



Launch of SDC Education Strategy on Basic Education and Vocational Skills Development and the SECO Position Paper on Skills

31 May 2017, SDC, Bern

In the context of the Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017–2020, where education is a priority, the SDC presented its new Education Strategy on basic education and vocational skills development and SECO presented its new position paper on skills development. The two federal agencies intend to expand substantially their activities in these areas.

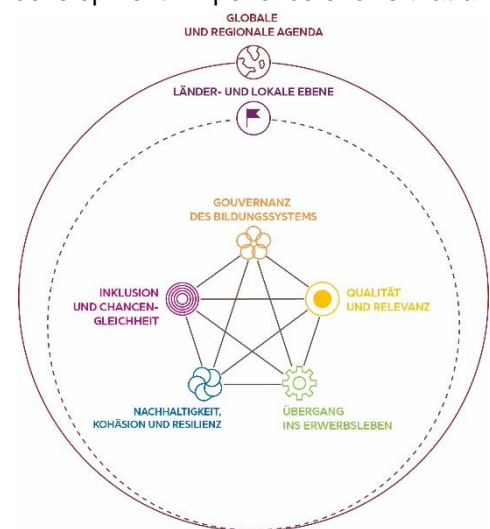
More than 100 people participated in the event of 31 May 2017 to launch the SDC's education strategy and SECO's position paper. The director general of the SDC, Ambassador Manuel Sager, and the head of SECO's Economic Cooperation and Development Division, Ambassador Raymund Furrer, opened the event, emphasising the importance of basic education and vocational skills development for economic and social development.

- **The SDC's education strategy is based increasingly on a systemic approach which stresses the relevance of the complementarity of basic education and vocational skills development.**
- **The Swiss education system provides a comparative advantage for the work of the SDC and the SECO, both in basic education and in vocational skills development, although adaptation to the respective contexts is key.**
- **The 2030 Agenda recognises the transformative potential of education for all SDGs. The SDC is also strengthening the role of education across sectors to improve health, food security, climate protection, access to water, greater peace and education in relation to migration.**
- **The SECO position paper emphasises the importance of strengthening skills to increase productivity, which leads to increased competitiveness, growth and job creation.**

The new education strategy combines the SDC's strengths in basic education and vocational skills development, linking them to the labour market and economic development. Experience shows that a combination of high-quality basic education and vocational skills development relevant to the labour market enables individuals to build capacities that expand their social and economic opportunities.

The SDC's activities in the area of education are based on the comparative advantage of Switzerland, inspired by the Swiss education system and taking Swiss expertise into account. The SDC is engaged in basic education and vocational skills development programmes in developing and transition countries, as well as in humanitarian crises, and is also engaged in the global political discourse on education. Extra attention is being given to education in fragile contexts. The education strategy is implemented using six strategic orientations (see graphic).

The SDC's education strategy has been critically assessed by the two former evaluators of the SDC's activities in the areas of basic education (2015) and vocational skills



The six strategic orientations of the SDC's education strategy on basic education and vocational skills development

development (2011).

Gita Steiner-Khamsi, the evaluator of the SDC's basic education programmes, gave a positive assessment of the transformative understanding of basic education through appropriate educational activities in projects of other sectors, such as health or food security, the strengthening of systemic approaches and governance of basic education, and also the stronger emphasis on basic education in fragile regions to improve the inclusion of disadvantaged groups and improve social cohesion. One of the SDC's mainstays, namely mother-tongue and multilingual teaching, could have been better highlighted as an important component in improving the quality of basic education. The evaluator sees good potential that the comparative advantages of the Swiss basic education system will also have more to offer in the future for the SDC basic education programmes.

Prof. Markus Maurer, evaluator of the vocational skills development activities, underscored the SDC's good reputation for its project interventions adapted to the respective context and its desire for more system developments. The vocational training expert did however point out that the majority of the SDC's vocational skills development projects currently focus on the impact on employment and the synergies with private sector development, while the articulation of basic education and vocational skills development is still not widely present in the SDC's current project portfolio. In his view, the interplay between vocational skills development and private sector promotion and employment is given too little weight in the new education strategy.

The SECO position paper for strengthening skills is oriented towards the private sector and is focused on continuing vocational training and on dual and sector-specific training in the formal sector. The position paper focuses on the tertiary education level and the formal area. Higher skills levels should help to increase productivity and create better jobs and thus promote the economic and social development of partner countries. The SECO position paper sets out three distinct areas for intervention: (1) framework conditions of the labour market at the macro level, (2) national tertiary level education systems at the meso level, and (3) advanced, practical training at industry/enterprise level. The participants were particularly interested in SECO's handling of the challenges of digitisation and viewed favourably the complementarity of SECO's positioning with other federal agencies active in international vocational training cooperation.

Thanks to the SDC's and SECO's programmes – which are carried out in a complementary manner – Switzerland's international cooperation in the areas of basic education and vocational skills development in the South and the East is now reaching even more countries and people, meaning less poverty, more economic development, better social cohesion, and providing prospects and protection in crisis situations.



There is a need for higher qualifications

«Ok, I have learned how to build... but there is no one to draw a plan and to instruct me what to do.»



Prerequisite Basic Education

«I would love to know what's written there.»



What the Education Strategy really depends on

Basic Education – Vocational Skills Development