# Measuring effectiveness in international cooperation

**Report of the Parliamentary Control of the Administration** for the attention of the Council of States Control Committee

of 27 April 2023

# Key terms



# International Cooperation Strategy

Every four years, the Federal Council sets out its strategy for international cooperation (IC Strategy) to Parliament in a dispatch and requests the required framework credits. The credits amount to CHF 11.25 billion for the period from 2021 to 2024.

## **Cross-sectoral implementation**

The IC Strategy is implemented by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) in the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER).





### External and independent evaluations

In IC, 'external' evaluations are made of specific projects or interventions and 'independent' evaluations are made of strategic issues. In both cases, the evaluations are carried out by external contractors.

### Success rates

Based on the external evaluations, the SDC and SECO calculate the success rates for their interventions abroad. These success rates are set out in the final report on the implementation of the IC Strategy in order to ensure accountability to Parliament and the public.



# Summary

Generally speaking, the way evaluations are used for measuring the effectiveness of international cooperation (IC) is not entirely expedient. Evaluations in IC are used to guide decision-making at various levels; the costs of conducting them are made transparent. However, there are shortcomings in the evaluation reports and in accounting for the results of IC to Parliament and the public.

In January 2022, the Federal Assembly Control Committees (CCs) instructed the Parliamentary Control of Administration (PCA) to evaluate the measurement of effectiveness in IC.

The FDFA/DDPS sub-committee of the Council of States Control Committee (CC-S), which is responsible for this matter, decided that the PCA should focus on evaluation as one specific instrument for measuring effectiveness. Consequently, the PCA did not examine the effectiveness of IC itself, but rather looked at the way in which the three administrative units responsible for IC – the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), and the Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) – measure and account for the effectiveness of their interventions through evaluations.

The PCA analysed the tools used in conducting evaluations and the associated costs. It interviewed more than thirty employees of the Federal Administration and experts. The quality of the evaluations was analysed in an externally commissioned metaevaluation. The analyses came to the following conclusions:

#### External evaluations have strengths but also weaknesses

The SDC, SECO and the PHRD measure the effectiveness of their projects primarily through external evaluations that they commission. The terms of reference stipulated by the Administration, which also have an influence on the quality of the evaluations, are satisfactory overall (section 3.1). The evaluation reports contain clear summaries, transparently presented data and coherent conclusions, which is particularly helpful in using the evaluations to guide decision-making in projects (section 3.2). The presentation of the methodology and results, on the other hand, is not satisfactory, which has a negative impact on the reliability of external evaluations and thus on their usefulness for accountability purposes. Despite these shortcomings, the quality of the evaluations is comparable to that in other countries (section 3.3).

#### The tools for evaluation management are mostly adequate, but vary in scope

The Administration does not carry out the evaluations itself, but must manage them and ensure their quality. The analysis of the guidelines and processes describing the different steps and responsibilities revealed inconsistency among the three administrative units examined. The SDC's and SECO's evaluation tools are clear and comprehensive, although the SDC's documents are very numerous and little used. The PHRD, on the other hand, has few and not particularly detailed evaluation tools. While this unit is significantly smaller than the other two, its evaluation tools seem insufficient to ensure the quality of the evaluations. In all three units, the persons managing the evaluations appreciate the expertise and support of their respective evaluation units (section 3.4).

### Evaluations are used appropriately for decision-making overall

The evaluations are intended to assist in decision-making at various levels of IC. The external evaluations are primarily used as guidance in the projects evaluated (section 4.1). The independent evaluations, on the other hand, serve the managers primarily as a basis for their strategic decisions (section 4.2). This difference in the use of evaluations can be described as appropriate. However, implementation of the recommendations made in the external evaluations is not systematically monitored, which is why their added value in terms of improving IC projects remains unclear (section 4.1).

## The use of evaluations to account to Parliament and the public is inadequate

It is essential that Parliament and the public are being informed of the effectiveness of IC. However, the evaluations often do not explicitly indicate the extent to which individual interventions contribute to the achievement of the goals stated in the dispatch on the IC Strategy. The final reports to Parliament on the implementation of the IC Strategy present some results, but no systematic assessment of the achievement of objectives (section 4.3). The success rates, which should provide an indication of the effectiveness of IC in the final reports, do not reflect the totality of interventions in IC and are not reliable (section 4.4).

### The costs of the evaluations are transparent and generally low

The evaluation costs are transparently indicated for all three administrative units (section 5.1). They generally amount to less than 2.5 per cent of the costs of the interventions evaluated. By international comparison, this percentage is rather at the lower end of what is spent on evaluations in the IC sector (section 5.2).

The full report is available in French, German and Italian (www.parl.ch).