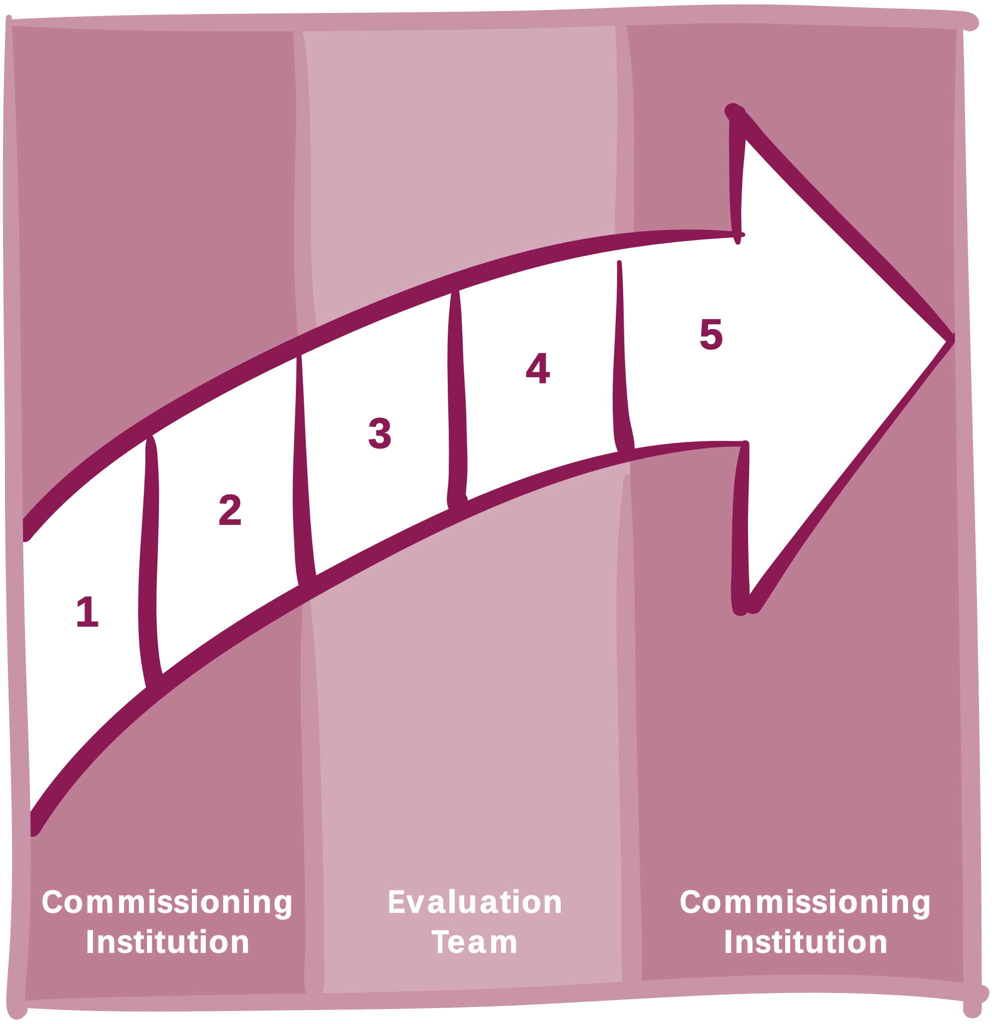
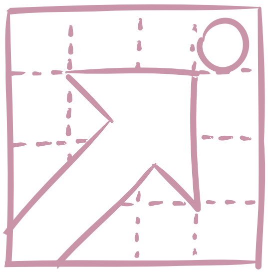
PART II

The Five Stages of External Evaluation

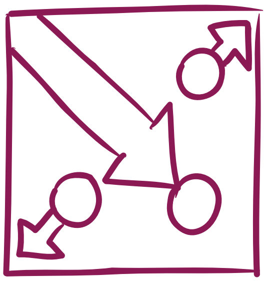


SWISS AGENCY
FOR DEVELOPMENT
AND COOPERATION
SDC

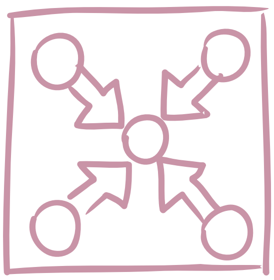
WORKING INSTRUMENTS
FOR PLANNING, EVALUATION,
MONITORING AND TRANSFERENCE
INTO ACTION (PEMT)
JUNE 2000



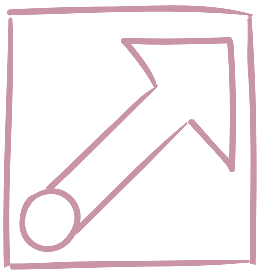
Planning



Evaluation



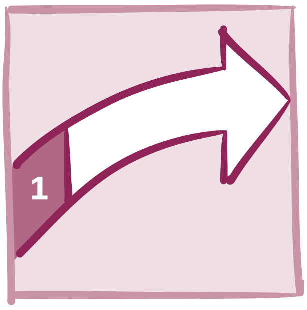
Monitoring



Transference into Action

Part II The Five Stages of External Evaluation

1. Negotiation, Terms of Reference, and responsibilities



Once it has been decided that it is worth conducting an external evaluation and an agreement has been reached with partners to carry it out, those responsible for the evaluation must formulate **Terms of Reference** (ToRs) for the evaluation process and solicit the opinion of partners in this respect.

The Terms of Reference constitute the **core** of an external evaluation. They establish the framework, objectives, tasks, responsibilities and possible procedures for the evaluation process. The ToRs are the only element that is binding on all parties in the process. Formulating them correctly and accurately will enhance the chances of success in terms of high-quality results and implementation. If only one external evaluator is responsible for this task, the ToRs will be among his or her particular duties. If several external consultants are involved, several individuals may share in the task of formulating the Terms of Reference.

1.1 Formulating Terms of Reference step by step

Shaping the process

Clarify responsibility (the commissioning institution or its local representative). Determine whom to include in consultations, and agree on procedures.

Selecting participants

Those who will be most directly affected – i.e. people and organisations important to the evaluation – must be identified and informed about the proposed evaluation (project steering committees, executing organisations, project managers, beneficiaries, others affected by the project, etc.).

Formulating key questions

In collaboration with its partners, the commissioning institution or its local representative formulates two or three key questions and determines **priorities.**

Drawing up profiles required for the evaluation team

Drawing up specifications for evaluators makes it possible to involve participants without having to name specific individuals in advance. The evaluation team can thus be assembled independent of individual or institutional interests, in accordance with determined specifications.

Consultation with participants

The individual responsible submits the draft Terms of Reference to other partners (e.g. programme and project partners in the South and the East) for consultation. Comments and additions are expressly requested. **Differences are settled** in dialogue with the partners, and a rough timetable is drawn up.

Preparing the final version

Following the consultation process (negotiation/consensus-building), final revisions are made in the Terms of Reference.

Assembling basic documents

The following reference documents are used in an evaluation: project document, application for funding, annual programme, budgets, policies, guiding principles of the institutions involved, etc.

Discussions and mandate for external consultant(s)

The Terms of Reference also constitute the basis for later discussions with the evaluation team.

The six elements in Terms of Reference for the evaluation

Background
- Project status, open questions
- Changes in the project context (social, political, economic, ecological changes)
- Previous evaluations/self-evaluations

Aims
- Aim of the evaluation
- What is expected from an external evaluation?
- Two or three key questions

Tasks
- Topics in need of further clarification (e.g. questions related to sustainability, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness or impact)
- Cross-sectoral issues or themes
- Specific questions

Procedure
- Specifications for the evaluation team
- Selection of a team leader
- Determining methodological approaches
- Linkages with self-evaluation, planning and monitoring
- Phases/schedule

Reporting
- Local discussion/feedback: expectations, form and function of feedback
- Debriefing with commissioning institution, final report: contents, scope, structure, language, deadline, mailing list (tentative)

Ohter considerations
- Financial planning
- List of reference documents
- …

1.2 Roles and responsibilities

As already mentioned, responsibility for formulating and negotiating Terms of Reference lies with the **commissioning institution.** The key questions for the evaluation are defined after consultations. While the evaluation team conducts the evaluation, the commissioning institution and other parties involved contribute to its content and organisation, e.g. critically examine the analyses and interpretation, if so wished, and discuss the submitted statements of position and compare them with their own views.

The task of the **evaluation team** is to fulfil the ToRs (specifications) once it has determined whether the commissioned task is feasible. The team is responsible for conducting the evaluation and drawing up the final report containing their appraisal. This concludes its task as the contractor. Responsibility for implementing the results lies with the commissioning institution, even if individual steps need to be taken by the various parties involved or partner organisations subsequently.

The success and hence the **benefits of an evaluation** depend, among other things, on adherence to the following principles:

- The institution commissioning an evaluation must ensure complete **transparency:** the task must be clearly explained to all those involved and contain no overlapping or vaguely defined secondary tasks.
- The **roles** of the various actors in an evaluation (partner institutions, coordinating office, commissioning institution, evaluator/s, etc.) must be clearly defined and communicated to ensure that all those involved understand their responsibilities.

	Levels of accountability	
Institution commissioning the evaluation (head office or local representative) in conjunction with the partner organisations	■ Decision for or against an evaluation ■ Briefing (oral introduction of the consultant)	■ Terms of Reference (concept, methodological parameters) ■ Logistics ■ Debriefing and implementation
Consultant (or team)	■ On-site briefing ■ Report	■ Implementation of evaluation
Partner organisations/project	■ Statement of position on ToRs ■ Statement of position on the report	■ Exchange of views with evaluation team ■ Operational implementation

1.3 Key questions

The key questions show the aspects of a programme or project on which the evaluation should **concentrate.** For example, it can examine how sustainable and/or relevant a project or programme is, what impact it has on the involved groups within and outside the project context, how effective it is with respect to the defined aims, and how efficiently funds are being deployed. Depending on the type of evaluation (range of questions, aims, team composition, resources), it focuses on one or two of the following areas and formulates a few key questions. These must be directed at the **specific context.** The areas are listed below together with a few examples of the relevant key questions.

Sustainability

Are the processes and effects that have already been set in motion sustainable?

Can the processes and impacts generated by the programme or project be **sustainably continued** and **further developed,** even after the support of the donor institution has been withdrawn? This question entails dimensions such as social institutionalisation (ownership, empowerment), technical adaptation, economic and financial benefits, environmental compatibility, institutional capacity and learning ability, and relations to the context of the project. The project or programme to be evaluated determines which dimensions of sustainability take precedence. Consequently the key questions to be asked are, for example:

- Have the partner institutions and involved sections of the population embraced the aims and activities originally promoted by the project?
- Can they continue them independently and adjust their strategies to changing conditions? Do they have their **own problem-solving capacities?**
- From an economic and financial standpoint, are there chances of success in the medium term?
- Is the setting conducive to furthering the dynamics already set in motion? Do people actively relate to the context of the project?
- Which measures of a socio-cultural, institutional, ecological, financial or technical nature could be implemented to increase the chances of the programme's or project's sustainable impact?

Relevance

Are we doing the right thing in relation to the overall context?

Does the programme or project make sense within its **specific context?** Are the requirements clear and are problems addressed systematically and reasonably? Is all available potential being used or built up? Answering questions concerning relevance calls for a wider perspective.

- In view of the requirements and aims of the participating population, and given the existing boundary conditions and development trends: Are we doing the right thing?
- Is the approach behind the programme or project appropriate to the problems to be solved? Or do we need to define other aims?
- Are our strategies **reasonable** and practical? Are the most suitable partners cooperating?

Impact

Which contributions do we make towards the overall goals of the participating population and partner institutions?

Which **desirable** or **undesirable** impacts is the programme/project having at a higher level and outside the sphere of its responsibility? Does it contribute to the overall, long-term goals?

- [ ] Which important changes can be identified?
- [ ] To what extent do the actual **project impacts** match the targeted impacts?
- [ ] Are there any major unforeseen effects?
- [ ] What are the impacts in terms of cross-sectoral themes?
- [ ] What are the most important changes in the project area not induced by the project?

Effectiveness

Are the results contributing to overall goals as planned?

Is the programme/project achieving the **specific objectives** agreed to with the partners?

- [ ] Is a monitoring system being practised to track the impact? What are the most important statements resulting from this?
- [ ] Have project activities actually led to the planned **results?**
- [ ] What particular factors were beneficial or detrimental to the outcome?
- [ ] Was a goal-oriented procedure selected?
- [ ] Is a monitoring system being practised to garner timely relevant information on goal achievement? What are the most important findings resulting from this?

Efficiency

Are we doing things right?
Are we achieving results at reasonable cost?

Is the best, most cost-effective performance being achieved with the input (personnel, ideas, know-how, material, time and finances)?

- ☐ What is the relationship between effort and expenditure (input) and the achieved results (output)?
- ☐ How does output compare with planned input?
- ☐ How are the organisation and implementation assessed (in terms of technical factors, environmental compatibility, time-saving, costs)?
- ☐ How do project management as well as steering and decision-making processes function?
- ☐ Is a suitable monitoring system in place at the implementation level? Are problems identified in good time and are practical, feasible solutions proposed?

1.4 Incorporating cross-sectoral themes

Evaluations can also be designed to examine how cross-sectoral themes are addressed. Primarily this involves examining the impact of a programme/project more closely against the social and political background. Incorporation of cross-sectoral themes entails a global, systematic approach to these areas within a very specific context, i.e. beyond the programme or project boundaries. Many themes can be addressed cross-sectorally, but only three have a universal and lasting impact on the cohabitation and development of societies: **gender** (the relationship between men and women), **environmental questions,** and **power issues** (questions of governance such as the observance of human rights). Alongside these, **other themes** associated with international development cooperation are prioritised and systematically addressed as cross-sectoral concerns, for example the fight against poverty and support for countries in transition. Selecting these themes may be subject to certain fashionable trends. When cooperating with partner institutions in the South or East (including for evaluation purposes), it is important to bear in mind that cross-sectoral themes always involve **value judgements** and **different ways of looking at a problem.** While gender, environment and power issues or other cross-sectoral questions can be just as dominant and pressing for the persons affected in these regions as for the donor institutions, they are often formulated differently.

If cross-sectoral themes are **explicitly** designated as programme/project goals or overall goals, they are also incorporated in the Terms of Reference of an evaluation and addressed during the evaluation. However, even if they are not mentioned in the plans it is interesting to determine what social or political changes have been produced by the programme/project or occurred within its context, who benefits from them, who is affected and who has been excluded.

Particularly when the evaluation questions the impact and relevance of a programme/project, it is necessary to examine its acceptability e.g. for women and men, for the environment, power relationships or other cross-sectoral areas. The **minimum standard** to be met is that no negative impacts should be generated (see also “Integrating Environmental Issues in Planning, Evaluation and Monitoring: A Practical Tool for International Development Cooperation”, “A Practical Tool for Combating Poverty”, “A Practical Tool for Dealing with Gender”).

Incorporating cross-sectoral themes affects the evaluation stages in different ways:

Terms of Reference

- Decision on **how much weight** is to be allocated to one or more cross-sectoral themes
- Decision on whether the analysis/assessment should focus on **goal achievement** or the status quo and/or the project **context.**

Team composition

- The team must have the requisite knowledge about the cross-sectoral theme at its disposal.
- Gender competence is required in every case.

Implementation

- Specific methods are available for analysing **cross-sectoral themes.** For example, one option is to differentiate by arranging the data and information according to social group.

Debriefing

- Cross-sectoral themes are explicitly discussed according to the Terms of Reference.

Implementation

- Implementing the findings of an analysis of cross-sectoral themes offers a major opportunity to increase the effectiveness of the programme/project or draw lessons for similar projects, even if it is not always possible or easy to transfer the findings to another context.

Negotiation, Terms of Reference, and responsibilities

Helpful hints

Quality
Clear, unequivocal Terms of Reference significantly contribute to the quality of an external evaluation.

Binding nature
Only one version of the Terms of Reference has been negotiated and approved by all partners prior to the external evaluation. It is the sole binding document for all involved parties.

Concentration
It is not practical to attempt to evaluate the entire project. A concentrated investigation is sufficient. The overall proportions of the programme/project must be borne in mind, i.e. the cost of the evaluation must be seen in relation to the size of the project and the anticipated benefits.

Timing/duration
The time at which the evaluation is to be implemented must be discussed with those involved. Since an external evaluation entails major effort on the part of the operational actors, it should be limited to a maximum of three weeks.

Pre-/post project tasks
Sufficient time must be scheduled for negotiating the Terms of Reference. This also applies to drawing up the report and on-site feedback to those involved.

Formulating questions – avoid premature assumptions
Open questions and doubtful or unclear areas related to a project should always be formulated as questions in the Terms of Reference rather than as hypotheses or assumptions.

Budget
If the budget is relatively modest, the evaluation need not address more than one or two fundamental questions.

Formulation
The Terms of Reference (one to three pages) must be precisely formulated.

SDC case study

Good preparation is half the battle

The "Irrigation and agricultural development in Patococha" project in Ecuador has largely achieved its aims on completion of the fourth phase. An external evaluation was pre-planned in the project agreement and accordingly incorporated in the relevant plan of action. The aim is now to assess what has been achieved in order to prepare the foundations for planning the subsequent completion and handover phase.

Since the project had already been evaluated earlier by an external, international team, the commissioning institution's coordination office proposes using national evaluators at this stage. This also complies with the principle of promoting local capacities and autonomous development processes. It has been decided to assign responsibility for the evaluation to the coordinating office, with the Headquarter being advised of all important decisions.

The coordinating office immediately goes to work: the external evaluation is incorporated in the project agenda for the forthcoming meeting of the steering committee, to be attended by all key participants. The coordinating office suggests that CESA, the private organisation commissioned with project implementation, prepares a first draft of the Terms of Reference together with the representatives of TUCAYTA, the farmers' organisation, to include the most important issues from their standpoint.

The draft is submitted one month later. The coordination office discusses it internally and informs the Headquarter, which recommends a stronger focus on gender-specific issues. Shortly thereafter the draft is revised and approved by the coordination office in conjunction with representatives of CREA, the regional government development agency.

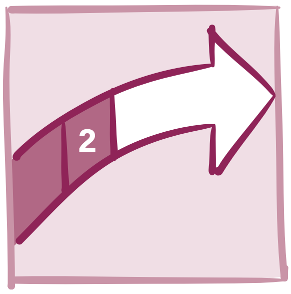
Once each of the participants has proposed three candidates for the evaluation team based on the jointly defined profiles (expertise in the fields of agriculture, irrigation and farmers' organisations, as well as experience of external evaluations, and a balanced male / female split), the most suitable are agreed on and a shortlist is drawn up. The coordination office must now examine the interest and availability of the candidates for the planned evaluation. Limited availability is a recurring problem, even with good local evaluators.

Finally, three experienced men have been found but no suitable woman. The candidates meet in the coordination office, where the details governing division of tasks, methods, preparatory work, etc. are laid down and the relevant *contracts negotiated. The logistics are handled by CESA, which coordinates all visits with TUCAYTA.*

Thanks to this good groundwork the evaluation proceeds without any major difficulties and produces important findings. On the one hand it demonstrates the successful results of the project: the irrigation system is up and running (approx. 600 ha) and has been managed by the farmers themselves since January 1996, despite some major outstanding problems. The new farming techniques promoted by the project are already being applied by 185 agricultural operators, resulting in improved soil utilisation, increased cultivation, higher-yield types of crop, significant increases in yield and hence higher incomes for the farming families. On the other hand, the evaluation also highlights the weaknesses: women's needs are not being sufficiently addressed by the project. Women are under-represented on important committees, have less access to scarce credit, and women's fields are less generously irrigated than men's.

Based on these findings, the evaluation team submits recommendations to the commissioning institution, which are later discussed with all participating organisations and largely implemented during the subsequent completion phase.

2. Assembling and training the evaluation team



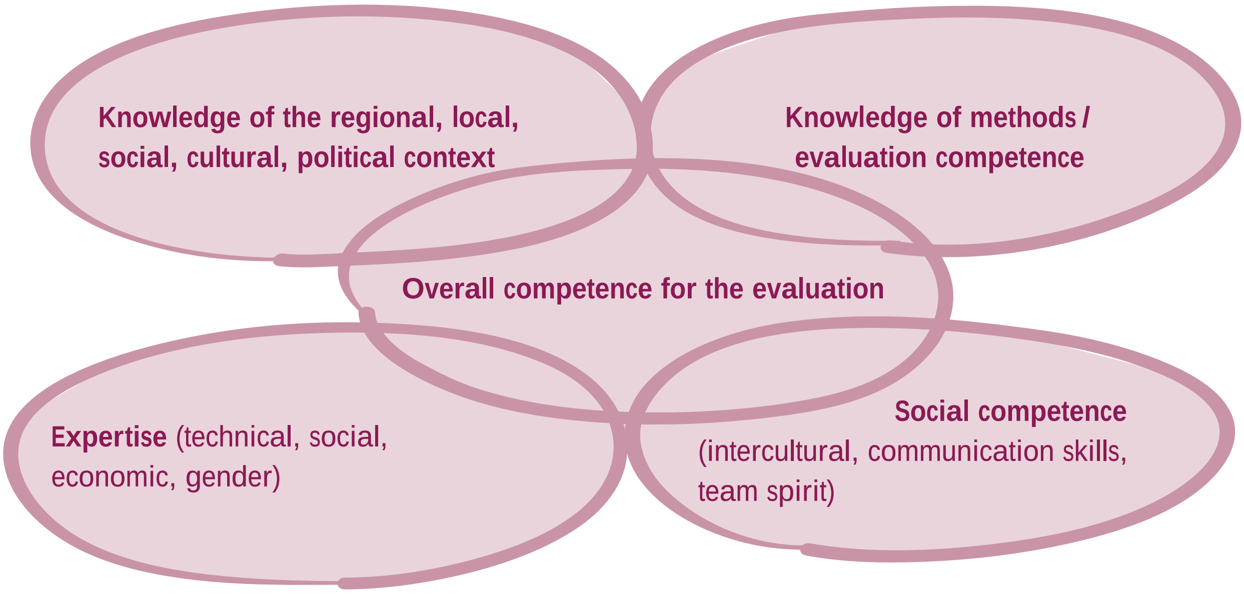
The quality of the external evaluation stands or falls with the **selection** of suitable persons and the **independence** of the team. The evaluation team must have a balanced representation of men and women and incorporate social competence as well as expertise in the area of gender roles. The success of the evaluation is heavily dependent on the team composition and the ability of team members to work together. Since the professional qualifications as well as personal characteristics of each team member contribute to the success of the evaluation, they must **complement each other.**

The composition of the evaluation team varies according to situation and requirements. Generally speaking it comprises two to four members, an external consultant as well as, if necessary, a representative of the commissioning institution and/or partner organisations. The commissioning institution should not be over-represented. The larger the team, the higher the cost of coordination, though this may prove necessary in order to ensure the requisite expertise. It is particularly important to involve **local human resources,** since local people are most familiar with the local context. This has been proven in practice; for example, if experts from neighbouring countries working on similar programmes are involved, they can contribute experience of solving similar problems and, in turn, can go home with fresh impetus for their own institutions.

Additional qualities are required of the leader of the evaluation team. He or she must be competent and experienced in order to be accepted by the other team members and be able to keep a cool head in difficult or hectic situations, handle conflict and stress, and steer negotiations.

Once the evaluation team has been defined, the commissioning institution and team members must determine and ensure that both sides **agree on their interpretation of the mandate.** The institutional backgrounds of the commissioning institution and partner organisations must be adequately clarified (guiding principles, values, mission, policies and guidelines).

2.1 Required competence and experience



Knowledge of the regional, local, social, cultural, political context	Involvement of local human resources, since they are most familiar with the context.
Expertise	Professional knowledge and skills (training and experience) depending on the programme / project requirements and questions to be addressed by the evaluation.
Social competence	Skills and aptitude for holding open, sensitive discussions, ability to express things clearly, team spirit, the ability to work with men and women, i.e. including those from other cultures, negotiating skills, ability to handle conflict.
Knowledge of methods	Analytical skills, didactic ability, problem-solving competence, the ability to moderate discussions, abstract thinking, organisational skills, and the ability to set priorities according to defined requirements and dependent on the situation.
Overall competence	Overall competence (mainly evaluation team management) largely consists of social and methodological skills. In addition it entails the ability to delegate, set objectives, shape decision-making processes, motivate and encourage others, think strategically and globally, and match activities to overriding strategies.

Assembling and training the evaluation team

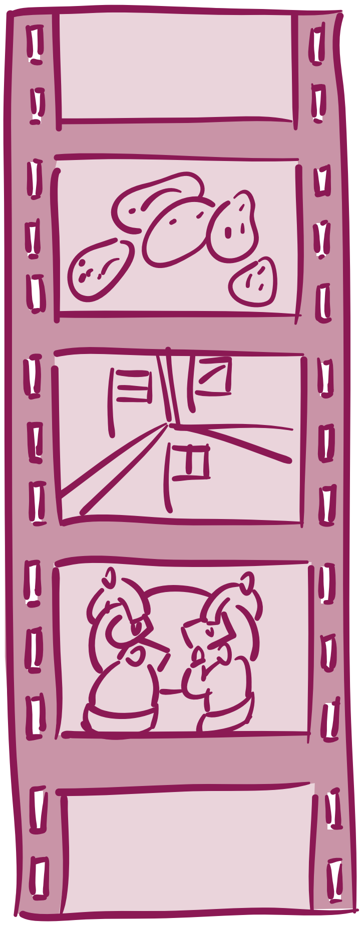
Helpful hints

Composition of the evaluation team	Team members' human and expert competence and experience should be complementary. Seek adequate gender and intercultural competence and try to achieve gender balance. Promote South-South and East-East exchanges.
Impartiality/ independence	Team members must be impartial vis-à-vis the various partners and as independent as possible of the commissioning institution.
Roles and responsibilities	Team members must have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
Culture- and context-specific preparation	Develop and increase awareness of the influence of cultural differences.
Exchange of experience	Integrate knowledge gained in similar projects and institutions in other countries, as well as regional exchange of experience.
Basic documents	The ToRs and contracts must be written at an early stage.
Size of team	Two to four persons.

SDC case study

Example of a set of requirements

The platform for evaluation of three potato programmes in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador in 1997 is complex: three countries, three projects, governmental organisations and organisations consisting of private partners with different interests, an internationally active institution involved in the various projects in different ways.



After various participants have attempted to bring a known evaluator into the team in order to promote specific interests and the other participants have objected to this move, it is proposed that a set of requirements be drawn up and agreed on as the basis for selecting the consultant. This proposal is accepted and the discussion can turn to the concrete requirements.

The set of requirements for the evaluation team is as follows:

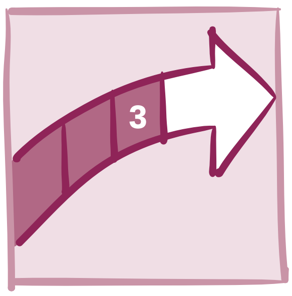
Team leader (internationally recognised expert)
Knowledge of the donor organisation and of conditions and working methods in this or similar international research institutions. Many years' experience in evaluating programmes and projects in international and inter-institutional development cooperation.
Knowledge of organisational development and management.

Team members
Agronomist with experience in economic analysis or vice versa: economist with good knowledge of agricultural issues
Specialist in organisational sociology with practical experience in farmers' organisations
Gender competence
Specialist in technology transfer in the field of small farming

Conditions for all
No direct involvement with the national programme or project
Experience in other projects and evaluations (if possible also in the South)

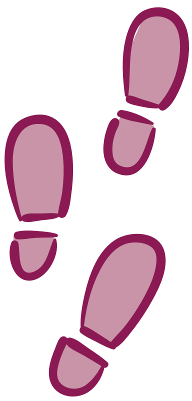
Based on this set of requirements, a team can be assembled for each of the three projects. The three evaluations are conducted in parallel based on the same set of key questions, which are important for the individual projects as well as for the future overall programme.

3. Conducting the evaluation



The evaluation is normally conducted according to a defined structure. Most evaluations are based on information in the form of documents, plans, project/programme budgets, guidelines, policies, research reports, or studies conducted by institutions, universities or donors. This material should be collated prior to commencement of the actual evaluation work. In some cases, for instance complex projects or examination of an impact or process, it may be worth commissioning a preliminary study to be conducted either by the relevant institution or independent consultants. The results of the **preliminary study** must be available before the evaluation team can begin work in the field.

Sole responsibility for conducting the evaluation is in the hands of the evaluation team, whose work is divided into three main phases:



1. Teambuilding, plan of action, initial contacts
2. Evaluation steps in the field
3. Local feedback

The work of the evaluation team begins with the team building. Sufficient time should be set aside for this since all members need to understand and agree on the background, questions, methods and procedures. An in-depth discussion of the Terms of Reference will lead to a **commonly shared** understanding of the task. If the team members introduce themselves listing their professional, methodological and other qualifications, complementary responsibilities can be optimally assigned. The team members define the key areas of the programme and draw up a provisional **plan of action.** This initial phase is worth investing in, since it is reflected later in the quality of the evaluation.

In the field the team initially holds discussions with representatives of institutions in the context of the programme or project to be evaluated. These encounters at the central and local level are not merely for form; important overriding questions may come to light in the course of these talks, and additional contacts may be forged.

Based on its findings, the evaluation team draws up working hypotheses which it continually monitors and amends in the course of the process and in line with the key questions, gradually moving towards its final assessment.

During field work the evaluation team can apply a range of **methods for gathering information.** Preliminary studies often call for cost- and effort-intensive methods such as questionnaires and surveys, participatory observation, etc. The evaluation will therefore usually agree on a simpler procedure such as interviews, field visits, group discussion, etc.

The commissioning institution must be advised of any severe problems which might occur during the evaluation. It will decide on further action (amendment to the ToRs, change in the team composition, mediation, discontinuation of the evaluation).

Once the evaluation team has collected information, analysed, examined, assessed and concluded, the involved institutions are invited to a **feedback seminar** (usually a half-day workshop) where they have the opportunity to state their position and discuss the submitted conclusions. Local feedback also allows initial results, key messages and proposals to be presented, and the reactions and opinions of the involved persons to be gauged. As many involved persons as possible (donor representative, partner organisations, representatives of the target group) must take part in this discussion of results, which must be adapted to the participants and the object of the evaluation. This consultation is the last opportunity for the evaluation team to examine or correct information and facts on the spot with those directly involved, and to make adjustments. The evaluation team should agree on the final conclusions and recommendations before announcing them publicly.

Since the evaluation can have serious consequences for the participants in a programme/project, the evaluator must meet high professional and ethical standards. Members of the evaluation team must be familiar with the local cultures and setting. However, it is the responsibility of the commissioning institution to draw the team's attention to local idiosyncrasies and the code of conduct that is also recommended by various evaluation societies.

3.1 Main phases

1. Teambuilding, plan of action, contacts

- Discussion and interpretation of the Terms of Reference
- Drawing up the evaluation instruments, criteria and indicators (evaluation team)
- Organisation and planning of work, concept and methods
- Contact with local programme / project partners
- Contact with other institutional actors (e.g. coordination office, embassy, etc.)

2. Evaluation steps in the field

- Information gathering and analysis
  Collection of facts and information from the cooperation process (recourse to planning).
- Assessment
  Personal and professional opinion on analysis, comparisons with similar projects for addressing the key questions (as defined in the Terms of Reference).
- Conclusions from the analysis and assessment
  Possibly with recommendations for the future, indicating various alternatives, advantages and disadvantages of specific options, risks and opportunities.

3. Local feedback and discussion with those involved

- e.g. with target group, politicians, NGOs, government offices, clients, persons affected by the project.

3.2 Ethical considerations

Fundamental values

In many cases it will be difficult to reach a balance between cultural traditions, the priorities defined by the various parties involved, the donors and the beneficiaries. It is therefore important to keep in mind the fundamental values defined by SDC in its **Guiding Principles (1999):**

- Justice, solidarity and efforts to achieve equity are basic values underlying our mandate; they determine our attitudes as individuals and as an institution.
- The success of our activity is based on trust, respect and understanding, and on sharing knowledge, resources and decisions with our partners.
- In carrying out our mandate, we count on personal commitment, professional capability, willingness to assume responsibility and to learn, and team spirit among our staff.
- With a view to achieving the greatest possible impact, quality, and efficiency, we employ structures and processes that provide incentives to performance and creativity, and to overcoming bureaucratic procedures and attitudes.

Partner institutions should be given the opportunity to present their own fundamental values to the evaluation team.

Cultural awareness

Persons working with people from other cultures should be familiar with their cultural background before beginning fieldwork. **Local customs,** religious beliefs and practices must be respected, and the social system, social taboos or politically sensitive areas must be borne in mind. Evaluators must be aware that their own preconceptions cannot always be transplanted to another context. It is therefore important to acknowledge, explain and be sufficiently flexible in order to achieve common objectives and solutions. It takes time to achieve such **rapprochement** and come to terms with different values and attitudes.

Anonymity/ confidentiality

The evaluator guarantees protection of the **information source.** While the procedure is transparent and the analysis is easy to follow, individual statements collected in the course of information gathering are treated as confidential.

Respect towards persons involved in the project

Since an evaluation entails extra work and expense for people in the South and East as well, evaluators must be punctual and manage time efficiently.

The evaluation team assesses programme or project aspects and processes. In the course of this work, questions are often posed with respect to the conduct of individuals, e.g. persons in leading positions. The evaluation team must ensure that people are not judged or criticised on a personal level and that they and their work are viewed **within the parameters of their function.**

Sense of responsibility

The evaluator is responsible for uncovering even facts which are not governed by the Terms of Reference if they are considered important in the overall context and for overall appraisal.

Verifying information

To ensure the validity and reliability of information, it may be useful to ask for comments from the various participants. Everyone involved in the process should be given an opportunity to state his or her opinion of the collated information. However, the final decision on using the data material lies with the evaluation team.

Disclosure of results/transparency

Project partners, including those responsible at the local level, are usually interested in reaching conclusions as quickly as possible. However, the evaluation team should limit this to a local debriefing where a brief outline of the work is discussed. The commissioning institution is responsible for disseminating the report within a reasonable time.

Conducting the evaluation

Helpful hints

Basic documents The Terms of Reference constitute the universally binding basis for conducting the evaluation.

Accountability The evaluation team has sole accountability. The task of the commissioning institution, its local representative and the project leader, is to manage and support the process.

Time for communication To ensure a successful outcome, the evaluation team must set aside sufficient time for communication within the team, preparing for the evaluation and establishing contacts.

Methodology The evaluation team must define procedure and methods in detail. Field visits and interviews must constitute a representative part of the work.

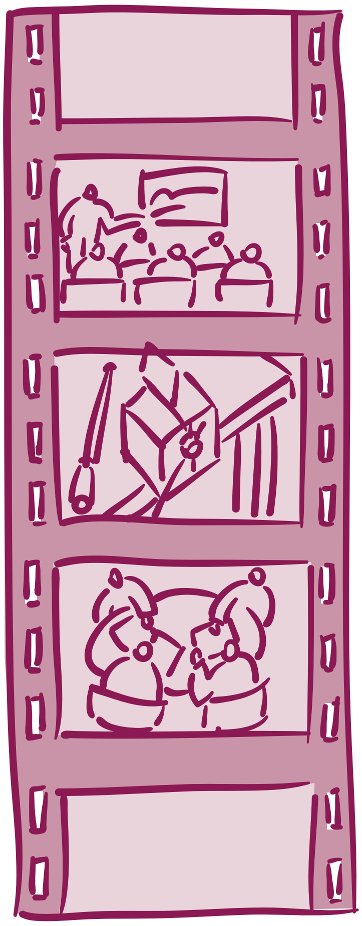
Right of participants to determine the timing of the evaluation The results are easier to implement if the evaluation is coordinated with the decision-making process and schedules of those involved.

Problems during the process The commissioning institution must be advised of any serious problems which occur during the process. The commissioning institution will then decide on further action.

Local feedback All parties involved in the programme or project must have the opportunity to input ideas and opinions.

SDC case study

Beneficial results despite obstacles



Following eight years of project activity, it has been decided to examine the strategy and missions of the Educational Institute for Professional Schoolteachers in Nepal (EIPS). The school is the first government-run institute of its kind and from the outset has been supported by SDC via Swisscontact, a private organisation, in conjunction with a Swiss co-director and three foreign experts on pedagogy, didactics, management and organisation. The necessity for an evaluation subsequent to the pilot and start-up phases is also prompted by the changed context, following political and institutional instability as well as unrest in Nepal. The external evaluation is opposed by the project officers: "Why do we need an external evaluation? It's much too early, given the 20-year project timeframe, and besides everything is running smoothly".

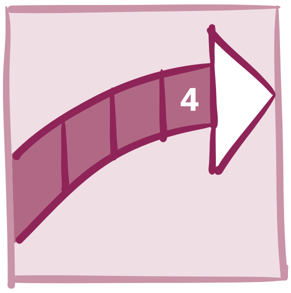
SDC and its coordination office in Kathmandu respond with the following arguments: An evaluation was mentioned during the credit applications for the initial two phases, yet so far none has been performed. The results of the external evaluation should provide a basis for dialogue and positioning for the transition to the third phase of the project, to be concerned with development. The three-page Terms of Reference jointly drawn up by SDC and EIPS were completed in 1998 and have been accepted by SDC and Swisscontact. The key questions focus on the institute's performance, impact, efficiency and chances of survival. Two people – an expert from Germany and one from Nepal – are commissioned to conduct the evaluation.

The evaluation lasts three weeks and is conducted in November 1998 amidst an atmosphere of tension and a climate of mistrust. It is regarded by project workers as an audit by Berne and an investigation into the four positions held by foreigners. Nevertheless the institute provides the evaluators with high-quality information and reports, as well as a document on strategic 4-year planning. The evaluators draw up an inventory and meet with representatives of existing and potential partner organisations. The format is largely identical for every meeting: a presentation of the status quo (information procurement) and the future vision (perspectives) of the partners constitutes the basis for discussion. This procedure combines the criticisms and initial solution proposals of participating and affected parties. The evaluators examine the institute's chances of survival, although this subject is regarded as rather premature in view of the fact that the project is still young, as well as the fact that the difficulty of self-financing for a centre of education is indisputable. However, the discussions produce positive results in terms of further action in the marketing area and a diversification of funding sources.

Only the EIPS and the SDC coordination office in Kathmandu state their position on the final report. Despite the difficulties encountered, the external evaluation highlights several factors: the lofty goals, the good work, the good progress according to plan, and the institutional problems with the supervisory organ. The evaluators list several options for further project procedure and as solutions to the problems identified.

The EIPS acknowledges the findings of the report in good faith, but points out the lack of a clear conclusion and the marked difference between the work which has been performed to date and future tasks. The coordinating office views the report as interesting and valuable. Some differences of opinion can be settled between the partners immediately and the evaluation results are incorporated in the Phase 3 plans, leading to concrete changes within the project.

4. Debriefing and final report



The work and therefore the responsibility of the evaluation team ends with the handover of the final report. At the debriefing, held on the commissioning institution's premises before the final report is handed over, the evaluation team or team leader provides information on the results. At this point the commissioning institution can still request **changes** in the form and tone of the report but not the content, for which the evaluation team is responsible.

The evaluation report presents the **evaluation team's view** and is based on the agreed Terms of Reference (Stage 1). It provides the link with the key questions and attempts to answer them. Generally speaking, a first draft of this report is drawn up during the mission and used by the team as a common starting point for local feedback (Stage 3). The team leader is responsible to the commissioning institution for the final report.

The debriefing on the premises of the commissioning institution is usually attended by the desk officer, superiors, and if necessary representatives of the coordination office, technical units and other interested parties. It is worth preparing well for the debriefing: the amount of effort expended is proportional to the quality of the report.

The commissioning institution is responsible for deciding on further action and distributing the report (Stage 5).

4.1 Content and structure of the report

The report should consist of no more than 30 pages (excluding Annexes) and contain:

1. A 3- to 4-page **summary** of the final conclusions and bases for decision-making.

2. **Evaluation procedure and results:** this part also elucidates methodology, information procurement and procedure in order to explain how the results were reached.

3. **Analysis:**
- Specific analyses according to the Terms of Reference: strategy, specific themes such as combating poverty, gender, environment, human rights, etc.
- Lessons for the operational and policymaking spheres.

4. **Assessment** including options and suggestions as a decision-making basis dependent on the mandate:
- Appraisal and assessment by the team, various estimations
- Recommendations for continuation of the programme / project
- Options
- Open questions
- Interpretations, advantages and disadvantages

5. **Annexes**
- Terms of Reference
- List of abbreviations, if required
- List of persons met and interviewed by the evaluation team
- DAC abstract according to prescribed structure (Part I, Annex 4.3)
- Summary of local feedback and other information
- Programme of work

4.2 Formulating the main conclusions

The most important part of the evaluation report as far as the future of the programme or project is concerned is unquestionably the fourth part, where the evaluation team lists and assesses options or recommendations for the future. Experience has shown that the procedure and formulation of suggestions have a bearing on the way in which the evaluation results are translated into practice. The following must therefore be borne in mind:

Recommendations sometimes contain a statement of what is desirable or mandatory, which in practice is rejected by the participants and pre-empts decisions. Often it is more advisable for the evaluator to formulate his / her own conclusions, submit them to an in-depth analysis, and present them to the commissioning institution as **open questions or options / scenarios.** The advantages of this procedure are as follows:

- The external evaluation is not perceived as a decision-making authority per se but as a means (one of several) of bringing together elements and suggestions in order to help those responsible come to a decision.
- It gives all participating partners greater flexibility for negotiating important course corrections for the subsequent implementation process.
- The feasibility of implementing solutions is increased if they are formulated by the persons actually responsible for a project.
- Project officers as well as desk officers gain more responsibility and greater decision-making control.

However, if a team, project, institution or organisation has not yet developed or is still in the process of developing self-regulating mechanisms and has commissioned an evaluation to furnish clear recommendations, this must be formulated as a task in the evaluator’s specifications.

It may be advisable not to submit any recommendations, for example if a broad platform is to be set up or if an in-depth discussion of the evaluation analysis is desirable or has been requested.

Debriefing and final report

Helpful hints

Different positions Before the evaluation team is dissolved, the members must be in agreement on the final conclusions and the various decision bases. If major differences of opinion exist, the report must reflect this if this helps to answer the key questions.

Respect The report should not document awkward situations, subjective feelings and impressions. It must treat the described situation / factors respectfully. Formulations must be carefully worked out without hiding or omitting important information (see Ethics of Evaluation).

Legibility The author of a report wants it to be read. The shorter, more intelligible, simpler and more systematic the report, the greater its chances of being read.

Debriefing Good preparation pays off. The discussion can benefit from visualisations which permit participants to weigh up and assess topics rapidly.

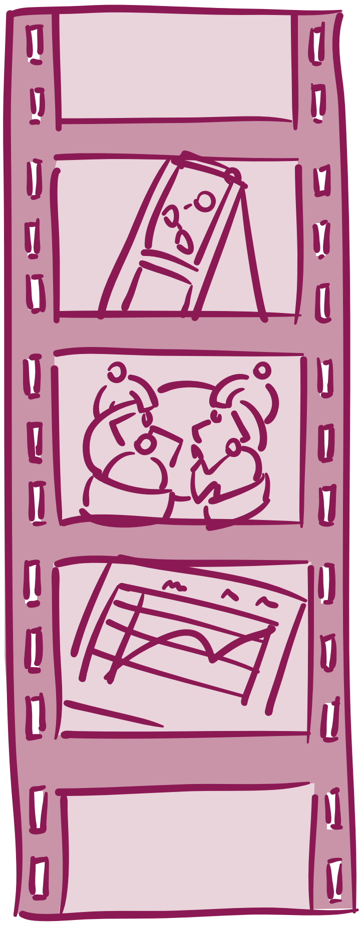
Completion of task The evaluation team’s responsibility ends with the handover of the report and the debriefing.

Availability/ transparency As a rule the commissioning institution makes the evaluation report available to the public: a summary (DAC abstract) is always published on the Internet (DAC Evaluation Reports Inventory) and the full report is kept by SDC.

SDC case study

Systematic preparation pays off

An ex-ante evaluation has been commissioned to clarify the possibilities and problems of a future SDC programme for promoting private-sector trade in Kosovo. A first draft of the Terms of Reference is drawn up by the desk officer at the commissioning institution's head office, following which he or she consults the coordination office by e-mail and revises the text together with the two experts at a 90-minute meeting.



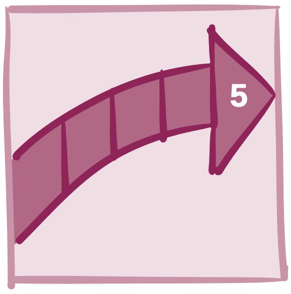
The clarifying mission lasts ten days. The quality of the report drawn up by the consultants is high, attesting not only to the experts' skills but also to the clarity of the Terms of Reference, both with respect to SDC's expectations and in terms of the instructions on the report's structure.

The last step in this mission is to hold a debriefing, at which the main item on the agenda is naturally the mission report. The question of whom and how many to invite is raised. In this case the target group is relatively large. In addition to the desk programme officer and specialists, the following are present: the head of the geographical section, a representative of the Industry, Vocational Training and Urbanisation Service, a representative of the Division of Humanitarian Aid and Swiss Disaster Relief Unit, a diplomatic intern, and a representative of the Federal Office for Refugees. One of the participants chairs the meeting.

The participants are first advised that the purpose of the meeting is not to provide depth of scientific focus or discuss decisions already made, but to make an initial appraisal of the report with a view to defining further steps in the planning process as far as possible.

The meeting proceeds as follows: presentation round, brief impressions by experts on the highlights and difficulties of the mission, and a question-and-answer round on the contents of the report. A macro and meso overview of possible programme directions has been prepared and is presented on a flip-chart. This facilitates discussion and, together with an assessment form on six of the report's recommendations and hypotheses, runs as a common thread through the debriefing. The nine participants are given the opportunity to weight the programme directions using adhesive markers, and state their position on the hypotheses and recommendations (fully agree – absolutely do not agree). This immediately shows up the areas on which there is consensus or dissent. The discussion can then focus more on areas where opinions differ. This procedure not only crystallises the main discussion points but also gives participants the opportunity to order their statements during the subsequent *discussion with reference to the visualisation. Based on the differences, some of which have been settled, some designated as explicit, the next steps up to and including the estimated effective start of the programme can be defined and summarised in a unilateral resolution. The debriefing is brought to a close after two and a half hours, providing a good basis for implementation.*

5. Implementing the results of the evaluation



Once the evaluation team has concluded its task, it is now up to the **commissioning institution** and the programme or project leaders to initiate the next steps, i.e. implement the evaluation results. Implementation means applying the evaluation results as a basis for decision-making with respect to the future of a programme or project. Implementing an evaluation means no less than explicitly (re-)**establishing the link** with PEMT. Decisions or adjustments are made on two levels within the framework of the programme/project: at the level of operational day-to-day steering by the implementers, and at the strategic level (policy decisions).

Over and above this, the results of the evaluation can be used for refining the content and evaluating experiences, which are of general interest for country and sectoral programme planning.

5.1. The interval between the final report and implementation

The commissioning institution uses the evaluation report to initiate a process whereby participants and, if necessary, future partners can form opinions on the results and the various positions can be collected and consolidated.

- The decision-makers in partner governments and/or national organisations responsible for executing the programme/project **state their position** on the central conclusions.
- The commissioning institution (head office or local representative) forms its opinion and states its position on the partner representatives' proposals based on their assessment of the evaluation results.
- If available, a steering committee attempts to obtain consensus on content and procedure, and the relevant steps are initiated.
- The partners formulate, for example, a shared **platform** as a basis for the next steps. For instance, the project leaders launch the next planning phase (planning workshops, reformulation of objectives) and are responsible for its implementation.

All these steps take time and should be coordinated to ensure transparency and institutional compatibility.

5.2 Problems of implementation

Practical experience shows that implementation deficiencies are one of the greatest weaknesses in translating into practice PEMT instruments, including evaluation. The reasons are many and varied; the following questions may help to clarify the problem:

- Was the evaluation sufficiently adapted to the circumstances?
- Have all participants been advised of the final conclusions of the evaluation?
- Is the decision-making culture of the programme/project impeding implementation?
- Are those directly affected refusing to comply with implementation?
- Are day-to-day problems so absorbing that it is impossible to follow the recommendations of the evaluation?
- Are political authorities and decision-makers failing to base their actions on the findings?

- Are the partners' attitudes known and clear with respect to the measures to be implemented?
- Have alternative implementation measures been worked out?

Answers to these questions should be obtained as far as possible during the implementation. One thing is certain: the more the collaboration is based on partnership at the evaluation stage, the more the awareness of common ownership is promoted, the greater the shared learning effect subsequently; and the more probable the chances of results being implemented successfully.

5.3 Applying the lessons of the evaluation to other tasks

The lessons on content (object of the evaluation) and method that we learn from an evaluation process contribute to enhancing the general quality of international development cooperation. It is important to disseminate the information widely, either directly or in abridged format if necessary. To this end various options exist which allow such lessons to be applied to other tasks:

- Thematic workshops for similar projects and / or other donors or organisations in the partner country, with a view to exchanging experiences and improving coordination.
- Subject-specific reports for incorporation in policymaking (e.g. "good practices").
- Cross-sectoral analysis (evaluation of evaluations on a specific topic).
- Annual reports containing information obtained from evaluations
- Publication of evaluation summaries
- Raising awareness and training on the institutional treatment of evaluations / PEMT
- "Good practice" for the methodical further development of evaluations

Implementing the results of the evaluation

Helpful hints

The evaluation is realistic and practical

Active participation of the partners in the evaluation process increases the chances of the results being implemented. The evaluation focuses on specific interests and the information requirements of those involved.

The evaluation must be made accessible

An evaluation can only be implemented if those involved are given the opportunity to read the report or otherwise be advised of the analysis and assessment, and discuss it. Quality has priority over quantity.

Different positions

The evaluation team recognises the interested parties and takes them into account.

Implementation of the evaluation results

The results are easier to implement if the evaluation is tailored to the participants' decision-making process and schedule.

Set aside sufficient time to negotiate implementation with the partners

Individual positions must be clearly stated. If opinions differ, alternatives must be sought and designed in line with the options available to the partners.

Small steps are better than no steps at all

It is often better to implement in small steps rather than try to achieve everything at once.

SDC case study

Since the early 1990s SDC has been supporting scientific projects in Eastern Europe. As a scientific reference institution in Switzerland, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) is in charge of implementing the programme. Switzerland, like other donors, wanted to help prevent a brain drain of specialists and scientists from Eastern Europe, and to strengthen scientific structures.

With a view to third-phase planning, the SDC consults with the SNSF and commissions an evaluation of the programme. As in the first evaluation conducted in 1994, the evaluation attests to the SNSF's high-level scientific competence, professionalism and efficiency in managing the programme. In general the joint research projects and partnerships between Swiss and East European research institutes are positively assessed. However, the evaluation also contains serious reservations regarding insufficiently explicit goal-setting, overall direction and incorporation of the projects in the context of research in Eastern Europe. Additionally, the relationship of individual actions to processes of political, economic and social transformation in these countries is regarded as too weak. The report therefore makes recommendations to the Swiss National Science Foundation which were actually made in the first evaluation in 1994 but apparently only partially discussed and implemented.

The SDC and SNSF evaluate the new report in a workshop attended by both institutions. At this event as well as during later negotiations, critical points concerning implementation of the recommendation lead to polarisation: while the SNSF representatives show a certain amount of understanding for the recommendations of the evaluation, they do not feel in a position to carry them out. Later they even ask whether they are still the right partners for the required programme mission and procedure. The SDC follows the arguments of the report but its negotiating position has long been unclear: with SNSF – an institution of national importance and a leader in the scientific field – as partner and executing institution, the scientific programme with Eastern Europe is in the political limelight. The process of implementing the results of the evaluation has reached a critical phase: either the partners must agree to a solution, or the evaluation results must be swept under the carpet.
A clear compromise solution proposed by SDC, whereby the programme is split between two partners, finally leads the Swiss National Science Foundation also to change its mind, and key sections of the evaluation results and recommendations are now to be tested in one or two countries as a pilot trial.