



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

BALANCING CONTEXT-SPECIFIC AND STANDARD INDICATORS

Key messages

Switzerland has gradually moved from a results system with only context-specific indicators to a system aligned to the 2030 Agenda that has a balanced mix of context-specific and standard indicators. This enabled aggregate reporting, which is much appreciated. The process was gradual in order to ensure ownership.

● Keyword

[Managing for Sustainable Development Results](#)

● Key partner

[Switzerland](#)

Challenge

Until 2015, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) allowed managers of the programmes and projects it supports to choose results indicators. The indicators chosen were thus context relevant and aligned to local needs and priorities. However, this led to a multitude of context-relevant indicators for a similar result, making it impossible to aggregate results at programme or corporate level. The challenge was to produce aggregated evidence for accountability and steering purposes, and to standardise data sufficiently to create a digitalised system. To align results closer with the Agenda 2030, Switzerland also linked its [International co-operation strategy 2021-24](#) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

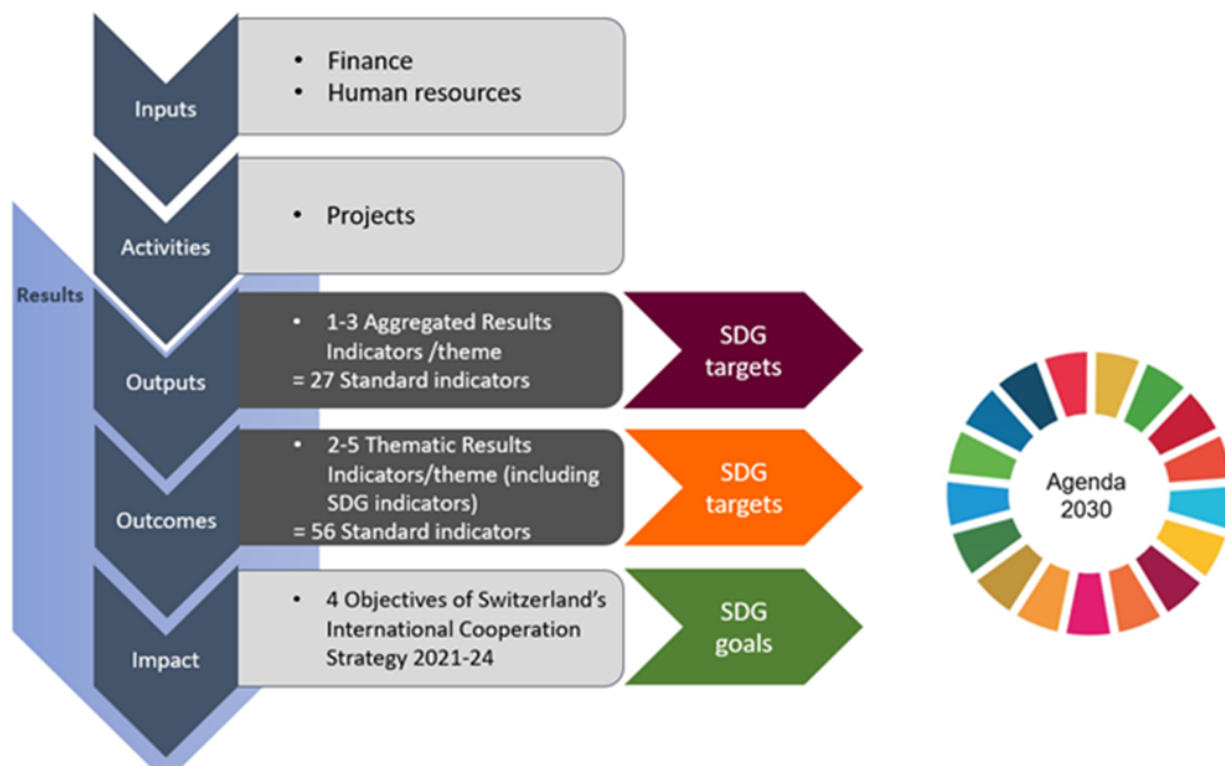
Approach

Switzerland has developed [a comprehensive system for measuring the impact of its international co-operation](#). Following internal discussions, agreement was reached in 2016 to introduce a menu of one to five aggregated reference indicators per priority theme. Programme reports and the experiences of the SDC's thematic staff were used to identify and define indicators that were grounded in reality. Indicators were selected mostly at output level to ensure attribution.

An [external evaluation](#) of the SDC's Results Based Management System advised focussing less on accountability and co-operation results, and more on development results and their use for steering and learning. The SDC therefore decided to keep the most relevant output and outreach indicators and add thematic outcome indicators. Since 2020, the menu comprises 83 standard indicators, each of which contributes to an SDG target. The outcome indicators can be SDG indicators where appropriate.

The SDC is also creating a digitalised Results Data Management system to improve the use of results data for steering, learning and accountability. SDC co-operation programmes are asked to ensure that at least 50% of the indicators used are standard indicators. The others may be determined freely, allowing programmes to remain context specific. This mix of indicators will be reviewed in the coming years and adapted accordingly.

Figure 1 Results reporting: Switzerland's International Co-operation Strategy 21-24 and Agenda 2030



Source: Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation.

Results

The [corporate accountability report](#) produced in 2020 for the first time contained results aggregated across a wide range of situations. The report, which was very well received, clearly demonstrated the results and value of Switzerland's international co-operation. It made it easy for lay persons to understand Switzerland's development co-operation achievements.

The indicator system also provides evidence on how the SDC's programmes contribute to the objectives of Switzerland's international co-operation strategy and to the 2030 Agenda.

Standardised results linked to SDG targets allow the SDC to:

- **report** on how it contributes to the 2030 Agenda
- **align its objectives** at local and country level to the SDG targets prioritised by partner countries and institutions
- **aggregate results** at different levels to enhance steering, learning and accountability.

Lessons learnt

The shift from diverse and context-specific indicators to more standardisation was a process with several rounds of discussions and adaptation to gradually improve the results system and ensure ownership and acceptance by management and staff.

Thematic responsibility for the standardised indicators ensures greater ownership, as their choice and definition are based on the experiences of the thematic networks and not determined in a top-down approach.

The introduction of standardised indicators and the initial digital analyses of aggregated results have triggered:

- some **reluctance** caused by less freedom of choice and the need for clear data structure for digital use
- but also **increased interest** towards results-based management for steering, thematic learning and accountability alike.

Further information

Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (2020), *Switzerland's international cooperation is working: Final report on the implementation of the Dispatch 2017–20*, https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/publikationen/rechenschaftsberichte/Schlussbericht-Umsetzung-Botschaft-2017-2020_en.pdf.

Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (2017), *Independent Evaluation of SDC's Results-Based Management System with a Focus on Poverty Reduction*, <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/NSBExterneStudien/855/attachment/de/3690.pdf>.

Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (2017), "Independent Evaluation: SDC's Results-Based Management System With a Focus on Poverty Reduction" (factsheet), *EvalBrief*, No. 5, December 2017, <https://www.aramis.admin.ch/Default?DocumentID=46039&Load=true>.

Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, *International cooperation: jobs, climate, migration and the rule of law*, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/strategie-21-24/allgemeine-informationen.html>.

Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, *SECO's projects have an impact*, <https://www.seco-cooperation.admin.ch/secocoop/en/home/results/impact.html>.

Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, *The SDC's impact*, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/results-impact/wirkung-deza.html>.

OECD resources

OECD, *Results in development co-operation*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/results-development>.

OECD, *Guiding Principles on Managing for Sustainable Development Results*, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/managing-for-sustainable-development-results_44a288bc-en.

To learn more about Switzerland's development co-operation see:

OECD (2021), "Switzerland", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/00eb9f0b-en>.

OECD (2019), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Switzerland 2019*, Development Co-operation Peer Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264312340-en>.

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