

## INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE SDC'S PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL PROTECTION 2013-17

**Social protection is an economic investment – it plays a key role in mitigating economic and social crises and shocks, and combating poverty, inequality and exclusion. An independent evaluation of the SDC's performance in social protection concludes that the SDC uses social protection as an effective and relevant modality to contribute to its core mandate of reducing poverty and inequalities, strengthening economic growth, tackling global risks, alleviating suffering, and promoting peace and stability. However, the report states that the SDC lacks an integrated and systemic approach to social protection, which reduces the impact and sustainability of its activities.**

The purpose of this evaluation was backward and forward-looking. The evaluation included a performance assessment of the SDC's social protection related portfolio of actions, during the period 2013-17. This was used as the basis to provide evidence-based inputs to propose a 'theory of change' and a narrative to conceptually define and support the positioning of the SDC and its Swiss partners in social protection. The evaluation additionally included recommendations on whether and how the SDC's approaches can be strengthened from a strategic and an operational point of view.

Social protection is defined as the collective set of measures aimed at protecting people against social and economic risks/vulnerabilities that adversely affect people's well-being and maintenance of sustainable livelihoods across the life-cycle<sup>1</sup>.

### KEY MESSAGES

- The SDC is utilising social protection as an effective and relevant modality to reducing poverty and inequalities.
- Social protection issues have been addressed by the SDC within the

context of projects across many of its priority themes, as a complementary policy field that enhances project thematic outcomes.

- The SDC's long-term presence in countries and its simultaneous way of working at local and national level are very well placed to create long-term impact.
- Measuring progress on social protection often appears to be coincidental rather than systematic, as the SDC lacks an integrated and coherent approach.

### MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 1. Fostering links and strengthening outcomes

While social protection is not considered a priority theme or topic at the SDC, social protection issues have been addressed within the context of the SDC's portfolio across many of the SDC's priority themes – most notably Governance, Food Security and Agriculture, Health, Employment and Economic Development. Social protection within the SDC may therefore best be conceptualised as an important complementary policy field

that enhances and fosters links with other sectors, thereby strengthening and maximising their outcomes. Such a multi-sectoral approach implies working across sectors and taking an integrated and systemic approach to social protection. Whilst the SDC has developed internal papers reviewing and reflecting on its engagement in the area, the findings of the evaluation indicate that the SDC lacks a coherent and systematic approach to social protection to date. For the majority of the projects the issue of social protection is not the principal focus but is a part of the overall measures that are being carried out aiming at a broader development goal.

#### 2. Innovative and efficient Swiss approach

The SDC's approach at country or regional level is commonly based on a parallel 'sandwich approach' that combines work at the national, policy and regulatory level, alongside interventions at the local level to strengthen service-delivery and citizen's access at the grassroots. The evaluators note that this mixed approach is highly efficient while at the same time providing good value

<sup>1</sup> These include life-cycle attributes (e.g. old age, disability, invalidity, or maternity and child), health risks (e.g. illness, accident, or

epidemics), economic risks (e.g. unemployment, injury, exclusion, or price shocks), and natural or ecological/climate-related hazards

(e.g. drought, flooding, earthquakes, or cyclones).

for money, especially for a small donor like the SDC. The approach of testing different delivery options at local level before proceeding to the scaling up of results ensures projects have strong innovative potential.

### 3. Swiss expertise remains hidden

The evaluation confirms that the SDC has a solid basis in social protection both in terms of presence in the field and know-how and expertise which it can build and expand upon. The SDC's know-how however often remains hidden in sectors and themes, as it is not strategically made available.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Enhance the SDC's engagement in social protection:** the evaluation presents three scenarios for the SDC to consider, linked to an enhanced engagement in social protection: a) leave it the way it is (with some slight changes), b) making it more important without turning it into a priority theme, c) make it a priority theme.

**2. Develop guidance documents and capacity development for social protection:** the development of a social protection framework that summarises and sets out the SDC's understanding of social protection is key to providing conceptual and strategic guidance for a more structured engagement by the SDC in social protection. A capacity development and learning package is needed, including via anchoring social protection within the SDC as a thematic network or unit where project officers can seek technical advice in order to be able to better integrate the topic of social protection into their work and create productive synergies with other themes.

**3. Develop a nexus in social protection:** enhance the existing internal dialogue between Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid with the aim of developing a common vision on how to better link and

strengthen long-term and short-term approaches in the context of an adaptive social protection approach.

**4. Seek more pro-active partnerships in social protection:** in order to strengthen social protection as a theme within the SDC, a more systematic and active engagement in international initiatives and partnerships on social protection is recommended.

**5. More balanced use of SDC tools:** the SDC's engagement in social protection has a strong focus on technical assistance. A more balanced use of the SDC's tool box of instruments, for example a stronger engagement in policy dialogue or public private development partnerships (PPDP) may help to enhance the impact and sustainability of the SDC's intervention in social protection.

**6. Monitoring for results in social protection:** the SDC should develop a set of basic social protection indicators that allow to measure progress and consistently report on them. Improved monitoring will allow the SDC to better highlight the results of social protection and its contribution to achieving the 2030 Agenda, reaching the goal of leaving no one behind (LNOB) and providing value for money.

## SENIOR MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The SDC senior management appreciates the quality of the evaluation report and finds that it provides a timely and useful assessment of the SDC's performance in social protection.

It took position in the Management Response where **nine out of ten recommendations** were either **fully or partly agreed with**. Only one was disagreed with. This shows a high level of convergence with the evaluation findings and that the SDC agrees to seize the opportunity to improve its results by the means of social protection.

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted by GOPA Consultants, with an international team consisting of Shawn Webb (team leader), Barbara Rohregger, Christine Bosch and Jonas Kaufmann.

The evaluation included a staff e-survey, interviews with SDC staff and partners, focus group discussions, analysis of eight case studies, two field visits (Albania, Zimbabwe (Southern African Region)) as well as a performance assessment (quantitative and qualitative data) of 87 identified projects/programmes relevant for this evaluation. The evaluation process was conducted in close coordination with the Core Learning Partnership (CLP).

The SDC senior management considers social protection as a most relevant modality to achieve the goal of LNOB and is gratified by the fact that various social protection components are currently being successfully implemented in different SDC programmes.

The SDC's senior management is in favour of improving the agency's engagement in social protection. It concurs with the evaluation findings that this modality can enhance the SDC's impact on poverty and resilience through more systematic work and exchanges within an SDC community of practice. By committing itself to incorporating social protection more systematically within ongoing operations, the SDC's senior management aims to support, build up knowledge and anchor social protection more effectively in the institution through existing structures.

