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Evaluation 2017/4

Independent Evaluation of SDC's Results-Based Management System with a Focus on Poverty Reduction



Independent Evaluation of

SDC's Results-Based

Management System with a

Focus on Poverty Reduction

Commissioned by the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division
of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

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Author	SPM Consultants, Stockholm/Sweden; Martin Schmidt; Markus Palenberg; Janet Vähämäki;

Bern, December 2017

I Evaluation Process

Evaluations commissioned by the SDC's Board of Directors were introduced in the SDC in 2002 with the aim of providing a more critical and independent assessment of the SDC activities. These Evaluations are conducted according to the OECD DAC Evaluation Standards and are part of the SDC's concept for implementing Article 170 of the Swiss Constitution which requires Swiss Federal Offices to analyse the effectiveness of their activities. The SDC's **Senior Management** (consisting of the Director General and the heads of SDC's departments) approves the Evaluation Program. The **Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division**, which is outside of line management and reports directly to the Director General, commissions the evaluation, taking care to recruit evaluators with a critical distance from the SDC.

The Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division identified the primary intended users of the evaluation, and invited them to participate in a **Core Learning Partnership (CLP)**. The Core Learning Partnership actively accompanied the evaluation process. It commented on the evaluation design (Approach Paper); it validated the evaluation methodology (Inception Report); and it provided feedback to the evaluation team on their preliminary findings. During a presentation on the Draft Evaluation Report, the Core Learning Partnership had the opportunity to comment on the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The evaluation was carried out according to the evaluation standards specified in the Terms of Reference.

Based on the **Final Report of the Evaluators**, the **Senior Management Response (SMR)** was approved by the SDC's Board of Directors and signed by the SDC Director-General.

The SMR is published together with the **Final Report of the Evaluators**. Further details regarding the evaluation process are available in the evaluation report and its annexes.

Timetable

Step	When
Approach Paper finalized	November 2016
Implementation of the evaluation	March – August 2017
Senior Management Response in SDC	December 2017

II Senior Management Response

Introduction

SDC commissioned an independent evaluation of its Results-Based Management (RBM) System with a Focus on Poverty Reduction. The mandate was to evaluate the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of SDC's RBM system, which covers most SDC management processes from the corporate to the project levels and across SDC. The evaluation process included close involvement with the SDC Core Learning Partnership comprising staff from all SDC Departments, from both Head and Field Offices. It included three field visits to Ukraine, Rwanda and Bangladesh, two broad surveys, in-depth interviews and three focused e-discussions. The evaluation team had access to the full range of SDC documentation.

The period examined spanned from 2008 to 2017. 2008 was chosen as the baseline, as an overall reorganisation at SDC took place that year. Major changes were introduced to foster a results-oriented culture within the organisation, enhance competencies and capacities to make evidence- and results-based management decisions, improve focus and efficiency, promote organisational learning, enhance communication on results, and strengthen SDC's contribution to delivering development results with a focus on poverty reduction. This evaluation represents the first comprehensive evaluation of SDC's approach to RBM following the reorganisation.

Assessment of the Evaluation

The evaluation report provides a timely and useful assessment of SDC's RBM system. The main objectives – assessing the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of SDC's RBM system – have been met, but the link between RBM and an improved impact on poverty, which was requested, could not be concluded, although the evaluation regards this as highly likely. Furthermore, as no recommendation specifically addresses poverty reduction, this Management Response refers to the related elements in the evaluation report, to enable SDC to improve the linkages between RBM and poverty reduction. This is particularly important in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the commitment to 'Leave no One Behind'. A second aspect that was not examined in depth is the Development Effectiveness Agenda. As a recommendation (no. 10) is however made in this regard, the related Management Response provides guidance for SDC on this. Finally, making better use of research evidence – if available – could complement SDC's well-established RBM system.

Main findings

The overall conclusion of the evaluation is that in conception and execution, the RBM system at SDC is a success, due to its flexibility in implementation, its contextual approach, its outcome orientation and the fact that it is applied to the whole institution. From a management systems revision point of view and in terms of producing changes in the mind-set and behaviour of key staff, the evaluation team's assessment is overall positive. The orientation of the RBM system guidelines and instruments towards the corporate, country and project levels are largely relevant and well understood. High quality guidance materials are produced and trainings are purposeful, of good quality and largely appreciated. Areas for improvement have, however, also been identified. The evaluation recommends that SDC focuses on and improves the strategic steering purposes of the RBM system and does not overemphasise domestic accountability. The quality of country and global strategies and related instruments is uneven, pointing to capacities and management issues. More focus is required on how SDC aims to contribute to development results, for example by developing sound theories of change and basing

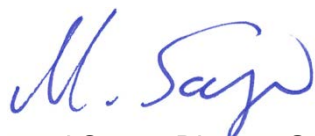
these on existing evidence – where available. The administrative burden is high as there is a tendency to overshoot results-related exercises, for example by involving too many people or responding to unclear demands for information with more rather than less reporting. There is, furthermore, also a need to clarify the managerial and strategic purposes of the RBM system.

Key elements of the Management Response

Out of the twelve recommendations, five are ‘fully agreed’ (green), seven are ‘partially agreed’ (orange) and none are ‘disagreed’. This shows a high level of convergence with the evaluation findings. The key measures have been summarised as follows:

1. Reinforce RBM within the Directorate by including an annual RBM-related objective at corporate level. Monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the RBM system through external Quality Assessments to steer the system. Analyse needs of Swiss stakeholders to target communication.	
2. Reinforce the role and involvement of thematic networks and Focal Points, in particular in the elaboration of Cooperation Strategies’ theories of change and results frameworks. Develop RBM capacities of thematic and field staff. Update and simplify Poverty tool in view of RBM.	
3. Improve efficiency of Cooperation Strategy processes through exchanges of good practices.	
4. Inform the field on the evaluation methodology of Cooperation Strategy and provide an Evaluation toolbox. Conduct quality assessment of a sample of strategy evaluations.	
5. Implement the Division of Labour between Head/Field offices and emphasise strategic issues to improve the value of Management Responses.	
6. Substitute the effectiveness reports with thematic evaluations, in view of reinforcing steering and learning while continuing to serve domestic accountability and communication purposes. Enhance thematic learning by making good use of available experiences and information.	
7. Maintain focus of Entry Proposal discussions on strategic considerations in the Operations Committee. Consider reference to research evidence in the next update of related guidelines.	
8. Assess the experience made with the Aggregated Reference Indicators and propose improvements to SDC’s results system in preparation of the next Dispatch. Consider linking the RBM system at SDC to the SDGs and enhancing narratives on results.	
9. Update SDC’s guidance on reviews/decentralised evaluations.	
10. Enhance Development Effectiveness by systematically referring to country results in Cooperation Strategies and implement joint programming. Consider SDG outcome targets and the principle of Leaving no One Behind as a common ground.	
11. Continue implementation of RBM as a flexible and contextual approach and implement advanced RBM training. Optimise Annual Report templates, guidelines and processes for steering. Identify a critical mass of staff with QA responsibilities in the field. Invest in a limited number of high quality impact evaluations.	
12. Explain management implications and prepare key messages on the purposes of RBM instruments to clarify for which processes the information provided is to be put to use.	

Bern, December 2017



Manuel Sager, Director General Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Annex: Table overview on recommendations and measures

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System-level management

Recommendation 1:		
<p>Introduce a ‘guardian’ of RBM system effectiveness in the form of a senior advisor inside the directorate¹. The responsibility of the RBM system guardian should be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Promote the system’s applicability for strategic <i>management processes</i> – retaining the SDC RBM approach of flexibility, contextualisation and outcome level focus. In doing so, the guardian should safeguard against tendencies to overdo and overwork system requirements and emphasise and ensure design and usage for its strategic purposes of learning and decision-making. b) Regularly analyse <i>information needs</i> of different audiences and thereby supporting the directorate in safeguarding effective reporting to domestic audiences. The guardian should be aware of the administrative benefits and costs of different types of reporting and use these for rational decision-making. c) Ensure <i>instruments</i> are designed and operated to efficiently fulfil their intended combination of purposes, including management and mitigation of natural trade-offs between different purposes. Efforts, costs and risks associated with operating instruments should be justified by their demonstrated purpose-related benefits and to review its instruments for purposes of clarity and amendments (take-outs, repairs and developments)². 		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree
<p>SDC’s Management agrees to reinforce the RBM within the Directorate in line with the three proposed lines of activities. However, there is no need to introduce a new position as the Head of South Cooperation Department oversees the section Quality Assurance and Poverty reduction (QA) and is, de facto, the guardian responsible for much of the RBM system with QA supporting SDC operations across the whole institution. Other RBM related responsibilities rest with the Evaluation and Controlling section (E+C) which reports to the Head of Staff of the Directorate. The Head of South Cooperation and the Head of Staff are part of SDC Board of Directors. Following the Reorganisation of SDC, a decision was taken to separate the responsibilities between QA and E+C as the latter should remain at arm’s length of SDC operations and Corporate Domain management, to ensure a certain independence. Introducing a position in the Directorate in charge of both sections would defeat this distinction of functions between QA and E+C that is, moreover, also viewed positively by the OECD. The close coordination between QA and E+C functions well and ensures RBM coherence. The Steering report (“Steuerungsbericht”) to the Board of Directors also monitors key aspects of the RBM system by an external consultant on an annual basis. It triggers management actions to strengthen the RBM system.</p>		

¹ When reform was instigated in 2008, the head of the Staff Directorate performed more or less this function. The evaluators are not in a position to determine if this is the right position today for want of a comprehensive understanding of SDC top management organisation. Our point is that the guardian needs considerable authority upwards and down to be effective.

² As indicated in 4.1.1, a screening function is already in place; the point here is to develop that function with a mandatory “due diligence analysis” when introducing and reviewing RBM instruments regarding their purpose(s), intended users and their information needs as well as related costs and benefits.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Include each year an RBM related objective at SDC corporate level to maintain and reinforce flexibility, contextualisation and outcome focus. The final responsibility of this objective lies with SDC Head of South Cooperation, hence is to be part of his/her MbO. Implementation is to be assured by QA Network within the Domains and by QA section for coordination. The Head of South Cooperation will also ensure that the human and financial resources allocated to QA and RBM across the whole of SDC are appropriate to deliver the expected results.	<u>Head of South Cooperation</u>	Jan 2018
b) Analyse the communication needs of key audiences such as parliamentary groups, Swiss media, public opinion makers etc. and report effectively using external communication specialists.	<u>Head of Staff Directorate</u>	2018
c) Starting in 2020, mandate every 4 years an external Quality Assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness in applying the RBM system for poverty reduction. The results and recommendations of the Assessment are to be presented to the Directorate for decisions to maintain efforts in line with benefits and mitigate possible trade-offs and orient QA Medium term Plan. This more comprehensive Quality Assessment is to replace the current Assessments that review individual instruments introduced just after SDC's Reorganisation. Quality Assessments of SDC's Management for Development Results will, however, be maintained as it contributes to the Directorates' Steering report / 'Steuerungsbericht'; assessments will also be carried out for updated or new RBM tools.	<u>QA section</u>	2020

Recommendation 2:

Make explicit use of SDC thematic and analytic capacities on key strategic objectives, i.e. the thematic focal points and networks and staff skilled in theory of change development and verification, in the formulation of theories of change and results chain logic in the critical instruments of CS, GP and AR and the accompanying Results Framework. Individual involvement should be subject to:

- Country Directors and heads of Global Programme divisions *requests* for thematic expert participation in key strategic formulation processes (CS, GP and AR and the accompanying RF).
- A systematic approach to how their themes (if applicable) are strategically operated, contextualised and outcome-oriented – theory of change, results chain logic and indicators, strategic analysis and priorities – in country strategies and global programme strategies.
- A responsibility with focal points and leaders of thematic networks to collect and document experiences with assisting strategic formulation as a basis for organisation wide learning across countries and regions.

Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>The quality of results of SDC operations rests not only on appropriate methods and processes but also on thematic and analytic capacities. The role and involvement of thematic programme officers (thematic network members) and Focal Points (FP) needs therefore to be systematic in the definition of Cooperation Strategies (CS) and Global Programmes (GP).</p> <p>As pointed out in the evaluation report (Chap. 4.3), <i>'the current level of elaboration of SDC Results Framework is insufficient in a poverty perspective. Both for reporting purposes, but critically as a basis for Cooperation Strategies and Annual Report analyses and sharpening portfolio priorities with regard to poverty outcomes'</i>. Theories of change and Results Frameworks are central to these key strategic processes and their quality should gradually improve using well-chosen indicators and refer to research evidence, where available. SDC staff should be more explicit about the extent to which theories of change are based on evidence.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Simplify and update the SDC tool for Fighting Poverty. This document was published in 2000 and should be revised to be more results oriented, practical and include inequality and Leave no One Behind.	<u>QA section</u>	2019
b) Further anchor RBM and theories of change by enhancing the know-how of NPOs currently in charge of monitoring, to become the first point of support in the field as QA Advisors.	<u>QA Network</u> and section	2019
c) Learning Events in Bern targeting all thematic FP staff in Bern on formulation of theories of change, Results Frameworks and their contribution to reduction of poverty and inequalities, and the use of available evidence. The FP are, thereafter, to provide support and orientation to their network members.	<u>QA Network</u> and section	2018-2019
	<u>Focal Points</u>	2018-2019
d) Mandatory information of concerned thematic FP in view of the preparation of CS; the FP then ensures participation of his/her network in preparing the Theories of Change and Results Frameworks.	<u>Heads of Cooperation</u>	2018 onwards
	<u>Focal Points</u>	2018 onwards
e) Wherever relevant, prepare short briefs on key topics that are of strategic or operational importance to SDC, based on existing research evidence.	<u>Focal Points</u> and thematic networks	2018 onwards

Country/Global Programme strategic process

Recommendation 3:		
Stimulate management capacities³ with country directors and heads of Global Programme divisions , as it is critical to making the strategic processes lean, efficient and purposeful. This could take the form of joint learning events with a comparative perspective on the above criteria.		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
CS processes vary indeed in efficiency and can be improved. The complexity rises with the number of parties involved and gains in efficiency and purposefulness would be especially worthwhile in the case of regional strategies or those involving several units of the Federal Administration (e. g. several SDC Domains, FDFA Division of Human Security, SECO, SEM). The report underlines (Chap. 4.3) that <i>'because most SDC interventions have indirect and complex linkages to the intended poverty reduction impact, in-depth theory-based planning skills to link results with poverty reduction impacts'</i> .		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Sharing of experiences with country directors, heads of Divisions and Global Programs during Lighthouse training and Koosem, good practices documented on CS processes and planning for poverty reduction.	QA Network + HOC + QA Poverty officer	2018-2019

Recommendation 4:		
Redesign the Country and Regional Strategy Evaluations into a tool at the disposal of country directors and heads of Global Programme divisions as new strategies come up for revision (including the peer review element). A "redesign" would mean to reduce the size of the evaluations, reinforce its support of the strategic analysis and employing thematic competencies to articulate strategic expectations (theories of change) supported by explicit results frameworks.		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
We agree that Country and Regional Strategy evaluations contribute to learning and strategic decision-making. Such evaluations are a key step in preparing new Cooperation strategies. Since 2010 they have been commissioned by the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Section (E+C) with a standardised methodology. For institutional learning purposes, the evaluations are conducted by a mixed team consisting of an external lead evaluator and SDC staff acting as peers. Due to the limited capacities, E+C commissioned only a reduced number of evaluations (2-3 per year) of particular strategic interest. E+C will continue to conduct a selected number of Country and Regional Strategy evaluations that are of strategic interest for SDC.		
Additionally, a large number of country and regional strategies are assessed through mid-term evaluations by the respective Integrated Representation (IR) / Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO). These decentralised evaluations frequently involve the participation of SDC peers already. Lean country and regional strategy evaluations are encouraged, to be commissioned by the concerned IR / SCO. However, it is not up to the evaluation team to		

³ For example, to clarify roles and responsibilities early in the process, to make sure consultations are efficient and focused on strategic assumptions and intent, to promote efficiency in information management supporting the analysis.

elaborate theories of change and results framework for new cooperation strategies. This remains a key step of the planning process for elaborating the country and regional strategies.

With more profound analysis of the results framework through enhanced involvement of thematic competencies and reference to existing research evidence – where available and of strategic thematic interest - the quality of results frameworks of cooperation strategies should and can improve.

In any case, country and regional strategy evaluations will use the existing standardised methodology whose utility has been confirmed through various evaluations over the last years. Those evaluations managed by IR / SCO can opt for a leaner evaluation process focusing on specific questions.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Inform Integrated Representation / Swiss Cooperation Office on the process and standardised methodology of Country and Regional Strategy evaluations - including Beneficiary Assessment - and present an Evaluation toolbox for inclusion in the Field Handbook.	<u>E+C</u>	2018
b) Quality assessment of a sample of country and regional strategy evaluations conducted by IR / SCOs.	<u>QA Network</u> and <u>E+C</u>	2020-2021

Recommendation 5:

Bring country directors and Bern desk officers closer together by establishing a joint responsibility for strategies and Annual Reports. The desk should, in this scenario, subdue its control function and instead assist the country director in coordinating headquarter input (e. g. as indicated in recommendation 2), including results logic and analytic motivations for strategic choices and direction.

Should such an arrangement prove fruitful, a future option for South and East Cooperation may be to follow the example of Global Cooperation and drop the Management Response to the AR entirely. The evaluation leaves such considerations in the hands of a future system 'guardian' and department directors.

Management Response

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
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The Division of Labour between Field and Head Office foresees that strategical issues rest with Head Office and this applies to CS where responsibilities are differentiated but joint. There is thereby agreement on joint responsibility for strategies. In the case of Annual Reports, the responsibility remains with the Field Office, in line with the delegation of responsibilities. The desk assists the Head of Division with the Management Response and enables the Field Office to implement the programme. A major difference between GP under the Global Cooperation and the work of the other SDC Departments is that GP responsibilities are at Head Office where the dialogue and steering is regularly done in close coordination with the Head of the Global Cooperation Department. This explains why a MR on the Annual Report is not required but the AR is approved by the Head of Global Cooperation.

A QA normative note is available and provides the required guidance for Management Responses (Notiz zur Diskussion der Jahresberichte der Länder an der Zentrale und Vorgaben zur Management Response). Chapter 3.2.3 of the Evaluation report points to the issue of improving the strategic value of the Management Responses.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Implement the document on Division of Labour Field / Head Office and emphasise strategic issues to improve the value of Management Responses in line with the Guidance note for Management Response.	<u>Heads of Division</u>	2018 onwards

Recommendation 6:		
Substitute the Effectiveness Reports with thematic evaluations so that they answer a demand from the thematic networks and focal points. The thematic evaluations should be formative and focus on learning and theories of change, and allow to extract information for accountability purposes as a secondary objective.		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>The evaluation correctly recognises that the reports on effectiveness have a dual aim “to inform the Swiss public on the effectiveness of Switzerland’s development cooperation” and to “contribute to the SDC’s institutional learning and hence to the ongoing qualitative improvement of its cooperation programmes and projects”. Serving the two purposes in parallel - accountability to domestic stakeholders on the one hand, and learning on the other - has been a challenge with effectiveness reports.</p> <p>Effectiveness Reports look at a narrow questioning in terms of evaluations, which often leads to confusion. We therefore agree to substitute the effectiveness reports with thematic evaluations. The thematic evaluation will have a focus on learning and theories of change, enriching the evidence base for strategic types of intervention, and can look at the whole range of DAC criteria (Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability) with relatively little additional effort. As suggested by the evaluation, the thematic evaluations will be used for accountability purposes as well. To do so, E+C will consequently enhance and diversify its communication tools.</p> <p>The thematic evaluations (including high quality decentralized evaluations) and robust impact evaluations will also be used as source for synthesizing and communicating effectiveness of programmes/projects and challenges met.</p> <p>End of Phase Reports and End of Project Reports were introduced to enhance steering and learning, amongst others, by contributing to experience capitalisation used by the thematic networks and to thematic evaluations.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Submit to the Directorate for approval a realistic rolling planning for conducting thematic evaluations for the coming years.	<u>E+C</u>	2018 onwards on an annual basis
b) Add a communication component to each thematic evaluation to achieve similar public outreach as with Effectiveness Reports.	<u>E+C</u> and EDA-Info	2018 onwards
c) Analyse yearly the EPR and EPROR produced during past 12 months on the related theme, with the purpose of institutional learning. Provide feedback to the concerned line managers and integrate the main conclusions in the Annual Report of the thematic network.	<u>Theme responsible</u> <u>Division Heads</u> + FP and thematic networks.	9.2018 onwards
d) Review the thematic learning at institutional level based on the experience in using the EPR and	<u>WLK</u> and thematic FP,	6.2019

EPROR as shown in the annual reports, and update the document 'Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance'.	E+C, QA Network	
e) Submit for Directorate approval a proposal for enhanced steering and experience capitalization in relation to EPR/EPROR and the update of the guidance on decentralized evaluations ('Merkblatt zur Durchführung von Reviews in der DEZA').	<u>QA Network</u> + E+C, WLK	11.2019

Recommendation 7:		
Emphasise the differences between Entry and Credit proposals by simplifying the former and underlining its precursor intent. This would mean to drop excessive deliberations on the future project/programme and be focussed on the key contextual and country strategic considerations motivating the intervention in the short term (12-18 months). ⁴		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
The Guidelines on Entry Proposal have been simplified and improved to this effect in 2017 and further clarified in October 2017. The issue is on putting these Guidelines into practice and maintain the focus on strategic considerations. EP are not based on short-term issues as the entire scope and foreseen impact of a project needs to be considered when deciding the worthiness of providing support or not.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Ensure application of EP Guidelines: discussions on EP to continue to focus on strategic considerations in the Operations Committee.	<u>Chairs of the Operations Committees / OPZ</u> and Heads of Division	2018 onwards
b) Provide cases of good practice of EP.	<u>QA Network</u> + Chairs of Operations Committees	2019
c) Consider reference to available research evidence in the next update of EP and CP guidelines.	<u>QA section</u>	2019

Recommendation 8:		
Conduct an independent evaluation after two years of implementation of the ARIs. This evaluation should cover costs involved (in terms of staff time, administrative costs etc.) associated to designing, using and quality-assuring indicators, and compare it with benefits, i.e. how this type of information is valued and used by different stakeholders (internal decision-makers, domestic constituencies, etc.).		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
An assessment is required on the experience with the ARIs in view of improving the results		

⁴ In effect, this would mean to beef up the medium term strategic horizon of the credit proposals with a specific emphasis on strategic intent. Operational planning horizons beyond the country strategy time-line are discouraged except in exceptional cases.

system for reporting and communicating but this can be carried out internally. Valuable external view and advice has already been provided by the OECD, which analysed in 2017 the RBM practice of 6 donors, covering SDC and the ARIs. SDC can perform such an assessment internally thereby also saving resources.

Taking into account the results communication approach already while preparing the next Dispatch and aligning SDC's results system to the SDGs, upon which all partner countries need to report, will be a considerable improvement in terms of coherence and efficiency. This will improve SDC's contribution to Development Effectiveness, the four principles being Ownership of development priorities, Focus on Results, Inclusive Partnerships, Transparency and Accountability.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Assess the experience made using the ARIs and whether certain ARIs and Thematic Reference Indicators can be linked to the SDG indicators which the OECD and the UN identified as having robust data already available, in view of the next Dispatch.	<u>QA section</u> + E+C + Focal Points	2018
b) Propose to the Directorate improvements to SDC's results system in preparation of the next Dispatch. The system is to provide the link to SDG based country results - avoiding double reporting on SDGs, contribute to improve SDC's performance regarding Development Effectiveness principles, simplify SDC's reporting system and enhance the narratives in the communication of results. Efficiency gains will also be explored (e.g. through digitalisation).	<u>QA section</u> + E+C + A&P + EDA Info	2018-2019

Recommendation 9:

Create guidance materials for decentralised evaluations and their Terms of Reference to support the coherence of country level results management and project reporting.

Management Response

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
The long tradition of evaluation at SDC means that valuable material is available, but needs to be updated and presented in a coherent manner. A first step is the updated SDC Evaluation policy (publication early 2018), to be followed by an update of the 2010 guidance on decentralised evaluations ('Merkblatt zur Durchführung von Reviews in der DEZA').		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Update the guidance on decentralised evaluations ('Merkblatt zur Durchführung von Reviews in der DEZA').	<u>QA section</u> + E+C	2019

Recommendation 10:

Support increasing operational partner alignment through programmes using and strengthening active government planning- and performance assessment frameworks. This means to actively use, analyse and support (through direct or joint programming) partner government systems for sector planning and reporting. SDC should offer to take active part in their strengthening and to develop capacities for strategic planning based on evidence.

Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>The four principles of the Development Effectiveness Agenda agreed in Busan 2011 and confirmed at the HLM of the GPEDC in Nairobi 2016 will frame our activities. These principles will guarantee a more effective support to our partner countries in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda and thus the achievement of the SDGs.</p> <p>SDC country and regional strategies support government results, which are presented in the right hand of CS Results Framework column as country results. Applying the Leave no One Behind principle and selecting SDG outcome targets and the country results by both partner governments and donors are an opportunity for both parties to find common ground and converging results frameworks. Joint programming with SDC participation is to be enhanced in this spirit. These measures all support Agenda 2030 and Development Effectiveness. SDC will draw upon other results only in a few exceptional cases when there is no governmental strategy or plan available or if the country results were not inclusively prepared. In some of these cases relevant country results might have been defined by multilateral organisations in conjunction with the partner country. Country outcome results guide SDC's programmes in both planning and monitoring and SDC engages in evidence based policy dialogue for enhanced strategic planning and capacity development.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Support partner countries in the implementation of their priorities, i. e. SDGs. Systematically apply, in all CS, country outcome results with a reference to government documents in the results framework right column. Use whenever available and relevant SDG based outcome targets/indicators as country results.	<u>Heads of Cooperation</u>	2018 onwards
b) Approve only duly explained exceptions if not based on government prioritised results.	<u>SDC Directorate</u>	2018 onwards
c) Using as basis country results, prepare and provide evidence basis for policy dialogue and development of country capacities in association with like-minded stakeholders and partners.	<u>Heads of Cooperation</u>	2018 onwards
d) Identify and implement new cases of joint programming, i.e. planning, monitoring and evaluation.	<u>Heads of Cooperation</u>	2018 onwards

Recommendation 11:
<p>Support the notion that RBM is not a scientific exercise, but a flexible and contextual approach to operational and strategic planning. In-depth analyses and comprehensive impact assessments and results analyses can be left to outside experts. RBM should be regarded first as a management approach and aid to operational planning and learning and secondly as a foundation for accountability. To this end:</p> <p>a) Maintain and further encourage the flexible use of RBM instruments and results frameworks as synthesised in 'use the tools, don't let them use you', a statement to which close to 90 % of surveyed SDC staff agreed (see annex 3, question 3 p. 7). To this end, RBM-wide training (not more but refocused trainings) emphasising the context of results management processes in SDC (section 3.4.3) may prove useful.</p> <p>b) Support the ongoing trend in SDC towards more understanding of the results chain logic, the identification of short-term (immediate) outcome objectives and indicators to strengthen results management, strategic content and communications and realistic planning for longer-term results beyond SDC's direct control.</p>

- c) Allow and advocate for alternative approaches to results monitoring, e. g. outcome mapping, outcome harvesting, contribution analysis, outcome stories or most significant change and encourage innovative, lean approaches throughout the organisation as natural elements of an evolving RBM system.

Management Response

Fully agree

Partially agree

Disagree

RBM will continue to be implemented as a flexible and contextual approach as proposed. The SDC Guidelines in fact already allow for alternative approaches to be applied. However, we will not advocate nor provide training for additional approaches as this would require more QA resources on one side, and, on the other side, would place undue additional burden on SDC staff to get familiar with and properly apply these alternative methods: the benefits of doing this do not justify the costs. Chap. 3.2.3 of the evaluation reports that SDC staff considers the Annual Report as the main instrument in need of adaptation towards strategic steering.

Impact evaluations can be a useful complement to the current RBM system generating useful evidence for strategically important thematic topics.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) The decision by the Directorate in 2017 to introduce compulsory advanced RBM training will focus on results management, results chain and better understanding of the value of RBM. This will be part of a QA training plan, which will draw upon the 2017 experience made by SDC Cooperation with Eastern Europe in 2017, and use external consultants for training field office staff. QA staff in the field will be targeted (training of trainers).	<u>QA section</u>	2019 onwards
b) Submit to the Directorate a proposal to optimise the Annual Report template, Guidelines and process to better serve strategic steering and planning needs.	<u>QA section</u>	2018
c) Identify a critical mass of staff with QA responsibilities in the field, within each geographic Division, as first support point and allocate sufficient time for these to support the field operations.	<u>Geographic Division Heads</u> + Heads of Cooperation	2018 onwards
d) Invest in a limited number of high quality impact evaluations (identified during strategy or project planning) to address questions of high strategic importance for SDC	<u>Focal Points</u> + thematic networks + E+C	2018 onwards

Recommendation 12:		
Incrementally work to highlight management implications and purposes in the structure and content of the Field Handbook. Introduce clear messages of instrument purposes, management implications ⁵ , and strengthen development effectiveness aspects such as using and strengthening partner frameworks for planning and monitoring.		
Management Response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
The Field Handbook contains all the key documents which are required for SDC staff to perform their duties. Many of these in fact do not directly concern RBM. E+C has updated the list of binding documents (Nov. 2017) with an explanation and overview of the Field Handbook which supports this recommendation. Management implications will be prepared, together with key messages, for the documents which concern RBM and lie in the responsibilities of QA and E+C.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) Explain management implications and prepare key messages on the purposes of QA and E+C instruments to clarify for what management processes the information provided is to be put to use. Consider the option to integrate such key messages into SDC's Field Handbook.	<u>QA section</u>	2019

⁵ See elaborate explanation in section 3.3 of this report.

III Evaluators' Final Report

Commissioned by the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division
of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

SPM Consultants
SE-Stockholm
www.spmconsult.se

Martin Schmidt; martin.schmidt@spmconsult.se
Markus Palenberg; markus@devstrat.org
Janet Vähämäki; janet.vahamaki@sbs.su.se

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Executive Summary

This evaluation was commissioned by SDC as an “Independent Evaluation of SDC’s Results-Based Management RBM with a Focus on Poverty Reduction” in December 2016. The contract was awarded to SPM Consultants (Stockholm) in collaboration with the Institute for Development Strategy (Munich), and the evaluation was carried out between February and August 2017.

The evaluation has a system-wide mandate. It should evaluate “the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency” of SDC’s RBM System; a system covering most SDC management processes from the corporate to the project levels and all domains. It should do this in a “participatory and utilization-focused process”, which has meant close involvement with the SDC Core Learning Partnership (CLP), three field visits to Ukraine, Rwanda and Bangladesh, two surveys covering over 700 staff in total, close to 60 interviews in Bern and other Swiss stakeholders and finally three focused e-discussions on specific topics with 3-6 participants each. The evaluation team had access to the full range of SDC documentation through the SDC online library (share-web.ch).

Covering the system from the SDC reorganisation of 2008 (Reo 2008) to the present, the evaluation comes to the **overall positive conclusion that, in conception and execution, the RBM System is a success**. It is a success because of its firm and in-depth hold of management perceptions and active practices in SDC, going in line with RBM intentions, and because there are widespread perceptions among SDC staff that results-orientation supports poverty reduction and other development outcomes. These perceptions and practices are supported by a set of flexible and purposeful guidelines.

Naturally, there is also room for improvement. To summarise the experiences of what has transpired over the 2008-2017 period, the following points are highlighted:

- The RBM reform can and should be continued but the system is in need of improvement
- Staff and leadership perceptions on RBM are still developing
- Key strategic instruments show improving but uneven strategic coherence
- An analytic perspective on using results information is improving but not yet sufficient
- Administrative burden in terms of overworked results management is high
- RBM guidelines are clear on ‘how-to’ but less on management implications

Against this background the evaluation has reviewed how the system has contributed to poverty reduction, and it presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, an improved SDC information base, monitoring capacity and programming focus on poverty reduction increases poverty orientation and the likelihood of more effective and efficient development impact. Several examples support the evaluators in this assessment. On the other hand, the elaboration of results frameworks and analyses in key SDC strategic instruments is on the whole insufficient for effective poverty orientation of SDC programming. It cannot be generally concluded, for example, from SDC results reporting that poverty impact has improved.

Also against this background, the evaluation studies how the system aligns with different RBM purposes; learning, decision-making, domestic- and partner accountability. The evaluation team concludes that while the purposes of learning, decision-making, and partner accountability are in focus in system guidelines, SDC management culture instead mainly emphasises domestic accountability. The situation is sub-optimal and naturally existing trade-offs between different RBM purposes could be better managed. In practice, it has meant attention being drawn away from strategic analyses and from using performance information as a basis for decision-making. Much is done in the name of domestic accountability, even if the effectiveness of corporate communications for this purpose remains largely unknown.

The evaluation points, however, to efficient results management (geared towards learning and strategic planning) spread across domains and instruments. Here, existing instruments support lean and purposeful strategic planning. RBM guidelines also have an in-built flexibility well attuned to the different needs of diverse forms of cooperation including work in fragile contexts, Humanitarian Aid, and Global Programmes, which favours an adaptability to context.

Regarding partner accountability, the evaluation confirms previous assessments that SDC can do more to align with the results management principles of the development effectiveness agenda 2030. SDC is a highly regarded partner, and contributes positively to project monitoring- and evidence based planning practices. Yet, SDC's use and support of partner and partner government monitoring and planning frameworks should be strengthened.

At the heart of the results reform, the evaluation finds the key strategic processes of Country- and Global Programme Strategies, the related Annual Reports, and their integral Results Frameworks. This is where the foundation for all strategic and operational work lies, and the management processes of putting them together are deemed central to organisational learning and strategic coherence.

Since 2009 several studies (SDC Quality Assessments, DAC Reviews, other outside observers etc.), including the present evaluation, has pointed out that these central instruments show improving but uneven quality. Aspects highlighted include RBM traits such as associations between performance information and strategic choice, results-logic and indicator formulation, and critical reflection on alternatives with which the present evaluation concurs. It also notes that it is the same purposeful guidelines, under basically the same interpretation with involved staff that produces such a diverse output.

Thus, from a systems perspective, the evaluation concludes that a main malfunction lies in the uneven use of performance information for strategic planning purposes (decision-making and learning). In turn, it drives **the central operational conclusion** that future system effectiveness is mainly a management challenge, rather than an instrument/guideline challenge.

Concluding the evaluation in line with this reasoning, a series of recommendations on four levels are offered predominantly to strengthen RBM governance:

System-level management

- 1) Introduce a 'guardian' of RBM System effectiveness in the form of a senior advisor inside the directorate.
- 2) Make explicit use of SDC thematic and analytic capacities on key strategic objectives.

Country/Global Programme strategic process

- 3) Stimulate management capacities with Country Directors and heads of Global Programme Divisions.
- 4) Redesign the *Country and Regional Strategy Evaluations* into a tool at the disposal of Country Directors and heads of Global Programme Divisions.
- 5) Bring Country Directors and Bern Desk Officers closer together by establishing a joint responsibility for Strategies and Annual Reports.

Instrument development

- 6) Substitute the Effectiveness Reports with thematic evaluations.
- 7) Emphasise the differences between Entry and Credit proposals.
- 8) Conduct an independent evaluation after two years of implementation of the ARIs.
- 9) Create guidance materials for decentralised evaluations and their Terms of Reference.

Further strengthening results orientation

- 10) Support increasing operational partner alignment through programmes using and strengthening active partner planning- and performance assessment frameworks.
- 11) Support the notion that RBM is not a scientific exercise, but a flexible and contextual approach to operational and strategic planning.
- 12) Incrementally work to highlight management implications and purposes in the structure and content of the Field Handbook.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AR	Annual Report
ARI	Aggregated Reference Indicator
BTC	Belgian Development Agency
CCM	Core Contribution Management
CHF	Swiss Francs
CLP	Core Learning Partnership
CS	Country Strategy
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EPR	End-of-Phase Reports
ER	Effectiveness Report
EU	European Union
GP	Global Programme
HA	Humanitarian Aid
MERV	Monitoring System for Development-Related Changes
HQ	Headquarters (SDC offices in Bern)
MAR	Multilateral Aid Review
MfDR	Management for Development Results
MR	Management Response
NPO	National Programme Officer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
OpCom	Operational Committee (SDC)
PCM	Project Cycle Management
ProDoc	Project Document
PROECCO	Promoting Climate Responsive Building Material Production and Off-farm Employment
QA	Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction
RF	Results Framework
RBM	Results-Based Management
RRT	Rapid Response Team
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SECO	Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SHA	Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit
SR	Swiss Rescue
TRI CHR	Thematic Reference Indicators Conflict and Human Rights
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

1. Introduction

1.1 This Evaluation

In line with its terms of reference (Annex A1), this evaluation examines the degree to which RBM-related processes and instruments adopted by SDC since 2008 have fostered a results culture within the organization, enhanced competencies and capacities to make evidence- and results-based management decisions, improved focus and efficiency, promoted organisational learning, enhanced communication on results, and strengthened SDC's contribution to deliver development results with focus on poverty reduction. Since SDC's reform in 2008, this evaluation represents the first comprehensive evaluation of the agency's approach to RBM.

The evaluation assesses the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of SDC's RBM system with a special focus on its contribution to poverty reduction, and it appraises SDC's RBM performance through a participatory, utilization-focused process in regard to corporate culture, management leadership, staff motivation and engagement.

As a system-level evaluation, it focuses on aspects of SDC's RBM system as a whole. Necessarily, many detailed instrument-level findings have been made and are used to support aggregate, system level conclusions and recommendations. The evaluation team chose not to issue formal recommendations specific to individual instruments, but related findings, conclusions and suggestions are made throughout chapters 3 and 4, where findings on this level are summarised.

The evaluation covers the period 2008 to today and focuses on assessing existing RBM processes and instruments across SDC with the exception of Institutional Partnerships that are covered by a separate evaluation.

The evaluation is forward-looking in that it identifies what works and what does not work with SDC's RBM, investigates underlying reasons, and formulates strategic recommendations to SDC's Senior Management and practical recommendations to the Operational Units of SDC Departments and the Quality Assurance Section and network. The evaluation was carried out by SPM Consultants (Stockholm, Sweden) in collaboration with the Institute for Development Strategy (Munich, Germany). The team consisted of Mr Martin Schmidt (team lead), Dr Janet Vähämäki (with limited possibilities to participate in the final stages of the evaluation) and Dr Markus Palenberg.

1.2 Definitions

In this report, a **development intervention** is a policy, programme or project aiming to contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Results of development interventions are effects caused by these interventions, i.e. "The output, outcome or impact (intended or unintended, positive and/or negative) of a devel-

opment intervention”¹. Recently², OECD DAC has considered differentiating between i) results of development, ii) results of development co-operation, and iii) organisational and operational performance, the first two of which correspond approximately to results levels in SDC country strategies and GP strategic frameworks.

Results can be **attributed** to development interventions if they are (entirely) caused by them. This is usually possible only for direct consequences of development interventions, i.e. for outputs and early outcomes. For subsequent changes (development outcomes and impacts), the evaluation team advocates **contribution language**. Usually, it is more accurate that a development intervention contributed to - or influenced - a change than that the change was the result of the intervention.

Results information covers quantitative and qualitative data on planned and achieved results (the “what”) and, importantly, also information about how those results were achieved (the “how”). With this, the evaluation team assumes a broad understanding of results information, including evaluative and research information. For example, also research evidence in the sense of “knowledge produced with scientific methods” as defined in a recent study³ are considered to represent results information.

In accordance with usage in SDC (see ToR, Annex A1), **Results-Based Management (RBM)** is defined in this report as a management strategy aimed at achieving important changes in the way organisations operate, with improving performance in terms of results as the central orientation. RBM provides the management framework with tools for strategic planning, risk management, performance monitoring and evaluation. Its primary purpose is to improve efficiency and effectiveness through organisational learning, and secondly to fulfil accountability obligations through performance reporting.

Project Cycle Management (PCM) is the term used for describing management activities and decision-making procedures used during the life cycle of a project or programme⁴. While RBM addresses SDC activities on all levels, PCM is focused on the project level. To make results orientation in project management explicit, the term PCM for results can be used, but for simplicity this report will simply refer to PCM.

In accordance with the OECD DAC Glossary, **Management for Development Results (MfDR)** is defined as a concept which incorporates relevant ideas about collaboration, partnership, country ownership, harmonisation, and alignment, and by providing a higher management standard by asking stakeholders to continuously focus on outcome performance, rather than short-term results.

¹ Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, OECD, 2010.

² Results in Development Co-operation, Case Studies of Results-Based Management by Providers, Discussion Paper Draft of June 2017, OECD DAC.

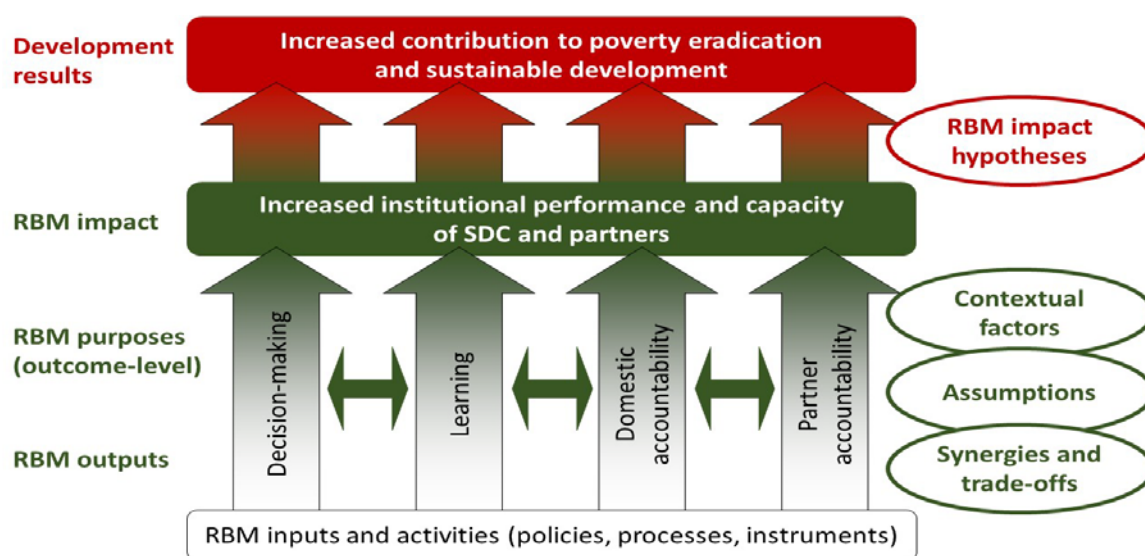
³ Research Evidence and Impact Evaluation at SDC, NADEL, ETH Zürich, 2017.

⁴ Definition taken from: SDC PCMi, module 1.

1.3 Approach

The approach and methodology of this evaluation are based on its terms of reference (Annex A1) and have been further developed in its inception report. The central framework used in this evaluation reflects the evaluation team's understanding of how RBM links to development results (Figure 1), and was developed based on SDC's present RBM Theory of Change⁵ and RBM research findings as detailed in the inception report.

Figure 1: RBM-Development Linkages



The framework first links RBM activities and outputs to increased institutional capacity and performance which then, in turn, is understood to increase contributions to development objectives. A central element of this understanding of RBM is that the first step can be mediated by different intermediary RBM outcomes which are called “RBM purposes” in this report.

Reflecting current RBM research, one useful way is to think about RBM in terms of the following four purposes (Table 1), that are described more detail in the inception report.

⁵ Medium-Term Programme Quality Assurance 2014 – 2017, SDC.

Table 1: Overview of RBM purposes

RBM purpose	Managing for results		Accountability for results	
	Improved decision-making	Management learning	Domestic accountability	Partner accountability
What is the RBM purpose, and how is it achieved?	Management and results information is used to inform SDC's internal decision-making processes. Decision-making covers strategic and operational decisions about aid projects, programmes and policy, budgeting, and management and performance appraisal of SDC's staff.	Management and results information is used for personal and organisational learning in SDC (and of development partners).	Accountability to domestic stakeholders means all forms of communication on SDC performance in achieving results to the Swiss taxpaying public, elected representatives, and oversight and auditing agencies.	Accountability by and to development partners means all forms of communication on management and results information between SDC and its development partners (developing country governments, implementing partners, other donors, and, ultimately, intended ultimate beneficiaries).
How does it contribute to development?	Better decision-making is assumed to improve SDC's performance in contributing to development results.	Strengthened personal and organizational skills and capacity are assumed to increase the contribution of SDC projects and programmes to development results.	Legitimacy and trust in SDC's ability to deliver development results effectively and efficiency is assumed to secure future financial and policy support to SDC, and to support Swiss policy coherence for development.	Communication from SDC to partners are assumed to ensure legitimacy, support, harmonization and international recognition of SDC's work in developing countries. Communication from partners to SDC serves SDC's information requirements for other RBM purposes.

The central advantage of an RBM framework based on purposes is that synergies and trade-offs between different RBM pathways to impact - symbolised by the horizontal arrows in Figure 1 - can be described and analysed, as described in more detail in the inception report of this evaluation.

Based on this framework, the evaluation answers evaluation questions around five topics: i) purpose (expectations and relative importance of the four purposes for SDC), ii) effectiveness (how instruments fulfil these expectations), iii) results culture (the organizational enabling environment for RBM), iv) learning from results information, v) efficiency (are RBM-related investments balanced by benefits).

To answer these questions, the evaluation team has applied the following evaluation instruments:

- Systematic desk review, covering RBM guidance materials, programme and project level planning and reporting cycles, evaluations and quality assessments, policy documents and RBM research literature
- 150 interviews and group discussions with 80 SDC staff (85% in headquarter) and 70 other stakeholders (Annex A2).
- Field visits to cooperation offices in Rwanda and Ukraine in April and to Bangladesh in May 2017.
- Visits to SDC headquarters in Bern in February, March and July 2017 for interviews and interactions with the Core Learning Partnership (CLP), a group drawn from SDC departments (and SECO) to provide input and feedback throughout the evaluation.

- A short, explorative “3-minute survey” in March 2017 and a more comprehensive online survey in May and June 2017 (Annex A3).
- Three e-discussions on selected topics with staff from different departments⁶.

This report is structured as follows. After this introduction, chapter 2 sets the stage by describing the development and current functioning of SDC’s RBM system. The next two chapters present detailed evaluation findings along RBM instruments (chapter 3) and synthesised findings for the RBM purposes introduced above (chapter 4). Chapter 5 draws overall conclusions from these findings and develops recommendations. Annexed to the report the reader will find the Terms of Reference (A1), a list of people consulted (A2), the results of the second on-line survey (A3), country visit case studies (A4), and finally suggestions made on the level of instruments in chapter 3 (A5) that are not part of the system level recommendations of chapter 5.

2. Results-based Management at SDC

It merits a brief introduction to the SDC version of RBM to put the reform and the period of 2008-2017 in perspective. This version is not singular nor spelled out in one definition. The ToR for this evaluation refers to four (4) internationally recognised definitions⁷ of results management in development cooperation.

Yet it is noted that the RBM System reform has been guided by a clear vision and with considerable cohesion. In the opinion of the evaluators, this vision is a broad interpretation of RBM as a management perspective, not to be confused with project management tools or specific ‘results-oriented’ approaches to identifying and analysing performance.

Of course, there is no definitive account of what RBM is with SDC and SDC staff. The image is patchy and individual viewpoints vary. However, from what the evaluation has observed in regard to the key elements of reform, guidelines and instructions, and in the development of operational and strategic practices over time, the following broad picture emerges:

In this image, the fundamental assumption is that successful aid management should be based in sound strategic thinking. Strategies are informed by results information, but it is not the sole source of guidance to either good decision-making or strategic priorities. It is also assumed that reality and working environments are in a state of flux; a fluidity that requires *flexibility* and strong elements of *contextualisation* in analyses of what to do. In line with this thinking, the SDC RBM System takes a broad view of results information - from overarching contextual development patterns to project level results – and makes a point in its strategic frameworks (in particular the MERV and the pivotal ‘Results

⁶ Global Cooperation Department, South Cooperation Department, Humanitarian Aid and SHA Department.

⁷ The OECD/DAC definition of **RBM** of 2002, the definition of **RBM** offered by Meier to the DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness in 2003, the definition of **Managing for Results** in the Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness of 2005, and the OECD/DAC definition of **Managing for development results** (MfDR) of 2005/2006.

Framework') to cover the whole spectrum while at the same time emphasise what matters most; beneficiary level *outcomes*.⁸

2.1 The RBM reform

The RBM element of the SDC 2008 organisational reform sprung from a combination of outside pressure domestically, mainly from parliament, and in the development community, mainly from the consequences of the Aid Effectiveness Agenda (Paris 2005 onwards) and the shifting focus on results of the OECD/DAC.

The main thrust of RBM reform was to introduce a strong element of results analyses and strategic thinking based on results in *existing* instruments of planning, reporting and project/programme cycle management. A central aspect of reform was the introduction of *results frameworks* (RF) in key instruments of Country/Global Programme Strategies, Annual Reports, and on the project level.⁹

In practice, this meant that SDC guidelines in all 9 core areas of the Field Handbook, from the corporate- to project levels, were infused with results-oriented instructions for gathering, processing, and using results information for reporting, learning and planning purposes.

The consequences of this shift in focus towards results, regardless if viewed positively or negatively, are best described as profound. DAC peer reviews in 2009 and 2013 welcome the focus on results and concludes in 2013 that SDC has made good progress in institutionalising RBM. It also points out that challenges remain and that institutionalisation and a culture of results management should be furthered to support both learning and accountability.

The DAC peer review of 2013 prompted a response from SDC, and several guidelines and instructions have since then been incrementally updated and modified to increase clarity and purposefulness. In 2016 the directorate of SDC concluded that while the reform has made good progress in key areas, challenges of management culture, the use of results information, and management support of a common understanding, remain and should be addressed.

⁸ Key references include SDC Annual reports 2009-2010, Maître 2013, current guidelines on the CS and the AR including the RFs.

⁹ An account is found in Adrian Maître; Results – a paper on results management at SDC, draft, September 2013, pp. 5-7.

3. Findings by Instrument

This section summarises evaluation findings related to RBM instruments and processes across the organisation (sections 3.1 to 3.3) and including all domains. In addition, findings relating to SDC's quality assurance function are presented (section 3.4).

SDC's RBM System affects a substantial part of SDC's working processes ranging from the corporate to the project levels.¹⁰ In consequence, chapter 3 has an exceptionally wide coverage. To facilitate reader access to the main points of the evaluation, the following summarises key findings and conclusions in chapter 3¹¹:

1. RBM System guidelines and instrument orientation on corporate, country and project levels are largely purposeful and well understood. From a RBM perspective, guidelines allow flexibility and contextualisation which supports a pragmatic and effective results management perspective in virtually all aspects of development aid delivery. On these grounds, the evaluation broadly concludes that current instruments are necessary and sufficient, although they can improve incrementally and in individual cases be revised (for instance, a point is made about the entry proposal guidelines).
2. The quality of country and global strategies, results frameworks and annual reports is uneven in terms of their analytical content and ability to convey a coherent strategic analysis of what SDC is doing and why. The range is wide from high to medium or low quality. There is a systematic tendency in the relationship between field offices and HQ in Bern to display inefficiencies with regard to the use of human resources, and an ability to clarify strategic intent. This tendency is particularly visible in the organisation of processes of Country Strategy formulation and in the elaboration of Management Responses to Annual Reports.
3. A central reason why strategic thinking is not always at the centre of strategic level management processes is a corporate overemphasis of domestic accountability. A second reason is that key processes are at times inefficiently organised. *Effective processes* – including clear roles and responsibilities and a focus on strategic planning - rather than *guideline clarity*, influences the quality of strategic documents, decision-making and learning in SDC programme management.
4. Finally, the evaluation finds that SDC Quality Assurance, although at times struggling with country level representation, largely delivers on its responsibilities. Guidance materials are produced qualitatively. Quality assessments are of high quality, although to an extent limited by their audit-like and one-instrument-at-a-time approach. Trainings are purposeful, of good quality, and appreciated by and large across the organisation.

¹⁰ A succinct overview is available in the Terms of Reference. See Annex 1 pp. 46-49.

¹¹ A summary of detailed suggestion made in this chapter is also available as annex 5 to this report.

3.1 Corporate Level Instruments and Processes

3.1.1 Dispatch

Swiss development policy is defined in comprehensive policy documents ('dispatches') of the Federal Council that cover four-year-cycles and define (but are not limited to) SDC's work program.

Compared to development policies of other countries¹², the dispatch is a comprehensive and detailed description of objectives, thematic and geographic priorities, and implementation modalities of Swiss development policy.

RBM features prominently in all dispatches reviewed by the evaluation team¹³. A clear focus is laid on defining and monitoring development results on the corporate, programme and project level and the two latest dispatches (2012-2016 and 2017-2020) explicitly required SDC to report progress in reaching its strategic objectives along pre-defined fields of observation and indicators.

Other RBM purposes feature less prominently in comparison, but an increasing priority on institutional and staff learning, and on knowledge management must be noted, especially in the current dispatch (2017-20). The importance of learning from past success and failure is stressed, but dispatches themselves do not demonstrate much critical analysis of lessons learned in their main text¹⁴ which, by itself, is not uncommon in central policy documents serving both accountability and planning purposes.

3.1.2 Corporate Reporting

On the corporate level, SDC reports results associated with its interventions in several ways.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs produces an annual **Foreign Policy Report** for parliamentary discussion. It contains an overview of SDC activities, mainly in terms of focus areas and priorities for financing. The report does not contain any direct information about results and is therefore not focused on in this evaluation.

Until 2016, these reports represented the only mandatory dispatch-related reports. However, because of intensified discussions on results reporting in parliament, the Swiss government amended reporting requirements for the 2017-2020 dispatch¹⁵, now requiring i) a mid- and an end-term report on effectiveness and impact of implementing the

¹² See, for example the analysis of Finnish development policy in: Evaluation of Finland's Development Policy Programmes from a Results-Based Management Point of View 2003–2013, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2015.

¹³ Botschaft über die Weiterführung der technischen Zusammenarbeit und der Finanzhilfe zugunsten von Entwicklungsländern, 2008; Botschaft über die internationale Zusammenarbeit 2013–2016, 2012; Botschaft zur internationalen Zusammenarbeit 2017–2020, 2016.

¹⁴ This excludes the annexed accountability report for the previous dispatch period annexed to new dispatches that is discussed in section 3.1.2. In dispatch main text, lessons learned are not thoroughly analysed. For example, SDC's lessons learned section in the 2017-20 dispatch describes achievements without further analysis and a single lesson learned (on farmer participation) is mentioned (dispatch 2017-20, p. 2455).

¹⁵ Bundesbeschluss vom 26 September 2016.

measures contained in the dispatch, and ii) external thematic evaluation and impact reports on results of country programme and multilateral aid.

Overall, SDC contributes to the following corporate reports that are briefly discussed.

The latest **Accountability Report** summarises developments and results against the dispatch 2013-2016, and an earlier report covered 2010-2013¹⁶. The evaluation team finds these reports useful in terms of 'accountability to domestic stakeholders'. In addition to global context developments, results of SDC activities are described with increasing systematism over time: while the report covering 2006-2010 focused on personal stories from aid recipients and selected project examples, the 2013-2016 report synthesised and compiled information from various sources in its results reporting in a more systematic fashion. The latest report also analysed SDC's contribution against strategic objectives of the 2013-16 dispatch.

Corporate Annual Reports are produced jointly by SDC and SECO. Based on the evaluation team's review, they mainly serve an accountability and communication purpose to Swiss public and parliament¹⁷. These reports are not mandatory, but interviewees saw them as playing a relevant and constructive role for upwards accountability. In its review, the evaluation team found them increasingly results oriented and reflective over the period 2008-2017. Before 2008, results were not covered in Corporate Annual Reports. In line with the earlier Accountability Report discussed earlier, Corporate Annual Reports between 2008-2012 mainly reported on results in the form of selected results and exemplary stories. From 2013 onwards, reports contained more aggregated agency-wide information on results.

Later Corporate Annual Reports also reflected on challenges associated with RBM, for example regarding hard to forecast circumstances and limitations in reporting on complex realities and contexts), or on plans rendered obsolete because of changing external circumstances or incorrect assumptions. The 2015 report, for example, provided two examples where plans were never implemented, and explained that both agencies took action in response to implementation failures. It commented that these "*actions show that the monitoring systems of SDC and SECO actually work*"¹⁸. The evaluation team thus finds that the results reporting has become an institutionalised part of SDCs corporate Annual Reporting and that there is today an increased awareness of the importance to also report on the difficulties with results reporting as well as to reflect on failures.

¹⁶ Switzerland's contribution – The achievements of the SDC in 2006–2010; The SDC contribution: Report on the result of Swiss international cooperation 2013–2016.

¹⁷ The Annual Report from 2008 contains an explanation of the re-organisation and provides a 5 page description on the importance of reporting on results, for example, "the impact on the development of countries and population groups needs to be optimised, with the reporting of results obtained to parliament and the Swiss public." (FDFA, AR 2008 p. 15). The initial objectives of SDCs RBM reform were thus justified both from the accountability to partners perspective as well as accountability to domestic constituencies perspective.

¹⁸ FDFA, 2015 p.46.

Since 2008, SDC published six **Reports on Effectiveness**¹⁹ with the dual aim “to inform the Swiss public and parliamentarians on the effectiveness of Switzerland’s development cooperation” and to “contribute to the SDC’s institutional learning and hence to the ongoing qualitative improvement of its cooperation and development strategies and projects”²⁰.

However, demonstrating how Swiss development cooperation has contributed to effectiveness within a specific thematic area has proved to be a complicated task, and effectiveness reports have resorted to apply a combination of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methodologies, including cost-benefit analysis and subjective scoring.

In the evaluation team’s assessment, Effectiveness Reports struggle with serving two types of RBM purposes in parallel: accountability to domestic stakeholders on the one hand, and learning on the other. Leaning towards the former, most reports present positive conclusions of the effects of Swiss aid, both in absolute terms and, in some cases²¹, also in comparison with other agencies. Some reports²², more than others, have also provided useful material for learning by visualising thematic results chains and by also focusing on what has not worked out and related improvement potential.

While all reports present lessons learned and recommendations, the evaluation team finds that shifting these comprehensive studies more towards the learning purpose would significantly increase their value for money, as conflicting incentives between accountability and learning purposes could be mitigated. With current costs between 250 and 400 thousand CHF per report, the team finds, SDC could as well conduct comprehensive, formative thematic evaluations that covered relevance and other OECD DAC criteria in addition to effectiveness. From these evaluations, it should be possible to draw information required for accountability-related reporting without significant effort.

3.1.3 Reference Indicators

In 2016, SDC launched a) mandatory standard indicator set at corporate level referred to as “Aggregated Reference Indicators” (ARIs), b) a set of partially mandatory “Thematic Reference Indicators for Conflict and Human Rights” (TRI CHR) and c) voluntary thematic and country oriented reference indicators at outcome level (see table). All indicators are tested in the 2017 programming cycle.

¹⁹ Report on Effectiveness of Swiss Development Cooperation in the water sector, 2008; Report on Effectiveness Swiss development cooperation in the agricultural sector, 2010; Report on Effectiveness on Disaster Risk Reduction in International Cooperation, 2011; Report on Effectiveness Swiss International Cooperation in Climate Change 2000 – 2012, 2014; Report on Effectiveness Swiss International Cooperation in Health 2000-2013, 2015; Report on Effectiveness on SDC in the field of Employment, 2017.

²⁰ SDC website, visited in June 2017.

²¹ ERs 2010 and 2017.

²² ER 2010, 2011, 2017.

Indicators	Utilisation
Aggregated Reference Indicators (ARIs)	40 indicators, mandatory if a strategy covers the respective thematic area and if relevant
Thematic Reference Indicators for Conflict and Human Rights (TRI CHR)	7 mandatory indicators and 33 voluntary indicators if a Cooperation Strategy covers a state categorised as fragile (currently 27 out of SDCs 48 countries ²³)
Thematic Reference Indicators (outcome oriented)	Voluntary but recommended if a strategy covers the respective thematic area. 7 networks have developed their own indicators. In total there exists approximately 115 reference indicators.
Specific country and thematic indicators (outcome oriented)	According to the context, adapted to the local requirements.

In the period 2012-2016, SDC produced corporate reporting figures from diverse program-level reports. Based on experience with this process and reacting to explicit reporting requirements in recent dispatches, in 2016, SDC's Directorate decided to introduce ARIs to simplify this aggregation and reporting process.

From interviews and guidance materials, it is evident that ARIs are intended primarily to provide data for external communication. Strongly influenced by the development of aggregated indicators at GIZ and SECO's positive experiences with a more limited indicator set, ARIs were designed to support i) attribution messages through output figures and ii) contribution messages through outcome and impact figures.²⁴ An attribution message (i) would for example be that SDC trained a reported number of farmers, and a contribution message (ii) that this helped moving a reported number of children out of malnutrition. Whereas ARIs serve communication, the purpose of TRI CHRs is both upwards accountability and improved programming and decision-making²⁵. ARIs were developed and grew out of the overall reference indicator development process, i.e. selected from available thematic reference indicators.

The evaluation team generally supports the idea of voluntary reference indicators. They can save staff time and improve indicator quality, relevance, and comparability. If they remain voluntary, they do not impose extra workload on development partners and they can be applied when considered useful by SDC staff and development partners as well.

Based on a brief review of ARI indicators, the evaluation team finds it noteworthy and useful that each indicator is backed up by a detailed indicator sheet that can be conveniently

²³ Internal SDC list of "fragile" States based on OECD data from report "States of Fragility 2016" Decision of SDCs board of directors (April 18 / November 19, 2016) / RON (as of May 18, 2017).

²⁴ Referenzindikatoren: Methodische Hinweise für Auswahl und Formulierung, J. Hunter, 2016; SDC Guidelines on the Use of Aggregated Reference Indicators for Reporting and Monitoring the Dispatch 2017-2020, 2016.

²⁵ The purpose of the ARIs is "to sustain parliament and broad public support for international cooperation in view of securing the finances needed to carry out our work" (p.1 ARI guidelines). The ARIs grew out of a need to "reporting comprehensively and convincingly" (ARI guidelines. p2) the need to have specific TRI CHRs were rather developed from the formulation of the effectiveness goal 5 in the Dispatch where it is declared that "Even in difficult circumstances – such as for instance fragile contexts - the International Cooperation accomplishes positive results with adapted working methods" (TRI CHR how to note p.1).

accessed through hyperlinks in ARI guidance²⁶. This is likely to help accessibility and standardization.

Indicator definitions themselves, however, still leave considerable “wobble” room for what to count because of two issues: i) almost half of the indicators are nonspecific and allow the monitoring agent considerable room for interpretation and choice on what to count, as for example in the number of “forest related policies, laws, strategies and plans developed at national level²⁷, ii) , instructions on how to deal with attribution and contribution are missing, leaving considerable interpretational freedom regarding what to count, for example if some policies, strategies, laws and plans in the previous example were only very marginally influenced by SDC projects and programmes. Options for handling attribution and contribution have been thoroughly analysed elsewhere, at least in general terms²⁸. In the evaluation team’s view, indicator definitions associated with DFID’s results framework²⁹ offer good practice examples on how to handle both issues with good quality.

The evaluation team also finds that costs and benefits associated with the introduction of mandatory reference indicators have not been sufficiently assessed. While indicator-based reporting is clearly required in recent dispatches, the effectiveness of related communication messages in terms of building trust and safeguarding legitimacy of SDC with key domestic stakeholders has remained unclear and, as far as the team knows, untested. More importantly, ARI guidance states that the additional workload associated with ARI monitoring and reporting should be kept minimal without providing advice on how to implement this in practice. In combination with limited indicator quality (see above), the team finds that this represents a potential public relations and reputation risk for SDC, if reported figures prove unreliable. On the cost side, ARI guidance explains that monitoring and reporting is intended in addition rather than instead of existing indicators that capture context-sensitive outcomes better and should remain the focus of SDC’s RBM³⁰, thus creating additional workload. Interviewed headquarter and country office staff was sometimes unaware of the on-going ARI rollout and mostly had unclear expectations and ideas about capacities and times needed for ARI monitoring and reporting.

Similar concerns are also reflected in literature on the subject. For example, a recent study by OECD/DAC on RBM practices in SDC finds that “*the indicators will undoubtedly be burdensome and technically challenging*”³¹, and other authors have highlighted related risks and challenges, for example increased reporting burden, loss of focus on impact and the bigger picture, imbalance with RBM purposes in favour upwards accountability, and staff resistance³².

²⁶ SDC Guidelines on the Use of Aggregated Reference Indicators for Reporting and Monitoring the Dispatch 2017-2020, 2016.

²⁷ Ibid., ARI CC2.

²⁸ The Role of Indicators in Development Cooperation: An overview study with a special focus on the use of key and standard indicators, DIE, 2014.

²⁹ Indicator methodology notes for DFID’s results framework indicators can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/indicator-methodology-notes>, visited in June 2017.

³⁰ “The ARIs do not replace but complement the thematic reference and context-specific indicators which are outcome-oriented and provide a deeper and broader set of results” (SDC ARI Guidelines, p 2).

³¹ OECD/DAC; Provider case studies, Switzerland, May 2017, p. 9.

³² For example: Results Based Management in the Development Cooperation Agencies: A Review of Experience, Binnendijk, 2001; Best Practices in Results-Based Management: A Review of Experience A Report for

Overall, the team therefore recommends to continue implementation of ARI's for corporate reporting purposes as planned, but to carefully assess costs, benefits and risks associated with ARI-based results monitoring and reporting (see chapter 5).

3.2 Programme Level Instruments and Processes

3.2.1 Country Strategies

SDC normally elaborate four-year Country Strategies (CS) and they are a centrepiece of the RBM system on strategic level. The CS incorporate the whole of the country programme and all its stakeholders, and the process of putting a new strategy together takes an indicative 6 months and includes a series of eight formal steps from mandate, the key Concept Note, to the finished product³³.

The CS are key steering documents. On the whole, their quality and relevance has been described as varying but also improving over the period since the 2008 reform³⁴. An exercise to oversee and sharpen the CS process and content, which points to this finding, was introduced in 2012 by the Evaluation Unit in its "Country and Regional Strategy Evaluations". These evaluations are now key to the SDC evaluation policy and so far eight Strategy Evaluations have been conducted (three more are in the pipeline in 2017).

Regarding content, the evaluations broadly suggests that good preparatory work, including solid mid-term foundations in the Annual Reports, combined with a strong and inclusive drafting process provide for stronger CS. They also point in particular to a 'shared understanding of the results framework' as a basis for a good strategy³⁵. A challenge, also prominent in interviews, has been the introduction of the new Results Framework (RF) and how it works as a basis for the strategic considerations of the CS. Many would measure the relevance and strength of the CS on the basis of their strategic content (for Swiss domains of intervention), and it is reasonable to assume that the clarity and strength of the Results Framework is positively linked to the prospects of a solid CS.

On this point, the Cooperation Strategy Evaluations recurrently refer to an incomplete and (on various accounts) faulty Results Framework as a main worry for the CS and its strategic considerations³⁶. From comparing assessments made in the Strategy Evaluations over time, there are inconclusive³⁷ indications that results frameworks are improving over time, but also that they remain problematic³⁸. Faulty or inadequate RF's represent a thematic worry, not least regarding CS strategic objectives and importantly the overall poverty

the United Nations Secretariat; Mayne, 2007; Review: Results Based Management in Development Cooperation; Vähämäki, Schmidt and Molander, 2011.

³³ SDC CS guidelines p. 5-7.

³⁴ Quality Assessment of Cooperation Strategies and Results Frameworks, March 2017, p. 11.

³⁵ See for example: Tanzania Strategy Evaluation 2014 p. 5.

³⁶ See for example: Mozambique Strategy Evaluation 2016 p. 22.

³⁷ Inconclusive as the strategy evaluations only have partial coverage (recall only 8 have been concluded)

³⁸ This is corroborated by the Quality Assessment of Cooperation Strategies and Results Frameworks, March 2017 and regarding the results frameworks of Annual Reports; Analysis of the Quality Assessment of the Annual Reports and Management Responses, March 2015 pp. 5-7.

reduction objective. With exceptions, results frameworks encountered by this evaluation are deemed insufficient³⁹ for portfolio assessments of poverty orientation.

On the process of putting the CS together, the Strategy Evaluations and interviewees point to management processes outside the CS itself as a key to a smooth and relevant CS process (with reasonable workload and strong strategic content). Also, they frequently refer to the process – however faulty or successful – as a healthy working exercise where learning and critical thinking comes to the fore⁴⁰. The Cooperation Strategy Evaluations themselves contribute to learning through their peer involvement, evaluation framework and conducive interaction with the country teams.

When asked what conclusions might best suit an improved strategic process, SDC staff generally point to the critical importance of the CS process being lean and strategic rather than heavy and lacking a meaningful strategic element. Most, in keeping with observations in the Cooperation Strategy Evaluations, suggests that improved management of these processes is the key, rather than in revisions to the content/structure of the CS format. The evaluators concur with this overall assessment.

3.2.2 Global Programme Strategic Frameworks

SDC's five Global Programmes are guided by multi-year strategic frameworks that lay out the context, rationale, goals and approaches taken by each programme and represent the most important strategic reference documents for these programmes.

The evaluation team considers Global Programme (GP) Strategic Frameworks generally useful and important for strategic planning, mainly as a reference frame for progress and results reporting, and as tools for internal and external communication. The frameworks analysed by the evaluation team⁴¹ clearly describe and explain the context, and vision, mission and objectives of the respective GP over a four-year horizon. They contain detailed results frameworks that break down intended results along programme components, and provide a financial overview. In addition, reflecting feedback of GP staff, the framework development process is an important opportunity for strategic reflection, including the consultation of stakeholders within and beyond SDC. However, in interviews, a focus group and an e-discussion on the subject, GP staff also raised important concerns regarding how to plan for concrete GP results as discussed below.

In the absence of QA Section guidance documents for GPs, the five GP Strategic Frameworks covering the period up to 2017 show some variation in their structure, and in the type of content provided. This is not an issue per se, and the evaluation team finds that GP management should retain some flexibility in presenting “their” program, reflecting the different ways GPs contribute to SDC’s development goals, and different management

³⁹ Note that “insufficient” can mean both a) inadequate results chain logic or outcome focus, or b) results logic may be adequate but their analytic significance is absent from the CS or AR analysis section. The observation is not isolated to poverty objectives.

⁴⁰ Quality Assessment of Cooperation Strategies and Results Frameworks, March 2017, pp 6-7.

⁴¹ Strategic Frameworks of the following GPs and periods have been reviewed: GP Climate Change (2014-2017), GP Food Security 2013–2017, GP Health 2015–2019, GP Water Initiatives 2013–2017, and GP Migration and Development 2013–2017. In addition, the new framework for GP Water 2017-2020 was also analysed.

styles of GP leadership. As all GPs are managed from headquarters⁴² within SDC's Global Cooperation Department, the evaluation team also assumes that regular information exchange, coordination and steering are taking place through informal day-to-day interactions in addition to formal coordination and steering processes.

Most GP frameworks reviewed by the evaluation team lack explicit theories of change. While it transpired in interviews with GP staff that such theories of change existed implicitly (i.e. all GPs were solidly based on well-understood pathways to impact, assumptions and necessary conditions), staff felt it was difficult to describe these causal relationships in GP framework documents in an easily digestible way. One concern was that GP success depended also on being able to seize opportunities as they presented themselves, for example when windows for policy influence suddenly opened. While chance and probabilities can be incorporated into nondeterministic theories of change, interviewed GP staff did not seem to consider or have experience with such approaches. It was felt that in order to allow for sufficient flexibility, theories of change would need to become so generic that they would cease to be useful. Apart from introducing change and probability, the evaluation team also suggests that more can be done to explicate the standard elements of GP theories of change along their trifold "standard" impact pathways defined in the Dispatch⁴³. One way to do this could be to research and incorporate existing social science research and development evaluation findings and lessons learned into these pathways⁴⁴.

The detailed results frameworks of reviewed GP frameworks provide only some indications of GP theories of change, i.e. of how programmes intend to influence and contribute to development outcomes, what supporting conditions need to be present, and what assumptions have been made. With the present approach, the reader may be left with little understanding on how the many described outputs and outcomes add up to a coherent and synergetic whole. Among the frameworks analysed, only GP Migration and Development systematically listed risks and assumptions to its impact hypotheses.

GP results frameworks themselves are constructed logically and break down programme goals along components into outcomes and outputs. The number, type and terminology used for describing intermediary results varies widely between frameworks. For example, GP Migration and Development's framework describes 4 impacts, 9 outcomes, and 21 "fields of observation", while the framework of GP Health exhibits 49 "expected results", 67 "activity lines" and more than 100 indicators. The evaluation team finds that some standardization of terminology would be useful, as well as some limitation of the overall number of entries. Of the five reviewed frameworks, only GP Health backed up intended results with indicators.

⁴² Some GPs have staff in the field as well.

⁴³ 1) initiating innovative projects and exchanging experiences within Swiss development cooperation, ii) making contributions to international policy dialogue and to norms and policies, and iii) developing know-how and networking to foster innovation and open new channels for influence (adapted from Dispatch 2017-20, p. 2382).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Research Evidence and Impact Evaluation at SDC, NADEL, ETH Zürich, 2017, and its discussion in section 4.1.2.

GPs act on the global level and, necessarily, influence rather than drive change, and need to seize opportunities as they evolve. Because of these characteristics, most informants felt that specific results objectives (and indicators) would often not remain relevant throughout the lifetime of a GP strategic framework. When asked how to deal with this challenge, interviewees split into two groups: some suggested a pragmatic approach in which there is mutual understanding between GC and GP management that the results framework would not be written in stone. They felt that the process of defining concrete results sharpened planning and helped accountability. Others felt that, overall, rigid results targets and indicators were not helping any RBM-related purpose very much. The evaluation team's view on this matter is that, similar to the findings in section 3.3.2 on CCM, that GP results frameworks serve mostly domestic accountability purposes, and should be designed (and limited) to fulfil that purpose. While the team assumes that the preparation of strategic frameworks triggers significant reflection and learning, only little can be learned from reported results achievement, which also has limited value for decision-making as discussed in section 3.2.4 on GP Annual Reports.

3.2.3 Annual Reports and Management Responses

On an annual basis, the country programmes are reported through the Annual Reports (ARs) which serve as both reporting and planning instruments for country operations. The link to the CS is made explicit in the AR guideline as a follow up of the existing strategic framework and a foundation for the new one (AR Guideline 2016 p. 1). ARs are approved on the Division level of each department.

It is safe to say that no other element of the RBM System trigger as many reactions as the AR. When respondents were asked in the in-depth survey of this evaluation what instruments were in most need of adaptation for decision-making and reporting purposes respectively, the AR stand out in a class of its own on both accounts⁴⁵. An e-discussion was also conducted on the topic. Desk and field officers alike point out its importance as well as its need for adaptation.

Many observations and suggestions related this way were voiced already in a global analysis of quality assessments of the AR and the management responses to the AR in 2015. Key points of the analysis and from interviewees include;

- Weak but over time developing results frameworks, and improvements associated with training, on-going country strategy processes (promoting awareness and knowledge) and 'learning by doing'⁴⁶
- Management responses increasingly providing strategic guidance, but with big differences in quality and usefulness⁴⁷, and
- A disconnect (to various degree) between the results frameworks and the analytic/ strategic elements of the AR.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See Annex 3 to this report, Questions 8 & 9 pp. 10-13.

⁴⁶ Quality Assessment Report 2015, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mainly a conclusion from interviews and e-discussion on AR.

- A questioning of the relevance of a time-consuming AR exercise when it has no apparent impact on steering or strategic thinking.⁴⁹

It seems clear that the quality of the AR's is linked to the results frameworks and an ability to translate performance into a strategic assessment that has relevance for decision-making. The predominant recommendation from SDC staff is 'make the AR analytic and with a clear implication for operational decision-making and it will improve its usefulness'.

It is also commented that there's a conflict between conveying results information for accountability purposes, and for purposes of decision-making and strategic thinking. This conflict contributes to a tension between reporting - crudely - on;

- annual *output* related results for accountability purposes, vs
- *outcomes* in the short and medium term for planning purposes

There is a much reported⁵⁰ tendency to focus on output for supposed accountability purposes in the AR, in favour of a more strategic account focused on outcomes. Interestingly, the revision of the AR Guideline July 2016 points out the "internal" and "strategic" level of the AR results framework, and emphasises its link to the results framework of the longer-term Country Strategies.⁵¹

Regarding the Management Responses, the QuAS report 2015 conclude that the quality and usefulness variety of the MR's is probably bigger than that of the AR's⁵². A series of interviewees suggests that when MRs are at their worst, they are mainly concerned with form and have little relevance and added value to offer the strategic analysis of the AR. From the perspective of this evaluation, the document review and surveys project a similar image. One overall reason cited is the non-systematic nature (and frequent staff turn-over) of the MR process. It is sometimes suggested that HQ lack a capacity to deal with and engage in the strategic thinking necessary to make the MR relevant and responsive to the strategic questions voiced by the country offices.

Again in South and East cooperation, the Country office/Desk relationship has a tendency to get strained from the desk performing both a supportive and a control function. The latter of which quickly loses relevance to planning when the MR focus on form rather than content. In further consequence, the process of bringing the AR to the point of decision-making/approval is at times overly laborious and out of strategic focus. Reports from Division approval meetings reflect this situation and calls (interview based) from senior management request a better focus.

Against this background, the evaluation concludes it is likely to be more a question of culture and process organisation, and less about guidelines and content, should the usefulness and quality of the AR and MR improve.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See e.g. comments made by Country Directors in Quality Assessment Report 2015, p. 6.

⁵¹ Guideline on Annual Reports 2016, p. 6.

⁵² Quality Assessment Report 2015, p. 5 section 3;2. This means in plain language that there is a larger span between the quality highs and lows in the MPs vis-à-vis the AR.

3.2.4 Global Programme Annual Reports

Through their Annual Reports, SDC's five GPs report on context developments, results and lessons from the past year, and on plans for the coming year.

GP Annual Reports are comprehensive and logically structured program-level documents. Also without guidance materials from the QA Section, they follow a standard structure that aids comparison and orientation. Similar to GP strategic frameworks, the evaluation team finds GP Annual Reports important and useful for a number of RBM-related purposes: for operational and short term strategic planning, for progress and results reporting, and as tools for internal communication. Several annexes provide additional information without breaking the flow of the main text. The evaluation team finds, for example, the annex on selected policy outcomes an instructive illustration of how policy influence is planned to be achieved, and what development effects are expected from it.

Most GPs report on results by describing SDC activities, contribution and results in three standard sections in the chapter on results in their Annual Reports: i) policy outcomes, ii) operational results, and iii) knowledge management and networks. These sections roughly correspond to the three approaches (international policy dialogue, innovative projects, knowhow and networks) GPs are expected to cover.⁵³

GP Annual Reports differ in how these reporting structures are integrated with each other. In their 2016 reports, only two GPs (GP Climate Change and GP Health) showed some degree of integration:

- GP Climate Change assumed correspondence between framework components and standard approaches, thus covering both simultaneously;⁵⁴ and
- GP Health structured its reported results primarily along the strategic framework and secondarily (on a sub-chapter level) along the three standard approaches.

Other GPs did not apply their strategic framework in the chapter on results and only reported on results vis-à-vis their frameworks in annexes.⁵⁵

The evaluation team finds the approach chosen by GP Health most useful because of two reasons. First, it reflects that results the programme aims to contribute to can be achieved by any (or a combination) of the three standard GP approaches, while it is often not feasible to divvy up results along these approaches. For example, innovative projects, networking and knowledge exchange can contribute to policy outcomes. Second, it provides necessary information for a more informed strategic framework monitoring.

Progress towards strategic framework objectives is tracked in an annex to GP Annual Reports. The assessment consists of a traffic light rating⁵⁶ for each framework component,

⁵³ Dispatch 2013-16, p. 2586; and Dispatch 2017-20, p. 2382.

⁵⁴ Component 1 corresponds to policy outcomes, components 2 and 3 to operational results, and component 4 to knowledge management and networks (2016 GP Climate Change AR, 2014-17 GP Climate Change Strategic Framework).

⁵⁵ It should be noted that GP Water repeats the framework objectives in the results chapter, but does not apply it for reporting in that chapter.

backed up by explanatory comments (usually citing specific results) and implications for steering and planning for the next year can be provided, especially for components rated yellow or red. The evaluation team finds this monitoring information only of limited value. Because progress is self-rated it remains unclear to what degree reported scores describe actual performance, and the little information provided in the annex itself make learning effects beyond what GP teams already know unlikely⁵⁷. In fairness, it should be noted that this observation applies not only to GP ARs but also to reported self-assessed results performance in other domains.

Overall, the evaluation team finds that GP Annual Reports would benefit from structuring their main chapter on results along their strategic frameworks, and to use the standard approaches of GPs as secondary references as in the case of GP Health. The current strategic monitoring annex could either be integrated into that chapter, or refer to it to enrich the evidence base.

For GP Annual Reports, there is no formal management response as, for example, in the case for Annual Reports for country and regional programmes (section 3.2.3). Instead, the minutes of the internal discussion meeting with the Head of Global Cooperation serve as such. From a review of 2016 minutes, the evaluation team's view is that this approach is pragmatic and useful.

3.2.5 Humanitarian Aid

*Swiss Humanitarian Aid (HA) is rooted in Switzerland's constitution. SDC's HA helps to save lives and alleviate suffering through prevention, emergency relief and reconstruction and rehabilitation. SDC's HA is delivered through four principal instruments: Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit experts, financial contributions to humanitarian partners, food and other material assistance, and humanitarian dialogue and advocacy*⁵⁸.

Interviewed HA staff felt that pressure for reporting on outcomes and impacts of SDC activities was considerably less pronounced for HA than in other domains. The reasons were twofold. First, interviewees explained that HA, relative to others, pursues shorter-term and more immediate objectives that can be mapped well on the output- and early outcome levels. Outcome level objectives in system oriented HA programmes including reconstruction and disaster risk reduction were also manageable from a monitoring viewpoint. Hence, domestic Swiss audiences were felt not to expect more than what was already at hand. Secondly, Switzerland has a long and proud history in HA. Public trust and support for this channel of Swiss development cooperation remained strong also through periods of budget pressure.

⁵⁶ Green = satisfactory (on track, no needs to adjust plans and strategies); yellow = less satisfactory (adjustments to plans and / or strategies are necessary); and red = unsatisfactory (off track, the relevance / sustainability of the activities is in jeopardy and major adjustments / re-organisations are necessary).

⁵⁷ With the amount of information currently provided in that annex, it is difficult for the reader to form an independent opinion on the degree of progress. The fact that report recipients may not know to what degrees ratings correspond to real performance is illustrated when, after GP Climate Change's Annual Report was presented for approval, it was "noted that all components are rated green and that GPCC should be more self-critical with respect to framework monitoring in the future" (GP Climate Change AR 2016 discussion minutes, p. 2.)

⁵⁸ Botschaft zur internationalen Zusammenarbeit 2017–2020, 2016.

Regarding SDC's several HA instruments - including UNOCHA pooled-funds, secondments, remote management, humanitarian system coordination, rapid response etc. – and the relatively high level of unpredictability involved, RBM guidelines on results reporting are understood as flexible and accommodating. To the evaluation team, this represents another example of pragmatic and flexible use of RBM that should be retained and encouraged.

The contextual variety of HA interventions and its consequences for planning and reporting is felt by interviewees across SDC domains. While emergency relief or responses to natural disasters has a high degree of unpredictability and short planning horizons, multi-year reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts as in Ukraine and Syria allows for “almost” standard development RBM.

3.2.6 The MERV

The Monitoring System for Development-Related Changes (MERV) is a sophisticated analytical framework for continuous monitoring of development patterns relevant to development cooperation management. It describes the operational environment in term of context and scenarios with which to contrast the Swiss portfolio (Guidelines to the MERV, 2016, pp. 3-4). It is updated with regular frequency (depending on context annually, bi-annually or quarterly) and has a structure that ends with an ‘executive summary’ outlining implications for Swiss development cooperation.

Correctly put to use, it is a supporting tool for the country analysis and its strategic framework. It broadens the ‘results-horizon’ of SDC to include more than programme/project level performance information. It puts performance into context with prevailing development patterns, and deepens the analysis of intervention logic and theory of change in the domains of Swiss operations. In this evaluation, a positive example of a clear linkage between the MERV and programme- and strategic choices is found in the Bangladesh Concept Note for the strategy period 2018-2021.

The MERV has been mildly accused of lacking a clear link to steering, that it has a static format, and that it is at times unnecessarily heavy (this is more common in fragile contexts where the MERV should be updated more frequently). Also, some perceive it in want of an outside third party perspective. However, it is a general sentiment with which the evaluators agree that the process of the MERV and its rewards in terms of reflection and analytic contributions to the Annual Reports and Country Strategies is a counterweight to its weaknesses.

It is concluded that the MERV has an important role for results management and its purposes of decision-making and learning in particular. To maintain or gain relevance, many SDC managers say it should stay brief in format and open in its analytic freedom to critically assess Swiss programme priorities from a contextual viewpoint. If any, the section next to be developed in the MERV format is probably the ‘executive summary’; making it more explicitly linked to implications for key strategic priorities and operational choices in the Swiss portfolio.

3.3 Project Level Instruments and Processes

The PCM Planning and Implementation system, or Core area 5 of the SDC Field Handbook, is the area dealing with project level guidelines and instruction. It includes all main project management instruments such as the entry- and credit proposals, reporting guidelines for end-of-phase and final reports, and also guidance on how to identify and formulate a log frame, results matrixes and theories of change. The introduction in 2010 of the End-of-Phase reports constituted an entirely new mandatory instrument designed to reinforce RBM practices. They were reviewed in quality assessments in 2011 and 2013 respectively⁵⁹.

There is a general impression collected from SDC (evaluation interviews, surveys and field visits) that the PCM is well conceived and highly functioning as a set of how-to guidelines. This overall perception cuts across domains and regions. Identified strengths include, besides clarity and usefulness, an analytical and operational flexibility allowed and even encouraged.

In this context it is worth pointing out that the entry- and credit proposal distinction⁶⁰ is particularly apt in the RBM System. In effect, it is a measure dealing with risk in a way that promotes results-orientation as a basic point of departure: 'We test our assumptions, and if they prove their merit we extend the effort'. The fact that this is not always the way it plays out in reality (see section 3.3.1) does not overshadow the RBM worth of the distinction.

In terms of overall weaknesses, references are sometimes made to the fact that guidelines while strong on how-to, offer less clarity about expected managerial implications.⁶¹ Interviewees makes the valid point that it is not necessarily in the PCM existing guidelines this should be included. The point is rather that the relative absence of managerial process instruction makes for a variety of practices not always consistent. The "management implications" implicit here fall in two main categories; one a) explaining in *what* management and decision-making processes the information provided should be used, and the other b) explaining how best to organise the *process* of arriving at a final strategic document (e.g. CS or AR) in terms of manning, roles, consultation etc.

On the whole, there is a reported satisfaction and high degree of compliance with the PCM. Again considered as a whole, the guidelines are coherent and make up a solid body of reference for operational how-to.

⁵⁹ A recent assessment was received by the evaluation team in August 2017 but has not been included in the analysis.

⁶⁰ Entry proposals are designed as precursor (initial, although explaining the long term intervention logic) interventions with and opening credit that can, if successful, be followed by longer term projects – motivated in credit proposals. Entry proposal decision-making in highly decentralised.

⁶¹ For instance, the guidelines for End-of-Phase (EPR) and End of Project/Programme Reports (EPROR) make clear that it is "addressed to operational units [...] in order to improve both steering by results [...] and documentation of results for learning and accountability" (EPR & EPROR January 2015, p. 1). It goes on to say that the reports should be addressed to responsible managers, and implies a decision-making and reporting process to take care of the outcome of the EPR & EPROR. An explanation of how this shall be done, however, is absent in the system and responsible staff point out that the process of using the results of the reports for said purposes is organised by management in each case.

One overall manifest and systematic problem observed relates to staff interpretations of the differences between entry- and credit proposals. Reinforcing these differences is thought to yield considerable operational efficiencies at a low cost (see further section 3.3.1 below). To the evaluators this also suggests that the Operational Committees (OpCom) of SDC departments, chiefly charged with approving entry- and credit proposals, has an important role to play in setting expectation for the two instruments right.⁶²

Quality assessments of the End-of-Phase reports (2011 and 2013) suggests by comparison that the quality and purposefulness of the EPR was improving, while weaknesses remained regarding their multi-purpose function and that their role as links to other instruments could be further clarified. The 2013 assessment indicated that the EPR would probably benefit from a stronger focus on learning and decision-making.⁶³

The evaluators conclude that the varieties in quality and content of PCM reports and documents are unlikely to be predominantly consequences of poor guidance materials. On the contrary it seems much more to be related to management culture and staff competencies – both in terms of previous knowledge and training of desk officers, and of management capacities (mainly to organise the key processes of PCM) of senior staff.

3.3.1 Project Cycle Management in different contexts

Project cycle management in SDC, it should be evident, constitute a substantial part of the entire workload. Compliance and management satisfaction with the guidelines is high or very high in all instances encountered by the evaluation.

In the sample studies examined by the evaluation, it is a stand out feature that as the RBM System reform has unfolded so has the overall quality of PCM documentation improved. Comparing project documentation and results reporting from early with late in the period 2008-2017, there are marked differences with regard to⁶⁴;

- Partners and projects having incrementally adapted to a results oriented perspective.
- In-project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems markedly adapted, particularly in 'mandated' and larger and long-term projects.
- Outcome increasingly representing (or specific on) the 'short term outcome level', meaning that the association with output and project implementation is closer and attribution potentially more reliable.
- Partner orientation and grasp of results management principles markedly increased.

One perplexity of the PCM keeps repeating itself regards the entry- and credit proposals. Although their respective guidelines are viewed as reasonably clear, the reality of related processes of decision-making are viewed as inconsistent. In particular, a tendency with Entry Proposals to be over-debated and over-ambitious, and the process of getting them through the system unnecessarily arduous, is reported (particularly in South Cooperation).

⁶² Note that the evaluation has had limited insights into the operations of the OpComs' and their guiding frameworks. Their paramount importance to the approval process merits the observation.

⁶³ Quality assessment of the End-of-Phase reports, September 2014, III.

⁶⁴ The four bullets are a combination of assessments made by SDC country office staff, SDC partners in Bangladesh mainly, and analyses made by the evaluators.

A closer review and comparison of entry- and credit proposal guidelines suggests to the evaluators that instrument and process efficiency could improve. Particularly, it seems a streamlining of the entry proposal guidelines – shortening, limiting the analysis to the key points of motivation and strategic intent (theory of change), and making contextual (and problem defining) deliberations redundant by reference to existing documentation – to emphasise the precursor nature of the opening credit, would be the most efficient way to herald better clarity as further elaborated in section 5.2 of this report.⁶⁵

A different observation, adjacent but pertinent to the PCM, regards the variety and sometimes inconsistency of external evaluations on project level. Someone captured the state of affairs with the comment “*Wie man in den Wald ruft, so schallt es heraus*”, hinting that SDC desk officers may need additional guidance to produce consistent and productive Terms of Reference for external evaluations on project level.

In Humanitarian Aid the guidelines are followed but entry- and credit proposals seem often to be shorter. There seems to be a quicker process for taking decisions. Within Humanitarian aid several respondents have argued that exemptions are quite often made to the PCM rules. An exemption made in a country was to merge the entry proposal and the credit proposal process. In general staff within Humanitarian Aid seem to be satisfied with the flexibility allowed when using the PCM tools, although it was also expressed that too much time was allocated to preparations.

In East Cooperation, the ins- and outs of project cycle documentation seems to be more in question in interviews than what is the case elsewhere. It may be this is related to contextual differences – such as the different nature of government relations, development levels and the partnership environment – but in the opinion of the evaluators, an equally likely explanation lies in the leadership styles of country directors, promoting the system differently.⁶⁶

One conclusion drawn by the evaluation team is that PCM practices vary to a high degree based on individual capacities and, perhaps even more, on direction and engagement from leading SDC staff. The tell tail sign this is the case lies in the fact that the same instructions (guidelines) produce such a variety in terms of quality and purposefulness (as observed by both the evaluation team, SDC staff and Quality assessments in EPR, entry- and credit proposals, and results matrixes).

In comparative reviews of PCM output, the evaluators conclude that PCM instruction is in fact very accommodative and flexible; allowing the planner/reporter to adapt presentation to contextual traits. This flexibility is, however, not always fully understood. For example, the evaluation team has found several examples of unawareness that it is not obligatory to use the SDC Logical Framework template.

⁶⁵ It is noted that a new guideline for Entry proposals was published in June 2017, although not to the effects outlined above.

⁶⁶ Differences observed between Ukraine, Serbia and Albania indicatively (not elsewhere corroborated) suggests to the evaluators that country direction is a major factor.

Finally, this does not mean guidelines are flawless. It is even the case they are not always fully RBM purposeful⁶⁷, although the vast majority of SDC staff in surveys for this evaluation suggests largely purposeful PCM instruments. The evaluators generally concur. Purposefulness is high and the relevance of the entire PCM body of instruments is high and should be labelled comprehensive.

3.3.2 Core Contribution Management

SDC manages its core contributions to multilateral organizations and other partners⁶⁸ using the Core Contribution Management (CCM) instrument, an RBM instrument introduced in 2011.⁶⁹ It consists of three distinct tools (and process steps): the CCM Sheet for strategic planning, the CCM Annual Report (CCM AR) for reporting and operational planning, and the management response to the CCM AR for management feedback and approval. CCM needs to be understood in the context of SDC's Annual Multilateral Performance Assessment (AMPA), that combines CCM data with results of assessments through the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) and self-assessments of the respective multilateral organizations.

In 2015, the CCM ARs and management responses were thoroughly assessed, following similar assessments in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Overall, the review took a critical stand and recommended significant revision of current practice. It concluded “*that the principle of 'Result-based Management' has been taken too far when designing the CCM-concept.*” The review found that, while systematic RBM of core contributions was needed and justified by the importance of this channel in Swiss development cooperation, that actual usage made of the tool did not justify the significant effort invested for operating it. Usefulness for decision-making was found to be limited because of too much focus on program-level results, whereas the study authors felt it should be driven by the degree to which Swiss and the multilateral organization's priorities overlap and by future opportunities for effective Swiss influence. With consequences across all purposes, the review found that CCM information was only of limited reliability, due to a variety of challenges: reporting cycle mismatches, establishing plausible causal and temporal linkages between Swiss contributions and results, missing or poor-quality results indicators, and ambiguous ratings.

In the evaluation team's own interactions with SDC staff, feedback on CCM was more favourable but also more limited than in the 2015 review as less people were interviewed specifically for CCM, and the instrument was investigated in less detail. On a general

⁶⁷ A tendency in guidelines to obstruct a fully partnership oriented perspective (an RBM purpose) by emphasising SDC operations in isolation is noted. At the same time it is noted that this tendency is mitigated in new versions of the guidelines over the 2011-2017 period (credit proposal guidelines is one example).

⁶⁸ CCM is also used to manage core contributions to Swiss and international civil society organisations or research institutions. In accordance with the terms of reference, the former are not covered in the present evaluation (Annex A1).

⁶⁹ SDC manages its core contributions to 16 multilateral organizations with CCM, of which six (WB, UNWOMEN, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, AfDB) are managed by the Global Institution Division and further through GP divisions: WHO, UNAIDS and GFATM by GP Health, CGIAR and IFAD by GP Food Security, and GCP by GP Climate Change. The GPE and the regional development banks (AsDB, AfDB, IDB) are managed in regional divisions. The five multilateral financial institution accounts (WB, AfDB, AsDB, AfDB, IDB) are co-managed together with SECO.

level, interviewed staff had been positive in 2015 as well and some of the above-mentioned challenges had been addressed, e.g. regarding reporting cycle alignment.

Based on its own analysis of CCM guidance and a sample of recent CCM sheets, Annual Reports and management responses, the evaluation team concurs with the general notion of conclusions and recommendations of the 2015 review.⁷⁰ Implementation of recommendations is reported⁷¹ and new CCM guidance material is in preparation, but recommendations are not yet visible in principal CCM guidance documents available to the team (dating from 2011 and 2013)⁷². Especially a design-to-purpose approach to CCM seems useful, i.e. disentangling decision-making and learning from accountability purposes, and designing and using the instrument based on those purposes seems useful.

To this end, the evaluation team finds that decision-making and learning is only partly served by the current approach. Regarding single organizations, the approaches and simple theories of change for influencing the strategic direction and effectiveness of supported organizations are the central framework around which planning and reporting should revolve.⁷³

Instead, to inform decisions on the portfolio level, comprehensive *comparative* assessments between organizations seem most useful, for example on their development effectiveness and their relevance with respect to the goals of SDC.⁷⁴ SDC's corporate overviews of its support to Global Institutions based on the Annual Multilateral Performance Assessment (AMPA) process represents an important information base, but, as a monitoring tool, does not provide the robustness of findings and detailed recommendations a comparative review or evaluation would offer.

The evaluation team also notes the absence of an overall multilateral strategy and encourages on-going efforts by SDC's Global Institutions Division to develop a division-level strategy. A more comprehensive strategy covering all partners could describe the overall rationale for SDC's current multilateral portfolio and outline strategic priorities going forward, covering the choice of institutions and relative investment levels in terms of, for example, i) their relevance for Swiss Development Cooperation objectives, ii) their development performance, and iii) opportunities for Swiss influence.

⁷⁰ An exception is, for example, the perceived need in the 2015 review to causally link organization-wide results (CCM Management Level 1) to the Swiss contribution which the evaluation team finds unnecessary as the organization's performance and not that of SDC is assessed.

⁷¹ QA Network Annual Programme 2017, p. 3.

⁷² With the exception of Annex 2 in the QA CCM guidelines on the rating of results achievement (QA CCM guidelines, 2013).

⁷³ The influencing strategies introduced for RBM of Finnish contributions to multilateral organizations could provide useful orientation, see Evaluation of Finland's Development Policy Programmes from a Results-Based Management Point of View 2003–2013, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2015.

⁷⁴ One example is DFIDs Multilateral Aid Reviews (MARs) Raising the standard: the Multilateral Development Review 2016, DFID, 201; and earlier annual MARs. The evaluation team duly notes the inherent difficulties of such assessments, for example in comparing development effectiveness across differing mandates, but finds that such analysis may nevertheless make a significant contribution to rational decision-making and accountability.

3.4 Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) at SDC is an agency-wide support function for RBM and PCM, delivered by the Network Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction (QA Network) with members from different headquarter departments and country offices, and the Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction Section (QA Section) that drives and coordinates QA work⁷⁵.

QA defines its mandate as supporting SDC's development goals by pursuing the following outcome: *"SDC staff, management and partners are using results, performance and context assessments for decision making/steering, learning and accountability (at all levels). SDC staff is further improving quality at entry in planning processes and documents and cost-effectiveness in operations"*⁷⁶. QA implements this mandate along four action lines: i) standards and quality assessments, ii) basic training and learning events, iii) advisory work on use of instruments, and iv) organisation and network, reflecting normative, controlling, capacity development and coordination roles⁷⁷.

Based on its review of past planning and progress reports⁷⁸ and staff interactions, the evaluation team found the QA Section to deliver effectively on these action lines, as detailed further below. A constant challenge appears to be staff capacity limitations linked to rotation and delayed or cancelled re-staffing. In January 2017, the QA Section operated with 5 full-time equivalents of which about half represented senior QA capacity⁷⁹. Not counting QA Section staff, the QA Network grew from 8 members at year-end 2009 to 33 members in January 2017, about evenly split between headquarters and field⁸⁰. QA Section staff (not counted in these network figures) acts as driver of the network's activities, and also here staff capacity appears to represent a challenge. Other (non-QA-Section) network members serve part-time, often with a small relative time share.

In the evaluation team's view, the QA network serves two vital functions, and should therefore continue to be strengthened. First, to ensure that RBM standards, and guidance and training materials relevantly satisfy existing demand and second, to make available, connect and coordinate QA SDC-wide. Interviewed staff felt that the QA network had penetrated SDC headquarters better than field offices, with little or no dedicated QA staff functions in several country offices. Because QA lies in the responsibilities of SDC domains, the QA Section can only inform and influence but not change this situation. In the evaluation team's view, it would be useful if every country office had a designated QA focal point that is part of the QA Network, and that these responsibilities are clearly reflected in job responsibilities and annual performance feedback processes.

⁷⁵ Medium-Term Programme Quality Assurance 2014 – 2017, SDC.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ QA Network Annual Programmes 2009-2017.

⁷⁹ QA Network Annual Programme 2017.

⁸⁰ QA Network Annual Programmes 2009-2017.

3.4.1 QA Guidance Materials

The QA Section and the QA Network have produced numerous guidance materials that are contained in SDC's Field Handbook. The Field Handbook is a comprehensive online directory of normative standards, reference documents, and working aids.

Within SDC, the QA Section is an important hub for RBM-related expertise. This transpires not only from the evaluation team's interactions with QA Section and other SDC staff, and consultants implementing QA assessments, but also from its review of guidance documents. QA guidance materials and the strategic plans and annual programmes of the QA Network/Section demonstrate a thorough and modern understanding of RBM. Continued access and contributions to the international RBM discourse are usefully supported by QA Section staff attending RBM-related workshops, for example on the level of the OECD DAC.

A large majority of surveyed staff felt that RBM guidelines were of good quality and useful, and that they provided pragmatic real-world operational guidance. This was also reflected in most interviews conducted by the evaluation team, although isolated critical remarks regarding specific guidance materials were made, for example guidance on policy dialogue that was found not to reflect realities on the ground despite extensive consultation during its preparation. In its own review of guidance materials, the evaluation team found that RBM-related content was correctly and clearly explained. It should also be noted that QA guidance explicitly invites pragmatic and realistic use of RBM instruments, for example by allowing for estimation and explaining that annual reporting indicators should illustrate rather than comprehensively map all results. Going forward, it would be useful if guidelines could more clearly explicate and prioritize what RBM purposes are served in what way by specific instruments, for example following the framework used in this evaluation. This could, in turn, be used to better manage SDC management expectations of strategies and reports.

Interviewees also felt that guidance materials were not accessible enough. While documentation is available to all SDC staff online, staff felt that the Field Handbook and the guidance therein was only useful if you knew where to look for what.⁸¹ To the evaluation team, this points to potential access and usage motivation issues and, indeed, about half of surveyed staff with an opinion on the subject felt that there was a lack of understanding of RBM at SDC in spite of good guidance material.

3.4.2 QA Quality Assessments

Since 2009, the QA Section has conducted about 20 quality assessments of SDC's RBM, PCM and CCM instruments. Quality assessment reports are based on qualitative analysis of documents along pre-established standard criteria. For several series of assessments (e.g. Annual Reports, CCM, MfDR), most or all relevant documents are included in the assessment. For others (e.g. End of Phase Reports, Results Statements), documents are

⁸¹ Earlier assessments found that guidance was not always applied, for example: "In general Program Officers do not read or use the Guidance for Rating of Results Achievement in CCM ... they do the rating more on the basis of an intuitive or gut feeling rather than by applying the standard criteria given in the guidelines." (CCM Quality Assessment, 2015).

sampled. Quality assessments cover country strategies, Annual Reports and management responses, CCM Annual Reports and management responses, credit proposals, ProDoc and progress reports, and end-of-phase reports.

The evaluation team has reviewed quality assessments and drawn from their results throughout this report. They follow an audit-like methodology. Assessment criteria are drawn from QA guidelines and developed by implementing consultants and SDC staff. The degree to which criteria are fulfilled is judged and quantitatively coded⁸². Assessment reports draw aggregate findings and conclusions from statistical analysis of criteria scores for the entire sample which is enriched by staff interview and surveys in some cases. The evaluation team finds this approach methodologically sound and reliable, and well suited to assess compliance with established standards. The ensuing information is useful for management, especially if timelines can be established over several years. It also represents a useful feedback and learning loop for adaptation of QA guidance and training material.

However, because of the audit-like approach, quality assessments focus on one instrument at a time and struggle to provide insights of a more strategic and evaluative nature. Because of their reliance on existing standards, there are also no quality assessments for instruments without such standards, for example for GP strategic frameworks and GP Annual Reports. Going forward, the evaluation finds it useful to conduct focused strategic reviews that go beyond the current quality assessment approach. Several quality assessments show useful efforts in including staff feedback through interviews, surveys and participatory approaches, but a shift in focus from assessing compliance to assessing usability, usefulness and operational and strategic costs and benefits associated with instruments would likely be valuable. In addition, multi-instrument assessments could be useful, for example formative reviews on how project and program-level instruments support and integrate each other.

3.4.3 QA Capacity Development

The QA Section coordinates a variety of capacity development activities, ranging from formal training courses to on-demand coaching and online self-learning tools.

In 2015 and 2016, close to 30 learning events along a variety of capacity development modalities and topics took place.⁸³ Based on a cursory review of available end-of-training

⁸² For example, along a 4-point scale for Annual Reports, or a two-valued yes/no scale for MfDR assessments.

⁸³ SDC operated several capacity development modalities. Multi-day face to face courses in Switzerland covered subjects such as PCM, policy influence and results orientation, participatory approaches, economic analysis. Shorter “lighthouse” trainings, also held in Switzerland, provided rotating staff with basic training on RBM, and shorter trainings were also held on specialty subjects, for example Cost-Benefit Analysis. Several workshops were held in partner countries to support Cooperation Offices with developing, monitoring and annual reporting on country strategies. Webinars on risk management and baselines for results monitoring were also held. Participant figures in training ranged from 7 to 34. The 23 events for which participant numbers were available reached a total of 364 participants, or about 16 participants on average per event (based on information kindly provided by the QA Section). The QA Section also conducts on-demand one-on-one coaching on selected subjects, and provides advice and support to SDC staff. In 2015, for example, about 30 coaching sessions took place and the evaluation team has heard some evidence of QA support, for example in the elaboration of program-level results frameworks.

feedback forms, trainings in 2015 and 2016 received overall very positive participant feedback. However, about half of the staff surveyed for this evaluation felt that RBM training materials were too theoretical, possibly pointing to a need to further adjust didactics and content more to capacities and operational needs of trainees.⁸⁴

In addition to one-off training and coaching, the QA Section operates a comprehensive online learning platform for SDC staff. The platform offers information, links to QA guidance materials, learning modules, and a multi-lingual modular e-learning tool on PCM (PCMi). In the evaluation team's own view, PCMi exhibits relevant, useful and easily accessible RBM content and it finds the modular architecture especially useful, as it allows advanced learners to cherry-pick those elements they still require.

In March 2017, the SDC Directorate decided to make a dedicated PCM course obligatory for rotating staff. This course should directly address SDC's RBM instruments and go beyond basic training already provided⁸⁵. The evaluation team concurs with this decision, and suggests extending it to program-level instruments and processes (see below). The results of the staff survey and interviews point to the need for better understanding of RBM, its purposes, practical know-how in making effective (and flexible) use of instruments and processes, and in learning where and how to access RBM information resources.

Such mandatory training should acquaint staff with all key program- and project level RBM instruments and processes. For this, different training modules could reflect different training needs of staff in different divisions and domains. Program- as well as project-level instruments should be covered, their RBM-related purposes clearly explained, and practical know-how for their usage taught, including deviations from by-the-book instructions when required by context or interventions type, as for example in the case of Global Programmes.

4. Findings by purpose

This chapter draws on findings made in the previous chapter and provides additional evidence along the framework of RBM purposes (figure 1 and table 1). The chapter concludes with a discussion on how RBM contributed to SDC's overall poverty objective.

Putting the findings of the previous chapter 3 in perspective of the RBM purposes of learning and decision-making, SDC RBM seems to suffer from a relative disconnect between the processes of supplying performance information and their translation into steering and strategic thinking. Predominantly, the evaluation finds that it is in the key processes of a) formulating strategies (in all domains) and b) annual reporting and management response, that the connections between the two are critically exposed.

⁸⁴ The evaluation team has not conducted a quality review of training materials, and available evidence did not warrant a comparative analysis of the relative effectiveness of different capacity development modalities.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the 'Direktions Komitee' of 20.3.17.

Field visits and information collected in different settings across all SDC departments suggest that, while there are varying practices, a common denominator is a sense that the relevance of results reporting for learning and decision-making depends primarily on an effective working process. It is a capacity with *managers* to organise participants and securing their respective and relevant input to strategic considerations that seems to be the main factor behind “successful” processes as described by participants.

This is not to say that information collection mechanisms are unimportant. As indicated, numerous studies point to results frameworks of limited quality. They also point to a tendency with reporting to be guided by accountability purposes, whereas their intended purpose is mainly described in guidelines as learning and decision-making. This is an area of conflict where the evaluation team believes SDC stands to gain from better balancing RBM purposes and adjusting instruments and processes through improved information management, but foremost by fostering a working environment more conducive to strategic thinking and learning.

Regarding ‘domestic accountability’ purposes, evaluation findings indicate that SDC grapples with domestic demand. Yet it also seems clear that the management culture is inclined to handle this demand in the context of the RBM System. In interviews, it has at times been suggested that too much resources have been allocated to corporate reporting. While the team is unable to quantify that judgement, it does conclude that this trait aggravates SDC difficulties using results information for RBM purposes.

In particular, the general difficulty with using results information impacts on the extent to which SDC poverty orientation has been served by the RBM System. While staff overall agrees RBM has had a positive effect on SDC’s ability to achieve poverty reduction⁸⁶, the absence of results information supporting that assessment is glaring. While this study concludes (see section 4.3) that poverty analyses and programme poverty orientation, much due to the contextualisation of SDC programmes, have improved, it cannot find evidence for the same conclusion in SDC results-reporting.

SDC corporate culture also has a role in downplaying the accountability interface with partners and partner governments (purpose 4). This trait has been observed by the OECD/DAC – calling for more transparency and reliance on partner frameworks and dialogue⁸⁷ – and is also visible to the team from observing SDC field operations.

In South Cooperation, for example, there are contrary indications towards a more partner oriented approach. An incremental move away from mandated projects to a larger portion of development partner- and partner government coordinated projects and programmes is visible (Bangladesh is an example). Evidence also suggests that the results emphasis of SDC has contributed in this regard: supported by increasing contextualisation and a stronger connect between the contextual analysis and strategic operational considerations, for example the evolution of the Bangladesh portfolio over the past two strategy periods, illustrates a shift. The extent of the shift in the entire SDC portfolio is unclear to

⁸⁶ Confer survey responses in Annex 3, Q10.

⁸⁷ Note that the first indicator of the OECD/DAC Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation is the extent of ‘use of country results frameworks’.

the evaluation, but from its limited perspective it appears to be present in a number of countries. It is also noted that partner orientation in Global Programmes is generally on a high level, both because of core contributions to multilaterals that naturally rely on partner systems, and because of additional project portfolio consolidation and phasing out of legacy projects from before GPs were introduced.

The following sections discuss purposefulness in more depth. Findings on both guidelines and practices will be examined, a summary of which is presented below.

TABLE 2: Summary of the purposefulness of RBM System guidelines and practices

RBM purposes 1-4	RBM guidelines to purpose?	RBM practices to purpose?
Decision-making	High level of purposefulness. Strong on strategic process and information management, a little less clear on process management but still purposeful.	Variable strategic coherence, quality, and link to performance information from highly purposeful to unclear. Portfolio-level decision-making (e.g. between countries, GPs, or core contributions) less clear.
Learning	High level of purposefulness. Guidelines could be clearer on learning through process and documentation.	Individual RBM-related learning variable but strong in some cases. Institutional learning mechanisms can strengthen, particularly in strategic process but also related to information management.
Domestic accountability	Out of guideline focus apart from reference indicators. Little clarity on effective communications (value for money) in the domestic accountability regime.	Strong SDC corporate (organisation-cultural) emphasis. Varying purposefulness and capacities.
Partner accountability	High level of purposefulness. Emphasis on some aspects of <i>mutual accountability</i> could increase, including strengthening partner country planning and monitoring systems.	Strong SDC partner involvement and dialogue. Varying information sharing. With exceptions, frail link to partner planning and M&E systems. Emerging joint programming.

4.1 Management for Results

4.1.1 Decision-Making

A basic expectation of a results oriented system is that it creates a basis for performance assessment, underpinning strategic choice and decision-making. A critical working process where this comes to the fore is in planning: From almost any perspective, SDC planning processes have taken a new shape because of the results reform.

For the SDC planner, the purpose of decision-making is a prominent feature of the Field Handbook guidance, and is also clearly on display in the SDC corporate interpretation of RBM (cf. section 1). A quality screening function also appears to be at work in successive updates of SDC guidelines increasingly emphasising decision-making purposes and making use of results information and indicators to that end (ref. AR guidance and CS guidelines 2016).

The noted disconnect between reporting and strategic thinking (cf. previous section 4) is therefore a primary concern, both to SDC QA and RBM steering mechanisms and to evaluators attempting to understand its causes and remedies.

As further noted, there seems to be a tendency to increasingly address the disconnect, and some examples have been examined. The team has visited Bangladesh, Rwanda and Ukraine in field missions and consulted several other country offices to corroborate findings (Bolivia, Honduras, Serbia, and to some extent Nepal).

For example, in Bangladesh SDC is currently moving from one strategy period to the next, and so a first-hand observation of the transition and associated working processes are at hand.

Comparing the Bangladesh strategic frameworks of the periods 2013-2017 and 2018-2021 shows an increase in strategic analysis, and the process of strategy development for 2018-2021 shows an increased systematic emphasis on strategic re-thinking of the SDC portfolio based on results information (both contextual and in programme performance). Results Frameworks have markedly evolved in terms of clarity and relevance to results logic and theories of change.⁸⁸ Comparing successive Annual Reports displays a similar pattern with regard to strategic analysis and results frameworks.

But the Bangladesh example does not seem to apply across all of SDC. It has been observed that the processes and quality of CS, RF and AR elaboration are plagued with difficulties – over-elaboration, poorly defined RF, large qualitative differences etc.⁸⁹ As further indicated in sections 3.3.1 & 3.3.2, the overall situation rather emphasises the disconnect and examples examined appears as exceptions to the rule.

In conclusion, SDC planning shows uneven progress regarding creating a results-oriented basis for decision-making and strategic choice. Of course, this does not mean decision-making is flawed in consequence, but it points to SDC planning and decision-making not always being comfortably founded in sufficient results-based analyses.

Clearly, there are SDC planning processes that produce solid results-oriented foundations for decision-making, and others less so. Evidence also seems to suggest that there are no systematic flaws in guidelines that would explain these differences. Rather, they point to *competencies* and *process management* as key variables. The evaluators believe the stark differences between CSs, RFs, and ARs observed by SDC respondents in this study and in Quality Assessments support this finding.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ The point here is not to suggest everything is perfect, only to show that these instruments have evolved from a results management perspective. The Concept Note (ref) is the clearest display of the outcome of the strategic process. In 2017 it includes succinct and to the point (strategic and critically bent analyses lacking excess or irrelevant information in the opinion of the evaluators) a) scenarios 2018-2021, b) a results summary of the period 2013-2017, c) a new results framework, and d) financial planning. The process have been backed up by “super-heavy but super-useful” self assessments of the three domains of Swiss cooperation 2013-2017.

⁸⁹ Quality Assessment of Cooperation Strategies and Results Frameworks, March 2017, pp. 11-13.

⁹⁰ See both *Analysis of the Quality Assessment of the Annual Reports and Management Responses*, March 2015, pp. 5-8, and *Quality Assessment of Cooperation Strategies and Results Frameworks*, March 2017, pp. 11-13.

The evaluation hence concludes that i) the system is primarily conceived to support decision-making purposes, and ii) it is critically a managerial issue whether the system can be used for that purpose by closing the gap between RF information and its use in the strategic analysis.

4.1.2 Management of Results Information

The fact that ineffective information management, in various ways, is a recurrent issue with SDC staff and external (and internal) assessments makes for justified discomfort. It is true, as has been shown, that there are indications of improvement over the period 2009-2017. But it is still worrisome that key information foundations may at times be wobbly as a basis for planning and strategy development.

Across instruments, the evaluation team has observed cases of poorly defined and applied results indicators. This is illustrated, for example, by results indicators in the 2013-2016 Great Lakes regional strategy that are often without target values, lack baseline values, are non-specific or lack timestamps⁹¹. Similar observations have been made for most Country Strategies reviewed by the evaluation team. In many cases, only few or none of commonly applied indicator quality criteria are fulfilled. For GP Strategic Frameworks, no QA standards exist and only one GP (Health) has introduced indicators in its pre-2017 frameworks, with similar quality issues. On the project level, similar issues prevail.

The annual quality assessments of Credit Proposals between 2009 and 2016⁹² found that measurable goals and indicators were missing in one third of all 2016 proposals, and that baselines were missing for two thirds.⁹³ In field trips to Bangladesh, Rwanda and Ukraine, pronounced variations were observed between projects. Some implementing NGOs operated with relevant indicators of excellent quality, reflecting mature corporate RBM systems more developed than that of SDC. However, other implementers had been unable to produce good quality indicators on their own, and required coaching and support for development and monitoring of results indicators. Several implementers in the latter category had a technical focus or were small local NGOs.

To strengthen information management, it is probably reasonable to consider increasing specialisation. Many key capacities involved – such as to distinguish overall development patterns from project performance indicators, objectives from indicators, outcomes from output, for indicator formulation and interpretation, for example for theory of change development – are presently expected more or less across all SDC staff.

A recent study by the NADEL - Center for Development and Cooperation - suggests the need for increasing use of research evidence in SDC programming. It makes important points about the need to understand and interpret impact evaluations, and to use research

⁹¹ Stratégie suisse de coopération pour la région des Grands Lacs 2013 – 2016, matrice des resultats, p. 20.

⁹² Based on: MfDR quality assessments 2009-2016.

⁹³ For earlier years, the share of credit proposals with measurable goals and indicators rose from 48 per cent in 2009 to 77 per cent in 2015, and the share of proposals with baselines for key indicators hovered between a low point (0 per cent) in 2012 and 23 per cent in 2014 and 2015 (Managing for Development Results (MfDR): Prüfung strategischer Planungsdokumente der DEZA, Ergebnisbericht 2016, Anhang 1).

evidence as part of the motivation for strategic assumptions. It also suggests strengthening focal points and thematic expertise in this way. Most of its recommendations would, in the estimation of this evaluation, call for specific competencies not to be expected across the line.⁹⁴

The evaluation team concurs with findings and conclusions of that study in principle, but cautions against underestimating challenges with operationalizing research evidence. In the evaluation team's own evaluation experience, much research evidence is abstract, or valid only in specific contexts and issues related to internal and external validity of evidence produced by, for example, randomised controlled trials, are widely discussed in literature. To operationalise research evidence, thematically and analytically skilled 'translators' are needed to access available evidence and interpret the degree to which it applies in SDC interventions; a function that requires expertise beyond that of average staff. Nevertheless, the team supports increased use of research evidence, especially for planning purposes and theory of change development, where it represents vital external evidence for assumptions about causal mechanisms within and beyond SDC's control.

Concluding this section, the variety of information management quality observed, while a cause for concern, also presents opportunities. According to the evaluators, a main ingredient in addressing the situation lies in learning from good management examples of applying information management guidelines in a purposeful way. Another is making better use of existing SDC knowledge as evident in the next section on learning.

4.1.3 Learning

Learning is an integral part of the processes of planning discussed in the previous section. Especially, SDC representatives refer to Country Strategies and Annual Reports as central learning occasions of exchange, joint thinking and reflection. Learning is here both individual (exchange with peers) and organisational (expressed in steering documents), and on this level the RBM system has been found to perform to purpose.

An important aspect of SDC learning is the organisation of 12 thematic networks gathering staff around critical themes such as health, water, climate etc.. The networks establish an environment for individual learning, and have proved effective in light of the consequences of decentralisation. Their potential to strengthen RBM learning purposes could be even further developed, and in particular in relation to the formulation of strategic intent (theories of change) in key SDC steering documents. A 2014 evaluation concluded the networks must not be objectives in themselves but a tool to sharpen SDC effectiveness⁹⁵. According to this evaluation, they can be used more systematically in sharpening the strategic analyses of key SDC tools such as the CS, GPs and ARs.

Improving the learning element of the system overall should also be on SDCs agenda, both because of the variable quality of said processes both also because improved and systematic learning is part of the remedy; properly channelled learning is a means to

⁹⁴ In passing, the evaluators would invite caution about overstating the importance of research evidence in development cooperation management. RBM in development cooperation is not scientific but works primarily on assumptions and strategic thinking using results information as a key, but not the sole, ingredient.

⁹⁵ Evaluation of SDC's Thematic Networks 2014 (SDC Evaluation 2014/3), p. 4.

address system shortcomings. Hence, if the overall shortcoming is a relative disconnect between strategic- and information management, a central question is how system learning can be made part of the remedy.

Overall, a conclusion is that learning may not be promoted effectively in information management (cf previous section 4.1.2). Attending to the issue involves, according to the evaluators, both making use of existing capacities to improve information management and to stimulate the proper organisation of results-information for strategic thinking.

Here the evaluation, like other observers⁹⁶, take the view that more can be made of the knowledge inherent in the thematic networks. The networks have a particular role in strengthening strategic thinking by reviewing and qualifying programme logic and *theories of change*.

SDC makes impact assumptions on many levels and critically on the;

- Strategic orientation and intent in Country Strategies and Global Programme Strategic Frameworks,
- Programme and project levels in entry and credit proposals.

To improve the usefulness of thematic networks, it is on these points that thematic expertise inside SDC should be brought to bear on key assumptions. According to the evaluation, such a measure would improve involvement and ownership with thematic SDC expertise to strengthen learning through information management, and specifically the assumptions made in theories of change and accompanying results frameworks.

In turn, if the thematic knowledge already available at SDC (in thematic networks and focal points) can be made instrumental in promoting stronger results information management and theories of change, strategic thinking in CS and AR stand to gain from a more solid foundation. This would bring better clout to country managers and desk officers arguing their strategic choices (entry and credit proposals, AR and CS alike) before the operational committees, divisions- and departments. The evaluators believe this would be a key route to an improved learning culture for development results.

4.2 Accountability

4.2.1 Accountability to Domestic Stakeholders

As seen in chapter 3, many SDC processes are in motion in relation to the information requirements of the Dispatch. It is evident that a concern with domestic accountability is pervasive at SDC, with both positive and negative consequences for the RBM System. On the positive side, the focus on results has equipped SDC with a potential to enrich its aggregated results reporting. This is visible in SDC's Annual Reports over time and in recent efforts to introduce reference indicators to the system (see section 3.1.3).

⁹⁶ See the Evaluation of SDC's Thematic Networks 2014 (SDC Evaluation 2014/3).

On the negative side, the feeling is lingering that results reporting is insufficient and that SDC must do more to cater to domestic needs, and the quest to find solutions at times sway focus and capacity away from using information for strategic purposes.

Perceptions vary considerably on what is best done to satisfy the perceived need. From close observation (see section 3.1), it is therefore difficult to discover a clear reporting- or accountability regime, i.e. a set of values and principles that would guide the communication of results to parliament and tax-payers. One reason is the volatility of the target, i.e. that domestic demand is unclear and rightly perceived as changing over time.

Perhaps more than a question of information, however, satisfying the domestic accountability purpose of RBM is an issue of trust. A trust which is built on confidence in the professionalism and competence with which development cooperation is conducted. In its closing sections, this evaluation will recommend a series of measures to strengthen SDC strategic processes. In regard to the issue of trust, it is here suggested that this 'strategic capacity' with SDC is at least as important as a capacity to illustrate and convey messages of results. That is to say; conveying the message that SDC has a highly sophisticated management system in place that it safeguards and incrementally improves, should probably be made a centrepiece in future communications for domestic accountability purposes. If the system enables SDC to respond to changing circumstances with a reoriented strategic agenda, that is a message worth communicating.

4.2.2 Accountability by and to Partners

Much literature in development cooperation has been concerned with what it means to be results-oriented in a partnership context. Already the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 laid out principles that are still at the forefront of the Development Effectiveness agenda 2030, many of which are echoed in SDC RBM guidelines.

Principles include joint programming, mutual accountability and the use and strengthening of national planning- and performance assessment frameworks. In consequence, RBM orientation is often correctly associated with the use and strengthening of national data and statistics, joint programming with joint M&E systems, and joint partner dialogue with national authorities to facilitate the implementation of national strategies.

Regarding accountability to development partners, i.e. all communication from SDC projects, programmes and headquarters to development partners to ensure SDC's legitimacy, support, harmonization and international recognition of SDC's work in developing countries⁹⁷, a mixed picture emerged from the evaluation team's interactions with SDC staff and partners in several countries (Bangladesh, Rwanda, Ukraine). Implementation partners of bilateral and multilateral projects naturally were well informed about project progress, and also interviewed government and government agencies felt well informed, for example through regular project Steering Committee meetings of which they were members. Information and communication of aggregated information (country, programme and corporate SDC level) was less effective, and most partners were unaware or hadn't or couldn't access such information. Apart from direct communication during

⁹⁷ Inception Report, p. 5.

project implementation, interviewed staff suggested improving use of passive social media and online tools, for example live twitter updates on SDC's country websites.

Regarding accountability *by* development partners, i.e. all planning and results information provided by partners to SDC to serve SDC's decision-making, learning and domestic accountability purposes⁹⁸, the picture is also mixed. For core contributions and other work implemented through multilateral organizations, SDC largely builds on available reports produced by (and for⁹⁹) those organizations. In addition, SDC's multilateral influencing plans¹⁰⁰ reflect strengthening of RBM in targeted organizations. In the evaluation team's view, this is in line with Development Effectiveness principles.

Somewhat to the contrary, much bilateral work appears to be defined and implemented primarily with SDC goals and information needs in mind and only to a limited extent relying on government strategic objectives and performance reporting. Most interviewed staff described country strategy development largely as an in-house process that invited participation by country partners only when a strategy had been drafted. In a similar vein, on the project level, much of Swiss development cooperation has been delivered through mandates suggested and implemented by Swiss NGOs, and related planning, monitoring and reporting requirements have primarily been driven by the need to satisfy SDC's own objectives and information requirements.

This said, this approach did not necessarily lead to SDC interventions being implemented in a 'silo', i.e. without integration into country frameworks. Also, there are clear tendencies in bilateral cooperation to engage more with other development agencies in joint programming and analyses, which tends to bring country frameworks to the fore.

However, it is noted that in the interaction with partners, SDC has largely stopped short of deepening the relationships described above. In the development effectiveness agenda, the assumption is that *partner accountability* should extend to direct reliance on, and strengthening of, national partner planning- and monitoring systems. SDC RBM thinking has also repeatedly indicated, in system overviews and operational guidelines¹⁰¹, that strengthening partner government capacities to plan and report effectively is in the interest of the results management system and the development effectiveness agenda 2030.

In operational terms, however, SDC very rarely works with partner governments on this level. Despite SDC Country Directors referring to an increasing Swiss contextualisation, and an adaptability in strategic- and PCM guidelines favouring deeper interaction, operational legacies and contextual factors are offered as explanations for why not. There is reason for SDC to consider stronger operative direction to achieve a change in this regard.

Before drawing overall conclusions, the evaluation team notes that a natural trade-off situation exists, primarily between domestic accountability (section 4.2.1) and

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ For example, evaluations by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN).

¹⁰⁰ Strategies on management level 2 in CCM Sheets.

¹⁰¹ See "Principles for results reporting by donors, SDC, June 2011" and the Field Handbook on CS and AR.

accountability by and to partners (this section). For example, the ARIs currently being introduced are intended to satisfy Swiss information needs, and indicators designed to primarily serve partner information needs would likely look different¹⁰². With this trade-off in mind, the evaluation team suggests increasing transparency about SDC's choices regarding different RBM purposes and how they are managed. In addition, existing improvement potential should be realised, for example by offering relevant information to partners and beneficiaries through SDC websites and social media channels, and to focus corporate reporting on indicators with mutual relevance for SDC and its partners.

4.3 Poverty Reduction Impact

The results reform of SDC has been in progress since 2008 and in 2017 it has reached a certain level of maturity. Its importance in shaping SDC direction can hence begin to be explored in regard to overall corporate objectives, and this evaluation will point in particular to the theme of poverty reduction (the overarching goal of SDC).

The evaluation cannot conclude whether the overall poverty impact of SDC programmes has improved since (and because of) the reform of 2008, but regards it as highly likely on the following grounds.

(A) First, there's an almost unanimous assessment by SDC staff and partners that the reformation of the *information base*, considered as a whole, has enabled the strategic dialogue to consider poverty aspects from a better position¹⁰³. The analyses underpinning strategic choice, in relation to poverty targeting and sharpening intervention approaches to better target the poor, has improved significantly - staff assessments range from "moderately" to "dramatically" in interviews¹⁰⁴.

(B) Asked to qualify this assessment, most respondents point to in-country aspects. The contextualisation of the country analyses has benefitted significantly from a systematic use of the results frameworks in Annual Reports and Country Strategies. In particular, an understanding of SDC programme impact and orientation in a larger country context has improved.

(C) Not only has the new information base improved poverty orientation, but the *evolution* of the results frameworks and strategic considerations of the AR and CS during the period 2008-2017 has gradually shown more poverty focus. This evolution is, it should be carefully noted, uneven. There are examples ranging from no to significant change. There is in fact so much diversity that it is only on an aggregate level this assessment makes sense.

¹⁰² Some synergies can be (and have been) exploited by using international standard indicators.

¹⁰³ In the in-depth survey for this evaluation, respondents were asked to what extent the RBM system had had an impact on SDC performance on poverty reduction. One third claimed not to be able to tell. Of those with an opinion, 75% said SDC performance had improved or significantly improved, whereas 25% said there was no impact detectable.

¹⁰⁴ See also Annex 3, survey question 10 "To what extent has RBM improved SDC's performance in contributing to poverty reduction?". Out of respondents who had an opinion (i.e. did not answer 'don't know') 75% considered it had *improved* or *significantly improved*.

On these accounts, the evaluation finds it reasonable to assume that the RBM and decentralisation reform of 2008 has altered conditions and improved the prospects of effective poverty orientation.

At the same time, it is a conflicting fact that SDC key documents (strategies and Annual Reports) struggle at length with a clear poverty analysis. The way quality assessments and other outside observers (including partners) describe SDC documents on poverty is at times unflattering to an organisation with poverty reduction as its overall objective.¹⁰⁵

Interview evidence for this study provides interesting insights in this regard. First, poverty is generally regarded as a core staff competence, and the need to express it on paper is often neglected on this account (“it is evident”). Secondly, joint exercises to analyse poverty aspects (with or without the poverty focal point or other expertise participating) leads to stronger documentation and a feeling with participants of real added value, also analytically. However, thirdly, it has also been claimed that an increasing administrative burden (RBM System related) has resulted in less time allocated to analytical tasks as well as dialogue with recipients of aid.

This said, and as pointed out in section 3.2.1, the current level of elaboration of SDC results frameworks is insufficient in a poverty perspective. Both for reporting purposes, but critically as a basis for CS and AR analyses elaborating and sharpening portfolio priorities with regard to poverty outcomes.

Other experiences (outside SDC) also support a conclusion from the evaluators, that a specialised competence is necessary to sharpen strategic poverty targeting and understanding of context for this purpose. A natural inference would be that some form of poverty help desk would add strategic value, in particular to the CS process but also to the AR. In turn, a richer body of written strategic poverty analyses from the field would reversely be an asset to the poverty focal point and to institutional learning mechanisms on poverty.

In addition to understanding poverty in all its aspects, the evaluation team finds it important that expert capacity for *planning for poverty reduction* is made available. Because most SDC interventions have indirect and complex linkages to the intended poverty reduction impact, in-depth theory-based planning skills are needed to link results directly associated with SDC interventions to poverty reduction impacts.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ See for instance the Analysis of the Quality Assessment of the Annual Reports and Management Responses, March 2015 p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ While results logic and theories of change are commonly applied to describe how activities lead to direct project results, these tools often become vague when describing subsequent causal linkages, and the assumptions and context factors supporting them. It is in this second regime that additional planning capacity is required, for example to analyse bottlenecks that stop relevant, effective and efficient SDC projects from contributing to such wider impacts. Research evidence, for example from impact evaluations, is a key ingredient for this type of planning exercise as has been suggested by a recent study (Research Evidence and Impact Evaluation at SDC, NADEL Center for Development and Cooperation, September 2017), but in-depth thematic and functional (operationally sensitive) expertise is required to operationalise it.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter presents overall conclusions and recommendations drawn from the findings presented in chapters 3 and 4. The section on conclusions is divided into two; one subsection assessing the past, and another looking forward.

In line with the terms of reference, focus is put on aggregate conclusions and recommendations about SDC's RBM System. Findings, conclusions and improvement suggestions on the level of individual instruments were presented alongside findings in chapter 3 and 4.

5.1 Conclusions

The overall conclusion of this evaluation of SDC's RBM System is that in conception and execution, the RBM System is a success. It is true that there are concerns related to the system and that it is far from perfect. But in terms of **management perspective overhaul**, from a **management systems revision** point of view, and in provoking **changes in the mind-sets and behaviour of key staff**, the evaluation team's assessment is overall positive. The changes in management perspective pre- and post-reform are considerable and operational consequences, particularly visible in country Annual Reports and strategic frameworks, have in many cases been far-reaching.

The evaluation team also observes that on all these accounts, progression has been irregular and asymmetric within SDC and with partners. A central observation is that there are considerable glitches between the supply of performance information and its use for learning and decision-making on various levels of the organisation. The conclusions and recommendations that follow highlight what asymmetries are in play and how they can be mitigated.

5.1.1 Looking back

From a management perspective, the SDC reform of 2008 was profound. With it, management demand for information was altered across the entire organisation from one year to the next. That change and what it has meant on the level of human- and management perceptions¹⁰⁷ is significant.

It can be debated what instruments and active content¹⁰⁸ represent the key elements of reform. However, there is a widespread perception, shared by the evaluators, that the Country/Global Programme strategic process and the new structure of the Annual Report, including the adjacent Results Framework, are to be found at the heart of the 'results' reform.

In addition, it should be noted that the SDC organisational reform of 2008 had two main strands. While introducing a more systematic approach to results management, the reform also decentralised the organisation and strengthened country offices and managers.

¹⁰⁷ ...and in practice on the levels of strategic- and operational thinking, for partner dialogue and monitoring, programme design and priorities etc.

¹⁰⁸ Operational guidelines and instruction, programme/project management directives and decision-making.

The two strands of reform point in particular to one aspect of mutual reinforcement; *contextualisation* was encouraged. By strengthening country managers and simultaneously introducing a systematic emphasis on results (in particular beneficiary-level outcomes), effective synergy was achieved. Strategic thinking in immediate proximity to the programme/project operational level became infused with a focus on results. In turn, that triggered a strategic process – on SDC country and global cooperation level, in the dialogue with partners and partner governments, in the dialogue between SDC field and HQ etc. – based on a developed ‘information base’. In all and with time, that information base has improved SDC’s programming sensitivity to its target environments.

Naturally, this does not imply SDC programmes now necessarily perform better or that results frameworks or indicators always make sense. However, it suggests that conditions for making informed choices and to adapt on-going programmes and sharpen their impacts have improved.

In line with this reasoning and with a similar argument (section 4.3), the evaluation team concludes that conditions for poverty orientation have improved, and have positively influenced the nature and orientation of SDC programming.

The evaluation team concludes that key elements of the SDC RBM interpretation – flexibility, a contextual approach and a broad view of results (section 2) – have been worked effectively into the SDC RBM System. Guidelines and instruction allow flexibility and reflexion, and in consequence operational practices tend to embrace adaptability and a critical perspective on what SDC does. To achieve this, the reform has been actively supported and encouraged by SDC senior management from the onset. Support seems not to have included, however, a particular drive to explain the management implications (see section 3.3) of the system to a sufficient degree.

Viewed from the perspective of SDC, its staff, partners and interlocutors, the following traits stand out from the period 2008-2017:

Reform is irreversible but in need of improvement

SDC staff share an almost unanimous sentiment that the reform cannot and should not be turned back. A results focus as a guide to learning and decision-making in most key management processes of SDC is considered an asset. But while there is no preference for turning back, there are two discernible camps with different views on what to do next.

One camp broadly believes the use of results information should further increase for both planning and accountability purposes, and that the future of RBM reform lies in sharpening existing tools and practices. The opposing camp takes the view that the reform has come too far in its results-orientation, and that SDC as a whole is close to (or beyond) its capacity limits in coping with results reporting requirements. Subscribing to both views is also common, interestingly because the apparent conflict is resolved by describing expectations in terms of the different purposes of the RBM System: Sensing that results reporting and the administrative burden of the system has reached a

maximum is *not* incompatible with the view that analyses and decision-making processes can still improve¹⁰⁹.

Perceptions on RBM are still developing

The above reasoning raises the issue of whether the messages of reform has reached its destination; the mind-sets of SDC staff? Regarding domestic accountability (purpose 3), there is little ambiguity as to an understanding of RBM purposes at SDC; which incidentally does not mean there is agreement on how, or even if the capacity exist within SDC, to convert the understanding of purpose into practice.

In terms of the other purposes (1, 2 and 4 in table 1), the idea of ‘what results’ to use in strategic planning and learning – and how to interpret them – is not fully embedded in the minds of SDC staff and organisation. To illustrate differences encountered, SDC staff give quite different accounts when asked to explain what the RBM System is all about. Specifically, while the ‘management-wide’ notion of RBM is clearly described by many staff, there is also a noticeable group envisioning RBM as a separate tool (mainly for obtaining, identifying, and/or explaining results). There is also another group that, in interviews, is unable to explain or identify RBM objectives and practices¹¹⁰.

Improving but uneven strategic coherence

Country/Global Programme Strategies and Annual Reports vary in quality and coherence. Over time (2008-2017) overall quality and coherence improve, but differences between countries and programmes remain. This is corroborated by SDC quality assessments, in interviews, and in the evaluators’ review of selected CS and GP strategic frameworks, and ARs. It is likely to be an indication that despite clarity of instruction and a decentralised organisation the full messages of the vision and purposes of the RBM reform, including that of strategic thinking as a main objective, remain somewhat elusive.

Analytic perspective is improving but not yet sufficient

A common thread in assessments of RBM instruments is that their content, despite improvement over the years, is still weak regarding strategic analysis and analytics, e.g. sound and meaningful assessments of strategic approaches and useful ‘real-world’ theories of change. In other words, strategies and reports focus too much on the “what” and not enough on the “how” or the “why not”. Senior staff in SDC headquarters and in country offices echoed this observation, clearly requiring more critical self-reflection and assessment of plans, and an organizational enabling environment supporting this; the current inclination of SDC senior management to see RBM mainly as tool for domestic accountability represents one important obstacle in this regard.

¹⁰⁹ One tangible example for this is the introduction of ARIs. On the one hand, ARIs are motivated by easing the corporate reporting burden. On the other hand, a large majority of SDC staff feels that more indicators are not needed.

¹¹⁰ One may add that there exist small groups that will never like the mechanistic elements of RBM such as quantitative indicator-based results frameworks. Probably other groups like that exist as well. All these people cannot be entirely “convinced” of the benefits of RBM. Their views need to be respected but also managed.

Drawing on international experience, this development appears to be natural after RBM Systems are introduced. At first, the focus is on measuring and reporting results using indicators. It is only when RBM Systems mature that a broader view on what results information represents and can be used for is taken. At that stage, good practice appears to be that different purposes of RBM are increasingly addressed in the design and operation of the system and its instruments. Clearly, SDC has already made progress along this trajectory but more can be done for purposeful integration and application of RBM. A next step should be to move towards more focus on how SDC aims to contribute to development results, for example by developing sound theories of change that explain rather than justify programming, and to apply them to strategic frameworks and progress reports by monitoring, in addition to results themselves, also critical factors for success such as underlying assumptions or necessary contextual factors.

Administrative burden is high

The previous observation is likely related to an adjacent tendency within SDC to overshoot results related exercises, for example by involving too many people or responding to unclear information demands with more rather than less reporting. Examples include heavy processes of putting Country Strategies together, and exchanges between field and Bern often beside the strategic objective. Troubles are manifested by terminological confusion, poor strategic reflexion, and too many unclear roles with involved staff. This tendency is also likely to be encouraged by a management culture conscious about accountability, and compliant to the point of (at times) interpreting instruction too strictly and inflexibly.

Importantly, the team finds that perceptions of “administrative” burden depend to some degree on how well staff understands why RBM-related activities are required, and to what degree staff is convinced of their usefulness. If RBM instruments are used for genuine strategy development, the team’s prediction is that this will not be considered an administrative activity anymore, but rather core work.

Guidelines are clear on ‘how-to’ but weak on management

RBM guidelines and instructions were found to provide good ‘how-to’ guidance, clearly describing type and form of expected content. However, these formal requirements partly obscure the overall vision of the results-oriented system to its interpreters, in particular to new recruits. In parallel, there is a sense with management staff that guidance is comparatively weak on the management expectations and implications of instruments, processes, and the overall system.

It has repeatedly been suggested in interviews that the lack (in some cases) of an evolved strategic and analytical section of the Annual Reports, and equally in related Management Responses, is related to this observation. That is, when management demand for strategic information is unclear, the inclination to report analytically lessens, resulting in descriptive narratives rather than insightful analysis and reflection.

Overall, this reflects the evaluation team’s finding that SDC RBM instruments are not yet sufficiently “designed-to-purpose” or with the a “form follows function” principle in mind, as RBM-related activity is at times undertaken with vague or no clear practical uses in mind.

The lack in this regard is an institutionalised vision about the managerial and strategic purposes of results management.

5.1.2 Looking forward

Zooming in on the factors that challenge the RBM System and its purposes, this section will motivate the evaluation team's attention to RBM governance.

The primary reasons lie in findings suggesting that properly managed, the RBM System and its guidelines work well for the purposes of learning, decision-making and partner accountability. More specifically, SDC key processes of strategic planning – involving these three purposes – show a strong tendency to be results-oriented and strategic under this condition. In turn, it means that existing guidelines (and RBM System coherence) are likely to be both relevant and adequate. The findings of this evaluation supports that conclusion.

If this is so, and in line with the SDC vision for the RBM System (see chapter 2), the evaluation concludes that future development should focus on strengthening strategic management. This reasoning is further underpinned by the following observations and conclusions;

- SDC management culture emphasises domestic accountability, thus skewing the application of RBM for other purposes, and creating uncertainty about top management attention and support of RBM for strategic planning purposes. Staff convinced their performance will be judged based on attaining planned results is naturally in conflict when also asked to critically self-assess performance.
- The evaluation finds little evidence to suggest RBM guidelines and tools create imbalances between RBM purposes of learning, decision-making, and partner accountability. In consequence, the system for incremental development of RBM guidelines and trainings can continue to be relied on in the foreseeable future.
- The key management processes of the system include the CS, GP, AR, and the accompanying RF. The purposefulness of these instruments hinges to a large degree on management capacities to utilise them efficiently and strategically.
- An organisational aspect accounting for inefficiencies lies in the relationship between field and HQ desk officers, often prolonging management processes and placing a focus on formal compliance rather than strategic analysis.
- Properly managed strategic processes (CS, GP, AR) are likely to strengthen SDC poverty and development outcome orientation, and are also likely to improve poverty and programme results in the medium term. To achieve this, results frameworks and their explicit link to operational priorities needs clarification across thematic objectives including that of poverty reduction, as a basis for sound decision-making and prioritisation.
- Thematic and analytic capacities are underutilised by the RBM System. The evaluation finds these capacities best serve results management by strengthening the structure, logic and thematic foundations of *theories of change* and thematic strategic thinking in the key processes of CS, GP, AR and the accompanying RF.
- Partner accountability is properly addressed in guidelines and instruction. However, in operational terms SDC has remaining ground to cover to adhere increasingly to the

2030 development effectiveness agenda. Particularly in using and strengthening partner systems for performance assessment, development statistics and development strategy and planning.

- Domestic accountability is likely to benefit from a broadening of the regime to include both results reporting and a demonstration of SDC strategic capacity (responsiveness and reorientation in the face of changing circumstances).

Under these conditions, including the decentralised SDC structure, the evaluation concludes it is rational to strengthen RBM governance to ensure system development and stimulate a supportive organisational culture.

5.2 Recommendations

System-level management

In line with the reasoning of section 5.1.2, and considering the organisation-wide applicability of the management system, this evaluation recommends an overall steering function to safeguard and develop RBM System effectiveness. It is assumed this function would have at its disposal the full capacities of the present Evaluation and Corporate Controlling and Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction divisions¹¹¹.

1. **Introduce a ‘guardian’ of RBM System effectiveness in the form of a senior advisor inside the directorate**¹¹². The responsibility of the RBM System Guardian should be to:
 - a) Promote the system’s applicability for strategic *management processes* – retaining the SDC RBM approach of flexibility, contextualisation and outcome level focus. In so doing, the guardian should safeguard against tendencies to overdo and overwork system requirements and emphasise and ensure design and usage for its strategic purposes of learning and decision-making.
 - b) Regularly analyse *information needs* of different audiences and thereby supporting the Directorate in safeguarding effective reporting to domestic audiences. The guardian should be aware of the administrative benefits and costs of different types of reporting and use these for rational decision-making.
 - c) Ensure *instruments* are designed and operated to efficiently fulfil their intended combination of purposes, including management and mitigation of natural trade-offs between different purposes. Efforts, costs and risks associated with operating instruments should be justified by their demonstrated purpose-related

¹¹¹ Institutionally this implies to lead and coordinate the RBM System work of the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division and Quality Assurance and Aid Effectiveness Division on all points A1a-c – the main units safe-guarding the present system. But also the work of other units in relation to the management system, including the divisions of Analysis and Policy and Knowledge-Learning-Culture.

¹¹² When reform was instigated in 2008, the head of the Staff Directorate performed more or less this function. The evaluators are not in a position to determine if this is the right position today for want of a comprehensive understanding of SDC top management organisation. Our point is that the guardian needs considerable authority upwards and down to be effective.

benefits, and to review its instruments for purposes of clarity and amendments (take-outs, repairs and developments)¹¹³.

2. Make explicit use of SDC thematic and analytic capacities on key strategic objectives, i.e. the thematic focal points and networks and staff skilled in theory of change development and verification, in the formulation of theories of change and results chain logic in the critical instruments of CS, GP and AR and the accompanying Results Framework. Individual involvement should be subject to;

- a) Country Directors and heads of Global Programme Divisions *requests* for thematic expert participation in key strategic formulation processes (CS, GP and AR and the accompanying RF).
- b) A systematic approach to how their themes (if applicable) are strategically operated, contextualised and outcome oriented – theory of change, results chain logic and indicators, strategic analysis and priorities – in country- and global programme strategies.
- c) A responsibility with focal points and leaders of thematic networks to collect and document experiences with assisting strategic formulation as a basis for organisation wide learning across countries and regions.

Country/Global Programme strategic process

This evaluation considers the Country/Global Programme strategic process a central element of RBM learning and decision-making. The process can be strengthened as follows;

3. Stimulate management capacities¹¹⁴ with Country Directors and heads of Global Programme Divisions, as it is critical to making the strategic processes lean, efficient and purposeful. This could take the form of joint learning events with a comparative perspective on the above criteria.

4. Redesign the *Country and Regional Strategy Evaluations* into a tool at the disposal of Country Directors and heads of Global Programme Divisions as new strategies come up for revision (including the peer review element). A “redesign” would mean to reduce the size of the evaluations, reinforce its support of the strategic analysis and employing thematic competencies to articulate strategic expectations (theories of change) supported by explicit results frameworks

The Country/GP strategic process and related annual reporting are critical foundations for CS's and GP's. To further strengthen their results orientation, it is warranted to address observed inefficiencies in process management, RF formulation, making strategies and

¹¹³ As indicated in 4.1.1 a screening function is already in place, the point here is to develop that function with a mandatory “due diligence analysis” when introducing and reviewing RBM instruments regarding their purpose(s), intended users and their information needs, and related costs and benefits.

¹¹⁴ For example, to clarify roles and responsibilities early in the process, to make sure consultations are efficient and focused on strategic assumptions and intent, to promote efficiency in information management supporting the analysis.

ARs more analytical and strategic, and to foster a management environment that encourages strategic thinking over formal compliance in the relationship between field and desk.

- 5. Bring Country Directors and Bern Desk Officers closer together by establishing a joint responsibility for Strategies and Annual Reports.** The desk should, in this scenario, subdue its control function and instead assist the Country Director in coordinating headquarter input (e.g. as indicated in recommendation 2) including results logic and analytic motivations for strategic choices and direction.

Should such an arrangement prove fruitful, a future option for South and East Cooperation may be to follow the example of Global Cooperation and drop the Management Response to the AR entirely. The evaluation leaves such considerations in the hands of a future system 'guardian' and department directors.

Instrument development

Overall, the evaluation found that the current set of RBM systems can be considered both necessary and sufficient, i.e. no evidence was found to suggest a need to abolish present instruments entirely, or to create entirely new ones. In a few cases, action can be taken to improve or ensure instrument efficiency. The following actions are advised;

- 6. Substitute the Effectiveness Reports with thematic evaluations** so that they answer a demand from the thematic networks and focal points. The thematic evaluations should be formative and focus on learning and theories of change, and allow to extract information for accountability purposes as a secondary objective.
- 7. Emphasise the differences between Entry and Credit proposals** by simplifying the former and underlining its precursor intent. This would mean to drop excessive deliberations on the future project/programme and be focussed on the key contextual and country strategic considerations motivating the intervention in the short term (12-18 months).¹¹⁵
- 8. Conduct an independent evaluation after two years of implementation of the ARIs.** This evaluation should cover costs involved (in terms of staff time, administrative costs etc.) associated to designing, using and quality-assuring indicators, and compare it with benefits, i.e. how this type of information is valued and used by different stakeholders (internal decision-makers, domestic constituencies, etc.).
- 9. Create guidance materials for decentralised evaluations and their Terms of Reference** to support the coherence of country level results management and project reporting.

¹¹⁵ In effect, this would mean to beef up the medium term strategic horizon of the credit proposals with a specific emphasis on strategic intent. Operational planning horizons beyond the country strategy time-line are discouraged except in exceptional cases.

Further strengthening results orientation

The final three recommendations are “soft” in the sense that they aim to promote a results oriented *perspective*. They are meant to be implemented by the RBM System steering function and top management staff.

- 10. Support increasing operational partner alignment through programmes using and strengthening active government planning- and performance assessment frameworks.** This means to actively use, analyse and support (through direct or joint programming) partner government systems for sector planning and reporting. SDC should offer to take active part in their strengthening and to develop capacities for strategic planning based on evidence.
- 11. Support the notion that RBM is not a scientific exercise, but a flexible and contextual approach to operational and strategic planning.** In-depth analyses and comprehensive impact assessments and results analyses can be left to outside experts. RBM should be regarded first as a management approach and aid to operational planning and learning, and secondly as a foundation for accountability. To this end;
 - a) Maintain and further encourage flexibility in the use of RBM instruments and results frameworks as synthesised in ‘use the tools, don’t let them use you’, a statement to which close to 90% per cent of surveyed SDC staff agreed (see Annex 3, question 3 p. 7). To this end, RBM wide training (not more but refocused trainings) emphasising the context of results management processes in SDC (section 3.4.3) may prove useful.
 - b) Support the on-going trend in SDC towards more understanding of results-chain logic, the identification of short term (immediate) outcome objectives and indicators to strengthen results management, strategic content and communications, and realistic planning for longer-term results beyond SDC’s direct control.
 - c) Allow and advocate for alternative approaches to results monitoring, e.g. outcome mapping, outcome harvesting, contribution analysis, outcome stories, or most significant change, and encourage innovative, lean approaches throughout the organisation as natural elements of an evolving RBM System.
- 12. Incrementally work to highlight management implications and purposes in the structure and content of the Field Handbook.** Introduce clear messages of the intended use of performance and contextual information provided, what processes of decision-making are involved and what feed-back is expected from planning and reporting units.

Annex 1. Terms of reference for "Independent Evaluation of SDC's Results-Based Management RBM with a Focus on Poverty Reduction" (short version)

Berne, 12 November 2016

1 Purpose, Objectives and Focus

1.1 Why an Evaluation and Why Now

Since the introduction of new and revised processes and tools during the organisational and operational changes in 2008/2010, no profound analysis or independent evaluation on SDC's RBM approaches was conducted. Over the last years, a high range of challenges and recommendations was addressed by the OECD DAC peer reviews (2009, 2013), and identified by internal quality assessments.

The Board of Directors decided in 2016 to assess how the current RBM approach is effecting poverty reduction, the explicit overarching goal of Swiss co-operation. Moreover, it is a very relevant and timely question considering the coming launch of the new Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017–2020. Furthermore, the results of the evaluation will support the formulation of the "Medium-Term Programme Quality Assurance 2018 – 2021.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this independent evaluation is

- to assess the relevance, effectiveness and **efficiency** of **SDC's RBM system**, with a special focus on its **contribution to poverty reduction**¹¹⁶.
- to appraise SDC's RBM performance through a **participatory, utilization-focused process** (see below) in regard to corporate culture, management leadership, staff motivation and engagement.

Utilization focused process aims at anchoring institutional learning and thereby analysing SDC's RBM. The overall evaluation approach should be strongly informed by the latest thinking on developmental evaluation (see Michael Quinn Patton¹¹⁷). This approach is tailored to complex environments, and sees the evaluator combining the rigor of evaluation (evidence-based and objective) with the role of enhancing a program's capacity for using evidence in reflective thinking on its work. SDC staff should learn during the evaluation process - not just at the end. This will not only increase the utility of the evaluation to SDC but will also support SDC's ongoing commitment to develop enhanced analysis, program design, monitoring and evaluation capacity.

¹¹⁶ Decision by the Board of Directors (4th April 2016) to give a special focus of the RBM evaluation on poverty concerns

¹¹⁷ Patton, M. (2010). Developmental evaluation applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use. New York, NY: Guilford Press

This evaluation is mandated by SDC's Board of Directors and commissioned by the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division, which is outside the operational line and reports to SDC's Director General. The contracted evaluation team will be independent of SDC.

The evaluation process and the knowledge generated by the evaluation serve to improve SDC's performance through **learning** within the organisation and among its partners. Good **communication** throughout the evaluation process and of the evaluation results serves both accountability and learning. That's why the evaluation will be conducted in a participatory, utilization-focused process.

1.3 Objectives

The main objective of the evaluation will be:

To examine the degree to which Results-Based Management RBM approach (processes and instruments) adopted by SDC since 2008 has fostered a results culture within the organization, enhanced competencies and capacities to make evidence- and results-based management decisions, improved focus and efficiency, promoted organisational learning, enhanced communication on results, and strengthened SDC's contribution to deliver development results with focus on poverty reduction.

The evaluation will assess **in priority** the **efficient use of existing RBM processes and instruments** at various level within SDC, and if necessary, their relevance in the framework of management for development results. The evaluation will analyse to which extent the RBM processes and instruments have supported a better orientation on **poverty reduction**.

The evaluation is expected to clearly identify **what works** and **what does not work** with SDC's RBM and **why**? The evaluation should formulate strategic recommendations to SDC's Senior Management, and practical and comprehensible recommendations to the Operational Units of the different Departments and the Quality Assurance section and network.

1.4 Focus and Scope

The evaluation shall consider the period since the introduction of the RBM processes and instruments concerned through SDC's reorganisation (Reo) in **2008 / 2010**.

All SDC departments are concerned with RBM: South Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid, Cooperation with Eastern Europe / CIS, Global Cooperation including core contribution to multilateral organization. Therefore, all domains shall be engaged in the evaluation process. All instruments and their quality will be analysed concerning all types of interventions: country cooperation strategies, bilateral projects and programs, global programs, and core contribution to multilateral organizations.

The evaluation will assess the roles and responsibilities of all involved actors in the RBM approach, including Board of directors, management of departments, divisions and section, field offices, thematic networks, implementing organizations, and QA section and network.

The primary intention of the evaluation is to focus on SDC's RBM approach and its development

effectiveness on poverty reduction. It is not intended to question on the general institutional set-up. However, the organizational position of the QA section may be looked at.

The evaluation shall focus on SDC's RBM system. It is not expected that the evaluation will make detailed comparison with other donors' RBM systems and practice.

2 Indicative Key Evaluative Questions

The question catalogue below is a first draft and has been compiled by E+C, together with representatives of the QA. During the inception phase, the evaluation team will further refine and prioritize the questions in consultation with SDC's evaluation officer and the Core Learning Partnership.

The evaluation questions (EQs) should be seen in direct relation to the Theory of Change of SDC's RBM which states the overall purpose of RBM, its different sub-purposes and the necessary institutional interventions to get there.

The evaluation questions are structured following four areas of evaluation:

1. Relevance and Performance¹¹⁸ of RBM in Contributing to Development Effectiveness and Poverty Reduction

EQ11. Are the existing processes and instruments **user-friendly**, well **understood** and **efficiently used** at various levels within SDC? Is the degree of standardization, comparability, and complexity of RBM processes adequate? What are the measures to implement RBM in a more efficient way? Is there enough room for specificity (e.g. for different instruments, types of intervention)?

EQ12. How relevant and performant are SDC's **RBM processes** in identification, planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting regarding development effectiveness with a **focus on poverty reduction**?

EQ13. To what extent is **results information** used for the purposes intended in results management, i.e. improved analysis, learning, planning, reporting and decision-making?

EQ14. To what degree is SDC contributing to support **RBM in partner countries** (e.g. use of country systems, M&E systems, evaluation capacities, SDG reporting, etc.)?

Even though the term "result" is clearly defined by OECD DAC, the evaluation should examine how the "results" are perceived at various levels within SDC, in different organisational settings and contexts, in regard to poverty reduction (humanitarian aid, fragile situation, qualitative or quantitative results, beneficiaries of interventions ...). Furthermore, the evaluation should examine "how causality (attribution) and sustainability of results" are addressed by SDC.

¹¹⁸ The degree to which a development intervention or a development partner operates according to specific criteria/standards/guidelines or achieves results in accordance with stated goals or plans (OECD DAC 2002: Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management)

EQ12 should pay special attentions to the implementation of RBM in a “Whole of Government approach” with other Swiss agencies (SECO, HSD), and its application in **fragile contexts**. In regard to RBM processes and instruments, it has to be noted that SDC changed significantly the focus since the Reo – from planning to monitoring and reporting (see Quality Assurance 2013).

The question of appropriateness of RBM instruments in **fragile contexts** should be examined (EQ11). To what extend is it possible to apply the RBM system in the context of humanitarian aid compared to development approaches.

EQ13 should specifically examine how SDC is monitoring and reporting on poverty and inequalities and to what extend steering decisions are taken on achieved results regarding poverty and inequality concerns.

It is also important to assess how SDC’s thematic priorities – defined in sector strategies, guidance of thematic networks – are put into practice through RBM processes and instruments.

2. Results Culture: Engagement and Support of the Leadership and “Buy-in” of the RBM System

EQ21. To what extend does SDC senior management engage in RBM, contribute to its institutionalization and promote a results culture? What are the requirements set by senior management for themselves and fir their staff in view of RBM? How does the leadership (directorate, headquarter and field offices) promote the effective application of processes and use of RBM instruments and how this helps to focus on poverty reduction?

This question should assess the degree of ownership by the senior management. It will be interesting to assess the eventual specificities among SDC’s departments and/or divisions.

3. Organisational Learning and Communication

EQ31. To what extend does the SDC use information on results and on achievements in poverty reduction for **organisational learning**? Is SDC open to **learning from successes and failures**?

EQ32. To what extent is SDC able to **communicate results** credibly for various audiences (SDC intern, national partners, parliament and Swiss public)?

4. Staff Competencies and Capacities in RBM and Poverty Reduction

EQ41. Is SDC management and staff adequately equipped to comply with RBM in an effective and efficient way? To what extend does SDC staff attend capacity building events and offers?

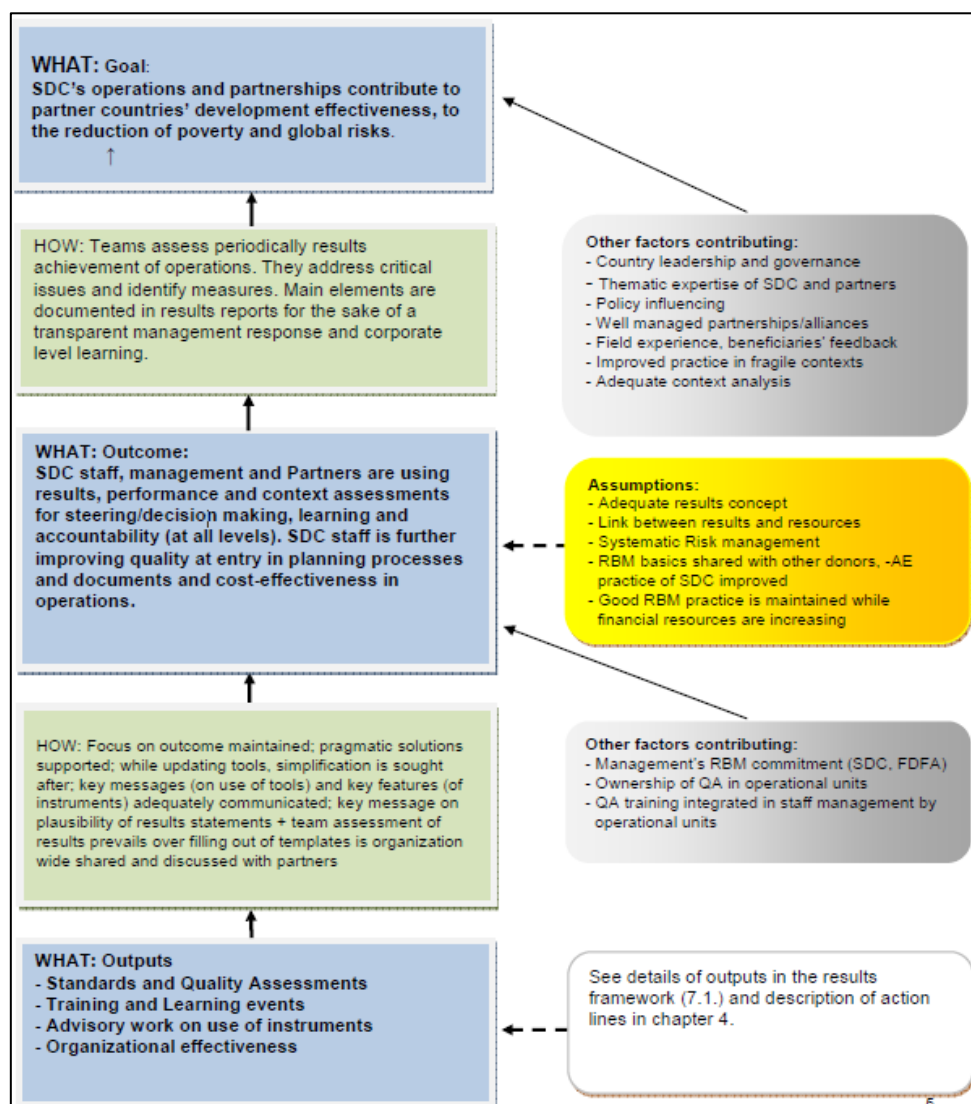
EQ42. To what extent are partner governments and (international and national) implementing agencies informed of SDC results orientation and involved and supported in RBM processes?

EQ43. To what extent do the QA section and QA network provide efficient and effective services in capacity building (e.g. how-to-notes, training and advice) at individual and organisational level for introducing and updating the RBM processes and instruments?

3 SDC's RBM System

3.1 Theory of Change ToC

The RBM contributes to SDC's mission in targeting the sustainable global development with a view to reducing poverty and global risks, illustrated by the following theory of change (SDC: Medium-Term Programme Quality Assurance 2014 – 2017)¹¹⁹. The ToC will constitute an important reference base for the evaluation.



¹¹⁹ Background information in Vähämäki (2013)

3.3.2 RBM Processes and Instruments

As mentioned above, SDC has undergone major organisational and operational changes since 2008/2010. Simultaneously, SDC has revised most of its operational RBM tools and templates, both for the handling of projects/programs and country strategies (= cooperation strategies). The revision of the processes and tools has focused on making working processes within the organisation more outcome-oriented.








In 2013, SDC's Quality Assurance section elaborated a paper on results management at SDC. The purpose of the paper is to provide some guidance for practical and operational management for SDC. The paper gives an overview on the different tools. It highlights those aspects of the actual set of the tools that contribute most to a strengthened result management.



The SDC **Field Handbook** (FHB) for international cooperation offers easily access to all normative and the most important documents (approx. 180) used by SDC's operational business. The structure of the handbook follows an operational logic. The documents are divided in nine key areas, so called "core areas". Each of these areas is distinguished by process visualizations, normative documents and working aids. The two following core areas directly concern the RBM system:

Core Area 3: **Strategy** (country level): Country strategy, Annual Report, Guidelines Division level

Core Area 5: **PCM Planning & Implementation** (Projects, Programmes and Contributions): Planning, Implementation, Core Contribution Management

The following figure provides an overview of SDC instruments for result orientated interventions. All instruments - as well as their templates – are described in the SDC Field Handbook for international cooperation. Furthermore, additional information is available, such as commented examples, forthcoming training offers or the link to the relevant e-learning offers (work in progress).

Level and Use	SDC Guidelines and Guidance
Corporate Level <i>Use: Monitoring and reporting at SDC's corporate level</i>	 Federal Dispatch monitoring (incl. Aggregated Reference Indicators ARI), yearly reports, yearly report on the effectiveness goals (internal), accountability report on the federal dispatch
Strategy Country Level <i>Use: Planning, monitoring and evaluation of cooperation strategies</i>	     

<p>PCM Planning and Implementation</p> <p><i>Use: Planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting at project/program level: South/Global Cooperation, Cooperation with East Europe, Humanitarian aid.</i></p> <p><i>Note: considering different types of support: mandates, contributions, sector-wide and programme-based approaches</i></p>	
<p>Core Contribution Management (CCM)</p> <p><i>Use: Management and steering of Swiss contributions to Multilateral Partner Organizations (MO), International NGOs and Research Institutes (INGO)</i></p>	

At the corporate level, SDC made substantial contribution (lead of the task force) to the international OECD process in elaborating the principles for results reporting by donors (see Goss Gilroy Inc., 2011).

Quality assessments (QuAs) are regularly conducted and are an important element for the Result-Based Management within SDC (see 7. Reference documents). They are carried out externally but closely accompanied by QA network members and operational staff. The objectives of such assessments are an appraisal of the quality and result orientation of reports and documents according to the required quality standards. They provide accountability towards SDC's Directorate regarding the evolution of introduced instruments and standards to strengthen RBM and provide the basis for recommendations by the Directorate.

The SDC guidelines and guidances are complemented by a series of How-to Note:

- Integrating SDC's Gender Policy into Cooperation Strategy Management (2013)
- Stakeholder analysis (2013)
- Financial & Economic Analysis of Projects with a focus on cost benefit analysis (CBA) & cost effectiveness analysis (CEA) (2015)
- Beneficiary assessment (2013)
- Impact hypothesis (2015)
- Memo on managing reviews within SDC (2010)
- PCM basic considerations for the use of funds (2015)
- Key features of CCM and the use of CCM instruments
- Policy Dialogue (2016)

SDC's **Division of labour** (DoL) between Head Office and Field Offices (SDC 2014) clearly distinguishes between the different tasks and responsibilities. The division of labour is generally valid for all departments of SDC. The DoL between Field and Head Office is an important management task contributing to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Since major changes have been introduced in the context of SDC's reorganiza-

tion efforts (2009/2010), the implementation of the principles of DoL has been assessed periodically¹²⁰.

¹²⁰ The last DoL assessment was made in 2014

Annex 2. People interviewed or consulted in e-discussions

SDC

Elisabeth Von Capeller Oswald	Head Eastern Europe
Valérie Rossi	Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division
Patrick Egli	Deputy Head Global Institutions
Adrian Maître	Deputy Head Eastern Europe (e.g. Quality Assurance)
Derek George	Desk Bangladesh
Barbara Böni	Co-lead, Division commonwealth of Independent States
Siroco Messerli	Head Division New Member States (ex. Deputy Coof Bangladesh)
Daniel Roduner	E+C: E-Moderation
Suzanne Müller	Focal Point Aid Effectiveness
Corinne Demenge	Deputy Head Gloal Coop. / Head Staff Global Coop.
Derek Müller	Head South Asia and Conflict and Human Rights Division
Jean-Gabriel Duss	Desk Ukraine
Manual Sager	Director General SDC
Giorgio Bianchi von Albertini	Desk Great Lacs
Odile Renée Keller	Head Analysis and Politics Section
Thomas Greminger	Head South Cooperation
Manuel Flury	Head GP Food security
Fabrice Fretz	Desk officers South Cooperation O-Asia (Focus group)
Anne Savary	Desk officers South Cooperation S-Asia (Focus group)
Maud Macho	Desk officers South Cooperation W-Africa (Focus group)
M.-T. Karlen	Desk officers South Cooperation SONAP (Focus group)
S. Pérez	Desk officers South Cooperation ALAK (Focus group)
Kuno Schläfli	Head Division Knowledge-Learning-Culture
Marie Gilbrin Duruz	Deputy Head Southern Africa, East and North Africa,
Daniel Bongard-Zollinger	Occupied Palestinian Territory Division (SENAP)
Pradeep Itty	Finance Global Cooperation
Katharina Elisabeth Häberli Harker	Head Quality Assurance (QA)
Andreas Huber	Head Political Affairs Section
Anton Hilber	Head Humanitarian Aid - Africa
Dimka Stantchev	Desk officers Global Program (Focus group)
Odile Inauen	Desk officers Global Program (Focus group)
Alexander Schulze	Desk officers Global Program (Focus group)
Geneviève Federspiel	Head Intern. Cooperation, SDC Honduras
Nils Rosemann	Focal Point CHRnet (conflict, human rights)
Rolf Gsell	Progr. Officer SDC Amman, ex. QA of Humanitar-

Jean Christophe Favre

Ursula Keller

Ursula Läubli

Yvan Pasteur

Roger Denzer

Dominique Favre

Peter Bieler

Felix Fellmann

Rainer Hochstrasser

Giancarlo di Picciotto

Lea Valaulta Naamneh

Jacques Mader

Steve Tharakan

Tommaso Tabet

Anne Moulin

Rudolf Felber

Silvio Manuel Flückiger

Ilona Postemska

Christian Diesler

Viktor Shutkevych

Petro Ilkiv

Victoria Yemets

Nicolas Guigas

Johan Gély

ian Aid at HQ

In charge of Public Private Development Partnership

Focal Point Gender

Head of cooperation, Belgrade (ex-head of QA)

Chef de Division Suppléant, Afrique de l'Ouest

Swiss Ambassador La Paz, Bolivia

Deputy Head, Global Cooperation

Head, Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division

Focal Point, Network Agriculture and Food Security

Deputy, Corporate Financial Planning and Consulting

Head, Cooperation Office Kigali; Regional Director, Great Lakes

Quality Assurance

Head, Global Program Health

CCM and MfDR

Adjunct Director, Health

Focal point poverty reduction, QA division

Evaluation Unit

Deputy Head Department Humanitarian Aid and SHA

National Programme Officer

Senior Advisor

Assistant Director of Cooperation

National Programme Officer

Chief Finance and Administration

Dep Director of Cooperation

Head, Global Program Water

SECO

Milena Mihajlovic

Markus Schrader

Tim Kaeser (WEIF)

Daniel Menebhi

SECO (WEQA): optional nur wenn genügend Zeit vorhanden

SECO (WELG) (16.3 Nachmittag)

Desk Ukraine Until End of 2016

Desk Ukraine since January 2017

PARTNERS

Mark Herkenrath

Isabel Gunther

Rudolf Batliner

Julien de Meyer

Markus Engler

Director, Alliance Sud

Director NADEL - Center for Development and Cooperation

Program Coordinator, ETH Zürich, NADEL

Consultant East Europe/VCE (RBM training)

Senior Consultant and Partner, KEK-CDC Consultants

Bangladesh

Beate Elsässer	Country Director SDC Bangladesh
Katia Stampfli-Ferraz	Head of Finance, Personnel & Administration, Bangladesh
Sabina Yasmein Lubna	NPO SDC, Sr. Programme Officer
Sydur Rahman Molla	NPO SDC, Programme Manager
Mr Sohel Ibn Ali	NPO SDC, Senior Programme Manager
Zowadul Karim Khan	NPO SDC, Programme Manager
H.M Imran	Security Adviser, Swiss Embassy
Md. Musleh Uddin	Deputy Chief Ministry of Commerce, Project director Katalyst
GB Banjara	General Manager, Katalyst
Fatema Mahmuda	Senior Deputy Director (Monitoring, Knowledge & Learning), ASK
Abdur Rouf Talukder	Additional Secretary, Executive Project Director SEIP
Faisal Hasan	IT & Database Specialist, SEIP
Syed Tarique-Uz-Zaman	M & E Specialist (P.h.D Eco.), SEIP
Khodeza Hossain	MRM Senior Manager, Sudokkho
Paul Weijers	Team Leader, Sudokkho
Anirban Bhowmik	Country Director, Swisscontact
Markus Kupper	Swisscontact, before in charge of Katalyst, Bangladesh
Samuel Heer	Managing Director, Swiss IBEX
Ishita Alam Abonee	World Bank, Consultant GPSURR, South Asia Region
M Akram-Ul Aziz	World Bank, Local Governance Consultant
Narissa Haider	UK AID, Private Sector Development Adviser
Taslina Islam	UNDP Programme Officer
Sharmeela Rassool	UNDP, Chief Technical Adviser, Human Rights Programme

Ukraine

Holger Tausch	Country Director SDC Ukraine
Lilia Popova	Head of Division on Cooperation with Local Authorities, Ministry of Regions
Olena Tregub	Head of Division Development Cooperation, Ministry of Economic Development
Olena Doroshenko	World Bank Health Programme
Oksana Garmets	DESPRO project Governance
Julia Lokshyna	DESPRO project Governance
Olena Lytvynenko	Deputy Head, Council of Europe
Olga Shevchuk	Programme Manager, Council of Europe
Lai Taavi	Senior Policy Adviser, World Health Organisation
Oleksandr Martynenko	Programme Manager, World Health Organisation
Dominik Papenheim	Senior Manager, Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine

Great Lakes

Nadigé Kanyange	NPO, Rwanda Cooperation Office, Programme Medias
Claude Rwagitare	Senior Regional Program Officer, Decentralization of Local Governance
Blondine Eyanchama	Regional Program Officer PROMOST/TVET
Wellars Ndutiye	Regional Program Officer Water and Sanitation
Théonèste Twahriwa	NPO Programme Santé
Daniel Wyss	Program Coordinator, SKAT/PROECCO
Fatou Dieye	Deputy Coordinator
Seleus Sibomane	Cooperation Office DRC, Chargé de Programme Santé
Dona-Fabiola Nshimir	Programme Décentralisation
Didacienne Gihugu	Charge Programme Foncier
Caroline Tissot Baranzini	Deputy, Cooperation Office Kigali
Deogratias Bashiburhana	Cooperation Office Burundi, Chargé Programme Foncier,
Marie-Louise Issanda	Chargé Programme PROMOST
Jean Paul Mugiraneza	Chargé Programme PROECCO
Martine Pochon	Regional Director, Interpeace
Renée Larivière	Program Officer, Interpeace
Jerome Gasana	Deputy Director-General, Interpeace
Dominique Habimana	Director General, Rwanda Workforce Development Authority
Alexandra Boin	Director, Statistical Methods, Research and Publications,
Jean-Pierre de Margerie	Rwanda Institute of Statistics
Tanimoune Mahamadou	Director Rwanda, DRC and Burundi, Swisscontact
Thaddee Barisebya	Director, Rwanda, World Food Program
Frank Asimwa	Program Deputy Head, World Food Program
Stephen Rodriques	Représentant Legal de l'Association Ruandaise pour la
Elisabeth Pitteloud	Promotion et la Connaissance des Droits de l'Homme (ARPCDH)
Mikael Boström	Legal Representative, The Future for African Actions on
Phanindra Adhikary	Sustainable Initiatives (FAASI)
Charlotte Taylor	Country Director, Rwanda, UNDP
Ellen Kallinowsky	Head of Cooperation Office, Burundi
Alessandro Mucchino	Head of Cooperation Office, Rwanda, SIDA
Jan Borg	Team Leader, Palladium
Pierre Dongier	Public Finance Management Advisor, Cooperation Office Rwanda, BTC
Pieter Dorst	GIZ
David Wininger	Head, Finance and Administration, Rwanda Cooperation Office
	Public Health Systems Advisor, BTC
	Advisor, Rwanda Health System Strengthening
	Head, Rwanda Cooperation Office, Dutch Development Cooperation
	Head, Cooperation Office DRC

Paul Jabo

Masengesho Kamuzini

Charles Karangwa

Marius Herrman

Urs Zollinger

Secrétaire Exécutif, Provence Ouest, Rwanda

Directeur de l'Institut Africain pour la Psychologie
Integrale

Chéf de Projet Santé Mentale

Junior Program Officer, Cooperation Office,
Rwanda

Managing Partner, King Zollinger & Co. Advisory
Services

Annex 3. Survey Results

SDC's RBM System: In-depth survey

An online in-depth survey was conducted with SDC HQ and country office staff 18 May to 6 June 2017. The purpose of the survey was to reflect on evaluation findings, and to test and validate emerging hypotheses of the independent evaluation of SDC's system for Results-based Management (RBM).

The 10 questions survey were addressed to 200 relevant SDC staff in English and French in a stratified random sample. At the time of closing the survey (14 working days in duration) the response rate stood at 44%. Completion rate (share of respondents that answered all 10 questions of the survey) was 90%.

Survey summary	
Recipients of the survey	200
Total no. of respondents*	88
Complete	79
Incomplete	9
<i>No. of people that opened the survey</i>	112
<i>No. of people that selected language</i>	102
<i>*No. of people that answered any question Q1-Q10</i>	88
<i>Survey open rate</i>	56%
<i>Response rate, complete + incomplete</i>	44%

The survey population was divided into strata based on organisational belonging per department. The sample was stratified to establish representative contribution of the respective subgroups, but as well to enable department based analysis of the result. There was a noticeable difference in the response rate between the strata in the survey. The result does thus not proportionally represent the total SDC staff, which should be taken into account in the assessment of findings. However, the deviations are minor and indicative conclusions can still be drawn from the survey results.

Respondents by department

Respondents	No of respondents	% of stratum sample
East	6	40%
Field	40	44%
South	25	57%
Hum	3	30%
Global Programmes	12	50%
Global Institutions	1	11%
Global Multilaterals	1	13%
Total survey	88	44%

In addition to multiple choice and Likert-based questions, the survey included four text response questions. At the closing of the survey, the text response questions has an average skipped rate of 52% and two thirds of the respondents had submitted input to the text response questions, providing an unusually high text question response rate.

Skipped text response questions	Respondents (n)	Skipped rate
English		
Q6b	34	57%
Q8b	20	34%
Q9b	23	40%
Q10 - Comments	42	72%
French		
Q2	1	4%
Q6b	17	74%
Q8b	8	36%
Q9b	8	38%
Q10 - Comments	13	62%

Summary & conclusions

The conclusion of the results of the in-depth survey is that:

(1) The purposes of the RBM system are viewed as clear and valuable. This image is maintained when the usefulness of the system was addressed from different perspectives. 81% find most SDC RBM practices useful in their work and close to 79% consider RBM guidelines to be useful and of good quality. One third, however, find most RBM instruments and practices not to be useful in their individual working tasks while genuinely useful for SDC. The purposefulness of the RBM system is though further emphasised by 85% of the respondents stating that they do not follow RBM planning and reporting requirements as a matter of compliance. In addition, many of the respondents have expressed a satisfaction with the RBM system in their responses to text response questions.

While respondents find that SDC has contributed to support RBM in partner organisations (65% out of which 18% stated 'significantly'), less than half (39%) have stated that SDC's RBM system (guidelines and practices) support the use of partner country systems for planning and reporting.

On a general note, the surveys also substantiate that the RBM system is well integrated. The 'don't know' and not-at-all-useful rates are with few exceptions low throughout the survey. This observation is further supported by the comparatively high survey response rate and the high rate of text question responses.

(2) Performance information seems to be widely used in project and strategic decision making processes. A clear majority of respondents state that they use project-level performance information for decisions in projects (87%) and country/programme level performance information in strategic decision making (84%). The bulk of respondents as well feels encouraged and supported by superiors in reporting and to use of results information in project/programme management (35% To a large extent, 43% To some extent).

Additional sources of information central to project and strategic decision making, other than results information, note a prevalence of MERV and Political Economic Analysis tools and reports. Risk assessment and CSPM are also frequently referred to in the survey. Many respondents state the political and economic context as being the most important information in project and strategic decision making. External evaluations and the nature and quality of the relationship with partner organisations are as well seen as important, being referred to by little over one third of the respondents.

(3) Whereas a clear majority have a positive and practical assessment of SDC's RBM system, the survey responses give emphasis to a need of revision and adaptation of SDC instruments and guidelines. Over 80% of the respondents would want to see significant adaptation of some of SDC instruments. Considering adaptation for RBM decision-making purposes, over one third see the need for adaptation of annual reports, and over one fifth opt for reviewing the management response to annual reports, credit proposals and cooperation strategy incl. the country results framework respectively. In relation to RBM reporting purposes, again most see the need to substantially adapt the annual report instrument (40%). Significant revisions of cooperation strategy incl. the country results framework (19%), progress reports (18%) and end-of-phase reports (17%) are also seen as important among the respondents.

The lion's share of responses relay a desire to simplify and better adapt SDC instruments to local context and operations. Improved linkages between the RBM system and existing documents are also seen as vital by the respondents. When asked if more indicators are needed, 79% of the survey respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Aversively, most respondents argue in text responses that indicators should be combined or the number of indicators should be limited. The instruments are also deemed to be too theoretical and in need of more flexibility.

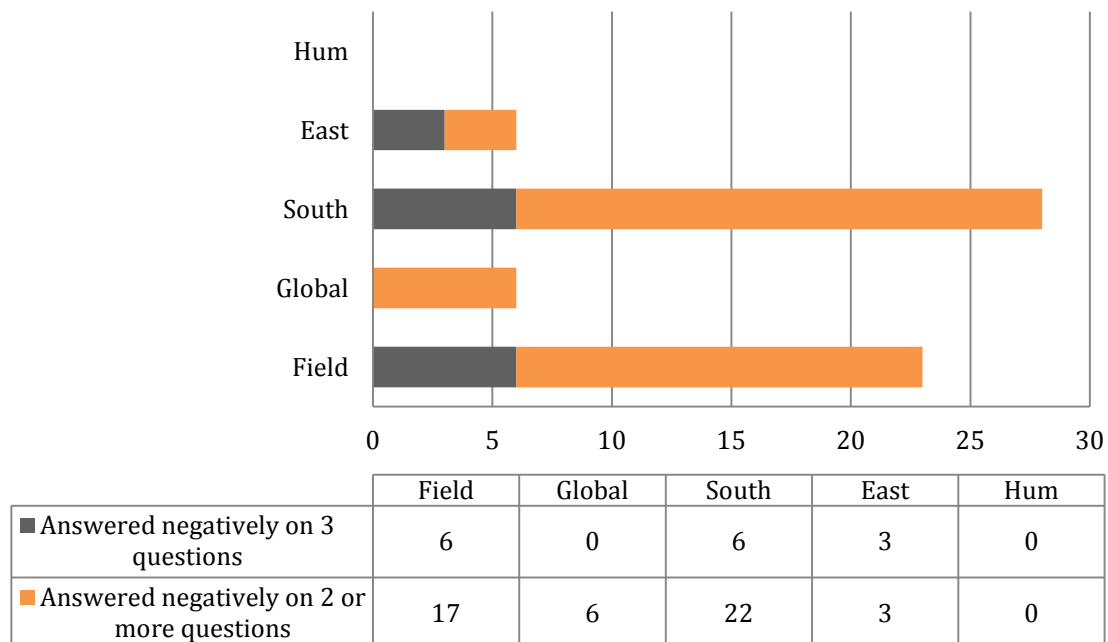
Further, the results of the survey suggest that there is need of additional RBM skills development initiatives and to further integrate the RBM system at SDC. Almost a third of the respondents (29%) agree and close to one fifth (18%) strongly agree to the statement that there is a lack of understanding of RBM at SDC in spite of good guidance material. 49% of the respondents also concur with the statement that RBM training materials are too theoretical.

(4) Most of the respondents consider SDC to be an organisation that enables learning from failure. 67% of the surveyed staff agrees that SDC management culture has successfully adapted such an approach and a majority subscribe to the statement that results information is widely used to continuously improve operations and planning. However, several of the text responses reflect fear of reporting on failures due to consequences on budgets, careers and reputation. Those with a negative perception are of the impression that the common organisational culture lack openness and that there is little resolve for change.

Some responses highlight that the negative perception value of the occurrence of failures is higher than the positive perception value of a good analysis of the explanations for failures. Judging from the responses, a small but substantial group of the SDC staff feel that more can be done to develop an open learning culture within the organisation.

(5) There is no evident division of negative or positive sentiment in the organisation observable in the survey. The responses per department do not show a significant deviation and each stratum show similar opinion distribution throughout the survey, as illustrated below.¹²¹

Department distribution of negative answers to Q3, Q6a Q7 & Q10

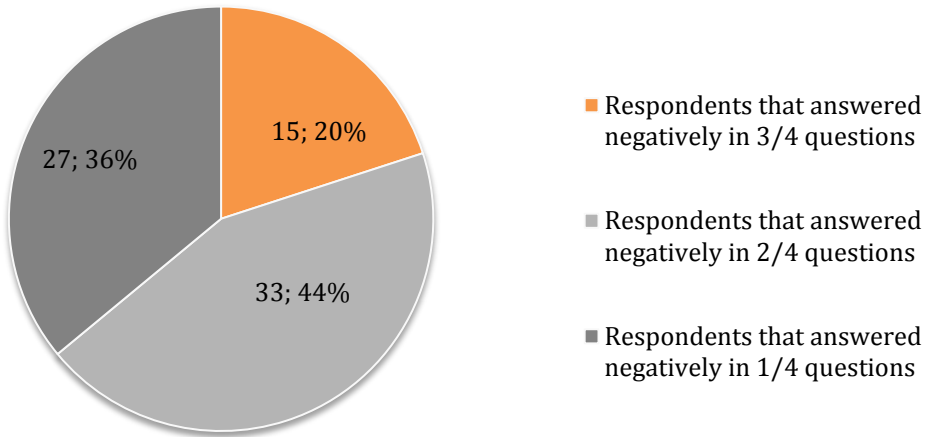


In order to examine if there was a core segment of respondents with pronounced negative views of the SDC RBM system, the survey results was as well divided by number of individual negative responses on questions Q3, Q6a Q7 & Q10. The results show that this is not the case.

As seen below, attitudes in survey question responses vary as well for individual respondents. This can suggests that the approach towards the SDC RBM system is not divided into different sets of opinion constellations. Rather, the majority of SDC staff seems to have a balanced recognition of the system, which also is supported by the considerable rate of text responses.

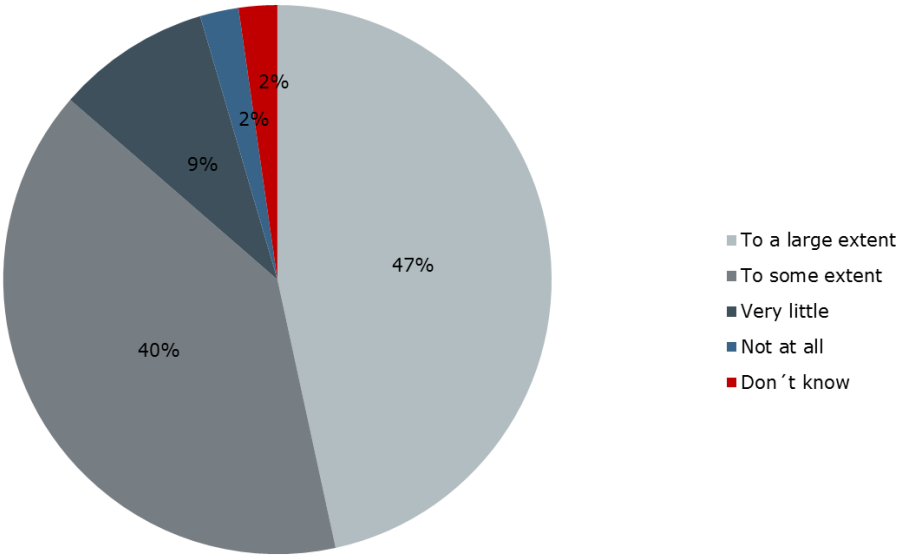
¹²¹ One deviation to be mentioned is that the share of the south department that answered "Annual report" as an instrument in need of adaption (Q8a), was 31 per cent units higher than the respondent share of the population that chose this instrument.

Number and percentage of respondents that have answered negatively on questions 3, 6a, 7 and 10

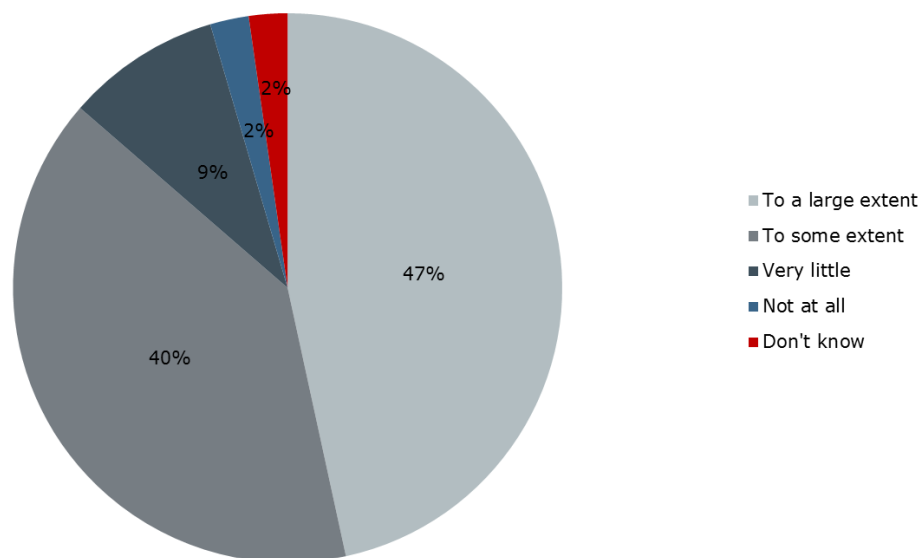


Findings/Observations

Q1a. To what extent do you use project-level performance information when you take decisions on your projects?



Q1b. To what extent do you use country/programme level performance information in your strategic decision making?



Q2. (Text Response Question) - Other than results information, what type of information matters most in project and strategic decision making? (e.g. MERV, Political Economy Analyses, risk analyses, CSPM etc.)

Total respondents 79

Respondents who skipped this question 9

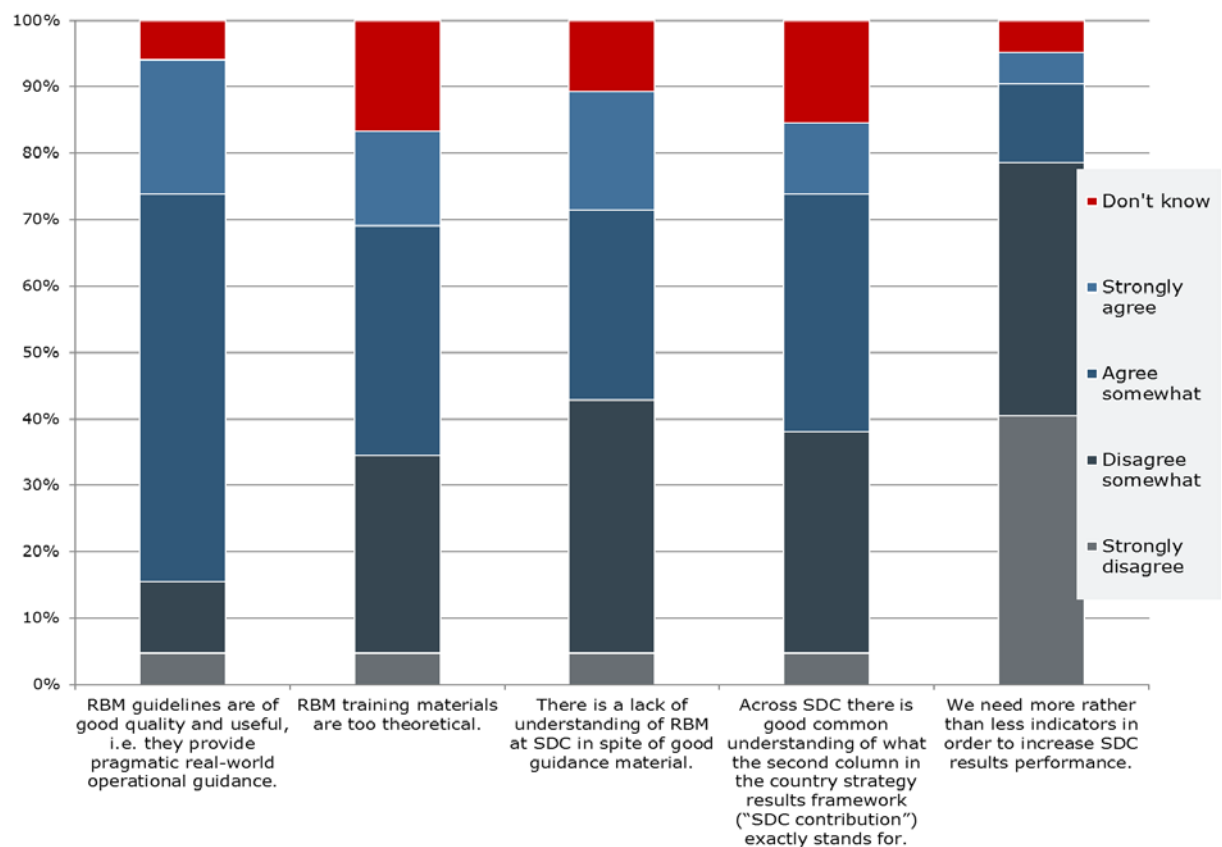
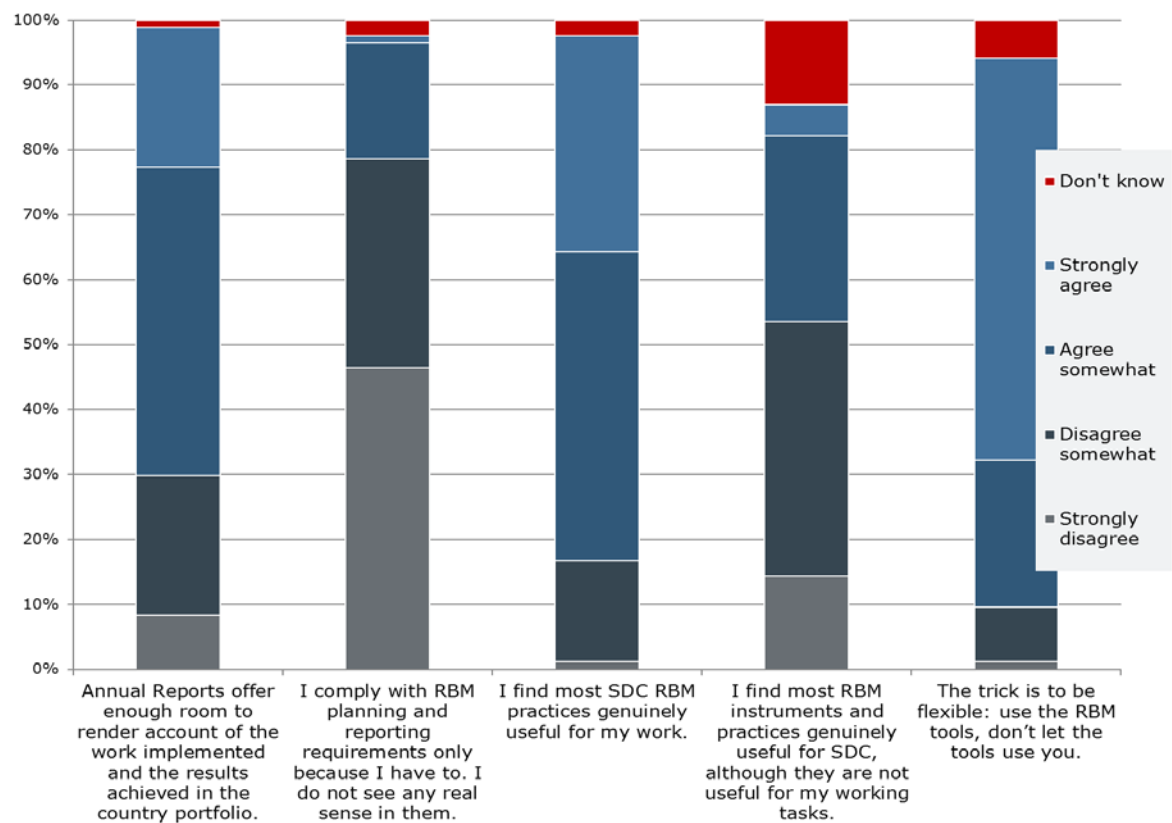
Response summary

The majority of the 79 respondents mention MERV (38), PEA (31) while risk assessment (23) and CSPM (21) are also frequently referred to.

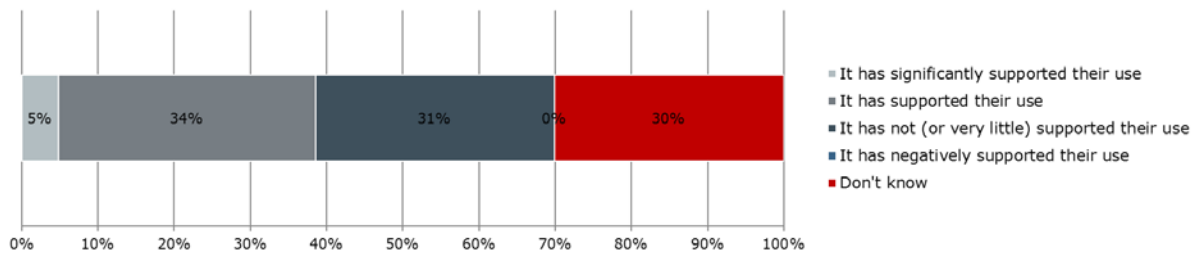
Many state the political and economic context as being the most important information in project and strategic decision making. In this respect, the nature of government-to-government cooperation, the potential of SDC projects influencing systems or national politics, the country's governance situation, institutions, embassy reports, access to the public and general attitude toward the SDC projects are highlighted.

External evaluations and the quality of, and relationship with, the partner organisations (e.g. trust, dialogue or reports) is as well frequently mentioned in the responses, with a little over a third of the respondents referring to this in their answers.

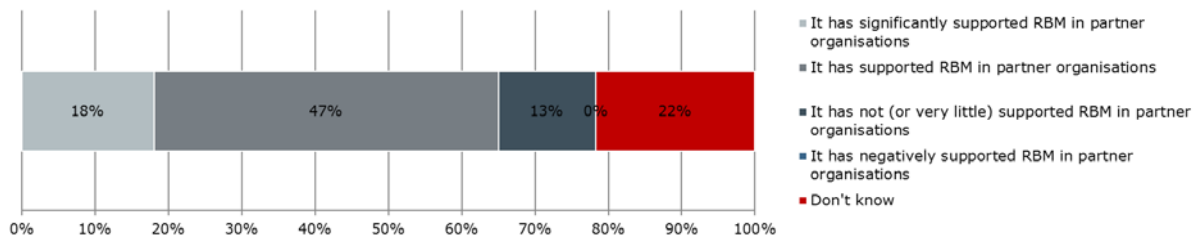
Q3. To what degree to you agree with the following statements?



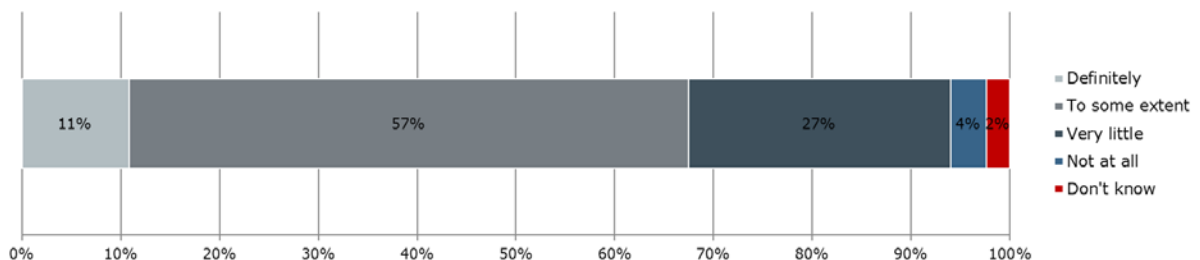
Q4. To what extent does SDC's RBM system (guidelines and practices) support the use of partner country systems for planning and reporting?



Q5. To what degree is SDC contributing to support RBM in partner organisations?



Q6a. Is the SDC management culture open to learning from failure?



Q6b. (Text Response Question) - If not at all or very little (in Q6a), what prevents SDC from learning from failures?

Total respondents 32
 Respondents who skipped this question 51

Response summary

While a majority (67%) agrees with the statement that SDC management culture open to learning from failure, many of the text response address shortcomings in the existing culture and system.

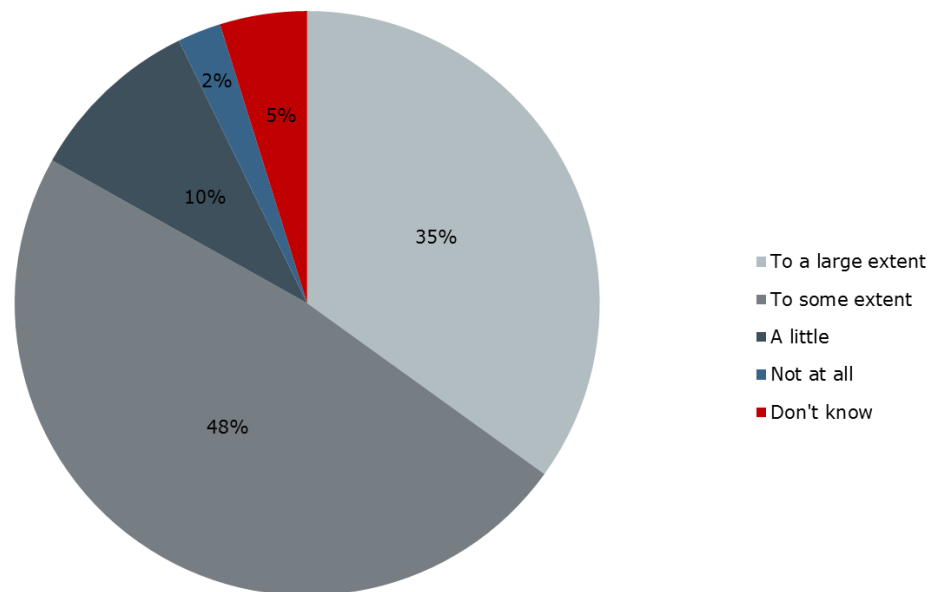
Most of the text response reflect on the challenges and needed improvements to establish a functioning learning culture. Several of the text responses voice fear of reporting on failures due to consequences on budgets, careers and reputation. It is also referred to the general organisational culture, where respondents see a lack of openness, little will of change and a defensive stance.

Some responses highlight that negative perception value of the occurrence of failures is higher than the positive perception value of a good analysis of reasons for failures. This supposedly leads to less reporting of failures and that failure reporting is being done is often done too late, is less exhaustive or productive than if learning from failure was more highly valued.

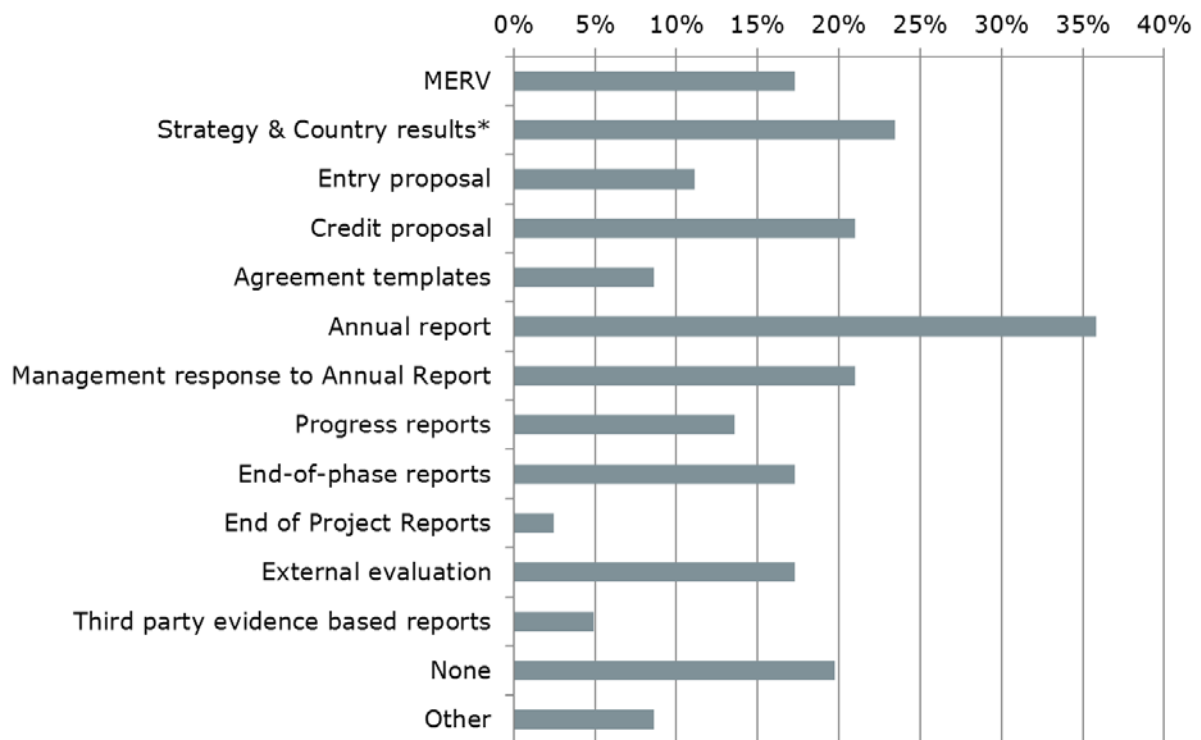
A few respondents emphasise that there is an emphasis on good results and that these equals success, while process development and improvement is not equally cherished. Judging from the text responses, more can be done to document and assess failures at an organisational level. It is also mentioned that elitism at the centre of the Department of Foreign Affairs restricts the willingness to accept failures as part of the organisational learning system.

Another perspective that reoccurs in the responses is that the cooperation strategy is too rigid and poorly understood. It is stated that there is a need for a reference framework that better adapts to the context, and not the other way around. A need for attentiveness is requested, in order for people to realize that some projects should be cancelled and not prolonged.

Q7. To what extent do you feel your SDC superior(s) support and encourage you in your reporting and use of results information in project/programme management?



Q8a. In your opinion, which SDC instruments need to be significantly adapted for RBM decision-making purposes?



**Cooperation Strategy and Country Results Framework*

In response to the 'other' option in Q8a, the following was provided:

- Opcoms
- Project Document
- Inclusion of reports on the effectiveness in the existing instruments
- System for monitoring policy decisions on SDC projects and programs
- There are too many instruments!
- Studies on the perception of beneficiaries of SDC programs
- Aggregate reference indicators and Reference indicators

Q8b. (Text Response Question) - Explain how, in your opinion, these selected instruments need to be adapted (e.g. omissions, duplications, desirable additions or removals, etc.)

Total respondents 53
 Respondents who skipped this question 28

Response summary

In general, the respondents are of the opinion that the instruments, as they are used now, are heavy and inefficient. There is a demand for a simplification of the instruments and better adaption to local context. The instruments are deemed to be overly theoretic and that there is a need for more flexibility.

Several respondents argue that the **annual report** should only be based on reference

indicators and should not include all the country results. Variations of what is reported in the results statement of the annual reports are too pronounced, making comparisons between different annual reports difficult.

The respondents also commented that the annual reports should analyse the quality and relevance of the data provided, and what can be learned for future programming. Too much time is thought to be invested in elaborating on outcomes and outputs, while not enough is allocated to managing implications. Some respondents ask for reports that are more reader-friendly to enable broader utilisation, also by other departments within the SDC.

In general, the respondents want more frequency in using the **MERV** for it to be relevant for monitoring programming in fragile contexts. It is also mentioned that there is a trap of “thinking that studying the past will help predict the future (which is not the case in uncertain and complex times)”.

The MERV is by most seen as a useful instrument, but the template and process is seen as exhaustive and detached from operations. Several respondents argue for focusing on fewer points but going more into depth.

Several respondents express a need for longer strategic periods with improved possibilities for adaptation to changing contexts. The **Cooperation Strategy** is viewed as too broad in terms of the thematic spread but too short lived in respect to the amount of time it takes to review and revise the strategy.

Some respondents think that the strategy should be presented to the Government and regularly discussed. It is argued that cooperation strategies should focus much more on their contribution in implementation of national development and sector plans.

In relation to **Country Result Framework**, some respondents mean that there is a lack of monitoring and that indicators are not considered when a Cooperation Strategy is prepared. There is a need for the framework to be more result-oriented. It is highlighted that it would be positive with fewer indicators in the in the Results Framework and to better use these in decision-making for future strategies.

The main critique of the **credit proposals** is that these are too general to successfully re-orientate a project in case of failure to provide the expected results. Some comments indicate that they should contain more objective and quantitative data on target achievement rate of project phases.

Several respondents experience the **Management Responses to the Annual Reports** to be general and vague. Some respondents also consider the potential of the management response is not utilized fully and that it should be used to influence future programming. It is commented that the Management Response is often written by a desk officer and does not relate to higher-level management strategic decision-making.

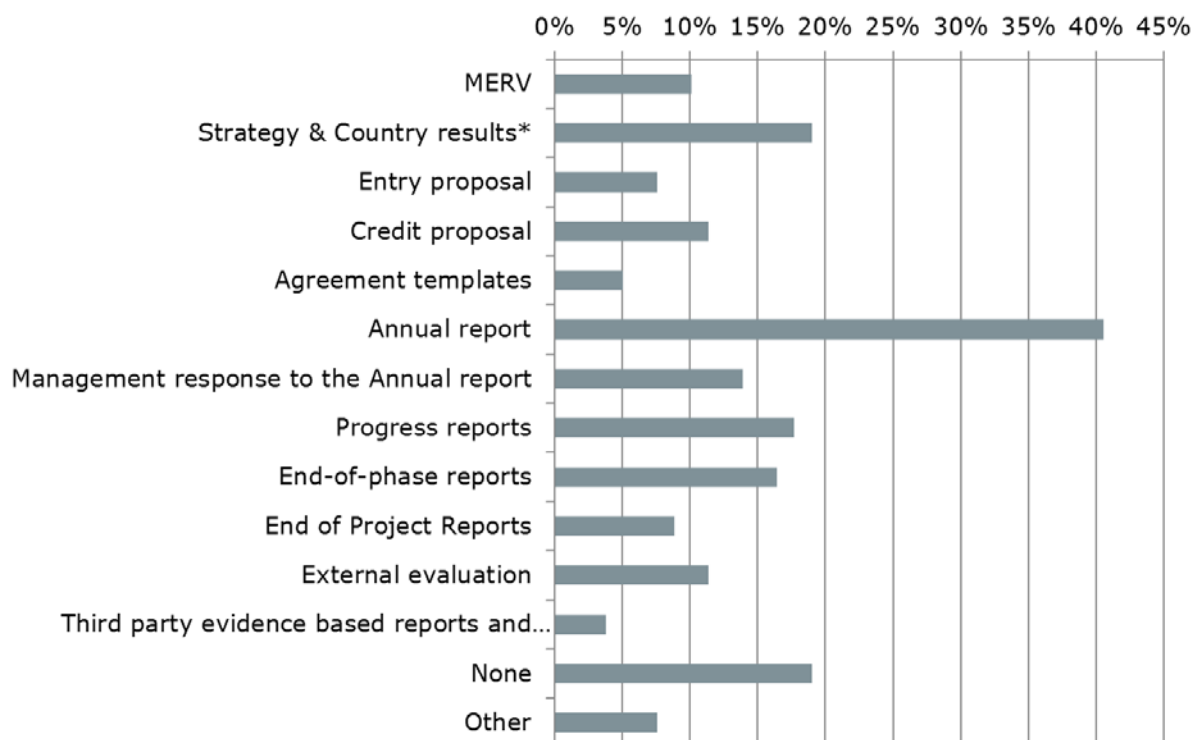
Several respondents mention that **End-of-phase reports** could be skipped or be better adapted to the purpose of having pre-next-phase discussion material. More emphasis on learning is also requested.

The opinion on **external evaluation** is that it needs to be ensured that such evaluations are done independently. It is mentioned, that SDC needs to reassure that financing and procurement of evaluators is done by an entity that is unrelated to implementation and management. This is meant to also reduce pressure to deliver positive evaluations reports.

In addition, there is an opinion that external evaluators does sometimes not verify good indicators or results and does not explore information that would generate real value in decision-making processes.

The respondents that answered “None” in Q8a commented that there is no need for significant adaptation of the instruments but that they should be applied and used in a more rigorous way. One respondent suggested more on-going training on the RBM.

Q9a. In your opinion, which SDC instruments need to be significantly adapted for RBM reporting purposes?



*Cooperation Strategy and Country Results Framework

Q9b. (Text Response Question)

Explain how, in your opinion, these selected instruments need to be adapted (e.g. omissions, duplications, desirable additions or removals, etc.)

Total respondents	48
Respondents who skipped this question	31

Response summary

In general, there is an opinion that reporting is heavy and absorbs resources. There seem to be a general request to simplify the instruments and that the reporting process is not compatible with operations. The problems arising from this is said to be that some pretend to know the results when they most often do not. The respondents express a need of more room for analysis rather than reporting, and request clearer and simplified relationship between the different instruments.

For **Annual reports**, several respondents emphasise the need to simplify and make it more user/reader friendly. A central challenge that is highlighted is that the Annual Reports are not harmonised and do not provide sufficient or correct information to facilitate comparison. Annual Reporting, it is commented, is too rigidly related to log-frame and does not reflect or describe results.

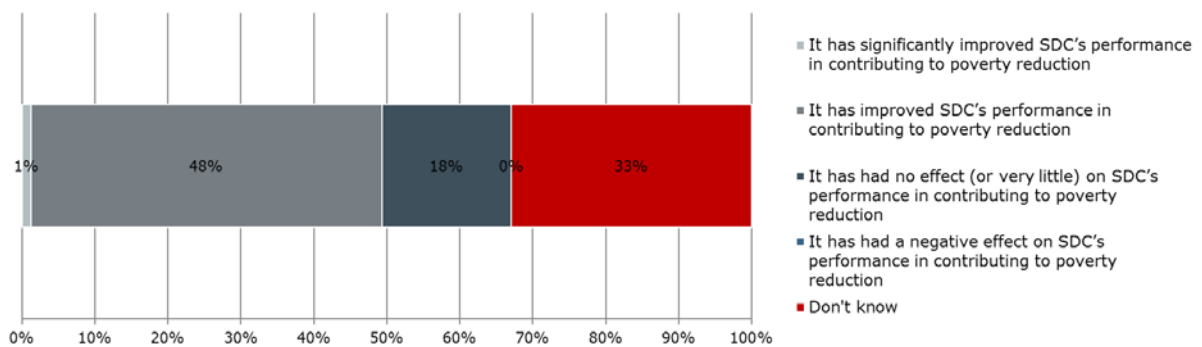
In respect to **Progress Reports**, it is stated that certain impacts (positive or negative) are not easily detected within short time periods. A follow-up matrix should be added and an evaluation responding to the priorities of SDC's strategy. Also, the context in which the partner organisations work in and time line of payments are said to be essential to be accounted for in the reporting cycle. One suggestion is to align SDC instruments with instruments of partner organisations for comparison motives. It is also suggested that SDC should introduce templates to decrease the administrative burden of partner organisations.

For **Cooperation Strategy**, ARI is suggested as an aid for reporting at the result level. It is proposed that the Cooperation Strategy exercise should become leaner and as well cover a longer time span for continuity.

A demand is expressed for the **Credit proposals** to include a (better) explanation of purpose and later on reflect on this in the annual report. The credit proposal instrument is suggested to become a more flexible instrument.

The **MERV** is proposed to put focus on the indicators of the results framework of the cooperation strategies. It is recommended to be revised to become more dynamic and be integrated in the Annual Report.

Q10. To what extent has RBM improved SDC's performance in contributing to poverty reduction?



Text response comments on Q10 "To what extent has RBM improved SDC's performance in contributing to poverty reduction?"

Total respondents 24
 Respondents who skipped this question 55

Response summary

A clear majority of the respondents on Q10 argue that RBM has improved SDCs performance in contributing to poverty reduction. In the text responses several express that RBM has helped SDC to establish a structure for better understanding the context and its reporting capabilities. This in turn is beneficial in sustaining a momentum towards poverty reduction, especially in the sense of targeting, recognizing different forms and types of poverty and demonstrating concrete results of the efforts to reduce poverty.

Some comments are however sceptical about the contribution of the RBM system in relation to poverty reduction, and several highlight that there are limited underlying facts to support the statement. Some respondents argue that RBM has improved SDC's performance on poverty reduction, but emphasise that it is too early to assess the impact of RBM on SDC's performance. It is mentioned that the indicators of the results framework are progress indicators and fitting tools only over several years. These would allow for a readjustment of strategies in place, if and when needed in the future.

The comments from the respondents that answered "No, or very little" are in sum that the reporting has improved, but that RBM have had no or limited effect on the quality of operations.

The respondents answering "Don't know" have in general terms argued that there is need for a study before making a statement on whether, and to what extent, RBM has improved SDC's performance in contributing to poverty reduction.

Annex 4. Summary findings from Country Visits

A4.1 Ukraine

A field visit was conducted by Janet Vähämäki to Ukraine on the 24-28/5 2017. Two domains (Health and Governance) as well as Humanitarian aid were chosen as evaluation objects. The evaluator interviewed staff within the SDC Office, Government partners, recipients of Swiss aid and other donors. In addition the evaluator participated in an informal dinner discussions with Heads of Development Cooperation in Ukraine. During the final day a round-up meeting was held where some preliminary findings were discussed.

Aid in Ukraine is highly projectified and fragmented. There exists no overall results framework led by the government and the Government has an extremely low capacity to coordinate aid among donors. Most aid programmes are implemented and led by donor supported Programme Implementation Units. There exists few donors and few structures that support improved RBM capacity within government. RBM is therefore mainly applied within SDCs own projects. The Governance/Decentralisation sector has come the furthest with a common Results Framework approach and harmonisation efforts with other donors.

A4.1.2 Findings by instrument

Staff within the SDC Office posed both positive and negative views on SDCs RBM instruments and guidelines. Some argued that in general RBM guidelines are clear and understandable. Moreover, the RBM instruments were by some considered to be rather flexible since re-allocation and decisions could be made relatively easy. Others considered that the return of investment of RBM was low. It was for example questioned for whom all results information actually is produced and whether aggregated information at different levels really is worth the effort. A respondent who both handled SDC and SECO projects declared that SDCs RBM guidelines is a "monster of documents" in comparison to SECO. It was therefore argued that the SDC could use more of storytelling and other forms of reporting to inform about results and that SDC should develop a set of guidelines that had an ambition level in between SDC and SECO.

In regard to the **Cooperation Strategy** process some respondents argued that the process was useful since it enforced to exchange information in between SDC, SECO and HS. It was argued that there was a need for the SDC office to have a communication document of what SDC is doing in Ukraine to externals, and that the CS served a good purpose for that. It was also argued that partners found the Country Strategy for Ukraine as positive. However, some argued that the level of ambition for the CS is high, and that it was not clear for whom the document was done and that the CS process was heavy now in comparison to previous CS.

SDC Ukraine has developed a separate **monitoring matrix on the country strategy** which contains a baseline, target and observed values for each year on the different indicators. The monitoring matrix predominantly has the same indicators as the Country strategy, but there are also some additional indicators. The monitoring matrix is only used as an internal working document (i.e. it is not officially sent to Head Quarters) and is mainly discussed during the mid-term reviews. Some staff within the office found the separate

monitoring exercise as valuable, others complained about the difficulties to: a) fill in the indicators every year, b) insert outcome information annually, c) measure impact, d) receive information from partners since they report too late, e) assure the quality and reliability of the data collected by partners, f) difficulties that the country indicators come in too late, g) that there were too many indicators since everyone wants to "appear in the matrix" with their projects; h) that some indicators were not relevant and do not tell what actually is happening in reality and i) that the matrix mainly served HQ needs. Some suggestions made by staff were to cut the indicators to half and to make the Country strategy processes more flexible so that indicators can be changed or dropped if needed.

SDC Ukraine has taken a decision to only do the **MERV** twice a year (previously it was done 4 times a year). For the mid-year review (in May) people from HQ are invited to discuss the overall progress of the programmes. For this review no document is produced but presentations are only made orally. The MERV is used as an internal exercise in Ukraine, it is shared with the Embassy to get their 2nd opinion. Several staff members found the exercise useful and found it positive to only do the exercise twice a year. A staff member for example expressed that "it is usually a lively moment when MERV is discussed, it is an occasion when I can systematise my thinking". However, others found it to be a heavy exercise without a clear purpose. It was argued that all information in the MERV is only on top and that the results are not judged by a professional. It was also raised that since the MERV is published for all public organisations in a chat world, the Field office is a bit more worried about the wordings in the MERV, and that writing the report therefore takes time. Some found the template to be strict. Some recommendations made on how to improve the MERV were that reporting could be done only on areas that have changed and let other things just be, to use the Embassy's political reporting as a source of information on what is happening and/or to contract a think tank who could provide an external professional opinion. Some argued that the MERV exercise could be skipped and that discussions on progress could be held anyway, without the strict MERV template.

The **Annual Reporting** was by some respondents seen as a positive process since it was seen as providing an overview of what others are doing and since it was then possible to discuss progress of the programmes. A respondent argued that there typically is a good discussion on the ratings. Another argued that "it brings a scientific touch to what we are doing". However, it was also declared that whereas that the exercise was useful for us but it was asked whether HQ really find it useful?. On the more negative side some declared that the AR held an ambitious format for reporting, that it was strict with pages and format and that the process was complex. It was argued that because of the strict format the document with very limited pages for the report could not be given to anyone external, they would not understand. It was also argued that the AR did not serve a programming purpose since it was not possible to change project programming because of the AR, that this was already done in other ways. It was therefore questioned whether the AR is used by anyone, why it was done, whether it actually leads to better programming by partners and whether it was worth the effort. Suggestions on how to make the AR more relevant was to only report on outputs annually and outcomes in the end-of phase report and to make the format more flexible so that it becomes easier to read the document and to use it as a communication and analysis tool.

Some found the **Management Response from HQ** on the Annual Report as positive. It was argued that it was positive to receive feed-back from the HQ since SDC, SECO and HR and thematic areas were bound by the document to provide a joint answer. However, it was also stated that answers often were mechanical, that “staff at HQ just insert a comment since they must say something on their thematic area”. However, it was also argued that the Office did not receive comments on all areas, i.e. that some areas were totally forgotten in the Management Response. An approximation made was that it takes about 2 weeks full time of office to write the Annual Report. The MERV exercise is less time consuming since it does not contain any quantitative data.

In regard to the **PCM guidelines** and processes it was commented that it regarded less work to work with contributions than mandates since you do not have to do a procurement. However, it was argued that with mandates you are in command. It was argued that the entry proposal guidelines were limited and restricted by their format and that joint programming was not promoted or pushed for in the PCM guidelines. Some recommendations made on the Entry Proposal and Credit proposal were to reduce the instructions of the guidelines and that these two documents could eventually, in some cases, be merged.

Regarding the **Annual Reporting guidelines for partners** some argued that they are clear and that partners often think that they are useful. Others argued that partners find it difficult to stick to this format. Partner reporting (i.e. use of the guidelines) were by some seen as comprehensive whereas others found the boring to read since they need to stick to a template. It was also argued that there was not so much analysis in the reports and that partners seldom provide information on failures and difficulties. It was moreover argued that reporting from international organisations often come in too late. Some recommendations done regarding partners reporting was if for e.g. a newsletter could be enough as a reporting requirement.

A common practice within the SDC office was to always respond with a letter on partners Annual Reporting. Some perceived the process with Annual Reporting from partners as positive since results could then be discussed with the partners. Others found that the reporting exercise was superficial since disbursements needed to be made anyway without discussion. Problems were specifically found with one **agreement template (the WHO)** since there is a paragraph agreed that SDC is obliged to disburse funds to the organisation despite that a report has not been approved.

It seemed to be a common practice within the office to always request partners to fill in the SDC Logical Framework, although this is not a requirement of SDC in the guidelines for Credit proposals. Staff argued however that the SDC RBM approach and the SDC Logical Framework was easier to apply within support to the Swiss organisations than international institutions.

Within the Humanitarian portfolio it was perceived that the Field office had little influence over decisions made in Humanitarian support. It was perceived that the Field office is consulted only in occasions when the projects are being criticised. It was perceived that the Humanitarian Department worked differently from rest of the SDC on how to follow for e.g. PCM regulations, they do a lot more exceptions from rules and they are more flexible. An exception was for e.g. done to combine the entry proposal and the credit proposal in order to save time.

All respondents declared that SECOs management and administrative routines were easier to deal with than SDCs. This is partly due to that all SECO decisions and all project management is done at the HQ level whereas SDC decisions and project management is the responsibility of the field office. For the field office it is however more difficult to know who to contact within SECO since the SECO projects and programmes are managed by the thematic expert and not, as within the SDC, by one Country Desk Officer. A Programme Officer in the field could therefore need to be in contact with several SECO persons. SDC has more overall knowledge of developments in the country whereas SECO has more knowledge on the thematic topic.

SDCs partners in Ukraine were in general fine with SDC reporting requirements. Three out of four partners declared that that the results information gathered within the projects contributed to improved learning, analysis and programming. All were positive and happy about the feed back they receive on their reports. However, one of the partners stated that it is difficult to understand what is meant by improved "analysis; that SDC is asking for more details at the same time as they ask for shorter reports –difficult to combine and that SDC is a tough donor in comparison to others.

The partners argued that the additional Country strategy Monitoring framework implied extra work. Even though the intention was that the information should be taken from the Annual Reports 3 out of 4 partners interviewed had been requested to fill in the whole table separately, in addition to their reporting in the annual review. Although the partners were believed to know about the monitoring matrix exercise, the matrix came as a surprise for all partners.

Partners complained about the difficulty to report on outcomes annually, and to report on impact. They generally seemed to be fine with reporting on outputs. They all believed that too much output information was requested – that SDC wanted to know a lot of details. A representative of a partner organisation for example said that "we sent SDC a list of different possible output indicators they could choose among, and expected they to come back to us with a selection of 3 or 4 of the 15 output indicators proposed for the project. However, they selected all of them for monitoring, which of course makes it difficult for us".

A4.1.3 Findings by purpose

Decision-Making and Learning

Results information is to some extent contributing to learning, improved analysis and decision-making. But, decisions are mostly taken because of other (political, financial or other reasons). Learning or improved programming is not declared to be the main purpose of why results information is being gathered. Decisions are not taken because of results from the past period but because of overall performance delays/speed up/things happening in the projects.

Accountability to Domestic Stakeholders

There is within the SDC Office a high discipline and understanding on the need to report on results for accountability purposes to domestic stakeholders. This purpose was brought up as the main purpose of RBM by most staff within the office, as well as by the partners (specifically partners that had a mandate).

Accountability by and to Partners

Accountability by and to Partners is less valued and understood as a purpose of why results information is gathered. There was specifically lack of efforts done to support existing government structures for RBM. Government officials complained about scattered information flows from donors on what they were doing. Other partners declared that they were in general reluctant to provide negative information or if a programme is not performing well to SDC since they were afraid that this would lead to consequences that funds are cut for their programmes.

Some issues that the SDC Field office in Ukraine might want to consider to make RBM more relevant for all purposes:

- Work with an overall Results framework to track progress of reform within government. This could decrease aid fragmentation, make projects and programmes sustainable in a longer run and facilitate higher level political dialogue.
- Support an enlarged government involvement and capacity to make sure that longer term impact is achieved
- Make sure the government receives monitoring information and that all SDC projects/programmes are registered in the government databases for aid
- Promote joint reporting mechanisms for donors
- Let the partners know that also failures are OK to report
- Support partners to use their own results frameworks, there is no obligation to use the SDC Log Frame for follow up.

A4.2 Great Lakes

Introduction

SDC's regional Great Lakes programme covers Rwanda's West Province, the North-West of Burundi, and the South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Its four priority themes are:¹²²

- access to basic services for the population (health care, hygiene)
- development of a local economy that creates jobs and incomes
- protection of civilians
- strengthening of democratic processes.

Overall coordination of the regional programme rests with the Rwanda office. The budget of the programme was CHF 32 million in 2016¹²³.

The Great Lakes programme was selected as one of three regional and country programmes visited by the evaluation team (see inception report for details). One evaluation team member (Palenberg) visited Kigali for one week in April 2017. 27 interviews and focus group discussions were held with 43 individuals. About half of all interviewees were SDC staff from the country offices in Rwanda, Burundi and DR Congo, and from

¹²² <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/great-lakes-region.html>, visited in June 2017.

¹²³ Grands Lacs Rapport Annuel 2016, avec planification 2017, p. 28.

headquarters in Bern. External informants were drawn from implementing NGOs¹²⁴, Rwandan government and government agencies¹²⁵, and from bilateral and multilateral agencies in Kigali¹²⁶. In addition, the evaluation team reviewed the country strategy 2013-2016 (the subsequent strategy was not available at the time), Annual Reports (2013-2016), and project-level documentation for selected projects¹²⁷.

Overall observations

Interviewed bilateral and multilateral development partners considered SDC's approach to RBM as striking a good balance between accountability and managerial requirements. One interviewee expressed this by situating SDC's approach in the "middle" of bilateral agency approaches, with DFID and the EU at the "prescriptive" extreme, and SIDA at the other. Some interviewees of other agencies (Dutch development cooperation, UNDP) had personally been involved in introducing RBM in their home institution and considered SDC's pathway to RBM comparatively smooth compared to sometimes "bumpy" implementation in their home institutions.

Across RBM purposes, interviewed SDC staff mostly felt that the RBM instruments and processes introduced after 2008 were useful. While accountability was felt to represent the dominant driver for RBM at SDC, interviewees felt that instruments and processes were also useful for decision-making and learning, if applied in the right way (see next point). With few exceptions, interviewed staff felt results frame targets and indicators were useful, and that there were neither too little nor too many.

Importantly, virtually all interviewed SDC staff felt that RBM tools were most useful when applied with pragmatism and some degree of flexibility, summarised as "use the instruments, don't let the instruments use you." Most senior SDC staff used RBM templates in this way and felt that headquarter staff in Bern would reciprocate this understanding.

Some interviewed staff expressed principal reservations regarding logframes because they were considered too rigid, not be able to reflect the richness of actual development work, especially in fragile contexts.

The degree to which RBM implementation partners were "RBM savvy" varied greatly. While some were more advance than SDC, for example in developing theories of change, results framework, and indicator-based results monitoring, others visibly struggled with understanding or applying these concepts. Especially small local partners had difficulties grasping RBM (see also section on partner accountability below).

Interviewed staff also felt that SDC desks played two parallel roles. First, helping the country/regional office in preparation of key documents for submission to headquarters and, second, to thematically and functionally quality-assure these documents. Based on

¹²⁴ Association Ruandaise pour la Promotion et la Connaissance des Droits de l'Homme (ARPCDH), Institut Africain pour la Psychologie Integrale, Interpeace, Palladium, SKAT, SwissContac, The Future for African Actions on Sustainable Initiatives (FAASI).

¹²⁵ Rwanda Institute for Statistics, Rwandan Workforce Development Authority, West Province Governance.

¹²⁶ BTC, Dutch Development Cooperation, GIZ, SIDA, WFP, UNDP.

¹²⁷ PEPP, PROECCO, PROMOST.

its interactions in the field study, the evaluation team found these roles somewhat conflicting as the first implied representation of the country office and the second of headquarters.

Observations related to “Managing for results” (decision-making and learning), including poverty focus

Program-level RBM instruments (regional strategy, Annual Report) were generally considered useful for management of the regional programme and, during preparation, and as a process for critical strategic self-reflection.

One broadly shared concern on the level of National Programme Officers (NPOs) was that the Annual Report, in its current form, was not providing sufficient space to describe the regional programme and its projects comprehensively. On the other hand, if elements were omitted because of space restrictions, SDC headquarters would sometimes inquire why these areas had not been covered, leaving NPOs struggling to explain that they had been covered by the program, but not by the report. While the need for more synthesis and less description was generally agreed, it was felt to not be easy in practice.

On the project level, ProDoc and progress reports were considered essential in assessing quality of design, monitoring implementation, and tracking emerging results. Especially the planning process, including the project level results framework, was considered important. In one of three projects reviewed (PROECCO), important changes in project strategy and goal-setting resulted from reflecting on impact pathways and results indicators.

Entry and credit proposals were accepted as necessary process steps, required to obtain project funding. One shared worry was that SDC headquarters sometimes “overcharged” entry proposals, requiring more detail than those submitting it felt was warranted at this PCM stage. Some clarifications on mutual expectations was considered useful.

Interviewees also felt that numeric results reporting was a challenge in thematic areas with less tangible and measurable objectives, for example in projects focusing on human rights, where effects such as empowerment and free choice could only be poorly mapped by quantitative indicators.

Generally, interviewees did not make a direct association between RBM-related activities, instruments and processes on the one hand, and increased contributions of SDC to poverty reduction. Rather, interviewees felt that effective use of RBM instruments enabled SDC to better plan for and reach short-term results directly associated with its projects and, secondly, that RBM had motivated increased reflection on how those intermediary results were expected to influence or contribute to development impacts such as reduced poverty.

Observations related to “Accountability to Swiss Stakeholders”

The need for rendering account to parliament and the wider Swiss public was generally recognised and considered important.

While there was general support for accountability-related monitoring and reporting of results, staff was unsure how reported results information, for example in Annual Reports,

would exactly be used. To the evaluation team, this points to a clear need to better explain the purposefulness and intended usage of information requested for accountability purposes, for example as done in the case of ARIs (Section 3.1.3). A small number of interviewees felt that most reporting done in the name of accountability was not really used for that purpose, or any other purpose.

Observations related to “Accountability to Development Partners”

In interviews with bilateral and multilateral development partners, SDC was considered essential and very engaged in sector coordination and liaison activities with the Rwandan government. Some expressed that this constituted “invisible work” in RBM as strategies and results frameworks might not reflect it adequately; a sentiment that was shared by interviewed SDC staff.

Interviewed Rwandan government and government agency representatives (felt well informed about ongoing SDC-funded activities, for example through shared planning and regular steering committee meetings, and clearly felt that SDC was contributing to Rwandan programmes rather than implementing “their own” projects. These interviewees also felt no burden associated with SDC-related reporting requirements.

Feedback from implementers and cooperation partners of SDC projects on SDC RBM-related reporting requirements varied. Some interviewees (representing large Swiss NGOs and multilateral partners) felt they could mostly draw from their own results monitoring systems for reporting on SDC projects. In other cases, for example for small local NGOs or consultancy firms with a strong technical focus, planning for and reporting on results remained a challenge, requiring coaching through SDC staff.

A4.3 Bangladesh

Introduction

A field mission to Bangladesh was carried out in May 2017 by Martin Schmidt of the evaluation team.

The Bangladesh programme is comparatively large (26.0 million CHF 2016) and during the 2013-2017 strategy period covered the three domains of 1) market development, 2) skills development, and 3) local governance. The mission came at a time when the process of formulating a new country strategy was in its final stages, which provided for an opportunity to review of the process first hand: Both on the level of strategy formulation on the part of the Country office, and on the level of partner interaction and strategic dialogue in anticipation of a new strategy for 2018-2021.

The Bangladesh case hence focuses on the instruments and processes related to the strategic transition, although other instruments came into focus as well. The mission also reviewed and met with representatives of main projects including Sudokkhu, Katalyst, SEIP, HR project (ASK and UNDP components), and PROLOG including partners from national government, Swisscontact, DFID/UK AID, UNDP, World Bank, and Palladium Group.

At the time of the mission, the draft Swiss Concept Note on the cooperation strategy 2018-2021 was available, and together with interviews and the self-assessments of the three domains in 2013-2017 it provided insight to SDC thinking behind the new strategy. The proposed new programme evolves the former domains into three new domains labelled 1) democratic governance, 2) income and economic governance and 3) safer migration, including visible shifts towards migration and vulnerable and poor groups in society.

Findings

Strategic process

The Country strategy, Annual Reports and Results Framework (CS-AR-RF) combined can be viewed as building blocks. Each element supports the next beginning with a CS + RF that defines expectation to be monitored annually in the AR. In turn, when a new strategy is formulated, past AR's make for a starting point in a performance analysis to inform strategy.

The making of the Swiss Strategy for Bangladesh 2018-2021 very much follows this logic, and the process from Opening- to Concept note reflects taking stock of past performance when building a new strategy. To illustrate, the self-assessment component of the process has been inclusive and, according to the evaluator and SDC staff, effective in arriving in well elaborated analyses of how to sharpen the impact of Swiss contributions. On this level, the RBM perspective is present.

The country office reports that the process (starting in the spring of 2016) has been heavy but purposeful. A key strength has been that enough time and effort has been allocated, resulting in strong scenarios, a purposeful MERV and exhaustive self-assessments to underpin the Concept Note (including a new Results Framework). Process management is deemed a key contributing factor. While it seems participants in the strategic process agrees existing instruments are purposeful and clear, it is equally clear that their *purposeful application* in the process of strategy development is overwhelmingly a managerial issue. A full review is not possible here, but it is our assessment that since the complexity of a country strategic process cannot rely on individuals performing in line with the guidelines of the Field Handbook, their contributions must be organised to come together in a purposeful way. *For this there are no management guidelines or (as far as we can see) management trainings at SDC.*

One weakness pointed out is found in past Annual Reports and their strategic analyses. On the other hand, although a stronger strategic reasoning may be desired from the AR, on the overall RBM System level all expat staff agree that the AR is 'the' game-changer of reform for the country office. It is positively forcing the office to think in results- and strategic terms. The analytic element of the ARs 2012-2016 is also steadily improving (in this regard, there is ambiguity as to how effective the AR Management Responses have been to respond to the strategic questions of the AR and to foster a sound analysis).

Country officers also refer to weaknesses regarding coordination between CO and HQ not always optimal, and of limited third party input to the process or the analyses.

In the strategic process the RF for Bangladesh has also been drafted (still in draft format). It is interesting to note that the framework has been developing strongly in a comparative perspective (both between countries, but also from the 2013-2017 RF). This is deemed both to be a reflection of a strong strategic process, but also a result of Swiss partner- and RBM orientation during the previous strategy period.

On project level, there are clear indications that SDC has been active in the development of reporting and planning frameworks with partners. This has happened both in government oriented programmes (e.g. SEIP, Katalyst), in donor coordinated programmes (e.g. Katalyst and UNDP HR programme) and in mandated projects such as Sudokkhu. SDC's role seems not to have been formalised or equipped with standard templates, but rather flexibly applied and individually driven.

Observing more closely the RFs 2013-2017 and 2018-2021 (draft) makes for an interesting comparison. Overall, the evaluator concludes that;

The clarity of indicators, results logic and theory of change has improved

The framework has developed in terms of the overall clarity of indicators and results logic. Results logic in 2018-2021 is also increasingly able to zoom in on short-term outcome level expectations from the project portfolio, meaning that the cohesion between expected interventions and their reflection in the RF is visible. In turn, this makes for a stronger association with the strategic analysis of the Concept Note and overall clarity of intent.

Partner dialogue on monitoring and results logic has received increasing attention

According to the evaluator, the 2018-2021 framework is influenced by a partner dialogue and is a reflection of developed project monitoring and evaluation instruments. The past strategy period had a marked focus on SDC requesting partners and implementers to develop their monitoring mechanisms, which comes out very strongly in partner interviews and in observing existing mechanisms. Partners both in government, local organisations and Swiss NGOs are able to show what action have been taken to develop monitoring capacity and the use (and formulation) of indicators. The tendency is stronger in larger than smaller projects, most likely correlated with capacity. But it is also clear that SDC has actively encouraged, analytically assisted, and been open to the re-allocation of project resources to improve monitoring mechanisms and follow-up capacity. With variations, the results are impressive.

The evaluator makes the assessment that an improved RF strengthens the conditions for purposeful Annual Reporting in the period 2018-2021.

Partner orientation and poverty focus in the Bangladesh portfolio

Against this background, the evaluators find it reasonable to assume that the 'management for results' culture is present and inflating in SDC Bangladesh. On the overall level, as we have seen, there is a strategic process with strong elements of a constructive results management culture.

On project level, this perspective comes out most clearly in the way partners perceive SDC and its contributions. Across the Bangladesh portfolio, implementing and government partners point to some key features characterising SDC contributions;

- When involved, SDC is proactive and a results oriented dialogue partner
- Individual SDC representatives have persistently worked towards improving project monitoring mechanisms, with results
- SDC monitoring focus has not been matched by a corresponding focus on project planning and management capacities (i.e. making use of M&E information)
- In large multi-stakeholder projects, SDC contribute with an outside view, constructively bringing in overview and experiences from other projects.
- SDC has consistently conveyed a perspective of the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalised
- Partners (ADB, WB, NGOs, DFID) think a clearer association with poverty reduction comes with increased outcome level attention, also for their own results frameworks.
- SDC can be better at sharing information and experiences inside their project portfolio

As noted in specific relation to poverty orientation, SDC partners in Bangladesh unanimously point to an increasing focus on poverty aspects in the dialogue. This is mainly credited to individual factors and, interestingly, to the SDC emphasis on (beneficiary level) outcomes in the results frameworks, guiding the strategic dialogue to aspects of;

- Targeting and differentiating between different social groups,
- Challenging programme modalities and approaches to improve poverty impact,
- Reshaping the partner's results frameworks to a more comprehensive poverty focus

Note that the projects review carried out by the evaluators in no way extends to an impact assessment. It is in orientation and the visibility of poverty related analyses that the observed change lies. The upshot is *an assumption of improved conditions for poverty impact* from SDC programming.

Comparing project documentation and results reporting from early with late in the period 2008-2017, the evaluator observes that;

- Partners and projects has significantly adapted to a results oriented perspective.
- M&E systems are markedly adapted, particularly in mandated projects (Sudokkhu, Katalyst etc.) but also in donor coordinated projects.
- Outcome increasingly representing the 'short term outcome level', meaning that the association with output and project implementation is closer and attribution more reliable.
- Partner orientation and grasp of results management principles has increased.

Annex 5. Additional Suggestions made in Chapter 3 Findings by Instruments

This annex summarizes and references additional suggestions made by the evaluation team throughout chapter 3. They are not reflected in the report's recommendations in section 5 because they are too detailed or too little researched. During a workshop with the CLP on a draft version of this evaluation report, the suggestion was made to list these additional suggestions in a separate annex.

Section	Topic	Suggestion
3.1.1	Dispatch	Influence future dispatches to be more explicit about priorities along (and trade-offs between) different RBM purposes.
3.1.3	Reference Indicators	Support the future development of <i>voluntary</i> reference indicators, but increase indicator quality by making indicators more specific. A good practice example are indicator definitions and protocols in DFID's results framework (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/indicator-methodology-notes).
3.2.1	Country Strategies	Improvement of the country strategic process is mainly a management challenge (i.e. to keep it lean, strategic and focused) rather than a structural/format challenge.
3.2.2	GP Strategic Frameworks	<p>GP Strategic Frameworks should continue to allow for some flexibility, reflecting the different ways GPs contribute to SDC's development goals, and different management styles of GP leadership. No additional QA Section guidance for GP Strategic Frameworks is needed.</p> <p>GP Theories of Change should be developed along the three standard pathways (policy, innovation, knowledge), and need to reflect the non-deterministic and opportunity-seizing approach of GPs better.</p> <p>GP Results Frameworks should be harmonized regarding the number and type of indicators and results terminology used.</p>
3.2.3	Annual Reports	<p>The usefulness of ARs can be improved through making them more analytic, including clear implication for operational decision-making. The tension between accountability and decision-making/learning purposes of ARs should be managed more effectively.</p> <p>Country desk officers perform both a support and control function which sometimes leads to overly laborious AR and management response processes; priority should be given to support rather than control.</p>
3.2.4	GP Annual Reports	GP AR vary in structure. A structure reflecting the Strategic Framework of the respective GP is most useful, as in the case of GP Health (2016), because it supports RBM vis-à-vis frame-

		<p>work results.</p> <p>The current strategic monitoring (annex to GP reports) is only of limited value and could either be integrated into the main results chapter, or refer to it to enrich the evidence base.</p> <p>The current approach of not issuing a formal management response to GP reports is useful and should be maintained.</p>
3.2.5	Humanitarian Aid	The evaluation team finds the pragmatic and flexible use of RBM instruments in humanitarian aid usefully reflects how development cooperation in this domain is less predictable. This flexible use should be maintained.
3.2.6	MERV	The MERV should stay brief in format and focus on critical and strategic analysis. The executive summary could be better linked to implications for key strategic priorities and operational choices in the Swiss portfolio.
3.2, 3.2.1	PCM	<p>Entry and Credit Proposals should be better differentiated in practice. Operational efficiency could be gained by not over-charging expectations and required detail in Entry Proposals.</p> <p>Guidance materials are strong on “how to” but could better address management implications by i) explaining in what management and decision-making processes the information provided should be used, and ii) how best to organise the process of arriving at a final strategic document.</p> <p>External evaluations on the project level show variety and sometimes inconsistency and additional guidance may be needed for desk officers in this regard.</p>
3.3.2	CCM	<p>The usefulness of CCM information (CCM Sheet, AR and MR) can be improved by designing the instruments “to purpose”, i.e. by disentangling decision-making and learning from accountability purposes, and designing and using the instrument based on those purposes. Currently, decision-making and learning are only partly served.</p> <p>Comparative assessments between supported multilateral organizations are a useful addition to current CCM practices, for example as in DFID’s Multilateral Aid Reviews (MARs).</p>
3.4	QA	Sufficient QA Section and QA Network staff capacity are important for securing these important functions, and linkages of country offices with the QA Network need to be improved.
3.4.1	Guidance Materials	Overall, guidance materials produced by the QA Section are of good quality and useful. Going forward, it would be useful if guidelines could more clearly explicate and prioritize what RBM purposes are served in what way by specific instruments, for example following the framework used in this evaluation. This could, in turn, be used to better manage SDC management

		expectations of strategies and reports.
3.4.2	Quality Assessments	Regular Quality Assessments provide useful information for management and for updating guidance and training materials, especially if timelines can be established over several years. However, limitations of the current audit-like approach could be mitigated by also conducting strategic reviews of instruments without QA standards or across several related instruments.
3.4.3	Capacity Development	The evaluation team concurs with SDC Directorate's decision to make a dedicated PCM course obligatory for rotating staff. The course should be extended to program-level instruments and processes and should acquaint staff with all key program- and project level RBM instruments and processes. A modular approach would allow tailoring the course to the needs of staff in different divisions and domains.

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Orders:
E-mail: deza@eda.admin.ch

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

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