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| No. 8 | **GPFS – At Work:**

Evidence for Development Practice: Monitoring Systems and Result Reporting in the Domain "Agriculture and Food Security" of SDC Country Strategies |

The purpose of this paper is to provide conceptual support and guidance to the operationalization of country strategies including agriculture and food security as a domain of cooperation.

This paper is based on results of an in-depth analysis of country strategies, result frameworks and annual reports. The analysis was carried out by the A+FS Network.

Monitoring systems of result frameworks and annual reports of country and regional strategies with the theme 'Agriculture and Food Security (A&FS)' were analyzed on their relevance and consistency, respectively. Results showed that in many strategies, A&FS is embedded in cooperation domains such as "rural development", "local economic development", or "private sector development". In SDC A&FS accounts for an investment of more than 250 million CHF annually and is reaching an estimated 2.1 million beneficiaries.

Country Strategies (CS) need to go beyond a functional programme-based monitoring and reporting system. A theory of change in strategies has to become common practice and the language in the Result Framework (RF) needs to be precise to make reliable monitoring possible. Too many outcomes and by far too many different indicators related to A&FS do not characterize a good RF. Many outcomes address two or more issues, leading to imprecise result reporting. Gender sensitivity of outcomes need to be improved to better reflect the transversality of gender in CS. Social status and poverty level need to be explicitly mentioned in the RFs.

The numerous indicators used in RF can be grouped into different sub-topics: The majority falls into the thematic categories: i) Natural productive resources: land, water, pastures, forests; ii) Agriculture value chain development; and iii) Agricultural services (advice and innovation, financial). The defined indicators need to have baseline data at the beginning of a CS period. If not defined at the beginning of a CS implementation, the baseline tends to be neglected and leads to a pragmatic 'ad-hoc approach' for annual progress reporting.

The following practical and feasible recommendations improve the CS and their RF and result in better annual reporting processes:

1. Consider reporting from the project intervention to the steering of a country program and aggregated institutional reporting

The monitoring system has to respond with evidence to three questions:

- Is there a valid theory of change?
- To what degree is the strategy effective?
- What are key messages for reporting to different audiences?

It is recommended to develop and apply few tested indicators with a common method for data generation that are consistently used and allow (gender and poverty sensitive) data aggregation. The use of few standard indicators (1/3 of all indicators) does not exclude the use of specific context relevant indicators (2/3 of all indicators) needed for program steering.

2. Language and precision in RF influences action

Small improvements in Result Framework (RF) generate significant progress in the domain. The following rule of thumb is recommended to be followed:

- 1 theory of change per domain

This series is meant to give guidance and reflects the position of the GPFS.

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- 2 outcomes per domain
- Each outcome addresses 1 issue
- 2 – 3 indicators per outcome with a possible standard description for some of them
- Each indicator observes 1 issue
- Baselines are part of the RF (under responsibility of the field office)
- Targets to be reached are part of the RF
- Outcomes and indicators have to be coherent

3. Do not hide men and women behind abstract formulations

The monitoring systems should make men and women as well as their social status visible. Farmer communities are largely heterogeneous and not so homogenous as often reported in the A&FS project documents. How theory of change, outcomes and indicators are formulated influences strongly how we observe results:

- **Invisibility** is fostered if we use generic terms such as: 'household', 'livelihoods', 'farmers', 'entrepreneurs'
- **Visibility** of people is fostered if we use clear terms such as: 'women', 'men', 'girls', 'boys'
- **Differentiation** is fostered if we add to above terms such as: disadvantaged, living in poverty, non-privileged

4. Monitoring in A&FS is especially complex and requires specific skills

Field offices should have trained staff that can perform the following monitoring tasks at the level of the RF in A&FS: i) define baselines; ii) data collection (don't do all yourself); iii) data processing; iv) data interpretation; v) reporting. An experienced staff in the field office should be trained and given an incentive to assure quality and consistency. Monitoring staff should be led by the field office management and supported by an expert coach in key moments.

5. Create a regional dynamic of A&FS monitoring

In practice, in depth learning takes place by people working together. It is proposed that RF and Monitoring Systems are developed in groups of staff that are responsible for monitoring in field offices of different SDC partner countries in a same region. These groups could be coached by an external monitoring specialist. During the elaboration of the RF the method of collecting data for each indicator should be planned.

6. Use monitoring data for strategic decision-making

In the domain A&FS the SDC is strongly involved in three thematic clusters:

- Land related issues (governance of tenure, ownership, management)
- Access to production factors: micro finance, knowledge, irrigation, seeds
- Productivity increase of crops and livestock rather than production alone.

These thematic clusters are highly relevant to poverty alleviation. Besides improving the monitoring systems, experiences of such important interventions could be capitalized with specific in-depth studies for future SDC strategic planning, particularly in the development of new CS.