021). *Independent Evaluation of the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021.*
- SDC. (2018) *Mekong Region Annual Report 2018 (With Planning 2019).*
- SDC. (2019) *Mekong Region Annual Report 2019 (With Planning 2020).*
- SDC. (2020) *Mekong Region Annual Report 2020 (With Planning 2021).*
- SDC. (2021) *Mekong Region Annual Report 2021 (With Planning 2022).*
- SDC. (2022) *Mekong Region Annual Report 2022 (With Planning 2023).*

Annex 2. List of persons interviewed (available only upon request; data protection)

Lebanon

1 Introduction

This case study report on governance as a transversal theme in SDC's Lebanon programme is one of four 'light touch' desk study cases carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022*" undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). The case-based approach consists of four 'light touch' studies and four 'deep dive' cases, which together provide the major evidence for the broader analysis on SDC's governance interventions and form the basis for the Evaluation Report. Lebanon was included as a desk-based case study to demonstrate how Switzerland addresses governance as a transversal theme (See Box 1) in a country programme where governance is not a domain and where a major governance crisis has been unfolding.

Box 1 Governance as a Transversal Theme

SDC has developed a set of tools on transversal governance including a *Practical Guide for Transversal Governance,* which has guided the detailing of the transversal governance elements in the interview guide for the Lebanon case study. The Guide provides practical advice for staff to include analysis of governance as a transversal theme in the programme cycle. The analysis framework, closely related to the SDC's Political Economy Analysis, underpinning the engagements include several levels: Structural and regulatory framework conditions in a given sector; Governance processes: performance and interaction in view of good governance principles; governance actors: behaviour, motivation, power and capacities; conflict potentials and conflict dimensions in a given sector, and interactions with other sectors including at regional and global levels. Important to note is also the inclusion of Swiss Humanitarian Aid. The analysis including the elements above leads to relevant lines of actions.
Source: Governance as a transversal theme, A Practical Guide to integrating governance in SDC sectors and priority themes (Part 2) (Undated).

The case study report covers the assessment of governance as a transversal theme from 2017 until 2022. The selected projects/programmes for assessment are shown below (Box 2):

Box 2 Selected projects for assessment

Work with state institutions:
1. UNICEF Bringing Aid Closer to Children (protection domain, ongoing) - (7F 09927).
2. Bekaa Water Management programme (water domain, ongoing) - (7F 09459).

Work with municipalities:
3. Emergency Responsiveness Initiative with the Tyr Union of Municipalities (DRR domain under former SCP ME, closed) – (7F-0878)

Localisation/civil society and human rights:
4. Regional Development and Protection Programme (livelihood, protection, ongoing. Funded by the Global Programme for Migration and Development until 2022, and South cooperation starting 2023). Implemented by Danida.
5. NRC Legal Protection for Refugees in Lebanon through Local Partnerships and Advocacy (protection domain, ongoing) (7F 09946).

The case study report is structured according to the EQs of the evaluation with specific formulations for governance as a transversal theme. The report addresses the EQs at strategic level based on evidence from the analysis of the selected engagements, document review and supplementary (virtual) interviews.

This study included a kick-off meeting with staff, individual interviews with SDC staff, analysis of selected programmes (see below), partner interview with UNICEF, interview with Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) staff, and a validation workshop. The report includes a brief description of the programme context, the programme itself and the projects (Chapter 2). The report then assesses selected programming aspects (Chapter 3), prior to answering the EQs (Chapter 4). Conclusions and recommendations are found in Chapter 5.

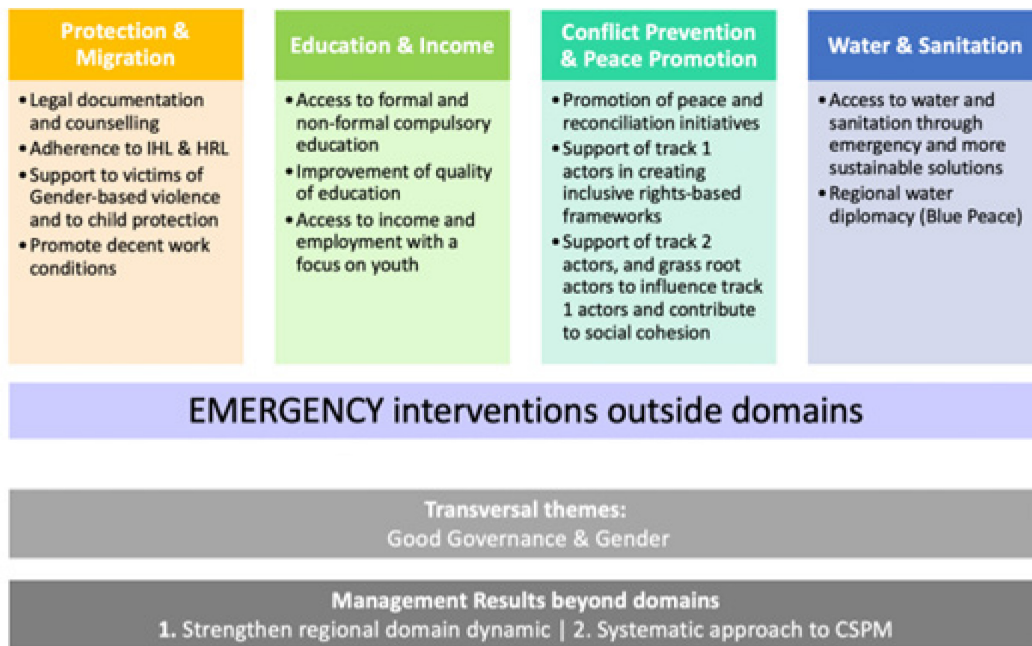## 2 Context, programme and project sample

Context

In Lebanon, the political instability, governance and economic crises are deep, and the downward spiral continues. The increase in social tensions among Lebanese and between host communities and Syrian refugees is one aspect of the crisis, but the regional issues should not overshadow the national crisis, which increasingly is the reality that the international community including Switzerland is engaging with. This includes questions regarding how to engage, when the entry points to Lebanese government stakeholders are limited, and when institutions and state-run services hardly function. The weak or non-existing state results in a weak social contract between state and citizen. This is compounded by a large number of refugees, which pressure an already fragile context. Civil society has therefore taken a much more active role, together with the international community in delivering services as parallel systems.

Programme

The Lebanon country portfolio is an integrated element in the Swiss Cooperation Programme Middle East (SCP ME) 2019-2024, which takes a regional approach to address the Syrian crisis. The programme covers engagements in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. The budget for the region is CHF 273 million for the programme period. The current programme and its predecessor programme aim to respond efficiently to the complex and protracted crisis in Syria and related refugee hosting countries in the region, through a WoGA approach. The overall goal of the regional programme is to contribute "to protect and empower conflict-affected and vulnerable persons, to save and reconstruct lives, to reduce fragility, to prevent and transform violent conflicts and to generate development perspectives, to promote good governance and protect and promote human rights, refugee laws as well as the respect of international humanitarian law".

The major external drivers of the SDC programme over time, are 1) humanitarian crisis focused on Syrian refugees; 2) deepening governance crises and an economic crisis heightened by Covid 19 and the Beirut blast, resulting in increased poverty across all communities. The SDC mandate in Lebanon continues to be strategically justified in burden-sharing and the spill overs of the Syria crisis without a real mandate to work specifically on conflict / fragility / governance. SDC is searching for entry points for meaningful nexus programming, using political economy analysis to assess chances of such programming to achieve long term impact. It is in this vein that the importance of transversal governance should be seen.

Transversal governance is realised through interventions in all four thematic domains: *Income & Education*, *Protection & Migration*, *Water & Sanitation,* and *Conflict Prevention & Peace Promotion*. Each domain has a specific objective and several expected outcomes and related indicators, and programming is supported by the mandatory transversal themes: gender equality and good governance and managed in accordance with conflict-sensitive programme management (CSPM). SDC has engagements in all four domains in Lebanon (see Box 3).

Protection & Migration	Education & Income	Conflict Prevention & Peace Promotion	Water & Sanitation
• Legal documentation and counselling • Adherence to IHL & HRL • Support to victims of Gender-based violence and to child protection • Promote decent work conditions	• Access to formal and non-formal compulsory education • Improvement of quality of education • Access to income and employment with a focus on youth	• Promotion of peace and reconciliation initiatives • Support of track 1 actors in creating inclusive rights-based frameworks • Support of track 2 actors, and grass root actors to influence track 1 actors and contribute to social cohesion	• Access to water and sanitation through emergency and more sustainable solutions • Regional water diplomacy (Blue Peace)

EMERGENCY interventions outside domains

Transversal themes:
Good Governance & Gender

Management Results beyond domains
1. Strengthen regional domain dynamic | 2. Systematic approach to CSPM

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) (2022) of the regional programme concluded that the country portfolio in Lebanon is on track with integration of gender, governance, and conflict sensitive programme management as transversal themes. It was also found that governance as a transversal theme hardly had indicators, although interviews showed that there were results within the projects. The MTR also concluded that the Lebanon programme has found ways of engaging in governance and peacebuilding activities particularly through PHRD.

The projects

The evaluation assessed transversal governance in five projects, which are presented below:

<u>**Working with State Institutions:**</u>

Project 1: UNICEF Bringing Aid Closer to Children (protection domain, ongoing) – (7F 09927).

The project has **two objectives** 1. Child Protection: Children at risk or engaged in child labour have access to improved and equitable prevention and response services within a strengthened child protection system. 2. Social Protection: Reduced household reliance on harmful coping strategies which affect the human capital development of children. The project has been supported by SDC in two phases: 2017-2019. 2'600'000 CHF/ while the overall budget for two years was 48 million CHF, and from 2019-2023 with CHF 3.467.600, including an additional credit.

Transversal Governance: This intervention tackles governance issues through the system-strengthening component factored into the child protection strategies for Lebanon. The component is also seen to enhance sustainability and scaling-up through capacity enhancement of local actors in attending to children's needs beyond the project period. Since 2023 SDC works with UNICEF on education under a distinct project.

Rationale and SDC's role: Child protection needs have always been high for refugees and have been soaring across all communities with the economic crisis. The project is having short term results through the provision of direct services to children and their caregivers while instigating improvements at the systemic level which will have a long-term impact. The prioritized system-level actions under this project are within policy frameworks and strategies that have been prioritized with the relevant line ministries, such as the Child Marriage National Action Plan or the National Social Protection

Strategy (NSPS). As an example, the project includes the piloting of "child grants" cash transfers that shall transition from a UNICEF-based programme to a national scheme under the NSPS. **An important part of the systems strengthening has specifically been included through SDC funding and this is pushing reforms to address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable children in the country. the possible extent.** *(Text summarised from Credit Proposals)*

Project 2: Bekaa Water Management programme (water domain, ongoing) - (7F 09459).

The "Bekaa Water Management Project has been implemented since 2015 as a Direct Action (by Humanitarian Aid). The overall goal of the project is for *"Host communities and Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley to benefit from safe, affordable and equitable access to well-managed drinking water and sanitation services, resulting in less water-related conflicts."* The BWMP is designed along two complementary components, each with one outcome. The outcomes focus on 1) Improved Organizational Management, and 2) Improved Infrastructure and Resource Management. **The institutional development and strengthening of management are seen as transversal governance** (also stated in the Credit proposal)**.**

The project focuses on the **nexus between Humanitarian Aid, Peace Promotion and Development Cooperation** addressing institutional, managerial, technical and social challenges at BWE. Although the project is implemented through humanitarian aid, it has a strong focus on technical cooperation. **The Bekaa Water Establishment (BWE), a regional arm of the Ministry of Energy and Water, administers the water provision of the Bekaa Valley including most of the Lebanese territory along the Syrian border.** It has the mandate to provide water and wastewater treatment services for approximately one million people, including irrigation for agricultural purposes, which accounts for roughly 60% of all the water used.

The first phase started in April 2016 and ended in December 2019 with a total budget of 4,32 Million CHF. Phase II (2020-2023) of the project has a total cumulated budget of 5 million CHF, which is constituted of 3 million CHF for project activities (from SDC Humanitarian Aid Budget) and of 2 million CHF for HR costs, including short-terms experts.
(Text summarised from Credit Proposals)

Working with Municipalities

Project 3: Emergency Responsiveness Initiative with the Tyr Union of Municipalities (DRR domain under former SCP ME, closed) – (7F-08708)

Lebanon has committed to the Sendai Framework of Action for 2015-2030 and has established a Disaster Risk Management unit at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) who, with support from UNDP and Switzerland. **The partnership between Switzerland and Union of Tyre Municipalities (UoTM) started in 2007 after the war between Israel and Lebanon (2006) and aimed at enhancing the response capacities of UoTM.** In 2012, the "Emergency Responsiveness Initiative project started its first phase. The main achievements of the project include: Establishing an effective Response Unit for Tyre that coordinates the main emergency and response organizations to enhance the quality and efficiency for emergency responses; Creating a functional operation room to coordinate the activities of the stakeholders; Implementing awareness campaign at community level on Disaster Risk; Setting up an early response mechanism on neighbourhood level, consisting of the village coordinators and the First Responder Teams. Building on the earlier engagement. The project was closed in 2021, in the final

stage of cooperation the RU was supported to engage in the Covid 19 activities, and the response unit also played a role after the Beirut Blast.

Transversal governance. The project was supporting the governance system of the Response Unit at the Union of Tyre Municipalities by" Enhancing its decision-making process to formulate policies, including disaster reduction and planning". Allocating the necessary resources for disaster risk reduction and response; Facilitating the participation of civil society and main stakeholders in RU activities. **The RU today is still functioning as an informal unit within the UoTM. It lacks the formal status to ensure its sustainability and independence, thus potentially jeopardizing its function and previous achievements.** The RU additionally does not dispose of sufficient capacities and resources to sustainably ensure the leading role in emergencies and to maintain a good level of quality of its services including of the members of the RU. SDC support from 2014-2016 amounted to 337,000 CHF and 2017-2021 CHF 634,000. The implementation was through Direct Action.
Source: Summary based on Credit Proposals and Final Report.

Localisation/civil society and human rights

Project 4: Regional Development and Protection Programme with Danida as lead agency (livelihood and protection domain, ongoing.

The Regional Development and Protection Programme 's overarching strategic objective is to generate improved, inclusive access to livelihood opportunities, protection and services for refugees, IDPs and host communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. RDPP II was implemented from 2018 to 2022 and supported by SDC with 5 mill CHF from the Global Programme Migration and Development. Phase 1 (2015-2017) was also supported by Switzerland (SEM) with a minor contribution (1 mill CHF). A third phase has just started with the support from South Cooperation. The total budget is 50 million Euros from the Czech Republic, Denmark, European Union (the Madad Trust Fund), Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland. The Credit Proposal notes the programme to be a good example of a humanitarian - development nexus approach. **There is considerable focus on gender as a transversal theme in the credit proposal narrative, but no mention of governance as a transversal theme.** There is no reference to a Theory of Change in the credit proposal. Drawing on the final report of the programme (June 2023) it is emphasised that RDPP II has localised aid through local and national NGOs, which were empowered through a tailored capacity development. The **Human Rights-Based perspective** and gender principles throughout its efforts, enabled participation, accountability, non-discrimination, and transparency for the benefit of all affected population groups. Flexibility and adaptiveness have been a major reason for the programme achieving beyond targets.
Source: GPMD Credit Proposal and Final report of RDPP II (June 2023).

Project 5: NRC Legal Protection for Refugees in Lebanon through Local Partnerships and Advocacy (protection domain, ongoing) (7F 09946).

NRC's Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme has been conducted in two phases. Phase 1 was entitling Ensuring Legal Protection for refugees from Syria (2017-2019). The evaluation looked in particular at phase 2 (see title above). The programme provides information, counselling and legal representation to refugees from Syria, including Palestinian refugees from Syria, on a range of legal issues affecting refugees, including civil documentation, legal residency, and housing, land and property (HLP) rights.

Outcome 1: Increased national NGOs' organisational capacity for quality legal service provision. **Outcome 2:** Improved access to rights and services for refugees from Syria and other vulnerable groups delivered through national NGOs. **Outcome 3:** Increased awareness and engagement on legal protection issues benefitting refugees from Syria through targeted advocacy.

The NRC ICLA Theory of Change is not clearly spelt out in the NRC project document but notes the following with regard to the ToC: "the broader ICLA programme in Lebanon separately looks at the provision of legal services to refugees in three main thematic areas: HLP rights; civil documentation; and legal residency, as well as linkages with advocacy. A Lebanon- specific Theory of Change for services related to employment rights is currently being developed. This division is based on the recognition that different circumstances and factors decide the levels of impact and success in these three areas. Ongoing outcome monitoring confirms that NRC's services have a strong impact on refugees' increased knowledge and understanding of their rights, and enable them to seek and protect their rights, especially when it comes to obtaining civil documentation such as birth and marriage registration. Protecting housing rights and preventing evictions is an equally important area, and NRC contributed significantly to an improved understanding and awareness of the importance of written lease agreements, both within refugee communities, amongst Lebanese landlords, and the humanitarian assistance community. With regards to legal residency, the positive impact of NRC's counselling activities is often hampered by the restrictive policy and implementation of legal residency regulations, but NRC's services help to prevent further harm to refugees by advising them on their available legal options and alerting them to potential protection threats".

The SDC credit proposal pays considerable attention to gender as a transversal theme, which also aligns with the target group. **Governance as a transversal theme** is formulated by NRC and SDC to be "tackled through the targeted advocacy component and the collaborative work with ministries and authorities at field and central levels" Source: CREDIT PROPOSAL Nr. 7F- 09946.02) SDC budget in Swiss Francs 1,850,000 CHF, USD 4 Mio.
Source: Credit proposal and NRC Proposal and Final Report

3 Understanding Transversal Governance, analysis, and programming

3.1. Understanding TG

Transversal governance became mandatory in the IC strategy 2017-2020 and the staff in Lebanon are well versed with the concept and the guidance materials.

The explicit mentioning of governance as a transversal theme in the Credit Proposals assessed is limited, although TG is a considerable focus in projects. The explanation is that "while everything has a political and a governance angle", it can be difficult to put a label on TG in projects because of its multi-faceted definition and the lack of relevant available indicators, beyond the governance ARI/TRIs that are not adapted to monitor transversal governance in the vast majority of cases. Several interviews reiterated that while the Lebanon context calls for major governance reforms, a core governance programme would not "fly" in the current context because the depth of the governance crisis is beyond the capacity of leverage of the international aid community for the moment. The advantage with TG is that the interventions are targeted at sectors, where there may be tangible entry points.

TG is open to interpretation and encompasses political and legal reforms, institutional development, capacity building, management and organization at state and not least municipal levels (as in the Tyre and BWE projects). In other cases, transversal governance is pointed to as a rights issue for specific target groups (children, women) with specific vulnerabilities in displaced and host populations (ICLA; RDPP, UNICEF).

It can be argued, and interviews pointed to that depending on the lens applied by individual staff, TG can constitute the larger parts of engagements or the opposite, noting that all support is humanitarian+, because of the country's governance crisis. The project sample shows the importance for SDC to be explicit about the understanding of TG. Also, because it was evident that partners may have different view of what TG is and should be. SDC has, for example, pushed for the institutional strengthening component in the UNICEF project, but this is not necessarily seen as a major focus by UNICEF, which could have consequences for SDC's monitoring of results of TG.

3.2. Political economy analysis

There is a trend away from a humanitarian mindset with limited analysis towards engaging in analysis, and thereby recognising that the programme operates in a protracted governance crisis rather than a humanitarian emergency. It is time and resource consuming to reach a common understanding for example among contributing donors of which crisis elements to focus on and what governance deficit really means and how to address it because of the complexity and scale. A political economy analysis would be an ideal tool to develop a shared understanding. Such analysis is conducted in some cases and is considered very valuable, but also resource demanding both for SDC and partners.

One barrier for conducting analysis is also the lack of funding for analysis, and partners are humanitarian, and projects are short term is it not possible. This does not apply to SDC, but this is the case for partners. The SDC team noted that they to a considerable degree rely on partners for the analysis (SDC only provides project contributions in the Middle East), and often structured and written analysis is not produced, instead there is a reliance on close dialogue and, in the worst case, "impressions". SDC staff increasingly promote analysis which is seen as the sine qua non to find relevant entry points to achieve results and influence reform agendas.

3.3. Internal learning

Given the importance of governance there was a call for more in-person analysis workshops and exchanges within SDC and in some cases also including key partners. The Guidance materials were called "inspiring", but the practical application in a very difficult context calls for in depth analysis and practical learning and continuous development.

4. Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Impact and Sustainability [21]

4.1. Relevance (EQ1)

To remain relevant in the region as an external actor, SDC (and others) have since the Syria crisis increasingly made a shift from shorter term humanitarian assistance to nexus approaches. These approaches are increasingly being attempted, because of the convincing narrative of the crisis requiring short term relief alongside needed development interventions and with peace elements in particular in the form of social cohesion. BWE is a project where ambitions for long term change have been reduced, because of the address emergencies of water supply disruptions. The UNICEF programme combines humanitarian needs (cash transfers) with long term strategic goals to establish a system for social protection. The programme strategy is to prepare building blocks for reforms, and if the political climate becomes more positive and there are opportunities the donors can support national change agents for structural changes. Meanwhile, the programme continues with a mix of short term (cash transfers) and long-term social protection elements. SDC sees its role as being a

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[21] The evaluation has no findings on efficiency in this case study; issues related to efficiency questions are included in the main report.

proactive advocate and driving force for the programme to support systems strengthening and prepare proactively to take the opportunities that may open up here and there within government, while being clear that the responsibility for both reforms and the funding of public services (incl. social protection) lies with the government and that humanitarian aid cannot and shall not replace the role of the government over the long term in the absence of macroeconomic and fiscal reforms.

For TG to be relevant in a sector programme, it is important to identify change agents and entry points. The interviews with staff pointed to entry points opening and closing all the time. It was said that a Theory of Change and its underlying assumptions, when based on a sound political economy analysis, remain a powerful tool to assess the relevance of an intervention and its chance to lead to impact. However, a Theory of Change currently needs to be rewritten before the ink is dry or at least that it may not hold throughout a multi-year programme and may need to be revised regularly. Another point made was that transversal governance in a sector needs coordination and a leading voice and weight in the form of tangible services, but also a minimum of ownership and leadership by the duty bearers in charge to have any chance of success.

4.2. Coherence (EQ 2)

In the Lebanon programme TG "blends in" with sector elements in the sense that the sectors focus on legal reforms, institutional strengthening and capacity development.

In the new UNICEF education programme, SDC has taken a leading role in coordination of the different donors around possible openings for reforms. These efforts also contribute to enhance the Swiss inputs to donor coordination, for example by communicating blockages, openings, innovative approaches etc. However, sharing experiences about the situation is very difficult and there are different views on major developments among in the international community. In the UNICEF project, the systems strengthening is coherent with the sector elements, as the programme links cash transfers and other immediate needs with a long-term system strengthening approach. In other projects services cannot be delivered because institutions disintegrate and fall apart, the BWE being a case in point.

With the multilevel crisis situation, short term humanitarian assistance provided in parallel to government institutions is often seen as "the most direct way" in the short term to reduce the immediate effect of the crisis on the population and justifies itself as a transitional measure, however, if sustained, the parallel aid forms eventually go against sustainable development and aims to strengthen systems and institutions. The Swiss priorities in Lebanon are to increasingly avoid parallel systems and keep the long-term perspective (nexus approach), both with regard to the Syria refugee crisis and the crises in Lebanon, noting that at some point there has to be a functioning state in Lebanon, which is accountable to its citizens.

Working to strengthen municipalities and their capacity to deliver services and other functions such as disaster management (like the UoTM project) are seen as both providing governance support and promote localization in order to keep local communities functioning and have legitimacy vis a vis the population. Humanitarian aid provided through municipalities was, in interviews, stressed as important to support municipalities to be seen as legitimate actors of the state but may also run the risks linked to clientelism that characterizes a failing state at all levels. It is therefore important to consider such support on a case-by-case basis.

4.3. Effectiveness (EQ 3)

One of the key questions of the evaluation is to assess what extent governance objectives can be achieved in challenging contexts and with regard to Lebanon the question is to what extent transversal governance can drive the achievement of sector objectives. The immediate answer is that TG in the sectors cannot be achieved in the short term, because it is the huge governance deficit, which is the root cause of the crisis. However, there are obviously different

levels and understandings of TG, and interviews with the team underlined that the team increasingly works with partners on entry points which may lead to "people centred" results in the form of institutional and legislative reforms (UNICEF, NRC and BWE) in the longer term.

However, this approach comes with complications, risks and uncertainties. Taking the BWMP as an example the overall goal was for "Host communities and Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley to benefit from safe, affordable and equitable access to well-managed drinking water and sanitation services, resulting in less water-related conflicts." The outcomes and impact hypothesis/theory of change can help throw light on this question:

- The BWMP was designed along two complementary components, each with one outcome. 1) Improved Organizational Management, and 2) Improved Infrastructure and Resource Management. The outcomes result from clarified responsibilities at BWE and sustainable and equitable access to safe water and wastewater services.

- By strengthening the management capacities of BWE towards efficient business processes, improved skills and know-how of all employees, and efficient workflows and customer orientation, and digitalization of services to strengthen transparency, the services provided by BWE is seen to be improving. By improving the technical operation and management of BWE infrastructure, water resources will be better protected, and energy consumption will be reduced. Improved management and technical operation combined will then contribute to equitable access to safe water and wastewater treatment services for the targeted communities in BWE's service area. Consequently, "Host communities and Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley will enjoy safe, affordable and equitable access to well-managed drinking water and sanitation services, resulting in less water-related conflicts". The institutional development and strengthening of management are seen as transversal governance (also stated in the Credit proposal).

The TOC did not hold; the deep crisis pulled BWE into an unsustainable institutional situation. The national government stopped recruitment of civil servants, neither could BWE afford to hire long term staff, and most staff became temporary and short term. Low staff morale, absenteeism and political appointments decreased efficiency and affected the outcomes of the donor support. Senior management positions were not filled, and leadership became a real issue. The BWE is currently muddling through. SDC is staying engaged, and even if the focus is mainly on emergency support and conflict mitigation activities among user groups keeping the long-term perspectives on the table is also being attempted. There are efforts to coordinate with municipalities and to install solar panels, raise tariffs and improve billing. The provision of solar panels is an effort to engage in a balance between long term investments and meeting immediate needs. PHRD has come in to train on conflict mediation between refugees and host communities.

While these adjustments have been an example of adaptive management in practice, the question should be asked if the institutional fragility is only grounded in the context and if more could have been done to prevent the collapse. SDC did an analysis, which showed that BWE had a weak set-up. This led to some adjustments, but the ambitions and the ToC of the project seems to have continued to be overoptimistic. The External Project Review of BWE (2021) concluded that **"the situation of the Water sector in general and in the Bekaa in particular is disastrous; meeting the planned outcomes that aim at institutional development and support, requests a leap that the BWE and other local structures are unable to make. Moreover, institutional development is also part of a more comprehensive legal and institutional framework, involving various national and local entities that, themselves, are fragile with limited effectiveness and efficiency, and complex relationships that often lead to blockage. This whole picture has worsened due to the political and financial crisis" (External Project Review p 15). In hindsight it can also be said that TG may have increased capacities and management efficiencies at some point, but not been sufficient for the project to be effective and reach its objective. This points to the limitations of programmes when the context deteriorates to the extent that this has happened in Lebanon, yet a related question to be answered in the future

is if institutions like BWE has the strength and level of resilience, which allows it to recuperate, when and if the context improves.

Turning to other projects there are both difficulties in pointing to TG through a desk analysis, but also documentation which point to achievements. The Tyre Union supports 64 municipalities, and SDC was engaged with them in several stages, first by supporting their work on how to give services to the communities and establish a response unit. There has been replication of capacity building and cascading of training for municipality staff, and management support. These efforts came to fruition, for example when the Tyre Union supported Beirut Union to handle the aftermath of the blast, in the Beirut port. This shows that there are achievements and a degree of sustainability even if the response unit has never become institutionally formalized. In the view of the evaluation, this is also an example of long term and patient resilience building.

With regard to the UNICEF engagement, Lebanon did not have a social protection strategy or framework, and this has been adapted on paper with the approval of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS). Donors are pushing towards a convergence and harmonization of pre-existing, donor-funded (grants and loans) social assistance schemes to align with the NSPS, but the ownership and capacity of the state to carry the needed fiscal reforms to afford its social protection remains an open question.

Policy dialogue and advocacy for reforms are attempted at different levels, but there are few entry points and therefore a limited number of decision makers to engage with. In countries where there are systemic and structural blockages for reform, as in Lebanon, it is difficult to gain access to policy dialogue at the level of state institutions, and reforms are blocked by patronage politics, which happen outside the formal government institutions. The structural barriers to reform and policy changes frustrate both staff and partners. Working with UNICEF is a way for SDC and donors to speak with weight and maintain entry points and work for long term reforms. Here SDC has passed a project extension to further sow the seeds for maintaining the endorsed reforms in relevant line ministries and to which SCO has contributed over the past years, i.e. the Child Marriage National Action Plan and the National Social Protection Strategy.

4.4. Impact and Sustainability (EQ 5 and EQ 6)

The NRC project in the sample is a case where the focus is on impact with the communities and removing barriers as they are experienced. In other words, the focus is on behaviour changes and thereby on informal institutional change. NRC advocates removing the obstacles they are facing, and their approach is humanitarian. There is also a recognition that the Lebanon government is not interested in a longer-term strategic approach towards local integration. Transversal governance therefore means a rights-based approach and protection of the rights of refugees. This is quite different from the other projects in the sample. Syrian refugees have been empowered while in Lebanon, and the evaluation was informed that refugees to a large extent see themselves remaining in Lebanon, because of lack of safety, security and livelihoods in Syria.

It appears from the sample that impact, and sustainability are difficult to establish based on the available documentation. Overall, the sample points to impact and sustainability not being realistic expectations in the shorter and possibly medium term. As SDC and their partners aim for institutional anchoring and longer-term results, the political situation and the governance deficit are key obstacles in this regard, also noting that services, to a considerable extent, are delivered by the international community.

Looking at impact and sustainability as institutional resilience does give a more optimistic outlook, and SDC and others see that their cooperation in municipalities with lower levels of the civil service, seem promising in terms of maintaining the results and establish institutional resilience in the crisis situation. Based on analysis of particular situations, SDC

finances nimble initiatives particularly at municipal levels, where there are pockets of actors and institutions who continue to operate. Resilience is then supported for example through trainings and small infrastructure.

5 Conclusions

TG in the sample

TG is increasingly a focus in projects because Lebanon is in a deep governance crisis, and the natural entry points, besides humanitarian assistance, is to advocate work on governance reforms through the few openings that exist. The explicit mentioning of governance as a transversal theme in the Credit Proposals assessed is limited, but the practice is different.

TG is open to interpretation, but based on the sample it is found that SDC works towards political and legal reforms, institutional development, capacity building, management and organization at state and not least municipal levels (as in the Union of Tyre and BWE projects). Indicators on TG for SDC as a whole may help both clarify what is expected and shall be considered as TG in programmes and with partners.

The project sample shows the importance for SDC to be explicit about the understanding of TG. On the basis of the sample, it appeared that there is a need for SDC as an institution to be more explicit about the expectations of TG in programmes. In this regard SDC could develop a set of core indicators for TG, which can help staff in different sectors to understand what is expected in terms of achievements. Obviously, indicators are project and programme specific, but examples would be inspirational and guiding staff to work systematically in analysis, planning and monitoring with governance dimensions in sectors. This would also help develop a common understanding with partners, as in the sample it was evident that partners may have different views of TG.

Programming based on analysis and learning

There is a trend away from a humanitarian mindset with limited analysis towards engaging in political economy analysis and targeting, and thereby recognising that the programme operates in a protracted governance crisis rather than a humanitarian emergency which needs to be underpinned by analysis, even if this causes delays and for some partners poses challenges. SDC should find resources (human and financial) to conduct PEA at sector level, which would also help partners working with SDC to understand how SDC perceives a given situation and therefore can help both partners and SDC both in planning and with adaptations during implementation.

Learning and training

Given the importance of governance there was a call for more in person workshops, exchanges and training in SDC for staff to be better equipped for the further detailing and thinking through the role of TG in protracted crisis. As all work is through partners, key partners should be invited to participate in learning sessions where feasible and relevant.

Relevance

To remain relevant in the region as an external actor, SDC in Lebanon has, since the Syria crisis, increasingly made a shift from shorter term humanitarian assistance to longer term development (nexus approach), however the protracted and deep crisis poses challenges for a nexus approach, because of the urgent humanitarian needs, the general lack of ownership and leadership of authorities when it comes to reforms, and hence the lack of perspective in the medium to long term for systemic change leading to concrete impact at the level of beneficiaries, especially if the context further deteriorates

For TG to be relevant in a sector programme, it is important to identify change agents and entry points, but these seem to change frequently (as they are often linked to individual stakeholders) and may not lead to the expected results.

Coherence

In the past two years there has been a "lack of outlook" for the international community. Sharing experiences about the situation seem difficult – this complicates working on governance. Nevertheless, the importance, in a context like Lebanon, to address the governance of the aid system (transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability) should not be underestimated. The international aid community cannot preach coherence and give lessons to authorities, if it does not walk the talk itself.

Governance of the aid system is an area where SDC is strongly engaged in Lebanon, with considerable human resources investment, because the potential for increased aid effectiveness is huge. And although there have been tangible first results (better needs analysis, unified aid framework), there are players who do not see the importance of this. Coherent, transparent and accountable governance of the aid system and its actors is a self-explanatory element of transversal governance, and the SDC team makes major strides in this direction, while other actors are less inclined.

On localisation it is important to note that besides municipalities - local organisations (civil society) have started to operate in the wake of the Syria crisis. Often the interest is in service delivery. In this regard the democratization element of localization is not always obvious.

Effectiveness

One of the key questions of the evaluation is to assess what extent governance objectives can be achieved in challenging contexts; the additional question in Lebanon is to what extent transversal governance can drive the achievement of sector objectives.

The immediate answer is that TG in the sectors cannot be achieved in the short term, because of the deep governance crisis in the country. However, there are different levels and understandings of TG, and interviews with the team underlined how the team increasingly work with partners on entry points which may lead to "people centred" results in the form of behavioural, institutional, and legislative reforms (UNICEF, NRC and BWE) in the medium to longer term, and achievements in the work with municipalities that continue to function, provided the context eventually improves. The UNICEF engagement includes short- and long-term activities and objectives and multi-donor engagement where there are achievements in particular areas. SDC role in this programme is strategic in the sense that SDC specifically supports areas of the programme where there are reform entry points.

A good example of achievements, impact and sustainability is the long-term support to the Response Unit of the UoTM. The Unit has continued to function after the end of SDC support and has shown capability for example to mobilise and help the Union of Beirut at the port blast. SDC aimed at helping the Response Unit to become institutionally anchored within the UoTM, this did not happen, but it continues to operate anyhow.

Impact and sustainability

The NRC project in the sample is a case where the focus is on short term impact with the communities and removing barriers as they are experienced. TG means a rights-based approach and protection of the rights of refugees. TG here is quite humanitarian. Efforts to achieve sustainability rightly focus on personal capacities at technical level. Moreover, understanding impact and sustainability as having supported institutional resilience, or as in the case of the UoTM response unit, the unit has remained operational and resilient without formally having become part being part of the the organisational set-up of the UoTM (see above).

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Annex 2. List of Persons interviewed (available only upon request; data protection)

Mongolia

1 Introduction

This case study report on SDC's Mongolia programme is one of four 'light touch' desk study carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022"* undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). In addition to the four 'light touch' case studies, the Evaluation includes four 'deep dive' cases.

Mongolia was included as a desk-based case study because Switzerland currently is in the process of phasing out its development cooperation in the country after over two decades of engagement. Against the backdrop of the closure of the country programme in 2024, it has been deemed an opportunity for the Evaluation to look at the Swiss governance portfolio in Mongolia, and *in particular consider issues related to learning, impact and sustainability.* Likewise, the Evaluation can, within the scope of the desk study, draw on the extensive capitalisation of experience activities that have been launched as part of the phase-out. Documents produced during this process addressing the governance portfolio are therefore the core source material for the current desk study.

The case study report draws on a desk review and assessment of a number of core governance projects/programmes and a few transversal governance engagements in Mongolia from 2017 until 2022. The emphasis in the study is therefore on the Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021, including the intentions of the Phasing out Programme 2022-2024. The sample of contributions covered by the Evaluation are as follows:

Core governance

- **Combating Gender-based Violence (GBV)**, which aims among others at providing shelters to the victims of GBV. Supported financially by the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC) and the United Nations Population Fund Country Office Mongolia (UNFPA) and jointly implemented by the Government of Mongolia (GOM) and UNFPA Country Office. Project ongoing until 31.07.2023.

- **The Governance and Decentralization Programme (GDP),** implemented since April 2012, aimed to support Mongolia's decentralization reform process by fostering empowered, democratic and accountable sub-national governments that provide services responding to citizens' needs. The programme, implemented in two phases (GDP I in 2012-2015; GDP II in 2015-2019) has been ended on 31.12.2022. However, one of its 3 sub-projects, the Decentralization Policy, the Constitutional Amendment process involved innovative and unprecedented participatory processes enhancing the legitimacy of the reforms and potentially establishing an emerging political convention. Support **(**sub-project of GDP), implemented by the Cabinet Secretariat of the Government of Mongolia has been extended until 31.12.2023.

- **Understanding and Managing Internal Migration in Mongolia (UMIMM) -** improving the socio-economic well-being of internal migration through evidence-based migration policies and concrete interventions by providing national and local authorities with regular, evidence-based data on internal migration. Implementing partners include: IOM, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP); Municipality of Ulaanbaatar (MUB); General Authority of State Registration; National Statistics Office (NSO); Ulaanbaatar Emergency Management Agency (UB EMA); universities / research institutes; Rural Local Governments; CSOs; and the Private sector. Duration: 2019-2023. Budget: SDC - 3,483,140 CHF

- **Strengthening Representative Bodies in Mongolia (SRBM***)*, supported the Local Assemblies and National Parliament to become more responsive and accountable to citizens. In the first phase, 2017-2020, SDC partnered with the Mongolian Parliamentary Secretariat (MPS), and (UNDP). The second phase (July 2021-December 2023) included

a strategic switch to direct contributions to the MPS, the Cabinet Secretariat and the Office of President. The SDC budget in Phase 1 was CHF 3'135'000. The total SDC budget for SRBM Phase 2 is CHF 2'250'000.

- **Mainstreaming Social Accountability for Improved Transparency and Participation in Mongolia (MASAM)** – co-funded with the World Bank –aiming at promoting social accountability and public participation in decision making. Project still ongoing until 31.07.2023.

Transversal governance:

- **Sustainable Livelihoods Project (SLP).** Co-funded with the World Bank and the Mongolian Ministry of Finance - which has established the Local Development Fund (LDF) mechanism, the main financial instrument of decentralisation through which the localities can themselves decide on which local projects to fund. SDC's contribution to this project has ended on 31.12.2021.
- **Public Investment in Energy Efficiency (PIE) Project.** Co-funded with the German International Cooperation (GiZ) – which focused on the refurbishment and insulation of schools/kindergarten and private apartment blocks. SDC contribution to the project ended on 31.12.2021.

The case study report does not include a section on methodology (as this is a common section for all case studies). The report includes a brief description of the programme context (Chapter 2) and a programme description (Chapter 3) as a backdrop for the discussion of the evaluation questions in Chapter 4: relevance, coherence, learning and knowledge management aspects, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The report addresses the evaluation questions at a strategic level based on evidence from the document review and supplementary (virtual) interviews. A considerable limitation of the desk study is the time allocation of five working days allocated to the Evaluation for the task. The reader must bear this limitation in mind.

2 Context of the programme

Mongolia has made significant progress in political, social, and economic reforms since adopting its democratic Constitution in 1992. The country is often described as an "oasis of democracy" or as a" role model" for other developing countries due to its establishment of democratic institutions, promotion of human rights, and economic freedom. Mongolia is a lower middle-income country with 3.29 million inhabitants, half of whom live in the capital city. It is one of the least densely populated countries in the world.

Mongolia performs above or like its peers across measures of democratic performance and governance, hereunder stability, absence of political violence, voice and accountability[22]. In terms of governance, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) won parliamentary and local elections in 2020 and the presidential election in 2021, consolidating its position as the dominant political force in the country. The opposition Democratic Party (DP) has faced internal divisions, challenging its role as the main countervailing political force to the MPP. The National Labour Party may emerge as a new "third party" to propel democratic reforms. Constitutional amendments were adopted in 2019 to strengthen checks and balances among Parliament, Cabinet, and the Office of the President, contributing to more effective and stable policy implementation, the empowerment of local governments, and improved judicial independence and accountability. Mongolia has also taken important steps to promote greater decentralization and stronger local governance.

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[22] WBG. (2018). Mongolia: Systemic Country Diagnostic. Accessed at: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/576101543874150141/pdf/mongolia-scd-final-version-november-2018-11282018-636792121231072289.pdf

Nonetheless, Mongolia faces several governance challenges. Corruption remains a serious problem, and the country ranks 110 out of 180 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2022). Other challenges include the recent democratic decline in terms of separation of powers, accentuating the need for continued fostering of democratic institutions and processes, a competent and politically neutral civil service, and strengthened protection of human rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited Mongolia's digital transition, with the government aiming to become "a digital nation" by 2030, including full digitalization of public services.

Economically, Mongolia remains vulnerable to external factors due to its overreliance on the mining sector. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a serious regression in economic progress, with a recession of 6% in 2020, but has been rebounding. The *Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2022*, projected already in 2022 that Mongolia's economic growth would expand by 2.3% and climbing to 5.6% in 2023, supported by domestic demand, investment, and recovery in industry, agriculture, and services. The report noted that, in terms of vulnerability, growth prospects do depend heavily on open trade portals with the Peoples Republic of China, and economic pressures as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The poverty rate has increased, and unemployment among young people is high. Mongolia also has the highest debt-to-GDP ratio in the region. The economic difficulties have had a negative impact on fiscal decentralization, with reduced transfers to local governments resulting in an overall slowdown of decentralization reforms.

3 Brief programme description

SDC has been operating in Mongolia since 2001 and established an office in Ulaanbaatar in 2004 to strengthen its presence in the region. Initially, focus was on promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, agricultural development, and food security. Over time, the programme expanded to include vocational education and training, as well as governance. The latter, governance, became a core focus of SDC's engagement in Mongolia, amounting to approximately half of Switzerland's portfolio (funding volume) during the period covered by the evaluation (2017-2021).

From 2018-onward, SDC has adopted an urban approach, developing projects that address specific challenges related to urban development. Through the 2018-2021 Cooperation Strategy, Switzerland aimed to empower Mongolian citizens and institutions towards a green, equitable, and prosperous society, with support across three key domains i) Agriculture and Food Security (AFS); ii) Vocational Education and Training (VET); iii) State Reform, Local Governance and Civic Participation (GOV), with an additional stand-alone project on Sustainable Artisanal Mining Project. In addition to the core governance programme, gender equality and good governance were mainstreamed throughout the three domains as transversal themes. Under the Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021, the core governance programme (domain no. 3) represented 50% of all investments. The financial volume of Swiss development assistance to Mongolia decreased from CHF 13.5 million to CHF 12 million in the period 2018-21.

The Governance domain objective aimed to foster accountable and effective national and sub-national government and an empowered civil society. Overall, the Strategy aimed to prepare for the transformation of Switzerland's engagement in Mongolia for the period after 2021. Strong institutions and good governance being at the core of Mongolia's future robustness, resulted in the governance domain taking a central position in SDC's programme efforts. The Strategy therefore notes that governance "will increase in importance, as transparent, responsive and accountable public institutions are an important precondition for the equitable distribution of benefits from the country's resource wealth". The Strategy does not use Theory of Change language but includes portfolio objectives and an *impact hypothesis,* similar to domain level theories of change.

- The impact hypothesis is that comprehensive capacity building of, and policy support for, national and sub-national governments favouring democratisation and decentralisation reforms will contribute to improved and equitable public service delivery and more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

The governance domain goal is to *contribute to accountable and effective national and sub-national government and empowered civil society, both responding to the needs of citizens.* The expected outcomes are: (1) Decentralisation: Improved performance and accountability of local authorities; (2) Democratization: Improved participation of citizens in decision-making, and the improved capacity and social accountability role of CSOs. To be noted is that SDC will continue its support to the decentralisation reform agenda of the Government of Mongolia through enhanced sectoral interventions (e.g. energy efficiency, land governance, waste management) with the aim of improving public services delivery in rural and urban/peri-urban areas, also benefitting marginalised groups. Also, through its support to create an enabling regulatory framework for citizens' engagement and streamlining the application of social accountability mechanisms, SDC will strengthen responsive and accountable decision-making. Transversal governance is presented as ´Every domain has an outcome dedicated to improving the institutional framework of the sector. Principles such as accountability, transparency, participation and efficiency will be applied in all SDC activities`.

The overall goal of the Phasing Out Programme (2022-2024) is *to contribute to an equitable, inclusive, environmentally friendly, and prosperous society through the accountability of state institutions at all levels and the empowerment of Mongolian citizens.* This programme has a clear Theory of Change noting that:

- *if* government institutions are capacitated to fulfil their functions, pursue decentralisation, and are more accountable to citizens, whereas citizens are empowered to express their needs,

- *then* equal access to and the quality of public services will improve, and citizens will exercise their rights and duties, leading to a more democratic and inclusive society with due respect for human rights.

- *Because* the portfolio outcome focuses on the supply side of strengthening equal access to decentralized services by state institutions that use participatory mechanisms and, on the demand side, supports civil society to preserve cultural heritage, as well as promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

The portfolio in the Phase Out Programme has the following outcomes: i) Democracy, respect for human rights, and promotion of gender equality; ii) Climate change adaptation/mitigation and environmental sustainability; iii) Inclusive Economic Development for sustainable livelihood of female and male herders and farmers. The three domains as formulated in the Phase Out Programme, is planned to open for future relations and broader coalitions including innovative partnerships for example with private sector, although the programme "chapter" will be closing for SDC.

Besides the two main transversal themes (gender and governance), digitalisation has also been mainstreamed throughout the portfolio, with the aim to support the government's objective to become a digital nation but also to address the digital divide within society.

The phase out process is followed through *management performance results* that inter alia monitor the following steering aspects: the operational closure of all projects; knowledge management and communication concerning results and experiences.

4 Evaluation findings

4.1 Relevance

- *To what extent are governance programs adapted to the local contexts and in line with the needs and rights of local target groups?*

"Good governance is, and will remain, one of the country's biggest challenges in order to ensure that all citizens benefit in an equitable and sustainable manner from the country's resource wealth and the expected economic recovery," – such is the framing of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Mongolia 2018-2021[23]. Thus, the framing of the governance domain focuses on a people-centred approach, aimed at ensuring equality and democratic governance principles. While the governance portfolio includes a mix of supporting rights holders and duty-bearers, the project sample included in the Evaluation indicates a stronger focus on the latter i.e., that SDC's programmes tend to partner with government stakeholders and institutions.

During the evaluation period, the context in Mongolia has remained relatively stable (albeit with a degree of democratic backslide on certain parameters), and therefore also favourable to engaging on governance reforms. As such, the context has allowed SDC to engage directly with Government institutions, in the form of policy dialogue, support reform, capacity development support, knowledge transfer etc., across different levels of government, and to support vertical and horizontal linkages between levels of government in a strategic and relevant manner.

The two key areas of intervention – decentralisation and democratisation – are relevant in the Mongolian context and constitute core areas of expertise and experience for SDC globally. In addition, digitalisation has been given high priority in the governance portfolio, which is seen by the Evaluation as relevant, strategic, and forward-thinking.

While anti-corruption appears to be a major governance challenge in Mongolia, SDC has not opted to address this in a dedicated engagement head-on. In many ways, this seems like a missed opportunity, but the Evaluation also recognises that SDC cannot do this alone, and the SCO has highlighted lack of donor coordination as a challenge on this topic. On the other hand, the focus on digitalisation across the governance portfolio (as discussed above), has lent itself to addressing anti-corruption indirectly.

Given that SDC is phasing out of Mongolia, the governance portfolio has placed considerable weight on ensuring local ownership going forward. One of the strengths of SDC partnering with Government directly across all of the engagements in the governance portfolio has been the ability to foster ownership, co-financing and considering long-term perspectives of the intervention (discussed further in Section 4.6 in relation to sustainability).

4.2. Coherence

- *How well are SDC's governance programs (officially) aligned with partner countries' priorities? Is there political will in the partner government to implement governance reforms? Local/national ownership?*

The Evaluation finds a high degree of external coherence and alignment with Government policies and close working relations with government institutions, in line with the strategic priorities of SDC for the phase out period. Given the relatively high level of democratic governance in Mongolia and the long-term Swiss presence, there is alignment, as can be anticipated in a context where there is also considerable degree of political will in the government and key stakeholders to maintain and promote rule of law. The close implementation collaboration with the World Bank further strengthens government

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[23] Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Mongolia 2018-2021, p 15.

collaboration due to the closeness between the Government and the World Bank. This cooperation opens the door for SDC to participate in significant institutional change and reform programming, although in practice this is also where SDC has faced difficulties at times. The three-year parliamentary delay in approval of the SLP3 (the project includes a soft loan component in the form of the WB's contribution coming from IDA) is a case in point. The delay may also be read as a signal of commitment from Mongolian representatives taking the country's interests into consideration and wanting to influence or possibly overrule World Bank planning. In the view of the Evaluation, development cooperation is political and parliamentary engagement may be seen as a sound sign of checks and balances. Although without specific evidence available but noting the level of corrupt practices in high institutions in Mongolia, barriers for approval processes may also have such reasons[24].

The Evaluation notes SDC's commitment to fostering national ownership of governance reforms and engagements. The Governance and Decentralisation Programme (GDP) has an intervention strategy focused on national ownership and alignment with national strategies, but also notes from the documentation that there seems to be more ownership for the programme at local level. Likewise, the Combatting Gender-Based Violence (GBV) project responded to the need for national policies and main partners are government institutions. The Understanding and Managing Internal Migration in Mongolia (UMIMM) project and the development of national migration data breaks new ground for the government and is positively received because it fills a gap since data has not earlier been available. Likewise, is it noted in the Strengthening Representative Bodies in Mongolia (SRBM) evaluation that there is emphasis on government ownership, and that "*the implementation modality was chosen upon consultation with government partners with Project Implementation Units (PIUs) embedded within respective partner government institutions*". However, the Evaluation would like to note that the establishment of PIUs is a parallel organisational set-up within a government often used by the World Bank, and experience has shown that these do not necessarily promote coherence and alignment in the longer run. Nevertheless, the co-funding by the Government has contributed to strengthen ownership and to increase the outreach of the programme according to the SRBM evaluation. Moreover, also as a way to promote ownership, institutionalization and sustainability reasons there has been a strategic switch from UNDP as contractual partner of phase 1 to direct contributions to the partners of phase 2.

With regard to internal coherence the Evaluation, does not have particular information beyond the good notable practice that internal coherence is included in the management results matrix and thereby a continuous focus of the SCO. In interviews, the Evaluation took note that governance increasingly has taken a foundational position within the programme, which has strengthened the internal coherence between sector engagements and the governance domain and the overall narrative in the Programme.

SDC emphasises close collaboration and coordination, not least through the co-financing of projects with the Government and with the World Bank. **Nevertheless, looking at the Development Partner Group, the understanding is that it is "bumpy" with limited joint steering and policy dialogue at sector level.** The Annual Report (AR) 2021 notes that information sharing is the main result of coordination. This does in principle pose a problem, as SDC in general seeks impact through policy dialogue and advocacy together with other external actors and is also known to take lead in such fora. An exception is in the area of fiscal decentralisation, where SDC and the World Bank together has conducted successful dialogues with the government. Anti-corruption is an important governance reform area where joint dialogue actions seem to be lacking.

Meanwhile SDC, because of its phase-out, no longer invests major resources in Development Partner coordination, unless particular issues related to SDC's engagement arise.

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[24] https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/kproducts/Country-Profile-Mongolia_2018.pdf

4.3. Effectiveness

- *To what degree can governance objectives be achieved in challenging contexts? Which approaches and strategies are the most effective?*

Assessment of effectiveness of the governance portfolio in Mongolia takes a point of departure in End of Phase Report (EPRORs), Annual Reports for the Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021, and external mid-term or final evaluation reports, where these were available. On this basis, the Evaluation finds the effectiveness of the sample of projects within the governance portfolio largely positive, with a high degree of achievement of project objectives and outcomes.

Major achievements have been made in terms of the decentralisation reform process in Mongolia. SDC has through GDP and SRBM strengthened national ownership and implementation of decentralisation, building on the achievements of the previous phases of support, hereunder the development of a State Policy on Decentralisation (political, fiscal and administrative) with a process plan (adopted in 2016). Working with the Parliamentary Working Group on Decentralisation (established in 2018), SDC has supported constitutional amendments (November 2019), and amendments to Law on Administrative and Territorial Units and their Governance (LATUG) (in 2021) to include provisions supporting decentralisation, empowerment of local governments, and to increase the efficiency, quality, and accessibility of public services. The (2022) *Independent Evaluation of SDC's Performance in National Policy Dialogue 2013-2020 (*here forth referred to as the "National Policy Dialogue Evaluation") highlights the successes in terms of policy reform on decentralisation to be largely attributed to the political capital invested by SDC, as well as the WOGA approach of joint policy and political dialogue.[25] The Evaluation of GDP, however, notes that the programme has been most impactful in administrative decentralisation, with less progress on fiscal and political decentralisation.

On decentralisation and local governance, SDC has further contributed to improving the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of Government functions, and capacities of civil servants at the local level. One of the ways this has been done is through digitalisation: through GDP, SDC has contributed to the digitalisation of 30 percent of the Municipality of Ulaanbaatar's (MUB) archival documents, de-concentration of the popular citizen registration service to all Khoroos (administrative subdivisions of Ulaanbaatar), and to the launch of MUB's e-Service platform which enabled 40,000 Ulaanbaatar civil servants and residents to benefit from over 70 digitized and integrated municipal e-services.[26] The first phase of the project also facilitated an improvement on the part of local (soum) governments in governing their local development resources, paired with a focus on enabling citizens to demand accountability of their elected representatives. Moreover, through SRBM, SDC has enhanced local parliaments' (called 'Citizens' Representative Hurals (CRHs)) organisational capacities, and the individual capacities of CRH representatives (as well as the national Parliamentary Secretariat).

SDC has also worked to create an enabling environment for citizen participation, to increase citizen's access to public decision-making processes through social accountability and ensure access to quality services. Alongside the World Bank, SDC has been a leading partner in mainstreaming social accountability across all of Mongolia's provinces and in Ulaanbaatar (through the MASAM project), to improve the transparency and efficiency of public resource management. An evaluation of MASAM found evidence that the project contributed to government capabilities and public understanding of social accountability, with high achievement of outcomes.[27] A large body of outcomes (86 in total)

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[25] SDC. (2022). *Independent Evaluation of SDC's Performance in National Policy Dialogue 2013-2020.* Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation: Bern, 2022. p. 17.

[26] INNOVABRIDGE Foundation. (2022). *Final Evaluation of the Governance and Decentralisation Programme (GDP) in Mongolia.*

[27] Smith, R. and N. Yansanjav. (2020). *MASAM Outcome Evaluation 2015-2019. An Evaluation of the Mainstream Social Accountability in Mongolia Project.*

suggests significant achievement of project goals, including at the policy level, e.g. in relation to the institutionalization of the citizen satisfaction survey (CSS) methodology. In addition to MASAM, SDC has also through GDP contributed to creating a policy environment that enables citizen engagement. However, the National Policy Dialogue Evaluation highlighted that the original policy dialogue aims on this area were initially not met due to lack of political will following a change in government; as such, the elaboration of a Law on Implementation of Citizens' Political Rights was not supported by the Parliament.[28] On the other hand, GDP contributed to the launch of a national programme on improving legal education to strengthen knowledge among the public of citizen engagement laws.

The governance portfolio has taken a holistic view to strengthening the state-citizen compact, with a dual focus on supporting rights holders and duty bearers; in the view of the SCO, this 'dual approach' has been a critical enabling factor for the success of governance engagements. For example, SDC has paired the trainings in the civil service with digital services that connect citizens to the duty bearers, allowing them to vote on priorities for municipal budgeting. Focus on decentralisation has likewise contributed to bringing decision making closer to citizens. SDC's governance portfolio has also taken such a holistic approach to combating GBV, which has proven effective in raising awareness of duty bearers and rights' holders, and ultimately led to the scale-up of GBV prevention and response mechanisms in Mongolia.[29] This has translated into concrete actions by the government, i.e., the creation of supportive policy frameworks (most notably, a Law to Combat Domestic Violence) and increased public financial and human resources to combat GBV. On the other hand, addressing the rights holders, and changing attitudes, behaviours and norms has proven more challenging, although the project has made progress.

Figure 1 Four ways that 'digital' shapes governance[1]

Digitalisation has been a core aspect of the governance portfolio, and there are significant results related to the development of digital tools and methodologies in Mongolia. Hereunder, the nationwide digital parliamentary system for citizens to comment and vote on draft laws; digital software for budget oversight; and digital E-Khutuch application offering legal information, counselling services and guidance to citizens. In general, digitalisation has had a very prominent role in SDC's cooperation programme in Mongolia 2018-2021, also recognised in the 2022 *Mapping of SDC's Projects in Digitalisation and Governance[30]*. The SCO has incorporated several dimensions of digitalisation of governance into the programme – hereunder digitalisation government services, enabling citizen participation through e-governance, and digitisation of government processes and functions (see Figure 1). Digitalisation has also led to anti-corruption gains as a way in the municipal waste collection and transportation management in Ulaanbaatar (i.e. transversal governance), according to SDC staff, although the project in question was not included in the project sample. The Annual Report 2021, also highlights digitalisation leading to anti-corruption gains, noting that digital government services had led to a 20-30% reduction in complaints regarding bribery.

- *Transversal governance: How effective are governance components in strengthening sector program outcomes?*

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[28] Ibid, p. 19; and Volume 3: Mongolia Case Study (p. 91-93).

[29] Pawlak, P. et al. (2023). *Evaluation Report of the Combating Gender-based Violence in Mongolia Project Phase 2 (2020-2023)*. UNFPA

[30] Hernandez, K. and Roberts, T. (2022) *Mapping of SDC's Projects in Digitalisation and Governance*, Bern: SDC Governance Network.

Linking decentralisation support up to a concrete issue has made the case for decentralisation, and its results, more tangible. In Mongolia, the energy sector has been a particularly effective and relevant entry point to engage on transversal governance. Public Investment in Energy Efficiency (PIE) project was started in 2015 with the aim for local authorities to understand how to reduce energy losses of public buildings, linking this to the use of local development funds, and the municipal budget. In Mongolia, where up to 60% of the local budget was directed toward heating, improving energy efficiency was linked to tangible gains in public funds for local development.

> Box 1: Transversal governance achievements and registration of results.
>
> In the Annual Report 2022 covering the first year of the Phasing Out Programme (2022-2024) transversal governance is marked across all three domains in the programme. There is also focus on digitalization, which the programme looks at as a transversal governance theme, as well as part of the governance portfolio, supporting the concerted efforts of the Mongolia Government to promote digitalization. It is noticeable for all years covered in the desk study that there is a higher awareness of gender issues as a transversal theme than can be registered for governance. For gender it is at output level (disaggregated data). The examples below are from the AR 2022. For ease of reference and as a way to signal the importance the Annual report has colour marked transversal governance achievements (blue colour).
>
> **Domain 1: Agriculture and Food security/climate change adaptation.** The Livestock tax (**transversal governance**), collected for the first time by local governments, already reached MNT 20 billion (= CHF 5.9 million) by October 2022. The amount was much beyond expectations. However, the extent to which it is re-allocated into sustainable rangeland management will be measured in subsequent years.
>
> **Domain 2: Inclusive economic development for sustainable development** A management system for protection of rangelands has been highlighted as a transversal governance result.
>
> **Domain 3: Governance** A nationwide **digital** parliamentary system for citizens to comment and vote on draft laws was launched as well as a nationwide Parliamentary Education Program with 14 training modules, and local centres for advocacy on the legislation in 3 out 21 provinces. Budget entities started reviewing and re-allocating their functions using the **digital** software.
>
> Moreover, the National Statistics Methodology Committee approved the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), which is the National Statistics Office's (NSO) survey tools for statistical data on internal migration. These data were adjusted by using the **digital** e-registration, which shows the real time migration situation in MUB and 2 provinces.
>
> **In the view of the Evaluation, the colour marking of transversal governance is important, but looking across the AR, the issue of what does transversal governance includes can be asked. Is all management and organisational action conducted in projects transversal governance or is it a structural and systems change/reforms and rights or is both? This question is raised at a general level in the evaluation.**

4.4. Efficiency & knowledge management and learning

- *Which modalities of cooperation – contributions, mandates, budgetary support, private sector engagement and other partnerships – are particularly conducive to achieving outcomes in governance programs?*

In the programme the main approach is to work through contributions with other donors in particular the multilaterals and with the Government. This approach also has

efficiency gains, as well as the approach promotes sustainability. Efficiency has, in the case of partnership with the World Bank, been both rewarding but also challenging. First in relation to the long delay of SLP phase 3 approval, and second with regard to SDC's ability to receive information from and engage directly with the World Bank to be able to follow and monitor implementation (the MASAM project being a case in point). Direct budget support to the government has not been possible due to corruption concerns, and the World Bank reduces fiduciary risks by setting up Project Implementation Units in government departments. The Evaluation has however no information indicating an overall concern with the use of contributions as the main modality for the governance portfolio, and notes that there are major advantages, which have become evident as the programme is being phased out.

- *To which extent do SDC funded programs learn/replicate from each other? And how?*

Knowledge management is a key part of the Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 and the Phasing Out programme 2022-2024. **The Evaluation finds the proactive and systematic approach expected to benefit both national stakeholders and SDC at strategy level and staff to be commendable**. The proactive approach is presented in the Phasing Out Programme:

- *"In order to fully leverage SDC's 20-year-long experience in Mongolia, sustainability, institutionalisation, and capitalisation of achieved results, best practices, and lessons learned are essential elements of the phase-out process".*

- *"To this end, a detailed plan for knowledge sharing and communication has been developed. The plan has several objectives: 1) to report on 20 years of Swiss investment and achievements in Mongolia to people in Mongolia and Switzerland; 2) to ensure knowledge transfer and sharing with governmental organisations in Mongolia and other institutions (bilateral and multilateral), and with SDC headquarters and other SDC offices worldwide; 3) to support the model of an innovative, modern, responsible, and reliable Swiss partner for possible partnership beyond 2024 and, therefore, contribute to the promotion of Switzerland as a centre of excellence; and 4) to contribute to the promotion of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals".*

Indicators for the accountability of the management to learning and knowledge management are also included in the programme (see Box 2).

Box 2 Indicators on learning & knowledge management

1. "Number of SDC-funded projects (excluding small actions and culture) with capitalisations and/ or results shared with development stakeholders in Mongolia (events, handover workshops, knowledge platforms, print and social media, partner organisation development groups) and within SDC (network products, events, brown bag lunches, inclusion in SDC general AR, etc.).

    Baseline (2021): 2   Target (2024): +9 (= 11)

2. Evidence that SDC-supported interventions in Mongolia have been taken over or have inspired the design/implementation of the programmes of Mongolian authorities and/or other development actors.

    Baseline (2021): 4   Target (2024): + 3 (1/domain = 7)"

Of the countries covered by the Evaluation, the Mongolia case has had the strongest commitment and investment to learning and capitalisation of results, not least because SDC is phasing out after 20 years. In an effort to consolidate results of Swiss engagement in Mongolia, the entirety of the governance portfolio has at this point been assessed or evaluated and activities continue until the closing. The annual reports also include a systematic

way of reporting on transversal governance, by colour coding results that are related to transversal governance. The annual reports also highlight results across different levels – systemic/ institutional, strategic/policy, and beneficiary level – to give readers a better overview of where the portfolio has had an impact (incl. on transversal governance).

The Mongolia SCO has also invested efforts in supporting cross-country learning across SDC staff and partners on governance. One way this has been done is that the SCO has sought to include peer evaluators/reviewers when undertaking assessments of programmes, as a way to instil more internal and cross-country learning within SDC. In addition, the SCO has arranged learning and knowledge exchanges with partners from Laos, Cambodia, and Tajikistan, inviting a delegation of government officials to Mongolia to exchange with peers from the Government of Mongolia.

The Evaluation cannot at this point assess the wider use in SDC but notes that the Mongolia example can be inspirational for other SCOs, and a main task for HQ to follow up on the activities and ensure knowledge management and capitalisation of the resources and efforts done at Mongolia level.

4.5. Impact

- *Which effects of programs (intended or unintended, positive negative) can be observed regarding people's lives and communities' functioning changed?*
- *To what degree do SDC's governance programs contribute to transformative changes and (local) institution building?*

Given the nature of the Mongolia case study, which primarily draws on desk review with a few supplementary interviews, a thorough and rigorous assessment of the impact of SDC's governance engagements has proven difficult. Nonetheless, given the good practices of the SCO in assessing and documenting results, the Evaluation has undertaken a brief meta-analysis of the governance portfolio's impacts.

SDC's **impact** hypothesis of the governance domain in Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 reads that:

- "Comprehensive capacity building of, and policy support for, national and sub-national governments favouring democratisation and decentralisation reforms will contribute to improved and equitable public service delivery and more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes".

Overall, SDC's governance portfolio in Mongolia is assessed to have a positive impact in line with the impact hypothesis at domain level including transformative changes in key reform areas, capacity development, institution-building and establishing venues for civic participation. The impact is achieved because SDC has selected the right partnerships, with major change agents in the international community and in Government. As discussed above in relation to effectiveness, GDP and SRBM have had an impact on the legal framework, supporting reforms that have enabled decentralisation. The Evaluation of GDP highlights the programme's role in institutionalising capacity development linked to decentralisation, as an important supplement to the legislative, and structural changes the programme has pushed for.

Positive impacts have also been observed regarding people's lives and communities' functioning. The evaluation of GDP highlights the value of linking legislative and structural changes to decentralisation to tangible changes in peoples' lives, something which GDP has effectively done. The LDF approach, which is a feature of several of SDC's governance programmes, has proven an effective model for rights holders' participation in decision-making, leading to changes that are felt by citizens and communities. Figure 2 below captures how citizens have been involved in determining how to spend funds to benefit their communities.

Figure 2 *Local Development Fund investment priorities based on citizen's votes*[31]
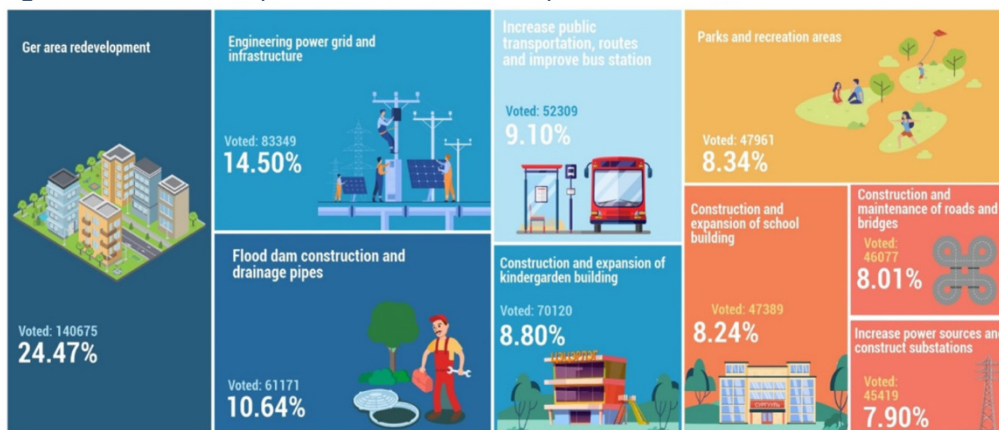
SDC has through MASAM brought about Improvements in access and quality of key social services, hereunder health and education. In particular, MASAM has had a tangible impact on the Mongolian population's access to, and quality of services in the education and health sector. Comparing the baseline (2016) and endline (2019) figures, access to education improved by twelve percentage points, and quality improved by eight percentage points. Access to health also improved by seven percentage points.[32]

As noted above in relation to effectiveness, digitalisation in the governance portfolio has also led to de-bureaucratisation and some anti-corruption gains which impact citizens directly.

4.6. Sustainability

- *To what extent are SDC governance interventions owned by partner governments (supported through their budgets) and part of national/local systems or policy environment?*

- *To what degree can achieved program results persist under a deteriorated context? What are the factors that facilitate lasting change through governance interventions?*

The Cooperation Strategy has a clear and timely focus on sustainability, particularly in the sense of institutionalisation, although less so on "people's lives". There is strong alignment with national development priorities, strengthening the capacities of local partners from government and civil society, reinforcing policy dialogue, and increased co-financing of government partners. In the phasing out period SDC has moved away from a general *governance* approach towards democracy, respect for human rights, and the promotion of gender equality, which entails addressing the issue of sustainability on a project-by-project basis, which in the view of the Evaluation is a pragmatic and workable way to assess sustainability.

In the following paragraphs the Evaluation highlights main issues from available reports. The overall finding is that SDC has captured the main issues to focus on in enhancing the sustainability of the projects and developed relevant exit activities. Some projects are given more space in the text due to the extensiveness and depth of sustainability issues assessed from the documentation available.

The *Innovabridge evaluation of GDP (2022)* found moderate-to-high sustainability in GDP, depending on the intervention area. Several factors of general nature, were found possibly to jeopardize sustainability in the sample – in spite of considerable project investments:

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[31]   Figure source: INNOVABRIDGE Evaluation of GDP.
[32]   Independent Research Institute of Mongolia. (2020). *Endline Study – Mainstreaming Social Accountability in Mongolia Project*. Prepared for the World Bank. p. 32-33.

- Setbacks because government staff who rotate into core positions may not being trained, and **capacity gaps** can occur.
- **Legal change is likely not to be completed** within the timeframe of the project.
- **Timeframes of projects are too short** for fiscal decentralization to increase its performance, become institutionalized and gain buy-in.
- **Government budget constraints.**
- **Evidence on hand-over options is mixed.** The main goal of the Exit Phase was consolidation beyond SDC – but due to delays the project was still in the midst of implementation.
- Impediments rooted in **political culture** are strong, such as corruption and temptation of tempering with processes, such as in Local Development Fund allocations. Political culture evolves slowly and incrementally; thus, good governance reform would always come up against contextual obstacles.

There is a considerable focus in the GDP evaluation on sustainability of formal systems, which in the view of this Evaluation should be expanded to include a focus on sustainability considerations of informal institutions, where sustainability is more diffuse and difficult both to obtain and gauge but of key importance. As an example, this Evaluation illustrates a separation between the formal/ informal lines of sustainability in order to show the complexity of answering questions of potential sustainability of programmatic interventions and not least at the time of programme closure where sustainability necessarily must be considered as "advanced guesswork".

Formal systems	Informal institutions (knowledge, attitudes and capacities)
Major laws, such as LATUG, General Tax and Status of Capital City Laws created conditions for effective public service delivery to citizens. On the other hand, **the legal change is incomplete** although advanced with LATUG.	**High level of national ownership.** Evidence at both vertical and horizontal levels. The decentralisation reform has a number of high-profile champions and **sustainability is partly hinged on persons.**
New administrative functions are stipulated in LATUG and the LDF mechanisms is embedded in the Budget Law which makes them compulsory for implementation, but **the adoption of numerous regulations and bylaws is pending.**	GDP fostered standardisation by engraining professional standards into country systems, which became accepted **norms and essential national requirements.**
Institutionalisation, i.e. almost all ministries, government agencies, parliamentary administration and MUB have been reorganised on the principles of rational distribution of functions. **However, ability of human resources to sustain the** results is a key risk. The 2024 elections may bring a different party into power that would trigger a considerable management-level change.	**Lasting attitudinal shift assumed in some organisations.** Citizens became more proactive and interested in local affairs that should sustain the appetite for participation: LDF has been already set up and decisions are being made now by the local people who benefit
Outsourcing of multiple functions to non-state service providers was an important institutional change in a country with an	**New networks and linkages** were created by the GDP – within the milieu of the SDC-funded projects, between NGOs, journalists,

inherited tendency towards state control, but evaluation`s respondents suggest that it is working with positive demonstration effect.	and government bodies, and between national and international partners that allowed for important knowledge transfer.

The MASAM project evaluation found "strong evidence for sustainability among most actors. Meanwhile the MASAM evaluation also cautioned that MASAM activities were only just ending as the project evaluation was done. The strongest indications of sustainability at national level come from the partnership with the Cabinet Secretariat, while there are also signs of greater **ownership** by three line ministries. Locally, formal integration of social accountability requirements into the management of services is particularly encouraging as it suggests a framework for continuing and growing demand for social accountability beyond electoral cycles. (Evaluation WB_MASAM (2020)).

The SRBM project was found to have had a focus on sustainability and thereby institutionalization from the onset guided by the SRBM 1's Sustainability Action Plan. As a result, the LATUG was approved by the Parliament in December 2020, the national induction training programme was institutionalized through a step-by-step strategy, maintenance of www.khural.mn was handed over to the Cabinet Secretariat etc (*SRBM_EPR Phase 1).*

The GBV project was from the start embedded in the concept of national ownership with different government bodies identified as key government partners, leading responsibility for specific outputs. The proactiveness of the Parliament and subsequent proactiveness of the implementing partner Ministries in the project ensured that the legal framework for operationalisation. The Evaluation of the project confirmed that the project was successful in boosting **national ownership** of GBV prevention and response. Numerous compelling examples were identified and presented in the evaluation. A factor that significantly contributed to the institutionalization of GBV prevention and response in Mongolia was the project funding modality, which included **co-financing** of the 2nd Phase by the GOM. The evaluation found that the **'pooled-funding'** approach increased collaboration among government stakeholders and development partners and played a crucial role in strengthening national ownership of GBV prevention and response (2018 Midterm Review – GBV project). *(2023) Evaluation Report of the Combating Gender-based Violence in Mongolia Project Phase 2 (2020-2023).*

The UMIMM project's migration data collection and management are gaining a central place for key policy considerations in Ulaanbaatar and nation-wide. However, sustainability cannot be assessed at this point. Overall, the Government of Mongolia has become more aware of the importance and is set to improve the quality of national data on internal migration for evidence-based policies and programs, going beyond emergency preparedness and response and moving into development planning growth. Yet it is too early to determine impact and sustainability. *IOM (2020). Interim Report to Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation: Understanding and Managing Internal Migration in Mongolia Project. Second Annual Report covering reporting period 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021.*

Sustainability has been set as a strategic priority in the Mongolia programme. SDC has at this level had a remarkable and proactive approach to sustainability issues within the programmes aimed at strengthening the likelihood of sustaining results and impact. There are considerable risks of sustainability being jeopardized; this is highlighted in the GDP evaluation, including that sustainability in informal institutions needs attention.

5 Conclusions

Relevance

The context has allowed SDC to engage directly with Government institutions, in the form of policy dialogue, support reform, capacity development support, knowledge transfer, etc., across different levels of government, and to support vertical and horizontal linkages between levels of government in a strategic and relevant manner. Digitalisation has been given high priority in the governance portfolio, which is seen by the Evaluation as relevant, strategic, and forward-thinking. While anti-corruption appears to be a major governance challenge, SDC has not opted to address this in a dedicated engagement head-on. The Evaluation recognises that SDC cannot do this alone, and the focus on digitalisation across the governance portfolio (as discussed above), has lent itself to addressing anti-corruption indirectly.

Coherence

There is a high degree of external coherence and alignment with Government policies and close working relations with government institutions, in line with the strategic priorities of SDC for the phase-out period. The Evaluation notes SDC's commitment to fostering national ownership of governance reforms and engagements. SDC emphasises close collaboration and coordination, not least through the co-financing of projects with the Government and with the World Bank.

Effectiveness

Major achievements have been made in terms of the decentralisation reform process. SDC has, through GDP and SRBM, strengthened national ownership and implementation of decentralisation. On decentralisation and local governance, SDC has further contributed to improving the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of Government functions, and capacities of civil servants at the local level. SDC has also worked to create an enabling environment for citizen participation, to increase citizen's access to public decision-making processes through social accountability and ensure access to quality services. The governance portfolio has taken a holistic view to strengthening the state-citizen compact, with a dual focus on supporting rights holders and duty bearers; in the view of the SCO, this 'dual approach' has been a critical enabling factor for the success of governance engagements. Digitalisation has been a core aspect of the governance portfolio, and there are significant results related to the development of digital tools and methodologies.

With regard to transversal governance, linking decentralisation support up to a concrete issue has made the case for decentralisation, and its results, more tangible. The energy sector has been a particularly effective and relevant entry point to engage on transversal governance. The colour marking of transversal governance used in the reporting is an important signal of how transversal governance is used.

Efficiency & knowledge management and learning

The main approach is to work through contributions with other donors in particular the multilaterals and with the Government. This approach also has efficiency gains, as well as the approach promotes sustainability.

Knowledge management is a key part of the Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 and the Phasing Out programme 2022-2024. The Evaluation finds this approach to be proactive and systematic. Of the countries covered by the Evaluation, the Mongolia case has had the strongest commitment and investment to learning and capitalisation of results, not least because SDC is phasing out after 20 years. The Evaluation cannot at this point assess the wider use in SDC but notes that the Mongolia example can be inspirational for other SCOs, and a main task for HQ to follow up on the activities and ensure knowledge management and capitalisation of the resources and efforts done at Mongolia level.

Impact

Overall, SDC's governance portfolio in Mongolia is assessed to have a positive impact in line with the impact hypothesis at domain level including transformative changes in key reform areas, capacity development, institution-building and establishing venues for civic participation. The impact is achieved because SDC has selected the right partnerships, with major change agents in the international community and in Government. Positive impacts have also been observed regarding people's lives and communities' functioning. The evaluation of GDP highlights the value of linking legislative and structural changes to decentralisation to tangible changes in peoples' lives, something which GDP has effectively done. SDC has through MASAM brought about Improvements in access and quality of key social services, hereunder health and education. As noted above in relation to effectiveness, digitalisation in the governance portfolio has also led to de-bureaucratisation and some anti-corruption gains which impact citizens directly.

Sustainability

The Cooperation Strategy has a clear and timely focus on sustainability, particularly in the sense of institutionalisation, and less so on "people's lives". There is strong alignment with national development priorities, strengthening the capacities of local partners from government and civil society, reinforcing policy dialogue, and increased co-financing of government partners. The overall finding is that SDC has captured the main issues to focus on in enhancing the sustainability of the projects and developed relevant exit activities.

There is a considerable focus on sustainability of formal systems, which in the view of this Evaluation could have been expanded to include a focus on sustainability considerations of informal institutions, where sustainability is more diffuse and difficult both to obtain and gauge but of key importance.

SDC has at strategic level had a remarkable and proactive approach to sustainability issues within the programmes and actively aimed at strengthening the likelihood of sustaining results and impact. There are also considerable risks of sustainability being jeopardized, these have been highlighted in the GDP evaluation.

Annex 1. List of Documents

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- SDC. (2022). *Mongolia Annual Report 2022.*
- Smith, R. and N. Yansanjav. (2020). *MASAM Outcome Evaluation 2015-2019. An Evaluation of the Mainstream Social Accountability in Mongolia Project.*
- UNFPA. (2020). *Combating Gender-based Violence in Mongolia Project – Phase 1: Final Project Narrative Report (June 2016-July 2020).*
- UNFPA. (2020). *Combating Gender-Based Violence in Mongolia Project Phase 2: Annual Narrative Progress Report. Reporting Period: 1 August – 31 December 2020.*
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The list above is selected and includes the main documents used in the analysis, the team had a larger number of documents available, which have been screened in the process.

Annex 2. List of Interviewees (available only upon request; data protection)

Tunisia

1 Introduction

This case study report on SDC's Tunisia programme is one of four 'light touch' desk study cases carried out as part of the "*Independent Evaluation of SDC's Engagement in the Field of Good Governance and Rule of Law from 2017 to 2022*" undertaken on behalf of Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC). The four 'light touch' case studies and the four 'deep dive' cases will together with broader analysis on SDC's governance interventions form the basis for the Evaluation Report.

This light touch' desk study was conducted remotely with a support of a lead consultant. A document review was complemented by interviews with key informants comprising SDC staff in country and headquarter, local and international partners, and implementing organisations (see annexes). A preliminary draft presentation, with high level findings was shared with SDC's staff and feedback integrated into this report.

The case study report focuses on the assessment of governance and rule of law programming in Tunisia from 2017 until 2022. The core governance programmes in Tunisia include:

1. Décentralisation
- PACT – Participation Active des Citoyennes et Citoyens Tunisiens (Niras)
- IPDLI – Initiative pilote de développement local intégré (ILO)
- TERI Moussanada Mahaleya sur la Régionalisation (World Bank)
- FNCT/FMCG – Fédération Nationale des Communes Tunisiennes/Fonds Municipal de Compétence Générale

2. Droits Humains
- Appui à la lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes (EUROMED-Rights)
- Prévention de la violence institutionnelle [financé par DPDH]
- Lutte contre l'impunité en Tunisie (OMCT)

3. Démocratisation
- TRUST – Transition Redevable pour la Société Tunisienne Supporting democratic gains in Tunisia (IFES) – PSPET
- PAET - Programme d'assistance électorale en Tunisie (PNUD) - PSPET
- DOORS – Ecoles démocratiques
- ORPP - Observatoire des Réformes et des Projets Publiques (SOLIDAR)

4. Prevention de l'extrémisme
- RESPECT/TFNA – Redevabilité, sécurité et prévention de l'extrémisme violent pour les citoyennes et citoyens tunisiens (DCAF)
- RESPECT/TARABOT – Cohésion Sociale pour prévenir l'extrémisme violent (PNUD)
- Houmty II (mon quartier) – inclusion des jeunes [financé par DPDH]
- Opinion Makers (Munadara Initiative)
- GCERF – Fonds internationale pour la prévention de l'extrémisme violent

The report addresses the Evaluation Questions at a strategic level based on evidence from the analysis of the selected engagements, document review and supplementary (virtual) interviews. The methodology is elaborated in Chapter 2. The report includes a brief description of the programme context (Chapter 3) and a programme description (Chapter 4) as a backdrop for the analysis of the programme's relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability (Chapter 5). Conclusions and recommendations are found in Chapter 6.

2 Context of the programme

Between 2017-2022, Tunisia has undergone profound political transformations, spearheaded by the popular uprising of 2010, the ousting of former President Ben Ali in 2011, the adoption of a new constitution in 2014. The new constitution has served as the basis for the organization of two cycles of presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2019 as well as local elections in 2018 which were broadly considered free and fair. Dozens of new political parties have gained formal recognition. These achievements were made possible, in large part, by the engagement of civil society, including the National Dialogue Quartet representing civil society, unions, employers and lawyers.

During this period, Tunisia has indeed taken important steps in its democratic transition, although economic, social, and security challenges have slowed progress. The fragmentation of the political landscape, the unclear distribution of responsibilities between the President and the Government, the incapacity of the Parliament to agree on important issues and to reach consensus on critical priorities such as, for instance an increase in municipal budgets, continued abuse of authority and corruption that persist within the security forces and the impunity from which the latter benefit still constitute significant problems. When it comes to economic indicators, a significant deficit in terms of macroeconomic and sectoral policies and outcomes were aggravated by the consequences of COVID-19, which has widened the social divide and leave the population's expectations largely unsatisfied.

The general frustration of the population with the political and economic situation as well as the lack of prospects for young people represent important factors that encourage migration or even in some cases can lead to criminal acts and/or violence. Extremisms and terrorisms are serious concerns to be addressed, as articulated by the National Counterterrorism Commission through a combined approach of promoting social cohesion and security measures.

Critically, the much-needed renegotiation of the social contract between the state and citizens – and the establishment of a relationship based on rights and responsibilities – has been proving difficult, amidst tensions between multiple social and political interests, and various challenges including that of integrating interior regions into the national economy, reforming the security apparatus, preventing violent extremism, and addressing climate change risks.

By the end of the period under review, the partisanship of the parliament rendered it ineffective in passing important legislation or even appointing members to a constitutional court. Because the court remained vacant, the country was plunged into a constitutional crisis when no judicial body was able to resolve a standoff between the parliament and President Kais Saied that began in January 2021. Saied suspended the constitution in September and put a new constitution to a referendum in July 2022. The new constitution, which went into effect following the certification of the referendum, returned Tunisia to a presidential system where the powers of the legislative and judicial bodies were significantly limited.

Despite the magnitude of these unfinished projects, Tunisia has managed to stay on course with the democratic transition in a turbulent region. Seen from a regional perspective, Tunisia enjoys relative stability, which at first glance seems more threatened by external factors such as the Libyan crisis than by internal factors. However, a more detailed analysis reveals a more nuanced situation and the importance of internal factors, particularly on the economic, political, social and security levels.

3 Brief programme description / ToC

Two cooperation strategies cover the period under review, 2017-2020 and 2021-2024. Guided by the objectives of its foreign policy and the goal of maintaining stability, security, prosperity and migration management in the Mediterranean region, and recognizing the new dynamic generated by the 2011 events, Switzerland's engagement in Tunisia has focused on supporting the democratic transition and the promotion of human rights towards the consolidation of the rule of law and sustainable and inclusive economic development, as a vector of social stability.

The cooperation priorities of both strategies covered: 1) democratic processes and human rights; 2) inclusive economic growth and employment; 3) migration and protection.

For each area, objectives to be achieved are respectively in terms of governance and policies, participation of citizens and workers and individual rights.

Moreover, in accordance with its foreign policy action plan for the prevention of violent extremism, Switzerland has also chosen to engage on the prevention of violent extremism in Tunisia, on the basis of a Declaration of Intent between the Tunisian and Swiss authorities signed in February 2016.

The ToC of the 2017-2020 strategy assumes that more accountable democratic institutions, transparent and efficient management of public finances, consistent economic and migration policies that respect human rights will improve the confidence of citizens and economic actors and encourage their contribution to development. It postulates that if citizens, especially young people, are more involved in decisions and their implementation, if they can acquire and exercise their professional skills and if those who resort to migration can share their experience, they will ensure a more favorable future. Finally, it assumes that the results in terms of good governance and the political and economic commitment of citizens will only be achieved in respect of the right to security vis-à-vis violent extremism or arbitrariness, the right to basic services for everyone and everywhere and the rights of victims facing the vagaries of migration.

The 2021-2024 strategy assumes that if Switzerland succeeds in its targeted contribution of recognized quality, Tunisia will then be in a better position to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals including the mobilization of resources. In addition, Tunisia will have developed a model of high-quality value chains with high profit margins and created strong economic and professional prospects for young people and women. It will also have put in place efficient municipal administrations and infrastructures, which meet the high standards of the green economy and good governance. It will also have stabilized its democratic system through mechanisms of accountability, decentralization and strengthening of social cohesion, as well as constitutional electoral cycles. Migration in all its dimensions will be governed with an approach that respects international law. All of this will be possible because Tunisia has strong potential to move forward on all dimensions of sustainable development and has the capacity to optimally leverage external support.

The implementation of the cooperation programme is guided by context analysis and conflict sensitivity and an understanding that transition processes are inevitably linked to a redistribution of powers and resources between different interest groups and components of society. This often-essential redistribution encounters resistance and can generate conflicts or exacerbate those that already exist. In Tunisia these areas of tension are 1) the lack of confidence of many citizens in institutions; 2) the frustration of educated youth who are poorly prepared for the job market and deprived of employment prospects, 3) inequality in access to services and resources and 4) the important role of opposing interest groups to a new distribution of resources or opposed to a democratic and pluralist agenda. Particular attention is given to the analysis of the political economy of the areas of intervention of Swiss cooperation and the conflict-sensitive program management instruments systematically used.

The choice of cooperation modalities is consistent with the objectives of the cooperation and the context: partners are public institutions for interventions addressing the definition of public

policies and the strengthening of institutions; non-governmental organizations and the private sector for interventions in support to citizen engagement, support for competitiveness and employment and diaspora engagement. In terms of rights to security, services and humanitarian protection, partnerships are diversified between state and civil society actors as well as multilateral institutions. To improve the influence of Swiss cooperation projects, strategic alliances are favoured with the main donors. Attention is paid to the flexibility and continuous adaptation of the portfolio.

Regarding geographic coverage, the Swiss cooperation focuses on the most disadvantaged areas, notably in the interior, and reducing regional disparities as well as to centers of economic activity capable of driving the country into a growth dynamic. Youth and women are priorities for the cooperation programmes.

The 2021-2024 programme adapted and innovated in response to the changing context through the following elements: a commitment to decentralization; strengthening the national accountability system through Independent Public Bodies; the theme of preventing violent extremism (PEV); strengthening support for macro-economic reforms; improving the business climate and access; financing especially for small and medium-sized Companies; increased attention to migration issues, gender, and adaptation to climate change.

The regional component is strengthened, placing Tunisia – as a pole of regional stability – as a privileged platform for developing cooperation and fostering dialogue with other countries in the region. Governance is present, as a transversal theme in the three areas of intervention.

4. Evaluation Questions

4.1. Relevance

– To which extent are governance programs adapted to the local contexts and in line with the needs and rights of local target groups?

The governance programs are adapted to the local contexts and in line with the needs and rights of local target groups.

The political context has evolved significantly during the period under review.

The annual reports 2017-2022, the 2019 Mid-term review and interviews conducted for this case study (see annexes 4-6) indicate that in the context of the fragile democratic transition, Switzerland governance programs, drawing on a good analysis and understanding of priorities and thanks to specific and cross-cutting governance interventions and a flexible approach, have been relevant and critical.

Interventions responded both to the priorities of the democratic process and related institutions and have attempted to respond to the needs and expectation of the population. This was the case, for example of interventions in support to the elections in the first part of the period under review, to transitional justice institutions, to accountability of institutions, participation, and transparency, and to providing space for political dialogue including on sensitive thematic such as PVE.

- *RESPECT/TFNA – Redevabilité, sécurité et prévention de l'extrémisme violent pour les citoyennes et citoyens tunisiens (DCAF)*
- *RESPECT/TARABOT – Cohésion Sociale pour prévenir l'extrémisme violent (PNUD)*
- *Houmty II (mon quartier) – inclusion des jeunes [financé par DPDH]*
- *Opinion Makers (Munadara Initiative)*
- *GCERF – Fonds internationale pour la prévention de l'extrémisme violen*t.

A critical factor in the relevance of Switzerland's effort was its attention to adapting to the continuously changing political situation and related challenges and opportunities reflected also by the decision by Switzerland to increase its engagement in Tunisia during the period under review. The focus on decentralization in the latter part of the period under review is an example of how Switzerland maintained the relevance of its interventions by diversifying its approach and focusing on meeting citizens' needs and expectations at a time when the space for central level institutions and reforms was shrinking.

The focus on security and on the prevention of violent extremism also reflected a growing concern in the country and the region, and an attention to risks that seriously undermined the human security of citizens. In this regard, suggestions were made to consider whether interventions on violent extremism should be integrated into the area of governance.

The focus on macro-economic reforms, and economic measures and the transversal governance interventions in support to the economic aspects of the programme, women and young people contributed to the relevance of the Swiss intervention in that it helped to address some of the key unmet expectations of citizens, to see their economic conditions and livelihood improved.

In addition,, remaining engaged, through the various moments of crisis, including since 2021 and in support to the difficult democratic transition is an appropriate choice and one that makes of Switzerland a reliable and quality partner.

– *How relevant are SDC's governance programs as a tool to achieve SDC's development goals?*

The governance programmes are a relevant tool to achieve SDC's development goals.

As the two programmes of cooperation for the period under review indicate, the programmes *on pape*r were fully aligned to Switzerland's foreign policy priorities notably its political, economic and security priorities, as articulated in the federal Constitution and strategies.

Tunisia is a priority partner in the International Cooperation Strategy (ICS) 2021 – 2024 reflecting the convergence between development priorities in Tunisia and Swiss interests (Positive political relations; Trade and economic cooperation; Democratic transition towards a full-fledged rule of law; Peace, security, and human rights; Good governance of migration; and Sustainable development.) The cooperation between Tunisia and Switzerland is also based on the MENA strategy of the Federal Council which defines sustainable development as a priority of Swiss foreign policy in Tunisia and underlines the importance of regional collaboration. The ICS, the MENA strategy the "Swiss Strategy in North Africa (2011-2016)" (SNAP) of March 24, 2011 highlights the need for sustained engagement in the country and for management according to the Whole of Government (WOGA) approach.

Cooperation in the field of governance is based on international agreements signed by the two countries and on the regular analysis of the support needs of Tunisian partner institutions. Finally, in terms of migration, Switzerland concluded a Memorandum of Understanding in 2012 establishing a Migration Partnership, which defines precise cooperation objectives.

In 2021 the focus on formal institutions (such as the constitutional reform processes) was ill conceived, and SDC pivoted to decentralised municipal level support. Pivot to local government approaches were arguably aligned, at least on paper, with State priorities (e.g. Decentralisation: Article 240 of the constitution set out role communes and Article 18 states basic principle: commune is the state when the state is not there). But the state's approach was more deconcentration rather than decentralisation as such, signalling limited political will to follow through with fiscal decentralisation. Before 2021 there was a focus on inclusive democracy and citizens participation, which allowed people to express needs in democratic context.

Currently, democracy is not taken off the national agenda entirely, but it is nominal. The President does not speak about participative citizenship – there is no focus on citizens' participation.

4.2. Coherence

– *To what degree are SDC's governance programs complementary and coordinated with other Swiss WOGA partners in particular in nexus settings?*

The governance programs are to a good extent complementary and coordinated with other Swiss WOGA partners.

The annual reports 2017-2022, the 2019 Mid-term review and interviews conducted for this case study The WOGA approach is well applied in Tunisia. Both the 2017 – 2020 and 2021-2024 foresee close cooperation by SECO, SDC, DSH and SEM through appropriate instruments according to the objectives pursued and with varied cooperation modalities.

The documents reviewed and interviews conducted indicate that the WOGA approach has proven relevant and helpful to be able to anticipate and engage across the political, economic, social, and security domains, including during difficult political moments. Moreover, with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, Switzerland's capacity to mobilise also a humanitarian response was relevant.

A need for greater coordination and cross-learning among the different Swiss entities, as well as among the programmes was mentioned by some officials consulted in the context of a difficult political environment where no such cooperation was being facilitated by national actors.

– *How well are SDC's governance programs aligned with partner countries' priorities? Is there political will in the partner government to implement governance reforms? Local/national ownership? Are SDC programs complementary to other donor's strategies and interventions?*

SDC's governance programs were aligned to Tunisia's priorities, but political will and national ownership have been limited. SDC programs are complementary to other donors' interventions.

The programs are well aligned with political priorities as expressed through the various phases of the democratic transition and attempted to respond to requests from partners.

However, as indicated in the annual report 2017-2022 and the mid-term review of 2019 reports and confirmed by people interviewed, the volatile political situation and diminishing will to reform, the structural resistance to change in core institutions, and the challenges of promoting participation by focusing on large scale institutions and reforms reduced the coherence of some of the interventions. Effective work with some institutions continued, e.g., CNCT, human rights, media, access to information, but is affected by changes in political commitments. Such realisation led Switzerland to place greater attention on the local level, where ownership was stronger, and interventions had a greater potential to respond to citizens' priorities.

The initial focus on elections as the mean to promote citizens' participation, for example, was reviewed with less support to authorities in charge of elections, and more on the media, civic education and strengthening capacities of right holders to help them preserve democratic gains. In the domain of migration, another priority, even if results on country level are modest, Switzerland's influence on the migration sector is important, especially as concerns protection, on which Switzerland is the main donor in Tunisia.

Interviews with staff involved with the governance interventions highlighted how political actors in the institutions (parliament, others) continued with clientelism, corruption, and other poor governance practice, under a democratic cover, and the risk that Swiss programmes aimed at reinforcing such institutions may even perpetuate practices which the revolution tried to get rid

of. Comments also pointed to the fact that the focus on participation, transparency, accountability, and the local level was laudable, but that the governance programs supported by Switzerland may not have managed to look at and/or found effective ways to change these practices in a structural way.

Partners and Swiss officials indicated that cooperation and complementarity with other donors have been positive. Switzerland has often played a constructive role in coordinating other international actors, and is broadly considered as a reliable, effective, and engaged partner. Its local presence has filled important gaps in the development cooperation environment where greater focus was on such processes as elections, for example. Moreover, the continued engagement by Switzerland, as the political situation deteriorated and other donors suspended their aid, contributed to an overall more effective international engagement with the country.

The absence of structures to coordinate development actors in-country, due also to the fact that Tunisia is not a typical development context did not facilitate effective coordination and complementarity among international partners.

4.3. Effectiveness

– *To what degree can governance objectives be achieved in challenging (authoritarian, post-conflict, fragile) contexts? Which approaches and strategies are the most effective?*

Whilst it is not helpful to categorise the context, the volatility of the political situation made the achievement of the cooperation objectives more difficult.

SDC staff interviewed, and partners indicated that: it is not useful to define the Tunisia context in term of fragility, conflict and/or authoritarianism, as it does not correspond to fixed categories; the perspective in the country is different from that seen from outside, which appears to emphasis a "crisis" mode whereas the challenges the country faces should be considered as inevitable in the context of a delicate political and social change.

That being said, the political context has been difficult, making the achievement of governance objectives, particularly structuring projects, challenging. The progressive weakening of the institutions in the areas of elections, decentralization, and accountability, e.g., three of the four key themes of the program, for example, at the hand of the Presidency and due to political rivalries and tensions, reduced the potential impact of the interventions. At the same time support to institutions and political parties that had been rejected by the citizens and that indicated little intention to become more inclusive and accountable, contradicts somehow the ambition to promote participation and inclusion. A noteworthy exception is the support to the National Commission for the Fight against Terrorism (CNTL), which remained an important institution. By the end of the review period, the programme also succeeded in increasing the degree of complementarity between the three main international partners, UNDP, DCAF and GCERF, which support the CNLT in complementary areas.

Support to the media, the promotion of public debate, and the promotion of freedom of expression, have possibly contributed to preventing greater shift towards authoritarianism and to keep some pressure on the authorities, albeit this is difficult to prove. They are believed to have contributed to empowering citizens in their interaction with the State at different levels.

The Swiss engagement in Tunisia, as demonstrated by the two cooperation programs that cover the period under review, and as confirmed by most informants, was flexible and adaptable. For example, the support that initially focused on the central level, was found after 2021 not to be effective, as most of the structures did not survive, and external interventions anyway could not drive the structural changes that were required. Local level interventions and support to civil society, as key actors driving the democratic process, have been mentioned as being more successful, in addition to more appropriate to the evolving context. Indeed, in a volatile context like Tunisia, the local level was recognised as the place where changes are more likely to occur and to impact on citizens' lives.

Lesson in terms of effectiveness include that it is difficult to achieve large-scale reforms in a volatile political context. What helps is flexibility and a focus on more nimble objectives, both of which characterised the Swiss approach. The presence of Swiss cooperation teams on the ground were deemed helpful to the delivering results.

Transversal governance.

– *How effective are governance components in strengthening sector program outcomes? Can transversal governance components improve the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions? If yes, then how? Identify examples of good practices. Is there a Theory of change at programme level? Is it coherent? Is it aligned with the overall governance understanding and vision of SDC?*

Transversal interventions were helpful but could have been more systematic.

Governance is present, as a transversal theme across the whole cooperation program. In the economic domain, for example, whilst major economic reforms have not been progressing as desired, improvements were possible in areas such as the management of public investments, the transparency of public finances, value chain work, improving business environment. Improvements in service delivery, in terms of governance at the subnational level are also worth mentioning. Another positive example is the urban development program, with which Switzerland has contributed to equipping partner cities with development strategies and planning instruments that help them plan their development, as well as capacities to develop and implement local infrastructure investment projects.

The Swiss cooperation has been particularly effective both via its core governance and the transversal interventions at supporting the development of a working method by training key officials at the central and local level, to changing some of the attitudes and behaviours, and to highlight the importance of establishing a culture of trust and accountability, which are all key ingredients for moving towards a more mature democratic system.

The analysis by the review team of the ToCs of the two phases of the cooperation programs under review indicate that the underpinning assumptions are well aligned to the governance understanding and vision of SDC and that they are broadly correct. The ToCs, however, fail short of appreciating the volatility of, and underlying tensions that influence the political and governance environment, overplaying the capacity of certain actors and process, and of external support, to deliver transformative change and impact. Overall, the ToC is oversimplistic and not a sufficient framework to identify and guide governance interventions and indicate some disparity between the ambition of what could be achieved and the reality of the context. To also note is the gap between the ambitions of the governance programs and the reality of what they could concretely achieve given the long-term nature of reform processes and the short- and medium-term nature of development cooperation interventions.

4.4. Efficiency

– *Which modalities of cooperation – contributions, mandates, budgetary support, private sector engagement and other partnerships – are particularly conducive to achieving outcomes in governance programs?*

Various cooperation modalities adopted by the governance interventions were well suited to achieve outcomes.

Tunisia is not a classic case of an aid-dependent development context, which has implications on the modalities of cooperation. The efficiency of the use of resources allocated to governance interventions depended on the capacity of the programs to adapt to the volatile context, on diversifying the delivery modalities, and on focusing on enhancing the impact of interventions that worked better.

Annual reports 2017-2022 indicate that the technical and financial support from Switzerland attempted to do all of the above. The choice of cooperation modalities was consistent with the objectives of the cooperation and the context: partners were public institutions for interventions addressing major reforms and policies and the strengthening of institutions; interventions combined a global systemic approach with one based on sectoral and/or local interventions; non-governmental organizations and the private sector for interventions in support to citizen engagement, support for competitiveness and employment and diaspora engagement. In terms of rights to security, services and humanitarian protection, partnerships were diversified between state and civil society actors as well as multilateral institutions.

To improve the influence of Swiss cooperation projects, strategic alliances were favoured with the main donors, including by Switzerland maintaining a strong and concerted SECO/DDC positioning in the multi-donor fund managed by the World Bank. Attention, as mentioned, was paid to the flexibility and continuous adaptation of the portfolio.

Regarding geographic coverage, the Swiss cooperation focused on the most disadvantages areas, notably in the interior, and reducing regional disparities as well as to centres of economic activity capable of driving the country into a growth dynamic.

Sustained engagement by the Swiss, as opposed to stop-and-go as has been the case with other donors, contributed to ensuring the investments made were more efficient in that they maintained presence and support, instead of having to start anew once stopped, and with a longer-term perspective.

The regional component was important and placed Tunisia – as a pole of regional stability – as a privileged platform for developing cooperation and fostering dialogue with other countries in the region.

– *To which extent do SDC funded programs learn/replicate from each other? And how? Is there learning from other donors.*

Switzerland worked well with local and international partners, capitalizing on learning from previous phases and on the relationships of trust and good collaboration established with partners; it has been upheld as an example of an effective partner by interlocutors. The way the programmes adapted over the years, and the attention paid to ensure their relevance to the context indicate a capacity and an investment on learning.

Interlocutors, however, have pointed to the absence of systematic ways to cross learn across Swiss funded programmes and with other donors.

4.5. Impact

– *Which effects of programs (intended or unintended, positive negative) can be observed regarding people's lives and communities' functioning changed? (inclusion, participation and human rights)*

The programs have enhanced people's awareness and capacities to participate in political opportunities and demand their rights and provided some instruments to local level actors to address democratic shortfalls and improve accountability and responsiveness.

Switzerland has supported progress with the Constitution making and the electoral processes, has promoted dialogue between political parties, the establishment of the new parliament, work on the prevention of torture and of violent extremism, among others. In addition to its support for the government and parliament, Switzerland has endeavoured to strengthen the capacities of independent bodies and civil society, whose role is essential in a stable and accomplished democracy.

The intervention has contributed to advancing the democratisation process in various ways. Documents reviewed and interviews indicate that Swiss support for strengthening the electoral system in the initial period under review has had significant success, leading on the one hand

to better transparency and greater accountability of electoral institutions and on the other hand to an increase in citizen participation. Evidence also indicates that through the governance work, Switzerland has contributed to strengthen the capacities of independent bodies and civil society, whose role is essential in a stable and accomplished democracy. Progress on inclusion, participation, and greater awareness and protection of human rights, including through effective work to strengthen the prevention of torture are also important changes facilitated by Swiss supported programs.

Support for the prevention of violent extremism (PEV) has contributed to change the discourse of the National Commission for the Fight against Terrorism, which today recognizes that the theme is as much a matter of good functioning of society and social cohesion, as well as the effectiveness of law enforcement. Such changes have the potential to have a lasting impact on how institutions and people interact regarding security matters.

- *To what degree do SDC's governance programs contribute to transformative changes and (local) institution building? What are the hindering and enabling factors?*

SDC programs have contributed to change but it is not possible to determine how transformative such change is, in particular as structural governance constraints persist.

The most positive and visible impact can be observed on actors at local level and on citizens, civil society organizations, local authorities, all of which are more aware of rights and responsibilities, the need for and value of participation, transparency, and human rights.

All people interviewed indicated that Impact is more likely to be noted at the local level, where the support to local cadres, to strengthening their capacitates, developing models of work, changing the mentality of elected officials, and enhancing their accountability may lead to lasting changes, if the situation in the country improves overall.

It is noteworthy that the approach pursued by the Swiss cooperation of working with and through others, instead of going alone and seeking visibility, may indirectly contribute to maximising the impact of its interventions, through the building of capacities, the strengthening of roles, and the empowerment that result from having led the implementation of a range of governance interventions.

In terms of impact, however, interventions may not have succeeded in making progress irreversible, transforming the political and socio-economic dynamics that fuelled the revolution, and certainly to catalyse a new social contract, which is the key change Tunisians have been expecting.

An analysis of available evidence indicates that reforms and changes must happen at multiple levels to be transformative, which has not happened in Tunisia. A focus on the local level, may be helpful and in the long term must yields results if at a large enough scale, but is not sufficient.

In regard to effectiveness, efficiency and impact, some informants pointed to the need to Integrate benchmarks to better measure the process and generate evidence.

4.6. Sustainability

- *To what extent are SDC governance interventions owned by partner governments (supported through their budgets) and part of national/local systems or policy environment?*

- *To what degree can achieved program results persist under a deteriorated context? What are the factors that facilitate lasting change through governance interventions?*

It is difficult at this stage and given the continuously changing environment to assess the sustainability of the governance interventions.

The two questions are linked in Tunisia and for both, it is too early to provide a response, given the continued and on-going volatility in the political situation and the relatively recent engagement of Switzerland on governance issue in the country.

Certainly, such volatility and the deterioration of the context are main undermining factors in terms of sustainability and cause of poor ownership by the partner government. Indeed, the fading of political will and commitment put in question, as some officials consulted pointed out, the likelihood that reforms would stand, and the institutionalisation of the interventions. The dissolution of the core institutions of the state is a clear indication of this.

Change is likely to be more impactful and sustainable at the local level, where the interventions contributed to developing new working methods, promoting behavioural changes, and strengthening accountability and citizens' participation citizens more effectively.

Some specific interventions, particularly in the economic domain (e.g., electronic payment systems, work with the Central Bank) may be more sustainable, but even that will depend on an improvement in the overall political and socio-economic situation in the country and on the continued capacity of Switzerland and other partners to deliver their programmes in Tunisia.

5 Conclusions

Overall, given the country context in the period under review, the governance interventions both through core governance programmes and transversal interventions are found to be:

- relevant and coherent in that they are doing what the country needs and are adapted to the context and address priorities for the country and for the Swiss cooperation;

- relatively effective in achieving stated objectives, although a gap between the ambitions and timeframe of SDC governance programs (short, medium) and the reality of what they can concretely achieve, and the timeframe required to achieve expected changes (long-term) was noted;

- efficient in that modalities of cooperation seem well suited to the context and adaptable, resources well used and a proactive effort to learn and adjust interventions, including in the context of cooperation with other international partners, pursued;

- impactful in particular in promoting greater awareness of rights and responsibilities, principles of democracy and good governance, and some change in behaviour including in key central institutions and mainly at the local level.

- modestly sustainable, as governance reforms take a long time, require constant political will and long-term commitment, which were not guaranteed during the evaluation period, and which are anyway hard to achieve through specific programmes.

In conclusion, the governance interventions supported by Switzerland were relevant and important, and contributed to promoting some positive change in Tunisia, and possibly to keep the democratic process alive. The capacity to adapt, stay engaged despite the political volatility, focus on citizens' rights and expectations and on the local level were helpful to navigate the volatile political context and the reducing space for reforms. The impact and sustainability of the programs are difficult to assess given the many variables that affect progress and stability in the country and the relatively recent engagement by Switzerland on governance themes.

Given the challenges in the political sphere, greater focus on transversal governance interventions may have helped advance overall governance objectives that were otherwise slowed down due to the lack of progress on core governance programs. Moreover, the need for institutional strengthening, policy reforms, and greater accountability were priorities and key conditions for progress with sectoral objectives.

The approach pursued by SDC has been overall appreciated by national and international partners, whose action it has contributed to complement and enhance. Swiss entities have worked well together in-country and through a regional approach, in line with the WOGA approach.

Drawing on the available evidence and analysis, the main forward-looking points are:

- Ensure programs and approaches in contexts as volatile as Tunisia are informed by real time analysis and assessments, including risk assessments, so as to facilitate the timely adaptation of interventions as circumstances change;

- Continue the flexible approach and emphasis on both central and local level, ensuring local level interventions are systematic and at a large enough scale to have an impact;

- Strengthen transversal governance work to better support other programs whose success also depends on key governance reforms, and to maximise their potential to contribute to advances in the governance domain as well as in improving people's lives;

- Consider whether interventions on violent extremism should be integrated into the area of governance;

- Integrate benchmarks to better measure the process and generate evidence.

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- SDC. (2023). *Projet "Initiative Pilote pour un Développement Local Intégré" (IPDLI)*
- SDC. (2018). *Supporting Democratic Gains in Tunisia Final Narrative Report 2016-2018*
- SDC. (2020). *Supporting Democratic Gains in Tunisia – Phase II Final Narrative Report 2018-2020*
- SDC. (2023). *Supporting Democratic Gains in Tunisia Phase III Operational Report 2020-2023*

Annex 2. List of Persons met (available only upon request; data protection)