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EVALUATION OF THE SDG LAB
FINAL REPORT

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1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Context

1.   In September 2015, all United Nations Member States endorsed the global agenda of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Goals comprised an urgent call to action by all countries, in a united global partnership to face collective challenges. In September 2019 the 'decade of delivery and accountability' for the related Agenda 2030 added renewed impetus and urgency to SDG achievement.[1]

2.   Six years later, the COVID-19 pandemic has both reconfirmed the importance of collective action to face global threats and challenges and highlighted the fragility of hard-won gains. For the first time in two decades, poverty and inequality are on the increase. For the tens of millions already living close to the edge, the pandemic has returned the spectre of hunger, scarcity and want.

3.   As attention turns to fighting the pandemic on national territories, the focus has shifted away from Agenda 2030 to more immediate concerns. Yet the pandemic has also highlighted the criticality of the SDGs as a force for global good, and the centrality of partnership and co-ordination in addressing truly global concerns.

4.   In December 2016, following the endorsement of Agenda 2030, the Swiss Government together with the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) initiated and financed a Geneva-based entity tasked with furthering the SDG agenda within Switzerland and beyond. The SDG Lab was envisaged as a mechanism to join up Geneva-based actors in the spirit of collective partnership, to '*incubate and accelerate*' progress towards the SDGs.[2]

5.   As of 2021, the SDG Lab has been operational for five years. At the mid-point of Phase 2, and with a further round of funding under consideration, the Government of Switzerland wished to review progress to date and identify ways forward for the future.[3] It therefore commissioned the present evaluation.

1.2 Overview of the SDG Lab

6.   **Origin and rationale** Following the adoption of Agenda 2030, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed a Special Advisor on Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The Special Adviser was tasked with supporting Member States and other relevant stakeholders to accelerate implementation of the SDGs, and a small unit in New York was established to support this agenda.

7.   In December 2016[4], the Government of Switzerland together with UNOG and the IISD initiated and financed the Geneva-based SDG Implementation Support Office (now the SDG

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[1] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/
[2] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition and stakeholder interviews (12/39)
[3] SDC (2021) Terms of Reference, Evaluation of the SDG Lab.
[4] Whilst the SDC finance agreement was established in August 2016, the 'project' started in December 2016.

Lab), tasked to further the SDG agenda under the remit of 'International Geneva'[5]. This concept recognises Geneva as the second multilateral hub after New York, hosting 33 international organisations, 181 Permanent Missions, 750 NGOs and several academic centres.[6] Geneva is also the headquarters of the World Economic Forum and the home to a wide range of actors from the private sector, , including the Swiss banking sector.[7] The SDG Lab was established in large part to harness this convening power.[8]

8.   **Institutional arrangements** The Lab has relatively complex institutional arrangements. It is situated within, and hosted by, the ***United Nations Office in Geneva*** (UNOG). This choice was informed by a) the role of the UN as the global convenor of, and reporting platform for, SDG implementation and b) its scope for high-level political leverage and convening power, which offered opportunities to bring together multi-stakeholder actors within Geneva.[9] The Lab is directly located within the Office of the Director General, which provides day to day oversight and management. Core professional staff, administrative services and grant agreements are all managed under contract with the UN's Office for Project Services (UNOPS)[10] and UNOG. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) is also a partner, responsible for management of the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem within the SDG Lab, and providing several core staff to the Lab (see para 15).

9.   The ***Swiss Confederation*** is the main funder of the initiative. Different elements of the Confederation have different functions and roles in relation to the Lab, as follows:
   - Until September 2020, the Lab was part of the portfolio of the *Global Institutions Division (GI)* within the Department of Global Cooperation of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC);
   - In September 2020, the SDG Lab and its budget were transferred to the *Analysis and Policy Division* (A&P) of the Department of Global Cooperation , which now project manages the Lab;
   - The *UN Division (UND)* within the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (FDFA), provided dedicated funding for Phases 1 and 2 (see Table 1) to supporting the Lab's main network of actors, the Geneva Ecosystem (see para 19);
   - The *Swiss Mission in Geneva* plays a role in promoting Swiss values within the UN (and other international organisations); coordinating Switzerland's multilateral policy; and promoting Switzerland as a host State and Geneva as a centre of global governance.

10.   These different elements, particularly of the Confederation, also have different priorities and interests in relation to the Lab, as Section 2 of this evaluation explores.

11.   **Concept and strategy** The Lab's conceptual design was as a new initiative, tasked to formulate its own strategic approach and to adapt as the external environment evolved. Phase 1 (2016-2019) focused on setting up and establishing organisational arrangements; developing partnerships; and mapping out a programme of work.[11] Phase 2 saw the Lab

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[5] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition and stakeholder interviews (14/39)

[6] Ibid.

[7] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition; and Stakeholder Interviews (8/39)

[8] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition

[9] Ibid.

[10] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition and SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement

[11] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition

focused on delivering against four identified outcomes of a logical framework ('logframe'): (i) further strengthening and engagement of the Geneva Ecosystem; (ii) addressing in-country challenges; (iii) disseminating the SDG Lab model; and (iv) achieving a more sustainable and diverse financial basis for the Lab.[12] Table 1 provides details:

Table 1: SDG Lab strategic architecture

	Phase 1 (2016-2019)	Phase 2 (2020-current)
Goal	To strengthen the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. *To accelerate concrete and measurable progress towards SDG targets at country level by enabling the diverse ecosystem of SDG actors in Geneva and beyond to maximize their contributions to implementing Agenda 2030.[13]*	To accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by enabling the very diverse ecosystem of SDG actors in Geneva and beyond to maximize their joint contributions to SDG challenges.[14]
Strategic Objectives/ Outcomes	The establishment of an "SDG Implementation Support Office" within United Nations Office in Geneva that will strengthen the network amongst Geneva actors and also ensure links across the global multilateral hubs. Success will be determined by the ability of the SDG Implementation Support Office to apply and reinforce a truly multi-stakeholder approach as well as its ability to link and leverage the technical know-how from Geneva with the realities and needs at country level.	• **GENEVA ECOSYSTEM:** The increased engagement of SDG practitioners in Geneva strengthens the steadily growing multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral ecosystem. • **IN-COUNTRY CHALLENGES:** Member States and other actors actively use Geneva's SDG expertise to address in-country challenges, including through UN country teams when relevant. • **MODEL:** SDG actors utilize the tools and lessons from the SDG Lab model in their own activities. • **SUSTAINABILITY:** Partners of the SDG Lab engage in strategic partnerships and the provision of funding.
Intervention Strategy	Four strategic pillars wherein the Lab acts as a: **Connector (Pillar 1):** Identifying, brokering and incubating innovative multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships involving actors in the ecosystem of Geneva and beyond in support of operational challenges in SDG implementation. **Amplifier (Pillar 2):** Capturing and creating a critical mass of practices, policies, tools or partnerships that are proving impactful at country level. **Question Asker (Pillar 3):** Creating the conditions for transformative approaches. **Innovator (Pillar 4):** Developing innovations and experiments.	'What the SDG Lab does': **Connector:** Creating new opportunities for diverse actors in and outside Geneva to meet and exchange information, experiences and ideas for collaboration **Amplifier:** Creating unique forums for telling stories of success and failure so that the lessons can inform future policy and practice **Question Asker:** Thinking, acting and investing in an intersectoral way doesn't 'just happen'. The SDG Lab aims to ask questions that uncover new ways of thinking and new paths to action. **Innovator:** Encouraging experimentation with new approaches, formats and processes, risk-taking and learning from failure.

Source: Phase 1 Finance Proposition (2016), SDG Lab Strategic Framework 2018/2019, Phase 2 Finance Agreement (2019), SDG Lab Logframe (2019)

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[12] SDG Lab Logframe, Phase 2 Finance Proposition
[13] SDG Lab Strategic Framework 2018/2019
[14] SDG Lab Logframe, 2020

12.   **Financial basis:** The Swiss Confederation has provided a total budget of USD $8.53m between 2016 – 2022; comprising USD $2.88m for Phase 1 and USD $5.65m for Phase 2[15]. The financial profile of the Lab is as follows:

Table 2: SDG Lab financial profile 2016-2021

	Phase 1 (USD) **12.2016 – 12.2019**	**Phase 2 (USD)** **01.2020 to 12.2022**	**TOTAL**
SDC (GI/A&P Divisions)	1,983,913[16]	4,748,379[17]	6,732,292
FDFA (UN Division)	900,000[18]	900,000	1,800,000
TOTAL	2,883,913	5,648,379	8,532,292

Source: Phase 1 and Phase 2 Finance Agreements between the Swiss Confederation and UNOPS; Budget Amendments #1 - #5; and Budget Forecast SDG Lab Phase II: 2020-2022

13.   The annual budget increased substantially from the first to the second phase, from approximately USD $960,000 per annum 2016-2019, to USD $ 2.1m in 2020, the first year of Phase 2.[19] The increase reflected a planned increase in operations, communications and travel, as well as increased support to '*incubate and accelerate specific initiatives*'.[20] The funding increase also recognised the heightened urgency of the Lab's mission given the Decade of Action and Delivery for Agenda 2030; increased demand for Lab services over Phase 1; and a recognition that the Lab would move, in Phase 2, from experimental mode to scaling up its model and successful initiatives.[21]

14.   At the same time, it was recognised that funding could not be indefinite. The Phase 2 credit agreement acknowledged that the SDCs contribution '*cannot be sustained at that level until 2030.*'[22] Inability of the SDG Lab to secure additional funding for the delivery of the Lab's strategic plan and objectives was identified as a potential Phase 2 risk.[23]

15.   **Lab staffing and management** The Lab began with one staff member (the Director) in December 2016, with IISD Senior Advisor and an assistant joining the team in the first quarter 2017. As of November 2021, it consists of a team of nine (seven full time and two part-time), several of whom are externally-funded. Table 3 sets out the current configuration:

Table 3: Lab staffing, November 2021

Role	**Full/ part-time**	**Affiliation**	**Financed by**
Director	Full-time	UN (UNOPS)	SDC (A&P)

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[15] In addition, a number of staff positions were funded by Member States including Nigeria and China (Phase 1) and the Russian Federation (Phase 2), the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (Phase 1) and the University of Geneva (Phase 1 and 2). See table 3.
[16] Financed by Global Institutions Division
[17] Financed by Analysis and Policy Division budget after its transfer from GI Division in 2020
[18] In Phase 1, UND funding to the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem (staffing) was separate from the SDG Lab.
[19] Analysis of Phase 1 and Phase 2 Finance Agreements
[20] SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement
[21] SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement
[22] SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement
[23] SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement

Programme Management Assistant	Full-time	UN (UNOG)	SDC (A&P)
Senior Advisor, Communications	Full-time	UN (UNOPS)	SDC (A&P)
Senior Advisor/ Advisor, Geneva 2030 Ecosystem	Full-time	IISD	UN Division (FDFA)
Communications Officer	Full-time	UN (UNOPS)[24]	SDC (A&P)
Partnerships Analyst	Full-time	UN (UNOPS)[25]	SDC (A&P)
Member States Focal Point (JPO)	Full-time	UN (JPO)	Russian Federation
Junior Project Officer, Geneva 2030 Ecosystem	Part-time	IISD	UN Division (FDFA)
Advisor, Academia	Part-time	University of Geneva - Tsinghua University	Geneva-Tsinghua initiative

Source: SDG team in September 2021; Expenditure details for SDG Lab as at Q2 2021; Stakeholder Interviews

16. The team structure is relatively flat. Team members have distinct roles but also collaborate within smaller teams on communications and monitoring, evaluation and learning (Figure 1). Reflecting increasing demands on the team, the Senior Communications Advisor often acts as a Deputy:

Figure 1: SDG Lab staffing
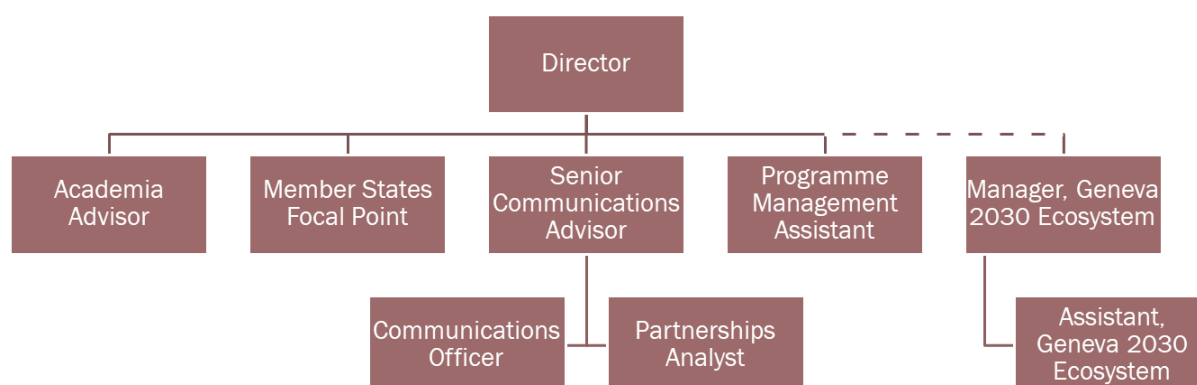
Source: SDG Lab documentation

17. **Governance and oversight** The Lab does not have a Steering Committee or similar governing body, but rather an Advisory Group was formed in June 2020. This comprises key stakeholders with an interest in the Lab and its activities and includes representatives of: the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Reos Partners Geneva, Geneva Tsinghua Initiative, University of Geneva, Roche Holding Ltd, Impact Hub Geneva, Minister of

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[24] IICA/ consultant: International ICA – Specialist personnel perform expert or advisory functions outside of their home country or place of residence, and normally require at least a Master's degree or equivalent educational background
[25] IICA/ consultant

Technology of Niger and Special Advisor to the President, and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement.

18.   **Activities** The Lab has undertaken diverse activities since 2017. Key items include:
- *The co-development and maintaining of the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem.* The Lab convenes and manages a network of 'SDG-interested' actors who meet three times per year to incubate multi-stakeholder dialogue and action on the SDGs (see para. 36). The Ecosystem is a core part of the raison d'être of the Lab.
- *The co-founding of the Building Bridges initiative,* bringing together actors from the UN, academia, civil society, the private sector and other areas around the theme of sustainable finance for the SDGs.
- *Convening dialogue fora and events* with stakeholders engaging on cross-cutting SDG-related themes
- *Developing core initiatives around key themes* such as the Pipeline Builder and the Swiss Blended Finance Centre, which seek to link private sector finance with SDG-related priorities
- *Fostering dialogue and collaboration* between national governments and Geneva ecosystem actors to engage with on-the-ground SDG challenges, though exchanges, sharing knowledge and convening discussions.

19.   The following sections of this report discusses the role of these activities in relation to the Lab's strategic aims and intended results.

1.3 Evaluation purpose, questions and methodology

20.   Overall, any evaluation's goal *'is to define, measure, and judge the **merit, worth, and/or significance** of an evaluand'*.[26] These concepts are defined as follows:

- **Merit** is the "intrinsic" value of an intervention: the term is used interchangeably with quality;
- **Worth** is the value (often monetary) of an intervention; the term is often used interchangeably with 'value';
- **Significance** addresses the role and importance of an intervention within its context. It can also be used to consider its scale.[27]

21.   Within these parameters, this evaluation's specific **purpose** was to '*assess, at mid-term, the results of the SDG-Lab achieved to date, taking into consideration the changing context and other constraints, including the challenges of COVID-19, with a view to making recommendations for planning and possible Government of Switzerland support for phase 3'*.[28] The evaluation's **questions** – aligned to the international evaluation criteria[29] - were as follows (Table 4):[30]

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[26] Scriven, M (1991) Evaluation Thesaurus; see also OEC DAC
https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm
[27] Scriven (1991) op.cit.
[28] Terms of Reference (See Annex 1).
[29] https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm
[30] Ibid. and Inception Note, October 2021.

Table 4; Evaluation Questions

Relevance to needs
• How well has the Lab served the needs of its constituents since its inception in 2017?
• How well has the Lab adapted to its new context (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent resource-constrained environment, new UNOG leadership)?
Achieving results
• Is the Lab's monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework suited to extract data and inform its strategic development?
• How well and far has the SDG Lab achieved its objectives (of phase 1 and 2), considering its role as an innovative initiative in the UN system?
• What higher-level results has it delivered?
Governance, management and institutional arrangements
• Is the current dual function of the SDG Lab within UNOG the most appropriate location/best mix and use of its time and resources?
• How well do the governance and oversight of the Lab function?
• Are the staffing and management arrangements the most appropriate?
Partnerships
• How successfully have partnerships been developed to enhance the delivery of the SDGs?
Sustainability
• Is the current resourcing basis of the Lab the most appropriate? What have been the implications of this arrangement for the Lab's operations and its future vision?

22.   The evaluation was both **formative** (learning) and **summative** (accountability) in its intent. It aims to account for, and learn from, the achievements of the Lab since 2017, while providing clear options and proposals for the initiative's future development.

23.   **Theoretical basis**: The original theoretical basis for the evaluation was the Lab's Theory of Change (ToC) and logframe. However, given shortcomings in their quality and construction (see section 2.3), the following Logic Model was developed (Figure 2). This draws together elements of the Lab's ToC and logframe and reflects the 'proof of concept' approach embedded in the Lab's financial agreements with the Government of Switzerland:

Figure 2: Logic Model
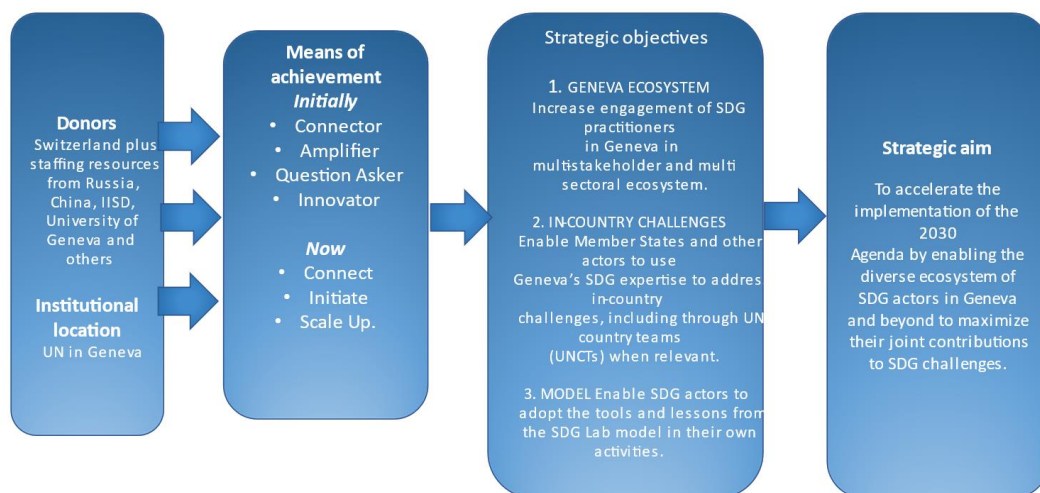
24. **Methodology** The evaluation design applied four key principles and approaches:
   i. A *fully systematic approach,* via a structured and systematic design;
   ii. An *appreciation of the organizational cultures* surrounding the Lab, including that of the wider UN in Geneva, the Swiss Confederation and International Geneva;
   iii. *Transparency & traceability of evidence*, achieved through the use of structured tools and the calibration of findings to the strength of the evidence; and;
   iv. A *consultative & consensus-building approach*, achieved by communicating frequently with evaluation commissioners and the SDG Lab management and team, and assuming a shared commitment to organizational improvement and contribution to the realization of the SDGs.

25. The evaluation generated its findings and conclusions through a mixed methods approach. Specifically;

   - Interviews with 39 stakeholders (see Annex 2)
   - Review of over 150 documents (see Annex 3)
   - Quantitative analysis of SDG Lab funding, activities and results.

26. Data was gathered against a structured tool, to ensure full transparency and to enable robust triangulation. Validation was conducted through a multi-stakeholder meeting, held in Geneva on November 15th 2021.

2.   FINDINGS

2.1 Relevance: How well has the Lab served the needs of its constituents since 2017?

Summary

The Lab is both strategically and operationally relevant. It has a clear niche within the complex international co-operation architecture of Geneva and is appropriately located within the UN system, as the main convening platform for the SDGs. Its work and thematic priorities selected are aligned to the strategic and political priorities of Switzerland.

Demand for its services outstrips its ability to supply them, and the Lab has prioritised thematic areas appropriately to date. It has adapted strategically over time to remain relevant to priorities emerging, and adjusted as required to the demands presented by COVID 19.

27.   **Clear strategic relevance** The Lab's focus on the SDGs/Agenda 2030, and its positioning within the UN, provide it with clear strategic relevance, as follows.

28.   **Aligned with international and UN priorities** The SDGs are the first truly international (as opposed to UN-centric) development agenda. However, the UN is and remains their international convenor and global platform. It is under the UN umbrella that the SDG framework was developed and globally presented; the UN convenes the international meetings for, and prepares global progress reports on, Agenda 2030; and it is under the UN that SDG results are, and will be, measured and reported.

29.   The Lab was conceptualised and is oriented around the SDGs, which remain its *raison d'être.* In this it is aligned with both the key global priorities of the period, and with UN aims. The Decade of Action, declared in 2019,[31] has intensified its strategic relevance, particularly as many fear a decline in focus on the SDGs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

30.   **Providing an SDG entry point** Institutionally, however, the SDGs lack a single systemic entry point in Geneva. The UN system in the city is widely recognised to be fragmented and, for outsiders, relatively inaccessible. A repeated complaint of stakeholders was the difficulty of identifying a systemic entry point for SDG-related dialogue: *'You can contact individual agencies and fight your way through the system, but there's no central entry point*.' Those interviewed made it clear that the Lab has provided a valuable - but also the only - entry point for the SDG platform 'in the round'. '*If it wasn't there, I have no idea who we would contact.'*

31.   **Mutual strategic advantage** Moreover, the positioning of an entity whose entire remit is geared to collaboration and stakeholder engagement within a central UN office – UNOG – which itself lacks a formal co-ordination mandate,[32] supplements the strategic advantage. While entities and organisations in Geneva are encouraged to collaborate, they cannot be forced. Locating an external entity (the Lab), whose entire *raison d'être* is to bring

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[31] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/
[32] SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement and Stakeholder Interviews (2/39)

diverse stakeholders together under the remit of the SDGs, within a UN-wide office which explicitly lacks such a mandate, provides a strategic complementarity that works to mutual advantage. For the UN in Geneva, the Lab offers a two-way gateway between the UN and the broader membership of 'International Geneva'. Two successive UNOG Director Generals have used and promoted the Lab for this function. For the Lab – and by extension, the Government of Switzerland – the Lab's UN housing confers the legitimacy and credibility to formulate and extend networks under the umbrella of the SDGs.[33]

32.   **Alignment with Swiss policy priorities** The Lab is strategically aligned with the Swiss Government's ongoing commitment to Agenda 2030. It is one of several Swiss investments to support SDG implementation,[34] and it sits within the Confederation's broader (14m CHF) commitment to UNOG SDG Implementation Support in Geneva 2020 – 2030.[35] The Confederation is also committed to Agenda 2030 domestically, through its 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy 2030.[36]

33.   The Lab also aligns with Swiss commitment to multilateralism, which is a key criteria and priority area for Swiss foreign policy/ international development aims.[37] Locating a Swiss-funded entity at the heart of the main multilateral platform in Geneva – the UN – provides a very explicit political endorsement of this priority.

34.   The Lab is also aligned to Switzerland's key foreign policy objectives. Thematic areas on which it has worked since 2017 (see section 2.3) include innovation; strengthening Geneva as a platform on global governance and the central hub for themes such as health and water; sustainable finance for the SDGs; private sector engagement; and the potential of digitalisation. These are all key strategic priorities for Swiss foreign policy.[38]

35.   **Diverse interests within the Confederation** However, the Lab also faces different – though complementary - interests and priorities from different elements within the Swiss Confederation (Table 5):

Table 5: Interests and priorities from within the Swiss Confederation

FDFA responsible implementation	Analysis and Policy Division, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)		• Delivery against Official Development Assistance aims, specifically economic development and welfare of developing countries[39]
	Global Institutions Division, Swiss		• Primary responsibility for dialogue with key UN

[33] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition, SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement and Stakeholder Interviews (7/39)

[34] For example, support for the Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development based in New York; building an effective monitoring and review mechanism for the 2030 Agenda (Phase 1 Finance Proposition, 2016, Phase 2 Finance Agreement, 2019)

[35] Phase 2 Finance Agreement, Annex 2: Minutes of the SDC Operations Committee (November 2019)

[36] https://www.eda.admin.ch/agenda2030/en/home/strategie/strategie-nachhaltige-entwicklung.html

[37] Dispatch on Switzerland's Strategy for International Cooperation 2017-2020; and Dispatch on Switzerland's Strategy for International Cooperation 2021–24

[38] Dispatch on Switzerland's Strategy for International Cooperation 2021–24; and Host State Dispatch 2020-2023 (2019)

[39] https://www.eda.admin.ch/sdc

and development of foreign policy on behalf of the Federal Council	Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)	SDGs and Agenda 2030	institutions and multilateral financial institutions.
	UN Division, State Secretariat		• Promoting Swiss values within the UN and other international organisations;
	Swiss Mission in Geneva, Switzerland's Missions and Delegations		• Coordinating and defining Switzerland's multilateral policy; • Promoting Switzerland as a host State and Geneva as a centre of global governance[40]

36.   Reconciling, and responding to, these different needs and priorities presents an ongoing challenge for the Lab, and indeed for Swiss Confederation stakeholders themselves, as subsequent sections of this report explain.

37.   **Challenging breadth of Geneva Ecosystem** The Lab initiated, convenes and manages the Geneva Ecosystem, which includes members from the UN, civil society, academia, the private sector and others (see Section 2.2). The Ecosystem's diversity presents both a strength and a risk. Positively, members' broad and diverse interests provide a powerful benefit when convened around the SDG agenda. Surveys and stakeholder interviews[41] confirm the Ecosystem's perceived value, as well as its role in enabling opportunities for collaboration.

38.   At the same time, the breadth of the Ecosystem's membership means that the Lab cannot feasibly be consistently and directly relevant to all its members. When consulted on proposed 'priority themes' on which the Ecosystem should engage, for example, members identified at four main topics; 'Data for the SDGs', 'A just transition', 'Digital connectivity' and 'sustainable finance'.[42] The Lab cannot feasibly hope to respond to all these issues and priorities. The risk, therefore, is decreased relevance to some Ecosystem members, who perceive the Lab's sphere of action as disconnected from their own. Nonetheless, both interview and survey data indicates a highly positive view of the Ecosystem's utility as the only SDG-focused dialogue platform in Geneva, and also of the Lab in convening and managing the Ecosystem (see section 2.2).

39.   **Demand exceeding supply** Particularly as it has increased in visibility within the Geneva architecture, the Lab has come to face more demand from its stakeholders than it can supply,[43] with an inability to respond to the sheer volume of requests received. Accordingly, it has had to prioritise. Analysis of sample email correspondence 2018-2021 finds a range of requests made and declined (Table 6):

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[40] Dispatch on Implementation Measures to Strengthen Switzerland's role as Host State for 2020-2023 (2019)
[41] Geneva 2030 Ecosystem – 2020 Review and Stakeholder Interviews (12/39)
[42] Ecosystem Focus Group Survey (October 2021) and Stakeholder Interviews (16/39)
[43] Evidence from email enquiries and tracker systems of requests made and granted

Table 6: Examples of requests declined

No	Entity/Event	Type of engagement requested	Date declined
1	University of Geneva	Lecture/speaking	29.11.2019
2	Government of Azerbaijan	Event participation	03.02.2020
3.	Impact Hub	Event participation	19.01.2019
4.	Lucerne University of Applied Science and Arts	Project partnership	25.05.2021
5.	University of Applied Sciences and Art Northwestern Switzerland	Lecture/Speaking	23.06.2021
6.	High Level Panel, 8th Global Forum on Health Promotion	Event participation	01.11.2018
7.	UNITAR	Speaking at event	04.07.2019
8	Global Diamond Investment SA	Meeting	21.10.2021
9.	Women's Leadership in Global Health	Event participation	22.11.2017
10	Graduate Institute	Lecture/speaking	10.09.2021
11.	Femmes Leaders Bilan Lausanne	Event participation	27.09.2021
12.	Journée Internationale de la Francophonie	Event participation	10.09.2021
13	Duke University	Meeting	22.11.2018
14	Circular Innovation Lab	Meeting	30.09.2019

Source : SDG Lab email communications 2018-2021

40.   The Lab articulates its prioritisation process as follows:
- Does it make SDG sense?
- Does it make UN sense?
- Does it leverage the ecosystem for the benefit of the SDGs?

41.   The prioritisation process is however also tactical, reflecting the relatively concentrated availability of higher-level staff resources to respond to the demands received (see section 2.6).

42.   **Strategic niche in relation to other co-ordination platforms** Recognising the fragmentation of the Geneva system, and to some extent pushed by both the global impetus for co-ordination to face common challenges and wider systemic reforms,[44] a plethora of co-ordination platforms have sprung up in recent years in Geneva. Currently, nineteen platforms are active,[45] many funded by the Government of Switzerland as part of its broader strategy for promoting International Geneva[46]. They include (Table 7) :

Table 7: Co-ordination platforms in Geneva

Network	Co-ordinator	Funder
Geneva Environment Network	UN Environment Programme	Govt. of Switzerland
Geneva Peacebuilding Platform	Graduate Institute Geneva, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed	Includes Government of Switzerland

[44] Secretary General's System-side reform agenda: see https://reform.un.org/
[45] https://www.genevaplatforms.ch/
[46] Dispatch on Implementation Measures to Strengthen Switzerland's role as Host State for 2020-2023 (2019); and Wennmann and Zintzmeyer (2020) Scoping Study on Platforms and International Geneva

	Forces, Geneva Center for Security Policy, Interpeace and the Quaker United Nations Office	
Geneva Science Policy Interface	Graduate Institute Geneva, ETH Zurich, LERU, EPFL, CERN, University of Geneva, University of Zurich	University of Geneva and Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Geneva Trade Platform	Graduate Institute Geneva	Government of Switzerland and the Graduate Institute
Geneva Water Hub	University of Geneva and Global Programme Water Division (SDC)	University of Geneva and Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)
International Geneva Health Platform	Graduate Institute Geneva	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

43.   These networks supplement the co-ordination agenda in the city, but differ from the Lab in two key ways. Firstly, they are largely thematically-focused, usually around a single theme, rather than oriented to the SDGs as an agenda.[47] Secondly, and critically, they are not institutionally housed within the UN.

44.   However, the 'lab' concept is far from unique. For example, Bonn, which hosts 150 organisations active in development cooperation, peacekeeping and sustainability, has developed as a hub for 'strengthening knowledge and competences for sustainable development' through the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability Research and the Innovation Campus Bonn. This is not 'housed' within the UN, however.

45.   The UN does however run 91 global UNDP Accelerator Labs, funded by German, Quatari and Italian co-operation, as well as by UNDP core donors. [48] UNDP Labs function as 'learning networks' on sustainable development challenges and are based at country level, with 91 Labs covering 115 countries.[49] Their role is to '*close the gap between the current practices of international development in an accelerated pace of change'*.[50]

46.   The SDG Lab has engaged with UNDP on their initiatives, but clear differences remain. The UNDP Labs are not, by definition, engaged with the International Geneva remit and agenda. They also provide different services to country governments from the SDG Lab, being focused on specific development challenges which arise from the country level.

47.   Finally, the World Economic Forum (WEF), also housed in Geneva, brings together political, business, cultural and other leaders 'to shape global, regional and industry agendas.'[51] It too has a different conceptual basis and operating model from the Lab, being

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[47] Recent study also indicates that some of these platforms have a tendency to deepen rather than cut across siloes (Wennmann and Zintmeyer, 2020)
[48] https://acceleratorlabs.undp.org/
[49] https://acceleratorlabs.undp.org/
[50] Ibid.
[51] https://www.weforum.org/about/world-economic-forum

focused at a much higher and broader level and with a much wider agenda, addressing challenges facing global society rather than the SDGs and Agenda 2030 with a focus on Member States, specifically. The WEF was also described by several stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation as primarily a *'think tank for global leaders'; 'more of a series of events than an entity'* rather than an SDG-focused entity through which direct dialogue and concrete collaborations are incubated to address SDG operational challenges.

48. **Strategic adaptation over time** The Lab's evolution over time reflects its conceptual basis as a new initiative, or 'start-up'. Phase 1 focused on establishing the SDG support entity within UNOG, experimenting with different approaches (e.g. convening cross-cutting events, identifying relevant themes to address and means of engaging with member states) and developing an effective operating model.[52] Phase 2 sought consolidation and expansion, with greater strategic focus across the four priority outcome areas of its logframe (see para 11). This led to a greater emphasis in Phase 2 on increased engagement with country governments, including through the development of a Member States strategy[53] and assigning a dedicated staff member responsible for proactively engaging with States' representations in Geneva.

49. **Positive adaptation to changes in UNOG management:** In September 2019, the former Director General of UNOG in Geneva, who was instrumental in establishing and supporting the work of the Lab, ended his tenure. This presented a potential continuity risk for the Lab. However, the Lab continues to be highly valued and championed by the new Director General, reflecting perceptions of its ongoing relevance and strategic niche in the UN system.[54]

50. **The Lab adapted swiftly to the Covid-19 pandemic** The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 brought considerable challenges, particularly given the Lab's conceptual basis of connecting people and facilitating dialogue. Restrictions on physical meetings therefore posed a significant challenge. Nonetheless, the Lab adapted quickly, with meetings and events moving to an online format. Examples include:
- An SDG Challenge session amongst five Member States[55] in advance of the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in March 2020;
- A meeting on the UN's High Level Panel: Covid and Inequalities (June 2020) in collaboration with the ILO and ECLAC;
- A virtual briefing on the "Africa's Pulse" report to Geneva-based Country Missions (February 2021) co-convened by the World Bank and the SDG Lab;
- An informal briefing on the upcoming High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (June 2021) for Geneva-based SDGs practitioners, Heads of Agencies and Member States[56].

51. The pandemic also disrupted the planned Ecosystem programme of events. The Lab therefore shifted the programme of work also online, including a series of informal virtual roundtables on 'Safeguarding SDG Investments during the COVID-19 Pandemic'; an 'SDG

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[52] SDG Lab internal planning documentation; stakeholder interviews (7/39)
[53] SDG Lab (2020) Member State strategy
[54] Stakeholder Interviews (11/39)
[55] Austria, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia
[56] SDG Lab Annual Report 2020 and SDG Lab Timeline (2021)

Moment' viewing in September 2020 and a re-invigoration strategy marked by a well-attended launch of the Ecosystem 'Accelerator' event in January 2021.[57]

52.   Finally, with events programmes cancelled or adapted to online, the Lab used the opportunity of COVID-19 to engage in organisational development. The inaugural Advisory Group meeting was held in June 2020, and the Theory of Change for the Lab developed over 2020 and early 2021. A Learning Journey was developed to support lesson-learning from the Lab's model. Three new team members also joined the team in early 2021, despite the challenges of remote working.

2.2 Coherence: How successfully have partnerships been developed to enhance the delivery of the SDGs?

Summary The Lab has developed a wide range of appropriate partnerships, and undertaken some significant collaborations geared to enhancing SDG implementation. The main partnership however is the Ecosystem, which has met frequently but suffered a loss of momentum in 2020 linked to COVID-19. Its members perceive the Ecosystem as very valuable, and a key forum for SDG-related dialogue in Geneva, though not all are consistently or actively involved.

53.   **The SDG Lab has been successful in forging partnerships and undertaking collaborations** The Lab has forged links with UN actors, national governments, civil society, the private sector and many others. However, there is a distinction between *partnerships* and *collaborations,* with the former assumed to be of a longer duration, while collaborations may include one-off events.

54.   **Collaborations** The Lab has collaborated on short-term events with an extremely wide range of organisations, including those from the UN, civil society, academia, the private sector and many others. Its Collaboration Tracker lists 88 collaborations with different organisations,[58] though this includes engagement with six organisations who have provided staff to the Lab[59]. Moreover, some collaborations actually involve engagement with longer-term partners, who participate in events but have an ongoing relationship with the Lab. Examples of key collaborations include:

- The So What? Series of events, which sought to link SDGs together under topical discussion themes, and convene dialogue around key issues
- Engagement with REOS partners on introducing country-based visitors to key interlocutors in Geneva.
- Working with the Millennium Institute to disseminate the tool they developed to plan and budget SDG priorities in a systemic way
- Engagement with the UN Library and Archives Geneva on a four-part podcast series "It takes a crisis...", running mid-December 2021 - May 2022.

55.   More extended/substantive **partnerships** include:

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[57] Ecosystem Meeting Participation statistics (October 2021)
[58] SDG Lab MoU and Collaboration tracker (October 2021)
[59] Staff in-kind were provided by Member States (Nigeria, China, Colombia), IISD, UNIGE and OIF.

- Building Bridges week, attended by [TBC] stakeholders in 2021 from across the spectrum of the private sector, civil society, the UN, Member States and other international organisations and academia. Building Bridges Week – which now has its own organisation (see Box 1 below) - involves a substantive partnership between the Lab, IISD, Sustainable Finance Geneva (SFG) and the Canton de Genève under a Sustainable Finance initiative.
- With the Geneva Science and Policy Interface (GSPI), on building resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic
- With academic institutions, supporting internships and postgraduate education e.g. with the Geneva Tsinghua Initiative, the University of Geneva and the Graduate Institute of Geneva;
- With the UN's Economic Commission for Europe, supporting its Annual Regional Forum in defining its thematic focus and engaging actors from the Geneva Ecosystem.

56.   **The Ecosystem as a key partnership** The main partnership developed however has been the Geneva Ecosystem, whose rationale was a core basis for Swiss funding of the Lab.[60] Membership of the Ecosystem at the end of 2020 stood at 372 individuals from 255 organisations (Figure 23.[61]

Figure 3: Ecosystem membership 2021
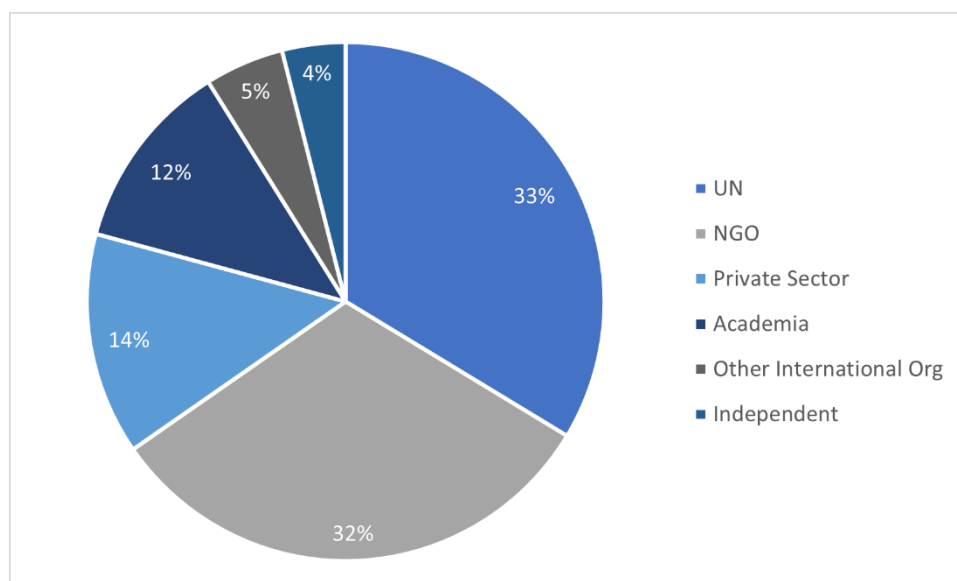
Source: Based data from SDG Lab Annual Report 2020

57.   Figure 4 below shows the growth since 2018:

Figure 4: Ecosystem growth over time
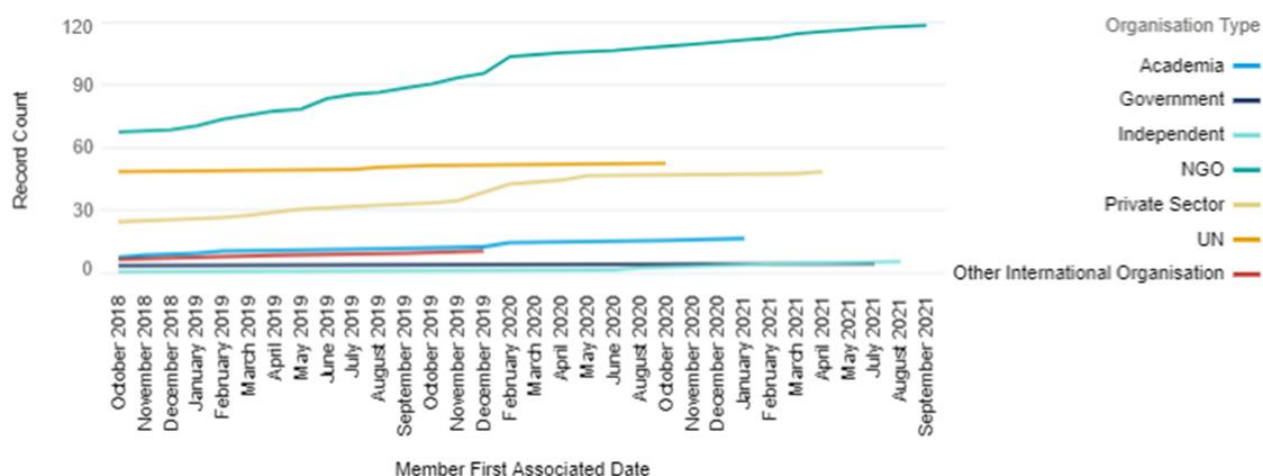
Source: SDG internal data, 2021

58.   The Lab receives a wide range of enquiries regarding the Ecosystem from interlocutors including journalists; UN agencies (UNODC, UNECE, UNIDIR, WMO, UN-REDD), multilateral institutions such as CERN, networks such as Entnest (a Geneva-based network for entrepreneurs) and many others.[62] However, interviews indicated that not all Ecosystem members are active, with estimates ranging from 60-90 'consistently active' members.[63]

59.   The Lab organises regular events for Ecosystem members, including quarterly meetings. Invitation: participation ratios have been varied, but overall ranged between 17% of those invited (in 2017) to 42-45% (2021) (Table 8). It proved challenging to sustain the Ecosystem's momentum during 2020, with events moving online. The Lab noted the loss of momentum and planned a 'refresh', or 'Accelerate' of events for 2021.

Table 8: Ecosystem event attendance

Description	Meeting Date	Invited	Attending	% Participation
Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Meeting #1 – Jun-16	Jun-16	27	20	74%
Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Meeting #2 – Oct-16	Oct-16	57	25	44%
Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Meeting #3 – Mar-17	Mar-17	187	83	44%
Geneva Ecosystem Meeting #4 – Nov-17	Nov-17	227	38	17%
Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Meeting #5 – Nov-18	Nov-18	259	117	45%
Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Meeting #6 – Feb-20	Feb-20	360	79	22%
Ecosystem Accelerate – Feb-21	Jan-21	375	158	42%
Ecosystem meeting on sustainable finance – Sep-21	Sep-21	356	97	27%

Source: Ecosystem Meeting Participation statistics (October 2021)

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[62] Email communications 2018-2021
[63] Stakeholder interviews (9/39)

60.   Events may be thematically-focused or comprise discussions on broader topics such as the UN's High Level Political Forum (HLPF). Often the level of interest relates to the topicality of the subject – for example, 65% of members expressed interest in joining an informal Ecosystem event ahead of the global climate change summit, COP 26.[64] Examples of Ecosystem events from 2021-2021 are as follows (Table 9):

Table 9: Example Ecosystem Events 2020-2021

Date	Event
2020	
January	Behavioural Insights for Climate Action in partnership with the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences of the University of Geneva and the Geneva Science-Policy Interface (GSPI)
February	Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Meeting
February	SDG Lunch Collider, partnership with CERN
March 18	SDG Challenge Session at the UNECE Regional Forum
May	UN Interagency Blockchain Group Gathering with Geneva Macro Labs, discussing blockchain's role in SDG achievement
	Pre-briefing on the 2020 High-level Political Forum
	Blended Finance Community Consultation
July	HLPF Brainstorm
September	Viewing Gathering of SDG Moment, held ahead of General Assembly
December	STEP Conference
December	Accelerate Campaign Launch
2021	
January 21	Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Accelerate Meeting
February 3	Joint SDG Lab – World Bank briefing for Permanent Missions: Africa's Pulse's: charting the road to recovery
March 18	Geneva Trialogue of the Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative (GTI) with SDG Lab contributing to panel on "Blended Finance for Open Innovation and the SDGs" and moderating session on "Open Innovation in the UN Geneva Ecosystem"
March 25	First Francophone Ecosystem Meeting
March 25	Building resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics with the Geneva Science-Policy Interface (GSPI)
June 21 and 30	Meetings of the Building Bridges Data Workshop Group
June 24	2021 HLPF Briefing with Member States & Ecosystem
October 27	Ecosystem pre-COP26 meetup
October 30, November 1	Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Data workshops

Source: SDG Lab (2020) Annual Report, SDG Lab (2021) Mid-Year Report and SDG Lab Director (Dec 2021)

61.   **Perceived utility** Both in surveys and in evaluation interviews, Ecosystem members praised the value of the network, reporting it to be '*important for our work"* and with '*impressive convening power'*.[65] A 2020 survey of members (Table 10)[66] found the following results (40 respondents):

Table 10: Survey of ecosystem members

Usefulness			
Very low	**Low**	**Quite high**	**Very high**

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[64] Ecosystem Focus Group Survey (October 2021)
[65] Stakeholder Interviews (9/39)
[66] Geneva 2030 Ecosystem – 2020 Review

0%	5%	31%	64%
Collective knowledge mobilisation			
Very low	**Low**	**Quite high**	**Very high**
5%	21%	38%	36%
Collaboration promotion			
Very low	**Low**	**Quite high**	**Very high**
5%	18%	36%	41%

Source: Geneva 2030 Ecosystem – 2020 Review

62.   Interviewees cited the main Ecosystem advantages as:[67]

- *Filling a gap* – the network is the only one in Geneva which brings academia, NGOs, UN agencies, other international organisations and Government (often Permanent Missions) representatives together in a single forum;
- *Providing a forum for theme or topic-based discussions* which sit outside individuals remits, mandates or areas of responsibility;
- *Meeting new interlocutors* or potential partners with similar areas of interest;
- Identifying *future potential collaborations.*

63.   Those interviewed saw the Ecosystem as filling an important strategic gap, and *'helping to keep the spirit of the SDGs alive in Geneva.'*

2.3 Effectiveness – To what extent has the SDG Lab delivered on its aims?

Summary The Lab's performance management tools are not currently appropriate for its performance management, which impedes the assessment of results. Stakeholders, and particularly those within the Swiss Confederation, also view the Lab's achievements, and specifically it's merit, worth and significance, through very different lenses. Overall, however, its merit, worth and significance, in the terms it was originally designed, are demonstrated. The Lab has achieved tangible results against its intentions, and particularly in relation to its convening power, for example through its work on sustainable finance and the SDGs. It has also brokered and disseminated (though not generated) knowledge on the SDGs. Progress on *incubating and catalysing progress towards the SDGs* and *modelling replicable approaches* are gathering momentum over time.

64.   Assessing the Lab's effectiveness suffers from two immediate challenges: 1. Limitations in its accountability frameworks and 2. Different perspectives on, and understandings of, results.

65.   **Performance management instruments** The Lab has two main performance management frameworks in place: a Theory of Change (ToC) and a Logframe. The former was developed over 2021 with input from the Advisory Group. The latter was developed with consultancy support and under instructions from SDC's Operational Committee[68] as a requirement of continued funding into Phase 2.

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[67] Stakeholder interviews (21/39)
[68] Email correspondence 13/10/2021

66.   Both tools suffer technical shortcomings, however. The ToC, despite being consultatively developed, is a conceptual rather than accountability tool. Its technical weaknesses include:

- No clear vision or goal
- No clear intended outcomes
- Weak vertical logic

67.   A logframe's remit is as a performance tool for programmatic interventions (projects or programmes).[69] Logframes are intrinsically unsuited as performance management tools for an entity, particularly one whose characteristics are more those of a 'start-up'.[70] SDC administrative rules require a performance management framework, though there is a lack of clarity on the exact nature of these requirements.[71] The logframe was imposed as a requirement by SDC in late 2019, and limited time was available for its development before Phase 2 approval.

68.   The Lab's logframe as it stands also has technical weaknesses. For example, Outcome 4 concerns the sustainability of the Lab, when Results Based Management logic indicates the need for substantive intended results, rather than internally-focused intentions. Other challenges include weak vertical logic, unclear results statements, and indicators which reply solely on satisfaction levels, with no clear means of verification.

69.   The challenge therefore is to develop a performance management tool for the Lab which satisfies SDC administrative rules and which is both suited to, and provides a useful management tool for, the Lab's operating model. The development *process* of this framework – which requires thinking through intended vision, goals and outcomes – is often as important in generating stakeholder consensus as the finished product.

70.   **Different perspectives on results** Also complicating performance assessment are the different interests and priorities – and therefore perspectives – of many of the Lab's key stakeholders (see Table 5). For those whose sphere of operation is primarily multilateral, and who are accustomed to the lengthy and frequently cumbersome processes that surround multilateral co-operation, the 'assumed benefits' of dialogue, consultation and the search for common ground hold intrinsic 'worth'. The often-extended processes which bring stakeholders around the table; which identify common interests and priorities; which

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[69] See for example Better Evaluation: 'A 'Logical Framework', or 'logframe', describes both a general approach to project or programme planning, monitoring and evaluation, and – in the form of a 'logframe matrix' – a discrete planning and monitoring tool for projects and programmes.'
https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/logframe

[70] Also noted by 14/39 interviewees. Such characteristics include: innovation; aiming at growth; flexibility; risk-tolerant; focused on problem-solving; scalability; and with a small team in the initial stages. See e.g. https://www.the-itfactory.com/startup-knowledgebase/en/article/what-is-a-startup/ and https://business.tutsplus.com/tutorials/what-is-a-startup--cms-26045

[71] Analysis and Policy division interlocutors had different perceptions of whether a logframe was a procedural requirement or otherwise. Other Swiss Confederation interlocutors felt that a logframe was not the appropriate tool to apply to the Lab.

highlight potential joint actions and expose gaps, are interim results along the long and bumpy road of generating consensus, often via complex pathways of disagreement and diversions.

71.   Conversely, for those more professionally familiar with the management of bilaterally-focused Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects and programmes, 'results' are more usually understood as tangible achievements, often at country level. 'Performance' is commonly viewed through the results-based management language of outputs, outcomes and impact. Success or otherwise is gauged by the OECD's definition of ODA resources as being '*administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective'* [inter alia].[72]

72.   These world views are far from mutually exclusive – indeed, they are highly complementary. Both are fundamental if the world is to move through the COVID-19 pandemic and towards SDG achievement. Nonetheless, when brought into focus by the burdens and requirements of a grant management process, the distinctions between them are sharply highlighted. Accordingly, the evaluation concepts of '*merit, worth and significance'* (para. 19) may be very differently understood.

WHAT RESULTS HAS THE LAB DELIVERED?

73.   When assessing the Lab's results achieved to date, the evaluation has applied the theoretical basis for the evaluation set out in Figure 2. This combines the original intent of the Lab from Phase 1; the three substantive Logframe objectives (1-3) for Phase 2; the Theory of Change and the intent and objectives of the Lab as set out in the agreement documentation between the Swiss Confederation and the Lab for Phase 1 and Phase 2.

74.   On this basis, summary progress against the Lab's four main objectives is as follows (Table 11) :

Table 11: Summary progress against objectives

1. **Convene** partners around the SDGs & build networks	High achievement
2. **Generate, communicate** and **broker knowledge** on the SDGs	Some achievement (underway)
3. **Incubate** & **catalyse** progress towards the SDGs	Emerging achievement (gathering momentum)
5. **Model** replicable approaches	Emerging achievement ((gathering momentum)

75.   The following sections of the report provide (i) a more detailed set of results (Table 12 below) and (ii) an analysis against each results area, in the following sections.

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[72] https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm

Table 12: Detailed results

Results area	Scale/density of results achieved	Results achieved	Details
1.Convene partners around the SDGs & build networks *(Logframe: The increased engagement of SDG practitioners in Geneva strengthens the steadily growing multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral ecosystem.')*	High achievement	• Ecosystem and its events sustained (despite some waning of enthusiasm over 2020) • 111 events held –25th Jan 2017 – 11th Oct 2021. Includes So What series; Building Bridges Week, Briefing events on HLPF etc, bringing partners together and allowing cross-sectoral dialogue • Lunch Colliders 2018-2021	'So what' series of events held 2019-2020 Building Bridges week held in 2019 and 2020 around thematic areas Pipeline Builder / Blended Finance Knowledge Centre initiatives aim to drive more private capital to SDGs Events highly appreciated by attendees, as indicated by feedback surveys and evaluation interviews. Praise for the chance to make connections and 'think outside the box'.
2.Generate and broker knowledge on the SDGs	Some achievement (underway but more potential to be realised)	• Sustainable Finance Mapping completed (June 2018) – "tells the story" of Geneva's sustainable finance potential.[73] • Written articles/think pieces on the SDGs • Website information-sharing • Increasing presence on Twitter • Speaking engagements – wide range, particularly at universities and seminars, as well as to the business sector and UN agencies • SDG Lab Dispatch, [74]monthly updates on actions and strategic priorities (though focused on the Lab rather than the SDGs more broadly). Sent to the Ecosystem, Heads of International Organizations in Geneva, Permanent Missions in Geneva, UN Geneva, Swiss Government.	Written thinkpieces, for example, request from Geneva Canton to contribute to a communication piece on the SDGs, including (but not only) on sustainable finance in Newsletter, to inform the Swiss parliament.[76] Website analytics show an average of 2277 visitors per quarter[77] 2020-2021, and a trend of stability/slight decline 2020-2021: • 7825 in total Jan 1st – June 25 2021. • Minus 8% compared to 2020. Twitter statistics:[78] • 4125 followers in January 2021 • 4512 June 2021

[73] SDG Lab (2018) Next Steps; SDG Lab (2018) Overview of actors; SDG Lab (undated) Geneva Sustainable Finance Partnership Principles Revision 2: internal planning document;

[74] Selected SDG Lab Dispatches: January 2019 – May 2021

[76] Email correspondence 18.10.2021

[77] 2159 visitors in Sept 2020; 1744 visitors in Dec 2020; 2976 in March 2021; 2229 in May 2021

[78] SDG Lab Twitter Analytics

		• Video productions for regional commissions on results[75] • Spotlight Series from the Geneva Ecosystem	• 400 increase, though the source of these was mainly Switzerland[79] Between 18-25 speaking events held annually with an average attendance of 41 people. These included at least: • 21 events for UN agencies • 19 events for business/ finance sector • 41 events for academic/ research institutions
3.Incubate & **catalyse** progress towards the SDGs *(Logframe: Member States and other actors actively use Geneva's SDG expertise to address in-country challenges, including through UN country teams (UNCTs) when relevant.)*	Emerging achievement (gathering momentum)	• Country level engagement in SDG Lab activities • Niger digitalization • Costa Rica investment opportunities for the Pipeline Builder with UNDP BIOFIN[80] • Building Bridges, the Pipeline Builder, the Swiss Knowledge Centre on Blended Finance • Introduction of PeaceNexus to UNIDR (UN Institute for Disarmament Research)[81] • Senior level country participation at Lab events	Advisory and brokering services provided to at least 3 Member States to support SDG challenges, including: • Connecting Niger delegation with Geneva expertise and finance to support connectivity • Connecting Costa Rica delegation with investment community in relation to decarbonisation plan Informing the upcoming Indonesian G20 presidency by providing insight and information through the Swiss Mission. Brokering engagement with Members States towards piloting the Pipeline Builder, including Ghana, Kenya, Costa Rica and Vietnam
4.Model replicable approaches *(Logframe: SDG actors utilize the tools and lessons from the SDG Lab model in their own activities).*	Emerging achievement	• Approaches from UN and other actors to learn from model developed • SDG Lab toolkit developed (2019) • SDG Lab Learning Journey developed (2021)	48 engagements since 2017 with Representatives (Permanent Mission, Government, resident coordinator etc.)

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[75] Outreach emails DATE Doc 76

[79] SDG Lab Twitter Analytics

[80] Email correspondence 01.07.2021

[81] Email correspondence 09.09.21

			Of these, at least 31 were visits by representatives to explore the SDG Lab and learn about its work.[82] At least 14 other approaches to explicitly learn from the Lab's model: (4 x UN; 5 x NGO; 3 x Govt; 2 x Academia), with advice and support provided[83]

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[82] SDG Lab Tracker: SDG Challenges – Country Requests
[83] SDG Lab Tracker: Requests for Lab's Model Replication

76.   This results area concerns the Lab's convening power and is the field in which the Lab has demonstrated most tangible achievement to date. Aside from sustaining the Ecosystem, the Lab has brought partners together at 111 events since 2017.[84] While events in themselves do not comprise tangible results, they illustrate the Lab's ability to bring stakeholders together; to foster dialogue around, and comprehension of, the SDGs; and to enhance the fertilisation of ideas and concepts to advance the SDGs. These networking events have also led to new connections and collaboration between members of the Ecosystem, further contributing to delivering in the SDG agenda.

77.   Examples of events convened– which feedback data indicates as highly valued by participants[85] – include (Table 13):

Table 13: Events held

Event	Partner	Date
Insight Session on Water Governance	UN Water	08.05.2017
Data and the SDGs	World Bank	22.06.2017
SDG Lab briefing on the 2021 High Level Political Forum	Geneva Ecosystem, Permanent Missions & others	24.06.2021
Informal Feed Back Meeting: HLPF 2017	Geneva Ecosystem	24.10.2017
Informal Feed Back Meeting: HLPF 2018	Geneva Ecosystem	01.11.2018
HLPF Briefings	Geneva Ecosystem	2017-2021
Pre-Event Open Space, UNECE Regional Forum	UNECE	18.02.2019
Lunch Colliders	Wide range	2018-2021
So What? Event series. Topics include: • Decent work and climate action (03.09.2019) • Practices for Healthy Lives and Peaceful Inclusive Societies (25.09.2017) • Zero Hunger and Health and Wellbeing and Climate Action (19.12.2019) • Gender equality; sustainable cities and communities (undated) • Gender and Innovation (01.06.2017) • Sustaining Peace and Sustainable Development (01.04.2019) • Country Leadership for People, Planet and Nature (17.12.2019) Sanitation and Inequality (25.06.2018)	Wide range, including: ILO, IUCN, IISD Govts of Costa Rica, Benin, Fiji, UK and others UN Women, Democratic Control of Armed Forces, International Gender Champions Geneva WIPO UNPBSO and UN DPPA Global Commission on Drugs Policy Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council	2017-2019
Behavioural Insights for Climate Action	Swiss Centre for Applied Sciences, University of Geneva Geneva Science-Policy Interface	28.01.2020
SDG Challenge Session, Regional Forum on Sustainable Development	UNECE Govts of Austria, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia	19.03.2020
Blended Finance Community Consultation: attended by 20 individuals from the Geneva Ecosystem and 20 from Zurich		May 2020

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[84] Lab Tracker data, 2017-2021
[85] Event feedback survey data; stakeholder interviews (22/39)

Inequalities and the Informal Economy: How to move from Crisis Response to long term resilience	IISD, ILO and UNECE Govts of Jordan, Portugal, South Africa,	09.06.2020
Charting the Path to Africa's COVID-19 Recovery: a joint World Bank and SDG Lab briefing	World Bank, Govt of Togo,	03.02.2021
Building Resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics	Geneva Science-Policy Interface	15.04.2021
Briefing event: the High Level Political Forum		25.06.2021
Building Bridges Warm Up Event on Sustainable Finance	IISD	21.09.2021

78.   The example of Building Bridges week, held in 2019 and recently in November 2021, illustrates convening power around the theme of sustainable finance (Box 1):

Box 1: Sustainable Finance: Building Bridges Week

In 2019, and following the development of a partnership between the Lab, IISD and the Canton of Geneva, the SDG Lab and partners initiated and convened Building Bridges Week, focused on collaboration between the finance and international development communities in Switzerland.[86] The event linked to flagship sustainable finance events already on the city's calendar (FC4S Network annual meeting and UNDP SDG Finance Summit Geneva).

More than 1000 Swiss and international stakeholders attended, including the President of the Swiss Confederation, the Director-General of UN Geneva, and numerous CEOs and opinion leaders representing NGOs, business, academia, and other international organizations.[87] The SDG Lab represents the UN voice in the Building Bridges 'movement'.

The Week featured over 30 events, organized by 50+ partners. Achievements included:
- Connections and shared understandings of the SDG framework and the role of private sector finance within it, forged
- Clarity on the key players and stakeholders who can engage in the Sustainable Finance agenda in Switzerland
- Enhanced engagement/commitment of the finance community to the SDG framework
- Clarity on the niche of Switzerland in supporting the role of sustainable finance in the SDGs
- Identification of persisting gaps (missing set of understandable and quantifiable metrics to measure what SDG impact means; a lacking framework for reporting on SDG progress; a need for a new approach to understanding risk; and the challenge of the 'billions to trillions' narrative in the current and forecasted economic climate.[88]

The Swiss Federal Council referenced Building Bridges Week in a June 2020 report on sustainable finance in Switzerland[89] which considered possible measures to help the country become a leading location for sustainable financial services, and to boost the Swiss sector's contributions to the delivery of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs through its finance industry.[90]

Building Bridges Week in December 2021 continues the themes of sustainable finance, including items such as: "Measuring the social dimension of sustainable finance -What's missing and how do we

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[86] Building Bridges Week Event Summary: 7-11 October 2019
[87] https://www.buildingbridges.org/2019-edition/
[88] SDC (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement Annex 15 triangulated through interviews with Building Bridges Week participants and Sustainable Finance representatives.
[89] Sustainability in Switzerland's financial sector: Situation analysis and positioning with a focus on environmental aspect
[90] SDG Lab (2020) Mid-year Report to SDC, September 2020

advance?". Building Bridges is now managed by Sustainable Finance Geneva in collaboration with Swiss Sustainable Finance, and co-ordinated by a former team member of the SDG Lab. However, the Lab remains heavily involved in the planning and implementation, retaining focus on the SDGs, and ongoing management of the initiative, including high level representation by the UN (Deputy Secretary-General and ILO Director-General) and Member States (including President of Costa Rica, the President of Ghana, and a senior representative from the Government of Indonesia).

RESULTS AREA 2: GENERATE AND BROKER KNOWLEDGE: FAIR ACHIEVEMENT

79.   This results area concerns the Lab's generation of knowledge, learning and communication around the SDGs, and the sharing of this with its partners, networks and collaborators. Achievement here is fair.

80.   The Lab has a Communications strategy[91] which sets out the context for communication on the SDGs within Geneva and the UN, the key audiences, branding approach, principles and goals over the following 12-15 months. Its principal audience is identified as 'institutions, country governments, CSOs and individuals turning the SDGs into reality', primarily in Geneva and the UN system (notably New York, Bonn and Nairobi), but also beyond. Its goals are set out in Table 14:

Table 14: Communication strategy goals

By mid-2019 the [SDG Lab] Initiative:
i.   Is universally known and its role understood among its target audience;
ii. Has a significant [to be determined] share of the target audience regularly making use of SDG Lab's communications products;
iii. Gives a sense by SDG Lab's leadership that its communications effort greatly contributes to achieving the Initiative's wider goals.
By mid-2020 goals for the SDG Lab are to:
i.   Become a preferred platform for exchange of ideas on cross-sectoral solutions to SDG-related challenges
ii. Expand the audience beyond the Geneva-based (and key New-York-based) actors.
iii. Drive and provoke change through its communications effort

81.   Even before the strategy, since 2017, the Lab has communicated extensively on the SDGs and related issues. It has successfully carved out a niche as an 'entry point' to the UN and the SDGs in Geneva, as testified by external stakeholders. The multiple ways in which the SDG Lab brokers and communicates knowledge around the SDGs is reflected in Figure 5. This reflects the diverse channels

Figure 5: Brokering and disseminating knowledge

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[91] SDG Lab Communications Strategy 2018-2019
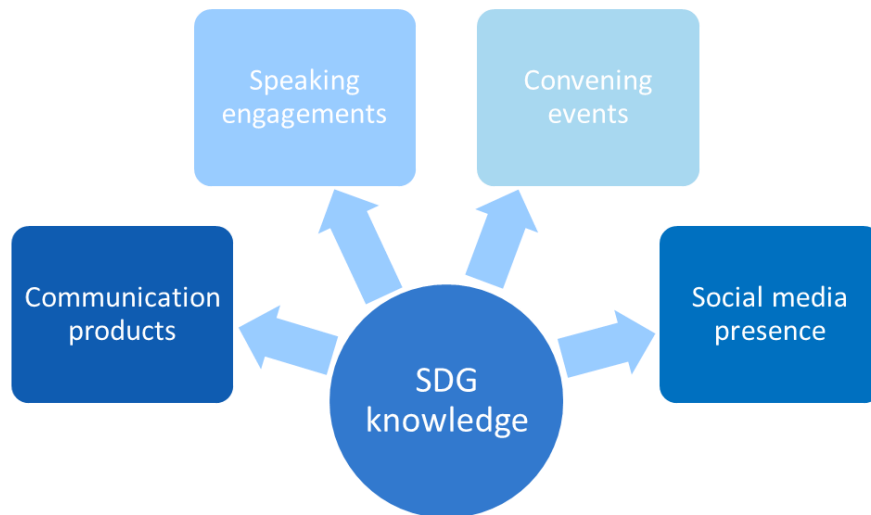
82. **Limited new knowledge generation** In terms of knowledge *generation,* however, the Lab has prioritised its *facilitation,* rather than directly producing new knowledge itself. The main mechanisms here are conceptualising and hosting events, convening stakeholders, and facilitating dialogue. Examples where 'new' (or at least newly understood) knowledge has been created include:

- *So What events* presenting cross-sectoral perspectives on SDG challenges curated with partners, held 2018-2020;
- *Building Bridges events* which has expanded knowledge on all sides. Although now an independent entity, the SDG Lab continues to provide a role in providing briefing material (e.g. primers) and leveraging its convening power[92].
- *Virtual briefings* to ecosystem members and Geneva-based country missions, such as the "Africa's Pulse" report and the High Level Political Forum briefing in 2021[93].

83. **Communication products** The Lab has generated multiple written knowledge products over time, ranging from think pieces to written records after meetings or events to ensure that knowledge generated is recorded. Communication products also include synthesis products prepared for UN regional forums. Many of these written pieces focus on (i) publicising the SDGs and Agenda 2030 and (ii) making knowledge accessible, e.g. by sharing new technical SDG knowledge. This may involve analysing and condensing dense technical information into accessible formats, and/or providing access to high level discussions through events or written records. Examples include:

- A communication piece on the SDGs, including (but not only) on sustainable finance) in Newsletter, to inform the Swiss parliament.[94]
- Articles on driving more capital to SDGs by the Lab's Director

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[92] https://www.sdglab.ch/en/what-we-do/2021/11/22/primers-for-building-bridges and Email correspondence July – September 2021
[93] SDG Lab (2020) Annual Report and SDG Lab Timeline (2021)
[94] Email correspondence 18.10.2021

- A discussion record of an event on COVID-19 and inequalities.[95]

84. **Sharing knowledge through speaking engagements** To communicate knowledge, the Lab also undertakes a range of speaking engagements on SDG-related topics to stakeholders including students and academic institutions, the business sector and UN agencies. Due to demand, however, these have to be selectively chosen to manage time constraints (see para 38). Table 15 provides examples:

Table 15: Example speaking engagements

Event	Speech	Date
Geneva Trialogue	Open Innovation in the Geneva Ecosystem	18.03.2021
Geneva Trialogue	Panel on Scaling Education for the SDGs	21.01.2019
Economic Policy Seminar, HEC Lausanne	Information on the SDGs	05.10.2021
University of Geneva: Economic Policy Seminar	SDGs	03.09.2021
150th Anniversary of Central Tracing Agency, in conjunction with FTFA	Work of SDG Lab	30.10.2020
World Investment Forum	Moderation of session on: moderate the workshop's third session: Evidence-informed budgeting and the SDGs – examples of good practices.	22.10.2018
Roxbourg MBA session	Speaking to students about SDGs	21.07.2021

85. Although the Lab's Director is most commonly requested for these events, emails indicate efforts to delegate appropriately, e.g. when requested to provide introductions to the SDG Lab's work, or to speak about the SDGs in broad terms at e.g. universities.[96]

86. **Communication through social media** The Lab has an active website and social media presence, used for sharing updates on the Lab's activities, SDG-related knowledge products and information on events. The Lab's website and Twitter presence show relatively strong numbers for a 'niche' organisation (see Table 12) and a trend of stability for the website/slight increase on Twitter. The Lab is also active on LinkedIn. Regular communications products include:
- The quarterly Dispatch
- The Spotlight Series from the Geneva Ecosystem
- The SDG Lab Learning Journey, developed in 2021 to share knowledge on the Lab's journey, as requested by stakeholders (see Results Area 4).

87. **Internal focus of knowledge products.** Some of the Lab's knowledge products are however excessively internally-focused. The Lab does produce a Dispatch on a quarterly basis, but this discusses only SDG Lab achievements and processes, rather than wider themes or issues concerning the SDGs. It does not, for example, relate SDG progress or new themes and trends emerging from New York-based dialogue.

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[95] Inequalities & the Informal Economy: How to move from crisis response to long-term resilience: Discussion record June 12, 2020 https://www.sdglab.ch/en/what-we-do/2020/6/12/inequalities-amp-the-informal-economy-how-to-move-from-crisis-response-to-long-term-resilience
[96] Email correspondence 2019-2021

88.   This 'internal' focus is likely a product of the Lab's perceived (and indeed very real) need to clarify and promulgate its actions and activities to its funders and stakeholders. It is however an example of where better use could be made of the Lab's resources, to inform the wider SDG community not of its own activities, but to generate and share knowledge within and beyond the Geneva community, to help inform progress towards the wider SDG agenda.

89.   **Need for clearer results focus** Moreover, not all communications products have however been directly geared to results. For example, the Lab has prepared video productions for the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development which captured the key themes arising from the Forums and featured interviews with key speakers. While valuable in themselves – and reportedly highly appreciated by the Regional Forums[97] – it is questionable whether the role of generating such products should rest with a Geneva-based entity which is not directly connected to the Forums. Such material might be more appropriately generated by the Forums themselves, leaving the Lab free to focus on its own core remit.

RESULTS AREA 3: INCUBATING/CATALYSING MOMENTUM ON THE SDGS EMERGING ACHIEVEMENT (GATHERING MOMENTUM)

90.   Captured in its logframe as '*Member States and other actors actively use Geneva's SDG expertise to address in-country challenges, including through UN country teams (UNCTs) when relevant)',* this aim reflects the wish of funders and the Lab itself to ensure that the benefits of the SDG Lab in Geneva appropriately 'trickle down' to country level**.** In this, it perceives the Lab as a *knowledge source,* providing its expertise and knowledge to country-level actors, rather than directly undertaking SDG-related activities at country level. The Lab was therefore intended to remain a *strategic* rather than *operational* actor.

91.   **Country engagement in SDG Lab activity** There has been extensive and senior-level engagement in SDG Lab activities since 2017, supported and brokered by the Lab's UN location (Table 16). The high political level of those present provides added momentum to the dialogue:

Table 16: Country involvement in SDG Lab events 2017-2021

Event	Date	Country Participation
Gender (SDG 5) + Innovation (SDG 9)	June 1, 2017	Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations Office
Healthy Lives (SDG 3) + Effective Institutions (SDG 16)	September 25, 2017	Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations Office at Geneva
Gender (SDG 5) + Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11	March 8, 2018	Minister of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Ecuador to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
Sanitation (SDG 6) + Inequality (SDG 10)	June 25, 2018	Ambassador / Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva Counsellor, Permanent Mission of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva

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[97] Stakeholder Interviews (5/39)

Sustaining Peace and Sustainable Development	April 1, 2019	Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
Decent Work (SDG 8) + SDG 13 Climate Action (SDG 13)	September 3, 2019	Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Costa Rica to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva
Zero hunger (SDG 2) + Health & well-being (SDG 3) + Climate action (SDG 13)	December 19, 2019	President of Costa Rica and representatives from Benin, Fiji, the Netherland and the United Kingdom-

92.   The SDG Lab has also initiated regional/country-level dialogue and discussions to addressing SDG challenges. Examples include:[98]

- *Virtual side event for UNECE Regional Forum 2020* (18 March 2020)**,** held for five member States (Austria, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia) of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), to discuss shared country challenges in SDG implementation;

- *High level panel on inequalities and the informal economy* (9 June 2020), held with ILO and attended by the UN Geneva Director-General, ILO Director-General and the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, as well as country representatives from Jordan, Portugal and South Africa. A resulting opinion piece, signed by the three Under Secretary-Generals, was published in 12 media outlets.

- *The Indonesian Permanent Mission in Geneva* sought advice from the Lab on framing the development agenda of the Indonesian Presidency of the G20 in 2022. The Lab joined the UN G20 Working Group on Dialogue with the Government of Indonesia on its proposed overarching G20 priorities.

93.   The two main specific examples of activities incubated by the Lab which have transpired into tangible SDG-related activity have occurred in Costa Rica and Niger (Box 2):

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[98] SDG Lab (2021) Midyear Report to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, September 2020, and SDG Lab (2020) Annual Report

Box 2: Incubating and catalysing SDG momentum in Costa Rica and Niger

Costa Rica
- The SDG Lab was approached by the Government of Costa Rica in 2019 in advance of the visit of the President to the Global Refugee Forum and its role in the Global Compact on Refugees in Geneva. Following consultation with the Ministry of the Environment, the Ambassador 'took the case' to the SDG Lab to request support for promoting the national decarbonisation plan and seek cooperation/ synergy to help implement the plan. Consequently, the President was invited to deliver a 'So What' lecture in December 2019;
- A road map was subsequently created, including an online meeting with leaders of projects (under the decarbonisation plan) and financial institutions, and a field trip planned. Although interrupted by the pandemic in 2020, dialogue continued;[99]
- In 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica requested information on how to run the Lab's multi-stakeholder convening model to support the formulation of its new foreign policy strategy.[100]

Niger
- The Lab was approached, through UNOG, by the Nigerien Minister of Technology, for connections to support engagement in connecting Nigerien villages to the internet.
- SDG Lab then curated a group of people to help address the problem and introduced the Minister to UN agencies working more on the applicability of connectivity.[101]
- A partnership with ITU, WHO and other stakeholders was then formed, to develop and fund a pilot e-health, e-agriculture, and digital ID project. Talks are underway with UNCTAD on an e-commerce strategy. ILO are to help Niger in developing youth employment and social protection strategies.
- In consultation with stakeholders, the implementation strategy was then refined to prioritize two key aspects of "Niger 2.0" for the Government of Niger: a step-by-step approach to the Smart Villages initiative ('*villages intelligentes'*) and a focus on digitalization, both to serve as vehicles that enable sustainable development for health, education and rural development.
- Funding from the Government of Germany was provided to support implementation of the Smart Villages initiative.
- A partnership with Care International and hiveonline were formed to introduce the Digital Village Initiative more widely across Africa.
- The initiative created the Smart Villages Blueprint – now being replicated in Pakistan and with plans to expand into other African countries

94.   In both the Costa Rican and Nigerien initiatives, contributions attributed to the Lab by stakeholders included:[102]
- Its *convening power,* and ability to make connections
- Its insight into *current SDG thinking*
- Its clarification to external country-level stakeholders of the *Geneva 'offer'* to support countries' ability to achieve goals.
- Its *openness* to work with approaches suited to the context and '*outside the normal bureaucracy'*.
- Its *professionalism.*

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[99] SDG Lab (2019) End of Phase Report Phase I and Stakeholder Interviews (2/39)
[100] SDG Lab (2020) Annual Report
[101] SDG Lab experiments – Niger; Building Smart Villages: A Blueprint – ITU and Government of Niger and Stakeholder Interviews (4/39)
[102] Stakeholder interviews (18/39)

95. Two other initiatives also illustrate the Lab's capacity to incubate initiatives from ideas, through to concepts, through to tangible actions, leading towards results (Box 3):

Box 3: Incubation examples

Pipeline Builder The Pipeline Builder initiative emerged from a convening hosted by the Lab, IISD, Sustainable Finance Geneva and the Canton of Geneva in mid-2018.[103] 20 entities from both the public and the private sectors were interviewed in early 2019 with the intention to identify where opportunities intersect and the missing elements to unlock capital markets for SDG investment.

The GroundUp Project was contracted to conduct research into building a deal-generating mechanism to accelerate existing market forces. The Pipeline Builder concept was therefore developed, which focused on 'intermediation' or 'brokering SDG investments.[104]

The Pipeline Builder was initially designed as 'experimental', being undertaken in a 10-12 month pilot aiming to test the operational model.[105] Its subsequent Phase 2 was launched in 2020, with research conducted on 10 focus countries, including Ghana, where support was provided by the UN Country Team. 18 countries were consulted for potential Pipeline Builder pilots: CARICOM (representing 15 Caribbean member States), [106] Costa Rica, Ghana[107], and Viet Nam.[108] As of November 2021, Ghana and Costa Rica are the two most developed engagements.[109]

Impact Hub
The SDG Lab collaborated with several actors, including the Impact Hub, on the design and implementation of the 'Sustainable Development Innovation Sprint' aimed at scoping the potential of International Geneva based organisations to contribute to the SDGs. 20 representatives of organisations were brought together, and four themes emerged: finance, digital infrastructure, food and energy.

Two of these identified themes went on to initiate tangible projects. Firstly, the initiative on sustainable finance and digital infrastructure (which coincided with the request from the Government of Niger described in Box 2 above, and which brought together a working group from International Geneva).

Secondly, in 2020, the Impact Hub has started an initiative to create an innovation culture and methodologies into the UN space. Tendering for that initiative was ongoing as of November 2021.

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96. Finally, new and evolving collaborations and action on the SDGs can be tracked as a result of initial connections that were made through SDG Lab-curated events and discussions or opportunities initiated by the Lab. Whilst these are difficult to specify, examples identified through stakeholder interviews include[110]:

- Discussions between UNICEF, UNIGE and the banking sector on the use of cryptocurrency as rewards for young people – emerging from connections made at hackathons held by UNIGE at Building Bridges Week
- An initiative to monitor carbon footprints across the Geneva Ecosystem (including the Swiss Mission) was made possible by connections to, and support for organisations to share this information with UNIGE, from the SDG Lab

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[103] SDG Lab (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement, Annex 14: Pipeline Builder Narrative v7.0 October 2019
[104] SDG Lab (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement, Annex 14: Pipeline Builder Narrative v7.0 October 2019)
[105] SDG Lab (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement, Annex 14: Pipeline Builder Narrative v7.0 October 2019)
[106] Email correspondence; SDG Lab Annual report 2020
[107] ibid.
[108] Email correspondence 21.01.2021
[109] Stakeholder Interviews (12/39)
[110] Stakeholder Interviews (12/39)

- Connections made through the SDG Lab between REOS partners and a Geneva-based expert in sustainable food systems and the SDGs has been key in the development of the Southern Africa Food Lab.

RESULTS AREA 4: MODELLING REPLICABLE APPROACHES: EMERGING ACHIEVEMENT

97.   This results area is concerned with the extent to which the Lab has generated and modelled approaches which are replicable elsewhere. In particular, it focuses on the model of the Lab itself, and its potential replicability.

98.   Following its evolution over Phase 1 and 2 (see para. 11), the Lab sees itself as more readily positioned to function in 2021 and beyond as a 'demonstration model' to partners, and in particular, to UN system units and functions who wish to adopt a similar approach.[111] Requests for advice on replicability from different stakeholder groups have however been arriving since 2018 (Table 16). They have gained in frequency/momentum over time given (i) the increased emphasis on partnership under the SDGs and UN system reforms and (ii) the increased visibility of the Lab within the strategic architecture of Geneva. Requests have ranged from full replicability of the Lab's own model through to replicating some aspects of its work. Table 17 below indicates recorded approaches from national governments, UN agencies and civil society organisations: [112]

Table 17: Approaches from governments to the SDG Lab re: modelling and replication

Organization	Sector	Date of Request	Request
Canton de Vaud	Government	2018	Replicate Lunch Collider
Brazil	UN	2019	Create a Lab based in Brasilia[113]
Lebanon	UN	2019	Create a Lab within the UNCT
German association	NGO	Jun-19	Replicate Lunch Collider
Sand Si	NGO	Jul-20	Create a Lab focused on SDGs and Sports
ITU	UN	May-20	Replicate Lunch Collider
Armenia	Government		
Concordia (Montreal)	Academia	Sep-20	Create a Lab based in Montreal or Quebec more broadly
GESDA	NGO	21-Mar-21	
Russia	NGO	Apr-21	Replicate the Lab in various Russian regions
EHL	Academia	Apr-21	Create a "sustainability lab" at EHL
Turkmenistan	Government	Apr-21	Take Lab learnings/resources and implement them at their SDG Centre
UNIDIR	UN	Sep-21	UNIDIR is starting to plan a UNIDIR Disarmament Lab and interested to learn more about the SDG Lab.[114]
ILO	UN	October 2021	Learn lessons on establishing an innovation lab on digital technologies that can support decent work'

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[111] Stakeholder interviews (5/39)
[112] SDG Lab Tracker: Requests for Lab's Model Replication
[113] Email correspondence May 2019
[114] Email correspondence September 2021

98.   In 2021, with the pace of requests increasing, the Lab developed a materials package outlining the 'SDG Lab learning journey'. The materials were 'soft-launched' online in December 2021[115], so that interested parties could replicate the Lab's journey, learn from its experiences of establishing a Lab within a UN/ multilateral context and at the same time reduce burdens of demand on the Lab itself. The Learning Journey will be shared with UNITAR and UNSSC, in the framework of the "UN SDG: Learn One Platform, One Partnership and One Programme for an effective, coherent and inclusive approach to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) learning" launched at the High Level Political Forum. In response, the Lab was invited to share the tool and hold discussions with UNDP to explore if these lessons and tools could be further advanced/ utilised in their country based Accelerator Labs.[116] The Lab team will also hold discussions with the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO).

ADDITIONAL RESULTS

99.   Four other areas of Lab achievement are not captured in standard 'results' formats but do present additional benefits to the SDG agenda. These are: (i) the very high level of political and strategic engagement in Lab activity (ii) the Lab's function as an entry point to the SDG agenda/the UN in Geneva (iii) the positioning of cross-cutting issues within the SDGs and (iv) added value for the Swiss development co-operation 'brand'.

100.   **High level strategic engagement**: Partly due to its positioning within UNOG and partly due to the high-level contacts of its Director and UNOG, the Lab has forged contacts at a high political and strategic level within partner countries, the UN system and the private sector. Above those listed in table 15, above, attendance lists include Ministers of State; Permanent Representatives to the UN: Resident Co-ordinators; Directors and Director Generals within the UN system; President of the Swiss Sustainable Finance network; and many others.[117]

101.   High-level engagement is not a 'result' *per se;* but it is an indicator of the Lab's reputational capital and significance within its own sphere. Senior level stakeholder engagement can enable political movement and traction; guide strategic direction; and influence change in a broader sphere. Conversely, high-level engagement also helps ensure that the Lab's ongoing programme of work reflects the leadership priorities of key partners.

102.   **Entry point to SDGs in Geneva:** The Lab has carved out a niche as the main entry point to the SDGs and the UN in Geneva, particularly for organisations who come new to International Geneva. There is no equivalent function in the city or the UN in Geneva. Comments include: *[118]*
* '*It is the main entry point. I would not know how else to approach the UN'*
* *'They are the main interlocutor for the SDGs from outside the UN. They then make connections inside.'*
* *'They are the port of entry. You can then go through them to find the route through.'*

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[115] http://www.sdglablearning.org
[116] Email correspondence Email correspondence September 2021
[117] SDG Lab trackers and stakeholder interviews (13/39)
[118] Stakeholder interviews (21/39)

103. Many stakeholders felt that the Lab's location within UNOG was key to both (i) facilitating entry to the UN as the main convening platform for the SDGs, and (ii) finding their way through the complex geometry of Geneva-based actors to identify like-minded partners and potential collaborators on SDG-related issues.

104. **Positioning of cross-cutting issues** The Lab's ability to position key cross-cutting issues related to, but not directly addressed by, the SDGs is a further area of comparative advantage. Digitalisation, for example, was considered by stakeholders a key vehicle for achieving the SDGs, but an area which did not fit directly or immediately under any current framework or organisational mandate. *'They have the overview, they can see what is coming up and raise it for discussion.' 'You can identify topical themes with them that we know are important, but which don't fit into our current mandate.'*

105. A 2021 survey of Ecosystem members regarding their areas of interest[119] identified the following four 'top' items. Notably, all four are cross-sectoral concerns (Table 18):

Table 18; Thematic priorities for Ecosystem members, 2021

Theme	Percent selected
• Data for the SDGs	55.2
• A Just Transition (climate action)	55.2
• Sustainable Finance	50
• Digital connectivity	40

Source: SDG Lab Ecosystem data

106. Other themes of interest identified were similarly cross-cutting: trade, partnerships, the nexus and cross-sectoral approaches.[120]

107. A clear example of positioning cross-cutting issues is the Lab's linking of sustainable finance with the SDGs. The gap in public sector financing to reach the SDGs is widely documented,[121] and the Building Bridges initiative, which joins the 'Left Bank' of private sector finance with the 'Right Bank' of the public sector and International Geneva, is a tangible demonstration of this. At the same time, the Pipeline Builder initiative is gaining momentum to deliver more tangible results on the ground. External stakeholders considered that this linkage could only be forged by actors sitting 'over and above' the current fragmented system: *'Only an entity like the Lab could have done this.'*

108. **Strategic benefit to Swiss brand/International Geneva** Finally, the Lab has provided some strategic benefits for Switzerland – and in turn, benefited from the value of the Swiss development co-operation 'brand'. On the former, the Lab has provided Switzerland with (i) a direct entry point to the UN Office in Geneva, (ii) a showcase to highlight the role and function of International Geneva and (iii) an explicit political and strategic statement of Switzerland's interest in, and commitment to, innovation in SDG achievement. The Lab's 'soft power' and ability to engage at high levels is a valuable asset here.

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[119] Ecosystem Focus Group Survey (October 2021). A total of 58 responses received, or 17% of members
[120] Ecosystem Focus Group Survey (October 2021)
[121] Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development

109.   In turn, however, the Lab has also benefited from the 'reputational capital' of the Swiss brand and particularly its connotations of neutrality and quality. *'If the Swiss are behind it, you know it's worth doing.' 'Only Switzerland could have funded this.'*

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESULTS

110.   The evaluation has also identified two areas where opportunities for results have not been maximised. These are: (i) Work on the intersectionality of the SDGs and (ii) More potential for linkage to the global conversation around the SDGs. In addition, not all activities have been directly geared towards intended results, and results have not always been communicated in terms understandable to the Lab's funders.

111.   **Intersectionality** The Lab has demonstrated potential for addressing the **intersectionalit**y of the SDGs, reflected particularly in 'So What' series of events held 2017-2020 (Table 19).[122] This brought together issues and concerns from two or more SDGs, and intersections were discussed by partners in a common dialogue.

Table 19: Intersections among SDGs

Date	Event title	Number of Attendees
June 2017	SDG "So What" Series: Gender and Innovation	124
September 2017	SDG "So What" Series: Healthy Lives + Peaceful and Inclusive Societies	51
March 2018	SDG "So What Series": Gender Equality and Sustainable Cities & Communities	77
June 2018	So What Series: Clean Water & Sanitation & Reduced Inequalities	130
April 2019	So What Series: Sustaining Peace & Sustainable Development	78
September 2019	SDG "So What?" Series: Decent Work and Climate Change	128
December 2019	SDG "So What?" Series-Special Edition: Zero Hunger, Health & Climate Action	213
June 2020	COVID-19 and the SDGs - Inequalities and the Informal Economy	538

112.   The So What series ended in 2020. Some of its ethos work has continued; for example, through work on cross-cutting themes such as digitalisation. However, particularly given the currently siloed organisational system of Geneva, more effort could be made to focus directly on these intersections. Examples might include: facilitating discussions on the intersections between different aspects of climate change and selected SDGs; and the inequalities being intensified by COVID-19 which impede progress to SDG realisation.

113.   **Linkage to the global SDG conversation** As para 7 notes, the Lab was originally intended to function as a 'counterpart' to a cross-SDG New York office, in which Switzerland has also invested. The intention was to provide Geneva-based actors with linkage to the global discussion on the SDGs, particularly given that many relevant dialogue and decision-making fora take place in New York.

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[122] SDG Lab (2017 – 2019) So What series reports

114.   Events such as the pre-briefing on the High Level Political Forum have provided insight to this global conversation. However, despite efforts made by the Lab,[123] this potential has not been fully maximised, with inconsistent positioning by SDC on the issue a notable factor. Yet the Lab is well-positioned to fulfil the remit to engage in, and translate, emerging themes in New York to the Geneva landscape. The Director has made two trips to New York over the duration of the Lab,[124] but is well-placed to engage here more strategically and systematically. Conversely, the Lab has the potential to provide a 'Geneva perspective' to New York discussions, through its position within UNOG.

115.   **Not all activities explicitly geared to results** As the Lab has developed its conceptual and strategic model over time, some of its Lab's activities have been undertaken responsively, rather than being directly geared to results. For example, the quarterly SDG Lab Update, which has a relatively wide circulation, focuses on SDG Lab activities undertaken, rather than wider themes which might be of greater relevance to its readership. Stakeholders interviewed agreed that they did not, in its current format, find the publication particularly useful. Some activities also represent 'nice to have' engagement which, while beneficial to some, present questionable relevance for a Geneva-based entity to undertake. For example, the regional forums communications initiative, while useful in communicating and amplifying messages from the forums to a wider audience, is arguably the task of the forums themselves rather than the Lab. Speaking engagements, while helpful in raising awareness of the Lab, could likely also be streamlined.

116.   **Scope for improvement in results communication** While communication sits at the heart of the Lab's agenda and operating model, and is also a substantive area of results, the Lab has not consistently translated its achievements into the terminology and framework of its main funder, the A&P Division of SDC.

117.   In large part, this is a function of limitations in the performance management framework (see para. 62). The production of the logframe in late 2019 was an effort to translate the intended aims of the Lab into more tangible results which could then be reported upon as part of funder accountability. However, the Lab's reporting, as reflected in the SDG Lab Update and other products, mainly focuses on activities undertaken. Thus, questions have arisen as to the Lab's effectiveness and its ability to deliver tangible results in terms more readily understood by A&P division. The Lab has, in response to these perceptions, redoubled its efforts to communicate – but has expanded its communication on activities rather than reconceptualising or reformulating results so that they are more recognisable in bilaterally-focused ODA terms. A revised performance framework, as proposed in section 4, should help ameliorate these challenges.

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[123] For example communication with the Office of the EOSG/DSG; Office of UNDCO; UNDP; UNDESA; ECOSOC.. The Deputy Secretary-General delivered a keynote speech at the opening session of Building Bridges 2019.
[124] Email correspondence 26.02.2020

2.4 Impact: Contributions to higher level changes

Summary: The Lab has made some early contributions to higher level results, with good progress seen in terms of increasing stakeholder engagement in the SDG agenda, reflecting its convening power. Contributions to supporting actors to address in-country SDG challenges and enabling them to use the Lab as a model are still emergent.

118.   Building multilateral momentum towards a common agenda such as the SDGs is a time-consuming process, and progress towards results often slow and with many 'bumps on the road.' As per section 2.3, mapping achievement here also depends on the lens applied – whether that of multilateral engagement or a more standard bilaterally-focused ODA lens.

119.   However, returning to the original intent of the Lab and theoretical framework set out in para 22 and section 2.3, the evaluation has identified the following *contributions to* higher-level changes (Table 20):[125]

Table 20: Contributions to higher level results

SDG Lab contribution	Strategic objectives	Strategic aim
• Sustaining of Ecosystem throughout 2020 and its refreshing in 2021 • Forging connections through the Ecosystem and beyond e.g. through Lunch colliders, Building Bridges	Increase engagement of SDG practitioners in Geneva in multistakeholder and multisectoral ecosystem **GOOD PROGRESS**	**Help accelerate the implementation of the SDG agenda by enabling the diverse ecosystem of SDG actors in Geneva and beyond to maximise their joint contribution to SDG challenges**
• Engagement with partner governments (mainly opportunistic basis) e.g. through the Pipeline Builder	Enable member states and other actors to use Geneva's expertise to address in-country challenges including through UN Country teams where relevant **EMERGING PROGRESS**	
• Responding to requests for SDG Lab models • Dissemination of SDG Lab learning journey	Enable SDG actors to use the tools and lessons from the SDG Lab model in their own activities. **EMERGING PROGRESS**	

120.   Overall, the Lab has therefore delivered good progress in terms of *increasing the engagement of SDG practitioners in Geneva in a multistakeholder and multisectoral ecosystem*; and progress is emergent in terms of *enabling member states and other actors to use Geneva's expertise to address in-country challenges* and to *use the tools and lessons from the SDG Lab model in their own activities.* The latter were both priorities under Phase 2, which

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[125] Contribution analysis is commonly used in evaluations to assess *progress towards* end results sought. See Mayne, J (20120 Contribution Analysis: Coming of Age?

was impeded by the conditions under the COVID-19 pandemic; the 'emergent' status is therefore justified.

121.   The Lab has therefore made some valuable contributions to its overall aim, to *'accelerate the implementation of the SDG agenda by enabling the diverse ecosystem of SDG actors in Geneva and beyond to maximise their joint contribution to SDG challenges.'* However, with only four full years of formation and consolidation to date, and with the core concept of the Lab only recently matured, there is scope to accelerate progress, and concretise results going forward.

2.5 Efficiency: What has the Lab delivered for the resources provided?

Summary: The Lab has proven a worthwhile investment for the Swiss Confederation to date, though interpretation of its results vary according to the lens used. Phase 2 has been impeded by COVID-19, and therefore results are less tangible than anticipated. The central disjunct between the expectations of the Lab's funding stream and its conceptual basis will need to be resolved going forward, if efficiency is not to be further impeded.

122.   The efficiency of the Lab is assessed in terms of the delivery of its activities in relation to its costs. This does not present a full value for money analysis, which has a methodology of its own,[126] but rather a qualitative analysis of its achievements in relation to its resources.

123.   The financial profile of the Lab is set out in Table 2 above. There has been considerable movement of resources between intended elements, with 2020-2021 presenting a particular challenge. Unspent funds of USD $335, 086 earmarked in 2020 for travel, hospitality, training, and monitoring and evaluation needed to be reoriented and reprioritized due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and were transferred with A&P agreement to the 2021 budget The Lab also requested amendments to (i) enhance a P4 position to a P5 and (ii) conduct training activity for Lab staff (cost CHF 16,000 for 2.5 days), changes which were not agreed by SDC due to procurement requirements.[127]

124.   As of June 2021, over USD $1 million equivalent still to be expended (Figure 6), though this does not take into account planned project expenditure nor rolling fixed costs, such as staff contracts, overhead fees. Currently, the Lab does not anticipate having budget remaining at the end of December 2022.[128]

Figure 6: SDG Lab Budget and Expenditure (December 2016 - June 2021)

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[126] See Fleming, F (2013) Evaluation methods for assessing Value for Money Better Evaluation; Online publication

[127] Email correspondence 23.12.2020; 15.10.2021; 23.09.2021. For the training activity, SDC had concerns regarding the proposed direct selection procurement approach, requiring instead UNOG procedures to be followed. The training is expected to be conducted in early 2022.

[128] Information supplied by SDG Lab, December 2021
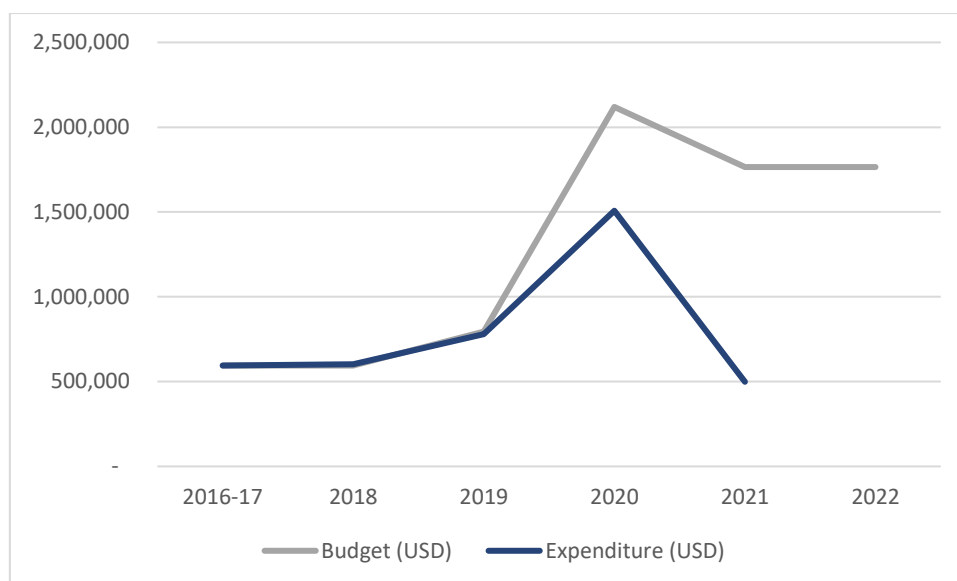
Source: Phase 1 and Phase 2 Finance Agreements between the Swiss Confederation and UNOPS; Budget Amendments #1 - #5; and UNOPS Interim Financial Statement: SDG Lab - Expenditure details as at 30 June 2021

125. **Financial sustainability** The Phase 2 finance agreement clearly states that the SDC contribution 'cannot be sustained at that level until 2030' and committing to efforts to source additional funding, including from member states, foundations and the private sector.[129] The inability of the SDG Lab to secure additional funding for the delivery of the Lab's strategic plan and objectives was identified as a risk going into Phase 2.[130]

126. External contributions to core resourcing have largely been in-kind to date, and comprise primarily staffing. They include JPOs provided by Governments of China and the Russian Federation (until end Phase 2); a seconded Nigerian diplomat; and a 50% position from the Geneva Tsinghua Initiative, as well as IISD staffing funded through FDFA (see Table for details 3). Not all these costs can be quantified, with for example amounts for the Geneva Tsinghua Initiative/University of Geneva post (50% doctoral student position) and Nigeria (diplomat on existing salary undisclosed to the Lab) unavailable. Moreover, the provision of staffing cannot be considered 'leveraged funds' in the same way that, for example, direct contributions to project-level initiatives might be counted. Based on annual JPO costs and equivalents,[131] however, the following totals of additional funds for staffing provided by other donors can be presented:

Table 21: Additional seconded post costs leveraged

	Total cost per year (USD)
Russia (2 years)	295,800
China (2 years)	295,800
Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)	147,900 (approx)[132]

[129] SDG Lab (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement
[130] SDG Lab (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement
[131] Data provided by SDG Lab, based on UN system information
[132] Based on broadly approximate salary calculation (SDG Lab)

TOTAL	738,600

127.   To try to build a funding base going forward, the Lab has developed an Investment Case,[133] and sought external financing from diverse sources, including the Governments of Canada and Sweden. Background research was also conducted on five key Swiss foundations in 2019,[134] and funding applications made to Foundations including the Botnar foundation (2020);[135] Massellaz foundation (2021); the Oak Foundations (2019); and the Hoffman Foundation (2021).[136] An application was also made to the SDC's 'Employment & Income' section (Engagement with the Private Sector section) within FDFA/SDC for the Pipeline Builder project, though this was not successful.[137]

128.   However, as the Phase 2 financing agreement recognises, fundraising among member states is challenging, especially given the competition with other cities in the world to become hubs, a factor compounded by political allegiances and alliances.[138] Many traditional public sector donors are more comfortable investing in 'projects' which provide directly delivered country-focused results, while private sector and philanthropic donors may hesitate to engage with a perceived UN entity and/or to finance an initiative whose results are perceived as part of a public sector remit. Resources from the private sector have therefore been sought to support specific projects. The Canton of Geneva supported the initial Building Bridges meeting[139] and EUR 1.8 million have been raised by the Pipeline Builder Project from the EU's European Innovation Council Accelerator programme to support continued growth in 2021 (though this application was not made the Lab but by its project partner, with the Lab supplying only agreement of partnership).[140]

129.   Additionally, the Lab's 'incubation' remit has led to external financing of three specific projects, namely:
- External sponsorship of Building Bridges, with 15 sponsors in 2021
- The Swiss Centre on Blended Finance, which was initiated and incubated by the Lab 2019-2021, and taken over by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) in 2021[141]
- The Niger *Villages Intelligents*, which was initiated through Lab intervention (see Box 2) and where the Lab provided support for a GIZ grant application to be developed and accessed.[142]

130.   However, the Lab lacks a clear internal fundraising strategy and targets, and does not have dedicated fundraising expertise within its staff complement. To ensure sustainability, this is a vital skillset going forward.

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[133] SDG Lab (2019) From experiment to scale: Invest in the SDG Lab to accelerate results
[134] Lunt Foundation; Charles Leopold Mayer Fondation; Oak Foundation ; Mava Fondation pour la Nature ; Fondation Chanel'
[135] Email correspondence April 2020
[136] Email correspondence April, October 2021
[137] Email correspondence September 2019
[138] SDG Lab (2019) Phase 2 Finance Agreement
[139] SDG Lab Annual Report 2019
[140] Email correspondence, July 2021
[141] Email correspondence 14.10.2021
[142] Email correspondence 02.07.2018

131.   Perceptions of the Lab's efficiency by external stakeholders depend strongly on the lens through which they are viewing the Lab. They fall into two main categories; those who see the process-oriented results of multilateral engagement as having *'intrinsic worth'* and those who view the Lab more from an ODA grant management perspective. Perception (in relative proportions) included:

- *'A small budget but significant achievement'*
- *'Punching way above its weight for what it costs'*
- *'Delivering a unique service which no one else can deliver, on a shoestring'*
- *'A little expensive for its delivery'*[143]

132.   In purely pragmatic terms, mapping finance committed against achievements to date indicates as follows (Table 22):

Table 22: Resources and results

Phase	Funding (USD)	Achievements
Phase 1	2,883,913	- Establishment, management arrangements and institutional set-up of the Lab - Partnerships formed - Design and development of conceptual approach and model - Ecosystem formation - Building Bridges concept/event - Events and outreach held
Phase 2	5,648,379	- Strategic niche consolidated - Ecosystem sustained - Pipeline Builder development - Building Bridges established - Country outreach expanded - Development of SDG Lab Journey - Events and outreach held, with broadening of thematic expertise to include finance and inequalities linked to Covid

133.   Overall, therefore, whether from an bilaterally-focused ODA grant management or when viewed through a primarily multilateral lens, the resources expended under Phase 1 have delivered 'worth' in allowing the set-up and institutional arrangement confirmation of the Lab, as well as confirming proof of concept. Under Phase 2, momentum has gathered but tangible results progress and expenditure has been less than anticipated, in large part impeded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here is where viewpoints diverge, however. The evaluation concludes that while delivery under Phase 2 does represent value for Swiss resources expended, this lies mainly in the multilateral perspective, assuming communication, dialogue and knowledge generation as intrinsically valuable on the road towards international consensus and, ultimately, action.

134.   However, this perspective is not fully aligned with expectations from thef the Lab's current managers within the Swiss Confederation, A&P. This reflects the different lenses through which the Lab is viewed by its stakeholders, and highlights the central disjunct at the

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[143] Stakeholder interviews (19/39)

heart of the Lab's challenges. If resources are to be justified going forward, <u>either</u> the Lab needs to adjust its model to fit more coherently with the priorities of its funding stream, <u>or</u> the funding stream needs to adapt to show greater acceptance of, and willingness to invest in, the process results which lie at the heart of the Lab's concept. Continuing with the current disjunct is consuming excessive amounts of time on both sides. It undermines both the Lab's certainty in its own conceptual model and ability to operate smoothly, as well as collective Swiss Confederation confidence in the value of their investment. It also impedes efficiency on all sides.

2.6 Governance, oversight and management arrangements

Summary: Governance systems are light, given the conceptual basis of the Lab, and no donor representative attends. Lines of accountability have become blurred over time, and there is disagreement among stakeholders about where primary accountability lies. Boundaries with UNOG have also become blurred over time. There are currently staffing gaps, particularly regarding fundraising and political/strategic expertise. These issues are however relatively straightforward to course correct.

135. **Governance systems:** The Lab has no formal governance mechanism, an initial choice in keeping with its status as a start-up. 2020 correspondence indicates plans for a Steering Committee, potentially consisting of representatives from SDC, UND, Permanent Mission Geneva, and the Agenda 2030 delegate from the Confederation.[144]

136. In mid-2020, an Advisory Group was formed, which meets three times per year. The Advisory Group has a Terms of Reference, though this is brief, and limits the role strictly to 'advice and strategic direction.' Board members also viewed themselves as having a 'challenge' function and serving as a 'sounding board' for the Lab.[145]

137. The Advisory Group brings access to diverse expertise to guide future direction. It comprises seven experts or 'thought leaders' representing diverse stakeholders within the 2030 Geneva Ecosystem including the UN, government, private sector, civil society and academia. The Swiss Confederation (Global Institutions)[146] were invited to sit on the Group but declined, and due to internal communication failings, A&P were unaware that the invitation had been made. Thus, the Advisory Group has no donor representative.

138. The Advisory Group are actively engaged in the Lab, and members interviewed spoke positively of the Lab's openness and receptivity to their proposals. '*They do listen; they do take on board suggestions.' 'It's a good group; we are all committed to the same objective.'* However, the Group does not provide a strategic steer to the Lab, and nor does it request or require performance reporting.

139. **Oversight and accountability** Along with the central dissonance of 'which lens', above, a further constraint to the Lab currently is differing opinions regarding where

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144 Annual Report 2020
145 Stakeholder interviews (6/39)
146 Email correspondence 02.03.2020 and 24.03.2020

'accountability' lies. This has been exacerbated by the shift of Lab project management from Global Institutions to A&P in September 2020.

140.   While stakeholders all agree that different lines of accountability exist – to SDC as funder; to UNOG as the management housing of the Lab; to the Ecosystem as its organiser and constituting body – there are disagreements about where the <u>primary</u> line of accountability sits or should sit. Specifically:
- The Lab sees itself as primarily accountable to UNOG as its hosting body, a sentiment reflected by UNOG. Some staff members also see a line of accountability to the Ecosystem;
- A&P see the Lab as being primarily accountable to SDC, as its funder;
- Other actors within the Confederation - Global Institutions and the Mission - see themselves as being interested in, but not providing a line of accountability for, the Lab.[147]

Figure 7: Lines of Accountability
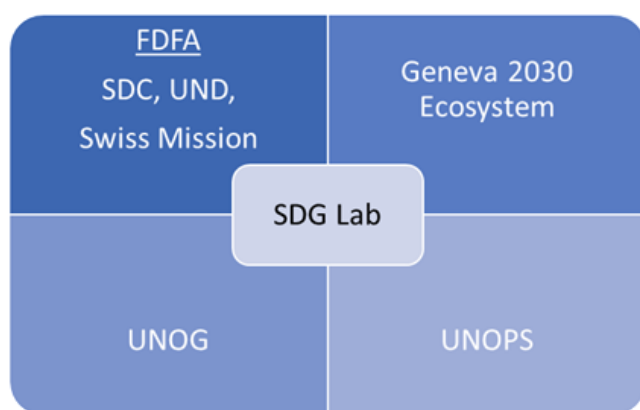
141.   Stakeholders moreover do not distinguish between the different lines of accountability, such as:

- Financial accountability – to SDC
- Administrative accountability – to UNOPS
- Managerial accountability – to UNOG
- Strategic accountability – to UNOG/SDC

142.   **Management arrangements and location within UNOG** The location of the Lab within UNOG remains strategically and operationally appropriate, given the UN's role as the key platform for the SDGs (see para. 27). Locating the Lab within the UN provides a clear statement of political and strategic neutrality and ereduces perceptual risks of Switzerland pursuing a 'bilateral agenda' within the SDGs. It also confers upon the Lab the political leverage and convening power of the UN system – enabling it to access UN agencies, member states and wider stakeholders (e.g. financial Geneva) critical to its mandate[148].

143.   The Lab is strategically situated within the Office of the Director General (DG), and the Director, whose appointment is a UN D1 position, reports directly to the DG.[149] There are different perceptions regarding whether the Director of the Lab is on secondment from SDC to UNOG; she is in fact directly contracted to UNOPS.

144.   The original intent was for the Lab to be located within UNOG but to retain a degree of autonomy.[150] However, these boundaries have become blurred over time, with the Director

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[147] Stakeholder interviews (22/39)
[148] Stakeholder interviews (31/39); Event participation statistics.
[149] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition and stakeholder interviews (12/39)
[150] Ibid and stakeholder interviews (18/39)

of the Lab at times representing the UNOG DG at different events. This lack of clarity has given rise to concerns and doubts on both sides, being viewed by the Lab as part of its direct managerial accountability to UNOG and by A&P as a potential distraction from core project activities. It also brings the risk that the Lab becomes a direct tool of UNOG, above and beyond the remit of the Lab, rather than a quasi-independent body[151]. Moving forwards there is a need to define the operational boundaries for the Lab, to enable it to retain flexibility and a level of independence and serve its multiple stakeholders, being more explicitly '*in but not of*' UNOG.

145.   External stakeholders perceived the location of the Lab within the UN as having several advantages:
- Increased *convening power,* with the UN location 'opening doors'
- *Institutional credibility,* which would be hard to generate from outside the UN (as other financed networks have found)
- Providing an *entry-point for external stakeholders* into the UN and, conversely, for the UN to build connections '*beyond the UN world'*.
- *'Serving International Geneva'* in a partnership which is grounded in the UN in Geneva but which embraces wider perspectives
- *Embodying the 'SDG ethos'* of Agenda 2030 being 'everybody's business', with the UN providing the platform but joining up stakeholders in a collective effort
- Providing *links between the UN and the international finance community* in a way that other actors, including UNDP, cannot
- Ability to *forge high-level contacts and relationships,* given the collective convening power of UNOG.

146.   **Swiss Confederation coherence and relationships** With at least three parts of the Swiss Confederation having interest in the Lab and inconsistent internal communication (Table 5), some confusion has arisen and relationships have at times become strained. Stakeholders agreed that different views exist between A&P, UN Division and the Swiss Mission in Geneva regarding the intent, aims and progress of the Lab.[152] This has made prioritisation, setting future direction and justifying ongoing financing a challenge.

147.   Email correspondence indicates bilateral communication flows between different parts of the Confederation and the Lab, without stakeholders in other relevant units always being copied.[153] Emails also indicate efforts by the Lab to join up parts of the Confederation but with varying degrees of success.[154] The Lab has, verbally and in writing, requested a single point of contact,[155] proposing that the Swiss Mission functions in this role. However, while this might streamline communications for the Lab, it risks effectively moving A&P 'out of the loop', despite being the main funders of the Lab.

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[151] Stakeholder interviews (9/39)
[152] Stakeholder interviews (19/39)
[153] For example, emails from the Humanitarian Section of SDC requesting Lab participation at Climate conference April 2022, but not copying A&P or the Mission Other examples: emails 24.-9.2018; 10.10.2020; 22.04.2020; 10.09.2021; 15.10.2021;
[154] Email correspondence 20.01.2020; 20.05.2020; 06.02.2018 03.14.2019 127)
[155] Email correspondence 03.02.2020.

148.   Relationships were especially soured by a late request from SDC in 2019 to develop the logframe as a condition of Phase 2 funding. Subsequently, a very late funding decision was made in the last few days of 2019, which left the Lab uncertain of whether it could continue to offer staff employment from January 2020.[156] The contract was eventually signed on 20th December 2019, but not before email exchanges between the Lab and SDC had become increasing fraught.[157]

149.   The Lab does not actively promote 'Swiss interests' given the Lab's understanding of its role as a UN entity, and that it is primarily accountable to UNOG. There is no consistent view among the Confederation or wider stakeholders on whether such promotion would be either appropriate or desirable. Nonetheless, a more consistent 'whole' of government' approach to the Lab, from the Swiss Confederation, as well as better communication of achievements to 'non-multilateral Swiss confederation representatives' would help to clarify and resolve these tensions.

150.   **Lab staffing and management** The staffing complement of the Lab is set out in Table 3 is appropriate for the scope of work currently undertaken. However, the Lab in 2018 and 2019 accepted diplomatic secondments from e.g. Government of Nigeria. This instrument proved problematic in balancing Lab with national priorities, and the strategy was not continued into 2020. Currently, secondments are funded by the IISD, the Russian Federation and the Geneva-Tsinghua partnership. Staff reported that such secondments can bring challenges, as funders also expect time to be dedicated to their own priorities.

151.   The current staffing complement does not however include a substantive deputy nor, as per section 2.5, fundraising skills and expertise. The role of high-level political engagement and diplomacy falls wholly on the Lab's Director, who already bears the burdens of conceptual and strategic development, operational planning and team management, as well as donor relationships. A relatively young team who lack experience in high-level political dialogue are unable to substitute for the value and weight of this experience; the high level of dependence on the current Director is already recognised as a risk in the Phase 2 Credit Agreement.[158] A substantive deputy, with long experience of high-level dialogue and who shares the reputational credibility of the current Director, would help reduce these burdens.

152.   **Management structures** The Lab functions as a small team, with the senior management team comprising the Director, Communications Officer and Ecosystem Manager. Delegation is considered strong, and junior members of staff are provided with opportunities to develop.

153.   The team dynamic is positive, and the Lab's leadership widely admired, particularly for the efforts dedicated to ensure continued teamwork during COVID-19. Partners were enthusiastic about Lab staffing, seeing them as 'valuable interlocutors' and as professional, capable and *'very different from some of the UN people – they are not afraid to innovate.'* *'People really like working with the Lab, really like them as people. This garners trust, which is important for NGOs.'*

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[156] Email correspondance 21.11.2020; 21.01.2021
[157] Ibid.
[158] SDC (2016) Phase 1 Finance Proposition

3. Conclusions

154.   The SDG Lab was an innovative initiative, designed and funded on a strategically appropriate basis. Overall, this evaluation finds that, five years into its implementation, and notwithstanding the disruption of COVID-19, the Lab has mostly delivered on its aims for its funders and stakeholders. It has delivered proof of concept and demonstrated the viability of a co-ordination focused entity, focused on the SDGs and sitting at the heart of the UN in Geneva.

155.   Key achievements 2017-2021 include:
- Providing an entry point to the SDG agenda in Geneva
- Convening diverse partners from across the spectrum around issue-based dialogue related to the SDGs
- Maintaining and sustaining the Geneva Ecosystem
- Joining up partners from across the private sector, UN, civil society and academia through the appropriately-named Building Bridges initiative
- Building connections with partner countries to help them further their SDG goals.

156.   Perhaps the main overarching benefit of the Lab has been its modelling of what is feasible. Despite the surrounding silos, the Lab has actively demonstrated that meeting across boundaries can work; and that, despite differences, more unites the international community than divides it.

157.   Five years in, the concept of the Lab has been proven. It has demonstrated clear strategic relevance and occupies a valuable niche. No other platform provides a similar entry point to the SDGs and the UN or has similar convening power to bring together high-level stakeholders to discuss topical issues of the day. There is little doubt that the importance of multi-stakeholder partnership will increase in the current global context, and the role of the UN might well be reinforced. Thus, if anything, the Lab's strategic relevance can be conjectured to increase.

158.   Demands for the Lab's services exceed its capacity for supply. Sustaining the momentum of the Ecosystem has not been without its challenges, particularly given the demands of COVID-19. However, partners remain engaged, even if interests and priorities are diverse. Requests for replication of the Lab's concept and operating model, as well as its activities, stand testament to its standing and reputation.

159.   Financial arrangements have worked to mutual benefit. Swiss financing has provided significant added value to the Lab, with its connotations of quality, neutrality and an international outlook. Conversely, Switzerland – and by extension International Geneva - has also benefited reputationally from the Lab's strategic location and areas of engagement. The UN, meanwhile, benefits from both the visibility of the Lab within the Geneva architecture and its positive reputational capital, and from the capacities that the Lab can provide to support its work.

160.   However, the Lab suffers from a central dissonance. From the point of view of multilateralism, in whose world the Lab was conceived and within which it has matured, the

merit, worth and *significance* of the Lab are not in doubt. Its *merit* - its essential benefits – are demonstrated in the demands upon it by those operating in the multilateral world. Stakeholders recognise the value of its convening power and communication and seek its replication. Its *worth* in terms of resources expended, is becoming apparent now that its concept is mature; organisational arrangements in place; and tangible results are beginning to be demonstrated. Its *significance* within the multilateral operating sphere has grown over time, with no other comparable function in place or accessible to stakeholders.

161.   When viewed from the perspective of bilaterally-focused ODA grant management, however, the tangible benefits of the Lab are less certain. Strategic significance within the operating concept remains, but its *merit* - when viewed from the perspective of 'economic development and welfare of developing countries' – is far less convincing. Moreover, the Lab's *worth,* when approached purely from the perspective of bilaterally-focused ODA benefits in relation to cost, is still uncertain.

162.   These perspectives, as stated, are far from mutually exclusive. They are complementary, and indeed are both essential if the SDGs are to be achieved. But currently, their differences are being forced into sharp relief by the demands of a bilateral grant management process. Fundamentally, the aims, intentions and core ethos of the Lab are not fully in sync with the remit of its current funding stream. Consequently, the absence of consensus or a common understanding on the Lab's purpose and function – and by extension, what its results should look like – is leading to diverse expectations.

163.   The Lab has the potential to function as a bridge between the worlds of multilateralism and bilaterally-focused ODA. To achieve this, however, differences must be reconciled and tensions resolved. This will require adjustment on all sides. For the Swiss Confederation, to withdraw from financing a now highly visible SDG-focused entity would be a significant political statement, and arguably not in its own foreign policy interests. Nonetheless, greater internal coherence of expectations is required. For the Lab, if the current funding stream is to continue, better communication of results would help.

164.   Going forward, adjustments are also needed to the Lab's operating model. Accountability provides the foundation of credibility. Its lines require clarification and a common understanding on all sides. The Lab itself would benefit from a clearer, more explicit and result-focused vision of the future – Where will it be in five years? Does Switzerland support that vision? How will it get there? Defining not only 'what we will do' but 'how we will achieve results' will provide the Lab and its stakeholders with a clear roadmap for the future and help establish wider confidence in its activities. Since form follows function, only once these items are in place can institutional arrangements be established.

165.   Collective commitment to the Lab's continuation should therefore be accompanied by common understanding of its short and medium term goals, objectives, priorities and programme of work. The process of developing a collective vision – if well-structured and managed - will itself help iron out outstanding conceptual confusions, such as on intended results. Clarifying these issues should allow Swiss Confederation stakeholders particularly to define cohesive expectations of the Lab and support – rather than determine – the intended results for the period. It will also help articulate an explicit narrative for co-operation, focused on the Lab's convening power.

166.   Within the Lab's own programme of work, tighter discipline will be appropriate, both in terms of defining a 'menu' of activities and providing a clear scope of operation. The Lab cannot realistically hope to respond to the wide range of requests it receives and would benefit from a tighter scope going forward. A more focused programme will help clarify and manage expectations on all sides.

167.   On the evidence of this evaluation, therefore, the Lab's proof of concept has been achieved. A clear substantive justification exists, along with a clear consensus from many of its stakeholders, that core funding for Phase 3 is merited. However, financing cannot be indefinite, and if the Lab is to maximise its potential benefits to the SDGs going forward, a clear roadmap to 2030 will be required, as well as external resources for project-focused activities.

168.   On this assumption, the evaluation makes Recommendations for the next funding period, along with a set of Options for the pathway to 2030. They are presented for review and collective discussion and are based on the premise that *'form follows function'.*

4 Recommendations and Options

IMMEDIATE: NEXT FUNDING PERIOD (PHASE 3):

Recommendation 1: FUNCTION: Continue core Swiss funding into Phase 3 but with a tighter concept; increased burden-sharing; & greater cohesion among stakeholders.

Recommendation	Details	How? Means of achievement
1.i Confirm an *in-principle* decision for core Swiss funding for the Lab in the next funding period.	• Commit to an in-principle funding agreement to cover **core Lab costs** over the next funding period. • Increase the proportionate share of Global Institutions and UN Division resources allocated to, and human capacity engagement with, the Lab.	
1.ii Collectively define a clear and results-oriented future vision for the Lab.	Articulate a clear goal for the Lab which positions it as a bridge between multilateral and bilateral worlds. Prioritise the Lab's function as convenor/communicator/ knowledge broker	Value the process as well as the product of the vision, generating it through a multi-stakeholder workshop. Employ expert external facilitation to reconcile different perspectives. Work collectively to confirm the performance management framework, with the emphasis on the benefits and milestones of convening international dialogue, generating new knowledge and generating consensus on the road to SDG achievement.
1.iii Confirm future intended results	Agree the form of accountability framework for the Lab which will satisfy FDFA/SDC requirements/ and function as useful performance management tool for the Lab Set intended results, recognising that these may be process-oriented Identify performance indicators which are substantive and not only perception-based.	

	Gear intended results to the Lab's core roles as convenor, communicator and knowledge broker.	
1.iv Seek project funding for dedicated initiatives	Recognise that Swiss funding alone cannot reasonably be expected to address all Lab activities, particularly given the degree of demand for its services. Seek external financing therefore for project related activities	Employ dedicated fundraising and donor relations expertise, either through a call-down consultancy contract or by recruiting the skillset into a post.

Recommendation 2: FORM: Clarify institutional housing, management and accountability systems and capacities needed

Recommendation	Details	How? means
2.i Reconfirm institutional housing within UNOG and define boundaries	Define clear boundaries, and use of Lab resources, within UNOG to retain independence. Investigate scope for directing core funding (i) directly to the Lab (ii) through UNOG directly.	Set out in a Memorandum of Understanding or similar, to be jointly agreed between the Swiss Confederation as core funder, the Lab and UNOG, how the role of the Lab will intersect with that of UNOG; what boundaries will be employed to ensure that Swiss funding remains fully focused on Lab aims and intentions; and how these will be applied. Confirm the funding channel for directing Swiss resources.
2.ii Refresh the original intent to act as a New York counterpart	As per the original design, revisit the Lab's original intent to provide a Geneva counterpart to New York multilateralism and build into programme of work.	Identify channels of communication with counterparts in the United Nations system in New York, and commit to regular engagement e.g. through quarterly meetings Design and implement a programme of dissemination of themes and topics emerging in New York based dialogue Map opportunities and entry points, along with UNOG, to apply a 'Geneva perspective' to New York counterparts working on the SDGs and Agenda 2030.
2.iii Define a strategically focussed programme of work geared to intended results	With intended results in place, define a clear programme of work which is not thematically-oriented, but focused on the Lab's core roles of convening, communicating and brokering knowledge. Aim to capitalise on its key niches – intersectionality of the SDGs and International Geneva Focus outwards rather than in, directing resources towards/ sharing broad knowledge on the SDGs	Set a two-year programme of work, explicitly geared to the Lab's intended results, but with room for adaptation where needed. Define a clear set of targets and milestones, aligned to results, which may be process-oriented.

2.iv Revisit management and staffing roles	With intended results and workplan in place, review the skillset available and develop a staffing strategy accordingly. Key **core** roles will include: • Director, Deputy Director • Ecosystem manager and partner country engagement lead • Communications Officer • Fundraising/donor relations specialist • Administrative support Other roles will likely be project funded and dependent on resource raising	Employ a substantive deputy with political and strategic experience and skills, and reputational capital in Geneva. Recruit fundraising/donor relations expertise Recruit/seek secondments or JPOs according to skillsets required.
2.v Revisit the governance and accountability functions	Although a light Advisory Group remains appropriate if the Lab is not to lose its agility, a firmer grasp of the Lab's intended aims and programme of work will be relevant going forward. Lines of accountability require clarification	The Swiss Mission and A&P should be represented on the Advisory Group The Group's remit may be tightened to provide a clear strategic steer, and request results performance reporting, while allowing the Lab to retain its agility and flexibility Confirm that accountability lines are: 1. Management: To UNOG 2. Strategic: To UNOG and the Confederation 3. Administrative & financial: To A&P/UNOPS

MEDIUM TERM: THE ROAD TO 2030: OPTIONS

Recommendation 3: Over the next funding period, collectively discuss and select options for continuance towards 2030, with a view to phasing down Swiss funding over the period.

The evaluation recommends Option 2 below, but with caveats of: Core funding only, with SDG Lab activities/initiatives separately funded; increasingly shared SDC resources between GI and A&P; the exploration of other funding streams within the Swiss Confederation; and with overall declining volumes over time.

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1.Become an entity within UNOG, either extra budgetary or systemic	• Receive regular resources, removing the need to fundraise • Have formal status and legitimacy as part of the UN system	• Risk of loss of independence • Reduced agility and capacity to innovate • Enmeshment within UN bureaucracy
2. Continue as a Swiss-funded entity within UNOG, but with core resource-sharing between A&P and GI Divisions respectively, on the basis of the Lab	• Mutual strategic advantage • Benefit from the Swiss 'brand' of quality and neutrality	• Ongoing requirement for core Swiss funding up to 2030 • If ODA resources, intended results will need to reflect

bridging the bilateral and multilateral worlds	• Providing the Swiss Confederation with a direct channel to UNOG	the multilateral nature of the Lab • Risk of boundaries between the Lab and UNOG becoming increasingly blurred, will need clear lines
3. Become an independent foundation with an income-generating consultancy arm	• Increased scope for flexibility and to set independent goals and programme of work • Independence from funder requirements/UNOG structures and UNOPS funding mechanisms	• Need for core resources unmet, risking lack of continuity • Loss of strategic advantage for the Lab, the Swiss Confederation and UNOG • Loss of legitimacy and credibility conferred by UN status
4. Become an independent entity managed by the Ecosystem, as part of civil society	• Reduce/remove need for continued Swiss ODA resourcing • Opportunity to seek funding as a civil society organisation • Building on relationships already formed	• Loss of strategic advantage for the Lab, the Swiss Confederation and UNOG • Loss of legitimacy and credibility conferred by UN status • Loss of core funding risks lack of continuity

ANNEXES

Draft term of reference for the SDG Lab's evaluation

1. Introduction

This document sets out the requirements related to the project evaluation mandate for the *SDG Lab: multi-stakeholder innovation and collaboration for the 2030 Agenda.*

The Terms of Reference (ToR) describes the purpose, context, objectives (including guiding indicative evaluation questions), scope and a proposed methodology of the evaluation. They further describe the evaluation process and the expected deliverables. The ToR is a component of the contract for this evaluation mandate.

2. Background information

General Context

The 2030 Agenda is the overarching agreement of UN Member States for sustainable development and represents its legitimate guiding framework with three main principles that should impact not only what needs to be done but also, and perhaps more importantly, how.

These principles are:

- **Universality**: Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs are for all countries.
- **Multi-stakeholder**: Governments alone cannot hope to deliver on the Agenda. It's about collaboration between different actors to maximize and leverage their complementary expertise, know-how and resources for the SDGs. This also means that official development assistance (ODA) must be much more catalytic for attracting financial resources, including from the private sector, and additional public resources.
- **Multi-sectoral**: Progress on the global challenges identified in the 2030 Agenda will require concerted efforts from various sectors. As an example, the challenge of non-communicable diseases cannot be solved by the health sector alone. Instead, it requires actions on education, climate and pollution, social norms, gender, and so forth.

Efforts towards an effective and transformative implementation of the Agenda 2030 were made since 2015, at the UN, in different countries, and by other development stakeholders. One such initiative supported by the Swiss Government is the SDG Lab, initiated in late 2016. Switzerland is the first and main operational contributor to the SDG Lab (through the Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United Nations Division (DNU))[159]. Other donors and contributors also provide support to the SDG Lab like the governments of China, Nigeria, and Russia through the UN JPO programme and staff secondments. Nongovernmental partners like the University of Geneva and the International Institute for

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[159] DNU is contributing to the Lab through the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem pillar.

Sustainable Development (IISD) contribute through specific initiatives such as co-founding the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem as in the case of IISD.

The starting point for the SDG Lab is that Geneva is in a unique position to support and deliver on all the three principles of the Agenda since it is one important multilateral and operational hub of the UN and a host city to many of the UN system organizations, non-UN development partners, humanitarian entities, private sector companies, civil society, academia, and policy-making platforms. The SDG Lab has envisioned to leverage this potential by being a "connector, amplifier, question asker, and innovator". As host state of the UN, Switzerland supports the strengthening of International Geneva through its support to the Lab which, in turn, works with and initiates multi-stakeholder initiatives that accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Context of the evaluation

The first phase of the SDG Lab (2016-2019) was designed as the creation and definition phase of the mere concept of an SDG Lab and to conduct a proof of concept. This phase focused on building the Lab's institutional setup (e.g., putting in place the administrative and operational systems to create a new entity), defining its modality of work, and launching activities where it could provide the highest value towards UN Member States and other stakeholders involved in promoting the 2030 Agenda in Geneva.

 The second phase (2020-2022) was designed to further explore opportunities to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to scale up activities that proved relevant and successful in phase one. The budget provided to the Lab by SDC was substantially increased, which, inter alia, allowed for an increase in 2 consultants, raising the number of staff/consultants funded through the Government of Switzerland from 5 to 7. Phase two should identify which are the most successful approaches and activities and take them to scale.

The third phase (after 2022), if approved, should focus on the areas where the SDG Lab can have the most impact and added value, based on phase 2 successes as well as possible adaptions.

The current evaluation should help identify what has the best proven record of the SDG Lab based on results achieved during phase 2, possible improvements/adaptations and propose a focus for the third phase, including a resizing of the project in accordance with the proposed focus.

Phase 1 (8.2016-12.2019):

The SDG Lab was created in 2016 in response to a joint recognition by the Swiss Government and the UN in Geneva and New York that the SDGs were not prominent enough in Geneva and that its unique ecosystem was being underutilized in this regard. The Swiss contribution provided support to United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) to allow the setup of the unit (called SDG Lab) to drive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Administratively anchored in UNOG, the new office planned to work in collaboration with the UN Special Advisor David Nabarro who had been tasked to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Part of phase 1 was to test assumptions and ideas to figure out the niche of the Lab. That process led to the articulation of this niche as to enable the diverse ecosystem of SDG

actors in Geneva and beyond to contribute towards SDG targets at country level by it acting as a "connector, innovator, question asker, and amplifier"[160].

During the early period of phase 1, the Lab started with limited financial resources and a team of two, thanks to a strategic partnership with the IISD. Positioned as a special unit in the Office of the Director-General (ODG), UNOG, and promoted by the Director-General as its 'voice' on the SDGs, the Lab experimented and tested activities to identify where it could provide the highest value towards UN Member States and other stakeholders involved in activating the 2030 Agenda.

At the same time, the Lab put in place the administrative and operational systems to create a new entity and gained substantial political clout and support as well as credibility as it developed and took on key themes and areas of work. For example, the Lab played an essential role in putting the SDG financing theme at the centre of International Geneva by incubating tangible multi-stakeholder projects to drive more capital for the SDGs at country level.

One such project was the first edition of the Building Bridges Week and Summit in October 2019 in which the Lab played an instrumental role as a key founder of this initiative. In addition, the Lab served as a catalyst to further strengthen collaboration and coordination on SDG finance in the Geneva ecosystem through other innovative products and new financial tools towards the SDGs, such as the Pipeline Builder pilot and the Swiss Blended Finance concept.

Phase 2 (01.2020-12.2022):

Two important changes in context happened at the beginning of this phase. In late 2019, the immediate political support and environment of the SDG Lab evolved, with a new UNOG Director-General taking office. In 2020 and so far in 2021, the global COVID-19 pandemic halted most physical meetings and shifted the attention and priorities of the development community towards addressing the immediate and mid-term socio-economic needs in response to the global pandemic.

During Phase 2, the SDG Lab has the ambition to focus on consolidating the results already achieved, continue to explore new opportunities, and demonstrate an increased critical mass of tangible results. In parallel, the Lab continues to remain agile by continuously assessing and adapting its initiatives and activities to be supportive and relevant to as broad an audience as possible.

The SDG Lab has the aim to focus on outputs and outcomes where it can have most impact and interest to all stakeholders. The Swiss Government increased substantially investment in the SDG Lab (the budget for phase 2 multiplied by 2.5), enabling the initiative to grow and to take on areas of work that proved not only successful during phase 1 but represented opportunities to carry forward in phase 2. The contribution also allowed for the addition of two consultants funded through the Government of Switzerland[161].

As the SDG Lab is focused on supporting and collaborating with actors of the Geneva Ecosystem engaged in turning the SDGs into reality, one major target group for increased

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[160] See the SDG Lab promotional flyer for a definition of these roles: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/591ead07f7e0ab400c8ec8f4/t/5e7cd6cb6d89d27011bcdc08/1585239 756505/SDGLab+-+postcard_EN.pdf

[161] Consult the document "SDG Lab Staffing 2016-2022" for an overview of the number and composition of staff for phase 1 and phase 2.

attention in phase 2 are Member States including through their Permanent Missions in Geneva.

3. Objective, scope and focus of the evaluation

The evaluation objective is to assess, at mid-term, the results so far achieved during phase 2, taking into consideration the changing context and other constraints (i.e., global COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on SDG implementation, new leadership at UNOG, new management and portfolio team within SDC and DNU, fundraising towards other donors). It will focus on the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the SDG Lab's work and to assess the validity of the assumptions made at the beginning of phase 2.

In addition, the evaluation will review the general setup of the project (i.e., institutional, and administrative support structure in the UN and DFAE) and make recommendations in view of the planning and possible support for phase 3. The review will also take into consideration the lessons learned and results achieved of the *creation* of the Lab (i.e., phase 1) in order to extract the key learnings of initiating a pure innovation.

Key questions

The key questions for the consultants to answer are:

1. How well and far has the SDG Lab achieved its objectives (of phase 1 and 2), taking the above-noted context into consideration, i.e. the SDG Lab as an innovative initiative in the UN system?
2. Is its monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework suited to extract data and inform its strategy (i.e., are the Lab's theory of change, setup, objectives, intervention strategy, implementation, and monitoring framework, relevant, effective, efficient, and sustainable?).
3. In a possible future phase, should the SDG Lab make changes, focus or amplify certain aspects to reach even greater impact and how?
4. Because of demand from Member states, the UN system and the Geneva Ecosystem, the SDG Lab serves as a key SDG resource office within UNOG and as a trusted advisor to the Director-General and the senior management team. It also has a role of creating, nurturing, and animating the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem in view to accelerate the 2030 agenda. Is this composition the best mix and use of its time and resources? What are the advantages/challenges of this dual function? To what extent are they synergetic or rather in conflict with one-another? Is this dual function sustainable in terms of workload and expectations from different stakeholders? Would a neutral and independent platform (outside UN) putting together civil society, governments and the UN be an option? What is the vision of stakeholders? Where do the external review consultants see the best potential? Does this observation require adaptation?
5. How has the Lab adapted to its new context (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent resource-constrained environment, new UNOG leadership)? How could the SDG Lab adapt to the new normal due to the Covid-19 pandemic and take advantage of virtual tools? Was it able to broaden the target audience?
6. Which thematic areas could be prioritized to take advantage of International Geneva's potential in contributing to achieve the SDGs? What about digitalization and science diplomacy in this regard?

7. The SDG Lab is financed to a very large extent, but not exclusively, by FDFA (SDC and DNUI). What have been the implications of this arrangement for the Lab's operations and its future vision? How does the potential of fundraising beyond the Swiss Government?
8. How is the governance and oversight of the Lab organized (accountability and finance)? Is there a need to adapt or refine the setup?

Although the evaluation will mainly concentrate on phase 2 (the last 18 months), it will also take into account the main results achieved and lessons learned since the beginning of the project (phase 1 and 2).

Evaluation focus

The evaluation will aim to explore the SDG Lab's results, unpack how and why those results have come about, and make recommendations for how the SDG Lab should evolve and focus. The evaluation will be equally interested in drawing the lessons from the Lab's results (achieved and not achieved) through the lens of understanding the opportunities and challenges of what it takes to "innovate" in the United Nations and beyond. It will also look at the institutional setup and approaches of the project (considering the many unknowns of the current environment, such as the overall shift of Member States towards responding to the global health crisis versus a whole of 'sustainable development approach', the impact of containment measures on convening and the longer-term impact on multilateralism, etc.) and make recommendations to adapt the setup and approaches if and as needed. The COVID-19 period needs to be taken into account, as the pandemic may have altered the way the SDG Lab operates and the environment within which it exists (i.e., UNOG, International Geneva, the broader UN and sustainable development community).

The primary user groups for the evaluation are therefore SDG Lab management and team, DFAE (SDC, DNU and the Swiss Mission in Geneva (MiGe)), the UN in Geneva and beyond, other past and present key stakeholders, and all current and potential contributors and donors.

Evaluation team

The evaluation shall be conducted by a team composed of two consultants (TBC). The overall responsibility will lie with the designated team leader. The consortium or consultants will have a contract with the SDC Analysis and Policy Division and will report to this Division at SDC in Bern.

Timeline

The evaluation will take place during the period mid-September to mid-November 2021, with the final report delivered end of November 2021. The SDG Lab should provide a written reaction to the evaluation report by mid-November 2021. The SDC Management response shall be available by mid-December 2021.

It is proposed that the evaluation be conducted in two phases to enable stocktaking, iteration, and tailoring of the approach. The first phase will allow the consultants to interview stakeholders (i.e. individual interviews with SDC, DNU, MiGe and SDG lab) and review key Lab documents and its operational and management tools. An inception meeting with the SDC, DNU, MiGe, and the SDG Lab (based on a two-pager provided by the consultants) will

allow to review preliminary observations and recommendations as well as, if necessary, answer clarification questions concerning the mandate. The second phase will then start with further interviews.

The following table provides an overview of expectations for each step of the evaluation including deliverables and key meetings with DFAE (SDC and DNUI), MiGe, and the SDG Lab team.

NB: the proposed dates are <u>tentative</u> and give an indication of time span needed for the planned activities, the table will be finalized with consultants and partners

Activity of the evaluation	Date confirmed)	Responsibilities
Kick-off meeting with the evaluation team, SDC, MiGe, DNU and SDG Lab	13.09.2021	SDC; MiGe, DNU, SDG Lab; Consultant/s
First interviews with stakeholders, partners, desk study, etc.	13.09.2021-23.09.2021	Consultant/s
Preparation of a 2 pager with first observations and proposals from the consultants (with clarifications and proposed adjustments to the mandate and the methodology).	28.09.2021	Consultant/s
Inception meeting with SDC, MiGe, DNU and SDG Lab to present the first observations and proposals of the consultants and agree on the way forward.	30.09.2021	SDC; MiGe, DNU, SDG Lab; Consultant/s
Further interviews with stakeholders, partners, and desk study, based on issues discussed in the review meeting.	01.10.2021-25.10.2021	Consultant/s
Presentation of findings and recommendations at SDC Bern.	26.10.2021	SDC; MiGe, DNU, SDG Lab; Consultant/s
Preparation of draft evaluation report	27.10.2021.-01.11.2021	Consultant/s
Draft evaluation report	02.11.2021	Consultant/s
Feedbacks on the draft evaluation report by SDC, MiGe, DNU, and SDG Lab	08.11.2021	SDC, MiGe, DNU, SDG Lab;
Final evaluation report	15.11.2021.	Consultant/s
SDG Lab written reactions and positions on the report	01.12.2021	SDG Lab
FDFA management response to the report	15.12.2021	SDC
Dissemination of the final evaluation report	10.01.2022	SDC

4. Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected to be submitted by the evaluator(s):

- Two pager before the inception meeting
- Draft evaluation report
- Final evaluation report
- List of interviewed persons; minutes of inception meeting; slides used for the presentation of findings; videos; leaflets; case studies; etc.

- Analysis of the intervention logic (logframe and theory of change): with an appreciation of the extent to which objectives have been achieved

5. Reference Documents

After signing the contract the evaluation manager (SDC), the SDG Lab will share the following documents with the evaluator(s) for the evaluator's first desk review:

- *Documents on the project, e.g. project documents, project factsheets, credit proposals, financial planning and reports, annual plans and reports for the phases, etc.*
- *General document on DFAE, e.g. SDC guidance documents and policies, etc. Relevant Swiss Foreign Policy documentation etc.*
- *An open list of key people to interview*

ANNEX 2: LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

No.	Name	Organisation and Role
1	Nicolas Randin	Head of Analysis and Policy Division, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
2	Georgette Bruchez	Deputy Head of Analysis and Policy Division, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
3	Christian Frutiger	Assistant Director General and Head of Global Cooperation, Swiss Government (SDC)
4	Christine Schneeberger	Deputy Head of Global Cooperation, , Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
5	Jacques Ducrest	Swiss Federal Council Delegate for the 2030 Agenda
6	Camille Gerber	Deputy Head of Section Host country policy, UN Division State Secretariat, FDFA
7	Silvano Sofia	Political Affairs Officer, UN Division, State Secretariat, FDFA
8	Kali Taylor	Building Bridges Week Coordinator, former Geneva 2030 Ecosystem Manager (IISD)
9	Anne Hassberger	Former First Secretary, Swiss Mission Geneva
10	David Nabarro	Founder and Managing Director 4SD, and former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the SDGs
11	Mille Bojer	Director and Global Evaluation Manager REOS Partners, and Member SDG Lab Advisory Group
12	Felix Staehli	Co-founder Impact Hub Geneva, and Member SDG Lab Advisory Group
13	Tatiana Volovaya	Director-General, UN Geneva
14	Michael Møller	Former Director-General of UN Geneva
15	Doreen Bogdan-Martin	Director, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and Member SDG Lab Advisory Group
16	Patrick Odier	Senior Managing Partner, Lombard-Odier, and President of Swiss Sustainable Finance
17	Nicolas Seidler	Executive Director, Geneva Science-Policy Interface (GSPI), University of Geneva
18	Daria Robinson	Executive Director, Diplomacy Forum, Geneva Science Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA)
19	Jürg Lauber	Permanent Representative, Swiss Mission Geneva
20	Pierre Strauss	First Secretary, Swiss Mission Geneva
21	Alexandre Fasel	Ambassador Science-Diplomacy, and former Permanent Representative, Swiss Mission Geneva)
22	Eliane Kiener	Deputy Head of Global Institutions Division, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
23	Elayne Whyte Gómez	Former Permanent Representative/ Mission of Costa Rica to UN Geneva
24	Lynn Wagner	Senior Director, Tracking Progress, IISD
25	Valentin Zellweger	Former Permanent Representative, Swiss Mission Geneva
26	Marion Barthelemy	Director, UN DESA/New York

27	Nadia Isler	Director, SDG Lab
28	Trine Schmidt	Senior Advisor, Geneva 2030 Ecosystem/ IISD
29	Edward Mishaud	Senior Communications Advisor, SDG Lab
30	Evgeniya Althukova	Member States Focal Point/ JPO, SDG Lab
31	Marlène Borlant	Communications Officer, SDG Lab
32	Eleonora Bonaccorsi	Junior Project Officer, Geneva 2030 Ecosystem, IISD
33	Davide Fanciulli	Programme Management Assistant, SDG Lab
34	Sydney Alfonso	Partnerships Analyst, SDG Lab
35	Francois Grey	Director, Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative, University of Geneva
36	Mallory Zhan	Academic Advisor, SDG Lab
37	Doreen Bogdan-Martin	Director, Telecomm Development Bureau, International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
38	Brindusa Borrow	Visiting Lecturer, Graduate Institute of Geneva
39	Christoph Lang	Counsellor, Embassy of Switzerland in Russia

ANNEX 3: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Swiss Development Corporation documentation

No.	Document
1	7F-09662.02 Support to UNOG unterzeichneter Kreditantrag
2	Annex 2: Minutes of meeting from the Operations Committee
3	Annex 3: Minutes of the consultation at HQ division level
4	Annex 4: Logical Framework
5	Annex 5: Budget Forecast SDG Lab Phase 2 2020-2022
6	Annex 6: Risk Assessment
7	Annex 7: Checklist for scoring the SDC Gender Policy Marker in the SAP
8	Annex 8: Checklist for scoring the SDC Governance Policy Marker in the SAP
9	Annex 9: List of SAP characteristics
10	Annex 10: Stakeholder Mapping
11	Annex 11: Activity Stakeholder Matrix
12	Annex 12: SCENARIOS FOR PHASE II (2020-2022)
13	Annex 13: SOG Lab Investment Case
14	Annex 14: Pipeline builder narrative
15	Annex 15: SOG Lab Building Bridges Week 2019 Summary
16	Annex 16: Results Overview
17	Annex 17: Organigramme
18	Extract of Minutes from the Operation Committee
19	7F-09662.01 Kreditantrag UNOG SDG Implementation unterzeichnet
20	7F-09662.01 Support UNOG Agreement
21	7F-09662.01 SDG Lab End of Phase Report Phase I
22	7F-09662.02 UNOG unterzeichneter Vertrag Amendment No. 5 (inkl. Beitrag AIO)
23	7F-09662 EA Support to UNOG Agenda 2030 unterzeichneter Eintretensantrag
24	SDC_SDG Lab Interim Financial Statement as at 30 Sept 2020.01
25	19-04-03 Project agreement SDC-UNOPS-3thAmendment
26	7F-09662.01 KA UNOG 2. Zusatzkredit unterzeichnet
27	7F-09662.01 KA UNOG 1. Zusatzkredit unterzeichnet
28	7F-09662.01 KA UNOG Kreditlaufzeitänderung
29	7F-09662.01 Support to UNOG Agend 2030 2nd Amendment 2018
30	7F-09662.02 UNOG unterzeichneter Vertrag Amendment No. 4
31	7F-09662.01 Support to UNOG Agend 2030 1st Amendment 2017
32	SDC Midyear report 2020
33	SDG Lab - Expenditure details as at 30 June 2021
34	SDG Lab Annual Report 2020 - SDC
35	SDG Lab External Review Docs Inventory Consultants - 20 Sept 2021
36	SDG Lab External Review Docs Inventory Consultants - version 23 Sept 2021
37	SDG Lab Interim Financial Statement as at 31 December 2020 (1.38 MB)
38	SDG Lab Midyear Report Jan-Jun 2021
39	SDG Lab_Expenditure as at 30 September 2020 - Details as per the agreed budget_
40	External Review SDG Lab Kick Off meeting 270921

SDG Lab documentation

No.	Document
1	SDG Lab - 2019 From Experiment to Scale
2	SDG Lab - Member States Engagement
3	SDG Lab At Glance_EN
4	SDG Lab Communications Strategy 2018-19
5	SDG Lab organigramme 2021.1
6	SDG Lab Phase II Application - Results Phase I
7	SDG Lab Phase II Application - Risk Assessment
8	SDG Lab Phase II Application - Scenario
9	SDG Lab Strategic Framework 2018-19
10	SDG Lab Timeline 2021
11	Internal Tracker Snapshots
12	Salesforce Snapshots
13	Tools
14	SDG Lab Logframe
15	SDG Lab M_E List of tools
16	SDG Lab Theory of Change
17	D11 Pipeline Builder Strategy update Jan 2021
18	SDG Lab Pipeline Builder FAQs
19	SDG Lab Budget Expenditure
20	SDG Lab Annual Report 2020 - Swiss Government
21	SDG Lab End of Phase 1 Report 2019
22	SDG Lab Midyear Report 2020
23	SDG Lab Midyear Report Jan-Jun 2021
24	SDG Lab Progress Report 2017
25	SDG Lab Progress Report 2018
26	Nadia Isler Mission to NY UNHQ TORs and schedule
27	FW International Cooperation Forum 2022 in Genf - Anfrage für einen Aus
28	Next Steps
29	Overview of Actors
30	Geneva Sustainable Finance Partnership Principles rev2
31	Mails to UN Regional Commission and UN DESA
32	HLPF 2021 Unpacked 2021
33	HLPF 2021 Unpacked 2021
34	Examples - Video series on the UN Regional Fourms
35	Examples - Regional Forums to HPLF
36	Fact sheet credit proposal for projects / programmes
37	Email SDG Lab to Global Institutions re: Advisory Group 2 March 2020
38	Email SDC-The Lab
39	Website analytics
40	Twitter analytics
41	Thought Leadership piece published through IISD
42	Salesforce analytics (website and twitter)
43	Dispatch versions
44	So What series reports

45	Country engagement spreadsheet
46	Requests for lab model replication
47	Collaboration tracker
48	Ecosystem participation stats
49	Email correspondence between Lab and Swiss Mission
50	Email correspondence from Canton of Geneva
51	Email from CyberPeace Institute to the Lab
52	Hoffman, A (2021)Unsustainable Philanthropy
53	Email correspondence from Lab to Heads of Missions / Permanent Representatives
54	Email between Lab and UNOG DG April 2020
55	Email between Lab and Jean Hauss-Meyer 08.04. 2020
56	Email between Lab and Government of Costa Rica 01.07.21
57	Email correspondence between Lab and UN Resident Co-ordinator in Vietnam
58	Email correspondence from UN Joint SDG Fund and Pipeline Builder project
59	Flyer: Collaborative Response in times of Crisis: Flyer for Safeguarding SDG Investments during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Series of Informal Private Virtual Roundtables
60	Email correspondence Organisation of Caribbean States and the Lab
61	Building Bridges Week Event Summary: 7-11 October 2019
62	Email chain between SDG Lab and DoI/SDC January 2020
63	Email from SDG Lab to Eliane Kiener 20 May 2020
64	Email chain between SDG Lab and SDC November 2019
65	Email from SDG Lab to SDC 21 January 2020
66	Email from SDG Lab to Swiss Confederation colleagues 22 April 2020
67	Email from SDG Lab to SDC and DoI 13 September 2021
68	Email from SDG Lad to SDC 03.02.2019
69	Email from SDG Lab to SDC and DoI/Mission 02.03.2018
70	Email from SDG Lab to SDC on 06.02.2018
71	Email between SDG Lab and SDC 18.12.2019
72	Email between SDG Lab and SDC 20.12.2019
73	Email between SDG Lab and SDC 04.12.2019
74	Email from SDC to SDG Lab 09.12.2019
75	Email from SDC to SDG Lab 31. 10.2019
76	Email chain between SDC and SDG Lab October 2020
77	Email exchange between SDC and SDG Lab 26.11.2019
78	Email exchange between SDC and SDG Lab 22.10.2019
79	Email from SDG Lab to SDC 05.08.2019
80	Email from SDG Lab to SDC 03.04.2019
81	Funding submission to Botnar funding 02.08.2020
82	Email from SDG Lab to Massellaz.ch re: funding for Pipeline Builder 11.04.2021
83	Email re: Oak Foundation funding (24.10.2019)
84	Email from SDG Lab to Mission re: Sustainable Finance partnership
85	Email re: financing from Canton de Geneve for Sustainable Financing workshop
86	Email correspondence re: EU funding for Pipeline Builder
87	Email correspondence from SDC re: their support for Botnar Foundation financing
88	Email correspondence re: SECO funding for Swiss Center for Blended Finance 14.10.2021
89	Email correspondence re: Support to Niger for GIZ funding proposal
90	Email correspondence confirming acceptance for GIZ funding stream
91	Email correspondence re: internal research into Foundations

92	Email correspondence re: application to Hoffman Foundation
93	Email correspondence with SDC Employment & Income |Engagement with the Private Sector' re: resource raising for Pipeline Builder
94	Email correspondence with Hoffman Foundation 10.05.2020

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Management response to the "External mid-term Evaluation of the SDGLab: multi-stakeholder innovation and collaboration for the 2030 Agenda".

1. Introduction

The Analysis and Policy Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) commissioned an external mid-term evaluation of phase 2 of the project "SDGLab: multi-stakeholder innovation and collaboration for the 2030 Agenda".

The specific purpose of the mid-term evaluation was to assess, at mid-term, the results achieved so far during phase 2 (2019-2022), taking into consideration the changing context and other constraints (i.e., global COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) implementation, new leadership at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG), new management and portfolio team within SDC and the United Nations (UN) Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (FDFA), fundraising towards other donors). It was asked to focus on the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the SDGLab's work and to assess the validity of the assumptions made at the beginning of phase 2.

In addition, the evaluation was asked to review the general setup of the project (i.e., institutional and administrative support structure) and make recommendations in view of the planning of a possible support for phase 3. The evaluation had also to take into consideration the lessons learned and results achieved during the creation of the SDGLab (i.e. phase 1, 2017-2018) in order to extract some key learnings (cf. Annex 1 of the report: Terms of reference).

The evaluation team had access to the full range of SDC and SDGLab documentation. It generated its findings and conclusions through a mixed methods approach: Interviews with 39 stakeholders, review of over 150 documents and quantitative analysis of SDGLab funding, activities and results.

A multi-stakeholder validation meeting was held in Geneva on November 15th 2021 (participation: Swiss Mission in Geneva, UNOG, SDC Analysis and Policy Division, SDGLab – UN Division of FDFA was invited but could not attend).

SDC's Analysis and Policy Division thanks the evaluation team, Julia Betts and Kristin Olsen for this substantial and comprehensive report as well as the SDG Lab Senior management and the SDGLab team for their support and availability during the whole evaluation process. SDC's also thanks the Mission Geneva and the UN Division of the FDFA for their collaboration and contributions.

2. Management Response

The Management Response (MR) states the position of the SDC on the recommendations of the external mid-term evaluation of the "SDGLab: multi-stakeholder innovation and collaboration for the 2030 Agenda" project. The MR provides SDC's basis for negotiations and decision-making in view of the support of a possible phase 3 of the project. The MR has been consulted with the Head of the Global Cooperation Domain and the GI Division of SDC as well as with the Swiss Mission in Geneva and the UN Division of the FDFA.

3. Assessment of the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by a team of two independent experts in accordance with international standards. The evaluation process was well managed and included the relevant parties i.e. the Swiss Mission in Geneva, the UN Division of the FDFA, UNOG and the SDC as well as the SDGLab.

The stakeholders of the SDGLab (UNOG, Geneva Ecosystem members, Member states, other UN entities and FDFA representatives) were interviewed by the consultants during the evaluation process.

The main objectives of the evaluation have been mostly well covered by the evaluators. They were: 1) review the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the SDGLab's work; 2) review the general setup of the project (i.e., institutional and administrative support structure in the UN and at DFAE) and 3) make recommendations in view of the planning and possible support for phase 3.

The SDC appreciates the comprehensiveness of the evaluation report and the sound analysis of key elements related to the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the SDG Lab's work.

While the report's analysis and findings are considered to be useful for strengthening the strategic orientation of the project "SDGLab: multi-stakeholder innovation and collaboration for the 2030 Agenda", the recommendations are broadly formulated, providing general orientation for the future support, but not proposing concrete approaches or practical options for the phase 3.

The compliance with the terms of reference (annex 1 of the report) was mostly met, however some questions have been only partially covered, for example the issue of the monitoring (question 2), the issue of the dual function of the SDGLab Director both as member of the senior management team of the Director General of the UN Geneva office (DG) and as Lab Director (question 4). The issue of governance has been covered (question 8) but no substantial proposals or recommendations were made. The issue of the funding (question 7) was not sufficiently addressed (advantages / disadvantages of Swiss funding most of the budget of the Lab, the implications of funding dependency for the Lab's operations and its future vision).

The project is ambitious, broad, and flexible and the view of a wide range of stakeholder's were captured by the consultants during the evaluation. SDC considers that some recommendations are made towards UNOG and the SDGLab (i.e. clear and results-oriented future vision; seek project funding for dedicated initiatives; revisit management and staffing of the Lab; revisit the governance and accountability function) while others are relevant for SDC. This management response covers more specifically aspects which are under the responsibility of SDC, in its role as donor and strategic partner of this project.

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4. Main findings and conclusions

Review findings (extracts from the evaluation report)	*Conclusions (paragraph 154, page 48)* *The SDGLab was an innovative initiative, designed and funded on a strategically appropriate basis. Overall, this evaluation finds that, five years into its implementation, and notwithstanding the disruption of COVID-19, the Lab has mostly delivered on its aims for its funders and stakeholders. It has delivered proof of concept and demonstrated the viability of a co-ordination focused entity, focused on the SDGs and sitting at the heart of the UN in Geneva.* *Relevance (summary of chap 2.1, page 9)* *The Lab is both strategically and operationally relevant. It has a clear niche within the complex international co-operation architecture of Geneva and is appropriately located within the UN system, as the main convening platform for the SDGs. Its work and thematic priorities selected are aligned to the strategic and political priorities of Switzerland. Demand for its services outstrips its ability to supply them, and the Lab has prioritised thematic areas appropriately to date. It has adapted strategically over time to remain relevant to priorities emerging, and adjusted as required to the demands presented by COVID 19.* *Coherence (summary of chap 2.2, page 15)* *The Lab has developed a wide range of appropriate partnerships, and undertaken some significant collaborations geared to enhancing SDG implementation. The main partnership however is the Ecosystem, which has met frequently but suffered a loss of momentum in 2020 linked to COVID-19. Its members perceive the Ecosystem as very valuable, and a key forum for SDG-related dialogue in Geneva, though not all are consistently or actively involved.* *Effectiveness (summary of chapter 2.3, page 19)* *The Lab's performance management tools are not currently appropriate for its performance management, which impedes the assessment of results. Stakeholders, and particularly those within the Swiss Confederation, also view the Lab's achievements, and specifically it's merit, worth and significance, through very different lenses. Overall, however, its merit, worth and significance, in the terms it was originally designed, are demonstrated. The Lab has achieved tangible results against its intentions, and particularly in relation to its convening power, for example through its work on sustainable finance and the SDGs. It has also brokered and disseminated (though not generated) knowledge on the SDGs. Progress on incubating and catalysing progress towards the SDGs and modelling replicable approaches are gathering momentum over time.* *Under the 4 chosen results area the estimation / scale of results achieved is define as such by the consultants:* • *Result area 1: Convene: High achievement* • *Result area 2: Generate and broker knowledge: Some achievement (underway but more potential to be realised)* • *Result area 3: Incubate and catalyse: Emerging achievement (gathering momentum)* • *Result area 4: Model replicable approach: Emerging achievement* *Impact (summary of chap 2.4, page 39)* *The Lab has made some early contributions to higher level results, with good progress seen in terms of increasing stakeholder engagement in the SDG agenda, reflecting its convening power. Contributions to supporting actors to address in-country SDG challenges and enabling them to use the Lab as a model are still emergent.* *Efficiency (summary of chap 2.5, page 40)* *The Lab has proven a worthwhile investment for the Swiss Confederation to date, though interpretation of its results vary according to the lens used. Phase 2 has been impeded*

	by COVID-19, and therefore results are less tangible than anticipated. The central disjunct between the expectations of the Lab's funding stream and its conceptual basis will need to be resolved going forward, if efficiency is not to be further impeded. ***Governance, oversight and management arrangements (summary of chap 2.6, page 44)*** *Governance systems are light, given the conceptual basis of the Lab, and no donor representative attends. Lines of accountability have become blurred over time, and there is disagreement among stakeholders about where primary accountability lies. Boundaries with UNOG have also become blurred over time. There are currently staffing gaps, particularly regarding fundraising and political/strategic expertise. These issues are however relatively straightforward to course correct.*
SDC response to the main findings and conclusion	**Conclusions** SDC agrees with the conclusions. The SDGLab was able to play an important role within the Geneva Ecosystem to promote the SDGs and promote a multi-stakeholder approach. **Relevance** SDC agrees on most on the findings on relevance. The SDGLab has found a niche and is a relevant unit for promoting the SDGs and convene different stakeholders (UN, Governments, NGOs, public and private sectors) in Geneva to exchange and plan about multi-stakeholder partnerships to advance on the SDGs. SDC partially agrees with the statement that the SDGLab is appropriately located within the UN system. This institutional set-up has a number of advantages and disadvantages and SDC would have welcomed a deeper analysis of the consultants regarding the following aspects: access and acceptance from UN agencies, Members States, International organisations, civil society, private sector based in Geneva; accountability to partners/stakeholders, whose needs and perspectives are taken mainly in consideration by the SDGLab; sustainability of the set-up, flexibility and cost of the set-up as well as the sustainability of such a set-up. . In their recommendation 3, the consultants propose to study several mid-term future set-up options for the SDGLab (beyond phase 3) including two options for the SDGLab to become an independent entity or foundation. But first, clarity on its mandate, priorities and vision is needed. Maybe parts of the current SDGLab activities and work would be more relevant when conducted within the UN, while other parts could be managed outside the UN. **Coherence** SDC agrees with the findings on coherence. The SDGLab was successful in reaching out and developing partnerships and in particular in mobilising the Geneva Ecosystem around the SDGs. **Effectiveness** SDC overall agrees with the findings on effectiveness. The current SDGLab management tool (logframe as requested by SDC for the approval of phase 2) has the merit to frame the work but seems inadequate for result reporting. The challenge is to develop a performance management tool by the SDGLab which satisfies SDC requirement (for a contribution) as well as the monitoring needs of the SDGLab itself as well as the needs other possible partners (i.e. other donors). A result tool taking into account the specificity of the SDGLab should be proposed by the SDGLab for phase 3. SDC agrees with the fact that the SDGLab has achieved good results in some areas: in particular on sustainable finance in its role at the initiation of the Building Bridges week and as broker and disseminator of knowledge on the SDGs.

Comments on the scale of results achieved in the 4 areas

Result area 1: SDC agrees and acknowledges the high achievement done under **convening partners** around SDGs and building network (Geneva Ecosystem) which is a strong asset of the SDGLab.

Result area 2: **brokering of knowledge**, some results are convincing, for example as the SDGLab plays a unique role in information sharing on the SDGs in the international Geneva. As noted by the consultants the generation of new knowledge was limited. However through its facilitation role, it supported some generation of knowledge among the Geneva Ecosystem.

Result area 3: Regarding the results under **incubating and catalysing** momentum on the SDGs, the consultants reported on the extensive engagement of the senior management of the SDGLab for country engagement on the SDGs. (i.e. with Costa Rica, Niger, Ghana) and on two incubation examples (i.e. pipeline builder and impact hub) showing the commitment of the SDGLab to promote new and evolving collaboration for promoting tangible actions for the SDGs realisation. Results are rated as emerging, with no assessment of the pertinence of the supported initiatives. In the review of its mid to long term vision, the SDGLab shall assess the pertinence of the chosen activities.
Those activities could be considered as "sub projects" of the SDGLab that could raise interest of other donors and could be managed under specific partnerships, if external additional funds can be raised for those initiatives.

Result area 4: **model replicable approach**. This result area concerns the extent to which the Lab has generated and modelled approaches which are replicable elsewhere. In particular, the model of the Lab itself and the multi-partnership approach.
According to the report, there are several requests from national governments, UN agencies and civil society organisation towards the SDGLab in view of replicating the whole or part of the SDGLab model or multi-partnership approach. Is it really the objective of the SDGLab to promote its model, for example by supporting the emergence of one or two local SDGLab at local level (to serve as best practice)? The SDGLab could focus mainly on promoting multi-stakeholder approaches.

Impact
SDC partially agrees with this finding. While acknowledging the good results in terms of increasing the engagement of SDG practitioners in Geneva in a multi-stakeholder and multisector ecosystem, the impact in engagement with partner's governments and dissemination on the SDG agenda are still to be shown. What are the priorities set by the SDGLab and the focus of its activities? Is dissemination of a model the role of the SDGLab? How will these activities be continued? What is the vision of the SDGLab concerning its impact on the long run?

Efficiency
SDC partially agrees: While the SDGLab has proven a worthwhile investment for Switzerland (promotion of Switzerland foreign policy objectives, promotion of the SDGs, using International Geneva as a platform for multi-stakeholder initiatives in favour of the SDGs, etc.), the issue of value for money (or cost benefit) needs also to be taken into account. While this dimension is difficult to be quantified in the sense that partnerships and networking activities (which is recognised by SDC as an essential part of the SDGLab role and activities) need important resources in terms of time and personal, the right size and the mid-term and long-term financial sustainability of the SDGLab has to be clarified. The assumption was that the SDGLab would be able to raise additional funds over time

so that SDC could progressively reduce its share to the SDGLab funding. Normally, SDC finances up to 50% of the costs of the partner in the framework of a contribution. Such assumption was made for phase 2. As this assumption could not materialise (for reasons mentioned in the report) the SDGLab needs to identify opportunities to mobilise funding, for example through projects. Currently about 90% (estimation) of the core funding (cash or in kind) is ensured by SDC and the UN Division of the FDFA.

Governance

As requested in the Terms of reference of the evaluation, the questions on how the governance and oversight of the SDGLab is organized (accountability and finance) and if there is a need to adapt or refine the setup, where looked at by the consultants.

SDC agrees with the main findings of the evaluation regarding governance. The question of accountability has to be clarified as well as the role of the current advisory committee and the relevance of creating a steering committee for the SDGLab. Concerning the internal organisation at the UN, the roles of UNOPS and UNOG have to be clarified. When it comes to financial accountability, role and responsibilities between UNOPS, UNOG, the SDGLab and SDC needs to be clarified, as the current set-up is complicated and time consuming.

Concerning the role of the SDGLab Director, the evaluation recalls that the original intent was for the Lab to be located within UNOG but to retain a degree of autonomy. The evaluation points out that over time, the role of Director of the Lab evolved (i.e. by representing UNOG DG at events) and a lack of clarity emerged (SDGLab independence versus accountable to UNOG). SDC agrees with the need to clarify the operational boundaries for the Lab (SDGLab in but not of UNOG).

Concerning the role of the SDC, one should take into account the fact that the SDC and UN Division of FDFA funding is a contribution to the SDGLab. This means (according to SDC rules and administrative procedures) that the part of the SDC financing should represent a maximum of 50% of the whole SDGLab budget (as planned and agreed in the budget for phase 2). Due to the difficulties encountered by the SDGLab to find other co-funding (other bilateral donors see it as a Swiss initiative and therefore are not interested to find it, private foundations cannot easily finance UN entities, etc.), Switzerland remained the major contributor (about 90%) of the SDGLab during the last 3 years. This financial predominance of Switzerland raised concerned on the Swiss side and led to a stronger involvement in the financial issues (i.e. requests for transfer of funds between budget lines or change of personal status, etc.).

The evaluation recommends recruitment of new profiles (deputy, fundraising...). SDC sees the merits to modify the profile of the SDGLab staff, but not to increase the staff size.

5. Recommendations

3 recommendations have been proposed. Recommendations 1 (function) and 2 (form) have some several sub recommendations. Recommendation 3 is proposing options for the future and cannot be assessed within a table and with ratings (agree, partially agree, don't agree).

Out of the 9 sub-recommendations made under recommendations 1 (function) and 2 (form), 4 are rated as 'fully agreed' (green), 5 are "partially agreed" (orange) and none are "not agreed" ('disagree' - red) – see table below.

This appreciation is made by SDC and covers areas of its responsibilities, taking into consideration that only parts of the recommendations are targeted towards SDC, and many recommendations are targeted towards the SDGLab. This is the reason why SDC has given the opportunity to the SDGLab to provide written reactions to the recommendations of the evaluation (see following document).

Recommendation 1: FUNCTION

Continue core Swiss funding into Phase 3 but with a tighter concept; increased burden-sharing; & greater cohesion among stakeholders

Confirm an in-principle decision for core Swiss funding for the Lab in the next funding period.	🟩
Collectively define a clear and results-oriented future vision for the Lab.	🟧
Confirm future intended results	🟧
Seek project funding for dedicated initiatives	🟧
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	**Disagree**

Recommendation 2: FORM

Clarify institutional housing, management and accountability systems and capacities needed

Reconfirm institutional housing within UNOG and define boundaries	🟩
Refresh the original intent to act as a New York counterpart	🟧
Define a strategically focussed programme of work geared to intended results	🟩
Revisit management and staffing roles	🟧
Revisit the governance and accountability functions	🟩
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	**Disagree**

Recommendation 3: Medium Term

Over the next funding period, collectively discuss and select options for continuance towards 2030, with a view to phasing down Swiss funding over the period.

No table summary (see comments below)

Overview of recommendations, management response and measures

	Recommendation 1		
	Continue core Swiss funding into Phase 3 but with a tighter concept; increased burden-sharing; & greater cohesion among stakeholders		
	Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree		Disagree
	SDC confirms the "in principle" interest for funding phase 3 for 3 years (2023-2025). The main responsibility to define the future vision and the expected results of the SDGLab lays by UNOG/SDGLab which is in charge to work out the SDGLab strategy for the next period. SDC is ready to provide comments to the proposed strategy, supports a "tighter concept" (focus) and will indicate the results and budget items it will support and finance. SDC is open to provide core funding as well as possible specific activities funding. The UN Division will decide on the continuation of its support on the funding to the Ecosystem Geneva. As the recommendation 1 is addressed both to SDC and to the SDGLab, SDC can only partially agreed with the sub-recommendations b) to d) as SDC does not have the lead on those 3 aspects. SDC will collaborate with the SDGLab to clarify relevant operational and administrative agreements for its financing (i.e. SDC's written approvals to allow UNOPs budget shifts or change of personal status, etc.)		

Measures		Responsibility	Timing	
a)	Confirm an in-principle decision for core Swiss funding for the Lab in the next funding period. SDC position: SDC foresees the funding of a phase 3 with a tighter concept. SDC is open to provide core funding as well as funding of specific activities (to be agreed on) SDC (as set up in its credit proposal for phase 2) is envisaging a gradual decreasing funding for the next three years, while UN Division funding could remain (tbc) at the current level and continue be earmarked for the Geneva Ecosystem	SDC	January 2022 – in principle interest Mid-2022 Recommendation by SDC Operation Committee June 2022: formal SDC decision	
a)	Collectively define a clear and results-oriented future vision for the Lab. SDC position: SDC agrees that a clear and result oriented future vision is needed. However, it is not a collective responsibility to establish this future vision, but the main responsibility lays by UNOG/SDGLab. SDC is ready to comment and provide inputs, but the SDGLab shall develop its vision for the future as well as its explicit and result-focused vision. SDC is open to consider a new and more adapted monitoring system (taking into account the specificity of the SDGLab) to be proposed by the SDGLab.	SDGLab SDC to provide comments	Feb-March 2022 Exchanges between SDC and SDGLab End of March 2022: proposal from the SDGLab for phase 3	
b)	Confirm future intended results SDC position: SDC would welcome that the SDGLab provides a project proposal with intended results to SDC by the end of March 2022	SDGLab SDC to react	End of March 2022 UNOG/SDGLab submit a first project proposal for phase 3	

		Responsibility	Timing	
c)	*Seek project funding for dedicated initiatives* SDC position: SDC agrees with the proposed recommendation to find projects funding and encourages the SDGLab to explore opportunities to raise funds for dedicated initiatives or projects.	SDGLab	Ongoing	(orange)

	Recommendation 2		
	Clarify institutional housing, management and accountability systems and capacities needed		
	Management response		

Fully agree		**Partially agree**		**Disagree**

Measures		**Responsibility**	**Timing**	
a)	*Reconfirm institutional housing within UNOG and define boundaries* SDC position: Recommendation 3 considers alternatives for the current institutional housing of the SDGLab at UNOG. 4 options are listed, with no deeper analysis, neither identification of possible alternative hosting institutions. Considering the range of possibilities SDC agrees that the institutional housing within UNOG is the best option for phase 3. Within UNOG, the role and functions of the SDGLab Director (SDGLab Director role versus role as part of Senior management team of UNOG) shall be defined for the coming period of 3 years, a written agreement or MoU as proposed by the consultants would be welcome on that issue. *"Ensure that SDGLab is in UNOG not of UNOG".*	UNOG/SDGLab SDC will comment	February 2022	(green)
a)	*Refresh the original intent to act as a New York counterpart* SDC position: Once the vision and expected results are defined by the SDGLab, the recommendation to act as a New York counterpart should be considered if it would be contributing to the agreed vision and expected results.	SDGLab	Ongoing	(orange)
b)	*Define a strategically focussed programme of work geared to intended results* SDC position: SDC agrees with this recommendation to focus its programme of work and align then with the intended results. SDC would welcome a project proposal from the SDGLab by the end of March 2022	SDGLab	February/March 2022	(green)
c)	*Revisit management and staffing roles* SDC position: This point is under the responsibility of the SDGLab. SDC sees the merits to modify the profile of the SDGLab staff, but not to increase the staff size.	SDGLab SDC will comment	Ongoing	(orange)

d) Revisit the governance and accountability functions SDC position: SDC agrees that the governance and accountability have to be clarified and strengthened (role and composition of the advisory committee and/or relevance of a steering committee for the SDGLab). The internal organisation within UN, the roles and responsibilities of UNOPS and UNOG could evolve and be clarified. Accountability toward SDC will also need clarification. A new agreement between SDC and the UN will be needed for phase 3, as an extension of the current old agreement with UNOPS will be problematic for SDC.	SDGLab /UNOG SDC will comment	March – May 2022	

Recommendation 3: Medium Term

Over the next funding period, collectively discuss and select options for continuance towards 2030, with a view to phasing down Swiss funding over the period.

The consultants worked out 4 possible options for the mid-long term continuation of the SDG Lab to be discussed collectively:

1. Become an entity within UNOG, either extra budgetary or systemic.
2. Continue as a Swiss-funded entity within UNOG, but with core resource sharing between A&P and the Global Institutions (GI) Divisions at SDC respectively, on the basis of the Lab bridging the bilateral and multilateral worlds.
3. Become an independent foundation with an income generating consultancy arm.
4. Become an independent entity managed by the Ecosystem, as part of civil society.

SDC expected some substantial inputs on this topics, to be able to take some decisions before phase 3, and not as issues to be considered during phase 3 as proposed by the consultants.

SDC position:

- Options 1 is in the hands of UNOG and the Member States of the UN, with the support of SDC.
- Option 2 proposes a co-financing of the SDC funds by the Global Institutions (GI) and the Analysis and Policy (A&P) Division. Such a co-financing would make the project management on the side of SDC more complicated and time consuming, with no clear added value. Funding by A&P and some implications and internal consultation with GI would be feasible, pending an interest from GI.
- Options 3 and 4 are to be considered, once the vision, mission and objectives of the SDGLab are clearly defined. The option should not only be to create a new foundation or entity, but should also consider joining/be integrated to existing foundation of entities, to be identified in Geneva. All those options will need discussion within UNOG and with its main funders (SDC and others). A long preparation time is expected to implement option 3 and 4.
- SDC would like to propose an additional option (option 5) to be considered. It would consist to distribute the different objectives/expected results of the SDGLab to different units/institutions (as mentioned in the 4 options). That would means that there would no longer be one entity (SDGLab) doing it all, but the tasks would be given to different existing or to be created units/organisations/foundations.

6. Final remarks and next steps

This external mid-term evaluation was the opportunity to document and assess the work and achievements of the SDGLab since its start in 2017, with a special focus on phase 2 (2019-2021). The project is recognized for its management and activation of the Geneva Ecosystem (convener role), for being instrumental in the launch of several interesting initiatives (building bridges, pipeline builder...) as well as helping several partners (Members States, UN organisations...) to find the best interlocutor to work on the SDG. It has promoted and successfully worked with a multi-stakeholder approach with the various development actors in Geneva. The SDGLab is globally appreciated by the stakeholders involved in their work. SDC, based on these observations, foresees the funding of a phase 3 with a tighter concept and proposes hereinafter an overview of the next steps to be taken for the planning process.

The main next step is the work on the project document for phase 3 by the SDGLab with a proposed deadline at end of March 2022. During the elaboration of the first draft, SDC is available to participate and provide comments on demand. Based on the first draft, some adjustments can be proposed by SDC to reach an agreement. Based on the agreed project document, SDC will prepare the internal documentation (credit proposal) for phase 3 to be submitted for recommendation at the SDC operation committee by mid-2022. Formal decision is taken shortly after by the Head of the Global Domain of SDC.

Discussion and negotiations should start soon on a future agreement between SDC and the UN, as this should be done in parallel to the development of the project document. SDC will not be in a position to extend the current old agreement with UNOPS covering phase 1 and phase 2.

Date and signature   Berne, 3. 2. 2022

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SDG Lab External Evaluation – UN Geneva Management Response

I. Introduction

The external evaluation of the SDG Lab occurred at an important phase in its lifecycle: with more than five years of experience, learnings and results since its creation, an in-depth exercise to inform its future was welcomed. The leadership of both UN Geneva and SDG Lab view the external evaluation as an opportune moment to reflect on the Lab's lessons and achievements to date—at the mid-point of the Lab's Phase 2 funding—and to seek external views and feedback on its work, not only from the perspective of its primary donor, the Swiss Confederation, but also from its other contributors and key partners and collaborators, past and present.

Furthermore, the external evaluation provides the SDG Lab with the opportunity to receive a 360°-degree assessment of its work and to offer additional clarity on how its activities are perceived, as well as to receive feedback on ideas, themes and areas for further exploration and improvement.

The leadership of UN Geneva/SDG Lab appreciates the external evaluation, its findings, conclusions and recommendations. The leadership is particularly satisfied to note that, overall, the conclusions of the external evaluation are very positive about the SDG Lab. It is equally appreciative of the useful observations and recommendations of the report that will allow the SDG Lab to continue to improve in its next phase. While UN Geneva/SDG Lab does not fully agree with all findings, and would nuance some, for the purpose of a short management feedback, the reactions shared in this document focus merely on the conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation.

The leadership of UN Geneva/SDG Lab expresses its gratitude to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for commissioning this report and for the constructive exchanges that were held with SDC, the Swiss Mission in Geneva and the UN and International Organizations Division (IOD) in the lead up and throughout the exercise. The leadership wishes to take this opportunity to thank SDC and IOD for their financial contribution and expresses gratitude to the Swiss Mission for its support.

II. General feedback on conclusions

The UN Geneva/SDG Lab aligns itself with most conclusions of the evaluation and notes with satisfaction that the evaluation concludes that the SDG Lab: "... is both **strategically and operationally relevant**"; that it has "... a **clear niche** within the complex international co-operation architecture of Geneva and is appropriately located within the UN system as the **main convening platform for the SDGs**" (p. 9, "Summary"); that the "concept of the Lab has been proven" (para. 157); that "**no other platform provides a similar entry point to the SDGs and the UN** or has similar convening power to bring together high-level stakeholders" (ibid.); and that based on these and other findings, "... **core funding for Phase 3 is merited**" (para. 167).

Substantially, and reiterating a central element of the Lab's *raison d'être*, the report underscores how the **SDG Lab approach**, i.e., its model of advancing innovation, connecting stakeholders, forging unexpected partnerships, breaking silos, and amplifying good practices, among other roles, has **demonstrated what is feasible for such an entity in a complex UN and international setting.** As

the report notes, the SDG Lab "…has actively demonstrated that… despite differences, **more unites the international community than divides it**" (para. 156).

Furthermore, the Lab appreciates the evaluators' assessment that in the current global context – i.e. the importance of multi-stakeholder partnership – the Lab's "**strategic relevance can be conjectured to increase**" (para. 157) and, subsequently, "**demands for the services exceed its capacity for supply**" (para. 158). The evaluation has equally highlighted the important relationship between UN Geneva and the Swiss Confederation and that both parties have benefitted from the SDG Lab partnership, which, ultimately, showcases a joint and reinforcing commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (paras. 31, 33 & 34).

The report also acknowledges the **adaptability of the Lab and how it has remained strategically relevant** to stakeholders since inception and has adjusted to the highly dynamic situation presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which unfolded at the start of Phase 2 (p. 9, "Summary" & para. 50).

The UN Geneva/SDG Lab also appreciates the conclusion that invites the SDG Lab to further "tighten" its scope of activities, based on the observation that demand for its services is increasing and that further prioritization will be required. The SDG Lab welcomes this comment and will look at addressing this explicitly in the definition of its vision for Phase 3, taking into consideration the recommendation to "…**prioritize the Lab's function as convenor/communicator/knowledge broker**" (p. 50 recommendation 1.ii)

Additionally noted and welcomed are the conclusions that underscore the **"diverse expectations"** (para 162) of the Swiss Confederation and the **"tensions"** (para 163) that need to be resolved in that regard. The SDG Lab views this conclusion as a useful invitation to openly discuss these very real challenges to find constructive ways that would allow the SDG Lab to be less exposed to this **"central dissonance"** (para 160). In dialogue with its Swiss counterparts, the SDG Lab stands ready to help to bridge this gap, including through tailoring its monitoring and results reporting in a different way, if relevant.

III. Feedback on recommendations

The UN Geneva/SDG Lab supports most of the recommendations and finds that the proposals are grounded in evidence captured in the report. Below are short reactions to the immediate and medium-term recommendations. The leadership supports that these recommendations are the cornerstones to ensure continuity of the SDG Lab, as recommended by the evaluation.

Immediate: Next funding period (Phase 3)

Recommendation 1: general comments

The "in-principle" confirmation of commitment of Swiss funding to the core resources of the SDG Lab for Phase 3 represents **a cornerstone recommendation (1.i)** that is instrumental to allowing the SDG Lab to move ahead in strategizing, planning and documenting its next phase. The UN Geneva/SDG Lab has no comment to make on the financial burden sharing recommendation as this is an internal Swiss Confederation decision to be made. Notwithstanding, the leadership would very much welcome the recommendation for further engagement with Global Institutions (GI) in view of its multilateral mandate and focus on the United Nations at SDC.

The UN Geneva/SDG Lab leadership supports the proposal of **further articulating an overarching goal and prioritizing its core functions (1.ii)** and agrees that the SDG Lab is well positioned to continue to articulate its work as a bridge between multilateral and SDG impact at country level. The recommendation to further articulate this goal in a "collective" workshop (1.ii) is noted. The SDG Lab is open and willing to engage in such an exercise, though a discussion on the modalities may be warranted with counterparts of the Swiss Confederation and other stakeholders to ensure a useful, constructive and forward-looking exercise. The SDG Lab would suggest that the workshop focus on an exchange of views on the vision for Phase 3 to be proposed by the SDG Lab and to use this opportunity to **provide clarity and direction** from Swiss counterparts and other stakeholders on the **SDG Lab's accountability and performance framework (1.iii)** so that emerging tools are fit for purpose.

The recommendation to seek project funding (versus core) for **dedicated initiatives (1.iv)** is supported by UN Geneva/SDG Lab and has already been pursued in Phase 2 with some success. The SDG Lab will continue its efforts to raise non-core funds for the projects it incubates, based on the full appreciation that Swiss core funding alone cannot be expected to fund all the SDG Lab activities. The leadership appreciates the credit given to the SDG Lab for its efforts in resource mobilization so far and would welcome a broader exchange on this matter with Swiss counterparts and other stakeholders to assess how networks could be leveraged and explore other concrete ways to raise additional funds.

Recommendation 2: general comments

UN Geneva/SDG Lab takes note of the recommendation related to **institutional housing within UNOG and the defining of boundaries (2.i).** While UN Geneva/SDG Lab has a very clear understanding of the SDG Lab housing arrangements and its modus within the UN, it seems that some clarification could be helpful to mitigate misunderstandings or concerns of the Swiss Confederation. If helpful, UN Geneva/SDG Lab has no objection to the recommendation of agreeing to an MoU to frame the institutional set-up and would seek clarification from Swiss counterparts on useful points to be addressed in such a document.

The leadership welcomes the recommendation to **further maximize collaboration and knowledge sharing between Geneva and New York (2.ii)**. As evidenced in the report, the SDG Lab has in many instances already served as an effective relay between both hubs in Phase 2. While efforts can certainly be heightened, the SDG Lab will have to ensure that such a role does not inadvertently take over most of its human capacity, taking into account the recommendation to "prioritize" and "tighten" the focus of its activities. Building stronger bridges between Geneva and New York also requires continued **political support from** Member States to reduce the risk of perceived mandate overlap between UN Geneva and UN Headquarters. Support from Switzerland and other Member States will be important.

The recommendation to define a programme of work that **capitalizes on the core roles and key niches of the SDG Lab** is well taken (2.iii). The SDG Lab will be working on its definition in the framework of its vision for Phase 3. The SDG Lab leadership will also re-assess the relevance of its **current staffing roles (**2.iv), in the context of its next phase and take into consideration available funding. The leadership fully appreciates the recommendation of employing a **Deputy Director** with political and strategic experience and skills. Out of necessity, this non-existing position has been partly filled by the Head of Communications in Phase 2, but the present arrangement is not sustainable. A proposal was submitted to SDC for approval prior to the external evaluation and the decision was made to wait for the conclusions of the report.

UN Geneva/SDG Lab leadership takes note of the recommendation to explore ways for the current informal **Advisory Group to have a firmer grasp on the vision and activities of the SDG Lab** as it

enters Phase 3. The SDG Lab is very willing to increase the involvement of the Group and continues to highly value the feedback and suggestions of such a diverse and skillful group of professionals. This was precisely the intent of UN Geneva/SDG Lab leadership when it created this group in 2020, yet the COVID-19 pandemic limited to a large extent the interaction with and among Group members. Lastly, the leadership very much welcomes the recommendation to nominate to the Group a representative of the Swiss Mission and Division of Analysis and Policy (A&P). This invitation was previously made to Swiss counterparts in 2020. The leadership hopes the recommendation will be taken up.

Medium term: The road to 2030

Recommendation 3: general comments

UN Geneva/SDG Lab leadership welcomes the recommendation to use the next funding phase (phase 3) to **"collectively discuss and select options for continuance towards 2030" (p.52)** and to discuss in that phase the different potential operational and funding scenarios. The leadership also echoes the closing recommendation of the evaluation to proceed with **Option 2 "Continue as a Swiss-funded entity within UNOG…"**. It agrees with the evaluators' assessment that this conclusion is based on a solid assessment, as evidenced and reflected in the viewpoints of many stakeholders (para. 167).

As mentioned before, the feasibility of the recommendation of core resource-sharing between the Divisions of A&P and GI is to be assessed by the SDC. Based on its experience so far and on the findings of the external evaluation, the SDG Lab would however strongly **welcome any institutional arrangements** that would give the SDG Lab the opportunity to interact more regularly with the multilateral arm of SDC, considering that GI leads the agency's relationship with the United Nations.

In addition, and bearing in mind that the SDG Lab strives to support SDG results at country level while operating in a multilateral context, the leadership would welcome arrangements that facilitate a dialogue with **all Swiss counterparts** that are **directly involved in the funding of the SDG Lab and/or who have interest in the scope of its work (i.e. A&P, GI, UN and International Organizations Division, Swiss Mission).** Lean and efficient mechanisms could be established to improve the communication flow, facilitate the sharing of information and feedback by and to the SDG Lab and create a federating working relationship.

In the interest of limiting the length of this document, the leadership will not comment directly on the other options mentioned in the recommendation 3 matrix. Notwithstanding, UN Geneva/SDG Lab is available to comment on any other of the options if deemed desirable. Based on its experience and on the assessment of the evaluators, the leadership clearly supports option 2 as the only viable option.

IV. Conclusion

The evaluation has helped the SDG Lab in further finetuning and reflecting on the next phase of its development. The positive review of the SDG Lab provides additional momentum to accelerate its efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The evaluation's recommendations are critical and pertinent in designing Phase 3 and are already influencing activities in 2022. In this regard, the leadership of UN Geneva/SDG Lab looks forward to reviewing the Swiss Confederation's management response to the evaluation and to working together to map out next steps.

V. Acknowledgments

UN Geneva/SDG Lab leadership and team would like to acknowledge and thank the external evaluators, Julia Betts and Kristin Olsen, for their professionalism and engaging collaboration and dialogue throughout the external evaluation process. The team would also like to express its gratitude to its counterparts within SDC namely the Divisions of Analysis and Policy and Global Institutions, as well as within the UN and International organizations Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva. Similarly, much gratitude is expressed to all representatives of partnering organizations and entities, as well as independent individuals who made themselves available to be interviewed by the evaluators.

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Signed 18 January 2022

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