



Application process for phase 2025-2028

# Application for programme contributions: checklist – criteria

After the eligibility clearance, the SDC invites eligible Swiss NGOs, umbrella organisations, NGO alliances and cantonal federations to submit proposals for programme contributions. For the allocation of programme contributions, the following criteria apply.

## Mandatory criteria

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance.

Proposals need to comply with the mandatory requirements of the *SDC Guidance for Engagement with Swiss NGO* (March 2023) and need to include all required documents mentioned in the list of criteria and in the templates for programme contributions. Applications that are not complete or not compliant will not be taken forward to the evaluation step.

The mandatory criteria and documents include:

- I. A certification quality seal, according to the provisions of the *SDC Guidance for Engagement with Swiss NGO*, is attached to the application (applies only to eligible applicants that were awaiting their final certification during the eligibility screening process);
- II. The applicant’s annual and audited financial reports (including source of funds) as well as operational annual reports are available online; and
- III. All annexes as stipulated in the application form are submitted.

## Assessment criteria

All proposals, which successfully passed the screening for completeness and compliance will be evaluated on the basis of the objectives and principles of SDC engagement with Swiss NGOs:

### Overview of criteria

	<b>critterion</b>	<b>page</b>
<b>1</b>	Coherence and Relevance	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	Management Criteria (governance and institutional steering)	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	Enable access to Swiss expertise, innovation and services	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	Strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in fragile contexts and protracted crises	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	Applying a human rights-based approach to mainstreaming gender and good governance and to implementing conflict-sensitive management	<b>3</b>
<b>6</b>	Integrating policy dialogue	<b>4</b>
<b>7</b>	Strategic focus on strengthening civil society and CSOs as actors in their own right	<b>4</b>
<b>8</b>	Promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships and cross-sector mobilisation and cooperation on the ground	<b>4</b>
<b>9</b>	Promoting and respecting national ownership of development priorities	<b>5</b>
<b>10</b>	Improving effectiveness, strengthening transparency and accountability	<b>5</b>
<b>11</b>	Optimizing cost effectiveness and minimizing transaction costs	<b>5</b>

(11 criteria, 18 indicators)



## 1. Coherence and Relevance

Coherence of the international programme with the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the objectives of Switzerland's International Cooperation.

### *Indicator*

1. Programme alignment with Switzerland's development and humanitarian goals and the Sustainable Development Goals.
  - The programme demonstrates alignment with Swiss International Cooperation goals<sup>1</sup>, with corresponding indicators in the results framework.
  - The programme includes references to SDGs, with corresponding indicators in the results framework.

## 2. Management Criteria (governance and institutional steering)

Applicants have in place clearly defined and well-functioning governance and steering/management mechanisms, including reporting guidelines and procedures, risk management practices and standardized Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems including impact measurement.

### *Indicators*

2. Quality and clarity of the institutional governance framework, including checks and balances and clearly presented distinction between strategical and operational decision bodies.
3. Availability of results frameworks, risk management, monitoring and evaluation processes and an open access to past results and evaluations.

## 3. Enable access to Swiss expertise, innovation and services

Due to their proven competencies, their long-standing presence and partnerships in various countries and their sound knowledge of the contexts, NGOs are important actors in international cooperation. With their thematic and operational expertise and know-how, Swiss NGOs are well positioned to share knowledge and innovations while cooperating with local actors. However, additional expertise can be brought into international programs, when NGOs combine their knowledge of local context and expertise with additional skills from Swiss academic, private sector and other institutions.

### *Indicators*

4. Promoting/delivering Swiss expertise, innovation and services through concrete action.
  - Examples of activities implemented in collaboration with Swiss institutions in the past are presented in the track record.<sup>2</sup>
  - Concrete action is presented in the programme for collaboration with Swiss institutions in delivering the programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Switzerland's long-term goals are described in art. 54 of the Federal Constitution of Switzerland (SR 101), in art. 5 and art. 7 of the Federal Law on Development Cooperation and International Humanitarian Aid (SR 974.0), in art. 2 of the Federal Act on Cooperation with the States of Eastern Europe (SR 974.1) and in art. 2 of the Federal Act on Measures pertaining to Civil Peace Support and the Promotion of Human Rights (SR 193.9).

The Strategy of Switzerland's International Cooperation 2025-28 can be summarized in four broad areas:

**Human development:** saving lives, alleviating human suffering, and supporting access to quality basic services for the poorest populations.

**Sustainable economic development:** create decent jobs through the development of appropriate framework conditions, of markets, of the local economic environment and of the private sector.

**Climate and environment:** ensure environmentally friendly development, resilient to climate change and natural disasters, in favor of the most disadvantaged.

**Peace and governance:** resolve conflicts, promote peace, democracy and the rule of law, and ensure respect for human rights.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of NGO umbrella organizations and NGO alliances, focus on collaboration with Swiss institutions that are not part of the alliance or included under the umbrella.



#### **4. Strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in fragile contexts and protracted crises**

Working in and on fragility and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to increase resilience and to respond to emergencies in fragile contexts is a priority for SDC and for its engagement with NGOs. An optimal investment tackles the structural factors responsible for fragility and low resilience. In order to increase the resilience of the countries and the populations to shocks and crises, international cooperation relies on a close connection (nexus) between the humanitarian responses and economic, environmental and social development investments, especially in the case of long-term crises. The nexus is particularly of value in protracted crisis situations where short-term emergency relief and long-term development and peace objectives co-exist and cannot be dealt with separately.

##### **Indicators**

5. Understanding of the comparative advantages of nexus approaches and how converging humanitarian, development and peace activities can build systems and reduce future vulnerabilities.
  - Context analysis identifies underlying issues that could be addressed more appropriately with nexus approaches.
  - Programme includes innovative approaches with humanitarian, development and peace linkages that include the monitoring of development outcomes.
6. Proposal demonstrates clear capability to deliver a programme working in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
  - The NGO demonstrates a proven track record in having implemented projects and programmes linking humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace activities in fragile contexts and fast-changing crisis situations.

#### **5. Applying a human rights-based approach to mainstreaming gender and good governance and to implementing conflict-sensitive management**

The promotion of gender equality and good governance, based on the human rights principles, including non-discrimination, inclusive participation, accountability, the rule of law and conflict-sensitive management is at the core of promoting sustainable development and humanitarian aid. SDC is committed to a human rights-based approach in all interventions.

##### **Indicator for gender equality**

7. Equal opportunities for women and men within the organization, at strategic level and in the programme proposal
  - Gender equality is developed in the context analysis as a key issue.
  - The program document mentions explicit affirmative measures to enhance women's participation and address harmful traditional norms.
  - There are indicators in the results framework that monitor how women are included and how they are represented in the governance and in the program's steering and delivering.

##### **Indicators for Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), inclusion and non-discrimination**

8. HRBA is applied in the context analysis, including an analysis of power dynamics, identifying the causes for discrimination, exclusion and conflicts; and reference is made to the international human rights framework. The context analysis pays specific attention to the rights of women and girls and includes equality, as well as to the rights of vulnerable groups, to non-discrimination, empowerment and inclusive participation, to transparency, accountability and rule of law.
9. Human rights principles are reflected at strategic, programme and institutional levels, including equality and non-discrimination, empowerment and inclusive participation, transparency, accountability and rule of law.
  - Programme includes HRBA in its strategic orientation.
  - Programme demonstrates furthering the empowerment of rights holders and strengthening of duty bearers.
  - Conflict sensitivity is reflected in programming and in risk management ("conflict sensitive lens" / do no harm).



10. Vulnerable, marginalized, and disadvantaged groups are targeted by concrete affirmative action and are the main beneficiary groups of the intervention, with equality and non-discriminatory methodology in place to reduce inequalities amongst groups (women/men, rural/urban, ethnic, religious, etc.); conflict-sensitive management principles are in place. Equal opportunities for people with disabilities are stipulated within the organization, at strategic level and in the programme proposal.
  - o NGO demonstrates a track record in the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

## **6. Integrating policy dialogue**

Policy dialogue is an integral part of SDC's engagement with Swiss NGOs. Swiss NGOs also engage in policy dialogue with national and/or multilateral stakeholders in order to enhance effectiveness in line with the principles of effective development co-operation (Switzerland has joined the *Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)* and adheres to the principles for enhancing the effectiveness of contributions to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup>).

### **Indicator**

11. Policy dialogue (local, subnational, national, regional and/or multilateral level) is included as a clear component / integral part of the intervention.

## **7. Strategic focus on strengthening civil society and CSOs as actors in their own right**

A strong and well-organized civil society is essential for effective advocacy of human rights, promotion of gender equality, inclusive and sustainable development and participatory political processes. Well-informed and empowered citizens can voice their concerns and claim public space for participation, engage around issues that matter to them and hold their governments and political representatives accountable. This presumes that all people, including disadvantaged groups, are aware of their rights, relate to their society and feel confident and responsible enough to engage.<sup>4</sup>

### **Indicator**

12. Evidence of strategic focus on strengthening local, national and/or regional civil society organisations as actors in their own right as well as equitable partnerships with CSOs in the countries. The applicant transfers as high a proportion of the programme contribution as possible to its strategic CSO partners in humanitarian and development contexts.

## **8. Promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships and cross-sector mobilisation and cooperation on the ground**

Effective international cooperation requires coordination and collaboration between the different institutions present on the ground. SDG 17 recognises that effectiveness is increased when multi-stakeholder partners mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals. SDC's engagement with Swiss NGOs should facilitate cooperation between NGOs, the private sector, and academia not only in Switzerland – as already assessed above – but as well in the partner countries and at international level.

### **Indicator**

13. The programme demonstrates that multi-stakeholder partnerships / cross-sector cooperation, collaboration with international institutions and/or community coordination are part of the intervention.

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<sup>3</sup> The UN Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) is based on the four principles of effective development co-operation including country ownership, a focus on results, inclusive partnerships and transparency, and mutual accountability (<http://effectivecooperation.org/about/principles/>).

<sup>4</sup> See OECD DAC Recommendation on Strengthening Civil Society (2021).



## 9. Promoting and respecting national ownership of development priorities

Partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs.

### *Indicator*

14. Use of or reference to country-led development objectives/results embedded in the programme's implementation and reference to inclusive partnerships recognising complementary roles of different actors as well as long-term sustainability; hand-over plan.

## 10. Improving effectiveness, strengthening transparency and accountability

Effectiveness is the extent to which humanitarian, development and peace outcomes are achieved. Development efforts must have a lasting impact on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, and on enhancing countries' capacities, aligned with their own priorities. International programmes are implemented in a complex and rapidly changing environment, and as such, monitoring changes at outcome level, questioning assumptions, and evaluating results will lead to institutional learning and adaptive and evidence-based decisions; this all is crucial for effective international cooperation. Mutual accountability and accountability to the intended beneficiaries of development co-operation, as well as to respective citizens, organisations and constituents, is critical to delivering results: Transparent practices form the basis for enhanced accountability (GPEDC principles).

### *Indicator for outcome orientation to improve effectiveness*

15. Availability of a clear outcome-oriented M&E system with appropriate resources allocated to collecting and evaluating data and space for steering and adapting the programme based on results.
- Quality of the results framework (incl. SMART<sup>5</sup> indicators at outcome level) and resources allocated to the programme's M&E.
  - Availability of a steering mechanism for the programme (e.g. self-evaluation and reflection on results, adapting annual plans etc.).

### *Indicator for transparency and accountability*

16. The programme clearly demonstrates that it is accountable to the beneficiaries; and that it will engage beneficiaries and stakeholders (citizens, organisations, constituents, shareholders) at various levels throughout the programme.
- Programme clearly demonstrates it will reduce inequalities (LNOB).
  - Programme demonstrates accountability to and empowerment of beneficiaries.
  - Circular feedback loops are in place, giving a voice to beneficiaries and stakeholders of the intervention, engaging them on the programme/project/service, including participating in M&E.

## 11. Optimizing cost effectiveness and minimizing transaction costs

SDC's engagement with Swiss NGOs is not only measured by results, but also by cost effectiveness. The international program budget is appropriate for the expected outcomes. Innovative management techniques, modern communication and digital technology are used to minimise transaction costs including coordination costs (excluding communication and fundraising costs).

### *Indicators*

17. Programme demonstrates a budget directly related to the expected results.
- Financial resources of international programme allocated to countries identified as fragile contexts<sup>6</sup>.
  - Appropriateness of budget allocation per outcome in relation to the results expected.
  - Amount of support charges for the program and their relation to the intervention strategy.

<sup>5</sup> SMART indicators are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable (as well as Assignable in the case of umbrella organizations and alliances), **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the OECD State of Fragility report available at the time of the submission of the proposal.



18. Share of transaction costs that can be co-financed by SDC in relation to the international programme.
  - Programme demonstrates a percentage of overhead costs in line with the certification held by the applicant.