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**Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC**

# A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

## REGIONAL ART AND CULTURE PROGRAMME

Central Asia, Phase III (2012 - 2015)



UstatShakirt Youth Music Programme in Zyndan, Kyrgyzstan, supported by RACP March 2015

## Final Report of the External Review Team

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of **a review of the SDC Regional Art and Culture Programme** in Central Asia (RACP). It focuses on Phase III of the programme (2012-16) and was conducted by François Matarasso and Alice Thomann between February and March 2015. Its findings are based on a review of programme documents and a two week field trip to meet partners and stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (2-16 March 2015).

**The rationale of RACP is clear and realistic:** it aims to support arts and culture actors in creating work that protects a space for democratic discourse, free expression, respect for cultural diversity and human rights. These values are not necessarily explicit: art should not be a form of propaganda. Rather they are enacted in concerts, festivals, publications, master classes, schools programmes, exhibitions and other activities in which civil society, democracy, tolerance and human values are nurtured and celebrated.

The Review team finds that **RACP has been successful in achieving its outcomes** in the three areas set out in its strategy:

- First, arts and culture actors are doing **more, better and richer work** thanks to its support, and their capacity to work independently has increased, though sustainability is still an aspiration and they will need financial aid for the foreseeable future.
- Secondly, people living in **culturally deprived and peripheral communities** (including culture actors) have benefited strongly from work that has reached beyond capitals through national programmes, outreach initiatives and local projects.
- Thirdly, across the whole body of work and among partners there is a serious and deepening commitment to **cooperate across divides**, honour culture diversity and showcase shared values.

The Review recognises that progress has been less strong in Uzbekistan because of the political context, legal considerations and the fragility of civil society partners. The team believes, however, that these challenges (and less severe parallels in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) only make the work more important. In a civil space that can feel restrictive, the RACP opens windows onto neighbours, other cultures and new ideas, allowing in **a vital breath of fresh air**.

The team notes some minor issues but considers the selection of partners and the pattern of grants to be good. It also notes valuable work in **gender equality and engaging young people**, and the support of good management among NGO partners. It finds that empowering people, bridge building and promoting democratic values and human rights have been **the most effective dimensions of art and culture** in RACP III, but that there is little potential for the creative economy in the region at present.

The **intervention strategy** is effective. The team sees the National Programme Managers as development agents more than administrators (partly because much work is self-initiated) and believes that their demanding engagement is justified. While they see ways to simplify administration, the team views the overall management of RACP as exemplary.

The review notes the RACP's **distinctive niche among regional donors**. SDC's focus on local culture and development, its expertise and well-judged interventions, and its continuity in values, rationale and commitment make Switzerland's work highly appreciated by beneficiaries and by peers, cultural institutions and some state actors.

The Review makes some **recommendations for the next phase**. It does not propose major change in the rationale, priorities or management but sees scope to build sustainability and simplify processes. Its principal recommendations are:

- A revised and simplified structure of **planning**, to support better understanding of the outcomes expected of individual grants and **clear criteria** for making them.
- A regional programme with a clear identity and common purpose that applies a **principle of national subsidiarity** wherever possible.
- **Partnership funding agreements** with 2-3 key NGOs in each country, offering multi-annual grants for an agreed programme of work and organisational capacity building.
- **Project grants** (re-designated small actions) to ensure a developmental and responsive capacity, especially to build capacity of new and emerging artists and NGOs.
- **Learning grants** to support exchanges and short residencies among artists in Central Asia who are not (yet) benefiting from the first two forms of support.

The Review also proposes that consideration should be given to **increasing the budget** in the next phase with the aim of (a) achieving a **better ratio of costs to benefits** from the existing delivery structure and (b) investing in the **sustainability of key NGOs** to secure long-term benefits for local populations.

In conclusion, the Review team considers that the Regional Arts and Culture Programme is a **mature, distinctive and productive dimension of SDC's Cooperation Strategy in Central Asia**. It is especially valuable because it functions differently from the rest of SDC's work, making connections with other parts of society and attracting positive attention to its high-profile work. Instead of focusing on challenges, RACP honours what local people value in their culture and celebrates its achievements.

The **RACP is a real asset to SDC** in the region and beyond, though its success could be better communicated its successes as it prepares for a new phase of work in 2016.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Regional Arts and Culture Programme

### 1.1.1 Rationale

The Regional Arts and Culture Programme (RACP) sits within the framework of Switzerland's cooperation in Central Asia, which, in its current phase (2012-16) aims:

To contribute to strengthening state service delivery and civil societies, to improve the living conditions of the population, to offer new economic perspectives, to reduce risks related to natural disasters and to prevent conflicts.

In Uzbekistan, SDC focuses on access to drinking water, but in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan it also supports the transition to market economies, improvement of public services, the rule of law and democratic systems. Most SDC work is therefore concerned with health, justice, public sector reform and water. But, in keeping with the Agency's decision to assign at least 1% of its budget to culture, all three countries benefit from investment in arts activity through the RACP.

The reasoning for this is set out in the Phase III Programme Document. In a context where the diversity and freedom of expression are increasingly constrained, along with opportunities for intercultural exchange, support for independent arts and culture actors can help protect the conditions of democratic discourse. There is a risk that these people, who are often particularly open-minded, creative and talented, are silenced or forced abroad because they cannot work at home. So investing in their work can be seen as a relatively safe way of:

- Sustaining the creative individuals who open windows in shuttered rooms;
- Bringing audiences into contact with stimulating cultural experiences and new ideas;
- Building the capacity and resilience of the independent arts and culture sector;
- Strengthening formal and informal civil society organisation and networks; and
- Keeping open the pathways between ethnic, cultural and national groups.

### 1.1.2 The rationale seen in a concrete example

One experience of the review team may help to make this abstract rationale more concrete. It is not a high profile example and so gives a telling indication of its reach and value.

Towards the end of our two-week trip in the region, we visited Zyndan in eastern Kyrgyzstan with members of UstatShakirt, an arts development NGO that SDC has supported since 2007. Zyndan is an isolated farming community of about 1500 people, at the head of a valley. As in many of the villages we passed to reach it, the spring sun shone on the dome of a smart new mosque between the school and the culture house. We were welcomed by the president of the municipal council, the head teacher and other locals, and watched a theatre performance by teenagers and a music class with 7 year old children. The work was very good in several respects, but it was the gender equality that was most striking. Girls took leading roles in the play while the alternate seating of boys and girls in the komuz class seemed the embodiment of non-segregation. When, as one interviewee had told us, there are growing claims that mu-

sic is 'un-Islamic', integrated music classes, actively supported by the community, protect a living space for education, tolerance and opening minds through creative exploration.

Zyndan is one of 30 school projects created by UstatShakirt with SDC support; UstatShakirt is one of many SDC partners and grantees. In 2014, the RACP supported 2,160 culture actors who reached over 41,000 people through their work, which ranged from folk music to contemporary art. But whether it is traditional or modern, urban or rural, challenging or affirming, each element of this rich, diverse programme contributes to protecting a space of respect, tolerance, exchange and discovery: a breath of fresh air.

### 1.1.3 Programme development and management

The Regional Arts and Culture Programme was established in 2007 when successful but unconnected strands of work in the three countries were brought together in one programme, under a Steering Committee made up of National Programme Managers, Country Directors and a backstopper. This has strengthened the work's reach and profile, and supported more exchange and cooperation between artists in the three countries. It has also brought closer alignment of the work of NPMs and an increasing coherence to the programme as a whole.

## 1.2 The Review

### 1.2.1 Terms of reference and Methodology

This Review was commissioned in January 2015 by the Swiss Embassy in Kyrgyzstan and undertaken by François Matarasso, an independent UK-based consultant, and Alice Thomann, Head Team Culture and Development of the Knowledge Learning-Culture Division of SDC HQ in Bern, Switzerland. The terms of reference require us to:

Assess the **results** of the RACP regarding its stated objectives/outcomes [and] assess the **intervention strategy** of the programme with regard to the chosen partners, geographical focuses, regional-national dimensions, organisational structure.

On the basis of its findings, the review team is then required to:

'Make **recommendations for the next phase** with regard to orientation, partnerships, and management of the programme'.

The terms of reference specify a methodology including: a review of programme documents; an inception report with initial findings; a two week field visit to meet partners and stakeholders; and a final report, which is this document. A total of 40 days was allowed for the work, 75% for fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with the report to be delivered within two weeks of the visit. That methodology has been followed, and the list of partners interviewed and field visits is available. Although the days and timetable allowed were the minimum necessary, the quality of the documentation and faultless organisation of the fieldwork by the NPMs, give us confidence in our findings and recommendations.

### 1.2.2 The Review Report

This report is presented, as required, according to the structure of the terms of reference.

- **Section 2 gives an assessment of results**, in relation to the outcomes in the RACP programme document, with reflections also on crosscutting issues;
- **Section 3 reports on the intervention strategy** and management;

- **Section 4 sets out recommendations** for the next phase.

We are also required to keep the report under 20 pages, which is challenging because the RACP is such a complex body of work.<sup>1</sup> But our task is to describe the forest, not every tree, and to suggest how those who look after it can do so in years to come. This document aims to do that, with genuine admiration for what has been achieved, not just by SDC, but still more by the thousands of artists and culture actors who have done such good work in difficult circumstances over the past three years.

## 2 PROGRAMME RESULTS

### 2.1 Outcome 1: More active and connected arts and culture actors

#### 2.1.1 An increase in activity

SDC's investment is of great value to artists and cultural organisations in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. There is little or no funding for independent cultural work from the state, which struggles with existing commitments (e.g. the Kyrgyz Ministry of Culture is responsible for 2,000 facilities and 12,500 employees). Private sponsorship is rare and unreliable. International donors are few and mostly have narrower interests (see 3.2 below). Consequently, Switzerland's engagement in culture is highly appreciated by artists and, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, by ministers, officials and NGOs. SDC is a funder of first call and last resort. Its support is thought to give a project credibility and open doors to other funds. At the same time, SDC is seen as the agency that will back ideas others would turn down.

SDC investment has undoubtedly increased arts and cultural activity in all three countries. About 2,250 arts and culture actors benefited each year, or 6,747 in total, though we cannot say how many individuals this includes since some have been supported more than once. Audiences have also been substantial: on average over 45,000 people attended events each year, though again, we cannot say how many attended more than one. The reach of this work into rural areas was important, and is discussed in Section 2.2 below.

#### 2.1.2 Better work, different work

The work supported by SDC has generally been of very good quality, both in artistic terms and in its management and delivery. The grant profile does not suggest that exceptional artists or opportunities are being overlooked. In a small field, where key individuals receive regular support, there is a risk of cosiness but when that danger has been identified, for instance in Uzbekistan, appropriate steps have been taken to address it. The commitment to youth means that new voices are a strong part of the programme: the older generation cannot afford to be complacent in their partnership with SDC. NPMs consistently push grantees to be more ambitious, develop new ideas and build on past success. SDC's high expectations of

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<sup>1</sup> This envelope has been slightly exceeded to accommodate further information requested by the Steering Committee after discussion of the draft at its meeting in April 2015.

grantees and partners contribute to the evident growth in ambition and quality between the present phase and previous ones.

### 2.1.3 Capacity-building

SDC supports this growth in capacity directly through training initiatives, such as the Stage Directors' Lab and the Cultural Mediation workshop, and indirectly by investing in projects that enable arts and culture actors to build skills by doing. Although their principal goal is creative production the capacity building value of project grants should not be underestimated.

People have gained skills, experience and confidence through both routes, extending their networks and, encouraged by SDC staff, working across borders, cultures and art disciplines. Organisations granted funds are required to meet transparency and accountability standards, so people often have to learn new management, finance and reporting skills. Although it is not the purpose, the effect is to transmit ideas about professional working. All this has contributed to stronger, more ambitious and better-supported cultural actors, especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan where the political conditions are more favourable to civil society. This growing confidence is evident in new work recently undertaken by key partners:

- **Didor Film Festival** and the **Ethno Jazz Festival** are both now working outside Dushanbe.
- **UstatShakirt** has projects and trained teachers in all regions of Kyrgyzstan;
- **Ilkhom Theatre** is developing the first play for children in its history;
- **Bishkek Jazz Festival** depends on SDC support only for bringing in artists from abroad;
- **Dushanbe Art Ground** is developing projects in Tashkent and Bishkek.

It is notable that state and institutional actors are increasingly keen for partnerships with SDC. At our meeting, the Tajik Deputy Minister of Culture proposed establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with SDC, while in Kyrgyzstan the Ministry of Education is willing to support teachers participating in the UstatShakirt schools programme. In Dushanbe, the Music Conservatoire would like to take on leadership of the Ethno-Jazz Festival and so embed it into a nationwide programme of music tuition, showcases and performance. There are similar signs of engagement at a local level, for instance in the public support of the presidents of local councils in Kanibadam, Zyndan and elsewhere.

### 2.1.4 Questions and challenges

This success presents SDC with a critical challenge about its **sustainability**. In the absence of much willingness or capacity by the state to use public funds for independent cultural activity, we do not expect that work funded by the RACP would continue without SDC support. We admire tenacity of many art and culture actors who work without funding when necessary, but recognise that such conditions severely restrict the impact of their work. Alternative sources of income, such as sponsorship or sales, are small, difficult to access and likely to change the focus of the work. There is no easy answer to this problem, but recognising it is a necessary first step to any response.

## 2.2 Outcome 2: Improved access to arts and culture in culturally deprived and peripheral communities

The relations between capitals and regions within each country are complicated by history, geography and socio-economic factors, as well as culture. The RACP has been successful in reaching out to culturally deprived and peripheral communities, thereby securing more equal



access to its benefits and fostering links between communities. A third (34%) of events in Phase III took place in rural areas, where a quarter of all audiences (26%) attended; (this slight discrepancy may be due to the smaller populations outside the capital). It is notable also that 60% of arts and cultural actors benefiting from the programme are based in rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of the National Programme Managers (NPM) on this issue has, if anything, become sharper, in response to a perception that the gap between centre and periphery is widening. It may also be that this work is becoming easier thanks to past successes, which have built organisations capable of extending their work in rural areas (such as the Ethno-Jazz Festival) as well as the reputation, networks and experience of the SCO staff. The work itself includes national initiatives, such as UstatShakirt (KG) and Sogdiana (UZ); outreach initiatives, such as Echo Didor and the Ethno-Jazz Festival (TJ); and local initiatives, such as Kanibadam Theatre (TJ) and the Savitsky Museum (UZ).

### 2.2.1 National initiatives

UstatShakirt (KG) and Sogdiana (UZ) aim to engage young people in culture throughout their respective countries. Both use music as the means to do this, but in different ways. **Sogdiana**, a traditional music ensemble at the Tashkent Conservatoire, has run a folk music contest since 1996 to identify and encourage gifted performers. SDC support has increased regional opportunities, diversity and, in 2014, participation of musicians from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The project is a focus for existing music activity rather than creating new ones.

**UstatShakirt** was established in 2004 to raise interest in Kyrgyz culture, and has been supported by the Aga Khan Music Initiative and the Christensen Fund, as well as SDC. It is now working through the young musicians they have nurtured to train and support teachers in an ambitious schools programme. Thirty schools participate in what they hope will be a national programme. The coherence, thoughtfulness and ambition of UstatShakirt and its team of trainers are impressive. As an NGO, it has a potential for sustainability, though it is likely to depend on external funding for the foreseeable future.

It is not coincidence that these two large programmes are rooted in **young people's access to traditional music**. This approach is popular, easily understood, appropriate to schools and scalable. It is relevant and sensitive at a time when culture and identity are being connected with nationalism: in fact, UstatShakirt aims to introduce young people to a range of cultures through music. This experience underlines that opportunities for innovation and creativity can be found in traditional culture as easily as in contemporary art, something that is also evident in the renewal of a Kyrgyz theatre aesthetic by Sakhna.

### 2.2.2 Outreach initiatives

The objective of extending access has also been met through outreach work by projects based in capital cities. This is perhaps most evident in Tajikistan, where no single project compares with the national initiatives just described. Here, as the **Ethno-Jazz Festival** has grown, it has run master-classes and concerts in Khojand, Khorog and Kurgan-Tube, meeting an enthusiastic response from musicians and audiences. For practical reasons, these events last several days and require the active participation of local partners to be successful.

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<sup>2</sup> This seems high, if a third of events and a quarter of audiences were in rural areas; a number of possible explanations come to mind, but without more information it is impossible to know.

The **Didor Film Festival** has followed a similar path with Echo Didor, taking cinema to rural areas. Three weeks after their Dushanbe event, the team organised a mini version at Kanibadam Theatre from 6-9 November 2014, screening several festival films. One outcome was a decision to create Sughd Sinamo, a regional film studio at the theatre, with support from the provincial governor. The SCO was influential in both these developments, encouraging all the partners to keep moving forward and helping source technical equipment.

### 2.2.3 Local initiatives

SDC has also supported many local initiatives outside the capitals with grants. These tend to be standalone projects because there are not (yet) opportunities to link them with others, but that is changing as the programme matures. Some deserve support because they are the only professional cultural activity in an area. Thus, a small grant to the **Roof of the World Festival** supported a key arts event in Khorog (Gorno-Badakhshan), attended in 2014 by 14-15,000 people, and also enabled the participation of artists from Uzbekistan.

Other projects are driven by gifted, charismatic leaders who benefit from participating in the activities supported by the RACP and its partners, and in turn create new opportunities for collaboration within the RACP network. So in Tajikistan, the appointment of Muhiddin Juraev after his graduation from the **Ilkhom Stage Directors' Lab**, to the **State Theatre in Kanibadam** has opened new possibilities for SDC partnerships. It enabled Echo Didor to take place, as well as a planned coproduction with Ovlyakuli Khojakuliev, an Uzbekistan-based director and SCO project partner. A grant for new light and sound equipment (and help in procuring it) has been put to good use in a feature film and a new theatre production about the dangers of early marriage. Juraev has ambitious and well-conceived plans to rebuild local people's trust in the theatre, which could be a key SDC partner in the region. A comparable relationship already exists with the **Savitsky Museum**, in Nukus, Uzbekistan, where SDC has supported outreach activities for young people since 2007.

### 2.2.4 Questions and challenges

**Sustainability** is also relevant to the question of access as partners seek revenue from new sources. The different approaches to ticketing of **Didor Film Festival** and **Bishkek Jazz Festival** illustrate the tension. Didor events are free and so widely accessible, while the Jazz Festival has steadily increased its prices so its audience should expect to pay for a good concert. However, most people cannot afford to pay 500 Som (10CHF) or more, so financial sustainability could be secured at the price of access. Alternative sources of funds, such as private sponsors or eventually government grants, might also shift programming priorities away from those with few resources towards higher profile activities in the capitals.

Building bridges between cultural resources and citizens is vital to securing better access and to the wider rationale of RACP. In this sense much of the work supported could be described as a form of **cultural mediation**, since it involves artists reaching out to build trust and understanding. But there are also narrower ideas of cultural mediation, more concerned with educating taste. Bridges must be crossed in both directions. Good culture actors – like the Talas youth theatre director who met local teachers *to ask them what they wanted* for their pupils – understand the need to listen as well as speak. In the context of Central Asia and the RACP rationale, we feel there is a need to define more clearly what is understood by cultural mediation, or to use another term to describe this aspect of access.

## 2.3 Outcome 3: Increased readiness in the arts and cultural scene to cooperate across divides, showcasing shared values and commonalities

One reason for working with arts and culture actors is the belief that they are especially open to other voices and cultures. Our contact with partners generally endorsed this idea: almost everyone we met, even when passionate about their own work, was genuinely interested in what was happening in the next room, the next street, the next village. The RACP has identified partners who share its belief in the value of cultural diversity and exchange and who express that belief in their work – some very deliberately, some more passively. Indeed, we wondered whether some partners have developed a stronger sense of their shared values and experiences as a result of being supported by SDC. Bringing partners together and encouraging them to develop more opportunities for mutual support might build on this.

### 2.3.1 Conscious and implicit commitment

The Dushanbe Ethno-Jazz and Bishkek Jazz Festivals enact their commitment to shared values across national, ethnic and cultural divides in each performance. Concerts by musicians from different countries, sharing and exploring their varied heritages, are an affirmation of cultural open-mindedness. In other contexts, this may seem normal: here, where nationalism and ethnic identity has been a recent territory of violence, it calls to mind Phil Ochs' words that *'in such an ugly time the true protest is beauty'*.

Where young people are concerned, the commitment to cultural inclusion is sometimes more didactic. Thus the programme developed by UstatShakirt begins with Kyrgyz culture but is intended to introduce them later to the other cultures of their country and the wider region. It was striking to see the pride with which children in this programme at Karakol School played Russian classical and Kazakh folk music as well as in the Kyrgyz traditions.

A similar openness and welcome of outsiders is evident across the RACP projects. While the Didor Film Festival has helped revive awareness and appreciation of Tajik cinema, contributing indirectly to the industry's revival, it proudly celebrates Central Asia as a shared space of cinematic creation: the 2014 edition included selections from Armenia, Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and other countries, alongside Tajik films. While professional exchanges such as the Ilkhom Directors' Lab are valuable, these public events have a visible symbolism as well as reaching a much wider public.

### 2.3.2 Questions and challenges

**Promoting shared values online:** The Imhoart website aims to showcase shared values and commonalities within the arts and culture sector in Central Asia. Whilst we believe the idea of a virtual communication platform uniting the three countries was good, and we respect the energy and commitment that has gone into this, we do not feel that it has achieved what was hoped. Nor has it become a platform for communicating news or sharing experience within the growing community of actors that RACP has supported: few of those we met read it. The platform has not been opened to other critics in the region or to new voices such as the writers who took part in the Bishkek arts journalism training, which we suggest would increase a sense of shared ownership across the arts and culture community.

**Losing sight of core values:** There are times when, despite good intentions, SDC's values are lost in translation. Among the plays and concerts we saw during the fieldwork, was a production supported by a small grant to the Tashkent Youth Theatre. Unfortunately, the portrayal of gender roles in 'Devil Woman' was the opposite of what SDC promotes. The creative team

involved would be shocked to hear this, since for them the play celebrates a romantic ideal. Of course, misunderstandings do happen, and this was the only example of the kind we saw. Nonetheless, and while rejecting any propagandist intention for the RACP, it is evident that more questions about art could be asked. Later in this report we suggest criteria for selecting partners and awarding grants to reduce similar risks in future.

## **2.4 Crosscutting issues**

### **2.4.1 Gender equality**

In line with the RACP's approach, gender equality has not been promoted by commissioning work with direct messages about the issue. We think this is wise because propaganda makes bad art (as well as being ethically questionable), because the RACP's strength lies in creating space for common ground, and because values are most convincingly expressed by actions not statements. In fact, the RACP supports gender equality quietly but effectively by ensuring that females participate in and benefit equally from its work. It is inspiring, for example, to see boys and girls perform together not just in cities but also in rural communities. The programme enacts its commitment to equal rights through its work. This can be more difficult in professional music and theatre, where historic legacies give men dominant roles, but the RACP has a good record of supporting projects initiated and managed by women. There are wide variations in the proportions of female participation in different projects, but the balance is good across the programme as a whole. That the NPMs are female is also an implicit sign of empowerment, since they are the public face of SDC's cultural programme.

### **2.4.2 Young people**

The story is similar with regard to young people, RACP's other crosscutting priority. Across the programme as a whole, monitoring data shows this goal has been met, though with variations from project to project. Many, such as those with schools, are designed for children. Others, for instance in capacity building, tend to involve older people. This is not a concern if balance is achieved overall. It should be noted, however, that some activities, including festivals reach a mixed audience. It would be worth keeping an eye on this in future to explore with partners whether – as might be the case with Didor Film Festival – special events could be planned to attract young people and so encourage intergenerational contact.

### **2.4.3 Conflict sensitivity**

The RACP cannot avoid sensitive issues in Central Asia – indeed, its rationale is precisely to support a constructive engagement with difference. In doing this it faces both short-term crises and long-term political situations. An example of the first is the withdrawal of permission for the Khojand Street Theatre Festival in 2014. The difficulties arising from the second are numerous and complex, including administrative, bureaucratic and legal obstacles that SDC staff have become adept at working around. They are most severe in Uzbekistan, where they have a significant impact on what can be achieved.

Freedom of expression and its limits is an especially difficult issue. It was forcefully raised in Tashkent, where we met artists who were courageous in expressing ideas unacceptable to government and who argued that SDC was not consistently supportive of their position. However, the risk that a single grant might provoke a threat to SDC's freedom to operate in a country must be taken seriously, as must the possibility of unforeseen consequences for third

parties. The case of Umida Akhmedova has left its mark. There is no answer to an issue that must be faced case by case. Whatever staff training can be provided, there is always a need for judgement in such situations. The best preparation for decisions that risk causing offence lies in building relationships of trust through openness and consistency.

## 2.5 The most effective dimensions of art and culture

Art and culture is a complex activity, especially in a development context. Art projects have multiple outcomes, including some that are hard to see, as when they affect how we think. These outcomes evolve with time and their influence on our actions cannot always be known; they certainly cannot be controlled. Our assessment of how the RACP has been most effective is therefore cautious. That said, we see concrete achievements and strong further potential in the way projects have **empowered people, built bridges and promoted democratic values and human rights**. Almost every project supported by RACP – even those that seem less central to its core goals – shows real success in these areas, as the cited examples illustrate.

There is some success and further potential in **reinforcing other dimensions of a development programme** (i.e. the main domains of cooperation in Central Asia). An example is the play we saw in Kanibadam, about domestic violence, gender equality and early marriage. However, we caution against an approach that would promote ‘message art’. It would meet resistance from artists, produce mediocre work and undermine SDC’s reputation for upholding democratic values and freedom of expression. The belief that the SDC is interested in the people it supports for their own sake is at the heart of why the RACP (and Switzerland) is valued by its partners. Art has great power to convey ideas, but it is best done by working with artists who share SDC’s values and giving them the freedom to create work they believe in.

Finally, we see little or no possibility, in the present situation of Central Asian economies, that RACP projects can **promote economic growth and create jobs** except insofar as SDC’s own funding itself does this; e.g. through festivals. The problem, of course, is that the benefits end if the funding is withdrawn. This might be different were there a shift in the programme’s purpose (e.g. towards high-quality handicrafts) but that would need feasibility studies. More importantly, it would erode the positive aspects of the current programme, especially in terms of promoting diversity, human rights and democratic values. The programme does, however, enable the arts and culture actors it supports to **sustain a professional life as artists** and in doing so it endorses the validity of art as a career as a contribution to society.

The areas where RACP is most effective – empowering people, building bridges and promoting democratic values and human rights – are also, in our view, those that are most valuable in Central Asia today. Indeed, we suggest that this is largely true throughout the global South, although there are places where the economic potential of the arts is much stronger. Some arts and culture partners share this assessment, but others, understandably, would place more emphasis on jobs and the professional life of artists.

The bridge building component of the RACP has been effective because, as already noted, most artists are naturally interested in what others are doing. Curiosity is essential to creativity and so openness to other ideas and influences is natural (though not universal) in artists. At their best, artists and culture actors are driven by the desire to connect with one another, with peers in other fields and, crucially, with audiences.

## 3 INTERVENTION STRATEGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The RACP intervention strategy has been appropriate to its context and effective in achieving the positive results reported. There is clarity and purpose throughout the work. Most projects and grants contribute strongly to the RACP's strategy and there is a growing sense that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We do not therefore see a need for significant change to the rationale, strategy, main partnerships or kind of work supported. Our proposals aim instead to strengthen existing approaches so that success can be sustained and built on. Many are therefore procedural and relatively minor; taken together, though, we believe that they will make the next phase of the RACP more effective and simpler to manage.

In this section of the report we treat each topic in two ways. The first is a brief analysis of an aspect of RACP III that we were asked to look at in the terms of reference. The second makes some proposals for development of this same aspect under RACP IV. In contrast with the recommendations in Section 4, which focus on the programme as a whole, these are often more detailed and practical. They may refer to an individual project or partner or to an aspect of process. They are also more tentative, partly because of the constraints of time and space within which we are reporting, and partly because there may be no definitive answer to the point in question. We trust that the Steering Committee will find these reflections useful in reaching its own conclusions about how to plan the next phase of the RACP.

### 3.2 SDC's distinctive place among donors

#### 3.2.1 RACP III – Analysis

SDC is valued and trusted as a donor by stakeholders and peers in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is the only agency supporting local arts and culture actors over the long term, building capacity, with a broad range of interests and a specific regional, cross-border focus. People value SDC's presence and the continuity in its thinking, methods and approach. As a result, the RACP itself has some distinctive characteristics worth noting:

- **It enacts** rather than preaching its core values of human rights, respect, diversity etc.;
- **It empowers people** by enabling them to succeed within their capacities;
- It is valued partly because **it focuses on strengths** not problems;
- It provides **safe opportunities to test** ideas, partners and new ways of working;
- **It has a very low failure rate**, especially given the serious obstacles it often faces;
- **It is relatively low cost** as a programme and in what individual grants deliver;
- It is a **visible and admired** dimension of Switzerland's cooperation in Central Asia.

The programme connects SDC with parts of civil society not otherwise engaged in its work, while remaining fully aligned with the purposes and values that guide Switzerland's cooperation work in Central Asia. There are few other donors supporting culture in Central Asia. Embassies mostly promote their own culture, bringing artists from the US or Europe to perform in the region. SDC's main peers are the OSI/Soros Foundations, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the Christensen Fund. It has joint-funded projects with each and relations are very good, but they have varied interests and priorities. AKDN and Christensen have

focused on traditional music; while OSI has broader interests, it is more concerned with the growth of markets for the arts. In Uzbekistan, there are almost no other funding possibilities.

In addition to money, SDC adds value through close support and partnership sustained over years. If it were to cease funding art and culture, there would be an immediate and sharp decline in activity. Other donors would not fill the gap: indeed, they might reduce their own commitments to culture in the absence of SDC's pathfinding work.

### 3.2.2 **RACP IV - Proposals**

Since there are few international donors and there is common ground between them, it makes sense to strengthen collaboration. This could secure better value for money for funders and increase the security of partners currently dependent on a single donor. Cooperating to support partner NGOs' programmes, rather than separate projects, could strengthen their coherence and reduce transaction costs (e.g. negotiation and reporting) and strengthen the strategic focus of all agencies' work.

The Aga Khan Development Network's values are close to those of SDC and music is a cornerstone of its work. It is now reviewing its strategy and the representative in Bishkek suggested to us that it might be timely to renew a focus on performance and international promotion. The Christensen Fund supports traditional culture, although a change of leadership later this year might alter its priorities in the region. The OSI/Soros network also shares SDC's core values and understanding of art as a key element in democracy, civil society and human rights. Its focus on capacity building is an obvious area of collaboration that has been productive in the past. OSI might be able to supply tailored organisational development support to the key partnerships proposed in 3.5 below.

Despite the limited possibilities for cultural funding in the region, we do not consider that having the RACP seeking to leverage external resources from foreign partners would be cost effective. It would also bring new risks given the sensitivity of some governments to foreign funding of NGOs.

## 3.3 **The Regional dimension of RACP**

### 3.3.1 **RACP III – Analysis**

The move to a regional programme has strengthened RACP, made it more ambitious and visible, helped it achieve greater coherence and given it confidence. It may actually be SDC's most fully realised *regional* programme in Central Asia because it is small and unthreatening to any of the nations. Regional work has helped SDC staff share knowledge, advice and critical perspectives, resulting in a strong sense of common enterprise. It has also created useful regional training and capacity building initiatives, and offered audiences experiences from beyond their borders. This achievement deserves to be better known across SDC.

That said, the eagerness to fulfil the regional rhetoric risks unnecessarily complicating RACP operations. In practice, aiding festivals or training labs in one country to include artists from others is in itself a valid form of working regionally. The designated regional and cross-border activities (e.g. the internet strategy through Imhoart or the theatre co-productions) have faced difficulties and are yet to fulfil their promise. The demand for the approach is not always clear; they also bring a degree of administrative complexity or inefficiency.

### 3.3.2 RACP IV – Proposals

Regional cooperation and exchange should continue in RACP IV but we are not sure that large training projects and co-productions are always the most cost-effective way of achieving this. Without ruling them out, we suggest that a **residency programme** could enable artists from each country to spend time with each other, in ways that fit more naturally with their work programmes and creative interests. For example, the director of Jazzirama may want to spend a fortnight with e.g. UstatShakirt (and vice versa), seeing how they work. A young film professional may want to visit Didor to see how a film festival is planned. The emphasis would be on exchange and allowing people to follow their interests. We think this approach would create more and better contact between culture actors and that the relationships would be sustained because people had developed friendships and creative collaborations on a human level.

The value of designating some activities as ‘regional’ is unclear. It might be simpler to operate **a presumption in favour of cultural exchanges** in all projects and require an explanation when such exchanges are *not* proposed rather than when they are. A fund could be held by the regional lead for regional workshops and peer-exchanges (which we see as a more flexible way of supporting intercultural dialogue than co-productions). We also suggest that support for artists’ exchanges – both as residencies and for performances – should be opened in principle to people from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to ensure that artificial barriers are not created within the Central Asian space. Finally, we see a case for using the name **‘Central Asia Arts and Cultural Programme’** so that its identity is clearer within and beyond the region.

National Programme Managers work well together, and we see scope for building on this with a third meeting each year, just for NPMs, at which they can see work and events outside of the reporting and planning agenda, as well as having time to exchange informally. In terms of **regional management**, we suggest adopting a principle of subsidiarity: that whatever can be done by one SCO should be managed there. Support for regional events such as festivals, the theatre lab or learning workshops are probably best managed by the NPM in whose country they are taking place: these questions are considered further below

## 3.4 Management approach

### 3.4.1 RACP III – Analysis

The RACP is effectively managed, with expertise and dedication. The longer serving staff have deep knowledge of the arts and culture sectors, but more recently appointed staff have also shown judgement and courage in making necessary changes. Formal and informal **cooperation between SCO staff** is good. We do not see rotating the regional leadership every two years as the most efficient model, and suggest that fixing it for the period of one phase (three to four years) may be a simpler solution. Though the function of (part-time) regional leader doesn’t and cannot replace that of permanent coordinator, we consider that opting for such alternative would now require a level of organisation not worth undertaking and possibly counter-productive to the good dynamics of cooperation among NPM.

In the absence of a permanent regional coordinator, we see the role of the backstopper as key to the programme’s success. The current person brings relevant expertise in culture for development and an external overview that has helped NPMs closely involved with everyday concerns. The role of a critical friend, who has the good of the programme at heart and can

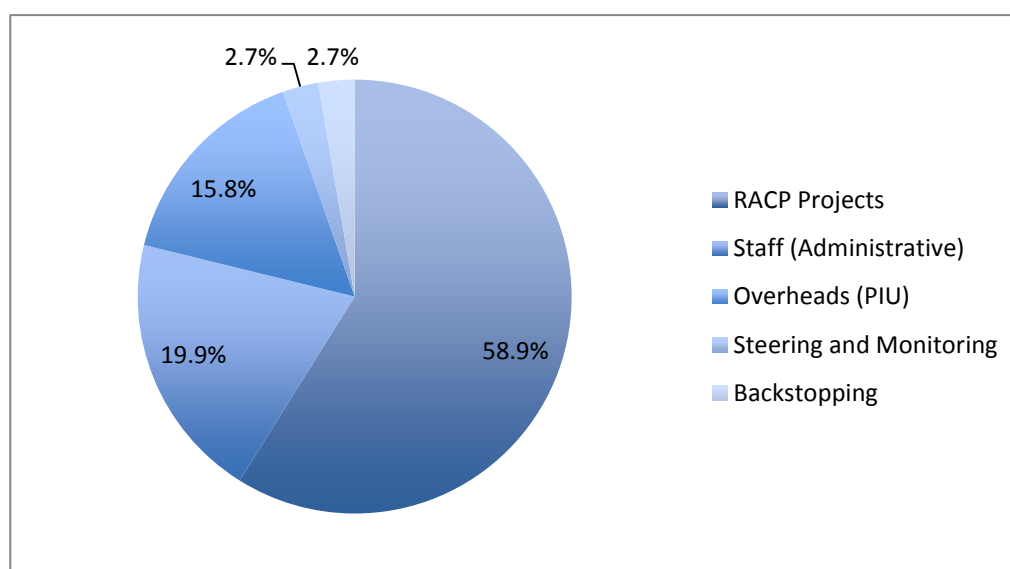


therefore be trusted to highlight problems or weaknesses, can be invaluable. In the present case, the cost is marginal and the benefit substantial: indeed, we suggest that consideration be given to allowing a little more time for this work to get the most from it in future.

The active participation of Deputy / Country Directors and the Ambassador in Kyrgyzstan is a critical source of advice and check, especially in the Steering Committee, where they have the opportunity to keep the team focused on essentials and strategic objectives. They also have a role in **managing risk**: it would be worth considering a process for involving them in decisions involving previously agreed types or degrees of risk. Overall, the programme management is efficient and productive: all those involved deserve credit for the programme's successes. Indeed, in this respect, we see RACP as setting a standard for comparable SDC initiatives.

The **National Programme Managers** take a hands-on approach to their work. They are willing (and able) to stir projects where appropriate and to require changes in the proposals brought to them. In addition to assuring the work's quality, this keeps them in touch with partners' everyday realities. There is a fine balance, which has been kept, between a developmental approach and a directive one. If the partnership model proposed below is adopted, the NPMs should be able to step back from some areas of work and invest more time in new, emerging partners.

The most valuable part of the NPM's work is developmental – in the support they give arts and culture actors. There is a risk of working too much *for* rather than *with* partners, if only because it is easier to get things done; but this should be guarded against since it reduces capacity-building opportunities in daily work. It is important also to ensure that there is time for dialogue with partners, visits to supported cultural activities (which are highly appreciated by the partners) and first-hand monitoring (rather than relying too much on reporting through forms and questionnaires).



RACP EXPENDITURE DISTRIBUTION 2012 - 2014

The chart above shows the distribution of expenditure on the RACP during Phase IV. There have been minor fluctuations from year to year, but the percentages have been very stable. A little under two thirds of the budget has gone to support the work, and a fifth on salaries. The PIU costs may be described as overheads as they cover rent, equipment and so on. The de-

scription of staff time as administration is rather misleading though, since it does not distinguish between time spent on development work (advising partners, planning activities, etc.) and actual administration (monitoring, report writing, financial control etc.).

It is difficult to assess the RACP's value for money because there are no benchmarks against which to compare it. Making grants is not in itself difficult: making good grants that produce real value in fragile conditions can be very difficult. Since there is an inescapable set up cost in making a single grant, there is also a relationship between cost-effectiveness and the overall budget. But, if we cannot offer definitive, quantifiable assessment of RACP in this respect, we can say, based on experience of cultural sector donors and other SDC offices, that the staff and other resources used to deliver the programme are the minimum necessary in the conditions in which it operates. We do not see any evidence of waste or inefficiency.

### 3.4.2 RACP IV – Proposals

There is potential to simplify and streamline the RACP planning framework. We found it difficult to follow the chain between the three stated outcomes, the actions lines (theatre development, music for development, mediation, documentary films), the outputs (capacity building, performances, platforms) and the relation with the construction of the budget in the documents we have seen. The **logframes** often used in development work have weaknesses where cultural programmes are concerned (for the reasons given in 2.5 above) but, suitably adapted, this approach can provide a clear and consistent planning framework. We suggest that this should be the basis of RACP IV and that this thinking would then guide a 3 or 4 year strategy supported by more detailed annual plans.

We are cautious of rigid planning and monitoring in arts programmes because they can be bureaucratic and misleading about where value is actually produced. But a planning approach that is too loose can be equally problematic if it encourages a proliferation of administrative interventions intended to remedy small problems or knowledge gaps. A planning framework rooted in the RACP rationale and shaped by its experience would reinforce its management and administration, ensuring coherence of all supported activities with the rationale and providing criteria to select or refuse them. The RACP regional and national budgets should mirror the terms used in the strategy and yearly plans, avoiding excessive detail and seeking internal coherence (it should not be possible to charge an expense to different budget lines).

The foundation of the monitoring framework for RACP IV would be a statement of the programme's aim and outcomes. The current aim and outcomes have served well, although outcomes are not mutually exclusive: most activities contribute to more than one outcome. This is not a problem in itself, but it makes it difficult to distribute outputs and activities in the linear logic of the logframe, since there is most of the time no *single* causal link between an output and an outcome, but multiple connections. This being said, the lograme has proved itself sufficient to its task and while we think that revision could make it easier to work with, we do not consider it essential. There is a case that it is better to stick with what people know and are used to operating.

Whatever is decided on this point, we suggest that RACP IV should not define at the outset further action lines and detailed outputs in terms of products, performances, etc. Instead we propose adopting **three funding mechanisms**, and **a set of criteria** that should be met by any support from the RACP to ensure consistency and respect the RACP rationale.

- **Partnership Grants**, which would provide multi-annual support based on agreed plans to two or three key NGOs in each country.
- **Project Grants**, which would provide support to other organisations and groups for time-limited arts and cultural projects lasting up to a year.
- **Learning Grants**, which would assist individual artists in residencies, training, exchanges and elaboration of small learning projects *within* Central Asia, beyond those organised by the RACP or supported as part of the RACP partners' programmes.<sup>3</sup>

The amount of funding, and the expectations and responsibilities attached, would be appropriate to each grant line, with learning grants being the smallest.

In addition, a set of selection criteria would help the RACP team communicate what the programme is about, identify partnerships and projects most likely to contribute to its objectives, and provide a consistent basis on which to prioritize or refuse support. These criteria could include the applicant's:

- Proposed contribution to one or more RACP objectives/outcomes;
- Commitment to SDC values such as gender equality, cultural diversity etc.;
- Artistic quality and potential to develop;
- Organisational standards, capacity and potential;
- Interest in working with other arts and culture actors from the country or the region;
- Engagement with civil society and the wider public.

Clearly, the first two are essential. Any proposal that is not aligned with these should go no further. The remaining four criteria are matters of judgement: some proposals may be stronger in one area than another. In order to relate these criteria to the funding mechanisms above, we suggest that, in relation to the RACP objectives (#1), Partnership Grants would have to contribute to all three objectives, Project Grants to at least two and Learning Grants to at least one objective.

We also suggest that reporting systems are tested for need. While the quality of all the documents we saw is good, a lighter administrative touch would free NPM time for more important tasks. Deciding what really needs to be known by who would be a good place to start. Using fewer, simpler quantitative indicators complemented with strong 'outcome stories', would do justice to the RACP's results. It might also help in **telling the RACP story** to external audiences – in each country, regionally, and to stakeholders in Switzerland. There is a real success story to be shared, as well as transferable learning useful to SCOs elsewhere.

## 3.5 Partners

### 3.5.1 RACP III – Analysis

Where it can, the RACP is right to focus on the independent sector, which is closest to SDC values and best able to deliver projects which advance the programme's goal. In working with this sector, RACP also strengthens civil society actors, organisations and networks, and builds

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<sup>3</sup> In Switzerland, SDC supports the [South Cultural Fund](#), through which Swiss organisations who invite artists from the South and East receive a contribution towards the activity. Artlink, that manages the fund, is interested in identifying artists from SDC partners countries who could be proposed to Swiss venues.

a social and cultural legacy. Its support extends beyond funding to include formal and informal training, access to contacts and expertise. But the human importance of trust, belief and commitment, maintained over time, should not be underestimated.

Several RACP partners are now strong, independent and well-run, with potential to move to a different kind of relationship with SDC. The indicators of their robustness include attracting funding from other sources, greater independence, more ambitious and strategic programmes and (sometimes) the confidence of state partners. We have also considered the quality of the partner's artistic work, management and administration, its vision of its role in society, its peers and its own organisational future, its alignment with the RACP values, objectives and priorities. In our assessment, the strongest partners are:

- Bishkek Jazz Festival, Sakhna and UstatShakirt (Kyrgyzstan),
- Didor Film Festival, Dushanbe Art Ground and the Ethno-Jazz Festival (Tajikistan); and
- Ilkhom Theatre, Sogdiana Orchestra and Savitsky Museum (Uzbekistan).<sup>4</sup>

However, they are not equally advanced, and they have different strengths and weaknesses. The first who could move to a type of partnership are probably UstatShakirt, Dushanbe Art Ground, the Ethno-Jazz Festival and Ilkhom Theatre. But individual support plans will be needed: there is no standard solution. Ilkhom's needs and prospects are not the same as DAG and the partnership funding approach we propose is partly a response to that.

### 3.5.2 RACP IV – Proposals

Multi-annual funding is intended to build the RACP's partnership foundations (though this will be difficult in Uzbekistan). The proposed **partnership agreements** could be for 2, 3 or 4 years, based on a mutually agreed programme of work with clear outputs. The variable time length reflects the different situations and capacities of each partner, and avoids a logjam of work so that each SCO is negotiating only one or two partnership agreements at a time. This approach aims to give more autonomy and more responsibility to organisations as they become ready for it, encouraging them towards the first stage of sustainability.

Various safeguards will be needed, such as ensuring that NGOs are not too dependent on one person or a single source of funding. Assisting them to build their own partnerships, for instance with local or national authorities, is also important, while always protecting them against the pressures of external demands for rapid growth or replication. Where international donors (AKDN, Christensen, OSI) can also be engaged with aligned objectives, it would be good to seek reducing administration by agreeing consistent monitoring and reporting systems on the basis of a programme.

In the next phase SDC should also explore whether some bridges to state institutions could be cautiously built. Ministries of Culture and Education in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are showing interest in aspects of the work. Moving leadership from Bactria Cultural Centre to Dushanbe Conservatoire might secure the future of the Ethno-Jazz Festival and its music outreach work. Other opportunities undoubtedly exist and, if successful, would help embed good work into the structures of public service.

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<sup>4</sup> Ilkhom Theatre is a limited company, while Sogdiana Orchestra and Savitsky Museum are state culture institutions; conditions in Uzbekistan do not currently make it possible to work with NGOs.

### 3.6 Other funding streams

#### 3.6.1 RACP III – Analysis

Although SDC has wisely prioritised partnerships in the RACP, it has retained the flexibility offered by **small action** grants. These funds are valuable in allowing the programme to be responsive to unexpected opportunities, support new and emerging artists, and build partnership with other donors or institutions. The financial risk is small and most small actions produce worthwhile results. But the term ‘small actions’ is unhelpful if it implies these grants are unimportant (as is the ‘hands-off’ approach of NPM to such actions, in a perspective of strengthening the capacities of newcomers). As a result, small actions are not always aligned with programme objectives and can become opportunistic. In our view, they should not be used as general sponsorship. Although this problem is not serious since the grants are small, better value could be secured by using consistent criteria to assess all proposals.

#### 3.6.2 RACP IV – Proposals

Partnership agreements should be paralleled by **project grants** for those at an earlier stage of organisational development, for new productions and for individuals where freedom of organisation and expression is constrained. We prefer the term ‘project grant’ to ‘small actions’ (although in reality they may be the same) because it underlines the integration of this strand of work within the RACP strategy. These grants should not be *ad hoc* donations or sponsorship of artistic work (even local) responding to other objectives (e.g. *Landeskommunikation* of the Embassy)<sup>5</sup> but planned interventions that meet the same criteria as all RACP expenditure. They should be carefully selected projects with the potential to grow in capacity, ambition and sustainability.

We also suggest creating a third funding line, provisionally called **learning grants**, reserved for supporting individual artists and culture actors wanting to develop their professional practice. They should be light-touch, perhaps based on a letter of application and an interview, with a written report supported by creative work as appropriate. With an upper limit of, say, 2,000 CHF, these would enable artists to arrange visits, residencies, informal training and exchanges with each other. The funds would be principally used for travel, accommodation and living costs away from home. If new productions were proposed as a result of learning grants, a separate proposal would need to be made for a project grant. The intended outputs of these low-risk grants are not exhibitions or performances (though they may happen) but artists with enhanced skills, experience and networks.

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<sup>5</sup> As a general rule, SDC culture programmes and small actions in the field of culture do not aim at enhancing Switzerland’s image. Although such programmes often contribute to a positive image of SDC (people appreciate support for their cultural expressions), the visibility of Switzerland should not be a major reason for support. The RACP respects this position entirely. The relationship built with cultural actors can be a useful basis for *Landeskommunikation* initiatives, but they should be funded from different sources (Finkomp, Präsenz Schweiz) and identified as such.

### 3.7 Cost-effectiveness

#### 3.7.1 RACP III – Analysis

As discussed above (3.4.1), it is hard to assess the RACP's **cost-effectiveness** in the absence of reliable benchmarks and without being able to apportion staff time or link specific outcomes to individual grants. However, based on our experience of similar programmes, we consider that RACP is productive and that staff time is well used. Indeed, we were surprised to see that two of the NPMs had additional responsibilities and so were working only part-time on RACP.

We were also asked whether an **increase in the programme's budget** in the next phase would produce a better cost-benefit ratio. Again, without detailed analysis of budgets, grants and staff time, it is hard to be sure, particularly since we believe that simplifying processes would have a positive effect on the last of these. We are also aware that cultural projects are not always directly replicable or scalable, in the way, for instance, that capital projects might be. Projects that are so dependent on individual talents and capacities cannot always be easily expanded. The partners are very different and the ways in which they work might be developed with additional resources will also vary. With that proviso, we believe that there is potential to achieve greater and more sustainable outcomes with a larger budget in RACP IV.

#### 3.7.2 RACP IV - Proposals

Planned and tapered increases, linked to achievable plans as envisaged in the new model of partnership agreement, could make a big difference in outputs and outcomes, as well as strengthening the sustainability of some organisations. Support for extending the reach of UstatShakirt to more schools, or to the Ethno-Jazz Festival through conservatoire-backed outreach and teaching, are examples that could be considered. Likewise, the Didor Film Festival could be enlarged with a fringe element run by young people (which would help secure the succession of a leadership which is not young); the cinema itself has potential to become a regular venue for a range of valuable activity. Sakhna is another NGO whose potential is constrained principally by funding rather than the capacities of the people or the demand for the work. There are other examples where a larger budget could achieve significantly more, provided it continues to be used in a sensitive and responsive way. The key is probably not, at this stage, to envisage bringing in many new partners if there was more funding, but to use additional resources to extend and strengthen the work of the existing partners.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Conclusions

After eight years of operation, Regional Art and Culture Programme has established itself as a strong part of SDC's cooperation strategy in Central Asia. It is particularly effective in:

- Supporting innovative artists and culture sector actors vital to society's development;
- Enabling audiences with very limited access to culture to experience new ideas;
- Developing civil society organisations and networks in the cultural field;
- Bringing together people with different cultural identities in mutual respect;
- Demonstrating that open artistic and cultural expression need not be threatening;

All this combines to protect and sometimes to enlarge a social space where democratic values can be expressed and intercultural dialogue happen. It has the potential to allow marginalised voices to be heard and new or unpopular ideas to be shared. RACP is, in short, not a nice addition to the SDC's core purpose but another way of achieving that purpose whose value lies precisely in its difference, because it opens partnerships, opportunities and routes for change that are not accessible through other SDC programmes.

The RACP cost is low in the context of SDC investment in the region, and its grants achieve a high success rate: almost all deliver or exceed their anticipated goals. It is well managed by a committed and experienced team whose most valuable work should be seen as developmental not administrative. There is a strong argument that a phased increase in the RACP budget would bring a more advantageous return on investment by enabling the NPMs to build on the strong foundations laid with a proportionally smaller increase in management time. Some adjustments to processes should be made to achieve best value in the next phase, whether or not the decision is made to increase the budget.

## 4.2 Recommendations for RACP Phase IV

In the following section, we conclude by setting out our principal recommendations, based on the review, and which have been touched in the preceding analysis. We do not repeat here the reasons for each recommendation, which we trust will be sufficiently clear by this point.

### 4.2.1 Rationale

We recommend that **the Regional Arts and Cultural Programme should be continued** after 2015, for a three or four year period before review. The **programme rationale should be maintained** and linked as directly as possible to grants through the planning framework.

### 4.2.2 Priorities and resourcing

We recommend that the **focus on independent arts and cultural actors** be maintained, and that steps be taken to strengthen the NGO and civil society networks that sustain their work. We further suggest that:

- The commitment to **peripheral and culturally disadvantaged areas** be strengthened;
- The programme should aim to achieve **equal participation by females and young people** under 30 during the next phase.
- A **presumption in favour of intercultural dialogue** and exchange be applied across RACP;
- A stepped **increase in the programme budget** should be considered.<sup>6</sup>

### 4.2.3 Planning framework

We recommend that the current planning, monitoring and reporting system be reviewed and that consideration be given to **adjusting the planning framework for the next phase** of the

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<sup>6</sup> SDC's **1 percent for culture** is a benchmark at the level of the whole organization. A minimum contribution to culture is expected from all SCOs, ideally corresponding to at least 1% of the programme budget in a given country or region. Where there is potential, and support for culture has proved a cost-effective contribution to SDC overall objectives in a country, support can exceed 1%.

programme, but that it is understood that this framework exists to guide not to restrict. It should not be the only way of evaluating the RACP's results but establish a single clear line through all it does. We also propose that **criteria for assessing proposals and grants** should be established for RACP IV.

#### 4.2.4 Management

We recommend that the **regional character of the programme should continue** but that simpler management systems, based on the principle of subsidiarity, should be adopted. Rather than designating certain projects 'regional' the presumption in favour of cultural exchange should mean that opportunities to promote such contact should be explored in every project (though it will not always be possible or desirable in every case). We also propose that:

- **National Programme Managers** should be understood to be doing development work for a proportion of their time, and empowered to work actively with partners.
- **The Steering Committee** and regional management system with its backstopping should be maintained.
- More **contact between programme staff** should be encouraged, including a third possible meeting between NPMs.

#### 4.2.5 Funding mechanisms

We recommend that the established **pattern of funding be maintained** in the next phase, though there may be changes in terms of individual NGOs, and that attention is given to helping key partners to become stronger and more sustainable over the next phase. We propose that funding be awarded, on the basis of criteria and agreements linked to the planning framework, through **three funding mechanisms** only:

- **Partnership Grants**, for multi-annual support to two or three key NGOs in each country.
- **Project Grants**, for time-limited arts and cultural projects lasting up to a year.
- **Learning Grants**, for residencies and exchanges outside the international training activities directly supported by the RACP and its partners.

#### 4.2.6 Communication

We recommend that steps be taken to **improve knowledge of RACP**, its purpose and its achievements, within the Central Asian region, within the SDC community and among interested parties in Switzerland, both to build support for its work and to share lessons from its practice with interested parties. As a first step, we suggest that work should be done on:

- **An internet and social networking strategy**, built in close dialogue with RACP partners and stakeholders and reflecting their needs;
- Producing or commissioning materials (text, video, images) that can help **tell the story of RACP** to political, development and other audiences.