

External Review of the Implementation of the SDC Education Strategy and Education Fund

Final Report – Version May 31, 2021

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Abbreviations

ALAK	Latin America and Caribbean Division of SDC
BE	Basic Education: used in the broad meaning of the education strategy
CEMETS	Centre on the Economics and Management of Education and Training Systems at the ETH Zurich
DAO	West Africa Division of SDC
DCdVET	Donor Committee for dual VET
DCED	Donor Committee for Enterprise Development
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EiE	Education in emergencies
ES	SDC's Education Strategy for BE and VSD
FDFA	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FP	Focal Point
FoBBIZ	Swiss Forum for Skills Development and International Cooperation
FSD	Financial Sector Development
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HA	Humanitarian Aid Department of SDC
IAG-TVET	Inter-agency Group on TVET
IC Strategy	International cooperation strategy
IC-VPET	International Cooperation in Vocational and Professional Education and Training (of Swiss federal offices)
IDP	Inter-American Development Bank
IED	Inclusive Economic Development
IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning
IFC	International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ITC	International Trade Centre
MENA	Middle East and North Africa Division of SDC
NADEL	Centre for Development and Cooperation at the ETH Zurich
NORRAG	Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training
NPO	National Programme Officer of SDC
PHZH	Zurich University of Teacher Education
PSD	Private Sector Development
PSE	Private Sector Engagement
RECI	Réseau Suisse Education et Coopération Internationale
SC	South Cooperation Department of SDC
SCO	Swiss Cooperation Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SERI	State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation

SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SEM	State Secretariat for Migration
SFIVET	Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNEVOC	UNESCO Institute for TVET
VET	Vocational education and training
VPET	Vocational and professional education and training: Acronym for the Swiss VET or TVET system
VSD	Vocational skills development: SDC term used in the broad meaning of the education strategy

Executive Summary

1 Introduction

The Federal Dispatch 2017-20 put a strong emphasis on education (including BE and VSD) and set a target to increase the commitments to this thematic area by 50% compared to the 2013-2016 period. In 2017, SDC launched a new Education Strategy (ES) which serves the implementation of the goals in the dispatch, but which has a time horizon beyond that.

After three years of implementation, and before the new IC Strategy 2021-24 took effect, SDC commissioned an external review of the education strategy to a team of four independent consultants. The review team was composed of two consultants each with BE and VSD backgrounds, and it was co-lead by a BE and a VSD expert. However, the team made substantial efforts not to report separately on BE and VSD and the respective developments, but to develop an integrated perception of the implementation of the ES and the resulting conclusions and recommendations. The has the character of a stocktaking exercise on the implementation of the ES, and it seeks to:

- a) Capture whether measures that were decided in the ES have been implemented and whether SDC is heading towards its objectives.
- b) Analyse the processes, the factors facilitating and hindering progress towards the set objectives.
- c) Identify the priorities to be addressed in the coming years regarding the implementation of the ES in the light of the new dispatch 2021-24. has the character of a stocktaking exercise ("Standortbestimmung") with the intention to guide implementation for the period 2021-24, and it was not meant to assess the ES itself.

The review is based on the following sources:

- A **SAP data analysis** assessed the volume and characteristics of the overall education portfolio and its evolution between the period 2014-2016 and the period 2017-2019.
- An **online survey** carried out in December 2020 yielded 111 responses, half of which from SDC staff (headquarters and field offices) and the other half from external stakeholder.
- **Individual and group interviews** were conducted with more than 70 internal and external stakeholders.
- An extensive **document analysis** included institutional policies and strategies, regional and country programmes, evaluation, credit proposals, key documents produced by the focal points, selected documents of national and international partners.
- Seven **case studies** selected by the two focal points illustrate selected elements of the ES and its implementation.

Following the logic and sequence of the implementation modalities, the inception report translated the TOR into 13 review question. The implementation modalities represent the backbone for the implementation of the ES, and they are the main drivers for changes in portfolio, financial commitment, geographical expansion, in-house cooperation patterns and strategic partnership arrangements. The structure of the present report also follows this rationale.

2 Key findings

a) Overall appreciation of the ES

Despite considerable differences in the overall use and perception of the ES across the organisation (the ES was comparatively more relevant for staff dealing with BE than VSD, and for field staff more than for headquarters staff), there is a consensus that the ES, together with the dispatch 2017-2020 and the target to increase commitments to education by 50%, were instrumental to make education a prominent sector within SDC. For implementation, the ES served more for inspiration and conceptual clarity than for directly influencing programming decisions. For this purpose, the ES is often considered to be too broad to orient decision making and implementation..

b) Increased financial commitment

Both the dispatch 2017-20 and the ES stipulate a 50% increase in SDC's commitment to education. This was closely monitored at the level of the directorate through the regular "Steuerungsberichte". In June 2020 it reported the achievement of the target value with 52%, whereas the last "Steuerungsbericht" of the dispatch period in December 2020 reported an achievement of 37%. This reduction can be explained by the fact that not all commitments were actually implemented. The SAP data analysis of the review team showed an increase of 33% in actual spending when comparing the 2014-2016 period to the 2017-2019. Irrespective of the precise figures on the rate of achievement, the expansion is significant and the target of increasing commitment to education by 50% is unanimously perceived as having been instrumental in making education a priority theme for SDC.

c) Education in fragile and emergency contexts

Education in emergencies (EiE) and the strengthening of the humanitarian and development nexus, are among the most significant progress in the implementation of the ES. Progress are observable at all levels: policies and strategies, international policy dialogue and field level. SDC integrated EiE in protection (one of the four priority themes of humanitarian aid) and contributed to key international partnerships and policy dialogue initiatives, with an active participation of both South Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Domains. Good practices have emerged from the field regarding EiE/child protection in various contexts. However, EiE is still insufficiently institutionalised, and no strategy is in place to foster progress in this direction. In VSD, the thematic work on the contribution of VSD to livelihood in crisis affected contexts is at a more initial stage.

d) Complementarities between BE and VSD

Increased synergies between BE and VSD is a key purpose of having a joint strategy. The need for programmes and portfolios, which integrate BE and VSD is widely recognised across the organisation. Despite promising trends in the field and punctual initiatives at headquarters, the organisation failed to mainstream increased synergies between BE and VSD. This represents one of the major shortcomings of the ES implementation so far. The shortcomings are of both conceptual and structural nature.

Conceptually, the organisation lacks a common understanding of the various dimensions and levels of the interrelations between BE and VSD. However, a conceptual framework for this interrelation has to go beyond BE and VSD. It depends on a holistic perception of the transition from the world of education to the world of work and includes non-educational services like, coaching, placement support, start-up support, etc. A common understanding of the interplay also includes a common understanding of the demarcations and the separate core business of each BE and VSD, and it has to consider that BE cannot be reduced to economic goals and purposes, and VSD cannot be reduced to education.

The structural divide (as reflected in the lack of institutionalised meetings between the host divisions, common yearly objectives and activities between the FP and the networks, joint technical advice to the countries, common webpage on their respective shareweb, dedicated staff in each team to ensure collaboration and learning, etc.) between the two host divisions, FP and networks hampered progress and needs to be overcome.

e) Other complementarities

Under this heading, the complementarities between VSDF and PSD/FSD, and between education (both BE and VSD) and other thematic sectors were assessed.

As the FP VSD is integrated in the IED Expert Team, strong complementarities are observable at all levels, namely at the level of guiding documents, working approaches, the organisation, and regional and country programmes. The IC Strategy 2021-24 stipulates VSD to become even more instrumental to

contribute more directly to the creation of decent jobs. This further reinforces the need for complementarities with PSD.

In BE, sustained efforts to dialogue with other sectors/thematic issues led to increased synergies. The most tangible results can be found in protection, alongside promising dynamics in disaster risk reduction, health, civic education and gender.

However, less than 20% of the respondents in the survey feel that the ES contributed to increased synergies with other sectors. The key challenge is to continue strengthening synergies and provide technical support to SDC staff in non-education areas who wish to effectively use (part of) the education system or who need to strengthen the basic skills of their target groups to reach the goals of their sector. In order to maximise the use of limited resources, the proactive development of synergies also requires focusing on a limited number of sectors/thematic issues.

f) Strategic partnerships and policy dialogue - International

In this dimension of the ES, the differences between BE and VSD are substantial.

The FP Education manages a partner portfolio of more than CHF 20 million per year and attributes slightly less than half of its human resources to policy dialogue and the management of the partner portfolio.

In turn, the primary focus of the FP VSD is on the promotion of the dual system, but it has only a budget of approximately CHF 300'000 as contribution to the DCdVET, and it allocates about 10% of its human resources to the international policy dialogue¹.

In BE, the progress in the strategic positioning of SDC in the international aid architecture in education is a major achievement in the implementation of the ES. Results were achieved based on a more strategic steering of partnerships and increased participation in governing and technical bodies of organisations. The major challenge is to keep voice and influence despite the decision to invest less intensively in human resources.

In VSD, options for enhancing and strengthening SDC's participation and presence in regional and global policy dialogue should be explored, be it in coordination with the FP Education or with other entities in charge of VSD in the federal administration.

g) Strategic partnerships and policy dialogue – National

The dual system is a high-profile and internationally recognised Swiss brand in VSD. Those federal offices involved in international activities have created with IC-VPET a formal structure for coordination. The Swissness factor in BE is less obvious but some efforts have been made to identify the comparative advantages of Switzerland beyond VSD.

The potential to use the expertise of Swiss education stakeholders exists in both VSD and BE. In BE, the development of a platform for Swiss and partner country actors is being piloted with a well-positioned national agency. For both BE and VSD, the key challenge is to truly serve partner countries, with reasonable transaction costs.

h) Innovation

The EF was created as an instrument contributing to the ES implementation across domains in SDC (except Eastern Europe). It has a qualitative rationale (improve effectiveness of interventions through innovation and learning) and a quantitative rationale (expansion of education through a “catalytic effect”). Key findings show that the Education Fund (EF) contributed to the ES by stimulating and supporting innovation. Partly due to the COVID-19 crisis, almost all 15 projects include the use of ICTs (distance learning), which offers high potential for mutual learning. The hypothesis regarding the

¹ This concerns only the VSD part of the FP e+i. In PSD, the FP participates prominently in the international policy dialogue, e.g. in the DCED-Donor Committee for Enterprise Development.

“catalytic” effect of the EF cannot be confirmed and remains to be verified in the longer run. Current governance and procedures of the Education Fund are too heavy, and they are not aligned with the structure of SDC as decentralised organisation.

i) Roles and responsibilities within SDC for the implementation of ES

At the level of the directorate and of the senior management, the engagement to reach the 50% increase in commitments to education was unanimous and strong. The engagement in implementing the ES beyond quantitative scaling up varies between domains and divisions.

The host divisions are committed to their thematic function. However, they did not manage to overcome the difficulties of cooperation between the two focal points.

The focal points and their networks played a crucial role as drivers and catalysts for the implementation of the ES. However, the review found that, for various reasons, the two FP (and their networks) have different levels of ownership in the ES. This latter was higher on side of the FP and network Education, which took the ES as their major reference to structure all aspects of their work. The two focal points succeeded in developing their services and networks, and their clientele expresses generally a high satisfaction. The FP VSD is particularly appreciated for its tools and instruments, and the FP Education for its increased technical advice and its specific strengths in the international policy dialogue. Though they formally do not belong to the focal points, regional advisors are important stakeholders for strengthening the thematic competence of the networks. Also the substantial backstopping mandates with their networks of consultants were a decisive factor for the quality of the services of the focal points.

Overall, the implementation of the ES highly depends on human resources and specialised expertise. As long as staff working on thematic issues is subject to the general rotation system, maintaining their thematic competence remains a challenge for the institution..

j) Strategic orientations

The strategic orientations are very broad, and according to the survey, they had a limited direct effect on shaping the portfolio. At the operational level, there are many good practices which illustrate various dimensions of the strategic orientations. However, in the absence of a monitoring system, such evidence remains anecdotal, and the organisation lacks a strategic overview on the portfolio.

k) IC Strategy 2021-24

The IC Strategy 2021-24 confirms the importance of education, including BE and VSD at different levels and under various titles. The Federal Council formulated four objectives for the IC Strategy. At this top level, education is defined as basic service, confirming the focus of SDC on universal basic education for all and on strengthening respective systems (formal schooling and all alternative/equivalent provisions) as its core business. When the strategy describes decent jobs creation as a target, it defines VET as one of the key instruments with a focus on potential entrepreneurs and job creators. This requires a diversification of the VSD portfolio. Finally, the improvement of the economic and social perspectives of vulnerable groups (mentioned in diverse chapters) requires integrated approaches which combine BE, VSD and other labour market instruments.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

The recommendations are presented under the four main headings:

- a) Recommendations on the interplay between BE and VSD
- b) Recommendations related to BE
- c) Recommendations related to VSD
- d) Recommendations on structural and organisational issues

a) Recommendation on the interplay between BE and VSD

Recommendation 1: Take the beginning of the new IC Strategy 2021-24 as opportunity to relaunch the process to strengthen the interplay between BE and VSD

This process entails conceptual and structural work:

- The FP Education and VSD and their networks enter with external support a process to develop a common understanding of the interplay between BE and VSD. This comprises both the demarcation between the two (what they do separately in the framework of their respective core business), and the interplay (what they can do together). This conceptual framework results in a common understanding on the strategic and operational implications at the different levels of the organisation. A typology tool for the interplay between BE and VSD with add-ons for selected issues could be the tangible result of this process.
- The host divisions, FP Education and VSD and their networks define and communicate joint objectives, priorities and activities to promote, support and report on the implementation of the interplay.
- The host divisions and FP Education and VSD explore new organisational arrangements to ensure a fruitful collaboration between the FP and networks, allowing to respond to both their joint mission and their specific core business to implement the ES and the IC Strategy 2021-2024.

b) Recommendations related to BE

Recommendation 2: Ensure the institutionalisation of EiE/child protection, focus on synergies with selected sectors/thematic issues and increased attention to core pedagogical issues

- HA and SC: Elaborate a strategy to build on progress and ensure the institutionalisation of EiE/child protection taking into account: (i) in-house awareness raising, staff capacity building and knowledge management, (ii) technical advice to operations (with tools, hands-on advice, peer exchanges, etc.), (iii) active participation in international policy dialogue and in supporting the Geneva Global Hub for EiE, (iv) adequate human and financial resources.
- The FP Education: Promote synergies with a selection of key sectors/thematic issues taking into account the demand at field level (SCOs, programmes), the priorities of the IC Strategy 2021-24 (in particular climate change, health, migration) and increase attention to the “core business” of strengthening the effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes and learning outcomes.

Recommendation 3: Keep SDC’s position in international policy dialogue and continue developing access to specialised Swiss expertise

- The FP Education maintains SDC’s position in international policy dialogue through active participation and building on good practices (in particular the two-ways and mutually beneficial links between the international policy dialogue and the country operation levels).
- Identify key thematic issues in which SDC wants to be influential (relevant for field operations and policy dialogue) and examine the possibility to collaborate with “think tank” type of partners (or increase collaboration with “think tank” functions of existing partners such as IIEP, INEE, NORRAG) to build convincing cases based on data and evidence.
- Continue developing broker services (partnership with Movetia) for low-threshold access to specialised Swiss expertise (for partner countries, field offices and projects).

Recommendation 4: Build on assets, focus on selected priorities and on the services mostly appreciated in house.

- The FP maintains the balance and mutually reinforcing links between the four pillars of the FP work: Technical advice, international policy dialogue and partner portfolio, network.
- The FP (with the network) consolidates the technical advice to countries and strengthens the elaboration of tools to guide strategic decision and operational implementation. Capacities are increased through the involvement of external support.

c) Recommendations on the further development of VSD

Recommendation 5: Diversify the VSD portfolio under the IC Strategy 2021-24 with a dual focus on jobseekers from vulnerable groups and potential job creators and multipliers

- The focus on the improvement of the social and economic perspectives of vulnerable groups shall primarily be pursued under comprehensive approaches which integrate educational, vocational and labour market insertion components, services and instruments. This includes the further development of the interplay with BE.
- SDC further diversifies the bilateral VSD portfolio beyond the massive outreach to jobseekers from vulnerable groups to potential job creators and multipliers. This includes training offers at different qualification levels, including post-secondary and non-academic tertiary levels. In this type of training dual approaches are particularly promising.

Recommendation 6: The FP VSD continues to promote dual approaches through the DCdVET and explores options to scale-up SDC's participation in and contribution to the international policy dialogue in TVET

- National qualifications frameworks and competency-based approaches are international trends in VSD. At the level of the policy dialogue, the potential of the integration of such approaches and dual VET under a common roof might be of particular interest.
- Scaling-up the international policy dialogue might be done independently and/or in cooperation with the FP Education.
- At the national level, the diversification of the portfolio targeting potential job creators and multipliers opens new windows of opportunities for direct cooperation with Swiss stakeholders.

Recommendation 7: The FP VSD continues its strong focus on need-responsive technical advice and enhances its attention proactively to VSD systems development

- Beyond the continuation of its already strong focus on need-responsive technical advice, the FP VSD prioritises the strengthening of institutional learning and reflexion with a specific focus on VSD systems development and strengthening. It also reinforces knowledge management through the promotion of evidence-based data around key priority issues for field operations.
- In cooperation with HA, the FP VSD further develops the thematic knowledge of the FP VSD and the VSD network regarding improved livelihood in crisis affected contexts.

d) Recommendations on structural and organisational issues

Recommendation 8: Consider a second phase on the basis of the consolidated results of phase 1, provided governance and procedures can be streamlined.

- Consolidate the results of phase 1 regarding the “catalytic” potential and the implementation of the learning concept.
- Streamline governance and procedures.
- Consider attaching a thematic focus to the EF in order to encourage innovations that support key strategic areas of the ES and new IC Strategy 2021-2024 and those that go beyond technology.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen thematic expertise both for the positioning in the international policy dialogue and for quality development in field operations

- While strengthening the thematic expertise, specific attention should be paid to increased integration between BE and VSD, the institutionalisation of protection/EiE, and the diversification of the VSD portfolio.
- Allocate additional resources and identify other solutions (such as mixed profiles and job description) to further implement the institutionalisation of protection/EiE and cross-sectoral integration of BE/VSD.
- Explore options on how to develop, retain and rotate thematic expertise within thematic careers/domains.

Recommendation 10: Retain the instrument of the Steuerungsberichte under the IC Strategy 2021-24, but shift its focus from the 50% increase to other selected issues

Possible issues for monitoring at the level of directorate include

- Progress in strengthening complementarities between BE and VSD
- Enhanced education and protection support in fragile and crisis-affected contexts
- Priority issues in strategic partnerships and the international policy dialogue
- Progress in diversifying the bilateral VSD portfolio

1 Introduction

The Federal Dispatch 2017-20 put a strong emphasis on education and set a target to increase the commitments to this thematic area by 50% compared to the 2013-2016 period. The dispatch defined education as Basic Education (BE) – including alternative education – and Vocational Skills Development (VSD)². In 2017, SDC launched a new Education Strategy (ES) which serves the implementation of the goals in the dispatch, but which has a time horizon beyond that. It defines several strategic elements, namely: (1) SDC's priorities, (2) strategic orientations, (3) approaches, (4) implementation modalities, (5) possible lines of interventions and (6) fields of observation (see Annex).

After three years of implementation, and before the new IC Strategy 2021-24 takes effect, SDC commissioned an external review of the education strategy to a team of four independent consultants.

The review seeks to:

- (1) Capture whether measures that were decided in the ES have been implemented and whether SDC is heading towards its objectives.
- (2) Analyse the processes, the factors facilitating and hindering progress towards the set objectives.
- (3) Identify the priorities to be addressed in the coming years regarding the implementation of the ES in the light of the new dispatch 2021-24.

The review is not an external evaluation of the ES itself but rather takes stock of main elements of its implementation ("Standortbestimmung"). Clients and main addressees of the review are the focal points Education and Employment and Income (hereafter: FP Education and FP VSD³) and their host divisions West Africa and Latin America. Major milestones of the review included:

- Kick-off meeting at SDC on July 7, 2020,
- Inception Report, dated October 5, 2020 / Revision dated November 4, 2020
- Draft Report on the Education Fund, dated January 11, 2021,
- Preliminary Summary Report, dated March 11, 2021.
- Virtual sounding board meeting on April 19, 2021.
- Consolidated feedback by the DAO and ALAK divisions on the draft report, dated April 30, 2021.

The report is structured as follows: The methodological approach is outlined in chapter 2. Chapter 3 captures the general perception and use of the ES by the different stakeholder groups. Chapter 4 to 12 discuss the review findings regarding different aspects of the ES and along the review questions in the inception report. The conclusions and recommendations of the review team are presented in chapter 13. Supplementary information and data are included in the Annexes.

2 The methodology

As suggested in the inception report, the approach to the review included these work steps:

- SAP data analysis
- Survey
- Individual and group interviews
- Document analysis
- Case studies

² In line with the strategy, we use the terms BE and VSD to differentiate between the two sub-sectors within SDC. In this sense, the term BE goes beyond basic education in the narrow sense and includes life-long learning.

³ The terms FP Education and FP VSD are used in this report, because the two units are addressed like this in the ES ("focal points BE/VSD"). The terms refer to the teams of the respective thematic units, and they are not in line with the formal designations and terminology. The VSD team is not a separate unit, but belongs to thematic unit E+I.

2.1. Integrated review approach

The ES is a joint strategy for BE and VSD, whereas the two thematic units are institutionally separated. Accordingly, the review team was staffed with two consultants with BE background, and two consultants with VSD background. The team lead was a co-lead between a BE and a VSD consultant. For selected interviews, case studies and document analysis, there was a division of labour along BE and VSD demarcations, whereas interviews at the management level and with the focal points were conducted jointly. The review team made substantial efforts not to report separately on BE and VSD and the respective developments, but to develop an integrated perception of the implementation of the ES and the resulting conclusions and recommendations. At times, this was a challenging and time-consuming process but worthwhile.

Because of the differences between the two sub-sectors BE and VSD on various dimensions (stage of development, understanding of the role of the FP, bilateral and multilateral portfolio, working approach, priorities, etc.) not all chapters can be equally balanced. This holds in particular true for the two issues on education in fragile and emergency contexts, and on the international policy dialogue, where the focus is more on BE. However, at the level of the decisive issues, and in the conclusions and recommendations the review team was careful to maintain the balance between the two sub-sectors.

2.2. SAP data analysis

An analysis of SAP data⁴ provided by SDC was carried out to assess the volume and characteristics of the overall education portfolio. At the time of the review, SAP data was available for the years from 2014 to 2019, enabling a comparative view of the three years prior to the launch of the strategy (2014 to 2016) to the consecutive three-year period 2017 to 2019. Since the period covered by this review saw an institutional change in SAP codes, the SAP codes for both dispatch periods were taken into consideration.

The SAP data analysis follows the SAP Manual.⁵ Projects that include at least one of the following BE and VSD SAP codes amongst the three priority thematic areas⁶ were considered:

BE	12725 Formal basic education;
	12726 Non-formal basic education;
	12727 Education Policy;
	12730 Tertiary education;
	20001 Education policy and administrative management;
	20002 Education facilities and training;
	20003 Teacher training;
	20004 Primary education;
	20005 Basic life skills for youth and adults;
	20006 Secondary education;
	20007 Higher education;
VSD	20092 School feeding;
	12728 Vocational training (till 2016);
	12729 Teacher training sec. educ.;
	20008 Vocational training;
	20009 Advanced technical and managerial training.

⁴ The SAP database is the most important source for financial, thematic and geographic characteristics of the SDC portfolio used for internal management and external reporting. This analysis is strictly limited to the scope and quality of data available in the SAP-based database that was shared with the Consultant team by SDC's Statistics section.

⁵ Manual für die SAP-Merkmale; Version vom 29.12.2017.

⁶ Each SAP code refers to one specific thematic area. Based on a list of SAP codes, each SDC project is identified by a first, a second and a third priority thematic area.

Several observations need to be made about this assessment:

- The analysis combines bi- and multilateral portfolios as no clear distinction is made in SAP data and manually disaggregating data entries would have been too time-consuming and approximate at best.
- Results are reported by spending rather than by number of projects.
- Due to the structure of the SAP database and the nature of the specific SAP data set the consultants were provided with by SDC for this analysis, the reported spending volumes are slightly overestimated for education according to SDC's Statistics department as the data set did not strictly follow the sectoral priority allocation method. It is important to keep this in mind with regards to figures reported in this report.
- With regards to the 50% increase on **commitment**, it is noteworthy that it refers to two **four**-year periods i.e. entire 2013-2016 Dispatch period vs. the 2017-2020 period; whereas the data analysis in this report focuses on actual **spending** in two **three**-year periods: 2014-2016 vs. 2017-2019. It needs to be considered that internal data from the *Steuerungsbericht* refer to commitments and follow a different methodology. It is important to note that **the two data sets cannot be compared**.

2.3. Survey

The online survey was carried out in December 2020. The FP Education and the FP VSD sent an invitation to all members of the education and VSD networks, as well as to SDC staff at headquarters and in the field. In addition, the Réseau Suisse Education et Coopération Internationale (RECI) and the Swiss Forum for Skills Development and International Cooperation (FoBBIZ) informed their members about the review and motivated to take part in the survey. The overall number of invitees and therefore the response rate is not known because the lists overlap.

There are 111 responses, half of which were from SDC staff and the other half from external stakeholders. The responses from SDC are evenly distributed between National Programme Officers (NPO), international staff in the field, and staff at headquarters. Overall, all five main categories used for the analysis are well covered (see Table 1). Stakeholders familiar with the strategy were probably more likely to participate. Hence, the statements regarding the importance and effects of the strategy could be somewhat overestimated.

There are many respondents with a VSD and Private Sector Development (PSD) focus. BE comes third, whereas as other foci are scattered throughout SDC's thematic areas (see full distribution in the Annex). Hence, the overall results of the survey are more representative of the views of participants with a VSD background. Therefore, every question was assessed separately for participants with a BE and VSD focus, and for SDC participants working in the field and at headquarters, respectively. Where there were noticeable differences between these groups of participants, they are indicated in the text.⁷ Note: the group of headquarter participants contains a high number of participants working on PSD and Financial Sector Development (FSD) topics. This should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

⁷ The group of respondents working on both BE and VSD topics were included in the BE assessment as well as in the VSD assessment. Were this group to be left away, the differences are likely to be more pronounced than they already are. Participants with a focus on Education in Emergencies (EIE) were included in the BE group.

Table 1: Role and thematic focus of survey participants

Role	Participants	Participants with BE focus (but not VSD)	Participants with VSD focus (but not BE)	Participants with BE and VSD focus
SDC National staff (field offices)	23	3	10	5
SDC International staff (field offices)	18	4	6	5
SDC headquarter	19	3	6	2
Implementer	26	-	-	-
Consultant	17	-	-	-
Other	8	-	-	-

Note: Only SDC participants were asked about their thematic focus. There are 16 thematic areas altogether, only BE (incl. EIE) and VSD are shown above. The full distribution is shown in the Annex. Several thematic areas could be indicated.

In regard to the geographical distribution, there is a similar number of participants who indicate they are working in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, or on projects implemented in these regions. Participants who focus on BE topics have a strong presence in Africa, reflecting the allocation of BE projects across the regions (see Annex).

Of the 60 SDC participants, the vast majority work for the South Cooperation Department. There are only scattered responses from other departments. The 17 consultants who took part in the survey cover the complete project cycles from project design, backstopping, review and evaluations, development of tools and instruments, and strategic development.

2.4. Group and individual interviews

The inception report was based on the assumption of 3-4 focus group meetings and on 24-32 interviews with internal and external stakeholders. Because of the COVID-19 crisis, physical focus group meetings were impossible after the kick-off meeting. This was replaced by interviews, partly in groups. Except for the case studies in VSD, the interviews were conducted by the two lead consultants Fabienne Lagier (FL) and Matthias Jäger (MJ). In individual interviews, FL focused more on internal and external BE stakeholders, including the strategic partners, and MJ on VSD stakeholders. Interviews with senior management staff and with the thematic teams Education and VSD were conducted jointly by FL and MJ. Beyond the proposal in the inception report, the interview list suggested by SDC comprised a total of 61 interviews, out of which 29 BE, 16 VSD, and 16 joint BE/VSD. Ultimately the team conducted more than 70 interviews, out of which 26 jointly by FL and MJ.

2.5. Document review

An extensive document review was made, including institutional policies and strategies; regional and country programmes; evaluations; credit proposals from all the domains; key documents produced by focal points (thematic documents, portfolio analysis, tools, activity planning and reports, communication leaflets and factsheets, etc.), webinar recording; key documents of partners (Swiss and international)

2.6. Case studies

As part of the review, seven projects were selected as case studies. These studies were to explore and illustrate how selected aspects of the ES were implemented, namely the interplay between BE and VSD and between VSD and PSD, education in fragile contexts, inter-sectoriality, transition to work and systems

development. The case studies were selected by the FP Education and the FP VSD. For each of the case studies, an interview was conducted with the responsible person(s) at the respective Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO). Interviews were focused on the selected aspects explored in relation to the ES.

The projects portrayed in the case studies are:

- Afghanistan Quality Learning (AQL) project, Afghanistan
- Education et Formation des Populations Pastorales en zones Transfrontalières (PREPP)
- Enhanced Skills for Sustainable and Rewarding Employment (ENSSURE) and National Vocational Qualifications System Project (NVQS), Nepal
- Enhancing youth employment (EYE) project, Kosovo
- Opportunities for Youth Employment – Scaling-up youth employment in agriculture (OYE), Southern Africa project, Zambia and Zimbabwe
- Projet de renforcement d'un environnement sûr et protecteur pour l'accès à l'éducation et aux actes d'état civil dans la région de Mopti et Tombouctou (NRC) et Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation (PADE), Mali.
- Roll-out of Safe and Child-Friendly School Construction Guidelines (SCSCG), Myanmar

Short “spotlights” are included in the text to summarise the learnings from these case studies. The full descriptions are included in the Annex.

2.7. Structure of the report

The revised inception report, dated November 4, 2021, translated the TOR into fourteen review questions. Their sequence followed the logic of the chapter on implementation modalities of the ES, and it added observations on the strategic orientations, and specific reflections regarding the implication of the new International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024 on the implementation of the ES. As proposed in the inception report, the implementation modalities are given priority as structuring element for the review and this report, because they represent the backbone of the implementation of the ES. They are the main drivers for changes in portfolio, financial commitment, geographical expansion, in-house cooperation patterns and strategic partnership arrangements. Accordingly, the chapters 4 to 12 include increased financial commitment (chapter 4), education in fragile and emergency contexts (chapter 5), complementarity BE-VSD (chapter 6), complementarity with private sector development (PSD) / financial sector development (FSD) as well as with other sectors (chapter 7), strategic partnerships and policy dialogue (chapter 8), support to innovation and evidence-based learning (chapter 9), roles and responsibilities within SDC (chapter 10), the strategic orientations (chapter 11) and the alignment with Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-24 (chapter 12). Chapter 13 then comprises the conclusions and recommendations of the review team.

2.8. Terminology

In this report we refer to the team of the focal point education and to the VSD team in the focal point e+i as FP Education and FP VSD. Hence, the terms FP Education and FP VSD refer to a team and not to a single individual (the person officially assigned who has the official function and title Focal Point). The review team is well aware, that these terms are not in line with the official and formal terminology. This is for easy reading, and because also the ES refers the two thematic FP Education and VSD.

The terms BE (Basic Education) and VSD (Vocational Skills Development) are used to differentiate between the two sub-sectors within SDC. The term BE goes beyond basic education as levels of the formal education system (primary and lower secondary) and also includes alternative basic education provision for children and youth and life-long learning provision for youth and adults (e.g. literacy).

3 General perception of the Education Strategy

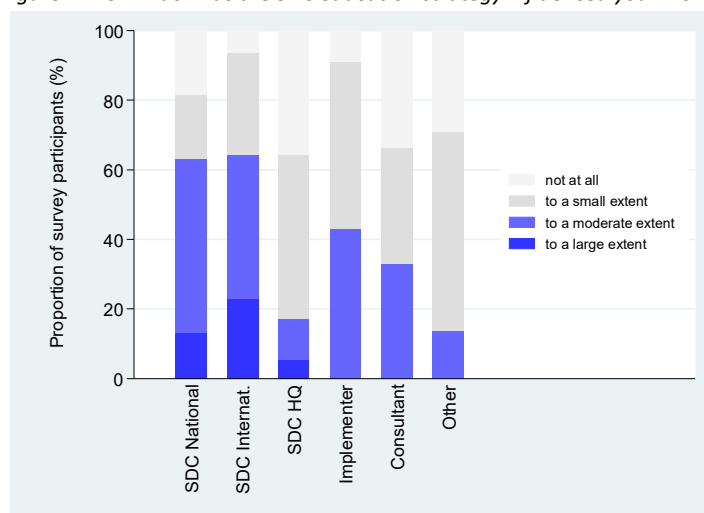
This chapter seeks to capture the general perception and use of the ES document by the different stakeholders inside and outside SDC. It is based on the survey and on interviews.

Key findings

- Despite considerable differences in the overall use and perception of the ES across the organisation, there is a consensus that the ES, together with the dispatch 2017-2020 and their target to increase commitments to education by 50%, were instrumental to make education a prominent sector within SDC.
- The ES was comparatively more relevant for staff dealing with BE than VSD; and for field staff more than for headquarters staff.
- The ES served mostly for inspiration and conceptual clarity and is often considered too broad to orient decision making and implementation.

3.1. Effect of the ES and the quantitative target in the dispatch 2017-20

Figure 1: How much has the SDC education strategy influenced your work?



Note: 101 responses

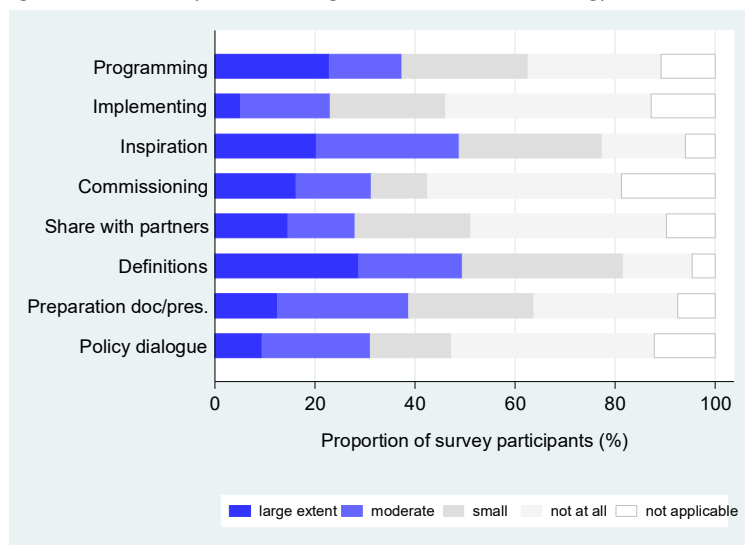
Despite considerable differences in the overall use and perception of the ES across the organisation, there is a consensus that the ES, together with the dispatch 2017-2020 and its target to increase financial commitments to education by 50%, was instrumental and a decisive factor to make education a prominent issue in the organisation and to trigger changes. This is confirmed by the findings of both the survey and interviews.

3.2. Relevance of the ES for the work

Asked about how much the ES has influenced their work, about 40% of the participants in the survey feel that the ES has influenced their work in a noticeable way (large or moderate responses). There are considerable differences between the stakeholder groups (Figure 1). The strategy has been comparatively more important for SDC staff than for implementers, consultants and others. Among SDC staff, the ES has been more influential for field staff than for HQ staff, and slightly more important for international than for national staff. When disaggregated, the data shows a much higher influence of the ES for survey participants with a BE background (76% of them report a moderate or large extent) than for participants with a VSD background (44%). The smallest effect can be observed for respondents with a VSD background at headquarters.

3.3. Use of the ES and effect on programming and shaping the portfolio

Figure 2: How have you been using the SDC Education Strategy?

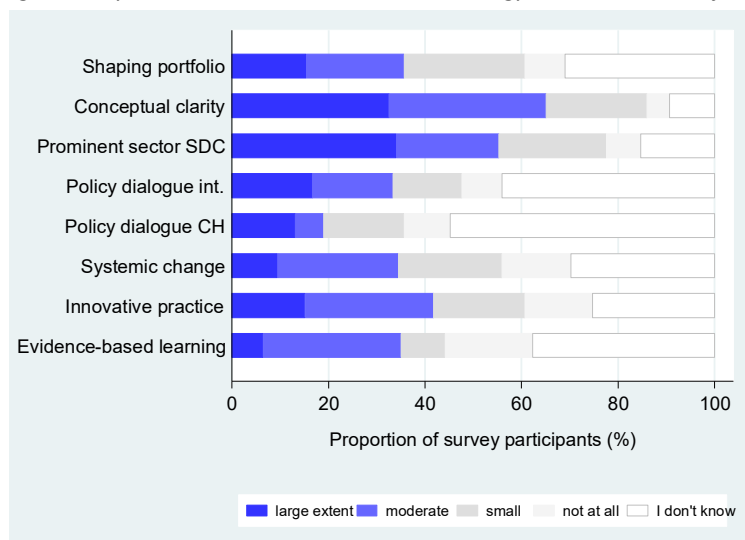


Note: 89 responses.

As regards the purpose of a strategy, it could be expected that it has primarily an effect on programming decisions and on shaping the portfolio. Asked about how the ES has been used, this expectation was not confirmed. The answers ranking first focus on the ES as a source for inspiration and as reference document regarding terminology and definitions. With only about 30% of the respondents using the strategy to large, or moderate extent for programming decisions, this answer only ranked fourth (Figure 2). However, the disaggregation of data shows significant differences between BE and VSD, and between HQ and the field. In BE 70% of respondents use the ES for programming decisions against 48% in VSD, and 56% in the field against 8% in headquarters. Respondents with a BE focus generally consider all types of utilisation of the ES more relevant than those with a VSD focus. Almost 70% of respondents with a VSD background see the ES as a reference document and use it for definitions (see Annex).

Similarly, a thematic strategy could be expected to have by default a primary effect on shaping the portfolio. Asked about the effect of the ES on different changes, this expectation was not confirmed. Only some 30% of the participants believe that the ES had a major or at least moderate effect on shaping the portfolio. However, disaggregated data show again substantial differences between BE and VSD. While for 67% of the respondents with BE background the ES contributed to a large extent or at least moderately to shaping the portfolio, in VSD this was only the case for 41%. For a majority of respondents, the ES has primarily contributed to conceptual clarity, and it was instrumental to make education a prominent issue within SDC. Smaller groups of respondents see effects of the ES in other areas, such as boosting

Figure 3: In your view, has the SDC Education Strategy contributed to the following (SDC-wide)?



Note: 84 responses

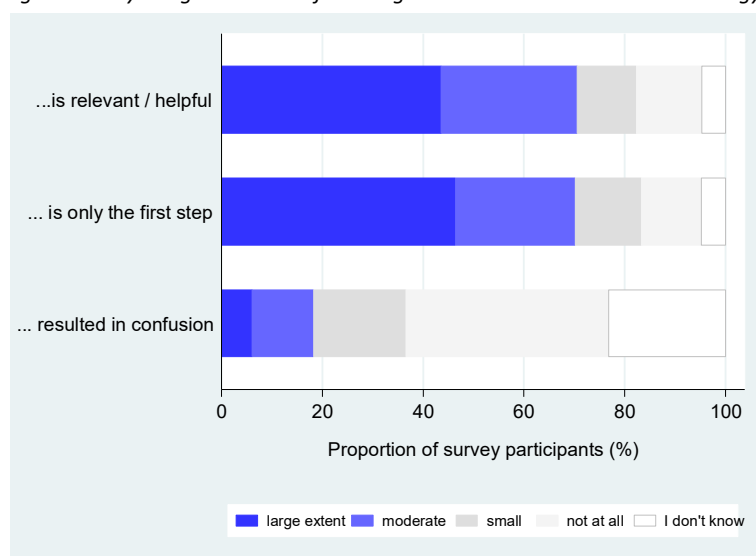
innovation. For this question, the differences between BE and VSD participants are smaller. For SDC headquarter staff, the effect on conceptual clarity dominates all other aspects.

3.4. Differences between BE and VSD

Beyond the differences on selected issues as highlighted above, also the overall perception and appreciation of the ES is radically different, particularly between the two FP Education and the FP VSD. This is mainly due to the fact that the strategy met the two units, their networks, and the related portfolios at completely different stages of development. While the FP Education took the ES as opportunity to expand BE beyond West Africa, to reshape and strengthen its work in international policy dialogue and to develop a new understanding of BE for the organisation, the FP VSD struggled with scarce resources to keep up the pace with the – since 2015 – rapidly growing VSD portfolio. This is being dealt with in more details below.

Despite all the differences, a joint strategy for BE and VSD is nevertheless perceived to be helpful. This was confirmed both by the survey and many interviews. At the same time, a majority of participants in the survey consider the strategy only as a first step, and they see the need for the complementarity between BE and VSD to be further developed. However, a sizeable minority (18%) believes that the strategy has rather added to confusion than to clarity. This applies to 0% of respondents with BE background as compared to 29% with VSD background, 31% in headquarters, 29% of consultants and 21% in the field.

Figure 4: Do you agree with the following statements? The Education Strategy



Note: 82 responses

Individual observations and comments on the strategy itself meander with all shades of grey between the two extremes that (a) the joint strategy and a more holistic perception of education was absolutely the right thing to do for SDC and the ES is an excellent document to boost the education sector and guide its development, and (b) the strategy is long, headquarter-driven, too broad, not sufficiently practical and guiding the work and, thus, not enough responding to the needs of the field.

4 Increased financial commitment and evolution of the portfolio

This chapter reports on the increase in commitments (comparing the 2013-2016 and 2017-2020 Dispatch periods) and on the increase in spending (comparing the 2014-2016 and 2017-2019 periods).

Key findings

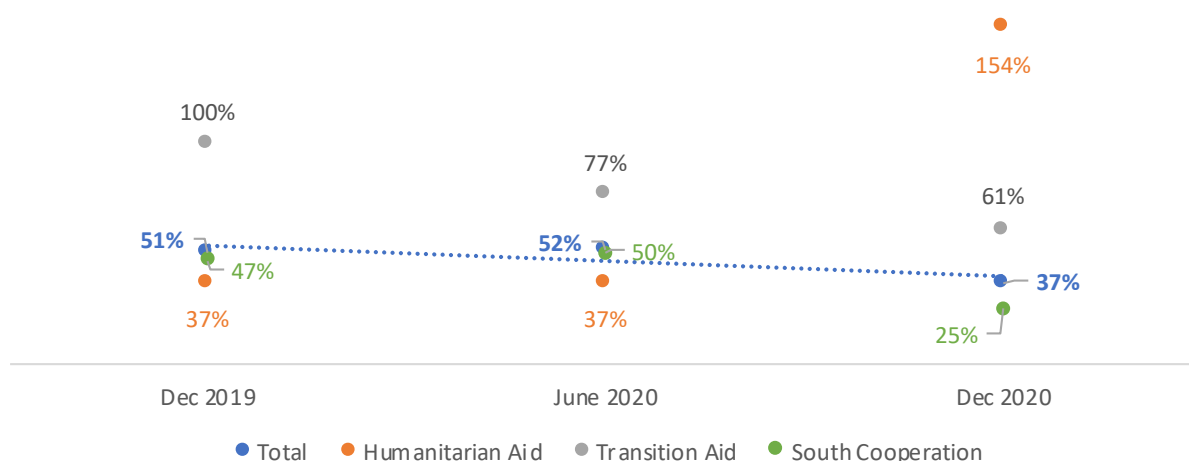
- The *Steuerungsbericht* of June 2020 reported the volume of commitments planned in the 2017-2020 framework credit to have reached the target value of 50%. However, the one of December 2020 reported the increase had fallen from 52% to 37% as not all planned commitments in BE and VSD in the 2017-2020 framework credit were actually implemented
- Regarding actual spending, based on SAP data analysis, the review found an overall 33% increase when comparing the 2014-2016 period to the 2017-2019.
- Irrespective of the precise figures on the rate of achievement, the target of increasing commitment to education by 50% is unanimously perceived as having been instrumental in making education a priority theme for SDC.

4.1. Steuerungsberichte

The focus on the increased financial commitment during the dispatch period 2017-2020 was closely monitored by the directorate through half-yearly *Steuerungsberichte*. The *Steuerungsbericht* of June 2020 reported the volume of commitments planned in the 2017-2020 framework credit to have reached the target value of 50% (an overall increase in commitments of 52% was reported: 50% for South Cooperation, 77% for Transition aid and cooperation with Eastern Europe, 38% for Humanitarian Aid). The *Steuerungsbericht* of December 2020 reported the increase had fallen from 52% to 37% as not all planned commitments in BE and VSD in the 2017-2020 framework credit were actually implemented. The results show that commitments in Humanitarian Aid had spiralled up to 154%, while commitments for Transition Aid went down slightly to 61% and those for South Cooperation went down by half to 25%. This evolution is to be seen against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted field operations, as well as the fact that some of the commitments under South Cooperation were shifted to the next framework credit 2021-2024. Commitments relating to BE made up 68%, and those related to VSD accounted for 32%.

The figure below shows the evolution of commitments over the last three *Steuerungsberichte*.

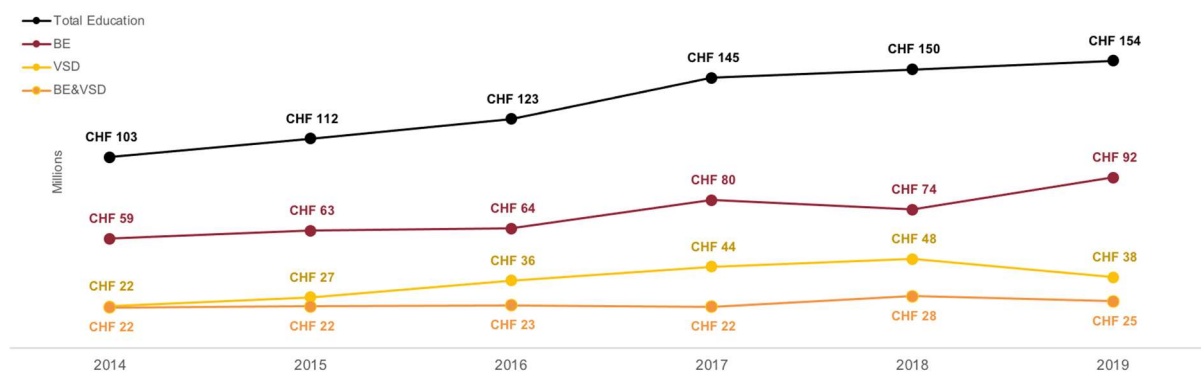
Figure 5: Evolution of commitments



4.2. SAP data analysis

The detailed analysis of the SAP data provided by SDC through the review shows that **overall annual spending** in education has seen a steady increase from CHF 103mio in 2014 to CHF 154mio in 2019 with variations across the BE, VSD, BE-VSD portfolio over the years.

Figure 6: Evolution of annual spending

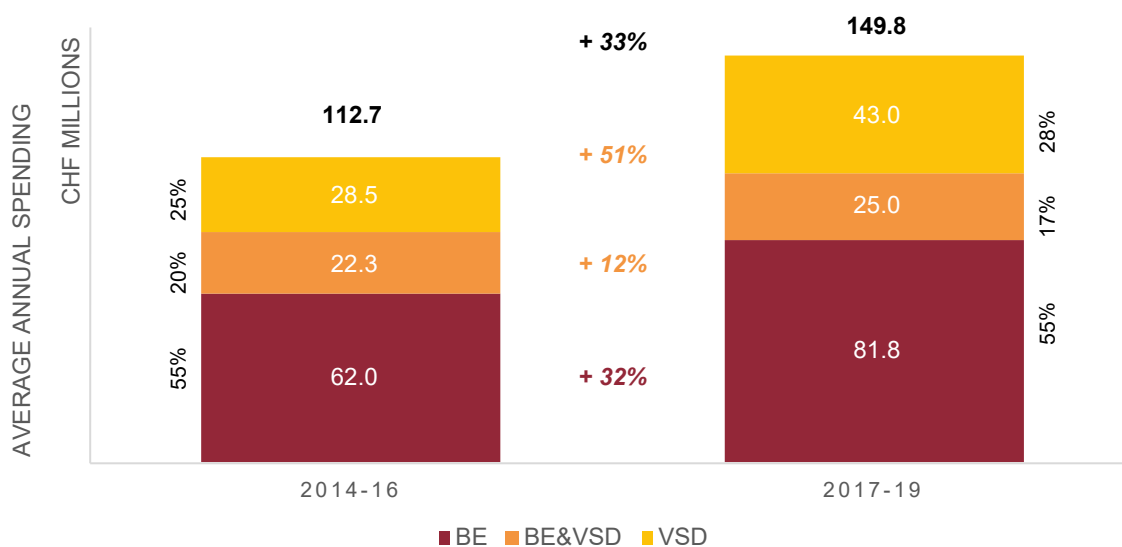


The total volume of the overall education portfolio 2017-2019 (in terms of spending over a three-year period) increased by 33% compared to the 2014-2016 period: from CHF 338mio to CHF 449mio.⁸ This is a considerable achievement.

Looking at BE and VSD portfolios in more detail, it results that the biggest increase occurred within the VSD portfolio (+51%). The BE portfolio increased by 32%. Spending on joint BE-VSD projects increased by only 12% compared to the previous period. This means that while the share of BE spending remained constant at 55%, the share of VSD spending increased (25% to 28%) and the share of joint BE-VSD spending actually decreased (20% to 17%) despite the effort of the ES to encourage linkages between the two portfolios.

The following graphs depict average annual spending for the two periods.

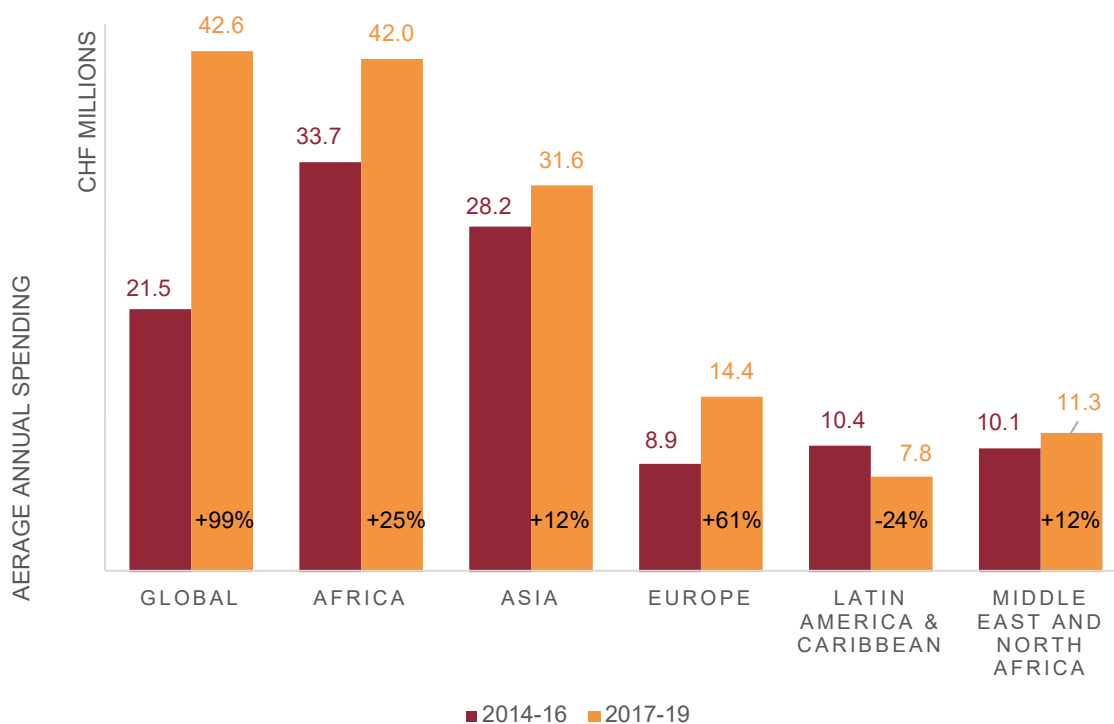
Figure 7: Changes in annual spending – thematic areas



Looking at geographical regions, it emerges that spending in the overall education portfolio increased across all regions, with the exception of Latin America and the Caribbean. The biggest increase occurred in spending on global projects, which nearly doubled and increased its share of the overall portfolio from 19% to 28%.

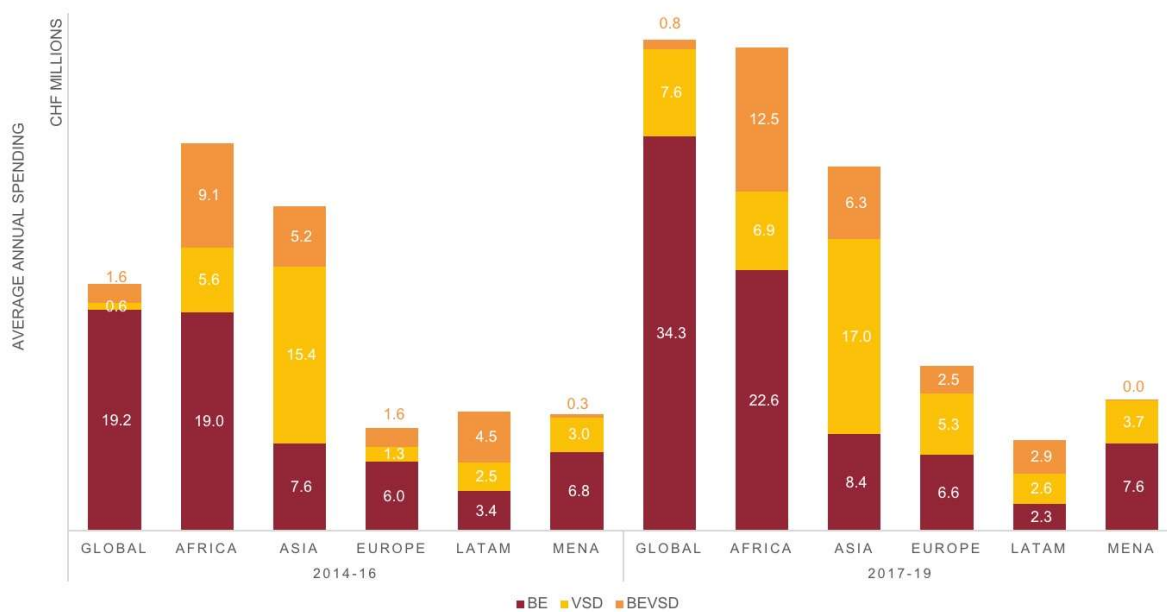
⁸ Data is strictly limited to SAP database provided by SDC – see methodology section.

Figure 8: Changes in annual spending – geographical regions



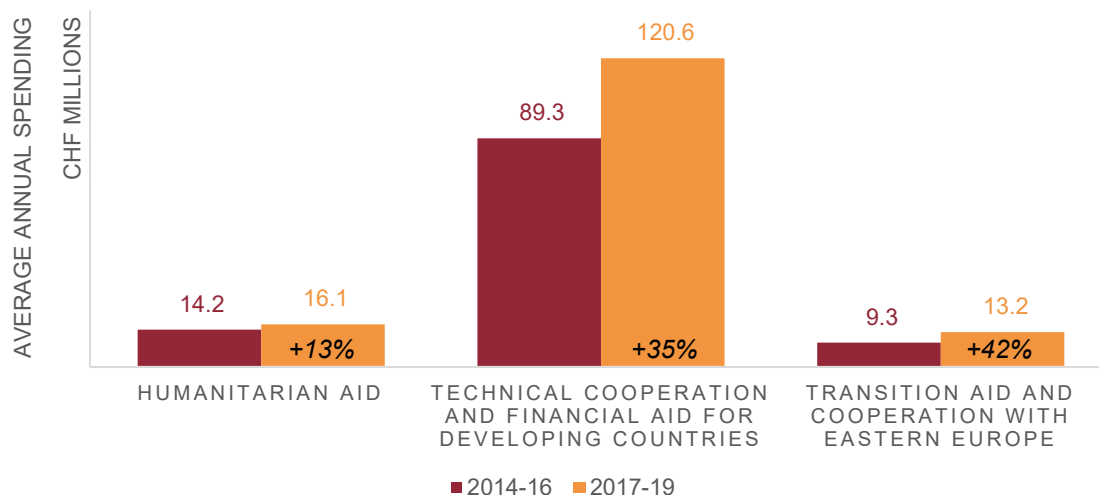
The following chart shows average annual spending broken down by BE, VSD and BE & VSD across the regions.

Figure 9: Changes in annual spending – geographical region and thematic areas



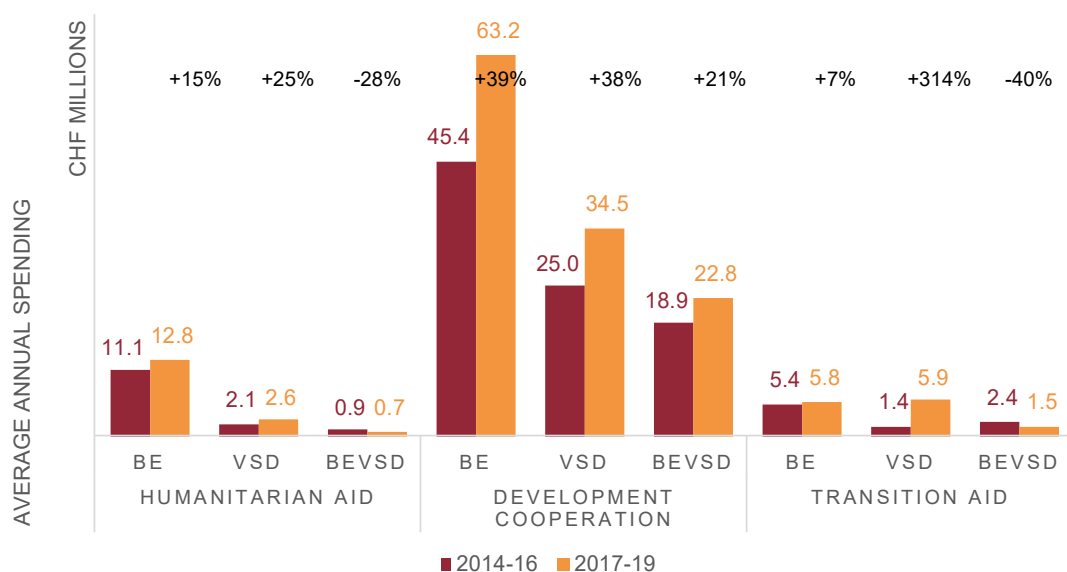
Spending increased in all three framework credits (Humanitarian aid; Technical cooperation and financial aid for developing countries; Transition aid and cooperation with Eastern Europe) for the overall education portfolio between the two periods, with the distribution between the three framework credits remaining quite stable.

Figure 10: Changes in annual spending – framework credits



While BE contributed to the increase in humanitarian aid spending – at least in absolute terms – VSD did so on transition aid; both contributed equally to the increase in development cooperation; joint BE & VSD spending increased only in development cooperation, as the detailed break down below shows.

Figure 11: Changes in annual spending – framework credits and thematic areas



5 Education in fragile and emergency contexts

Key findings

- Education in Emergencies (EiE) and the strengthening of the humanitarian and development nexus are among the most significant progress in the implementation of the ES.
- Progress concerns all levels: policies and strategies, international policy dialogue and field level.
- However, EiE is insufficiently institutionalised, and no strategy is in place to foster institutionalisation.
- The thematic work on the contribution of VSD to livelihood in crisis affected contexts is at a more initial stage and should be further pursued.

Addressing “education and protection needs of children and youth during emergencies and crises”⁹ is one of the five priorities of the ES. “Enhancing inclusive and conflict-sensitive quality education in fragile and crisis contexts”¹⁰ is also one of the four lines of intervention of the strategic orientation “Inclusion and Equity”, which sets a focus on integrated EiE/child protection. Finally, the implementation modalities of the ES stipulate that SDC “will step up its education support in fragile and crisis-affected contexts and will reinforce “the nexus of development/transition and humanitarian aid”¹¹. In the planning of the implementation of the ES, Humanitarian Aid was identified as having high potential for BE (in relation to protection issues) and a low potential for VSD regarding increased commitments. In terms of content, the new focus (regarding crisis and humanitarian contexts) were set on protection/EiE for BE and on livelihood for VSD¹².

On the side of protection/EiE, this issue has been given strong attention since 2017 and changes can be observed at all levels: policy, strategy, international dialogue and operations. Hence, this chapter focuses on this dimension (protection/EiE). The work in the area of livelihood, which was chosen as a “new focus” for VSD to implement the ES in crisis affected contexts, is at a more initial phase¹³. Recently (April 2021), the FP e+i has conducted two webinars on IED-Inclusive Economic Development in fragile contexts. In the consultant’s view, this work should be further pursued.

Protection/EiE

Policies and strategies: Education in emergencies has been formally integrated in protection, one of the four priority themes of humanitarian aid. Protection has also become a key element of the IC Strategy 2021-24: “Saving lives, ensuring quality basic services, especially in relation to education and healthcare, and diminishing the causes of forced displacement and irregular migration (human development)”¹⁴. The humanitarian aid domain is currently finalising its “Operational Concept Protection (including gender-based violence, education in emergencies and migration/durable solutions)”, which defines its understanding of the centrality of protection, the legal and strategic frameworks and the operational priorities/lines of intervention to, among others, engage with duty bearers at bilateral and multilateral levels, mainstream protection and ensure quality programming.

International policy dialogue: SDC engaged actively in key initiatives, namely the creation and launch (in January 2021) of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. This results from a pledge made by Switzerland at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, co-signed by nine organisations¹⁵. This hub offers the opportunity to bring EiE to scale by creating dialogue and synergies among organisations, making the best use of International Geneva as a humanitarian hub. Another result in that same direction is the transfer of

⁹ SDC (2017), The SDC’s Education Strategy, 5

¹⁰ SDC (2017), The SDC’s Education Strategy, 27

¹¹ SDC (2017), The SDC’s Education Strategy, 32-33

¹² SDC (2017), Interne Kommunikation zur Umsetzung der Bildungsstrategie und der Botschaft 2017-2020

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ SDC (2020), Switzerland’s International Cooperation Strategy 2021-24, 43

¹⁵ Education cannot Wait, Global Education Cluster, Graduate Institute Geneva, International Committee of the Red Cross, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, UNICEF, University of Geneva, International Organisation for Migration, UNESCO, UNHCR

a part of the ECW fund secretariat from New York to Geneva. With those initiatives and its previously established partnerships with leading organisations in this field, SDC has actively contributed to the strengthening of an ecosystem around EiE in Geneva and it should be able to benefit from it. Various interviewees (in FDFA, internal external and stakeholders) highly appreciate SDC for its active role in this process.

Still at the international level, the support to the global ECW fund, started in 2019, is a direct consequence of the implementation of the ES. It is also an opportunity for SDC to contribute to the policy dialogue on the nexus between humanitarian aid and development in the field of education. The fact that SDC is represented jointly by both heads of SDC Humanitarian Aid and South Cooperation in the high-level steering committee is a sign of engagement in that direction. SDC also supports other strategic partners with strong involvement and capacities in this field, in particular the INEE, NORRAG and IIEP (see chapter below on strategic partnerships).

On a somehow different level (more related to capacity building), the Humanitarian Aid Department (with the support of the FP Education team), contributed to improve the quality of humanitarian education in a joint process with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Save the Children. The project “Humanity” and several post-graduate courses (CAS, DAS, MAS) in *Pedagogical Approaches in Education for Humanitarian Principles and Values* have been created since 2018, within the University of Teacher Education Zug (and other universities) for humanitarian aid and education professionals across the world. According to the HA domain, the ES and the services of FP Education were key supporting factors in this process.

Operational level: As no monitoring system is in place, appreciating SDC’s progress in supporting EiE at the field level cannot be done systematically and relies on case studies (Afghanistan and Mali) and interviews. The analysis of expenditures based on SAP data revealed the average annual spending in education under the HA framework credit has increased by 13% between the two periods compared (from CHF 14.2 to 16.1mio). Amongst the HA portfolio, BE has the biggest share and has increased the average annual spending volume from CHF 11.1 to 12.8 mio. As the number of projects does not seem to have increased in line with spending across the two periods, this suggests that individual projects receive relatively more financial attention. A mapping of EiE and child protection, completed in December 2020, identified 48 projects with a concentration in West Africa (29), Afghanistan and the MENA region. The support to EiE tends to be stronger in countries where education is one of the three domains supported by SDC. The mapping exercise also showed a need to better integrate EiE and child protection and link them to gender-based violence (as expressed in the Swiss Pledge at the Global Refugee Forum, the Operational Concept Protection and the IC Strategy 21-24). The necessity to further improve the work in EiE at field level was acknowledged by all interviewees concerned with this issue.

On the development side and regarding the nexus: The contexts where SDC operates in education are marked by growing fragility and conflicts. This is especially the case in West Africa, the MENA region and Afghanistan, where the engagement in basic education is strong. In Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, all programmes evolved to cope with the deterioration of the security situation. The arrival of more humanitarian actors was (and still is) a challenge in terms of coordination and alignment to national policies. The nexus issue has come to the forefront in several countries including Mali and Afghanistan.

In these contexts, despite difficulties, SDC could build on various strengths related to its prior engagement in BE and the way it operates, especially in West Africa: long-standing expertise in alternative education provisions (for out-of-school and drop out children and youth) and their link to the education system, adaptation of schools to local situations, experience in working with communities and local authorities (decentralisation, school governance), presence in the field, contribution to policy dialogue and system strengthening from the perspective of this field expertise.

Spotlight “Education in conflict affected situation in Mali” (*topic education in emergencies, nexus development-humanitarian. aid*)

For the last decade, Mali has been facing a complex crisis (armed and inter-community conflicts, terrorist attacks, banditry, etc.), which deeply affects the population and the capacity of the State to provide basic social services, especially in Central and Northern Mali. The education system is severely hit. More than 15% of all fundamental schools have been closed (previous to the COVID-19 pandemic) including for being, as symbol of the State, a direct target of radical groups. SDC responded to the crisis through (i) *new (humanitarian aid) interventions* specifically targeting emergency situations (through e.g. protection, psycho-social support, community learning centres where schools are closed, access to civil status documents, (ii) *the transformation of existing (south cooperation) programmes* (through e.g. increased flexibility to insure the continuity of learning paths for displaced children, child protection measures, social cohesion in schools) and (iii) *consistent efforts to build the nexus* and make these interventions truly complementary (common vision and indicators, sharing of roles in the different local contexts, project headquarters brought to the same location, mutual learning, building on previous assets in working with local authorities, etc.). Within the SDC Cooperation Office, Sokona Sissoko (education programme officer) and Larsan Traoré (protection officer) have now mixed job descriptions (education/protection) to “act as one”.

According to Sokona Sissoko: « *Intégrer le travail du développement et de l'aide humanitaire a demandé un changement de mentalités [...] mais finalement, une fois cette intention clairement posée, on peut dire que cela a été facile pour nous de créer des synergies dans le secteur de l'éducation car nos programmes et leurs partenaires intervenaient dans la même région et poursuivaient les mêmes objectifs : assurer la continuité scolaire et la protection des enfants. Nous avons vraiment gagné en travaillant mieux ensemble. D'une part, nous avons pu mieux intégrer les questions de protection et d'urgence dans l'éducation, par exemple par une meilleure prise en charge des traumatismes subis par les enfants. D'autre part, les interventions en protection ont pu mieux intégrer l'éducation et prendre le relais là où il n'est plus possible d'intervenir à travers le système formel. Nos programmes se sont ainsi vraiment mis en complémentarité [...] La situation évolue très vite et nous sommes constamment face à l'urgence. Les groupes armés sont partout. Nous nous sentons dépassés parfois. A peine on réussit à rouvrir certaines écoles que d'autres sont fermées [...] Le travail que nous faisons n'est possible que grâce à la participation communautaire. Nous avons un fort ancrage local et une longue expérience dans l'appui aux collectivités territoriales et aux services déconcentrés de l'Etat [...] Nous avons beaucoup de témoignages. Les gens nous disent que le fait d'avoir été à leurs côtés tout ce temps et malgré tout ce que vit le pays, les a sauvés ».*

All interviews with concerned desks and/or SCOs (e.g. Mali, Afghanistan, Lebanon) mention good collaboration between HA and SC domains (including with the FP Education team) and progress at the institutional level regarding the integration of the two domains.

In conclusion, the political commitment and contribution to the international policy dialogue, the development of new strategies and various experiences at field level show an overall progress in engaging with EiE and strengthening the nexus in the education sector.

However, as raised by various interviewees, there is still a long way to go, especially to reinforce the capacities of humanitarian aid to respond to protection needs and to adequately integrate education and child protection in this response. Education has still not become an integral part of humanitarian aid. In SDC, firm efforts will be needed to institutionalise EiE through awareness raising, capacity building of staff and support to operations with tools and hands-on advice. At present, HA has limited resources dedicated to the issue both at headquarters and at field level. The domain does not have a clear strategy and road map to foster this institutionalisation and too much relies on the FP Education, which puts SDC at risks of not being able to sustain progress and live up to its commitment. The coming rotation within the FP Education team increases this risk. Sustaining progress also requires engagement in South Cooperation as the contexts in which SDC operates will further require adequate responses to fragility and crises in the education sector and the strengthening of the nexus.

At the level of policy dialogue, joint efforts (on HA and SC sides) also need to be sustained. The Geneva EiE Hub was launched, but strong commitment will be necessary in the coming years to make it live up to expectations.

6 Complementarity between BE and VSD

Key findings

- Increased synergies between BE and VSD is a key purpose of having a joint strategy.
- The need for programmes and portfolios, which integrate BE and VSD is widely recognised across the organisation.
- The need for strategic and operational guidance, knowledge management and joint technical advice is recognised as well and will potentially grow, as various strategic decisions have been taken towards an increased integration of BE and VSD.
- Despite promising trends in the field and punctual initiatives at headquarters, the organisation failed to mainstream increased synergies between BE and VSD, which represents one of the major shortcomings of the ES implementation so far. Shortcomings are both conceptual and structural.
- The organisation lacks a common understanding of the various dimensions and levels of the interrelations between BE and VSD.
- Approaches to solutions go beyond BE and VSD and depend on a holistic perception of the transition from the world of education to the world of work. Effective learning and insertion paths for target groups require (i) a sufficient level of basic learning skills (e.g. numeracy, literacy) for further VSD and (ii) non-educational services from other systems.
- Approaches to solutions need to consider that both BE and VSD have their own core business, and that BE cannot be reduced to economic goals and purposes, and VSD cannot be reduced to education.
- The structural divide (as reflected in the lack of institutionalised meetings between the host divisions, common yearly objectives and activities between the FP and the networks, joint technical advice to the countries, common webpage on their respective shareweb, dedicated staff in each team to ensure collaboration and learning, etc.) between the two host divisions, FP and networks hampered progress and needs to be overcome.

6.1. Joint strategy and need for synergies

Increased synergies between BE and VSD is one of the key purposes of having a joint strategy. Accordingly, the ES addresses the complementarity between BE and VSD prominently in several places, including at the top level of SDC's five priorities. In the more descriptive chapter on SDC's understanding of education, the complementarity and interconnection between BE and VSD plays a major role. And last but not least, also the implementation modalities devote a chapter to the synergies between BE and VSD. This reflects, among others, the importance the management of SDC attributes to this issue.

The survey confirms the need for more complementarities, in that a clear majority of approximately 70% of the respondents perceive a joint strategy for BE and VSD as helpful and relevant (see **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** in chapter 3.4 above).

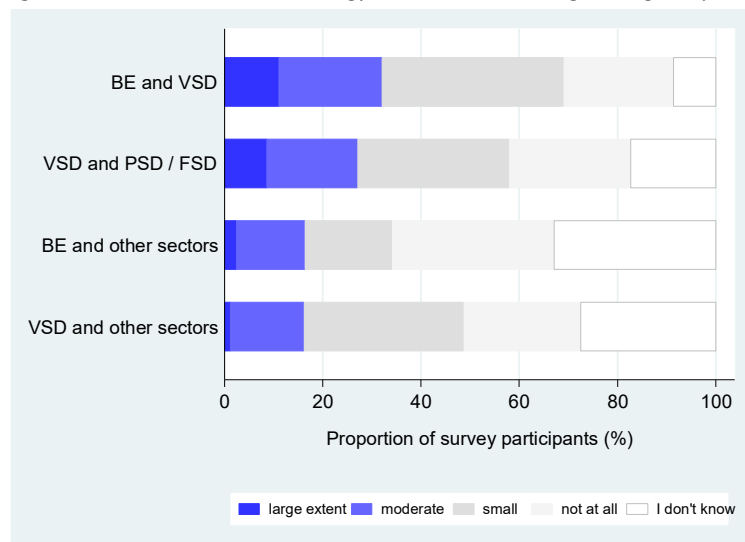
The question on the desirability of and the need for more complementarity between BE and VSD, the respective stage of development, and the related challenges and obstacles was addressed in all interviews.

Overall, the consensus on the need for more complementarities between BE and VSD is high in the organisation both at HQ and in the field. Many interviewees raised a lack of more profound reflexions as well as strategic and operational guidance on this issue. Several interviewees from different divisions in the South Cooperation domain regret that they are not provided with joint technical expertise from the Focal Points BE and VSD.

6.2. Stage of development

Considering (1) the importance the management attributes to the issue, (2) the undisputed needs, and (3) the high awareness in the organisation on these needs, the stage of development of the “interplay” can be seen as low. The SAP analysis of the review shows that the financial volume of joint projects BE/VSD has grown by 12% as measured by expenditures, but their share in the overall portfolio has been reduced from 19.8% in the 2013-16 period to 16.8% in 2017-19 period¹⁶. Asked about the contribution of the ES to strengthening of synergies, about one in three respondents confirm a large or a moderate improvement of the synergies between BE and VSD (Figure 12). When further disaggregated, data show a strong

Figure 12: Has the Education Strategy contributed to strengthening complementarities and synergies?

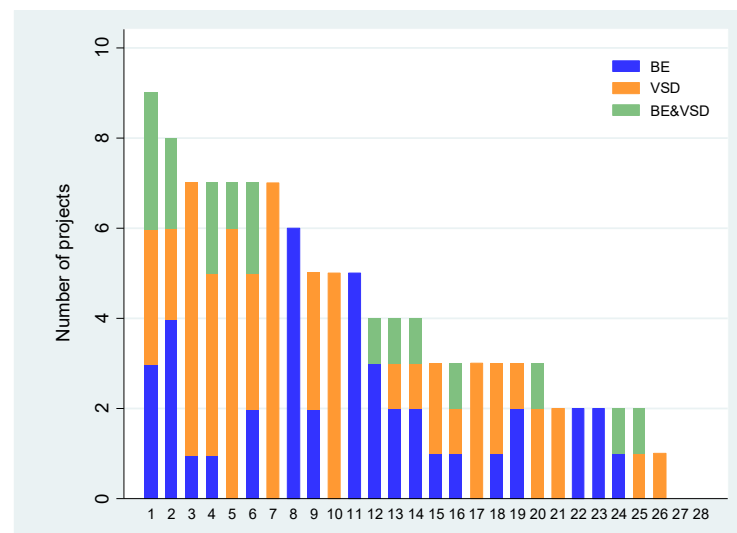


Note: 81 responses

contrast between field and headquarters staff. Some 49% of field staff think that the ES contributed to a large or moderate extent to strengthening synergies between BE and VSD, while only 14% of headquarter staff share this opinion. This difference is difficult to interpret. It might indicate that field staffs have taken action to strengthen synergies while little was achieved at headquarters level. The difference might also partly be due to the fact that more survey participants at headquarters have a VSD or PSD background.

The survey also points to the fact that many staff members have mixed BE/VSD portfolios but that few projects cover both sub-sectors. Indeed, SDC participants were asked about the number of BE, VSD or joint projects they were involved in over the past three years. Despite the fact that only half of the

Figure 13: In how many projects / programmes were you involved over the past 3 years?



Note: 28 respondents (each bar represents one respondent)

participants responded to this question, it is still an interesting result that a majority of respondents have a mixed portfolio of BE and VSD projects. The results show also that combined BE and VSD projects are still relatively rare as compared to either BE or VSD projects.

Despite the review finds limited progress in the overall development of synergies between BE and VSD, this does not mean that nothing has happened. Steps have been taken, and many interview partners have pointed to the F2F workshop in 2019 as a major initiative of the Focal Points Education and VSD and at promising development in selected regions and countries.

The workshop devoted one full day to the interplay between BE and VSD. This was perceived by many interviewees as a milestone in promoting the implementation of this dimension of the ES. This included a keynote input from the World Bank, a panel discussion with high-level participation, various group work sessions and a draft discussion paper. Overall, this workshop generated a wealth of information and ideas. However, the momentum did not develop into a catalyst for further developing the issue systematically.

At the field level, a new domain “education and income” was created in the MENA Cooperation Programme, and project portfolios are currently being developed at the country level, including in Lebanon and Jordan. According to various interviews, progress has also been made in all DAO focus countries to strengthen the linkages between BE and VSD. The recent changes regarding the strategic planning of regional and country strategies (organised around expected outcomes and not limited to three thematic priorities anymore) should also be more conducive for combined interventions in BE and VSD. On a higher strategic level, the IC Strategy 2021-2024 (see below for further analysis) and the Federal Council’s Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa 2021-2024 mention BE and VSD together as focus subsectors for prosperity (and, in the case of the Great Lake region, as pillars of job creation).

6.3. Lack of a common understanding of the interrelations between BE and VSD

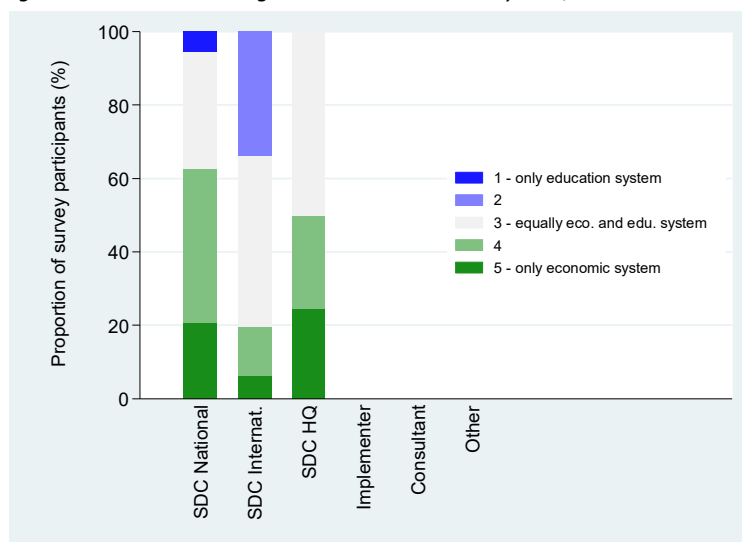
The review observes a lack of common understanding of the different dimensions of the interrelations between BE and VSD as one the major reason for this shortcoming. Structural divide and working modalities between BE and VSD are another major factor (see following section).

The ES document itself, but even more so related working papers and documents, use a variety of terms to address the issue (complementarity, comprehensive approaches, synergy, interplay, interaction, interconnection, holistic perception of education, interlinkage, interfaces, continuum education-training-work). None of these terms is defined to describe different levels and dimensions of the interrelations. They are rather used arbitrarily and interchangeably. Different interviewees also showed confusion between basic education understood as a level of the education system and as a set of foundational skills (such as numeracy, literacy and problem-solving skills) necessary for further learning, including in VSD. Whereas strengthening BE as a level of education needs an intervention at the education system level, strengthening basic learning skills of target groups can be done through “lighter” interventions focused on service provision and combined to VSD.

The preliminary discussion paper for the F2F 2019 was an attempt to address the issue. Thereafter, this paper should have been developed into a guidance paper. This paper is available in a draft version, but it has not been finalised yet. However, the review team has serious doubts as to which extent the present draft is conceptually sufficiently sound to serve as guidance paper and foundation for a common understanding. It deals only with some selected elements of the interrelations between BE and VSD, without giving a holistic overview. In order to come to grips with the issue, some more foundation and conceptual work will have to be done.

The survey asked SDC participants about their opinion, whether VSD belongs more to the education system, more to the economic system or equally to both systems. The differences between the perception of NPOs, SDC Internationals and HQ staff is quite remarkable. For a majority (63%) of NPOs VSD belongs to the economic system. The SDC Internationals see VSD by and large as belonging equally to both systems, with a sizeable minority (33%) seeing it more as part of the education system. At HQ, opinions are split almost 50:50 between VSD as part of the economic system, and VSD as equally belonging to both systems. These answers should not be over-interpreted, because they are likely to be linked to the positions of the respondents, and the composition of portfolios. Yet they are still a strong indicator for the absence of a common understanding in the organisation.

Figure 14: Does VSD belong more to the education system, more to the economic system, or to both in equal parts?



Note: 50 responses

The FP Education advocates for the development of a holistic perception of education as an approach to the solution. In their understanding this would encompass and integrate BE and (part of) VSD. For the review team, a holistic perception of education is necessary but not sufficient. It is only one step in the process, and once developed, it represents only a piece of a bigger puzzle. This bigger picture is a **holistic perception of the interrelations between and the transition from the world of education to the world of work**. Such a holistic perception goes beyond BE and VSD and includes non-educational services from other systems. In particular the (re-)integration of specific vulnerable target groups into education and/or income requires thinking in terms of learning and insertion paths. Bringing people from disadvantaged groups on such paths requires (i) to bring them to a sufficient level of basic learning skills (literary, numeracy, problem solving skills) in order to access further VSD and (ii) to provide coaching and a selection from a variety of services like stipend programmes, placement services, temporary employment / work programmes, temporary salary subsidies, start-up support, access to micro-financing, technical advice.

Any future approaches need to reflect that BE and VSD should not only be considered in relation to each other. Both BE and VSD have their own core businesses. And most importantly, the approaches need to capture the understanding that **education cannot be reduced to economic goals and purposes, and VSD cannot be reduced to education**. Hence, it is necessary to clarify the demarcation between BE and VSD (what they do separately and in what logic) and what they do together and how. This should lead to more clarity in strategic decision making and give operational guidance. A tool such as the “VSD typology” tool which was often referred to as very useful in the interviews could be beneficial.

6.4. Structural divide between BE and VSD

Having a joint strategy should have led to significant collaboration between the two host divisions, the focal points and the networks. In fact, they have worked together to develop and, in different occasions,

to promote the implementation of the ES (e.g. in-house communication on the ES in 2017, F2F in 2019). This collaboration was probably stimulated by the goal of the 2017-2020 Dispatch (50% increase in commitment to education) that BE and VSD had in common. However, there are very few tangible signs of collaboration and efforts to overcome the structural divide such as institutionalised meetings between the host divisions, common yearly objectives and activities between the FP and the networks, joint technical advice to the countries, common webpage on their respective shareweb, dedicated staff in each team to ensure collaboration and learning, etc. The Education Fund (“Education meets Innovation”) has the merit of being a rare attempt in this direction. This is even more surprising because the review found other good examples of structural arrangement to foster collaboration between thematic areas/specialist. Just to name a few, the case study on Mali shows how the protection and education areas (hence the humanitarian aid/development nexus) were better integrated by mixing job descriptions of the programme officers in the SCO; in the IED Expert Team, mixed job description in the area of VSD/PSD/FSD were also elaborated for each staff.

These kinds of measures are conducive both to increase knowledge and foster collaboration across sectors. The review found a clear lack of trust of the two teams to work together and a fatigue resulting from previous unfruitful efforts. These difficulties are one of the causes of a lack of implementation of the ES regarding the interplay, but also and primarily, a symptom of structural problems that need to be addressed. Two major elements are (1) to foster a better knowledge of BE for VSD specialists and of VSD (and related E+I topics) for BE specialists (both at headquarters and in the field), and (2) to foster collaboration by a set of measures such as e.g. selected staff with mixed profiles and job description (headquarters and field), shared strategic objectives and activities and common technical advice (for FP and networks), etc. These requires human resources highly specialised in BE and/or VSD, both at headquarters, regional (regional advisers) and country level. According to various interviews and our own analysis, the current rotation system does not seem to be conducive for building and retaining the necessary specialised competences.

In conclusion, in light of the importance given to the “interplay” in the ES and across SDC, concrete results are lagging behind. The review found that this is due (i) to a lack of conceptual clarity regarding the demarcation (what BE and VSD do separately as their “core business”) and the “interplay” (what they do together/in complementarity and how); (ii) to the structural divide between host institutions, focal points and networks in charge of BE and VSD. Addressing these issues should be a priority to better serve current and developing trends in field operations and to support the high-level strategic decisions taken in the IC Strategy 2021-2024 and in other documents (such as the Federal Council’s Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa 2021-2024), which highlight the integration of BE and VSD to provide access to employment and income to target groups.

Spotlight “Education and training for pastoral population in West Africa” (topic : link BE/VSD)

The PREPP is a regional programme that provides basic education and training to transhumant pastoral populations in cross-border regions of six countries in West Africa. These pastors face growing constraints due to climate change, the deterioration of the security situation and conflicts with sedentary populations. Only 5 to 10% are literate and about the same percentage of children go to school. For SDC, education was the best entry door to address the multiple sources of exclusion. As explained by Abd-el Wahab, Regional adviser for BE and VSD, it is thanks to a relevant mix of basic education (literacy, numeracy), vocational skills development (modules linked to their economic activities) that the population participates in the programme. Both are indispensable. Literacy is necessary for further learning and daily life. But without the more technical modules, people would not be equipped with the skills to improve their pastoral economic activities and would not enter and stay in the programme. *« Les élèves sont intéressés mais ce qui les motive le plus, ce sont les formations techniques plus poussées liées à leurs métiers. Des modules ont été développés sur l’emboûche bovine, l’alimentation du bétail, les premiers soins vétérinaires, la fabrication du fromage, la gestion du cheptel et la santé de la reproduction [...] certains voudraient aller tout de suite à ça. Ils sont pressés et n’ont pas la patience de faire l’alphabétisation. Mais l’alphabétisation est indispensable. Sans cela, comment lire une notice de médicament à administrer ou s’assurer du bon dosage ? Il faut aussi pouvoir lire les panneaux et les réglementations concernant la transhumance, tenir ses comptes, etc. Nous avons aussi introduit un module*

d'éducation à la paix que nous sommes en train d'améliorer. Tout cela demande l'écrit. Mais il est vrai que sans la formation professionnalisante, les éleveurs ne resteraient pas dans les cours d'alphabétisation. Nous sommes en train de voir comment dispenser une alphabétisation plus courte. De façon générale, ce qui les fait s'investir dans l'apprentissage, c'est la qualité de l'enseignement et la pertinence par rapport à leurs défis de tous les jours ».

7 Other complementarities

7.1. Complementarities between VSD and PSD/FSD

Key findings

- Complementarities between VSD and PSD/FSD are observable at all levels, namely at the level of guiding documents, at the level of the organisation, and at the level of regional and country programmes.
- In the absence of a monitoring system, a systematic assessment of the complementarities between VSD and PSD at the operational level of individual projects is difficult.
- The IC Strategy 2021-24 stipulates VSD to be instrumental for the creation of decent jobs. This reinforces the need for complementarities with PSD.

Complementarities between VSD and PSD/FSD are observable at all levels, namely at the level of international guidelines, at the level of the organisation, at the level of regions and country offices, at project level, and in the policy dialogue.

By default, VSD belongs always and everywhere to different systems, namely the education and the economic system. This is unavoidable, because unlike general education systems, VSD and VET systems with an outreach to majorities of its clientele are not financeable from public sources alone and without private sector contributions in any form. This dual ownership in VSD is already reflected at the highest international level of the SDG: VSD belongs to both, the SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and SDG 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all).

Within SDC, the strategic orientation of VSD is not only defined through the ES, but equally through the medium-term orientation for E+I. Formally, the two guiding documents for VSD are at the same level of a "Leitdokument B". The VSD team attempted to bring the orientations at the operational level together and developed respective working tools. The backbone of this toolbox is the VSD typology tool, which attempts to capture the VSD landscape in the tension between the education and the employment system, and between social and economic policy orientations¹⁷.

At the level of the organisation, the VSD team belongs to the FP E+I, which in turn has become part of the Expert Team for IED-Inclusive Economic Development. In addition to the FP E+I, the expert team for IED also comprises the competence centre for private sector engagement. Within this IED expert team, staff members have a primary function as member of the VSD, the PSD, the FSD or the PSE team, but in a secondary function, they are also involved in selected activities of other teams. Also the lead for individual management processes (strategic support, operational support, international policy dialogue, national policy dialogue, etc.) is across the IED expert team. This work organisation promotes actively the synergies between VSD and the other areas of IED.

At the level of the international policy dialogue, Switzerland is a prominent member of the DCED-Donor Committee for Enterprise Development. The approaches and standards developed under this committee have a strong spill-over effect on VSD. This is in particular observable for the definition of indicators and related monitoring approaches, and for the adoption of the concept of systemic changes (which is conceptually different from VSD systems development).

¹⁷ SDC, E+I Network, VSD Typology – Orientation and Impact of VSD, fourth revised edition, March 2019

At the level of regional and country programmes, VSD belongs in the Western Balkans, and in many other partner countries in South cooperation to economic domains like Skills and Employment (Mekong), Income and Economic Development (Bangladesh), Economic Development (Bolivia), Employment and Economic Development (Great Lakes), Employment and Inclusive Economic Development (Central America), Employment and Income (Nepal), etc.

The absence of a monitoring system makes it difficult to assess the complementarities between VSD and PSD at the operational level systematically. This remains anecdotal, as it is limited to selected cases and statements in interviews. Such observations suggest that there are complementarities between VSD and PSD at the level of designing and structuring the portfolio of respective domains, but less at the level of project implementation.

At the level of the description of the thematic priority 1 (Decent Jobs), the IC Strategy 2021-24 stipulates the promotion of VSD inspired by the Swiss VPET system with an increasing focus on potential entrepreneurs¹⁸. While in other places the IC Strategy advocates for synergies between VSD and BE, under this heading it is not only about synergies between VSD and PSD, but even more about how VSD can be made instrumental for job creation.

Spotlight EYE project, Kosovo (topic: synergies between VSD and PSD)

The EYE project has recently started its third and final phase. All three phases have followed an integrated approach towards employment creation, simultaneously addressing the demand and the supply side of the labour market, and services which mediate between the two, namely career guidance and matching services. Arjeta Lleshi from the SCO in Pristina thinks that in the first phase, a good balance has been struck between the three elements: *“The integrated approach worked well. You can stimulate both [demand and supply], and include job mediation, thereby working on different market failures. This works particularly well with industry-led solutions, meeting the immediate needs.”* The success in the first phase led to a more ambitious agenda in the second one. Crucially, the project expanded its scope from purely non-formal trainings to the formal side of skills provision. This overstretched the project in her view: *“We found that if you wanted to work on longer-term systems development and institutional reform, you needed another set of tools, capacities and skills.”* Now in the third (exit) phase, the complexity was reduced again. The project plans to work on industry-led solutions and job mediation services and at the same time create more synergies with other SDC and SECO projects to stimulate the demand side. She explains that the interplay does not necessarily have to happen in one project, and that the “integrated” can also be implemented across the project portfolio.

7.2. Complementarities between education and other thematic areas

Key findings

- Sustained efforts have led to increased synergies, mainly between BE and other sectors/thematic issues with the most tangible results in protection and promising dynamics with e.g. disaster risk reduction, health, civic education or gender.
- However, less than 20% of the respondent to our survey feel that the ES contributed to increased synergies with other sectors.
- The key challenge is to continue strengthening synergies and provide technical support to SDC staff in non-education areas who wish to effectively use education to reach their goals or who need to strengthen the basic skills of their target groups.
- The proactive development of synergies requires focusing on a limited number of sectors/thematic areas.

The search for strengthening synergies between education and other thematic areas is one of SDC's priorities in the ES. Inter-sectoral work is aligned with the “SDG spirit” and architecture that recognise education both as a sector and a vector (to reach other SDGs). It is also a recommendation endorsed by the SDC management response to the “Evaluation of SDC's performance in Basic Education 2007-2014” commissioned in 2016. The willingness to help other sectors achieve their goal through a more effective

¹⁸ IZA-Strategie 2021-24, German version, p 29

use of education/the education system is valuable, as is the search for making education more responsive to the changing needs of societies. Both of these goals require inter-sectoral dialogue and common understanding.

For VSD, the efforts for synergies are oriented first of all towards PSD/FSD, although collaborations with other sectors, for instance with migration, also took place. There, the E+I network and the SDC network on migration and development developed a joint working tool for practitioners in development cooperation and humanitarian aid on VSD and migration. As a matter of fact, at the field level many projects in health and food security, namely in agriculture, encompass strong VSD components.

Spotlight OYE Southern Africa project, Zambia and Zimbabwe (*topic: synergies between VSD and other sectors / labour market inclusion*)

OYE is present in various African countries, funded either by SDC or other donors. Through OYE+ (currently in its first phase 1, 2018 – 2023) in Southern Africa, SDC co-funds the interventions in Zambia and Zimbabwe. Frédérique Weyer from the Embassy in Harare believes that the OYE is an effective and relevant intervention for two reasons: One is that the trainings are short yet well-rounded, addressing technical and soft skills, as well as other skills alike. *“OYE tries to comprehensively address what is needed to start a business or find employment. Not just in terms of technical skills, but also life, business and financial skills.”* The other success factor are follow-up activities, which reach beyond the training itself. They include both on site coaching and WhatsApp support groups for those who opt for self-employment (in Tanzania, for instance, there is a group on horticulture, and another one on poultry). For those who look for wage employment, there is coaching and job placements. She says that the participants are not split into groups that aim for self-employment or wage employment: *“Realistically, in Africa most youth will be self-employed. Those currently employed might only be a step away, as it is unclear how long employment will last. Or they combine employment and self-employment. Life, business and financial skills are never lost.”*

However, this chapter focuses on BE, because strengthening synergies with other sectors and “non-education programmes” was a priority for BE since the performance evaluation in 2016.

Since 2017, the FP Education has been searching the adequate way to promote a better contribution of education to other sectors and issues, be it through education or “non-education” programmes. A first challenge regarding “non-education programmes” is to have a view of what exists. A portfolio analysis¹⁹ led to the identification of programmes in different sectors (governance, water, DRR, health, peacebuilding, etc.), some with major interventions in schools. This analysis showed an increase from 22 to 39 interventions in other sectors with a BE component between 2016 and 2018.²⁰ Half of these interventions were in protection, governance and health.

The FP Education team has proactively promoted dialogue and collaboration with other sectors/thematic issues. The most visible results are in the area of protection. Other processes (such as learning journeys, peer exchange, elaboration of working aids, joint programmatic advice) have taken place with the sectors/thematic areas disaster risk reduction, conflict and human rights, governance, gender, health and migration. These efforts were more intense at the level of headquarters (with other focal points), although several processes (e.g. governance/human rights, DRR, protection) also involved field offices and results are visible at programmatic/operational level (e.g. in protection, migration)

Interesting examples of programmes show how education contributes and is used in other SDGs and sectors.

Spotlight “Education and Disaster Risk Reduction”, Myanmar (*synergies between education and other sectors*)

The project **Roll-out of Safe and Child-Friendly School Construction Guidelines** builds on a decade of humanitarian aid to infrastructure (re)building in Myanmar that started after the 2009 cyclone. From the start, the aim was to rebuild in a safer and sustainable way in this hazard prone country. Over the period, the strategy evolved from a narrow focus

¹⁹ SDC (2020) SDC’s engagement in Basic Education/Lifelong learning

²⁰ Ibid, p.10

on high-standard infrastructures building (mainly through contractors) to a community-based approach fostering participation at all stages, from building (smaller infrastructures) to maintenance. As they were the first choice of communities, a focus was set on schools. The experience gained over years led to standards adapted to the specific risks of various contexts, conducive for protection and learning. In various contexts, improvement in school infrastructures translated in increased school attendance, teacher engagement and learning outcomes. Despite a complex political situation and highly fragmented education system, SDC was able to build trust with the ministry of education and other school providers (ethnic armed organisations, monastic and private schools), which in some occasions also started to work together. The roll-out of the guidelines builds on all these assets and is a unique opportunity to improve school infrastructures in the whole country. Key to that process is the building of a school construction authority with presence in all the regions, able to support the process with engineering capacities. A task force of 53 members has been created (whereas only 7 education officers were previously in charge of the whole country). As the government does not serve the most unprivileged ethnic groups, SDC also supports other education providers.

According to Mark Häussermann in the SDC cooperation office, a lot can be learned from this experience: *“My philosophy is that when you build but you don’t have anybody to manage your infrastructure portfolio (47’000 schools), one waists a lot of money. You have to think on the longer term and progressively build national capacities and institutions to handle this huge task in close collaboration with communities, which is essential for any sustainable initiative [...] if an education system does that well, a lot of money can be saved for other crucial tasks, like teacher training or textbooks [...] donors do not prefer this field because corruption is visible and construction takes a lot of effort to monitor. But I truly believe we can overcome that by engaging through community participation and capacity building [...] I think SDC has gained valuable experiences in short term emergency infrastructures as well as in some longer term in different countries in working with education authorities. We could take this up to more places and get closer to the efforts made to secure access to education in emergencies. Through this, we build trust with education authorities. This can open doors to working in education more broadly. There are many other challenges to solve in education which can be taken up by our development colleagues”.*

Progress made since 2017 brought better visibility and understanding of the links between education and some other sectors as well as results at conceptual and operational level in selected areas. On the whole, this result seems to be still limited (less than 20% of the respondents to our survey think that the ES contributed to increased synergies between education and other sectors) and calls for further efforts. This requires focusing on a limited number of sectors/thematic in order to maximise the use of limited resources and the potential effects on programmes (through consistent conceptual work, evidence-based learning, tools, advice, etc.). This would allow supporting those SDC staff members who wish to effectively use and support education to reach their goals or strengthen the basic learning skills of their target groups. Criteria to establish priorities should include the demand and potential at operational level (SCOs, programmes) and the priorities of the IC Strategy 2021-24 (protection, health, climate change and migration). In order to maximise effects, synergies could be found with strategic partners/think tanks also dealing with these inter-sectoral issues.

8 Strategic partnerships and policy dialogue

8.1. International level

Key findings

- The FP Education manages a partner portfolio of more than CHF 20 million per year and attributes slightly less than half of its human resources to policy dialogue and the management of the partner portfolio.
- The FP VSD only contributes approximately CHF 300’000 to one partner and allocates about 10% of its human resources to international policy dialogue.
- In BE, the progress in the strategic positioning of SDC in international policy dialogue is a major achievement in the implementation of the ES. These results are due to a clear strategy including an increased participation in governing and technical bodies of key organisations.

- The major challenge for BE is to keep voice and influence despite the decision to invest less intensively in human resources.
- Partnerships with think tanks/networks could be strengthened to develop more “brain power” along “political power”.
- Options for enhancing and strengthening the global policy dialogue in VSD need to be explored.

Both the human resources allocated to policy dialogue and the budget for contributions is fundamentally different between the two focal points. The FP Education allocates about 130% FTE (which is slightly less than half of its overall 280% FTE staff strength) to policy dialogue. In 2020 it managed a partner budget of about CHF 24.7 million (CHF 8.2 million from DAO plus CHF 16.5 million as core contribution to GPE from the multilateral domain). In turn, the FP VSD spends approximately CHF 300'000 for international partnerships, and allocates less than 10% of its human resources. Accordingly, this chapter will deal more prominently with the changes and achievements in the partner portfolio and policy dialogue of the FP Education without neglecting the efforts of the FP VSD.

a) FP VSD

For the **FP VSD**, the primary focus in international policy dialogue is on the promotion of the dual training system. This is not meant in the sense of “exporting” the Swiss VPET system, it rather serves inspiration. In particular selected key features like practice learning or private sector participation are potential role models. For this purpose, SDC is an active member of the DCdVET, the Donor Committee for dual VET of the German speaking countries, and it contributes to financing its secretariat. The DCdVET produces publications and working instruments on dual VET and private sector participation, it organises workshops and webinars, and it acts as resource centre for issues around dual VET.

At the ILO, one of the global key players for labour market issues, including employment and skills development, Switzerland is represented through the SECO. The respective coordination takes place bilaterally. SDC, through the FP VSD, made a one-time contribution to ILO for the development of the apprenticeship toolkit.

Under a joint venture between the IDB-Inter-American Development Bank, Germany and Switzerland, a multi-donor TVET Fund for the transformation of TVET in Latin America and the Caribbean was established. The fund is run by IDB, and it is meant to finance two types of projects, namely: (1) Pilot projects to mobilize innovation in TVET, and (2) Projects and activities to mainstream TVET in country's projects and initiatives, particularly in IDB Group's operations.

Initially as a private sector development initiative, SDC contributed to the establishment of the SIINC (Social Impact Incentives Fund) in collaboration with the IDP-Inter-American Development Bank and other private sector organisations. It is implemented by a German firm called Roots-of-Impact. Coming transactions will shift focus to VSD and clean energy.

Not under a VSD, but rather under a PSD perspective, Switzerland is an active member in the DCED (Donor Committee for Enterprise Development). In addition to all major bilateral donors, the DCED comprises multilateral organisations like the ILO, the WHO, the IFC, the ITC, the OECD, the EC or the UNIDO, and private organisations like the Master Card Foundation as members. At present Switzerland is represented in the Executive Committee through the SECO. This organisation is not primarily about VSD, but its approaches and standards have a strong spilling-over effect on approaches and standards (e.g. in monitoring, or in adopting the concept of systemic changes) in VSD projects.

In other global or regional VSD structures, Switzerland is not an active member. The membership in the Interagency Group for TVET is limited to multilateral organisations. Selected bilateral donors, including SDC, have access to one out of two annual meetings. In addition to the FP VSD, SDC also pushed for the DCdVET to be invited. At the level of working groups, SDC suggested the DCdVET to become a member of the working group on work-based learning.

The UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training is an UNESCO Institute. The FP VSD maintains casual contacts and has met the new director.

Regional organisations with a focus on TVET include organisations like the European Training Foundation, regional development banks, or organisations like e.g. the Colombo Plan Staff College²¹. In comparison with other sectors, including education or health, the architecture of international organisations, and the wide array of different approaches and philosophies in vocational skills development, make the sub-sector by default more scattered and fragmented.

Challenges and room for improvement

VSD is not only in SDC split between education and economic development, but also at the level of the SDGs where VSD is explicitly mentioned in two targets: under SDG 4 and implicitly in SDG 8.²² In addition, target 8.6 refers to the ILO job pact, which includes VSD as a crucial component.

Because VSD is by default always in a sandwich position between education and the economy, and because VSD is characterised by many different approaches, beliefs, philosophies, cooperation modalities between the public and the private sector, also the international aid architecture is more scattered and fragmented. Nevertheless, options for enhancing and strengthening SDC's participation and presence in regional and global policy dialogue in VSD should be explored, in coordination with the FP Education and taking into account the other entities in charge of VSD in the federal administration.

b) FP Education

The implementation of the ES had a major impact on the FP Education regarding both the selection of partners and the strategic steering of partnerships. This resulted in increased contributions and positioning in key spaces of the international aid architecture and policy dialogue on education as well as in stronger links between this global dialogue and field operations. As mentioned above, the FP Education manages a substantial partner portfolio and, since 2018, allocated slightly less than 50% of its human resources to its management and to policy dialogue.

Changes in partner portfolio

The ES led to a withdrawal from two partnerships²³, which focused on adult education. This decision was made according to one of the new foci of the ES "no more alpha"²⁴, which meant staying engaged in literacy as a component in other sectors but withdrawing from large-scale literacy programmes in bilateral aid²⁵ and from specialised agencies at the multilateral level. A hosting proposal was extended (lead by the FDFA Division for International Organisations) to the UNESCO International Bureau for Education (IBE) in Geneva²⁶, provided it would be given a cross-sectorial mandate regarding curriculum issues. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) was added to the list of priority multilateral organisations in the IC Strategies 2017-2020 and 2021-2024 and financed through the Domain Global Cooperation. These changes allowed strengthening existing partnerships (e.g. NORRAG, the UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning) and entering new ones. SDC started to support the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) in 2018, the Education Cannot Wait fund (ECW) in 2019 and the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies in 2020 (that SDC participated to create).

²¹ Anecdotaly it may be mentioned that the present Director General of the Colombo Plan Staff College is a typical product of early Swiss Development Cooperation. He started his career in TVET as project assistant in a SDC TVET project in Nepal, and then moved up through the system.

²² Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. Target 4.4: By 2013, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Target 8.6: By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training. Target 8.B: By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization

²³ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning (UIL) and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE).

²⁴ SDC (2017), Interne Kommunikation zur Umsetzung der Bildungsstrategie und der Botschaft 2017-2020

²⁵ Literacy is still part of the ES as a component of programmes from other sectors (when target groups lack literacy/numeracy skills), including in VSD programmes (e.g. BE catch-up measures).

²⁶ SDC's support had been previously discontinued to this Institute due to unsatisfactory management and results.

Changes in the steering/management of partnerships

The FP Education also adopted a more strategic vision and new modalities in the steering/management of the partnerships.

- *Strategic objectives:* The strategic objectives for each partnership were clearly (re)defined.
- *Soft earmarking:* Various contributions (5 out of 8 international partners) were softly earmarked (e.g. to the West Africa and MENA regions for ECW).
- *Participation in governance:* SDC became a member of the governing and/or technical bodies of the partners that have these kinds of structures (GPE, ECW, INEE). With the others (e.g. IIEP, NORRAG), a close dialogue is nurtured. In the case of ECW, both heads of SDC Humanitarian Aid and South Cooperation are on the high-level steering committee. In GPE, SDC is an alternate board member and a member of the Grants and Performance Committee.
- *International Geneva:* SDC has become actively involved in “international Geneva” and contributed to the development of its “global education profile” especially in the field of EiE (with some reflections on the link between actors of “global education” and other sectors including “global health”).
- *Alliances with “like-minded” partners:* The FP Education managed to strengthen alliances between SDC and “like-minded” donors and organisations to increase the sharing of ideas and gain influence not only in the organisation where it sits but also in other spaces (e.g. the good relations built with France in the Continental Europe constituency of the GPE allowed SDC to follow closely the discussions and decision making processes of the SDG4 Steering Committee, of which SDC is not a member).
- *Increased collaboration among SDC’s partners:* The FP Education encourages collaboration among its partners (e.g. GPE/IIEP). In the case of GPE and ECW, SDC engaged consistently to raise the issue of their coordination as “twin funds” in charge of strengthening the nexus between humanitarian and development aid in the education sector.

The FP Education has also become more actively engaged in the management of Swiss contributions to other priority multilateral organisation (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNRWA), which have important missions and activities in education.

Strengthening communication between global and country level

The FP Education has made consistent efforts to link developments at global level with its work at country level. This was especially the case with GPE and, more recently, with ECW. The communication was nurtured on both sides (from headquarters to field offices and vice versa). Country offices have been frequently consulted to elaborate SDC’s positions within GPE (both on the board and Grants and Performance Committee). On the other side, the FP Education used to inform the SCOs about the decisions and dynamics of the GPE, regarding their countries or more generally. Other mechanisms have been used, such as webinars with the GPE secretariat staff in Washington and SDC country offices engaged in education.

Outside perception

Interviews were conducted (all at director – except GPE – and technical staff levels) with ECW, GPE, IIEP and NORRAG. Partners were invited to be “critical friends” and point to areas of improvement. Globally, the perception is very positive. All interviewees appreciate SDC as a reliable and committed partner who is close to field realities. In the two global funds, SDC is perceived as a small but “vocal” partner and a good negotiator.

In particular GPE underlined the fact that despite its small size, SDC’s participation and influence in governance, strategic and policy development exceeds its financial contribution. SDC is also perceived as being vocal on specific issues such as LNOB and gender equity, the focus on Africa, the quality of education and EiE. SDC is seen as playing a decisive role in coordinating and negotiating common positions within its constituency. The fact that SDC managed to keep its role as alternate board member in GPE despite the arrival of bigger donors, is seen as recognition of its leadership and its ability to negotiate and create a good team spirit. The role played in the Grants and Performance Committee of GPE is highly appreciated for its quality.

IIEP views SDC as a bilateral agency very committed to the strengthening of education systems and donor alignment. It appreciates SDC as a true “like-minded” partner, values the numerous informal peer exchanges regarding technical and policy dialogue issues and SDC’s efforts to foster collaboration with some of its other partners.

NORRAG appreciates the positioning and visibility that SDC has been able to gain over the last four years in international policy dialogue on education. It also acknowledges the positive role played by SDC in NORRAG’s own evolution as an important think tank/network and sees potential for further leveraging their partnerships, especially around common thematic issues.

ECW shared its appreciation of SDC’s leadership and competencies as a member of its governing and technical bodies. Engagement in key issues (such as LNOB, mental health and psychosocial support, protection, quality of education) is valued. The commitment and coordination among different entities of the Swiss government, which allowed a fast pace in the creation of the Geneva Global Hub for EiE is highly appreciated. The same is true regarding the collaboration and engagement of both HA and SC management in ECW, which is seen as a leading example of the institutional changes needed to progress in the humanitarian and development aid nexus.

Challenges and room for improvement

More “brain power” on selected issues: Globally, the changes made in the partner portfolio of the FP Education allow SDC to participate actively in the key spaces of international dialogue on education, both on the normative and SDG monitoring side (UNESCO, GEM). Increasingly, this participation extends to the financial mechanisms (funds), which are key drivers for operations and policy dialogue. The changes also mark a clear shift towards EiE and the humanitarian-development nexus, which absorbed an important share of SDC’s increased support to international partnerships. In contrast, the share of the portfolio allocated to “think tanks” has remained fairly low and the strategic vision with this kind of partners could be further developed. In short, SDC could develop more “brain power” (along the political power it has gained) on selected thematic issues that matter for SDC at field level and that could raise its profile in international policy dialogue. Key issues identified as strengths of SDC’s bilateral work and of education in Switzerland should be prioritised (e.g. language issues, free public BE, “permeability” of the system, etc.). “Think tanks” could be used to “build the case” with solid knowledge, data and evidence through expert groups, participatory dialogue with field specialists and applied research. They could also be used to amplify and disseminate SDC’s work through their strategic partnerships, fora and networks.

More links with global partners at country level: The links between these levels are strength of SDC’s work. They are valued by SCOs and are key in making SDC a credible partner in policy dialogue. Cooperation at regional/country level could be further developed (e.g. between IIEP office in Dakar; in GPE country coordination mechanisms).

Finding best ways to keep voice and influence with less intensive investment in human resources, as already decided by SDC: Strengthening the positioning of SDC in international policy dialogue absorbed an important share of the human resources of the FP Education, particularly in GPE, where SDC has been an active member of the board and of the technical committee on Grants and Performance. A withdrawal from this latter has already been decided. This will allow SDC to save human resources (without jeopardising its influence) and invest more energy into the two priorities mentioned above.

8.2. National level

Key findings

- The dual system is a high-profile and internationally recognised Swiss brand in VSD, while the Swissness factor in BE is less obvious at first glance.
- In VSD, those federal offices involved in international activities have created with IC-VPET a formal structure for coordination.
- The potential to use the expertise of Swiss education stakeholders exists in both VSD and BE. In BE, the development of a platform for Swiss and partner country actors is being piloted with a well-positioned national agency.
- For both BE and VSD, the key challenge is to truly serve partner countries, with reasonable transaction costs.

Strengthening the Swiss dimension in international cooperation through strategic partnerships with relevant Swiss stakeholders (including other Swiss federal offices, civil society, academia, cantonal offices and the private sector) as well as the use of Swiss expertise is one of the implementation modalities of the ES. The IC Strategy 2021-24 even reinforces this orientation.

a) “Swissness”

With the dual system, **VSD** has a high-profile and internationally well recognised Swiss brand, which also enjoys considerable political support across the political landscape. Some politicians would even like to see the dual system as an “export article”. However, in international cooperation this is hardly possible – in particular in the sense of dualizing complete national VET systems. The dual system can serve as a model and inspiration for training approaches, or it can be implemented as one approach among others in promising and dynamic sub-sectors of local economies. As a matter of fact, the dual system is not an exclusive Swiss brand, it is equally well rooted in all German speaking countries. Thus, for the further promotion of the dual system in international cooperation, SDC not only relies on Swiss resources, but it has also joined hands with development agencies of other German speaking countries. This resulted in the establishment of the DCdVET (see above), which is for SDC the primary channel to further promoting the dual system.

In VSD another decisive Swissness factor for the success of the VPET system is its legislation independently from but harmonised with and with bridges to the general education system. While the general education system is in the legislative authority of the cantons, VPET is legislated at the federal level.

In **BE**, the Swissness factor is less obvious than in VSD. However, the 2016 external evaluation of basic education²⁷ pointed to the fact that SDC’s strengths in bilateral cooperation actually reflect the ones of its education system(s). As a follow-up of this recommendation endorsed by the management response, the FP Education commissioned a study²⁸ on the “comparative advantages” of Switzerland in education²⁹. The findings were condensed in a communication leaflet. Workshops with Swiss stakeholders further explored these reflections. In a next step, a pilot mandate to test how the Swiss expertise could be linked to SDC’s partner countries was given to Movetia, the Swiss agency for exchange and mobility in education³⁰.

b) Collaboration with other Swiss offices

At the level of the federal administration, different entities and institutions implement international activities in **VSD**. They are based on their respective mandates and have a different focus and orientation.

²⁷ Evaluation of SDC’s Performance in Basic Education 2007-2014

²⁸ DDC (2018), Le système scolaire suisse: bonnes pratiques et plus-value potentielle pour la DDC

²⁹ SDC (2018) Impulse für die Internationale Zusammenarbeit in Bildung: Erfahrungen der Schweizer Schulbildung.

³⁰ Movetia was created in 2016 jointly by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), the Federal Office of Culture (FOC), the Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO) and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK).

Apart from SDC, other federal stakeholders include SERI (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation), SECO (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs), SEM (State Secretariat for Migration), the FDFA's Directorate for Political Affairs, and SFIVET (Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training). Together they created the IC-VPET (International Cooperation in Vocational and Professional Education and Training) in 2015. The lead is with SERI. The IC-VPET meets occasionally for exchange, and it organised national stakeholder symposia. At present, the structure is not very dynamic and active.

In **BE**, SDC continued to work closely with the FDFA's United Nations and International Organisation Division, particularly with the UNESCO Section (including the Swiss ambassador to UNESCO) on SDG4. The collaboration with this division was intensified regarding the place of education in International Geneva. This resulted in the hosting proposals to GPE, ECW, IBE and the launch of the Global Hub on EiE. This was successful for ECW and IBE, whereas GPE transferred part of its secretariat to Paris.

The **FP Education** also intensified exchanges with different actors of the education system(s) in Switzerland, for instance the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education and teacher training institutions to engage in dialogue on how the strengths and expertise of Switzerland could be better used in development cooperation.

c) Networks

The **FP Education** continued to support the RECI (Réseau Education et Coopération Internationale), a national network of civil society and specialised organisations and individuals (NGOs, teacher training intuitions, etc.). According to interview with board members³¹, the changes since the launch of the ES in 2017 are visible and positive. The ES itself is seen as a solid document that has served as a reference in strategic reflections for the board itself and in some cases for their respective organisations. Members welcome both the continuity of key SDC thematic priorities (inclusion, quality) and the move towards a more holistic approach (e.g. reflection on private sector actors, sustainable development, migration, disaster risk reduction). They also noticed the increased presence in international policy dialogue and welcome the sharpening of SDC's work on EiE and the humanitarian-development nexus. The increased attention to "Swissness" and to Swiss actors in education is being welcomed by some members, while others call for caution regarding the risks (political instrumentalisation, ethnocentrism and selling Switzerland as a "model"). RECI board members would be interested in more exchanges on the implementation of the ES within SDC, in particular at field level. They would also appreciate more dialogue on themes of common interest such as the interplay between BE and VSD and on the identification of opportunities for joint events or mobilization of RECI members' expertise for SDC events.

The **FP VSD** continued to support the FoBBIZ (Forum für Berufsbildung in der Internationalen Zusammenarbeit). This network was established as cooperation between Swiss NGOs with a focus on implementing VSD projects, selected Universities of Applied Sciences with international activities in VSD, and consultants. SDC supports the network with a small core contribution and is represented in the sounding board.

d) Swiss expertise

Some interviewees in country offices express the need and the desire of partner countries to have more access to Swiss expertise at the level of peer exchange, including institutional partnering. As the National Agency for Mobility and Exchange in Education, **Movetia** would in principle be well positioned to serve as platform to provide broker services to respond to such demands. Created mainly by the Cantons and the Confederation, it serves as a platform for national and international exchanges and has extensive knowledge of stakeholders and competencies within the system. It could further develop as an interface between SDC partner countries and the Swiss stakeholders.

In **VSD** and the Swiss education landscape, the **SFIVET** has a unique status. Although it functions similar to a University of Applied Sciences, it is a federal institute. It has established a unit for international

³¹ All RECI and FoBBIZ members were also invited to participate in the survey

cooperation. This unit has a focus on: (1) Standardised and tailor-made courses for international participants, (2) Expertise with a focus on teaching and instruction, quality, curriculum development, etc., (3) Exposing delegations to the Swiss system. The SFIVET is an accredited UNEVOC Centre and has entered cooperation agreements with various international organisations, among others with GIZ. The interaction between SDC and the SFIVET takes place (1) in the framework of the IC-VPET, (2) through annual institutional level meetings, and (3) at the level of specific initiatives or projects. Among the latter, there are plans to develop a new CAS addressing local programme officers, SDC staff in the rotation system with new responsibilities in VSD, external consultants, and project staff of implementers.

Another unique institution in VSD is the **CEMETS at the ETH Zurich**. This centre is established under the Chair of Education Systems. CEMETS is the Centre on the Economics and Management of Education and Training Systems and is called a **reform lab for VET systems**. Among others, CEMETS produces Education Factbooks for specific countries. It provided this service for free for interested SDC partner countries in VSD. The Chair for Education Systems also implements a major R4D research project financed by SDC and the Swiss National Foundation under the name LELAM-TVET4Income. This is the acronym for the full title, which also includes the key research question: Linking Education and Labour Markets: Under what conditions can Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) improve the income of the youth? From SDC side, this project is accompanied by Guido Beltrani, the head of the FP E+I. Beyond this institutional relation, relations with CEMETS and the Chair for Education Systems are bilateral. CEMETS is surely a potential resource centre and strategic partner for reinforcing the systems development orientation of VSD.

e) Challenges

The key challenge in both BE and VSD is not to overstress the Swissness factor as “export article”, but to truly respond to the needs of partner countries and institutions for low-threshold access to specialised Swiss expertise. This requires the possibility for direct communication between partner countries, institutions and project and institutions serving as clearing house in Switzerland.

9 Support to innovation and evidence-based learning

Key findings

- The Education Fund contributed to the ES by stimulating and supporting innovation.
- Partly due to the COVID-19 crisis, almost all projects include the use of ICTs, which offers high potential for mutual learning.
- The hypothesis regarding the “catalytic” effect of the EF cannot be confirmed and remains to be verified in the longer run.
- Current governance and procedures are too heavy, and they are not aligned with the structure of SDC as decentralised organisation.
- Although not reviewed systematically, efforts to improve evidence-based learning seem fairly limited.

9.1. Evidence-based learning

Supporting innovations and learning from evidence-based and impact evaluations to improve interventions and support policy dialogue, is one of the ES implementation modalities. Regarding innovation, the major initiative has been the creation of the Education Fund (EF).

With regards to evidence-based learning, the R4D programme of the Swiss National Foundation and SDC has one focus on employment in the context of sustainable development. Within that framework, three VSD projects are implemented:

- The LELAM-TVET4Income project under the Swiss lead of the Chair for Education Systems of the ETH explores how education and labour markets are linked, and more specifically, under what conditions TVET can improve the income of the youth?
- The Skills for Industry project under the Swiss lead of the PHZH in Zurich explores the contribution of vocational skills development to inclusive industrial growth and transformation: It analysis critical factors in six countries.
- The decent work project under the Swiss lead of the University of Lausanne explores the adaptation and strengthening of educational guidance and career counselling to promote decent work in the two West African countries Burkina Faso and Togo.

Other steps towards evidence-based data include the portfolio mapping in BE, EiE and VSD, or the changing of SAP codes in the education sector. Efforts towards documenting and sharing of evidence and good practices seem to be limited. A point in case is that only a single impact evaluation was carried out, in Benin. However, on reasons of time constraint and resources, the review did not systematically investigate the R4D projects and other initiatives for evidence-based learning. Thus, this chapter mainly deals with the Education Fund.

9.2. Education Fund

The EF was created as an instrument contributing to the ES implementation across domains in SDC. It has a qualitative rationale (improve effectiveness of interventions through innovation and learning) and a quantitative rationale (expansion of education through a “catalytic effect”). The results of the EF implementation so far have been reviewed in a separate report submitted in December 2020 (first draft) and slightly modified for the final version (see Annex). Key findings are summarised below.

Projects funded: Fifteen projects have been funded (6 in Africa, 4 Latin America, 3 in MENA and 2 in Asia). The majority (9) are in general education (from primary to tertiary), 3 are in VSD and 3 have education and VSD components. Two projects are from “non-education” sectors. Eleven projects are in fragile and crisis-affected contexts. Nine focus on migrant and/or displaced population. The majority of projects (XY projects) were submitted by the South Cooperation Domain (followed by Humanitarian Aid Domain with 6 projects).

Innovation (outcome 1): The EF succeeded in encouraging innovation in key areas of the ES. Partly due to the COVID-19 situation, there is a concentration of projects in the use of ICTs and remote/blended learning (12 out of 15 projects have ICTs as a major component). A majority of projects are implemented in fragile and crisis-affected contexts, linking education closely to other sectors, mainly to health, protection and migration issues as well as to resilience and social cohesion (contributing thus to different objectives and implementation modalities of the ES). Although various projects might have been financed through usual procedures, the interviewed SCOs felt encouraged by the EF to test innovative approaches and partnerships and view the Fund as an appropriate incentive.

Expansion (outcome 2): Regarding the quantitative rationale of the EF (outcome 2), the results are mixed and provisional. The funds spent are lower than planned in the credit proposal. This is mainly due to a late operationalisation of the EF and the subsequent loss of the 2019 budget. However, in 2020, the demands of SCOs exceeded the available resources (additional funds amounting to 640'000 CHF were allocated to the EF from the DAO and FP Education budgets). The EF succeeded in encouraging education activities in new contexts and establishing a dialogue with several SCO, representing one of the added values of the EF. However, the longer term effects and results in terms of scaling up cannot be assessed at this stage. The EF benefitted general education (from primary to tertiary education) more than VSD projects, reflecting the different characteristics and “stage of development” of these sub-sectors and their consequent “buy-in” in the EF. Overall, the hypothesis regarding the “catalytic” effect of the EF cannot be confirmed and remains to be verified in the longer run.

Learning (outcome 3): The potential for mutual learning from innovation for current and future programmes is good, especially thanks to the concentration of experiences in the areas of ICTs and education and in crisis-affected contexts. This somehow unexpected result should allow for peer-

exchanges and learning among SCOs and with the headquarters. However, to realise this potential, the Focal Points and their networks will have to implement a learning concept and dedicate adequate resources. With its experience related to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the EF could also bring about institutional learning on how to encourage innovation in key thematic areas and quickly adapt to new situations.

Governance and procedures: Current arrangements are too heavy, and they are in contradiction with the structure of SDC as decentralised organisation. This makes transaction costs too high, especially at the level of headquarters. The role of the focal points is too much in administration, and it is insufficiently focused on technical advice and institutional learning.

10 Roles and responsibilities within SDC

10.1. Domains, divisions and country offices

Key findings

- The engagement at the directorate and senior management level to reach the 50% increase in commitments to education was unanimous and strong.
- The engagement in implementing the ES beyond quantitative scaling up varies across domains and divisions.
- The host divisions are committed to their thematic function. However, they did not manage to overcome the difficulties of cooperation between the two focal points.

According to interviews with the management level, in the South Cooperation and in Humanitarian Aid domains, the strategy has a high value and the engagement to implement it is generally strong. The focus in the Eastern Europe Cooperation domain was mainly on the 50% increase target. The Global Cooperation domain contributed especially through the financing of the GPE as a new priority multilateral organisation. The implementation at regional/country level differs between domains and divisions (also see chapter 4). Eastern Europe and Eastern and Southern Africa rather retained their primary focus on VSD as part of economic development, and scaled it up. On the flip side, MENA developed in its regional programme a new domain education and income, and HA increased its attention to education in emergencies as an integral part of protection. In Asia the picture is mixed. VSD is traditionally a strong leg in a majority of Asian countries, and many of them continue and even have substantially scaled-up VSD programmes. Other countries started to open windows of opportunities and to embark on new elements like new interfaces between BE and VSD (e.g. Myanmar) or to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus (e.g. Afghanistan). And last but not least, education (BE and VSD) traditionally always was a priority in West Africa. This continues, but the focus increasingly shifts to a more systemic perception of the interventions and a stronger focus on EiE and the nexus.

At the level of senior management and the directorate, the primary attention was on the increasing importance of education for the organisation. This was rather a direct effect of the dispatch 2017-20, which stipulated a 50% increase in the commitments to BE and VSD than of the strategy. Respective achievements were closely and regularly monitored through the *Steuerungsberichte*.

For operations, country offices are more guided by their regional and/or country programmes than by thematic strategies. Thematic strategies play their most important role in the process of developing new regional and country programmes. There, country offices consult the relevant focal points of their choice, depending on the selection and scope of their three domains.

10.2. Host divisions

As host divisions of BE and VSD, DAO and ALAK have a shared responsibility in promoting the implementation of the ES. DAO historically had a stronger ownership of the development of the ES, which

still prevails today. For ALAK, VSD is only a part of its thematic responsibility in the field of inclusive economic development, which now includes PSD, PSF, VSD and the competence centre for private sector development, all under one focal point. At the thematic level, ALAK is also in charge of implementing the mid-term orientation for E+I, a *Leitdokument B*, like the ES.

Both divisions are committed to their role as host of thematic focal points. Regarding their collaboration at management level, it has varied over the period (according to changes of personnel). In recent years, the two heads of divisions have been trying to help the two focal point teams overcoming their difficulties in working together (for instance development of a collaboration charter in 2020). However, the results were limited.

10.3. Focal points and networks

Key findings

- For various reasons, the two FP (and their networks) have different levels of ownership of the ES. It is clearly higher in the FP and network Education, which took the ES as their major reference. This has a direct impact on the understanding of their role and function, on their priorities, and on their work organisation.
- The two focal points succeeded in developing their services and networks, thanks to additional resources.
- The clientele of the focal points expresses generally a high satisfaction with the competence and the services of the focal points.
- The FP VSD is particularly appreciated for its tools and instruments, and the FP Education for its increased technical advice and its specific strengths in the international policy dialogue (as well as the interlinkages between these two levels).
- Substantial backstopping mandates with their network of consultants are a decisive contributing factor for the quality of the services of the focal points.
- Though formally not belonging to the focal points, regional advisors are important stakeholders for strengthening the thematic competence of the networks.
- As long as staff working on thematic issues is subject to the general rotation system, the focal points are challenged with how to maintain their thematic competence.
- Despite the commitment of the management, the two focal points failed to develop a trustful cooperation. This hampered the implementation of the ES.

a) Stage of development

The launch of the ES met the two focal points, their networks, and the related portfolios at completely different stages of their development.

The **FP Education and its host division DAO** took the responsibility to coordinate the process of developing and writing the ES. However, it was a joint process and the ES was co-authored by the two divisions. On the whole, the FP Education took the ES as an opportunity to expand BE in bilateral cooperation beyond West Africa, to gain outreach and a new standing within the institution, to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus, to reshape its multilateral and global partner portfolio for the representation of SDC in the international policy dialogue, and for relaunching the education network. Among others, this evolution was also based on additional human resources and the support through a backstopping mandate starting from 2018.

Different from BE, **VSD** was already before the launch of the ES one of the strong legs in SDC's bilateral portfolio across all regions. In the wake of youth unemployment as a European and global challenge, the Swiss (and other dual) VET systems gained increasing international and political attention. Therefore, political pressure resulted in a fast and massive scaling-up of the bilateral VSD portfolio. This started prior to the launch of the ES around 2015. In 2019 the VSD portfolio map shows in 7 regions and 35 countries a total of 71 VSD projects. In terms of the number bilateral projects, this was an increase of approximately

30% as compared to 2016³² The FP VSD struggled to keep up with the pace in terms of conceptual and quality development. Their focus was on responding to the increasing demand and needs of country offices and the development of hands-on tools and instruments. Their buy-in to the development and subsequent promotion of the ES was low, as it absorbed their already scarce resources. According to interviews, the ES did not change much for the FP VSD as compared to the previous joint guidelines of 2011. Moreover, for VSD the interface with the world of work is equally important as the interface with education. Structurally, this is reflected by the fact that the medium-term orientation for E+I is for the FP VSD just as important as the ES. Both papers are classified at the same level as *Leitdokument B*.

b) Human resources and work organisation

The **FP Education** structures its work in four inter-linked “wings”, which are complementary and have clear “cross-fertilisation” effects: (1) Policy dialogue, (2) Partner portfolio management, (3) Education network, (4) Technical Advice to bilateral and multilateral programme. The FP officially has total staff strength of 300% FTE (de facto 280%). With approximately 130% FTE, it allocates less than half to policy dialogue and the management of the partner portfolio. Within that, GPE alone absorbed about 70% FTE almost a quarter of the entire staff resources (when SDC was a member of its Grants and Performance Committee). The other part of its resources of 150% FTE is split between technical advice and network facilitation. The FP Education administers a budget of about CHF 22 million. This compares with the budgets of the Global Programmes health or migration, but with considerably less FTE. and a large scope of work with policy dialogue, international partnerships, technical advice and network facilitation, The FTE allocation can thus be considered as modest. Beyond the FP Education, SDC has regional advisors in West Africa and MENA (covering BE and VSD). The backstopping mandate has provided technical advice, communications and network facilitation, including shareweb, and supported policy dialogue since early 2018 with an allocation of approximately 320 days/year.

The **FP VSD** – and the FP E+I more broadly – structures its work in seven working areas: (1) Strategic support, (2) Operational support, (3) Innovation, (4) Knowledge management and learning, (5) Partner relations, (6) International policy dialogue and standards setting, (7) national policy dialogue. In 2019 the FP VSD received an additional staff and has now total staff strength of 245% FTE. The FP VSD allocates the major share of its resource (about 130%) to technical advice (both at strategic and operational levels), and about 50% FTE to knowledge management and network facilitation. This leaves about 30-40% FTE to each innovation and policy dialogue (national and international). This means, for the international policy dialogue, the FP VSD has around 10% FTE, or even less. Beyond the FP VSD, SDC has regional advisors for VSD in the West Balkans, in Southeast Asia, in West Africa and MENA (the two latter covering VSD and BE). They formally do not belong to the focal point but they reinforce the SDC’s VSD capacities and facilitate the communication with the concerned regions. The backstopping mandate supports the FP VSD with an allocation of approximately 200 days/year.

c) Policy dialogue

The ES defines the representation of SDC in Swiss and international entities and policy dialogue as one of the key responsibilities of the focal points. As mentioned above, the FP Education allocates about 130% FTE to this priority activity, whereas the FP VSD only about 10%. As regards to contents, the issue has been dealt with extensively in chapter 8.

d) Technical advice and working instruments

Providing technical advice to the SDC departments and divisions at head office and country offices is another core task of the focal points defined in the ES. The FP VSD allocates about half of its overall staff strength or 130% FTE to this task, the FP Education approximately 130% to 150% to network facilitation/technical advice.

³² The SDC vocational skills development portfolio in 2019, accessed at www.shareweb.ch/site/EI/Pages/VSD/vsd-home.aspx

The **FP VSD** understands technical advice as its primary function and “raison d’être”. This was already the case prior to the launch of the ES. Traditionally, the focus of the technical advice was at the level of projects. During the implementation of the ES, this level moved gradually up to the more strategic level of regional and country programmes. The focus on tools and instruments (VSD typology tool, common outcome indicators, cost-benefit analysis, etc.) is directly linked to the FP VSD’s understanding of technical advice. Though they are not part of the FP VSD, regional VSD advisors substantially support the advisory function of the FP VSD.

As compared to the situation prior to 2017, the **FP Education** made significant progress to strengthen its advisory function. The primary challenge was to make its services known, build relationship and trust outside West Africa, where technical advice was already well established. This was done with substantial inputs in the MENA region (regional and country programmes in e.g. in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria), or in Afghanistan. Additional efforts were made in the Great Lakes region, in Myanmar, or in the migration programme. Some technical advice also took place in Latin America (Colombia), in the Western Balkans (Roma education fund), or in Tanzania. The Education Fund was also instrumental in expanding the services of the FP Education to some countries. In West Africa, collaborations and technical advice remained substantial, including in relation to EiE and the humanitarian-development nexus.

e) Network facilitation and knowledge management

The networks are facilitated by the focal points. Their mission is primarily to support joint learning, knowledge management and technical advice to operational units. The network Education also pays specific attention to linking “... global initiatives and policy dialogue with field-related activities and vice versa”³³. The key instrument in both networks is a core group comprising members and liaison persons from the different divisions with regular meetings, annual planning, etc. The membership in the network is broad and goes beyond SDC.

The **education network** was relaunched in 2017 with the strategy to support the implementation of the ES³⁴. Since then, and compared to the situation in 2017, significant improvements have been made. The network has been structured with an active core group representing all domains as well as key divisions concerned with education. Members of this group are involved in the development and implementation of annual plans with differentiated work streams³⁵. The network has been instrumental in (i) getting itself and the focal point services closer to field preoccupations and needs (resulting in increased technical advice, capacity building³⁶, peer exchange among SCOs and with the headquarters, etc.), (ii) linking field work and international policy dialogue (in both directions) and (iii) circulating key sectoral information from and to their divisions (related to SDC field operations, international partners, etc.). Network core group members also contributed to choosing thematic priorities and, in some cases, producing working aid and knowledge products (on issues such as the economic case for investing in education³⁷, ICT and education³⁸ and private sector engagement in education³⁹). The members of the core group generally have a positive appreciation of the evolution of the education network, its dynamism and the richness of the meetings and exchanges. Most of them feel that the network effectively contributes to the implementation of the ES and provides the organisation with useful information, expertise and capacity building opportunities. The results from the survey show an important influence of the ES on the work of colleagues in the field with a BE background, which tends to confirm that the education FP and network did a significant work regarding dissemination and promotion of the ES.

³³ SDC Education Network, ToR-SDC Education Network Advisory – Core Group

³⁴ SDC (2017), Concept note Education Network.

³⁵ A) Thematic learning, exchange, guidance and capacity development, B) Quality assurance, monitoring, strategic/programmatic advice, C) knowledge management, communication and D) Edu-Partners, Fora and policy dialogue on SDG-4

³⁶ For e.g. training on Education in Emergencies for SCOs in 2020/2021

³⁷ SDC (2018), The Economic Case for Investing in Basic Education (commissioned to Ji Liu)

³⁸ SDC (2019) Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and Education, Summary note (commissioned to Jigsaw Consult)

³⁹ SDC (2020), Scoping Study Private Sector Engagement in Basic Education and Lifelong Learning (commissioned to I-Gravity)

The range of topics of these activities include issues like (a) job creation in selected economic sectors, (b) ICTVET, the future of work in selected regions, (c) the theory of change for VSD, (d) exchange with consultants, (e) cooperation with private sector engagement, (f) the presentation of relevant publications, etc.

The activities of the **VSD network** encompass the organisation of own events, participation and presentations in events of others, webinars, e-discussions, communities of practice, etc. With the e-talk, the E+I Network has also launched a new format, which is more interactive than webinars, but with a limited audience. The participation with a substantial delegation from partner countries and the contributions to the 3rd International Congress on VPET in 2018 in Switzerland was one of the highlights. It was preceded by an internal pre-event for the participants of SDC. The webinar for the promotion of the VSD typology tool with its various add-ons was perceived by various interviewees as one of the most prominent activities of the VSD team in the E+I network.

The promotion of knowledge management and capacity development is one of the main responsibilities of the focal points for the implementation of the ES. Within that, network facilitation and **sharewebs** are core instruments.

The differences in the structure and the contents between the sharewebs education and VSD reflect and confirm the different understandings of the two focal points. The **shareweb education** is closely aligned with the ES and its implementation. The focus areas reflect the six strategic orientations plus education and protection and education and the IC Strategy 21-24 priorities. It entails a wealth of information and links to key activities of its strategically selected partner portfolio. (see above in chapter 8).

Among others, the focus of the **shareweb VSD** is on three main issues: (1) Topics, (2) Resource box, and (3) Projects. The topics include issues like gender and VSD, private sector participation in VSD, youth employment, informal sector and self-employment, VSD and migration, fragility, inclusion, and National Qualifications Frameworks. Thus, the topics implicitly encompass various dimensions of the ES, without explicitly making reference to it. The resource box mirrors the focus of the FP VSD on tools for practitioners like a VSD glossary, the VSD typology tool with add-ons on various dimensions, common outcome indicators for VSD, an instrument for cost-benefit analysis of VSD projects, or a working instrument for VSD and migration. A comprehensive project database for the complete E+I portfolio with highly differentiated search options includes 368 projects with 952 phases, out of which 113 concern VSD.

Despite these positive developments in **both focal points and networks**, several core group members feel frustrated that they are not able to contribute more actively to the design and implementation of the network activities. They feel overstretched by their other tasks and underline the fact that the thematic work is not sufficiently valued by the management (see below). Some members coming from geographical divisions reluctant to open their programmes to certain changes impelled by the ES (e.g. taking into account basic education needs in VSD programmes) also felt frustrated. Finally, a good share of members of the core group (and beyond) regret that the education and VSD network do not have more joint activities. Although they think it is necessary to deal separately with core BE and VSD issues, they view the two separate network with very low collaboration as a missed opportunity of overcoming structural divide as it would be required by the ES.

f) Backstopping

The **FP Education** has been supported by a backstopping mandate with a volume of about 320 days/year. This was entrusted in early 2018 to NORRAG to provide technical advice to the FP, support communications and network activities, including Shareweb and newsletters, and policy dialogue (especially in relation with GPE). Besides this, smaller mandates have been given to support the FP on specific issues (e.g. to Movetia on developing links with Swiss actors in education; to the Swiss Educational Innovation Network (SNBI) to support the use of ICTs in education, and to I-Gravity to support relevant collaboration with the private sector in education).

The **FP VSD** has a long tradition with external support and backstopping. The last mandate under the lead of KEK-CDC Consultant, which expired in 2019, had a volume of about 150 days/year. The new mandate

from 2020-24 has a volume of approximately 200 days/year. KEK-CDC Consultants is in the lead, but the mandate assembles expertise from other organisations like INBAS, the PHZH, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Swisscontact, individual consultants and others. Beyond the support to regular activities of the FP VSD (Shareweb, contributions to the E+I newsletter/e-mails, dGroups, portfolio overview), the mandate has a focus on conceptual issues (e.g. on approaches for the cooperation with Swiss partners or for advisory services at the strategic level), capacity building (e.g. for the introduction and coaching of new staff working on VSD issues, organisation and facilitation of a consultants network), and communication (e.g. dissemination of the tools).

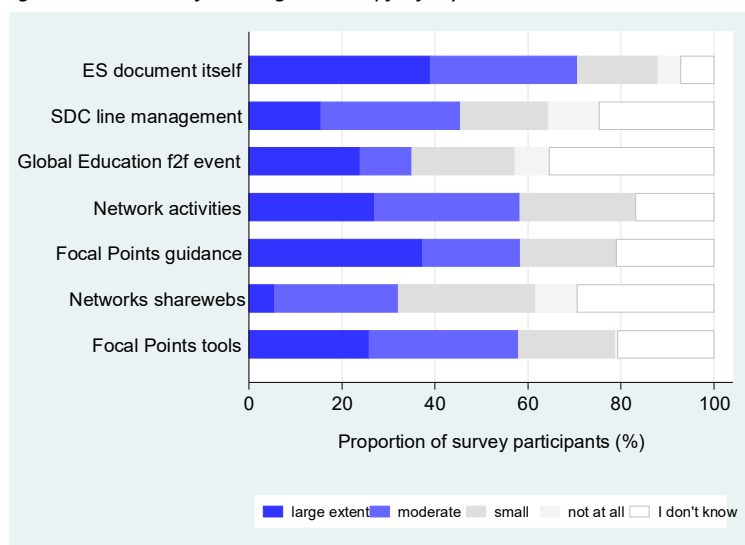
g) Perception of the clients

Generally speaking, the work and services of the focal points is well received and appreciated by the clients as the survey results in Figure 15 shows. Apart from the document itself, it is mainly the network activities, the guidance through the focal points and tools developed by the focal points which are considered to be most supportive. The shareweb are the least helpful service.

This is by and large confirmed through interviews. In the case of the FP Education, the strengths that were repeatedly mentioned are related to (1) the quality of collaboration, technical advice and responsiveness to field work, (2) the positioning in global policy dialogue and the interlinkages with operational work, (3) the functioning of the network.

In the case of the FP VSD, the highest appreciation is for their tools and instruments. This holds in particular true for the VSD Typology Tool with its various add-ons. With this tool the FP VSD tried to capture the VSD landscape in the tension between the education and the employment system, and between social and economic policy orientations⁴⁰. This tool can also be instrumental for further discussions on the interrelations between VSD, BE and other systems.

Figure 15: Have the following been helpful for you to understand and use the ES at country level?



Note: 53 responses from SDC and consultants

h) Challenges

Frequently mentioned challenges concern three main issues:

Lack of cooperation between the two focal points and networks: The participation in thematic networks is anyhow a challenge for staff from operational divisions. This challenge is further aggravated for those colleagues who should participate as members or core group members in both networks. They would

⁴⁰ SDC, E+I Network, VSD Typology – Orientation and Impact of VSD, fourth revised edition, March 2019

welcome more joint activities to work on common issues. The F2F in 2019 is widely seen as a good practice in that regard.

Lack of adequate recognition of thematic work: Many core members expressed frustration for not being able to devote adequate time to thematic work and to contribute more actively. Some regret that the thematic work is not given sufficient attention and recognition within the institution: although the participation in networks is part of the job description, it is frequently not formally evaluated.

Rotation and loss of expertise: Many interviewees express a high esteem for the thematic work, the services of the focal points and the networks. Specialised expertise and competencies are increasingly seen as the core element to bring added value to partner countries. The rotation system was frequently mentioned as a threat to building and keeping solid expertise and “institutional memory” within SDC.

11 Strategic orientations

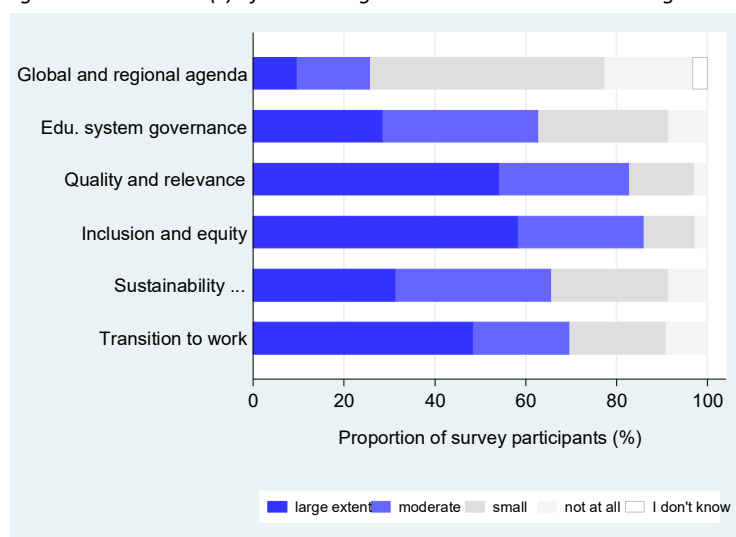
Key findings

- The strategic orientations are very broad and had a limited direct effect on shaping the portfolio.
- In the absence of a monitoring system, the organisation lacks a strategic overview on the portfolio.
- At the operational level, there are many good practices which illustrate various dimensions of the strategic orientations

The strategy defines six strategic orientations. In theory the strategic orientations of a thematic strategy should constitute the main guiderail for steering the evolution of the portfolio at the level of the institution, and for respective programme and project design at the level of the responsible organisational units. In order to further facilitate such processes, the strategy defines fields of observation for each strategic orientation. This is meant to serve as basis for a respective monitoring system.

In the survey more than 30% of the SDC participants responded, that these strategic orientations did not have any influence on shaping the portfolio in their respective organisational unit. For the other 70% of

Figure 16: Which one(s) of the strategic orientations has been driving those changes?



Note: 39 responses

the participants, their main focus was on inclusion and equity, on quality and relevance and on transition to work. The focus on the global and regional agenda is less prominent. However, this is the perspective of respondents mainly from the field. At headquarter, the FP Education pays utmost attention to this orientation, and it is the main driver for the global policy dialogue. Respective achievements have already been reported in chapter 8 above.

Both the portfolio review for education and lifelong learning 2016-18 and for vocational skills development 2017 make reference to the strategic orientations as one dimension among others. Both reviews struggled to structure their overview accordingly.

At the level of the directorate, the *Steuerungsberichte* have two foci, i.e. (a) the 50% increase of commitments and (b) the policy dialogue with multilateral organisations. They do not make reference to the strategic orientations.

A monitoring system reflecting the strategic orientations and based on the fields of observation has not been developed. This was a decision from the directorate. This would also be rather challenging, given the complex nature of the underlying concepts and the breadth of these strategic orientations. They are formulated so openly, that some participants in the survey and interview partners observe, that the strategy does not really have a clear focus, that it rather serves as inspiration than as guidance, or that almost all different types of projects can somehow be accommodated under the strategy. Some people perceive this as an advantage because it allows field offices in a decentralised organisation like SDC to align their programmes more with the perceived needs of the country than with the strategy. However, as prerequisite for taking informed steering decisions and monitoring implementation, each strategic orientation would have to be further operationalised based on a common understanding of the underlying concepts and orientations within SDC.

At the management level, SDC lacks a strategic overview on the portfolio. This makes informed steering decisions difficult, and it is challenging, if not impossible, to accompany the evolution of the portfolio systematically and related to the six strategic orientations.

Irrespective of these rather summative and critical observations on the stage of implementation of the strategic orientations, replies on open questions in the survey, interviews and case studies reveal quite a patchwork of interesting approaches and good practices for the implementation of different aspects of the strategic orientations.

Spotlight AQL project, Afghanistan (topic: systems strengthening, nexus development-humanitarian aid)

In the eyes of Abdul-Wahid Zirak and André Daniel Müller from the SCO in Kabul, the Afghanistan Quality Learning (AQL) project is remarkable in several ways. The first element is the shift towards a system strengthening approach in a very fragile context. The project supports two service branches of the Afghan Ministry of Education concerned with education quality and governance (this thematic focus is itself interesting, given that most projects in Afghanistan focus on access rather than quality). André and Zirak note that *“From the needs assessment until now, [the Ministry of Education is] the owner of the project. This fosters accountability and sustainability. The drawback of such an approach can be that you need to work with bureaucratic procedures and hurdles which could stop activities altogether. But things have been going well so far.”* Another noteworthy element is that AQL attempts to build bridges between community schools and public schools. Many humanitarian projects focus on community-based learning spaces which can provide education close to the community. Yet such projects can fail to ensure continuity in the learning pathways. AQL is trying to address this gap. *“If you have humanitarian projects, always think of what comes next: How can students complete their education? Otherwise, you might enrol students at the beginning, but they might still not have the path they were wishing for. And if you have development projects, the question is: How can refugees and IDPs be reached and best served through your projects?”*

Spotlight ENSSURE and NVQS projects, Nepal (systems strengthening)

Since adopting a new constitution in 2015, Nepal is a federalised country, with 7 provinces, and 753 municipalities. Usha Bhandari from the SCO in Kathmandu calls this a “golden opportunity”: *“This is an opportunity to work on the reform of entire TVET system. Hence we have extended our support with the aim to establish clear TVET functions at all three tiers of government.”* The reform process required input on various topics. Through the two projects ENSSURE and NVQS, SDC brought in a lot of Swiss expertise, which she considers as important given that there are very few national TVET experts available in Nepal. The approach to support the reform process through several projects adds flexibility. *“A single project cannot do everything. We work on many different levels with our projects. Implementing several projects [with different timelines] allows us to have a rolling planning. Given the changes in the reform process, this is important.”* Providing support through different interventions is also a means to mitigate risks. A case in point are dual VET apprenticeship and short course with Work Based Learning approaches that are introduced under ENSSURE, whose linkages to higher TVET levels are assured through the approved National

Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF). SDC's simultaneous support in the National Vocational Qualification System through the Nepal Vocational Qualifications System Project (NVQS) has made it possible.

12 The IC Strategy 2021-24

Key findings

- The IC Strategy 2021-24 confirms the importance of education, including BE and VSD at different levels and under various titles.
- The Federal Council formulated four objectives for the IC Strategy. At this top level, education is defined as basic service.
- At the level of the target of decent jobs creation, VSD is defined as instrument with a focus on potential entrepreneurs and job creators.
- The improvement of the economic and social perspectives of vulnerable groups requires in our interpretation integrated approaches which combine BE, VSD and other labour market instruments. This is also supported by annex 2, where BE and VSD are both mentioned in objective 1.

The IC Strategy 2021-24 confirms the importance of education (BE and VSD). Education is mentioned at several places in the document, be it jointly as BE and VSD or be it separately with a focus on either BE or VSD. This namely includes the following chapters of the IC Strategy 2021-24:

- Chapter 3.4 describes the four objectives decided by the Federal Council for the overall orientation of the IC Strategy 2021-24. At this level the Federal Council defines BE as basic service⁴¹.
- Chapter 3.5.3 translates the four overall objectives decided by the Federal Council into four thematic priorities. At this level the description of the thematic priority 1 (decent jobs) stipulates the promotion of vocational education and training inspired by the Swiss VPET system with an increasing focus on potential entrepreneurs. Also at this level, the description of the thematic priority 3 (migration) stipulates the improvement of economic and social perspectives of vulnerable groups through improved basic education, vocational skills training and labour market insertion.
- Chapter 4 outlines the implementation in the framework of the respective instruments. At this level the description of HA as instrument in chapter 4.1.1 defines EiE as integral element of the protection focus theme. Also at this level, the priorities for the bilateral cooperation in chapter 4.1.2 include BE and VSD in Africa, Asia, Latin America and in the MENA region. The focus in Eastern Europe is on job creation.
- Annex 2 mentions BE and VSD in objective 1 (sustainable economic development) under the sub-objective 2 (decent jobs) as one support area. Objective 3 (human development) refers to the top level objective, and defines education prominently as one out of the two basic services, which Switzerland wants to promote. And finally, the sub-objective 9 (human rights and gender equality) makes makes a link the SDG 4 (Quality education).

The description of BE and VSD, of their respective importance and expected contributions under the different thematic priorities, and also of their interrelation is not fully consistent in the different chapters of the document and in the annex. This requires interpretation. The review team bases its observations, conclusions, and suggestions primarily on the top-level descriptions and orientations of the overall objectives and the subsequent descriptions of the four thematic priorities of the IC Strategy 2021-24. This leads to an interpretation which is different from annex 2.

At this level, the IC Strategy defines BE (together with health) as one of two basic services to be promoted and supported by Switzerland, while VSD is called to focus increasingly on multipliers and job creators. In

⁴¹ In this chapter we refer to the IZA-Strategie 2021-24, the German version of the IC Strategy 2021-21

our reading this confirms the focus of SDC on universal basic education for all and on strengthening respective systems (formal schooling and all alternative/equivalent provisions) as its “core business”.

Regarding VSD, the IC Strategy gives at the top-level of the description of the four thematic priorities two different messages:

- a) Under the thematic priority 1 (decent jobs) it stipulates VPET for potential future entrepreneurs, multipliers and job creators as an important contributing factor to economic development and decent job creation.
- b) Under the thematic priority 3 (migration) the focus is on vulnerable groups and young people for the improvement of their economic and social perspectives.

This is not a contradiction as it might look like at a first glance. VSD serves always and by default different purposes and policy objectives. The two high-level objectives in IC Strategy respond to the labour market realities in many SDC partner countries. These labour markets are frequently characterised by a duality between a massive oversupply of unskilled and low-skilled jobseekers, and more dynamic and growth-oriented industrial sectors which are unable to recruit the necessary qualified workforce.

As a consequence, national TVET systems should serve both purposes with a puzzle of different training approaches of different durations, at different qualification levels, serving a different clientele financed from different sources, and implemented under different legislative acts and authorities. As stipulated by the IC Strategy at the top level, also the VSD portfolio of SDC should encompass different types of projects serving different social and economic purposes. Translated into practice, the future VSD portfolio should focus on at least the two different types of projects in at least two quadrants of the VSD typology tool (namely labour market inclusion and industry solutions).

Addressing multipliers and potential job creators in more dynamic segments of local economies and at higher qualification levels (including post-secondary and non-academic tertiary level) is a specific strength of VSD. In recent years, SDC has left this dimension of VSD by and large to the SECO.

The focus on the improvement of the economic and social perspectives of disadvantaged populations and young people is not an exclusive VSD task. This is the main focus of a majority of the bilateral project portfolio, be it under the labels of BE, VSD or of EiE. The human development focus of the IC Strategy challenges SDC to integrate these approaches under a holistic perception of the transition from the world of education to the world of work. Paths for (re-)integrating vulnerable groups into education and/or the world of work require not only basic and vocational learning, but also non-educational services like orientation, stipend programmes, coaching, employment assistance, work programmes, temporary employment, temporary salary subsidies, self-employment promotion, start-up support.

13 Conclusions and recommendations

13.1. Introduction

SDC has been overall successful in making education a prominent sector and expanding commitment and actual spending. Beyond specificities across domains and subsectors, the trend in expansion is clearly set. The key factor has been the institutional and management engagement in all domains, both at headquarters and in the field, to meet the goals of the Dispatch 2017-20 and increase the commitment to education. These efforts have been supported by the FP and networks, which have been the backbone of the promotion and implementation of the ES, with a stronger ownership and influence on side of BE. They have been able to play this role through the strengthening of their services, increased resources and backstopping.

The overall result now calls for various types of responses to manage the success, ensure quality and focus on selected priorities. The expansion of the bilateral portfolio with a massive increase of projects and programmes, calls for operational guidance, technical advice, knowledge management and quality control. In the same way, the expansion of SDC’s multilateral engagement calls for sustained engagement

in policy dialogue. Some of the measures are in the hands of focal points and networks: they can maximise the use of limited resources, by focusing on selected issues and on the services mostly appreciated, namely tailor-made advice to countries, tools, learning through peer-exchanges and capacity-building. Other measures are beyond their control and depend on SDC's management, which is called to secure adequate resources and specialised thematic expertise at the headquarters (focal points), in the regions/countries and for supporting participation in the networks. Other measures are needed to correct the BE/VSD divide.

The review shows that some areas of progress need a response towards institutionalisation and building on progress. This is the case for **education in crisis-affected context**, where emerging good practices at policy and operational levels need to be institutionalised, and in **international policy dialogue**, where SDC can build on its assets to further sharpen its profile. SDC's contribution to international policy dialogue on VSD could be intensified. Regarding strategic partnership in Switzerland and the willingness to benefit more from **Swiss expertise**, the review recommends continuing to seek to focus on a pragmatic approach facilitating an interface between the demand of partner countries and Swiss expertise.

Finally, there are areas that call for firm improvement. This is the case for **the interplay between BE and VSD**, where the review found little achievement despite a prominent position in the ES as well as a high interest in the institution. The first answer to this situation is conceptual. Clarifications are needed both to define “demarcation” and “interplay” between the two sub-sectors. Demarcation calls for clarity about what VSD and BE do separately, as their core business, setting clear focus on priority issues. Interplay calls for clarity about what VSD and BE do together and how. The review argued that the interplay is of particular need in programmes serving underprivileged groups with very low levels of BE and difficult access to training and decent jobs. Successful integration in learning paths asks to address the lack of basic learning tools (including literacy and numeracy) and bridge the world of education with the world of work, which requires services that go beyond the education and training systems. This process of clarification should be given high priority. It is central to implement the IC Strategy 2021-2024 or the Federal Council Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa 2021-2024. It is also justified by the growing number of regions, countries and programmes that are moving towards an increased integration of the two sub-sectors.

The second answer to this issue is **structural and institutional**. The “interplay” dimension of the ES calls for more integrated FP/networks and human resources management, which should be reflected at all levels of their mandates. The success very much depends (i) on the capacities of SDC to find and retain specialised thematic competences and (ii) on the structural arrangement to encourage their collaboration. The first calls to mitigate the risks of losing thematic expertise due to the rotation process; the second to better integrate BE and VSD thematic services. Good practices found elsewhere in the institution could be useful (e.g. selected staff with mixed profiles and job descriptions..

A new start is also recommended regarding the issue of **monitoring** the ES implementation. The review found itself constantly confronted with the lack of data regarding the implementation of the ES. Although the decision was taken at directorate level to not develop a monitoring system for the ES, we recommend re-opening the discussion on this issue and seize the opportunity to prioritise key aspects, where changes are expected and should be monitored. This is especially important at the level of the Board of Directors. Indeed, as the objective of increasing commitment to education by 50% will not be monitored anymore by the Board, there is a high risk of losing sight of the ES implementation and the major progresses done in this sector during the 2017-2020 period.

The recommendations are detailed below. They do not address the whole range of issues explored by the review but intend to focus on the most prominent and useful elements to take into account in the coming period to further implement the ES. They are presented under the four main headings:

- e) Recommendations on the interplay between BE and VSD
- f) Recommendations related to BE
- g) Recommendations related to VSD
- h) Recommendations on structural and organisational issues

13.2. Recommendations on the interplay between BE and VSD

Assets: Strengthening the synergies between BE and VSD is one of the key purposes of having a joint strategy. It is a major priority and implementation modality of the ES. The review found that the need for more interplay is widely recognised across the domains and levels of the organisation. At the field level, increased synergies (as an effect of the ES) are perceived by almost 50% of staff. A move towards increased integration is visible or planned in various regional and country programmes and projects. At a higher strategic level, the IC Strategy 2021-24 and the Federal Council's Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa 2021-2024 also push for increased synergies between BE and VSD. This calls for a better integration of BE and VSD within an enlarged perspective bridging the world of education to the world of work, especially when serving marginalised target groups.

Challenges: The limited progress in exploiting synergies between BE and VSD is the major shortcoming of the ES implementation. This has a conceptual and a structural dimension.

Conceptually, SDC lacks a common understanding of purpose, concepts, terminology, approaches and policy implications on the interrelations between BE and VSD. BE and VSD specialists often lack understanding of the other field. The (re-)integrating of marginalised target groups into education and/or work even goes beyond BE and VSD. It requires paths, which are based on a holistic perception of the transition between the world of education to the world of work, which combine basic foundation skills with vocational skills, and which include non-educational support and services from other systems. A common understanding of the interplay includes both an understanding of the complementarities/synergies at the different levels, and of the demarcations between the two subsectors, i.e. the respective core businesses of BE and VSD. The existing draft guidance paper is conceptually not sufficiently sound to address these issues. The beginning of the new IC Strategy 2021-24 could be used to relaunch this process, which might require external support.

The structural divide between the two FP and networks under two host divisions hampered conceptual progress. The FP neither developed substantial collaboration in their service provision (learning/knowledge management, joint technical advice), nor did the networks carry out joint activities beyond the milestone F2F workshop in 2019. Some of the solutions are in the hands of the host divisions, FP and network, while others are institutional and exceed their responsibility.

Recommendation 1: Take the beginning of the new IC Strategy 2021-24 as opportunity to relaunch the process to strengthen the interplay between BE and VSD

This process entails conceptual and structural work:

- The FP Education and VSD and their networks enter with external support a process to develop a common understanding of the interplay between BE and VSD. This comprises both the demarcation between the two (what they do separately in the framework of their respective core business), and the interplay (what they can do together). This conceptual framework results in a common understanding on the strategic and operational implications at the different levels of the organisation. A typology tool for the interplay between BE and VSD with add-ons for selected issues could be the tangible result of this process.
- The host divisions, FP Education and VSD and their networks define and communicate joint objectives, priorities and activities to promote, support and report on the implementation of the interplay.
- The host divisions and FP Education and VSD explore new organisational arrangements to ensure a fruitful collaboration between the FP and networks, allowing to respond to both their joint mission and their specific core business to implement the ES and the IC Strategy 2021-2024.

13.3. Recommendations related to BE

The recommendations related to BE take three dimensions of the ES implementation into consideration: the thematic focus, the partnerships and the supporting structure of the FP Education and network.

a) Thematic Focus

Assets: Strong attention was dedicated to (a) education in crisis-affected context and (b) to the links between education and other sectors/thematic issues. This reflects the key priorities of the ES (address education and protection needs during emergencies and crisis and promote education as a means of enhancing the different dimensions of sustainable development - environmental, social and economic). Equity issues (through the promotion of LNOB and gender equity) and education system governance (two others of the five key priorities of the ES), have been given strong attention too.

Education in crisis-affected contexts: The results related to EiE and the humanitarian and development nexus are amongst the most significant of the ES implementation. EiE has been integrated in protection, one of the four priority themes of HA, and a key element in the IC Strategy 2021-24. SDC managed to become an active player in strengthening the ecosystem around EiE in “international Geneva”. At operational level, trends and good practices have emerged (e.g. West Africa, MENA, Afghanistan). Overall, the linkages and dialogue between SC and HA in the field of education have developed both at operational and policy dialogue level.

Links to other sectors/thematic issues: The understanding of how education and schools can be used to reach the goals of some other sectors has grown. The most tangible results so far are with protection, while promising collaborations have been developed with e.g. disaster risk reduction, health, civic education and migration. The FP Education also promoted an enlarged vision of the quality of education, focusing not only on pedagogy but also on broader issues such as child well-being and safety.

Challenges: *Education in crisis-affected contexts:* Overall, implementation is still at an early stage. SDC made commitments, which will require sustained efforts towards institutionalisation. No strategy is in place and human resources dedicated to this issue in HA are limited. Sustaining progress requires a clear strategy with efforts in various domains to support both operations and policy dialogue.

Links to other sectors/thematic issues: Less than 20% of the respondent to our survey feel that the ES contributed to increased synergies with other sectors. Thus, there is a need to pursue collaboration and technical support to those who wish to effectively use the education system to reach their goals or who need to strengthen the basic learning skills of their target groups. The proactive development of synergies requires focusing on a limited number of areas as there is a risk of dispersing the limited resources of the FP and not reaching the operational level. There is also a risk of neglecting the core business of solving the “learning crisis” in overstretched education systems. Indeed, key issues, such as curriculum development, teacher training or textbooks also need be subject of thematic work and attention.

Recommendation 2: Ensure the institutionalisation of EiE/child protection, focus on synergies with selected sectors/thematic issues and increased attention to core pedagogical issues

- HA and SC: Elaborate a strategy to build on progress and ensure the institutionalisation of EiE/child protection taking into account: (i) in-house awareness raising, staff capacity building and knowledge management, (ii) technical advice to operations (with tools, hands-on advice, peer exchanges, etc.), (iii) active participation in international policy dialogue and in supporting the Geneva Global Hub for EiE, (iv) adequate human and financial resources.
- The FP Education: Promote synergies with a selection of key sectors/thematic issues taking into account the demand at field level (SCOs, programmes), the priorities of the IC Strategy 2021-24 (in particular climate change, health, migration) and increase attention to the “core business” of strengthening the effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes and learning outcomes.

b) Strategic partnerships and policy dialogue – International and national

Assets: The results in this area are among the key progress of the ES implementation. SDC succeeded in sharpening its positioning in the international aid architecture in education (UN and global funds) thanks to a clear strategy including changes in its partner portfolio, increased participation in governing and

technical bodies and making GPE a priority multilateral organisation. Outside perception of SDC is positive, especially regarding its ability to link policy dialogue and field interventions. At the national level, SDC worked to identify specific strengths of the Swiss education system. A partnership started with an institution uniquely positioned to potentially serve as a broker between SDC partner countries and the specialised Swiss expertise.

Challenges: The international policy dialogue absorbed a big share of the resources of the FP. The work intensity will have to be reduced according to decisions already made, while keeping good practices and influence. The share of the portfolio allocated to “think tanks” remained fairly low and could be increased to develop more “brain power” (along the “political power”) on selected thematic issues that matter for SDC at field level and that could raise its profile in international policy dialogue and benefits to its operations. In Switzerland, the partnership with Movetia is at an initial stage and needs sustained dialogue to make Swiss expertise relevant to partner countries with reasonable transaction costs.

Recommendation 3: Keep SDC’s position in international policy dialogue and continue developing access to specialised Swiss expertise

- The FP Education maintains SDC’s position in international policy dialogue through active participation and building on good practices (in particular the two-ways and mutually beneficial links between the international policy dialogue and the country operation levels).
- Identify key thematic issues in which SDC wants to be influential (relevant for field operations and policy dialogue) and examine the possibility to collaborate with “think tank” type of partners (or increase collaboration with “think tank” functions of existing partners such as IIEP, INEE, NORRAG) to build convincing cases based on data and evidence.
- Continue developing broker services (partnership with Movetia) for low-threshold access to specialised Swiss expertise (for partner countries, field offices and projects).

c) Supporting structure (FP and network)

Assets: The five past years have been marked by a strong development with additional staff in the FP, the start of the backstopping mandate and an expanded and structured network, which all together supported the ES implementation. The key asset of the FP is the balance between the four mutually reinforcing pillars of its work. Technical advice to countries, collaboration with humanitarian aid and link to other sectors all grew.

Challenges: The FP manages a budget similar to a global programme with limited human resources, which calls for a need to focus on key thematic issue, partners for policy dialogue and services mostly appreciated in-house, which are tailor-made technical advice, tools for operational work and learning through peer-exchanges. This latter, so far assumed by the FP, would benefit from the involvement of external support (e.g. backstopping).

Recommendation 4: Build on assets, focus on selected priorities and on the services mostly appreciated in house.

- The FP maintains the balance and mutually reinforcing links between the four pillars of the FP work: Technical advice, international policy dialogue and partner portfolio, network.
- The FP (with the network) consolidates the technical advice to countries and strengthens the elaboration of tools to guide strategic decision and operational implementation. Capacities are increased through the involvement of external support.

13.4. Recommendations on the further development in VSD

a) Thematic focus

Assets: In the wake of the youth employment crisis, the Swiss PVET system with its dual approach to VSD gained internationally high attention. This resulted in political pressure to scale up SDC's bilateral engagement in VSD. This started prior to the launch of the ES in 2017. Since 2015 the bilateral portfolio in VSD experienced a massive growth. This growth was further reinforced under the dispatch 2017-20 and the ES with the focus on 50% increase in commitments to education.

Challenges: With its focus on massive outreach to the target group, VSD mainly works at the level of low-skilled labour. In many partner countries the labour markets are characterised by a deep divide between an oversupply of low-skilled, un- or underemployed youth/young adults, and the more dynamic and growth-oriented segments of the economy which are unable to recruit the necessary professional staff. This is usually the case for specialised professionals, shop-floor supervisors and first level managers. This is exactly the area where VSD has substantial potential to make a big difference, and where dual approaches and private sector participation are particularly promising approaches⁴². Also the IC Strategy 2021-24 challenges SDC to diversify its VSD portfolio to not only cater to jobseekers from vulnerable groups, but also to potential job creators and multipliers.

Recommendation 5: Diversify the VSD portfolio under the IC Strategy 2021-24 with a dual focus on jobseekers from vulnerable groups and potential job creators and multipliers

- The focus on the improvement of the social and economic perspectives of vulnerable groups shall primarily be pursued under comprehensive approaches which integrate educational, vocational and labour market insertion components, services and instruments. This includes the further development of the interplay with BE.
- SDC further diversifies the bilateral VSD portfolio beyond the massive outreach to jobseekers from vulnerable groups to potential job creators and multipliers. This includes training offers at different qualification levels, including post-secondary and non-academic tertiary levels. In this type of training dual approaches are particularly promising.

b) Policy dialogue

Assets: The high international interest in the Swiss dual system and the related political pressure challenged SDC to promote and scale-up dual approaches in development cooperation, particularly in the bilateral portfolio. In order to support implementation, SDC was a driving force and a founder member in the DCdVET, the donor committee for the promotion of dual VET. SDC also co-finances its secretariate, which at present is hosted by Swisscontact in Zurich. With the dual system, SDC has an obvious Swissness factor.

Challenges: Despite the high interest in dual systems, the international trends in VSD are going in a different direction. An important focus is on national qualifications frameworks and competency-based approaches. This challenges SDC and other donors with dual systems to explore the potential for cross-fertilization, synergies and cooperation between the different TVET approaches. At present, the FP VSD has neither the human nor the financial resources to scale-up its presence in the international policy dialogue beyond the DCdVET, and the opportunity-driven occasional participation in other platforms.

In VSD targeting potential job creators and multipliers, dual approaches are potentially promising. Conceptually such approaches are closer to the Swiss understanding of VSD. This opens new windows of opportunities for the cooperation with Swiss partners.

⁴² SDC, E+I Network, VSD Typology – Orientation and Impact of VSD, fourth revised edition, March 2019

Recommendation 6: The FP VSD continues to promote dual approaches through the DCdVET and explores options to scale-up SDC's participation in and contribution to the international policy dialogue in TVET

- National qualifications frameworks and competency-based approaches are international trends in VSD. At the level of the policy dialogue, the potential of the integration of such approaches and dual VET under a common roof might be of particular interest.
- Scaling-up the international policy dialogue might be done independently and/or in cooperation with the FP Education.
- At the national level, the diversification of the portfolio targeting potential job creators and multipliers opens new windows of opportunities for direct cooperation with Swiss stakeholders.

c) Supporting structure

Assets: The massive growth of the bilateral VSD portfolio challenged the FP VSD with its limited resources to keep up with the pace in terms of conceptual coherence and quality control. Accordingly, the FP VSD focused on technical advice responding to the needs and requests of the field. In order to support these processes, it developed a substantial number of instruments, tools and guidance papers for practitioners, with the VSD Typology Tool as backbone.

As the FP VSD is integrated in the Inclusive Economic Development expert team, the synergies with PSD/FSD in terms of working principles, project approaches and instruments are strong. This includes the adoption of the notion of systemic change.

Challenges: VSD is primarily implemented in bilateral cooperation. Thus, the responsibility for implementation is mainly with South Cooperation and Eastern Europe domains. The cooperation with HA is less accentuated. Labour market integration of jobseekers from vulnerable groups is the common focus of many VSD projects. They usually have a massive outreach and an effect on labour market inclusion, but a limited impact on the sustainable development of national TVET systems. Focal Points and networks play a prominent role by bringing technical expertise and promoting learning/knowledge management. In this respect, the FP VSD should, in addition to the already strong focus on practical advice and tools for practitioners, concentrate on institutional learning and reflexion, in particular with regards to its contribution to strengthening VSD (or TVET) systems. In order to support this, a set of ex-post evaluations comparing the results of several interventions, or a meta-evaluation could be instrumental.

Recommendation 7: The FP VSD continues its strong focus on need-responsive technical advice and enhances its attention proactively to VSD systems development

- Beyond the continuation of its already strong focus on need-responsive technical advice, the FP VSD prioritises the strengthening of institutional learning and reflexion with a specific focus on VSD systems development and strengthening. It also reinforces knowledge management through the promotion of evidence-based data around key priority issues for field operations.
- In cooperation with HA, the FP VSD further develops the thematic knowledge of the FP VSD and the VSD network regarding improved livelihood in crisis affected contexts.

13.5. Recommendations on structural and organisational issues

a) Education fund

Assets: Through the Education Fund (EF), 15 projects are being implemented across geographic divisions and domains (HA, SC, GC), mainly in BE. As most of them focus on (or include) the use of ICTs in education (distance learning), the potential for exchanges and mutual learning is high. The fund proved to be a useful tool to support innovation in response to the COVID-19 crisis and most interviewees from SCOs

expressed satisfaction for the instrument and flexibility. It also allowed testing education interventions in countries, which do not have an education domain.

Challenges: The governing structure and procedures of the EF are in contradiction to decentralisation of SDC and cause high transaction costs, which absorbs too many resources of the focal points to the detriment of technical advice and institutional learning. The EF has been more useful to BE than to VSD, which may imply different positions regarding their respective participation in a phase 2. Overall, making recommendations for a phase 2 is difficult as the majority of projects are at an early implementation stage (with no possibility of appreciating the “catalytic effect”) and joint learning processes are limited so far.

Recommendation 8: Consider a second phase on the basis of the consolidated results of phase 1, provided governance and procedures can be streamlined.

- Consolidate the results of phase 1 regarding the “catalytic” potential and the implementation of the learning concept.
- Streamline governance and procedures.
- Consider attaching a thematic focus to the EF in order to encourage innovations that support key strategic areas of the ES and new IC Strategy 2021-2024 and those that go beyond technology.

b) Human resources (thematic expertise)

Assets: Thematic expertise has been a decisive factor to drive and ensure the implementation of the ES so far. Specialised experts were available at headquarters, in several regions (education and/or VSD advisers) and supported by backstopping mandates.

Challenges: SDC is challenged to mobilise and retain expertise in thematic functions (focal points, regional advisors). Key experts often need to be recruited externally. In the absence of thematic careers, the current rotation system puts a constant threat on the thematic expertise. Considering for e.g. that the budget managed by the FP education alone is comparable to a global programme (but with considerable less FTE), human resources dedicated to education (BE/VSD) can be considered as modest. The further implementation of the ES requires to overcome the structural divide between BE and VSD. Any future scenario will have to include cross-sectoral expertise, a blend of headquarters field staff, and mixed profiles and job descriptions (as it is already the case in the IED team for VSD/PSD/FSD topics).

Another area, which needs specific attention, is the institutionalisation of EiE, which currently relies on limited capacities on side of HA and considerable inputs from the FP Education. This requires the recruitment of staff with protection/education profiles in the field and dedicated staff at headquarters to work across humanitarian aid and development in education.

Finally, dynamic networks are at the heart of bridging thematic, policy dialogue and operational work. However, staff often feels unable to dedicate the time as planned and this task is not part of their annual evaluation. Measures should be explored to allow and value their participation.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen thematic expertise both for the positioning in the international policy dialogue and for quality development in field operations

- While strengthening the thematic expertise, specific attention should be paid to increased integration between BE and VSD, the institutionalisation of protection/EiE, and the diversification of the VSD portfolio.
- Allocate additional resources and identify other solutions (such as mixed profiles and job description) to further implement the institutionalisation of protection/EiE and cross-sectoral integration of BE/VSD.
- Explore options on how to develop, retain and rotate thematic expertise within thematic careers/domains.
- Explore solutions to encourage and value active participation in thematic networks.

c) Monitoring

Assets: The ES defines fields of observation. This was meant to guide the assessment of the implementation of the education strategy. Under the dispatch 2017-20, the directorate closely monitored the 50% increase in commitments to education.

Challenges: The fields of observation are too broad to enable meaningful monitoring of the strategy implementation beyond anecdotal evidence. Even if a results framework was not required, the absence of a monitoring system for a thematic strategy presents a major challenge and an obstacle to strategic planning and steering. The lack of respective information was also an obstacle for the present review. Developing a full-fledged monitoring system alongside the strategy, which facilitates the learning, provides insights on the effective use of resources (beyond the tracking of commitments), supports SDC to informed steering decisions, and which facilitates priority setting at management level, would possibly be too ambitious at this stage. Yet it is important to keep education and the implementation ES on the radar of the directorate.

Recommendation 10: Retain the instrument of the Steuerungsberichte under the IC Strategy 2021-24, but shift its focus from the 50% increase to other selected issues

Possible issues for monitoring at the level of the directorate include

- Progress in strengthening complementarities between BE and VSD
- Enhanced education and protection support in fragile and crisis-affected contexts
- Priority issues in strategic partnerships and the international policy dialogue
- Progress in diversifying the bilateral VSD portfolio