



## INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE SDC'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE WATER SECTOR 2010-2017

Since 2016, ensuring a sustainable water management is officially a sustainable development goal. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC has been pursuing this goal for many years. An independent evaluation shows that its water activities brought significant benefits in terms of health, quality of life and gender equality. Whilst the project approach was generally effective, the impact on the sector as a whole has been mixed.

### CONTEXT

The main purpose of this evaluation is to provide evidence based inputs for the new Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) Water Policy and to support the thematic orientation of SDC's engagement in water activities. The evaluation covers the years 2010 to 2017 and all four domains of South Cooperation. In total, CHF 812 million covering 490 projects were spent.

### MAIN FINDINGS

#### 1. Improvements in health, quality of life and gender equality

The interventions on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) reached the poor and brought benefits in terms of health, quality of life and gender equality. They have achieved their aims supported by a clear strategy and a strong resource base. Further, the use of participative approaches and technology was a strong feature of the SDC water engagement.

#### 2. A new sustainable development goal was funded

The global programme was strategic at the global level, reflected Swiss comparative advantages and provided a centre of gravity for water in SDC. It operated at a high level within water diplomacy and was successful in the efforts to develop a sustainable

development goal. SDC's mature track record gave it an ability to absorb and make good use of funds. The Swiss based networks have contributed to learning and networking between water professionals.

#### 3. Sanitation and hygiene could be strengthened

Concerning the WASH interventions more could have been done on sanitation and hygiene. Still, the impact of the WASH interventions was more immediate and the interventions were better documented than the SDC water interventions.

#### 4. Structural factors hindered the extension of the projects

Whilst the project approach was effective, the impact on the sector has been mixed. The barriers for national replication of the SDC approaches were often out of control of the SDC as they were related to longer-term structural factors such as absence of governmental structure or insufficient access to capital. Also, communication could be improved. In the global programme, links to the bilateral level were not always strong. The potential of the networks was not fully used.

#### 5. The Swiss approach was found relevant

The continuity, long-term approach and flexibility of SDC were important

factors for the good performance of its operations. Wider impacts on governance, peace and the environment were evident and the Swiss approach to subsidiarity and decentralisation was found particularly relevant. The contribution in these areas was increasingly built into the newer project designs but not well monitored in older projects.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Working more closely with other donors:** SDC projects have been effective in reaching poor and marginalised populations. However, the demonstration value has not been fully exploited or brought to the level of prioritisation where it can influence and effect transformative change. The recommendation can be implemented through systematically working more closely with other donors. The cooperation with SECO and international finance institutions should be intensified.

**2. Enhance sustainability through greater attention to economics:** The SDC has adopted state of the art approaches to ensure inclusive management of water services. Still there are instances of high vulnerability where more specific and realistic plans and expectations for cost recovery are needed. The cost-benefit analysis, feasibility and economic decision

making tools should be extended and developed. Multi-use water resource development projects that focus on the end use of water should be encouraged.

**3. Accelerate the contribution to sanitation, hygiene and environmental protection:** Whilst the progress in water is impressive, the contribution to sanitation, hygiene and environmental protection is less so. SDC is already increasing attention to these areas. But more is still needed especially for wastewater treatment, faecal sludge management and use of market-based approaches in waste management.

**4. Enhance sustainable interventions where there are crises:** SDC has funded partners in emergencies and complex situations in which communities are still vulnerable. Sustainability of interventions is crucial if the interventions are to last long beyond the project period. When complex and humanitarian situations justify, it should be considered aiming at greater sustainability of the services provided. The use of secondees to support appropriate authorities should be encouraged, especially where there is a highly likelihood of needing to respond to future crises.

**5. Reinforce the links between the global programme and regional actions:** The global programme was strategic and reflected Swiss comparative advantages. Nevertheless, the links to the bilateral level were not always strong. Many SDC staff at the country level were not aware and not able to take advantage of highly relevant initiatives of the global programme. Where global staff were operating at regional level, the interaction was more pronounced. This led to benefits and indicates the potential that stronger links would have. To tackle these difficulties, an action plan could be set out. It should be considered placing global staff at regional level where there are many global activities.

**6. Strengthen the SDC contribution:** SDC has developed considerable capacity at project level, but too often this capacity is not used institutionally when the projects stop. Where feasible, the transfer of capacity and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems should be built into institutions, civil society organisations and academia that have a longer-term presence in the sector or in the country. It should be considered introducing a contribution to knowledge networks into the performance appraisal of key staff.

**7. Develop a unified water strategy:** The SDC strategy guiding water engagement is from 2005 and much has happened since then. Given SDC's big contribution to the water SDG, as well as the trend toward mainstreaming water, a new Swiss engagement-wide strategy for water is timely. Integrating governance into the water sector is one of a number of products that could form a base for the strategy. The terms of reference for a strategy development with a focus on the issues should be adjusted with a focus on mainstreaming and use of political economy analysis. Opportunities and challenges for systemic change should be identified and the use of policy dialogue to advance reforms in water strengthened.

**8. Enable partners' capacities to implement actions and gender equality:** Some partners have shown considerable capacity and have made efforts to address transformational change, but other partners continue to demonstrate gender mainstreaming actions that may have unsustainable effects. SDC has an opportunity for more widespread influence through the networks it sponsors to build capacities in gender mainstreaming. To achieve this goal, a gender review of existing networks and learning platforms can be undertaken. "Flagship gender and water" projects should be selected and communication intensified.

## SENIOR MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The Management Response was submitted to the Board of Directors for approval and signed by the SDC Director-General. It sets forth concrete measures and actions to be taken, including the division of responsibilities and a time horizon for their implementation by the concerned units of the SDC. The Senior Management agrees with all eight recommendations. This shows both a high level of plausibility between the findings and the recommendations as well as the readiness of SDC to further improve its performance in the water sector.

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted by PEM Consult. A combination of six different approaches and methods was used in this evaluation. The theory of change was analysed, the evaluation questions verified and the portfolio was deconstructed with selection of desk and field samples. Further, a desk study of normative and review documents and several interviews with stakeholders were conducted. For the desk sample 48 projects and country visit sample of 20 projects were selected. In addition, different country visits were undertaken and a project case study made in each case as well as a detailed country note.