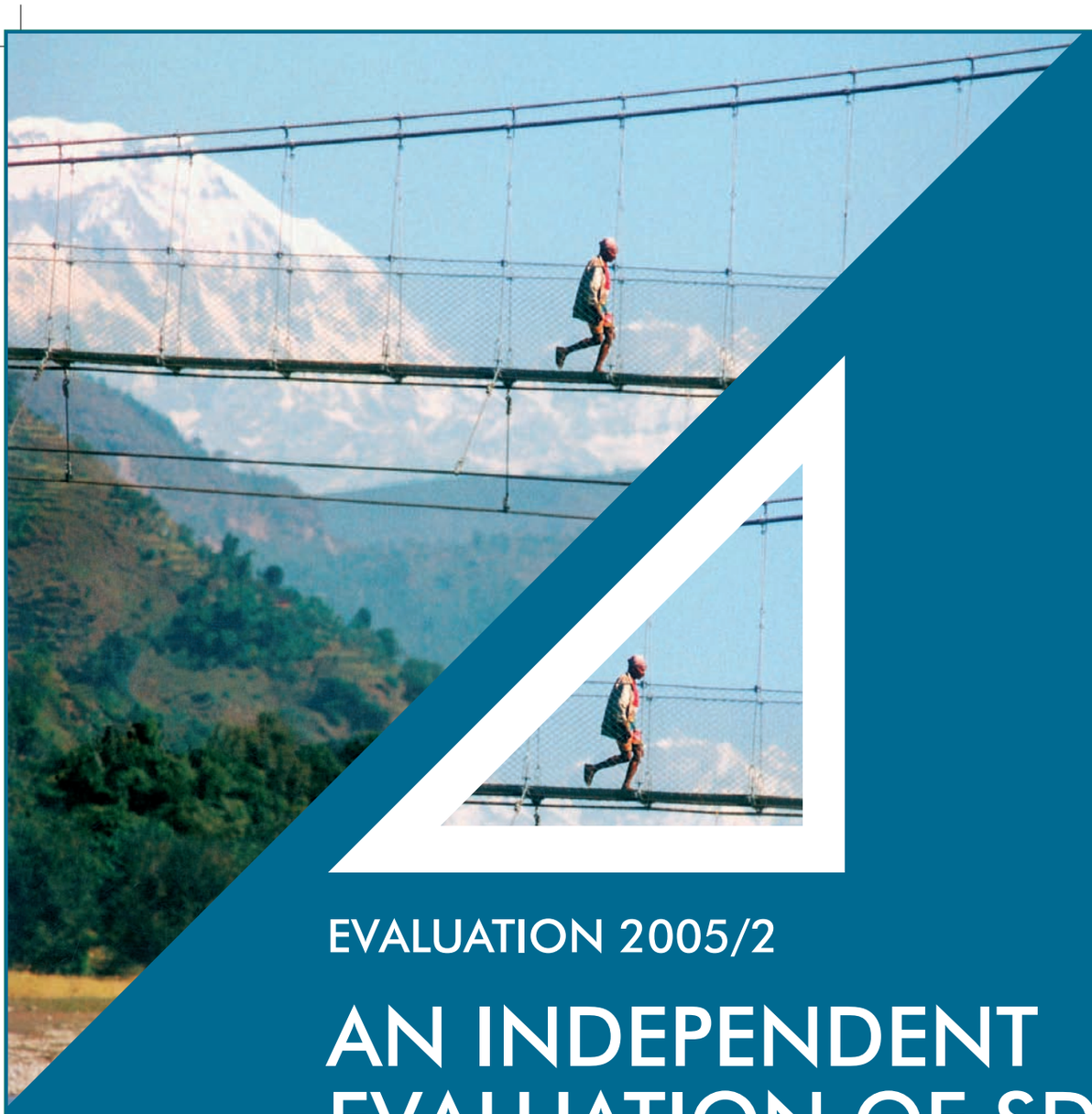

EVALUATION 2005/2

AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF SDC NEPAL COUNTRY PROGRAMMES 1993–2004

BUILDING BRIDGES IN NEPAL – DEALING WITH DEEP DIVIDES

DEZA DIREKTION FÜR ENTWICKLUNG UND ZUSAMMENARBEIT
DDC DIRECTION DU DÉVELOPPEMENT ET DE LA COOPÉRATION
DSC DIREZIONE DELLO SVILUPPO E DELLA COOPERAZIONE
SDC SWISS AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION
COSUDE AGENCIA SUIZA PARA EL DESARROLLO Y LA COOPERACIÓN

Independent Evaluation of

SDC NEPAL COUNTRY PROGRAMMES 1993–2004

Building bridges in Nepal – dealing with deep divides

Commissioned by the Evaluation + Controlling Division
of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Contents:

I Evaluation Abstract
II Lessons Learnt
III Agreement at Completion Point
IV Evaluators' Final Report

Berne, June 2005

Independent Evaluation Process

Independent Evaluations were introduced in SDC in 2002 with the aim of providing a more critical and independent assessment of SDC activities. They are conducted according to DAC Evaluation Standards and are part of SDC's concept for implementing Article 170 of the Swiss Constitution which requires Swiss Federal Offices to analyse the effectiveness of their activities. SDC's ***Comité Stratégique (COSTRA)****, which consists of the Director General, the Deputy Director General and the heads of SDC's six departments, approves the Evaluation Programme. The* ***Evaluation & Controlling Division (E+C Division)****, which is outside of line management and reports directly to the Office of the Director General, commissions the evaluation, taking care to recruit evaluators with a critical distance from SDC.*

The E+C Division identifies the primary intended users of the evaluation and invites them to participate in a ***Core Learning Partnership (CLP)****. The CLP actively accompanies the evaluation process. It comments on the evaluation design (Approach Paper). It provides feedback to the evaluation team on their preliminary findings and on the draft report.*

The CLP also discusses the evaluation results and recommendations. In an ***Agreement at Completion Point (ACP)*** *it takes a stand with regard to each evaluation recommendation indicating whether it agrees or disagrees and, if appropriate, indicates follow-up intentions. The CLP also identifies* ***Lessons Learned (LL)*** *which are generic lessons applicable in similar contexts. In a COSTRA meeting, SDC's Senior Management discusses the evaluation findings and the CLP's ACP and Lessons Learned. In a* ***Senior Management Response****, it expresses its opinion and final decisions for SDC. The Agreement at Completion Point, the Senior Management Response and the Lessons Learned are published with the Final Evaluators' Report. The Senior Management Response forms the basis for future rendering of accountability.*

For further details regarding the evaluation process see the Approach Paper in the Annex.

Timetable of Independent Evaluation of SDC Nepal Country Programmes 1993–2004

Step	***When***
Evaluation Programme approved by COSTRA	*January 2004*
Approach Paper finalized	*July 2004*
Implementation of the evaluation	*Sept.–Dec. 2004*
Agreement at Completion Point drafted by CLP	*March 2005*
Senior Management response in COSTRA	*June 2005*

I Evaluation Abstract

DONOR	SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
REPORT TITLE	Building bridges in Nepal – dealing with deep divides - an independent evaluation of SDC Nepal Country Programmes 1993–2004
SUBJECT NUMBER	E-05.04
GEOGRAPHIC AREA	NPL
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STATUS	C
AUTHORS	Julian Gayfer (team leader), Chandra Kala Bhadra, Raghav Raj Regmi, Pierre Robert

Subject Description
This report is an independent evaluation of bilateral Swiss development assistance to Nepal from 1993 to 2004. The evaluation had three main objectives: to assess the relevance and effectiveness of SDC assistance, and to assess the response of SDC management and programme to the conflict situation in Nepal. The programme portfolio under review consisted of about 50 projects, divided across three main sectors: transport (ranging from 33–38% of disbursements), Occupational Skills and Enterprise Development (OSED), (11%–26%) and Rural Development/ Natural Resources Management (21%–25%). The political and social context of the assistance programme, covering the two planning periods (1993–98 and 1999–2004) has been deeply affected by almost eight years of open conflict.

Evaluation Methodology
The evaluation is based on evidence gathered through consultations with a wide range of people familiar to various degrees with SDC's programmes and projects in Nepal, and with the broader context of Swiss assistance (Annex B). This included interviews with managers and staff at the country office in Nepal and at SDC's headquarters in Berne, representatives of the Nepal Government (HMG), interviews with project staff, non-governmental organisations (NGO) representatives and government officials working on SDC-supported projects, including during field visits to Dolakha District; and meetings with forestry users groups, members of Tuki Associations and other representatives of beneficiaries of SDC-supported activities. Extensive project and programme documentation, ranging from individual project proposals to programming documents, sector concepts and project evaluations, as well as SDC policy statements, guidance and toolkits on overall strategies, thematic issues, etc, were consulted (Annex C). In addition the evaluation met with other donors and consulted reports from a variety of agencies, intended to give a basis of comparison between SDC's approaches and those of other organisations working in similar areas of the development process in Nepal. Lines of

enquiry were guided by the Evaluation Matrix (Annex D) developed by the Evaluation Team.

Major Findings

The sector sub-programmes have operated in effect as independent programmes, with – until recently - few lateral or thematic linkages. However, SDC's strategy to deliver on its sub-programme goals has been relevant, broadly effective and reflecting a sensible use of resources. In addition the SDC approach has provided a platform for continued operations in the conflict context. The programme has been well aligned with government development strategy. SDC's community-based participatory approach to development was also consistent with government and donor policies. Gender-balanced development has been a constant with the themes of poverty orientation and intensification on good governance replacing in 1998 that of environment and HIV/AIDS awareness from 1993. From 2002 governance and peace building have also been introduced as a transversal theme. The evaluation found evidence of many conscious and genuine efforts across the programme to interpret and mainstream transversal themes within projects and there are signs that this process has had an important influence on partner organisations. Partner diversification has been a particular part of the programme strategy. This diversity is a strength. However the extent to which SDC has been precise in its distinctions on partnership and strategic in its choice of partners is questionable. A key partnership for SDC is that with Helvetas. This appears to have matured over the period under review, and to have become akin to a strategic alliance, both parties recognising each other's strengths.

Lessons Learned

Our analysis of the situation in Nepal provides the following general lessons:

- Use a range of conflict warning mechanisms.
- Ensure staff are adequately briefed and supported.
- Be deliberate about assessing the conflict objectively.
- Assess the implications of the conflict on development work.

The evaluators recommend that SDC continue to implement a development strategy based on "Building on Resilience". This would involve deliberate engagement with the conflict, seeking to integrate and mutually reinforce a governance-based development programme with a conflict transformation strategy and conflict mitigation activities, thus contributing to a renewed discourse on development liable to engage the Maoist leadership.

II Lessons learned

Below is a list of lessons learned drawn out by the Core Learning Partnership Switzerland during the Agreement at Completion Point meeting on March 17th in Berne. Some of the points are not strictly lessons but take the form of statements or even of questions to be considered in future evaluations.

Cooperation Strategy
A cooperation strategy needs clear and measurable programme-level goals that can be monitored and an overall results framework which integrates sector and project activities. It is not sufficient to have coherent sector programmes within a cooperation strategy. This applies to cooperation strategies in general.

Evaluation Focus
The evaluation produced clear and concise results at the programme level, but it was less clear on specific issues such as response to conflict situations. Was the brief for the evaluation team overloaded?

Learning and Valorisation of Knowledge
The evaluation process and in particular the Core Learning Partnership encouraged co-learning across divisions and departments in SDC and beyond (from Nepal to Berne/SDC and Zurich/Helvetas). Knowledge available within SDC was tapped and esteemed. This was much appreciated by the CLP.

Cost Benefit
There was a consensus that the evaluation including the Core Learning Partnership was a resource and time-consuming process. While some judged it to be valuable and "worth it", others found the cost-benefit ratio not quite satisfactory or even would have preferred an internal review.

Cooperation of two CLPs
The concept of the two CLPs, one in Nepal and in Switzerland, was appreciated. However, ways need to be identified to go beyond mutual consultations towards common elaboration of statements and to thus increase the weight of the CLP in the partner country.

CLP for whom? and Institutional Learning
The goals of the CLP were not always very clear. For which level is the CLP preparing its input? What is the role of the CLP and of E&C in furthering institutional learning? Such questions need to be more clearly addressed at the start of the venture.

Independent Evaluation and Local Knowledge
The initial doubts regarding an evaluation team without previous knowledge of the Swiss context and no working experience with SDC in particular waned completely in the course of the evaluation. Knowledge of the partner country context is, however, considered indispensable.

III Agreement at Completion Point
Stand of the SDC Core Learning Partnership (CLP) regarding main recommendations

COSTRA Standpoint

The Comité Stratégique (COSTRA) of SDC in its meeting of June 17, 2005, discussed both the Agreement at Completion Point compiled by the Core Learning Partnership (CLP) and the proposal for SDC's cooperation strategy for Nepal 2005–2008. COSTRA appreciated and approved the findings and recommendations of the evaluation and the Agreement at Completion Point overall. Given that the evaluation had already served as a very valuable and substantial input into the strategy formulation process, COSTRA refrained from a deliberation of specific recommendations.

A General appreciation of the evaluation

The CLP appreciates the evaluation as very complete, it agrees to most of the analysis and general thrust of the report. The CLP particularly values the intimate knowledge of the Nepali context by the evaluating team that is evident throughout the report. The report has evolved very substantially through the evaluation process and thus reflects the contributions of all involved.
Generally on the recommendations, if they seem to be somewhat general, the CLP agrees on the thrust of them. As to the geographical focus of SDC, the CLP agrees with the report that its experience in specific areas is an important strength. Based on these experiences and long-lasting partnerships SDC might develop new initiatives. Complementarity of the area based know-how with the thematic programme components should be maintained.

The CLP recognizes the substantial changes in the political context after the direct take over by the king on February 1, 2005, the imposition of the state of emergency in the country and the subsequent suspension of press freedom and basic human rights, which is a severe blow to democracy and development. Nepal is in a full-fledged crisis and the space for development cooperation has become very restrained. SDC as a longstanding, widely trusted and neutral party should come out strongly to uphold the fundamental human rights in Nepal. Basic decisions need to be taken about the future of Swiss development cooperation in Nepal[1].

[1] On Feb 25th a number of overriding issues to be addressed were communicated to SDC Senior Management. The Management Standpoint reflects the situation of mid-March 2005.

B Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the **working assumptions on the "new reality"** outlined below:

- The armed conflict will continue.
- The government remains an important partner in the programme, irrespective of who holds ultimate state authority.
- There are *de facto* two governments, given the authorisations required.
- The environment is not conducive to normal development planning processes.
- The conflict has shaken society to an extent where it may now be open to a more targeted (less equal and less resource based) approach to reaching the poor.
- The importance of cash income to the rural poor will continue growing during the armed conflict.
- Overall economic growth is not likely to rebound significantly while the conflict continues.

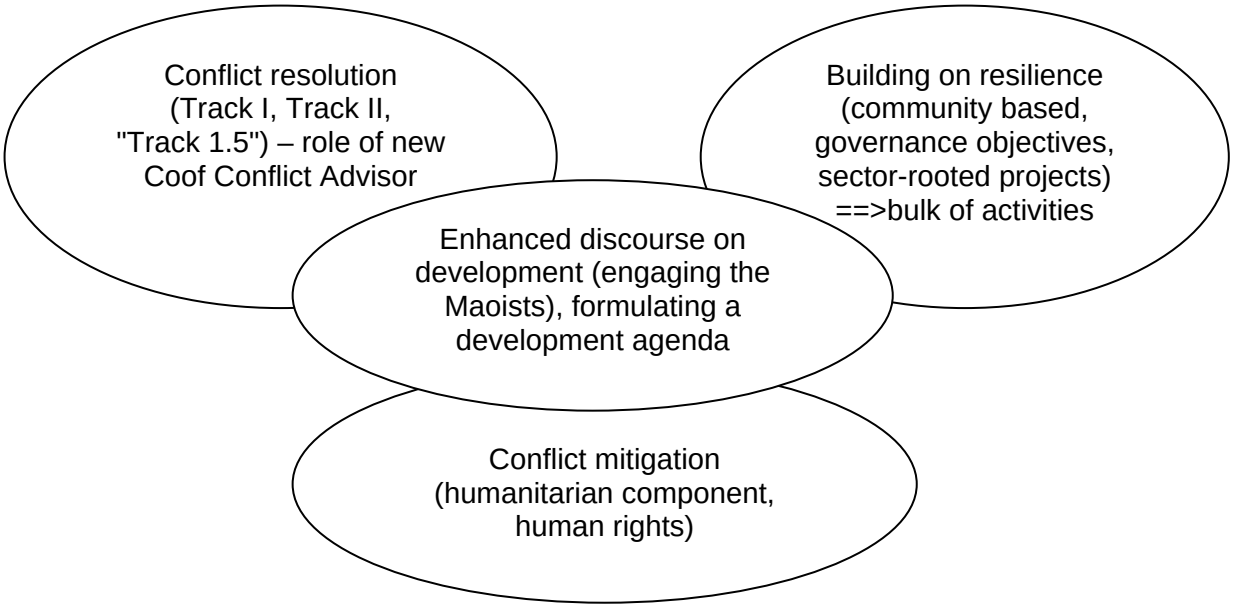
In this context, the evaluators envision two possible scenarios for future SDC programming in Nepal:

- The ***"Back to Basics" scenario***. This would essentially mean a narrow focus on those activities that are the most conflict-resistant (mainly those based on existing grassroots-level relationships), with minimal exposure in districts new to SDC and a tight separation between development activities and any Swiss involvement in conflict transformation. This would constitute a coping strategy allowing SDC to minimize risk to itself and its projects during the conflict period, at the cost of losing the influence it has on actors in the conflict.

- The ***"Building on Resilience" scenario.*** This would involve deliberate engagement with the conflict, seeking to integrate and mutually reinforce a governance-based development programme with a conflict transformation strategy and conflict mitigation activities, thus contributing to a renewed discourse on development liable to engage the Maoist leadership. This engagement would aim at encouraging support by the Maoist side for a development agenda. This strategy would build on the key achievements of the previous SDC programmes, at the risk of increased exposure to political pressure and compromising on traditional perceptions of Swiss neutrality.

Of the two scenarios, it is the second which appears to the evaluators to be most relevant to the current situation in Nepal and most effective at drawing out SDC's added value as a development actor and supporter of conflict resolution. The figure overleaf summarises the proposed approach. However, whatever approach is taken by SDC (but particularly if a strategy akin to the "building on resilience" scenario is adopted), the following **recommendations**, stemming from the findings of the evaluation, should be taken into account:

Figure 1: "Building on Resilience" strategy



Stand of the CLP

From a development agency perspective, the most important changes are the existence of two authoritarian governments which both are not anymore prepared to give space to work to the development actors. Also, the neutrality of development actors is not accepted anymore.

In this situation it is probably better to speak of ***"options for future programming***" instead of ***"scenarios".***

In view of the latest developments, the CLP

- rules out option/scenario 1: "Back to Basics";
- accepts option/scenario 2 "Building on Resilience" as a valuable option that would need to be adjusted to the new situation and include humanitarian interventions and human rights;
- remains open to a new option 3 of phasing out the current programme.

Recommendation 1

Develop programme-level objectives and implementation strategies.

The 1993–97 and 1998–2004 country programmes had good project outlines and explicit sector strategies, however they lacked clear programme-level strategies and associated outcome statements that would have explicitly integrated the (sector and project) activities into an overall results framework. The logical framework approach could be adopted at programme level, as it is already at project level, to help ensure that programme-level objectives are explicit and indicators are systematically monitored.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP fully agrees that programme-level strategies and measurable objectives are essential, but questions whether the logical framework approach is the most appropriate tool at programme level.

Recommendation 2

Consider a set of governance objectives as primary programming framework.
These objectives would integrate the cross-sectoral concerns of SDC, while providing the overall context for the implementation of sector-based concepts and projects.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP agrees with the recommendation to put, within the mandate of poverty reduction, cross-sectoral objectives as primary programming framework, such as conflict transformation, Governance and Human Rights based Approaches.

Recommendation 3

Ensure that Annual and Country programmes are based on a clear and systematic analysis of the country situation.
On the basis of instruments such as MERV and FAST, and of the analysis of the social and political situation, programming documents should include elements such as:

a. SWOT analysis of SDC as a donor;

b. Overview of the development sector;

c. Consideration of the social and political situation;

d. Consideration of key cross-sectoral concerns.

It is not suggested that all of these elements be present at all stages of programming, but they should be considered whenever relevant.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP agrees with the recommendation and considers that this has been the practice for at least one year (see annual programme 2005). The current situation shows, that taking into consideration the dynamics of the social and political situation is very important.

Recommendation 4

Consider ways of building synergies between the development programme and conflict transformation strategy.
This may involve the use of case studies from development projects as part of the engagement with parties to the conflict, as well as timing some "Track II" activities to coincide with key development activities.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP agrees with the recommendation, which has been put in place systematically. For example, public auditing that has been introduced in infrastructure programmes and capacity building in trauma counselling.

Recommendation 5

Consider expanding activities related to conflict mitigation.

This may include expanding humanitarian aid budgets, as well as using some development programme funds to address some of the direct impact of the conflict (enhanced research and reporting on the use and impact of landmines, clearance of landmine and other unexploded ordnance, human rights monitoring and protection, support for internally displaced persons, training of IHL monitors). This aspect implies that approaches used in the humanitarian field be used also in some aspects of development work – particularly that support to people affected is not necessarily addressing the poorest victims. Addressing the conflict in this way may provide valuable "entry points" for conflict transformation activities, and may bring to light new information on the actual impact of the conflict on the population of Nepal.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP agrees with considering expanding programme framework with aspects related to conflict mitigation and humanitarian aid in a contiguum. Operational Consideration (competences, shift of resources) have to be included into this reflections, as well as the nature of possible humanitarian interventions beyond the examples cited in the recommendation.

Recommendation 6

Nurture Users' Groups as a broader development force.

Users' Groups have demonstrated their effectiveness beyond their function as a sectoral tool. Expanding their use should be done in conjunction with continued capacity building support to local government, to ensure that Users' Groups are not unduly relied upon as a substitute to the state in remote areas – even though, in practice, this is their function in the conflict context.[2]

Stand of the CLP

The CLP fully supports the recommendation as a principle, stressing the need to capitalize on the diverse experiences made. However, under the current situation, the exposure of user group leaders and the illegitimacy of local governments have become a concern.

Recommendation 7

Consider re-orienting Coof management around a programme results framework.

This would stem from the proposed set of programme-level strategic objectives. A change in management approach may involve, in particular, re-organising staff responsibilities at sector head level to take account of the programme objectives and to ensure the maintenance of appropriate levels of technical know-how.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP agrees with the principal thrust of the recommendation, i.e. if SDC adopts a stronger Programme results framework the organisation of the COOF would need to be reviewed to ensure optimum programme outcome. A balance of programmatic, operational and managerial competence must be achieved. The CLP considers that the current matrix organisation is a step into that direction, further steps might have to follow.

[2] It must also be noted that leaders of users' groups are de facto in a politically exposed situation, which may put them at risk if the conflict worsens and if either side becomes politically radicalised.

Recommendation 8

Consider developing partnership agreements with relevant INGOs.
The strategy proposed above may involve higher levels of workload for Coof staff. In order to cope with this change, it may be appropriate to hive off further operational responsibilities for sector activities to relevant partners. It is suggested that this could be done in the context of a strategic partnership agreement with Helvetas.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP agrees in principle with the recommendation and adds that the option of alliances with other donors needs to be considered.

Recommendation 9

Review modalities of Coof-Berne relationship.
While maintaining the thematic advisory functions of Headquarter-based experts in relation to Coof programme management processes, it may be advisable to consider revising the role of the geographical department in relation to Coof, developing its strategic challenge function.

Stand of the CLP

The CLP agrees with the recommendation. It is all the more crucial if the COOF management is reoriented around a programme-oriented framework.

The issue of the relation between COOF and Head office (addressed in the COOF 2000 Strategy) goes beyond the Nepal case and is reviewed currently in the frame of another independent evaluation. It should be addressed in that context.

C Lessons on response to conflict situations

General appreciation

The CLP agrees to many points mentioned in the lessons. However they remain rather sketchy, a more in depth analysis could produce more substantive learnings. Generally coordination between donors, specially joint conflict analysis and response is very important. Important issues to be addressed in the future are how to implement conflict impact monitoring based on hypotheses and how to translate monitoring evidence into management action.
In the following some additional points will be mentioned to the specific lessons.

Evaluation Report:

Our analysis of the situation in Nepal provides the following general lessons on how SDC should operate in a conflict situation, or in countries where there are latent tensions:

Lesson 1
Use a range of conflict warning mechanisms.
MERV is an internal SDC mechanism, which can be replicated in any country. FAST is managed by the Swiss Peace Foundation and as such is not within the control of SDC – however the extension of its use to countries where SDC may need it can probably be envisioned. Other mechanisms remain necessary, including:

a. Following up MERV reports with management notes indicating how, if at all, assistance programmes are affected by changes in country situations.

b. Liaison with other donors and other relevant organisations to compare assessments of conflict risks (to the extent these views are not already covered in the MERV).

c. Support for human rights monitoring mechanisms within the country, particularly in relation to distant areas or vulnerable sectors of society, which may be affected by emerging conflict earlier than others.

It must be borne in mind, however, that no mix of management instruments can fully guarantee the timely detection of emerging conflict.

Stand of the CLP

The lesson is well taken. Some tools are not mentioned, such as regular assessments by independent local analysts and the PCIA. It is furthermore important to distinguish between conflict monitoring (MERV, FAST) and conflict management tools, such as security guidelines.

Lesson 2

Ensure staff are adequately briefed and supported.
A primary responsibility of SDC is to its own staff, and to people directly working on projects it supports. Measures such as those listed below – as successfully deployed by SDC in Nepal – are necessary to ensure adequate support for staff working in risk areas:

a. Comprehensive and regularly updated survey of the personnel vulnerable to risk, and of the nature of the risk they face.

b. Appointment of a security manager, assisted as appropriate by staff in relevant locations, and responsible with relevant tasks, from the provision of security advice to travel authorisation, for example.

c. Provision to staff of training and briefings on relevant issues, including conflict early warning, security training, or human rights protection and monitoring techniques.

d. Ensuring that staff have access to appropriate (confidential) and timely support in case they experience a security incident, and that staff working in conflict areas – and areas of high tensions even if there is no open conflict – are regularly monitored, and undergo thorough debriefing if an incident occurs.

It is also important to ensure that, in principle, security-related support provided by SDC be available, as relevant, to national and international staff on equal terms. SDC already has relevant procedures in place, the Nepal evaluation did not bring to light specific concerns about the nature of the procedures.

Stand of the CLP

An atmosphere of openness has to be created, in order to enable staff to freely report problems. A competition to stay longest in an area has to be avoided. Identify practical conflict management trainings and how to deal with an expanding "conflict management industry". IHL should be considered also.

Lesson 3

Be deliberate about assessing the conflict objectively.

The experience of Nepal has shown that, even in a context of widespread conflict, actual project activities may remain relatively unaffected (or be only marginally affected) for an extended period of time. The impact of an emerging conflict on SDC activities is therefore not necessarily an appropriate measure of the level of conflict – this is why it is important that an assessment of an emerging conflict be carried out, including but also looking beyond, SDC activities themselves.

Lesson 4

Assess the implications of the conflict on development work.

There are clearly no general prescriptions in this respect, but aspects to consider may include economic development patterns, which may be disrupted in some regions already in the latent phase of a conflict. Options for SDC may also need to be reviewed, ranging from continuation of all or some activities to disengagement and/or coordination with other bilateral or multilateral donors.

Stand of the CLP

No additional remarks on lessons 3 and 4.

IV Evaluators' Final Report

Building bridges in Nepal – dealing with deep divides

AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF SDC NEPAL COUNTRY PROGRAMMES 1993–2004

Commissioned by the Evaluation + Controlling Division
of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

February 2005, Berne

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The Performance Assessment Resource Centre (parc)

www.parcinfo.org

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Full responsibility for the text of this report rests with the authors. In common with all evaluation reports commissioned by SDC the views contained in this report do not necessarily represent those of SDC or of the people consulted.

[1] www.parcinfo.org

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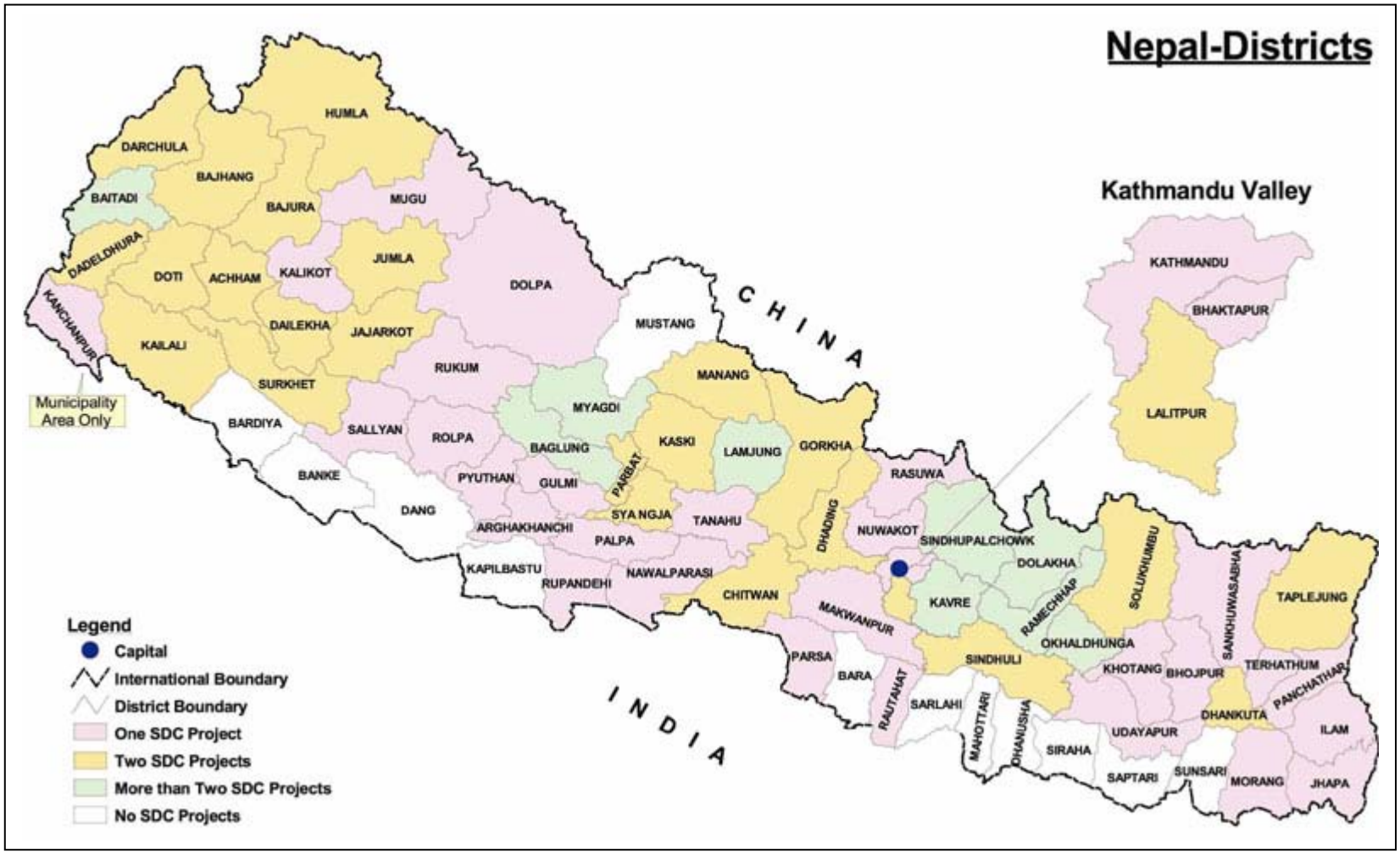
ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADDCN	Association of District Development Committees Nepal
BTS	Balaju Technical School
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CLP	Core Learning Partnership
Coof	(SDC) Country Office
CPN(M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CTEVT	Centre for Technical Education and Vocational Training
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DFO	District Forest Office
DHO	District Health Office
DoH	Department for Health
DoR	Department of Roads
DoF	Department of Forestry
DOLIDAR	Department for Local Government
DTMPs	District Transport Management Plans
FAST	*Frühwarnung und Analyse von Spannungen und Tatsachen-ermittlung* (Independent Early Warning Program)
FECOFUN	National Federation of Forest User Groups
FSMP	Forest Sector Master Plan
FUG	Forest User Group
HMGN	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
HURON	Nepal Network of NGOs
IDP	Internally displaced person
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
JTS	Jiri Technical School
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MERV	Monitoring, Evaluating, Reporting and Verifying (Framework)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NDF	National Development Forum
NPC	National Planning Commission
NRM	Natural Resources Management
NSCFP	Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project
OSED	Occupational Skills and Enterprise Development
PARC	Performance Assessment Resource Centre
RECOFTC	Regional Centre for Community Forestry Training
RHDP	Rural Health Development Project
RNA	Royal Nepalese Army
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation
SIPP	Small Industries Promotion Programme
SSMP	Sustainable Soils Management Project
SWAP	Sector Wide Approaches
TFE	Training for employment
TITI	Training Institute for Technical Instruction
TEVT	Technical Education & Vocational Training
VDC	Village Development Committee


Nepal-Districts
Kathmandu Valley
CHINA
INDIA
HUMLA
DARCHULA
BAJHANG
BAITADI
BAJURA
MUGU
DADELDHURA
DOTI
ACHHAM
KALIKOT
JUMLA
DOLPA
KANCHANPUR
DAILEKHA
JAJARKOT
MUSTANG
KAILALI
RUKUM
MANANG
SURKHET
MYAGDI
Municipality Area Only
BARDIYA
SALLYAN
ROLPA
KASKI
LAMJUNG
GORKHA
BAGLUNG
PARBAT
BANKE
PYUTHAN
GULMI
RASUWA
DANG
SYA NGJA
TANAHU
DHADING
ARGHAKHANCHI
NUWAKOT
SINDHUPALCHOWK
PALPA
DOLAKHA
KAPILBASTU
RUPANDEHI
NAWALPARASI
CHITWAN
KAVRE
MAKWANPUR
RAMECHHAP
SOLUKHUMBU
SANKHUWASABHA
TAPLEJUNG
OKHALDHUNGA
PARSA
SINDHULI
BARA
KHOTANG
BHOJPUR
TERHATHUM
RAUTAHAT
SARLAHI
PANCHATHAR
DHANKUTA
MAHOTTARI
DHANUSHA
UDAYAPUR
ILAM
SIRAHA
SAPTARI
SUNSARI
MORANG
JHAPA
KATHMANDU
BHAKTAPUR
LALITPUR
Legend
Capital
International Boundary
District Boundary
One SDC Project
Two SDC Projects
More than Two SDC Projects
No SDC Projects

1. Executive Summary

1. This report is an independent evaluation of bilateral Swiss development assistance to Nepal from 1993 to 2004. The evaluation had three main objectives: to assess the relevance and effectiveness of SDC assistance, and to assess the response of SDC management and programme to the conflict situation in Nepal. The programme portfolio under review consisted of about 50 projects, divided across three main sectors: Transport (ranging from 33–38% of disbursements), Occupational Skills and Enterprise Development (OSED), (11%–26%) and Rural Development / Natural Resources Management (21%–25%).

2. The political and social context of the assistance programme, covering two planning periods (1993–98 and 1999–2004) has been deeply affected by almost eight years of open conflict. SDC's programme for 1993–97, developed before the breakout of the Maoist insurgency (at a time when future insurgency leaders were still within mainstream politics), did not cover issues of political violence. The 1998–2004 programme described the Maoist insurgency as a threat to "the social peace in a growing number of rural districts" and "to the activities of development agencies and to the human rights situation". It was only in the 2002–2005 Addendum, and even more clearly the 2005 Country Programme, that the conflict was given a central place in programme development.

3. SDC's approach has long favoured decentralisation, and it is probably no coincidence that government agencies with which SDC has sustained association (roads, forestry) appear to be among the most positive about devolving decision-making. SDC may have had a positive impact on Nepal's gradual shift towards more decentralised government, through the long-term interaction between its advisors and government agencies and probably also through the positive examples set by its sustained support of local government. SDC has been instrumental in the development of community-based organisations (CBOs) and service providers.

4. SDC strategy in Nepal has evolved over the period under review. The thread running through the two country programmes at the purpose level is the emphasis placed on building and embedding the institutions and processes of democracy (post democracy movement) within Nepalese society. The Country Programme (CP) of 1993–97 focuses on the role of governmental institutions. This is effectively broadened in the 1998–2004 CP to encompass civil society. Programme thrusts reflected in the strategic objectives of the CPs are:

   - Road / trail network development moved to a sustainable basis;
   - social broadening of access to technical skills and related employment opportunities;
   - a shift to demand led service provision through social organisation (e.g. user groups) in specific areas of rural development.

   Since 2002 a fourth aspect, supporting "drivers of change" operating within the legal and planning framework of Nepal, has been added – reflecting the growing stagnation of the political and development process.

5. Overall, there is a limited sense of a programming strategy in pursuit of programme purpose level objectives. Sectors – as defined in accordance with SDC organisational requirements – have been used by SDC as means of clustering resources and

energy. The sector (sub) programmes have operated in effect as independent programmes, with – until more recently – few lateral or thematic linkages. However, SDC's strategy to deliver on its (sub) programme goals has been relevant, broadly effective and reflecting a sensible use of resources. In addition the SDC approach has provided a platform for continued operations in the conflict context. The programme has been well aligned with government development strategy. SDC's community-based participatory approach to development was also consistent with government and donor policies.

6. SDC's transversal themes have evolved over the two country programme periods; gender-balanced development has been a constant with the themes of poverty orientation and intensification on good governance replacing in 1998 that of environment and HIV/AIDS awareness from 1993. From 2002 governance and peace building have also been introduced as a transversal theme. The evaluation found evidence of many conscious and genuine efforts across the programme to interpret and mainstream transversal themes within projects and there are signs that this process has had an important influence on partner organisations.

7. Partner diversification has been a particular part of the programme strategy. This diversity is a strength. However the extent to which SDC has been precise in its distinctions on partnership and strategic in its choice of partners is questionable. A key partnership for SDC is that with Helvetas. This appears to have matured over the period under review, and to have become akin to a strategic alliance, both parties recognising each other's strengths.

8. The core business of the SDC programme has remained in the 3–5 focus districts of Dolakha, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk, Kabhrepalanchok and Okhaldunga (Kabhre and Okhaldunga coming in the early stage of the CP 1998–2004). These districts were ranked from 30 to 50 out of a total of 75 districts in an "Indicators of Development" exercise conducted by ICIMOD in 1997. There has been some – limited – extension to the geographical scope of the Country programme through some expansion of "quality products" (such as bridges) to nation-wide level and through supporting Helvetas work in the mid-West.

9. The conflict situation effectively means that the fundamentals of peace and good governance on which a sustainable development path can be pursued are now largely absent. However the evaluation concludes that it was appropriate for SDC to continue to support the development process in focus districts rather than moving resources into other areas. There is no evidence to suggest that long-term Swiss support to the focus districts has led to a reduction in levels of government support to these districts.

10. The absence of a clear and tight results framework at the programme level – with objectives, targets, indicators and baselines – has been a constraint to an effective programme monitoring approach. One recent development has been to start to examine in a more systematic manner a sector's contribution to poverty alleviation, in terms of equity, governance and gender. At the individual project level there is a rigorous and strictly applied system of reviews and operational planning processes. The project monitoring approach is part of SDC's reflective learning and sharing style with some thematic workshops being organised by the Coof to look at cross cutting elements across projects.

11. Three major changes, all brought about from 2002 onwards, have been introduced to adapt SDC's programme management to the conflict. They are:

- Introduction of the Governance domain in 2003 in order to develop and implement a strategy of support for activities related to human rights protection and the fight against corruption.

- Establishment of the MERV and FAST processes, respectively an internal reporting mechanism, and a research and analysis project based on data gathering about conflict-related incidents.

- Development of a conflict transformation strategy. Essentially the strategy involves traditional Track I and Track II approaches, and (unconventionally) contacts aimed at sensitising the Maoist leadership to development issues.

12. The programme as a whole lacked explicit responsiveness to the conflict in the earlier years. However, there was good responsiveness to the conflict at project level. SDC was focusing on communities, thus laying the groundwork for more conflict-resistant development.

13. SDC's influence in Nepal seems to have been bigger than its level of spending would suggest. In the crucial area of decentralisation, SDC also brought added value through its long-standing support for this policy and its ability to demonstrate some of its benefits in specific districts. At community level, SDC seems to have been a trend-setter for bottom-up development.

14. The evaluators recommend that SDC continue to implement a development strategy based on "Building on Resilience". This would involve deliberate engagement with the conflict, seeking to integrate and mutually reinforce a governance-based development programme with a conflict transformation strategy and conflict mitigation activities, thus contributing to a renewed discourse on development liable to engage the Maoist leadership.

2. Introduction

This is the final draft report of an independent evaluation of bilateral Swiss development assistance to Nepal from 1993–2004[2]. The evaluation had three main objectives; to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) assistance, and to assess the response of SDC management and programme to the conflict situation in Nepal. An Approach Paper for this evaluation (Annex A) was developed by SDC in July 2004 in consultation with other stakeholders and the evaluation team from the Performance Assessment Resource Centre (the PARC).

In June 2003 a new management team started work at the Kathmandu Coordination Office (Coof). The evaluation feeds into the planning process for assistance to Nepal as the current planning cycle ends in mid 2005. The political and social context of the assistance programme has been deeply affected by almost eight years of open conflict. The evaluation provides an opportunity to assess the impact of the conflict on past operations and consider the strategic options that lie ahead for Swiss bilateral assistance. This requires a set of working assumptions on the nature of the conflict, how this will evolve, what this means for Nepal's development path and the way in which SDC can best add value.

2.1 Programme Overview

The evaluation covers SDC assistance since 1993, comprising two planning periods (1993–98 and 1999–2004) and a portfolio of about 50 projects. Total disbursements varied from about CHF 15.4m in 1997 to about CHF 21.7m in 2003,[3] although annual figures were not always exactly comparable – for example the 1997 figure did not include humanitarian aid. In broad terms, the projects were divided into three main sectors:

- Transport, which comprised 38% to 47% of disbursements in the first planning phase, and 33% to 38% in the second;
- Occupational Skills and Enterprise Development (OSED), 21% to 26% in the first phase, 11% to 16% in the second;
- Rural Development/ Natural Resources Management (NRM), 21% to 23% in the first phase, 25% in the second[4].

In broad terms, other costs (pilot projects, administrative costs, and, in the second phase, Governance- and Equity-related projects) represented 15% to 25% of disbursements, and humanitarian aid accounted for a further 5% to 10%. The Approach Paper notes that Nepal was in 2003 the third-largest recipient of Swiss bilateral development assistance and that Swiss assistance represented (in 2002) about 3.5% of all bilateral and multilateral assistance to Nepal.

While the period covered by the evaluation is already over a decade long, the evaluators have sought to place SDC's assistance since 1993 in the broader historical context of Swiss engagement in Nepal. This is because some of the major projects implemented during the period under consideration have roots going back to the 1970s or earlier, and

[2] SDC's Evaluation and Controlling Division commissions at least one independent country programme evaluation annually.

[3] The figures in this subsection are drawn from *SDC Country Programme for Nepal, 1998–2004*, Annex 4, and *Annual Programme 2005 Nepal*, final draft (5 October 2004), Annex 5.

[4] This figure hides a reduced level of funding – in absolute and relative terms - for agricultural sector support; identified by the National Planning Commission (NPC) in 1991 as a key area for investment in tackling poverty.

Swiss assistance has long focused on a small number of districts in the Central Region of Nepal where its experience was instrumental in shaping the programmes under review. The long history of SDC's engagement in Nepal (and the even longer history of engagement by Swiss actors pre-dating SDC's establishment) is a key aspect of SDC's image in Nepal today and is influencing SDC's current approach.

2.2 Scope and methodology of the evaluation

The evaluation is based on evidence gathered through consultations with a wide range of people familiar to various degrees with SDC's programmes and projects in Nepal, and with the broader context of Swiss assistance (Annex B). This included interviews with managers and staff at the Coof in Nepal and at SDC's headquarters in Berne, representatives of the Nepal Government (HMG), interviews with project staff, non-governmental organisations (NGO) representatives and government officials working on SDC-supported projects, including during field visits to Dolakha District; and meetings with forestry users groups, members of Tuki Associations and other representatives of beneficiaries of SDC-supported activities.

Extensive project and programme documentation, ranging from individual project proposals to programming documents, sector concepts and project evaluations, as well as SDC policy statements, guidance and toolkits on overall strategies, thematic issues, etc, were consulted (Annex C). In addition the evaluation met with other donors and consulted reports from a variety of agencies, intended to give a basis of comparison between SDC's approaches and those of other organisations working in similar areas of the development process in Nepal. Lines of enquiry were guided by the Evaluation Matrix (Annex D) developed by the Evaluation Team.

The key stages of the evaluation were the following:

- An initial visit to Berne in July 2004 provided the opportunity for an initial set of interviews and meetings with relevant staff.

- A first mission to Nepal in September / October was conducted, in which most interviews with Kathmandu-based interlocutors were carried out, including Coof personnel. The visit was concluded with a stocktaking meeting at the Coof and the dissemination of an Aide-Mémoire setting out preliminary findings and outlining directions for further enquiry.

- A debriefing meeting was held in Bern in October with the Core Learning Partnership (CLP). This was the opportunity for further interviews in Berne and Zurich. Meanwhile, roundtables were held in Nepal with selected NGO representatives identified during the first mission.

- A second mission was carried out in Nepal in November / December, including a short visit to Jiri and Charikot in Dolakha District. The visit was concluded with a debriefing in the Coof and a meeting with the Nepal CLP.

- A final meeting to receive feedback on the draft report was held in Bern in January with the CLP (Switzerland) and in Kathmandu with the CLP (Nepal).

- The recommendations and lessons from the final report were considered at the Agreement at Completion Point meeting in Bern in February.

2.3 Programme results framework

Over the two Country Programme periods under review; 1993–1997, and 1998–2004 Nepal has moved from a "developing country" to a "country in crisis". The core task of the PARC team was to evaluate the performance of the Country Programme (1993–2004) by linking inputs, project activities and SDC programme outputs with impact. This implied viewing impact in terms of the Swiss contribution to a set of intermediate outcomes associated with Nepal's development strategy and its progression towards its development goals.

Assessments of the programme's relevance and effectiveness – **in terms of results** – were made in reference to the hierarchy of objectives and targets outlined within the Country Programme documents (see Box 1 & 2 at end of section 2.3). These represent the higher order goals that Swiss assistance to Nepal is aligned to, the development focus to the programming period (purpose-level objective), the standards set for delivery of corporate priorities (transversal programme components) and the strategic objective for each "sector", which the sum of "project level" activities and the programming engagement of the Coof team are set to deliver.

The evaluation is focused on the programme level of SDC's engagement in Nepal with our assessment of achievements being made primarily against a consolidated view of Country Programme "Output" statements configured under Programme Strategic Objectives, and reflecting the sectoral (sub-programme) divisions adopted by SDC (Annex E). These statements reflect our interpretation of key contributions that SDC – as a partner within the wider donor community – was aiming to make to the reform and development process in Nepal over the period under review. These therefore provide the basis for forming judgements on programme performance – **in impact terms** – drawing on evidence reviewed by the evaluation team during their 20-day visit to the country.

Whilst, due to the programme-level nature of this evaluation, no specific assessments are made on individual project performance (in terms of delivery against their own respective objectives) the configuration of projects in relation to the Programme objectives is broadly indicated in results frameworks prepared by the team for each sector (Annex F). Some reference is made within the report to projects to illustrate specific programme level achievements / issues.

In addressing the specific questions outlined in the Approach Paper relating to relevance and effectiveness, the evaluation has aimed to establish whether over the period in question the SDC Country Programme:

- has done what it said it would do and done it well;
- has been engaged in areas and worked in ways that were appropriate and constituted the "best fit" to the wider reform process within the "sector"; and
- has made a contribution to a set of intermediate outcomes representing steps towards Nepal achieving its development goals.

Whilst in no way seeking to underplay the significance of the conflict the evaluation team has strived to strike a balance between making judgements on programme performance against the declared intentions of the programming periods, and take account of the way in which the conflict situation has progressively impacted on relevance and to a lesser extent programme effectiveness. Prior to 2001 / 02 the insurgency was generally regarded as being effectively development project neutral.

Box 1: SDC NEPAL: COUNTRY PROGRAMME 1993–1997

GOAL:
Poverty alleviation through:
- the sustainability of democratisation;
- improved subsistence agriculture and sustainable forest management in the hills (as part of sustainable land-use and preservation of the ecological balance).

PURPOSE:
HMGN's decentralisation policy embedded– through the strengthening of governmental institutions, particularly at those levels which are most immediately relevant for the programmes's beneficiaries.

TRANSVERSAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS:
TPC 1: Gender balanced development in all SDC programmes and projects.

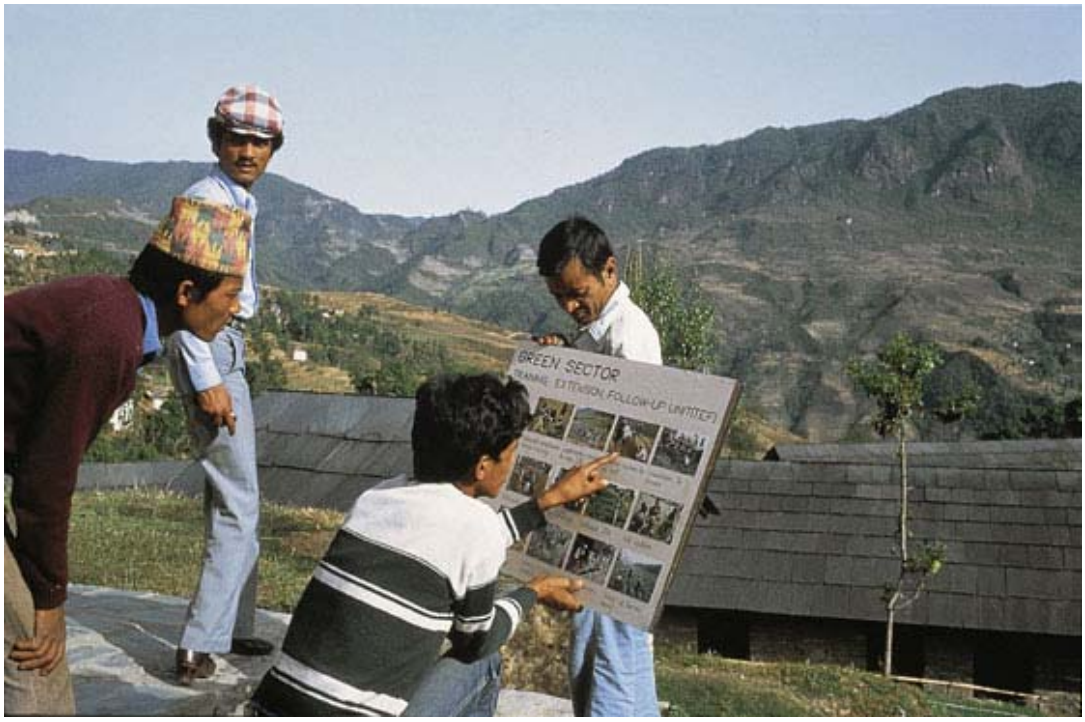
TPC 2: Environmental awareness and environmentally compatible behaviour to be given due consideration within all project planning.

TPC 3: Promotion of AIDS awareness building throughout SDC's programme.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES "SECTORS":
SO 1: The economic return of road sector investments increased.

SO 2: Access to technical schooling socially broadened.

SO 3: User Groups as a key participatory approach to sustainable land use tested and established.



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Swiss development cooperation in earlier years: The Integrated Hill Development Project (IHDP) in the 1970s (note the barren hills at the time)

Box 2: SDC NEPAL – COUNTRY PROGRAMME 1998–2004

GOAL:
Poverty alleviation through:
- (98) Nepal putting to good use her rich human resources for the improvement of the living conditions of the people in a self-reliant manner.[5]
- (01) A system of decentralised governance with development oriented strong local institutions.
- (02) Empowering society to exercise democratic rights in a peaceful, just and equitable state.

PURPOSE:
P 1: Institutional mechanisms established which ensure that the use of public resources is effective and transparent.

P 2: Programmes and projects adjusted to deliver social justice and equity.

TRANSVERSAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS:
TPC 1: A transformatory process for gender balanced development integrated into all programmes and projects.

TPC 2: A specific poverty orientation introduced to all programmes and projects.

TPC 3: (from 2003): Intensifying the integration of the characteristics of good governance in SDC's programmes and projects.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES "Sectors"
SO 1: Road and trail network improved on a sustainable basis – thereby facilitating access and mobility of people and the exchange of goods *(furthering the social and economic development of specific regions)*

SO 2: Employment opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged people enhanced – through the opening up of access to *quality* training (in occupational skills) and *business development services* and the improved long-term competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (SME).

SO 3: Organisational capacity of communities and the ability of farmers to interact with service providers improved.

From 2003:
SO 4: Nepali driving forces for change operating within the legal and planning framework of Nepal encouraged and supported.

The report has been structured to cover all issues raised in the Approach Paper. Section 3 outlines the key features of the context (Nepal & SDC) within which the SDC programme in Nepal has been designed and implemented. Readers familiar with the country may wish to move directly to sections 4 & 5 which assess, respectively, programme relevance and effectiveness. Section 6 assesses how the conflict has affected the programme and how SDC have responded. Section 7 presents the initial conclusions and recommendations highlighting key experiences, insights and results that SDC could build on. By way of general orientation each section from section 3 onwards is prefaced with a quotation taken from a collection of essays entitled *Nepal in the Nineties*[6]*;* introducing some of the challenges foreseen in 1990–1992 for Nepal's development path following on from the democracy movement.

[5] Country Programme Vision Statement
[6] *Nepal in the Nineties: versions of the past, visions of the future,* Ed M. Hutt, OUP, 1992

3. Context of SDC's work in Nepal

"Is the Nepalese state capable of radical reform and transformation to become an effective agent for change, and what will be its role in promoting development?"

Nepal has undergone deep changes since 1993, which have radically altered the conditions in which development assistance operates in the country. Some of the key stages of these changes are summarised here, as is their impact on SDC's programmes.

3.1 Political context

The Movement for the Restoration of Democracy of 1990 led to the abolition of the *Panchayat* (non-party) system of government where all significant positions of political authority were filled by royal appointees or their supporters. In quick succession a new Constitution was proclaimed in November 1990, under which Nepal was formally declared to be a constitutional monarchy; parliamentary elections were held in May 1991 (205 deputies elected on a first-past-the-post system); the administrative structure of the country was reformed through innovative decentralisation legislation (see below); and local elections were held in mid-1992.

The year 1994 can in hindsight be characterised as the last instance of normal democratic institutional development (despite the shortcomings of the election system itself), as institutional stalling and armed conflict combined in subsequent years to slow progress to a crawl. Since these elections and the successive, mostly short-lived governments they gave rise to the political situation has worsened. This, despite the passage of encouraging pieces of legislation regarding civil and political rights, such as the Statute of the National Human Rights Commission, adopted in October 1996, and the abolition of the death penalty. However, implementation of these and other laws was slow (for example, the Human Rights Commission only took office in 2000, and the 1999 Local Self-Government Act fell into abeyance as a result of the declaration of emergency in 2001, effectively without ever being applied). Public optimism about the government at the start of the 1990s has been progressively replaced by scepticism and frustration and an increasing dissatisfaction with the performance of political parties.

The years since the Palace Massacre and the assumption of power by King Gyanendra, originally marked by the imposition of a state of emergency, have been years of political stagnation. The nominal parliamentary regime was ended in 2001 and replaced by direct rule from the Palace, and locally elected bodies have also been effectively dissolved (in that the term of the elected representatives in the local bodies was not renewed by the government on expiry nor were the elections held). Meanwhile, the administrative, executive and judicial arms of the state continue to run in the Kathmandu Valley and district headquarters, but their reach is increasingly theoretical beyond (even within) district headquarters. The current situation is one of political stalemate, essentially involving three actors – the Palace, the political parties and the Maoist insurgency. The government (and what is left of the mainstream political class) inches towards dialogue with the Maoists, who are wary of talking to those they see as powerless agents of the Palace. The Palace, for its part, is believed to be relying on advice from senior military personnel on matters concerning the conflict – and may be advising the King that a military solution to the conflict is possible (see below). As for the Maoist insurgents, they appear to be facing a choice between negotiating a settlement of the conflict – which at this point would mean acceptance of a continued role for the monarchy – and continued armed struggle, which, while unlikely to lead to a decisive victory, is likely to further undermine the current political order.

It is relatively difficult to assess SDC's understanding of the political context and the way it may have impacted on programme development. The main sources of information in that respect are the country programming documents for the two periods concerned, and interviews with relevant personnel. The 1993–97 programme document (formally approved in November 1993), despite being written during the vibrant period that followed the first democratic elections, is clear-headed about the progress of democratisation and governance. It concludes for example that (despite the new constitution, parliamentary elections and decentralisation process), "so far there are no clear indications that a real renovation of the fundamental *social contract* is taking place between the ruling elite and the broad popular basis."

The 1998–2004 country programme document, issued in July 1998, continued to express scepticism about the effectiveness and accountability of political processes, but it seemed to credit the government with "good governance" intentions, suggesting that a "functioning democratic system", decentralisation and "institutional pluralism" were developing – although they needed support. By contrast the Addendum to the Country Programme for 2002–2005, elaborated in August 2002, remarked that "the current Nepalese polity appears incapable to control the Maoist violence" and that the government's budget for 2002–2003 reflected the priority given to the armed conflict. The Annual Programme for 2005, issued in October 2004, went further in highlighting – besides the overwhelming importance of the armed conflict – the political instability, the "authoritarian tendencies" of the King and armed forces and the dim prospects of a return to democracy.

3.2 The conflict

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Times of uncertainty: road check near Nepalgunj

On 13 February 1996 (Falgun 1 2052 in the standard Hindu calendar used in Nepal) the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN[M]) and its political wing the United People's Front (Bhattarai), declared a "People's War" aiming, according to a CPN(M) publication, "to bring an end to the rule of a vengeful regime and to establish a people's New Democracy". The United People's Front had, earlier in February, presented to the government of then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba a memorandum making 40 demands – these demands, including the abolition of the monarchy, became the platform of the insurgency.

The conflict was characterised from early on by a high level of violence inflicted on civilians and other non-combatants by both sides, while formal armed encounters remained relatively sporadic. In the first years of the insurgency, police and armed police (under the formal authority of the Home Ministry) were carrying out most of the counter-insurgency operations, even though the Royal Nepalese Army

(RNA) got involved early on in police training and other support aspects. The RNA was formally mobilised into the conflict in 2001, and this seemed to coincide with a sharp increase in the level of violence. Although violence levels are always difficult to track, some official figures (as underestimated as they probably are) provide some indication of the growing magnitude of the conflict
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(RNA) got involved early on in police training and other support aspects. The RNA was formally mobilised into the conflict in 2001, and this seemed to coincide with a sharp increase in the level of violence. Although violence levels are always difficult to track, some official figures (as underestimated as they probably are) provide some indication of the growing magnitude of the conflict:

- Amnesty International in March 1997 compiled a list of names of 50 civilians reportedly killed by police in connection with the conflict between February 1996 and March 1997, and another 14 reportedly killed by CPN(M) forces (the government claimed the killings resulted from the legitimate use of force during "encounters").

- In 1998, the Home Ministry stated that 97 people had been killed by police in so-called "encounters" between 13 February 1996 and 25 May 1998. The Ministry stated that 66 civilians had been killed by CPN(M) forces during the same period, as well as 17 police officers.

- Between 26 May and 7 November 1998, during an "intensified security mobilisation" operation by police, 227 people were killed by police and 24 civilians were killed by CPN(M) forces, according to official figures.

- Between December 1998 and late August 2003, the number of officially acknowledged deaths caused by the conflict grew almost exponentially, from about 300 in 1999 to over 2,300 in 2003 – this despite two short-lived cease-fires in 2002 and 2003. In the 15 months since 1 September 2003, over 3,500 deaths are officially acknowledged.[7]

The January 2005 official death toll from the conflict is over 10,000. High as it is, this figure almost suggests that the conflict is sustainable at its current pace (the population of Nepal is over 22m). However any notion that the conflict is sustainable is probably incorrect, for at least four reasons:

[7] Figures compiled from reports issued by Amnesty International in 1997 and 1999 and by Human Rights Watch in October 2004.

- The rate of reported killings has been increasing so fast that it may take just two years for the number of victims of the first eight years to double. Even if the increase in acknowledged deaths is partly a function of better monitoring (not just increased levels of armed violence) the civil war is bound increasingly to affect what normal social and economic life remains in Nepal.

- While the conflict is acute across much of Nepal, the large urban centres where an increasing proportion of the population is concentrated are relatively sheltered. This means that the killings disproportionately affect rural areas, where signs of conflict-related tensions are widespread (lack of male workforce, social order breakdown, etc).

- The figure is probably greatly underestimated anyway: the authorities, if they keep a count at all of the deaths they know about, do not make it public, and those figures that are acknowledged in formal statistics are those compiled by NGOs and other monitors, mostly based in district headquarters, who have only partial access to information. The real death toll of the conflict may be significantly higher.
- The figures also say nothing about the impact of the conflict on civilians through non-lethal casualties (including from anti-personnel landmines), internal displacement, and "opportunity cost" in terms of lost social services, education, etc.

SDC's programme for 1993–97, developed before the breakout of the Maoist insurgency (at a time when future insurgency leaders were still within mainstream politics) did not cover issues of political violence. The 1998–2004 programme described the Maoist insurgency as a threat to "the social peace in a growing number of rural districts" and "to the activities of development agencies and to the human rights situation". However the conflict was not at that time described as a threat to the democratic processes. It was only in the 2002–2005 Addendum, and even more clearly the 2005 Country Programme, that the conflict was given a central place in programme development (see section 6).

3.3 Decentralisation and local self-government

One of the first outcomes of the democratic movement, in parallel with a new Constitution and Parliament, was administrative reform aimed at increasing local self-government. In 1991 decentralisation legislation set up Development Committees at District, Municipality and Village levels (led by directly or indirectly elected people), alongside partly-elected Councils at each level. The legislation was followed in 1992 by the first elections to local bodies. The legislative framework of decentralisation was further developed in 1999 (Local Self-Government Act) and 2001 (Decentralisation Implementation Plan). The Poverty Reduction Strategy published in 2003 (Tenth Five Year Plan) reaffirmed the government's commitment to decentralisation as "an important means to bring development closer to the poor". This is generally regarded as a significantly mature product compared with earlier Five Year Plans.

Overall, the legislation appears to have devolved to the local level authority the implementation of policies set at the centre. However many observers report that power remains largely concentrated in ministries, in particular through the detailed allocation of funding used at district level. This characterises a situation where the elected Government has been generally pro-decentralisation, in contrast to an administration which has been reluctant. As a result of the conflict and of the suspension of locally-elected bodies the decentralisation process has, in effect, largely been frozen. Nevertheless the decentralisation process seems to have been effective with some

central government agencies, such as the Department for Local Government (DOLIDAR), which seem by now ready to devolve increasing implementation authority to districts, while setting broad policy directions.

SDC's approach has long favoured decentralisation, and it is probably no coincidence that government agencies with which SDC has sustained association (roads, forestry) appear to be among the most positive about devolving decision-making. SDC may have had a positive impact on Nepal's gradual shift towards more decentralised government, through the long-term interaction between its advisors and government agencies and probably also through the positive examples set by its sustained support of local government in districts such as Dolakha.

There is a common perception that decentralisation as implemented in Nepal – where devolution of authority was not accompanied by accountability – has resulted in a spread of the malaise of corruption from the centre to the district. Anecdotal evidence from the SDC focus districts suggests that towards the end of the 1990's the accountability of locally elected officials towards their constituents was showing a positive trend. Moreover the changing nature of central Government funded programmes – as part of wider moves to become more client oriented – was starting to limit the scope for corruption within line agency officials working at the district level.

3.4 Civil society and the NGO sector

One long-term beneficial impact of the 1990s democratic movement has been the emergence of a thriving NGO sector in Nepal. NGOs at all levels have mushroomed across the country, including community-based organisations (CBOs) at district level and below. CBOs are proving to be some of the most conflict-resistant types of social organisations: according to those who work with them, this is largely because they can gain tacit or formal acceptance from Maoist leaders, and because their work may be seen by local communities as directly beneficial.

The 1990s have also seen the emergence of NGOs (and some official agencies) working on gender rights, supporting ethnic minorities and Dalits, and contributing to bringing an official end to bonded labour. People are now more demonstrative / assertive in their rights in different arenas

NGOs can be roughly divided into the following categories, from grassroots level onwards:

- Local CBOs, such as users groups (forestry, water);
- Service provider NGOs, offering training and programme implementation on issues such as health, gender, community development etc, at district level and below;
- National NGOs or networks of local NGOs / CBOs, which beyond their local activities also may engage in nationwide monitoring, lobbying, etc.

SDC has been instrumental in the development of CBOs and service providers – in many ways the Tuki Associations were a prototype of service provider NGOs at the time they were set up with SDC support. National organisations are the main interlocutors of SDC in relation to the Governance domain and other cross-sectoral activities.

3.5 Economic development and national development goals

The overall economic environment in Nepal has shown only sluggish improvement in the period under review. Per capita income went from about US$ 180 in 1992 to US$ 250 in 2003, a slow growth rate by South Asian standards. According to an Asian Development Bank (ADB) study[8], real growth was negative in 2001–02, rebounding to 2% in 2002–03 and possibly to 4% in 2003–04. Even the highest of these figures would barely lead to improvements in per capita income, due to the continuing population growth of about 2.5% per year. It is widely estimated, despite the lack of precise figures, that remittances from about 3.5m Nepalese working abroad are playing a key role in maintaining current levels of incomes, both for households and, through foreign exchange controls and taxation, for government coffers. If correct, this estimate would indicate that endogenous economic growth has been negative or barely positive for the last four or five years.

At the same time, some progress has reportedly been made towards achievement of national development targets (using the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework) in areas relevant to SDC activities. Key such areas of progress include (data from the ADB study quoted above):

- Reducing by half by 2015 (relative to 1990) the proportion of people whose income is under US$ 1 per day. That rate was officially about 38% in 1996, the ADB states that it has probably "declined by several percentage points" since. However, even if official figures are to be believed (SDC's 1993–97 programme estimated that "40–60%" of the population lived in "absolute poverty") current trends do not suggest that the MDG target will be met by 2015.

- Equal access for boys and girls to primary and secondary schooling by 2005, to all levels of education by 2015: there has been significant progress, as the ratio of girls to boys in primary education grew to 79% in 2000–01 – however the progress falls short of that needed to fully meet the MDG target.

- In an encouraging sign, child (under 5) mortality has been reduced by 37% (to 91 per thousand) between 1990 and 2001, suggesting that the MDG target of a two-third reduction is achievable if current rates of reduction are maintained.

Although there has been progress in these and some other areas, it has generally not been at the rate necessary to achieve the MDGs. Moreover, there are strong suggestions that some sections of society have been left behind. These include in particular inhabitants of districts where conflict is acute and internally displaced people (IDPs). Other improvements in areas relevant to SDC include the reversal of some negative environmental trends (forest cover and forest resource use in the Mid-Hills) as well as the extension of the network of rural roads and trails, and improved access to clean drinking water.

3.6 Development assistance

Switzerland's long-standing presence in Nepal and its familiarity with certain rural regions have allowed SDC to develop a specific approach to development assistance in Nepal. To some extent, SDC's approach has been different from that of other donors – many Swiss interviewees have been quietly critical of approaches taken by other donors. However, these approaches have influenced SDC, if only because some other donors

[8] See ADB, *Country Assistance Programme Evaluation for Nepal*, September 2004, sections 7-9.

and multilateral organisations have large budgets compared to SDC's. Two key aspects seem relevant in this respect:

- The failure to take the government to task for its ineffectiveness in delivering sustainable development and fighting corruption decisively. For many years donors have been unable or unwilling to take a unified stand in these respects – a pattern that only changed, to some extent, during 2004, when participants in the Nepal Development Forum delivered an exceptionally critical statement of concern to the authorities.[9]
- The focus on macro-economic management and economic growth, promoted primarily by ADB and the World Bank, seems to have fuelled the belief that broader development objectives (from a decrease in discrimination to conflict transformation) could be reached through growth and the use of the traditional government machinery. However, counter-productive policies have probably contributed to defeating these objectives.

It seems that SDC's relationship with the broader development community has been ambivalent: it has contributed to coordination initiatives – most visibly in 2004 at the National Development Forum (NDF), and in relation to Switzerland's role at the UN Commission on Human Rights in the same year – but the bulk of its efforts to influence government policies and practices have remained strictly bilateral. It can be argued that this was a pragmatic way forward with SDC effectively distancing itself from donor coordination processes that added little value yet incurred transaction costs.

As will be argued in Section 6 below, the conflict has contributed to SDC focussing more of its projects at community level. This has contributed to the durability of activities.

3.7 SDC Corporate change

The table overleaf seeks to visualise the way the Nepal programme was influenced by shifts in SDC's global policies and strategies, set in the context of the Nepal Government's planning processes.

The global policy approaches of SDC, as summarised in table 1, seem to suggest a clear trend away from specific prescriptions and towards general principles of development. For example, the "tasks" identified in 1991 included specific sector activities, an approach that seems to have been diluted in subsequent years. This shift, combined with a decentralisation process that has given increasing authority and leeway to Coordination Offices to develop and manage programmes, has apparently had two effects in Nepal:

- it contributed to the programming process taking more account of national priorities as expressed in the successive plans, including the 2003 PRSP,

- it may have helped set the scene for SDC's closer involvement with governance issues and with conflict transformation, both of which are addressed in the 1999 Guiding Principles more explicitly than previously.

[9] The weakness of the Nepalese Government has probably contributed to donors (including multi-laterals) behaving like a separate state rather than trying to work and adapt the government system. This trend may have been enhanced as donors became more results-driven. It is unfortunate, for example, that donors did little to try and help democratic decentralisation take root and enhance accountability. If donors raised concerns when the duties of decentralised officials were suspended, they did so behind closed doors, with no apparent effect.

The change in global policy guidance and the decentralisation of programme development have changed the relationship between SDC Headquarters and the Coof: thematic policy support teams appear to be playing an increasing role in helping Coordination Offices develop their strategies, while geographical desks seem to have developed an organisational liaison and advocacy role (both internally within SDC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and externally towards parliamentarians, the media, etc).

Table 1: The external reference points for SDC Nepal programme

SDC Policy & Strategy development: key priorities	**SDC Nepal Programme**	**HMG Policy & Strategy**
Programme guidelines, 1991 (Goals: Improving living conditions, humanitarian aid, positive image of Switzerland) (Tasks: optimal development of individuals in their environment; education, professional training, health; essential needs for supply, housing, education; facilitate the organisation of poor people in accessing productive resources; humanitarian aid)	1993–1997 Country Programme	8th Plan (1992–1997) Poverty alleviation; people-based development
Guidelines North-South, 1994 (peace, human rights, democracy, rule of law, welfare promotion, social equity, environment protection)	1998–2004 Country Programme	9th Plan (1997–2002) Poverty focus, social mobilisation, decentralisation
Guiding Principles, 1999 (poverty, sustainability, conflict resolution & peace building, empowerment, access to information, gender equity, cultural diversity, human rights, law and democracy)	MTRP, 2002 => Addendum 2002–2005	
Strategy 2010, published 2003 (help for self-help, knowledge as capital, international dialogue, solidarity)	2004 Annual Programme 2005 Annual Programme	10th Plan (2003–2008) PRSP, MDGs focus, good governance, decentralisation, social mobilisation, NGO partnerships

4. Relevance of SDC's work in Nepal

Development activities and interventions must become more "political", more aware that is, of the different and often mutually opposed interests that exist within local communities and within Nepalese society more generally and be more openly prepared to confront the existence of such conflicting interests in the "practice of development".

This section reviews the fit of SDC's strategy, relationships and portfolio to the wider reform process in Nepal. It considers whether SDC did the "right things" and operated in an optimal way in terms of internal processes, organisation and programme management, given the context for the country programme.

4.1 The Programme Strategy

SDC strategy in Nepal has evolved over the period under review. The thread running through the two country programmes at the purpose level is the emphasis placed on building and embedding the institutions and processes of democracy (post democracy movement) within Nepalese society, on the understanding that this will provide the basis for a path of sustainable development. The country programme of 1993–97 focuses on the role of governmental institutions. This is effectively broadened in the 1998–2004 country programme to encompass civil society.

Programme thrusts reflected in the strategic objectives of the country programmes are:

- road / trail network development moved to a sustainable basis,
- social broadening of access to technical skills and related employment opportunities,
- a shift to demand led service provision through social organisation (e.g. user groups) in specific areas of rural development.

Since 2002 a forth aspect of supporting "drivers of change" operating within the legal and planning framework of Nepal has been added reflecting the growing stagnation to the political and development process.

The key features of the strategy set out within the country programmes are:

- a focus on strengthening district level action – strong support to decentralisation (as a tool of democratisation),
- a community based participatory approach to development with a deliberate push to grassroots work,
- a willingness to try new approaches – but slow evolution.

There is no strongly developed sense of programme. The programme documents have therefore had limited value as a strategy per se. Sectors – as defined in accordance with SDC organisational requirements not that of HMG – have been used by SDC as a means of clustering resources and energy. The sector (sub) programmes have operated effectively as independent programmes with the attention to transversal themes providing some (minimal) lateral linkages. Sub-programmes are more akin to an archipelago of projects and there is no strong sense of synergies having been worked between projects

within a sub-programme and more importantly for delivering on the Programme Purpose level.

Sector strategies developed over the period 1998–2000 did provide a (sub) programme framework for what had earlier been a collection of projects. However there is limited evidence to suggest that these have become living documents nor been influential in shaping the direction and form of ongoing projects and decisions on where and how new opportunities should be pursued. There continues to be a sense that projects – within the frame of long term commitments to a sector – continue to progress organically from phase to phase with little scrutiny as to what they are contributing to in terms of programme level objectives. Whether their continuation is justified, and if so in what way could this contribution be enhanced by a change of approach or more radically an alternative course of action. This may be partly due to the way in which the programme level (strategic) objectives and desired results of the SDC programme were stated and presented – in various forms in various documents – and the absence of any systematic monitoring against SDC's objectives at this level.

At the programme "output" level the evaluation team has established – through extraction from the programme documents and the "sector strategies" – a consolidated picture of the outputs that the country programmes have aimed to deliver within each sector / intervention area. In the sectors of transport and OSED the outputs appear to "read across" well to the bigger picture of sector reform to which HMG and the wider donor community have committed to. This is less clear in the "NRM" sector. That said the respective sector (sub) programmes do indicate a spread of "characteristics of approach" which illustrate commonalties and potential points of learning across the programme at large (see Annex G):

- policy and legislative framework development – including strengthening the user voice in the policy process,
- systems development and technology development to support policy implementation,
- approach development (and move to national scale) of user driven service delivery,
- redefining and / or establishing / strengthening new institutional roles – including split between private sector and public sector,
- bringing a client service orientation to service delivery organisations.

Our overall assessment is that the SDC strategy to deliver on its (sub) programme goals has been relevant, broadly effective and reflecting a steady sensible (cautious) use of resources. In addition the SDC approach has provided a platform for continued operations during the conflict period.

The SDC programme has been well aligned to a progressive HMG development strategy (as articulated through the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth 5-Year Plans) in the areas of:

- employment generation, labour intensive transport sector development, policies targeted at specific disadvantaged groups, linkage of development to market forces & sustainable NRM,
- a community based participatory approach to development,

- an increasing move to a rights-based approach.

SDC has been providing support in major sectors which are considered of strategic importance for the development in Nepal; infrastructure development (roads / bridges), natural resources management, human resource training and health. The question has been raised as to whether it was appropriate for SDC to align behind HMG development strategy given the way that such strategies may have failed to take full cognisance of the social divides within the country. For example was the type of decentralisation – with its limited challenge to traditional concentrations of power – that some observers feel that HMG was pursuing, consistent with that which SDC favoured? We understand that in the lead up to the 1993–98 programming period SDC made a strategic assessment that there were gaps in the government's approach to decentralisation and for this reason started to support the work of the Nepal Law Society, an initiative that was the forerunner to the raft of small governance initiatives that emerged within the programme from 2000 on. Such action back in 1993 reflects a creative approach by SDC to operating within the framework of HMG's development strategy – working to support policy development, strategy shifts and implementation from within.

4.2 Portfolio of activities

The sub sections below characterise key parts of the project portfolio in terms of the nature of the sector, the reform process and the approach taken by SDC, within the respective (sub) programmes. See Annex H for a listing of projects by programming period.

4.2.1 Transport

A clear accord has existed between HMG and the donor community on roads and development of the wider transportation network. SDC has enjoyed a strategic and centre-stage relationship with HMG developed on the basis of a long standing commitment to the sector, capacity building working within the lead agency and a portfolio of activities that effectively straddled macro / meso / micro levels. This relationship has now matured to the point where the main operating partner of SDC has shifted from the Department of Roads (DoR) to DOLIDAR. SDC has worked constructively with other donors (bilateral and multi-laterals) and we saw evidence of a dynamic to its work in the sector as demonstrated by its willingness to operate under new modalities in working with multi-laterals. SDC has responded positively to requests to become engaged in national scale activities.

4.2.2 Technical Education

This remains a very fragmented sector with no clear guiding strategy. Training provision remains driven by the relationship between training providers and HMG and INGO funding rather than effective links to the market. Whilst SDC is recognised as having long and valuable experience in the technical training area its positioning to influencing government thinking has until recently been relatively weak. Decisions taken in the late 90's on the portfolio of projects in support of programme objectives have led to SDC now being well positioned as a strategic partner for sector change. Partly as a result of these shifts in the portfolio SDC was perceived by some respondents as having moved its interest in the sector away from government to the private sector institutions. Dialogue and relationships with multi-laterals have (at times) proved difficult and uncertain suggesting that SDC has not embraced multi-laterals as potential strategic partners with the "muscle" to spark / accelerate change in the sector. SDC is currently developing a more concrete and focused implementation strategy for its own OSED concept, at the same time slowly working with the government towards clarifying national strategy and policy framework for the sector.

4.2.3 Forestry

SDC support has – together with the majority of other donors – reflected the primary HMG focus of tackling resource degradation around settlements in the hills. Whilst relevant in its own right, this has been to the detriment of other key areas within the 1989 Forest Sector Master Plan (FSMP). Notably the forest resources of the Terai and the high altitude forests; both of which are of considerable importance to sustaining and developing the role that forestry can contribute to tackling poverty. The relationship between the donor community and HMG on reform of the forest sector over the review period has been a volatile yet productive one. SDC has – at times unfairly – been seen within HMG as being overly possessive of their particular "view of community forestry" and unwilling or reluctant to enter into a discourse with ideas of HMG that may challenge this view. It is questionable whether SDC can be considered a strong "working partner" with HMG in terms of working within the policy framework; having been considered aloof, happy to work in isolation.

P. Egger

Sustainable management in community forestry project

There has been concern over the effective parallel implementation organisation in the district. Very few linkages with the DFO are seen as leaving HMG vulnerable to SDC exit. This coupled with SDC's strong associations with the National Federation of Forest User groups (FECOFUN) and the way in which support for the Good Forest Governance Programme with the Regional centre for Community Forestry Training (RECOFTC) came through, has left HMG suspicious of "game playing" by SDC and therefore happy to maintain a respectful distance. Recently SDC and HMG have started to enter into a period of more active engagement. Overall we see evidence that the strong supportive stance taken by SDC on the empowerment of Forest User Groups (FUG's) and related policy issues has made an important contribution to the development of community forestry in Nepal.

SDC's consistency in promoting a pro-poor orientation to community forestry is appreciated. However this is tempered by some concern within HMG over the cost / benefit of the Swiss approach[10]. There is no apparent shared vision between SDC and HMG on the "end game" in community forestry in the mid hills that SDC support is contributing to. For example no real debate on whether the pace of community forestry development – the slow evolution favoured by SDC – is too slow? requires a different track? examines the future role envisaged for FUGs? the DFO? and the future (post donor support) financing scenario of community forestry? Swiss support still operates through traditional project office structures. We found no evidence of the extent to which there has been new thinking on this, nor alternatives considered.

4.2.4 Health

SDC is notable for the way in which they have worked on looking at health issues from a social rather than a medical perspective. The focus has been on empowerment both of users and frontline service delivery agents with a very limited ambition in terms of geographical reach; covering 60% of all Village Development Committees (VDCs) in two districts over a 12 year period. This slow "software dominated" process makes it hard to see / visualise the benefits commensurate with the level of inputs. It has provided a working alternative – although the question marks about the viability of wider application remain – to the delivery of HMG local health services policy provision through community mobilisation. Recently the project Rural Health Development Project (RHDP) has re-focused on finding weak points in HMG health delivery system at VDC level and addressing these (i.e working within this framework).

The project has suffered – particularly in its early stages – from the lack of a strong HMGN agenda to pick up on, and from the effective "suspension" in 1998 of SDC support to the health sector, given the decision to not expand, as part of refocusing within the Country Programme. In many respects the SDC work on health posts has been ahead of its time and in this way has been challenging (at times out of step) with the Health Ministry. It has lacked the strength to exert wider influence that comes from being an active player (with strategic partners) in the national discourse on policy and strategy. The RHDP is aligned with – but not working within the District Health Office (DHO) nor part of the DHO plan. It is not clear whether the RHDP "demand led approach" to local health services figures in the new health sector support plan and its objective of availability of quality drugs at reasonable low cost prices.

4.2.5 Governance (Decentralisation)

The Peer Review of Local Government (2000) and the Fiscal Decentralisation Seminar (2000) both supported by donor partners (incl. SDC) are seen as key events by the Association of District Development Committees (ADDCN) in building a "new atmosphere" to the decentralisation process post the uncertainties regarding the passage of the Local Self Government Act. In general SDC is seen as having played a supportive (not leading) role in pushing on institutional / legal reforms associated with the decentralisation agenda. One view is that SDC could have been expected to have had a more profound influence on energising the local government discourse in Nepal, given its own rich experience of how local government works in the federal setting of Switzerland; a counter to what was felt to be too much debate and superficial observation on devolution of power in Nepal. SDC has been fully supportive (in contrast to some donors) of the principle of channelling funding through the local Government to promote their accountability. We understand that SDC were ready to make bilateral agreements with the District Development Councils (DDC's) in 1999 / 2000.

[10] Ref to Gronow and Branney study that found that Swiss approach was less resource intensive then some other bilaterals working in community forestry.

DEZA/Stefan Maurer

Good governance radio listener's club

4.2.6 Assessment

Looking across the programme we see projects with strong internal logic, although this doesn't always extend to locations and phases. There is a clear pattern of "organic" development of projects: from one phase to another; projects tend to be amended rather than thoroughly restructured. This appears to be linked to the strong culture of continuity and reliability built by SDC. Commitments are long-term. Many projects have a strong, deliberate community orientation, working with users. SDC does not seek "visibility" or acknowledgement of its support in its partners' public documents. Perhaps as a result, activities may be "known only by those known" (to SDC). The strength of SDC's commitments may have led to a relative neglect of the cost / benefit analysis of projects and of efficiency issues. For example there appears to be no explicit review of alternative options in relation to the implementation of a project.

In sum looking at the programme level and sector reform our overall assessment is of a mixed picture in terms of the SDC portfolio offering a strategic response to sector reform as reflected below (the extent to which this was delivered on is considered in the next section on effectiveness):

4.3 Transversal themes

SDC's transversal themes have evolved over the two country programme periods; gender balanced development has been a constant with the themes of poverty orientation and intensification on good governance replacing in 1998 that of environment and aids awareness from 1993. From 2002 human rights and peace building has also been introduced as a transversal theme.

We have found evidence of many conscious and genuine efforts across the programme to interpret and mainstream transversal themes within projects and there is evidence that this process has had an important effect on partner organisations. This has been tackled

in a sensitive and generally proportional way within projects, finding the "space" for active consideration and advancement of transversal themes in a step wise / learning by doing fashion. One example is that at Balaju Technical School where the gender angle was introduced into the project – in the absence of any obvious hook in the project document – through SDC posing challenging questions and suggesting to the college ways of how to internalise and take forward this agenda.

Some observers felt that donors have pursued a narrow interpretation (dalit, women) of what excluded groups means in Nepalese society and what this means re. root causes of the conflict. SDC has demonstrated through its work an appreciation based around vulnerability and has been effective in targeting and shaping within its programmes efforts for inclusion of the poorest elements within society.

Initiatives to empower women have been consistently pursued. SDC has used action research within projects to build up their understanding on specific issues before then adapting for implementation (e.g. shift in focus on work with FUG's from numbers of women (quantitative) to women in decision making (qualitative) as evidenced by shifts in FUG Operational Plans. In community forestry the gender balance has been embedded in the policy and legislation and is being put into practice (women influencing decisions). FUG's have also provided a platform for women members to be elected to VDC's. There is clear evidence of growing sensitivity among the community groups in benefiting the marginalized members of the group (dalit, women) while distributing the benefits of the common resources.

In the planning process for the 1993–1997 Country Programme a strategic decision was taken by SDC to pursue the user group approach as the "best bet" vehicle for reaching and impacting on the lives of the poorest. This was informed by learning from earlier work that concluded that the Integrated Hill Development Programme (IHDP) approach of top down integration didn't work effectively. The recent report commissioned by SDC "*The contribution of SDC activities to poverty reduction"* concludes that this approach to poverty orientation by SDC has been fairly successful. It cites various examples of where SDC projects have had a positive effect on the lives of poor people. The Evaluation team also found both anecdotal and statistical evidence to support this. What is more difficult to gauge from the data is the extent to which these positive gains have been achieved in a way that lends itself to be rolled out to scale outside of a donor funded project.

The poorest groups have generally not benefited in a way that is preferential to gains made by other economic groups within the communities. This raises the question of whether an approach to targeting the poorest of the poor built on key principles of community empowerment and local Government and in the SDC case generally involving adjustments to accommodate a more pro-poor approach within the frame of existing projects, can deliver in the MDG timeframe or whether alternatives need to be considered.

4.4 Relationships

In implementing its Country Programme SDC has maintained relationships with a wide range of institutions / actors in development straddling the macro (centre) meso (district) / micro (community) levels. Partner diversification has been a particular part of the programme strategy. This diversity is a strength. However the extent to which SDC has been precise in its distinctions on partnership and strategic in its choice of partners appears to be limited. During the 1993–98 CP SDC did make a deliberate and strategic choice to engage with multilateral agencies (World Bank & ADB) in order to further its objectives of scaling up in the OSED sector. True partnership relates to organisations of a similar power level working together under a set of shared objectives. There is little

evidence of such relationships within the programme. What we see more of are partnerships in a "contract" form and to a much lesser extent partnership in a "strategic alliance" form in which two organisations are working for the same goal / on a shared issue.

Each form of partnership has its context, potential and limitations. Our sense has been that some of SDC's partnerships have been self forming – with SDC naturally gravitating to those it feels already comfortable with – rather than the result of a more considered view on what level and form of partnership would advance delivery of (sub) programme objectives. In some cases this may mean actively exploring a partnership with an institution / actor that seems at odds with the SDC outlook. Where SDC enters into a "partnership" in particular with institutions / actors outside of government the evidence suggests that it "digs in" to try and make it work. Good practice in terms of how to exit from a project partnership modality in a controlled and enabling way was seen at Baluja Technical School.

A key partnership for SDC is that with Helvetas. This appears to have normalised and matured over the review period to one which is more akin to a strategic alliance with both recognising each other's strengths. For example Helvetas have effectively piloted approaches with SDC "buying the product" and paying for scaling up and roll out, as in the case of the work on trail bridges.

The relationship with Foreign Affairs has been a collaborative one on development co-operation but with the exception of the Bhutanese refugee issue there has been a series of visits made to Nepal rather than engagement on issues impacting on development.

There are mixed signals on the objectives of the relationship that SDC is looking to develop and maintain with HMG. We see examples of periods where actions seem to have reflected a feeling of the value of distance from HMG and others where there is an apparent greater willingness to work within the HMG framework on trying to bring change – creating the environment for institutionalising good practice. Overall the result is a picture of adhoc partnership.

Notwithstanding the value of the committed and innovative way in which SDC has worked with local NGOs further swings of support towards NGOs within the bilateral assistance programme need to be measured against the recognition that the state (central apparatus) will continue to have a key role in remote areas with critical infrastructure needs.

4.5 SDC's strengths as a development partner

The general perception of SDC as a partner on the basis of the relevance of how it conducted itself was positive. SDC was credited with:

- benign aid – no strings attached,
- work grounded in sound relationships at district level,
- keeping on track – not wavering like other donors,
- a strong rural affiliation – historically going into remote areas,

- working earnestly – and with a long term commitment – within the space given to them within the "development map" of Nepal,

- a donor (an exception) that is seen to do and set an example to follow rather than "order",

- bringing a heavy and valued emphasis on training – people focus – reflecting a view that it is the people in institutions (not the institutions themselves) that are seen as the force for change,

- a neutral / facilitating player,

- a consistent advocate for decentralisation.

A number of criticisms, some the direct converse of the above, were made suggesting areas of weakness. Two are highlighted below:

- Traditionally not looking at the full complexities of the political economy in Nepal. As a result operating on the basis of the particular perception of the development process (the x, y, z of problems) articulated by HMG which many now discount.

- Vulnerable to the vagaries of an individualistic approach. Individuals within SDC working in a style reflecting a seeming reluctance to enter into a discourse/ line of joint enquiry on issues, preferring to critique and discount immediately. A style that to partners seems at odds with the corporate expectations of SDC.

4.6 Geographic areas

The core business of the SDC programme has remained in the 3–5 focus districts of Dolakha, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk, Kabhrepalanchok and Okhaldunga (Kabhre and Okhaldunga coming in early stage of the CP 1998–2004). These districts were ranked between 30 and 50 out of a total of 75 districts by an "Indicators of Development" exercise conducted by ICIMOD in 1997. There has been some – relatively limited – extension to the geographical scope of the Country programme through some expansion of "quality products" (e.g. bridges) to nation-wide level and through supporting Helvetas work in the mid-West. This reflects the deliberate distinction of SDC between two types of projects; those with a geographic working area (e.g. NSCFP) and those having a primarily thematic or an institutional, or a policy objective and not a geographic domain (e.g. suspension bridges).

The perception from the Evaluation Teams consultations in Dolakha district is that long term Swiss support – as you would expect given the level of resources invested – is regarded as having had a positive effect on the development of the district especially in respect to human resources (investment in education including infrastructure) and in wider human resources (in-district professional skills training). There is evidence of SDC funded projects having had a positive effect in terms of general infrastructure, access to community resources, household assets and social empowerment on the livelihoods of the very poor and marginalised.

The conflict situation effectively means that whilst some of the ingredients for district led development may have been fostered by SDC in the focus districts the fundamentals of peace and good governance on which a sustainable development path can be pursued are now largely absent. Our overall assessment is that – notwithstanding the above – it

was the right decision to continue to support the development process in focus districts rather than moving resources into other areas. The potential "power" of a nexus between strong community organisations and capacitated DDC's is yet to be realised in these districts as a result of the conflict.

There is no evidence to suggest that long term Swiss support to the focus districts has led to a reduction in levels of HMG support to the said districts. The possibility however of a strong Swiss presence reducing in-flows from other prospective donors was raised.

4.7 Programme management

The broader monitoring challenge facing the programme was illustrated by the comment within the 1999 NRM Sector Strategy that called for the "development of an impact monitoring procedure" rather than monitoring project performance in terms primarily of inputs and activities. It appears that across the programme this remains a gap, despite Coof time investment in developing tools such as the OSED Sector Framework Controlling Monitoring Plan. The absence of a clear results framework at the programme level – with objectives, targets, indicators and baselines – has been a constraint to an effective programme monitoring approach. One recent development has been to start to examine in a more systematic manner a sector's contribution in equity, governance and gender terms to poverty alleviation.

At the individual project level there is a rigorous and strictly applied system of reviews and operational planning processes. The project monitoring approach is part of SDC's reflective learning and sharing style with some thematic workshops being organised by the Coof to look at cross cutting elements across projects. More recently the Coof staff have started to play a more challenge / responding function to the project reports and to move into a more pro-active (non-observer) role in key events such as Yearly Plan of Operations. Project Mid-term reviews are used to assess whether a project is on track to deliver against its objectives and (in more recent years) whether the project remains relevant to the conflict context. An example of action taken was the Small Industries Promotion Programme (SIPP) a business Development Services project which was stopped six months into start-up on basis of poor relevance for the conflict situation. There is no evidence of a project being stopped or radically modified on the basis of its need to adjust to programme level objectives / performance requirements.

The key shift in the relationship between SDC Nepal and SDC HQ over the period 1993–2004 has been the transfer in 1994/95 of responsibility for monitoring the programme level to the Coof. This has meant that the **Annual Plan** has become the key "contract document" instrument between HQ and SDC Nepal on what the programme is delivering. It is not clear what criteria SDC HQ uses in assessing the performance of a country programme over an annual or programme term.

The Coof seems to attract and retain excellent staff. In terms of how the Coof deploys its own resources in support of delivering the Programme strategy we see evidence of a change with the Coof starting to act in a way that is more strategic and more akin to a funding agency rather than a programme execution agency. In the past there appears to have been a gap within the structure whereby SDC project staff implemented the project and provided information to Coof who engaged with HMG on policy issues as a matter of protocol rather than as part of furthering a programme agenda.

There appears to be some reticence in working together with (rather than alongside) other donors on programme level concerns. It is suggested that in this respect SDC could be bolder and more strategic in future.

5. Effectiveness of SDC work

What will determine the future development of Nepal will be the extent to which democratic politics develops in the rural areas and the ways in which the new conventional wisdom of popular participation by local communities in sustainable development will be translated into effective practice. …

This section assesses the achievements and contribution of the programme at three key levels in a "results chain" linking SDC inputs to programme outputs, and the impact of SDC's programme. Impact in terms of SDC's contribution as a part of the wider donor effort to a number of intermediate outcomes associated with reform / change paths convergent with or aligned to the development strategy of HMG.

Given the absence of any substantive monitoring data – in output terms at the programme level – available to the Evaluation Team and the limited time precluding any more systematic gathering of primary data, the judgements made within this section are inevitably highly subjective and largely perspective based[11] and open to the bias that can easily emerge from the relatively small group of people consulted in relation to each (sub) sector. That said the judgements do provide a firmer basis for drawing some conclusions and the information presented in this way may usefully spur further discussion – post-evaluation – within SDC and the Coof team.

5.1 Programme level results (Activities): a comment

5.1.1 Transport

Suspension bridge mapping & the technology transfer associated with construction have been two areas where SDC has made a significant contribution to development in Nepal. Linked initiatives now being taken forward at the national level includes District Transport Master Plans (DTMPs) piloted by Helvetas in 1993 / 94 and local maintenance agreements.

SDC Kathmandu

Rural road construction in Ramecchap (District Roads Support Programme)

[11] Evaluation reports on selected projects were also reviewed.

In the road sector key achievements include: the establishment of the Road Board Fund, an important instrument for raising funds for maintenance of all types of road and marking a mind-set change within the DoR, the development and mainstreaming of the length workers concept, policy and standards development within DoR, piloting of maintenance contracts with private contractors and initial moves on shifting responsibility for district roads to DDC's and Municipalities leaving DoR to focus on strategic roads. Swiss support has been credited with institutionalising the "group working" culture within DoR and to supporting in a low key, relatively informal yet effective way a momentum to organisational change within DoR. In sum the combination of support to the network of foot bridges, suspension bridges, district road and strategic road network has increased economic access to rural communities. Moreover this strategic resource has been assisted in a way that demonstrates principles of good governance.

5.1.2 Agriculture

A clear policy result to which SDC support has contributed is the inclusion of manure as a fertilizer within the Integrated Plant Nutrient System, itself part of the Ninth Plan agenda of focusing on organic fertilizer. Other areas of success identified are: maize and potato seed production, brokering exchanges and collaboration between HMG District Offices and NGOs with donor pressure leading to a HMG policy change on working with NGOs, and fostering a shift in government thinking from supply led individual technical extension support approach to a demand led group to group approach. Within the Sustainable Soil Management Project (SSMP) area there is evidence of positive trends in soil fertility status against benchmarks established at project start-up and of increased production of high yielding varieties of maize, and in off-season vegetable production. However many families remain in food deficit and out migration of men continues.

DEZA/Thomas Egli

Rice terraces in Dillihit

5.1.3 Forestry

There are now over 13,000 FUG's in Nepal with a national federation and district chapters (FECOFUN) compared to about 300 groups in 1992. Those FUG's supported directly by SDC through NFSCP are characterised by and regarded for their comprehensive and stronger Operational Plans, a key foundation for a dynamic and self-sustaining group. HMG's Community Forestry programme has been instrumental in reversing the trend of environmental degradation in areas around settlements in the mid-hills. Community forests now represent an important growing asset for some communities which can be invested in for community use and development. SDC has been a contributor to this process and is credited with innovative work on working with local service providers, promoting pro-poor thinking and actions within the groups and more recently (and perhaps belatedly) for making a shift from passive to active management of the resource. This includes dealing with the key issue of lost increment (forest productivity)[12] and maximising the enterprise potential of the forests. Important advances have also been made in terms of building the social capital of the groups including the representation of women and dalits in FUG committees. Notwithstanding the inevitable internal problems of groups operating within a society and culture of deeply entrenched social divisions FUGs have proved to be a resilient force for change and an entry point for wider community development.

5.1.4 Health

There are elements of SDC's work on local health service delivery that are clearly successful demonstrating a growing sense of service orientation amongst health workers and empowerment processes enabling community mobilisation to engage with a wide spectrum of health related issues. SDC have been involved – to a limited extent and with limited success – in promoting the wider application of the SDC approach or conversely seeing where and how the approach can be modified in a way that allows it to be more readily taken up by others with more limited resources. There is evidence of improving health status in focus VDC's within SDC Districts. The effect of the RHDP on bringing organisational changes within the DHO has been minimal. Self motivated individuals have engaged with the project but the wider incentives for improved performance including taking the lead on health service issue debates within the districts remain weak. Strategic alliance and adjustment with the developments in the health sector policies and programmes, and influencing with the 'successful experiences' of SDC health initiative at the macro level policies of the government is not noticed. Whilst this was not explicit within the project's objectives the potential opportunity was there.

5.1.5 Occupational skills and enterprise development

SDC support to the sector has continued to evolve purposively over the Programme period. Prior to 1993 Swiss support was "tested" through "one to one" and successful institutional relationships with Jiri Technical School (JTS) and Balaju Technical School (BTS). In the 1993–98 programme the focus moved to working with key HMG institutions; the Centre for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) & the Training Institute for Technical Instruction (TITI). These efforts to engage with key HMG institutions on the long term visioning required to move national technical training provision and structures in line with more of a market perspective failed. The "trial" of collaborating with multi-lateral agencies to scale up SDC's work in the sector proved unsuccessful. One factor was the different approaches to institutional strengthening and this was exacerbated by the lack of clear direction from HMG on the future for technical education. SDC support has subsequently been increasingly focused on private sector training providers through Tfe & F-Skill. The sector continues to suffer from a fragmented

[12] Community Forest Productivity – MAI of up to 5% possible within management community forests yet average off-take levels sanctioned by Committees is around 1% (MFSC Guidelines based on MAI of 1%, most DFOs use 2%). There is no resource deficit in the 3 districts in which NFSCP operates.

approach, lack of market sensitivity for quality training and the lack of institutionalised processes for vertical or horizontal entry to vocational training.

In 2003 SDC embarked on a significant re-focussing of its sector framework based on an assessment that the TEVT sub-sector represents the most appropriate choice to address social conflict transformation. As a consequence the project SIPP was dropped, the project Tfe re-designed, F-Skill strengthened, a policy dialogue on the TEVT sub-sector initiated, and a new project to strengthen the Skill Testing System in Nepal designed. In order to remain linked with economic activities, a pilot project with Helvetas was also initiated (ELAM plus) in the Far West of Nepal supporting micro enterprise development. The extent, to which SDC drawing on the strengths of its redesigned programme can now exert influence on the direction for the sub-sector currently being taken by ADB and HMG, remains to be seen.

One of the more general effects of the portfolio of projects has been the build-up of pockets of local capacity, which makes people less vulnerable locally. This is significant, particularly in the context of a (possibly worsening) conflict.

DEZA/Stefan Maurer

Suspension bridge

5.2 Assessment of Programme level results (Outputs)

Table 2 provides our assessment of the extent to which programme outputs – the majority of which in transport, OSED & NRM have a thread running through from 1993 – have been achieved. The ranking used is that of: fully achieved, largely achieved, partially achieved, very limited achievement and too early to judge.

Table 2: Achievement against Programme outputs

Outputs relating to each sector (sub) programme of the Country Programme 1993–2004	**Extent to which Output achieved**
Transport	
Policy framework for sustainable management of the r*oad network* established.	Largely
Appropriate procedures and technologies for *strategic road* maintenance and rehabilitation developed and implemented.	Largely
System for efficient planning and implementation (maintenance, rehabilitation and construction) of *district roads* developed.	Partial
Planning and maintenance procedures (developed earlier) for *main trail suspension bridges* applied routinely and efficiently.	Largely
A sustainable basis for the (97on – large scale) construction and maintenance of *local (trail) bridges* developed.	Largely
Occupational skills and enterprise development	
CTEVT role as an effective policy maker, quality standard setting and co-ordinating body established.	Very limited
An enabling environment (policy framework, co-ordination structures) for the public (CTEVT) occupational skills development system.	Very limited
Improvement in the quality of training delivered by TEVT (Technical Education and Vocational Training) sector (OS) institutions in Nepal.	Very limited
Improved long term competitiveness of SMEs re. potential for profit & job opportunities for people with lower education backgrounds.	Very limited
Local stakeholder advocacy initiatives for policy refinement and enforcement in the OSED sector.	No progress
Natural resource management / rural development	
Practical application (*locally adapted and affordable*) of a gender balanced and participatory approach to local resource management.	Largely
Local people able to fully harness the socio-economic potential of forests.	Partial
Improvement in soil fertility and productivity in bari dominated farming systems in mid-hills.	Partial
Participatory development of a locally adapted and affordable (health care) system.	Very limited
Good governance and peace building	
Capacity of (other) stakeholders in governance and decentralisation strengthened.	Partial
Effectiveness improved of civil society organisations and the media in their drive for advocacy and awareness building in all areas of public life.	Very limited
Accountability and transparency of service of MoES, MoH and MoAC promoted (2002 on).	Very limited
A policy / legal framework and social environment conducive to the implementation of decentralisation developed.	Partial

5.3 Assessment of Programme level impact

Table 3 provides our assessment – again highly subjective – of the impact that development assistance (the wider donor effort within Nepal of which SDC is a part) has had over the review period on key outcomes aligned to HMG development strategy. We also make an assessment of the significance of the SDC contribution to that impact achievement.

Table 3: Assessment of impact and SDC contribution by CP Strategic Objective (relating to period 1993–2004)[13]

	SDC Nepal strategic objectives – broadly aligned with HMG poverty reduction strategy.	**Impact**	**SDC contribution**
SO 1	Road and trail network improved on a sustainable basis.	High	Significant
SO 2	Employment opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged people enhanced.	Low	Important presence
SO 3	Organisational capacity of communities and the ability of farmers and households (on an individual basis and through user groups) to interact with service providers [and markets] improved.	Medium	Contributor
SO 4	Nepali driving forces for change operating within the legal and planning framework of Nepal encouraged and supported.	Too early to assess	A key donor

5.4 Assessment on development progress in Nepal

Country Programme Evaluations need to also consider the country's overall development progress. As outlined earlier in section 2 Nepal has over this period reputedly made progress towards some of the interim targets it has set itself in relation to the MDGs. There are however strong suggestions that some sections of society have been left behind – inhabitants of districts where conflict is acute and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in particular. Recent (2003) Data from the Districts of Nepal Indicators of development exercise conducted by ICIMOD and SNV indicates that within the five SDC focus districts the (relative) shift in general development status over the period 1997–2003 has been as follows:

District	1997	2003	Shift in relative development status
Sindhupalchok	50	48	Improved by two level
Dolakha	47	41	Improved by six level
Okhaldhunga	30	39	Decreased by nine level
Kabhrepalanchok	35	15	Improved by 20 levels
Ramechhap	48	51	Decreased by three level

The overall ranking is calculated based on three major clusters of indicators related to 1) Poverty and Deprivation, 2) Socio-economic and Infrastructural Development and 3) Women's

[13] SO quoted is that corresponding to period 98–2004 and to which the comparable SO for 93–97 relates.

Empowerment. The best district is ranked 1 and the worst district is ranked 75. The positive change or negative change is also influenced by the performance of other districts. Annex I provides a comparison of some relevant parameters for the years 1997 and 2003.

5.5 Donor co-ordination and harmonisation

We found no programme specific objectives on donor co-ordination and harmonisation against which to assess SDC's performance in this area. We found evidence of SDC being a participant in various donor (sectoral) forums including the donor forestry group which it currently chairs. Many of these forums are discussing and looking at ways of taking forward elements of HMG's agenda on harmonisation within its Foreign Aid Policy, including basket funding and channelling through Government accounts in support of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs). We understand that whilst SDC Nepal has support in principle for such developments it is of the view that the current conflict and poor governance climate is not conducive. A clear example of a successful coming together of donors is the development of the Basic Operating Guidelines.

6. Response to conflict

The new constitution (1990) represented a dramatic advance in the evolution of a democratic, constitutional order in Nepal. Whether it will actually work in practice depends on whether the political parties can co-operate with one another, and with the palace, in its implementation, and whether the growth of communalism witnessed during 1990 will be recognised, understood and contained.

6.1 Issues of definition

It is beyond the remit of this evaluation to take a position as to the status of the conflict in Nepal. Whereas the Maoists themselves have been referring to a "People's War" and have used Marxist-Leninist terminology to describe their actions, they seem to be following a relatively traditional "United Front" approach of using the armed struggle (in which the armed insurgents are the "vanguard", the instrument of an ultimately political objective of overthrowing the government). In other words the Maoists have not called for, or openly waged, an all-out civil war. The authorities for their part have also refrained from characterising the conflict as a civil war – initially they treated it as a mere law and order problem, and later as an armed insurgency, suggesting that they perceive the conflict (or want to project an image of it) as a relatively limited one in terms of its military scope. Whereas the word "terrorist" has been used by the authorities in relation to the Maoists, their use of the term has been limited, partly because they have faced challenges by pro-Maoist groups such as students' organisations and trade unions, which have strongly opposed the government's labelling of the Maoists as terrorists.

The introduction of a state of emergency in 2001 however changed the formal legal framework of the conflict. As Nepal is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, the main UN-developed human rights treaty protecting civil and political rights), its government can only suspend certain human rights safeguards if emergencies arise which "threaten the life of the nation". Whereas the government did not say when imposing the state of emergency that the nation was being threatened by the Maoist insurgency, it has effectively admitted as much by doing so.

The second important aspect of the legal framework of the conflict is that the government has accepted that international humanitarian law, and particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949, applied to the conflict. The Conventions are applicable to the conflict both because they are part of customary international law, and because Nepal has formally ratified the Geneva Conventions. The Maoists have never officially admitted that they were obliged to abide by the Conventions, but they have also not formally stated the contrary. In any case the Conventions apply irrespective of whether either party recognise them formally.

Under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) the Maoists are required to exercise restraints in areas spelled out by the Geneva Conventions. The Conventions take no position on the status of the belligerents or on the legitimacy of their claim to statehood. Essentially, they require that the armed forces on both sides provide basic protections to prisoners (including safeguarding their life and protecting them from torture and ill-treatment) and to civilians – particularly by refraining from excessive use of force and indiscriminate killings.

For governments and their armed forces, however, the requirements go beyond IHL, because government forces are bound by national and international law as well as by IHL. As a result, the Government of Nepal continues to be bound by legal obligations to

prosecute the perpetrators of human rights violations, for example – an obligation that is not incumbent on the Maoist side, so long as they do not have attributes of a state such as a body of legislation, judicial institutions, etc. [14]

Two significant consequences relevant to SDC's development work in Nepal can be drawn from this overview:

- Contacts with the Maoist insurgency, including work with NGOs deemed to be linked to the Maoist movement, do not imply recognition or otherwise of its legitimacy.

- It is appropriate, in terms of both IHL and international human rigths law, to hold the Nepalese authorities and armed forces to a more demanding standard than that applying to the insurgency.

6.2 Impact of the conflict on individual staff

The evaluators do not have information on casualties sustained by project staff as a result of armed violence. There have been no written reports of such casualties, and staff working on projects not mentioned precedents of this nature. It can therefore be assumed reasonably safely that the conflict has not claimed the life of development personnel employed by SDC. However, it is possible that individuals working on SDC-supported projects may have been more indirectly affected by the conflict. Experience in the development and aid sector in conflict situations suggests that staff may be affected in ways such as the following:

- *Individuals refraining from working on projects, or changing jobs, out of concern for their own safety or that of relatives*. Whether some people have refrained from working on SDC projects because of risk to themselves or relatives is almost impossible to ascertain. However, it seems that, in general, association with development organisations has been seen by many Nepalese as more of a protection than a risk, at least for those people who are in a position to make such choices. As far as international staff are concerned, none of those interviewed suggested that themselves or colleagues had refrained from working on SDC projects out of safety concerns. However, consciousness of safety issues grew gradually since the start of the conflict, affecting the approaches of both Nepalese and international staff.

- *Individuals taking steps to protect their own or their colleagues' safety by negotiating with parties to the conflict, without adequate organisational support.* Some interviewees have alluded to contacts with armed groups. There is no indication that these contacts have been seen as unduly burdensome or stressful in themselves. Initiatives to develop contacts with the Maoists were started by SDC in 2003. They resulted, inter alia, in the development of the Basic Operational Guidelines, adopted by a number of agencies and making explicit the modalities of their work in the conflict context.[15]

[14] To distinguish between the human rights obligations of states and armed opposition groups, human rights organisations like Amnesty International use different terms to characterise breaches of human rights by either side. Government officials may carry out human rights violations, whereas the term applying to breaches carried out by armed forces is human rights abuses.

[15] SDC noted that further attempts by development agencies to engage the Maoists in development issues have been hampered by lack of consensus, some governmental agencies refusing to have formal contacts with the insurgents.

- *Individuals being confronted with armed violence, or the threat of it, and the possibility of having to take decisions for which they are not prepared or trained.* The need for training in this respect has been identified about 3 years ago within SDC, and in the last year in particular many training sessions have been held in this regard. One of the initiatives taken in 2004 involves human rights training for project staff. Some interviewees have suggested that there was too much training in conflict-related issues, reflecting weariness about discussion of the conflict. However, it would seem that, between about 1996 and 2001, SDC staff and staff working on SDC-supported projects were not explicitly prepared or trained to deal with conflict issues.

6.3 Impact of the conflict on the programme

The impact of the conflict on the programme can be categorised as follows.

- At project level:
  - Logistics. Certainly many projects have encountered logistical difficulties related to the conflict. These have ranged from delays caused by strikes to the impossibility to transport staff and materials around the country, and the difficulty or danger in reaching some areas. However, the concentration of activities in relatively accessible districts familiar to SDC has minimised the impact of the conflict on logistics.

  - Stakeholders. The conflict obviously brought about a new "stakeholder", albeit a shadowy one – the Maoist insurgency. In the main, the Maoists have essentially exercised an indirect influence on existing stakeholders. As a result, their influence has changed the prioritisation and role of some stakeholders. This was made clear during the evaluation, for example when project managers and many others spoke about the "acceptability" of activities to the Maoists. The key changes seem to have been the following:

    - enhanced focus on "communities" as interlocutors for projects, as represented by users' groups, village representatives and service providing NGOs.

    - relative de-prioritisation of government institutions, because of their reduced ability to deliver activities in the field.

- At programme level:
  - Sustainability. As outlined above, projects and programme have increasingly focused on grassroots-level communities during the period under consideration. This evolution was consistent with the long-term approach of SDC in Nepal, and arguably with the organisational culture of SDC, which has long emphasised work at local level. The conflict seems to have reinforced this approach, which seems to have been vindicated in that activities managed at local level have been seen to be the most conflict-resistant – such as BBLL, forestry, DRSP.

  - Strategic objectives. The programme objectives were relatively unaffected by the conflict until very recently. While the 1998–2002 programme acknowledged the existence of the Maoist insurgency, it described it essentially as a risk to the effective implementation of the programme. In

contrast, the current programme – particularly the revised version for 2005, prepared in late 2004 – acknowledges that the contents and strategic orientation of the programme need to be adapted to the conflict situation.

- Programme management. Three major changes, all brought about from 2002 onwards, have been introduced to adapt SDC's programme management to the conflict. They are:

  - Introduction of the Governance domain. This was introduced in 2003 in order to develop and implement a strategy of support for activities related to human rights protection, anti-corruption, and monitoring and reporting of human rights violations and abused, including those related to the conflict.

  - Establishment of the MERV and FAST processes. The MERV is an internal SDC reporting mechanism through which a political and social analysis of the situation in Nepal, particularly in relation to the conflict, is carried out by Coof and shared on a regular basis with headquarters. The FAST is a project implemented by the Swiss Peace Foundation. Researchers in most of Nepal's districts (members of the human rights network HURON) compile information on conflict-related incidents; this information is centralised in Kathmandu and entered in a specialised database, thus tracking a broad range of events indicative of current levels of violence. The data are further analysed by a UK-based expert on Nepal.

    The two mechanisms are complementary, in that the MERV is essentially a political situation report, while the FAST is a detailed attempt at charting the actual incidents which form the day-to-day reality of the conflict. However, Coof staff and other Kathmandu-based persons familiar with the two mechanisms, while praising the effectiveness of MERV and FAST as reporting tools, tended to feel that both were more useful to staff in SDC Headquarters than to those based in Nepal – they suggested that Nepal-based staff were familiar with the issues anyway, and that MERV and FAST tended to confirm existing analysis rather than bring them new information.

  - Development of a conflict transformation strategy. This component is the most recent aspect of SDC's approach, although it has been under consideration for several years. Essentially the strategy involves traditional Track I and Track II approaches, and (unconventionally) contacts aimed at sensitising the Maoist leadership to development issues. This strategy will be significantly enhanced in 2005 with the appointment of an additional staff member in Coof.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the face of a deepening crisis, fundamental contradictions emerge more clearly and the possibility – indeed the necessity – of significant change emerges.

The period 1990–2004 has seen the promise of democracy and an initial momentum behind a progressive development policy agenda exposed by seemingly deep and fundamental divides within Nepalese society – of which the armed conflict is one tangible (and undeniably critical) element. This report entitled "Building bridges in Nepal – dealing with deep divides" has endeavoured to review the experience of SDC's bilateral assistance programme over largely the same period (1993–2004). In this final section we offer our conclusions on the performance of the programme based on what SDC set out to achieve and how it read and responded to the growing insurgency culminating in what is effectively today a "civil war". We make recommendations on how SDC could approach its next programming period and offer lessons drawn from our analysis of Nepal on how SDC bilateral assistance could operate in conflict situations.

7.1 Key conclusions

This evaluation has used three main criteria for assessing the performance of the Nepal programme: the relevance of SDC's strategy, relationships & portfolio, and effectiveness of its programme (delivering project and programme level results and contribution to outcomes), and the adequacy of its response to the conflict situation. The overall conclusions are the following:

7.1.1 Relevance

The Swiss approach to the **transport** sector has been of high relevance; expertise has been appropriately used and demand is large. For much of the review period the relevance of the **OSED** sector activities has been low: there has been little dynamic to the sector and limited SDC strategic actions to be influential in creating one, with the possible exception of the F-Skill project, involving the private sector. More recent work by the Coof has successfully positioned SDC to have a more strategic role in addressing crucial policy issues. Activities in **NRM / RD** show mixed relevance – the User Group idea is strong but enough has not always been done around it to allow it to realise its full potential.

7.1.2 Portfolio

The Country Programme is a group of evolving projects, subject to continual fine tuning, but lacking sufficient, explicit programme-level objectives. As a result it is not clear where the programme objective boundaries lie. On the other hand the programme has included broadly effective projects and reflected a sensible, if at times conservative, use of resources. SDC's approach has provided a platform for continued operations during the conflict period. There has been a marked attachment to long-term association with projects, partners and perceived "best practice". SDC's work culture values reflection, but experience at the project level is not yet effectively integrated at programme level. The mainstreaming of governance whilst a feature of much of the work within the sectors and recent work by the Coof team can be strengthened further.

7.1.3 Effectiveness

In the **Transport** sector there has been success in making progress against a number of objectives. Success factors have included good institutionalisation; good fit between the need and Swiss competence (genuine value added through ability to provide relevant technology); broadly favourable policy and institutional environment; presence of strong "co-donors" (such as DFID) with strong compatibility between bilateral programmes in the sector.

In **OSED** there was limited success in making progress against objectives. Reasons included: very little institutionalisation; no clear or effective government counterpart; less obvious or tangible "need"; no solid entry platform for Swiss engagement except Technical Colleges; lack of a clear dynamic within a relatively disparate set of "sector" activities, and doubts over the fit between Swiss aims in the sector and Nepalese realities. Also, the sector activities appear to be largely supply- (donor-) driven.

In **NRM / Rural Development** there has been satisfactory success in terms of progress against objectives – including a significant reversal of negative environmental trends in the mid hills. Success factors included: adequate institutionalisation, Users' Group organisations delivering positive benefits across membership (in general terms), including building awareness on inclusion issues, and a positive dynamic to increasing user groups responsibilities.

In terms of cross-sectoral aspects, the key conclusions of the evaluation are the following:

- The programme has been effective in harnessing the broader development potential of Forestry Users' Groups as a force for wider change in communities. However this potential does not seem to have been used to full effect in fostering organisational change in government delivery agencies working at the district level (e.g. DFO, DHO). It also appears that DDCs had started before 2002 to recognise the strengths of community groups and their capacity to take on more tasks, but the suspension of locally elected bodies seems to have ended that positive trend.

- SDC has made a relatively small – but in some cases significant – contribution to improved performance of central government institutions, in specific areas such as roads.

7.2 Responsiveness of SDC to the conflict situation

The programme has not been very responsive to the conflict. For most of the period under consideration there has not been a particular conflict lens applied which would have taken SDC to address the conflict directly. However, SDC appears to have ended up in a reasonable space (somewhat fortuitously perhaps), although along the way it may have missed some opportunities in relation to conflict mitigation work. In 1993, SDC were right to go with the optimism in programme design. By 1998, given SDC's strong traditional understanding of exclusion issues, it should have been more aware – or at least questioning – of the limitations of traditional development approaches in addressing conflict: it still appeared at that time to be more concerned with ineffective government than with addressing the conflict. By 2002, SDC took action to address the conflict (18 months after other donors) through studies, training and strategic reviews, which led to the addition of the Governance post at Coof.

Through the period, however, there was good responsiveness to the conflict at project level. SDC was focusing on communities as it was losing confidence in the central

government, thus laying the groundwork for more conflict-resistant development, although this was not the original objective of the community-based approach.

7.3 Added value

SDC's influence in Nepal seems to have been bigger than its level of spending would suggest: this stems from SDC's long history in Nepal, which has contributed to earning it respect within government and from other agencies. Influence also seems to stem from SDC's long-standing support for major successful projects in the transport and NRM / RD sectors, and from its long-term association with specific districts.

In the crucial area of decentralisation, SDC also brought added value through its long-standing support for this policy and its ability to demonstrate some of its benefits in specific districts. However, decentralisation in Nepal remains an unfinished business, largely due to the conflict.

At community level, SDC seems to have been a trend-setter for bottom-up development. Similarly, work at district level seems to have often empowered local agencies. At national level, there are tangible benefits from innovative ideas – including "historical" ones like carpets, rural roads, Tuki system, skills training and bridges. The latter is a good example of broader impact: bridge building is now researched in a university department and the approach is exported.

SDC sees itself (and is often seen) as "more than a development agency" particularly in relation to the conflict. It has worked consistently – if not always explicitly – on new institutional frameworks for sector activities; positioning users as the main driving and shaping force for new arrangements that favour the interests of the poor.

7.4 Strategic issues

In reaching the conclusions above the evaluation team identified a number of issues crucial to shaping the future programme – both in the short term and in the longer term support to the development process in Nepal. These issues include:

- Defining how exactly SDC's position in Nepal is unique, and how this uniqueness can be best used as an entry point for conflict transformation. The present evaluation suggests directions in that regard.

- There has been a shift over the 1993–2004 period in terms of the emphasis within the portfolio. From a focus on technical outcomes, the programme has moved towards capacity building and a focus on processes (governance, addressing conflict causes). The maintenance of this trend by SDC as a bilateral development agency may require closer partnerships with other donors.

- The opportunity to increase the relevance of country programming through adopting a set of strategic objectives (governance related) as the primary country programming framework – under which sectorally rooted projects are located.

7.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on **the working assumptions on the "new reality"** outlined below:

- The armed conflict will continue.
- The government remains an important partner in the programme, irrespective of who holds ultimate state authority.
- There are *de facto* two governments, given the authorisations required.
- The environment is not conducive to normal development planning processes.
- The conflict has shaken society to an extent where it may now be open to a more targeted (less equal and less resource based) approach to reaching the poor.
- The importance of cash income to the rural poor will continue growing during the armed conflict.
- Overall economic growth is not likely to rebound significantly while the conflict continues.

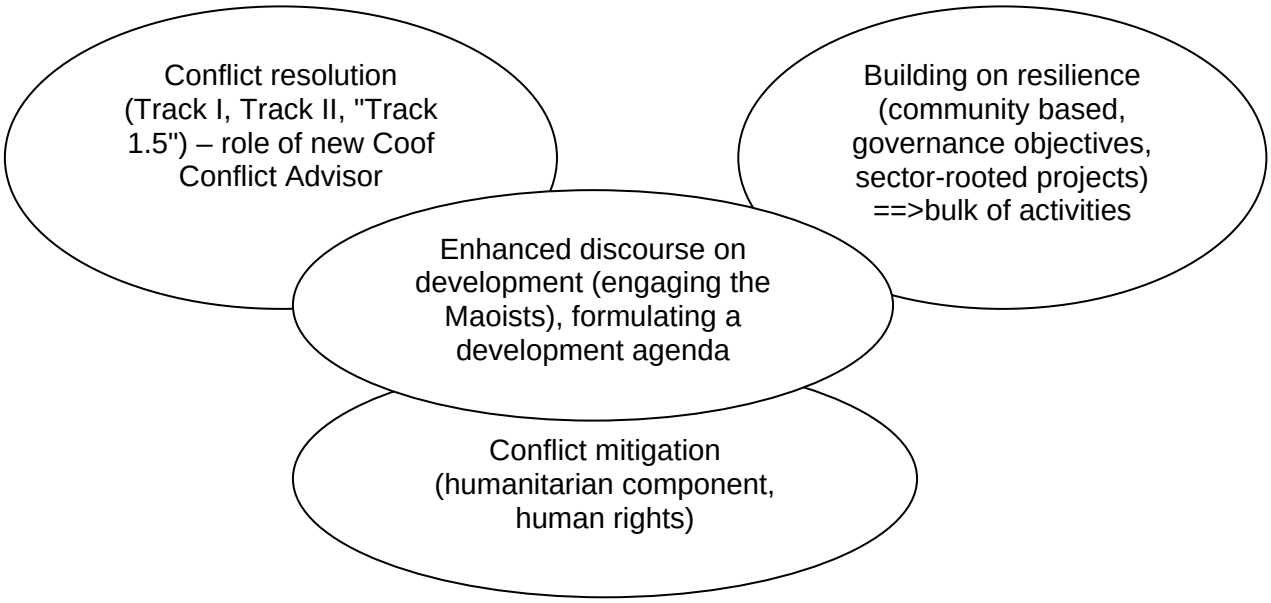
In this context, the evaluators envision two possible scenarios for future SDC programming in Nepal:

1. The ***"Back to Basics" scenario***. This would essentially mean a narrow focus on those activities that are the most conflict-resistant (mainly those based on existing grassroots-level relationships), with minimal exposure in districts new to SDC and a tight separation between development activities and any Swiss involvement in conflict transformation. This would constitute a coping strategy allowing SDC to minimize risk to itself and its projects during the conflict period, at the cost of losing the influence it has on actors in the conflict.

2. The ***"Building on Resilience" scenario.*** This would involve deliberate engagement with the conflict, seeking to integrate and mutually reinforce a governance-based development programme with a conflict transformation strategy and conflict mitigation activities, thus contributing to a renewed discourse on development liable to engage the Maoist leadership. This engagement would aim at encouraging support by the Maoist side for a development agenda. This strategy would build on the key achievements of the previous SDC programmes, at the risk of increased exposure to political pressure and compromising on traditional perceptions of Swiss neutrality.

Of the two scenarios, it is the second which appears to the evaluators to be most relevant to the current situation in Nepal and most effective at drawing out SDC's added value as a development actor and supporter of conflict resolution. The figure overleaf summarises the proposed approach. However, whatever approach is taken by SDC (but particularly if a strategy akin to the "building on resilience" scenario is adopted), the following **recommendations**, stemming from the findings of the evaluation, should be taken into account:

Figure 1: "Building on Resilience" strategy



1. **Develop programme-level objectives and implementation strategies.** The 1993–97 and 1998–2004 country programmes had good project outlines and explicit sector strategies, however they lacked clear programme-level strategies and associated outcome statements that would have explicitly integrated the (sector and project) activities into an overall results framework. The logical framework approach could be adopted at programme level, as it is already at project level, to help ensure that programme-level objectives are explicit and indicators are systematically monitored.

2. **Consider a set of governance objectives as primary programming framework.** These objectives would integrate the cross-sectoral concerns of SDC, while providing the overall context for the implementation of sector-based concepts and projects.

3. **Ensure that Annual and Country programmes are based on a clear and systematic analysis of the country situation.** On the basis of instruments such as MERV and FAST, and of the analysis of the social and political situation, programming documents should include elements such as:
    a. SWOT analysis of SDC as a donor;
    b. Overview of the development sector;
    c. Consideration of the social and political situation;
    d. Consideration of key cross-sectoral concerns.

    It is not suggested that all of these elements be present at all stages of programming, but they should be considered whenever relevant.

4. **Consider ways of building synergies between the development programme and conflict transformation strategy.** This may involve the use of case studies from development projects as part of the engagement with parties to the conflict, as well as timing some "Track II" activities to coincide with key development activities.

5. **Consider expanding activities related to conflict mitigation.** This may include expanding humanitarian aid budgets, as well as using some development programme funds to address some of the direct impact of the conflict (enhanced research and reporting on the use and impact of landmines, clearance of landmine and other unexploded ordnance, human rights monitoring and protection, support for internally displaced persons, training of IHL monitors). This aspect implies that approaches used in the humanitarian field be used also in some aspects of development work – particularly that support to people affected is not necessarily addressing the poorest victims. Addressing the conflict in this way may provide valuable "entry points" for conflict transformation activities, and may bring to light new information on the actual impact of the conflict on the population of Nepal.

6. **Nurture Users' Groups as a broader development force.** Users' Groups have demonstrated their effectiveness beyond their function as a sectoral tool. Expanding their use should be done in conjunction with continued capacity building support to local government, to ensure that Users' Groups are not unduly relied upon as a substitute to the state in remote areas – even though, in practice, this is their function in the conflict context.[16]

7. **Consider re-orienting Coof management around a programme results framework.** This would stem from the proposed set of programme-level strategic objectives. A change in management approach may involve, in particular, re-organising staff responsibilities at sector head level to take account of the programme objectives and to ensure the maintenance of appropriate levels of technical know-how.

8. **Consider developing partnership agreements with relevant INGOs.** The strategy proposed above may involve higher levels of workload for Coof staff. In order to cope with this change, it may be appropriate to hive off further operational responsibilities for sector activities to relevant partners. It is suggested that this could be done in the context of a strategic partnership agreement with Helvetas.

9. **Review modalities of Coof-Berne relationship.** While maintaining the thematic advisory functions of Headquarter-based experts in relation to Coof programme management processes, it may be advisable to consider revising the role of the geographical department in relation to Coof, developing its strategic challenge function.

7.6 Lessons on response to conflict situations

Our analysis of the situation in Nepal provides the following general lessons on how SDC should operate in a conflict situation, or in countries where there are latent tensions:

1. **Use a range of conflict warning mechanisms.** MERV is an internal SDC mechanism, which can be replicated in any country. FAST is managed by the Swiss Peace Foundation and as such is not within the control of SDC – however the extension of its use to countries where SDC may need it can probably be envisioned. Other mechanisms remain necessary, including:

[16] It must also be noted that leaders of users' groups are de facto in a politically exposed situation, which may put them at risk if the conflict worsens and if either side becomes politically radicalised.

a. Following up MERV reports with management notes indicating how, if at all, assistance programmes are affected by changes in country situations.
b. Liaison with other donors and other relevant organisations to compare assessments of conflict risks (to the extent these views are not already covered in the MERV).
c. Support for human rights monitoring mechanisms within the country, particularly in relation to distant areas or vulnerable sectors of society, which may be affected by emerging conflict earlier than others.

It must be borne in mind, however, that no mix of management instruments can fully guarantee the timely detection of emerging conflict.

2. **Ensure staff are adequately briefed and supported.** A primary responsibility of SDC is to its own staff, and to people directly working on projects it supports. Measures such as those listed below – as successfully deployed by SDC in Nepal – are necessary to ensure adequate support for staff working in risk areas:
   a. Comprehensive and regularly updated survey of the personnel vulnerable to risk, and of the nature of the risk they face.
   b. Appointment of a security manager, assisted as appropriate by staff in relevant locations, and responsible with relevant tasks, from the provision of security advice to travel authorisation, for example.
   c. Provision to staff of training and briefings on relevant issues, including conflict early warning, security training, or human rights protection and monitoring techniques.
   d. Ensuring that staff have access to appropriate (confidential) and timely support in case they experience a security incident, and that staff working in conflict areas – and areas of high tensions even if there is no open conflict – are regularly monitored, and undergo thorough debriefing if an incident occurs.

   It is also important to ensure that, in principle, security-related support provided by SDC be available, as relevant, to national and international staff on equal terms. SDC already has relevant procedures in place, the Nepal evaluation did not bring to light specific concerns about the nature of the procedures.

3. **Be deliberate about assessing the conflict objectively.** The experience of Nepal has shown that, even in a context of widespread conflict, actual project activities may remain relatively unaffected (or be only marginally affected) for an extended period of time. The impact of an emerging conflict on SDC activities is therefore not necessarily an appropriate measure of the level of conflict – this is why it is important that an assessment of an emerging conflict be carried out, including but also looking beyond, SDC activities themselves.

4. **Assess the implications of the conflict on development work.** There are clearly no general prescriptions in this respect, but aspects to consider may include economic development patterns, which may be disrupted in some regions already in the latent phase of a conflict. Options for SDC may also need to be reviewed, ranging from continuation of all or some activities to disengagement and/or coordination with other bilateral or multilateral donors.

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