

Reflecting back on two decades of Swiss - Tajik collaboration in Primary Healthcare Development

*Webinar organized in the occasion of the 30th anniversary of SDC action in
Eastern Europe and Central Asia, April 21st, 2021*

Wednesday, April 21st, 10 – 11.30 am (CET)/1 – 2.30 pm (Tajikistan time)

WEBINAR NOTES

Background information/Rationale

Switzerland has been supporting transition processes in the "Eastern Block" (Eastern European and Central Asian countries) since the early 1990s, specifically since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As former Soviet republics, the newly created independent territories were facing similar challenges, such as limited basic service delivery across social sectors, insufficient economic diversification and job creation, low citizen's participation in decision-making and weak accountability of public institutions. These limitations essentially impeded the countries' economic development and increased the risk of regional instability.

Driven by the vision of a world without poverty and in peace, Switzerland supported Eastern European and Central Asian countries in the implementation of their national development strategies, engaged in policy dialogue with government authorities, and supported projects at local, national and regional levels.

In a tribute for thirty years of Eastern Swiss Cooperation, SDC Eurad Division is engaging in an internal stocktaking process aimed at gathering testimonies and fostering opportunities for institutional reflection and dialogue about successes, challenges and lessons learnt accumulated through extensive technical development collaboration in these countries.

After two decades of close and rich collaboration, the Swiss-Tajik partnership in the health domain has come to an end in March 2021, with the phasing out of the last project aimed at strengthening primary healthcare. In recognition of the efforts invested and the results achieved, as well as of the importance of capitalizing upon lessons learnt and institutional memory, the Eurad Division would like to dedicate the opening of the stocktaking process with a retrospective exchange on the impact of Switzerland's engagement on Tajikistan's health sector.

Take home messages

- Underfunded systems are fertile grounds for perverse incentives. This remains an important challenge for international cooperation in the health sector... including in Tajikistan."
- From a health systems strengthening perspective, quality assurance is a very important aspect, because it stimulates the use of the system and contributes to its development and sustainability.
- The success of the Swiss health programme in Tajikistan was the biggest when it worked directly with the practitioners. They gave the best response to the intervention, because they had a stake in the proposed improvements and they were at the heart of the system. The same cannot be said about the country's institution (with the exception of the medical university), who have shown little commitment throughout (also due to frequent changes).
- Changes of mindsets and practices need a lot of time. In this perspective, SDC's systemic and long-term engagement proved valid and different from the usual donors' environment.
- We have family medicine in TJ now! Although the gains from the CH-TJ partnership are not financially sustainable (yet), a shift in mindsets and practices has been operated and it is there to stay.
- Developing mutual trust and finding a common language was a determining factor of success (this comes with personal relationships).
- Continuous information at community level was determinant to generating a conducive environment for adoption of change.
- Lesson learnt: pay attention to resistances from local authorities and other key stakeholders and address them early on.
- Recommendation: establish a business plan from the beginning of the project and consider all possible funding opportunities available locally (do not limit the analysis to MoH-related public funds).

Links to movies about the health programme in Tajikistan

1. Community Based family medicine project implemented by Aga Khan Health services in Pamir area:
https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/themes-sdc/health-development/health-systems-sanitation.par2_projectfilter_page8.html
2. The Enhancing Primary health care project implemented by Swiss TPH
<https://youtu.be/iC-70HAJzA>
3. **More information about the SINO project (Enhancing primary health care services) can be found on the following link:**
https://issuu.com/communications.swisstph/docs/swiss-tajik_cooperation_final