

1. Background

From March - November 2023, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) has retained services of Fedesarrollo (<https://www.fedesarrollo.org.co/>), under the lead of Rafael Puyana, for the establishment of an external evaluation of the programme Colombia mas Competitiva (C+C).

The C+C Program is a bilateral program that seeks to improve Colombian competitiveness by strengthening the productive sector and creating a favorable environment for business, which allows Colombian products to be integrated into international markets in selected value chains and with a transversal emphasis on green growth, climate change mitigation and adaptation, gender equity and financial inclusion. Since 2017, it has carried out a first phase (2017-2020), its second phase is underway (2021-2024) and a final exit phase is planned (2025-2028).

The C+C Program has established a structure on three levels of intervention at the macro level (public policy reforms), the meso (sectoral interventions and reforms) and the micro level (Support of productive units in specialty coffee, cocoa, tourism, and ingredients and contributes to sustainable and inclusive productive development and the creation of quality jobs). In addition, C+C manages a mechanism called the Swiss Expert Network (SEN) to transfer knowledge and strengthen institutional relations between Swiss and Colombian actors.

The purpose of the evaluation was to 1) measure the achievements of the C+C phases I and II and to 2) identify outstanding challenges for Phase II currently underway; document the lessons learned; and 3) make a series of recommendations for the design of the next exit phase.

2. Appreciation of the Report: Structure, Methodology & Process

The evaluation carried out by Fedesarrollo is in line with the expectations of the TOR, it is a good document, well-structured and has a robust methodology combining data sources, collection techniques and analyses, both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative evaluation focuses on the micro level, due to the availability and richness of data on beneficiaries and consists of two components: impact evaluation and results evaluation. The program's databases and the creation of control groups with reliable sources, such as the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) were vital.

Throughout the process, the cooperation with the evaluator team was efficient and professional. Fedesarrollo was well organized yet flexible in its approach, which allowed to respond to issues that arose during the process.

The evaluation report is thorough and contains interesting findings, underlined by visual graphics, based on qualitative observations crossed with empirical evidence from data, which provide valuable insights into lessons learned and recommendations for the remaining time of this second phase or a possible next exit phase.

3. Key findings and lessons learnt

Overall. The evaluation concludes that the C+C programme has established itself as the main reference for international cooperation in competitiveness policy in Colombia. The qualitative and quantitative evidence shows that C+C is well positioned among key actors in competitiveness policy at the national and sub-national levels, making it a key asset for SECO-WE HQ and the Swiss Embassy in Colombia. The evaluation identifies excellent results in terms of relevance and coherence, as well as positive performance in terms of programme efficiency and effectiveness in achieving results. Nevertheless, challenges should be addressed and reflected in the operational management of C+C, and opportunities for improvement in sustainability initiatives and in the effectiveness of the Swiss Expert Network (SEN) mechanism.

At the macro level, there is a highly positive perception of the stakeholders due to the demand driven approach, its flexibility to respond to the needs of actors, and the fulfillment of objectives that have driven the generation and support of public policies and public goods. There are successful cases of projects

in this component that were able to consolidate public goods and achieve sustainability over time. However, the results should be improved and regional private and civil society allies promoting the sustainability should be identified. Finally, although the C+C program managed to leverage the agenda of "National System of Competitiveness and Innovation", this system lost relevance in the current Government. The program should seek dynamics and agendas designed for the long term beyond current Government and aligned with the interest of Switzerland in the long term.

At the meso level, the demand-driven nature of the C+C Program is a significant asset and differentiating component compared to other cooperation programs. Although the governance of the Strategic Committees has allowed public-private actors to be aligned around public goods relevant to the value chains, the trickledown effect to the micro level and private sector actors did not happen as expected. This may be due to the fact that the proposals are submitted in most cases by public entities. Likewise, after the execution of initiatives, the results are not monitored, which prevents measuring the impact of the initiatives and the C+C Program at the meso level. However, despite the absence of resources allocated for post-implementation project monitoring, C+C successfully established some highly valued public goods that have become benchmarks for the country's competitiveness across various value chains. For instance, in the special cocoa industry, the National Cadmium Strategy, facilitated by the program, united 32 relevant entities to develop public goods and regulatory frameworks conducive to enhancing the cocoa chain's competitiveness. The challenge in the near future for the meso level is to ensure that a higher percentage of initiatives become self-sustainable and have more impact.

At the micro level, the C+C Program carried out initiatives that addressed the needs of the value chains of special cocoas, special coffees, natural ingredients, and sustainable tourism of beneficiaries in the respective regions. With this approach, the C+C Program has achieved considerable positive results and impact on commercial and social level, such as exports, sales, employment generation, and participation of women in leadership roles. For example, cocoa exports in the program experienced a four times stronger growth compared to the national average between 2017 and 2021. The evaluation mentions several other relevant examples. It does not put into question the choice of the relatively commodity-oriented value-chains per se.

Interaction between the three levels: According to the evaluation, the C+C Program faces challenges in achieving an effective interaction between the three levels (public policy - sectorial reforms - value chains). Additionally, the Program struggles to communicate results effectively between levels and with external actors. Difficulties in the project monitoring once projects are completed lead to the struggle of assessing sustainability and impacts of C+C. In addition, the evaluation reveals that there should be a greater focus on the cross-cutting themes financial inclusion, skills development, and climate change.

SEN: The criteria "impact and sustainability" of the SEN receives a rating "highly unsatisfactory". The evaluation concludes that the strategy and management of the Swiss Expert Network (SEN) must be adjusted. The SEN has not managed to consolidate its primary objective of sustainably connecting Swiss and Colombian institutions, with some rare exceptions.

Main findings according to DAC criteria

Criteria	Top level	Public Policy – Macro level	Sectoral reforms – Meso level	Value chains – Micro level	SEN
Relevance and consistency	Highly satisfactory	Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Effectiveness	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory
Efficiency and management	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory
Sustainability and impact	Not satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly unsatisfactory

4. Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
A – Strategic level					
Recommendation 1 To support public policies and sectoral reforms in generating public goods, it is recommended to identify strategic priorities or innovative mechanisms that can be addressed with private actors generating public goods to not depend on changes in government every four years, as well as finding regional allies private and civil society organizations that promote the sustainability of the C+C Program in the regions. Additionally, more specific implementation models are required to move from knowledge to action and generate strategies for the transfer and appropriation of knowledge within the value chains for its incorporation to improve their results and scalability.	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
	Response This is one of the most relevant recommendations in relation to the sustainability of C+C. In some cases, the initiatives of the public policy component and sectoral reforms have been sustainable and generated impacts, but not for all. We consider that it is key to understand why some interventions achieve results and impacts and other that do not, to learn and try to increase that success rate in the future.				
	Measures 1. A small (light) consultancy / workshop with an expert that focuses on four objectives for the macro and meso level: (I) Understand the context and the characteristics of the interventions that were most successful and those that were not successful (II) Propose what could be done with the current interventions of public policies and sectoral reforms so that they are sustainable (III) Define possible private and mixed associations and foundations that can present proposals aligned with public policies and public goods and that do not			SECO/SC	1. Q2 2024 2. Q2 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
Ref: 2.1, 3.1	<p>depend on the governments in power. (IV) Prioritize which departments and municipalities have the best conditions for interventions to have desired results and impacts and be sustainable over time.</p> <p>2. Identify priorities aligned with the economic cooperation of Switzerland and Colombia that could be addressed with private actors and that do not depend on changes in government, for example: role of private actors in compliance with the EU zero deforestation chain regulation (EUDR) or role of private companies in Colombia's reindustrialization strategy (CONPES 4129).</p>				
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>The C+C Program must seek a balance between competitiveness and innovation and the cross-cutting themes in accordance with the capabilities of the different initiatives. To this end, it is recommended to have a guideline on the scope of the cross-cutting themes, establishing lines of action at each level (macro - meso - micro) and consolidating metrics and goals. Additionally, it is recommended to articulate the scope of the market goals (export and commercialization, etc.) and those of the cross-cutting themes with the execution period of the projects, regional capacities, the level of maturation of the initiatives, and the beneficiaries. Finally, it would be essential to seek permanent support mechanisms for the executors to achieve goals in transversal approaches, with personnel specialized in gender equity, financial inclusion, and sustainable landscapes, which allow for achieving concrete results.</p> <p>Ref: 1.1, 4.7, 4.11</p>	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>Although the focus is competitiveness, we consider that progress has been made in activities that could show results in these "cross cutting themes" in 2024.</p> <p>Perhaps an effort must be made to communicate better, consolidate public knowledge assets, and generate concrete strategies for awareness and strengthening of capacities around cross cutting themes, particularly access to financing, and climate change adaptation and mitigation.</p> <p>As this is the last year of project implementation and in view of the sustainability, mechanisms and strategies need to be explored to raise awareness and strengthen good practices in the cross-cutting themes.</p>		<p><u>Measures</u></p> <p>2. Involve governing institutions and experts in cross-cutting themes (gender, financial inclusion, climate change adaptation and mitigation) in the program committees. For instance, work closely with Bancoldex, Asobancaria, representatives of the main banks, and associations of financial institutions (including Fintech) to monitor the new project of alternative financing mechanisms and encourage banks to propose solutions and products.</p> <p>1. Strategic adjustments for next phase on cross-cutting themes to be considered.</p>		1. SECO/SC in Concept doc 2. SECO/SC in Concept doc	1. Q2 2024 2. Q2 2024
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>Although it is perceived that the geographical coverage has been adequate, and the inclusion</p>	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
<p><u>Response</u></p>					

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
<p>of PDET regions has allowed social impacts highlighted by the beneficiaries, it is recommended to intentionally and strategically propose a geographical prioritization (departments and municipalities) for all levels (macro, meso, and micro), based on variables such as feasibility, potential impact, results, sustainability. Carrying out this type of prioritization in strategic focuses can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.</p> <p>Ref: 2.3, 4.5</p>	<p>It is essential to localize and understand the high-potential regions for this phase, but even more so for a possible next phase of C+C, anticipating also the need for higher co-financing on behalf of the beneficiary regions in view of the sustainability of C+C and in line with the exit, and taking into account other Swiss interests in a long-term perspective (SDC/AMS), etc.</p> <p>Measures</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an analysis of the areas (departments and municipalities) where, due to their conditions, the goods and services generated by the projects are more likely to achieve the expected results and impacts in order to make decisions where it can be more efficient to do pilots in this phase or a possible future phase. 2. Review the locations (departments and municipalities) with a higher number of interventions and a good investment/result ratio. Also cross-check with key criteria of interest for the design of the next phase of cooperation and define/require more ambitious levels of co-financing to support the sustainability/exit phase. 3. Validate the relevance of intentionally building a regional approach to the C+C Program and, if positive, take the first steps in 2024. 			<p>1.SC 2. SECO /SC 3. SECO SCO</p>	<p>1. Q2 2024 2. Q2 2024 3. Q4 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>1. The experience of using the SEN mechanism shows that, except for a few cases, long-term collaboration has not been generated between Swiss and Colombian institutions and that although there is time allocation and distributed tasks in the implementing agency team, it is necessary to strengthen the team to advance faster. For this, it is vital to have a person with exclusive dedication (or main activity) for the management of issues related to the SEN. It is also recommended to define the mapping of actors, strategic issues to work on, financing schemes, communication strategies and facilitate the process of access to the SEN mechanism to guarantee greater use of it.</p>	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
<p>Response</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We agree that the SEN lacks tools that facilitate interaction between with stakeholders. More dedication / resources from the team seem vital in order to increase the impact, also comparing it with other components that have more dedicated specialists and consultants. 2. In our view, defining long-term relationships from the outset is good in theory, but in practice makes the process more difficult, because for building long-term relationships it is key to start with specific and small efforts that link Colombian institutions with Swiss institutions. <p>The recommendations for the SEN should be evaluated from a strategic and cost-efficiency angle in order to ensure impact.</p> <p>This said, the recent progress of the SEN points in a more positive direction, with more relationships being established in the last semester of 2024. This slightly related picture explains the 'partially agree'.</p>					

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
<p>2. Although some SEN interventions have been developed, and the beneficiaries perceive them as successful, it is not clear that the objective of connecting Swiss and Colombian institutions in the long term has been achieved, and it is evident that there are opportunities for improvement to publicize the mechanism to potential beneficiaries, in that sense, the following technical and operational recommendations are made for the SEN:</p> <p>Ref: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6</p>	<p>Measures</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Request the team to give special attention to SEN, especially to be able to close deals and consolidate stories and narratives of how Swiss entities connect with Colombian entities thanks to C+C. 2. Monitor more frequently the progress of the SEN, in order to have updated information on progress. 3. Consolidate lessons learned from phase II of C+C and validate adjustments and improvements that could be made to the mechanism in the future, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (I) increase resources/team dedicated to the SEN (II) Establish a mapping of the actors and strategic issues to work on (III) Establish financing schemes, communication strategies and facilitate the process of access to the SEN (IV) Create SEN proposals since the formulation of the project at the different levels (macro - meso - micro) (V) Create a platform or catalog to identify experts and services to facilitate the use of the SEN (VII) Carry out a mapping of the most frequent demands at the different levels and the offer of Swiss institutions (VIII) Generate a socialization tool that facilitates articulating the mechanism with the actors' demands and Swiss experts' service offer. 			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SC / SECO 2. SC / SECO 3. SC / SECO 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Q1-Q2 2024 2: Q1-Q4 2024 3: Q2-Q4 2024
B – Technical and operational					
<p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>Strengthening knowledge management, transfer, and appropriation strategies, e.g., renewing the bibliographic repository and public knowledge assets, added to improving or creating new mechanisms for internal and external socialization of progress, results, and impacts, can contribute to the program's sustainability and the positioning of SECO and the Embassy. For this, it is also crucial to strengthen monitoring mechanisms for initiatives with potential for growth and scalability of their results, primarily focused on</p>	<p>Fully agree Partially agree Not agree</p>				
	<p>Response</p> <p>The Implementing Agency has developed and improved its monitoring mechanisms compared to Phase I. However, there is room for improvement in the measurement and consolidation of results and their subsequent communication and dissemination.</p> <p>In addition, cost/efficiency improvements could be explored in the management, transfer and appropriation of knowledge and public goods.</p>			<p>SECO/SC: tbc</p>	
	<p>Measures</p>			<p>1.SECO(SCO)/ Swisscontact</p>	<p>1+2) Measures to be taken in</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
<p>consolidating homogeneous mechanisms for all levels (macro-meso-micro), which allows measuring the aggregate impact of C+C.</p> <p>Ref: 1.3, 1.4, 2.4, 2.8, 3.3</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Include topics related to sustainability in the agendas of the strategic committees, delve deeper and agree on what will happen to the public goods and services generated once the projects end. 2. Call between Swisscontact team and SECO (+ ev. Fedesarollo) to identify improvements and recommendations on the Monitoring and Evaluation system, especially on: (I) the number of indicators and the efficiency for showing results and impacts in aggregate (II) Feasibility and cost/efficiency of being able to monitor initiatives after they finish the project. 3. Part of the resources should be used to improve strategies and assets to facilitate the dissemination and appropriation of knowledge (example: digital repository) using programs such as GQSP or Sibs.co as a reference. 4. Implement rapid deployment tools (online surveys, satisfaction studies) focused on measuring the degree of satisfaction of the actors, topics of greatest interest, and possible strategies to facilitate the program's positioning and the transfer and appropriation of knowledge. 			<p>2. SECO (SCO)</p> <p>3. SC</p> <p>4. SC/SECO</p>	<p>to account for the new phase.</p> <p>3+4) Q2/Q3 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>Design and implement a communication strategy capable of (I) disseminating progress, results, and impacts of the C+C Program and (II) facilitating dialogue between actors, which involves the creation of dissemination spaces articulated with other collaborators and actors of the different levels. For this, it would be necessary to carry out periodic and systematic compilations of results from the beneficiaries, improve the mechanisms for internal and external socialization of progress, results, and impacts, and define mechanisms for monitoring initiatives once they are completed.</p> <p>Ref: 1.5, 1.8, 1.9, 4.4</p>	<p>Fully agree</p>	<p>Partially agree</p>	<p>Not agree</p>	<p>1. SECO/SC</p> <p>2. SC</p> <p>3. SC</p>	<p>1. Q1 2024</p> <p>2. Q2 2024</p> <p>3. Q2/3 2024</p>
<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>The timing of this recommendation is ideal as C+C is in its final year of implementation where results need to be seen. With regard to strategic committees, it is important to find a more attractive way of raising awareness; sometimes these committees are very formal formats that may not manage to stay in the minds of participants for more than a few days. There is also much that must be improved in terms of facilitating dialogue with and among external stakeholders.</p>					
<p><u>Measures</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. C+C communications agency to develop content and strategies aimed at critical stakeholders in the committees as well as external actors. Implementing agency to integrate adjustments and to present them in future committees with clear indications on the dynamics to be followed. 2. Communication agency to explore the relevance and impact of developing activities and articulation events with internal and external stakeholders and other cooperation actors. 3. Implementing agency to create more frequent activities and dynamics to promote synergies and interaction between the three levels, for example through thematic working groups. 					

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
<p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>There are delays in the process before the start of project execution, which is affecting implementation deadlines by having shorter implementation times, which is why it is recommended to identify bottlenecks, particularly those related to the stages of: (I) presentation of ideas, (II) construction of concept notes or expressions of interest, (III) validation with allies and interest groups, (IV) Preparing and presenting to the committees (V) granting of "no objections", (VI) formulation of projects, (VII) creation of terms of reference, (VIII) open tender to identify executors, (IX) contracting, among others.</p> <p>Ref: 1.6, 2.7</p>	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
				<p>Response</p> <p>Given that the programme is already well advanced in allocating resources to initiatives, we do not see this as an urgent matter, but it is essential to improve these processes in the future.</p> <p>It is necessary to identify the causes on the basis of specific cases and to draw lessons from this phase in order to avoid further frustration and delays. Where possible, bureaucratic hurdles should be removed and clear deadlines should be set for each step of the process. The process needs to be more streamlined.</p>	SECO/SC
<p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>Identify mechanisms to expand proposals beyond those presented by committee members, and evaluate the convenience of linking regional actors with an active role in the Committee, for example linking academia or the private sector, which can trigger articulation with local governments, and give a greater role to the private sector with specific companies or foundations that lead from demand, as other international cooperation initiatives do.</p> <p>Ref: 2.6, 3.6</p>	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
				<p>Response</p> <p>It is vital to increase competition and quality, and the fact that only members of the committees can present proposals does not encourage competition and quality of the proposals; in some cases, the proposals received have deficiencies, and this later implies more time to (I) land strategic matters and (II) define and write concept notes. However, it makes sense to keep this in mind for a possible next phase, and in this phase, there would not be much to adjust unless SECO can give a clear indication, and it may help the allocation of C+C budget resources for 2024.</p>	1. SC/SECO 2. SC/SECO 3. SECO/SC
<p>Measures</p> <p>1. Depending on the outcome of 2023 and the availability of funds, consider and decide to validate the methodology so that other actors can submit proposals. Where appropriate, increase the participation of key players and the representation of regions (local vision) in the strategic committees of the chains.</p>					

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
	2. Discuss the issue during the design phase of a possible next phase and adapt the issue in the operational manual for the next phase. 3. Provide clear guidance on the question of the quality of the proposals received, with templates for the next phase. The implementing agency is responsible for the quality control of the proposals.		

Daniela Fabel Glass
Programme Manager

Monica Rubiolo
Head of Trade promotion

André Pantzer
Programme Manager

Liliana de Sá Kirchknopf
Head of Trade promotion