



# CREATING THE PROSPECT OF LIVING A LIFE IN DIGNITY

PRINCIPLES GUIDING  
THE SDC IN ITS COMMITMENT  
TO FIGHTING POVERTY

DEZA DIREKTION FÜR ENTWICKLUNG UND ZUSAMMENARBEIT  
DDC DIRECTION DU DÉVELOPPEMENT ET DE LA COOPÉRATION  
DSC DIREZIONE DELLO SVILUPPO E DELLA COOPERAZIONE  
**SDC** SWISS AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION  
COSUDE AGENCIA SUIZA PARA EL DESARROLLO Y LA COOPERACIÓN





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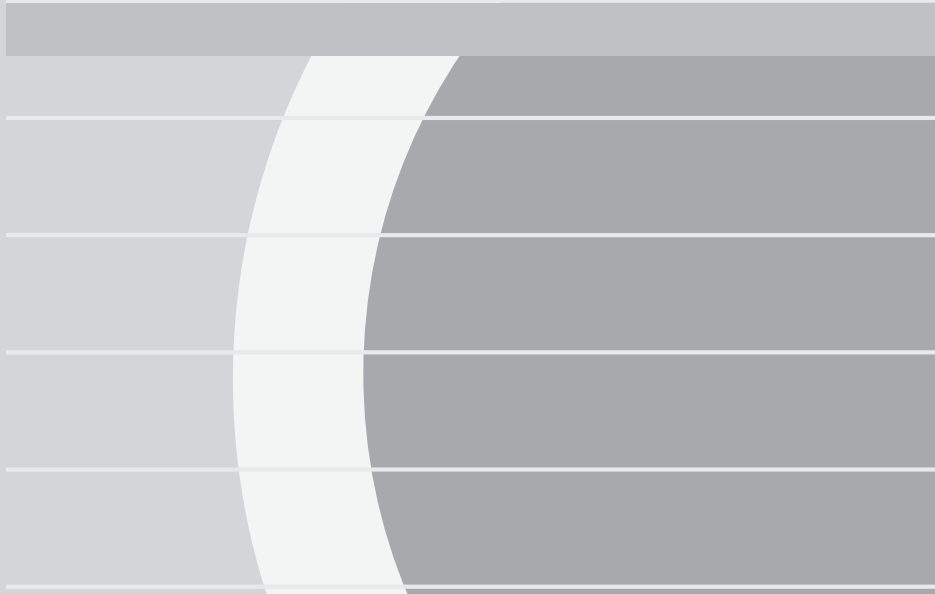
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# Introduction



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The present principles of SDC in its fight against poverty are a condensation of the fundamentals found in the Organization's master plans, strategies, and approaches which, in turn, are the fruit of many years of SDC experience in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation with partner countries in the South and East<sup>1</sup>. For SDC staff, these principles form the frame of reference for the concrete implementation of SDC activities in a given geographic or international and multilateral context.

In our day-to-day work on behalf of the deprived and disadvantaged, we often discover contradictions and encounter limits. It turns out impossible for us to apply all of the principles simultaneously and to the same degree in each and every situation. It is crucial that we be just as aware of these contradictions and constraints as we are of the modest possibilities that we have to exert an influence and effect a change. The present poverty principles are here to help us avoid all-too-hasty, pragmatic compromises. They are designed to prevent us from losing sight of our vision and the objectives of our mission.

<sup>1</sup> They are implicitly contained or explicitly formulated in a number of documents on fighting poverty, both on a general institutional level (SDC Guiding Principles, Strategy 2010, etc.) and in departmental, divisional, or country guidelines, orientations, and strategies. There also exist relevant documents on guiding principles drawn up by other organizations such as the UNDP, the World Bank, DAC/OECD – in particular the DAC Poverty Reduction Guidelines – to whose formulation SDC also made its contribution.

# 1 The Vision

Many people live in a state of material well-being and relative safety, secure in the knowledge that the lion's share of their basic needs is well covered. We in Switzerland are among these individuals. However, for one-third of the world's inhabitants, life is characterized by conditions that flagrantly violate their dignity and their rights. Two billion women, men, and children are exposed to chronic poverty or advancing impoverishment. Unable to satisfy their fundamental needs, their very existence is under constant threat as they are also imperilled by natural and technical disasters, crises, and conflicts. They are subject to discrimination based on social origin, sex, race, age, colour, creed, as well as other factors. They are excluded from participating in social, political, and economic processes and sharing their respective gains.

The UN Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals<sup>2</sup> reaffirm the basic right of all human beings to participate in the economic, social, and political processes of society. This means their right to freely, actively, and effectively participate in shaping society, take part in decision-making processes, and share in the fruits which development brings.

SDC shares this point of view. Our vision is one of a world in which all people can live in prosperity, peace, freedom, and security, and a world which will also provide future generations with sufficient resources for their own development<sup>3</sup>. It is also a world in which the development of society unfolds on the basis of sustainable production and consumer behaviour, with a just distribution of material goods and resources, and an equitable sharing of opportunities, knowledge, choices – and power.

<sup>2</sup> Millennium Development Goals – MDGs.

<sup>3</sup> From the SDC Guiding Principles.

The engagement in favour of the disadvantaged and the commitment to their empowerment is also vested with a political dimension as it calls into question those development models, interests, and power relations that are the causes of injustice and poverty, and are responsible for destroying the bases of life. In engaging ourselves together with people living in poverty to bring about a change in this situation, we cannot escape the inevitable prospect of conflict – latent conflicts emerging or simmering conflicts breaking out. The poverty principles oblige us to create space and to support those mechanisms and capacities required for a peaceful resolution of conflict. At the same time, our commitment to the achievement of just development also represents a contribution to reducing the potential for social conflict.





## **The Basic Values** 2

### **Dignity**

All persons have the right to live their lives in dignity. Dignity means being able to independently shape one's life and one's future, to draw on one's own experience and capabilities, and to live as a respected member of one's social group and of society as a whole. To live a life in dignity, people must be able to satisfy their basic needs and to exercise their political, civil, social, cultural, and economic rights.

### **Diversity and Respect**

Diverse patterns for shaping a satisfying and meaningful life exist. Based on universal and unalienable human rights, SDC consciously respects and promotes the realization of diverse objectives, forms and paces of change within the social transformation process leading to sustainable development.

### **Justice**

The vision of a just world implies a socioeconomic model which is morally, politically, economically, and ecologically sustainable. To enhance justice requires less waste, less overabundance, and less straining of resources on the one side and less exploitation and impoverishment on the other. This means the reduction of disparities – in particular a halt in the violent and constantly increasing divide in prosperity worldwide and within individual countries – and the renegotiation of interests and power. In the delicate issue of negotiating on different interests, SDC takes the side of the disadvantaged populations and countries.

### **Participation and Ownership**

The active participation and ownership of all segments of the population is a fundamental precondition for the sustainability of the social transformation process. Genuine participation signifies identifying the process as your own and assuming the responsibility for it. Discrimination and the exclusion of individuals and groups from decision-making

processes and from the exercise of power – along with depriving them from society’s material goods – is an impediment to sustainable and just development. In particular, the imbalance between men and women represents a significant obstacle in the development process.

### **Solidarity and Responsibility**

It is the people themselves who are the responsible actors in the transformation process. SDC operates in solidarity with those who are disadvantaged. We support them in the actions they themselves undertake to bring about concrete changes in their living conditions. We encourage societal actors who strive to improve the structures and framework conditions, and who oblige their government to discharge its responsibilities according to the principles of good governance. Both in our own context and in the international and multilateral policy dialogue, we take it upon ourselves to champion sustainable modes of production and consumption and to promote global development conditions which are more just.

### **Peace, Freedom, and Security**

Justice, well-being, and the possibility for free personal development are values and goals in and of themselves. Simultaneously, they form an important basis for economic and political stability, and hence for freedom and security in the world. It is for this reason that SDC accords paramount importance to the development of just and free societies.

# 3 The Common Understanding

## **Poverty means discrimination, obstacles, and exclusion**

- in satisfying the basic necessities of life;
- in the use and development of an individual's physical and human potential, capacities, and creativity;
- in seizing the opportunities and choices for fashioning a fulfilling and dignified life;
- in the realization of one's aspirations;
- from participating in the formulation and decision-making stages of the social, political, and economic transformation processes.

## **Well-being implies**

- being able to ensure one's own subsistence in dignified conditions, with the ability to ensure one's livelihood thanks to one's own work;
- being an equal-footed and responsible member in the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of society;
- having equal access to resources, information, services, institutions, and decision-making structures;
- being protected from violence and arbitrariness;
- being able to count on assistance, security nets, and solidarity in the event of crises and disasters;
- enjoying a positive outlook towards the future for oneself and for the coming generations.

## **Main questions - before we get involved (in projects, programmes, SWAPs, PRSs, multilateral initiatives)**

**Can we achieve anything? What? How does our contribution provide a major added value? What and where are our particular competences? Where does the application of our modest means promise the largest possible effect? (leverage effect)**

**Is our engagement really targeted at the central needs of the poor? How well do we know what they are? How can we contribute to having the problems of the poorest addressed and their empowerment fostered? (responsiveness and flexibility)**

**What are the other donors doing? What is the government doing? How are we linking our activities to those of the others and making them complementary? (synergies)**

**Have significant experiences already been made in domains similar to that of the activities planned? Has such experience been analyzed, evaluated, and exchanged? (capitalization of best practices and lessons learned)**



**Fighting poverty means**

- empowering the disadvantaged and enhancing their capacity to mitigate disparities and to stop the advance of impoverishment;
- building on the capacities, experiences, and potentials of the disadvantaged;
- establishing priorities in favour of the poor and disadvantaged, and in so doing recognizing their point of view and respecting their priorities;
- fostering organizations operating in the interest of the poor;
- working at all levels – on national as well as multilateral – towards a change in the structures and framework conditions leading to the discrimination, impoverishment, and exclusion of individuals and social groups;
- encouraging effective poverty-reduction policies;
- advocating for the poor in the defence of their rights and in the denunciation of the misuse of power;
- confronting the conflicts which may emerge in aligning ourselves with the poor and disadvantaged, and helping to deal with them by peaceful means in the interest of the disadvantaged;
- utilizing disasters, crises, and conflicts also as an opportunity for a new start and a new design of possibilities.



## **Engagement, Procedure, Commitment** 4

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**What we don't do**

View the poor and the disadvantaged as isolated phenomena, without considering the political, social, and economic system they are part of

Perceive in a person only what he or she lacks

Idealize the poor and disadvantaged

Confuse poverty with modesty and simplicity of needs

Solve the problems for the "others", thereby undermining their own responsibility

Impose our support where we are perhaps not needed

Unwittingly contribute by means of our bilateral programmes and multilateral cooperation to worsening the situation of disadvantaged groups and populations

**4.1**

**What we do and what approach we adopt**

**Combating the causes**

SDC supports efforts to change the structural causes and framework conditions which produce impoverishment, chronic poverty, dependence, injustice, and exclusion, or which allow them to persist. In doing so, SDC activities are guided by the Millennium Development Goals. In the interest of sustainability and in order to achieve the largest possible impact from the limited means at hand, SDC focuses on certain key areas within these Goals, placing particular importance on the aspects of quality in the achievement of the objectives: the lessening of disparities, the active role of those concerned, and the quality of the process in social and ecological terms.

**Engagement on all levels**

SDC is engaged on the local, national, and multilateral levels. On the one hand, it fights poverty by empowering people to enable them to improve their living conditions on their own, to enhance



their influence on institutions and decisions, to make use of their rights, and to bring about changes in structures and framework conditions. On the other hand, SDC also operates “from the outside” to bring about an improvement in national and international framework conditions and in institutions. It participates in an engaged political dialogue with the governments of its partner countries, as well as in the international and multilateral context.

### **Human rights and the rule of law**

SDC supports civil society organizations and associations as well as state institutions that contribute to the promotion of human rights and the rule of law. Good governance and the rule of law are mutually dependent upon one another. SDC calls for and promotes these on all levels. Its commitment is based on the right every individual has to development, and it implies the building of capacity among civil society actors to monitor government agencies and institutions in the correct execution of their tasks.

### **Coordination and coherence**

SDC encourages the coordination of its work with the other Swiss\*, international, and multilateral actors on behalf of and in the interest of the poor. It strives to ensure the coherence of its commitment to the disadvantaged at all levels. SDC sheds transparency on both contradictions and counter-running policy approaches in its cooperation with other Federal Offices, bilateral donors, and multilateral institutions, while advocating the highest degree of coherence possible.

### **Poverty Reduction Strategies – PRS**

SDC coordinates its commitment to fighting poverty by aligning its activities with coherent national PRS processes or other poverty-oriented programmes and strategies. It fosters transfer of ownership, together with the steering of these processes by the governments concerned and by civil society. The active participation of civil society in the formulation of development goals and in the elaboration of national programmes and strategies, together with their implementation, is a priority.

\* The national partners for coordination and questions of coherence are, first of all, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (seco), followed by other Federal Offices and Swiss NGOs active in the partner countries, as well as representatives of the private economic sector.

## Designing and planning programmes and projects

### being explicit

explicitly naming the focus on poverty as such

transforming the implicit assumptions on poverty into explicit statements, in particular in terms of the situation analysis, choice of partners, and definition of the “target” groups

formulating the goals and the expected results: short and medium-term results and impacts, possible interactions and side effects, strived-for long-term effects

### transparence

clearly and openly state our values and goals to the partners

unequivocally negotiate common goals and impacts

clearly state the roles to be played by both sides

precisely determine and formulate the commitments and responsibilities of both sides jointly with the partners. The same must also be set down and explicitly formulated between the implementing partner organizations (NGOs, government bodies, and donor committees etc. on the one hand, and beneficiaries on the other)

imperatively negotiate and define the criteria and deadlines for review, modification, and adaptation in the project or programme

have the beneficiaries analyze project progress themselves

## 4.2

### How we work

#### Long-term engagement and immediate results

Where and whenever possible, SDC activities are to bring about improvements which are visible and noticeable to the poor within a relatively short period of time. The sustainable fight against poverty, however, takes time and requires perseverance. SDC’s engagement is long-term. It is a reliable and predictable partner.

#### Partnership

Authentic partnership presupposes that the partners mutually comprehend each other as a whole. For SDC, this particularly means not only addressing the problems, needs, deficiencies, and weaknesses of the poor, but also taking into consideration their knowledge, abilities, experience, entrepreneurial spirit, and creativity. The recognition and mobilization of these diverse capacities and of the existing physical and spiritual resources, enables people to become the owners of their transformation process and thus equal partners in development cooperation.

## Participation and clarity in the roles played

We are fully aware of our role as external actors in a social process that is being undergone by those concerned. By virtue of our outside support, we are participating in their development process. On the one hand, our role consists in supporting our partners and their governments in their own efforts and in fostering their possibilities, capacities, and potential. On the other hand, thanks to our influence on the economic, political, and institutional framework conditions, we strive to facilitate and provide long-term backing to the efforts of the disadvantaged to bring about change and to develop. We realize that we share many values, yet live in different contexts and benefit from different experiences. We respect the view of the persons affected. The analysis of their problems and the planning of innovative solutions is a joint undertaking based on their experience and the goals they have set for themselves.

## Systemic thinking and selective action

Poverty has many causes and appears in a multitude of forms, all of which are mutually conditioning and reinforcing. Fighting poverty re-

quires a holistic approach so as to intervene in this complex system and change its modus operandi to the benefit of the disadvantaged. To do so, we must perceive, capture, and understand the situation of those concerned in its entirety and within their particular context. We think in a systemic manner, and we act selectively. This means that we leave out no aspect in our analysis of the situation of the poor and of their resources, capacities, and potentials. It means that in our concrete interventions, we chose a selective and sectoral entry point. We thereby strive to use the modest means at our disposal so as to create the best possible synergies in favour of the poor.

## 4.3

### What we are committed to

#### Empowerment

Empowerment represents both a goal and a method for SDC in its work. It is an emancipation process in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, obtain access to resources, and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. The activities of SDC are designed to strengthen the poor and destitute in bolstering

**Implementation/programme and project management**

To consistently focus on poverty means:

Always keeping one’s eyes and ears wide open to learn what is on the minds of the partners and the poor.

Are we asking ourselves the right questions, and are we receiving our information and replies directly from those concerned?

Are we familiar with their needs, and do we know where they set their priorities?

Do our partner organizations know and respect the needs and priorities of the people affected?

Are we indeed planning and achieving the mobilization and strengthening of the capacities and the empowerment of the disadvantaged? Are our partner organizations doing the same?

What provisions have we made for when there is a strong divergence between our objectives and those of our partners, or those of our partners and those of the population concerned? Do we know their indicators for improvement and progress, and have we exchanged our views in this regard?

How can we afford to take the time necessary?

How can we bring the different tempos – ours and that of those affected – into harmony with each other?

The PEMI instruments (Planning, Evaluation, Monitoring, and Implementation) are conducive to systematically incorporating poverty-relevance into all levels of our activity.

their self-esteem and identity, their self-confidence, and in their ability to analyze problems and develop potential solutions of their own.

**Gender**

The discrimination and the exclusion of individuals and groups can be due to any of many different factors. The inequality between women and men is the most widespread form of discrimination and represents an enormous obstacle to development. Women are at a multiple disadvantage; they are unequally burdened with tasks necessary to the well-being of society; they are often exposed to many types of violence. Women and men differ from each other in the way they live deprivation and poverty, having different roles to play and manifesting their own specific needs. They also diverge in where they set their priorities for improving their opportunities in life. SDC takes these differences and problems into consideration across the entire scope of its activities. It fosters transformation processes in such a way that no group is subject to discrimination. Women and men participate in the development process, each utilizing their full potential and entitled to an equal share in the fruits of development.



## **Institutional Embedding** 5

### **Commitment and responsibility**

Our engagement in favour of the poor and disadvantaged as well as in favour of “bringing relief of those in need and alleviating poverty in the world” is a commitment set down in law, and one of the five objectives of Swiss foreign policy<sup>4</sup>. This engagement is a binding element of SDC’s professional code of ethics. The poverty principles are a reflection of the values we hold in common in the execution of our mission. Drawing inspiration from these values, all SDC employees bear the responsibility for planning and implementing activities, projects, programmes, interventions, and initiatives to combat poverty. On the political level, the SDC directors are responsible for representing these principles in Switzerland, as well as in bilateral, international, and multilateral organizations and initiatives.

### **Empathy and professionalism**

Our task is indeed demanding. On the one hand, it consists in properly grasping the complex phenom-

enon of poverty and the resources and capacities of the poor that can be potentially mobilized; while on the other hand, it implies taking into account the importance and the ramifications of the political and economic framework conditions – both on the national and international levels. This calls for empathy and sensitivity, along with an in-depth understanding and experience with respect to the given local, regional, and national context, i. e., the social, economic, political, and cultural specificities. Above all, this demands intercultural capacities along with a thorough understanding of global development-policy and economic relations. SDC makes it possible for its employees and partner organizations to acquire these prerequisites and continually improve themselves. Professionalism implies constantly enhancing theoretical and practical capacities and unceasingly developing methods and instruments for the sustainable combat of poverty. SDC attaches great value to strengthening the coming generation in the domain of poverty issues and fighting poverty, in particular by building their competence for systemic approaches and multidisciplinary cooperation.

<sup>4</sup> 1976 Federal Law on International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Art.5, para.2: “It primarily supports poor developing countries, regions, and population groups”.

Foreign Policy Report 2000: Ch. 2.3.2 Prosperity and Poverty: the “Fight against Poverty and Inequality” as a major foreign policy goal.

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