



Management Response

EVALUATION OF THE SWISS PROGRAMME ON CAPACITIES FOR TRADE POLICIES (C4TP)

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1) Background

The Swiss Programme on Capacities for Trade Policies (C4TP) aims at improving trade negotiations capacities, implementation of trade agreements and cooperation among trade policy stakeholders. It covers two components and is implemented by two agencies: the GFA consulting group (GFA) and the St. Gallen Endowment for Prosperity through Trade (SGEPT). SGEPT offers a comprehensive database to policymakers to monitor trade and inform policy formulation called the Global Trade Alert (GTA). Most of its activities are concentrated in International Geneva, especially targeting WTO delegations and capital-based personnel through hybrid workshops. GFA intervenes at the country level and its activities mainly consist of the provision of training and consultancy through trade experts. The content is tailored to the needs identified in trade policy, but it also includes support for the effective use of the GTA database. The Programme initially covered the period from 01.12.2020 to 31.12.2024 and has been extended until 30.06.26. SECO, as the only donor of the Programme, commissioned an external evaluation and retained the services of Ms Famke Schaap (Independent consultant) with contributions by Ms Jasmina Debeljak (local expert in Serbia) for the External Review Mission of C4TP. The evaluation had the following main objectives:

- Assess the level of performance of the two components and implementing agencies.
- Strategically evaluate the Programme's results and design with its three types of intervention (full-fledge, small project, fill-the-gap intervention).
- Learn about the success factors and identify main bottlenecks for the achievement of project results.
- Based on these insights, conduct a critical review of Phase I and make recommendations on the future direction of the project.

The insights from the evaluation will be used for designing the potential follow-up phase.

2) Appreciation of the report: structure, methodology and process

The report is well written and has allowed to produce key findings that will be relevant to decide on the future of the Programme. The case-study approach (three case studies highlighting different types of intervention) has been followed as requested and allowed to reach

conclusions on the Programme's design. The evaluation has also enabled to assess the level of performance of the two implementing agencies. Through a mixed methods approach for this evaluation, combining quantitative and qualitative data, interviews with various stakeholders and an online questionnaire, the evaluation has been able to grasp various viewpoints and to synthesize them. The report could yet have been shortened and better structured.

3) Key findings and lessons learnt

C4TP has a satisfactory level of relevance. For GFA, the programme showed high satisfactory levels of target beneficiaries in the full-fledged interventions and moderate satisfaction levels in the fill-the gap and small interventions. This is mostly related to the absence of a needs assessment and the high resources needed in terms of identification for the latter. The relevance of the GTA database is overall high for target beneficiaries across interventions.

C4TP has a partially satisfactory level of coherence. The evaluation pointed high coherence with WEHU's portfolio. Yet, the coherence with the three pillars of the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy Strategy – i) rules-based international system, ii) access to international markets, iii) sustainability in economic relations – can be improved by increasing support for the integration of the beneficiaries in the WTO, the alignment with the EFTA negotiating agenda and the inclusion of core themes of the Strategy such as digital and sustainable trade.

C4TP has a satisfactory level of effectiveness. For GFA, the Programme showed moderate effectiveness. The technical skills and competencies acquired through the Programme have resulted in improved trade negotiation capacities of target beneficiaries, and supported implementation of trade policy, but GFA had difficulties deploying resources in small-scale interventions. The GTA component has been effective, even if it requires highly-skilled beneficiaries to be able to use the database.

C4TP has a partially satisfactory level of efficiency and management. The Programme's efficiency was overall performant, especially for full-fledged programme interventions ran by GFA. The efficiency and management were less performant for fill-the-gap and small projects, also due to the resources spent unsuccessfully on identification phases. For SGEPT, the efficiency and management has improved due to partnering with an implementing partner (IISD).

C4TP has a partially satisfactory level of impact. The Programme has achieved positive outcomes, especially in enhancing professional skills at individual level, but the long-term impact (especially at institutional level) remains difficult to demonstrate. This is related to the fact that the start of the Programme has been slow and that the Programme's activities have only in few cases (mainly full-fledged programmes) been designed with the 'inclusive and sustainable trade policy' objective in mind.

C4TP has a partially satisfactory level of sustainability. This evaluation found that the GFA and GTA interventions in principle allow for lasting effects. The GTA component allows for lasting effects, due to its important inputs into decision-making. Yet, the evaluation also pointed to the vulnerability of the long-term net benefits of the interventions, which appear to be very dependent on the institutional capacity of the beneficiary organizations, especially for the GTA component, which requires governments and stakeholders to have the necessary skills to use and understand the database. These conditions are not always met in the beneficiary countries, which limits the lasting effects. This can be considered a common challenge when building capacities in a developing context. Overall, the C4TP Programme could do more to

support beneficiaries in creating the conditions to leverage on the knowledge and skills for net benefits to last.



4) Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
A – Strategic					
Recommendation 1 Refine the intellectual framing of the C4TP (narrative, theory of change, key concept definitions) to fit the changing understanding on what constitutes successful trade policy in today's highly dynamic global trade environment, and in the context of changing stakeholder expectations in Switzerland and in beneficiary countries.	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
	<u>Response (SECO)</u> SECO agrees that the C4TP intellectual framing must be refined. C4TP I's narrative with its focus on the COVID-19 was yet relevant at the time when the project was drafted, as the pandemic was leading to an unprecedented disruption of the global economy and world trade. C4TP II's narrative could be more focused on the new emerging challenges such as protectionism, digital trade and climate. In any case the databases, material and services provided will need to have a clear trade liberalizing and multilateral orientation, in line with Switzerland's Foreign Economic Strategy and interests. Considering the current stagnation of multilateral negotiations, a focus on plurilateral negotiations, in line with Switzerland's Foreign Economic Strategy, may be advisable.				
	<u>Measures</u>				

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
	Constitution of a new narrative for C4TP II underlining the importance for the programme to adapt to new trade and geopolitical challenges and align with the AWS. Consider reorienting the support on the WTO/multilateral pillar towards plurilateral negotiations.			SECO	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)
Recommendation 2 More closely align C4TP with the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy, as well as the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy and EFTA negotiating agenda	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
	<u>Response (SECO)</u>				
	While C4TP I sometimes assisted countries' FTAs negotiators (e.g. Serbia, Mongolia), C4TP II could more specifically concentrate on these types of services. The current context of increased protectionism in the United States should boost countries' appetite for negotiating FTAs and create an opportunity to assist them. The interventions could be done in coordination with WHFH, without jeopardizing developmental objectives. SECO can explore options for aligning more C4TP with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy and EFTA's negotiating agenda, including the Future EFTA Trade Policy Orientation. However, the programme should be designed to ensure the deployment of resources independently of the negotiations.				
	<u>Measures</u>				
	Explore the option of a) including in the next phase a new pillar dedicated to assisting FTA negotiations, and b) design the fill-the-gap interventions in countries that have negotiated a FTA with EFTA or that might be future FTA partners. For countries currently negotiating a FTA with EFTA, support could include ex-post activities (e.g. Malaysia).			SECO	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)
Assess the possibility to organize the activities in a follow up phase in line with relevant thematic areas captured in EFTA FTA SDT Chapters, such as digital trade, inclusive economic development, sustainable supply chains, sustainable management of natural resources, etc.			SECO	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)	

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>Enhance accessibility and stimulate accessibility of C4TP funds through a dedicated 'fill-the-gap' C4TP 'vehicle' of support, available for a broader group of countries and conduct needs assessments more systematically.</p>	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
	<p><u>Response (SECO)</u></p> <p>Currently, the fill-the-gap interventions already allow to intervene in non-SECO priority countries. Yet, C4TP II should on the contrary be more selective. On top of the countries of the EFTA negotiation agenda, fill-the gap interventions should whenever possible happen in LDCs and their WTO delegations should access exclusive services. This new component would be part of the <i>Trade Package for LDCs</i> for the MC14. SECO also agrees with the idea of conducting needs assessments in a more systematic way.</p>				
	<p><u>Measures</u></p>				
	<p>Greater use of needs assessments, especially for small-scale interventions.</p>			Implementing agency/ies	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)
	<p>Analyze the option of an earmarked component for LDCs with a dedicated budget for WTO delegations and capital-based personnel through fill-the-gap interventions.</p>			SECO	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>To re-organise the set-up of C4TP with a C4TP central component, which can complement individual / country-specific guidance with more cross-country collective learnings and</p>	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
	<p><u>Response (SECO)</u></p> <p>The current set-up of the Programme with very targeted fill-the-gap interventions leads to very specific products. The advantage of this approach is that it allows to answer very specific needs, with interventions highly adapted to the local context. Furthermore, the material produced can sometimes be highly sensitive and, as a result,</p>				

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exchange of insights between countries on specific thematic and/or challenges. The Programme design should also include two types of intervention (full-fledge and fill-the-gap) instead of three.	hard to transfer to other beneficiaries. The current approach should continue in the next phase. Yet, it is true that the full potential of knowledge replication hasn't been exploited yet. SECO agrees with the idea of producing and centralizing transferable C4TP products whenever it is relevant through the creation of a central component. SECO supports revising the Programme's design, including the number and types of intervention to ensure the deployment of the resources.				
	<u>Measures</u>				
	Creation of a C4TP central component, for example in the form of a sharepoint for all beneficiaries and diffusion of the material			Implementing agency/ies	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)
	Revision of the Programme's design, including the number and types of intervention.			SECO	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)
Recommendation 5 To further allow strengthening of the accessibility and usability of the GTA platform, as well as broadened scope of the thematic issues covered: beyond WTO-only, to capture digital and sustainable trade themes, as well as subsidies and other 'strategic trade policy' themes.	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
	<u>Response (SECO)</u> SECO agrees with the idea of increasing the accessibility and usability of the GTA platform, especially for non-expert users of the private sector or governments of LDCs which sometimes lack the skills to effectively use it. Broadening the scope of the thematic issues covered by C4TP is partially supported. SECO believes that the integration of some contemporary themes such as increased protectionism, digital trade and climate change in the services proposed by the next phase is relevant, but this shouldn't lead to an excessive production of material, papers or databases. Furthermore, given the difficulties underpinning the multilateral trade system and its importance in Switzerland's Foreign Economic Policy Strategy, SECO believes that the WTO agenda and delegations should play a greater role in C4TP II.				

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	<u>Measures</u>				
	Solicitation of beneficiaries' feedback on how to improve the accessibility of the C4TP Dashboard.			SGEPT	Already implemented
	Organization of sustainable trade-related workshops including the multilateral and plurilateral committees and initiatives in the WTO (e.g. CTE, TESSD, DPP)			Implementing agency/ies	Start of C4TP II (2 nd semester of 2026)
B - Operational					
Recommendation 6 To acknowledge that trade policy has become a strategic and sensitive area of policy and reforms, requiring trust and confidence between beneficiary institutions and implementing agencies (and SECO as donor agency). For this to work, consider reducing reliance on a commercial service provider for delivery of sensitive trade policy advisory services. Alternative options may be international organizations with a combined trade	Fully agree	Partially agree	Not agree		
	<u>Response</u> SECO agrees that the current Programme's set-up has led to some inefficiencies between the two implementing agencies. It is surprising for us that the use of a commercial partner is perceived by some partners as an issue for TA delivery. This will be taken into account for the next procurement, though non-discrimination of offers needs to be ensured.				
	<u>Measures</u>				
	Chapter on GTA-GFA cooperation is included in the progress reports.			GFA and SGEPT	Already implemented
Plan on synergies between GTA and GFA.			GFA and SGEPT	Already implemented	

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
policy and capacity building experience.			

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