Evaluation Policy

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Revised in March 2018

Contents

Abbreviations

2030 Agenda	United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ARAMIS	Administration Research Actions Management Information System – Platform for external studies run or funded by the Swiss Federal Administration
CLP	Core Learning Partnership
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DEReC	DAC Evaluation Resource Centre
E+C	Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
LangA	Federal Act on the National Languages and Understanding between the Linguistic Communities (Languages Act)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QA	Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction Section
RBM	Results-based management
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEVAL	Swiss Evaluation Society
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

1 Introduction

This Evaluation Policy defines the purpose, principles and main responsibilities regarding evaluations at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). At a time of increased calls to justify development funding and to demonstrate its effectiveness, the SDC is committed to providing evidence of development results through evaluations as an important source.

International cooperation is increasingly influenced by global determinants. Transboundary challenges call for global solutions involving both local and international actors. Issues of coherence are gaining in importance, and the effectiveness and impact of specific contributions to development cannot be easily attributed. Combined with this is increased political interest in results and accountability, transparent disclosure of development investments and a more specific focus on country systems and the self-responsibility of local partners. The international community is calling for improved coordination and a common approach towards greater effectiveness and efficiency in order to optimise development results. International cooperation has to focus on results from the point of view of incremental change and impact (theory of change). Strategic linkages between global programmes and local initiatives are of key importance in striving to achieve these goals.[1]

Art. 170[2] of the Swiss Federal Constitution lays down the evaluation requirements of the SDC; it stipulates that all federal offices of the Swiss government should review the effectiveness of their measures. In order to implement the SDC's parliamentary mandate in a purposeful, effective and targeted manner, the organisation requires adequate resources and evaluation capacities.

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1   Busan partnership; Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation; 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and SDGs.
2   Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, of 18 April 1999 (Status as of 1 January 2018). Art. 170 Evaluation of effectiveness. The Federal Assembly shall ensure that federal measures are evaluated with regard to their effectiveness.

2 Purpose of the SDC Evaluation Policy

Evaluation at the SDC is not a stand-alone tool or instrument: it complements other instruments and processes and is an inherent part of the SDC's results-based management (RBM) system. Other tools, such as case studies or assessments, complement the monitoring and evaluation processes but are not covered by this policy.

The SDC Evaluation Policy[3] is primarily addressed to the staff of the SDC but also serves as a source of information for other entities and partners. As the SDC's framework for evaluations, the policy provides:

• the rationale for evaluations within the SDC; and

• an overview of the evaluation architecture within the SDC.

The Evaluation Policy does not include an in-depth discussion of specific conceptual, methodological or operational aspects.

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3   The SDC Evaluation Policy is a Category B guidance document with normative character. The SDC's Category B guidance documents are binding.

3 Evaluation definition and purpose

The SDC adheres to the definition provided by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC), i.e. "An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors."

Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of a development intervention.[4]

Evaluations can take place before, during and after the implementation of an intervention, strategy or policy. Pre-assessments (ex-ante evaluation, appraisal or assessment) are complementary and are important for determining development effectiveness, but they differ from evaluations focusing on ongoing or completed interventions. This Evaluation Policy does not cover all aspects of pre-assessments.

Monitoring vs evaluation

Monitoring refers to a process of systematic gathering, analysing, collating and documenting data at different levels of observation, drawing on various sources of information.

The different monitoring processes are crucial for continued learning and decision-making, especially for steering and adapting ongoing programmes or for investing in new initiatives.

Evaluation refers to specific research that complements monitoring within the SDC's RBM system. Evaluation can seek answers that are not generated by monitoring, such as the causal effect of a project or programme, the relevance of thematic approaches or policies at the SDC or the effectiveness and efficiency of partnership relations.

Evaluations at the SDC serve three interrelated purposes:

- **Learning** with a view to improving the quality and results of development cooperation by gathering knowledge about what works, and why;

- Evidence-based **decision-making** and **steering** of programmes, projects, initiatives, cooperation strategies, networks and policy dialogue for a steady increase in relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability;

- **Accountability** through reporting and communicating the results of development cooperation to stakeholders (i.e. the FDFA and Parliament) and the wider public in Switzerland and abroad, including beneficiaries.

All evaluations address accountability through an assessment of results. They provide evidence for learning and decision-making, strengthening implementation and improving the design of new development interventions or strategies. Depending on each specific evaluation and context, more emphasis or weight can be placed on learning, steering or accountability.

The use of country systems (monitoring, evaluation and statistical data) is crucial for measuring efficiency and effectiveness. Especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda and global implementation of the SDGs and their targets and indicators, monitoring and evaluation capacities at country level are essential. The SDC is committed to supporting capacity development of evaluation skills and processes in partner countries and beyond.

Current and future challenges in evaluation often require joint reflection and action by development partners. The SDC is therefore engaged in joint learning and adapting of tools, approaches and methodologies and participates in the relevant evaluation networks.

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4   OECD DAC: Quality Standards for Development Evaluation 2010. www.oecd.org

4 Evaluation principles

Evaluation at the SDC is guided by the following core principles derived from the OECD DAC[5], ALNAP[6] and SEVAL[7] quality standards for evaluations[8]:

1. **Usefulness**. The evaluation, including the evaluation process and its result, must be designed according to its intended use. Defining the intended users and uses is therefore crucial. The evaluation results must be provided in a timely manner for their intended use.

2. **Feasibility**. The evaluation must be conceived and implemented in a context-sensitive and cost-effective manner.

3. **Correctness**. The evaluation must be implemented in a manner that is lawful and ethical. Respect and impartiality are non-negotiable criteria. The rights and dignity of all of those involved in an evaluation must be respected.

4. **Quality and reliability**. Quality and reliability relate to the personnel, the process and the result of the evaluation. The evaluation must provide appropriate, useful information, based on methodologically sound approaches. The recommendations must be comprehensively and logically linked to the findings.

5. **Participation**. The active involvement and participation of the parties concerned is essential for ensuring ownership and use of evaluation results. Evaluation findings are relevant to donors and recipients. Terms of Reference should address the issues of concern of each partner.

6. **Impartiality and independence**. High-quality evaluations require evidence that is objective and credible. Development evaluation processes must be impartial and independent of programme design, management and implementation. The views of evaluators in the evaluation reports are respected as an independent view-

point. No pressure is exerted on them to adapt their views or formulations. The SDC responds to their recommendations with a written Management Response.

7. **Transparency**. Evaluations, including the process, data, conclusions and recommendations, Management Response and follow-up measures must be publicly available to allow for accountability and lessons learned.

8. **Partnership**. Wherever feasible, the SDC conducts evaluations in coordination with other agencies and partners (donors, governments, NGOs, etc.).[9] The SDC's evaluations of contributions to multilateral organisations and development banks are based on the principle of subsidiarity.[10]

These eight principles apply to all parties involved in the evaluation process and are safeguarded by the commissioning unit (through an appointed person responsible for the evaluation process) throughout the entire evaluation process.

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5   OECD DAC: Principles for evaluation of development assistance 1991. www.oecd.org
6   ALNAP. Strengthening humanitarian action through evaluation and learning. www.alnap.org
7   Evaluation standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society, 9 September 2016. www.seval.ch
8   Additionally, the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (www.unevalutions.org) and the ALNAP Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide (www.alnap.org) list a series of elements that are also relevant and should be consulted for SDC evaluations. The ALNAP guide describes the 'Do No Harm' principle, and the UNEG guide emphasises systematic enquiry, competence, integrity, honesty, respect for people, and responsibilities for general and public welfare in their ethical guidance.

9   The OECD DAC Guidance for Managing Joint Evaluations (http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/37512030.pdf) should be used as the basis for joint evaluation processes.
10   The SDC uses results and evidence from evaluations conducted by these organisations, external assessments or evaluation processes (e.g. MOPAN). The SDC does not evaluate activities of multilateral organisations or development banks.

5 Evaluation criteria

When planning an evaluation, the following criteria – based on the OECD DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance[11] – must always be taken into consideration. Evaluations in the context of humanitarian aid should also include the additional criteria listed below, based on the ALNAP Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide.[12] If a criterion is considered irrelevant, this should be explicitly stated in the evaluation concept note, Approach Paper or Terms of Reference. **It is not mandatory to use all evaluation criteria; on the contrary, the SDC encourages increased focus on evaluations for specific uses and users.**

- **Relevance**. The extent to which a programme is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor. *Is the intervention relevant in relation to the goals and policies of Swiss development cooperation and the needs and priorities of partner countries and target groups?*

- **Effectiveness**. A measure of the extent to which a programme attains its objectives. *To what extent were the objectives (outcomes) achieved or are likely to be achieved?*

- **Efficiency**. Efficiency measures the results – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to the inputs. *Are there more cost-effective ways for achieving the same results?*

- **Impact**. The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. *What are the intended and unintended effects of the programme, including the effects on the beneficiaries and others?*

- **Sustainability**. Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. *To what extent will effects be maintained when the SDC's support has come to an end?*

Additional criteria for humanitarian aid evaluations (to be considered as described above):

- **Connectedness**. The extent to which activities of a short-term emergency nature are carried out in a context that takes longer-term and interconnected problems into account. Replaces the sustainability criterion used in development evaluations.

- **Coverage**. The extent to which major population groups facing life-threatening suffering were reached by humanitarian action.

- **Coherence**. The extent to which security, developmental, trade, and military policies as well as humanitarian policies are consistent and take humanitarian and human rights considerations into account.

- **Coordination**. The extent to which the interventions of different actors are harmonised with each other, promote synergy, avoid gaps, duplication and resource conflicts (often part of effectiveness).

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11 OECD DAC: Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance. www.oecd.org
12 https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/alnap-evaluation-humanitarian-action-2016.pdf

6 Types of evaluations

A variety of types of evaluations are possible, depending on the requirements of those commissioning the evaluation. The different types, as listed by the OECD DAC, can be clustered into four dimensions, i.e. by **unit of analysis** (institution, policy, strategy, theme, sector, programme, project), **timing** (ex-ante, real-time, mid-term, formative and ex-post), **approach** (theory-based, impact, developmental, utilisation-focused, meta, etc.), and **relationship to the subject** (independent, self-evaluation):

The SDC considers all evaluations to be strategic within its RBM system but differentiates between the following commissioning entities:

- **Evaluations commissioned by the senior management and managed** by the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division (E+C);

- **Evaluations commissioned by the operational units** of the four SDC departments, or the Swiss cooperation offices abroad.

The most common types of evaluation are (in alphabetical order):

Type of evaluation[13]	Short description[14]
Cooperation strategy evaluation	Mid-term or end-term evaluation of a country or regional cooperation strategy. Often of a summative[15] or formative[16] nature.
Impact evaluation[17]	Impact evaluations establish the causal effect of a project, programme or policy on one or several outcome(s). Usually conducted for greater evidence before up-scaling innovations.
Institutional evaluation	Sector-wide, organisational or partner evaluations based on overarching institutional objectives. Frequently uses developmental approaches.[18]
Joint evaluation	An evaluation in which different donors and/or partners participate. Potential benefits include mutual capacity development, joint learning, harmonisation, reduced transaction costs, and broader scope.[19]
Meta evaluation	Meta evaluations are designed to aggregate findings from a series of evaluations. They can also be used to denote the rating of an evaluation to judge its quality and/or assess the performance of the evaluators.[20]
Programme/ project evaluation	Mid-term or end-term evaluation of a programme/project or a set of programmes/projects within the SDC's operational departments. External evaluations are the norm; sometimes also conducted with the participation of peers.
Self-evaluation	Self-evaluation is an evaluation by those who are entrusted with the design and delivery of a development intervention.[21] Self- or internal evaluations are mainly used for learning purposes.
Thematic evaluation	Evaluation of a selection of development interventions, all of which address a specific development priority that cuts across countries, regions and sectors.[22]

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13 The list of types is not exclusive; different combinations of types are possible.
14 http://www.betterevaluation.org/ provides additional useful information. The OECD DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management provides definitions of the most frequently used terms.
15 Summative evaluations are conducted at the end of a programme or project in order to determine the extent to which anticipated results (mainly outcomes) have been achieved. Summative evaluations can be combined with formative evaluations.
16 Formative evaluations seek to improve the performance of ongoing programmes or projects. The main use is for learning, steering and management. Formative evaluations can be combined with summative evaluations.
17 Useful information can be found at http://www.3ieimpact.org/en/
18 A developmental evaluation is an evaluation approach that can help social innovators develop social change initiatives in complex or uncertain environments. http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental_evaluation
19 The OECD DAC's Guidance for Managing Joint Evaluations should be used as a basis for joint evaluation processes. http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/37512030.pdf
20 Definition from the OECD DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management.
21 Definition from the OECD DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management.
22 Definition from the OECD DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management.

7 Evaluation process

All evaluations at the SDC follow a six-step process[23], independent of the evaluation type or the commissioning unit (i.e. the SDC's senior management or the operational units). The following process constitutes a minimum standard; any deviances should be duly justified.

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23 SDC guidance tools regarding the evaluation process are available at https://www.shareweb.ch/site/qa.

Evaluation step	Brief description and *key documents*
1. Define the **evaluation subject**	Develop an initial description of the evaluation subject (programme, project, strategy, policy, etc.). Base the evaluation on an existing theory of change or programme logic. This initial step ensures the *use orientation* of the evaluation: why is an evaluation needed, and who will use the evaluation results and what for?
2. Frame the **boundaries** of the evaluation	Define the purpose, the scope and the specific questions of the evaluation. Also clarify who should participate in the evaluation (in a reference group, core learning partnership, etc.) so as to ensure ownership and acceptance of the evaluation results.
	Terms of Reference (ToR) or an *Approach Paper (AP)* describe the background and context, purpose, objective, scope and timeline of the evaluation.
3. Select an **evaluator**	Select an evaluator (or team of evaluators) through (international) competitive bidding.
	❯ The *contract* with the winning bidder sets out the terms of the mandate. Self-evaluations are also based on clear ToR and/or specifications for the internal evaluation team.
4. Ensure a **methodological sound** evaluation	The SDC's evaluation principles must be safeguarded through the whole process.
	The *Inception Report (IR)*, prepared by the evaluator(s), summarizes the main findings of the preparation phase and clarifies the evaluation process, including all methods and methodological issues.
5. Report on, and support use of, **evaluation findings**	Draft findings should be discussed and validated with key stakeholders. The evaluators are asked to produce an independent, high-quality and use-oriented report.
	The final *Evaluation Report* provides direct and explicit evaluative answers to the key questions. The report explains the methods and methodologies used and describes the findings, challenges and shortcomings and provides conclusions and recommendations.
6. Ensure a formal **Management Response**	A formal *Management Response* by the commissioning unit that acknowledges the value of the evaluation's findings and recommendations within the current context and provides a strategic orientation of its use, including actions to be taken and responsibilities.
	The SDC is committed to ensuring that Management Responses are complete, published and followed-up on.

8 Roles and responsibilities

The SDC's senior management

The SDC's senior management delegates responsibility for conducting evaluations of a primarily institutional nature to the Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division (E+C). The senior management approves the evaluation schedule on an annual basis. The senior management is responsible for approving and ensuring the production of Management Responses to these evaluations.

Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division (E+C)

The E+C Division is responsible within the SDC for planning, organising and commissioning the evaluations ordered by the SDC's senior management. The E+C Division is also responsible for the publication and follow-up of Management Responses to these evaluations.

The E+C Division assures high evaluation standards in all their evaluations and advises the Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction Section (QA) on adequate guidance for all evaluations. The E+C Division also participates in international joint evaluations and represents the SDC in national and international evaluation networks.

The E+C Division coordinates its activities with other evaluation units of the Federal Administration. By disseminating the evaluation results to the public, parliamentary commissions, etc., the E+C Division actively contributes to ensuring transparent access to evidence-based results and thereby public legitimacy of international cooperation.

The E+C Division has a specific evaluation budget for the performance and follow-up of evaluations and for strengthening evaluation capacities among its partners, as well as for maintaining its own skills and capacity building.

Operational units (at head office and Swiss cooperation offices)

The operational units of all SDC departments and Swiss cooperation offices (SCOs) conduct evaluations of strategic interest to them. They have the following role in evaluation:

- Planning and coordinating evaluations according to international and Swiss evaluation standards, including conformity with the SDC Evaluation Policy;

- Formulating a Management Response for all evaluations commissioned, used in the implementation of recommendations and for follow-up;

- Ensuring the future evaluability of programmes (i.e. explicit theories of change, results matrix, baselines, monitoring information);

- Contributing to corporate knowledge management. The operational units ensure adequate dissemination of evaluation results, lessons learned and recommendations;

- Publishing the evaluation report (including the Management Response) in the Swiss government's 'External Studies' database[24];

- Collaborating on evaluations carried out by the E+C Division, e.g. in coordination and management tasks, participation in reference or steering groups or core learning partnerships (CLPs), provision of data and information, participation in interviews or focus group discussions.

Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction Section (QA)

The Quality Assurance and Poverty Reduction Section (QA) advises and supports the operational units on the conceptual and methodical aspects of evaluations. QA contributes to strengthening the results-based focus and to promoting a learning-oriented operational management by using evaluations as an integral part of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation concept (RBM). QA provides the necessary training and capacity development for this purpose and formulates the corresponding standards and guiding documents.

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24 https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/studies.html

9 Communication of evaluation results

Communication of evaluation results is a prerequisite for (institutional) learning, steering, transparency and accountability. The SDC strives for full transparency and therefore ensures that evaluation reports, including the corresponding Management Responses, are made publicly available. The evaluations commissioned by the SDC's senior management are published on DEReC, the FDFA's website, the public database of external studies/evaluations of the Swiss Federal Administration and ARAMIS. All other evaluation reports (including the Management Response) are made available in the public database on external studies/evaluations of the Swiss Federal Administration. A plan for the dissemination of the Evaluation Report should be established as part of the ordinary planning of an evaluation.

As well as the Evaluation Report, its summary and Management Response, additional publications for key stakeholders should also be considered. Evaluation evidence and recommendations should be easily accessible to a non-specialist public.[25] Therefore, information leaflets, image and video material, fact sheets or targeted reports such as Reports on Effectiveness should be produced on the basis of Evaluation Reports so as to promote public awareness and discussion of international cooperation and humanitarian aid. It is of key importance that the dissemination of such information should be targeted, reader friendly and in step with present-day communication standards.

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25 Art. 7 Languages Act (LangA) "The federal authorities shall endeavour to ensure that their language is appropriate, clear and comprehensible and shall ensure that gender-appropriate wording is used."