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Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

Status Report on Gender Equality 2021 **Empowering Women in Times of Crisis**



Foreword

Progress to achieve gender equality is too slow and piecemeal, and it has been further undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the second year, women have been particularly affected and their living conditions have become increasingly difficult, especially for those belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups. Moreover, multiple global crises linked to climate change, natural disasters, and violent conflicts do reinforce these inequalities. Simultaneously, these difficult times generate an opportunity to decisively tackle obvious structural deficits and reverse regressive trends.

Women are underestimated yet important agents of change and promoters of peace. They must be able to participate more effectively in public debates and decision-making processes, to voice their priorities and contribute to the solution of current challenges. This has been repeatedly emphasised in several key moments of global policy debates during 2021 and explicitly supported by our several contributions.

The present report shows how the SDC engages to advance gender equality and it informs about our achievements and recurrent challenges – with a focus on the three strategic pillars of combating gender-based violence and women’s political as well as economic empowerment. It also highlights our ambition to strive for substantial and transformative changes by addressing entrenched power inequalities and obstructive social norms. Several of the portrayed project examples include activities to gain support of women’s husbands, male politicians and businesspersons, as well as traditional leaders.

The SDC is convinced that women’s full participation in the political and public sphere is a precondition for achieving gender equality. Since many years, we are supporting women’s leadership building, their increased representation and ability to realise important priorities, particularly in local governance, parliaments, and civil society initiatives, including in peace-building processes.

This will continue to require our full commitment and our ability to respond to actual challenges. Active women are increasingly experiencing gender based violence in the public sphere, and the promotion of women’s rights is facing growing resistance by regressive tendencies and through growing dissemination of gender stereotypical narratives. Patriarchal structures and deeply entrenched social norms continue to be a major obstacle to women’s equal participation.

Their engagement requires environments free from violence, which is still a major concern to us. Moreover, they need financial means that they can use and hence an employment or business to generate income and secure their livelihood. We clearly notice that women’s economic empowerment contributes to improving their social status, recognition, and self-esteem. The SDC is committed to continue working on enhancing women’s professional skills and employment opportunities, their entrepreneurship, and improving their access to economic resources. We have learned about the potentials of digitalisation and need to ensure it works in women’s favour. Finding solutions to reduce women’s high burden of unpaid domestic and care work is an ongoing challenge we must continue to address.

Finally, I would like to point out that we have taken further steps in the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH), which mirror our commitment to zero tolerance on this matter. This is very important to me and remains a priority.

As we read in this report, positive change is possible. We have achieved promising results but we also see room for improvement and the need to advance further. It requires perseverance, coordinated comprehensive efforts, and dedicated measures to counteract the current pushback of achieved gains and accelerate progress.

I wish you a good read!



Patricia Danzi

Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Main Messages

1. Acting in step with international initiatives on gender equality

Several important international conferences addressed gender inequality in 2021. At the Generation Equality Forum, Switzerland – including the SDC – has committed to multi-stakeholder-driven actions in the fields of ‘economic justice and rights’ and ‘women, peace, security, and humanitarian action.’ It is a chance to reach out to a larger community of donors, civil society, and the private sector and to leverage collaborative efforts. At the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), a major outcome was the acknowledgement of the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls, and the call for their increased inclusion in climate action. This is an issue that deserves further attention in the future.

2. Dealing with the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2021, the COVID crisis continued to affect women disproportionately in all spheres of life, again hampering the SDC’s work in advancing gender equality. In some cases, this was offset by driving digitalisation or strengthened ties with local stakeholders. This however had its limits, especially in reaching out to women from most vulnerable populations. Rising social inequality is a concern, as well as the multiplying effects of different intersecting crises – the pandemic, climate change, natural disasters, and violent conflicts. This requires working even more on interfaces and, as illustrated by several project examples, applying targeted measures for most marginalised populations.

3. Responding to the severe concern of sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains one of the most serious problems globally. In 2021, it continued to be an alarming issue. Following its rapid responses at the outset of the pandemic, the SDC has further increased its financial commitments and persistently pursued its efforts in eliminating SGBV. Actions included support to survivors, sensitisation measures, and the strengthening of relevant domestic stakeholders. Men and boys have also been specifically addressed, both as survivors of SGBV and as crucial actors in transformative change. Despite a decrease in persons assisted throughout 2021 – as compared with 2020 – the SDC managed to provide support for about 88’000 survivors of SGBV, comprising about 73’000 women and girls and 15’000 men and boys. Following up on this issue remains crucial.

4. Push for women’s economic empowerment and recognition

Women are still much less integrated into formal economy than men, their jobs are less secure, and their incomes are lower. They also continue to bear the main burden of – mostly unpaid – care work. With the SDC’s support, many women were encouraged to engage in economic activities that increased their confidence, wellbeing, and social status. Nearly half of the 70’000 persons who benefited from new or better employment were women, and the proportion of women gaining better access to and making use of formal financial products and services have increased from 6% to 33%. Nevertheless, in the economic sphere, the majority of project beneficiaries are still men. There is further room for improvement.

5. Enhancing women’s political participation as a precondition for gender equality

Women’s full political participation is a sine qua non for achieving equitable societies. However, this gender gap remains one of the largest globally – and continues to widen. The SDC’s actions contributed to enhancing women’s participation in the political and public spheres. In 2021, about 750’000 women from disadvantaged groups and 125’000 additional women participated in and influenced public service provision, decision-making, and budgets in their localities, making up close to 40% of the total beneficiaries. Leadership building yielded results in women’s ability to engage in conflict prevention and resolution. Further efforts are necessary to increase their representation in political institutions. This is even more important in view of the unfolding backlash against gender equality.

6. The SDC’s financial commitments

In 2021, the SDC committed a total of CHF 1.264 billion to bilateral aid interventions addressing gender equality. Compared to 2020, this is an increase from 71% to 75%. 4% of the total committed funding (CHF 55.8 million) were allocated to interventions with gender equality as their principal objective – which is a decline compared to 2020; and 71% (CHF 895 million) were committed for interventions integrating gender in a transversal way – which is an increase. Overall, the SDC has not yet reached its target of minimal 8% for gender-principal and 85% for total gender commitments.

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1. Gender Equality at a Time of Global Crisis

The UN Agenda 2030 corroborates that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.”¹ Even though girls and women make up more than half of the global population, they are disproportionately suffering from the consequences of poverty, violence, insufficient health care, etc. These issues are amplified in situations of crisis. The Global Gender Gap (GGG) Report 2021 offers preliminary evidence that the negative social and economic effects of the COVID-19 emergency have “impacted women more severely than men, partially re-opening gaps that had already been closed.”² The UN further states that “with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back.”³ Further data indicate that the protracted ‘double-shift’ of paid and unpaid work in a context of school lockdowns and limited availability of care services contributed to an increase of anxiety, stress, job insecurity, and challenges to maintain work-life balance among women with children. The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated digitalisation and automation. While many opportunities arise from rapid digital evolution – especially also for women – it also further disrupts the labour market to the disadvantage of women. In this regard, the GGG Report 2021 predicts “significant challenges for gender parity in the future of jobs due to increasing occupational gender-segregation.”⁴ The report further states that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the overall expected time to close the global gender gap from 100 years to 136 years, with significant disparities across regions: Whereas Western Europe could potentially close its gender gap within 52 years, North America within 62, and Latin America and the Caribbean within 69 years, it would take more than 100 years in other regions: 122 years in Sub-Saharan Africa, 135 years in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 142 years in the Northern Africa and Middle East, and even longer in Asia, with an estimated 165 years in East Asia and the Pacific and 195 years in South Asia.⁵ This means that at least another generation of women – in most cases significantly more – will have to wait for parity.⁶

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple other global crises are unfolding, and their intersecting effects amplify pre-existing inequalities. The climate crisis, natural disasters, and violent conflicts accentuate the already difficult living conditions of marginalised and vulnerable populations, with gender inequality specifically affecting women and girls, e.g. indigenous, rural, or migrant women, those with disabilities, but also persons with various sexual orientations and gender identities.

With regard to the environmental crisis caused by global warming, the postponed 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) was held in Glasgow in 2021, bringing parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Amongst the major outcomes of COP26 was the acknowledgement of the disproportionate and gendered impacts of climate change and its linkages to women’s and girls’ participation in education, the economy, leadership, and decision-making. COP26 organised a special ‘Gender Day’ to obtain new commitments from countries and stakeholders to ensure climate action is gender-responsive and to improve women’s leadership in line with the UNFCCC’s Gender Action Plan and UN Women’s Feminist Action for Climate Justice. Particular attention was paid to the participation of female negotiators from developing countries at COP26. The agreed ‘Glasgow Climate Pact’ explicitly encourages countries “to increase the full, meaningful and equal participation of women in climate action and to ensure gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation.”⁷ As part of this effort, the SDC – in partnership with the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) – has supported the participation and leadership of female country delegates at the COP; women’s access to climate funding; and the development of an online knowledge platform with information and expertise on gender and climate change.

1 See: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

2 WEF (2021): Global Gender Gap Report 2021. Geneva: World Economic Forum, p. 5.

3 United Nations (2020): The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. Policy Brief. New York: United Nations, p. 2.

4 See 2, p.6.

5 See 2.

6 See: <https://www.internationalwomensday.com>

7 United Nations (2021): Glasgow Climate Pact. New York: United Nations, paragraph 95.

In 2021, the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UN General Assembly (UNGA) have adopted unanimous resolutions on environment and climate change, both explicitly referring to gender equality and women's rights.⁸ They both call for gender-responsive action to address climate change and environmental degradation. "The empowerment, leadership, decision-making and meaningful participation of women and girls, and the role women play as managers, leaders and defenders of natural resources and agents of change in safeguarding the environment" are highlighted as important in this regard.⁹

Specific gendered effects of climate change can be observed in various areas: women and girls are often disproportionately affected because of the dependence of many women on natural resources for their livelihoods (e.g. relying on water, land, and forests). Climate change may also propitiate migration from rural to more urban areas out of economic hardship. In many cases only men migrate, while women are left behind with their responsibilities back home for care and domestic work, coupled with the burden of income-generating activities with limited access to resources and ownership. Another gendered aspect of migration is the increased vulnerability of female migrants, who are much more exposed to sexual violence than non-migrant women, for example. In many regions of the world, climate change-related impacts are a threat to peace and security. Security risks disproportionately concern women and girls, who are key providers of nutrition, water, and energy, but have fewer resources and limited rights (e.g. regarding property, land, or loans) to tackle changing conditions.¹⁰

Despite the great challenges posed by the simultaneous global crises and their strong gender implications, this particularly difficult time in global history may also open windows of opportunity for fundamental social change. In some regions, for example, the impacts of climate change are also leading to important socio-economic shifts that are transforming traditional gender norms around economic activity, decision-making, and leadership.¹¹ The COVID-19 crisis can be seized as a turning point to rebuild more equal, inclusive, and resilient societies and "to re-shape and rebuild systems, laws, policies and institutions to advance gender equality."¹² However, this calls for decisive action and perseverance in the face of the 'gender backlash' unfolding at the same time. Rising authoritarian, anti-human rights, nationalist, and conservative trends around the world are undermining the very concept of gender equality.¹³

An important event to energise the promotion of global gender equality in 2021 was the 'Generation Equality Forum,' held in Mexico City and Paris. The purpose of this global initiative is to accelerate action to realise gender equality by 2030, through operationalising commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs.¹⁴ The Forum's action agenda, known as 'Global Acceleration Plan,' is a response to the above-mentioned challenges and an opportunity for joint action driven by the commitments of multiple stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector, foundations, and UN agencies – which also include Switzerland. The Plan defines six critical issues that underpin gender equality.¹⁵ It is further complemented by another action area, the 'Compact on Women, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action,' to which Switzerland also adheres. UN Women monitors the Forum's action agenda and ensures accountability of envisaged commitments and implementation over the next five years.¹⁶

8 Women's Human Rights App, www.womenshumanrights.ch

9 United Nations Human Rights Council (2021): 48th session of the Human Rights Council: Resolutions, decisions, and President statements.

10 United Nations (2020): Gender, Climate & Security. Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change. New York: United Nations.

11 Ibid.

12 United Nations (2021): The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021. New York: United Nations, p. 36.

13 SDC (2022): Gender and Rising Authoritarianism. SDC Synthesis Note, March 2022; SDC (2022): Gender and Rising Authoritarianism: Implications for Women's Political Empowerment and Participation. SDC Topic Paper, May 2022.

14 Generation Equality Forum (2021): Accelerating Progress for Gender Equality.

15 The six critical issues are: 1. Gender-Based Violence; 2. Economic Justice and Rights; 3. Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR); 4. Feminist Action for Climate Justice; 5. Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality; and 6. Feminist Movements and Leadership.

16 UN Women (2021): Action Coalitions. Global Acceleration Plan. New York: UN Women.

2. The SDC's Contribution

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and SDG 5 in particular are the cornerstone of Switzerland's engagement for gender equality and women's empowerment. Based on Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24, the SDC continues to focus on three strategic pillars: the elimination of gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment, and women's political empowerment and participation, including their participation in peacebuilding. Furthermore, gender equality remains a transversal theme to be mandatorily considered in all its actions. The SDC strives for substantial and transformative change in overcoming the gender gap. This implies to look further at harmful social norms, power inequalities, and behavioural change, as well as to address obstacles imposed by women's high burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Non-binary understandings of gender are receiving more attention, and addressing multiple forms of discrimination has become increasingly central to the SDC's work. The SDC has mandated the thematic Gender Unit to promote continuous institutional learning and competence building, to ensure thematic quality, and to represent the SDC in global/national policy dialogues. It closely collaborates with the members of the SDC Gender Network and with important international organisations, initiatives, and competence centres.

2.1 Capacity Development and joint learning

Training of Gender Focal Points: After the interruption caused by COVID-19, the Gender Training of Trainers resumed and was offered for a second time, for the first time in online format. About 20 participants engaged in learning about the Triple Role of gender focal points (Advising, Facilitating, Leading/Championing the topic) and the integration of gender along the project cycle. The course combined some self-directed learning sessions (studying methodological and thematic tools) with inputs by resource persons and peer-led learning sessions, which have proved to be effective. Overall, learning expectations have been met. Participants clearly expressed their wish for advanced follow-up trainings, for example deepening learning on the intersection between gender equality and Leave No One Behind (LNOB), the Triple Role of gender focal points, and how to effectively promote gender mainstreaming in the SDC's daily operational work, as well as with partners.

Training in specific sectors: In 2021, the pilot training on **gender and economics** took place in collaboration with NADEL, the Center for Development and Cooperation in Zurich. The course builds on the SDC-financed manual elaborated by UN Women and strengthens the capacity of technical advisors and project staff on gender-responsive economic policy. The pilot training was met with great demand and has proven so successful that NADEL decided to include this training in its regular CAS curriculum. Further, a training on **gender and disaster risk reduction (DRR)** has been offered, as a collaborative effort between the SDC DRR and gender networks, together with the Swiss NGO DRR platform. Participants were introduced to concepts of climate change, DRR, gender, and interlinkages between them. They learnt about ways to integrate the gender lens in disaster risk analysis, about gender-responsive and transformative disaster risk management (DRM), and about gender in monitoring and learning. Participants appreciated the training as successful and expressed the desire to deepen their knowledge with more practical case studies. More information is available on the Swiss NGO online DRR platform.¹⁷

The gender learning day with partner organisations, which took place on 17 November 2021, focused on the link between gender and COVID-19. Participants explored different impacts of the pandemic on gender and shared practice-based solutions and lessons learnt. UN Women opened the session with information on the impact assessments it had undertaken and its recommendations to overcome the underlying structural barriers (build back better). Partner organisations presented selected case studies on topics such as women's economic empowerment (Swisscontact), health (Swiss Red Cross), sexual and gender-based violence (Iamaneh), and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (Peace Women Across the Globe). These topics were jointly discussed in different working group sessions. Additional information is available on the SDC Gender Shareweb.¹⁸

¹⁷ See: <https://drrplatform.org/events>

¹⁸ See: <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Gender/Pages/Activities/Gender-Learning-Day/2021-11-SDC-Gender-Learning-Day.aspx>

New podcast learning format on women’s economic empowerment: The SDC Gender Status Report 2020 highlighted the need to enhance efforts to close the gender gap in SDC-supported projects on inclusive economic development. In response to this, the Gender Unit launched a new initiative of joint learning to stimulate more transformative action. With its podcast series “Empower!”, voices from the field are put into the spotlight. Project partners and field office staff share their strategies and lessons learnt in mainstreaming gender, with a specific focus on women’s economic empowerment. This allows tuning into stories around the globe, from Bolivia to Tanzania. The series is available online.¹⁹

Building knowledge on gender in the insurance industry: Insurances are part of financial products, and access for women is a particular challenge. In tune with previous work, the Gender Unit continued supporting the ‘Access to Insurance Initiative’ (A2ii) and its gender mainstreaming activities. The initiative was created in 2009 to respond to requests from policymakers, insurance regulators, and insurance supervisors for learning and advice on access to insurance. With the SDC’s support, a gender lens has been introduced. The report on ‘The Role of Insurance Supervisors in Boosting Women’s Access to Insurance’ presents important findings on the persistent gender gap, and the need of regulators and supervisors for more accurate gender data as a prerequisite for their action. Supervisors are crucial to promote gender-responsive approaches and incentivise gender-smart innovations in the insurance market.²⁰ You can read more on these important insights on the A2ii website.

Better understanding on the gender backlash in the context of rising authoritarianism: As part of a collaborative learning initiative of the thematic units Governance, Gender, Social Equality, and Fragility, Conflict & Human Rights, a study on ‘Women’s Political Empowerment and Participation in Authoritarian Contexts’ has been elaborated and discussed within the network’s communities. It explains how conservative, populist, and authoritarian powers introduce a narrative that re-emphasises traditional notions of gender roles and rejects the very concept of gender equality as an imposed Western agenda. Ultimately, this restricts women’s engagement in the public sphere and undermines the promotion of their rights. This perceived ‘gender backlash’ is an overall global tendency that is spreading to varying degrees in several countries across the world, as the study highlights. It requires a dedicated and adapted response, and the study lists several possible entry points in this regard. More information is available on the SDC shareweb.²¹

Expanding the understanding on sexual and gender-based violence: On the International Men’s Day on 19 November 2021, the new SDC position paper ‘Sexual Violence against Men and Boys, Including against Members of the LGBTIQ+ Community’ was launched with a webinar.^{22,23} The SDC promotes an inclusive approach to SGBV response. Namely, it acknowledges that all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientations or gender identities, can be victims of sexual violence and have a right to adequate services. Since 2017, the SDC has been supporting advocacy for the rights of male survivors. The paper provides background and rationale of the Swiss position. SDC’s Humanitarian Aid has also supported the global SGBV coordination infrastructure, through the SGBV Area of Responsibility (AoR), to formulate their first ever guidance note on male survivors for SGBV coordinators at field level.

In a webinar on the occasion of the ‘16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women,’ the Gender Focal Points in the Swiss representations abroad and at SDC’s Headquarter discussed the linkages between SDC’s gender equality policy and zero tolerance of sexual misconduct policy. Because various forms of sexual exploitations, abuses, and harassments are more likely to take place in contexts of stark gender inequalities, it can be concluded that efforts to bring about greater gender equality in the SDC – as well as in its partner organisations and projects – should be tackled with the urgency of a compliance issue. Another event during the 16 days of activism was a training for humanitarian staff on ‘Gender in Displacement’ and the launch of a publication that displays a gender-transformative approach to humanitarian action.²⁴

19 See: <https://anchor.fm/empower-sdc>

20 Miles, Katherine S. und Manoj Pandey (2021): The Role of Insurance Supervisors in Boosting Women’s Access to Insurance. Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

21 See: <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/learningjourneys/learningjourney2020/SitePages/Home.aspx>

22 LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer/questioning, and more) designates non-heterosexual, non-conforming, and non-binary sexual orientations or gender identities.

23 SDC (2022): Sexual Violence against Men and Boys, Including against Members of the LGBTIQ+ Community. SDC Position Paper, Bern: SDC.

24 SDC (2021): When the Weddings Songs Change – Gender Relations in Humanitarian Contexts. Protection in Focus No. 10/11 (2021). Bern: SDC.

2.2 Further steps in the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH)

PSEAH is increasingly anchored in the SDC with a newly created PSEAH Focal Point position to support the implementation of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' (FDFA) commitment to zero tolerance for inaction against sexual exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment (SEAH). In November 2021, the FDFA launched a unified Whistleblowing Platform to enable reporting on all forms of irregularities, including sexual misconduct, both by staff and partner organisations. The SDC senior management has clearly reiterated the commitment to zero tolerance. The SDC PSEAH Focal Point has produced guidance and tools to support reflection of staff on SEAH.²⁵ The aim is to create a culture of discussions and reflections on power relations and sexual misconduct, in order to prevent those behaviours, rather than simply responding to them. Discussions were initiated around gender and power dynamics in the working environment and the role of men in prevention was emphasised on the occasion of the International Men's Day.

17 SDC offices have started to implement the guidance and to provide feedback on challenges with PSEAH for further learning. The Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit, a pool of experts who are deployed in humanitarian contexts, has been systematically trained on PSEAH.

2.3 Policy Dialogue and Commitments to Global Initiatives

The donor committee for enterprise development (DCED) and its working group on women's economic empowerment (WEE) build an important pillar in the SDC Gender Unit's policy work, highlighted by the SDC's co-chairing engagement. The group is very active in its different work items. In 2021, important flagship documents informing the engagement of donors with respect to WEE were issued:

- [Donor Responses for Promoting WEE during COVID-19](#),²⁶ with the corresponding webinar for the beginning of 2022
- [Donor Engagement in Gender-Lens Investing: Approaches and Opportunities](#)²⁷

The Gendernet of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC Gendernet): All throughout 2021, a particular focus was dedicated to the topic of 'financing for gender equality,' including innovative ways of 'gender impact investing' in the private and public sectors. Different participants shared their efforts to enhance investments for closing the gender gap (e.g. the Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) gender bond, or the multi-stakeholder global alliance for sustainable feminist movements), and to elaborate tools and standards for gender-smart investments (e.g. the 2xChallenge and Gender-Smart). This remains high on the global agenda, given the need to advance faster in achieving SDG 5 and to reverse the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Gender Unit attentively follows these discussions, also in view of the SDC's commitment to engaging with the private sector. Finally, in 2021 the DAC Gendernet issued a series of interesting policy and working papers that relate to the SDC's internal learning and work streams:

- [Gender Equality across the Humanitarian – Development – Peace Nexus](#)²⁸
- [Gender Equality and Fragility](#)²⁹
- [Development Finance for Gender Equality: The Gender Equality Forum Action Coalitions](#)³⁰

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW): During the 65th CSW, which took place 15–26 March 2021, the SDC contributed to the interactive dialogue session on 'Building Back Better: Women's Participation and Leadership in COVID-19 Response and Recovery.' It highlighted Switzerland's engagement in strengthening women's leadership and participation in citizen-led initiatives and local governance processes that address community issues and thus provide an avenue for building back better.

Call to Action on Protection from SGBV in Emergencies: Switzerland has made commitments to the Road Map 2021–25 of the Call to Action, a multi-stakeholder advocacy platform for more visibility, funding, and quality of SGBV prevention and response in humanitarian contexts. SGBV remains a severely underfunded area in every emergency. Switzerland has committed to increase its funding for SGBV, to invest in local actors and in longer-term programmes. In 2021, the SDC provided CHF 13.1 million for SGBV in 18 different humanitarian contexts. With 40% funding for local organisations, the SDC was on track to honour its commitment to provide half of its funding to local SGBV actors. 70% of all contracts for SGBV projects were for the duration of two years or more, which in turn ensures more stable and predictable funding. In the Horn of Africa and in West Africa, the SDC is presently planning SGBV interventions in a nexus modality.

²⁵ <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/SDCPSEAH>

²⁶ Grantham, Kate and Leva Rouhani (2021): Donor Responses for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment During COVID-19. OECD Policy Brief November 2021.

²⁷ Lechin, Lu and Arianne Muirow (2022): Donor Agency Engagement in Gender Lens Investing: Approaches and Opportunities. Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group. OECD Working Paper.

²⁸ OECD (2021): Gender Equality across the Humanitarian – Development – Peace Nexus. Gender Equality Perspective Series, July 2021.

²⁹ Goemans, Charlotte, Diana Koester and Seve Loudon (2021): Gender Equality and Fragility. OECD Development Co-operation Working Paper, July 2021.

³⁰ OECD (2021): Development Finance for Gender Equality. The Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions. Gender Equality Perspective Series, June 2021.

Generation Equality Forum: The Generation Equality Forum, which was postponed in 2020, was finally held in Mexico (March) and Paris (June/July). It was the culmination of the global campaign 'Generation Equality' launched by UN Women in 2020 to mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and to give it a new impetus. In view of the forum, six Action Coalitions have been designed to be driven by multi-stakeholder partnerships and new financial commitments (governments, civil society, private sector, philanthropic organisations etc.). These include six thematic areas identified as having the highest urgency for implementation and the greatest potential for impact. In the same spirit, the Compact on Women, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action (WPSHA) has been created to include this important field of action. Switzerland joined the Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights (ECJR) and the Compact on WPSHA, with coordinated commitments by different federal offices.

Box I: The SDC's commitments to the global campaign 'Generation Equality'

In a comprehensive joint effort between the gender and education thematic units, the global programme 'Food Security', and the humanitarian aid department, the SDC committed to the following action areas:

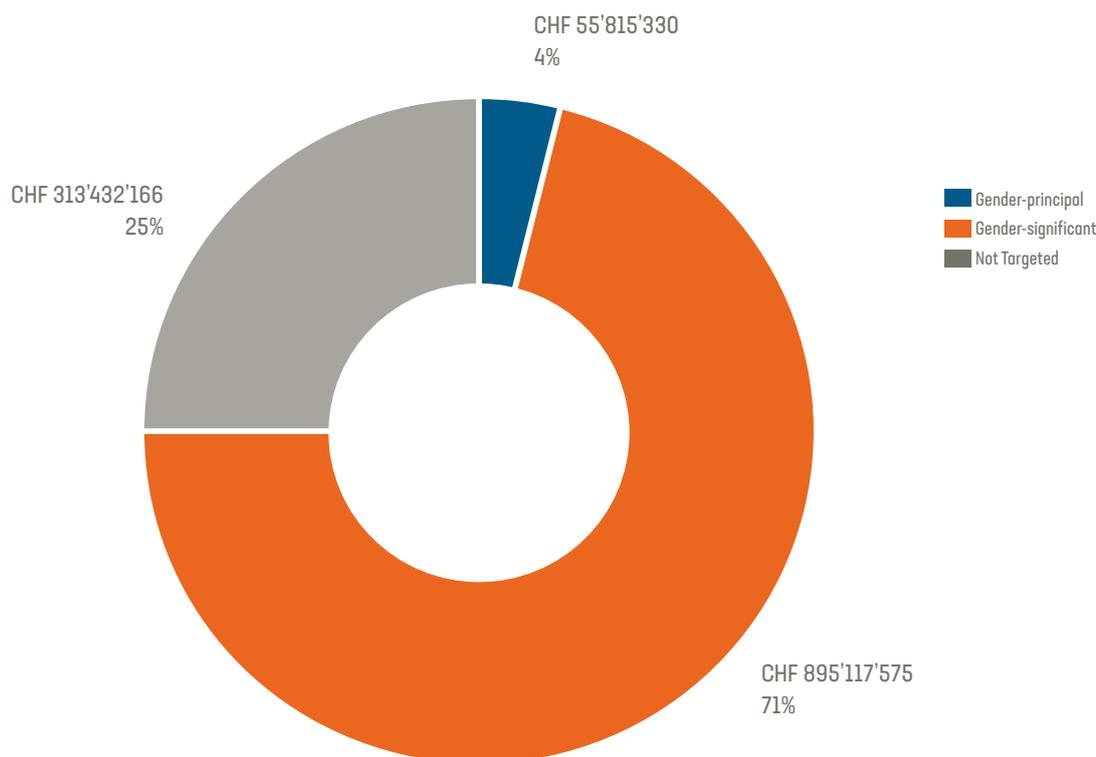
- increase women's access to land and control over productive resources: core funding to the International Land Coalition, which explicitly promotes women's land rights;
- scale up investments in the education of adolescent girls and young women to enhance essential skills for critical future work: core funding to the 'Global Partnership for Education' and to 'Education Cannot Wait' (a new Global Fund for Education in Emergencies), both with a strong emphasis on gender equality;
- promote gender-transformative economics: funding the joint ILO/UN Women programme on decent work and income security for women through inclusive growth and investments in care economy;
- direct assistance for local women's organisations in the area of WPS-HA (Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action): commitment to increase funding and switch to core funding modality for the Global Network of Women Peace Builders (GNWP), contribute to the UN Women Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, commitment that at least 10% of the SDC/HA SGBV programme funding is channelled directly to local actors, with an emphasis on women-led initiatives;
- engage with Humanitarian Appeals and Recovery Programmes: Engaging with intermediaries to remove barriers for and empower women-led organisations to drive, define, and deliver principled humanitarian response;
- fund comprehensive SGBV services: CHF 60 million funding for SGBV prevention and response over the period 2021–2025.

3. The SDC's Financial Commitments to Gender Equality

The Swiss International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24 is “committed to promoting gender equality and good governance in all its interventions.”³¹ In 2021, the SDC committed a total of CHF 1.26 billion to bilateral interventions, including humanitarian interventions and the SDC’s global programmes (see Figure 1). Of the mentioned total amount, 75% (CHF 950 million) were invested in overall gender-specific interventions in 2021. The remaining 25% (CHF 313 million)

of the total committed funding went to interventions with no gender component (meaning that gender was not targeted). Out of the mentioned total funds for gender-specific interventions, 71% (CHF 895 million) were allocated to gender-significant interventions with gender equality as a cross-cutting issue. 4% (CHF 55 million) were channelled into gender-principal interventions, where gender equality is the main objective.³²

Figure 1: Allocation of the SDC’s committed bilateral funds in relation to gender equality in 2021



³¹ FDFA (2020): International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24. Bern: FDFA, p. 17.

³² The numbers are based on the SDC’s Gender Policy Marker that complies with the OECD DAC Gender Policy Marker. It refers to the total spending commitments for gender-specific interventions approved in the respective reporting year, even if these are multi-year commitments. It does not reflect the annual disbursements.

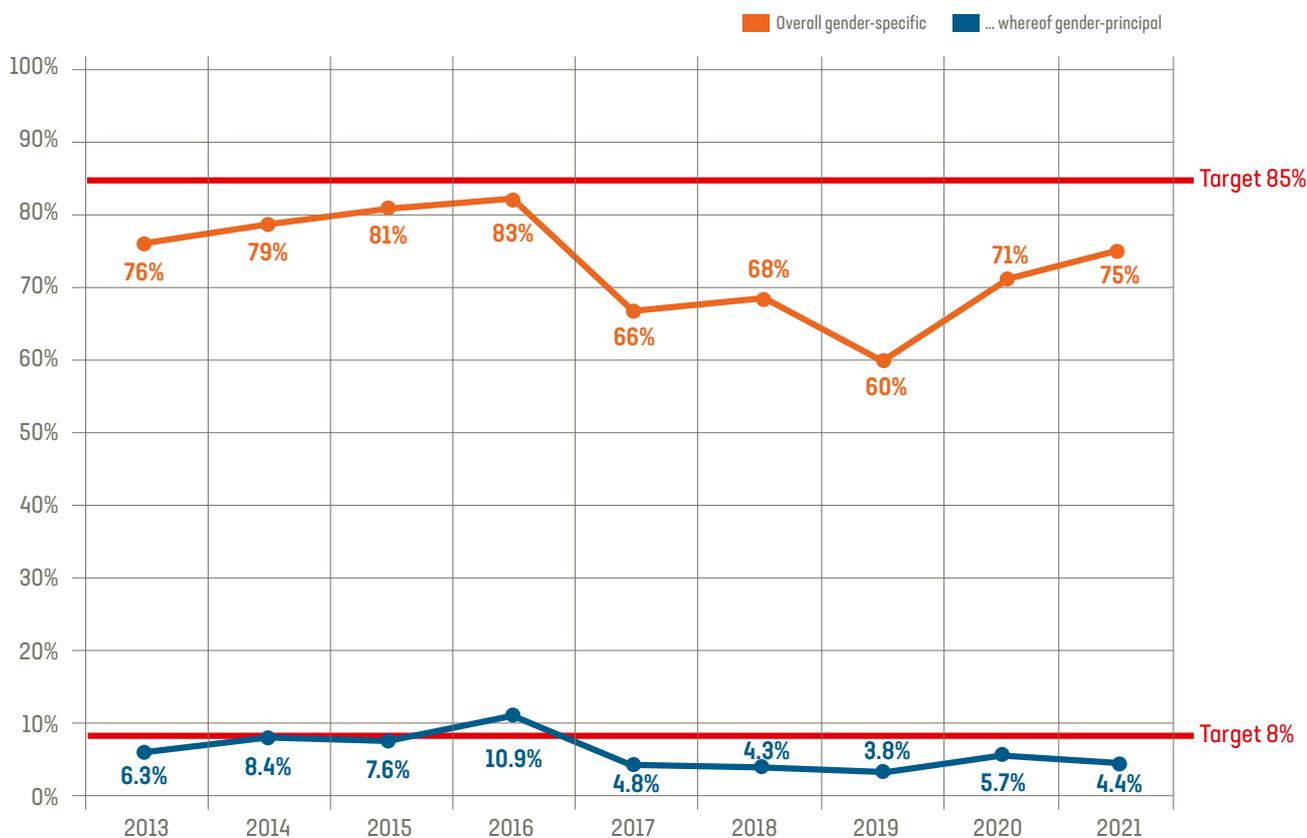
Figure 2 shows the **trend of the SDC's bilateral allocation of funds to gender equality** from 2013 to 2021. The targets for the SDC's allocations have been modified in 2021, compared to the previous years. The earlier minimal target for gender-principal allocations (10%) has been slightly lowered to 8%, while the target of 85% for the overall gender-specific commitments³³ has been maintained. This corresponds to more realistic, though still ambitious, target values, and enables future appraisals to be even more meaningful.

An important observation for 2021 is the remarkable trend of a 15% increase in the overall committed funds for gender-specific interventions within three years of funding (from 60% in 2019 to 75% in 2021). At the same time, there is a notable decrease of funded gender-principal interventions from 5.7% in 2020 to 4.4% in 2021. Even though this difference does not seem considerable in terms of percentages, it corresponds to a CHF 16 million decrease. The current development is not in line with the previous notable increase from 3.8% in 2019 to 5.7% in 2020.

The above-mentioned data indicate that the SDC does not yet address gender-principal programming and budgeting solidly and broadly enough. Another challenge is related to the SDC's capabilities to exert a direct influence in situations of contributions to interventions of large international and multilateral organisations. A further constraint consists of considerable funds being channelled by the SDC – namely in the Humanitarian Aid and Global Cooperation – through core contributions to multilateral organisations which, according to the DAC criteria, are not recorded in the reporting on Policy Markers, such as for example the important core contribution to UN Women, or to the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF).³⁴

Noteworthy is the ongoing decline of committed funds where gender is not targeted. Although the reduction of interventions not targeting gender was not as remarkable as between 2019 and 2020 (11%), this number continued to drop from 29% to 25% between 2020 and 2021. This means a positive evolution in terms of increased gender awareness and a more systematic application of the gender checklist through the use of gender Policy Markers. Despite this, further efforts are clearly needed, given that 25% of all bilateral allocations still leave gender dimensions completely unaddressed.

Figure 2: Trends in bilateral funds committed by the SDC to gender equality focused interventions (2013–2021)



³³ Overall gender-specific commitments combine gender-principal and gender-significant commitments.

³⁴ The SDC adheres to the OECD DAC guidelines for reporting on Policy Markers that exclude core contributions to multilateral organisations.

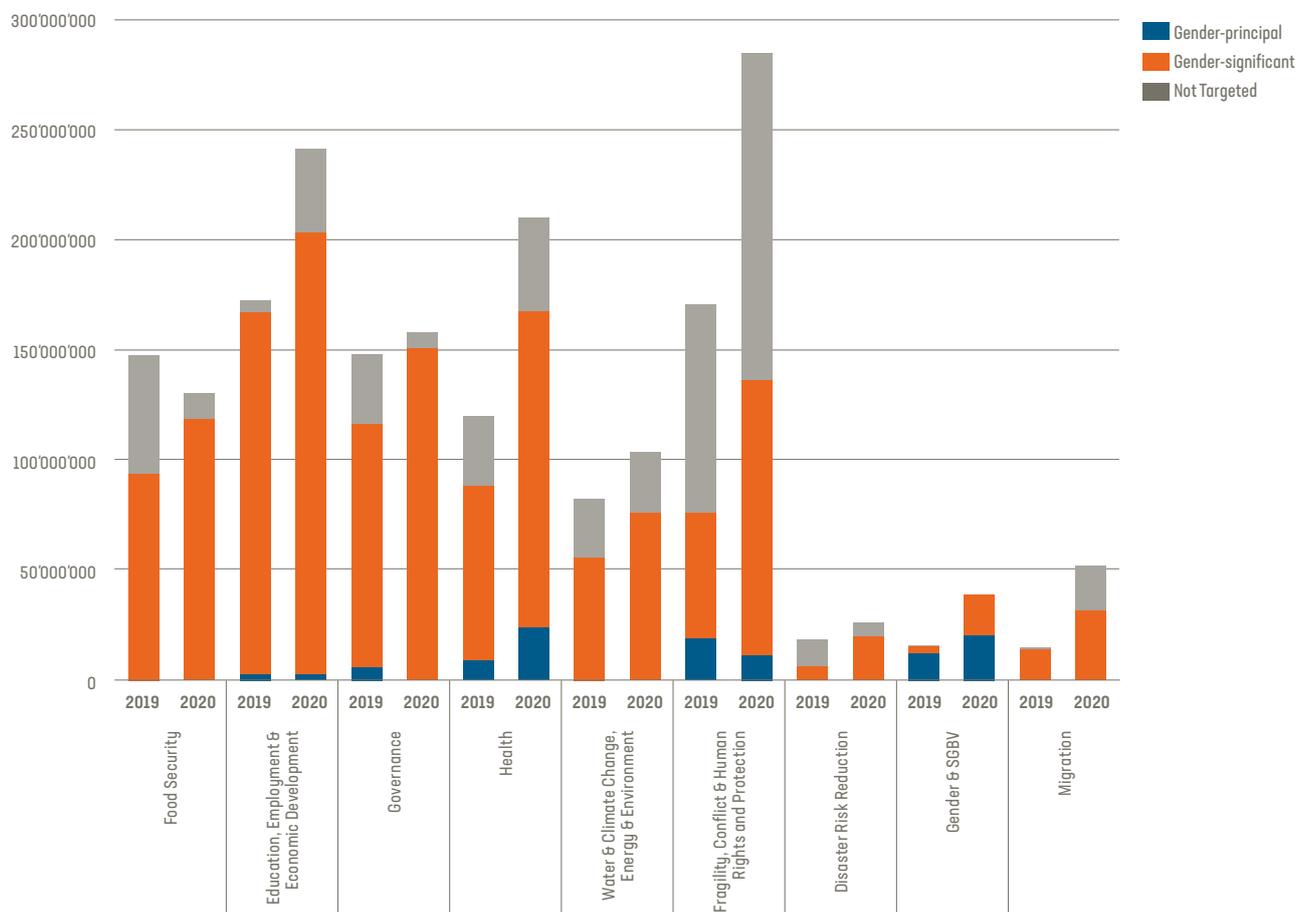
Figure 3 provides an in-depth look at the changes in the **thematic distribution of bilateral funds committed to gender** in 2021. The data show that funds for gender equality were committed to interventions in all thematic areas.

The three areas that committed the most funds to gender equality in 2021 were Education, Employment & Economic Development (CHF 202 million), Health (CHF 166 million), and Governance (CHF 150 million). Compared to 2020, the top position remains unchanged, with increased funding in 2021. Despite the fact that numerically more funds were invested in 2021 than in 2020, Governance lost its second position (moving to third position) at the advantage of elevated allocations to health-related interventions linked to gender equality. The overall gender-specific funds committed to Food Security, however, were reduced in 2021, dropping from third to fifth position. Allocations in the field of Fragility, Conflict & Human Rights and Protection increased, moving from fifth to fourth position. However, it is noteworthy that, as in 2020, most of the funds in this thematic area (52.2%) were not targeted. With 148 million in 2021, this is by far the biggest not targeted share. Overall, the top five thematic areas did not change but rotated in the ranking. Interestingly, financial allocations for Gender & SGBV have been steadily growing since 2019. This increase of almost 150% within the last three years illustrates the SDC's dedicated commitment to invest more in Gender & SGBV.

For **gender-significant interventions**, the situation in 2021 remained similar to that of 2020. The majority of funds were directed to Education, Employment & Economic Development (CHF 200 million), with an increase of CHF 37 million since 2020. The second position of committed funding is held by Governance (CHF 150 million) followed by Health (CHF 142 million). In 2021, Food Security did not rank among the top three thematic topics anymore, despite the increase of funds dedicated to gender-significant interventions (from CHF 90 million in 2020 to CHF 118 million in 2021). Overall, it is worth noting that allocated bilateral funding for gender-significant interventions has increased in all thematic areas in 2021 compared to 2020 – reversing the negative trend observed between 2019 and 2020.

The majority of funds with regard to **gender-principal interventions** were invested in the thematic areas of Health (CHF 24 million) and Gender & SGBV (CHF 21 million). Compared to 2020, the funds for the area of Fragility, Conflict & Human Rights and Protection for gender-principal interventions were reduced by almost two thirds (from CHF 19 million in 2020 to CHF 7 million in 2021), which corresponds to only 2.5% of its overall funding. This means that this thematic area lost its top position from the previous year and dropped to the third rank in 2021, with roughly the same funding as in 2019. In contrast to 2020, no gender-principal

Figure 3: Allocation of the SDC's committed bilateral funds (CHF) by thematic area in 2020 and 2021



projects were financed in 2021 for Water & Climate Change as well as Disaster Risk Reduction. Whereas no gender-principal funding was dedicated to Migration in 2020, almost CHF 1 million was invested in 2021.

Figure 4 presents the details of **gender-principal interventions in the thematic area of Fragility, Conflict & Human Rights** (not including Protection, in contrast to Fig. 3). Related to gender, this thematic area received the third largest contribution among gender-principal, but only the seventh largest among gender-significant interventions in 2021.

Focussing only on Fragility, Conflict & Human Rights and its projects with a gender-principal approach, this topic displays three different subfields of intervention: Half of all the gender-principal commitments were allocated to Human Rights (CHF 1.9 million). The second subfield of Legal and Judicial Development received 37% (CHF 1.4 million) of the funds. The smallest investment of 13% (CHF 501'150) was dedicated to Conflict Prevention.

As the thematic sub-area of Human Rights is closely related to strengthening women's human rights, it is not surprising that half of the committed SDC funding for gender-principal interventions was dedicated to this specific topic. More astonishing, however, is the fact that only a modest share (13%) of gender-principal funds was invested for Conflict Prevention, especially given the SDC's strong commitment to Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

Figure 5 shows the **geographical distribution of bilateral funds** in 2021. The highest amounts of bilateral funds for gender equality were committed in Sub-Saharan Africa (CHF 332 million), followed by Global/Other Interventions (CHF 260 million)³⁵ and Asia (CHF 126 million). These top three positions are held by the same geographical areas as in 2020, with the only difference that Asia changed its ranking from the second to the third position.

Figure 4: Allocation of committed funds (in CHF) for gender-principal interventions in the thematic area of Fragility, Conflict & Human Rights and its subfields in 2021

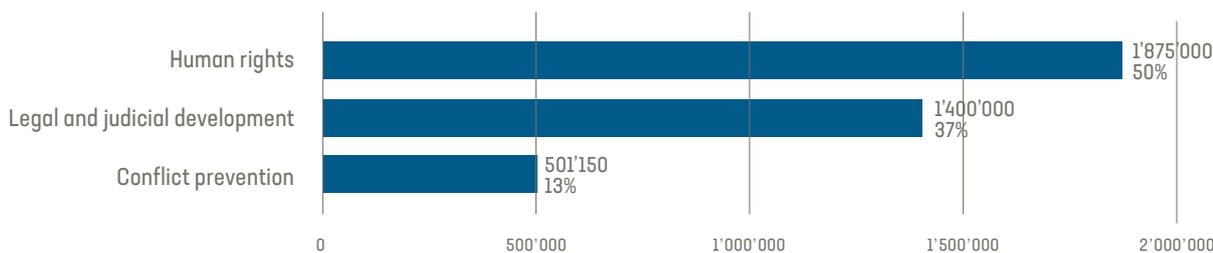
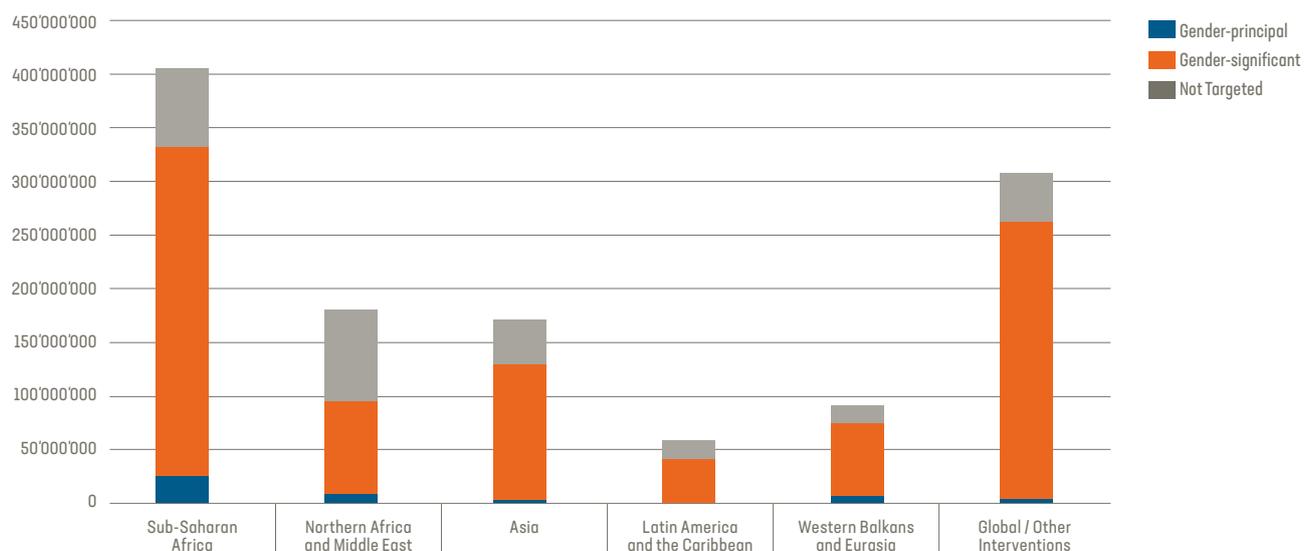


Figure 5: Allocation of the SDC's committed bilateral funds (CHF) in 2021 by geographic area

(The numbers for 2021 do not include European countries, Switzerland, and 'not specified' countries.)



³⁵ Global/Other Interventions cover several continents.

The picture is similar for gender-significant interventions, where Sub-Saharan Africa (CHF 308 million), Global/Other Interventions (CHF 254 million), and Asia (CHF 122 million) received the three largest shares of funds in absolute numbers. The volume of all committed funds addressed to these top three geographical areas increased compared to 2020. There was a very remarkable rise for Global/Other Interventions from CHF 7 million in 2020 to CHF 254 million in 2021.

With regard to allocated funds for gender-principal interventions, the situation changed fundamentally compared to 2020. In 2021, the committed funds for Sub-Saharan Africa (CHF 23 million) almost doubled and represented the most important investment. It is followed by Western Balkan and Eurasia (CHF 11.5 million) and Northern Africa and Middle East³⁶ (CHF 10.5 million), both of which did not rank among the top three geographical areas in 2020 in terms of gender-principal interventions.

Overall, Sub-Saharan Africa is the number one beneficiary for both gender-significant and gender-principal interventions, whereas Latin America and the Caribbean have the lowest share in both areas. This is most probably due to the phasing out of the SDC's country programmes in this region. Apart from Sub-Saharan Africa, Global/Other Interventions and Asia are also under the top-ranking regions.

Box II: Development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment

Development will only be sustainable if men and women equally benefit from it. In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the ground-breaking resolution 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,' which in its preamble explicitly includes the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the Agenda defines. With regard to financing, the UN Member States express in Paragraph 20 an explicit commitment "for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap."³⁷ Despite this agreement, more development finance – both in quantity and quality – is needed to live up to the Goals defined by the international community.

The most established statistics available are those for bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by members of the OECD 'Development Assistance Committee' (DAC). The DAC gender marker has been used for more than two decades by DAC members to report their ODA and to qualitatively track the financial flows that target gender equality.³⁸

Between 2018 and 2020,³⁹ the overall percentage of DAC members' bilateral allocable ODA screened against the gender equality marker,⁴⁰ either integrated or dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, remained at an average of 45%.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the volume committed to gender equality and women's empowerment was raised from USD 53 billion (2018–2019) to an unprecedented USD 56.5 billion (2019–2020) on average per year. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, holding this steady level of 45% and even increasing in financial volumes for gender equality and women's empowerment are remarkable elements.

Similar to 2018–2019, the majority of committed funds (40% of total bilateral aid) integrated gender equality as a significant policy objective in the assessment period 2019–2020, with an investment of USD 50.2 billion. This means that only 5% (USD 6.3 billion) of the allocable ODA were committed to interventions specifically dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment as the principal objective.

In 2019–2020, the two DAC members Iceland and Canada reported the highest rates (both 88%) of bilateral allocable ODA for gender equality. Switzerland is currently (2020) ranking at the 9th position with regard to these statistics, allocating 55% of its aid either to gender-significant or gender-principal programmes. Although this percentage of Swiss support has dropped by 3% ever since 2019, the volume has increased (from USD 2.077 billion in 2019 to USD 2.496 billion in 2020).⁴² A top ten ranking indicates an important policy focus on gender equality for these members. However, there is a notable difference regarding gender-principal investments among these top ten DAC members. While the top five members⁴³ committed between 14% (Ireland) and 25% (Netherlands) of their bilateral ODA to gender-principal interventions, Switzerland and the EU Institutions bring up the rear of the top ten DAC members, with a share of only 4% allocated funds dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment as the principal objective. According to the OECD, "all DAC donors can do a better job of implementing a twin-track approach of both mainstreamed and dedicated funding towards gender equality."⁴⁴

36 Also referred to as MENA region.

37 UN General Assembly Resolution (2015), A/RES/70/1: Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

38 For more information see: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/dac-gender-equality-marker.htm>

39 This involves the assessment periods 2018–2019 and 2019–2020. The OECD's snapshot 2022 provides the latest information on development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment, using 2019–2020 data collected by the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate.

40 Statistics on gender focus exclude bilateral non-allocable aid since several members do not apply the gender marker on these forms of aid.

41 The OECD's snapshot 2022 provides the latest information on development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment, using 2019–2020 data collected by the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate.

42 CRS (2022): Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Donor Charts. Statistics based on DAC Members' reporting on the Gender Equality Policy Marker, 2019–2020. Creditor Reporting System database, p. 31; Creditor Reporting System (CRS) Aid Activity database, available at <http://oe.cd/oda-gender>.

43 Iceland, Canada, Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Belgium.

44 See <https://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/development-finance-for-gender-equality-and-women-s-empowerment.htm>

4. The SDC's Gender Results

This chapter describes how SDC projects have advanced gender equality in 2021. It features the results of the SDC's gender-responsive reference indicators and showcases a selection of projects addressing gender-relevant issues in four main topics in different regions around the world. Reference indicators include a selection of both purely quantitative indicators (so-called aggregated reference indicators/ARIs), typically measuring the number of people benefiting from a project, and of more qualitative (though still quantifiable) indicators (so-called thematic reference indicators/TRIs) such as, for example, perception indicators. Because the SDC's online results data system is still under development, only the results for ARIs are available for this report.

Measuring gender results meaningfully by means of quantitative indicators is only possible to a certain degree, for multiple reasons. First, measurement requires that indicators are always measured in the intended ways. Second, developments that are crucial for advancing gender equality – such as changes in attitudes or in social norms, practices, or customs – result from interacting psychological, social, political, economic, and ecological developments that are notoriously difficult to capture in quantitative terms. Therefore, this chapter presents quantitative results and complements them with the portrayal of 12 exemplary projects to provide readers with a better idea of the SDC and its implementing partners' efforts in 2021 to work towards a more gender-equal world.

As outlined in chapter 3, during 2021 the SDC supported projects concerned with the promotion of gender equality as a primary objective ('gender-principal' interventions) and projects pursuing other main objectives while retaining a strong focus on mainstreaming gender issues ('gender-significant' interventions). The projects featured in the present chapter demonstrate the wide range of the SDC's engagements – thematically, geographically, and with different funding and implementing partners.

The project examples cover the SDC's three thematic priorities under gender, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), women's economic empowerment (WEE), and women's political empowerment and participation (WPE). A fourth section entitled 'Women, Peace and Security' (WPS) has been added to this year's report in order to raise awareness on the SDC's strong commitment to actively promote the implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions under this agenda, as well as to illustrate the different possible entry points to do so. The showcased project provides a good practice example of how, by improving one specific aspect – in this case the economic empowerment and improved knowledge on trade regulations of women cross-border traders in the Great Lake Region –, other overarching aims can be achieved simultaneously, in this case more political stability and peace in the region.

This chapter features two parts: First, a map provides an overview of all countries with gender-specific SDC activities, as well as the geographical location of the twelve showcased project examples. The second part of the chapter contains four sub-chapters, each of which provides an overview of the results achieved with regard to one of the thematic axes, followed by the corresponding project examples. The project examples are tagged with an SDC reference indicator and feature the results of each project, as well as a project description, key gender-related results, and challenges – including the continuing obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.

Map of the SDC's Gender Equality-Focused Interventions

The map provides an overview of countries in which the SDC and its partners are implementing gender-specific interventions.

This map is not exhaustive, and the featured interventions are based on a selection by the SDC Gender Unit.



Serbia

Empowering civil society for their action in promoting gender equality in Serbia (see Example 11, p. 46)

Bangladesh

Support for women and men who have escaped trafficking in Bangladesh (see Example 1, p. 22)

Bangladesh

Increasing the incomes and quality of livelihoods of char households in Bangladesh (see Example 5, p. 32)

Laos

Enhancing women's participation in community-led development in Laos (see Example 9, p. 42)

**Mekong Region
(Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar,
Thailand, Vietnam)**

Advancing the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in water governance decision-making processes in the Mekong region (see Example 10, p. 44)

Cambodia

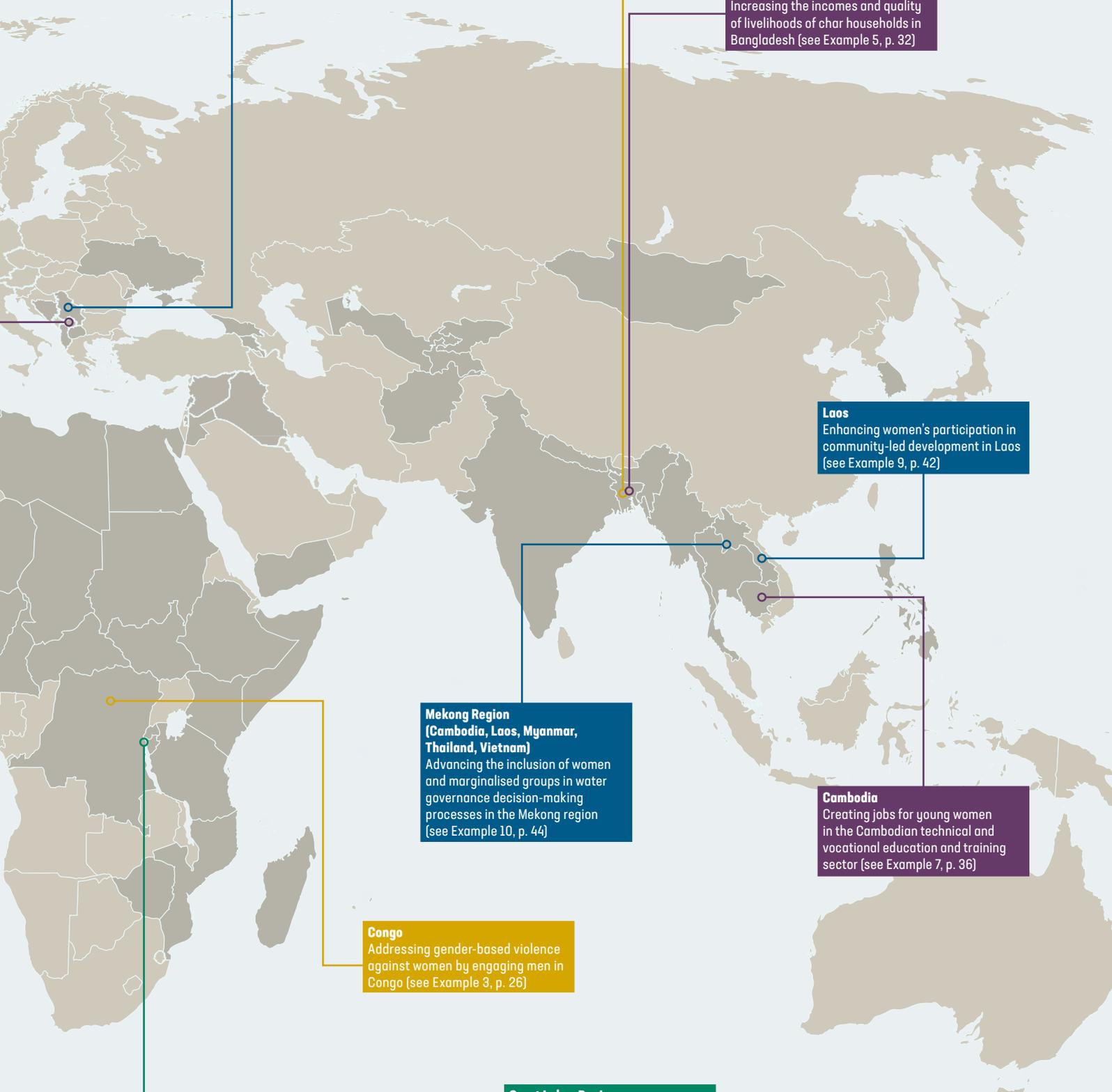
Creating jobs for young women in the Cambodian technical and vocational education and training sector (see Example 7, p. 36)

Congo

Addressing gender-based violence against women by engaging men in Congo (see Example 3, p. 26)

**Great Lakes Region
(Rwanda, DRC, Burundi)**

Working towards a more inclusive society, better cooperation, and sustainable peace in the Great Lakes border region through women's cross-border trade (see Example 12, p. 50)



REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Gender-Based Violence; Trafficking; Migration

Indicator:

GEN_ARI_1: Number of persons subjected to different forms of SGBV having received required (medical, and/or psychosocial, and/or legal) support

MIG_TRI_3:

Number of migrants and forcibly displaced persons experiencing violence, exploitation, and abuse who access protection/rehabilitation services

Example 1: Gender-significant intervention

Support for women and men who have escaped trafficking in Bangladesh

Both the SDG 5 and SDC definitions of sexual and gender-based violence explicitly include human trafficking. The project 'Ashshash – For Men and Women who Have Escaped Trafficking in Bangladesh' supports both women and men – or girls and boys, respectively – who have escaped trafficking and institutions that assist survivors. The project promotes strategic interventions such as psychosocial counselling, health and legal support, or skills and entrepreneurship development for people (mainly women) who have escaped trafficking. Moreover, partner institutions and organisations are enabled to provide better services to survivors. The aim is to improve survivors' social and economic wellbeing and to enable them to become self-sufficient by using the reintegration services provided by the SDC implementing partners.

Implementing partner

Winrock International

Beneficiaries

In 2021, a total of 1'597 women and 480 men who escaped human trafficking have benefited from this intervention. Among the beneficiaries are poor and marginalised persons, religious and ethnic minorities, single mothers, widowed and divorced persons, and persons with disabilities and limited access to formal education and institutions.

Finances

The project is currently in its first phase (2018–2022). The SDC has contributed an amount of CHF 5.72 million for this first project phase and CHF 600'000 for the year 2021. In total, the SDC has allocated CHF 26 million for the three project phases (2018–2029).

Gender analysis

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking

Women and girls in Bangladesh are at a high risk of being trafficked due to their diminished status in society. Because of their gender and migrant status, they face multiple oppressions. Gendered poverty, lack of viable employment opportunities, lack of control over financial resources, and limited access to education are factors that can exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking and further limit their ability for reintegration. These gender-specific risks expose Bangladeshi women and girls both to internal trafficking within Bangladesh as well as to international trafficking, to India specifically, but also to Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and Lebanon.



Activities

Providing services to women who escaped trafficking and strengthening domestic support

'Ashshash' supports women, girls, boys, and men as well as their families who have escaped human trafficking by improving their social and economic wellbeing through reintegration services. Beneficiaries are provided with psychosocial counselling, graduate from technical and entrepreneurial trainings, and receive health support and legal compensation. Furthermore, specialised trainings enable public and private partner institutions and organisations to provide more competent and effective services beneficial to survivors of trafficking. These partners are active in all five districts covered by 'Ashshash' and include NGOs providing social protection services and training institutions offering skills development services based on the contextual needs and requirements of survivors. Project partners also collaborate with private sector stakeholders to facilitate the employment of survivors. Further activities – such as community radio programmes – aim to campaign against trafficking in humans, to raise awareness for the plight of trafficked women and men, and to empower survivors of trafficking and SGBV.

Results

Socioeconomic reintegration of survivors of human trafficking, positive transformation of societal perceptions, and institutional support

Women and men who received financial support from the project and its partner organisations were able to increase their income through the expansion of their business ventures. They were able to meet their immediate needs along with those of their children and their respective educational expenses, while also exhibiting independence and self-sufficiency. Survivors were found to be encouraged to move forward with sustainable endeavours for the future through increased family acceptance and autonomy in decision-making. In addition, thanks to 'Ashshash,' communities in trafficking-prone areas are now more aware of the dangers and mechanisms of trafficking and irregular migration, and there has been a demonstrable positive shift in societal perceptions towards survivors of human trafficking.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Fear of stigmatisation and backlash against survivors of human trafficking

Following the resurgence of COVID-19 in April 2021, the Bangladesh government imposed a tighter lockdown and strict travel restrictions. Some of Ashshash's counsellors and trainers faced organisational restrictions due to the pandemic, which had a negative impact on the implementation of Ashshash's activities such as counselling, skills-training, job placement opportunities, provision of legal support, and awareness-raising. COVID-19 induced limitations in access to services, institutions, and employment opportunities for trafficking survivors, while in turn substantially diminishing survivors' abilities to enhance their skillsets and/or access employment. Access to digital modes of support services proved to be particularly difficult for female survivors due to the limited availability of technology. Furthermore, increased instances of SGBV at home and rising mental health suffering added to the already considerable financial dependency and psychosocial instability of both female and male survivors.

In terms of learnings, there is still much scope for raising awareness among family members, community members, and stakeholders about trafficking survivors and for further empowering survivors. Persistence will be needed to achieve real transformation of pervasive gender stereotypes and deeply held beliefs about trafficking survivors. In particular, the expected increase in women's employment in non-traditional occupations will require long-term support, skills development, confidence-building of trafficking survivors, as well as continued awareness-raising measures in institutions and among employers. Furthermore, there is need for more interventions to address the restricted mobility of women survivors in seeking training or employment due to family-related responsibilities.

Sources

Ashshash: For Men and Women Who Have Escaped Trafficking 2021: Gender Strategy and Action Plan Progress Report.

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. Swiss Cooperation Office Bangladesh.

Winrock International 2021: Ashshash: For Men and Women Who Have Escaped Trafficking. Annual Report January 1 to December 31, 2021.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence; Fragility, Conflict and Human Rights

Indicator:

GEN_ARI_1:
Number of persons subjected to different forms of SGBV having received required (medical, and/or psychosocial, and/or legal) support

FCHR_TRI_2:

Number of processes or policies that increase societies' capacities to resist and mitigate all forms of violence, or that strengthen coping mechanisms, state-society relationship, and social cohesion

Example 2: Gender-principal intervention

Strengthening knowledge and advocacy on women's rights in the fight against gender-based violence towards internally displaced women in Burkina Faso

Since 2020, the SDC has been supporting the project 'Stop Gender-Based Violence in Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) sites' in Burkina Faso. The SDC works with international organisations to address violence against displaced women, with the aim of educating women and their host communities on women's rights by creating a monitoring network and involving public figures in the fight against SGBV.

Implementing partner

In addition to the SDC, the Royal Danish Embassy, the Swedish Embassy, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are technical and financial partners of the project, which is implemented by the National Federation of Wend Yam Groups.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, 12'426 women, 2'131 girls, 9'616 men, and 1'894 boys benefited directly from project interventions. Of these 26'067 beneficiaries, 17'090 were IDPs: 6'867 women, 2'060 girls, 6'259 men, and 1'904 boys.

Finances

In 2021, the SDC contributed six percent (CHF 11'219) of the overall budget of CHF 68'164.

Gender analysis

Internally displaced women are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence

The violence faced by women in Burkina Faso mainly results from social norms reproducing inequalities between women and men. This manifests itself in customary practices such as excision,⁵³ forced or levirate marriage,⁵⁴ and polygamy, as well as in the social exclusion of women and in their difficulties in accessing land. Furthermore, since 2015 Burkina Faso has been confronted with the presence of non-state armed groups, which has led to recurrent security incidents, community conflicts, looting, and human rights violations. This hostile

environment has forced people to leave their villages and take refuge in surrounding settlements. In 2020, the number of IDPs reached one million, 84% of whom were women and children. Many of the displaced women were left without any livelihood and were oftentimes exposed to SGBV within the host communities, such as sexual harassment, stigmatisation, rape, and moral or psychological violence. By early 2021, the exorbitant rate of 18.2% of all IDPs had experienced SGBV since their arrival in these new sites.

Activities

Strengthening local awareness on gender-based violence against internally displaced persons and providing psycho-social support to survivors

The main objective of the project is to eliminate all forms of violence, especially against internally displaced women and girls, both in the public and private spheres. The project focuses on the support of SGBV survivors, referring them to psychosocial and legal care structures that aim at the recovery of their physical integrity and the strength and confidence needed to reintegrate into society. Furthermore, in terms of SGBV prevention, the project has developed a variety of activities to foster awareness on women's rights and to strengthen their advocacy.

In 2021, project activities focused on addressing the inequalities resulting from patriarchal norms and on training communities on women's rights. This was achieved through awareness-raising sessions, women's active participation in monitoring networks, and the training of public authorities – such as police and judicial officers – on women's rights, violence against women, and humanitarian crisis situations among IDPs. All project activities emphasised the common responsibility in fighting against SGBV, both through personal awareness and through individual and community engage-

⁵³ One of several practices of female genital mutilation (FGM).

⁵⁴ Levirate marriage: A custom or law decreeing that a widow should, or in some cases must, marry her dead husband's brother.

ment. In addition, the project engaged customary and religious leaders in promoting positive, non-violent images of masculinity and gender equality.

Results

Increased awareness about gender-based violence and a functional community-based response system, benefiting SGBV survivors

In 2021, 68 SGBV survivors directly benefited from project interventions, having been able to access support and counselling, as well as psychosocial and legal services. Numerous community-based mechanisms for prevention, alert, referral to specialised structures (such as health, law enforcement, justice, and humanitarian response), and protection against SGBV are in place and functional at the local level. For example, 95 community leaders have committed to the promotion of positive masculinities and gender equality, and 29 women's organisations have been engaged in SGBV alert, prevention, and response activities.

Project activities have directly resulted in a reduction in SGBV and domestic violence in the targeted communities. These developments have enabled survivors to heal and integrate into the host community socially, politically, and economically. Project achievements are: (1) host communities have increased their knowledge about the changes needed in socio-cultural norms to promote gender equality and combat SGBV; (2) local community-based mechanisms for prevention, alert, referral to specialised structures, and protection against SGBV affecting IDPs have been established; (3)

women's organisations and customary and religious leaders have been strengthened in their role as warning actors and were supported in their activities to prevent and respond to SGBV. Among the implemented project activities, the setup of 12 mixed-gender monitoring groups turned out to be a key strategy in raising awareness for and mobilising against SGBV.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Limitations on the number of participants in awareness-raising sessions

In 2021, the main negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the project was a significant reduction in the number of participants in the awareness-raising sessions. This notwithstanding, the impact of the pandemic has decreased compared to 2020 due to protective measures such as choosing more spacious classrooms, greater respect for social distancing, the limitation of participants, and the use of disinfectants and masks during sessions.

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REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Gender-Based Violence; Fragility, Conflict and Human Rights

Indicator:

GEN_ARI_1: Number of persons subjected to different forms of SGBV having received required (medical, and/or psychosocial, and/or legal) support

FCHR_TRI_2:

Number of processes or policies that increase societies' capacities to resist and mitigate all forms of violence, or that strengthen coping mechanisms, state-society relationship, and social cohesion

Example 3: Gender-principal intervention

Addressing gender-based violence against women by engaging men in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The project 'Men Will Fight Violence Against Women' applies Community Psychosocial Approaches (CPA) to involve men in the fight against SGBV in the DRC. The wars and conflicts raging in the project region not only traumatise women and girls, who often fall prey to SGBV. Husbands, fathers, and sons who have 'failed' to protect their female family members from violence often reject survivors out of shame and consideration for the family's reputation. Such situations also increase the risk of male family members resorting to violence themselves. Particularly men bearing weapons and active in conflicts are prone to turn to violence because they frequently suffer from psychosocial disorders, alcoholism, or drug addiction. The project applies group therapy and awareness-raising events to help these men and boys heal, to positively influence their attitudes towards women and girls, to raise their awareness about SGBV, and ultimately to engage them as promoters of women's rights and gender equality.

Implementing partner

The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) and the Soins de Santé Mentale (SOSAME) in the DRC are responsible for the implementation of the project.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, a total of 1'052 women and 1'601 men benefited from this intervention. Among them, 501 women survivors of SGBV were identified and followed up for care.

Finances

The SDC has supported the third phase of the project (January to December 2021) with a contribution of CHF 63'379.

Gender analysis

Armed conflicts and cultural norms give rise to gender-based violence

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), the deteriorating security situation in several regions of the DRC, the unequal power relations between men and women, as well as the low status of women in Congolese society are sources of physical and psychological violence against women and girls. Although the country's laws explicitly grant women and men the same opportunities in terms of access to work, as a result of local traditions many women are still in practice deprived of basic rights such as access to education. The subordinate position attributed to women limits their participation in the political, economic, and social spheres and may lead to SGBV.



© Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), RDC

Activities

Group therapy and awareness-raising for men scarred by war and conflict

A major line of interventions applied CPA to prevent and combat SGBV by promoting positive attitudes and practices regarding the role and position of women in society and by raising awareness about SGBV. Particular emphasis was placed on providing psychological support to men and boys affected by armed conflict, while also educating them on various aspects of gender equality, including legal aspects; the division of labour between men and women; a balanced management of common goods and power in the household; women's autonomy and independence; and gender complementarity. A second line of activities included awareness-raising workshops in several regions addressing people of different genders and ages, as well as the engagement of political, administrative, and religious leaders and NGOs for the promotion of gender equality. A further line of interventions aimed to improve the identification of SGBV survivors; the quality of medical, psychological, and legal care and support provided to them; and supporting the development of effective community responses to SGBV cases.

Results

Men have become advocates for gender equality and fighting SGBV

In 2021, five therapy groups for men in different locations were attended by a total of 80 civilians and security officers. In these groups, participants developed measurably more positive attitudes towards women and greater awareness of SGBV. Group therapy participants sensitised an additional 852 peers.

Furthermore, numerous awareness-raising workshops brought women, men, girls, and boys together to share experiences and discuss perspectives on gender equality and SGBV. 765 people (almost half of them men) participated in these workshops in eight villages, and an additional 574 people (two-thirds of them men) participated in another series of 136 awareness-raising events applying CPA. In addition, a total of 293 local leaders were mobilised to promote gender equality, tackle impunity for perpetrators of SGBV, and challenge cultural norms and practices that promote SGBV.

Regarding service delivery, 1'733 men and women in need of psychosocial support were identified in the three project regions, including 1'027 cases of SGBV. 1'427 of these persons – around two thirds of them women – were accompanied within the framework of the project. In 2021, the cases of 501 women and 297 men could be closed due to the achievement of psychosocial rehabilitation, which entails social stabilisation, resumption of responsibilities, belief in one's own abilities, active participation in discussion groups, testimony of the facts experienced, and disappearance of symptoms.

An important learning from this project was that communities can heal their wounds and recover from their losses themselves if provided with the necessary and appropriate approaches and techniques such as CPA.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

COVID-19 slowed down interventions and overall implementation

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the project has decreased compared to 2020, yet overall implementation was still slowed by continued difficulties in reaching potential beneficiaries. Other challenges included the handling of sensitive interventions that threatened to exacerbate rather than alleviate the issues at stake, especially in processes of reconciliation and mediation. In addition, SGBV survivors sometimes perceived services that targeted potential or alleged SGBV perpetrators as complicit with the aggressors. Future interventions in this area will require even greater efforts to create a climate of trust and extremely careful selection of credible and trustworthy mediators.

Sources

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. SDC Cooperation Office Congo.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2021): DR Congo: Rapport de situation, 7 September 2021. Reliefweb Platform.

Additional information by the SDC Cooperation Office Congo (personal communication, May 2022).

INDICATOR

Example 4: Gender-significant intervention

Theme:

Gender-Based Violence; Fragility, Conflict and Human Rights

Indicator:

GEN_ARI_1:
Number of persons subjected to different forms of sexual and gender-based violence having received required (medical, and/or psychosocial, and/or legal) support

FCHR_TRI_2:

Number of processes or policies that increase societies' capacities to resist and mitigate all forms of violence, or that strengthen coping mechanisms, state-society relationship, and social cohesion

Improving institutional capacities for the prevention of gender-based violence as a key component of citizen security in Honduras

Since 2018, the SDC has been supporting the 'Territorial Citizen Security Programme' (Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana Territorial) in Honduras, aimed at improving levels of citizen security by strengthening the role of local actors in the management of social violence prevention. With a strong participatory component and a gender and human rights approach, the project provides the necessary support for the effective implementation of crime and violence prevention mechanisms and for the enhancement of access to justice. Efforts aimed at the prevention of SGBV and the promotion of gender equality are highlighted in multiple project components.

Implementing partner

Implementing partners are the GFA Consulting Group GmbH and the Centre for Research and Promotion of Human Rights (CIPRODEH).

Beneficiaries

In 2021, 5'860 women and 781 young people benefited directly from this project. Of the total 6'641 beneficiaries, 717 belonged to indigenous communities.

Finances

The SDC's financial contribution for the first phase of the project (2018–2022) amounts to CHF 4 million. In 2021, the SDC's contribution totalled CHF 900'000.

Gender analysis

Persistent gender gaps and high prevalence of SGBV

Gender inequality remains pervasive in Honduras, particularly in the political and economic spheres. At the political level, gender gaps persist in most decision-making arenas at both national and local levels, compromising women's full political participation. In the economic sphere, women face severe difficulties in the pursuit of their autonomy, given the unequal distribution of access to resources and the existing gaps in access to employment based on location, educational level, and age. Honduran women are also highly exposed to SGBV, the rates of which have increased considerably since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data on femicides is particularly striking, registering 342 violent deaths of women in 2021. This picture is aggravated by the limited capacity of state institutions at local and national levels to address violence against women and girls (VAWG) and by the high level of impunity in SGBV cases, related to the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes in judicial institutions and society.



Activities

Institutional strengthening to prevent SGBV and ensure access to justice

The project aims to improve security levels in the regions of La Moskitia and Golfo de Fonseca and seeks to strengthen the role of local governments in the management of violence prevention and citizen security together with justice operators, citizens, and local organisations. The efforts to prevent SGBV and improve access to justice for SGBV survivors are particularly noteworthy: During 2021, the project has worked to strengthen local women's networks and Municipal Women's Offices, supporting awareness-raising activities for the prevention of domestic violence in communities with a high incidence of VAWG. Multiple capacity-building activities have also been held for network members on the support of SGBV survivors in judicial proceedings. The project has also trained 100 officers of the National Police and 50 staff members of the Inter-institutional Criminal Justice Subcommittees on the prevention of VAWG and the promotion of gender equality. In addition, a 'Care Route for Cases of Domestic Violence' (Ruta de atención de casos de violencia doméstica) has been developed in the municipality of Choluteca, to facilitate and ensure women's access to justice. Finally, resources have been allocated to the design and implementation of awareness-raising radio campaigns on domestic violence, both locally and nationally.

Results

Enhanced capacities to assist SGBV survivors

The project has contributed to the improvement of prevention and care services for SGBV survivors in the targeted regions, particularly in the department of Choluteca, where 305 women survivors were assisted by the Office for Domestic Violence Care of the National Police. There is also evidence of improved inter-institutional relations and better integration of civil society actors in the planning and implementation of actions aimed at reducing the incidence of SGBV. The support provided to the organisation 'Red Regional de Mujeres del Sur' has resulted in the creation of a network of legal promoters capable of orienting women on the

legal framework for the protection of their rights in cases of domestic violence. During 2021, 56 legal promoters have been certified in 16 municipalities in the targeted regions, being able to follow up on 73% of the cases of SGBV and seven cases of femicide. Finally, progress has been made in the consolidation and creation of new Offices for Domestic Violence Care in the intervened regions.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Addressing SGBV in an emergency context

In the emergency context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of domestic violence has severely increased, and given the government's measures to contain the health emergency, many of the services for SGBV survivors had to be suspended temporarily, compromising survivors' access to protection and justice. The project had to adapt quickly to the exceptional circumstances, which, however, also provided an opportunity to strengthen links with various security and justice agencies and with municipalities and women's networks in the territory. Part of the project funds was reallocated to provide rapid response and support to SGBV attention services (e.g. by purchasing food supplies and biosecurity materials). Additionally, given the experience gathered during the first year of the pandemic in terms of virtual working, the project has managed to foster inter-institutional online meetings and training processes during 2021, which are key components of its operational plan.

Sources

Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM) (2021): Observatorio de Violencias contra las Mujeres.

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SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. SDC Cooperation Office Honduras.

Velásquez, A.M. (2021): La desigualdad social en Honduras: evolución y respuesta institucional, Documentos de Proyectos, Ciudad de México, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL).

4.2 Women's Economic Empowerment

Why action is needed

Equal economic participation is central to achieving gender equality, and vice versa. It is also a prerequisite for successfully implementing the SDGs, which call for full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, as well as for equal pay, in target 8.5.⁵⁵

As the project examples in this report attest, the persisting economic gender gap remains rooted in gender stereotypes and unequal power relations. Women are often still primarily relegated to – frequently unpaid – care or domestic work. The paid work women pursue – typically in addition to their unpaid workload ('double burden') – tends to be situated in the lowest paid and most exposed areas of the informal sector, such as street vending or domestic work. Globally, women still undertake three times more reproductive work than men, with women in poorer countries devoting even more time to this work than women in rich countries.⁵⁶

At the same time, unpaid reproductive work, such as childbearing or nurturing, is often perceived as having low value and mostly remains invisible in mainstream economics.⁵⁷ Due to the association of poor or no payment with a low socio-economic status, women are relegated to vulnerable positions within their relationships, families, and communities. This does in turn not only compromise their educational achievements and economic opportunities, but also promotes gender-based violence and generally increases risks to women's health.⁵⁸

A quickly growing number of studies is further confirming that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental effect on women's already disadvantaged economic situation. Globally, labour market recovery from the pandemic shock has stalled during 2021, with poorer countries, young people, and women – especially young women – still suffering disproportionately from employment losses. The female-dominated informal sector has been hit especially hard, with jobs plunging by 20% at the height of the crisis.⁵⁹

Overall, more efforts are necessary to enable women's full economic participation. The projects presented in this chapter show how the SDC is tackling these challenges to foster positive developments in women's economic empowerment.

The SDC's achievements

Working towards women's economic empowerment continued to be at the heart of many SDC interventions in 2021. A focus was placed on incorporating the gender and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) perspectives into economic development projects working in different sub-fields. This included women's vocational skills and leadership development; (self-)employment and income creation for women employees, entrepreneurs, or smallholder farmers; and improving women's access to and control over economic resources (e.g. finances, land). A focus was also placed on enhancing women's decision-making power and address obstructive gender stereotypes – as illustrated in the selected project examples.

The following aggregated quantitative results can be reported for 2021:

- SDC-funded interventions contributed to **new or better employment** for 68'814 people in 17 countries, of whom 18.7% were female members from LNOB target groups and 30.4% were women of non-LNOB target groups.
- A total of 318'789 people in ten countries received **access to and made use of formal financial products** and services, of whom 3.6% were female members from LNOB target groups and 27.8 % were women of non-LNOB target groups.
- A total of 636'212 persons in 21 countries have enrolled in **new or better vocational skills development**, of whom 8.8% were female members from LNOB target groups and 12% were women of non-LNOB target groups.
- 546'706 smallholder farmers in nine countries profited from **increased incomes from agricultural production**, among them 23.1% were female members from LNOB target groups and 2.4% were women of non-LNOB target groups.
- **18'065 migrants and forcibly displaced persons** benefited from services that enable them to access **safe and decent work opportunities**, of whom 51.1% were women.

55 See 38 and Article 3 (g) of the UN General Assembly's 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, p. 2.

56 UN Women (2020): Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World. New York: UN Women, p. 140–173.

57 Seedat Soraya and Marta Rondon (2021): Women's Wellbeing and the Burden of Unpaid Work. *BMJ*; 374; n1972.

58 Fawole, Olufunmilayo I. (2008): Economic Violence to Women and Girls: Is It Receiving the Necessary Attention? *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 167–177.

59 ILO (2021 and 2022): Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work. Eighth and Ninth Edition (October 2021 and May 2022). Updated Estimates and Analysis. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

In SDC projects promoting new or better employment, nearly half of the beneficiaries were women, among them over 18% female members of disadvantaged groups. Although this result is positive at first, it should nevertheless be viewed critically: Compared to the 57% of female beneficiaries in 2020, the number has decreased, and considering the significant and persisting gender gaps in employment and pay, women should at present make up the clear majority of the beneficiaries of such interventions. On a positive note, the number of women from LNOB target groups has increased sixfold. In SDC projects targeting migrants and forcibly displaced persons, slightly more than half of the beneficiaries were women.

In terms of formal financial products, the results are mixed: Only roughly a third of the beneficiaries of financial products are women, and the number of only 3.5% for LNOB women is far too low. (It should be mentioned that the figure of only 2.3% for LNOB men is also very low). Still, the general trend is positive, with the ratio of women beneficiaries having risen by 500% compared to 2020 (6% in 2020; 31% in 2020) – with considerable positive trends for women from both LNOB and non-LNOB target groups.

Mixed results have also been reported in vocational skills development: Of all persons newly enrolled in vocational skills development thanks to SDC interventions, overall only 21% were women, of which 9% from disadvantaged groups. These numbers attest to a wide gender gap in this relevant field, which is stagnating compared to 2020: Whereas the number increased for female non-LNOB target groups (from 3% to 12%) the number for female LNOB target groups has halved (from 19% to 9%).

Among smallholder farmers who profited from increased incomes, only about a quarter (23%) were women, almost all of whom were members of disadvantaged groups (only 2% of all beneficiaries were women not belonging to vulnerable groups).

From an intersectional perspective, SDC interventions promoting improved vocational skills development and better access to formal financial products and services did not perform as desired, as they were not able to include women from disadvantaged groups in significant numbers. In this context, it is particularly noteworthy that while 80% of all beneficiaries of vocational skills development projects were members of vulnerable groups, only about 10% were women. On the other hand, in projects promoting higher incomes in the agricultural sector, women beneficiaries from disadvantaged groups clearly outnumbered other women beneficiaries.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ All SDC data are based on the respective annual reports 2021 and the SDC's electronic annual results recording for 2021.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Incomes from Agricultural Production; Women's Economic Empowerment

Indicator:

AFS_ARI_1:

Number of smallholder farmers with increased incomes from agricultural production

IED_TRI_5:

Proportion of women with a positive perception on their influence on business and economic-related decision-making

Example 5: Gender-significant intervention

Increasing the incomes and quality of livelihoods of char households in Bangladesh

The project 'Making Markets Work for the Jamuna, Padma, and Teesta Chars (M4C)' aims to increase the incomes and quality of livelihoods of char households, thereby reducing their poverty and vulnerability. The project seeks to improve and diversify the economic activities of char households, increase investment in infrastructure and market development, and to expand national and local service providers in the public and private sectors. M4C also aims to enhance char women's involvement in economic activities through more significant income opportunities, which are intended to contribute to greater decision-making power for women within their households and in their communities.

Implementing partner

Implementing partners are Swisscontact-Bangladesh and Rural Development Academy (RDA), Bogra.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, 1'200 women and 7'700 men directly benefited from project interventions.

Finances

The project is ongoing (2011–2024) and is currently in its third phase (2020–2024), for which the SDC has allocated CHF 5.5 million. In 2021, the SDC committed CHF 1.5 million to this project.

Gender analysis

The invisibility of women's work

The chars of northern Bangladesh are riverine lands that are prone to erosion and remain disconnected from the mainland seasonally or year-round. Due to their geographical location, char women are in a particularly vulnerable situation, which is further exacerbated by recurrent natural hazards – such as floods, droughts, and storms. Char locals have little or no access to basic services, such as adequate transport, housing, electricity, financial services, health care, or even education, compared to mainland residents. Char women also face a range of social, cultural, and religious norms that exclude them from the productive sphere and limit their access to and control over resources and assets, participation in household decision-making, or community-level engagements. In the local agricultural and livestock sector, women farmers take a leading role in some agricultural activities, such as post-harvesting and animal husbandry. However, their contribution often goes unrecognised. In addition, due to the lack of educational facilities beyond primary school in many char areas, most adolescent girls fall prey to the prevalent practices of early marriage and childbearing, further restricting their ability to engage in economically productive activities.



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Activities

Enhancing char women's involvement in economic activities

By creating more meaningful income opportunities and increasing business interactions, M4C aims to improve char women's participation in economic activities and contribute to increased decision-making and bargaining power for them. The project successfully identified sectors with high involvement of women, such as goat rearing and native chicken rearing. Through the semi-commercialisation of these sectors, M4C enhances women's income-generating opportunities. The project also identified 13 women interested in investing and doing business, and supported their capacity building through its partners. These women are now working as input retailers (seed vendors), native chicken vaccinators, and livestock service providers. In addition, the project's main partner, the Chars Development Research Centre (CDRC), identified possible gender-sensitive business models that directly contribute to women's economic empowerment, and incorporated training in hand-crafts and sewing for char women entrepreneurs into its curriculum.

Results

Increase in income, employment, and agency

The project managed to increase farmers' incomes and their access to diversified activities, focusing on sustainable environment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, gender equality, and social inclusion. M4C has successfully engaged women farmers in market promotion activities, achieving significant impact: To date, 7'700 char farming households have benefited from the project, including 1'200 women farmers who have directly increased their savings. Additionally, around 6'800 female farmers accessed bull fattening, goat rearing, and native chicken rearing services during 2021. At least 252 market actors have been sensitised to increase women's entrepreneurial activities, including 89 service providers who expanded their business volume by adding women-led sectors (free-range chicken farming, bull fattening, and goat rearing) to their portfolio. The growth and diversification of the agricultural sector is expanding the local labour market and trade-related employment. Increasing numbers of unemployed, unpaid, or low-paid women, men, and youth, who had limited access to non-farm employment due to the pandemic and geographic isolation, are now finding self-employment in the agricultural sector.

Positive changes were also observed in terms of women's empowerment (e.g. increased knowledge of agriculture, improved sales behaviour, and bargaining skills) and their enhanced decision-making power on a range of issues (e.g. selection of seed products, purchase of native goats and chickens, travel, marriage of their daughters). Expanding women's economic opportunities is thus an effective way to address systemic non-economic barriers to gender equality.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Impeded project implementation and increased vulnerability of women and girls

M4C conducted a visual ethnography study on the impacts of the pandemic on the char economy, which revealed that the absolute exclusion from education and health care, along with the economic ailments of COVID-19, induced unemployment and heightened the rates of child marriage and gender-based violence in the chars. Moreover, the project's target groups are facing a difficult financial situation that has been exacerbated due to the pandemic. Recurrent lockdowns also hampered the finalisation of key partnerships, the testing of new ideas, and the cooperation with existing partners.

Despite these challenges, a key learning from 2021 was the recognition of the CDRC's potential to facilitate the economic empowerment of char women. M4C has therefore emphasised the CDRC's intensive involvement in gender mainstreaming in the various project interventions. In addition, a range of needs in terms of primary health care for women in the char areas have been identified and possible responses (such as diagnostic services for prenatal care) are being assessed.

Sources

Making Markets Work for the Chars 2021: Annual Report.

Making Markets Work for the Chars 2021: Gender Systemic Audit.

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. Swiss Cooperation Office Bangladesh.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Net Additional Income; Employment and Women's Economic Empowerment

Indicator:

IED_TRI_1: Change in average yearly net income (salary/wage or profit) of individuals in reported currency, adjusted for inflation

IED_ARI_2:

Number of persons having new or better employment

Example 6: Gender-significant intervention

Advancing women's career opportunities in Benin's agro-food sector

Since 2018, the SDC has been contributing to the project 'Green Innovation Centres for the agro-food sector in Benin ProCIVA.' The goal of this project is the implementation of innovations by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (M, SME) in Benin. Selected enterprises are granted financial support on the condition that they strengthen their consideration of vulnerable groups, notably women and youth, in their mission statements, management, and recruitments.

Implementing partners

The German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) is responsible for the implementation of the project.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, 20 agro-food microenterprises and SMEs received funding. 44 women and 56 men benefited directly from project interventions.

Finances

The project started in March 2018 and ended in December 2021. The SDC's financial contribution in 2021 amounted to CHF 473'149 and an additional CHF 265'923 from the COVID-19 Fund.

Gender analysis

Unequal employment opportunities and representation in company management

Many inequalities persist between men and women in Benin. These are manifested, for example, in women's lesser participation in decision-making processes, and in their impeded access to education, employment and income, health care – including reproductive health care –, land, equipment, and credits. At the micro-social level, decision-making power is usually in the hands of men, while women are expected to be obedient to men in all domains. Consequently, women's involvement in any activity, whether economic, cultural, or political, is subject to their husband's authorisation. In terms of women's economic participation, this discrepancy translates into a markedly uneven employment rate, which is three times higher among men (16.8%) than among women (5.0%), and under-employment affects women (65.4%) much more than men (41.5%). Moreover, female managers in enterprises are generally under-represented, although representation rates vary according to the size of the enterprise: the larger the company, the less likely it is to be headed by a woman.



Activities

Targeted and nuanced measures to the benefit for women entrepreneurs and employees

The main project objective is to expand the capacity of selected SMEs, through training and coaching in technological innovations and in the elaboration of business plans. These activities aim at contributing to the sustainable entrepreneurial growth and competitiveness of these businesses. The project particularly aims at promoting and supporting women and young employees. It has defined an indicator target of 35% women among the beneficiaries. Project interventions included: (1) positive discrimination of women entrepreneurs in the selection of SMEs; (2) training and coaching of women, men, and youth on equal terms, taking into account factors impeding the participation of disadvantaged groups in project activities; (3) outreach to the spouses of women entrepreneurs to explain the SME Loop Approach – an entrepreneur-centred support methodology geared towards developing managerial skills and entrepreneurial attitudes – in order to gain support for women entrepreneurs.

Results

Empowered women in the world of small and medium-sized agro-food enterprises

Despite negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ProCIVA project has far exceeded its planned outcomes: Since 2018 the project has created 735 new permanent local jobs, 276 – or over a third – of which were filled by women. In 2021, 44 of the 100 SMEs selected for support were female-led. During this period the supported businesses created 71 new permanent jobs, of which 19.7% were filled by women.

The selected SMEs have been strengthened in their managerial skills and have developed business plans, and many have received technical training. Thanks to ProCIVA, businesses have increased their turnover by 84% on average, created new jobs, and have been able to gain significantly better access to finance in prioritised value chains. This outcome has contributed to a more sustainable economic development in the region and, in the case of female-led businesses and women employees, promoted the transformation of gender norms that perpetuate gender inequality in Benin. A particularly positive effect was thereby achieved through the role model function of successful women entrepreneurs.

The project highlighted the effectiveness of positive discrimination in favour of women entrepreneurs and employees in increasing women's economic participation; the importance of coaching focusing on the specific challenges of women entrepreneurs and their access to finance; and the relevance of strengthening digital skills, especially for women.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Implementation of digital activities and financial support

Despite the SDC's valuable emergency support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the supported businesses, these remained vulnerable as they continued to face drastic decline in sales, an increase in commodity prices, and growing job insecurity, which led to significant staff turnover in some companies. However, compared to 2020, the economic situation of companies has stabilised in 2021. In the aftermath of the latest COVID-19 waves, the project in particular aimed to seize the opportunity to build and promote women's digital skills to increase their resilience in the face of upcoming challenges. Therefore, trainings, coachings, and e-commerce promotions were partially conducted digitally (while face-to-face sessions were also resumed after health measures were lifted).

Sources

GIZ and SDC (2018): Proposition de projet (ProDoc). Contribution suisse au projet de 'Centres d'Innovations Vertes pour le secteur agro-alimentaire au Benin (ProCIVA),' champ 2.

GIZ and SDC (2021): Rapport Final (2018–2021). Contribution suisse au projet de 'Centres d'Innovations Vertes pour le secteur agro-alimentaire au Benin (ProCIVA),' champ 2 : Mise en oeuvre des innovations par les Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (PME).

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. SDC Cooperation Office Benin.

SDC (2021): Logframe ProCIVA. SDC Cooperation Office Benin.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Vocational Skills Development and New and Better Employment; Women's Economic Empowerment

Indicator:

IED_ARI_1: Number of persons enrolled in new or better skills development

Example 7: Gender-significant intervention

Creating jobs for young women in the Cambodian technical and vocational education and training sector

The goal of the 'Skills Development Program (SDP)' is to provide certain disadvantaged groups, especially young women and men and low-skilled workers, with better access to decent employment and higher incomes. The project promotes innovative interventions that create and foster decent jobs for these target groups and increase their employability through technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

Implementing partners

Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT), Directorate General of Technical Vocational Education and Training of MoLVT, Ministry of Tourism, National Employment Agency, National Polytechnic Institute of Angkor, Regional Polytechnic Institute Techo Sen Siem Reap, National Institute of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Cambodia-Japan Friendship Technical Education Centre, Provincial Training Centres, Provincial Department of Tourism, Young Cambodia Chef Association, HR Club, Hospitality Vocational Training Schools, and freelance master trainers and assessors.

Beneficiaries

Over the current second project phase (2020–2024), 6'229 women and 6'321 men are expected to have benefited from the project. In 2021, 1'589 women and 1'752 men were supported by the project. Among beneficiaries were notably disadvantaged youth and low-skilled workers, but also secondary target groups such as trainers, instructors, entrepreneurs, managers, and school management staff.

Finances

The SDC has contributed an amount of CHF 8.34 million for the second project phase (2020–2024). In 2021, CHF 2.55 million were allocated to the project.

Gender analysis

Gender stereotypes lead to women's exclusion from the economic sector

The state of Cambodia is looking to mainstream gender equality in the social, economic, and political spheres in national policies and action plans. However, despite existing gender-responsive legal and policy initiatives in several sectors, women continue to suffer persistent gender-related disadvantages in many relevant spheres of society, including the economy. Moreover, economic growth in Cambodia has not translated into commensurate employment growth – except in the garment sector – and has generally not been inclusive of women. These developments, coupled with the persistence of gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes in Cambodian society, continue to hamper women's economic participation, decision-making power, and access to health care. The context is also marked by high rates of gender-based violence.

Activities

Gender-responsive interventions for the eradication of the gender gap in TVET

In 2021, affirmative and gender-responsive activities were carried out to contribute to the eradication of the gender gap in TVET programmes. During 2021, the project continued to advocate at MoLVT for better accessibility to the stipend programme and special funds for women, disadvantaged groups, minority groups, and migrants to have equal opportunities to access training. All partner training providers have been supported to integrate the 'Do No Harm' principle and incorporate a gender perspective in their skills training programmes. They have also been encouraged to diversify women-oriented occupations – including hospitality services, food and beverage services, food processing, basic ICT graphic design, or network and camera installation. The SDP has also devoted efforts to the provision of technical support and continued mentoring to all

partner training providers to implement the 'Gender Equality and Inclusion Guidelines' for an inclusive off-the-job training programme. This should ensure close support for women and other disadvantaged trainees during their training. The project has actively worked with these providers to monitor learning progress and provide mentoring for women to prevent them from dropping out of training programmes. Training providers and private companies have been encouraged to work together to provide an inclusive on-the-job training programme, free from all forms of violence, during traineeships. In addition, the SDP has supported the development of an outreach strategy to recruit trainees by targeting committed, self-motivated, and disadvantaged young people, especially women and members of left behind ethnic groups.

Results

Better skilled young women – also beyond the typical female occupations

During the reporting period, the project achieved tangible intermediate results in terms of mainstreaming gender equality in skills trainings in the following occupational fields: entrepreneurship, automotive repair, building electrical wiring, electrical maintenance and installation, computer servicing, masonry, in-house wiring, motorcycle servicing, air conditioning servicing, community tour guide, barista, cook, food and beverage processing, and beauty and salon. In many of the trainings for rather male dominated occupations the representation of women was high. For instance, between 50% and 65% of all people who have enrolled in trainings in computer servicing, community tour guide, and entrepreneurship were women. Overall, women account for approximately 50% of the total num-

ber of graduates to date. Moreover, women show an outstanding completion rate: 80% of the 1'431 women learners who initially enrolled in the programmes completed their trainings. In addition, as planned, the recruitment process for new female trainees was carried out in a gender and ethnically inclusive manner.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Barriers to attending online training for women during the pandemic and a decline in their enrolment

Due to the pandemic-related school closures – which lasted more than a year – the implementation of the interventions faced many challenges and they had to be significantly adapted. Although the shift to digital teaching and learning ensured that the programmes could continue during the period of restrictions, this shift brought to light the lack of adequate competences and infrastructure. This particularly bore the risk of losing learners from the most vulnerable communities, as not all of them were able to participate online. Especially for women learners, the barriers to attending online trainings from home were greater, as they often faced the double burden of domestic and care work and studying from home. Accordingly, drop-out rates increased during the pandemic, while new enrolments – particularly by women – decreased drastically or stopped altogether.

Sources

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. Swiss Cooperation Office and Consular Agency Cambodia.

Skills Development Programme (2021): Operational Report 2021.



REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Inclusive Business Development and Employment; Women's Economic Empowerment

Indicator:

IED_ARI_2: Number of persons having new or better employment

Example 8: Gender-significant intervention

Creating an inclusive economic environment in Kosovo

The 'Promoting Private Sector Employment (PPSE)' project aims to increase gainful and inclusive employment for young women and men in Kosovo, with a special focus on women and minorities. The project supports enterprises in the food and natural ingredients and tourism sectors to grow through increased competitiveness, product diversification, and improved market access. PPSE enhances the dialogue between the private and the public sectors and strives for sustainable job growth in Kosovo.

Implementing partners

Implementing partners are Swisscontact and Riinvest.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, 332 people have directly benefited from project interventions, of which one third were women.

Finances

The project is ongoing (2013–2025). The SDC has contributed an amount of CHF 5.55 million for the current third project phase (2021–2025), thereof CHF 1.42 million for the year 2021.

Gender analysis

Persisting barriers to women's economic empowerment

Following the declaration of independence, Kosovo adopted a constitution and laws to address women's representation, participation, and wellbeing by mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes. However, the establishment of such Gender Equality Mechanisms (GEMs) does not guarantee their actual implementation or successful functioning. For instance, women continue to face greater difficulties when starting to work or running a business. Although women entrepreneurs make a significant contribution to the economy, this tends to remain invisible as they are frequently engaged in the informal sector. Barriers to women's economic empowerment include traditional gender roles, limited property and inheritance rights, unpaid household responsibilities, irregular work, lack of access to finance for women-owned businesses, and lack of opportunities for capacity building and networking. Traditional norms remain one of the key obstacles to women's inclusion in specific project actions.

Activities

Improving the supply, efficiency, and competitiveness of targeted SMEs

During 2021, PPSE conducted several activities targeting women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). PPSE engaged in three new partnerships with women-owned SMEs to upgrade their processing and packaging machinery, with the goal of improving current products and introducing new ones – such as dried fruit and vegetables or homemade ajvar. A total of eleven SMEs also participated in a five-month training programme aimed at improving their business performance. Technical training on product development, new recipes, storage, and product safety was provided to nine women-owned SMEs. As especially women owners of small SMEs in the food sector still prefer to sell their products in less formal ways – such as on social media platforms – PPSE has trained 53 SMEs (of which 27 were women-owned) in the appropriate use of such platforms to improve their visibility and to handle sales. In the beekeeping sector, PPSE convened the ORGANIKA association to hold eleven information sessions (4 with women beekeepers) to familiarise beekeepers with the requirements and standards to be followed for organic certification. Finally, in the tourism sector, PPSE continued to facilitate and monitor the process of obtaining Safe Travel protocols and certifications through the Kosovo Tourism Union (KTU).



Results

Increased income and social recognition of women's work

In the tourism sector, eleven SMEs (3 women-owned) have introduced 17 new tourism products in 2021, such as team building activities, camping for families with children, ski touring, and horse riding. Through the technical training provided by PPSE, the targeted SMEs improved their business skills, which resulted in an increase in the range of their marketed products and in the companies' revenues. Additionally, beneficiary SMEs have reported an increased number of followers, likes, and orders following the digital sales training. In the beekeeping sector, despite great interest shown during the information sessions for organic certification, many SMEs were not yet ready to embark on the process due to the costs involved. In 2021, only one woman-owned beekeeping SME has been certified. Lastly, thanks to PPSE's support in the tourism sector, the KTU was granted the role of official ambassador for the Safe Travel protocols and certifications by the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC). As a result, 35 companies (including tour operators, guesthouses, and transport providers) – of which eight are women-owned – have been equipped with the Safe Travel certification.

Overall, the PPSE has contributed to increasing the income of targeted women-owned SMEs. This not only adds to these women's financial stability but also generally increases the social recognition of women's work and entrepreneurship and hence contributes to a positive transformation of gender roles and norms.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Resuming growth in the aftermath of COVID-19

The year 2021 was still marked by COVID-19 related restrictions, causing difficulties in market access for women-owned businesses. To address this challenge, PPSE designed the intervention 'Digital Sales Channels for Small-Scale Processors' to steer SMEs towards digital promotion, digital sales, and e-commerce.

Fortunately, compared to 2020, the negative impact of COVID-19 has diminished for both the food and tourism sectors. SMEs resumed their investment schemes and continued to develop their businesses as planned, resulting in steady growth at all levels. This demonstrates the resilience of SMEs, particularly in the food and natural ingredients sector, where a recovery of employment and income generation for both women and men has been observed.

Sources

Promoting Private Sector Employment PPSE Kosovo 2021: Semester Report 2021.

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. Swiss Cooperation Office Kosovo.

4.3 Women's Political Empowerment and Participation

Why action is needed

There is a global consensus – expressed in the 2030 Agenda Declaration⁶¹ – that women's full political participation is a *sine qua non* for achieving overall gender equality. Despite this common goal, the gender gap in political empowerment and participation remains the largest globally, having further widened in 2021.⁶² Although the proportion of women parliamentarians reached an all-time high in 2021,⁶³ women still occupy only a quarter of all parliamentary seats and ministerial positions in the world; in nine countries there are no women ministers at all; and in over half of the world's countries there has never been a woman head of state. However, these figures obfuscate the fact that considerable progress has been made in several countries. For instance, in Mozambique, the share of women ministers has risen from 29% to 46% in 2021. In Mali, the share of women parliamentarians has increased from 6% to 27%. Moreover, in other countries women's overall political participation has retained a high level, such as in Nicaragua, Rwanda, or Bangladesh, which rank fifth to seventh in the Gender Gap Index measuring women's political empowerment.⁶⁴

A multitude of barriers hinder women's access to policymaking, including persistent harmful gender stereotypes and customs, discriminatory laws and institutions, lack of access to financial resources and powerful networks, and gender-based violence. Overcoming these obstacles, however, means opening the door to a more inclusive and thus more democratic politics. Women decision-makers prioritise crucial social issues – falsely categorised as 'women's interests' – that male representatives tend to disregard, such as SGBV, reproductive and sexual rights, or childcare. However, in reality women leaders impact democratic policymaking far beyond these areas. For instance, there is evidence that they increase trust in political leaders, lower the level of corruption, perform more constituency work, or promote peacebuilding and cooperation.⁶⁵

COVID-19 has created additional challenges for women's political empowerment and participation. Despite women's strong involvement in the day-to-day management of the pandemic as key workers and family carers, in many cases their political involvement has been further constrained by this crisis. In general, women have had limited opportunities to make themselves heard in political responses to the pandemic.⁶⁶ The constraints they have faced have been very diverse and have, for instance, manifested themselves in the form of under-representation in expert task-forces managing the COVID-19 crisis, or in intensified online violence and harassment against women in politics following the rise of online campaigns and parliamentary sessions.⁶⁷ Other gendered developments have affected women's opportunities to participate politically, such as their increased economic precariousness, an overall tendency to return to traditional gender roles, greater reliance on informal practices that reinforce male political dominance, inequities in access to online platforms, or decreased public visibility of women.⁶⁸ At the same time, COVID-19 has also raised public awareness of gendered issues such as unpaid and paid care work or public health. The ongoing process of rebuilding states after COVID-19 hence also brings opportunities to promote and strengthen women decision-makers and to advance gender issues in policymaking.⁶⁹

61 See 38, Declaration (20).

62 See 2.

63 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021): Women in Parliament in 2020: The Year in Review. Geneva and New York: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

64 WEF (2021): Global Gender Gap Report 2021. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

65 King's College London (2020): Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy. London: The Global Institute for Women's Leadership.

66 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2021): The Global State of Democracy 2021: Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

67 See 64.

68 Brechenmacher, Saskia and Caroline Hubbard (2020): How the Coronavirus Risks Exacerbating Women's Political Exclusion. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2020.

69 See 2; Buccus, Imraan (2021): Rebuilding Active Public Participation after the COVID-19 era: The South African Case. Journal of Public Affairs 21:e2720; Hibbs, Leah (2022): "I was able to take part in the chamber as if I was there" – Women Local Councillors, Remote Meeting Attendance, and COVID-19: A Positive from the Pandemic? Journal for Cultural Research, 26:1, p. 6–23.

The SDC's achievements

The SDC places a strong focus on the promotion of women's – especially vulnerable women's – political participation, namely their representation and meaningful participation in (local) government bodies, parliaments, and civil society-led initiatives, including their involvement and leadership in peace- and state-building processes. Interventions particularly concentrate, on the one hand, on women's empowerment and leadership, and, on the other hand, on more gender-responsive political institutions, procedures, and practices.

The following aggregated quantitative results can be reported for 2021:

- In 2021, a total of 2'358'515 persons in 17 countries participated in and influenced public service provision, decision-making, and budgets in their localities thanks to SDC-supported interventions. Women made up close to 40%, with about 33% from disadvantaged groups and 5% other women. Interestingly, women from LNOB target groups clearly outnumber other women and their number is fairly close to that of male LNOB target groups.
- In only two subnational government councils in SDC-supported regions in Benin, a minimal threshold of 30% representation of women has been reported. The assumption is that with a minimum participation of 30%, women will be able to exert greater influence. The actual figures show that there is still a great need for action here.

Nevertheless, the example of Benin, as well as another example in Niger (see below) show that progress is possible, despite contexts marked by highly patriarchal societies and challenging political dynamics. Following the presidential election in Benin in May 2021, a woman was elected Vice-President of the Republic for the first time. She is a former beneficiary of the women's leadership development programmes supported by the SDC and a reference for women political leaders in advocating for the involvement of women in decision-making bodies. Further, with the SDC's support to local school management committees, the participation of women rose to nearly 40%, and 41 of the 80 school governments established in 2021 (52%) are headed by girls. Through this strategy, both girls and boys are equally prepared for the exercise of power and democracy, thus breaking the misconception of power being reserved for boys and men.

In Niger, the SDC's support for more inclusive local governance has boosted the participation and involvement of women in the political sphere. Following the last local elections in December 2020, the representation of women in councils improved. In the two partner regions (Dosso and Maradi), the number of elected women rose from 10% to 30%. In the Dosso region, the number of women mayors has risen from one to five. Women are represented in 39% of the communal concertation frameworks and citizens' oversight bodies, which were previously exclusively male. Additionally, the majority of communes currently involve women in the mobilisation of local resources. In the Dosso region, women's organisations are emerging timidly in the management of market infrastructures.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ All SDC data are based on the respective annual reports 2021 and the SDC's electronic annual results recording for 2021.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Governance/
Citizens'
Participation;
Women's
Political
Empowerment

Indicator:

GOV_ARI_1:
Number of people
participating in
and influencing
public service
provision,
decision-making,
and budgets in
their localities

Example 9: Gender-significant intervention

Enhancing women's participation in community-led development in Laos

The 'Local Development Programme for Bokeo, Bolikhamxay, Khammouane and Vientiane Province' aims at reducing poverty in Laos by strengthening governance, fostering community-led development, and facilitating access to community infrastructure. The project places special emphasis on women, who are disadvantaged with regard to most socio-economic indicators such as health, nutrition, education, and income. The main project objective is to improve the living standard in selected villages in 14 of the poorest rural regions through poverty reduction, improved food security, and environmental sustainability.

Implementing partner

Executing agencies are the Department of Planning of the Ministry of Planning and the Investment Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency (LuxDev). Implementing agencies are the Department of Planning and Investment and the Village Development Committees of the targeted villages.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, the project was active in 229 villages, where it supported 984 community-led activities and 77 infrastructure projects, reaching approximately 45'000 women, 45'000 men, and 62'000 girls and boys.

Finances

In 2021, the SDC contributed CHF 941'072 to the project, which started in 2017 and will end in 2022.

Gender analysis

Highland rural women among the poorest and most marginalised in Lao society

Gender inequalities remain a major development concern in Laos, as women continue to be disadvantaged in social, economic, and political aspects of life. In terms of community decision-making and representation, women in rural areas often lag behind men, who represent the family in village bodies, form the vast majority of elected committees, and often hold the key positions in villages. This disparity tends to be the greatest in remote highland villages, where traditional patriarchal gender roles prevail, fewer opportunities and services are available, and ethnic minorities with limited social and political capital prevail. Highland women are hence among the poorest and most marginalised in Laos. Ethnic minority women are in a particularly vulnerable position. Their lack in education, knowledge, and social resources often exposes them to discrimination and exploitation.

Nevertheless, rural women perceive their situation as gradually improving, with better access to education, health care, water, sanitation, communications, and labour-saving technologies. Attitudes regarding women's rights, participation, and education are becoming more liberal even in rural villages. Women's rights are also increasingly recognised in national legislation and policies, although implementation does not always reach the villages.



© LGP Project

Activities

Prioritising women's needs to enhance their involvement in village development

Project interventions aim at mainstreaming gender equality by ensuring that (1) women are equal partners in the democratic process of village development planning and in prioritising project interventions; (2) women are represented in village development committees, water user groups, school committees, and other decision-making bodies; (3) training and community support activities allow for the full participation of women; (4) women have equal access to education, water, sanitation, hygiene, and nutritional improvements; (5) project data collection is sex-disaggregated.

In the run-up to project activities, gender analyses were carried out in each province to identify critical issues and opportunities, and to sensitise stakeholders on gender issues. Similarly, each major activity is based on a participatory gender analysis and a corresponding strategy to ensure that it reflects women's needs and priorities. Finally, gender-based indicators and targets were defined for all project levels, such as indicators for representation, parity in education, or teenage pregnancy rates.

Adherence to participatory principles ensures women's equal participation at all stages of village-level interventions. Furthermore, the project supports the formation of women's production or marketing groups and the establishment of other women's interest groups, for instance in connection with micro-finance loans, agricultural extension, or livestock vaccination. Village grant schemes include numerous disbursements aimed at reducing women's workload – for example financing household water connections, the installation of toilets, the construction of rice mills, or the improvement of storage and transport facilities. In addition, special provisions and funds support adult education for women and in particular promote literacy and numeracy among ethnic minority women. Finally, awareness-raising workshops for women and men challenge gender stereotypes and emphasise the advantages of joint efforts regarding daily tasks traditionally relegated to women.

Results

Women's equal participation in decision-making and tangible improvements in their livelihoods

Participatory village development planning has improved women's participation in the targeted communities. Women's participation in all community decision-making processes has spurred the transformation of gender roles and norms. Furthermore, tangible results were achieved with respect to women's access to education, water, sanitation, hygiene, and credit, as well as with respect to women's representation in user groups and village development committees.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Support to destitute families and food insecure households

The COVID-19 pandemic strongly affected the implementation of project activities and had a severe economic impact on most households in the 229 targeted villages. While in 2020 the economic repercussions were more severe because remittances decreased and agricultural trade was disrupted, in 2021 the project was in fact more affected due to prolonged lockdown periods. The special COVID-19 response funds offered by the Luxembourg Government offered welcome relief by enabling project partners to distribute rice to food-insecure households, transfer cash to destitute families, and distribute hygiene products and other protection materials in the targeted communities.

Sources

Hansen, Peter Kurt (2021): Governance Strengthening and Rights-based Development. Applied Approaches for Local Development in Lao PDR.

LuxDev: LAO/030. Local Development Programme for Bokeo, Bolikhamxay, Khammouane and Vientiane Province. Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency (LuxDev).

LuxDev (2021): Technical and Guidance Notes. Laos – Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender in ICP V. Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency (LuxDev).

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. SDC Cooperation Office Laos.

SDC (2021): Technical and Financial Document Lao/030. Local Development Programme for Bokeo, Bolikhamxay, Khammouane and Vientiane Provinces. SDC Cooperation Office Laos.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Governance/
Citizens'
Participation;
Women's
Influence
on Political
Decision-Making

Indicator:

GOV_ARI_1:
Number of people
participating in
and influencing
public service
provision,
decision-making,
and budgets
in their localities

GEN_TRI_3:

Proportion of
women with
a positive
perception on
their influence in
exercising their
political functions

Example 10: Gender-significant intervention

Advancing the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in water governance in the Mekong region

Building on the positive impact of the 'Inclusion Project' (2014–2019), the 'Inclusion Project II' (IP2) was launched in 2020 as part of Oxfam's Water Governance Program. IP2 supports local communities in the Mekong area in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to engage in decision-making on the water resources they rely on and aims to achieve a more informed, transparent, and responsible water governance in the region. The project focuses on strengthening women's leadership capacities, and on policy dialogue that is inclusive of riparian communities and civil society actors.

Implementing partners

Implementing partners are OXFAM and International Rivers.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, 1'028 women and 1'302 men benefited directly from this project.

Finances

The financial contribution of the SDC for all project phases (2020–2024) amounts to CHF 3 million. In 2021, the SDC committed CHF 343'083 to this project, which is currently in its first phase.

Gender analysis

Disproportionate impact of altered water regimes on women and marginalised groups

The Mekong River flows through six countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and China. Despite its transboundary nature, each country pursues different – and often contradictory – policies for its management. As water insecurity is rising across the region due to climate change, large-scale infrastructure construction, agricultural expansion, industrial pollution, and growing urban populations, the inclusive management of scarce water resources is proving critical for future sustainability. Women in riparian communities tend to be the primary users of water resources and are thus disproportionately affected by the negative consequences of unnatural changes in water regimes – caused, for example, by the construction of hydroelectric dams. For women who are elderly, single, widowed, have a disability, or belong to an ethnic minority, the negative impact of such social and environmental changes is even greater. Women and other vulnerable groups are still systematically excluded from water governance decision-making processes, although their involvement plays a key role in protecting the region's water resources and the livelihoods that depend on them.



Activities

Promoting gender equality and building women's leadership in water governance

In 2021, the project has collaborated with 19 regional and national partners to promote gender equality and social inclusion in water governance. IP2 has worked to increase the confidence and skills of women leaders through capacity building activities – specifically in relation to public speaking, gender equality, and transformative leadership – and by facilitating their participation in water and energy governance forums and events. The project also trained civil society organisations (CSOs) and private sector actors in the use of gender and social analysis frameworks and tools, and consultations have been held at state level to advance gender mainstreaming in government plans and policies. Further capacity-building activities have been organised to improve the knowledge of community networks on water governance and renewable energies, and on inclusive participation in policymaking processes. IP2 organised more than 20 workshops and events on 'Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion' (GEDSI) to strengthen the capacity of CSOs in promoting gender equality and women's leadership in local water resources management. Additionally, the project has forged partnerships with international organisations – such as the Asian Development Bank – to increase awareness on the impacts of hydropower and the need for sustainable alternative energy sources. Finally, a political and economic analysis was conducted in the target countries to inform advocacy processes and improve the engagement of civil society and community actors in water governance policymaking.

Results

Increased participation of women and marginalised groups in water governance

The project successfully engaged more women – including young and indigenous women – in public events related to water governance and renewable energies at local, national, and regional levels. The 1'028 women who took part in IP2 activities report an increase in their confidence and skills to engage in public debates. A noteworthy example was the participation of three regional women leaders in the '2021 Global South Women's Forum on Sustainable Development' and their issuing of a joint statement on 'Women Leaders and their Journey to Environmental Justice.' The trainings also earned a group of 14 women – including ten women from

indigenous communities – a spot on Cambodia's 'Women on Air' radio programme, where they raised their concerns and recommendations on issues impacting the Mekong River, reaching an audience of 19'850 people. Through the development of the GEDSI framework and collaboration with various stakeholders, IP2 has been able to integrate gender-sensitive approaches and to strengthen the voice of women and marginalised groups in water governance. Both the soft and technical skills of diverse networks in the region have been strengthened through project interventions, contributing to increased involvement of these actors in resource management policymaking at local and national levels.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Flexible support and emergency responses in times of crisis

During the COVID-19 pandemic, IP2 worked closely with its local partners and community leaders to ensure flexibility in the support provided, for example through holding online events and trainings or disseminating information through broadcast media. The use of virtual platforms provided good opportunities to promote dialogue and engage participants living in remote locations. Media organisations, journalist networks, celebrities, and social media influencers have been involved to reach out to a wider audience and raise awareness on energy policy and water governance issues in the Mekong River. IP2 also addressed other emergency issues raised by local organisations, such as the increasing food insecurity faced by communities displaced by water infrastructure projects. Inter-community solidarity ties were strengthened during the pandemic, with riparian ethnic communities mobilising relief through donations of self-cultivated rice for the most affected communities.

Sources

International Rivers (2020): State of Knowledge: Women and Rivers in the Mekong Region.

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. SDC Cooperation Office Laos.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Governance/
Active Civil Society;
Reforms
Promoting
Gender Equality

Indicator:

FCHR_ARI_1:
Number of
civil society
organisations
that contribute
to multi-stake-
holder dialogue
or to the
respect for
human rights

GEN_TRI_1:

Number of
gender-
transformative
policy and
legislative
reforms in place

Example 11: Gender-significant intervention

Empowering civil society for their action in promoting gender equality in Serbia

The goal of the project 'For an Active Civil Society Together (ACT)' is to contribute to an active civil society for the benefit of all people and higher citizen engagement in decision-making. CSOs are supported in effectively mobilising citizens and voicing their interests, but also in enhancing their alliance building and influence on decision-making processes. ACT looks at gender as a cross-cutting and intersectional topic and supports several Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working on women's rights, anti-discrimination, and protection of LGBTIQ+ rights. Its implementation strategy hinges on three key intervention mechanisms: Constituency building, capacity-building, and grant schemes. The quality of these interventions is enhanced by mainstreaming gender equality, social inclusion, and good governance in all objectives, implementation strategies, and monitoring frameworks.

Implementing partners

Implementing partners are HELVETAS Swiss Inter-cooperation and Civic Initiatives Belgrade.

Beneficiaries

2021 was the second year of implementation of ACT. A total of 21'955 women, 16'013 men, and 851 non-binary persons have benefited from the project in this year.

Finances

The SDC allocated CHF 5.74 million for the first project phase (2019–2023). In 2021, the SDC contributed CHF 1.9 million to ACT.

Gender analysis

Persistent discrimination of women and LGBTIQ+ people in decision-making and economic participation

Patriarchal cultural and social norms continue to predominate in Serbian society. Women are systematically discriminated against in many spheres of life. However, other groups are disadvantaged as well, especially people with non-heterosexual, non-binary, and non-conforming sexual orientations or gender identities, such as LGBTIQ+ persons. Consequently, these people are less politically active in their communities and are economically marginalised. For instance, women account for 56% of all unemployed persons in Serbia – an imbalance that is even more pronounced in the case of women in rural areas and Roma women.



Activities

Supporting CSOs working on women's rights, anti-discrimination, and protection of LGBTIQ+ rights

ACT regards gender as a cross-cutting and intersectional topic and specifically also supports 14 CSOs working in the field of women's rights, anti-discrimination, and protection of LGBTIQ+ rights. The implementation strategy of the project hinges on a Human Rights Based Approach applied in three key intervention strategies: first, constituency building – modelling support to the needs and expectations of citizens; second, capacity-building – tailor-made training and mentoring for CSOs and the promotion of networking between CSOs; and third, grant schemes – financial support to enhance constituency building and policy advocacy, and awards for innovation and best practices.

In 2021, ACT provided 1) institutional grants to six women organisations and two CSOs working on the promotion of LGBTIQ+ rights; 2) three advocacy grants and one CSO partnership grant to CSOs working on gender equality; and 3) advocacy grants to two women CSO networks: the 'Roma Women Network of Serbia' (advocating for ending of child marriages in Roma communities), and the 'Network of Women 45+' (advocating for improving the economic position of unemployed women aged 45+). Furthermore, all ACT monitoring tools include gender-sensitive indicators and disaggregate all collected data by gender.

Results

Stronger organisational capacities and successful initiatives of CSOs

Institutional grants enabled women's and LGBTIQ+ organisations to strengthen their capacities by developing strategic documents such as communication strategies or funding diversification plans. The provided funds also allowed organisations to continue with their activities, such as the development of SOS help lines for survivors of SGBV, the organisation of workshops on violence prevention for girls in different cities across Serbia, or lobbying for LGBTIQ+ rights in Local Action Plans in 16 local self-governments in Serbia. Furthermore, thanks to the work of the 'Network of Women 45+', the Serbian 'National Strategy for Gender Equality' for the period 2021–2030 for the first time recognises women aged 45+ as a category of hard-to-employ persons, stating that measures to increase employability and self-em-

ployment need to include a focus on women aged 45+. As a result, local authorities in three Serbian cities have already adopted specific measures aimed at employing older women.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Authoritarian tendencies, civic activism, and limited access to institutions

As a reaction to the many burning problems in Serbian society at large and in specific communities, the end of 2021 was marked by a strong wave of civic activism, especially in the field of environmental protection. Several groups, including ecological organisations and women's groups, participated in these protests, mobilising many citizens across Serbia. These events showed the great potential of stronger political participation of Serbian citizens. On the other hand, a continuous democratic backslide is taking place in Serbia, with growing authoritarian tendencies, and the CSOs are exposed to constant pressure and discrediting.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Serbia in the midst of social and political disturbances, which provided fertile ground for strengthening authoritarian tendencies. Consequently, women's and LGBTIQ+ groups became further exposed to threats and attacks from various right-wing groups. Restrictions on the freedom of movement during the COVID-19 pandemic further deteriorated citizens' access to institutions and organisations and hence impeded a positive development of political participation. In 2021, most ACT grantees' activities took place online, making it difficult for CSOs to mobilise. This particularly affected rural areas, where most of the population is elderly, with limited or no access to internet, and lacking the skills to use social media and other online tools. On a positive note, the situation improved compared to the previous year, and ACT was again able to organise face to face events and bring together some of its grantees.

Sources

SDC (2021): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2021. Swiss Cooperation Office Serbia.

4.4 Women, Peace and Security

The UN Women, Peace and Security Resolution

Women and girls carry the brunt of violent conflicts and crises, being often subjected to systematic SGBV, lacking access to justice and remedy, and being exposed to loss of livelihoods and personal autonomy. Similarly, in peacebuilding processes, women's voices tend to be less heard, despite proof of the positive impact of women's participation in peacebuilding by shattering gender stereotypes, creating new narratives about women's roles in society, and confronting the legacies of SGBV and gender inequality.⁷¹

Based on these insights, in 2000 the UN Security Council (UNSC) issued Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' (WPS). This and a subsequent series of related resolutions until 2019 constitute the so-called 'WPS agenda' or '1325 agenda.' On the one hand, these resolutions underscore the disproportionate effects of armed conflicts on women and the importance of taking action in this regard. On the other hand, they call for the meaningful inclusion of women in peacebuilding efforts.⁷² Switzerland is committed to the implementation of the resolution and the entire WPS agenda. Accordingly, it has developed four National Action Plans (NAPs) as per UNSC Resolution 1325, the latest covering the period from 2018 to 2022.⁷³ The 'Swiss Women in Peace Processes' (SWiPP) network, founded in 2021 to bring together Swiss women diplomats and international security experts to advance women's participation in peacebuilding, is a good instance of Swiss efforts. Switzerland also adhered to the 'Compact on Women, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action' that was launched in the framework of the Generation Equality Forum in June/July 2021. In 2022, it also co-leads (together with South Africa) the international 'Women Peace and Security Focal Points Network,' with the aim of advancing the implementation of the WPS agenda.

Despite long-standing international efforts, the path to meaningful women's protection in armed conflicts, their contribution to international security, and their participation in peacebuilding processes are far from being fulfilled. Accordingly, in 2020 around seven out of ten peace processes did still not include any women negotiators, mediators, or signatories.⁷⁴ At the same time, the combination of ongoing violent armed conflicts, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an alarming increase in SGBV against women and girls globally.

The SDC's achievements

The SDC is centrally involved in Switzerland's efforts to implement the WPS agenda and the respective Swiss NAP to implement UNSC Res 1325. It mainly follows two lines of intervention: 1) measures to prevent and to respond to SGBV and 2) measures to promote women's participation and leadership in politics and in the public sphere, which in turn favours their involvement in peace- and state-building processes.

The SDC strengthens the commitment to the prevention of and protection against SGBV, it provides support to survivors, with particular importance given to post-conflict contexts, humanitarian crises, and the involvement of men and boys in prevention and response. Women and men, girls and boys, and people with non-heterosexual, non-conforming, and non-binary sexual orientations and gender identities have different roles, needs and vulnerabilities in conflict and post-conflict situations. For instance, women may often be rejected by their communities as a result of surviving rape, while persisting taboos exist with regard to male survivors of sexual violence. Concerning the latter, the SDC is committed to establishing awareness about the fact that men are not only perpetrators of SGBV but may also themselves be survivors. In a study reporting on the DRC, for instance, one quarter of male participants reported having experienced sexual violence.⁷⁵ In addition, the SDC started to pay increasing attention to LGBTIQ+ people affected by SGBV. As the Council of Europe (COE) notes, people with non-conforming sexualities and gender identities are particularly at risk of becoming victims of SGBV because they appear to challenge patriarchal

⁷¹ UN Women and UNDP (2022): Women's Meaningful Participation in Transitional Justice: Advancing Gender Equality and Building Sustainable Peace. New York: UN Women and United Nations Development Programme.

⁷² UNDP (2019): Parliaments as Partners Supporting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda – A Global Handbook. Oslo: United Nations Development Programme.

⁷³ FDFA (2018): Women, Peace and Security: Switzerland's Fourth National Action Plan to Implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2018–22). Bern: FDFA, Directorate of Political Affairs.

⁷⁴ See 39, paragraph 15; data from the Council on Foreign Relations, women's participation in peace processes.

⁷⁵ See 24.

gender stereotypes.⁷⁶ Importantly, the SDC also aims to better integrate women in governance processes and civil society initiatives, which gives them scope for their action in conflict prevention and peaceful conflict transformation. Moreover, the SDC seeks to incorporate men further in its peacebuilding activities to promote gender equality. The aim is to persuade men to support this cause as their own, following the rationale that improvement is not only in the interest of women, but benefits society as a whole.

In the absence of specific reference indicators pertaining specifically to WPS, there are no accurate aggregated quantitative results that can be reported on this specific topic. The following illustrative examples can, however, provide insights on the matter.

One of the SDC's current WPS-related projects aims at enhancing prospects for Palestinians to live in dignity, prosperity, and in peace with Israel, through the respect and promotion of human rights, including gender equality, international humanitarian law, and the rule of law by all duty bearers. Amongst the Palestinian and Israeli human rights and humanitarian law organisations active in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt) and supported by SDC in the framework of this initiative, some do focus on WPS in the oPt. They provide legal aid and protection services to the population and advocate for the respect of international law, including a specific focus on gender equality and on the implementation of the WPS Agenda (e.g. in the framework of the Palestinian NAP 1325).

Further, the SDC supports specific WPS projects, such as for example in Mali the project on women's participation in the peace, security, and recovery process, which is a contribution to the implementation of Mali's NAP 1325. The project was able to engage about 2'000 women in discussion forums, which included a reflection on options for the better inclusion of women in institutional and electoral reform processes as well as consideration of women's possibilities to contribute to the reconstruction of the state. An additional 400 women benefited from social cohesion projects – for instance through income generating activities and trainings for the organisation of women's initiatives on social cohesion and peacebuilding – as part of the implementation of Resolution 1325 in the regions of Timbuktu, Gao, and Koulikoro.

Another example is the SDC's specific contribution to the Global Network on Women Peace Builders (GNWP), which yielded some noteworthy results. This commitment allowed to strengthen the implementation, including monitoring and reporting, of the UN Security Council resolutions on WPS and YPS (Youth, Peace and Security) at country level, namely in Ukraine, Lebanon, and Rwanda (targeted by the SDC's contribution for 2021). Activities in 2021 included trainings for civil society, women activists, and government representatives on how to use the well-established CEDAW reporting mechanism to include WPS progress reporting and generate joint reflection and accountability. Moreover, women activists have developed communication and advocacy messages to effectively address the gendered impacts of COVID-19; young women have been trained in leadership skills and have themselves trained and involved other young women in peacebuilding activities; and multi-stakeholder workshops on localising WPS resolutions resulted in the identification of concrete action points and the establishment of monitoring committees.

⁷⁶ COE (2019): *Gender Matters: A Manual on Addressing Gender-Based Violence Affecting Young People*. Second Edition. Brussels: Council of Europe.

REFERENCE INDICATOR

Theme:

Prevention and Reduction of Conflict; Women, Peace and Security

Indicator:

FCHR_TRI_1: Number of civil society initiatives that contribute to preventing or reducing conflicts

Example 12: Gender-principal intervention

Working towards a more inclusive society, better cooperation, and sustainable peace in the in the Great Lakes border region through women's cross-border trade

The 'Mupaka Shamba Letu (MSL)' project seeks to address the lack of social cohesion among border communities in the Great Lakes region of Africa and to contribute to a more inclusive society, better cooperation, and sustainable peace. The specific objective of the project is to strengthen the role and capacities of women engaged in small scale cross-border trade in the border areas of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Burundi, to jointly challenge the gender dynamics that contribute to conflicts in their communities and the wider region, and to use their influence to promote greater mutual understanding between border communities.

Implementing partner

International Alert in cooperation with eight national NGOs and four microfinance institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi.

Beneficiaries

In 2021, 6925 women, 275 girls, 956 men, and 104 boys benefited from the project. The project works with the same beneficiaries during all project phases. Beneficiaries include members of ethnic minorities – the Batwa or Pygmies in Burundi and the Banyamulenge in the DRC – and people with disabilities, albinism, and underaged mothers.

Finances

The project is ongoing (2019–2022) and is in its second phase of implementation. It is co-founded by the Swedish Embassy in the DRC and in Rwanda, as well as by the Swiss Cooperation Office in Rwanda. In 2021, the SDC committed CHF 439'962 to this project.

Gender analysis

Precarious working conditions in the women-led cross-border trade

Women in the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi face several difficulties preventing them from accessing formal employment, which is heavily dominated by men in all three countries. Informal economy activities have therefore become an important source of livelihood for women in the region. Cross-border trade is one such activity. It is overwhelmingly led by women and allows them to participate in a market economy, despite it being a difficult environment for women to operate in because of high levels of formal and informal taxation and because of volatile political allegiances between countries. In this conflict-affected border area, enhancing cross-border trade remains one of the few opportunities to alleviate the poverty and food insecurity faced by communities.

Women's working conditions in the informal sector are generally precarious, and there are significant barriers to expanding small-scale trade. Among informal sector workers, women small-scale cross-border traders (WSSCBTs) are among the poorest in the region. They face numerous challenges, such as limited access to financial capital or credit lines to expand their businesses; administrative obstacles at border crossings; inadequate implementation of trade agreements; harassment and corruption by border officials; or the persistence of socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality – especially in the productive sphere.

Activities

Empowering Women Small-Scale Cross-Border Traders

During the reporting period, the MSL project has carried out multiple activities in accordance with the stipulated result areas. To achieve more inclusive gender dynamics between WSSCBTs and their spouses and to strengthen their decision-making power in the household, dialogue groups – women’s, men’s, and mixed groups – have been established to facilitate dialogue on gender and power issues and provide tools for conflict resolution. In addition, a literacy training programme has been developed for these women to enhance their capacity to access economic resources and their engagement with trade institutions. To increase economic power and the capacity of WSSCBTs to advocate for greater social cohesion and regional cooperation, the project has supported the establishment of a network of savings groups, as well as the creation of cooperatives and associations through which women can strengthen their collective voice vis-à-vis local, trade, and market authorities. MSL

has also worked with microfinance institutions to develop accessible financial products for WSSCBTs and has supported advocacy initiatives at the local level to address the impact that conflict in communities has on their economic activity. To increase cooperation between business actors (including cross-border women traders and SMEs) in border areas and to leverage their influence in promoting greater social cohesion and regional peace, SMEs in the region have been mapped, and training modules on gender- and conflict-sensitive business practices are being developed for these enterprises. Finally, to ensure adequate understanding of and access to border trade legislation and processes – both for WSSCBTs and for border and customs officials – trainings have been organised on the legislation and regulations in force in the region, and advocacy activities have been supported that call for the reform of laws and policies regulating cross-border trade. Furthermore, technical working groups have been established to monitor the implementation of cross-border trade policies, and joint work has been carried out with five radio stations in the region to facilitate the mass dissemination of the debate on policy and legislative reforms.

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Results

Stepping up inclusion, cooperation, and peace

About half of the WSSCBTs from the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi involved in the project have improved their level of self-confidence, participation, and influence in both their households and communities. This contributes to the transformation of gender dynamics, which for example manifests itself in an increase in joint housework and decision-making in economic matters. An overall improvement in terms of women's economic empowerment has also been observed in all project sites, resulting in increased influence and leadership. WSSCBTs feel that the improved economic resources and status have enhanced their ability to advocate for social cohesion and regional cooperation, for example through the reactivation of the activities of traders whose capital had been depleted after the COVID-induced border closures, or through dialogue with border officials and municipal, provincial, and national authorities. Furthermore, more than half of the WSSCBTs and border and customs officials involved in MSL have clearly improved their knowledge about border legislation. This has led to a better collaboration between traders and officials, as well as to a reduction in administrative obstacles and violence towards women traders. WSSCBTs are increasingly complying with laws and border crossing requirements and abandoning fraudulent practices. Moreover, illegal tax collection has been abolished in some places (e.g. Kamanyola market), illegal barriers have been removed (e.g. in Uvira City), customs clearance and entry cards fees have been reduced or removed, and parking fees have been lowered. These developments are of utmost importance, because they have led to an increased use of formal cross-border trade channels and a reduction of conflicts at regional borders.

Additionally, a second survey among beneficiaries in 2021 suggested that WSSCBTs' concerns have shifted away from a strong focus on economic empowerment to a greater emphasis on psychological and social empowerment and a discussion of the role women may play as agents of change in their communities.

Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021

Massive impact on project progress due to border closures

Responses to the pandemic varied from country to country and have overall exacerbated the tensions between countries in the Great Lakes region. COVID-19 restrictions have had a huge impact on cross-border trade due to border closures, restrictions on the mobility of people, and containment measures in some border communities covered by the project. In particular, the closure of borders has significantly slowed down the process of creating privileged spaces for consolidating economic exchanges, strengthening social ties, and promoting regional and economic integration. This in turn has hindered the development of social cohesion and the establishment of a trading community for peace that the MSL project is seeking to establish through cross-border trade. Nevertheless, in 2021 – compared to the situation in 2020 – there has been a marked flexibilisation of COVID-19 measures, which has accelerated the pace of implementation of project activities again. With the current trend, the security situation in the region bodes well for the future, given the talks underway between authorities and the rising awareness of the role that trade can play in restoring social ties, social cohesion, and peace in the Great Lakes region.

Sources

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5. Conclusion and Outlook

COVID-19

Once again, the Covid-19 pandemic has continued to hamper the implementation of SDC-supported interventions in 2021. Due to lockdowns and economic ailments, rates of child marriage and domestic violence continued to rise, loans could not be disbursed, the number of participants in educational interventions declined, and jobs were lost. This is just to name a few of the reported negative impacts.

At the same time, implementing partners have also reported on positive effects of the crisis. There was, for instance, evidence of strengthening solidarity ties within and between communities and of reinforced links between implementation partners with security and justice agencies, municipalities, and grassroots networks. In addition, in many projects the pandemic has spurred digitisation, especially in the fields of education and e-commerce. In this sense the COVID-19 pandemic has also opened a window of opportunity to advance the (re)building of more equal, inclusive, and resilient societies.

It is still crucial to consider the gendered effects of COVID-induced changes. For instance, while digital teaching and learning ensured the continuation of certain programmes during lockdowns – and in many cases also improved women’s digital skills – it also bears the risk of excluding the most vulnerable communities. Especially for women, the barriers to teaching or attending courses online from home are greater, as they are typically simultaneously responsible for domestic and care work. This has sometimes led to high dropout rates and a decline in enrolment among women.

The SDC has continued to adapt its work to these circumstances, building on the experience gathered in 2020, exploring possible areas of action, and trying to respond to people’s most pressing needs. Increasingly it had to deal with other intersecting crises, too, such as in the conflict-prone Great Lakes region, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Honduras. It also had to operate in regions that are particularly exposed to the effects of climate change and natural disasters, for instance in the case of Bangladesh. Despite interlocking crises, in 2021 the SDC was able to achieve tangible results in its quest for more inclusive and gender-just societies.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Regarding the SDC’s dedicated fight against SGBV, project examples demonstrate the SDC’s multidimensional approach, which particularly also involves men and boys, both as survivors of SGBV and as crucial actors in inducing changes in gender dynamics. A good example for this is the project in the DRC, where armed conflicts and high incidences of violence not only traumatise women survivors of sexual violence but also their husbands, fathers, and sons, who allegedly ‘failed’ to protect them. As a result, male family members often reject female SGBV survivors out of consideration for the family’s reputation. It also increases the risks for men themselves – especially men bearing weapons and active in conflicts – to become SGBV offenders. Therapeutic groups were conducted with these men to raise their awareness about SGBV and gain their support for change. In Honduras, the SDC tackles SGBV by improving levels of citizens’ security in general, as it is not an isolated problem but closely linked with internalised patterns of violence. Local actors are capacitated to manage violence prevention and care, and to improve survivors’ access to justice. As a concrete result, almost three quarters of SGBV cases in the region could be followed up legally in 2021.

SDC-supported interventions have also allowed to assist survivors of trafficking, another form of SGBV. The intervention in Bangladesh, for example, successfully helped people who have survived trafficking to build a new life. In addition, the project raised awareness among local communities about the plight of trafficking survivors and helped relevant state and non-state actors to become more accountable and effective in providing services to survivors. As this example shows, the SDC pays special attention to particularly vulnerable groups. This is also evident in the Burkina Faso intervention, which in 2021 has specifically supported dozens of internally displaced women with counselling, psychosocial, and legal services. Host communities have also been sensitised, a monitoring network was established, and almost 100 public figures were recruited for the fight against SGBV.

Despite these positive results and the significant increase in the SDC’s financial commitment to combating SGBV in 2021, the potential for broader inclusion of this crucial issue in SDC interventions has not yet been fully realized. Given the ubiquity of this alarming issue in the context of all SDC projects and given the phasing out of several SDC-supported SGBV projects, consistent SGBV mainstreaming and programming is recommended in the future. Moreover, it has become clear that harassment, threats, and violence against women engaged in the public sphere are increasing and require our attention.

Women's Economic Empowerment

The SDC has also moved forward with women's economic empowerment. The skills development project in Cambodia, for example, has improved disadvantaged young and low-skilled women's access to decent employment by successfully recruiting more women for non-typical female occupations that potentially offer better job and career opportunities. In rural Bangladesh, female target groups from a very remote area were able to increase their incomes and were reported to have gained more knowledge about agriculture, increased their decision-making power, and improved their sales behaviour and bargaining capacities. The project in Benin involved employers in its effort to increase women's incomes, granting businesses financial support on the condition that they give greater consideration to vulnerable groups such as women and youth. Deliberately strengthening women entrepreneurs was another major focus in this project, as was the case in a project in Kosovo. Activities promoting innovation and competitiveness of women-owned businesses have led to increased incomes and growing self-confidence of participating women entrepreneurs. All these projects generally reported that promoting women's economic participation has also helped to challenge traditional gender roles and to improve recognition of women's labour in their regions.

While the successes of these projects are notable, they have partially been offset by the impact of COVID-19, which has continued to exacerbate women's economic situations disproportionately. Moreover, significantly more men continue to benefit from SDC-supported projects within this thematic field, particularly in the area of vocational training, where again only about one-fifth of beneficiaries were women and even less were women from disadvantaged groups. Additionally, in terms of access to finance (30% women, only 3.5% from disadvantaged groups) and income from agricultural production (25% women) the gender gap remains. Only in the area of employment women make up nearly half of the beneficiaries. This means that even more focused efforts are required to increase outreach to women in the future while at the same time reducing the significant societal barriers they face. Also, in the coming years, the issue of unpaid care work and care economics will need to be pursued more systematically.

Women's Political Empowerment and Participation

Tangible positive results for target groups of the SDC have also been reported in the realm of women's political participation, specifically in terms of women's equal involvement in local development planning, budgeting, and managing public services. Close to 40% women – with 30% women from disadvantaged groups – were active in such initiatives. This is crucial because it directly affects many women's everyday lives. Considering their specific perspectives on and knowledge about these issues, listening to their voices is crucial if we meaningfully want to achieve poverty reduc-

tion and economic stability, improved food security, and environmental sustainability. The good practice examples in the Mekong region demonstrate this: Women who took part in the respective activities there have reported an increase in their confidence and in their skills to engage in public debates.

A specific focus was set on interventions targeting particularly vulnerable groups, and on initiatives operating with a bottom-up approach. Project reports have confirmed that special efforts are needed to include disadvantaged population groups and in particular women in decision-making. Good practices include the specific activities for minority women in village development planning in Laos, or the successful activities specifically involving older women and LGBTIQ+ persons in Serbia to ensure diversity of citizens' engagement in decision-making.

This notwithstanding, for the second consecutive year the SDC's institutional target to increase the number of political bodies with at least 30% women's representation has been poorly met. As much as one might consider this target to be particularly ambitious, it remains a key target to bring about a turning point in women's influence and power. Dedicated efforts in women's leadership building are necessary, they must also be assured of the necessary financial resources for their commitment, and more needs to be done to gain support by male representatives, political parties, and women's families. Perseverance and comprehensive and targeted approaches are important to proceed and to counter the increasing global backlash against gender equality.

Women, Peace and Security

The SDC continued its commitment to implementing the UNSC resolution on WPS (UNSCR 1325) and subsequent resolutions contained in the framework of the 'WPS agenda,' with the aim of ending violence against women and fully involving women in peacebuilding processes. The Great Lakes intervention represents a good practice of how to capitalise on the proven positive impact of women's participation: By strengthening the economic foundations, knowledge, and social status of women cross-border traders in the border region of Rwanda, the DRC, and Burundi, the project enables these traders to engage with border authorities and customs officials to address causes of conflicts due to misconduct, high administrative burdens, and harassment. The project further seeks to challenge the gender dynamics that contribute to conflicts in traders' communities and in the wider region. It further aims at promoting greater social cohesion and regional cooperation. The SDC remains determined to further support such initiatives and to build upon its long-lasting experience in preventing and combatting SGBV in conflict and post-conflict situations. In the future, it will be important to better capture how the SDC's work on women's political empowerment and participation can enhance their role in conflict prevention and transformation, and to continue working in this direction.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ARI	Aggregated Reference Indicator	oPt	Occupied Palestinian territory
AoR	Area of Responsibility	OSSC	One-Stop Service Centre
CONASUR	National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation	PGE	Peace, Governance and Equality
COP26	UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties	PCM	Project Cycle Management
CAS	Certificate of Advanced Studies	PSEAH	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
COE	Council of Europe	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
CPA	Community Psychosocial Approaches	SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women	SIGI	OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee	SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
DCED	Donor Committee for Enterprise Development	SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	SWiPP	Swiss Women in Peace Processes
DRM	Disaster Risk Management	TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction	TRI	Thematic Reference Indicator
ECJR	Economic Justice and Rights	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation	UN	United Nations
FDFA	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs	UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
GGG Report	Global Gender Gap Report	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion	UNGA	UN General Assembly
GEM	Gender Equality Mechanism	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	UN OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peace Builders	UNSC	United Nations Security Council
HRC	Human Rights Council	UNSC Res	United Nations Security Council Resolution
ICT	Information and communication technologies	VAW	Violence against Women
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons	VAWG	Violence against Women and Girls
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-, Intersex, Queer/ Questioning, and others	WEF	World Economic Forum
LNOB	Leave No One Behind	WPE	Women's political empowerment and participation
NAP	National Action Plan	WPS	Women, Peace and Security
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations	WPS-HA	Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action
NADEL	Center for Development and Cooperation ETH Zurich	WSSCBTs	Women Small-Scale Cross-Border Traders
ODA	Official Development Assistance	WTTC	World Tourism and Travel Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

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