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Evaluation 2014/3

Evaluation of SDC's Thematic Networks

Evaluation of

SDC's Thematic Networks

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

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Annexes and Case Studies (CD)

Bern, December 2014

Evaluation Process

Evaluations commissioned by SDC Senior Management were introduced in SDC in 2002 with the aim of providing a more critical and independent assessment of SDC activities. These Evaluations are conducted according to the OECD DAC Evaluation Standards and are part of SDC's concept for implementing Article 170 of the Swiss Constitution which requires Swiss Federal Offices to analyse the effectiveness of their activities. 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 SDC.

The Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division identifies the primary intended users of the evaluation and invites them to participate in a **Core Learning Partnership (CLP)**. The CLP actively accompanies the evaluation process. It comments on the evaluation design (Approach Paper). It provides feedback to the evaluation team on their preliminary findings and on the draft report. During a Synthesis Workshop, the CLP validated the evaluation findings and conclusions and, with the facilitation of the SDC Evaluation Officer and the Evaluation Team, elaborated recommendations and lessons learned for SDC. These are noted in the **Agreement at Completion Point (ACP)**.

Based on the **Final Evaluator's Report** and the ACP, members of the middle management of SDC drafted the **Senior Management Response (SMR)**. The SMR was subsequently approved by SDC's Senior Management.

The ACP and the SMR are published together with the Final Evaluators' Report. For further details regarding the evaluation process see the Approach Paper in the annex and on the CD attached.

Timetable

Step	When
Approach Paper finalized	December 2013
Implementation of the evaluation	March 2014
Agreement at Completion Point	June 2014
Senior Management Response in SDC	September 2014

I Long Evaluation Abstract

Donor	SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Report title	External Evaluation: Thematic Networks in the SDC
Geographic area	Global
Sector	Multisector Other: Thematic networks
Language	English
Date	October 2014
Authors	Breard & Associates: Patrick Breard, Lene Poulsen, Judith Kallick Russell

Subject Description

This report is an independent evaluation of the functioning and results of the Thematic Networks in the SDC. The evaluation considers in particular the contribution of the networks to SDC's operational and policy work, to the quality of its strategies and policies, and to SDC's thematic competence and knowledge management. It covers the period 2009-2013. The Evaluation does not compare the networks but focuses on the network structure as such.

Evaluation Methodology

The Evaluation applied mixed methods and analysis tools. Data collection included review of existing documentation and the collection of new data through face-to-face and telephone interviews with network stakeholders at headquarters and in Swiss County Offices (SCOs), a general online survey of the 12 existing Thematic Networks and a user survey among network members. The data collection also included case studies in three SCOs (Benin, Kyrgyzstan, and Nicaragua) and benchmarking studies of thematic networks in other donor agencies (particularly Sida and DFID). The analysis tools consisted of stakeholder analysis, network analysis, and an assumption and contribution analysis.

Major Findings and Conclusions

The thematic network structure was a critical tool for SDC's 2008 reorganization and mandate to promote learning, share knowledge, provide theme-related operational advice, capitalize on experiences, and formulate good practices to ultimately improve operations in the field. The network structure is particularly important in a decentralized organization, where multidirectional vertical and horizontal communications is important to increase regional and local ownership. Overall, the established network structure has proven able to respond to the functions defined in the mandate of the thematic networks in terms of promoting learning and passing on professional and methodological knowledge; providing theme-related operational advice to the organizational units within the network; and capitalizing on experience and identifying good practices. The efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of the thematic networks vary and are continuously developing and adapting, as they should be, particularly for a relatively new organizational structure where the official reorganization phase only finished in 2012.

While the overall structure seems to have arrived at a relatively stable state in terms of network functioning with effective use of general networking tools such as face-to-face meetings, there is now a need to further develop a systematic, results-based mechanism that will facilitate more focused, impactful results and a use of the networks as organizational tools rather than objectives per se. While the general concept of the thematic network structure as the modus operandi for SDC's thematic focus has been internalized throughout the organization, there are still uncertainties about how best to use the networks including roles and responsibilities and network members are generally not claiming full ownership and engagement. This is reflected for instance, in the tendency for limited pro-activeness of the members in the daily functioning of the networks such as D-groups and e-discussions where a dynamic dialogue rarely develops and most communication is vertical with very limited horizontal communication.

Some of the challenges to the daily functioning are related to practical issues such as language barriers. However, there are also challenges with regard to the perceived relevance of some of the network functions, such as technical advice and sharing of good practices where the SCO demand is often specific and requires adapted solutions rather than global advice.

The challenge for SDC to focus thematically, which has often been highlighted for instance in OECD DAC peer reviews, seems to be reinforced through the current network structure with the thematic networks distributed throughout the organizational units, drawing attention in 12 directions. Thus far, there are only limited structures put in place to ensure an integrated approach of the thematic networks. As a result, the general perception of SDC as a strong thematic organization has decreased in spite of the fact that staff directly involved in technical activities has increased through the network structure.

Priorities for Change

The priority areas for change include Role and responsibility of the thematic networks in SDC's structure; Functioning and effectiveness (use of different instruments); Outcomes (thematic advice, knowledge management for improved thematic quality, policy); Design and anchorage (focus areas, local-regional-global); and Membership profiles.

Summary Recommendations

- SDC should continue with thematic networks to strengthen thematic quality of its operations and policy.
- Each thematic network should apply result-based management to clearly define their contributions to SDC operations.
- Thematic networks should strengthen their efficiency with special focus on responding to SCO needs.
- The thematic networks should strengthen the integrated thematic approach.
- SDC should foster a learning culture.
- SDC should ensure that the network architecture is optimal.

II Senior Management Response

Evaluation of SDC's Thematic Networks

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
Recommendation 1: **SDC should continue with thematic networks to strengthen thematic quality of its operations and policy.** **Senior management should establish an overall steering group for the thematic network structure with participation of representatives from senior management, SCOs, management of thematic networks, quality assurance section, and K&LP to coordinate and monitor the thematic network structure and ensure that:** a. The thematic focus and activities of the thematic networks are explicitly integrated in key operational processes, including the full Project Cycle Management and human resource management, b. The thematic focus of the networks is aligned with the thematic priorities presented in the Bills to the Parliament and priority domains of Country Strategies, c. Procedures are established to ensure that thematic networks for areas that are no more in demand by SDC's operations will be reorganized either through integration of the themes into other thematic networks or by ceasing the focus to the area, d. Each network has a well-functioning network management, including focal points, network facilitators, theme managers, and a core / steering group with participation of SDC network members from headquarters and SCOs, e. Each thematic network develops structure, functions,	**CLP <u>partly agrees</u> with Evaluation Team** The CLP agrees with the recommendation in the sense that TNW should be stronger positioned and better used through greater recognition of their values. However, the CLP believes that the creation of an additional body (network stakeholder group) is not the key to achieve that. Instead, the CLP believes that the senior Management should develop a better ownership on this topic and that the representation of the TNW in senior management bodies, in BoD discussions and further forums (retreat, Politik-Fragen, etc) should be more prominent. The CLP agrees with the ET that internal human resource investment is an issue (however, that does not account for financial resources which it considers mostly adequate). In line with that, SDC should develop a medium term thematic profile. <u>Proposed concrete measures</u> • *Include K&LP as permanent representation of focal points in the relevant platforms of the senior management*	**Management <u>partly agrees</u> with ET** The BoD agrees that it will involve itself more in issues of thematic networks and learning, notably during its retreats However, it does neither agree with nominating one of its members as "champion" for general networks issues nor with including K&LP as permanent representation of focal points in senior management meetings. But instead, **in view of further improving TNW management, TNW issues will be addressed in the Status report and taken up by Team managers at least once a year at Senior management level in relevant platforms such as retreats of SDC Directorate.** BoD agrees with CLP to elaborate a medium to long-term thematic profile for SDC in light of forthcoming thematic priorities on the next Bill to Parliament 2017-2020.

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
and priorities according to specific needs and opportunities for that network, f. Ensure that technology is in place and is being used for full integration of National Program Officers in network planning and other network management activities such as participation in core/steering groups, g. Thematic networks are innovative, proactive, and support the organization's changing needs in a complex environment.	• *Appoint a member of the directorate as champion for TNW and the implementation of the recommendations of this evaluation (e.g. WPI)* • *Elaborate a medium to long-term thematic profile for SDC*	
Recommendation 2: **Each thematic network should apply result-based management to clearly define their contributions to SDC operations.** **The network management in consultation with the whole network should apply rolling multi-year planning and result-based management with special focus on SCO needs and SCO knowledge resources that should/could be mobilized through the network. The result-based management work plans should include indicators and targets for network activities at output and outcomes levels. Moreover, the multi-year plans should clearly identify:** a. Contributions to the full Project Cycle Management with identification of roles and responsibilities of Network Members and the bureaucratic processes for mobilizing Network Members, including role of Focal Points, Theme Managers, and Core Members, for different forms of technical support through different network tools such as peer support, field visits, and virtual support, and according to specific criteria, b. The role of Focal Points to decide when to respond directly to a request for technical advice, when to involve National Program Officers, or when to involve the entire network,	**CLP <u>agrees</u> with Evaluation Team** The CLP recognizes the importance of multi-year planning. In fact, most of the FP and TNWs are already using key instruments of results-based management for their respective mandates. Nevertheless the CLP also stresses the importance of the characteristics of the TNWs in terms of flexibility, innovativeness, and responsiveness. Therefore the implementation of RBM should not lead to a bureaucratization of TNW and it should specifically focus on contribution logic to outputs and outcomes on policy, normative and operational level. The CLP recognizes the definition of theories of change for the FP and TNWs as key instruments to achieve an adequate RBM. *Proposed concrete measures* • *Plan activities based on theories of*	**Management <u>partly agrees</u> with ET** BoD agrees with the CLP that rigid medium term planning is not appropriate to make networks' contributions to SDC's operations and policies more visible and accountable. TNW do already apply annual planning and thus contribute to RBM of the institution as a whole. Nonetheless, **TNW contributions to SDC operations ought to be "client oriented" and respond to the needs of the institution as a whole, including SCO.** **In this regard, each TNW should be managed on the basis of a medium term strategy paper (Leitdokument B), with outcomes and indicators relevant to SDC's operational and policy needs and priorities.**

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
c. Regular monitoring of thematic quality at all phases of the Project Cycle Management, for instance through systematic participation of Focal Points and /or Network Members, d. Systematic mainstreaming of the thematic networks in Project Documents, e. Priority needs of SCOs in a demand driven manner based on systematic monitoring of SCO knowledge needs with identification of most appropriate means of knowledge sharing and thematic advice according to the specific SCO, f. Role of regional and thematic sub-groups in the delivery of thematic network outcomes, specifying the role of Regional Advisors as link between regional and global knowledge and know-how including capacities to link the regional and global levels.	*change.*	
Recommendation 3: **Thematic networks should strengthen their efficiency with special focus on responding to SCO needs** **The network management should review and continuously develop network processes to promote efficiency, including**: a. Development of a multi-directional communication strategy to promote horizontal communication, including spontaneous knowledge sharing, b. Development and coordination of regional and thematic sub-groups according to needs expressed by Network Members and SDC Senior Management, and define the roles, responsibilities, and structures of regional and thematic sub-groups in the overall network structure, c. Strengthening network animation through training and special recruitment with focus on promoting network initiatives by regular members, foster network	**CLP <u>disagrees</u> with Evaluation Team** The CLP finds that FP and TNWs should be responsive to SDC in general, while policy demands of the head quarter addressed to FPs should not jeopardize operational needs of SCOs. Strengthening the functioning of TNW to this effect is not a matter of efficiency but a matter of relevance. In order to strengthen relevance and functioning, the CLP initiates a new effort to clarify the specific mandate of each TNW in a bottom up process. The core mandates of the TNWs should be defined taking into account the differences between the 12 networks. This should include reinforcement as well as revising of responsibilities of the network	**Management <u>partly agrees</u> with ET** The BoD agrees that TNWs should strengthen their effectiveness/ efficiency but also their relevance in responding to the SCOs' needs. However, part of their tasks is also to support other units of SDC including HOs and representation offices with multilateral organisations. Furthermore, **as SCOs are integral parts of TNW, the later have also a particular responsibility to train local staff, empower them in assuming their responsibilities, and in general strengthening a learning culture.** **Moreover, BoD expects the head of divisions responsible for thematic areas to be active in validating and disseminating**

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
ownership, and increase network facilitation to trigger queries from field staffs on D-groups, d. Development and sharing of know-how and not just thematic knowledge, e. Development of good practices, lessons learned, and thematic reports based on SCO needs and input, f. Improvement of existing networks tools, particularly trainings, technical workshops, development of technical and position papers, g. Introduction of new members to networks with one-on-one consultations – written or verbal –between representatives from network management and new members to improve their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the opportunities the network offers, h. Continuous thematic training for network members according to needs and opportunities, i. Update the yellow book for easier reference for users of network services and develop overview of technical capacities available among the members of the network with identification of their geographic location, j. Explanation of role of SDC Communication Officers at headquarters and in the field within the communication about network roles and activities.	management (line managers, theme managers, focal points, and thematic program officers). Specific activities regarding the functioning of TNW can be defined only based on an updated core mandate and taking into account all NW audience. *Proposed concrete measures* ● *Reinforce and revise the mandate and responsibilities of the network management.*	**innovative approaches and methodologies, and sharing good practices and lessons learned across SDC and its partners in a systematic way, with the support of K&LP.**
Recommendation 4: **The thematic networks should strengthen the integrated thematic approach** **Focal Points of all thematic networks should ensure joint planning to maximize their complementarity in support to SCO priority domains with special focus on**: a. Defining complementarity for joint support to the Project Cycle Management,	**CLP partly agrees with Evaluation Team** The CLP agrees that harmonization and coordination of TNW activities are crucial; however joint planning should not be a purpose in itself. Rather, synergies among different TNWs should be exploited when relevant and based on needs which result from operational activities touching upon	**Management partly agrees with ET** Unlike the recommendation of the Evaluation Team, BoD agrees with the CLP and hence does not see the need for TNW to go for joint planning. However, **TNW should be encouraged to further strengthen internetwork collaboration and develop complementarities according to operational**

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
b. Defining cross-cutting network activities, including Face-to-Face, training, and peer support, c. Establishing a website for joint planning and coordinated activities for easy reference.	different, ev. cross-cutting, thematic domains. Moreover it is not only the FP's task to initiate integrated approaches but the initiative should also be expressed by NW members, in particular field staff, program officers and the line management. Also, the CLP considers that the suggestion for thematic career clusters, such as a green cluster would strengthen TNW harmonization and the model of thematic careers as such. It should also be recognized that most of the TNWs have constructive collaboration with external networks and international centers of thematic excellence. *Proposed concrete measures* • *propose clusters for the thematic carreer* • *Encourage the network members, in particular field staff, program officers and the line management to initiate integrated approaches*	**needs and opportunities.** As suggested by the CLP, **thematic staff profiles should be clustered according to thematic priorities of the next Bill to Parliament 2017-20.** **Ideally, thematic staff profiles and related careers should be organized around clustered (interlinked) thematic issues such as green or social sector.**
Recommendation 5: **SDC should foster a learning culture.** **Senior Management should strengthen a learning culture that will embrace successes, failures, and risk taking. To achieve this, Senior Management should develop:** a. A strategy for the role of risk taking in thematic networks and processes for systematically learning from success and failures and scale up innovations,	**CLP agrees with Evaluation Team** The CLP notes the Evaluation's findings about the importance of explicit senior management leadership in promoting a learning culture based on opportunities and risk-taking has been highlighted in recent evaluations of DFID, including their systematic use of instruments such as	**Management agrees with ET** A good learning culture is of particular importance for SDC. **Learning from successes but also from failures strengthens its credibility and hence should be promoted by SDC management. In this regard, BoD expects TNW to be more active in reflecting and reporting on**

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
b. Guidelines for partnerships for knowledge and know-how development and sharing with special attention to the role of knowledge and know-how partnerships in the thematic networks, c. Implement existing or develop new processes to encourage institutional knowledge and expertise and not just individual learning, d. A strategy for learning from others including the role of external partners in the networks and the use of differentiation between outcome-oriented network memberships with well-defined roles and responsibilities for all members and D-groups where more passive membership is an option, e. Strengthen the role of thematic learning in SDC's organizational training concepts, f. Guidelines for Line Managers to incentivize and reward knowledge sharing.	'failure-fairs'. Moreover, the CLP also recognizes the importance of appropriate reward schemes for a learning culture based on successes and failures as recommended by the Knowledge Management Evaluation (2009). *Proposed concrete measures* • *Foster and support innovation with appropriate reward schemes for a learning culture.*	**operational and policy successes as well as failures and challenges.** BoD believes however that setting standards should not be overemphasized to the detriment of learning. Thus BoD is of the opinion that additional guidelines and strategies are not required.
Recommendation 6: **SDC should ensure that the network structure is optimal.** **In future adaptations of SDC's organizational structure, Senior Management should consider the optimal network architecture, including organizational anchorage, the role and responsibilities of Theme Managers and Focal Points, and the number of thematic networks, with special attention to:** a. The different roles and needs for Theme Managers in the different domains, b. Authority of Focal Points to negotiate directly with the Line Managers outside their own line the use of network members time for network activities, for instance for providing horizontal cooperation, c. Ensuring that an integrated thematic approach will be favored.	**CLP <u>agrees</u> with Evaluation Team** The CLP agrees with the finding in the Evaluation that the TNWs have been able to adapt to an organizational set-up that is not always optimal. The situation of networks with the backing of a global program is different from the situation of networks without such a strong thematic anchorage and authority (e.g. regarding human resources and network management). The anchorage of TNWs in geographic units of focal points may be counterproductive to the effectiveness of the TNWs, since the insufficient institutional authority of FP on thematic standards does not sufficiently	**The recommendation is not applicable at this moment as it is meant for <u>possible future adaptations</u> of SDC's organisational structure.** Nonetheless BoD is aware that there is room for improvement with regard to TNW architecture as well as roles and responsibilities within the TNW. Adjustments will be done in view of the thematic orientations of the next Bill to Parliament.

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
	support the application of best operational practices (thematic quality standards) in other organizational units. Therefore, it should be further detailed what an optimal architecture (not structure) should look like, taking into account the differences between TNWs. Also the repartition of responsibilities between FP, theme managers, core group members and line managers should be clarified. *Proposed concrete measures* • Rethink and define optimal network architectures for different types of networks. In particular the anchorage of TNW in organizational units. • Define repartition of responsibilities between FP, theme managers, core group members and line managers	
	Further recommendations by the CLP The CLP recommends that the K&LP will lead a (participatory) mapping exercise identifying the different mandates and responsibilities of the FP and the diversity of the focus and structure of TNW, for instance different focal point set-ups, different roles of core groups and different levels of participation of boundary partners. The mapping exercise should result in a proposal on structuring/setting up of the	BoD does not see the need to go for a complete mapping of the TNW. **BoD is however in favor of conducting a light mapping of the financial and human resources of the focal points, which should ultimately be a basis to optimize the TNW management.** **The light mapping will be carried out by K&LP, who will report to BoD within 6**

Recommendations (Evaluation Team - ET)	Proposed concrete measures (Core learning partnership - CLP)	Management Response (Steering Committee)
	different TNWs and clarified responsibilities of actors in line with recommendation 6. Based on the findings on the relationship with boundary partners (including i.e. NGOs, multilateral Organizations, other federal offices and centers of expertise) a policy for partnership and membership should be suggested by the FPs.	**months.**

III Evaluators' Final Report

Evaluation of SDC's Thematic Networks

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October 2014

Acknowledgements

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

A&FS	Agriculture and Food Security Network
BOD	Board of Directors
CLP	Core Learning Partnership
CEDRIG	Climate, Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Integration Guide
CC&E	Climate Change and Environment Network
C&HR	Conflict and Human Rights Network
CS	Country Strategy
CSPM	Conflict Sensitive Program Management
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DLGN	Decentralization and Local Governance Network
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction (Network)
E&I	Employment and Income Network
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
F2F	Face to Face
FP	Focal Point
HQ	Headquarters
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
K&LP	Knowledge and Learning Processes Division
MeRV	Monitoring of development-relevant changes
MoB	Management by Objectives
M4P	Making Markets Work for the Poor
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPO	National Project Officer
KM	Knowledge Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PED	Political Economy and Development Network
RBM	Result Based Management
REO	Reorganization
SCO	Swiss Country Office
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency

Executive Summary

SDC established its thematic networks in 2008 and they have been – to varying degrees – consistent with SDC's strategic objectives by promoting learning, sharing knowledge, providing theme-related operational advice, and capitalizing on experiences. After 5 years of functioning, SDC mandated this Evaluation to analyze to what extent and in which context the introduction of networks has improved the effectiveness of SDC's operational and policy work, the quality of its strategies and policies and SDC's thematic competence and knowledge management.

The thematic networks currently address 12 different thematic focus areas in SDC and include participation of SDC staff members at headquarters and at Swiss Cooperation Offices with a related thematic responsibility. Moreover, a majority of the networks include external partners as members. As a reflection of SDC's overall thematic and geographic coverage the 12 thematic networks are anchored in different operational units at headquarters. Based on the individual development of thematic focus over the years in SDC, the networks build on different network traditions. This, combined with the current geographic and thematic focus, means that the 12 thematic networks are at different levels of maturity and differ in terms of focus given to different functions and outputs such as knowledge sharing, technical advice, participation in policy development, and development of norms, guidelines and methodologies.

The 12 thematic networks are dynamic structures with a relatively high level of flexibility and interest in supporting innovative efforts, providing a strong framework for relevant and dynamic dialogue, learning and knowledge generation. However, there is no well-developed culture for risk-taking and learning from failures in SDC as is required in complex environments. Furthermore, the large number of thematic networks combined with limited attention to joint planning and monitoring among the networks is counter-productive to SCO needs for an integrated thematic approach. In addition, the network functions do not fully respond to SCO needs, particularly in terms of know-how and how to adapt good practices, as well as integrated thematic approaches fitting the priority domains of the Country Strategies.

The thematic networks have continuously benefited from the support of SDC senior management, even if active network promotion has been limited. As 12 slightly different entities, the networks have various degrees of adoption of the initially envisioned governance structure. The thematic networks have been mainstreamed in a range of internal corporate procedures and guidelines, though there are some remaining gaps and partial implementations. Still, SDC networks make an important contribution to thematic quality assurance with the direct involvement of Theme Managers, Focal Points, Thematic Program Officers, and – to a lesser extent – the broader network community. Thematic networks contribute to promoting and passing on professional and methodological knowledge without yet making the most of all available tools. Altogether, thematic networks contribute to SDC institutional learning primarily though ad hoc initiatives, rather than systematic mechanisms. External partners contribute to the quality of the networks also through ad hoc initiatives and not strategically. The thematic networks are an effective instrument to SDC's Knowledge Management and are beginning to develop ways to capitalize on experience and formulate good practices while being supported by adequate financial resources.

Collectively, the networks are already demonstrating a limited level of impact after only a short period of time. They clearly provide added-value to SDC and its partners in a more

collaborative, participatory format from the previous F-Department. Some networks have developed Theories of Change or results frameworks to guide their work, linking it to SDC strategic objectives, and monitor their outcomes, achieving more focused impact. Networks have proved to be a strong tool for identifying, developing and mainstreaming norms and policies, which ultimately improves impact in the field. Though functioning within a strong vertical, top-down context, networks offer a framework that has begun to support SDC to overcome geographic, organizational, and thematic compartmentalization.

Therefore the sustainability of the networks stems primarily from their recognized added-value. Integrated thematic and bottom-up approaches promote relevant and effective networks and support institutional thematic learning. Networks are fairly well established and poised to move to the next stage of development.

Against this backdrop, the Evaluation formulates the following recommendations:

1. **SDC should continue with thematic networks to strengthen thematic quality of its operations and policy.**

   Senior management should establish an overall steering group for the thematic network structure with participation of representatives from senior management, SCOs, management of thematic networks, quality assurance section, and K&LP to coordinate and monitor the thematic network structure and ensure that optimization of the thematic networks.

2. **Each thematic network should apply result-based management to clearly define their contributions to SDC operations.**

   The network management in consultation with the whole network should apply rolling multi-year planning and result-based management with special focus on SCO needs and SCO knowledge resources that should/could be mobilized through the network. The results-based management work plans should include indicators and targets for network activities at output and outcome levels.

3. **Thematic networks should strengthen their efficiency with special focus on responding to SCO needs.**

   The network management should review and continuously develop network processes to promote efficiency.

4. **The thematic networks should strengthen the integrated thematic approach.**

   Focal Points of all thematic networks should ensure joint planning to maximize their complementarity in support to SCO priority domains.

5. **SDC should foster a learning culture.**

   Senior Management should strengthen a learning culture that will embrace successes, failures, and risk taking.

6. SDC should ensure that the network architecture is optimal.

In future adaptations of SDC's organizational structure, Senior Management should consider the optimal network architecture, including organizational anchorage, the roles and responsibilities of Theme Managers and Focal Points, and the number of thematic networks.

1. Introduction

In 2008, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) embarked on a major reorganization to respond to the increasing complexity of the international development cooperation agenda. Some of the major challenges identified by SDC in its former structure included too little coordination between bilateral, multilateral, and thematic activities with different departments pursuing different strategies, and too many and poorly coordinated domains. To address these challenges, thematic networks were established to "provide a framework in which knowledge is exchanged and skills are built and maintained."[1] Network functions were defined, to:

- Promote learning and pass on professional and methodological knowledge,
- Provide theme-related operational advice to the organizational units within the network, and
- Capitalize on experience and formulate good practices.[2]

Since 2008, a total of 12 thematic networks have been established and located in the operational domains[3] and units within SDC under the direct responsibility of the responsible for the thematic area in SDC, the theme manager. The daily management of the networks is ensured by thematic focal points supported by core groups of network members, program officers and / or external backstoppers. Moreover, the networks benefit from administrative support. Network members are SDC staff located at headquarters and in the Swiss Cooperation Offices (SCOs) who will typically be "thematic program officers". Moreover, some of the thematic networks include external partners among their members. Overall, it is estimated that more than 1,300 staff from SDC and its partner organizations participate in one or several thematic networks. In addition, the division of Knowledge and Learning Processes (K&LP) provides support for knowledge management and networking.

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[1] Network Mandates, 2008. Original text: "In den Netzwerken wird Wissen ausgetauscht, Kompetenzen aufgebaut und erhalten. Sie ermöglichen den Linienvorgesetzten wie auch den Focal Points, ihre Kernaufgaben wahrnehmen zu können." Translation provided in various notes from the K&LP department, including "SDC Networks – Overview for Networks Members" Fact Sheet, 9.1.2013.

[2] Network Mandates, 2008. Original text: "1/Lernen fördern und Fach- und Methodenwissen vermitteln operationelle, 2/thematische Beratung in den Organisationseinheiten, 3/im Netz Erfahrungen kapitalisieren und gute Praktiken formulieren". Translation provided in various notes from the K&LP department, including "SDC Networks – Overview for Networks Members" Fact Sheet, 9.1.2013.

[3] SDC is organized in four operational domains: Global Cooperation, Regional Cooperation, East Cooperation, and Humanitarian Aid.

Table 1: Organizational anchorage of thematic networks in SDC

DOMAIN	DIVISION	THEMATIC NETWORK LEADERSHIP[4]
Global Cooperation	Analysis and Policy	
	Global Institutions	
	Global Program[5] Climate Change	Climate Change & Environment (CC&E)
	Global Program Food Security	Agriculture and Food Security (A&FS)
	Global Program Migration & Development	Migration & Development (Migration)
	Global Program Water Initiatives	Water
	Knowledge and Learning Processes	
Regional Cooperation[6]	Staff Unit, Regional Cooperation	Gender
	West Africa	Education
	Eastern and Southern Africa	Health
	East Asia	Political Economy and Development (PED) - no longer active
	South Asia	Conflicts and Human Rights (C&HR)
	Latin America and the Caribbean	Employment & Income (E&I)
	Quality Assurance and Aid Effectiveness	
East Cooperation[7]	Western Balkans	Decentralization and Local Governance (DLGN)
	New EU member Countries	
	Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	
Humanitarian Aid and SHA	Staff Unit, Humanitarian Aid & SHA	
	Multilateral Humanitarian Aid	Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)
	Asia and America	
	Africa	
	Europe & Mediterranean Basin	
	Field Resources	
	Equipment and logistics	

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[4] Theme Managers and Focal point(s)

[5] The Global Programs Climate Change, Food Security, Water, and Migration and Development concentrate on multilateral policy dialogue, the formulation of innovative solutions, and the sharing of knowledge.

[6] Regional cooperation domain focuses on bilateral cooperation with SDC priority countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

[7] East Cooperation domain focuses on bilateral cooperation with Eastern and Central European countries as well as Central Asia.

While the 12 thematic networks share a number of common features they are also characterized by different modes of operation, membership, and geographic coverage as a reflection of SDC's overall thematic and geographic coverage. Likewise, the 12 networks differ in terms of focus given to different functions and outputs such as knowledge sharing, technical advice, participation in policy development, and development of norms, guidelines and methodologies.

To assess the performance of the thematic networks as an organizational strategy and structure vis-à-vis the overall goals and priorities of SDC, an external evaluation has been commissioned by SDC. The mandate defines the focus of the evaluation in terms of:

- Functions and contributions of the networks,
- Role, costs and benefits,
- Benchmarking with other network-based organizations, and
- Learning and transfer of knowledge.

1.1   Evaluation Methodology

The overall goal and objectives of the Evaluation as defined by SDC[8] is to analyze to what extent and in which context the introduction of networks has improved the effectiveness of SDC's operational and policy work, the quality of its strategies and policies, and the thematic competence and knowledge management.

The methodology for the evaluation was further defined during the inception phase in collaboration with the Independent Evaluation Team, the Evaluation and Controlling Division, and the Core Learning Partnership (CLP) [9] established for the Evaluation. The final methodology is described in the Inception Report [10] approved by SDC and follows a conventional evaluation using mixed methods and analysis tools for assessing the thematic networks with regard to relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, impact, and sustainability and present conclusions, lessons-learned, priorities for change, and recommendations. The Evaluation has benefitted from a continuous and critical dialogue throughout the exercise with a broad range of network stakeholders, including during a final participatory workshop with the CLP for review and further development of preliminary findings, conclusions, and priorities for change.

The Evaluation was launched in January 2014. It is informed by various means and sources including review of background documentation, interviews with network stakeholders[11], a background survey on the networks' structures and activities, and an online survey[12] of network members on their perceptions of the networks' roles and impacts. Three Swiss Cooperation Offices (SCOs) were also visited to provide a deeper and more concrete understanding of network impacts in the field: Benin, Kyrgyzstan, and Nicaragua. Aides-memoires on the findings from the SCO visits are included in the annexes to the report.[13] Finally, the Evaluation conducted an assessment of thematic networks in other development

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[8] See Approach Paper/03.12.2013 presented in Annex 8.1.

[9] The Core Learning Partnership established to accompany the Evaluation consists of representatives of the 12 thematic networks.

[10] See Annex 12.

[11] See Annex 1.

[12] See Annex 8.

[13] See Annexes 3, 4, 5

cooperation organizations to provide context and inspiration[14], with particular focus on the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The annexes to the report include detailed analyses carried out for the Evaluation, including stakeholder analysis, assumption-cum-contribution analysis, and network analysis.[15]

A number of evaluability challenges were identified by the Evaluation team and validated by the CLP during the inception phase and workshop. Some of the expected challenges have been confirmed during the Evaluation, while others have been mitigated by the Evaluation methodology.

Table 2: Evaluability challenges of the Evaluation

KEY EVALUABILITY CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED DURING INCEPTION PHASE	EVALUABILITY CHALLENGES OBSERVED DURING THE EVALUATION AND CHALLENGES THAT HAVE BEEN MITIGATED
Impact measurement	Considering the relatively short time period that the thematic networks have been established, concrete impacts are difficult to identify.
Lack of baselines	Mitigated: The F-Department – the technical department prior to establishing networks – carried out annual user surveys, the F-Barometer, on the services provided by the F-Department. Moreover, SDC has a remarkably good documentation.
Lack of counterfactuals	The nature of the Evaluation does not allow the establishment of a counterfactual, particularly considering the dynamic structure of SDC post-reorganization.
Dynamic nature of the networks	The Evaluation has confirmed that the networks are still maturing and evolving. In addition, they have developed into 12 different structures in response to network needs, though complicating an overall assessment.
Time boundaries	Mitigated: The Evaluation focuses on the period 2008-13. Overall, time boundaries have not been a challenge for the evaluation. However, the Evaluation will invariably focus on the current status and less on the process that has taken place over the last 5 years.
Institutional memory	Mitigated: Limited institutional memory has affected the Evaluation's data collection, with some apparent contradictions in statements from different sources. Substantial review of background documents and use of triangulation has helped to address the issue.
Cost benefit analysis	The scope of the Evaluation does not allow for a proper cost-benefit analysis as suggested in the Approach paper. This was confirmed by the CLP during the Inception workshop and it was agreed that the Evaluation would not assign economic values to perceived benefits and costs.
Benchmarking	Mitigated: SDC is unique in its replacement of a single technical unit with thematic networks and global programs for priority areas for SDC's influence of the global agenda. While other bilateral donor organizations have invested substantially in thematic staff networks over the last years, their structures and contexts are different from those of SDC. Still, the Evaluation has identified good practices and lessons-learned from Sida, DFID, UNDP and others.

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[14] See Annex 6.
[15] See Annexes 9, 10, 11.

KEY EVALUABILITY CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED DURING INCEPTION PHASE	EVALUABILITY CHALLENGES OBSERVED DURING THE EVALUATION AND CHALLENGES THAT HAVE BEEN MITIGATED
Differentiation between networks and focal points	The thematic networks are often difficult to distinguish from the functions of the Focal Points. This is in line with the original mandate[16] that the networks will allow the Line Managers and Focal Points to perform their core tasks. The Evaluation did not find clear distinction between when Focal Points performed their tasks as technical advisors or in the name of the networks.

The evaluation report is presented as a succinct document based on SDC's requirement. For further details, the reader is invited to explore the annexes.

1.2 Context

With the focus on results-based development policies over the last decade, SDC has given increased focus to the technical quality of the final results and the need for establishing effective mechanisms within the organization to ensure technical excellence. In this context, the organization initiated discussions about knowledge networks in the beginning of the 2000s. Some of the initial efforts culminated in 2004 with the organization of the 'Dare to Share Fair' at SDC Headquarters. One of the key ideas promoted at the Fair was that the challenge for a development organization such as SDC is not so much knowledge management but rather supporting social learning as a means for knowledge generation and sharing through both virtual and face-to-face networking. In addition, the knowledge network discussion was based on SDC's long tradition for supporting thematic networks, including staff networks on thematic areas developed over the years in support of SDCs programs.

Based on SDC's experience, knowledge networks were identified as effective vehicles to replace the former thematic and technical department (F-Department) as part of the 2008 reorganization. The F-Department was established in 2001 and organized around the following thematic priority areas: Natural Resources and Environment, Social Development, Governance, Employment and Income, Conflict prevention and management, and Knowledge. The F-Department was designed to provide technical services to the operational divisions through policy and concept development, identification of good practices, technical advice, networking and promote access to networks, education and training, and information and documentation. The staff was predominantly technical advisors and many were recruited to cover both F-Department functions and functions in geographic lines. While it was intended to increase the integration of technical services into operations, it also led to some perceived inefficiency related to the complex lines of authority and reporting.

The F-Department gained feedback on their efforts through the F-Barometer, which was an annual user survey among SCOs and operational units at headquarters. Overall, the surveys showed appreciation of the services provided but also concerns about their relevance for field operations, including the number of guidelines, practices, and policies that were not directly adaptable to different contexts. Moreover, there were differences between SCOs and headquarter units regarding expectations about the services. In 2005, the F-Barometer showed that operational departments and SCOs saw a potential in increased networking of local expertise, particularly through regional networks. However, several respondents also pointed to the additional workload of networking. Therefore, it was determined that new networking activities should be targeted, selective, and limited in scope. Moreover, to strengthen networking of local expertise, the F-Department should play a more active role in

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[16] Defined by a decision of the Board of Directors in 2008.

developing network capacity. It was found that the lead for networking should remain within the operational units, although there was no agreement about who should support the networking tool.

Many of the concerns expressed in the annual F-Barometer were later reflected in the reorganized SDC with the leadership[17] of 12 thematic networks with links to SDC's specific domains: Global, Regional, East Cooperation, and Humanitarian Aid, and with a mandate to be responsive to operational / field-based needs. The networks are therefore located across the organization with members based in different geographic and thematic units at headquarters and the field. [18] To ensure full integration of the thematic areas into the operational activities, a general principle of the reorganization was that there would be no independent policy formulation or program budgets for thematic networks.

The following section on Findings focuses on relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability and will discuss key functioning of the 12 thematic networks and their roles in contributing to the thematic quality of SDC's operations, policies and vision as defined in SDC's objectives. SDC's overall strategy is outlined in the Bills to the Parliament for the Framework Credits for 2009-2012 and 2013-2016, also referred to as the Dispatches[19, 20]. Within an overall objective of supporting the efforts of poorer countries to overcome humanitarian crises and deal with problems of poverty and development, SDC's five strategic objectives are defined in terms of:

- Preventing and managing crises, conflicts, and catastrophes,
- Provide equal access to resources and services,
- Promote sustainable economic growth,
- Support transition to democratic, market economies, and
- Promote a globalization that further socially responsible and environmentally friendly development.

2. Findings

2.1 Relevance

Box 1 presents an overview of the key findings with regard to relevance that is the extent to which the 12 thematic networks are consistent with SDC's mandate, operations, and policies, including thematic priorities.

Box 1: Key Findings

- The mandate of the 12 thematic networks in terms of knowledge development and sharing, operational advise, and good practices is consistent with SDC's mandate and strategies;
- The 12 thematic networks are dynamic structures with a relatively high level of flexibility for the individual network to develop according to the specific thematic context. While the networks in principle support innovation, there is no well-developed culture for risk-taking and learning from failures as required in complex environments according to the

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[17] Theme manager and Focal Point (s). It is important to understand that it is only the leadership that is located in the different domain units.

[18] Moreover, some thematic networks spread outside SDC with members located in other organizations.

[19] (Botschaft/Message).

[20] Bills to the Parliament for the Framework Credits for 2009-2012 and 2013-2016.

> Bill to Parliament for Framework Credits;
>
> - The significant number of thematic networks combined with limited attention to joint planning and monitoring among the networks is counter-productive to SCO needs for a thematic integrated approach;
>
> - The network functions do not fully respond to SCO needs, particularly in terms of knowhow and how to adapt good practices and in terms of integrated thematic approaches fitting the priority domains of the Country Strategies.

2.1.1 Twelve Thematic Networks

The 12 thematic networks were formally established between 2008 and 2010. Some of the networks were built on SDC networks that existed before the reorganization. For instance, the Gender contact persons in SDC already had a staff Gender network and the Water program has a long tradition for networks with SDC staff and external partners. The different traditions for networking and different years of establishment have an impact on the maturity of the networks. In addition, the networks are to a large degree defined by the Focal Points. Time periods with low capacity for network facility for instance linked to staff rotation have had obvious impacts on otherwise 'mature' networks (See 2.2.1.5 for more information). As can be seen in the following figure, all 12 networks have had an important increase in number of members. However, the numbers cover both active and more passive members. Several networks such as CC&E, A&FS, and DRR have, therefore, also launched activities to eliminate passive members who no longer show interest in network participation, which will likely decrease the recorded number of network members.

Figure 1: Number of members and membership development of the thematic networks 2010-2013
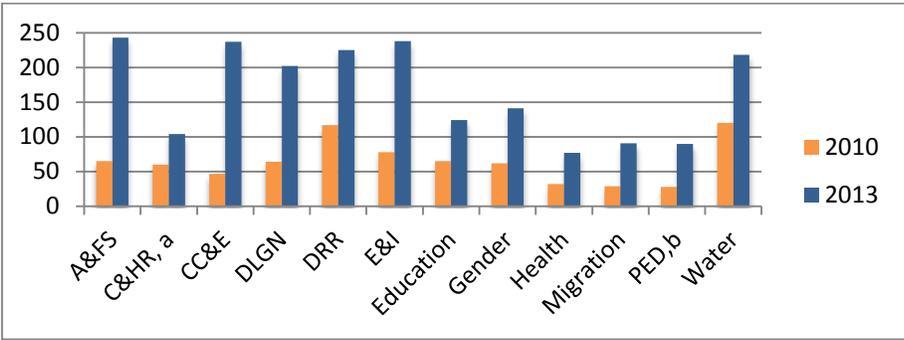
Notes: a: C&HR network membership numbers from 2011 & 2013, b: PED network membership numbers from 2010 & 2012

The thematic networks do not have technical competence criteria for membership. Overall, it is expected that members are primarily SDC staff working on the specific thematic issue. SDC members will often have limited to no formalized training in the specific thematic areas, although many have thematic experience. In addition, seven of the networks include staff from partner organizations among their members who generally bring thematic experience. As one of the original purposes of the thematic networks was defined in terms of learning from others, the importance of including external members in the networks was highlighted in a decision by the Board of Directors (BoD) on 28.11.2011 encouraging all networks to consider how best to include external partners in their activities.

The overall mandate of the thematic networks was defined in SDC Management Decision of 26.09.2008 in terms of the key functions of the networks: institutional learning, provision of thematic advice to the operational units, and good practices. The networks will support the Line Managers and Focal Points in carrying out their key functions. The 12 networks adhere to the overall decision both in definition and application. In addition, some networks highlight other key functions as part of their mandate:

a. Raising thematic profile and thematic mainstreaming (particularly C&HR, DRR, PED, Migration),
b. Quality assurance (particularly C&HR, Gender, Health),
c. Policy development / influencing (particularly C&HR, DLGN, Gender, Health, Migration),
d. Organizational coherence on thematic issues (particularly Water),
e. Rapid problem solving through peer exchange (particularly Water),
f. Link with other thematic networks (particularly A&FS and DRR).

These special key functions respond well to SDC's mandate and show the importance of flexibility in the design of the thematic networks:[21]

a. PED and Migration are new thematic issues for SDC, and DRR and C&HR are defined in the strategy as a global issue with the network leadership anchored in the Humanitarian Aid domain and Regional Cooperation; all requiring special attention to mainstreaming;
b. C&HR and Gender have normative mandates (implementation of the Conflict Sensitive Program Management (CSPM) and Gender sensitive approaches);
c. Networks whose leadership is anchored outside the Global domain are not linked to special global programs with policy mandates. Networks on issues defined by SDC's Strategy as global themes (health) or crosscutting areas (gender, governance) therefore have an important policy input function.

Moreover, the Evaluation finds that point d, e, and f are highly relevant for all thematic networks:

d. Organizational coherence on thematic is important for a corporate identify;
e. Peer exchange is a validated good practice for thematic support provided good management of the available human resources in the networks and full authority to do so;
f. To ensure effectiveness of the overall thematic network structure with 12 different thematic areas special attention is required to ensure an integrated thematic approach.

2.1.2 Coherence between the Thematic Networks and SDC Mandate

In principle the 12 thematic networks are consistent with SDC's mandate and overall strategy as defined in the Bills to the Parliament for the Framework Credits for 2009-2012 and 2013-2016. The Bills, though, put little emphasis on the specific functions of the networks as they were defined originally in 2008, including knowledge management, advice within the organization, and capitalizing on experiences. Still, the 2013-16 Bill provides more explicit attention to thematic issues than its predecessor, including strengthened capacity to deal with

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[21] A Stakeholder Analysis in Annex 11 provides further details about the characteristics of the 12 thematic networks.

global challenges[22] in priority countries and regions, and support to initiatives on innovations, policies, and standards to strengthen developing countries' capacities to manage global challenges. As such, the thematic focus that the networks strive to achieve and the geographic focus of several of the networks, matches the objectives of SDC's Strategy. However, the 2013-16 Bill also highlights the dynamic and complex conditions in SDC partner countries, which call for risk taking, acceptance of failures, flexibility, and adaptation. The Evaluation finds that some of the thematic networks promote flexibility and some innovativeness, for instance through learning projects. However, a culture of risk-taking and acceptance of failures still has to be developed.

Whereas the overall structure of the 12 thematic networks is consistent with SDC's strategies, the Bills to the Parliament also highlight the need for SDC to focus geographically and thematically. The Evaluation concurs with the conclusion of other institutional evaluations of SDC, including the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Peer Reviews that consistently call for greater thematic focus in Swiss Development Cooperation. The high number of thematic focus areas and corresponding high number of thematic networks seem counterproductive to an integrated thematic approach to the complex development and emergent challenges as called for, for instance, in the post-2015 agenda. The Evaluation appreciates the increasing use of initiatives to coordinate network activities, such as joint planning for some of the networks and joint activities. However, there is still no overall structure to guarantee an integrated thematic approach of the networks. As a result, the networks tend to be 12 individual networks operating side by side with challenges of overlaps, competition and grey thematic areas that are not fully covered. During the Evaluation, participants pointed out that the F-Department's five thematic focus areas were more consistent with the needs at SCO level, where the thematic areas cut across the priority domains of the Country Strategies. Most projects and programs therefore require attention from several networks. For instance, some of the health projects in Kyrgyzstan also included components of civil society, social development or local governance. But there are limited procedures offered by the thematic network structure for an integrated approach of several networks in support of the priority domains in the Country Strategies.

Each network emphasizes to various degrees the three key network functions defined originally during the 2008 reorganization. Generally, the theme related operational advice is seen as less relevant for many SCOs. This corresponds, to the concerns already expressed by SCOs in the F-Barometer form 2003-2007 to questions about the relevance of technical advice from headquarters or other SCOs. These surveys also showed that generally there is limited demand for such services. Furthermore, the complexity in partner countries leads to a need for adaptation of good practices rather than direct sharing of good practices and general technical advice. However, the Evaluation saw limited attention to development of procedures to best adapt good practices to local contexts and the networks generally focus on knowledge rather than knowhow. Still, SCOs generally appreciate the existence of the thematic networks and the social networking and greater sense of corporate belonging they offer, which further harmonization of SDC's image throughout the world. It should also be noted that SDC's key principle of gender equality at all levels of SDC's operations has been furthered by the efforts of the thematic network on gender.

The two Bills to Parliament relevant for this Evaluation (2009-2012 and 2013-2016) refer to the role of networks to support SDC as a learning organization where the most important resource is its staff. According to the 2009-2013 Dispatch, networks integrate staff at SDC

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[22] Climate change, water scarcity, food insecurity, pandemics, and irregular migration.

headquarters, SCOs, and partner organizations. The BoD has on several occasions highlighted the importance of the integration of external partners to strengthen learning from others as an integral part of the network mandate. A BoD decision of 28.11.2011, for instance, requires for the 2012 planning Focal Points to include considerations on how best to include external partners. However, most of the networks still limit membership to SDC staff. Networks that integrate partner organizations not only come closer to the objective outlined in 2009-2012 Bill (particularly Water, A&FS, CC&E, DLGN, DRR, E&I, and Education), but also report positive impact in terms of knowledge development, capitalizing on experience, and learning. Some challenges were reported during the Evaluation regarding incentives for partners to participate to ensure that network participation would not give any advantage for mandates or SDC contracts. It should also be noted that networks with membership limited to SDC staff have taken special measures to include partner organizations constructively in the network functioning, for instance by inviting them for special e-discussions, Face to Face events (F2F), and special events (e.g., Health and Gender).

Finally, it should be noted that the Bills to Parliament stress the importance of poverty eradication as the overall objective of all SDC activities, including the thematic networks. With SDC's current organizational structure, the daily oversight of the poverty mandate is under the responsibility of the Quality Assurance and Aid Effectiveness Section, who is also responsible for the process / methodological quality assurance of the networks and thereby overseeing the role of the networks in contributing to poverty reduction. The Evaluation finds that by harmonizing network activities in an integrated thematic approach, the networks would have greater possibilities to address poverty eradication in a coherent and integrated manner with greater impact.

2.2 Efficiency / Effectiveness

Box 2 presents an overview of the key findings with regard to efficiency and effectiveness, that is the performance of the network operations and functioning as an organizational tool for knowledge sharing, thematic advice, and capitalizing on experience.

Box 2: Key Findings

- SDC management supports the thematic networks, which are mainstreamed in a range of procedures and guidelines, however with moderate contribution to awareness raising;

- Thematic networks are an effective instrument to SDC's Knowledge Management and are beginning to develop ways to capitalize on experience and formulate good practices;

- Thematic networks make an important contribution to SDC thematic quality assurance mostly with the direct involvement of Theme Managers, Focal Points, and Thematic Program Officers, less so with the broader network community;

- Thematic networks contribute to SDC institutional learning but systematization remains in progress;

- Thematic networks build bridges across the organization, though with limited coordination to maximize thematic and regional synergies;

- External partners make a valuable contribution to the quality of thematic networks;

- Thematic networks have sufficient financial resources to deliver valuable support to SDC and its partners.

2.2.1 Organizational Framework

2.2.1.1 Management

Since the launch of the thematic networks, the **BoD** has provided them with the necessary space and resources to grow. Annual Status Reports are submitted to the BoD that has taken decisions with regard to SDC's network landscape and functioning**.** The thematic networks are represented in the BoD through the heads of Domains. Upon proposition of the Theme Managers, the BoD, at times, requests and instructs Focal Points and the networks to elaborate policies or strategies related to their theme[23]. Although K&LP benefits from the attention of SDC senior management, OECD DAC's peer review (2014) points out that "SDC's knowledge management system has strengths and weaknesses and would benefit from having a champion in senior management"[24]. Furthermore, the thematic networks are not systematically and regularly referred to by the BoD as management tools that must be tightly embedded in the functioning and results of the entire organization. In addition, according to the online survey conducted by the Evaluation, only 37% of SDC headquarters (HQ) staffs agree that SDC's management promotes sufficiently strengthening of thematic knowledge.

Line Managers are the Heads of the organizational units and Country Directors. Their mandated tasks in thematic quality assurance[25][26] cover recruitment of thematic staff, thematic training and networking, application of "Good Technical Practice", steering operations in line with technical standards, and minimizing the loss of expertise and fostering technical careers. They negotiate with the Focal Points how (much) their Thematic Program Officers will participate in network activities. In practice, Country Directors especially have played a seminal role in the early years of the networks by encouraging their staff to join and participate in network activities, including by mainstreaming network participation in the objectives of the staff. The online survey carried out for this Evaluation indicates that networks are part of the job description of 83% of SDC HQ respondents and 66% of field participants. Furthermore, 74% of survey participants from SDC HQ and 63% from the SCOs indicated that participation in the networks is referred to in their annual objectives / annual performance reviews. However, only 36% of SDC HQ survey respondents and 49% from SCOs agree to the suggestion that staff's active participation in thematic networks is **acknowledged and rewarded**. Line Managers are certainly impactful network supporters but not yet proactive, systematic, or **visible** enough in their **support**. Line Managers remain unclear regarding involvement of the Focal Points and/or the broader networks for thematic quality assurance and the criteria upon which this task is delegated or transferred across the organization.

2.2.1.2 Networks' Governance

Theme Managers are the heads of the divisions where the thematic networks are anchored and to whom overall SDC responsibility for a theme has been entrusted. By mandate Theme Managers[27] have to[28,29] set thematic priorities, manage and report on their theme, recruit and

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[23] SDC, "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance", SDC Knowledge and Learning Processes Division, Bern, 2010.

[24] OECD, "Review of the Development Co-Operation Policies and Programs of Switzerland, DAC Peer Review", OECD, Paris, 2013, p.58.

[25] SDC, "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance", op.cit.

[26] SDC, "SDC Networks – Overview for Network Members: Fact Sheet", SDC Knowledge and Learning Processes Division, Bern, 2013.

[27] In addition to their responsibilities as line managers.

guide Focal Points, issue technical advice documents, and allocate financial resources to the networks. In practice, Theme Managers have interpreted their role differently depending on the needs and context of the theme and thematic network. Overall, these functions have been more or less explicitly delegated to the Focal Points, with some higher risks of insufficient thematic guidance or networking results. When Theme Managers have strong thematic expertise, it has been mentioned that they may rather advocate the theme to senior management than network matters per se. In addition, Theme Managers are expected to take "(...) due account of the learning and knowledge needs of other organizational units and of the entire organization, particularly the demand voiced by the country programs"[30]. While a number of instruments such as F2F meetings and e-discussions have proven effective to elicit the needs of network members, not all networks carry out periodic assessments –e.g. annual online survey to identify priority demands- of **SDC needs in thematic knowledge** at the organizational and country levels. Cross-fertilization and collaborations between thematic areas have been punctually organized, leading at times to tangible outcomes, but the extent to which Theme Managers strategize cross-thematic integrations and cross-networking knowledge development may be limited. While the financial resources allocated by the Theme Managers to the thematic networks are found to be adequate, consultations held by the Evaluation indicate that the delegation of tasks to some Focal Points do not necessarily come with the required capacity to maximize the networks –e.g. sufficient time to facilitate the network. Furthermore, SDC has started to develop regional thematic networks for which the provision of capacities – human and financial –is also limited.

Focal Points represent SDC thematically [31], [32] and facilitate thematic knowledge management (KM) and organizational learning in SDC. According to their mandate, they provide advice and manage the portfolio of their backstopping mandate(s) and strategic partnerships. Focal Points are expected to organize, inter alia, the work of the network, encourage horizontal exchange among the networks, maintain and develop professional and methodological skills, and organize thematic training. This requires a range of competencies that are not only thematic but also span across networking skills, capability development, knowledge and learning management. Focal Points can be supported by Thematic Program Managers or external backstoppers. In practice, Focal Points come with different strengths, sometimes demonstrating thematic expertise jointly with networking experience or, more often, just one of these capabilities. In that case, thematic expertise tends to prevail over networking skills that were indicated to the Evaluation as being quite difficult to find. On a case-by-case basis, Focal Points can take on the role of Theme Manager –e.g. when the corresponding Theme Manager has no genuine thematic expertise. This may create additional workload for the FP to the detriment of the pure **networking function**. Furthermore, Focal Points to whom thematic leadership has been delegated do not necessarily benefit from the same hierarchical recognition for external representation. In line with the normative document on network roles[33], some networks (e.g. E&I) have committed different Focal Points to cover respectively specific sub-thematic areas with effective results in terms of network vibrancy. Some global programs have recruited assistants with knowledge management background to specifically focus on network facilitation.

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[28] SDC, "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance", op. cit.

[29] SDC, "SDC Networks – Overview for Network Members: Fact Sheet", op. cit.

[30] SDC, "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance", op. cit.

[31] Ibid.

[32] SDC, "SDC Networks – Overview for Network Members: Fact Sheet", op. cit.

[33] SDC, "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance", op. cit.

Networks **Core Group** members[34] are primarily expected to engage in proactive participation in and contribution to network activities, and to support the Focal Points with the planning and monitoring of network activities and recruitment of new members. The current setup and leverage of Core Groups appear to be uneven between networks. A majority of networks have Core Group meetings periodically –e.g. from every other month to every 6 months. **Active Core Groups** are indicated to **make a significant difference** for animating the networks while less active ones are found to be less effective at generating participation. Still, some networks are challenged to regularly convene Core Group participants. Accountability and incentive mechanisms to acknowledge and reward network support of Core Group members have been differently taken up across the organization. Some networks (e.g. DRR, Gender, and C&HR) do not have formal Core Groups, though in some cases alternative network management structures such as steering and advisory groups have been established. One network – Water – is in the process of setting up an advisory group as a consultative body, in lieu of a Core Group that is an agenda setting body, with thematic contact points in every relevant geographic division. These contact points liaise with regional thematic contact points animating regional networks in their respective region, jointly forming a comprehensive and inclusive architecture. This appears to be an effective approach to foster cross-regional and global coordination[35]. Core Group members are usually HQ staff. Quite rarely regional program staffs working at the SCOs are Core Group members (e.g. Education) and never National Project Offices (NPO).

2.2.1.3 Membership and Support

By mandate **Network Members** are primarily expected to contribute to the thematic quality of SDC programs by means of professional advice, and engage in proactive participation in and contribution to network activities. However besides the F2F and to the exception of a couple of networks, network participation is more reactive than proactive. While network members still find D-groups useful, few can be considered as vibrant. **Spontaneous or facilitated queries and responses do not exist in a number of the thematic networks** and D-groups are quite often vehicles to share information in one direction, from headquarters to the field. E-discussions tend to be well managed and to generate reasonable levels of participation in every network. Though to some extent, participants tend to provide cases or examples when questions are asked, and not engage in a dialogue. Facilitating online exchanges on an on-going basis is a time consuming task and capacity has not yet been sufficiently developed. A more critical issue though is that networks are not always perceived as relevant due to their focus on global matters, which for some appears quite detached from local needs. The Evaluation acknowledges that SDC management recommends that staff should not be an active and formalized member in more than two networks. This is understandable in the prevailing set up where being a network member comes with responsibilities that have not been disaggregated to differentiate membership roles in a range of levels of networks such as primary, secondary, and tertiary networks.

Backstoppers are contracted external partners (such as universities or NGOs) and frequently engaged in facilitating the e-discussions and leading knowledge-building activities,

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[34] SDC, "SDC Networks – Overview for Network Members: Fact Sheet", op. cit.

[35] Another innovate approach concerns Humanitarian Aid (HA) and Swiss Humanitarian Aid Domain: Expert Group. Since the 1980s, the domain has worked with Expert Groups organized around 10 themes. The Expert Groups meet four times a year with representatives from the HA domain. In response to increased institutional focus, a Specialized Group between Environment & DRR (SG Env&DRR) was established to provide operational support, formalizing collaborations across thematic Expert Groups. The SG Env&DRR also works with other thematic areas, particularly the SDC global programs on Food Security, Climate Change, and Water.

which may include supporting most network activities and preparing a number of specific outputs such as newsletters, concept notes prior to e-discussions, F2F agenda and reports, etc. Some backstoppers indicated to the Evaluators that they would have the capacity to support even more networks' activities if it was mandated – such as webinars, online panels, activating the networks on an on-going basis – but their current backstopping contracts have **limited time allocation**. While they comply with SDC demands, only rarely do they suggest innovative activities. Their consultation in the overall work planning of the network is not systematic. The mandate of the backstoppers tends to be activity and output driven, but not necessarily outcome oriented.

By mandate the **Knowledge and Learning Processes** (K&LP) unit is a demand driven body that provides effective support to Focal Points through the monthly Focal Point Café, quarterly training seminars, and on-demand assistance. The scope of the unit is to provide support to Focal Points but not to assist regional networks. There is no network linking staff at headquarters and in the field and backstoppers engaged in facilitating networks and in related knowledge management activities. Some learning modalities such as induction training, job shadowing, and peer coaching have not been taken up by all networks to further support Focal Points. Besides accelerating on-boarding time, these modalities are often used to help newcomers to embed existing practices in their work activities and create greater consistency between different departments in the organization. In SCOs, networking and knowledge management support is made available through the guidelines and the blog produced by K&LP. SCO staff is not necessarily aware of the trainings that are provided in the field, although tailor-made knowledge management trainings are delivered by K&LP on demand. Some SCO Communications Officers do not appear to be involved in knowledge management and network activities such as contributing local news or reports to a network newsletter, or presenting the networks and how to join to new staff or partners. K&LP does not have the responsibility to **coordinate** network activities **ex-ante** –e.g. yearly– but to report ex-post through the Status Reports. While K&LP gets the attention of the SDC BoD, the organization has not put in place a Knowledge Board or a high-level governance structure during the first years of the implementation of the networks.

2.2.1.4 Operational Practice and Processes

SDC networks are referred and mainstreamed in several key phases of the SDC Project/Program Cycle Management (PCM) guidelines but not all. For instance, there are no special references to the thematic networks in the guidelines for entry proposal implementation, Project/Program implementation, and Project handover and closing. This can lead to some missed opportunities including during Project/Program **implementation**, which is a phase during which networks can be tapped to seek comparative experiences and advice. However, the Evaluation observed that in practice the networks are sometimes used during implementation. Networks also appear to be a logical channel to communicate project activities, news, and achievements. Furthermore, Project/Program implementation includes the preparation of End of Phase reports, which are not systematically shared with the entire networks and discussed. In practice, thematic networks are rarely tapped into to provide comments on any step of the PCM – even when featured in existing work processes - but individual network members such as the Focal Points are invited to attend the Operations Committees. Criteria that help to decide when consultations should be escalated up to the entire network are not available.

Additional notable normative documents include the "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance" mentioned earlier. A review of various terms of references for vacancies recently published by SDC indicates that networks tend to be frequently referred in the job descriptions of new staff. The "MoB Objectives 2014 for Network

members" further spells out recommendations for mainstreaming the networks into the annual objectives of all staff.

Documentation providing guidance to the development of SDC **project documents**[36] makes **little reference if any to the networks**, either as an instrument through which to collect and recall good practices and lessons learned from other countries during project design –e.g. foster knowledge institutionalization through systematic review of relevant End of Phase reports-, or as a vehicle to collect and share experiences during project implementation.

Work plans of networks take different forms according to the issuing network and some examples of network indicators and long term results-based planning exist (e.g. A&FS, CC&E). Most frequently though work plans tend to be activity oriented rather than **results-based**. Typically, the work plans of the networks do not include baselines, indicators, or targets at output and outcome levels. Moreover, network outcomes are not monitored systematically for all the networks in a comparable manner and there are no general tools to ensure that networks activities are relevant and efficient in general. Few networks have developed a comprehensive Theory of Change that could form the backbone of results-based work plans although several have launched plans for applying Theory of Change approaches for planning and monitoring.

2.2.1.5 Human Resources Management

As mentioned, a review of recent SDC job vacancies indicates a trend for mainstreaming the thematic networks and knowledge management in the job descriptions of various staff positions. However, the Evaluation was not able to identify guidelines presenting how to effectively review and assess the networking skills and experience of candidates

Time committed to the thematic networks by SDC staff is mandated to be up to 50% for Focal Points, 20-30% for Core Group members, and 10% for network members[37]. SDC staff indicates in the survey carried out for the Evaluation that their job description features a level of participation below 10% for one third of Core Group members, and below 5% for 45% of SDC networks members. When asked in reality how much time they commit to the networks, 65% of Core Group members indicate less than 10% and 58% of SDC network members indicates less than 5%. On average Focal Points indicate spending more than 50% of their time with the networks. However, it should be noted that a clear distinction between activities dedicated to the networks and to the thematic areas might not be relevant inasmuch as the thematic networks were foreseen as a tool for the Theme Managers and Focal Points to accomplish their technical responsibilities[38].

Thematic career paths have been recently developed for Health, Water, Green track, and E&I. This allows staff dedicating more than 60% of their time to a theme to stay for up to 6 years in the thematic position. According to several staff consulted by the Evaluation, this helps to postpone the "brain drain" that job rotation inflicts to the organization. However, the attractiveness of a thematic career may be lower than the regular management track that is often considered to offer greater responsibilities and benefits in line with an international development career. The extent to which the organizational model of thematic careers has been implemented to the fullest is questionable. In any case, some thematic staff who are not

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[36] E.g. SDC, "Checklist for Project/Programme Documentation (ProDoc)", SDC Quality Assurance, Bern, June 2011.

[37] SDC, "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance", SDC Knowledge and Learning Processes Division, Bern, 2010.

[38] Ibid.

part of the four tracks already established, indicated genuine interest for having this scheme expanded to their own theme.

2.2.1.6 Communication Strategy

K&LP and the networks have developed various communication tools, such as fact sheets, guidelines, online videos, and blogs to facilitate both internal and external network communication. All networks have simple communication strategies. There are some implicit multi-directional communication strategies in the networks – e.g., the use of F2F for strengthening horizontal communications – and there are some tools in place for multidirectional communications, vertically and horizontally, that are not yet exploited for this purpose –e.g. D-groups-.

Some SDC partners based in the field have indicated that they are not aware of the networks while others are members of one but are unaware of how to join another. Some SCO staff has also expressed a lack of awareness of SDC networks -including how to join- and a lack of visible communication from management to support the networks. There is no evidence of a dedicated communication strategy that would target different segments through different information sources, messages, and channels.

2.2.2 Activities and Contributions

2.2.2.1 Providing Quality Assurance

According to 86% of the online survey respondents, the networks have improved the effectiveness and thematic quality of SDC's projects/programs. But the Evaluation also found that it is difficult to precisely assess thematic quality assurance as indicators of thematic quality in SDC programs, projects or policies have only been developed for a few thematic areas. Particularly E&I and A&FS have developed reference indicators which are adhered to in some Cooperation Strategies. Likewise, the annual performance reports on gender equality mainstreaming also offers a good tool for thematic quality assessment for the gender network. In addition, the contribution for quality assurance is written in documents but remains demand driven and not systematic. It is not clear how/when Focal Points should be involved in quality assurance in spite of the guidelines[39] or the processes stemming from the PCM. As discussed earlier, Focal Points are not systematically consulted in important stages of PCM (among others, entry proposals, credit proposal and End of Phase Reports). Basically the line management brings in the necessary expertise and it is often difficult to differentiate between the network as such and the Focal Point or how the Focal Points bring in relevant network expertise for quality assurance. Likewise, Focal Points and or theme managers typically participate in operation committees but the use of the expertise from the networks in general for this participation is not systematized for instance through criteria upon which network consultations are triggered for thematic quality assurance. Network tasks and quality assurance are not specified or enough for staff to understand and systematically apply.

According to interviews and documentation reviewed for the Evaluation, networks anchored in Global Programs seem to be less directly engaged in thematic quality assurance, while networks anchored in Regional Cooperation Divisions, the East Domain, and Humanitarian Affairs appear to be more involved. However, the online survey did not return a clear pattern on the contribution of the networks to the effectiveness and technical quality of SDC's projects/programs according to their anchor in a Global Program or a Division.

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[39] See section 2.2.1.4 and SDC, "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance", op. cit.

2.2.2.2 Thematic Learning

Various training modalities have been put in place by the networks, such as learning projects (e.g. DLGN, Migration), training seminars (e.g. Water, C&HR), or certified trainings (e.g. Gender). Likewise, learning occurs also during F2F events, e-discussions, or through other external networks. Respondents to the online survey for the Evaluation[40] indicate that they have well benefited professionally -learning, networking, etc.- from recent F2F events (71%) and to a lesser extent from trainings (51%) and technical workshops (52%). But almost half of survey respondents indicate that attending training or technical workshops has not benefited them. This leads the Evaluation to question their design. More fundamentally, the extent to which learning is reactive or strategically designed is unclear. Bridges between the training concept[41] adopted in 2013 and the networks are still limited for thematic knowledge. Implementation of this concept can also be an opportunity to cascade at field level the enhancement of networking skills and development of a knowledge sharing culture. It should also be noted that several of the networks have recently carried out assessments of training needs among their members (e.g. CC&E, DRR, and A&FS).

2.2.2.3 Organizational Learning

Around 82% of survey respondents agree to the proposition that the networks have improved thematic learning in their organization –e.g. SDC division, country office, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)[42], partner organization etc. Yet, organizational learning does not seem to be a concept that is yet fully embedded in the thematic networks so far. Staff looks at learning aspects to be only training and individual development while limited attention is given to the benefit of the networks for organizational learning. In fact, SDC has not clearly defined what organizational learning they want to obtain from the networks and the extent to which they want the networks to codify and embed thematic knowledge in the organization. This being said, various good practices were mentioned earlier[43]. Some tools produced by the networks were introduced in SDC's instruments –e.g. Climate, Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Integration Guidance (CEDRIG), Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), Conflict Sensitive Program Management (CSPM), PED's stakeholder analysis. During the Evaluation, staff has pointed to the need for systematic and leveraging key tools –e.g. End of Phase reports as background documents to inform the early stage of project design. This is also in line with recommendations from SDC's Knowledge Management evaluation[44] conducted in 2009. However it still remains unclear how thematic knowledge is embedded into the organization and who is responsible.

2.2.2.4 International Cooperation

A number of SDC thematic networks have forged partnerships with a variety of Swiss international cooperation institutions and relevant staff from many of these institutions has often become network members45. These partners bring their expertise to the SDC thematic

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[40] Cf. Annex 8.

[41] SDC, "Advanced Training Concept 2013–2016", SDC, Bern, August 2013.

[42] SECO Technical experts are based in Bern as well as decentralized in the embassies. When SDC and SECO have joint country offices staff typically work for both organizations.

[43] See section 2.2.1.4 on Operational Practice and Processes.

[44] Knechtli B. & al., "Evaluation of Knowledge Management and Institutional Learning in SDC", SDC & PricewaterhouseCoopers, Bern, 2009.

[45] A sample of these partnerships features:

- Water networks: AGUASAN, Swiss Water Partnership, Skat,
- Education partners: Swiss commission for UNESCO, IPE, NORAG, RECI, FSEA, ADEA, UIL, and

networks that accept external members (e.g. Water and CC&E). According to 86% of SDC staff responding to the online survey carried out for the Evaluation, external participation has a positive influence on the quality of SDC networks. Likewise, 75% of external members indicate that they have referred other actors to SDC papers, reports and experiences shared on the networks. While these results are positive, there is no evidence that every network has devised a well thought through partnership strategy. From a knowledge management standpoint, an assessment of the knowledge gaps faced by an organization is helpful to identify the need for new thematic partnerships or network members. This was further highlighted in the BOD decision on 28.11.2011 encouraging all networks to consider how best to include external partners in their activities as mentioned in the Relevance section. During the Evaluation several networks acknowledged that attracting staff from ministries and universities would be beneficial. A complementary entry is to identify outreach and policy influence objectives to inform the search for new partners. The trend to deliberately bridge policy, science and practice to increase development results is already in progress in various bilateral or multilateral organizations.

2.2.2.5 Knowledge Management

Organizations design and implement knowledge management (KM) programs to attain various strategic objectives and in response to internal and external environments. A classical KM paradigm describes two distinct directions: 1) organizations working in stable and homogeneous environments are interested in collecting and codifying knowledge so that models can be easily and cost-effectively replicated across similar conditions, and 2) organizations working in complex, highly specific or changing environments connect people so that knowledge is swiftly accessible and adapted to the local context on a need basis. Deciding to network SDC is a sound KM choice. However, the extent to which this networking and exchange of knowledge successfully occurs on a daily basis depends on each network. While some networks (e.g. DLGN, E&I) have been able to create an active community generating dynamic exchanges, most of the others tend to under-utilize the D-groups and concentrate knowledge exchanges on time-bound vehicles (F2F, e-discussions, Newsletter). If we refer to SDC's own documentation[46], the current reference to thematic networks in lieu of communities of practice is questionable. A mismatch in the terminology used by SDC can lead to unclear objectives, or lowered expectations and capacities to achieve them. When it comes to knowledge codification, which could partly palliate vibrant knowledge exchanges, it seems that networks do not generate yet the range of knowledge products expected from survey participants[47] –e.g. good practices, lessons learned, and thematic reports. The extent to which the current level of production, the topics selected, the range of stakeholders involved, and the type of product created respond to a demand originating from field survey is questionable. Considering the initial purpose of the networks that is, inter alia, to "*capitalize experiences and formulate good practice*", the Evaluation was expecting to find series of corporately branded, practical, and didactic 'Good Practice' papers. Some networks have started to organize peer-to-peer missions involving network members as internal reviewers and/or advisors in lieu of external consultants. This practice has a number of benefits but does not seem to be precisely formalized or institutionally supported yet.

• E&I: Helvetas, AGRIDEA, University of Zurich, KEK CDC consultants, INBAS, PHZH.

[46] SDC, "Good Practice: Nurturing Networks", SDC Knowledge and Learning Processes Division, Bern, 2011.

[47] Cf. Annex 8.

2.2.2.6 Joint Activities

Most thematic networks provide examples of joint activities, for instance through F2F events, e-discussions, and the development of knowledge products (e.g. A&FS and E&I, A&FS and Gender, Education & E&I, Water & Health, PED & DLGN, Migration & C&HR, etc.). Overall, collaborations between themes tend to be bilateral. A laudable exception is the CC&E network[48] but otherwise it does not seem that thematic networks are engaged in a joint planning exercise that would be part of a coordinated annual exercise for all or relevant sub-groups of the thematic networks. This appears especially missing for networks encompassing sub-themes that overlap (e.g. Education and E&I, DLGN and C&HR). But there is no overall strategic plan about how/why working together and special incentives are not necessarily in place at the individual level to foster this approach.

Regional networks tend to become part of the agenda of the global F2F (e.g. Water, Education) in order to facilitate a more comprehensive and coherent work planning. Accessibility of thematic knowledge to the local context is a critical component for the successful functioning of the networks. Across all regions, participants feel that tools and technical support from the region are more easily accepted and applied within a local context. In West Africa and Latin America, this view was even more pronounced due to language limitations and shared in interviews during the Evaluation, including during the case studies in Benin, Nicaragua, and Kyrgyzstan[49]. However, it is still not all networks that have clear policies and coordination of regional networks and the mandates of the global and regional thematic networks appear sometimes to overlap. Likewise, and translation of content is not systematically addressed.

2.2.2.7 Resources Context

Assessing the costs and benefits of thematic networks in a bilateral organization is always an elusive objective. Monetizing the outcomes of the networks and the impact that exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences may have had on the living conditions of the beneficiaries is out of reach. The task is rendered even more complex as most of the thematic networks are not results-oriented and do not monitor their outcomes. In terms of costs, it would be a great challenge to estimate direct and indirect costs of the networks and the scope of the Evaluation does not allow for a detailed analysis and establishment of comparable budgets and much less for a proper cost analysis.[50] Networks rely on a budget to organize F2F meetings and trainings, studies, reviews and learning projects, facilitation and ShareWeb maintenance, and acquire software. However, the networks do not have budgets as such but budget lines under the thematic budgets for the Focal Points and Theme Managers. While the annual Status Reports of the K&LP division presents some overall budgets for the thematic networks, fact checking with the individual networks showed some discrepancies between their own numbers and the numbers in the budgets presented in the Status reports. This is most likely due to inclusion of different funding sources in some of the numbers and different approaches to what costs should be included as networks budgets.[51]

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[48] The CC&E network coordinates its activities with networks & platforms that work in interconnected areas: A&FS, DRR, E&I, Poverty-Wellbeing, and Réseau. Meetings are held every two to three months to exchange information about their agendas and identify opportunities for intensified cooperation. There is a joint work plan.

[49] Kindly refer to the Aides Memoires of the three case studies presented in Annex.

[50] This was already recognized by the CLP during the Inception Workshop. Kindly refer to Annexes for the Inception Report.

[51] For instance, some networks report annual budgets for F2F events of around CHF 80,000. However, these budgets do not generally cover travel costs or opportunity costs for the F2F participants and its annual allocations for often for bi-annual F2F and organization of joint F2F where each network will have a similar annual budget.

However, the budgets provided by K&LP in the Status reports can be used as a raw proxy to provide a general **context** and show that SDC does invest in their networks. For example, in 2012 the operating budget for the 12 networks was indicated at CHF 3.652 million. The overall expenditures of the organization that year were CHF 1,848.7 million. If we take the operating budget of the networks for 2012[52] and the number of network members that year, the organization has invested an average of CHF 2,410 per network member. However, this figure is actually higher per single individual as many members are part of several networks.

2.2.3 Thematic Networks in Other Organizations

The Evaluation reviewed some relevant external organizations to benchmark SDC's networks and share experiences. The Evaluation conducted a more in-depth case study of Sida and DFID and explored other relevant organizations.

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)[53]
- **Context**: Sida networks were introduced as part of a major reorganization in 2009 as a mechanism for staff to share ideas, improve internal learning, and coherence. However their implementation proved to be a challenge: expectations were too high for the resources and equipment provided. In 2011 the Director General took the decision to focus the networks on knowledge management and dissemination of learning. Simultaneously, the thematic department was downsized and thematic expertise was put in the operations departments.
- **Structure**: Ten thematic networks were initially created and some of them have formed sub-networks. All Sida networks are internal, that is for Sida staff only. Their size goes from a couple of dozen members to 160. The senior policy specialists who are in charge to manage the networks devote up to 30% of their time to this activity.
- **Functioning**: The primary objectives of the networks are to build technical competences and to link staff in headquarters and embassies. Sida thematic networks do not have the mandate to develop policies and guidelines, which is done by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sida networks do not have a mandate of quality assurance or to develop knowledge products, but the management may commission such products on a case by case and consultations with network members may be organized. Networks produce newsletters, organize video meetings between headquarters and the field, organize training seminars, disseminate information resources, and organize F2F although a tight budget -EUR 18.000 to be shared by all networks for the F2F- does not provide room for frequent events. The networks do not benefit from any external backstopping.

Department for International Development, UK (DFID)[54]
- **Network members:** More than one third of DFID's workforce is made up of technical advisors organized in professional cadres. Technical advisors are recruited based on professional competencies established by the cadres, that is the networks.

Likewise, some networks use backstoppers for the organization of F2F events but funded under separate backstopper budget lines and not F2F budget lines. And some other networks apply other practices. It is also noted that the many budgets seem standard for networks without specific considerations for the geographical coverage of the networks or number of participants.

[52] Pending this budget is accurate, cf. above provisions.

[53] See Annex 6.

[54] See Annex 7.

- **Network structure:** There are 14 professional cadres functioning as thematic networks to strengthen thematic quality of DFID's policy and operations. The members of the professional cadres, the technical advisors, are located in geographic departments at headquarters and in the field and accountable to their line manager and their Head of Profession who are also heads of the professional cadres. The Heads of Profession are located in the Research and Evidence Division under a Chief Scientific advisor.
- **Network participation:** Members are required to provide 10% of their time for networking – 'Cadre time' – supporting DFID units other than their own. The cadre time is managed by the Heads of Profession in coordination with the line managers and the interests of the technical advisor.
- **Internal knowledge and learning:** The Evidence and Program Exchange (EPE) unit coordinates sites that identify and streamline information sources. Staff is encouraged to innovate and take risks through innovations such as 'talent management', 'need to fail fast' and 'fail fairs'.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- **Context**: Knowledge networks were created in 1998 as a mechanism to link headquarters with country offices but become instantly used be country offices to directly support each other. The number of networks grew in the next first years to progressively cover each priority theme of the organization. There were 12 global knowledge networks 5 years after the establishment of the first one.
- **Structure**: Networks are anchored in the Bureau for Development Policy (BDP). They are thematically guided by a practice leader, operationally driven by a practice manager, and supported by a network facilitator and a research analyst. A central knowledge management unit in BDP coordinates the networks. Networks were initially internal to UNDP staff but most of them have become progressively opened to external partners. Five years after the creation of the first network, UNDP networks had between 400 to more than 1,000 members.
- **Functioning**: Networks are primarily used to enable country offices to support each other, share experiences, and develop new knowledge. Network products include newsletters, e-discussions, queries/responses, face-to-face meetings, surveys, development of knowledge products –e.g. networks consultation has become a compulsory step in the development of certain publications-, and an online portal. In the early 2010's the online networks have moved to a social networking platform to enable members to exchange in smaller cliques.

KfW Development Bank[55]
- **Structure:** Knowledge management and thematic backstopping is located in the 12 thematic competence centers at KfW's headquarters, which are anchored in geographic departments. They also work closely with technical staff from GIZ (German Technical Cooperation). KfW is currently being restructured and there is some discussion about abolishing the competence centers.
- **Value-added:** From the field perspective in Kyrgyzstan, the competence centers positively support technical needs within and across geographic departments. Teams of thematic experts and program officers visit the field office frequently for technical support and backstopping of concept development and program implementation.

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[55] See Annex 5

Medicus Mundi Switzerland
- **Structure:** Network of approximately 45 Swiss organizations and 200 individual members. Members are expected to have thematic competence and know how to use network communication tools and mechanisms, including network facilitation.
- **Improving functioning:** A general evaluation in 2013 of Medicus Mundi Switzerland recommended that the network focuses on key thematic areas and integrates knowledge sharing and advocacy, involve external stakeholders, strengthen synergies among its members, involve more field staff actively, and apply different approaches to knowledge sharing.

2.3   Impact

Box 3 provides an overview of key findings with regard to impact; that is the extent to which the thematic networks have made significant contributions to SDC's operations and policies.

Box 3: Key Findings

- Reflective of the different stages of each network, some have more developed Theories of Change or results frameworks to focus and guide their work and link it to SDC strategic objectives;

- Networks are a strong tool for identifying, developing and mainstreaming norms and policies, which ultimately will improve impact in the field;

- Though functioning within a strong vertical context, networks offer a framework that has begun to support SDC to overcome compartmentalization.

Measuring impact – long-term effects produced by network activities, whether directly or indirectly, intended or unintended – is challenging within the complex nature of international development and humanitarian cooperation. As mentioned in the methodology section[56], one key challenge in measuring the impact of the networks is the relatively short time period that SDC has developed and employed thematic networks. Other limiting factors include highly interconnected processes, various influencing stakeholders, and a lack of systematic monitoring of overall network activities within a results framework. Although impact is limited and attribution at times unclear, impact by the thematic networks on projects, programs and policies is demonstrated in some circumstances.

2.3.1 Theory of Change

While a formal Theory of Change was not formulated at the inception of the network structure in 2008, simplified outlines of the underlying Theory of Change were developed at later stages, including in preparation of this Evaluation.[57] It appears that the originally intended functions of the networks were to promote learning and share knowledge, provide theme-related operational advice, and capitalize on experience and formulate good practices.[58] Recognizing the value of network expertise, network functioning has evolved to also include network contributions to policy development. The underlying, implicit assumption for the networks is that members will gain new ideas and knowledge through their participation in the

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[56] See section 1.1.

[57] Kindly refer to Approach Paper, Annex 1.

[58] Network Mandates, 2008. Original text: "In den Netzwerken wird Wissen ausgetauscht, Kompetenzen aufgebaut und erhalten. Sie ermöglichen den Linienvorgesetzten wie auch den Focal Points, ihre Kernaufgaben wahrnehmen zu können."

networks, which will then lead to improved projects, programs and policies. Moreover, the organization will strengthen its technical capacity through increased cooperation among network members. In this way, the networks are critical for allowing decentralized work while maintaining an organizational identity and connection.

Developing and employing a results-based management tool will link network activities with overall organizational goals and provide a basis for monitoring change over time. Reflecting their varied development, each network has developed different types and levels of Theory of Change or logic frameworks to guide their work. A few have more advanced representations of their vision and paths with which they plan to achieve that vision – e.g., Health, DRR, and Gender and E&I. For some of the networks anchored in global programs, there is a strategy for global programs that includes the networks, but does not articulate a separate network Theory of Change, strategy, or logic framework.

2.3.2 SDC Operations

Overall, there is initial evidence that the thematic networks have contributed to the development of policies, SDC strategies and programs, which have positively impacted the implementation of projects in partner countries. In addition, during the consultations conducted by the Evaluation resource persons referred to an improvement in the quality of the networks over the years, without referring to any baseline or indicator to corroborate this assessment. Nonetheless, the increased demand for participating in F2F, increased ease at getting contributions to e-discussions, and increased use of knowledge from NPOs may be seen as proxies.

There is a perception by staff that SDC thematic expertise has decreased with the dissolution of the F-Department and the introduction of the networks. However, during those years, F-Barometer studies were conducted as a monitoring and learning instrument and documented the relevance of the F-Department's work in relation to daily operations – projects, programs and strategies. This provides a baseline against which we can compare the results from the online survey on the thematic networks carried out for this Evaluation. Although the scales have different ranges and cannot be directly compared, it is notable that in both 2007 and 2014 respondents were fairly satisfied with the services provided by the F-Department and the thematic networks.

Table 3: Impact of services from the F-Department on SDC operations (2007)[59] [60]

Service	No impact	Little impact	Middle impact	High impact	Average (scale 1-4) [61]
Advice	3%	16%	56%	25%	3.1
Policies, concepts	7%	32%	55%	7%	2.8
Networking access	15%	26%	54%	4%	2.6
Learning	3%	18%	65%	13%	2.9

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[59] Question: Over the last 12 months, what impact have the services from the F-Department had on your work?
[60] SDC, "F-Barometer 2007 – Auswertung," Bern, 7.8.2007.
[61] Scale: 1=no impact to 4=high impact.

Figure 2: Perceived influence or impact of SDC thematic networks by SDC HQ and SCO staff
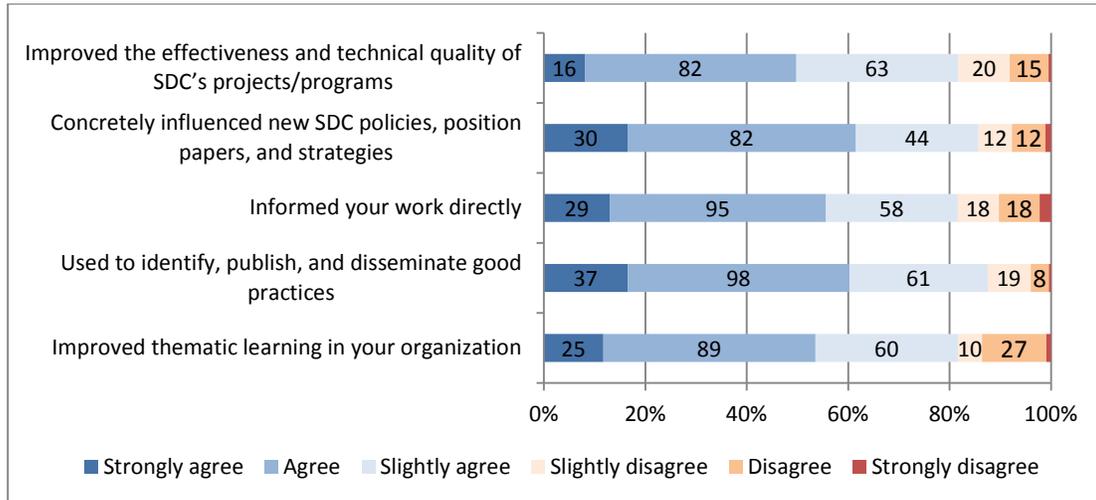
The 2014 online survey[62] also showed:

- Approximately 80% or more respondents for each network said thematic knowledge learned from the network is being applied in SDC projects and programs.
- Approximately 70% or more respondents from each network said that concretely influenced new SDC policies, position papers, and strategies.
- Across the board, a majority of respondents from each network said they benefitted from the F2F. For a few networks, as much as 80-85% said they benefitted.
- All – except one network in its early stages of development – were reported to address well what members need to know about the theme to perform their work.
- For almost all networks, more respondents felt that e-discussions rather than d-groups were beneficial.

Networks provide **technical advice** to SDC organizational units, influencing their projects, programs and operations. The advice is most effective and influential when shared directly by technical experts. For example, with the introduction of making markets work for the poor (M4P) initiative developed by the E&I as a new approach to project management, there was no internal SDC experience and staff looked to the broader network – mostly external partners with M4P expertise – for technical support. However, unlike this example, there are a number of cases where attributing this technical advice to the networks is not clear, as discussed in section 2.2.2.1.

Mainstreaming **norms and tools** developed or adopted by one network to all – such as, CEDRIG, Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), M4P, Gender equality mainstreaming performance reports and Gender checklist – has increased thematic and technical dialogue and understanding within and across networks. F2F trainings have direct impact on project and program design and implementations, such as the case in Mongolia where, after

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[62] NB: The survey did not reach members of the Health and PED networks directly. From the Water network only 7 members got the survey directly. As many network members participate in more than one network though, indirectly several members of the Health, Water, and PED networks received the questionnaire. See Annex 8 for an analysis of the survey.

attending a F2F that included sessions on HRBA, the staff learned that their project included mining rights and HRBA helped to focus and improve their efforts. Similarly after attending a Gender F2F, the SCO in Sudan was able to identify and incorporate gender issues more systematically in their projects. The Gender checklist responds to the SDC policy of gender equity as a transversal theme requiring attention to gender issues for each project.

The formulation of **good practices** is a form of sharing generalized technical advice. As mentioned in section 2.2.2.6, good practices are being formulated on an ad hoc basis. Mandated external partners, Focal Points and thematic network members are formulating some good practices that inform on-going projects and sometimes launch new ones. For networks anchored in Global Programs, the Global Program staff generally provides the technical advice, and not the network Focal Points or members. E-discussions and D-groups share and sometimes formulate good practices, such as with WASH, the Water toolkit for HRBA. Good practices are also shared and discussed during F2F meetings, creating a space to further develop concepts and deepen understanding. There are some documents, such as the Annual Gender mainstreaming performance reports, which include sections dedicated to good practices. In some limited cases, networks capitalize on good practices identified by other organizations – UN agencies, European Commission, and the World Bank – for sharing them with SDC thematic network members. However, adapting good practices to local contexts often requires direct technical advice to support their application.

In general the networks have **influenced/informed decision-making, SDC policies and norms**. Almost every network has provided examples of relevant influence. For instance, the Water network organized an e-discussion on water and mining that has led to a policy position, operational implementation concept, and a memorandum of understanding with partners. Another example is a portfolio review conducted by two network members of the Education network, which has informed a country program. And the PED network has organized several political economy assessments that informed country strategies. Though mostly influenced by Theme Managers and Focal Points, there are some examples when issues emerging from network interests and discussions – for instance, election support, water and mining, and fragility – have influenced SDC policy and priorities.

Some Focal Points are mandated or dedicate significant efforts to **global policy work** – such as Gender, Health, and C&HR – providing policy inputs and participating in global discussions. The global programs influence policy considerably through their technical staff and do not systematically involve the networks, although there are a few instances of consultations on the D-groups and e-discussions that precede developing positions by the global programs, as was the case with CEDRIG and the Swiss position on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO).

The networks have had some impact in geographically, organizationally, and thematically **overcoming compartmentalization** within SDC. Around 73% of respondents from the online survey indicate that they have directly contacted people known through the networks. Thematic networks continue to have a strong vertical communications flow, with some instruments and activities that are beginning to facilitate horizontal flow.

Geographically, the networks provide a framework for knowledge sharing across regions. Through the various instruments in place – F2F, newsletters, e-discussions, etc. – they create bridges not only between headquarters and the SCOs but also among the SCOs. However, SCO staff is not closely involved in the planning of network activities beyond what is discussed during the F2F meetings. For instance, in Addis Ababa, colleagues from Central America shared experiences on the concept of metal silos for grain management post-harvest in Central America through an open blog during a regional F2F meeting. However, as mentioned earlier during the Evaluation many resource persons expressed some concern in

general about the usefulness of knowledge sharing among the regions as the relevance will often be seen as questionable. There is a recent trend toward developing more regional efforts, which participants feel provides more relevant support, though they also bear the risk of creating new clusters and slowing down the exchanges organized at the international level and the overall organizational consistency that the thematic networks can strengthen. Organizationally, although there are strong vertical communications and ties, the networks strengthen linkages from the SCOs to headquarters, increasing their connection to the SDC community and their corporate identity. As one NPO stated, they would feel isolated without the network.

At the organizational level, the Core Groups in principle provide thematic linkages across divisions or throughout the organization, though in actuality this is not consistent. In addition, when a Core Group member is more senior in the line management, their impact on operations within their division is stronger. At the senior management level, Theme Managers bring network issues ad hoc to higher-level meetings, without working necessarily within an overall strategic approach.

As the networks continue to develop individually, they are also recognizing the need to collaborate to better meet the needs of the field offices. There is not yet an overall strategic approach to the interactions across thematic networks, with only ad hoc horizontal connections in headquarters and in the field. However, purposeful ad hoc collaborations are increasing and impacting the quality of operations, such as HRBA and water sanitation, Innovative rural agriculture in Latin America, and education and vocational skills development in West Africa. In addition, the large number of networks and the distribution of thematic staff throughout the organization have diluted the impact of any one network.

Many SDC thematic networks are active and influential in **policy development and global agendas.** The Health network contributed significantly to SDC's health policy and Switzerland's international health policy. An e-discussion with DRR members influenced SDC's position on the post-Hyogo position. And the development of the **Swiss post-2015 position,** being led by SDC, includes inputs from the networks through dedicated discussions in F2F meetings, e-discussions and D-groups. In addition, some network members participate in an inter-ministerial task force or provide technical support or inputs for position papers. For networks anchored in Global Programs, the networks were not directly involved in policy development and the Global Programs provided technical support.

2.3.3 External Partners

SDC thematic networks have made linkages with **external partners** to varying degrees without an overall partnership strategy (See section 2.2.2.5). For those networks with large numbers of external partners as members, backstoppers and contractors, the partners' work influences the networks and, to some extent, the networks have influenced their work. These experts often have careers in that specific topic and bring a profound understanding of the topic to the network. As active network members and leaders of network activities, external partners often significantly influence the discussions within the networks, broadening and deepening understanding for SDC staff and network members. For those networks who have purposefully not included external members – such as, Health, Gender, C&HR – they seek linkages with partners through their participation in F2F meetings, brown bag meetings, workshops, and the like. There was concern from some resource persons during the Evaluation that the same partners are continually contracted and others (even those supported by SDC in other ways) are not, limiting opportunities for diverse perspectives and inputs.

By involving partners, the networks have also influenced external partners, which lead to the networks influencing the development of **Swiss thematic knowledge**. The online survey for the Evaluation shows that 84% of external partners say their SDC network "has improved thematic learning" in their own organization. Through on-going partnerships and dialogue, some SDC thematic networks are strongly engaged in building thematic knowledge. AGUASAN – a long-standing community of practice that the SDC water network supports – is strengthening the thematic capacity of Swiss international cooperation on Water. And AGUASAN has participated in SDC water network's F2F meetings and other activities.

2.3.4 Thematic Excellence

It remains unclear if SDC thematic networks should have the ambition to reach a level of **international excellence**, though some level of institutional expertise is necessary for optimal impact in the field. This directly relates to the need to further clarify the overarching purpose of the networks. In comparison, Sida has shifted the purpose of their networks so that they no longer have a mandate to develop or influence policies and influence international dialogue but build technical competencies and relevant international perspectives for staff.

Although the ultimate ambition is unclear, the networks are involved and recognized in the international community to varying extents. Network staff is often invited to attend conferences, meeting with other networks, and other types of activities, demonstrating recognition of thematic expertise and providing the opportunity to disseminate SDC thematic knowledge and engage in thematic dialogue. As mentioned earlier, in the online survey, 66% of respondents say they tend to refer other actors to the SDC papers, reports and experiences shared on the network. Some SDC thematic network outputs are being referred to in scientific publications, such as CEDRIG being discussed in an IADB[63] publication. In some areas, there are newly developing bilateral technical support and exchanges with international organizations, for example with IFAD[64], UNDP, and World Bank.

2.3.5 Unexpected Side Effects

The Evaluation has identified a few unexpected side effects from the development of the thematic networks, particularly the following:

- The mandate – according to the 2008 REO documents – is for SDC thematic networks to promote learning, to advise and to capitalize experiences. The development of 12 different thematic networks, as opposed to the 5 thematic areas in the F-Department, has diluted the perception of thematic focus throughout the organization. Still, there is an increase since the F-Department in actual numbers of current staff working directly in thematic areas.

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[63] Inter-American Development Bank. Tetra Tech Inc., "Climate Change Data and Risk Assessment Methodologies for the Caribbean" Inter American Development Bank, Washington D.C., 2013
[64] International Fund for Agricultural Development.

2.4 Sustainability

Box 4 provides an overview of key findings with regard to sustainability; that is, the extent to which the thematic networks and their interventions are likely to last.

Box 4: Key Findings

- Sustainability is grounded in the recognized added-value of networks, which will motivate participation and engage management support;
- Integrated thematic and bottom-up approaches promote relevant and effective networks;
- Institutional learning is critical to sustaining a level of expertise that will deepen and solidify SDC's thematic and operational capacities;
- Networks are fairly well established, poised, and with sufficient technical, financial, and organizational resources to move to the next stage of network development.

Sustainability, the extent to which SDC thematic networks and their interventions will last, requires years of functioning to accurately measure. However, there are some specific examples that point to potential sustainability of the SDC networks and their activities in the future.

The networks as instruments are fairly well established in SDC learning and knowledge sharing. Each network is at a different stage of development and purposes, as determined by their membership and leadership. Two major upcoming factors will affect the overall functioning of the organization and therefore the context within which the networks function: 1) the upcoming change in Director-General and 2) the integration process with FDFA. Looking forward, the thematic networks are poised to strategically integrate their work and evolve with changing contexts, needs and SDC priorities.

2.4.1 Networks as Value Added

The sustainability of the networks relies most significantly on their recognition as providing expertise and the necessary services and knowledge that respond to SCO needs. With this clear **value-added**, the networks' use as management and operational tools would increase.

An **integrated thematic approach** will provide strong support to field offices with multi-thematic programs that address the complex needs of each country context. As the networks become more established, they are seeking ways to collaborate that will better support country office needs. At headquarters, they are participating in F2F meetings of other related networks and developing integrated guidelines (such as CEDRIG). At the field level, projects that include more than one thematic network share information and there are a few examples of knowledge sharing across networks with all office staff.

One of the key assumptions by stakeholders is that the networks will be more relevant, effective, efficient and results-oriented with a **bottom-up approach**. It is also assumed that this approach will instill a mutual influence whereby increased network member ownership will further motivate their participation and vice versa, while capitalizing on inputs from the field. Some examples are member participation in F2F design, joint network planning during F2F, and exploration of topics that emerged from member comments and interests.[65]

In addition, although rotation of Swiss staff is viewed incongruously – opportunity for network growth or hindrance for network continuity – **NPOs and external partners are constant**

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[65] See Annex 9 for further details.

members who provide strong grounding for the network. In particular, the active involvement of NPOs and field-based partners strengthens the bottom-up approach.

2.4.2 Organizational Thematic Learning

The creation of the networks introduced a paradigm shift within SDC. Whereas experts provided services to the organization within the F-Department, knowledge is now learned and shared more directly across the organization among knowledge users. **Organizational thematic knowledge** – rather than individual – is critical to sustaining a level of organizational expertise that will deepen and solidify SDC's thematic and operational capacities. As an example, a learning project led by an external partner and expert in the field with the participation of various interested network members, discussed at the F2F and culminating in a report and short lessons learned will deepen SDC institutional knowledge on a particular topic through a process that builds SDC capacity. Section 2.2.2.3 shows that organizational learning is limited, while this section points to areas where it is beginning to take hold as the networks continue to develop and evolve.

Solidifying organizational learning also requires **policies and processes** to support documentation, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer. K&LP developed well-designed documents to support the Focal Points in their facilitation of the networks, though more is needed. The Focal Point Cafés are a strong process that provides a unique and valued opportunity to share knowledge and build capacity in network facilitation. The Field Handbook, end of phase reports and end of post reports capture the accomplishments and intended plans for a project or position, though they are not consistently applied and do not include specific reference to responsibilities within networks.

The SDC structure allows for the continuation of **theme-related technical advice to support operations**. The Focal Points, external partners and network members combined have an extensive pool of expertise. This expertise is not yet utilized to its fullest through more dynamic e-discussions, increased numbers of peer reviews and enhanced regional technical support.

3. Conclusions

The thematic network structure is critical for SDC's 2008 reorganization and mandate to promote learning, share knowledge, provide theme-related operational advice, capitalize on experiences, and formulate good practices to ultimately improve SDC operations in the field. The structure is particularly important in a decentralized organization, where multidirectional vertical and horizontal communications is important to ensure organizational identity while increasing regional and local ownership. Overall, the established network structure has proven able to respond to the functions defined in the mandate of the thematic networks, particularly in terms of promoting learning and passing on professional and methodological knowledge; providing theme-related operational advice to the organizational units within the network; and capitalizing on experience and identifying good practices. The 12 thematic networks have developed with different approaches to the various network functions and modus operandi reflecting the flexibility and adaptability of the network structure. As a result, the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of the thematic networks vary and is continuously developing and adapting as could be expected of a relatively new organizational structure where the official reorganization phase only finished in 2012.

While the overall structure seems to have arrived at a relatively stable state in terms of network functioning with effective use of tools such as face-to-face meetings, there is now a need for more emphasis on developing systematic, results-based mechanisms that will

facilitate more focused and impactful results, including well-developed Theories of Change or results framework for each network or 'family' of networks. Likewise, with the maturing of the networks there should be more focus on using the networks as organizational tools rather than objectives per se. While the general concept of the thematic network structure as the modus operandi for SDC's thematic focus has been internalized throughout the organization, there are still uncertainties about how best to use the networks including roles and responsibilities and members are generally not claiming full ownership. This is reflected for instance, in the tendency for limited pro-activeness of members in the daily functioning of the networks such as D-groups and e-discussions where a dynamic dialogue rarely develops and most communication is vertical with very limited horizontal communication.

Some of the challenges to the daily functioning of the networks are related to practical issues such as language barriers. However, there are also challenges with regard to the perceived relevance of some of the network functions, such as technical advice and sharing good practices where the SCO demand is often specific and requires adapted solutions rather than global advice. What SCOs are more often requesting is support in adapting good practices and technical advice from other contexts to their own specific context.

The challenge for SDC to focus thematically, which has often been highlighted for instance in OECD DAC peer reviews, seems to be reinforced through the current network structure with the thematic networks distributed throughout the organizational units, drawing attention in 12 directions. So far, there are only limited structures put in place to ensure an integrated approach of the thematic networks and most of the networks tend to work independently from each other although recently there have been some initiatives to strengthen cooperation in small families of thematically related networks Likewise, the effective thematic focus that is found at SCOs with overall thematic areas that cut across the 12 thematic networks greatly limits program officers' capacity to effectively participate in all relevant networks. As a result, the general perception of SDC as a strong thematic organization has decreased in spite of the fact that staff directly involved in technical reflections has increased through the network structure.

4. Lessons Learned

The following key lessons learned are based on the specific findings of the Evaluation:

1. Global networks offer good potential for strengthening corporate identity. However, to be effective and relevant the global networks need to be complemented by strong regional structures.

2. For thematic networks to be productive beyond simple knowledge sharing there is a need for developing communities of trust at manageable sizes.

3. The relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of thematic networks depend to a large degree on the capacity of the network facilitators to animate thematic discussions and promote multidirectional horizontal communication. This capacity is both a personal capacity but also a professional skill. Ideal network facilitation will therefore be a tandem with a thematic expert and a network facilitator with strong networking skills.

5. Recommendations

Priorities for change for structure and functioning of SDC's thematic networks were collectively identified with the CLP during the final validation workshop. The priority areas for change include Role and responsibility of the thematic networks in SDC's structure (value added at all levels of SDC operations, demand driven, innovations); Functioning and effectiveness (use of different instruments); Outcomes (thematic advice, knowledge management for improved thematic quality, policy); Design and anchorage (focus areas, local-regional-global, head quarter/SCO and organizational anchorage); and Membership profiles (SDC staff's thematic qualifications, competence level, role of external members).

Based on the findings, conclusions, and priorities for change presented in this report the Evaluation recommends that:

Recommendation 1: SDC should continue with thematic networks to strengthen thematic quality of its operations and policy.

Senior management should establish an overall steering group for the thematic network structure with participation of representatives from senior management, SCOs, management of thematic networks, quality assurance section, and K&LP to coordinate and monitor the thematic network structure and ensure that:

g. The thematic focus and activities of the thematic networks are explicitly integrated in key operational processes, including the full Project Cycle Management and human resource management,

h. The thematic focus of the networks is aligned with the thematic priorities presented in the Bills to the Parliament and priority domains of Country Strategies,

i. Procedures are established to ensure that thematic networks for areas that are no more in demand by SDC's operations will be reorganized either through integration of the themes into other thematic networks or by ceasing the focus to the area,

j. Each network has a well-functioning network management, including focal points, network facilitators, theme managers, and a core / steering group with participation of SDC network members from headquarters and SCOs,

k. Each thematic network develops structure, functions, and priorities according to specific needs and opportunities for that network,

l. Technology is in place and is being used for full integration of National Program Officers in network planning and other network management activities such as participation in core/steering groups,

m. Thematic networks are innovative, proactive, and support the organization's changing needs in a complex environment.

Recommendation 2: Each thematic network should apply result-based management to clearly define their contributions to SDC operations.

The network management in consultation with the whole network should apply rolling multi-year planning and result-based management with special focus on SCO needs and SCO knowledge resources that should/could be mobilized through the network. The result-based management work plans should include indicators and targets for network activities at output and outcomes levels. Moreover, the multi-year plans should clearly identify:

a. Contributions to the full Project Cycle Management with identification of roles and responsibilities of Network Members and the bureaucratic processes for mobilizing

Network Members, including role of Focal Points, Theme Managers, and Core Members, for different forms of technical support through different network tools such as peer support, field visits, and virtual support, and according to specific criteria,

b. The role of Focal Points to decide when to respond directly to a request for technical advice, when to involve National Program Officers, or when to involve the entire network,

c. Regular monitoring of thematic quality at all phases of the Project Cycle Management, for instance through systematic participation of Focal Points and /or Network Members,

d. Systematic mainstreaming of the thematic networks in Project Documents,

e. Priority needs of SCOs in a demand driven manner based on systematic monitoring of SCO knowledge needs with identification of most appropriate means of knowledge sharing and thematic advice according to the specific SCO,

f. Role of regional and thematic sub-groups in the delivery of thematic network outcomes, specifying the role of Regional Advisors as link between regional and global knowledge and know-how including capacities to link the regional and global levels.

Recommendation 3: Thematic networks should strengthen their efficiency with special focus on responding to SCO needs.

The network management should review and continuously develop network processes to promote efficiency, including:

a. Development of a multi-directional communication strategy to promote horizontal communication, including spontaneous knowledge sharing,

b. Development and coordination of regional and thematic sub-groups according to needs expressed by Network Members and SDC Senior Management, and define the roles, responsibilities, and structures of regional and thematic sub-groups in the overall network structure,

c. Strengthening network animation through training and special recruitment with focus on promoting network initiatives by regular members, foster network ownership, and increase network facilitation to trigger queries from field staffs on D-groups,

d. Development and sharing of know-how and not just thematic knowledge,

e. Development of good practices, lessons learned, and thematic reports based on SCO needs and input,

f. Improvement of existing networks tools, particularly trainings, technical workshops, development of technical and position papers,

g. Introduction of new members to networks with one-on-one consultations – written or verbal –between representatives from network management and new members to improve their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the opportunities the network offers,

h. Continuous thematic training for network members according to needs and opportunities,

i. Update the yellow book for easier reference for users of network services and develop overview of technical capacities available among the members of the network with identification of their geographic location,

j. Explanation of role of SDC Communication Officers at headquarters and in the field within the communication about network roles and activities.

Recommendation 4: The thematic networks should strengthen the integrated thematic approach.

Focal Points of all thematic networks should ensure joint planning to maximize their complementarity in support to SCO priority domains with special focus on:

a. Defining complementarity for joint support to the Project Cycle Management,

b. Defining cross-cutting network activities, including Face-to-Face, training, and peer support,

c. Establishing a website for joint planning and coordinated activities for easy reference.

Recommendation 5: SDC should foster a learning culture.

Senior Management should strengthen a learning culture that will embrace successes, failures, and risk taking. To achieve this, Senior Management should develop:

a. A strategy for the role of risk taking in thematic networks and processes for systematically learning from success and failures and scale up innovations,

b. Guidelines for partnerships for knowledge and know-how development and sharing with special attention to the role of knowledge and know-how partnerships in the thematic networks,

c. New processes or implement existing ones to encourage institutional knowledge and expertise and not just individual learning,

d. A strategy for learning from others including the role of external partners in the networks and the use of differentiation between outcome-oriented network memberships with well-defined roles and responsibilities for all members and D-groups where more passive membership is an option,

e. A stronger role for thematic learning in SDC's organizational training concepts,

f. Guidelines for Line Managers to incentivize and reward knowledge sharing.

Recommendation 6: SDC should ensure that the network structure is optimal.

In future adaptations of SDC's organizational structure, Senior Management should consider the optimal network architecture, including organizational anchorage, the role and responsibilities of Theme Managers and Focal Points, and the number of thematic networks, with special attention to:

a. The different roles and needs for Theme Managers in the different domains,

b. Authority of Focal Points to negotiate directly with the Line Managers outside their own line the use of network members time for network activities, for instance for providing horizontal cooperation,

c. Ensuring that an integrated thematic approach will be favored.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of Persons Consulted

Annex 2: List of Key Documents Reviewed

Annex 3: Nicaragua Country Case Study

Annex 4: Benin Country Case Study

Annex 5: Kyrgyzstan Country Case Study

Annex 6: Sida Case Study

Annex 7: DFID Case Study

Annex 8: Online Survey

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Imprint

Annexes to the Evaluation Report of SDC's Thematic Networks

Prepared by
Breard & Associates SARL

Table of Contents

Annex 1: Liste of Persons Consulted

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Annex 3: Nicaragua Country Case Study

AIDE MEMOIRE: NICARAGUA
26-28 March 2014

This Aide Memoire provides a summary of key findings from the mission of Judith Kallick Russell to Managua during 26-28 March 2014. The purpose of the mission was to inform the evaluation on SDC's thematic networks illustrated through the role of the thematic networks in country and regional operations and the role of the knowledge generated at country and regional levels in the thematic networks.

I.   Background
Swiss development cooperation – including SDC and SECO – has a long history of working in Central America. Swiss cooperation initially began in Honduras in 1978 and then extended to Nicaragua in 1982 with a focus on improving economic development, local governance and rule of law. In response to the devastation of hurricane Mitch throughout Central America in 1995, Swiss cooperation efforts expanded to include food security and climate change projects in El Salvador and Guatemala. Since 1993, Nicaragua has been the main regional office.

In recent years, the bilateral and multilateral community has been shifting their priorities away from Central American and withdrawing their support and physical presence. This includes the re-prioritization of countries for SECO, leading them to physically withdraw from the country. SDC is one of a small number of donors remaining in the region.

II.   Programme Strategy
SDC has aligned its current strategic plan for Central America (2013-2017) with local needs and Swiss interests. The programme's overall goal continues to be firmly grounded in its focus on poverty reduction, concentrating on the poorest countries – Nicaragua and Honduras – and targeting poor regions. The approach has been adjusted to meet the changing needs of the region.

Table 1: Domains and Related SDC Thematic Networks

Domain 1: Inclusive economic development	Domain 2: Reducing state fragility, inclusive governance	Domain 3: Environmental vulnerability, climate change
Generating employment and income in an inclusive manner, mainly by supporting rural value chains and promoting local economic development.	Strengthening governance mainly at the local level and, specifically in Honduras, enhancing security sector performance and human rights.	Adapting to climate change by better water resource management and disaster risk reduction.
Thematic Focus		
Employment and Income	Decentralization and Local Governance	Water
	Conflict and Human Rights	Climate Change and Environment
Additional Relevant Themes		
Agriculture and Food Security	Agriculture and Food Security	Agriculture and Food Security
Decentralization and Local Governance	Gender	Decentralization and Local Governance
Gender		Disaster Risk Reduction
		Gender

III.   SDC Networks

SCO staff in Nicaragua participates in a number of different SDC networks – internationally, regionally and locally – to meet work expectations, broaden their knowledge and increase Swiss impact.

SDC thematic networks relevant to Central America
- Agriculture and Food Security
- Climate Change and the Environment
- Conflict and Human Rights
- Decentralization and Local Governance
- Disaster Risk Reduction
- Employment and Income
- Gender
- Water

SDC regional networks and initiatives relevant to Central America
- **ACOSAM:** a network within Latin America developed by SDC in 1998, focusing on economic development, climate change, and implementation tools and methodologies.
- **DLGN Regional Meeting:** DLGN conducted an initial f2f in Bolivia, just after the evaluation mission in Managua. The aim of this meeting was to discuss DLGN issues specifically among SDC offices within Latin America.
- **Innovaparadet:** a newly created network focusing on innovative agriculture and economic development. The SDC Regional Advisor based in Nicaragua is animating and facilitating this network.

IV.   Office Structure

The SCO in Nicaragua provides services for SDC, SECO, and the consulate. The Ambassador is based in Costa Rica and travels to the other Central American countries

for particular activities and events. Nicaragua has one of the largest offices in the field with 46 staff, including a Regional Advisor. In response to local contexts, SDC had been supporting joint projects with Honduras and Nicaragua. In recent years, the contexts of the two countries have taken different directions and therefore SDC's support to those countries has adjusted to each individual context. To this end, the Honduras office is being strengthened. To a lesser extent, the Nicaragua office also supports projects in El Salvador and Guatemala. Since the withdrawal of SECO's physical presence in the region, the SCO has been managing SECO's few remaining projects.

V. Resources

SDC provides the vast majority of Swiss bilateral investment in Central America. Approximately 90% of their financial resources are split between Nicaragua and Honduras, with 10% dedicated to regional projects. By 2017, Swiss development cooperation intends to increase their financial investment in Honduras so that it is the equivalent to what they invest in Nicaragua.

Table 2: Swiss Cooperation Budget in Central America by Source

	2011 (millions CHF)	2012 (millions CHF)	2013 (millions CHF)	Projected in Strategic Plan 2013-2017 (millions CHF)
SDC	35.71	42.68	46.10	
SECO	3.06	2.06	3.98	
Other Federal, Cantons, & Municipalities	1.37	1.78	0.11	
Total	40.14	46.52	50.19	35-40 per year

Table 3: Swiss Cooperation Budget in Central America by Domain and Country

Domain of intervention	Disbursements 2013 (in CHF million)			Planned disbursements 2014-2017 (in CHF million)			Total disbursements 2013-2017 (actual & planned) (in CHF million)
	Nica.	Hond.	Regional	Nica.	Hond.	Regional	Total
Domain 1: Inclusive economic development	4.61	2.92	1.89	23.74	19.24	5.57	57.98
Domain 2: Reducing state fragility, inclusive governance	9.37	14.15	0.53	27.45	44.45	4.24	100.18
Domain 3: Environmental vulnerability, climate change	4.98	0.46	5.84	34.19	10.60	8.06	64.13
Non-core programme	1.05	0.57	1.63	4.05	4.03	7.28	18.60
Total	20.01	18.10	9.89	89.43	78.33	25.15	240.90

VI.   Key Findings

The following are a summary of key findings according to the general categories of the evaluation matrix articulated in the evaluation's Inception Report.

Relevance

- **SDC thematic networks are useful and relevant for SCO programme** – Network members felt that the networks were a solid support for their work and filled a need that would otherwise be a gap in their processes. All said they would like the networks to continue, with some suggested adjustments. Partners who were members of the networks were particularly enthusiastic about the usefulness of the networks for their work, helping them to better understand SDC as well as expanding their technical knowledge.
- **SDC networks are not easily aligned with SCO strategy and projects** – The regional strategy and projects developed by the SCO are developed directly in alignment with local needs. However, in supporting strategic achievement and project implementation, the SDC networks overlap in thematic scope. Transversal themes, such as gender, are relevant for all projects.
- **Most partners were not members of SDC thematic networks** – The majority of partners interviewed were not aware of the international SDC thematic networks, though a number of them were members of Innovaparadet.[1]
- **All partners identified interest for SDC regional initiatives –** Partners felt that there is much more to gain from sharing knowledge among others in their region, rather than at a global level. The SCO is beginning to address the interest for regional dialogue through the newly created innovaparadet and participation in regional meetings and initiatives of the DLGN network.
- **Networks encourage some input from members, but members would like more** – All the networks discussed during the interviews were reported as encouraging some participation from members in designing f2f meetings, e-discussions, and other activities. However, SCO staff suggested that there should be more balanced flow between the HO and field.

Effectiveness/ Efficiency

- **Partners perceive SDC as unique, supportive funder** – Partners reported having a unique relationship with SDC, as compared to other funders. They felt that SDC "accompanied" them in their work and was committed to supporting the process throughout. In addition, they felt that SDC was involved in appropriate key moments, without being overbearing.
- **SDC Expertise/ support sought through informal connections** – many participants reported contacting their informal connections within the organization for answers or support, rather than the network. Some reasons mentioned by a few participants were:
  - The network is too time-consuming or cumbersome.
  - Prefer contacting people who they can trust to provide quality support.
- **Inspiration and information sought through national/regional sources** – When looking for ideas or inspiration, most participants report first turning to national or regional institutions or networks. Latin America is rich with expertise and networks, which were reported as more desirable resources due to depth of knowledge within a similar culture, context and language.
- **Clearer focus for the networks –** many participants felt that the purpose and objectives of the networks were not clear. They felt that the topics discussed were too broad or too varied. It was also suggested that the topics be addressed more systematically.

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[11] Innovaparadet is a newly created regional network (See Section III).

- **Products and services**
  - Newsletters are excellent way to quickly stay informed
  - Some guidelines and checklists are used, though some participants felt that they would like the document to be adapted or for them to be further trained, so that the products' application is more meaningful.
  - Advice and guidance during the development of a new project is a critical moment when networks are involved. Other key moments when the network is useful are when linkages can be made to learning: midterm reviews, final evaluations, lessons learned, good practices, end of phase report, etc.
  - F2f – critical to build personal connections, to increase comfort when communicating virtually.
  - International f2f – good to have in Switzerland to help linkages between field and HO.
  - The webpages were sometimes difficult to find information, not so user friendly. Webpages were seen as very document oriented, rather than with graphics, photos, and other visuals to increase attraction and enhance communications.
- **More concise information sharing is well received –** participants much preferred when there were summaries of e-discussions or applicable lessons learned shared. They felt that often the networks provided too much information, particularly with case studies and e-discussions. They suggest having more summaries in e-discussions and during f2f, lessons learned, guidelines, clarity in SDC's position, etc.
- **Thematic quality assurance responsibility of line management** – Participants felt that quality assurance is and should be ultimately the responsibility of line management. Focal points provide support and advice. However, they also felt that SDC should have clearer standards.
- **Participation in e-discussions is challenging and time consuming** – Participants report most of their time is spent following network discussions rather than more actively participating. Some reported obstacles are:
  - Contributions are well researched and carefully crafted, therefore, requiring a significant amount of time and energy.
  - Participants often feel information flow is top down (from HO to field), although degree of this varies depending on the network.
  - Fear of contributing to an unknown group of colleagues.
  - Limitations in English.
  - Some topics are too general, superficial or not relevant for their context.
- **Lack of importance or recognition of contributions demotivates members** – Many participants perceived their efforts or inputs are not valued, demotivating their involvement in the networks.
- **Time away from office**
  - F2f: Some felt that the networks require too much time away from the office for f2f meetings; others felt the f2f are critical to the good functioning of the networks.
  - Peer learning: Some suggested that there should be more opportunities for NPOs to provide support to other SCOs to build stronger NPO capacity in both countries, and deepen country-to-country and regional connections.
- **Network integration into office management**
  - Each team approaches network coverage differently. Sometimes it is consistently one individual; sometimes they rotate responsibility among team members.
  - The Regional Advisor is coordinating some meetings with all staff to share an aspect about their network. Although not a regularly scheduled meeting at this

point, the staff felt that this was a very useful opportunity to share knowledge and exchange ideas.
- o Strong management support facilitates and motivates network use and participation.
- o Most staff working with networks has articulated network objectives in their MAPs. However, office objectives have higher priority.
- o Suggested to include network objectives in Office Annual Plan, where it could be more concretely integrated into the SCO's work.
- **Synergies and complementarities of networks**
- o Networks are considered to be working fairly independently within the SCO, with more linkages to network at HO than across networks within the SCO, reinforcing vertical connections. However, the SCO staff meetings designed to share knowledge and learning encourages horizontal dialogue and support across networks and thematic work.
- o Some networks were considered to collaborate well together at HO, providing useful, concerted support to the SCO. Other networks did not collaborate as well at HO and created more time and effort from the SCO.
- **Global Programs prioritize their projects** – for those projects in that theme that are not part of a Global Program project, SCO feel there is less attention or support.
- **Although relevant, no staff is active in CHRnet** – The SCO strategic plan clearly states the office's interest in strengthening its commitment to prevention of violence and promotion of human rights. However, CHRnet is not actively followed nor considered to be a useful resource.

Impact
- **Networks directly influence SDC project/strategy development and increased soft knowledge** – SDC staff reported concrete influence of networks when expertise was provided for developing new projects or strategies. They also report an increase in connection, support and knowledge because of the networks' products and services, generally stating that this improved their quality of work without providing many specific examples.
- **Partners concretely apply knowledge gained from networks** – Those partners that were members of SDC networks felt they were effective in supporting their work and were able to quickly provide examples of concrete knowledge they gained from the network to help improve their quality of their work.
- **SCO staff share knowledge from external networks as well** – Most staff are members of non-SDC networks as well and, when relevant, they informally share knowledge gathered from those networks with other staff.
- **Active participation in network improves career** – One staff member observed that in recent years a few Swiss staff were selected for their current positions around the world in part because of their active involvement in a network.
- **Regional connections** – Participants felt that the socio-political similarities and ease of language are critical for meaningful exchanges within the networks.
- **International connections** – Although participants are interested in strengthening regional connections, they also feel that a less extensive international connection should continue.

Sustainability
- **Strengthening linkages with universities in the region** – The SCO is building stronger linkages with universities in the region to access local expertise. It was suggested that they should be brought into regional networks to strengthen the network and increase local or regional capacity.

- **Strengthen linkages with Swiss universities** – Increasing linkages to Swiss universities through the networks was suggested as a way to increase expertise within the network and to broaden understanding in Switzerland about SDC's work.

		Mission to Nicaragua 25-29.3.2014 **Judith Kallick** **COSUDE Thematic Networks Evaluation**	
			29.03.2014
Date	**Time**	**Activities**	**Comments**
Tuesday 25.3.2014	19:15	Arrive in flight AA 993	Transfer to Hotel Los Robles
Wednesday 26.3.2014	7:45	Transfer hotel-Cooperation Office	
	8:00-9:30	**Marilaure Crettaz**, Thematic Regional Adviser COSUDE	Cooperation Office
	10:00-11:00	**Andreas Gerrits,** Deputy Director of Cooperation COSUDE	Cooperation Office
	11:00-12:00	Reserva	
	12:30-13:30	Lunch	
	14:00-15:00	**Carmen Alvarado**, National Programme Officer COSUDE	Cooperation Office
	15:00-16:00	**María Antonia Zelaya**, National Programme Officer COSUDE	Cooperation Office
	16:00-17:00	**Urs Hagnauer**, Operational Director Water and Sanitation Programme COSUDE	Cooperation Office
	17:30	Transfer OfCo-hotel	
Thursday 27.3.2014	7:45	Transfer hotel-Cooperation Office	
	8:00-9:00	**Jose Luis Sandino**, National Programme Officer COSUDE	Cooperation Office
	9:30-10:30	Reserva	
	11:00-12:00	**Ivan Rodríguez,** (Swisscontact). Regional Head of Project: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development in Rural Areas (PYMERURAL)	Vía skype or telephone
	12:00-13:30	Lunch	
	14:00-15:30	**Carmen Pong**, Water and Sanitation Regional Head of Project (AGUASAN) and **Virginia Cordero**, Apoyo a Inversiones Municipales Head of Project COSUDE	Project's Office
	16:00-17:00	**Carlos Pérez**, National Programme Officer UNDP (Climate Change)	UNDP's Office
	18:00	Transfer hotel	

Date	Time	Activities	Comments
Friday 28.3.2014	7:30 AM	Transfer hotel-Cooperation Office	
	7:45-8:15	**Fabrizio Poretti**, Deputy Director COSUDE/ Humanitarian Affairs	Cooperation Office
	8:30-9:20	**María Auxiliadora Briones,** Fundación para el Desarrollo Tecnológico Agropecuario y Forestal de Nicaragua.	FUNICA Office
	9:30-10:30	**Estela Alemán**, Coordinadora Técnica Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE)	CATIE
	11:00-12:00	**Manuel Ulloa** – Coordinador de Proyectos, **Ismael Alonso** – Administrador Financiero Defensa Civil	Oficina Defensa Civil
	12:30-13:00	Lunch	
	13:00-14:00	**Hubert Eisele**, Regional Director of Cooperation COSUDE	Cooperation Office
	15:00-16:00	**Duval Llaguno**, Natural Resources Senior Specialist IADB	IADB Office
	16:00-17:00	**Monchita Rodríguez**, Universidad Nacional de Nicaragua's Vice Rector	Universidad Nacional de Nicaragua
	17:30	Transfer to hotel	
Saturday 29.3.2014	05:15	Transfer to airport	COSUDE's driver

Annex 4: Benin Country Case Study

AIDE MEMOIRE: BENIN
7-9 April 2014

This Aide Memoire provides a summary of key findings from the mission of Patrick Breard to Cotonou during 7-9 April 2014. The purpose of the mission was to inform the evaluation on SDC's thematic networks illustrated through the role of the thematic networks in country and regional operations and the role of the knowledge generated at country and regional levels in the thematic networks.

I.   Background

West Africa faces problems relating to demographic development, food insecurity, economic and institutional weaknesses as well as poor management of public affairs. All these factors are serious obstacles to sustainable development. Against this backdrop, the SDC is pursuing its goal of poverty reduction in its priority countries Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It is concentrating its efforts on the areas of basic education/professional training and rural development/local economies. It supports processes of public affairs management at the communal level.

Within its projects in West Africa the SDC gives preference to inclusive partnerships with all the actors working in the fields of local regional and international development. Public bodies, NGOs, civil society, donors and the private sector are among its main partners. The SDC attaches importance to this experience and takes part in the political dialogue to strengthen reform efforts and innovative measures that in the region according to need.

II.   Overview of SDC Country Strategy

For the period 2013-2016 SDC strategy in Benin focuses on three themes:

- **Decentralization and local governance:** The SDC supports the Benin government's efforts to decentralize state structures. The aim is to bring government closer to citizens and to meet their needs more effectively by improving the quality of services.
- **Rural economic development:** Creating income-generating jobs. The SDC wants family-run farms to increase their production in order to boost the country's food security and foster the emergence of other economic sectors that create jobs in rural areas. To this end, it is committed to the modernization of family-run farms and collaborates with farmers' organizations.
- **Basic education and vocational education and training:** Offering alternatives to those excluded from the school system The SDC is committed to an inclusive education that gives everyone a chance. Thanks to its efforts, children, young people and adults who have been unable to attend school or who have received insufficient schooling acquire skills that not only enable them to find jobs that provide an income, but also to exercise their citizenship.

In addition, Swiss development cooperation in Benin works on two transversal themes:

- **Gender**: To increase economic, social and political autonomy of women to fight poverty;
- **Good governance**: To improve social and economic frameworks by strengthening the principles of good governance such as transparency, non-discrimination, citizens' participation, accountability, rule of law, and by fighting corruption.

Several complementary themes are also taken into account in SDC programmatic work in Benin:

- **Climate change adaptation**;
- **Green economy**;
- **Migration**;
- **Culture**.

A number of regional and global thematic programs are also implemented in Benin in the areas of:

- **Decentralization and local governance;**
- **Rural economic development;**
- **Basic education and vocational education and training;**
- **Food security;**
- **Migration and Development.**

III.   Resources
SDC provides the vast majority of Swiss bilateral investment in Benin.

Swiss Cooperation Budget by Source

	2011 (millions CHF)	2012 (millions CHF)	2013 (millions CHF)	Projected 2014-2016 (millions CHF)
SDC				
Bilateral development cooperation	8.49	17.44	15.26	
Humanitarian Aid	0.12	0.18	0.09	
SECO	-	-	-	
Other Federal Offices	-	-	0.02	
Cantons & Municipalities	0.51	0.76	**	
Total	9.12	18.38	15.37	20-21 per year

SDC figures excluding program contributions to Swiss NGOs; ** = figures not available | – = nil or amount < 5'000 CHF

Swiss Cooperation Budget by Domain

	Projected 2013-2016 (millions CHF)
Rural economic development	26
Basic Education and Vocational Education	25
Local Governance and Decentralization	14
Other	9
SCO	7
Total	81

IV.   Office Structure
Swiss development cooperation with Benin began with a series of bilateral agreements, including a technical cooperation agreement that was signed in 1981. Switzerland subsequently opened a cooperation office in Cotonou in 1983. The Swiss Cooperation Office in Benin is attached to the Swiss Embassy in Accra, Ghana, and provides services for SDC and the consulate.

The SCO in Benin has a large office with 42 staff (in 2012), including five international staff of which two are Regional Advisors.

V.   SDC Networks
SCO staff participates in a number of different networks, both internationally and regionally, to meet work expectations, broaden their knowledge and increase Swiss impact.

SDC thematic networks relevant to Benin:
- Agriculture and Food Security
- Climate Change and the Environment
- Decentralization and Local Governance
- Employment and Income and M4P
- Education
- Migration
- Gender
- Water and sanitation

SDC regional thematic networks:
These networks are considered as sub-networks of SDC thematic networks. They have been developed for various themes such as gender, A+FS, education, local governance and decentralization. Regional networks organize face to face events, peer reviews and study visits, email / electronic networks exchanges such as commenting on project documents and TORs, sharing CVs of consultants, etc.

External networks and initiatives relevant to Benin:
- **RESAO:** Réseau Afrique de l'Ouest pour la protection des enfants - West Africa Network for the Protection of Children.
- **National technical committees (thematic working groups or round tables):** Plateau Technique Finance with a number of working groups on different themes such as water, education, macro-economics and public finance management, private sector, etc. They meet once a month to prepare technical notes and comments which are then discussed by the heads of the agencies and the Government. Some of these groups have up to 50 members. They remain in contact through email networks between meetings.

VI.   Key Findings
The following are a summary of key findings according to the general categories of the evaluation matrix including in the Inception Report.

Relevance
- **SDC thematic networks are useful**, they contribute to sharpen SDC in house expertise on the given themes both for country strategy and programs and participate in the development of SDC policy positions –Education and the post-2015 agenda-. They are also useful mechanisms to provide access to information and learn from other SCOs. Without them it would be like working in isolation.
- National networks / working groups / fora are more important in the daily work of the SCO because they occupy more of SDC staff time, are often directly related with SDC programs and are part of SDC policy dialogue with the government.
- SDC thematic networks (both at global and regional scale) have the objective of learning, sharing, inspiring, sharpen expertise in house. Comparatively, they occupy less time than national networks.

- Participation in national networks / collaborative platforms / working groups tends to be prioritized over regional networks, which are in turn prioritized over SDC thematic networks.
- **Regional networks** tend to be very active and are perceived as **highly relevant and useful**. They allow sharing practical information and engaging participants in concrete collaborations. Simultaneously, regional networks do not necessarily have a budget and enough capacities. Activities such as webinars, teleconferences, more active Dgroups could be considered.
- Nevertheless, there is a **lack of vision** when it comes to the networks and knowledge sharing at SDC. The overall importance of the networks within SDC should be clarified. SDC expectations vis-à-vis the networks should be spelled out.
- Networks are **not results-oriented** enough. They do not have a precise project charter with a specific results framework, objectives, targets and indicators. Some of them do not even have a work plan. Furthermore there is no on-going monitoring of their outcomes –e.g. results of a F2F 6 months later-.
- SDC could eventually **revisit the thematic coverage** and **sharpen the focus** of some networks -for instance E+I / Vocational education vs. the Education network, or C/HR and DLGN-. The evaluation team should make recommendations for SDC to address what staff and external partners perceive as thematic incoherencies which are not fully understood.
- Some networks attached to the regional cooperation –e.g. Education, Health- have started to embrace global agendas, contribute to global conferences, support the work of multilateral agencies, etc. SDC should discuss if they should not become global networks.
- Some staff perceives that SDC thematic networks attached to the global cooperation have greater capacities and global reach than when attached to a regional division and that it can impede the opportunities to scale up good practices and replicate programs in other regions. On a related note suggestions were made for SDC to have the capability to revisit, as needed, the attachment of a network to a division or another.

Effectiveness/ Efficiency
- Any assessment of the networks should consider that **not all networks are the same**. Some receive better comments than others. Networks are differently active, from up to 10 messages a day on E+I to a dormant Dgroups for Migration and Development.
- Partners find that SDC provides **adequate feedback** on thematic issues although they tend to perceive SDC's comparative advantage in the area of policy dialog rather than on thematic expertise.
- Overall it is found that the **quality** of the networks has improved over time, although no baseline or indicator is available to precisely assess the change.
- There is a competition between networks to attract attention and staff time. The percentage of time to commit to the thematic networks is an objective that becomes an issue for senior staff who would prefer this objective to be removed from their terms of reference. Basically the **roles and responsibilities** towards the networks have not been disaggregated or specified enough, which creates undue expectations for some staff. Committing time to the networks –and to knowledge sharing and to thematic development- should not necessarily involve the same activities and same time commitment for junior, mid-level, and senior staff. Senior managers may have a greater role to play at incentivizing network participation than to directly participate, while mid-level staff may have a greater role to play at sharing technical knowledge, and junior staff at sharing thematic updates about local activities.

- The **multiplication of networks** –global and sub-regional, as well as thematic- is a **challenge**. It is sometimes felt that the number of networks should be reduced, which is a complex topic as networks are only there to support SDC existing theme coverage. But there are thematic overlaps between networks which do not seem to be entirely coordinated.
- Besides the addition of a regional component / working day in the global F2F, there are **no clear processes or guidelines** to facilitate an on-going integration between the global and regional networks and enable smooth knowledge exchanges between global and regional levels and vice versa.
- The process to involve **Focal Points at HQ** is unclear and could be further detailed. Are Networks Focal Points systematically involved in reviewing the "Program Idea and Entry Proposal" when they are part of another division or does the consultation stop with the "focal points" of the division originating the program? Further, there is some ambiguity in SDC procedures about the type / scope of involvement of networks stated as "Network consultation and quality control". Should all the network members be consulted, or only a few of them, or just the FP? Is it following a well-defined and standard process or is it ad hoc and depends on personal proximity between actors? Are networks "institutional counseling bodies" that provide systematically thematic advice or not? It seems that a few years ago this question has been denied.
- Global networks are **not enough demand oriented**. They do not perform regular needs assessment except, for some of them, during the global F2F. In general networks are perceived to be too much top-down.
- Greater coordination between global F2F and sub-regional events could eventually be considered in order to have less F2F but with a stronger regional component, e.g. by organizing a longer F2F to fit regional consultations in its last days. However, this would bear the risk to have fewer local partners involved in these events.
- **Peer advisory missions, evaluations conducted by network members, and study visits** are the preferred and perceived most effective means to share and gain knowledge, advise other countries and programs, and ultimately increase the effectiveness and results of SDC. Such direct face-to-face networking modalities could be more clearly supported at the institutional level.
- On a close token, network members could be more systematically involved when national programs are being formulated, for instance by being invited during the program design and validation workshops.
- The networks are not sufficiently promoted. Some SDC staffs are not member of any network and unclear about how to join. Similarly, some external partners are member of one SDC network but do not know how to join others. The K&LP function has not been fully cascaded at SCO level. No training has been provided on Knowledge Management / Knowledge Sharing and networking at the national level.
- Linkages between networks / knowledge sharing and **Communications** could eventually be further maximized. Networks produce and disseminate newsletters that could be a platform for further sharing what is being done at the national level. Communications staff may be interested in becoming a focal point for Knowledge Management and networks, e.g. to present the networks to new comers, link communications with networks products, etc.
- **Language** is a **constraint**, especially when exchanges tend to be thorough and quite formal such as with e-discussions. Consequently contributions to global networks may not be as frequent as they could. Leveraging regional networks is easier due to the absence of a language barrier and due to proximity and mutual trust between members that these networks have installed.

- Some staff also indicates that SDC networks strategy could be more specific and action oriented when it comes to tapping or leveraging **external networks** to advocate positions and showcase the work which is performed by the agency.

Impact
- Networks have increased thematic **learning** and **broaden the range of options** that can be considered when designing or implementing a program. For instance:
  - A peer visit organized in Burkina Faso under the aegis of a regional network has helped to observe that community radios –which have been a component of SDC projects in Benin for a long time-, broadcast city hall meetings. This is beneficial in terms of public transparency and accountability and this practice is now being considered for replication in Benin.
  - A peer review mission in Chad has observed that some projects involve specialists of the Koran to discuss with local chiefs and religious leaders and demonstrate that marrying girls at 12 and putting them out of school is not in the Koran. This approach is being considered for the gender program in Benin.
  - The DLG F2F in Mozambique in 2013 featured Social Accountability as a theme. Although work had been already done by SDC on this area, this has helped to plan a visit to Mozambique with a national partner in order to review and study the practical tenets of projects embedding Social Accountability as an area of work.
  - A training organized in Benin in 2013 by the regional DLG network covering the topic of pooling municipal resources for building shared infrastructures has flagged a number of good practices and issues which are now reflected in relevant projects (e.g. contain the number of partners).

- The networks have shared **practices / ideas** that are now reused in programmatic work, for instance:
  - The farmer field school methodology to perform agricultural extension / training work has been mainstreamed in rural economic development projects.
  - External partners indicate that *Making Markets Work for the Poor* (M4P) is an approach that has been successfully rolled out and is now effectively leveraged to strengthen projects design, inclusiveness, and sustainability.
  - A gender F2F has been useful for external partners to learn on gender manipulation in the context of micro credit activities. Some practices or proposed alternatives are now being integrated in projects implemented by external partners.

- The networks have developed or contributed to develop **tools** and guidelines which have been used or are referred in project design and implementation, for instance:
  - Guidelines (known as "voluntary guidelines") on land management developed with FAO are now used as reference materials in relevant projects.
  - The stakeholder's analysis tool developed by the PED network has been used to assess power structures in villages and is now part of the body of knowledge of the staff.
  - The regional gender network has elaborated minimum standards for gender programs in 2011 and subsequently contributed to strengthen the capacity of local actors to adopt them.
  - Guidelines to measure education results and facilitate the selection of indicators in education projects.

- The networks have developed or contributed to develop **policies**, for instance:
  - Post-2015 position paper for education.
  - In progress: post-2015 position paper for gender.

- The networks have helped to inform **programmatic** work, for instance:
  - A regional network meeting in 2010 on alternative education for pastoral populations resulted in an advocacy paper presented in a global conference and subsequently in partners designing a pilot program implemented in 5 cross boundary areas of the region.

Sustainability
- Institutional set-up varies and global programs are provided more resources to operate the networks. Some staffs indicate that networks have **little financial resources** to operate, for instance when comparing the resources allocated to the networks with the overall budget of the SDC. Backstopping support for the networks is sometimes found to be too limited and to be increased. This should question the extent to which networks and thematic capacities are a priority at SDC.
- Simultaneously, the primary constraint is not necessarily about financial resources but about the **time** staffs have to commit to the networks compared to other operational tasks such as program management. This also questions the priority of the networks and the one of a thematic excellence in SDC. Such constraints should also consider the percentage of time that FP or core group members can effectively commit to the networks.
- **Thematic career tracks** are not yet available for every theme which creates some uncertainties for some about their professional development prospects and the importance that SDC devotes to thematic expertise and quality. Salary increases are not the same for international management staff and international thematic staff which may make the latter path less attractive in the long run.
- Not all of the staffs have the networks referred in their terms of reference and annual objectives. Managers are not accountable for the results of the staff vis-à-vis the networks. SDC leadership does not clearly communicate on the importance and commitment to the networks. SDC's expectations vis-à-vis the networks should be clarified.
- Rules for networks **membership** are not very clear or not specific enough. Participation in networks appears sometimes to be conditioned to management agreement. Staffs do not necessarily distinguish between membership in a primary and secondary network(s) with different types of involvement and responsibilities.

Evaluation des Réseaux Thématiques de la DDC
Mission Bureau du Bénin
Programme des consultations - Patrick Breard

	Lundi 7 avril 2014	Mardi 8 avril 2014	Mercredi 9 avril 2014
8h00-8h30	Bruno Poitevin, Directeur Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, ONG mandataire / partenaire à Haie Vive		
8h30-9h00	Bruno Poitevin, Directeur		
9h00-9h30	Transfer au bureau de la coopération suisse (rue du PNUD)	Mr. Salihou Mamadou Alidou, Chargé de Programme	Mme Fiaux Mary-Luce, Conseillère Régionale Éducation/Formation professionnelle
9h30-10h00		Mr. Salihou Mamadou Alidou, Chargé de Programme	Mme Fiaux Mary-Luce, Conseillère Régionale Éducation/Formation professionnelle
10h00-10h30	Briefing avec toute l'équipe	Mr. Dadjo Eric, Chargé de Programme	Mme Fiaux Mary-Luce, Conseillère Régionale Éducation/Formation professionnelle
10h30-11h00		Mr. Dadjo Eric, Chargé de Programme	
11h00-11h30		Mme Donnet-Descartes Séverine, Directrice Résidente Suppléante	
11h30-12h00		Mme Donnet-Descartes Séverine, Directrice Résidente Suppléante	ONG Brücke – Le pont (Bénin et Togo M. Gabriel Batawila Téléphone au +228 90 05 35 10
12h00-12h30		Mme Donnet-Descartes Séverine, Directrice Résidente Suppléante	ONG Brücke – Le pont (Bénin et Togo M. Gabriel Batawila Téléphone au +228 90 05 35 10
12h30-13h00	Repas avec Zbinden Simon	Repas de midi	Repas de midi
13h00-13h30	Repas avec Zbinden Simon	Repas de midi	Repas de midi
13h30-14h00	Mr. Oumow Serge, Conseiller régional Migration et Développement	Repas de midi	Repas de midi
14h00-14h30	Mr. Oumow Serge, Conseiller régional Migration et Développement	Mr. Lalèyè Babalola Gérard, Chargé de Programme	
14h30-15h00		Mr. Lalèyè Babalola Gérard, Chargé de Programme	

	Lundi 7 avril 2014	**Mardi 8 avril 2014**	**Mercredi 9 avril 2014**
15h00-15h30	Mme Agossou Codjia Blandine, Chargée de Programme	Union de gestion des partenariats / PASDER Mme Ouorou N'Gobi Sonsonna Agathe, Chargée de programme, localisée à Parakou – téléphone de Cotonou sur 97 63 60 64	Mr. Markus Eggenberger – Conseiller regional, DDC Mali
15h30-16h00	Mme Agossou Codjia Blandine, Chargée de Programme	Union de gestion des partenariats / PASDER Mme Ouorou N'Gobi Sonsonna Agathe, Chargée de programme, localisée à Parakou – téléphone de Cotonou	Mr. Markus Eggenberger – Conseiller regional, DDC Mali
16h00-16h30	Mr. Tonoukouin Serge Camille Mensah, Chargé de Programme (se trouve actuellement en suisse pour un f2f santé -> téléphone de Cotonou)	Union de gestion des partenariats / PASDER M. Jacques Essou Messanh Directeur de l'UGP, localisée à Parakou – téléphone de Cotonou sur 95420247	
16h30-17h00			Compte rendu verbal de la mission avec l'équipe opérationnel
17h00-17h30	Mme Bouraïma Moudjibatou, Chargée de Communication	Mr. Virchaux Jean-Luc, Directeur Résident	Compte rendu verbal de la mission avec l'équipe opérationnel
17h30-18h00		Mr. Virchaux Jean-Luc, Directeur Résident	

Annex 5: Kyrgyzstan Country Case Study

AIDE MEMOIRE: KYRGYZSTAN
1-4 April 2014

Preamble

This Aide Memoire provides a summary of key findings from the mission of Lene Poulsen to Bishkek during 1-4 April 2014. The purpose of the mission was to inform the independent evaluation on SDC's thematic networks about the role of the thematic networks in country and regional operations and the role of the knowledge generated at country and regional levels in the thematic networks. The Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO) – Swiss Embassy in Kyrgyzstan is one of three SCO cases used to inform the evaluation.

I would like to thank the whole staff of the SCO in Kyrgyzstan for organizing the mission and ensuring a program that allowed interviews with a broad range of network stakeholders during a very condense program. The welcome and support from the SCO staff is very much appreciated. Moreover, I would like to express my appreciation to the many resource persons I met during the mission for taking their time to share their experience and perceptions about thematic networks and knowledge management in development cooperation. Your contributions and support are invaluable for the evaluation.

I.   Background

1.   In order to respond to the increased complexity of the international cooperation agenda, the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) underwent a major reorganization in the late 2000s. The objectives of the reorganization, which was launched in 2008, were defined in terms of a single Swiss development policy strategy that would effectively address global challenges and provide practical solutions to problems in the South and East. Moreover, the reorganization should further maximum use of SDC's extensive expertise and experience while increasing the collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and other federal agencies. Finally, the reorganization should allow a greater focus on decentralization to SDC's cooperation offices.

2.   Some of the major challenges identified in the former SDC organizational structure included too little coordination between bilateral, multilateral and thematic activities with different departments pursuing different strategies and too many and poorly coordinated domains. The restructured proposal led to a more streamlined organizational setup with four operational and totally reorganized domains instead of the former six domains:

- Global Cooperation Domain: policies addressing global challenges to have greater policy influence in international processes addressing global public risks. The domain is also responsible for knowledge management for the entire organization;
- Regional Cooperation Domain: regional and national cooperation strategies and programs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and Caribbean;
- East Cooperation Domain: regional and national strategies and programs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; and
- Humanitarian Aid Domain: disaster risk management, including preparation and response to emergencies.

3.   With the reorganization, the former thematic and technical resources department (F) was abolished and replaced by a network structure, including 12 thematic networks.[2] The

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[2] Agriculture and Food Security (A&FS), Climate Change and Environment (CC&E), Conflicts & Human Rights (C&HR), Decentralization and Local Governance (DLGN), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Education,

goal of the network structure is to enhance operational relevance, utility, and utilization of technical knowledge at both policy and operational levels. To ensure full integration of the thematic areas into the policy and operational activities the responsibility for the thematic networks is placed under the heads of units (theme managers) in the four operational domains but with organization-wide coverage. The daily management of the networks is ensured by focal points supported by a group of core members and external backstoppers. In principle, the members of the networks are all SDC staff with thematic responsibilities whether they work at headquarters or in SCOs. In addition, some of the 12 networks include implementing partners, such as Swiss NGOs among its members.

4. To assess he performance of the thematic networks as an organizational strategy and structure vis-à-vis the overall goals and priorities of SDC, an external evaluation has been commissioned by SDC. The mandate defines the focus of the evaluation in terms of:
  • Function and contribution of the networks,
  • Role, costs and benefits,
  • Benchmarking with other network-based organizations, and
  • Learning and transfer of knowledge.

5. The evaluation was launched in January 2014. It is informed by various means and sources including review of background documentation, interviews with network stakeholders (SDC management, theme managers, focal points, core members, regular members, network support staff/backstoppers, and partners), background survey on the structure and activities of the 12 networks, and an online survey among network members on their perceptions of the role and impact of the networks. Moreover, three Swiss Cooperation Offices (SCOs) have been visited to inform the evaluation: Benin, Kyrgyzstan, and Nicaragua. The objective of the visits to the SCOs is to provide concrete cases on the role of SDC's thematic networks in the country/regional operations and the role of the knowledge generated at country/regional level in the thematic networks. As such, the evaluation uses the three SCOs as illustrations. This also implies that the evaluation does not assess the SCOs as such. This Aide Memoires therefore focuses on general findings and lessons-learned in Kyrgyzstan relating to the actual and potential interactions of the SCO with the thematic.

6. The visit to the SCO in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan took place from 1 to 4 April 2014 and included interviews with Office Management, program officers, and partners: Kyrgyz government partners, Swiss NGO partners, Kyrgyz NGOs, and other development partners. Moreover, the SDC desk officer for Kyrgyzstan was interviewed. A list of resource persons interviewed is attached in annex. The focus of the interviews was knowledge generation and sharing, knowledge management, thematic advise, thematic quality assurance, and networking in general.

II.   Introduction: Swiss Cooperation with Kyrgyzstan
7. Swiss Cooperation with Central Asia started in 1993 with Kyrgyzstan who had joined the Swiss-led voting group at the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development shortly after its independence in 1991. Since 1993, total Swiss ODA to Kyrgyzstan has amounted to 292 million CHF. The first official cooperation agreement between Switzerland and Kyrgyzstan was signed in 1994 and the Swiss Cooperation Office in Bishkek opened in 1996. In 2012, Switzerland opened its first embassy in Kyrgyzstan. The ambassador is also the director of cooperation. For the last five years, Kyrgyzstan has been a shared priority country for

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Employment & Income (E&I), Gender, Health, Migration, Political Economy and Development PED (active until June 2014), and Water.

SDC and SECO with a single country strategy co-produced by the two agencies. Likewise, reporting follows a single set of country results.

8.   In spite of good economic growth rates over the last decade, Kyrgyzstan remains one of the poorest countries in the region, with a per capita GNI of USD 920 in 2011. Absolute poverty has increased lately, moving from 33 percent in 2010 to 37 percent in 2011. Kyrgyzstan is considered a fragile country, and governance is a significant issue. Switzerland has therefore used a conflict sensitive program management approach (CSPM) when designing and implementing its programs in Kyrgyzstan. The country program focuses on three core domains: health (20% of Swiss funding), public sector reforms (44%), and infrastructure and private sector development (26%). SDC engages in all three domains, while SECO focuses on public sector reforms and infrastructure and private sector development.   80 percent of Swiss aid is delivered as project type interventions, 8 percent as sector budget support (no general budget support), and 3 percent as core support to NGOs. This split is mirrored at the aggregate level across all donors, with a limited amount of budget support provided to the government.

Domain 1: Health	Domain 2: Public sector reform and infrastructure	Domain 3: Private sector development
Objectives		
Ensure equitable access and improve quality of health services delivered countrywide, with a focus on rural areas	Increase equitable access for citizens to services through transparent and efficient use of public resources	Strengthen PSD, which leads to job creation, economic growth and ultimately poverty reduction
Thematic Focus		
Health Governance Gender Environment	Governance Gender	SME Governace Gender Environment
Projects		
Budget support to the health sector reform; Community Action for Health; Health care waste management; Medical education; Health provider autonomy.	Public finance management reform; Financial sector development; Legal assistance to rural citizens; Voice and accountability; Water and wastewater rehabilitation; Public utilities coaching; Hydropower plant rehabilitation.	Financial markets; Investment climate; Trade promotion; Business advisory; Housing microfinance; Organic cotton production and trade; SME development in rural areas

9.   In addition, the SCO in Kyrgyzstan supports peace building, regional water management; and regional arts and culture.
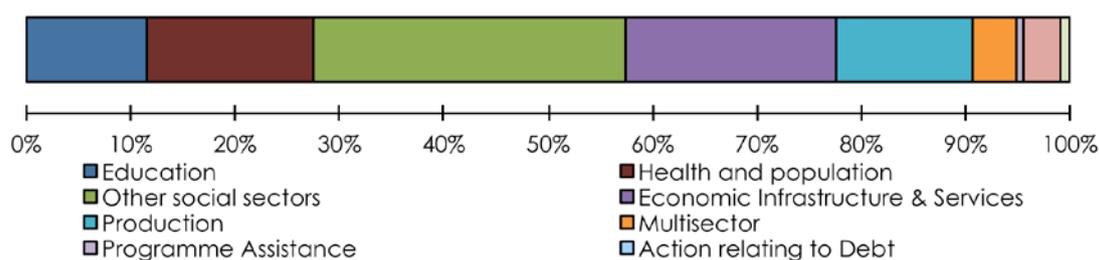
10. As can be seen in the following 'Aid at a Glance' from OECD, Swiss development cooperation is the 10th most important in terms of monetary ODA to Kyrgyzstan. Within Swiss aid, Kyrgyzstan received 2% of the overall ODA in 2012 and constituted the 14th most important recipient country of Swiss ODA in monetary terms.

Receipts	2010	2011	2012
Net ODA (USD million)	380	525	473
Bilateral share (gross ODA)	56%	45%	54%
Net ODA / GNI	8.5%	9.3%	7.8%
Net Private flows (USD million	23	15	12

For reference	2010	2011	2012
Population (million)	5.4	5.5	5.6
GNI per capita (Atlas USD)	840	900	990

Top Ten Donors of gross ODA (2011-12 average)		(USD m)
1	AsDB Special Funds	94
2	Turkey	90
3	IDA	77
4	United States	61
5	EU Institutions	31
6	IMF (Concessional Trust Fur	30
7	Germany	29
8	Russia	25
9	Japan	25
10	Switzerland	23

Bilateral ODA by Sector (2011-12)

Legend:
- Education
- Health and population
- Other social sectors
- Economic Infrastructure & Services
- Production
- Multisector
- Programme Assistance
- Action relating to Debt

Sources: OECD - DAC, World Bank; www.oecd.org/dac/stats

11. Kyrgyzstan was one of the two case countries reviewed for the 2013 OECD/DAC Peer Review of Swiss development cooperation.[3] The review noted among others that:

- SDC and SECO are well coordinated in Kyrgyzstan. However, coordination with other federal agencies could be improved. It was noted for instance that there was limited coordination with the activities of the Federal Office of the Environment and that SCO strategies only apply to SDC and SECO and that environment is not a priority issue in the SCO strategies;
- The level of decentralization varies between SECO and SDC, which has some impact on the efficiency and scope of the work of the SCO staff and the coordinated approach;
- Gender is a new crosscutting issue for SECO under the 2013-16 Dispatch. SECO could benefit from SDC guidance on gender equality mainstreaming;
- Programming choices are evidence-based thanks to Switzerland's solid knowledge of country context and with a clear priority to the poorest regions and people. However, Swiss ODA is spread thinly across several small projects and programs, e.g., in Kyrgyzstan there were 25 projects and programs planned, ranging in expenditure from CHF 25 000 to CHF 3.9 million, in 2013; and
- The donor community has a long tradition for working together in Kyrgyzstan and Switzerland actively and efficiently supports aid coordination, including joint assessments with other development partners. Partners praise Switzerland's long-term commitment to cooperation in Kyrgyzstan and the focus on capacity development of local partners.

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[3] OECD/DAC (2014) "OECD Development Co-operation Peer Review: Switzerland 2013" Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris

III.   Differences and similarities between SDC and SECO

12. As staff are recruited to the SCO to cover different thematic areas, many will work for both SDC and SECO projects. The very different level of decentralization between SECO and SDC has direct impact on the role of national program officers (NPOs) in project management and the backstopping they receive. However it should also be noted that since 2010 SECO has started piloting the drafting of credit proposals at SCO levels and it is expected that such procedures will be formalized in the future.

13. Staff working for SECO projects will receive training in Bern, which allows creation of informal networks with colleagues from other countries and headquarters. These informal networks are useful for support for instance to identification of consultants. Moreover, the close and frequent contact with SECO HQ allows for a smooth access to SECO technical experts; e.g., technical experts from SECO Bern will visit SCO annually for monitoring/backstopping purposes and program officers in the field will have weekly teleconferences with thematic staff at SECO HQ. SECO also facilitates exchange visits of NPOs among countries, which again strengthen their informal networks.

IV.   Findings on the SCO and the thematic networks

14. The following presents a summary of the general findings from the data collection on the relationship between of the SCO Kyrgyzstan and the thematic networks. The findings are based on interviews with resource persons in Kyrgyzstan, the desk officer for Kyrgyzstan in SDC Bern, and review of background documents such as annual reports and project documents. After a short introduction to findings on the participation of SCO staff in the thematic networks, the findings are presented as they relate to the evaluation criteria of the Evaluation of SDC's thematic networks: Relevance, Efficiency/Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability, and Lessons Learned.   More detailed information about the evaluation criteria for the Evaluation of SDC's thematic networks, including evaluation questions and indicators can be found in the Inception Report for the Evaluation.

Participation in Thematic Networks

a) SCO management assigns program officers to participate in SDC's thematic networks while ensuring that all relevant thematic networks are covered by a primary staff member and a backup member. In principle, each program officer will be member of at least one network.   During the annual reviews of personal performance, the workload of individual staff members is reviewed, which might result in redistribution of the network memberships. This was for instance the case for the membership of the gender network that was transferred in 2012 from one NPO to another. Since gender in terms of logic can easily be considered part of the quality assurance mandate at the SCO, the NPO in charge of quality assurance easily accepted to take over the functions as gender contact person at the office and as such member of the Gender Equality Network.

b) Management has been discussing how best to make network participation part of the goals and annual planning in the MoBs,[4] e.g., by including objectives and expected results of network participation in line with suggestions from the Knowledge and Learning Partnership (K&LP) division (November, 2013).   However, the idea is questioned by the staff in terms of feasibility and it would require substantial reflections and specific training to make it effective in the new MoBs.

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[4] Management by Objectives - former MAPs - personal performance agreement)

Relevance

a) The concept of thematic networks and the structure that was established during the reorganization offers good potential for thematic support to the SCOs. However, the means still need to be developed to ensure that the structure will work as planned.

b) When the thematic networks are used for specific support, it will typically be for identification of experts / consultants based on specific requests. This will usually be based on communication between the Focal Points and the SCO through the Desk Officer for Kyrgyzstan in Bern and the networks as such will not necessarily be mobilized or directly involved. It should be noted, though, that there is no clear differentiation between the different roles the focal points usually have: network focal point and thematic advisor or manager. So while the desk officer / the SCO might refer to requests to the focal points it might in fact rather be the same person but in the capacity as thematic advisor that will respond. There will generally be a quick feedback to requests for experts / consultants but it was also noted that the suggested experts are typically well-known. As such, they will be proven experts with good knowledge and understanding of SDC functioning. But the process might exclude identification of experts that individual network members might know.

c) There is a good pool of national consultants in Kyrgyzstan, including specialists in public sector reforms and the health sector, which are among the priority domains for the SCO. These national consultants generally combine a high technical expertise, good local understanding, and good knowledge of international cooperation. Moreover, many programs are backstopped by an international consultancy, which provides a good level of thematic quality assurance. This might limit the relevance of the thematic networks for identification of experts and even knowledge and experience and the relevance and need of the networks as knowledge brokers for SCO staff can be questioned. When in need, program officers will typically use Internet search engines to find technical / scientific information or use local partners, regional specialist groups, and international partners in Kyrgyzstan such as the World Bank and bilateral donors. Likewise, the donor coordination offers good platforms for exchange of experience and sources for knowledge.

d) The documents developed in the framework of some of the networks are considered to be of good quality. However, their direct usefulness at field level is questioned by some staff members. Still there seems to be a difference in the perception of the relevance of the thematic networks among newer and more experienced SCO staff. For many young and/or recently recruited program officers, the networks and particularly the ShareWeb offers a good overview of technical information in the specific areas. While the network newsletters in principle should offer similar opportunities, SCO staff members question the relevance of the newsletters and few spend time on reading them in details.

e) The three priority domains of the Swiss development cooperation in Kyrgyzstan cut across several thematic networks. E.g., some of the health projects could also be seen as civil society or social development projects or local governance. But there is limited procedures offered by the thematic network structure for an integrated approach of several networks in support of the priority domains. This could be furthered, for instance, within a system where relevant networks would participate together in the planning and monitoring of the priority domains. At the SCO level this would involve members of the relevant thematic networks working together to develop a single plan of action, including monitoring for thematic network support/input. At HQ level this could involve, among others, joint participation of theme leaders and focal points (or regional 'substitutes') for relevant networks for developing a single plan of action for thematic network support.

f) The SCO recognizes the importance of DRR and Migration in Kyrgyzstan. E.g., it is estimated that around 20% of the population work as migrant workers, mainly in Russia and Kazakhstan. Moreover, there are more than 172,000 IDPs (including people living in IDP-like conditions in Kyrgyzstan (2013, UNHCR). Likewise, Kyrgyzstan is highly susceptible and vulnerable to natural disasters due to its location in a seismically active and mountainous region. Natural hazards often develop to disasters (earthquakes, flooding, mudslides, avalanches, droughts), partly because of limited state and local government capacities (UNISDR, 2010). However, the SCO has taken a clear position on focusing the country cooperation program and will cover DRR and migration as humanitarian responses if concrete needs develop. At the same time, it is understood that public sector reform and infrastructure programs will indirectly support disaster risk management and migration. Still, the SCO has decided not to be members of those networks.

Efficiency/Effectiveness

a) The SCO considers that the concept of the thematic networks and the structure for ensuring greater horizontal and vertical integration of thematic support is positive and the possibilities for communication with peers in other offices is good. However, the lack of integration of 'the real field' staff in the networks, i.e., staff working for partners implementing SCO projects leaves the current communication structure imperfect. Swiss development cooperation in Kyrgyzstan is highly respected for its technical quality level, innovativeness, adaptability, and flexibility. Many projects have developed interesting delivery models. However, such experiences are not necessarily fed back into the network. First of all, the mandates do not include specific budget lines for knowledge sharing and secondly, many of the thematic networks do mainly / exclusively have SDC staff as members. This means that implementing partners in Kyrgyzstan are not members of the relevant thematic networks.

b) The lack of mobilization of implementing partners in the thematic networks seems counterproductive to the purpose of the networks in horizontal and vertical knowledge sharing to improve the technical quality of projects in the field and feed expertise from the field back into SDC's policies and other operations. While NPOs have a good overall comprehension of the projects and programs they are managing, the implementing partners will have will have a much more field based understanding of the methodologies, approaches, practices, and lessons-learned in the individual projects based on their daily work at the implementation level. There have been discussions at some of the F2F meetings about the need to open the membership and involve implementing partners actively in the networks. However, there are several factors to consider, including the time required for active network membership of implementing partners. This challenge could be addressed by including networking explicitly in the mandates. Likewise, it will be needed to find a communication structure within the networks that will promote active participation of different stakeholders.

c) Most partners are unaware about the network structure although some of them have been invited to provide input of network newsletters and some network newsletters are being shared with the partners. However, the role of the networks as such is never discussed. Some partners noticed that that language can be an issue for full use of newsletters. On the other hand, partners remember participation in SDC thematic inter-country meetings in the past, i.e. before the 2008 reorganization. Both partners and SCO staff see these meetings as effective means for promoting knowledge sharing and institutional learning.

d) During discussions with partners and SCO staff, It was suggested that greater involvement of implementing partners, including government agencies, in the thematic networks would also allow a greater possibility for participating in peer exchanges and make greater use of lessons-learned and know-how generated in SDC funded projects.

e) When new staff starts at the SCO, they are normally given a couple of weeks to acquaint themselves with the SDC, the SCO, and their specific portfolio. The introduction will include reading through internal guidelines, annual plans, strategies, etc. Networks are mentioned in the introduction but there is no systematic introduction about the functioning of the specific networks, their objectives, and the responsibilities and opportunities of network members. This is particularly important considering the different procedures, functioning, and structure of the thematic networks.

f) Most NPOs have participated in face-to-face meetings of the thematic networks. However, there is a general office policy limiting travels for most national program officers to one annual travel abroad and face-to-face meetings will often compete with other travels, including participation in training events or peer exchange. Moreover, the workload of NPOs is significant and priorities have to be made because of time constraints and overlapping events, such as critical national program activities that happen to be organized at the same time as face-to-face meetings. In practice, this often means that participation in non-operational tasks such as network activities will tend to be given less priority than competing operational tasks. The general impression is that participation in face-to-face meetings are important for the SCO as it allows new inspirations and offer participants the possibility to focus on a limited number of subjects over the course of the meetings and thereby developing their knowledge. Eventually, the knowledge developed during the meetings will be translated into operational activities in one way or another and thus translated into institutional learning. To optimize the value of face-to-face participation it would be important to ensure a more systematized follow-up at the SCO level. Still, time constraints, the perceived relevance of the knowledge accumulated during the meeting, and the lack of tradition for systematic follow-up should be taken into account when addressing the options for post-meeting activities. Finally, it was noted that some staff feels that face-to-face meetings in Bern or its vicinity are useful, as this will allow to combine face-to-face participation with other meetings at SDC HQ.

g) The exact structure and functioning of the individual thematic networks and the differences among them is not clearly understood at the level of the NPOs and SECO staff. E.g., there seems to be an expectation that all the networks will have identical structures and that they function in the same manner, including membership criteria and policies for including non-SDC staff. Likewise, as most demands for input from the thematic networks will be addressed to the Focal Points (often through the desk officer as mentioned earlier), it is essential that Focal Points have a good comprehension of the specific local context. However, at SCO level it is felt that Focal Points do not necessarily have sufficient capacities and contextual knowledge to respond effectively to all requests. Moreover, in the case that other network members would be involved in the response they will often also have limited relevant contextual knowledge.

h) The desk officer plays a critical role in the communication between the SCO and HQ and often also between the SCO and the Focal Points / key network members, particularly during initial discussions. The formal role of the desk officer in the communication with the networks is not well defined though and in terms of resources they might have too limited time to follow all networks. The weekly meetings among desk officers, which allow exchange of what is going on, do rarely - if ever, make

references to the thematic networks. The desk officer visits the SCO at least once a year while thematic persons from the networks have more limited time available for country visits. Desk officers normally work in the position for about four years and generally have a good understanding of the countries they cover.

i) The many different contexts to be covered by the global thematic networks result in a number of challenges for sharing lessons-learned and general knowledge sharing. As a result, many network members advocate for regionalization of the thematic networks. The local governance network LoGIn was mentioned as a concrete example of a well-functioning SDC-sponsored regional network, e.g., the annual face-to-face meetings of LoGIn are excellent opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking among peers on issues of direct relevance for the SCO portfolio in Kyrgyzstan. Likewise, implementing partners have participated in LoGIn activities in the past and found the network activities relevant and useful for governance activities in Kyrgyzstan.

Impact
a) The Theory of Change of the networks is that national program officers will gain new ideas and knowledge by being part of the networks, which should lead to better and more sustainable projects and programs. In this way, the networks are critical for allowing decentralization work while still maintaining an organizational identity. Moreover, the network notion implies that staff feel more connected to the main organization; e.g., there will always be someone out there working on similar issues. However, some SDC staff question the assumption that staff will gain relevant and adaptable knowledge.

b) Overall, the impact of the thematic networks at the SCO level in Kyrgyzstan includes norms, guidelines, and policies developed by the networks, for instance the SDC health policy, guidelines on conflict sensitive program management, and guidelines on gender equality mainstreaming. These tools have facilitated the project and program development and implementation. Moreover, the face-to-face participations have allowed staff to increase their knowledge and access to general thematic information.

c) Still, the exact impact of this on the field level operations is limited because of the lack of integration of implementing partners in the networks and the limited perception of direct relevance of the networks for the work in Kyrgyzstan.

Sustainability[5]
a) From the SCO perspective the use and usefulness of the thematic networks and hence their sustainability depends first and foremost on the perceived value of the networks in terms of service providers, acting as competence centers / centers of excellency and their capacity to respond to concrete and operational demands from the field. If the value of the thematic networks will be perceived positively for the country programs in the future, their usefulness as management and operational tools would increase, and as such their actual use.

b) To promote a more integrated approach of the thematic networks there should be greater information on activities in the different thematic networks, for instance during weekly staff meetings.

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[5] The sustainability issue was addressed in terms of what should happen in terms of ensuring sustainability of the networks. It can thus also be seen as findings of what network stakeholders at the SCO see as critical for the thematic networks to be meaningful and thus sustainable or durable.

c) To facilitate the full use of the networks members would need to get a thorough introduction to the responsibilities and opportunities that comes with being a network member. This might include the need for training in network participation with proper attention to the differences in the functioning and structure of the 12 thematic networks. Moreover, new members need to have a good sense of what experience they can expect to draw on in the networks, e.g., whom can they address for specific subjects.

d) To promote active participation in the networks, the overall facilitation of the networks should be more structured, for instance with 'topic of the month' suggested by network members. This would furthermore improve network members' ownership of the networks, which is critical for active participation. Moreover, facilitation should pay more attention to promoting a dialogue around inputs. To avoid 'input inflation' where inputs get longer and longer and more and more academic in nature, the facilitation should also encourage shorter inputs and even consider a Twitter-like maximum.

e) Regional networks are more relevant and offer a number of opportunities for effective for effective thematic knowledge sharing, institutional learning, and technical advise through various tools including peer exchange and e-discussions in most common language. Moreover, regional networks would tend to be smaller and thus enabling a greater feeling of community among network members. Experience from various groups and networks seem to indicate that the groups should not exceed 15 to 25 persons to ensure a good community feeling and proactive interaction among network members. To strengthen the network structure, it would be important to consider a greater level of regionalization, for instance with a two-layered structure.

Lessons Learned
a) The concept of the thematic networks is good. For the efficiency and effectiveness of the networks, it is important to have a clear agenda and relatively small communities allowing all members to have a sense of belonging.

b) The leadership of the networks is critical for their functioning. The ideal leadership of the networks would include 1/ a senior thematic expert with good SDC field experience, good communication skills, and who would undertake frequent visits to the field and 2/ a knowledge management expert with good communication skills and with expertise in knowledge brokering in addition to some thematic skills to be able to inform the network in an easily digestible form on what is going on in the world – and in SDC – on different thematic issues.

c) SDC's policy of staff rotation has an influence of the functioning of the networks. A similar problem was seen in the functioning of the F-sections. A greater active involvement of NPOs in different network functions, including as core members would to a certain degree counterbalance this challenge.

d) Where the networks could be more relevant is in sharing good practices and lessons-learned from other countries for instance through D-Groups. This should include sharing lessons-learned from 'failures', i.e. experiences where methodologies and approaches have not led to the expected results with identification of influencing factors. However, there is limited experience[6] in active participation in the D-Groups in Kyrgyzstan, partly as ongoing communication is not perceived as relevant, which is partly seen as a result of the very different contexts in different parts of the world. This

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[6] A concrete example was mentioned where a network member in Latin America had requested suggestions for concrete problem related to waste management. The request in the D-group generated many suggestions for solutions from around the world but never a proper discussion.

might also explain the relatively low activity level of most of the D-groups in general. On the other hand, the F2Fs are seen are seen as very positive instruments allowing for practical networking among peers and developing functional and informal sub-networks. Some of the NPOs, for instance, have established contacts with NPOs in other SCOs.

Lessons Learned from other organizations

a) Knowledge management and thematic backstopping in the KfW Development Bank is organized around thematic competence centers at KfW's headquarters in Frankfurt (Kompetenzzentren).   Overall, KfW is structured around geographic directorates subdivided into geographic and special program departments.   The competence centers are located in the geographic departments.   There are a total of 12 competence centers consisting of sector and policy teams on different thematic areas: agriculture and natural resources, general procedures and principles, environment and climate, development research, carbon credits, governance, health-education-social policies, water and waste management, financial and private sector global funds, peace and security, energy, carbon credits, and urban development, located in the different geographic departments.   From the field perspective in Kyrgyzstan, the organization with competence centers is satisfactory; e.g., the health programs can draw on the thematic expertise in the relevant competence center in spite of the fact that it is located in another geographic department.   Likewise, teams of thematic experts and program officers are visiting the Kyrgyz office frequently for support and backstopping of concept development and program implementation. KfW is currently being restructured and there have been internal discussions about the abolishment of the competence centers. It should also be noted that in addition KfW Development Bank also works closely with technical staff from staff from GIZ (German Technical Cooperation) on technical issues.

b) The World Bank has long been known for putting emphasis on knowledge networks and networking as critical elements for achieving overall development objectives, including Global Practices. It was noted that implementing partners are requested to budget for networking in their project proposals. From the perspective of the NPOs working at World Bank country offices, the matrix structure of the World Bank (country management units and sectors) does not cause any special challenges. The manager of the health project, for instance, will report to the head of health in Washington and not to the country manager on a daily basis. But the annual performance evaluations are done with both: first the country manager and then the sector manager in at the World Bank HQ in Washington D.C.

c) The Centre for International Private Enterprises, a USAID funded institution established in 1983, was mentioned as a good example of an organization that promotes active knowledge sharing networks linking different stakeholders, including private sector and NGOs and where new networks are established according to needs in the field.

Resource persons interviewed

NAME	POSITION	ORGANIZATION	THEMATIC FOCUS	THEMATIC NETWORK MEMBERSHIP
Rene Holenstein	Ambassador	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan		
Remy Duiven	Deputy Director of Cooperation	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan		DLGN C&HR
Bakyt Makhmutov	Senior Advisor	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan	Policy Water Resources	Gender Water
Damir Bisembin	National Program Officer	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan	Public/Private Sector/Eco.Affairs	
Elvira Murataieva	National Program Officer	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan	Health / Public Sector	Health
Tunzhurbek Kudabaev	National Program Officer	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan	Water&Infrastructure	Water
Jyparkul Shabdankulova	National Program Officer	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan	Local development	E&I, DLGN
Djamilia Moldakhmatova	National Program Officer	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan	Art&Culture Reconciliation	C&HR
Elke Oehme	Program Manager	Embassy of Switzerland - Kyrgyzstan	Private Sector Development	
Thomas Walder	Desk Officer, Kyrgyzstan/Uzb	SDC – Bern		Gender Water
M. Khalitov	Deputy Director	Kyrgyz State Agency for LSG	Local development and decentralization	
Chinara Abdrakhmanova	Head	Health Policy Analysis Division, Ministry of Health	Health	

NAME	POSITION	ORGANIZATION	THEMATIC FOCUS	THEMATIC NETWORK MEMBERSHIP
Tobias Schueth	Director	Swiss Red Cross - Kyrgyzstan	Community Action for Health – Health Care Waste Management – Swiss funded	
Tolkun Jamangulova	Deputy Director	Swiss Red Cross - Kyrgyzstan	Community Action for Health – Health Care Waste Management – Swiss funded	
Kunnura Raimbekova	Program manager	KfW Bankengruppe German Development Cooperation	Health	
Asel Sargaldakova	Senior Health Specialist	World Bank – Kyrgyzstan	Health	
Nadezhda Dobretsova	Chairperson of the Board	Development Policy Institute	Voice of Accountability – Citizen's Participation – Oversight of Budget Processes – Swiss funded	
Bekbolot Bekiev	Project manager	Development Policy Institute	Voice of Accountability – Citizen's Participation – Oversight of Budget Processes – Swiss funded	
Sabina Gradwal	Project manager / deputy program leader	Development Policy Institute	Voice of Accountability – Citizen's Participation – Oversight of Budget Processes – Swiss funded	
Johan-Peter Porten	Senior Advisor	Helvetas – Kyrgyzstan Helvetas - Switzerland	Vocational Skills Development	
Jane Gisin	Advisor	Helvetas-Kyrgyzstan	Women's economic empowerment in M4P – Swiss funded	
Maksat Abdykaparov	Manager	Helvetas – Switzerland	Skills Training in Rural Areas – Swiss funded program	

Annex 6: Sida Country Case Study

Aide Memoire
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
29 April 2014

This Aide Memoire provides a summary of key findings from the mission of Patrick Breard to Stockholm on 29 April 2014. The purpose of the mission was to inform the evaluation on SDC's thematic networks illustrated through the role of the thematic networks in the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

I.   Background
Sida works according to directives of the Swedish Parliament and Government to reduce poverty in the world. The overall goal of Swedish development cooperation is to contribute to making it possible for poor people to improve their living conditions. Sida has three main assignments:

- On behalf of the Swedish government, suggest strategies and policies for Swedish international development cooperation.
- Implement the strategies and manage interventions, (including monitoring and evaluation of results)
- Participate in Sweden's advocacy work and in the dialogue with other countries, donors and recipient countries, as well as with international organizations and other actors.

Sida's selection of cooperation countries and priority themes is based on political decisions made by the Swedish government. According to the fundamental principles of Swedish aid, it is the responsibility of each recipient country to adopt its own strategy for economic development and for combating poverty. This strategy forms the basis for the cooperation strategy that Sweden and the respective countries or regions form together. In order to carry out its work, Sida cooperates also with Swedish government agencies, organizations and international bodies like the UN, the EU and the World Bank.

Sida's head office is located in Stockholm. The total number of employees at Sida is 678 people (as of January 2014), of which approximately 140 persons work outside Sweden. The agency is engaged in development cooperation with a total of 33 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Africa is the current priority of the agency. Direct bilateral cooperation with European and Latin America countries has been mostly phased out but support is still provided thorough regional and global programs.

II.   Thematic Priorities
Swedish development aid follows three overarching thematic priorities; democracy and human rights, environment and climate change and gender equality and womens' role. Together with efforts to promote economic development and humanitarian support, they encompass all Sida activities. Sida main efforts are further presented in five areas:

- Democracy, equality and human rights
- Economic development
- Knowledge, health and social development
- Sustainable development
- Peace and security

Until last month Sida thematic orientations were guided by overarching thematic policies that were spelling out Sida's objectives and approach for the sub-themes under each

policy. Until 2008 these policies were defined by SIDA and then were taken over by the Government.

This has changed early 2014. The policies have been replaced by the Platform for Swedish Development Cooperation. The document does not contain policies but shorter principles with goals and sub-goals, in a results oriented approach. In general terms the platform indicates that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is responsible for spelling out what are the development results expected by Sweden, while Sida is in charge of defining how this will be achieved. This creates the overall framework for the country results strategies.

III.   Resources

Sweden's total development aid budget for 2014 is about SEK 38.4 billion (circa CHF 5.18 billion), which is one per cent of BNI. From this, deductions are made for, among other things, refugee costs in Sweden, EU assistance and contributions to the regular budget of some UN agencies. Those costs excluded gives SEK 31.8 billion for aid. The funds are managed by several actors of which MFA and Sida are the largest.

About SEK 19.2 billion is decided upon by Sida, and another SEK 10.6 billion is targeted to multilateral support decided upon by the Prime Minister's Office but channeled through Sida.

Development funds are attributed on the basis of a political decision by the Government. Funds come from the Government to SIDA with a country focus and are channeled to the relevant Sida regional department before being allocated to the respective Embassies where they are attributed to the Head of Cooperation. Funds are provided on the basis of each country results strategy which is usually defined for a 5-7 years period and is based on national needs and priorities and on Sweden comparative advantages.

IV.   Structure

Until 2008 Sida had a matrix organization, with regional departments on one side and the thematic departments on the other. Funds were channelled either through the geographic departments, or the thematic departments, or sometimes directly delegated to the Embassies. Thematic support required by the Embassies was provided by the Thematic Departments at Head Office (HO). This overall setup was found to lack clarity and decision was taken to reorganize Sida and to streamline it.

From 2008 to 2010 Sida was reorganized as a pillar organization with three pillars: Administration, Policy, and Operations. Funds were allocated to Operations, and the two other departments were providing support (administrative and thematic). Funds were then delegated to the embassies by the Operations department. Thematic staffs were floating around between a focus on global policy work and support to the operations. This was found to build a heavy and unclear structure.

In 2011 the decision was taken in 2011 to strengthen Sida focus on Operations and perform a new reorganization. Operations were provided the ability to manage their own thematic capacities and have their own thematic staff in their department. Simultaneously this new setup presided over the creation of Sida thematic networks.

Today Sida is organized in ten departments, Internal Audit and the Director General's Office. Five departments work with implementing the development assistance:
- Three departments cover country and regional operations:
    - Africa;
    - Asia, North Africa, and Humanitarian Aid;
    - Latin America and Europe.

- Two departments cover global operations:
  - o International Organisations and Policy Support Department, which is in charge of thematic support[7], and;
  - o Partnerships and Innovation Department, which covers CSOs, the private sector, financial instruments, capacity development.
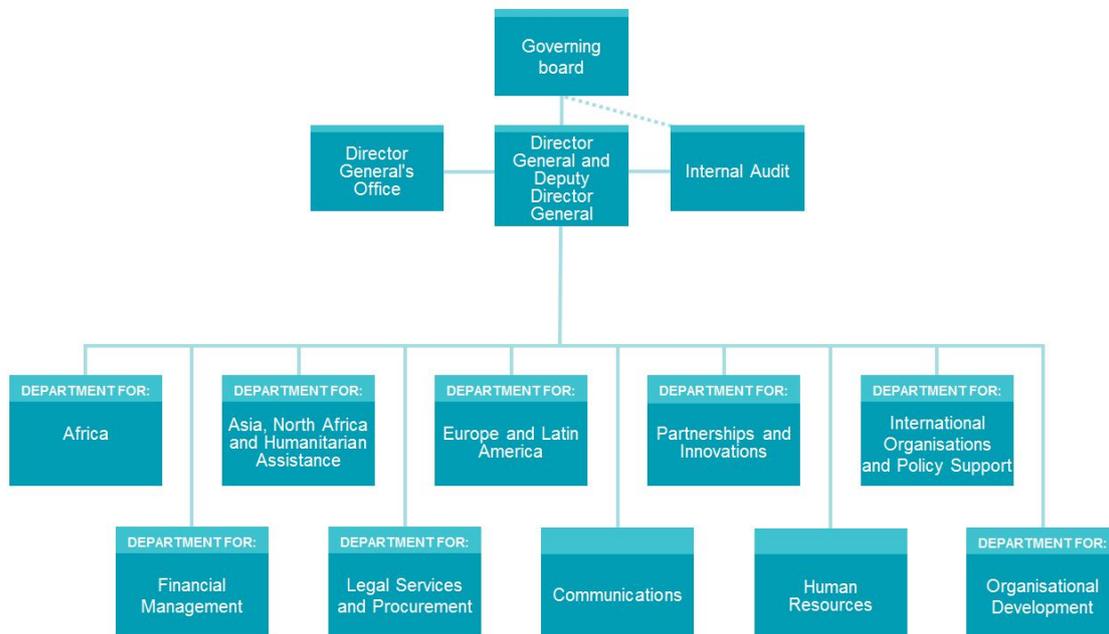
Source: Sida website, May 2014

When Sida had a pillar structure, thematic work used to cover policies, thematic quality, and thematic capacity development. At that time the thematic section had up to 80 staffs. Now there are 18 staffs working in the Policy unit, although this comes as a recent increase which would tend to demonstrate that thematic expertise regains some importance in the organization.

Sida staffs in embassies specialize on the thematic areas covered by the country strategy. Some thematic areas are represented in most if not all of the Embassies –e.g. democratic governance- while some others are implemented in just a few countries –for instance Energy, Trade, Education, etc.-. The relevant operations departments at SIDA HO have thematic advisors who provide thematic and operations support to the field –e.g. the Africa Department may have 2 Energy advisors-.

V.   SIDA Networks
Sida's networks were introduced in 2009 as a mechanism for staff to share ideas, improve internal learning, and coherence. However their implementation proved to be a challenge: expectations were too high for the resources and equipment provided. In 2011 the Director General took the decision to focus Sida's networks on Knowledge Management, i.e. "by **knowledge management** is meant strategies and practices used to identify, create, distribute, and enable adoption of insights and experiences, thus improving the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of Sida's work. In other words, networks are essential in promoting learning, for competence development and to achieve policy coherence in

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[7] In Swedish the title of the Department is "Internationella organisationer och tematiskt stöd" which has been translated as "Policy Support" although the Department does not develop policies anymore.

the organization[8]". The memo announcing the creation of the networks provides key information on their expected modalities of work, inter alia:

- "Networks do not make decisions on the allocation of resources, but may decide to recommend to the line structure that a certain issue needs to be addressed in SIda's regular work plan. This could be done through the formation of a working group, a project or through other means. No formal reporting is done through the networks.
- Networks should be established according to need. This means that networks can be closed down and new ones established as needs change.(…)
- Sida staff may join any thematic network, regardless of their organizational affiliation. Membership is voluntary, but staff is expected to use networks in order to keep themselves informed of developments in their thematic area and to contribute experiences that may be of value to colleagues.
- Lead policy specialists and policy specialists are responsible for network management in their policy area. Responsibility for network coordination rests mainly with the policy specialist. Each unit within the Department for Policy Support assigns one staff as a member of a network coordination group for the department, to ensure consistency in network activities (…).[9]"

Ten thematic networks have been initially created, on:
1. Environment and Climate Change
2. Agriculture (including forestry and Food security)
3. Sustainable services (including water, sanitation, energy, and urban development)
4. Market Development (including private sector development and trade)
5. Democracy, Human Rights and Public Administration
6. Gender Equality
7. Health
8. Education
9. Development Analysis
10. Multilateral Coordination

It is to be noted that in addition to the thematic networks, Sida has created networks that are functional or management related, such as:
- Methods network
- Middle-management network
- Controllers network
- Administration network
- Etc.

VI.   Key Findings
The following are a summary of key findings articulated according to main categories and evaluation questions that have been provided in the Inception Report.

Relevance
- Sida thematic networks cover the **priority and sub-priority themes** of the organization. Networks are created based on the needs of the staff. The Head of the Department for International Organisations and Policy Support is responsible for defining which network to create[10], operate, or dismantle. Some of the networks

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[8] Sida, "*On the establishment of thematic networks at Sida",* Memo 2001-05-01.
[9] Ibid.
[10] For instance a discussion is currently going on regarding the creation of a network on Employment, a theme supported by a working group that may be transformed into a (sub) network.

> operate working groups as a modality to build competences on specific areas. Working groups are active as long as there is a need and then are closed[11].

- Networks were created through a decision from the DG. Participation in the networks is **voluntary** so they must deliver services that are needed. Some networks have surveyed their members but there is no systematic and regular assessment of the priority thematic needs of staff. Some of the networks have not yet reached a critical mass of members and are not very active –e.g. Education network- while some others are perceived as mature –e.g. Health network-.

- The networks substitute the specific thematic units which Sida had in the matrix organization; thematic specialization is now **spread** across the organization. The thematic networks are found to be a relevant instrument to harness and share thematic competences but they do not replace the previous thematic units that used to bring strong professional identity to the specialists and a robust body of expertise to the organization. The thematic networks are useful to field staff but thematic support is primarily received through the line or through the members' own informal national and regional networks.

- Some networks have established sub-networks. It is up to network members to instill complementarities or control the level of overlap between the networks. Network members are part of a mailing list but this is not a requisite to share messages or to see messages from a given network. Staffs can send a message to a network they are not a member of. Network membership is primarily mainstreamed thinking.

Efficiency & Effectiveness
- The objectives of the networks are to **build competences and to do knowledge management**. Project proposals, comparative experiences, lessons learned are not discussed on the networks. However thematic specialist can act as brokers and refer another network member if contacted for advisory support, quality assurance, feedback, etc.

- **Quality assurance** of project proposals is done through committee meetings to which thematic specialists can participate if there is a demand from the line. Every year each country must select a program –e.g. new area- that will be assessed at the level of the Operational Department and then at Central level. Thematic specialists are involved in the assessment at Central level. Accordingly, proposals that will be assessed at this level tend to be formulated by involving the thematic specialist from the start, so that there is little risk that such projects will be put aside. Specialists can be consulted by receiving the proposal directly although most often the consultation goes through the line. Consultations can also involve teleconferences, video conferences, etc. usually jointly with the Operational Department. Networks are not involved and do not contribute to quality assurance.

- The head of the Department for International Organisations and Policy Support has the authority and responsibility to decide the creation or closure of thematic networks. Thematic networks are managed by a (senior) policy specialist. Network **governance** features a "hub" composed of staff from the Operations Departments. Their participation in the networks is not necessarily referred in their ToR but may be specified in their annual contract (i.e. annual objectives). Networks hubs have varying number of members (from 2 to 6) based at HO. The role of the hub may slightly vary from one network to another as the various networks have different ways of working. The members of the hub do not always perceive the network as a priority. There has been some staff turnover in some of the hubs as some members indicated that they did not have time anymore to be involved. Hub

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[11] For instance a working group on Disabilities had been created and then shut down after some time. Later on this working group has then been momentarily reopened for a specific project; it is expected to be closed again once activities will have been completed.

> members tend to meet every 6 to 8 weeks –every other week for the Health network-.

- Policy specialists managing the networks commit between 10 and 40% of their **time** to this activity –i.e. depending on the network-. Network management includes tasks such as:
  - o Organizing F2F meetings,
  - o Organizing video meetings with HO and staff in the embassies,
  - o Organizing seminars,
  - o Producing newsletters,
  - o Coordinating working groups,
  - o Backstopping the email network,
  - o Facilitating thematic debriefs when staff return from a field mission or join HO after a field assignment.

> In addition to managing the network, policy specialists support the Operations Departments and collaborate with the MFA and external institutions. Sida is a **line** organization, so thematic support has no power. The line decides when to involve the thematic specialists. Sometimes it can imply providing thematic advisory support to project design, appraisal or implementation, but usually the support that is provided is more strategic –e.g. decision between programmatic options-.

- It is not mandatory for Sida staff including at the Embassy level to be part of any network. Networks have varying number of members (and active members):
  - o Gender: 85 (40)
  - o Democracy & Human Rights: 160 (30)
  - o Agriculture & Food Security: 70 (10-20)
  - o Energy, Infrastructure and Urban Development: 75 (15)
  - o Education: 20 (8-10)
  - o Health: 40 (20-25)
  - o Trade (sub-network): 40 (10-15)
  - o Private Sector (sub-network): 80 (3-8)
  - o Environment and Climate: 100 (20-25)
- Network members engagement includes reading emails, participating in video conferences –with up to 15-20 participants from HO and the field-, sharing knowledge with other members through the email network -although this does not frequently happen as the preferred mode of exchange is through the video bridge-, and eventually contacting each other directly as they are now aware of the areas of work and expertise of the different members. Network participation is always voluntary; so people need to get something out of it.
- At Sida, staff can have a **thematic position** in the field, i.e. program managers focus on one theme or have eventually a second area of work, but that entails some thematic focus. This is different in the Ministry were staff rotate from one embassy to another and can have a different role / thematic focus from one duty station to another. Sida staffs are supposed to be thematic, which makes job rotation easier. Theoretically someone at Sida could stay 20 years in a thematic job although people tend to move on, either on a voluntary basis or because staffs are supposed to spend time in the field.
- All thematic networks are **internal**, except for the Health network that has some external members from the MFA.
- Policy development has been removed from the attributions of Sida. The Government indicates now the "why" and "what" of Swedish development cooperation while Sida defines the "how" of its implementation. Thematic networks are not involved in the development of Sida strategies, policies, programs, and projects.

- Networks are more relevant for HO thematic work and are not much involved in operations work. Furthermore, Sida's work on policies, thematic guidelines, and the like is now gone –to MFA-. The new modus operandi is to focus on country strategies, which is expected to make thematic work the result of a bottom-up process. This may imply identifying which countries are implementing projects that have one or another thematic component. This is somewhat a difficult review as projects and results strategies are covering several themes simultaneously –e.g. education of women on agriculture and market development in rural areas -. The impact this change is going to have on the networks and their services is not yet clear.

- The networks result from a senior management decision that has been differently interpreted and there are still varying conceptions about what the networks are about. Networks **activities** may slightly vary from one network to another. The following activities present an aggregate:
  - Most of the networks but not all have a **newsletter** -as there are lots of newsletters already on the thematic areas covered by Sida it is sometimes found difficult to deliver a product that is well differentiated-.
  - Some networks post **news flashes** during global conferences or other events in order to share timely updates.
  - Most networks disseminate short **articles** and papers from external organizations.
  - Networks have an **intranet** page -however many embassies cannot access SIDA networks intranet pages so the email network is rather used to disseminate information-. These pages are not extremely active; staffs do not necessarily know how to use these spaces, publish documents, receive notifications, etc.
  - Most networks organize regular **video meetings** with HO staffs and the embassies –e.g. every other week-. These video meetings can bridge up to 8 embassies and are one of the preferred means to share information and discuss. These meetings can gather up to 15/20 participants although the technical set up is not always easy to manage.
  - Networks organize **seminars** several times per year at HO. Guest presentations and lectures are also attended by the embassies through video link.
  - Some networks arrange a participation in events organized by **external institutions** that SIDA supports, for instance through the global programs. When these institutions have seminars or thematic meetings in Stockholm, it can be an opportunity for SIDA to be involved and attend state of the art trainings and discussions.
  - Thematic networks have a **mailing list** which is used to communicate information rather than to engage members in discussions, mutual support and peer exchanges. Bottom up exchanges, calls for comparative experiences, spontaneous discussions for mutual support are not happening. Mailing lists are not used to launch spontaneous discussions or for members to seek advice and consult other staffs. Knowledge sharing, mutual updates and discussions take place through the video bridge. Thematic support may be sought through the line or by directly contacting the policy specialist.
  - Networks do not organize e-discussions. There used to be an e-Learning platform with courses holding online exchanges, but this platform is not operational anymore.
  - Network activities include also **thematic debriefings** after a field visit or when a staff returns to HO after a field assignment.
  - Some networks but not all have organized **face-to-face events** (F2F) for competence development and joint discussions. These events have been run at HO or in an embassy. One network organizes a F2F every year while other

> networks have organized just one F2F or none due to budget limitations. Some networks have organized regional F2F.
>
> o One sub-network (Trade) has compiled a brief **professional profile** of its members, covering area of formal responsibility and other area of expertise, in order to facilitate direct contacts and mutual support.

- It is not the **role of the thematic networks** to develop toolkits, guidelines, etc. If this is to be done, this will come as a **line** decision that will be implemented in a project mode. The development of knowledge products will eventually involve a reference group composed of network members or consult the network. But networks do not have the mandate and the budget to carry out to such developments. Sida does not make policies; it is the Government that has this responsibility. If guidelines have to be developed, then the line will manage the project.

- There are other networks than the thematic networks (e.g. the analysts' network, middle-management network, controllers' network, administration network, etc.) which are now becoming more interested in linking with the thematic networks to be up to date on these thematic areas, be aware of the state of the art issues, etc. This is positive for the thematic networks as it helps them to get larger and earlier buy-in for their activities. Members from the other networks areas are strongly invited to join the thematic networks.

- There is no corporate policy or guidelines prescribing the amount of time staff should devote to the networks. Attachment to a theme was different when Sida was structured as a 3 pillars organization as staffs were then supposed to devote 10% of their time to thematic networks. This requirement has disappeared with the new structure. This is found to be a missing incentive for network participation. This requirement may be reintroduced if there is support from the Director General –i.e. if the vision of the DG on the matter evolves-. The current laissez-faire approach is also valid for the number of networks staff can subscribe to, which is not guided or prescribed but depends on the interest of the staff. In practice, network members indicate varying levels of involvement, from 0 to 10% or more of their time. Network participation can be formalized on an ad-hoc basis in the annual contract that each staff defines with its management and the results he/she is supposed to achieve. Based on staffs' individual objectives, belonging to one or several networks for a given period of time may be meaningful. When the annual objectives / contract are revisited, network membership may be adjusted accordingly.

- Participation in the thematic networks does not have an influence on staffs' careers. There is no corporate mechanism for **performance assessment** / professional development linked to the networks. It is not incentivized.

- A number of thematic networks have become overarching networks with "sub-groups" or **sub-networks** engaged in specific activities. This stems from the fact that the original networks were found too broad or not focused enough. Thematic networks that have developed sub-networks include:

1. Environment and Climate, with:
   - Agriculture and forestry
   - Water and sanitation
   - Sustainable services
   - Biodiversity
   - Institutional change and capacity building
2. Market Development, with:
   - Private Sector
   - Trade

3. Energy, Infrastructure and Urban Development
   - Energy
   - Urban Development

Sub-networks may compile and disseminate brief newsletters, share information on state of the art policies, on global conferences and governance debates, etc. Some sub-networks organize video conferences with staff in the embassies and have organized regional meetings. Sharing knowledge between networks is very fluid; no guidelines indicate what to share specifically on a sub-network or on the overarching network. Usually sub-networks members will also be part of the overarching network. However due to these sub-networks, it is more difficult for the overarching network to generate a continuum of exchanges.

- Sida has not developed **regional** networks or sub-networks at the regional level. However some thematic networks have organized regional meetings.
- Some networks have **working groups** which are created on a need basis. For instance D&HR has 5 working groups:
  o Freedom of expression
  o Justice
  o Disability
  o Lesbian, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals
  o Politically sensitive countries

  Working groups meet on a voluntary basis. They involve participants from HO and from the embassies through a video link. The thematic specialist coordinates the agenda, collects topics participants would like to discuss, prepares and circulates minutes. These working groups are primarily a forum for peer support but they may also feature presentations, talks from external guests, etc. These working groups are not sub-networks. They last as long as they are needed and then are closed. For instance the disability working group has been closed and then momentarily reopened but will be closed again.

- **Coordination** of activities between the networks, including between the overarching networks and the sub-networks, is overseen at the level of the Policy Unit. There is a combined yearly operational plan that indicates the activities that will be performed by the different thematic networks and the projected outputs. Knowledge exchanges between networks tend to be ad-hoc and the result of spontaneous initiatives from network members. Relationships with other networks are primarily done by members themselves. For instance some network members are gender specialists. Nevertheless joint meetings have sometimes been organized, for instance between Health and Education. Usually program managers focus on 1 or 2 networks which are relevant for their job and do cover their thematic area of work.

- Network members are part of a mailing list but this membership is not a requisite to share messages or to see messages circulated on this list. Staff can send a message to a network they are not a member of. Network membership is mainstreamed thinking. Most networks communications going through the mailing lists come from the managing policy specialists.

- Network activities are reported to the Head of the Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, and then to the DG. Ad-hoc consultative / decision making meetings have also been organized with the DG on specific issues. Monitoring of network activities has also comprised a survey for some of the networks –Health, Education-. Networks are monitoring their activities and outputs, but not their outcomes.

Impact
- The foreign office is involved in defining the position of Sweden on the post-2015 agenda. There is a staff in Sida directorate working with the DG on the post-2015

agenda but networks are not involved. It is not the role of the network to be involved in defining this agenda but the network contributes by circulating relevant information.

- Networks have established **synergies** and cross-collaborations between themes. There is no other mechanism to create linkages between thematic areas across the organization.

Sustainability
- In the past years middle-management has not much prioritized the thematic networks as Sida has gone through a number of reorganizations which have focused the attention -lots of staffs are gone, e.g. 200 in the administration department-. Nevertheless, greater attention has recently been expressed from **middle-management** for the thematic networks, for instance by indicating that participation in the networks F2F or regional meetings should be among the priorities of the staff when formulating the annual travel plans.
- **Financial resources** of the networks are very limited. At HO there is a small budget, around Euro18.000 per year for all thematic networks to organize F2F / regional events. There is no mandatory budget for the networks at the Embassy level, accordingly organizing a global F2F is not easy as each member has to participate. Usually the Embassy hosting a network event will contribute financially to its organization.

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Evaluation of SDC Thematic Networks
Mission to SIDA
Patrick Breard
29 April 2014

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9:00-10:00   *Mirjam Palm:* Senior Policy Specialist, Energy, Infrastructure and Urban Development; Policy Unit, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Sida

12:00-13:30   *Eva Bursvik:* Senior Policy Specialist, Trade; Policy Unit, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Sida

              Stellan Arvidsson-Hyving: Senior Policy Specialist, Education and Focal Point UNESCO; Policy Unit, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Sida

13:30-14:00   *Anders Molin:* Senior Policy Specialist Health and SRHR; Policy Unit, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Sida

14:00-15:00   *Birgitta Weibahr:* Policy Specialist Human Rights and Democracy; Policy Unit, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Sida

15:30-17:00   *Karin Isaksson:* Senior Policy Specialist, Environment and Climate; Policy Unit, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Sida

<div align="center">

6 May 2014

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11:30-12:00   *Ana M. Gren:* Senior Policy Specialist Water Resources Management and Sanitation; Policy Unit, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Sida

Annex 6: DFID Country Case Study

Thematic Networks in DFID

I.   Introduction

More than one third of DFID's workforce is made up of technical advisors organized in professional cadres. As of September 2013, there were 800 full time equivalent technical advisors working at DFID headquarters and in cooperation offices.[12]   The technical advisors provide technical input to design and implementation of policies and operations in cooperation with project managers. All technical advisors are assigned to DFID's system of thematic networks, the professional cadres. There are currently 14 professional cadres, including thematic excellence networks and broader process focused networks such as statistics, evaluation, and a 'generalist' cadre. DFID's current business plan (2012-15) defines six priorities: international commitments, wealth creation, transparency, combat climate change, governance and security in fragile and conflict-affected countries, and international actions for girls and women. The thematic excellence cadres support these priorities in a crosscutting manner and focus on more specific thematic areas: economics, governance, social development, health, private sector development, climate and environment, livelihoods, conflict, infrastructure, education, and humanitarian.

II.   Technical advisors

Recruitment of technical advisors is based on accreditation based on the professional competencies of the cadres. This also means that members of the professional cadres are all accredited technical specialists.   The accreditation is based on technical competency frameworks developed specifically for each professional cadre. For climate change advisors, for instance, the core competencies required include demonstrated understanding of climate resilient, low carbon, and environmentally sustainable growth; environmental management; climate adaptation; environmental economy; and knowledge of the latest climate change research such as the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Special attention is given to a broad knowledge of the different aspects of climate change and development planning as well as understanding of the underlying challenges leading to current policies. There are three general levels of technical advisors. The entry level (A1) requires at least four to six years of professional experience. The technical career path moves through the three levels with increasing requirements for documented experience and competencies.

The technical advisors are based in geographic departments and report in a matrix mode to both their direct line manager and to their head of profession on technical issues who are also the heads of the professional cadres.

The concept of 'cadre time' was introduced in 2011 and refers to the requirement of all members of the professional cadres to provide 10% of their time to supporting other DFID sections than their own. According to the 2014 evaluation 'How DFID Learns', initially there was a certain opposition among line managers to the 'cadre time'. However, the practice is now accepted and praised as a critical element for the effectiveness of the professional cadres as centers of excellence for the whole organization. As such, the 'cadre time' is improving both individual and organizational learning and thematic excellence.

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[12] ICAI (2014) "How DFID Learns" Independent Commission for Aid Impact, London

III. Heads of Profession

Organizationally, the leadership of the professional cadres, the heads of profession, is located in the research and evidence division under the leadership of a chief scientific advisor. The primary responsibility of the heads of profession is professional development of their cadre and ensuring that professional advice is embedded throughout all aspects of DFID's work on policy, planning and programming technical excellence. Moreover, the heads of profession are responsible for external representation and for providing thought leadership on the thematic issue for instance through identification of emerging trends of importance for DFID and participation in public debate. The Head of Profession has delegated authority for management and technical capability of their professional cadre. This entails lead responsibility for the recruitment, promotion, accreditation for all advisers in their cadre.

The heads of profession are responsible for the management of the 'cadre time'. Overall, professional cadres consider the 'cadre time' a positive contribution to the full use of corporate knowledge and know-how. It requires, that the heads of profession have a good understanding of the experience and capacities among the technical advisors in his or her cadre. For a cadre of 70 advisors such as the climate change and environment cadre, for instance, this is seen as manageable, particularly for the supply side of the use of the 'cadre time'. However, there is an inherent challenge in demand planning and the effectiveness of the 'cadre time' depends to a certain degree on the flexibility of the technical advisors and their line managers. Still, considering the size of DFID and the number of technical advisors it is normally always possible to respond to demands within a short time framework. For some demands the heads of profession might choose to advertise the demand to all members in the cadres through e-channels but generally, specific cadre members will be contacted for their specific knowledge and competencies. The cadre time is also used to a certain degree for professional development of technical advisors who desire to develop further in specific areas.

IV. Professional cadres

The network activities within the professional cadres include bi-monthly clinics with cadre members throughout the organization through use of videoconference technology and annual face-to-face cadre conferences organized either in the UK or in the field. Experience from DFID shows pros and cons with both locations and in general the face-to-face conferences will therefore be organized on a rotational basis in the UK and in a relevant field location. In terms of direct costs there are no significant difference between organization in the field vs. in the UK and the costs are generally £90 to 100 per day per participant, including travel costs, accommodation, and organization. Most of the practical activities linked to the organization are commissioned to special consultants or companies. Over the last years there have been more and more face-to-face conferences organized jointly by several professional cadres. While the annual conferences are primarily for cadre members, implementing partners will often participate too and make special presentations to strengthen organizational learning from the project and program implementation. Moreover, learning from implementation has been systematized through special budget lines in implementation contracts for networking and communication of result and experience similar to what is seen in organizations such as the World Bank (see for instance Aide Memoire for country visit to Kyrgyzstan). This can include participation in the annual cadre conferences or presentation at special brown-bag sessions at DFID headquarters organized by the professional cadres.

Other network activities of the professional cadres include a special website for members, regular information exchange, and newsletters. For many of these networking or cadre management activities, generalists who work for the whole research and evidence department support the heads of profession.

As the heads of profession are located in the same unit, the Research and Evidence Division, they work closely together under the guidance of the Chief Scientific Advisor. The heads of professions meet twice a month for coordination, general exchange of information, and joint planning. The professional cadres used to be organized in four so-called families headed by chief program officers. However, it was found that the families created additional challenges for an overall integrated approach and collaboration with other professional cadres from other families. The structure has therefore recently been dissolved and there is now only one overall chief scientific advisor.

V.   Centers of technical excellence

In 2012, DFID launched the Professional Evidence and Applied Knowledge Services (PEAKS) frameworks for groups of professional cadres: Climate, Environment, Infrastructure and Livelihoods (CEIL), for Economic and Private Sector Development (EPS), Governance, Social Development, Conflict and Humanitarian (GSDRC), and Health and Education Advice and Resource Team (HEART). The PEAKS replaced DFID's old Resource Centres created to provide rapid operational and super-specialist support to DFID advisors as well as general knowledge services, such as e-newsletters, training materials, and technical guidelines. With the PEAKS the knowledge services are offered to the development community in general and not only to DFID staff. The different knowledge services are available on special websites, which also include helpdesk facilities for rapid desk-based expertise to support programme planning and inform policy through call-down consultancies and knowledge transfer for development policy and operations.[13] To provide context related support, the PEAKSs have access to partner expertise in all 26 DFID priority countries and manage databases with trusted consultants with local expertise.

The four PEAKSs are managed by consortia of professional development and knowledge organizations, such as universities, applied research institutions, NGOs, and consulting companies. The total budget allocated for the four PEAKS is £8 million (2012-17).[14]

In addition to the PEAKSs, DFID offers internal knowledge and learning sites for its staff coordinated through the program Evidence and Program Exchange (EPE) launched in 2013. The EPE provides central points for staff to access knowledge through an evidence site, an evaluation site, and the special sites for the individual professional cadres. Special staff are responsible for the management of knowledge sites, which are also supported DFID knowledge managers. It is expected that the EPE will address concerns about the challenge DFID staff often report with regard to the multitude of information sources and the problems in identifying the right ones.

VI.   Lessons-learned

According to the 2014 evaluation 'How DFID learns':

- DFID's structure is supportive of individual learning and development of its staff. Instruments such as individual performance frameworks and 'talent management' initiatives are effectively supporting the individual learning. Recent development with open and constructive discussions within the organization on the importance of learning from failures has further strengthened the learning characteristic of the organization with development of new ideas such as 'need to fail fast'. During 2013, DFID's Research and Evidence Division has piloted approaches to carefully

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[13] See for instance the website "Evidence on Demand" for the PEAKS for Climate, Environment, Infrastructure and Livelihoods.
Available at <http://www.evidenceondemand.info/homepage.aspx>
[14] ICAI (2014) "How DFID Learns" Independent Commission for Aid Impact, London

exploiting and learning from failures in 'Failfaires'[15], which is expected to strengthen the learning culture in DFID.

- "The 2013 annual review of the performance of PEAKS reports that 'expectations within DFID for high quality evidence-based products have increased over time and since the PEAKS contracts were signed'. It also notes that DFID has an intention to reduce reliance on PEAKS, drawing instead on the 10% cadre time, albeit that 'there may be issues around business workload volumes and the need for wider experiences that may still sometimes require external support'."

- Usage data from the Evidence and Program Exchange showed that the "unique visitors using the cadre sites per month ranged from 17 (infrastructure) to 88 (economics). For both the evidence and evaluation sites, the sections on guidance proved to be the most popular, while online discussions proved to be the least popular."

- Overall, it appears that DFID staff are not immediately drawn to its own systems for general knowledge searches through the various intra- and internet platforms.

- DFID invest substantial amounts in thematic research, for instance through commissioned research and general support to research partners and networks. While the research is perceived as important knowledge sources for DFID activities, there is little evidence on use of DFID program experience in research programs.

- It is important to distinguish between knowledge and know-how. So far most attention has been given to knowledge and there is a need to move towards adaptive learning to emphasize know-how. This would have an impact, inter alia, on the profiles on technical cadres.

According to a 2013 staff survey about the use of evidence in DFID activities[16]:

- Use of evidence in DFID activities has increased on the last three years with perceived positive impact on DFID's poverty eradication agenda. The use of evidence is particularly concentrated among professional cadres. The professional cadres are identified as great sources of knowledge and experience but staff still call for a more coordinated approach to information sharing. While research results are appreciated sources of knowledge there is a need for enhancing the regional relevance of the commissioned research in collaboration with country offices and policy teams. In general, there is an ongoing discussion in DFID on how to strengthen regional support, for instance through establishment of regional hubs with different relevant technical advisors.

- The survey showed that the satisfaction with the professional cadres and the head of professions as sources of evidence depends on the stability of the heads of cadres. Frequent rotations for the posts decreases the effectiveness of the cadres for knowledge management,

- In principle, evaluations are considered to be important sources for knowledge and experience, but they are still not used systematically for organizational and individual learning processes.

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[15] The Failfaire concept was invented by the NGO MobileActive. The idea is to create a save environment for sharing and learning from experience from initiatives that are not delivering, projects that are not having any measurable impact on the lives of people, and pilots that never moved further. The Chatham House Rule is applied, i.e., participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. Failfaires are organized regularly in various development institutions such as the World Bank.

[16] The Evidence in Action Team (2013) "DFID Evidence Survey" Department for International Development, London.

Annex 8: Online Survey

Online Survey

This annex provides a summary and analysis of the online survey conducted to gather perspectives and feedback on the functioning and results of SDC thematic networks.

I.   Background

The survey questionnaire has been developed in collaboration with SDC. It has taken into consideration a user survey conducted by the K&LP division in 2012. However, the purpose of the two surveys differed. Moreover, for logistical reasons mailing lists for two of the networks were incomplete (Health and Water).

The survey has been opened during 2 weeks, from 28 March to 11 April 2014, and sent to 1010 persons who are members of one or more SDC thematic networks. Overall, it is estimated that currently, around 1,200 persons are members of the thematic networks.

The survey was anonymous. Survey questionnaires have been made available in English, French and Spanish. Altogether, the survey has compiled feedback from slightly more than 400 participants. A detailed review of the responses and cleaning of data has retained 399 questionnaires as valid for analysis, which gives a response rate of 40 percent. Statistically this would present a representative sample size. However some limitations –confer infra- in terms of representation of SDC thematic networks and representativeness of the target sample imply that the findings analyzed below represent the opinion of the sample but not necessarily the one of the entire population of networks members.

II.   Survey Demographics

a. Organizations

1. Where are you currently working?	#	%
SDC - HQ	92	23,1
SDC - Field	149	37,3
Other Swiss federal agency (e.g., FOEN)	9	2,3
International or local NGO	96	24,1
Scientific research community (university, think tank, etc.)	25	6,3
Multilateral or bilateral organization (e.g., UN, development banks)	12	3,0
National Government Ministry or Agency	1	0,3
Other	15	3,8
Total	399	100,0

Key findings:

- A majority of survey respondents is SDC staff (circa 60%) with a prevalence of field staff;
- Almost one quarter of participants come from NGOs.

b. Geographic focus

2. Which region are you working on / in?	#	%
Global	104	26,1
West Africa	34	8,5
East and Southern Africa	30	7,5
East Asia	30	7,5
South Asia	37	9,3
Latin America	43	10,8
Eastern Europe & CIS	64	16,0
Western Europe and the Mediterranean	15	3,8
Other, please specify	40	10,0
Missing	2	0,5
Total	399	100,0

Key findings:
- Survey respondents working primarily on a global scale present the largest single segment of participants;
- However, altogether almost 75% of respondents are rather focusing on regional or national work;
- Few respondents are working in / on Western Europe and the Mediterranean. Except for Eastern Europe and the CIS, other regions tend to be quite evenly represented.

c. Job function

3. What is your current position?	#	%
Head or Deputy: Head or Deputy of Cooperation/ Head or Deputy of Division/ Head or Deputy of Section/ Head or Deputy of Country Office	62	15,5
Program Manager: Thematic focal point, thematic specialist, regional or national program manager, international staff, etc.	188	47,1
Project Officer: National project officer, national staff	87	21,8
Support: Network support, administration, finance, operations	14	3,5
Missing	2	0,5
Other	46	11,5
Total	399	100,0

Key findings:
- Participants indicate being primarily program managers, followed by project officers;
- Participation from support staff is very limited.

d. Gender

4. Sex	#	%
Female	184	46,1
Male	214	53,6
Missing	1	0,3
Total	399	100,0

Key findings:
- Males are slightly more represented than females in the survey.
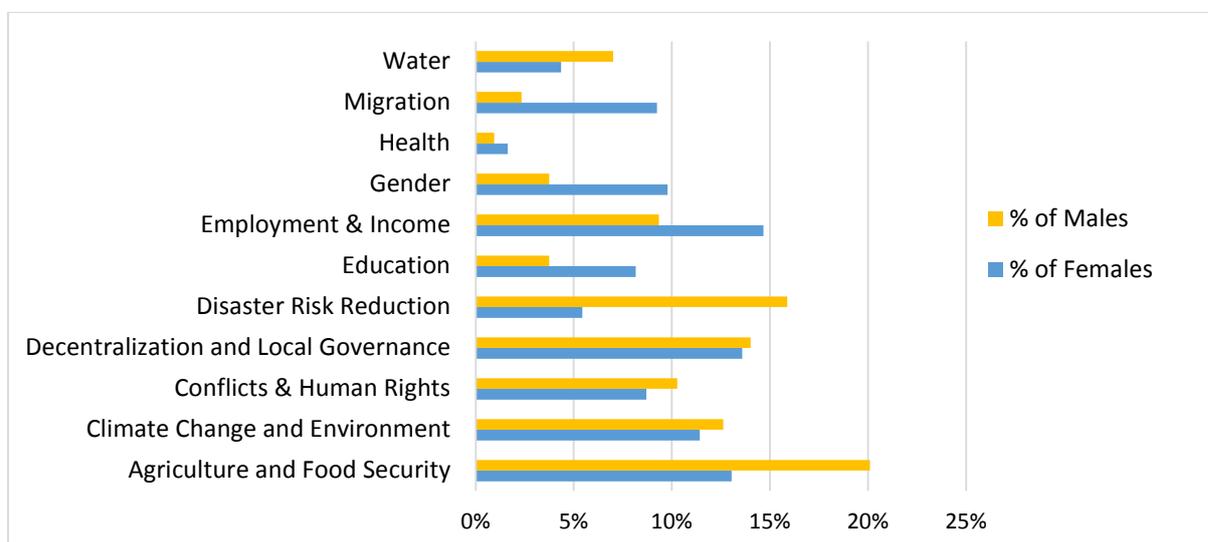
III. Selection of SDC networks
a. Primary network

5. Please select the SDC thematic network on which you would like to focus your responses throughout the survey to best inform this evaluation:	#	%
Agriculture and Food Security	67	16,8
Climate Change and Environment	48	12,0
Conflicts & Human Rights	38	9,5
Decentralization and Local Governance	55	13,8
Disaster Risk Reduction	44	11,0
Education	23	5,8
Employment & Income	47	11,8
Gender	27	6,8
Health	5	1,3
Migration	22	5,5
Water	23	5,8
Total	399	100,0

Key findings:
- Due to some omission in the dissemination of the survey, members of the Water and the Health networks did not receive the questionnaire. Respondents having selected one of these two networks have made this choice after receiving the questionnaire through another network they are a member of. The Water and Health networks are underrepresented in the survey;
- The Political and Economy Network has not been selected by survey participants.

Figure 1: Please select the SDC thematic network on which you would like to focus your responses throughout the survey to best inform this evaluation

- Males and females have not equally selected the same networks. Male participation in the survey is particularly high for the DRR and A&FS networks. Female respondents are proportionally more represented on the Migration, Gender, E+I, and Education networks.

b. Role in the network

6. What is your relationship to this thematic network?	#	%
Theme Manager	15	3,8
Focal Point	29	7,3
Web master	2	0,5
Network facilitator / back-stopper	19	4,8
Core group member	35	8,8
Network member	269	67,4
None of these, please specify	27	6,8
Missing	3	0,8
Total	399	100,0

Key findings:
- About two third of the respondents indicate no specific role but regular network membership;
- The number of focal points is rather high compared to the effective number of SDC networks Focal Points –i.e. as referred in SDC terminology-. Close review of the results indicates that more than two third of the respondents having selected this choice have "loosely" interpreted the term Focal Point –i.e. are contact persons for a theme or a network but not SDC Network Focal Point as such-.

c. Membership in other networks

7. In which other SDC thematic networks are you a member? (select all that apply)	#	%
Agriculture and Food Security	53	13,3
Climate Change and Environment	59	14,8
Conflicts & Human Rights CHR	27	6,8
Decentralization and Local Governance	45	11,3
Disaster Risk Reduction	35	8,8
Education	15	3,8
Employment & Income	40	10,0
Gender	32	8,0
Health	9	2,3
Migration	25	6,3
Political Economy and Development	7	1,8
Water	28	7,0
Regional, please specify theme and geographic coverage:	19	4,8
Total	394	100,0

Key findings:
- On average, network members tend to be part of a second SDC network.

Primary network	**In which other SDC thematic networks are you a member?**												
	A+FS	CCE	CHR	DLG	DRR	Education	E+I	Gender	Health	Migration	PED	Water	Total
A+FS	13	16	1	1	2	1	19	4	0	0	0	6	67
CCE	12	10	0	1	12	0	1	2	0	0	1	4	48
CHR	1	0	11	5	1	0	1	5	1	4	2	2	38
DLG	1	1	5	21	3	1	3	3	3	6	3	4	55
DRR	4	22	4	1	10	1	1	1	0	0	0	4	44
Education	2	0	2	3	0	5	5	2	1	1	0	0	23
E+I	14	2	0	3	4	3	6	5	1	3	1	0	47
Gender	2	1	1	6	0	3	2	6	2	1	0	1	27
Health	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	5
Migration	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	3	0	9	0	1	22
Water	4	6	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	23
Total	53	59	27	45	35	15	40	32	9	25	7	28	399

- Some networks present stronger cross-memberships than others, for instance between A+FS and E+I or between CCE and DRR;
- For about half of the networks, 20 to 30% of respondents indicate being also part of another network covering a similar thematic area –e.g. regionally-;
- A few networks have been more frequently referred as a secondary network than as a primary one –e.g. CCE, Gender, or PED-.

IV.   Participation in SDC Thematic Networks
a.   Duration of membership

8. How long have you been a member of the thematic network you selected for this survey?	#	%
Less than 3 Months	15	3,8
3-12 Months	92	23,1
12-36 Months	176	44,1
More than 36 Months	112	28,1
Missing	4	1,0
Total	399	100,0

Key findings:
- Close to 75% of the respondents have been members of the selected network for more than one year, but 25% can still be considered as rather new to the networks.

b. Reasons for network membership

9. Why are you member of the network you selected for this survey? *Multiple choices allowed*	#	%
Part of my job description	181	31,0
Invited by Focal Point / other network member	89	15,3
Professional interest	214	36,7
Encouraged / expected by my supervisor	67	11,5
Other, please specify	32	5,5
Total	583	100,0

Key findings:
- Overall, professional interest is the primary reason for joining a network, followed by having network membership featured in the job description;

Membership: Part of my job description	Where are you currently working?			Total
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	
No	27	62	129	218
Yes	65	87	29	181
Total	92	149	158	399

Membership: Invited by Focal Point / other network member	Where are you currently working?			Total
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	
No	80	126	104	310
Yes	12	23	54	89
Total	92	149	158	399

Membership: Professional interest	Where are you currently working?			Total
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	
No	52	72	61	185
Yes	40	77	97	214
Total	92	149	158	399

Membership: Encouraged / expected by my supervisor	Where are you currently working?			Total
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	
No	75	113	144	332
Yes	17	36	14	67
Total	92	149	158	399

- Out of 241 participating SDC staffs –HQ and field-, 35 were invited to join the selected network by the Focal Point or by another member and 53 indicate that membership was encouraged or expected by their supervisor.

Reason for joining (as % of respondents from the region) Regional focus	Part of my job description	Invited by Focal Point / other network member	Professional interest	Encouraged / expected by my supervisor
Global	35,58%	23,08%	50,96%	11,54%
West Africa	61,76%	11,76%	41,18%	11,76%
East and Southern Africa	60,00%	10,00%	60,00%	23,33%
East Asia	66,67%	30,00%	73,33%	26,67%
South Asia	45,95%	29,73%	54,05%	18,92%
Latin America	39,53%	27,91%	55,81%	11,63%
Eastern Europe & CIS	45,31%	20,31%	50,00%	25,00%
Western Europe and the Mediterranean	40,00%	26,67%	66,67%	13,33%
Other region	36,59%	21,95%	51,22%	14,63%
Total	45,23%	22,36%	53,77%	16,83%

- Cross-tabulated results further indicate some variations between regions. For instance, joining the network is part of the job description of more than 60% of the respondents working in /on West Africa, or East and Southern Africa, or East Asia, compared to 35% for participants working on a global scale.

c. Time involvement

	How much time does your job description define that you should be dedicating to the network you selected for this survey?	How much time, in reality, do you dedicate to the network you selected for this survey?
Not applicable / Not in job description	172	23
Less than 5% of your time	83	205
From 5%-10% of your time	82	104
From 11%-25% of your time	37	36
From 26%-50% of your time	9	9
From 51%-75% of your time	4	6
More than 75% of your time	6	6
Missing	6	10
Total	399	399

Key findings:
- Respondents devote time to the network even if it is not referred in their job description;
- Slightly more than half of the respondents devote less than 5% of their time to the network they have selected.

How much time does your job description define that you should be dedicating to the network you selected for this survey?	SDC-HQ	SDC Field	Non SDC
Not applicable / Not in job description	20,2%	38,8%	61,8%
Less than 5% of your time	16,9%	24,5%	20,4%
From 5%-10% of your time	24,7%	29,3%	10,8%
From 11%-25% of your time	22,5%	6,8%	4,5%
From 26%-50% of your time	6,7%	0,7%	1,3%
From 51%-75% of your time	4,5%	0,0%	0,0%
More than 75% of your time	4,5%	0,0%	1,3%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

- For almost 40% of SDC field staffs the job description does not define a time commitment.

How much time, in reality, do you dedicate to the network you selected for this survey?	SDC-HQ	SDC Field	Non SDC
Less than 5% of your time	33,3%	54,9%	70,7%
From 5%-10% of your time	30,9%	35,9%	19,2%
From 11%-25% of your time	19,0%	9,1%	5,0%
From 26%-50% of your time	5,9%	0,0%	2,8%
From 51%-75% of your time	5,9%	0,0%	0,7%
More than 75% of your time	4,7%	0,0%	1,4%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

- SDC staff dedicate more time to the networks than non SDC respondents;
- Slightly more than 70% of non SDC survey respondents dedicate less than 5% of their time to the network.

V.   Network Activities
a.   Assessment of participation in network activities
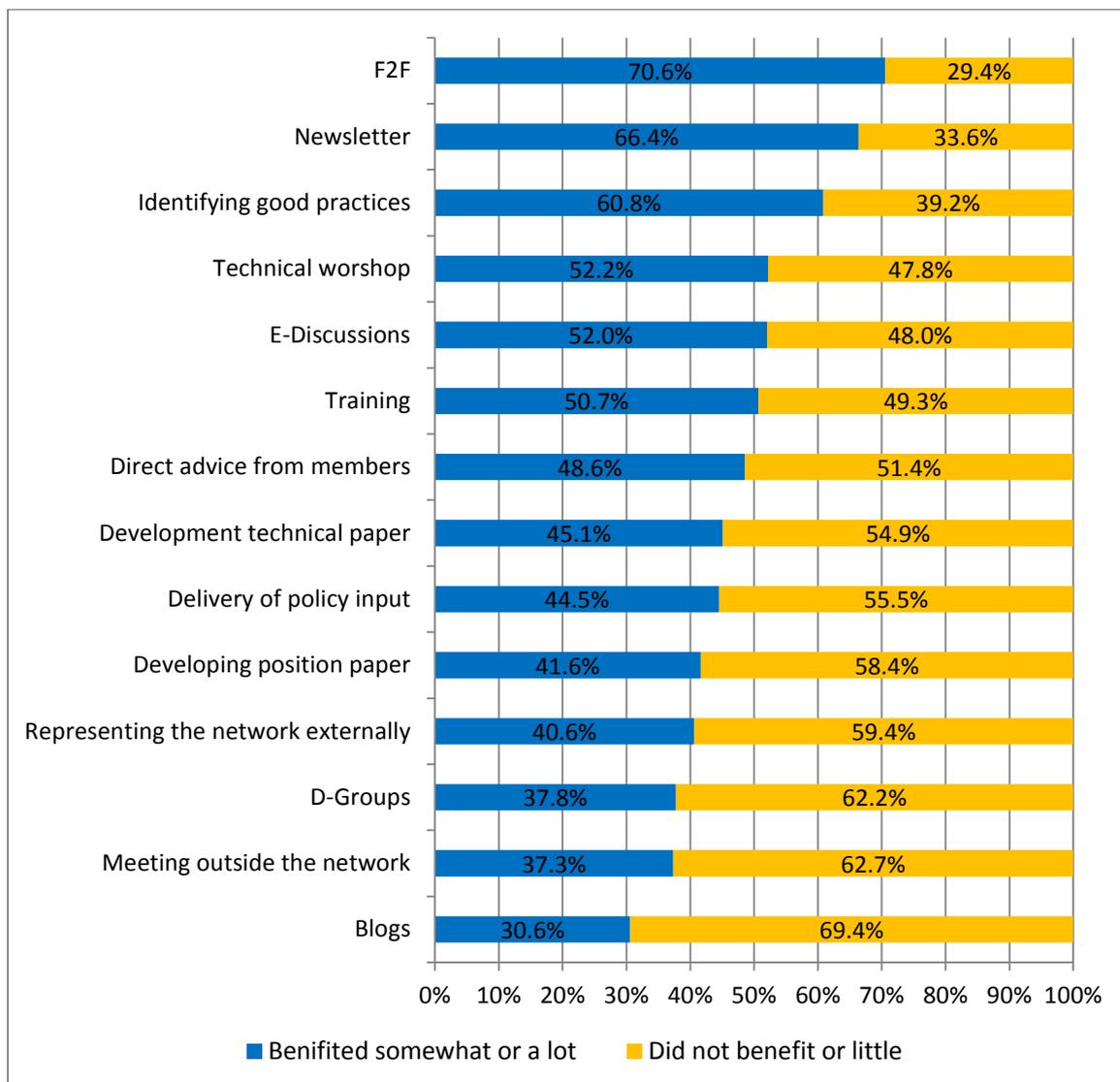
Figure 2: For the network you selected for this survey, how much did you benefit professionally (learning, networking, etc.) from participating in the most recent activities?

Key findings:
- Overall, a few network activities / services have professionally benefited a majority of respondents –i.e. F2F events, newsletter, and identification of good practices-;
- Some activities have been found beneficial by close to half of survey respondents but not beneficial by the other half -i.e. technical workshops, e-discussions, trainings, and direct advice from network members-;
- Some network activities are rarely found to be beneficial –i.e. blogs, meetings outside the network, D-Groups, network representation, etc.-, however with some discrepancies between networks.
- More specifically, cross-tabulations of survey results indicate that D-Groups have particularly benefited respondents from the E+I network (72,4%) and the DLGN network (51,3%); e-Discussions have been found more frequently beneficial to members of the E+I (70,6%), DLGN (63,6%), and CC&E (61,5%) networks; F2F are positively assessed across all networks but by a higher proportion of survey respondents from the Education (85%), E+I (83,8%) and DLGN (82,9%) networks; networks newsletters are found more frequently beneficial to Education (94,7%),

Water (75%), and CC&E (70%) networks members; and survey respondents from the DLGN (67,4%), E+I (62,9%), and Education (57,1%) networks report having professionally benefited from receiving direct advice from other network member(s).

Additional activities included in comments:
- Access to pool of experts/ gaining technical support;
- Knowledge about upcoming job opportunities.

Sample quotes:
- *I didn't even know I'm a member. I received hundreds of emails regarding WASH in Health Facilities (e-discussion) but unfortunately there was too much unfiltered information I couldn't keep up and eventually gave up.*
- *En algunas ocasiones se han solicitado insumos por parte de la red global y la red regional de género. No obstante, a veces no es clara la utilización que se le da a los insumos enviados.*

For the network you selected for this survey, how much did you benefit professionally (learning, networking, etc.) from participating in the most recent activities:	Benefitted a lot or somewhat		
	SDC-HQ / total SDC-HQ	SDC-Field / total SDC-Field	Non-SDC / total non-SDC
Training	47%	58%	46%
Face to Face (F2F)	69%	76%	65%
E-discussions	44%	50%	58%
D-groups	29%	40%	40%
Blogs	27%	34%	29%
Newsletter	73%	63%	65%
Technical workshop	60%	45%	54%
Development of technical paper	60%	38%	42%
Receiving direct advice from other network member(s)	58%	48%	42%
Development of positioning paper	53%	32%	44%
Delivery of policy input	54%	38%	43%
Identifying good practices	66%	60%	58%
Representing the network you selected for this survey in meetings external to SDC	53%	38%	35%
Representing the network you selected for this survey in SDC meetings outside the network	59%	32%	29%

- F2F receive almost comparable assessments from SDC staff at HQ or in the field;
- D-groups are more positively assessed by field staff;
- More SDC HQ staff indicated having benefited from the development of technical papers;
- It is unclear why non-SDC respondents assess their role with regards to the representation of the network.

For the network you selected for this survey, how much did you benefit professionally (learning, networking, etc.) from participating in the most recent activities:	Benefitted a lot or somewhat	
	Female / Total Female	Male / Total Male
Training	47%	42%
Face to Face (F2F)	71%	71%
E-discussions	53%	51%
D-groups	85%	38%
Blogs	36%	27%
Newsletter	70%	63%
Technical workshop	53%	51%
Development of technical paper	51%	41%
Receiving direct advice from other network member(s)	54%	44%
Development of positioning paper	51%	34%
Delivery of policy input	49%	40%
Identifying good practices	60%	62%
Representing the network you selected for this survey in meetings external to SDC	38%	42%
Representing the network you selected for this survey in SDC meetings outside the network	33%	40%

- Female survey respondents return more frequently a positive assessment of the D-groups than males.

b.   Language

Which region are you working on / in?	Has the language of the network you selected for this survey ever been a significant obstacle or hindrance to your active participation?		
	No	Yes	Total
Global	101	2	103
West Africa	25	9	34
East and Southern Africa	29	1	30
East Asia	29	1	30
South Asia	37	0	37
Latin America	33	8	41
Eastern Europe & CIS	63	0	63
Western Europe and the Mediterranean	15	0	15
Other	39	1	40
Total	371	22	393

Key findings:
- By large language is not a barrier for most of the survey respondents;
- About one third of West Africa participants and a quarter of Latin America respondents indicate that language is an obstacle.

This question was commented by 35 survey respondents:
- French and Spanish speakers (West Africa/L.A.) are the ones who write all the comments about language as hindrance.

Sample Quotes:
- *El idioma casi siempre es el inglés lo que impide que la información en las discusiones electrónicas se pueden transferir al equipo local*

- *El inglés es idioma oficial o el alemán que no siempre se puede acceder a entenderlo.*
- *En general no ha sido una limitación. Sin embargo, a veces alguna información viene únicamente en alemán a francés, lo cual si limita el entendimiento y difusión del material con copartes interesadas.*
- *In fact, not for me: But 5times YES!!!!! for my 5 NPOs : I have raised the issue several times for all the Networks in questions: English is not a mere obstacle, it is closing the door to West African NPOs. Dramatically underestimated by HQ. Every message, ever, instruction in English will be ignored by the NPOs and for the expat programme manager it is not feasible to translate everything for ever one. Note also that regularly our NPOS do not want to participate in F2f for feeling bad in the English focused event. A whispering translation does not help (seems they still feel like marginalized. Most important: Your QUESTIONNAIRE WONT EVEN BE READ by those who are its main target group in this office and other offices in Central and Western Africa..*
- *La seule langue anglaise utilisée dans les réseaux thématiques auxquels j'ai participé m'a frustré!! Je ne peux pas transmettre clairement mes idées aux autres membres!!*
- *Langue principale: Anglais. La communication également en français serait plus appropriée pour les francophones*
- *Le réseau Education est bilingue français-anglais. C'est un défi eu égard aux ressources à disposition*
- *The language challenge is a real one! French in East Africa is almost excluded, English in West Africa may become more applicable in the future. In Africa, the communication needs to be held in two languages.*
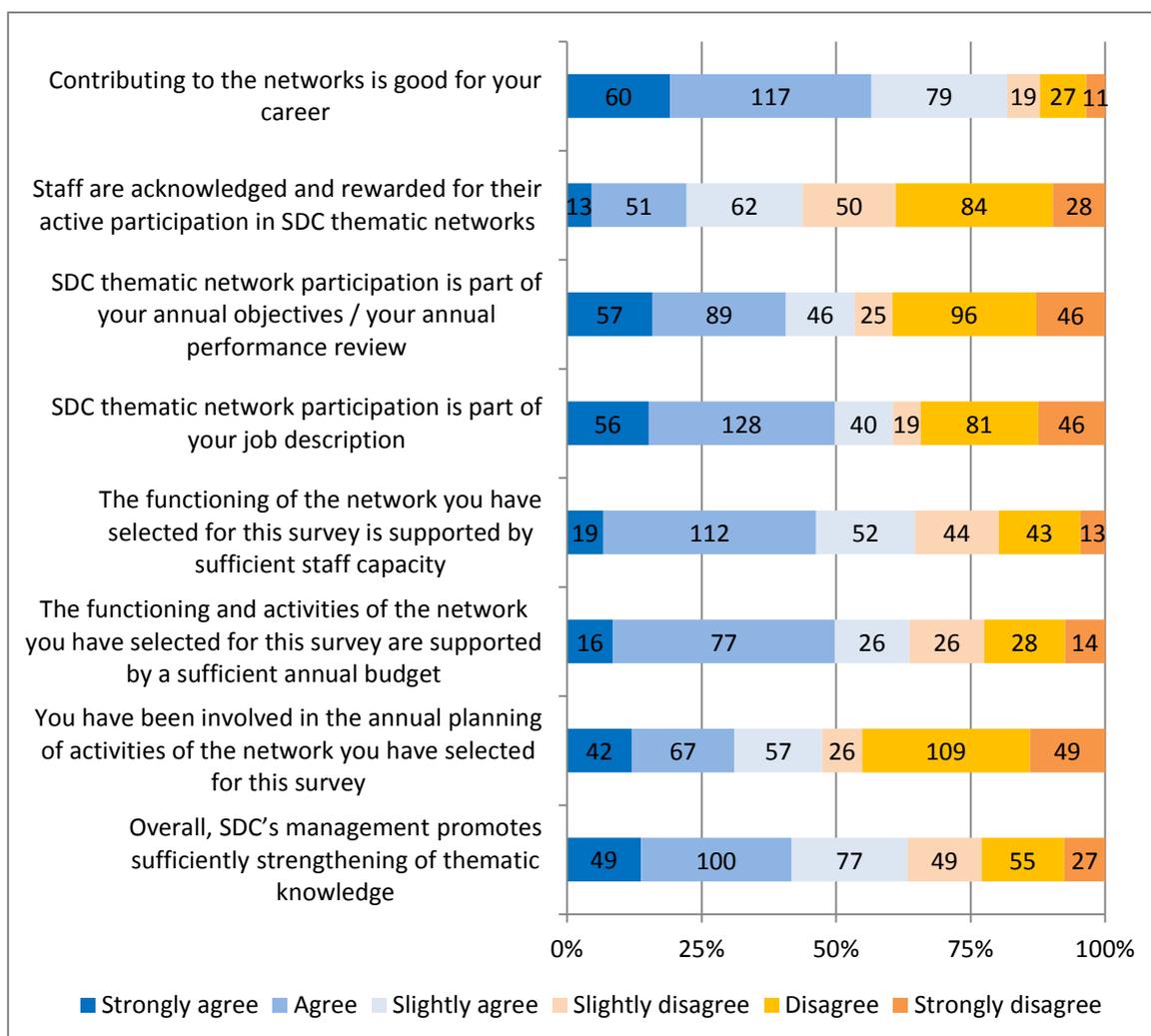
VI.   Scope of SDC Thematic Networks
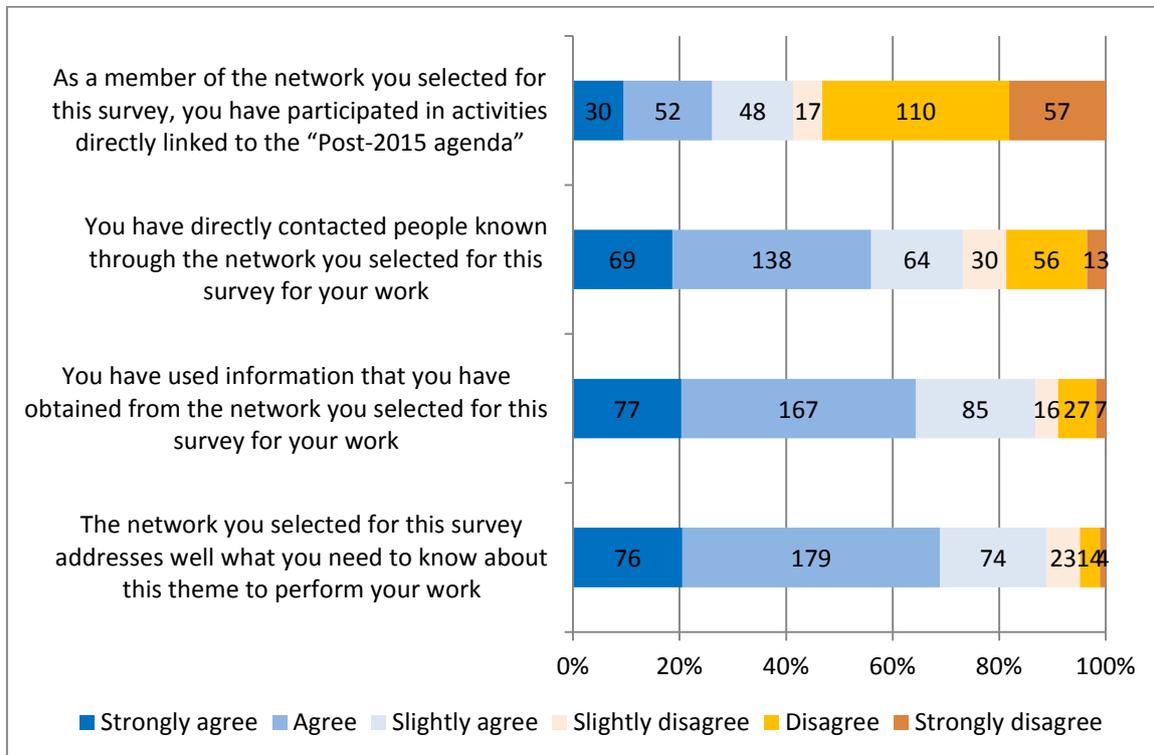
Figure 3: Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements

Key findings:
- Survey respondents indicate that networks are relevant to provide the thematic knowledge members need to perform their work.

- Networks provide information that a majority of respondents indicate using;
- Networks are effective at building direct bridges between members;
- Networks have not systematically involved members into the joint definition of positions on the "post-2015 agenda". Cross-tabulations of survey results indicate that the most active networks on this topic have been Education, Gender, Water, and to some extent Disaster Risk Reduction.

		The network you selected for this survey addresses well what you need to know about this theme to perform your work		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
Where are you currently working?	SDC-HQ	17	70	87
	SDC-Field	11	131	142
	Non-SDC	13	128	141
Total		41	329	370

		You have used information that you have obtained from the network you selected for this survey for your work		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
Where are you currently working?	SDC-HQ	11	78	89
	SDC-Field	22	120	142
	Non-SDC	17	131	148
Total		50	329	379

		You have directly contacted people known through the network you selected for this survey for your work		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
Where are you currently working?	SDC-HQ	17	70	87
	SDC-Field	32	109	141
	Non-SDC	50	92	142
Total		99	271	370

		As a member of the network you selected for this survey, you have participated in activities directly linked to the "Post-2015 agenda"		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
Where are you currently working?	SDC-HQ	42	39	81
	SDC-Field	68	45	113
	Non-SDC	74	46	120
Total		184	130	314

This question was commented by 29 survey respondents. Sample quotes:

- *Being new to SDC, the network has been an opportunity to meet people, this has made the integration more easy. I also appreciated the opportunity to have access to field experiences and colleagues from the field during the F2F. However, I cannot say that, with these contacts we have worked on something related to the network. It has above all help me for my specific work, when I need to get feedbacks or support from the field*

- *J'ai participé en sept 2013 à l'atelier F2F en Suisse sur des réflexions concernant le post 2015 et la stratégie de plaidoyer en faveur de l'éducation inclusive*
- *The network could do more to develop related offline activities where professionals could connect face-to-face. Though useful, there are limits to what a virtual network can provide in terms of tangible or concrete benefits.*
- *The Network does not produce any technical Information about the theme that is useful to me because it focuses very much on SDC internal processes, instruments and tools. It is difficult to get an enriching thematic exchange (even if there are regular meetings with focal points of the Network and we have a good working relationship). We feel that we have to follow what SDC says and that there is not enough openness for other ideas.*
- *The network is not yet fulfilling a "network function" in my understanding, but is mainly busy in putting together guidance from a headquarter perspective and hand it "down" to the field level for implementation. Therefore little focus on exchange activities among network members as of now*
- *The network seems to be more useful for beginners in SDC HO (young colleagues) or for NPOs (to support them in connecting better with SDC culture). The network does not provide useful input for understanding the context in which we are working. Good practices can be inspiring but the risk of useless blueprint is high.*

VII. Governance and Institutionalization of SDC Thematic Networks
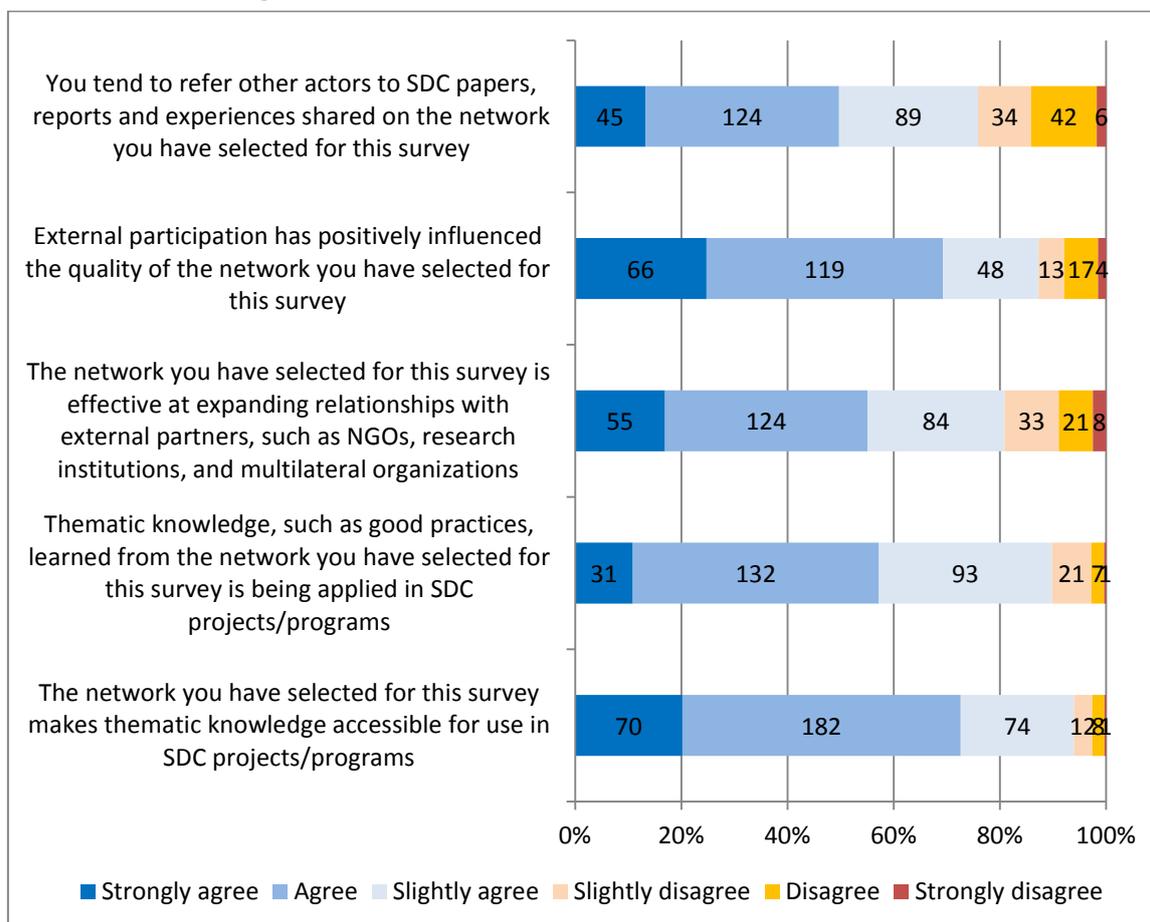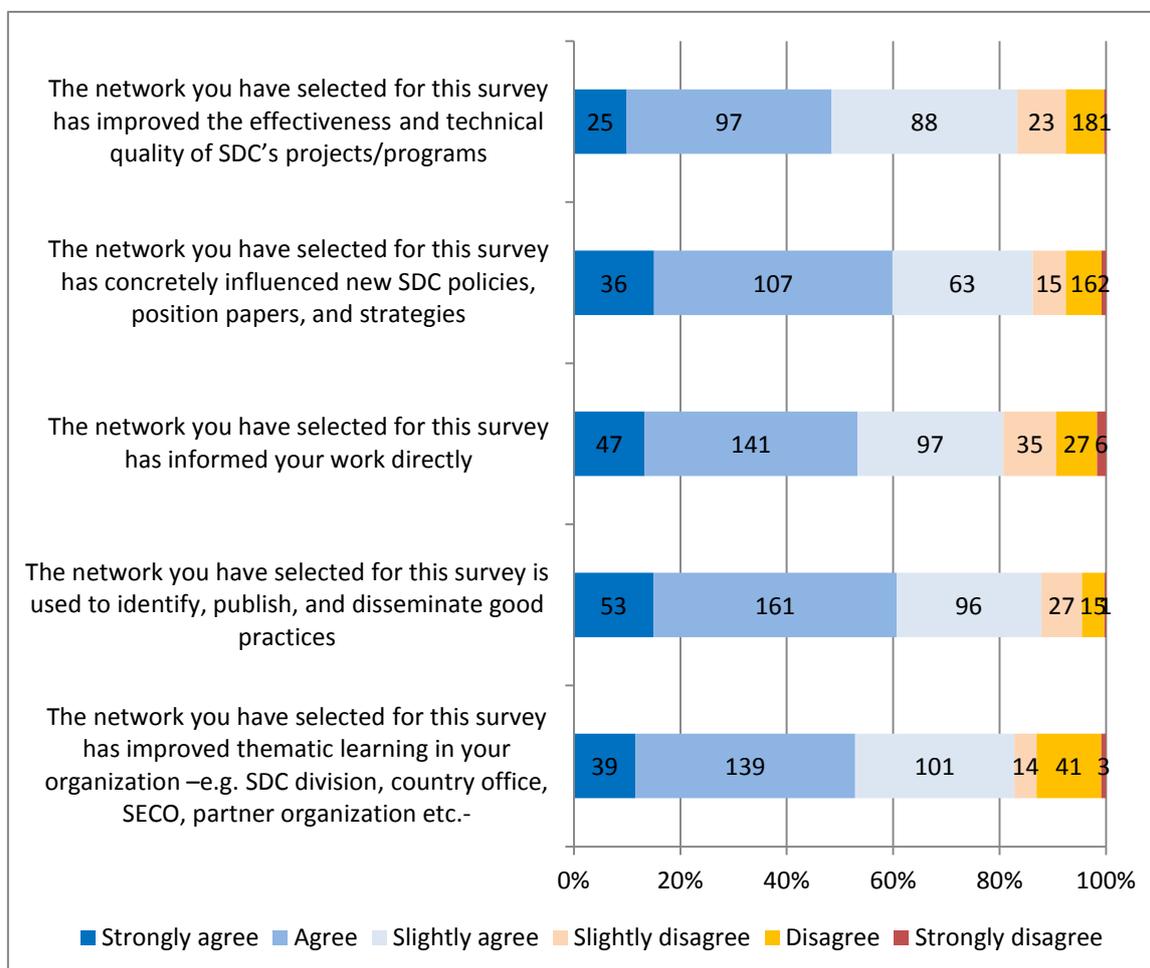

Figure 4: Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements

Key findings:

- Overall a majority of survey participants indicate that SDC networks have been adequately institutionalized;
- Respondents point out that SDC thematic networks may not be consultative or inclusive enough when it comes to defining their annual work plan;
- A majority of participants indicate that their active involvement in the networks is not acknowledged and rewarded;
- Cross-tabulation of survey results indicate that network participation is part of the job description of a minority or SDC HQ staff but majority of SDC field staff. Similarly, thematic network participation is part of the annual objectives / annual performance review of a minority of respondents from SDC HQ but majority from SDC field offices.

Overall, SDC's management promotes sufficiently strengthening of thematic knowledge	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	54	43	34	131
Agree	32	102	92	226
Total	86	145	126	357

You have been involved in the annual planning of activities of the network you have selected for this survey	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	25	69	90	184
Agree	61	62	43	166
Total	86	131	133	350

The functioning and activities of the network you have selected for this survey are supported by a sufficient annual budget	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	18	28	22	68
Agree	37	44	38	119
Total	55	72	60	187

The functioning of the network you have selected for this survey is supported by sufficient staff capacity	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	40	24	36	100
Agree	41	92	50	183
Total	81	116	86	283

SDC thematic network participation is part of your job description	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	14	49	83	146
Agree	73	97	54	224
Total	87	146	137	370

SDC thematic network participation is part of your annual objectives / your annual performance review	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	22	52	93	167
Agree	65	91	36	192
Total	87	143	129	359

Staff are acknowledged and rewarded for their active participation in SDC thematic networks	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	47	61	54	162
Agree	27	59	40	126
Total	74	120	94	288

Contributing to the networks is good for your career	Where are you currently working?			
	SDC-HQ	SDC-Field	Non-SDC	Total
Disagree	18	22	17	57
Agree	50	105	101	256
Total	68	127	118	313

This question was commented by 34 survey respondents, with the following key messages:
- How network contributions affect your career depends heavily on the attitudes of the superiors;
- Improved knowledge and competence helps in one's career;
- Visibility in the networks helps in one's career.

Sample quotes:
- *Acknowledgement and reward for the participation in networks depends heavily on the attitude of the superiors towards network participation. In the three positions I have been working in at SDC, I experienced three different attitudes, ranging from active encouragement to complete ignorance.*
- *Frequent job rotations seem to be hindrance to building thematic competences at SDC. Training programmes on thematic issues are not often offered and not replicated sufficiently throughout the institution.*
- *Good for my career: Yes in the sense that it provides job enrichment, and competences you may apply in your work.*
- *je présume que "faire de la visibilité" (positive) est toujours bon pour sa carrière... Yes.*

- *Networks are very low in the hierarchy, and there is no thematic career opportunity after having abolished the thematic direction, and given the very limited number of thematic advisory positions, now also downgraded by subordination to country directors rather than heads of division.*
- *Participar en espacios de intercambio sobre temas relevantes para mi trabajo es muy importante y la red con el apoyo de ASOCAM impulsa esto y es muy enriquecedor*

VIII.   Functioning of SDC Thematic Network

Figure 5: Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements

Key findings:
- Overall a vast majority of survey respondents indicates that the thematic networks do convey knowledge that is used in SDC operations;
- External participation has a positive influence on the quality of the networks.

This question was commented by 23 survey respondents. Sample quotes:
- *The network makes thematic knowledge accessible for use in SDC projects/programs but time allocation is not sufficient to capture all the good inputs sent. In addition, the thematic knowledge is sometimes applied in SDC projects/programmes but due to lack of time to treat the information, sometimes it is not translated into practice.*
- *External participation should be increased, an inetworkard focused network may meet needs of individual career progression but not necessarily lead to better development outcomes. This risk needs to be balanced with the desire to be internally relevant (which is a bottom line)*

- *... Network does expand relationship, but is it effective? Mixing two questions in one makes accurate response difficult.*
- *The network needs to do more in sharing and promoting its tools (e.g. CEDRIG tool) and good practices with others. So far there have not been many events which included external participation.*

IX. SDC Thematic Network Results

Figure 6: Please indicate to which extent you agree with the following statements

Key findings:
- Overall a vast majority of survey respondents indicates that SDC thematic networks do have a positive impact on members' work and on SDC institutional learning, and on the quality of SDC intervention;
- A cross-tabulation of survey results analyzing networks anchored in regional divisions and comparing responses from participants working on / in this region vis-à-vis those working in / on other regions does not show any significant difference in the type of assessment participants have made. In other words, networks are not more positively assessed –or significantly- by members working on / in the region hosting them.

Where are you currently working?	The network you have selected for this survey has improved thematic learning in your organization –e.g. SDC division, country office, SECO, partner organization etc.-		Total
	Disagree	Agree	
SDC-HQ	15	64	79
SDC-Field	24	110	134
Non-SDC	19	105	124
Total	58	279	337

Where are you currently working?	The network you have selected for this survey is used to identify, publish, and disseminate good practices		Total
	Disagree	Agree	
SDC-HQ	14	74	88
SDC-Field	14	122	136
Non-SDC	15	114	129
Total	43	310	353

Where are you currently working?	The network you have selected for this survey has informed your work directly		Total
	Disagree	Agree	
SDC-HQ	16	70	86
SDC-Field	25	112	137
Non-SDC	27	103	130
Total	68	285	353

Where are you currently working?	The network you have selected for this survey has concretely influenced new SDC policies, position papers, and strategies		Total
	Disagree	Agree	
SDC-HQ	10	61	71
SDC-Field	16	95	111
Non-SDC	7	50	57
Total	33	206	239

Where are you currently working?	The network you have selected for this survey has improved the effectiveness and technical quality of SDC's projects/programs		Total
	Disagree	Agree	
SDC-HQ	15	53	68
SDC-Field	21	95	116
Non-SDC	6	62	68
Total	42	210	252

a. Integration SDC-FDFA

Survey participants were reminded that the integration process of SDC and the Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) was on-going, and asked what impact they expected this process to have on SDC's thematic networks. Comments were received from 229 respondents. Key messages are as follows:

- About 45-50% of the comments formulated refer to the integration as an opportunity for the thematic knowledge in SDC and the networks;
- About 15-20% of respondents making comments indicate that this will have no impact;
- About 35-40% are concerned that it will dilute or marginalize thematic networks and that more generalists will be selected for positions that require technical expertise.

Sample quotes:
- *(+) more visibility and contribution to strategic level(+) better links between policy and field levels (-) a priority and longest administrative path(-) managers with less thematic knowledge*
- *A dilution of content. By this I mean more focus on global policy rather than practice and practice to policy at national or regional level.*
- *As a consequence of the merger, I expect even more generalist getting positions that would better be filled with experts. That could potentially have a negative impact on thematic networks as people join the network as a result of the current position rather than because of their professional profile. The thematic essence of the network could be watered down.*
- *At best it should enrich them. This applies particularly to the area of human rights and conflict where other parts of FDFA have expertise from different angles.*
- *I don't really expect any negative impact from this process. Networks strength depend in the capacity of increasing this networks, the actual process is doing that.*
- *La prudence des diplomates peut infléchir certaines initiatives pourtant hautement nécessaires*
- *Le rapprochement entre le DFAE et la DDC peut permmettre de mieux peser sur l'agenda post 2015*
- *Less influence of the network members on the policies of SDC, even less potential for SDC to determine its policies.*
- *No impact is expected. The integration does not affect the functioning of the networks.*
- *Provides an opportunity for the thematic networks to become more effective. It has the potential to provide evidence based policy influencing opportunity.*

b. Networks improvements

Survey participants were invited to share suggestions about how to improve SDC thematic networks. Comments were received from 227 respondents. Key messages are as follows:

- More space for participation and acknowledgment of non-core members (SDC staff and external partners);
- Encourage or focus on regional networks instead of worldwide;
- Involve FDFA more;
- Enable and foster thematic competencies within SDC and with partners (including civil society);
- Establish clear and relevant how-to-notes, with clear, concise examples of good practices;
- More peer exchange within SDC and with other donors/ external partners;
- More proactive network facilitation;
- Increase interactions and linkages across networks;
- Resolve language issues for West Africa and Latin America, otherwise all the work that networks are doing is lost for those regions;
- Clarification of the role and objectives of the networks;
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities of network members;
- Set up a clear monitoring system for each network to support evidence-based decisions and measure change/ impact;
- In addition to the trainings that are shared, online courses should also be promoted.

Quotes:

- *Most relevant aspect of thematic networks is to provide thematic, strategic guidance to the operations in the field, network experts need essentially to be facilitators and match makers bringing in the knowledge from other geographical regions to the field. From a field perspective networks are too much headquarter driven and perceived as a way of keeping the HQ occupied*
- *Better and more consistent annual plans that build on positive approaches of other networks, more senior management commitment, clarity on the web platform (transition has been long discussed and planned).*
- *Look for incentives for field staff to participate more (not only SDC staff, also external actors)*
- *Promote the regional networks rather than the internationals: The regional networks prove to have the more adequate level of abstraction for NPOS in contents and discussions. Whereas the global level is necessarily "farther away"; more generalised or abstract*
- *Clarification of what role the networks play in the definition of SDC's policies and approaches.*
- *Fostering the thematic competencies at SDC needs to follow a more strategic vision*
- *Set clear objectives for Networks and distinguish objectives from activities*
- *Reduce number of thematic networks.*

X. Networks Stories
a. Networks contributions to enhancing SDC results

Altogether 237 respondents share experiences or perspectives on the contribution of the networks to enhancing SDC results. Key messages are as follows:

- Networks contributed to bringing policy issues forward;
- Networks contributed to improved project design/ implementation ;
- Networks promote deeper understanding/ integration of norms/ best practices;
- Networks share well-tested approaches that can be applied in other contexts;
- SDC required norms developed through networks (gender equality, MERV, CSPM, HRBA) influence project design and implementation.

Sample quotes:

- *In a regional F2F meeting in Addis Ababa I learnt a lot on post-harvest handling of grains which is a problem in our sub-region. A project to introduce the metal silo of which SDC has experience in Latin America has since been started in the country I work Zimbabwe. In the regional F2F in a blog opened we had colleagues from Latin America share their experiences online which to me was very beneficial.*
- *1) Elaboration of a new internal policy on GMO; 2) Focusing on few strategic topics and promoting them; 3) Outreach to external expertise;*
- *After becoming the member of the network we ensured Integration of Humanitarian Aid, rehabilitation activities (WASH in hospitals and Schools) in to Regional Cooperation Water for Livelihood activities as a synergy.*
- *Broadened perspective on subject, strengthened professional and personal capacities, enhanced self-consciousness allow for better and deeper conversation with partners, to dig deeper and to go to the root causes of issues and challenges.*
- *CEDRIG tool which has been developed by the network has been shred with the Inter American Development Bank and they have used it a s basis for developing their own risk screening tool.. Trainings on CEDRIG tool (in different regions) made people more aware of Climate Change and Disaster risks and as a result are integrated into projects or strategies.*
- *CEDRIG Handbook: CC analysis at the Cobu to ensure that CC, Environement and DRR are considered in the new country strategy. Cobus () had systematically applied the CEDRIG tool during its process of elaborating a new country strategy*
- *Development of HRBA tools, CAPEX reports etc are changing the working modality of SDC. Similarly feedback to MERV practices have been useful to alayse the contexts in fragile states.*
- *Enhancing results, that is the maximum networks can and should do. Here to examples:1) Postharvest Management: Thanks to the sub-network on this topic and the increased investment of SDC in this topic that followed, Switzerland is nowadays considered a leading Nation in the topic with the specificities: focus on staple crops and on household and community level.2) Land Governance: Thanks to the network (not exclusively) the SDC internal exchange on this topic was strengthened and allows intervetions at different levels (national, global)*
- *Expérience capitalisée et partagée sur les élections ont permis d'orienter de nouveaux projets et leurs propositions de crédit; ainsi que d'éviter certaines erreurs commises auparavant, et donc d'économiser beaucoup d'argent et d'énergie.-*

b. Unexpected side effects (positive or negative) of SDC thematic networks
Various unexpected side effects stemming from the networks were shared by a total of 170 survey participants. Key findings are as follows:
- Being a network member is more time-consuming than anticipated;
- Increased connections country to country;
- Increased connections across division, domains, and the institution;

- Type of behaviour and communications can influence (positively or negatively) the motivation of network members, core members, etc. Insensitive communications lead to conflicts within the network and across SDC;
- Face-to-face meetings increase enthusiasm and inspire new ideas.

Sample quotes:
- *The rotation system seems to make network sustainability harder to achieve. It would be beneficial for the networks to develop more distributed leadership models to mitigate the effects of this system. Inter-network collaboration is happening more and more. It should not only be encouraged, but there should be some active support for a rational collaboration (e.g. which networks with which other ones, around which topics, what modalities?). This is anyway happening, but it would be good to make it less spontaneous and more deliberate.*
- *Members are proud to be network members and it makes them loyal not only towards the network but also towards SDC!*
- *It is a network in name only. I am also not sure if the directive that Country Offices should not participate in more than 3 networks is really facilitating learning. Additionally the fact that nearly no senior management (decision makers (DoC & Head of Divisions or Deputies) participated (in whole or in part) in the F2F is a surprising and inhibiting factor for the network.*
- *The network is dominated by a few members only, which is understandable, but a second and third tier resource pool has to be created, specially allowing NPOs to take up a more active role. Most of the learning comes from the rich field experiences. These are gathered through different means and fed into key note papers which are then used for training field offices by network experts. Some acknowledgment of the source of knowledge would be appreciated.*
- *positive and competitiveness not seen yet, but overlaps of global and national programmes and non-coherence still persists*
- *Il y a une contradiction entre le concept de réseau (souple, adhésion volontaire) et la réalité institutionnelle relativement rigide de la DDC*
- *There is a risk to be perceived by outsiders as a thematic "talking shop". Due to the many different country challenges the discussions on meetings and f2f are too general and unspecific and often add little quality to the work as a programme manager. Within the formal meetings there are few discussions of interest and few discussions which are followed up in the real world and are leading to an impact. The best discussions are on bilateral level. The best part of the network is to know and informally exchange with people sharing the same interest.*
- *Amazingly successful in building linkages across countries that one would never have considered as having peer learning potential. Built social capital within the organisation that spans nationalities and spatial spread. Negative side effect is that silos seem to be getting formed. There is not too much sharing across networks*

XI.   Proposed Priorities
a.   Priority activities to improve SDC technical efficiency
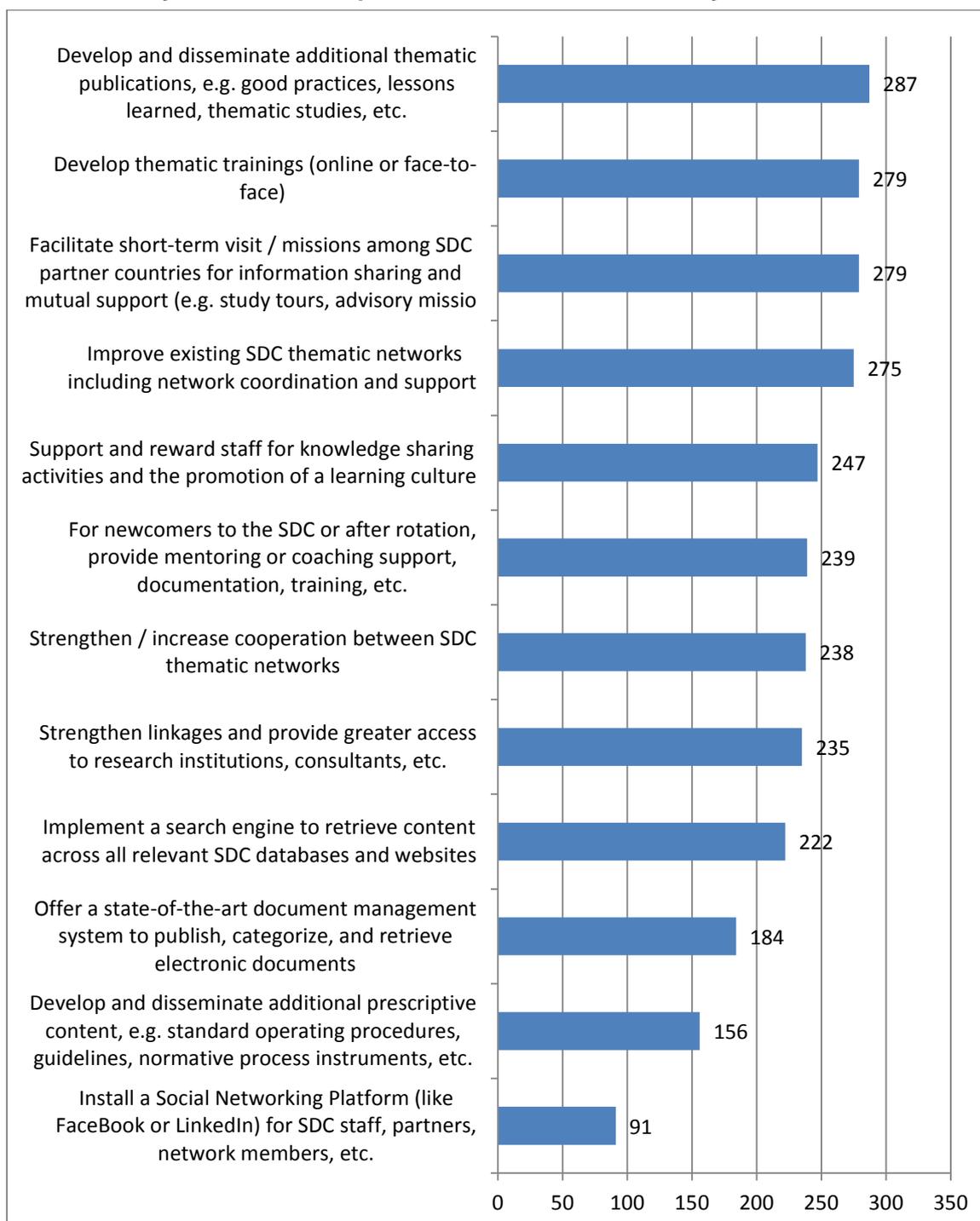
Figure 7: In your opinion, what types of activities should SDC make a high priority to improve its technical efficiency?

Key findings:

- Institutional thematic learning and individual capacity development are the perceived priorities of survey respondents;
- Thematic assistance, mutual support and learning through short field visits and missions are activities in which SDC regional networks are engaged but global networks only progressively developing;
- Networks governance, functioning and capacities have room for improvements;

- Cultural change at SDC corporate level as well as networks incentivization and recognition at the individual level are works in progress;
- Technology-driven KM activities (search engine, social networking platform, CMS) are not prioritized.
- Cross-tabulation of survey results does not show any significant difference between the priority rakings of SDC-HQ staff, field staff, and external respondents.

Final comments were given by 108 respondents, with the following key messages:
- SDC needs to improve its strategic planning processes;
- More regional trainings for NPOs;
- SDC needs to carefully develop appropriate expectations for networks (not too much, not too little);
- Networks should influence coherence from global to regional to country level initiatives and among the networks;
- It's challenging that networks are low priority for members and managers.

Sample quotes:
- *SDC needs to improve its strategic planning processes with different stakeholders.*
- *The main challenge remains that networking will always be a second or even third priority for the program officers. Therefore, the time allocated to networks is always less than expected and in consequence, the important and useful knowledge shared in not always translated into practice.*
- *Close coordination and making linkage among the relevant SDC networks are the must for reaching the overall objectives in an effective and efficient manner.*
- *FOCUS ON SHARING. THIS CAN HAPPEN FROM ANY PLACE IN THE WORLD. THE SPIDER DOES NOT HAVE TO BE IN BERN.*
- *how well linked are SDC (and soon FDFA) networks with the big thematic players like World Bank, DFID, UNDP? are there gains to be yielded in collaborating more closely with them?*
- *I am not convinced that the network idea is functioning for networks that can only meet globally. I guess networks with regional advisors (due to their belonging to a global programme) can exchange more frequently and have more regionally tailored aspects and meetings. Also peer-review and help could be fostered. I believe the path for the survival of networks is regional hubs and advisors facilitating the networks in their region in between F2Fs. If it remains a centralized issue these networks (and the one I am a member of) will most likely die or fully lose their character and relevance (which by the way is a common fate of communities of practice and widely researched on)*
- *It is important to link the more theoretical knowledge to the very practical knowledge of SDC staff. It should be avoided that someone teaches others on how to do. The knowledge of all different staff members should be linked and good practices, etc. worked out together so that everybody feels respected and feels that it´s already acquired knowledge can contribute to the given theme.*
- *il serait important de ne pas séparer le normatif du thématique! par exemples, des lignes directrices devraient contenir quelques bonnes pratiques; des études thématiques Yes, mais avec une vision institutionnelle: que signifie le thème pour la DDC, pour l'impact de ses interventions, etc.. en général, il manque de liens plus forts entre contrôle de qualité, controlling et évaluation et KM et les réseaux. Le KM ne devrait pas être un pilier à part (« nice to have ») mais faire partie intégrante du management et de la recherche de résultats et de qualité du travail de l'institution. Il faut pour cela convaincre en premier lieu « la ligne »; et les différents niveaux de direction et management de l'utilité des différents instruments, inclus les réseaux thématiques. - la formation - depuis les réseaux - est d'une certaine façon séparée de l'offre de formation du département ou de la*

confédération. il serait important de lancer une réflexion à ce sujet. Jusqu'ici chaque réseau a développé de son côté des instruments, approches et a organisé des formations en relation (CSPM, CC/DRR check, M4P, etc.). Les réseaux de la DDC devraient mieux se lier aux réseaux internationaux sur ce point (voir grandes offres de formation en ligne de la BM ou FAO).

- *Las redes somos todos nosotros y debemos sentirnos identificados con las mismas. Podría ser útil revisar la definición de los temas en las redes, algunos son muy amplios, otros muy específicos y otros se repiten. Incluso, ver la coherencia entre los temas de las redes y los temas de la Cooperación global.*

- *Many of these suggestions can be implemented with relatively little resources, if done right. For example, there is absolutely NO NEED for SDC to install a social networking platform; however, there is a GREAT NEED to use existing social networks to the advantage of the work of SDC, for example by using Twitter as a knowledge sharing tool, better connect SDC staff and consultants on LinkedIn etc.*

- *Nothing really. We will need to be consistent. I have often observed in three years, the position of the facilitator has changed two times. People need to take pride in being facilitators and coordinators. They will need to maintain strong links with field, where action actually lies and NOT at the head office level. Core network members have to come from field*

- *The thematic overlaps between the different networks should be reflected in their physical infrastructures (platforms with common parts; document search across networks...).*

- *Networks in the current form have probably not reached their potential. The concepts are not yet sufficiently thought through. It is a good moment to evaluate them after 5 years, learn and launch a new phase. A solid analysis of network benefits is needed. Furthermore, SDC networks have to team up with state of the art expert knowledge on key topics.*

- *The result of this survey should be reviewed and the follow-up actions have to be taken by relevant authorities.*

Annex 9: Networks Analysis

Synthesis analysis of the 12 thematic networks evaluated

Purpose, objectives, and mandate	The overall mandate of the thematic networks, as defined in the SDC Management Decision of 26.09.2008, is knowledge sharing and development and maintenance of capacities. The networks will support the Line Managers and Focal Points in carrying out their key functions. The same decision defines network functions as: • Promote learning and pass on professional and methodological knowledge, • Provide theme-related operational advice to the organizational units within the network, and • Capitalize on experience and formulate good practices. The 12 networks adhere to the overall decision both in definition and application. In addition, some networks highlight other key functions as part of their mandate: a. Raising thematic profile and thematic mainstreaming (particularly C&HR, DRR, PED, Migration), b. Quality assurance (particularly C&HR, Gender, Health), c. Policy development / influencing (particularly C&HR, DLGN, Gender, Health, Migration), d. Organizational coherence on thematic issues (particularly Water), e. Rapid problem solving through peer exchange (particularly Water), f. Link with other thematic networks (particularly A&FS, E+I and DRR). These special key functions are part of the mandate, fully justified and show the importance of flexibility in the design of the thematic networks: a. PED and Migration are new thematic issue for SDC requiring special attention to mainstreaming; DRR and C&HR are defined in the strategy as a global issue but the network leadership is located in the HA domain and Regional cooperation domain respectively requiring special attention for mainstreaming, b. C&HR and Gender have normative mandates (implementation of the CSPM and Gender sensitive approaches); c. Networks whose leadership is located outside the Global domain are not linked to special global programs with policy mandate. Issues defined by SDC's Strategy as global themes, such as health or crosscutting areas such as gender, therefore have an important function in providing input to policy development. The Evaluation finds that all thematic networks would benefit from including d, e, and f as key functions, considering that: d. Organizational coherence on thematic issues reflect the principles of assuring a corporate identify particularly for networks with no normative mandate; e. Peer exchange can play an important role but requires good management / knowledge of network human resources and full

	cooperation from line managers; f. Special attention is required to ensure an integrated thematic approach when working with 12 thematic focus areas as explained in the main report.
Role in Strategic Plan	The two relevant Dispatches (2009-2012 and 2013-2016) refer to the role of networks to support SDC as a learning organization where the most important resource is its staff. According to the 2009-2013 Dispatch, networks integrate staff at SDC HQ, field offices, and partner organizations. It should be noted that most of the networks still limit membership to SDC staff. Networks that integrate partner organizations incl. academia, NGOs, and UN agencies come closer to the objective outlined in Dispatch 2009-2012 (particularly Water, A&FS, CC&E, DLGN, DRR, E&I, and Education) and generally report positive impact in terms of knowledge development, capitalizing on experience, and learning. Some challenges were reported, though, during the evaluation regarding incentive for partners to participate and measures have to be taken to ensure that if external partners participate in the networks they would not have any special advantage when competing for mandates. Moreover, some resource persons reported a tendency for non-SDC members to dominate network discussions and dialogues. Again special measures from the network management are required to address this challenge. Networks with membership limited to SDC staff have taken special measures to include partner organizations constructively in the network functioning, for instance by inviting them for special e-discussions, F2F, and special events (e.g., Health and Gender). Moreover, the 2009-2012 Dispatch stresses the importance of poverty eradication and the role networks should play. Poverty reduction is the overall objective of SDC and should be the ultimate goal of all activities, including the thematic networks. With SDC's current organizational structure, the daily oversight of the poverty mandate is under the responsibility of the Quality Assurance and Aid Effectiveness Section, who is also responsible for the process / methodological quality assurance of the networks and thereby overseeing the role of the networks in contributing to poverty reduction. Over the last years several of the networks have developed theories of change for their role in contributing to SDC's overall objective. E.g. Health will contribute to the improved health status with a focus on the poor and most vulnerable populations and Gender will contribute to gender equality, sustainable development and poverty reduction. This more specific attention to Theories of Change for the networks strengthens the focus on network relevance to contribute to poverty reduction. It will still be necessary to develop an overall Theory of Change for how the 12 thematic networks will contribute to poverty eradication, with clear links of the interconnectedness of the networks in this overall theory of change. In general, the two dispatches put little emphasis on 'how' SDC fosters learning, transmit knowledge and methodological competence; provide operational and thematic advice within the

	organization, and capitalize experience and to formulate good practices, i.e., the functions of the networks as defined originally in 2008. Still, the 2013-16 Dispatch gives more attention to thematic issues than the predecessor, including the section on expertise, innovation and dissemination of solutions with the impact objectives of:
	
	• Strengthened capacity to deal with global challenges (climate change, water scarcity, food insecurity, pandemics, and irregular migration) in priority countries and regions,
	   o Selected indicators: 'adaptation to climate change', 'rate the food security and sovereignty', and 'rate of spread of communicable diseases,'
	
	• Switzerland participates actively in multilateral initiatives on innovations, policies, and standards to strengthen developing countries' capacities to deal with global challenges,
	   o Selected indicators: 'integration of Swiss positions in international agreements', 'number of policy processes and international agreements influenced by Switzerland'.
	
	Moreover, according to the 2013-2016 Dispatch, SDC's five priority thematic issues (climate change, food security, water, health and migration) are addressed through global programs that are supported by thematic networks for development of the global priorities. The Evaluation has found that the roles of the thematic networks in feeding the global programs with operational / field experience does not work optimally in all of the networks with a corresponding global program and network members in some of these networks are unclear about their exact role.
	
	Finally, the 2013-2016 Dispatch highlights the role the thematic networks should play in institutional learning and for dealing with failures in terms of application of internationally recognized professional standards and the dissemination of good practices. In the Dispatch, this is particularly directed towards the East Cooperation where the rapidly changing environment should be taken into account. The Evaluation finds that these principles are valid for all cooperation contexts characterized by complexity and hence emergence. However, this also means that there is a need for risk taking and risk acceptance at all levels, including accepting failures and use failures for learning. In fact the more SDC goes into fragile contexts, the more important it will be to ensure that the learning culture of the networks will be seen not only as dissemination of good practices but also as learning from mistakes. The networks respond to a certain degree to the challenge as suggested in the Dispatch. However, there is little evidence of dealing with failures in the networks as part of the learning strategies of the networks.

Funding / Budget	The networks do not have budgets as such but budget lines under the thematic budgets for the FP and Theme Manager. While the annual Status Reports of the K&LP section presents some overall budgets for the thematic networks, fact checking with the individual networks showed some discrepancies between their own numbers and the numbers in the budgets presented in the Status reports. This is most likely due to inclusion of different funding sources in some of the numbers and different approaches

	to what costs should be budgeted as network budgets. The scope of the Evaluation did not allow for a detailed analysis and establishment of comparable budgets and much less for a proper cost analysis. For instance, some networks report annual budgets for F2F events of around 80,000 CHF. However, these budgets do generally not cover travel costs or opportunity costs for the F2F participants. Likewise, some networks use backstoppers for the organization of F2F events but funded under separate backstopper budget lines and not F2F budget lines. While other networks apply other practices. It is also noted that the many budgets seem standard for networks without specific considerations for the geographical coverage of the networks or number of participants.
Values of the network for SDC including spin-offs (measured against efficiency and strategic objectives)	Network members identify a number of values from the networks, including connection to knowledge sources, greater feeling of organizational belonging, vertical integration and greater understanding and awareness about SDC's thematic operations in different parts of the world. Moreover, network members with no specialist thematic skills express that that the network participation has provided a great forum for learning and in general for strengthening thematic proficiency. In addition to the learning that takes place during events such as F2F and e-discussions, most networks organize or promote regularly more formalized training events for SDC and partners. E.g., A&FS has offered input on land rights as part of a human-rights based training event, DRR and CC&E have organized training of trainer events for the use of the CEDRIG, C&HR has organized a number of training events on CSPM, DRR has organized mainstreaming training, DLGN has organized M4P training in Central America, Health has produced 7 short videos on health promotion as a learning tool for future training courses and workshops, Migration and DLGN have carried out a learning project on protection of migrants, as part of L4D PED has prepared training courses 'PE for Practitioners', and Water has organized Training on Human Right to Water and Sanitation implementation in Moldova and Nicaragua.
	While almost half of SDC respondents to the online survey indicate that they have benefitted from training offered by the network, many also express concern about the lack of formal and systematic introduction to the thematic areas particularly considering that many members enter the networks without specialized backgrounds. Moreover, several NPOs express concern for the limited availability of regional training events offered by the networks.
	The Evaluation found great appreciation among network members for the F2F events: more than 70% of the online survey respondents expressed that they had benefitted from participating in the F2F. The F2F was found beneficial for a number reasons: they offer opportunities for horizontal cooperation, corporate identity, and organizational and individual learning. Moreover, they stimulate innovation and several new credit proposals have been developed based on input in the F2F. Without carrying out a cost-benefit analysis, the Evaluation considers that the F2F to be cost-efficient instruments. The current trend to organize the

	F2Fs as joint events for several networks furthermore strengthens the integrated thematic approach that is typically more relevant for the field level. Overall, participation and input from all networks should be strived for in the F2F events. And participation from all interested network members either physically or virtually should be strived for.
Are potential opportunities offered by the networks being fully exploited	Efficient and effective network management requires networking capacity, motivation, support, and direction. The Evaluation found that that while the leadership of the networks has received some networking training and benefit from continuous networking backstopping from K&LP, there are limited systematic trainings in networking. Some of the networks, such as CC&E and A&FS have co-facilitators with daily networking responsibilities, such as maintaining the Shareweb and D-groups. Other networks such as DLGN and Gender use external backstoppers for some of the regular animation activities, for instance for maintaining the D-groups and managing a certain number of e-discussions per year (three in the case of Gender). The animation of the networks is generally output based with limited focus on outcomes and impact. Part of this problem stems from the use of backstoppers for network animation through output-oriented contracts.
	The role of the backstoppers very greatly among the networks. Overall, the Evaluation finds that the networks the backstoppers' broad knowledge and expertise in different areas is not well exploited as highlighted for instance in the annual performance review for the gender equality mainstreaming in 2012. The Evaluation recognizes the initiative of the Focal Point Café to review the modalities of the various backstopping mandates in the near future to learn about good practices and difficulties from other networks.
	Overall, network members express that the networks offer many of opportunities but that time constrains their full use. However, the time constraint might also be a matter of how the network relevance is perceived by members. The Evaluation found that most of the networks are still functioning as top-down vertical structures with very limited initiatives from the members and a clear lack of ownership among members. Part of the problem is linked to uncertainty among members about how to use the networks directly for advice or for sharing lessons learned, including good practices and failures. But it also seems that the problem might be linked to the animation particularly considering that some of the networks have been able to successfully mobilize horizontal communication with cross-fertilization in feedbacks (e.g., DLGN).
	Overall, it is estimated that around 15 to 20% of network members are members of at least two thematic networks. While membership of several networks in principle should increase the coordination of network activities, the Evaluation did not observe any special use of the experience that comes from multi-network membership to strengthen a more harmonized and thematically integrated approach.
Thematic and/or geographical focus	The geographic coverage of the 12 networks varies greatly and follows SDC's overall strategy regarding geographic coverage.

(in theory and in practice)	Networks covering transversal themes (Gender, DLGN, and DRR while C&HR covers fragile and conflict countries in all regions) have by nature a global coverage similar to the networks linked to global programs (particularly CC&E, Migration, and Water). In practice, though, some of the networks with a global coverage will only work in a limited number of countries. SDC's current DRR operations, for instance, are mainly limited to 12 countries while operations are being phased out in 17 other countries. This focus is reflected in the DRR network's geographic focus to those same countries, which furthermore is a result of the staff policy in many SCOs where staff will only be assigned to networks of direct interest of the country strategy. Networks linked to thematic programs with a limited focus area have a similar limited geographic focus. The Education network, for instance, focuses on Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger, Chad, Afghanistan, Mongolia, and Jordan.
	The Evaluation recognizes these facts but also finds that all SCOs could benefit from a certain participation in all thematic networks. This could be done, for instance, through participation in the D-groups, which would allow staff to follow the organization's overall development of different thematic issues, without requiring the full commitment of being a network member. This could also generate more understanding of the organization's resources and potentials for thematic integrated approaches.
Incorporation of cross-sectoral SDC principles such as gender	The Gender network participates actively in the organization of a number of joint activities with other thematic networks, for instance a brownbag lunch organized with the CC&E network and the upcoming F2F on land issues organized in cooperation with the A&FS network. Likewise, other networks with crosscutting mandates such as DLGN (governance) and C&HR (CSPM) are organizing joint events with other thematic networks.
	In a follow-up to the impact evaluation of SDC's performance in mainstreaming gender equality in 2008[17], SDC has prepared annual performance reports on gender equality since 2009. The ARs 2009 and 2010 were prepared as internal SDC documents by the Gender Focal Point. Since 2011, the reports have been prepared by the technical backstopper on gender / gender network. The reports are based on screening of Annual Reports, Management Responses, Credit Proposals and Cooperation Strategies for a number of case countries. Since 2011, the reports are presented in sequential manner, i.e., they build on previous AR recommendations. As part of the screening the reports use the Gender Project Marker (projects that fulfill 7 or more criteria on the gender equality mainstreaming checklist). The AR2012 reports include analysis by technical domains of programs and projects (Rural Development, Governance, Water, Education, Health, Migration, Nature Protection/Climate Change, Economy/Employment and Food Security/Emergency Response). This allows a good way of analyzing the integration of the thematic areas, and in principle also the integration of the thematic networks, although it is not presented as such. The

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[17] Rieky, S. et al. (2008) "Evaluation of SDC's Performance in Mainstreaming Gender Equality". Available at < http://www.sdc.admin.ch/en/Home/Effectiveness/Evaluations/Evaluations_Archives_up_to_2009/2009>

	AR2012 also notes that while the thematic backstoppers for the different thematic areas might have great gender expertise, this is not necessarily reflected in their backstopping. E.g., the Helvetas is backstopper for the CC&E network, which scored very poorly on gender equality mainstreaming in spite of Helvetas' gender expertise. AR2013 is based only on gender budgeting principles using for instance the proportion of budgets allocated to projects that qualify for Gender Policy Marker, making a comparison from 2009 and forward in addition to comparisons among SDC domains, regions, and countries. Among the results was low gender sensitive budgeting in education and migration and high in humanitarian aid and economic integration. The main recommendations from the 2013 annual report includes organization of targeted gender training in units and thematic networks with low inclusion of gender sensitivity. Moreover, the report contains a list of good practices of gender inclusion. Overall the annual reports provide limited attention to the role of the networks, including the network could or should play in the in addressing key challenges for gender mainstreaming. This might be due to the fact that there is not clear distinction between the gender network and the work of the gender focal point and the gender contact persons. The Evaluation considers that the overall principles of the annual reports on gender mainstreaming constitutes an excellent model for monitoring mainstreaming performance work within SDC and can be used as a model for monitoring network activities systematically. Moreover, the Evaluation considers that for the updated methodology for the gender mainstreaming performance reports, which are currently being developed, it will be important to specifically include the thematic networks.
	The location of the Gender Focal Point at the Management level of the Regional domain, furthermore, strengthens the integration principles in operations.
	There are strong links between the Gender network and Quality Assurance network, which in principle should support the integration of gender in network processes and methodologies.
Criteria for membership (sector experience, geographical representation) including different levels of membership and how contacts with potential members are being established	The networks do not have any technical competence criteria for membership. Overall, it is expected that members will primarily be SDC staff working on the specific thematic issue but often with no training / education in the thematic areas. Other members, though, will have a track record of thematic experience. In addition, seven of the networks include staff from partner organizations among their members; for several because of historical traditions where the current networks build on former SDC network initiatives such as Water and A&FS. On the other hand, the Gender network is also the continuation of gender network activities in SDC before the 2008 reorganization; still the membership is closed to SDC. This can partly be explained by the specific normative role of the current Gender network. As such, each SDC unit has to have a gender contact person according to SDC gender policy and they will be members of the Gender network. There are no core policies for nomination of gender contact persons though. It will often be staff working on gender / social development projects. Members do not

necessarily have a GEM / social development background. Other networks with membership limited to SDC, justify this from a perspective of seeing the networks as SDC management / operational tools directed towards SDC specifically rather than for general knowledge management. Moreover, some networks express concern that opening the networks to non-SDC partners could give some members advantages when new contacts go out in competitions. On the other hand, it is also recognized that integration of other partners can strengthen discussions and dialogue in the networks. However, the network instruments offer possibilities for combining the advantages of networks with open memberships with networks with membership for SDC staff only. As such, an active use of D-groups and the Sharewebs in general for public participation can be combined with specific e-discussions, working streams, and learning projects on issues that are more directed specifically for SDC's operations / management. Active involvement of implementing partners in D-groups, for instance, could address some of the challenges that the Evaluation has found regarding lack of systematic learning from field projects in the networks.

In principle, the networks do not have any geographic limitations. However, thematic geographic focus of SDC puts some natural limits to membership coverage.

According to the online survey, SDC staff members primarily sign up for the networks because it is part of their job description, particularly for staff at headquarters. Among SDC staff member, relatively few member indicate that they have signed up because of invitation from a Focal Point or invitation from another network member. This is interesting considering that, according to the defined roles and responsibilities of within networks, Focal Points and Core Members are supposed to recruit new members.
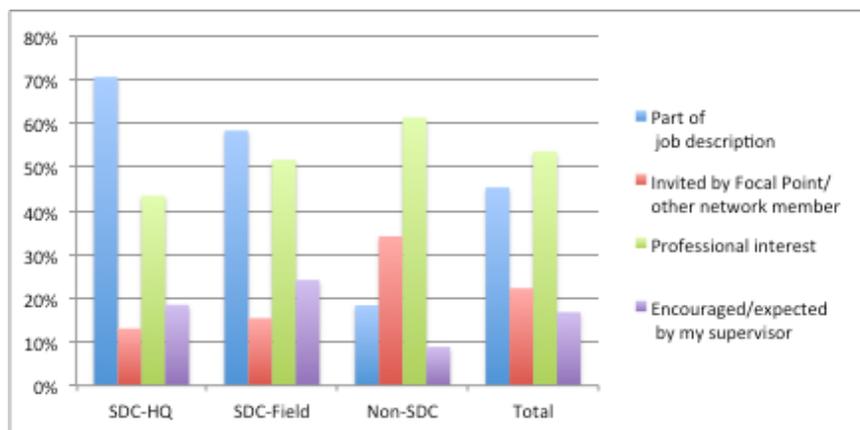
Reasons for signing up for the professional network

When newly recruited, a staff member signs up for a network, the D-group facilitator will typically issue a welcome asking the new member for an introduction. There is no special one-on-one introduction to the network for new members and while there is a lot of information available on the sharewebs and the K&LP website on the thematic networks, it can be an intimidating task for new member to find their way in the system, particularly for NPOs. It should also be noted that new network members in the

	field will typically also be staff who are new to SDC. During the first F2F in 2010 for the Gender network, the Shareweb moderator offered a half-day introduction to the use of different network instruments. Interestingly enough, HQ network members felt that this introduction was not necessary while NPOs appreciated the introduction.
Organizational setup (level of ties among members: open and direct lines of communication, possibility for subgroups for specific cooperation, links with program development, links with beneficiaries' program development)	Considering the mandated objective and functions of the networks, the Evaluation looked at evidence of multidirectional communication strategy: In principle, for international network communication it is important that strategies exist about: objectives for communication among different member groups (focal point, core group, theme manager, regular members), how members will communicate with each other, through which means, and how a multidirectional internal communication with both vertical and horizontal communication will take place. The Evaluation found that: • Some tools are in place where multidirectional horizontal and vertical communication already takes place such as the face-to-face events, • E-discussions offer the opportunity for multidirectional vertical and horizontal communication. But so far communication in most of the networks' e-discussions is only multidirectional vertically. There are some exceptions though such as the E-discussions in the DLGN network, • Newsletters also offer the opportunity for multidirectional vertical and horizontal communication. But so far most network newsletters seem to be based on one-directional vertical communication. There are few examples if any where network members take an active role in the communication in the newsletters, For external network communication with non-SDC stakeholders it is important that strategies exist about: stakeholder analysis, for each major stakeholder group (SCOs, desk officers, SCO management, etc.): objectives for the communication, how the network will communicate with other network stakeholders (who, through which means, when), how other stakeholders will communicate with the network (to who should they address communication, through which means, etc.). The Evaluation did not find any systematic reflection on communication with external stakeholders. Several tools are in place though that facilitate communication such as open Sharewebs. However, the usefulness of Sharewebs and similar instruments could be strengthened. E.g., during the visits to the SCOs, the Evaluation noticed a very low level of awareness about the Sharewebs and even the thematic networks among implementing partners.
Communications (means for day-to-day communication, role of face-to-face meetings, special events, lines of communication)	The D-groups is the main means of daily communication within the networks. Judging from the archives and discussions with network members, this is not a yet very efficient means of multidirectional communication. In fact, most communication is vertical and generally top-down initiated with bottom-up responses. The F2Fs offer good opportunities for multidirectional

	communication with full involvement of all participants and have shown to lead to new personal networks across the organization.
	For HQ members, there are regular meetings of the core-groups, which for many networks are constituted by all HQ based members. These meetings are considered to offer a good means of communication and considered to be effective for networking. However, there are no minutes of meetings of the HQ meetings posted on the D-groups.
Coordinator role: selection criteria, roles, general profile including network experience	The network Focal Points are senior technical experts recruited for their technical expertise and to a certain degree network capacities, e.g., a general perception about their thematic networks both within and outside SDC. The Focal Points are first and foremost technical advisors with a role in supporting the Theme Manager. The Evaluation finds that the combination of good and solid technical qualities with good and solid networking facilitator capacities are difficult to combine in all thematic areas. The profile of a good network facilitator is by nature very different from the profile of a good technical advisor. Some networks have resolved to have Focal Point teams. This could be systematized with tandem Focal Point teams in each network with senior technical advisors and knowledge management/networking specialists.
Governance (decision making, network planning)	Network management consists in principle of the Focal Point(s), the Theme Manager, and the Core Group. While their roles are clearly specified in the normative document "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance" (22.10.2010) and Management decisions 28.11.2011, there are still some uncertainties, particularly regarding the role of the core groups. Moreover, not all networks have established core groups (Gender and DRR or have dissolved the structure, C&HR while Water is considering replacing the Core Group with an advisory body. In some of the networks, the Core Groups consist of all network members at HQ while others have more selected membership.
Membership participation (who participates, on what, frequency of participation, incentives for participation)	The tasks and duties of network members are defined in the Fact Sheet "SDC Networks – Overview for Network Members" (09.01.2013):
	• Contribute to the thematic quality of SDC programs by means of professional advice to programs within the member's own organizational unit (input into important documents, participation in peer reviews),
	• Proactive participation in and contribution to network activities by means of theme-related input to e-discussions, face-to-face meetings and learning projects, etc. (contribution of experience, presentation of case studies and lessons learned from evaluations, capitalizing on experience, etc.; involvement in drafting network documents, taking the lead on sub- aspects of learning projects, etc.).
	Still, during the Evaluation several staff members expressed uncertainty about their role in the networks. It was particularly noted that members generally do not take ownership of the networks but refer to them as something outside their influence and responsibility. It was also noted that networks are often

referred to as being 'located' in a specific geographic unit, reflecting little recognition that the networks are located across SDC including members' own units through their mere participation. And even beyond SDC in the case of networks with external membership.

For most networks the participation is reactive, typically to requests from the network facilitator / Focal Point, for instance in preparation of F2F for input on country examples on the topic of the F2F (e.g., preparation of the F2F on gender and land rights, Gender and A&FS), and for special inputs for SDC / Swiss positions on certain issues (e.g., DRR requested input to SDC's position on the post-Hyogo agenda). While these consultations generate a certain membership participation they are generally limited to bottom-up inputs with no cross-fertilization from a membership dialogue on different inputs. Some networks have been able to move towards more dialogue in e-discussions with participation of a large number of members (particularly DLGN).

Part of the problem might be linked to language (no direct translation of all inputs), lack of clarity about what is expected by members – except reading the different inputs, lack of a safe learning culture, and lack of network members to understand how they would benefit from real engagement in the networks. It also seems to be linked to the role of the backstopper / moderator.

The Evaluation recognizes that the language issue can be difficult to tackle - and its multifaceted. While many people in principle can read and understand other languages there is often a barrier when they see an email in another language than their normal working language. So interventions in Spanish and French might only be read by very few people, for instance. Which is a pity because the idea is not to feed information to headquarters but to have a multidirectional and active knowledge sharing and knowledge development among network members. Moreover, a main objective of the thematic networks was to integrate the field in thematic discussions and development, particularly NPOs. So while Swiss nationals might be fully conversant in English, French, and probably Spanish and use these languages on a daily basis, many NPOs will 'only' have French or Spanish - or Russian as their working language. Translations of all inputs can be tedious and time consuming - but it is important to ensure that at least all inputs in Dgroups / E-discussions are available in English in a timely manner.

| Capacity development activities | All networks have organized a number of capacity development activities, primarily focusing initially on individual learning with an expectation that it will be converted into organizational learning, for instance through training of trainers. The Evaluation did not see any specific capacity development strategies for the individual networks / thematic areas and as such no specific development of objectives and indicators for capacity development of the networks in line with one of their primary functions: promote learning and pass on knowledge. Linked to the lack of specific capacity development strategies for the specific networks / thematic areas, there seems to be limited specific follow-up to capacity development activities. Still, the networks have various |

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instruments that in principle could and should serve for follow-up such as e-discussions and blogs. Some recent initiatives in some of the networks could offer some more strategic capacity development plans in the future; e.g. the DRR recently launched a survey of training needs among its members.

One of the exceptions is the certified gender training that has been launched by the Gender network.

Some examples of key capacity development activities:

Training: use of CEDRIG (DRR, CC&E), Right to Food & Land Rights in HRBA (A&FS), M4P training (E&I, CSPM training (C&HR), Human Rights to Water and Sanitation (Water). As a special case, Gender recently launched certified on-line training in cooperation with the University of Bern.

Learning: learning projects (DLGN, Migration), Learning event on indicators and monitoring (A&FS), and Change Skills and Knowledge for Practitioners (CC&E).

The training and learning events are first and foremost organized for SDC staff at HQ and in the field and secondly for partners in Switzerland and in the field. Likewise, the locations vary from HQ to cooperation countries for global, regional, or national training and learning events.

Several outlets are being used for the training and learning events, particularly special sessions during the F2Fs, special training sessions, e-discussions and to a lesser degree peer to peer training (e.g. Peer learning in health evaluations in Tajikistan and Great Lakes, Health). Self-training through special online videos (e.g. Health). So far, the networks have not used systematic mentoring. In addition, the networks regularly produce components to training modules (e.g., PED has prepared a training module on political economy linked to local governance & decentralization with DLGN) as part of the Train4Development initiative.

According to the online survey for the Evaluation around half of the respondents indicate that they have benefitted professionally from the training events organized by the networks.

Finally, it should be mentioned that several networks post overviews of training opportunities organized by partners on their ShareWeb (e.g., Healht and CC&E) where the networks take on a certain clearing house role in making sure that the posted training opportunities are of a certain quality.

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Monitoring and evaluation (performance criteria, self-assessments and how)

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The 12 thematic networks have limited formal monitoring, evaluation and reflection procedures/processes of network performance and impact. Some of the networks have launched discussions about performance and impact indicators (e.g., A&FS).. The Gender network / Gender thematic area prepares Annual Gender Mainstreaming Performance reports, which include screening of Credit Proposals, strategies and annual reports, provide an excellent M&E tool for the thematic issue of gender equality mainstreaming. These reports give a good indicator and basis for further discussion on the state of gender mainstreaming in different regions and thematic fields. The

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	Evaluation finds that the basic principles of these annual gender equality mainstreaming reports could be used for other thematic networks for annual or bi-annual monitoring of the thematic excellence throughout SDC.
Resource requirements, including funding requirements and operational support	The main resource challenge linked to the functioning of the networks observed during the Evaluation, is the limited active participation of network members in most of the networks in daily activities. The principle of having a certain percentage of staff working hours dedicated to network activities (e.g., 10% for regular members, 20 to 30% for core group members, and 50% for focal points (Management decision, 28.11.11) is applied very loosely based on justifications of work priorities. However, work priorities are a reflection of perceived utility. The Evaluation finds that some of the challenges regarding staff resources are linked to limited perceived utility of the networks and uncertainty about what roles and responsibilities for members. Another challenge is the lack of authority / lack of tradition that the network management has for negotiating use of member time for network activities, e.g., for task forces, peer reviews, one-on-one support, etc. This is also a reflection of the limited attention to the line managers' role to negotiate the use of their staff's time for network activities as outlined in the 22.10.2010 normative document "Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance".
	For technical resources, the Evaluation finds that overall the thematic networks integrated important technical resources although there is limited use of 'yellow-book' like databases on the existing technical capacities.
	For financial resources, the Evaluation did not observe any financial obstacle for carrying out network activities.
Description of network members	As described earlier, the 12 networks differ in terms of membership criteria with some networks being open mainly to SDC headquarters and field staff with some few members other federal agencies such as FDFA, SECO, Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), and Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) from while other networks include partners from partner organizations, including Swiss NGOs, research institutions and think-tanks. Across the different categories of membership (SDC headquarters, SDC field, other federal agencies, NGOs, and other external) there is an equal distribution between men and women. While most members are mid-career staff, there is also a number of junior and more senior staff. Generally members bring some thematic experience into the networks, although in some networks some SDC staff will enter the networks with very limited thematic background. This is partly a result of the rotation system within SDC where staff will be assigned program management responsibilities without necessarily being a thematic specialist on the focus areas of the programs. However, being part of the thematic networks offers thematic learning opportunities as well as a resource network to support them in carrying out their program management activities. The mixing of several levels of thematic competencies in the networks is believed to support general organizational learning. Moreover, considering the overall size of SDC and the number of thematic priorities, it can

	be argued that there are limitations to a fully fledged professional thematic network system as is known for instance in DFID with minimum thematic competency requirements for members of the professional cadres.
	To take full advantage of the thematic expertise and experience that network members bring, it is important to have updated member lists. The Evaluation noted that in response to the 2009 Knowledge Management Evaluation, there was a development of online 'yellow books' on network members and their specific thematic qualifications, capacities, and resources. However, the yellow book information is not systematically updated making use of network human resources for network focal points and others more difficult.

Examples of Preliminary Network Theories of Change / Contribution Hypotheses

The thematic networks have the mandate to promote learning, to advise and to capitalize experiences. An impact hypothesis or a Theory of Change of the networks was not formally established during the 2008 reorganization. However, it was implicitly assumed that the learning in networks affects the quality of operations and policy work. Based on observations, anecdotal evidence and interviews with resource persons the Evaluation has prepared an assumption-cum-contribution analysis, which is presented in a separate annex.

The following are some preliminary theory of change models and contribution hypotheses developed within the thematic networks. They show good models and background for further development of impact-oriented networks.

DRR
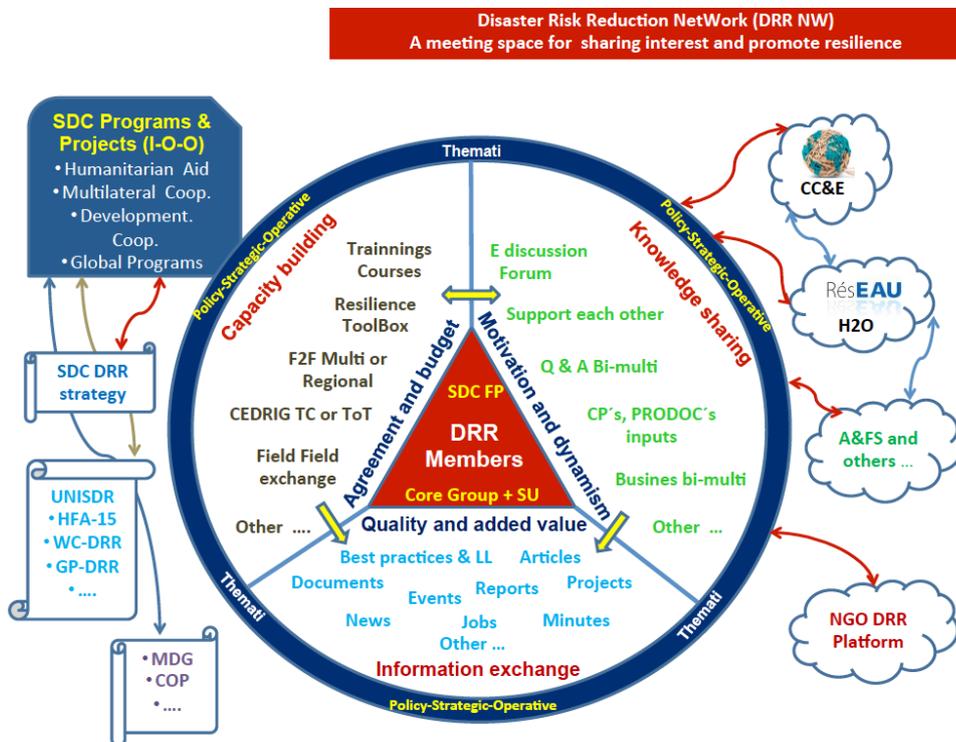
Prepared by Roberto Méndez, Regional DRR Advisor, Bolivia

Health
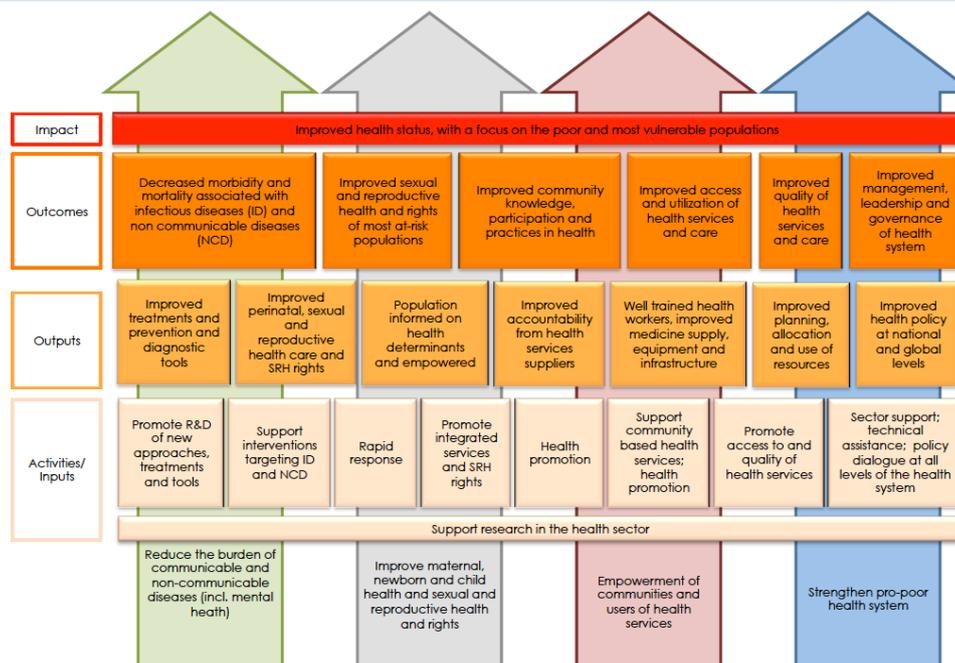
General theory of change of the role of network knowledge sharing (KS) and learning in the 12 thematic networks
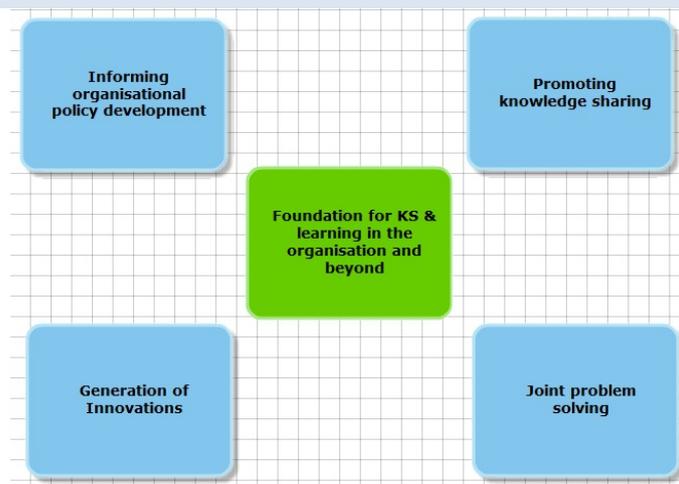
Prepared by Riff Fullan, Knowledge management advisor, Helvetas and technical backstopper for SDC technical networks.

"Theory of Change: Organizational memory is being build when knowledge sharing and learning is being supported across geographic, institutional and (to a lesser extent) language boundaries. If the networks do this successfully, they will have a substantial positive impact on the effectiveness of SDC programming through innovations, joint problem solving, knowledge sharing and organizational policy development. As such, the networks constitute arenas for increased knowledge sharing, they enable joint problem solving among members, they help to surface innovative ideas and practices, and contribute directly to organizational policy development. These things together allow the networks to both offer practical solutions and support in members' day-to-day work, while they also contribute to the evolution of thinking in the domains of the respective networks.

What is not well captured in the above diagram is the cross-institutional nature of the networks. While this aspect can introduce some complications (e.g. how can a network discuss and contribute to internal or even confidential processes/outputs?), it offers far

more significant benefits (e.g. allowing the organization to leverage knowledge outside of itself to contribute to the effectiveness of its work, influencing other organizations through the Networks, making it more likely that the organization will have a higher level of adaptability, which is also crucial in complex contexts."

Gender

"When it comes to Gender equality in SDC, the theory of change can be seen in two two steps

1. Integrating gender equality into SDC operations as a transversal theme according to SDC Gender equality policy,
2. Contributing to the strategic goals of the message 2013-2016 (as mentioned below) through the gender network

SDC gender policy clearly states that achieving gender equality is first about women's human rights and Swiss obligations according to Swiss Gender Equality Laws, CEDAW and the Bejing Plan of Action. Second, achieving gender equality is also about effective result-oriented development, highlighting the close link between gender equality, sustainable development and poverty reduction. Therefore, the gender equality policy aims at reducing gender-specific inequalities to achieve more effective and sustainable development and poverty reduction.

The impact hypothesis (on how to reduce gender-specific inequalities and achieve this overall goal) is that consequent Gender Mainstreaming will eventually lead to gender-responsive interventions that not only reduce gender inequalities but also better overall results of the programs and interventions. Gender Mainstreaming is based on a three-pronged approach a) integrating gender equality analysis as a transversal dimension, b) applying gender-specific interventions according to context-specific gender gaps and c) creating a supportive institutional environment. The latter includes allocation of resources (time and finances), building capacities and expertise among staff, management and partners through training, shared learning and capitalization, and subsequently conducting systematic quality assurance.

In this impact hypothesis the Gendernet consisting of members at HQ and Focal points in the Cooperation offices is the tool and structure through which thematic knowledge, expertise and learning is built up, shared and capitalized, with the different methods and communication channels available such as F2F, Shareweb, e-discussions, newsletter, working groups, production of knowledge products, etc. The Focal Point is the moderator and facilitator, steering and offering inputs, advice and expertise according to needs and demands. The transfer of knowledge through the decentralized structure of the networks contributes to the thematic quality and quality assurance of all programs and interventions. The effectiveness of this network approach however depends on institutional compliance (and political will) exercised by the management (in HQ as well as in the field) to make sure that gender mainstreaming is actually taken serious and integrated in policies, strategies, projects as well as in the institutional settings and office organization. The contribution of the gender net to the strategic goals of the dispatch 2013-16 works along these same lines, with the expertise and learning being specific to the respective thematic objective."

Annex 10: Stakeholders Analysis

Network Stakeholder Groups and their Primary Stakes in the Thematic Networks

The Evaluation conducted an analysis of key findings based on the data collected throughout the assignment. The key findings are organized according to each principle network stakeholder group and their primary interests in the networks. This stakeholders analysis is framed by the following questions:

- Who are the main network stakeholders (intended, actual, and potential)?
- What are their roles, contributions, and benefits vis-à-vis key network functions (learning, capacity development, advice, good practice) and network management?
- Are all potential network stakeholders involved in an optimal way?

PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS / STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	THEMATIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
SDC Management, Directors	• Organizational leaders, provide vision and strategic objectives for SDC and the networks • Provide overall institutional support but without active outreach / visible promotion	• Review the annual status reports and take decisions	• Senior managers are not necessarily member of the thematic networks	• Primarily indirect users, i.e. through Theme Managers or Focal Points	• Special training events organized by some of the networks for management • Overall, oversight of development and implementation of learning concept	• Overall responsibility for QA strategies and business plans
Line Managers (Heads of Organizational Units and Country Directors)	• Recruit thematically competent staff and guide them • Minimize the loss of technical expertise and foster technical careers	• Provide support as necessary to the focal points	• Participate in key network evens such as F2F • Approve network products for wider sharing	• Ensure the application of "Good Technical Practice"	• Ensure thematic training of and thematic networking by their staff	• Steer operations in line with technical standards • Thematic control responsibility in the operational line
Theme Managers Heads of Divisions	• Responsible for overall direction of the network, though often delegate to/	• Responsible for overall thematic efforts • Provide financial	• Responsible for overseeing knowledge generated through network	• Participate in promotion of knowledge products from the networks	• Support learning events in various capacities, including	• Responsible for overseeing thematic quality assurance

PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS / STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	THEMATIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
	support Focal Points.	resources to the networks • Recruit Focal Points and guide them • Defend thematic interests to senior management. • Rarely defend the network per se	• Issue technical advice documents		technical input • Ensure budget allocations for learning initiatives	
Global Programs Theme Managers	• Responsible for overall direction of the network, though sometimes delegate to/ support Focal Points.	• Responsible for overall thematic efforts • Provide financial resources to networks • Recruit Focal Points and guide them	• Responsible for overseeing knowledge generated by GP staff and output documents distributed through the networks • Issue technical advice documents	• Technical support provided by GP staff (not network) •	• Support learning events in various capacities, including technical input • Ensure budget allocations for learning initiatives	• Responsible for overseeing thematic quality assurance
Focal Points	• Lead direction of thematic networks	• Organize the work of the networks • Some seek out	• Organize the development of "Good Technical Practice" and its	• Provide technical advice (except those with	• Facilitate thematic knowledge management	• Provide technical advice at key moments in

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS / PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS	LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	THEMATIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
		inputs from field to determine direction of networks, while others determine at HQ level. All use F2F to gain member inputs for network planning.	documentation in technical advice documents, standards, policies and strategies • Global programs develop within GPs and disseminate through networks • Mandate Learning Projects	GPs) • Share relevant documents/ experiences • Provide advice, tools, good practices, etc. as relevant for network members	and organizational learning • Coordinate trainings • Share good practices and lessons learned	PCM cycle when requested by line management or SCOs.
Core Member Groups	• Support Focal Points in leading the networks • Some networks do not have a Core Group, but steering committees or nothing at all.	• Support planning and general management of networks • Act as sounding boards in regular network meetings • Level of involvement of Core Group	• Participate in planning and decision on knowledge products, • Participate in ad-hoc groups for learning product development	• Link between Country Offices and Focal Points • Provide advice, tools, good practices, etc. as requested by SCOs.	• Participate both as supporters and receivers of learning events • Participate in network planning, including organization of learning initiatives	• Provide limited advice in PCM cycle when requested by line management or SCOs.

PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS / STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	THEMATIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
		members varying across networks				
SDC Field Staff (Network Members)	• Participation responsive to requests, rarely proactive in generating discussion.	• Only involved network planning during F2F	• Involved in learning projects • Provide examples for good practices • Share experiences when requested • Peer review within other countries (limited opportunities)	• Directly benefit from products • Technical advice well received • Newsletters useful for overview of efforts across the network • Case studies too specific to particular context, difficult to adapt and too much information for limited SCO time • Good practices are well received - some too vague, others too context	• Participants in trainings, etc. • Sharing experiences requires reflection and learning • Learn & benefit through conducting & receiving peer reviews	• Benefit from high quality thematic support for design and implementation

PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS / STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	THEMATIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
				specific to be easily adapted		
Partner Organizations (Network members)	• Participation responsive to requests, rarely proactive in generating discussion.	• Involved in network planning during F2F	• Bring in strong expertise in thematic area • Generate knowledge for the purposes of their own organizations and share with network • Generate knowledge as mandated by SDC and shared with network	• Use network products to support project implementation (particularly when SDC implementing agency)	• Participants in trainings, etc. • Sharing experiences requires reflection and learning	• Benefit from high quality
Backstopping Organizations	• Supports the Focal Points / Core groups in development of network products, identification of new network activities (e.g., through analysis of e-user surveys)	• About ½ backstoppers facilitate network e-discussions and dgroups • No significant connections or dialogue with backstoppers across networks	• Generate knowledge for the purposes of their own organizations and share with network • Generate knowledge as mandated by SDC and shared with network		• Conduct trainings • Often facilitate F2F	

PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS / STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	THEMATIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
K&LP	• Supports Focal Points / Core groups in network management,	• Organize the production of the annual status reports • No mandate to coordinate the networks ex-ante • Primary stakeholders are the FP	• Develop a range of guidelines and tools on KM and networking • No D-group for FPs to network, regional networks, backstoppers	• Integrate network products in SDC's KM systems	• Responsible for facilitating learning across networks • Facilitate useful space for dialogue at FP Café • Slow to build learning culture within SDC	• Responsible for quality assurance for networking / functioning of the networks

Annex 11: Assumption & Contribution Analysis

The following table shows key assumptions of different stakeholder groups that would have an impact on the thematic networks' efficiency and effectiveness in contributing to SDC's goals and priorities. As such, the assumptions reflect what different stakeholder groups assume or take for granted will happen and not what different stakeholder groups recommends should happen for the networks to be relevant, efficient, effective and impact oriented towards SDC's goals and priorities. The key assumptions are identified during the data collection of the Evaluation and are not necessarily representative of a consensus.

Repetitions are sought avoided, particularly in the 'observed shortcomings in the assumptions' and the 'observed network contributions'. As such, the observed shortcomings refer to assumptions expressed in different ways in several cases.

Overall, the Evaluation notes that there are no major incoherencies regarding assumptions of different network stakeholder groups. Moreover, many of the assumptions have been confirmed during the evaluation, thus contributing in the underlying theory of change model for the networks. There are also many assumptions that do not happen in reality or only partly. The Evaluation did not identify any fundamental assumption without which the thematic networks would not contribute ('killer assumptions') to SDC's goals and priorities as identified in the underlying theory of change. However, the Evaluation has identified several assumptions that have not been realized in the current structure and thus hamper the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the thematic networks in contributing as planned and thereby limiting the impact. Specific efforts are required to reformulate some of the assumptions to make them more realistic considering the context, including resources for networking. To ensure that the assumptions in general will happen modifications to the functioning of the networks are required. The overall modifications that the Evaluation consider necessary are reflected in the recommendations.

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP	KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION			OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION	OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
Management staff	• Global programs / networks should influence global agenda • Networks are not normative • Improve coherence • Technical guidance • Ensure that global programs will not take over the excellence at the expense of the competency and support to bilateral cooperation • Management decides the role of networks in the PMC cycle	• Result oriented • Regular members contribute 5% of their time – core members 10 to 20%,	• Link different parts of SDC (both horizontally and vertically) – e.g. global and regional divisions - but also with outside SDC • Organization of the knowledge, lessons learned, supporting the operational programs, align with operations / SDC strategy, linking operational and policy, and bring field staff together	• Network members dedicate less time to the networks than assumed, • Assumption of time dedicated to networks limited by the lack of clear definitions of membership obligations, • Not all networks have core groups, • No clear directions about the role of the networks in the PMC, • Network contribution not systematically integrated in PMC key documents, • Horizontal linkage / communication limited, • Use of SDC field experience in global programs not fully systematized (role and links of global programs and networks in PMC not	• Influence global agenda; e.g., Health contributed significantly to SDC's health policy and Switzerland's international health policy. DRR's e-discussion on post-Hyogo influences SDC's post-Hyogo position, • Greater sense of corporate belonging of NPOs, • Networks with open membership improve links with non-SDC partners, • Increasing use of rolling results based planning in networks, • Provide technical advice, • Facilitate use of SDC field experience in global programs to a certain degree, • Sector knowledge management in

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP	KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION			OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION	OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
				clarified),	networks with great documentation and easy access,
Theme managers	• Bring together experience from all regions and improve overall quality of operations • Where there are global programs/themes: networks are for bilateral cooperation only but should inform global policy based on bilateral experience • Networks in regional domain improves cooperation with multilateral organizations by making collaboration based on concrete project / program experience	• Bottom-up approaches • Disseminate methodologies, training, F2F for exchange of knowledge/ know-how • SCOs need to be members of the networks for communication to function • Concrete activities will increase the effectiveness of the networks • When documents are shared with core members for comments, the core members will share with other members that they consider of relevance for the specific issue of the document • Theme managers	• Improve thematic quality of programs • Knowledge management and knowledge generation through innovative programs	• Lack of indicators for networks including quality of operations, • Network contributions not included systematically in project / program impact evaluations, • Lack of network initiatives from members, no sense of network ownership, • Lack of systematized inclusion of good practices and lessons learned in mandated projects, • Concrete activities increase effectiveness provided that they are relevant for the members' current portfolio, • The role of the core	• Facilitates decentralization with better integration of SCOs in overall technical knowledge development and knowledge exchange, • Innovation through activities such as learning projects in some networks, • Good knowledge sharing with some learning opportunities, particularly F2F, • Theme managers provide policy and organizational political support in most networks, • Them managers provide general oversight of network activities, • Many examples of line managers

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP	KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION			OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION	OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
		provide policy support and general oversight of network activities, e.g., randomly check of network generated documents for thematic quality control • FPs ensure that the networks are functioning, that the instruments are used optimally, including shareweb and peer reviews • Networks are different, why each FP will have specific TORs • Line managers ensure that network members to include network activities and indicators in the personal performance / planning review • F2F with thematic focus will lead to quality improvement in operations,		members is not necessarily perceived in terms of providing the bridge to other members but more in terms of overall network planning. Nor is the links with other networks clearly defined / perceived, • Theme managers thematic leadership limited in some instances by time constraint and lack of thematic excellence; limited transparency to the network members on the role and activities of the theme managers,	promoting network participation in staff planning and performance reviews, • F2Fs promote knowledge and know-how sharing which leads to motivation and collaboration and hence better projects members, • F2Fs have improved over the years with increasing attention to thematic focus for increased knowledge and knowhow of network members,

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP	KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION			OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION	OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
		• Core groups define network policy and ensure links with other networks			
Focal points	• F2Fs are not geared to systematic training: thematic training at specialized institutions • Tool for horizontal communication among members • Support learning in SDC	• Participatory approaches • Open membership and use of backstoppers will decrease effectiveness of networks as SDC tool • FP training in networking would strengthen the network effectiveness • Hosting in Regional domain might limit the organization wide attention to the theme • Core members are technical specialists • Core members assure the link between units and filed level operations • Theme managers involved in advice with other divisions / domains	• Promote quality learning to promote quality of programs through mutual learning processes and learning from experience,	• Open membership can generate more knowledge and know-how insight, but to be directly transferrable into operational and policy activities, structures and incentives for SDC staff active participation need to be strengthened, • Core members are not necessarily technical specialists; the identification/selection requirements for core members not clear; membership of core group seen in some cases as learning opportunity, • Limited specific attention to	• While F2F are not geared for systematic training they provide appreciated learning opportunities that have contributed directly to new projects, • Networks located in the regional domain have found ways to operate throughout organization although not in an optimal manner, • FPs are senior technical advisors with good track records taking thematic leadership, particularly in networks located in regional domain, • FPs with good informal network is SDC improve

| NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP | KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION | | | OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION | OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION |
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
		• Theme managers responsible for overseeing the functioning of the networks • FPs define activity levels, functions, and tools of his or her network • FP qualifications: innovative, informal network in SDC, visions, communication skills, technical expertise • FPs represent SDC thematically • FPs technical advise to the BoD		innovation as a key result of networks in result based management,	effectiveness of networks, • Networks with two to three years result based planning and management have clearer visions for development of SDC's technical excellence,
Core group members		• Core members dedicate 10% of their working time to the network	• Knowledge exchange, motivation, engender dynamics in operations and policy work	• Assumption of time to networks dedicated by core group members limited by the lack of clear definitions of their obligations,	
Network members	• Backstopping • Connecting field with policies • For network in Global	• Participation increases ownership and use of networks and hence	• Knowledge management	• The assumption about participation leading to ownership is a 'hen and the egg'	• FP's are defining the networks through their thematic leadership,

| NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP | KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION | | | OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION | OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION |
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
	Domain: communicate thematic knowledge developed within the global program throughout the organization	effectiveness • Anchoring in operational divisions strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of the networks • FP define the networks, including their relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness		problem; neither participation nor ownership will happen on their own but require relevant network activities and incentives for participation,	
Network support staff at the K&LP division	• Networks are learning structures that will foster capacity and quality but with no quality assurance mandate	• Networks with sufficient facilitating staff time will lead to vibrant communities • Open networks will strengthen the technical excellence of the networks and the effectiveness • FPs strengthen horizontal communication • K&LP responsible for quality assurance for networking / functioning of the networks • Quality Control	• Knowledge management, learning, and compliance	• Vibrant communities are essential for efficiency and effectiveness of the networks but not enough to ensure network contribution to SDC's goals and priorities (requires result based planning and management of the networks), • Line managers/theme managers' decisions of when to use the networks or not are not always	• K&LP providing excellent networking support, including instruments and networking practices, reflected in the operation of all the thematic networks, • All thematic networks organizing F2F regularly with good contributions to knowledge sharing, learning, development of individual professional networks,

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP	KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION			OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION	OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
		responsible for quality assurance for processes (reporting, etc.) • Theme managers responsible for quality assurance for thematic quality • Line managers / theme managers ensure that the networks will be used for operational and policy activities when necessary (i.e. can use other instruments including their own networks if they find more relevant) • Network members dedicate 10% of their time for network activities – core members 30% • F2F organized every 18 months more or less • K&LP offers networking support to the networks based		transparent for the network members, • K&LP's suggestions for networking instruments widely applied but not in a fully integrated manner,	organizational coherence and overall to more motivated SDC staff,

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP	KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION			OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION	OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
		on demand, e.g., resource planning, which tools to use, preparation of the F2Fs, setting the agenda, how to engage NPOs, and training in addition to regular support, e.g., monthly FP cafes • Networking instruments: Platforms (shareweb), blogs, mailing list, wiki, and other electronic platforms • Required FP qualifications: combination of technical capacity and e-moderation capacities			
Staff at the QA division	• Review all key documents in the PCM cycle (Cooperation strategy, Yearly report, End of phase report, Yearly plan of operations, project/program	• Normative documents outlining networks' mandate • All professional staff are member of at least one network		• While all thematic networks have normative documents outlining their mandate, it is still limited to functions and not results based.	• SDC is perceived as a network based organization where staff participate in at least one network.

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUP	KEY ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED DURING EVALUATION			OBSERVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION	OBSERVED NETWORK CONTRIBUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE EVALUATION
	NETWORK ROLES	NETWORK FUNCTIONING AND EFFECTIVENESS	NETWORK OBJECTIVES		
	document, credit proposals, entry proposals, implementation agreement, evaluation report, management response)				
SCO staff	• Capitalizing input from the field	• Regionalization of advice and network functioning critical for effectiveness			• More and more focus on regionalization of the networks have increased the interest in the networks and hence their effectiveness,
Backstoppers		• Network participation part of job descriptions and country programs • Role of backstoppers: nurturing the networks on a daily basis		• The role and effectiveness / efficiency of the backstoppers depend on the networks. Some are implemented in a mechanical manner based on outputs rather than outcomes.	

Annex 12: Inception Report

THEMATIC NETWORKS IN THE SDC

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

INCEPTION REPORT
FINAL VERSION

March 24, 2014

Prepared by
Breard & Associates SARL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CLP	Core Learning Partnership
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ET	Evaluation Team
FDEA	Federal Department of Economic Affairs
IR	Inception Report
K&LP	Knowledge and Learning Processes Division
KM	Knowledge Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and
REO	Reorganization
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE INCEPTION REPORT
1. This Inception Report (IR) reflects the Evaluation Team's (ET) understanding of the Approach Paper (Annex 8.1) for the Evaluation. The Report further defines the scope of the Evaluation, refines the evaluation questions and clarifies in greater depth the design and the methodology that will be used during the Evaluation. Finally, the IR responds to comments received during the kick-off workshop with participation of the Core Learning Partnership (CLP).

1.2. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN
2. The preparatory activities for the Evaluation have included:
- Review of basic documents about the networks, including annual status reports with critical reviews from the K&LP.
- Preliminary review of other network evaluations.
- Preparation of Inception workshop.
- Dialogue with Herbert Schmid, Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division.
- Inception briefing in Berne:
  - Inception Kick-off workshop with participation of CLP members and other core stakeholders of the thematic networks (Workshop Aide Memoire attached in annex 8.8);
  - Interviews with Key Staff (a list of SDC staff interviewed during the Inception briefing attached in annex 8.9).
- Preparation of preliminary review of SDC thematic networks.
- Finalization of Inception Report, including evaluation matrix and identification of countries.

2. SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

2.1. CONTEXT
3. A critical part of SDC's 2008 reorganization was the introduction of thematic networks to improve the quality as well as access and use of thematic knowledge in SDC's operations and to ensure coherence among its programs and activities at all levels. Within the new structure the networks were placed directly under the thematic managers in the operational line departments and the matrix organization that had been applied until 2008 was dissolved. In principle, the members of the networks are all staff with thematic responsibilities whether they work at headquarters or in the regions. Overall, SDC's Knowledge and Learning Processes division (K&LP) was mandated to support the development of the thematic networks. During the 2008 reorganization, which lasted until 2012, a number of new networks were created and existing SDC networks were adapted and integrated into the new network structure laid out in the reorganization. Over the years, the networks have developed into different types, operate under various framework conditions, and additional networks have been created. The context of the networks has been very dynamic during the 2008-2012 reorganization. The changes in SDC's thematic focus areas and its increasing use of third parties in its operations, new challenges have emerged for knowledge management.

4. To ensure accountability of the funding and draw lessons learned, SDC's Directorate has mandated an independent evaluation to assess the performance of the thematic networks and their contributions to SDC's strategic priorities.

5. The Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division and an independent evaluation team commission the evaluation; Breard & Associates SARL has been recruited to carry out the exercise. The core elements of the evaluation are

described in SDC's 'Approach Paper/03.12.2013' (Annex 8.1) and further elaborated by the Evaluation Team (ET) in their proposal. One of the first milestones in the evaluation was an Inception Workshop in Berne in order to kick-off the entire process. The inception workshop allowed feedback on the draft Inception Report prepared by the ET. This feedback is reflected in the final version of the Inception Report.

2.2. NETWORK-BASED ORGANIZATION

6.   In its basic form, a network is a set of nodes and links. In organizational and other social contexts networks are structures of individuals that interact to achieve collective goals such as knowledge management. Social networks can take many forms, for instance known as alliances, partnerships, or coalitions that in practice might differ little. The elusiveness of networks as a general concept is related to the coverage of the network concept by many different sciences such as network science and complexity theory, sociology, anthropology, diffusion theory, business management, and innovation management. The evaluation will apply the network definitions provided in SDC glossary, which forms the basis for evaluation specific glossary presented in Annex 8.3.

7.   When SDC reorganized in 2008, it chose a network-based structure to "provide a framework in which knowledge is exchanged and skills are built and maintained" according to an SDC Management Decision of 26.09.2008. According to the same decision, the functions of the networks were defined in terms of:
   •   Learning and transmission of professional and methodological knowledge,
   •   Thematic operational advice to organizational units attached to the network, and
   •   Formulation and development of good practices.

8.   Overall, SDC's structure identifies two types of networks:
   •   Thematic networks focusing on SDC's thematic priorities, and
   •   Management networks focusing on approaches and instruments to improve the quality of operational programmes.

9.   This evaluation only covers the thematic networks defined according to SDC South/East cooperation priorities.

10.   While following a general setup with theme managers, focal points, core group and network members, the networks operate in different ways defined by the organizational unit within which they are embedded and the priorities, including geographical, of the thematic areas. As such, they are dynamic and individual structures with different levels of sub-groups, inter-network collaborations, and interactions with non-SDC organizations and individuals.

3. SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

3.1.   GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

11.   The overall goal and objectives of this evaluation were stated in SDC's Approach Paper as follows:
   Overall Goal: The evaluation analyses to what extent and in which context the introduction of networks has improved the effectiveness of SDC's operational and policy work, the quality of its strategies and policies, and the thematic competence and knowledge management. Its thematic framework is the Bill to Parliament on development cooperation 2013-2016.
   Objectives:
   1. **Network Functions/Contributions**: The evaluation will take stock of how

the networks and the networks' landscapes as a whole function and how they contribute to higher effectiveness of SDC in its operations and its policy interventions.

2. **Roles, Costs, and Benefits**: The evaluation will reflect on the understanding of networks and their role, as well as their costs and benefits in order to produce recommendations regarding organizational development.

3. **Benchmarking**: Comparisons with other, selected agencies will provide additional impulses.

4. **Lessons learned**: Recommendations will be made on how learning and the transfer of knowledge can be further improved through further development of the networks system or other measures.

Timeframe: The evaluation focuses on the time period of 2008 through 2013.

12. During the inception phase, the Reference Group[18] has further stressed that the objectives of this evaluation focus on the functions of the networks and network system and on the networks' contribution to improved results and effectiveness of SDC.

13. Upon review of the final draft of the Inception Report, the Steering Committee has indicated that the framework of the evaluation should also consider "(i) SDC's **key processes** and respective **guidance** regarding the management of projects, country programs, contribution programs and policy work, as well as (ii) SDC's key messages on results management". Due to the fact that this request has come at the very end of the Inception Phase, the ET has indicated to SDC that it will be mainstreamed in the Implementation Phase to the extent possible[19].

3.2. THEORY OF CHANGE LOGIC MODEL JUSTIFYING THE NETWORK SYSTEM

14. A basic logic model for the Theory of Change justifying the current network system is presented through the following simplified graphical representation in the Approach Paper:

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[18] The Reference Group is a small, informal group created to advise the Evaluation and Controlling Division. The Reference Group is composed of some focal points, people who run networks at SDC, plus the person in charge of networking at the K&LP Division.

[19] In addition, the Steering Committee has indicated that the fourth evaluation objective should be complemented as follows: "Lessons learned: Recommendations will be made on how learning, transfer of knowledge **and the contribution to higher effectiveness of SDC operations and of SDC policy interventions** can be further improved through further development of the network system or other measures." The ET agrees that further refinement could have made the objective clearer in terms of impact assessment. However, the four objectives are defined in the Approach Paper and are included in the contract that has been signed for this Evaluation. They can therefore not be modified at this stage. Furthermore the ET considers that the intention of these comments in terms of the importance of focusing on the impacts of the thematic networks on the technical quality of SDC's operations is well acknowledged and reflected in the methodology presented in this Inception Report.

Through the introduction of thematic and management networks, policies, SDC strategies and programmes are improved (which ultimately leads to greater impact in partner countries)	Impact I
Within SDC a culture of permanent exchange of knowledge and of intensive learning is fostered	Impact II
Knowledge is exchanged in networks	Outcome I
SDC staff in field offices and head office contribute knowledge in the networks and are familiar with the access to knowledge	Outcome II
The Focal Points and Heads of Divisions with thematic responsibilities launch networks and build them up with different measures. They promote learning and the development of competences, advice and	Output I

15. During the evaluation the Theory of Change will be further explored and assumptions identified, including assumptions of different stakeholders.

3.3.   NETWORK STAKEHOLDERS

16. Direct network stakeholders include in principle all SDC staff, beneficiaries, subcontractors, and partners who are members of one or more of the 12 thematic network:

- Agriculture and Food Security (A+FS)
- Climate, Energy and Environment (CC&E)
- Conflicts & Human Rights (CHR)
- Decentralization and Local Governance (DLGN)
- Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)
- Education: Réseau E
- Employment & Income (e+i)
- Gender
- Health
- Migration
- Political Economy and Development PED (active until June 2014)
- Water

17. Indirect network stakeholders include select SDC staff, beneficiaries, subcontractors, and partners who are not members of a network but who in principle could benefit from the different network functions, such as theme-related operational advice, policy development, and good practices.

18. The stakeholders will play different roles in terms of informing the evaluation. The following table presents the different network stakeholder groups that the ET will interact with through interviews and / or surveys in order to obtain key information for the Evaluation. More details are provided in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 8.7).

**NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUPS TO INFORM THE EVALUATION,
THEIR INTEREST FOR THE EVALUATION
AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE EVALUATION**

GROUPS	KEY AREA OF INTEREST FOR THE	PARTICIPATION IN THE EVALUATION
Management staff	Use of Networks and network products for	Interviews
Theme managers	Functioning of the networks and role in thematic work	Interviews
Focal points	Functioning of the networks, interactions with other networks, roles on network in SDC's work	Basic network survey General Survey Interviews Group reflection
Core group members	Functioning of the networks,	General survey Selected interviews Focus groups
Network members	Functioning of the networks	General survey Selected interviews Group reflection
Network support staff at the Knowledge & Learning Processes division	Functioning of the networks	Interviews General Survey
Staff at the cooperation offices visited for the evaluation	Functioning of the networks, demand and supply of network products, program	General survey and selected interviews
Partners	Functioning of the networks, demand and supply of network products, program	General survey and selected interviews

19. All stakeholders identified as having a key interest for the purposes of the Evaluation in the table above will be informed about the Evaluation through a letter prepared and distributed by SDC. The letter will include a brief version of the Approach Paper.

3.4.   TARGETED AUDIENCE FOR THE EVALUATION

20. While all network stakeholders in principle are considered as having an interest in the outcome of the Evaluation, the targeted audience for the Evaluation is:
   • SDC Management,
   • SDC Operations Staff, and
   • Network members.

3.5.   MAPPING OF NETWORK ACTIVITIES

21. The activities of the thematic networks can broadly be categorized into:
   • Specific network activities including:
      - E-discussions on specific topics,
      - Thematic workshops and other 'face-to-face' meetings,
      - In-depth analysis of specific issues relevant to network members,
      - Thematic newsletters,
      - Development of specific products such as policy positions, approaches and methods, thematic studies and reviews, and good practices,

- Collaboration with other networks,
- Representation of SDC in different fora, and
- Training.

- Overall management of the network.

22. The evaluation will address all categories of network activities.

4. METHODOLOGY

23. The evaluation will be guided by the Approach Paper (Annex 8.1) and follow SDC's Evaluation Policy[20], including the underlying evaluation principles established by OECD[21], ALNAP[22] with a focus on outcomes and impact with identification of plausible patterns and trends while recognizing the challenges of capturing results in complex systems with many actors.

4.1. DATA SOURCES

24. The evaluation will collect and analyze data from a range of sources to triangulate and deepen understanding. The data for the evaluation will be collected from general documentation and network stakeholders as outlined above.

25. Three cooperation offices will be visited as case countries for more in-depth analysis. The selection criteria for the case cooperation offices include:
- Representativeness of thematic networks,
- Geographical representativeness,
- Field based regional thematic advisors,
- Due consideration to both emergency and development contexts,
- Practical considerations (security --- travel --- time limits),
- Reasonable outreach of the network in the country, and
- Different network functions.

26. During the Inception Workshop, it was suggested that the three case countries should be from the Latin America region, Africa, and Eastern Europe/Central Asia. A preliminary overview of the networks' main country outreach is presented in Annex 8.5. Furthermore a preliminary overview of the thematic focus of cooperation offices in selected countries is presented in annex 8.6.

27. Once the three case countries have been selected in collaboration with SDC, the ET will undertake missions to the three cooperation offices for selected one-on-one interviews, group interviews and focus groups or participatory workshops with SDC staff and selected partners. The final program for the planned three-day missions (not included day of arrival and day of departure) to the cooperation offices will be established in close collaboration with the relevant networks, thematic domains, and the cooperation offices.

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[20] SDC (2013) "Evaluation Policy – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)". Available at < http://www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_181530.pdf>. It should be noted that the Evaluation Policy is adapted to the Strategy for International Development 2013---16.

[21] OECD (2010) "Quality Standards for Development Evaluation". Available at <http://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dcdndep/36596604.pdf>

[22] Beck, T. (2006) "Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD---DAC criteria – An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies" Available at < http://www.alnap.org/resource/5253.aspx>

28. In addition to the case countries, the ET will conduct an analysis of one network-based organization comparable to SDC, such as the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) as suggested during the Inception Workshop. As part of SIDA's reorganization in 2008, formal thematic networks were introduced in 2009 to facilitate the overall objective of the reorganization in terms of efficiency, quality control, and greater focus on fieldwork through vertical and horizontal integration of technical staff. While it is generally recognized that the thematic staff networks have generated important knowledge, the use of the networks for program and policy design and implementation has been questioned for some of the networks[23]. Similar to SDC's thematic networks, SIDA's networks are organized with a number of overall networks and sub---networks. The main communication means are a mix of e-discussions and face-to-face meetings. SIDA's thematic and geographical focus areas for its development and humanitarian initiatives are comparable to those of SDC/SECO. DFID introduced the Knowledge Sharing initiative in 2000 to improve internal efficiency. Since then, the knowledge management approach has developed in different directions within different divisions with some networks / communities of practice / discussion groups. As highlighted in the 2010 OECD---DAC Peer Review[24] DFID's approach in outsourcing part of its knowledge development has on the one hand increased the DFID's production of quality knowledge as a public good but at the same time there are challenges in institutionalizing analytical capacity internally. Moreover, the use of knowledge products for management decisions has been questioned.

29.   Once the final case organization has been chosen in collaboration with SDC, the ET will conduct a document review, a mission to the selected partner's headquarters, and selected telephone interviews with network participants and partners in the field. The experience from the case organization will be complemented by lessons-learned from multilateral organizations based on the ET's own experience and selected document reviews. An overview of knowledge management and network evaluations of some multilateral organizations is presented in Annex 8.4.

4.2.   DATA COLLECTION

30. To ensure consistency during the data collection, an Evaluation Matrix will be applied. The Matrix (Annex 8.7) outlines evaluation questions according to the evaluation criteria identified in the SDC Evaluation Policy:

- **Relevance** of a network structure to vis-à-vis SDC goals & priorities.
- **Efficiency and effectiveness:** function and contribution of networks, costs and benefits, and performance compared with other agencies.
- **Impact:** contribution to SDC of learning and knowledge generated through the networks.
- **Sustainability:** Institutional learning through the network structure.

31. The questions are based on the Evaluation questions identified in the Approach Paper and complemented by addition questions suggested by CLP members during the Inception phase and during the Inception Workshop. Moreover, the Evaluation Matrix presents key indicators for the individual questions as well as sources for the data collection.

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[23] See for instance OECD (2013) "Peer Review Sweden 2013" Available at http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer---reviews/sweden---peer---review---2013.pdf.

[24] OECD (2010) "Peer Review United Kingdom 2010" Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer---reviews/45519815.pdf>

32. The evaluation will use various tools for data collection:
    - **Desk study:** A review of existing literature, documents and data will be conducted focusing on substantive programmatic and management aspects characterizing SDC's thematic networks.
    - **Interviews:** interviews with selected network stakeholders as outlined in the presentation of Networks' stakeholders above (Section 3.3). The interviews will be conducted both as face-to-face and virtual.
    - **Focus groups, group interviews and participatory workshops:** Focus groups, group interviews and/or participatory workshops will be organized with selected groups of network stakeholders as indicated above on specific issues that merit collective reflection.
    - **Surveys:** The evaluation will carry out two surveys:
        - **Basic Network Survey:** A questionnaire will be distributed to focal points of the 12 thematic networks for mapping of basic network information.
        - **General Survey:** A questionnaire will be distributed to network members (core and general) of the 12 thematic networks for further details on the functioning of the networks.

4.3.   DATA ANALYSIS

33. The evaluation will use a combination of complementary tools for analysis of the data collected:
    - Context analysis,
        - Stakeholder analysis,
        - Assumption analysis,
        - Network analysis, and
        - Contribution analysis.

4.3.1 CONTEXT ANALYSIS

34. A general analysis will be carried out of:
    - Overall international development and humanitarian agenda:
        - Priorities,
        - Main Actors,
        - Evolution since 2009, and
        - Post-2015 agenda: new requirements and actors.
    - SDC's general development:
        - Thematic and geographic priorities, including the evolution during the 5 years being evaluated (2008-2013),
        - SDC's comparative advantage, and
        - Post-2015 agenda.

4.3.2 STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

35. Network stakeholders will be analyzed according to the following questions:
    - Who are the main network stakeholders (intended, actual, and potential)?
    - What are their roles, contributions, and benefits vis-à-vis key network functions (learning, capacity development, advice, good practice) and network management?
    - Are all potential network stakeholders involved in an optimal way?

NETWORK STAKEHOLDER GROUPS
AND THEIR PRIMARY STAKES IN THE THEMATIC NETWORKS

PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS / STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	SPONSORSHIP, LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	CONNECTION	
SDC Management, Directors							
Heads of Domains, of Divisions, DoC							
Programme Managers							
NPOs, Field Staff							
Line Managers with Thematic Responsibilities		The framework will be used for the Evaluation. For the identification and analysis special attention will be given to Intended, Actual, and Potential Users. The stakes are not mutually exclusive and stakeholders might have multiple stakes in the network					
Focal Points							
Thematic Staff							
Operational Staff							
Staff concerned with the SDC's							
thematic work in FDFA and other direct collaboration partners in the federal administration							
Beneficiary Governments							
Partner organizations: NGOs, university institutes, private firms holding SDC backstopping mandates							

PRIMARY STAKES IN NETWORKS / STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	SPONSORSHIP, LEADERSHIP	NETWORK MANAGEMENT	KNOWLEDGE GENERATION	USE OF NETWORK PRODUCTS (ADVICE, GOOD PRACTICES, ETC.)	LEARNING	CONNECTION	
Thematic networks outside SDC (e.g. AGUASAN, Alliance Sud, etc.)							

4.3.3 ASSUMPTION ANALYSIS

36. The theory of change (ToC) presented in the Approach Paper will be further explored by identifying assumptions of major network stakeholders, including an analysis of the evolution of the underlying assumptions

- Identification of assumptions of different stakeholder groups vis-à-vis the contribution of thematic networks to SDC's goals & priorities, i.e. further understanding of the ToC,
- Are the assumptions coherent and in what ways?
- Have the assumptions evolved or are they static?
- Are the assumptions realistic?

4.3.4 NETWORK ANALYSIS

37. The 12 thematic networks will be analyzed according to their vibrancy (member engagement, outreach, innovation, etc.), connectivity (links within the networks and among networks, links to other SDC divisions, etc.), and effects (contribution to result change).

Overall description of the network system in SDC:
- Purpose and objectives,
- Role in strategic plan,
- Funding.

Values of the networks for SDC including spin-offs (measured against efficiency and strategic objectives):
- Are potential opportunities offered by the networks being fully exploited, including:
  - The ability to quickly expand its membership both from within and without SDC,
  - The ability to establish new productive connections across geographic and formal organizational limits of SDC constituencies, e.g. linking members up to critical sources of information and other resources in other regions,
  - The ability to adapt to external and internal changes in SDC,
  - The ability to develop trans-disciplinary solutions to complex development problems,
  - The ability to cooperate on special problems with other thematic networks,
  - The ability to develop innovative solutions, and
  - The ability to quickly respond to emerging needs, e.g., humanitarian crises.

Describing the different thematic networks:
- Thematic and/or geographical focus (in theory and in practice),
- Incorporation of cross-sectoral SDC principles such as gender,
- Criteria for membership (sector experience, geographical representation) including different levels of membership and how contacts with potential members are being established,
- Organizational setup (level of ties among members: open and direct lines of communication, possibility for subgroups for specific cooperation, links with program development, links with beneficiaries' program development),
- Communication (means for day-to-day communication, role of face-to-face meetings, special events, lines of communication),
- Facilitation / Coordination (theoretical and practical role of network coordinator), how are network members being connected with each other ("weaving"),
- Coordinator role: selection criteria, roles, general profile including network experience,
- Governance (who decides, network planning),
- Membership participation (who participates, on what, frequency of participation, incentives for participation),
- Capacity development activities,
- Monitoring and evaluation (performance criteria, self-assessments and how), and
- Resource requirements, including funding requirements and operational support.
- Describing network members:
  - Profiles (technical experience, network experience, access to decision makers (SDC and beneficiaries) with regard to SDC's program and project activities, communication capacity, participation in other networks),
  - Reasons for participating (requirement for fulfilling terms of reference, Personal development, disseminate knowledge, general curiosity, solving specific work challenges).

38. Upon review of the final draft of the Inception Report, some members of the Steering Committee for the Evaluation have suggested to select a few thematic networks for deeper analysis. The ET agrees with the principle of analyzing some of the networks in more details than others. However, from the inception phase it has become clear to the ET that the level of activities in the thematic networks varies greatly. So invariably some networks will be analyzed in further details than others simply because of level of data and information availability. However, it is also clear that there is a great wealth of specific good network practices and lessons learned in each one of the thematic networks. The ET therefore finds some level of analysis of each network important.

4.3.5 CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

39. The evaluation will also carry out a contribution analysis to identify the networks contribution to SDC functions, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. The analysis will be based on Stakeholders' perceptions of the result chain/ToC and include:

Identifying a comprehensive result chain as part of the theory of change:
- How does each stakeholder group perceive the result chain?
- What is the underlying theory of change / result chain for each thematic network?

Outcome mapping:
- Concrete observed changes in behavior, relations or actions described in the result chain.

For each level in the result chain:
- What are the perceived contributions of different network activities to the observed or planned outcomes?
- Were the network contributions sufficient to bring about the results?
- Would results have happened without the network contributions?
- Are there independency among network contributions and contributions from other sources?

5. EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT

40. As stated in SDC's Glossary[25] while SDC has a keen interest in the effectiveness of its operations, assessment of effects/outcomes and impacts of development interventions is a difficult task and qualitative and quantitative measurements will typically never be definitive and certain. Many factors are at play, including the complex system that characterizes international cooperation with dynamic and highly interconnected processes and a high level of influencing stakeholders. Still, it is possible to demonstrate the broader effectiveness of cooperation, for instance through the use of assessment criteria and monitoring identified during the definition of the initiatives to be evaluated.

41. The major challenges for the Evaluation include:
- Lack of proper baselines: Based on the data collected and analyzed as well as basic documents, such as the 2009 "Evaluation of Knowledge Management and Institutional Learning in SDC"[26], the ET will make a general judgment about the most likely baseline situation in 2008;
- Lack of a counterfactual: Questions such as 'what would have happened if the network structure had not been applied' will be determined through a general assessment;
- The dynamic nature of the networks and the different functioning of individual networks might lead to some confusions during interviews;
- Maintain the focus of networks as an organizational tool to improve the efficiency and quality of SDC's development and humanitarian interventions; i.e., the networks and knowledge management is not the overall goal;
- Time boundaries: The ET will aim to maintain a focus on role and functioning of the networks in the period 2008-2013; and
- Staff turnover and lack of institutional memory.

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE

42. The quality of the Evaluation process will be assured through SDC measures, including the role of the special entities established to accompany the Evaluation such as the Core Learning Partnership and the Steering Committee as described below.

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[25] http://www.sdc.admin.ch/en/Home/Glossary
[26] Knechtli, B. et al. (2009) "Evaluation of Knowledge Management and Institutional Learning in SDC" Available at < www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_178861.pdf>

7. ORGANIZATION OF THE EVALUATION

7.1.   ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

43. The Evaluation Team (ET) is composed of four senior consultants with extensive experience in different modes of humanitarian and development cooperation, including different organizational structures, networked-based organization, and knowledge management. The expertise of the ET includes policy formulation and implementation, monitoring and evaluation, strengthening the role of women and gender mainstreaming, good governance, and organizational theory. The Evaluation will be based on Team Work. The overall responsibilities for the team members are indicated in the following:

- **Dr. Patrick Breard**, Team Leader.
- **Ms. Lene Poulsen**, Team Member.
- **Ms. Judith Kallick Russell**, Team member.
- **Ms. Gita Swamy Meier-Ewert**, Team member.

44. SDC organizational setup and respective roles for the evaluation have been described in the approach paper as follows:

- **A Core Learning Partnership (CLP)** to accompany the evaluation has been constituted at SDC head office. The thematic networks are all represented in the CLP. Throughout the evaluation process, the CLP is engaged in learning through interactive reflection with the evaluation team. The CLP comments on the evaluation design and the key questions in the Inception Phase. The CLP comments on the Inception Report and on the Draft Evaluation Report. During the Agreement at Completion Point Workshop, the CLP receives and validates the evaluation findings and conclusions and together with the Evaluation Team elaborates lessons learned and recommendations for SDC which will be noted in an Agreement at Completion Point during the workshop.
- **SDC's Directorate** (Department-level Management and the Director General) will be interviewed and regularly debriefed by the Evaluation team. It will approve the Senior Management Response, which will be published with the evaluation report and form the basis for rendering accountability on the follow-up to the evaluation.
- **The Steering Committee** (selected mid- and senior-level managers) has been constituted at HQ including corresponding members in field offices. It will be periodically interviewed by the evaluation team and will be periodically briefed by the evaluation team on emerging findings. It should participate in the various workshops during the evaluation as relevant, will help draft the Senior Management Response to the evaluation and ensure its implementation.
- **Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Section (E+C)** commissions the evaluation, approves the final evaluation design and key questions in consultation with the CLP and the evaluation team, drafts and administers the contracts with the Evaluation Team, ensures that the evaluators receive appropriate logistical support and access to information, safeguards the independence of the team and facilitates together with the evaluation team the overall process with respect to the discussion of evaluation results and the elaboration of the Agreement at Completion Point. It is responsible for the publication and dissemination of the evaluation report.
- **Reference Group:** The Reference Group is a small, informal group created to advise the Evaluation and Controlling Division. The Reference Group is composed of some focal points, people who run networks at SDC, plus the person in charge of networking at the K&LP Division.

7.2. PROGRAMME

45. The evaluation team will undertake this assignment between January and June 2014, in accordance with the timetable below (based on SDC Approach Paper, the consultants' proposal, the contract, and suggestions from the Inception Workshop).

Due date	Task	Resp. *
14.01.14	Contract with evaluation team	EC & ET
14.01.14 – 03.03.14	Inception Phase	ET
30.01.14	Inception Workshop Bern	EC & CLP ET
16.02.14	Submission of draft Inception Report	ET
17.02.14 – 21.02.14	Analysis draft inception report	EC & CLP
26.02.14	Submission of Inception Report	ET
03.03.14	Agreement on Inception Report	EC & CLP & SC
03.03.14 – 30.05.14	Implementation Phase: field missions, data analysis, etc.	ET
25.03.14	Briefing in Retreat of BoD SDC	EC & ET
09.05.14	Submission of draft report	ET
12.-16.05.14	Analysis of draft report	EC & CLP
16.05.14	Synthesis / Debriefing workshop Bern	EC & CLP ET
19.-30.05.14	Revision of draft report	ET
26.05.14	Submission of final draft report	ET
30.05.14	Agreement on final draft report	EC & CLP
02.06.14	Preparation of Stand at Completion Point	CLP & ET
06.06.14	Agreement on Stand at Completion Point	EC & CLP
09.-20.06.14	Preparation of Management response	SC, EC & CLP
25.06.14	Agreement of Management response	BoD
31.07.14	Publication of Evaluation	EC

*BoD = Board of Directors of SDC, EC = Evaluation and Controlling Division (SHE), CLP = Core Learning Partnership, ET = Evaluation Team, SC = Steering Committee

7.3. DELIVERABLES

46. The main products of the Evaluation consist of:
- The Inception Report,
- A fit to print Evaluation Report not exceeding 20 pages, plus annexes and including an executive summary of maximum 4 pages, and
- An Evaluation Abstract according to DAC specifications and a stand-alone 1-2 page evaluation summary.

47. The Evaluation report will be organized as follows:
- Title page, list of contents, acronyms list.
- Executive Summary
- Introduction, including evaluation methodology
- Context
- Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Annexes

Annexes

Annex 13 Evaluation Matrix

EVALUATION CRITERIA	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	SOURCES
Relevance	Are the selection and the number of networks consistent with the SDC's mandate?	• Level of alignment with SDC mandate and strategic plan.	**Documentation** • SDC strategies[27] • SDC Annual Plans • OECD DAC overall priorities • Evaluations and Status reports • Network products **Survey** • SDC staff **Interviews/ Case Studies** • Key SDC staff • Partners
	Are network members involved in planning of activities of the networks?	• Types of involvement of stakeholders • Types of stakeholders involved	**Documentation** • Evaluation and Status Reports **Survey** • SDC staff • Network members **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Network members
	Is SDC's inclusion policy reflective in the networks' structure and functioning?	• Inclusion / diversity • Reported usefulness Indicators to be further developed.	**Documentation** • SDC strategies, annual plans, etc. **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff (national and international)

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[27] SDC strategies 2009-12 and 2013-2016.

		• Partners • Network members
Effectiveness and Efficiency	Do the networks make a significant contribution to: a) Effectiveness and quality assurance *(are networks fulfilling their functions?)* of the SDC's interventions? (Particularly projects and programs). b) Reviewing of experiences in Switzerland's international cooperation? c) Has the thematic quality (operational and policy level) of the different networks improved since their introduction? d) What influence does has external participation have on quality?	• Level of demand and provision of each major network function (training, innovation, counselling, good practices, etc.) • Number and type of questions proposed on networks. • Number and type of knowledge sharing by number and type of network members • Reported increase in quality of work. • Reported influence on operations and policy from network outputs. • Level and type of influence on stakeholders' experiences with Swiss international cooperation (primarily SDC) • Reported influence of external participation in work.	**Documentation** • Network archives and reports • Background documents on SDC's international cooperation **Survey** • SDC staff • Partners • Subcontractors **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • SDC Members • External Members • Partners • Subcontractors
	What <u>potential of optimization</u> does the evaluation team see with regards to: a) The effectiveness of the (different) 'governance structures' of networks (organisation, available resources, work modalities, networking within networks and among networks, which factors are the most effective ones? Which are hindering the process? Point of view and commitment of the SCOs) and of the system as a whole (network members	• Level of outreach of networks • Level of networks' abilities to provide useful, needed tools for stakeholders • Number and type of questions proposed on networks. • Number and type of knowledge sharing by number and type of network members • Level to which good practices for effective networks is implemented.	**Documentation** • Evaluations from other networks • Network archives and reports **Interviews/ Case Studies** • All SDC staff • Stakeholders • Bilateral and Multilateral partners

	as part of operational units and SCOs) [28] b) Comparisons with other institutions (e.g. bilateral [e.g. SIDA, SECO, FOEN, others] and multilateral donors [e.g. UNDP, World Bank])?	•	
	Have the networks influenced/ informed decision-making or stimulated demands for information from decision-makers (responsible for projects, program and policies)?	• Use of networks in development and approval of projects, programs and policies	**Survey** • SDC staff **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff
	Do the networks make a significant contribution to: a) To making thematic knowledge accessible for the SDC's operations and overcoming the "compartmentalisation" (promoting cooperation among SDC organisational units) b) To sound and efficient knowledge management? c) To the institutional learning in SDC?	• Number of thematic networks used by staff for same issue. • Level and type of collaboration among the networks. • Level and types of networks and kind of involvement in organizational activities • Level of joint work planning among networks • Level and type of influence on the efficiency of KM within SDC • Indicators on institutional learning Indicators to be further developed	**Documents** • Status reports • Activity reports/ work plans **Survey** • SDC staff • Network members **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Stakeholders Network members • Partners
	Mandate of the members of the networks and the thematic staff in the divisions and SCOs [29] respectively (including advisors with 20-30% thematic allocation) Do they provide a significant contribution to: a) The effectiveness and thematic quality of the interventions of their divisions and SCO, e.g. through feedbacks and	• Level of change in time and effort to effectively implement work. • Level of support by managers for network activities. • Number, type and perception of training in active network participation provided for staff members.	**Documentation** • Status reports **Surveys Interviews/ Case Studies** • Network Focal points • Thematic Managers • SDC staff • Network members

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[28] The separation of effectiveness and efficiency might not fit for the purposes of the scope of this evaluation.

[29] Swiss Cooperation Offices (Field offices of Swiss development cooperation)

	participation in reviews and planning and decision-making processes? b) The thematic learning in their divisions, SCOs, and relevant partner organisations? c) The overall thematic learning of the SDC?	• Level of initiative taken by staff for improved, innovative network activities • Number and type of network use and number and type of networks used when meeting a challenge. • Number and type of activities where networks are used. • Level of contribution of the networks in divisional, SCOs, partners, and overall SDC learning. • Learning indicators Indicator to be further developed,	• Partners
	Management of thematic knowledge and thematic networks: Does the SDC's management promote and request the development of thematic knowledge with the necessary priority? Does it provide the necessary resources to meet the expectations as they appear in the mandate?	• Ease of participation by stakeholders in the networks • Level of support (financial and otherwise) by managers for network activities (for support units like learning and networking) • SDC staff % of total (Focal points & members per network) • Level of initiative taken by staff for improved, innovative network activities • Percentage of work time dedicated to networks • Level of network institutionalization	**Documentation** • Status reports • Budgets/ expenditure reports • Documentation of Human, financial and technical resources **Survey** • SDC staff • Network members **Interviews/ Case Studies** • Network Focal Points • Thematic Managers • SDC staff
	Is SDC's human resource management use network capacity as recruitment criteria for new staff? Does SDC consider network capacity in performance reviews? Is network capacity considered for career development? Does SDC	• Inclusion of network capacities in official job descriptions, interviews and performance reviews	**Documentation** • Staff ToRs/ job postings • Guidance material (trainings, etc.) mainstreaming network capacities with

	have an effective thematic career path?		the staff **Interviews/** **Case Studies** • Human resources staff • Network members • Network staff
	What <u>potential of optimization</u> does the evaluation team see with regards to: a) The functioning of the networks 'governance structure' of networks (organisation, available resources, work modalities, etc.) Networking within networks and among networks, which factors are the most effective ones? Which are hindering the process? Point of view and commitment of the SCOs) and of the system as a whole (network members as part of operational units and SCOs) [30] b) The optimal and cost-conscious design of thematic learning and competences in the SDC? c) The promotion of personal competences that are required for leading a network? d) Development of Regional Networks? e) Backstopping and internal resources for high quality network functioning?	• Types of factors that are considered to support the functioning of the networks • Types of factors that are considered to hinder the functioning of the networks • Reported level of effectiveness by type of network and type of enablers or incentives. • Level of institutional support for staff with competences to lead a network. • Level to which good practices for efficient networks is implemented. • Resources of time of staff to operate in networks • HR development policies for staff in the thematic responsibilities • The availability of competent staff for focal points, regional advisors • Adequate support availability • Institutional context • Staff dedicated to the functioning of the networks • KM&CD backstopping support to the	**Documentation** • TORs of network coordinators for SDC & other bilateral/ multilateral organizations • SDC management • SDC staff • Stakeholders • Partners **Interviews/** **Case Studies** • Benchmarking organization

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[30] The separation of effectiveness and efficiency might not fit for the purposes of the scope of this evaluation.

		- functioning of the networks - Number of thematic partnerships with external organizations per network	
	In what ways has a multi-directional, multi-media (explicit or implicit) communication strategy been developed and applied for the overall SDC network structure and for the individual networks?	- Who is communicating with whom (among members, among networks, etc.) - Who is initiating these communications? - What types of guidelines exist and are followed for communications? - Degree of implementation	**Documentation** - Network documentation **Survey Interviews/ Case Studies** - Network members - Focal points - Thematic Managers
	Are there synergies, complementarities, duplication and/or contradictions among and within SDC's thematic networks?	- Joint work planning, implementation activities, etc. - Timing of joint planning and collaborations - Scale/extent of joint activities - Level to which network responsibilities are included in the annual individual work plans. - Communications: Network members' awareness of activities in other networks - Network members use of network functions of other SDC networks (outside of their member networks) - Network members use of network outputs from their member networks - Types of incentives for seeking synergies and complementarities	**Documentation** - Annual work plans and final assessments **Survey** - SDC staff - Network members **Interviews/ Case Studies** - Network Focal Points - Thematic Managers - Human Resources - Network Members

		between and within networks • Ways in which network focal points and theme managers are representing other networks when doing outreach (conferences, workshops, publications, opinion articles, blogs/posts, etc.)	
Impact	Do the networks make a significant contribution to: a) Learning and the building-up of thematic knowledge in Switzerland's international cooperation, and to networking with external partners, such as NGOs, research institutions, multilateral organisations, to international cooperation as a whole? b) SDC's identification and/or development of good practices? c) To making thematic knowledge accessible for the SDC's operations d) Operational advice for organizational units within the thematic networks e) To overcoming the "compartmentalisation"	• Use of network functions to strengthen SDC's influence with external partners (eg, positioning papers, etc.) • Demand for SDC's technical capacities in international cooperation in specific thematic areas. • References to SDC papers, reports and experiences by other actors. • Number and type of policies, SDC strategies or programmes influenced or informed by networks • Number and type of reported policies, projects, programmes of network member organizations influenced by networks • Reported good practices • Reported organizational advice from networks	**Documentation** • Status reports • Documentation of good practices written or referenced in papers, reports, conferences, articles, etc. **Survey** • SDC staff • Network members • Partners • Subcontractors **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Partners • Network members • Subcontractors
	What potential of optimization does the evaluation team see	• Use of network functions to	**Documentation** • Participation in

	with regards to: a) The possibility of networks to reach an internationally recognized position through thematic excellence?	strengthen SDC's influence with external partners (e.g., positioning papers, etc.) • Demand for SDC's technical capacities in international cooperation in specific thematic areas. • References to SDC papers, reports and experiences by other actors. • Benchmarking with other bilateral/ multilateral development organizations	international conferences, international forums, etc. • Requests/ provisions of advice for international publications, papers, articles, policy, etc. **Survey** • Partners • Network members • SDC staff **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Partners • Network members
	Do the networks make a significant contribution to: a) The SDC's position to the "Post-2015 agenda"?	• Ways in which networks have been involved in SDC's position on post-2015 agenda. • Staff's training and experience in working in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teams, • use of 'action research' methods for 'problem solving', e.g. as a project/program implementation strategy,	**Documentation** • Discussions within networks on post-2015, participation in conferences, etc. • Policy papers on post-2015 **Survey** • SDC staff • Network members • Partners **Interviews/ Case Studies** • Focal points • Thematic Managers • Network members • Partners
	Have the networks influenced/informed new policies, SDC strategies or programmes?	• Number and type of policies, SDC strategies or programmes	**Documentation** • Policy, strategy and programme

		influenced or informed by networks • Number and type of reported policies, projects, programmes of network member organizations influenced by networks	**papers** • Network outputs • PCM **Survey** • SDC staff • Partners **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Partners • Network members
	Which unexpected side effects of the creation of networks can be observed?		**Documentation** • Status Reports **Survey** • SDC staff • Network members • Partners **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Network members • Partners
Sustainability	What potential of optimization does the evaluation team see with regards to: a) The current process of integrating SCOs into integrated embassies and their access to knowledge through thematic networks? b) Ensuring the institutional thematic knowledge in view of the job rotation as a standard process in SDCs human resource management	• Level of awareness and use of networks throughout the Embassies. • Ways in which networks are accessed and used within the embassies • Level of joint work planning between SDC and SCOs • Ways in which SCO integration processes involve thematic networks. • Active participation and responsibility of local staff in thematic networks • Existence of policies and processes for accelerating the integration of new network members	**Documentation** • Guidelines and policies on knowledge transfer/ sustaining networks • Embassy guidelines, policies, reports, etc. **Survey** • SDC staff • Partners • Network members **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Embassy staff • Network members

		• Existence of policies and processes for sustaining of knowledge within network as members and staff change.	
	a) Will the SDC structure allow a continuation and promotion of learning and transition of professional and methodological knowledge? b) : Will the SDC structure allow the continuation of theme related operational advice to the operational units? c) Will the structure of SDC allow a continuation in capitalizing and formulating good practices?		**Documentation** • Guidelines and policies on knowledge transfer/ knowledge flow • SDC strategies and structure **Survey** • SDC staff • Partners • Network members **Interviews/ Case Studies** • SDC staff • Embassy staff • Network members
	Management of thematic knowledge and thematic networks: Does SDC management provide the necessary resources for continuation of the networks?	• Level of support (financial and otherwise) by managers for network activities (for support units like learning and networking) • SDC staff % of total (Focal points & members per network) • Level of initiative taken by staff for improved, innovative network activities • Level of network institutionalization	**Documentation** • Status reports • Budgets/ expenditure reports • Documentation of Human, financial and technical resources **Survey** • SDC staff **Interviews/ Case Studies** • Network Focal Points • Thematic Managers • Human Resources staff • SDC senior management

Annex 14: Approach Paper

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
**Swiss Agency for Development and
Cooperation SDC**
Evaluation and Controlling Division

**External, Independent Evaluation
Thematic Networks in the SDC
Approach Paper/03.12.2013
For call for offers to recruit the evaluation team**

Table of Contents

1. Conceptual Background

SDC's Directorate has mandated SDC's Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division[31] to commission an institutional External Evaluation of its 13 thematic networks since 2008 (see annexes)[32].

Until 2008, the SDC was organized in a matrix set-up. The operational responsibility of the programmes was with the geographical line, while a specific domain, the F Domain, was responsible for thematic knowledge. Staff members employed part-time both by the F Domain and an operational line function assured thematic cooperation and knowledge transfer between the two domains.

In 2008 SDC started a major reorganisation. The F Domain was dissolved; a network structure and four thematic Global Programme units were established. Creating the thematic networks was one of the important measures of this reorganisation (REO), which lasted 2008 - 2012. This evaluation needs to be understood in that context.

The basic assumption of REO 2008-2012 was that access to and quality of thematic knowledge needs to be improved for the operational and policy departments. In 2006 already, the Council of States' (SR) Control Committee[33] (GPK) diagnosed a "fragmentation" of the SDC. It was understood that one of the main reasons for this was that both the operational line and the F Domain had their own programme finance resources. The same GPK report formulated the following recommendation for thematic work of the SDC: "Switzerland should cooperate with other donors and take a lead role in themes in which its knowledge and experience are acknowledged."

Swiss Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey on 03.06.2008 formulated as the objective of the reorganization "to strengthen the SDC and to prepare it for future challenges so that it can assume the priorities of development policy even better". With regard to thematic competences: "The thematic specialists will be distributed among the regions. Thematic links will emerge, which are organized in networks."[34]

In order to better link thematic competences with the operational line, networks were introduced. Unlike in the structure prior to the reorganisation, the networks were not provided with programme resources. Only limited funding for f2f-meeting, backstopping and some research activities were made available. The responsibility for the theme of the networks was assigned to thematic managers in the operational line departments (heads of divisions and sections), and for the management of each network a focal point was created with limited human resources. The focal point was subordinated to the thematic managers. The focal points / networks were placed to these operational divisions where major thematic knowledge and experiences exist in operational programs (e.g. Disaster Risk Reduction in the Multilateral Humanitarian Affairs Division or Education in the West Africa Division). Although being placed like that, each network provides services to all organizational units of SDC. Furthermore, in four thematic areas, which correspond to major global challenges, global thematic programmes were created: Climate Change, Migration, Food Security and Agriculture, and Water.

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[31] The Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division forms part of the Staff of the Director General and is independent of line management. The evaluations it commissions provide an independent perspective and constitute one of the SDC's instruments for promoting learning and rendering accountability.

[32] In 2013, SDC has 12 thematic networks and 6 non thematic / management networks, the latter not being part of the evaluation.

[33] Geschäftsprüfungskommission

[34] „Reorganisation der DEZA: Bereiten wir uns auf die Zukunft vor (M. Calmy-Rey, 03.06.08)

Overall, funding for Swiss ODA significantly increased over the past five years, which are under consideration for this evaluation. As a consequence the percentage of programmes and projects implemented by third parties increased, thus leading to shifts in the availability of thematic knowledge.

Management decided that all focal points / networks adjust in quantity and quality existing strategic documents by the end of 2013.

The SDC management perspective

SDC's Board of Directors launched the networks with the following mandate (decision of 26.09.08):

> *In the networks, knowledge will be exchanged, competences built and maintained. They allow line management and focal points to assume their core responsibilities. The functions of networks are:*
> *1. To promote learning and communicate specialist and methodical knowledge*
> *2. To provide operational, thematic advice in organisational units and in the net*
> *3. To capitalize experiences and formulate good practice*
> *(…)In principle all staff members who have a thematic responsibility in their terms of reference will participate in the tasks of the networks (head office, cooperation offices)*

This mandate provided a broad orientation. SDC's Knowledge and Learning Processes division (K&LP) was mandated to support the network' development

During the build-up phase the SDC's board of directors decided not to take fundamental decisions with regard to SDC's network landscape and to its functioning. An evaluation in 2013/2014 should first provide sound evidence as a precondition for possible optimisations of the existing system or organisational adjustments. However, few operational decisions were taken, such as:

- The transfer of the governance transversal theme to DDLGN[35]
- No replacement of the Focal Point PED[36] (assuming that PED will be transferred to the network DDLGN in 2014 [Final decision to be taken in 2014].

The status reports of the networks

In order for the board of directors to monitor the networks development in SDC, K&LP has submitted annual "status reports" for discussion between 2009 and 2013:

On the whole, the status reports assessed the development of the networks and learning in the networks as progressing well but not yet accomplished. Among others, the following issues were addressed in the reports : The role of the networks and of W&LP; the participation of SCOs and local programme personnel in the networks; the participation of and collaboration with Swiss NGOs, universities and other implementers of SDC projects as well as local programme personnel in the networks; the thematic management structure of the SDC; the management and functioning of the networks; the main functions of the Focal Point; the subordination of the Focal Points; the thematic quality assurance; the financial and human resources of the networks/Focal Points; SDC's thematic profile as an institution and finally the introduction of thematic careers. Further, a survey amongst SDC staff in 2011 was conducted to assess the development of the networks since their start. The status reports serve as one information source regarding the build-up phase of the networks for the evaluation team.

Over time, the networks have started and developed differently and in a flexible way into different types and are today providing services under various framework conditions. Some are working hand in hand with global programmes and operational divisions, some

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[35] Democratisation, Decentralisation and Local Governance

[36] Political Economy and Development

with a specific thematic focus, and yet others are engaging on methodological aspects and fulfil various normative tasks.

2. Rationale and Objective of the Evaluation

In short, the basic documents of Reo and various previous analyses capture the following overarching institutional interests for the networks:
  ➢ To increase effectiveness and quality in the realisation of the SDC's programmes
  ➢ To sharpen the SDC's thematic profile
  ➢ To promote thematic knowledge together with partners and close to the programmes
  ➢ To create the preconditions for preservation, creation and development of competence in the thematic focus areas
  ➢ To strengthen a culture of exchange and cooperation within the SDC

This evaluation is mandated by SDC's Directorate 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 and their independence will be safeguarded throughout the evaluation.

By conducting such evaluations and being committed to learning from the results, SDC renders accountability to taxpayers in Switzerland, its partners and the ultimate beneficiaries of its activities. 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.
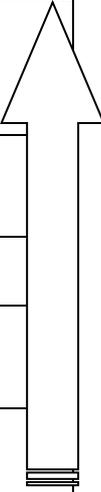
Overall goal:
The evaluation analyses to what extent and in which context the introduction of networks has improved the effectiveness of the SDC's operational and policy work, the quality of its strategies and policies and SDC's thematic competence and knowledge management. Its thematic framework is the Bill to Parliament on development cooperation 2013-2016.

Objectives:
  1. The evaluation will take stock of how the networks and the networks landscape as a whole function and how much they contribute to higher effectiveness of the SDC in its operations and its policy interventions.
  2. The evaluation will reflect on the understanding of networks and their role, as well as their costs and benefits in order to produce recommendations regarding organisational development.
  3. Comparisons with other, selected agencies will provide additional impulses.
  4. Recommendations will be made on how learning and the transfer of knowledge can be further improved through further development of the networks system or other measures.

3. Theory of Change

As mentioned above the build-up of the networks was realised with an open approach. The following theory of change was formulated ex-post for the purpose of this evaluation:
The aim driving the theory of change is to "create thematic and methodological knowledge relevant for operations and of high quality for improving the effectiveness of the SDC's interventions (operations and policy) through locating the responsibility for thematic knowledge closer to the operational demand".

Through the introduction of thematic and management networks, policies, SDC strategies and programmes are improved (which ultimately leads to greater impact in partner countries)	Impact I
Within the SDC a culture of permanent exchange of knowledge and of intensive learning is fostered	Impact II
Knowledge is exchanged in networks	Outcome I
SDC staff in field offices and head office contribute knowledge in the networks and are familiar with the access to knowledge	Outcome II
The Focal Points and Heads of Divisions with thematic responsibilities launch networks and build them up with different measures. They promote learning and the development of competences, advice and formulate good practices	Output I

4. Key questions

The list of key questions reflects preliminary discussions among different stakeholders inside and outside of SDC. The evaluation team will refine and prioritize the questions in consultation with the CLP during the inception phase.

1. Relevance
   Are the selection and the number of networks consistent with the SDC's mandate?

2. Mandate of the networks
   Do the networks make a significant contribution to
   e) Effectiveness and quality assurance of the SDC's interventions? (Outcomes). Has the thematic quality (operational and policy level) of the different networks improved since their introduction?
   f) Learning and the building-up of thematic knowledge in Switzerland's international cooperation, and to networking with external partners, such as NGOs, research institutions, multilateral organisations, to international cooperation as a whole? (Results)
   g) Reviewing of experiences in Switzerland's international cooperation? (Results)
   h) To making thematic knowledge accessible for the SDC's operations and overcoming the "compartmentalisation"
   i) To sound and efficient knowledge management?
   j) The SDC's position to the "Post-2015 agenda"?

   Which unexpected side effects of the creation of networks can be observed?

3. Mandate of the members of the networks and the thematic staff in the divisions and SCOs[37] respectively (including advisors with 20-30% thematic allocation)

   Do they provide a significant contribution to
   d) The effectiveness and thematic quality of the interventions of their divisions and SCO, e.g. through feedbacks and participation in reviews and planning and decision making processes?

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[37] Swiss Cooperation Offices (Field offices of Swiss development cooperation)

    e) The thematic learning in their divisions, SCOs, and relevant partner organisations?

    f) The overall thematic learning of the SDC?

4. <u>Management of thematic knowledge and thematic networks</u>

Does the SDC's management promote and request the development of thematic knowledge with the necessary priority? Does it support the development of the necessary resources?

5. What <u>potential of optimization</u> does the evaluation team see with regards to

    c) The functioning and the effectiveness of the networks (Networking within networks and among networks, which factors are the most effective ones? Which are hindering the process? point of view and commitment of the SCOs) and of the system as a whole (network members as part of operational units and SCOs)

    d) The optimal and cost-conscious design of thematic learning and competences in the SDC?

    e) The promotion of personal competences, that are required for leading a network?

    f) The possibility of networks to reach an internationally recognized position through thematic excellence?

    g) The current process of integrating SCOs into integrated embassies and their access to knowledge through thematic networks?

    h) Comparisons with other institutions (e.g. bilateral [e.g. SIDA, others] and multilateral donors [e.g. UNDP, World Bank])?

5. Process

APPROACH

The evaluation process will be iterative with and include periodic engagement of the CLP for feedback and learning processes. It will be structured by the following milestones:

<u>Inception phase:</u>
- Agreement on TORs between evaluation team and SDC evaluation division
- Provision of relevant documentation by SDC (evaluation officer, networks, W&LP)
- Submission of a draft inception report for discussion
- Kick-off workshop in Bern during the Inception Phase (0,5 days):
  - enabling the Evaluation Team to gain a better understanding of SDC's needs and priorities with regard to the evaluation.

<u>Agreement on final Inception Report</u>
- Agreement on the evaluation scope, key questions and methodology
- Integration of CLP feedbacks on the draft Inception Report into the final version

<u>Implementation phase</u>
- Implementation of evaluation according to methodological set-up as defined in the inception report (interviews, field visits, analysis of documentation)
- End of Mission debriefings by the Evaluation Team leader in the countries

<u>Final reporting</u>
- Submission of draft evaluation report
- Consultation of the draft evaluation report among the CLP

- Synthesis / debriefing workshop with the CLP conducted by SDC Evaluation Officer and the Evaluation Team (app. 1 day in Bern)
  - present the Evaluation Team's conclusions
  - forum for the CLP for feedback on the draft evaluation report
  - conduct a process for the CLP to generate lessons learned and recommendations for SDC and take a stand on the implementation of the recommendations (Agreement at Completion Point, ACP).
- Briefing of and discussion with SDC's Board of Directors
- Submission of the Final evaluation report
- At the end of the assignment, the Evaluation Team will support the process together with the CLP for generating and recording the recommendations.
- Briefing of the Interested Parties during (blogpost, video on main recommendations) and at the end (main findings and recommendations, management response etc.) of the evaluation process (forms to be determined)

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation will begin with the Inception Phase, during which the evaluation team is expected to conduct a preliminary assessment of SDC's thematic networks. Inter alia, the inception report is expected:

- to characterise the thematic networks (including categorisations of different types of networks and modalities applied) based on a compilation of documents made available by SDC
- to define together with the SDC evaluation officer the final selection of networks and countries/multilateral institutions for analysis
- to define the most interesting and relevant avenues for analysis (focusing of the key questions) and delimitation of a scope in relation of the resources available for the evaluation,
- to construct an ex-post intervention logic[38] (e.g. results chain).
- to provide clarity on the methodology to be applied, taking into account the quality of the data sources available.

In respect to the resources available, it is anticipated that the evaluation methodology will include:

- short, evidence-based case studies, e.g. at level of field offices or multilateral representations
- analysis (meta-evaluation) of evaluations, reviews, monitoring instruments (status reports etc.) and relevant project documentation
- to the extent possible rigorous quantitative and qualitative methods and the use of statistical methods as used in research

The definite selection of the case studies will be defined during inception phase. A number of short field visits will be decided in respect of a) the key questions, b) the various types of activities and modalities and c) geographical and thematic distribution. It may include some SDC intervention countries, representations at multilateral institutions.

The evaluation team is expected to carry out the evaluation according to DAC evaluation standards (see the OECD DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance).

The evaluation will draw its assessment and conclusions from various sources. It will draw as extensively as possible on available data, comparisons and where necessary on primary research. As there was not established a proper baseline for the set-up of the thematic networks a multi-level approach will have to be followed. The following

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[38] as reference see: Mayne J. (2008): Contribution Analysis – an approach to exploring cause and effect, ILAC Brief 16, CGIAR, and reference therein.

approaches are under discussion and will be decided between the CLP and the Evaluation Team:

1.1. <u>Document analysis</u>
- Decisions taken during the reorganisation process (see annexes as well), and inputs made in particular by respective working groups
- Annual "status reports" to the BoD of SDC on the development of the networks (2009 onetworkards) and further documents on the development of thematic networks
- Annual reports and planning documents by the networks, policy papers, tools and instruments produced by the networks

1.2. <u>Interviews</u>
- Semi-structured interviews with
  a. Beneficiaries: Director, heads of domains, of divisions, DoC, programme managers, field staff etc.
  b. Line managers with thematic responsibilities, Focal Points, thematic staff,
- Staff concerned with the SDC's thematic work in FDFA[39] and other direct collaboration partners in the federal administration
- Cooperation partners in Switzerland and abroad: NGOs, university institutes, private firms holding SDC backstopping mandates
- Thematic networks outside SDC (e.g. AGUASAN, Alliance Sud, etc.)
- Possibly electronic forums and discussion groups

1.3. <u>Quantitative analysis</u>
- Primary data collection where necessary (Questionnaires to HO and Field Offices). Possibly follow-up to survey done in SDC in 2012
- Quantitative comparisons with comparable institutions

1.4. <u>Field visits (approximately 3 days each)</u>
- Visits to 3 SDC field offices (2 with, 1 without thematic SDC personnel)
- Visits to 1 multilateral representation (e.g. UN New York, World Bank Exec. Office)

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE AND TIME PLANNING

Due date	Task	Resp. [40]
August 13	Call for expression of interest	EC
October 13	Analysis of expression of interest	EC
03.10.13	Preparation of Approach Paper	EC
15.10.13	Agreement on Approach Paper	EC & CLP (by writing)
25.10.13 – 30.10.13	Invitation call for offers (based on approach paper), Steering Committee Meeting	EC & SC
18.11.13	Discussion Approach Paper/TORs in SDC BoD	EC
	Compilation of Documentation	EC & CLP
04.12.13 – 20.12.13	Submission of offers	Candidates
23.12.13	Analysis of offers	EC & SC

[39] Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

[40] <u>Abbreviations</u> BoD = Board of Directors of SDC, EC = Evaluation and Controlling Division (SHE), CLP = Core Learning Partnership, ET = Evaluation Team, SC = Steering Committee

13.01.14	Contract with evaluation team	EC & ET
	Inception Phase	ET
	Inception Workshop Bern	EC & CLP ET
	Submission of draft Inception Report	ET
	Analysis draft inception report	EC & CLP
	Submission of Inception Report	ET
	Agreement on Inception Report	EC & CLP
	Implementation Phase: field missions, data analysis, etc.	ET
	Briefing in Retreat of BoD SDC	EC & ET
	Submission of draft report	ET
	Analysis of draft report	EC & CLP
	Synthesis / Debriefing workshop Bern	EC & CLP ET
	Revision of draft report	ET
	Submission of final draft report	ET
	Agreement on final draft report	EC & CLP
	Preparation of Stand at Completion Point	CLP & ET
	Agreement on Stand at Completion Point	EC & CLP
	Preparation of Management response	SC, EC & CLP
	Agreement of Management response	BoD
	Publication of Evaluation	EC

6. Expected Results

At Output Level

By the Evaluation Team:

- Aide Memoires of the Kick-Off Workshop of the Inception Phase with the CLP and Briefing of the Interested Parties,
- Inception Report, Debriefing on the Inception Report with the CLP, Aide Memoire of the meeting, finalisation of the Inception Report based on SDC feedback,
- Briefing note to SDC's Directorate on the preliminary findings,
- Aide Memoire of the Debriefing with the CLP on the Draft Evaluation Report,
- Facilitation of the Agreement at Completion Point Workshop with the CLP including elaboration of recommendations and lessons learned (in collaboration with the SDC Evaluation Officer),
- A fit to print Final Evaluation Report not exceeding 20 pages plus annexes and including an executive summary of maximum 4 pages
- A short and a long Evaluation Abstract according to DAC-Standards for DAC DeRec database.

By SDC:

- Review of the findings and conclusions, and participation in the elaboration of recommendations based on the findings and conclusions.
- An Agreement at Completion Point containing the Stand of the Core Learning Partnership and recommendations for SDC
- Lessons drawn by the Core Learning Partnership
- Senior Management Response

At Outcome Level

The SDC's management translates the insights from the evaluation into its strategies, programme development and human resources management related to the development of its knowledge management

7. Communication

The evaluation will regularly communicate the intermediary results. It will be managed as a learning process of the management and the institution as a whole.

8. Partners

Organisational Set-up and Respective Roles

- A **Core Learning Partnership** (CLP) to accompany the evaluation has been constituted at SDC head office. The thematic networks are all represented in the CLP. Throughout the evaluation process, the CLP is engaged in learning through interactive reflection with the evaluation team. The CLP comments on the evaluation design and the key questions in the Inception Phase. The CLP comments on the Inception Report and on the Draft Evaluation Report. During the Agreement at Completion Point Workshop, the CLP receives and validates the evaluation findings and conclusions and together with the Evaluation Team elaborates lessons learned and recommendations for SDC which will be noted in an Agreement at Completion Point during the workshop.

- **SDC's Directorate** (Department-level Management and the Director General) will be interviewed and regularly debriefed by the Evaluation team. It will approve the Senior Management Response, which will be published with the evaluation report and form the basis for rendering accountability on the follow-up to the evaluation.

  The Quality Assurance staff in the offices of the directors of the departments will track implementation of the Senior Management Response in their departments and regularly report on progress to their Directors.

- The **Steering Committee** (selected mid- and senior-level managers) has been constituted at HO incl. corresponding members in field offices. It will be periodically interviewed by the evaluation team and will be periodically briefed by the evaluation team on emerging findings. It should participate in the various workshops during the evaluation as relevant, will help draft the Senior Management Response to the evaluation and ensure its implementation.

- **Consultants** contracted by SDC's Corporate Controlling Section will elaborate an evaluation work plan and an Inception Report and carry out the evaluation according to DAC and SEVAL evaluation standards. They will conduct a Kick-off Meeting with the CLP at the beginning of the inception phase. They will conduct a debriefing for the CLP on the Inception Report and finalize it in consultation with the SDC Evaluation Officer to reflect the feedback as appropriate. They will conduct additional events with stakeholders throughout the evaluation process to ensure reflection and learning during the process. They will conduct debriefings for the stakeholders as appropriate following their evaluation missions. They will present a draft of their Evaluators' Final Report to the CLP, follow up on the CLPs feedback while safeguarding their independence and submit the Evaluator's Final Report in publishable quality as well as an Evaluation Abstract according to DAC specifications and a stand-alone 1-2 page evaluation summary. In an Agreement at Completion Point Workshop with the CLP, they will draw together the main conclusions of the evaluation and set out the evaluator's view of what needs to change ("priorities for change" and scenarios, if appropriate). From this starting point, they will facilitate a workshop process in which

the CLP draws lessons learned and develops options and recommendations for consideration by SDC's senior management, which will be recorded by the evaluation team. The evaluation team leader may be asked to debrief SDC's Directorate at the end of the evaluation process.

- **Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Section (E+C)** commissions the evaluation, approves the final evaluation design and key questions in consultation with the CLP and the evaluation team, drafts and administers the contracts with the Evaluation Team, ensures that the evaluators receive appropriate logistical support and access to information, safeguards the independence of the team and facilitates together with the evaluation team the overall process with respect to the discussion of evaluation results and the elaboration of the Agreement at Completion Point. It is responsible for the publication and dissemination of the evaluation report.

Bern, 03.12.2013/SHE

Annexes
- List of SDC's thematic (and non-thematic) networks
- Organogram with localisation of networks
- Tasks, Competencies and Responsibilities in Thematic Quality Assurance / 2010
- SDC Networks – Overview for Network Members (Fact sheet) / 2013

Annexes

List of SDC's thematic Networks
(Status October 2013)
1. Agriculture and Food Security A+FS
2. Climate, Energy and Environment CC&E
3. Conflicts & Human Rights C&HR
4. Decentralization and Local Governance DLGN
5. Disaster Risk Reduction DRR
6. Education: Réseau E
7. Employment & Income e+i
8. Gender
9. Health
10. Migration
11. Multilateral
12. Political Economy and Development PED (active until June 2014)
13. Water

Additional information:
The non-thematic networks are the following ones (not being evaluated):
1. Aid Effectiveness
2. Comprehensive Internal Controlling System (ICS)
3. Financial Management (F&S)
4. Quality Assurance QS
5. Learning and networking platform