Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development

Mid-term Review of the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development

Executive Summary

Recommendations

Management Response of the r4d programme Steering Committee

Bern, Switzerland
March 2018

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

FNSNF
SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Mid-term Review of the r4d programme 2012-2016

After 5 years, the r4d programme went through a Mid-Term Review (MTR) as formative evaluation. This document combines the Executive Summary, the Recommendations, and the Management Response of the r4d programme Steering Committee.

In 2017, the r4d programme was reviewed by an external company, Universalia, from Canada. The Mid-Term Re-view (MTR) covered the period from the start of the programme in 2012 until end of 2016.

Its objectives were to provide insight into the efficiency and effectiveness of the r4d programme, to highlight lessons learned thus far, to inform the remainder of the r4d programme until December 2021 and research for development programming more broadly.

THE MTR OF THE R4D PROGRAMME IN BRIEF

The present document combines extracts of the comprehensive MTR Report and the Management Response of the r4d programme Steering Committee and includes the following:

- Executive Summary, pp. I-IV
- Recommendations, pp. 25-29
- Management Response of the r4d programme Steering Committee

The full MTR Report is available for download on the r4d programme website http://www.r4d.ch.
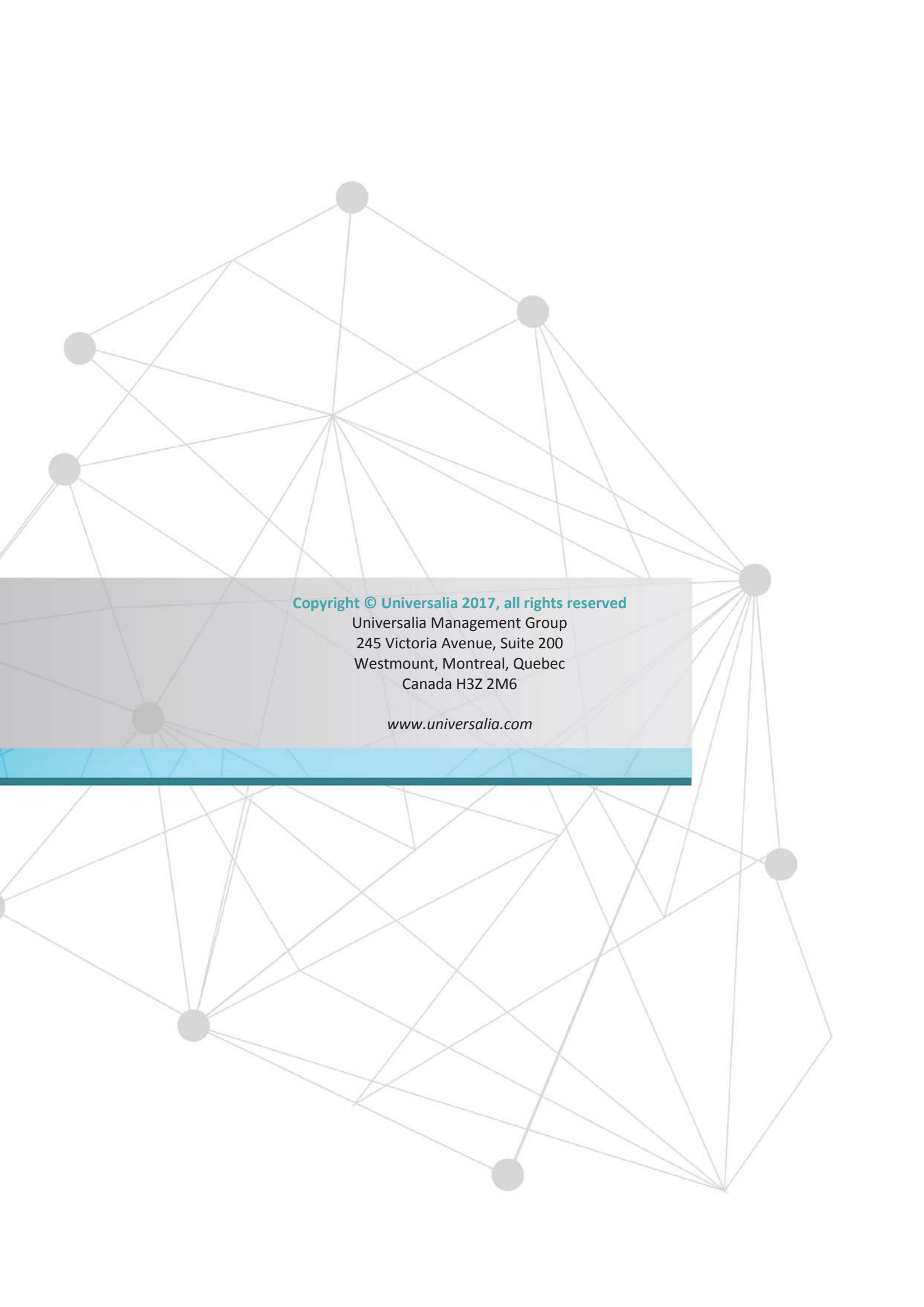
CONTACTS

For comments and inquiries please contact the r4d programme at:

- Swiss National Science Foundation: r4d@snf.ch
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Resaerch Desk: researchdesk@eda.admin.ch

Mid-Term Review of the Joint SDC-SNSF Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d)

UNIVERSALIA

Executive Summary

The Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d Programme) is an initiative jointly supported and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The focus of the Programme is to support research aimed at solving global problems, with a strong focus on least developed, low- and middle-income countries. Running from 2012-2021, the total programme budget is CHF 97.6 million, with the SDC providing CHF 72 million and SNSF providing CHF 25.6 million.

There are five Thematic Modules (TM) under the programme and a Thematically Open Module (OM), which currently consist of 46 research projects that are operationalised through transnational partnerships. As of February 2017, the programme supported 240 grantees in 45 countries.

In May 2017, Universalia was mandated to undertake a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the r4d Programme with the following formal and specific objectives:

- To assess the progress of the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d programme) against the specific objectives defined in the r4d Programme Results Framework and to identify enabling and hindering factors that have affected the achievement of the set objectives. The MTR should focus on the output and outcome levels (effectiveness).

- To appraise the Programme's management and organisational arrangements, including structure and processes (efficiency).

Overall, the MTR provides guidance to the r4d Programme, to inform management and to advise if a change of course is required to more

effectively and efficiently favour the Programme's success. It brings to light lessons learned from the phase under review, also making them available to both SDC and SNSF towards informing the remainder of the r4d Programme and R4D programming more broadly. As such, the MTR provides insights that speak to the possible future of the Programme and its continuity beyond December 2021.

1.1 Relevance

The r4d Programme is highly relevant to both SDC and SNSF, in complementary ways. Both institutions consider researching solutions to development challenges to be of high priority, which is itself advanced by the r4d Programme. The SDC prioritises finding relevant solutions to global development issues, which are favoured when developing country researchers are supported and research partnerships are developed. In line with SNSF priorities, the Programme also offers Swiss-based researchers unique research opportunities they would not otherwise have. Finally, the geographic distribution of funds advances Swiss development and/or humanitarian priorities while cultivating the country's open research tradition.

1.2 Effectiveness

At the mid-term of the r4d Programme, various projects are in diverse stages of producing research outputs, appropriate to their trajectory. As projects move into advanced stages of research, the number of research outputs is expected to rise, and projects are generally expected to be highly productive, in line with

expectations. Modules that are more advanced have produced more outputs including contributions to conferences and publications. There is general satisfaction with the research outputs, and confidence that some of the projects will be highly productive.

All projects have brought emerging results into policy fora and among stakeholders, in diverse ways and to varying extents, increasing both awareness and likelihood of use. Projects that are more advanced in timeframe also tend to lead in exposure and in the number of exchanges. The outreach to users and stakeholders is advanced in countries where Co-PIs have high social capital and have continuously engaged with users. Researchers appreciate the emphasis on outreach, supported by the Programme's budgetary allocations, but express an aspiration for more involvement from Swiss partners (especially the SDC) and donor agencies, that could help advance the policy and development outreach.

All projects are being carried out through research partnerships. As a result, at the Module level, there are more partner countries than Swiss institutions. Besides programmatic emphasis on North-South partnerships, the r4d Programme has allowed for South-South exchanges, which are highly valued by participants. For the time being, external network building remains under-developed.

The transnational research partnerships supported by the Programme are effective. Projects have been co-designed by Swiss-based and Southern partners, projects report frequent communication, and student exchanges contribute to effective partnerships. The effectiveness of the partnerships has been dependent on factors, including: matching capacities of researchers, prior working experience, and country contexts. However, co-authored peer-reviewed publications remain limited.

The r4d Programme promotes and produces interdisciplinary research, and is an important source of interdisciplinary funding worldwide. While the projects are interdisciplinary in nature, each approaches interdisciplinarity differently. The capacity to undertake interdisciplinary research has been enhanced qualitatively through the Programme, principally through the undertaking of research itself and the training of students and researchers. Given the relatively long timeframe of projects, many more university degrees are anticipated, amounting to important capacity strengthening.

At the outcome level, a few overarching statements capture progress of the r4d Programme.

- On Outcomes: Evidence and Solutions, overall, projects have been pursuing innovative, transdisciplinary and geographically diverse research, with a promise for delivering research outputs that are relevant and applicable. At the time of this MTR, many if not most research results were yet to be available. Nonetheless, Review Panel members and other stakeholders are optimistic that r4d Programme solutions being produced for reducing poverty and global risks will be of high quality, given the combination of research teams, questions being addressed, and resources available.

- On Outcomes: Making Use of Evidence and Tools – National and International Stakeholders, the r4d Programme is supporting highly relevant research, which is the basis of understanding and addressing development challenges in a more systematic and holistic manner. The Programme has also pushed researchers to undertake outreach and engagement activities as part of their design. The extent to which the research has and will inform national and international stakeholders has proven to be contingent to a significant extent on specific research design

elements, with some projects more savvy and intentional than others.

- On Outcomes: Scientific Competencies, the r4d Programme is contributing to the enhancement of researcher competencies and expertise for addressing complex global issues, with potential for higher-level systemic implications. For researchers from both TM and OM, the r4d Programme improves and strengthens the capacity of involved researchers to reflect on global issues in more nuanced and elaborate ways, and from various disciplinary angles.

The r4d Programme does not have an explicit gender strategy, nor is gender a cross-cutting issue in projects. Yet, about a quarter of sampled projects across Modules specifically focus on gender. As such the Programme may be considered gender 'neutral', while a reasonable proportion of projects selected reflect a concern with gender, and are themselves either gender 'specific' or gender 'intentional'.

While recognising the Programme as having its own unique 'Research for Development' identity, researchers perceive a moderate added value of being funded through both r4d Programme partners, SDC and SNSF. At the same time, because the r4d Secretariat is their main point of contact, researchers perceive the SNSF as a partner adding more value in strengthening their ability to achieve and meet the r4d project and Programme expectations as compared to SDC.

Thematic and Open Module projects are varyingly situated in sustainable development discourses, noting that projects reviewed by the MTR team were largely conceived before the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formalised. R4d Programme guidance is appreciated by researchers towards better aligning and specifying their work in terms of sustainable development.

Several internal factors are key in the achievement or non-achievement of outcomes

and outputs. Primary among these is a combination of research design, the relationships which researchers have between themselves, the support they receive at the programmatic level, support from the Review Panel members, and in the nature of the funding mechanism supporting more mutually empowering relationships between Swiss-based and Southern researchers. Limitations involve the low commitment of research partners, PIs or mixed institutional support from the SDC towards Review Panel members.

Among the external factors crucial to the outputs and outcomes is the context of the countries where research takes place and where the partners are based, along with the receptivity of the policy environment to the research themes being pursued. Local partnerships were instrumental as external factors, while the shorter-term OM projects were also limited by the availability of qualified staff.

1.3 Efficiency

Open and Thematic Calls are perceived to be complementary, both having an independent value and as a necessary compromise enabling the establishment and advance of the r4d Programme. It is possible to adjust Call design to further enhance the value of both Calls. The two-step submission process for Calls was managed within performance norms consistent with other research Calls inside and outside Switzerland. The process resulted in the selection and contracting of projects, using a full set of well-designed grants' administration tools and processes.

Review Panels rigorously reviewed pre-proposals and final proposals, and delivered the set of responsibilities identified in the Management Principles. Review Panel members have adjusted to delivering a broader set of responsibilities

than they originally envisioned or understood to be theirs.

Review Panels effectively assessed scientific merit in proposal review and selection from the start, particularly in the TMs, and progressively improved their integration of development consideration into the review and selection of projects. The value of these combined reviews to researchers is variable.

While the TMs reflect sustainable development discourses and hence global and Swiss development priorities, OM projects tend to have development relevance directly through developing country national policy and uptake pathways. However, the current design of the r4d Programme does not yet provide direct pathways for uptake via SDC development programming.

The review/selection process was managed in a pragmatic manner to determine the number and quality of submissions and success levels. Programme design, expectations regarding a balance of science and development, the specific thematic content that was defined for each Module, the Swiss research culture and the review/selection process all played roles in determining the number and quality of submissions and success levels.

Overall, project monitoring is appropriate, with two Panel Members tracking each project, report writing, site visits, and an MTE to summarize progress. Current practices enable a fairly effective if varied Programme-level monitoring. Notably, there is evidence to suggest that SDC Panel Members are not equally supported institutionally to participate in the monitoring of projects, leading to disparities in the value of such monitoring.

The range of instruments used by the r4d Programme helps keep projects on track towards meeting their objectives. They also contribute to building diverse configurations of research networks both within projects and somewhat beyond. Report writing and site visits stand out as particularly valuable.

The overall life-time management approach of the r4d Programme, and notably the continued support offered to projects by Review Panel members, is well regarded by Panel members and researchers alike. Panel members perceive this as a Programme aspect that gives them ownership of projects in which they are involved. Researchers see this as *contributing* to keeping research projects on track and, for the most part, favouring the achievement of project objectives.

Programme Management and Administration are well structured to serve the Programme. They have progressively overcome the challenges of bridging two different institutional cultures, though some adjustments could help the Programme in reaching its full potential.

1.4 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

At the current stage, the r4d Programme has had many notable successes and has been found to be both effective and efficient, for the most part. Towards ensuring that the Programme is able to meet its objectives, the main report contains a discussion on potential strategies and recommendations that should be considered for the remainder of the Programme, towards improving its ability to meet objectives by December 2021.

Finally, while the current MTR is specifically designed to assess progress and make recommendations towards ensuring that the r4d Programme most effectively meets its objectives, the MTR team has also been requested to provide insights for the conceptualisation, development and implementation of any future r4d programme, and is contained in the main report.

5 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d Programme) of SDC and SNSF was required to shed light on lessons learned thus far, to inform the remainder of the Programme until December 2021 and also inform r4d programming more broadly and into the future. In the following section, the MTR team shares key insights relevant to the remainder of the Programme trajectory. This is followed by a section providing insights that speak to the possible future of this Programme, and of others beyond 2021.

5.2 Insights for the Remainder of the r4d Programme

At the current stage, the r4d Programme has had many notable successes and has been found to be both effective and efficient, for the most part. Towards ensuring that the Programme is able to meet its objectives, the following potential strategies should be considered for the remainder of the Programme, noting that many are complementary of one another. Unless otherwise noted, recommendations are addressed at the Steering Committee (SteCo) and the Programme Coordinators.

Effectiveness in Research

1) Research teams have indicated that an important factor of success stems from the quality of research partnerships. Thus, the r4d Programme should further focus on improving the quality of research partnerships. Towards doing so, the r4d Programme is encouraged to provide comparable access to the Programme's capacity strengthening dimensions, including its skills development and training (e.g. r4d Skills). Capacity strengthening with a focus on Southern research partners will contribute to minimizing the gaps in research quality and capacities, and will support more balanced partnerships. In particular, r4d skills workshops should be made accessible to remote participants through web-enabled technologies. Training could also be provided to Swiss-based and developing country partners on communications, outreach and a slew of other elicited thematic areas. Given the centrality of developing country partners to research uptake, the development of Southern capacities alongside those of Swiss-based partners can be expected to contribute to the effective uptake of research.

Favouring Uptake – Engaging with Potential Users

2) It is a responsibility of researchers to develop uptake pathways, strategies and practices, both overall and as appropriate to their project trajectories. Given that not all r4d researchers are equally savvy and effective in pursuing relevant uptake approaches, they should seek appropriate

support in their development. Indeed, the r4d Programme could provide important support for the remainder of its life-time, notably on engaging with potential users. The r4d Programme (including Review Panel members) should support projects as early as possible in their strategic engagement with potential users, ensuring both that research outputs are well aligned with the needs of users and there are established linkages through which the research is made available to users. Engagement with users yields better results when it is done proactively – if the research is aligned with the users' needs and if users are aware of the research. Uptake efforts are less fruitful if undertaken entirely post facto. The experience from OM projects is of great value in this respect.

Favouring Uptake – SDC Uptake Pathways

3) The MTR revealed that SDC uptake pathways are yet to be developed, and are a latent and potentially powerful resource for favouring the use and uptake of results. At the MTR, it is now an appropriate time (i.e. there is a "window of opportunity) for the SDC to articulate and provide appropriate support for these potential uptake pathways to become catalytic, in several ways:

– At Headquarters: With the support of the SteCo, the r4d Secretariat and a few key Review Panel members, the SDC should develop an *identification and uptake support strategy* to review all projects and identify appropriate pathways for development uptake of the most promising findings. Pathways for uptake and scalability of research outputs need to be strategised for Switzerland and internationally and can include many channels, including engagement with development banks, multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies, in-country policy makers, civil society and private sector networks. Techniques that include the knowledge fairs and learning routes used by IFAD may be drawn upon for these purposes. This should be done through a dialogical approach with the researchers themselves.

– At Country Office level: The SDC should engage with projects at two stages: i) when the research process itself requires engagement with policy-level actors in countries, the SDC can provide support in establishing linkages through its in-country channels; ii) at the output stage, SDC should help researchers engage with policy actors in developing countries. Context is the biggest external factor in the effective delivery of outputs and outcomes, and is an area where the direct support of SDC can provide strong support. This should also be done through a dialogical approach with the researchers themselves.

Favouring Uptake – SDC Institutional Support

4) To take advantage of the current window of opportunity, the SDC needs to provide adequate institutional support, and this in a number of important ways.

– SDC SteCo members and Review Panel members should pursue engagement with the SDC Board of Directors, to advance the strategic value of the Programme and elicit their vocal institutional commitment for the remainder of the Programme life-time.

– The r4d Programme should be included in the SDC's annual planning cycle as part of its Management by Objectives. This would entail the provision of appropriate resources for SDC staff to perform functions related to the Programme (e.g. as Review Panel members, in support of uptake activities, etc.).

– Towards favouring that this commitment filters down consistently through the institution and is strengthened, SDC should clarify its human resource commitment to the Programme. This could

be done specifically through the allocation of Resources for Duty for working on the r4d Programme.

– To counter the challenge of staff rotation at SDC, handovers/knowledge transfer processes should be pursued, ensuring continuity in institutional memory.

Favouring Uptake – Communications

5) Though Communication Budgets are generally being spent in ways that are appropriate to their trajectory, the review undertaken of Food Security project communication-related spending suggests that a small proportion of projects may be under-spending on communication-related activities. Thus, it is recommended that r4d Programme Coordinators review the entire portfolio of projects' communications spending, and provide additional guidance and support to those projects whose communications' strategies and practices reveal themselves to be under-developed.

Favouring Uptake – Targeting the Private Sector

6) An under-developed area of this programme for the outreach, use and uptake of research has been the private sector. Given the growing role of the private sector as a development actor, including multinational corporations, the Swiss private sector and private sector actors in developing countries, the r4d Programme (and the projects it supports) should focus on a strategic and targeted engagement with the private sector, especially but not limited to projects that address the private sector. This can be done through strategically engaging with the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs[xxi] and the Competence Centre for Engagement with the Private Sector.[xxii]

Monitoring and Instruments

7) Some ambiguity persists for Review Panel members about expectations, roles and parameters of monitoring overall. It is thus essential that the r4d Programme clarify the role of Review Panel members in monitoring projects, with clear distinction of what differentiates mandating the direction and form of research relative to providing possibly useful advice and recommendations during site visits, when providing feedback on progress reports and then in the Mid-Term Evaluations. In particular, it is important to clarify for Panel members how to manage perceived "ownership" of research projects and providing advice along with their decision-making role in recommending funding continuation (or not).

8) While monitoring has been in many ways appreciated by researchers and Review Panel members alike, it is quite understandable that in some cases conflicts should emerge, especially given the multiple roles of the Review Panel members. The r4d Programme is encouraged to establish a light conflict resolution process in the short-term, especially one that relates to potential conflicts in monitoring, while crafting a more elaborate conflict resolution policy and process for any future r4d programme.

9) While there are no formal, project reporting requirements on the SDGs and Gender, these are nonetheless important areas of interest and concern at project and Programme level. Thus, it is recommended that project proponents are encouraged (but not required) to report on their alignment with the SDGs and on the gender-sensitivity of their projects in their scientific reports

(e.g. in the section on ethical considerations). Doing so would provide the r4d Programme with insights on these matters, which could inform future programming meaningfully. It must be emphasised that project performance should not be gauged against such report, and that this remains a learning exercise.

Contribution to the Literature

10) Many projects are undertaking research in conflict areas, taking risks and addressing challenges that frequently result in methodological adjustments. Given the important and growing body of literature on researching in conflict environments, the r4d Programme should encourage its researchers to consider pooling insights and publishing on such matters, in addition to their publishing and dissemination that is thematically focused.

5.3   Insights for Future Programmatic Strategies

While the current MTR is specifically designed to assess progress and make recommendations towards ensuring that the r4d Programme most effectively meets its objectives, the MTR team has also been requested to provide insights for the conceptualisation, development and implementation of any future r4d programme.

Continued SDC-SNSF Collaboration

1) The MTR team is firm in our belief that the value of SDC-SNSF collaboration and joint funding for both institutional partners has been demonstrated by the r4d Programme. We recommend that they continue working together into the future, should resources be available. The collaboration has a synergistic effect in advancing the priorities of both partners, and through the creation of a unique and much-valued opportunity for researchers and for other stakeholders.

Innovative Research

2) The r4d Programme created an important and rather unique opportunity for innovative, partnership-based, transdisciplinary research that is much valued by the researchers that are funded in Switzerland and in the Global South. Such programmatic framing should be maintained, with continued support for innovative research, which may not necessarily align with traditional academic outputs like peer-reviewed publications, but has potential to produce high impact.

3) Retaining the current balance between TM and OM type research is desirable, with medium and longer-term research support provided, with only minor modifications. The r4d Programme has an appropriate balance of TM and OM projects. Both have provided respective value. TM projects are currently producing outputs, demonstrating strong potential to generate a few key globally relevant solutions. OM projects on the other hand are highly relevant to specific national development contexts, and OM projects may attract research institutions and talented researchers unable or unwilling to take on the larger and more complex TM research. Above all, it is important to retain a balance between TM and OM given their respective value added.

Research Partnerships

4) Partnerships developed through the projects are highly valued by partners and have proved beneficial for the Swiss and developing country partners alike. They lead to more relevant research, and increase the research capacities of both. Many existing features of the r4d Programme have supported the development of effective partnerships, and any future r4d programme should continue to provide such support, including: resources for face-to-face meetings, ability to co-design research, and exchange of students. The support for effective partnerships could be improved in a number of ways:

   – Consider provision of funding directly to the PI and Co-PI institutions, without needing the PI institution to manage resources.

   – Support clearer communications planning internal to projects.

   – Provide more emphasis and encouragement on co-authorship.

   – Provide all involved researchers with training on KFPE principles (e.g. online if necessary).

   – Encourage researchers to explore and consider opportunities such as the Government Excellence Scholarships[xxiii], in order to improve teaching and research experiences. Such opportunities can be expected to improve partnerships, research and networking capacities more broadly.

5) While supporting Swiss-based researchers is a priority, any future r4d programme should consider opening the partnerships to other Northern researchers, on a no-cost basis to the programme. While Swiss-based researchers would remain PIs, this would further catalyse the quality and visibility of Swiss-based research.

Favouring Uptake

6) Uptake pathways further developed in the current r4d Programme, including those in collaboration with the SDC, should be maintained and adapted to the future programme realities and priorities.

7) Any future programme should develop and include a funding opportunity for r4d projects to implement or 'test' their research findings (e.g. collaboratively with NGOs, private sector actors, etc.) in order to transfer research into development activities if and when the opportunities arise over the course of project trajectories (e.g. for the development of concrete projects with development stakeholders).

8) A future programme should develop a 'transfer process' for OM projects that could be assessed and incorporated into a relevant TM, based on the fit to the thematic research and performance in the initial phase of work. This would require some adjustments to the OM Call in order for this to be a viable option.

Alignment with the SDGs

9) Strong alignment with the SDGs is encouraged, and can be actively pursued through the Call process itself, through monitoring, in the production of research outputs and cultivation of uptake pathways.

Building Researcher Networks

10) Participants in the r4d Programme have indicated a high appreciation for engaging with other researchers across Modules, across the Programme and beyond. In any future programme, network building could include a component for engaging with networks funded by other r4d programmes globally. One way to do this is to co-fund and co-organise knowledge sharing platforms with other relevant and comparable r4d programmes.

Gender Sensitivity

11) Given both SDC and SNSF commitments to gender, a gender strategy should be crafted that ensures the respective commitments of the collaboration are realised in practice. Although both SDC and SNSF have explicit commitments to gender, gender is not addressed systematically in the r4d Programme. Such gender considerations need to be reflected at various levels: in Call documents; in the drafting of guiding documents for the selection of projects, in the proposal assessment matrix, in the programme M&E system; in the guidance provided to researchers on the integration of gender into projects themselves.

Monitoring and Instruments

12) Projects that are discontinued after their Mid-Term Evaluation do not achieve their potential as assessed in the rigorous selection process. The rd4 Programme should review the potentially conflicting nature of the roles assigned to Review Panel members in the 'life-time management' approach, ensuring that roles and responsibilities of Review Panel members and researchers are clear and consistent. Any future r4d programme should develop balanced and appropriately binding peer-review systems and compliance principles in order to avoid conflicts within evaluation processes.

13) In an effort to avoid project or programme-level conflicts without mechanisms for their management and resolution, any future r4d programme should clarify a conflict resolution policy and process as part of the monitoring of r4d projects. These clarifications could include, for example, specifying the implications and expectations associated with Review Panel recommendations, and identifying a contact person for researchers in case of disagreement with a recommendation.

Efficiency

14) Towards ensuring that a strong pool of projects are selected, a future r4d programme should consider pooling (a portion of) its funds in a centralised manner that would permit the Steering Committee to allocate more or fewer funds to Thematic Areas that may have more or fewer meritorious proposals submitted.

15) The human resource contribution of SDC to any future r4d programme needs to be reviewed, in order to ensure that the right staff members are involved and permitted sufficient time for meaningful involvement, consistent with the research uptake strategy.

16) In an effort to ensure there are adequate project management resources available, any future r4d programme should consider allowing funding to cover release from teaching for PIs,

considering the high cost of management, and to add an incentive to PIs. Release time could be paid for actual costs to hire replacement teachers.

17) The life-time management approach of the r4d Programme should be maintained, but modified/adapted based on some of the monitoring and other recommendations provided above.

18) Given the effectiveness and efficiency of current management arrangements, any future r4d programme should pursue the same or similar arrangements.

Management Response of the r4d programme Steering Committee

The management response of the r4d programme steering committee appraises the MTR Report as valuable document with key learnings and recommendations.

In 2017, the r4d programme was reviewed by an external company, Universalia, from Canada. The Mid-Term Review (MTR) covers the period from the start of the programme in 2012 until end of 2016. Its objectives were to provide insight into the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme, to highlight lessons learned thus far, to inform the remainder of the programme until December 2021 and research for development programming more broadly.

A TIMELY FORMATIVE EVALUATION

We, the Steering Committee of the r4d programme, thank Universalia for the extensive and useful final report and welcome its findings. We are pleased that the r4d programme's progress is recognised as relevant and that early results demonstrate that the programme is making positive changes in terms of development outcomes. We are also glad to learn that the r4d programme is perceived as an effective and efficient undertaking with significant potential for bridging the spheres of scientific research and development.

We generally agree with and take note of the recommendations and lessons learned in the report. The MTR was undertaken at a time when research results were emerging and is, therefore, based on an assessment focused on the early stages of the r4d programme. Due to its timing, the MTR could not assess some of the activities that will be key for the dissemination and uptake of the research results at programme level, especially the synthesis work.

DESIGNED FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Contributing to systematic changes for sustainable development through research results is a complex and ambitious endeavour. The Steering Committee holds that the uptake of the research results is largely depending on the researchers' efforts when interacting with different stakeholders in the process of their research. Many features of the r4d programme were specifically designed to encourage such uptake at country or thematic levels as the beneficiaries of the programme are primarily stakeholders in developing countries or experts working in specific thematic fields. Donor agencies act as contributors or facilitators in funding research for development; they are not the primary users of the research results. However, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has already started to engage actively in the synthesis process to benefit from the knowledge generated by the r4d programme and will continue to do so.

The MTR used a mixed methods approach and included diverse informants in order to answer a variety of questions. As recipients of the results, we note that some MTR conclusions largely draw on inputs provided by the research community members, especially by means of the often-cited online survey among academics. A more balanced representation of viewpoints from the diverse group of informants has been expected.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The MTR offers 24 findings on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency and 28 recommendations. Our response focuses on each of the ten recommendations for the remainder of the r4d programme. It does not include replies to the 18 recommendations for future programmatic strategies as they will be taken as very valuable inputs once the preparations of the next multi-year planning processes start.

r4d programme Steering Committee, March 2018

Effectiveness in Research

RECOMMENDATION 1

Research teams have indicated that an important factor of success stems from the quality of research partnerships. Thus, the r4d Programme should further focus on improving the quality of research partnerships. Towards doing so, the r4d Programme is encouraged to provide comparable access to the Programme's capacity strengthening dimensions, including its skills development and training (e.g. r4d Skills).

Capacity strengthening with a focus on Southern research partners will contribute to minimizing the gaps in research quality and capacities, and will support more balanced partnerships. In particular, r4d skills workshops should be made accessible to remote participants through web-enabled technologies. Training could also be provided to Swiss-based and developing country partners on communications, outreach and a slew of other elicited thematic areas.

Given the centrality of developing country partners to research uptake, the development of Southern capacities alongside those of Swiss-based partners can be expected to contribute to the effective uptake of research.

MTR Report, p. 25

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Fully agree.

Justification
The r4d programme focuses on funding research that it is both of high scientific quality and relevant for development. Hence, capacity building is not a stand-alone objective of the r4d programme but is integrated in the programme objectives, mainly under objective three. The r4d programme, being based on well-established research partnerships and exchanges between the global North and South, inevitably contributes to an increased exchange of knowledge, competences and capacities at both ends. Furthermore, mutual learning and capacity building also emerge by providing research positions for a high number of PhD students and post-doctoral researchers in the projects. Finally, the Swiss government holds an annual competitive selection process, accessible also to the r4d projects, to provide individual excellence scholarships for foreign scholars to come and study in Switzerland.

Measures
The Steering Committee and the r4d programme management will further explore relevant learning processes beyond project teams, topics or countries. The r4d Skills series will continue until 2020. Its content/themes is/are based on the requests of researchers as well as on iden-tified key skills needed in contemporary research for development. The r4d Skills series will continue to explore possibilities for online/blended learning events to include more researchers in the workshops. Issues related to equal opportunities and access, including those who might be disadvantaged due to their geographical (remote locations), age (younger) or gender (female) characteristics, will be considered when planning managing future events. Co-authored publications by partners are encouraged throughout the projects' lifetimes.

Favouring Uptake
Engaging with Potential Users

RECOMMENDATION 2

It is the responsibility of researchers to develop uptake pathways, strategies and practices, both overall and as appropriate to their project trajectories. Given that not all r4d researchers are equally savvy and effective in pursuing relevant uptake approaches, they should seek appropriate support in their development. Indeed, the r4d Programme could provide important support for the remainder of its lifetime, notably on engaging with potential users.

The r4d Programme (including Review Panel members) should support projects as early as possible in their strategic engagement with potential users, ensuring both that research outputs are well aligned with the needs of users and there are established linkages through which the research is made available to users. Engagement with users yields better results when it is done proactively – if the research is aligned with the users' needs and if users are aware of the research. Uptake efforts are less fruitful if undertaken entirely post facto. The experience from OM projects is of great value in this respect.

MTR Report, p. 25

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Fully agree.

Justification
We strongly support the timely and effective implementation of this recommendation by the research teams. Transdisciplinarity, pathways to application and communication strategies are an integral part of the selected r4d projects. The objectives of the r4d programme can only be achieved through timely communication to and effective cooperation with other system stakeholders (larger science community, private sector, civil society organisations, media, policy-makers, international organisations and public at large).

Measures

We will continue to systematically monitor the project teams' efforts to meet their planned milestones related to application and communication, as well as to following-up and adjusting their strategies based on specific recommendations provided by the Review Panel members during the site visits and mid-term evaluations. Review Panel members give advice on key moments and target groups, and suggest opportunities of engagement in global, national and local networks. If necessary, an r4d skills workshop on stakeholder mapping and engagement could be organised.

The recently initiated synthesis work, which has not been under scrutiny of this MTR, will be implemented during at least four years of the r4d programme. The efforts so far will feed into this work. It will be aligned with the already existing processes in order in order to ensure quality and impact of the uptake strategies, both at the module and programme levels.

Favouring Uptake
SDC Uptake Pathways

RECOMMENDATION 3

The MTR revealed that SDC uptake pathways are yet to be developed, and are a latent and potentially powerful resource for favouring the use and uptake of results. At the MTR, it is now an appropriate time (i.e. there is a "window of opportunity) for the SDC to articulate and provide appropriate support for these potential uptake pathways to become catalytic, in several ways:

- At Headquarters: With the support of the SteCo, the r4d Secretariat and a few key Review Panel members, the SDC should develop an identification and uptake support strategy to review all projects and identify appropriate pathways for development uptake of the most promising findings. Pathways for uptake and scalability of research outputs need to be strategised for Switzerland and internationally and can include many channels, including engagement with development banks, multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies, in-country policy makers, civil society and private sector networks. Techniques that include the knowledge fairs and learning routes used by IFAD may be drawn upon for these purposes. This should be done through a dialogical approach with the researchers themselves.

- At Country Office level: The SDC should engage with projects at two stages: i) when the research process itself requires engagement with policy-level actors in countries, the SDC can provide support in establishing linkages through its in-country channels; ii) at the output stage, SDC should help researchers engage with policy actors in developing

countries. Context is the biggest external factor in the effective delivery of outputs and outcomes, and is an area where the direct support of SDC can provide strong support. This should also be done through a dialogical approach with the researchers themselves.

MTR Report, p. 26

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Partially agree.

Justification

As indicated in the introduction, the r4d programme has not been designed to primarily influence SDC activities, but rather to contribute directly to sustainable development in partner countries or at global level. The research partnerships funded by the r4d programme enable the research projects to be grounded in the local reality, thanks to the contextual knowledge of the researchers from the partner countries. In addition, the r4d programme has been designed to encourage co-creation of knowledge that includes continuous exchanges between all stakeholders involved, including researchers and the SDC. It is expected that this set-up provides the best opportunity to disseminate research results at project level. Although staff from the SDC are available to support researchers in establishing policy links at country and global level, this can only be complementary to the activities undertaken by the researchers themselves. Importantly, the request for such a support should come from the researchers' teams. The success of the SDC uptake strategy will depend on the researchers' willingness to engage in a policy dialogue at institutional or country level.

Measures

At module and programme level, the SDC remains interested to further utilise and disseminate relevant new knowledge created within the r4d programme. The synthesis processes that have just started will contribute to this objective during the remainder of the programme until 2021. The SDC representatives are being engaged in the synthesis process to contribute to the translation of research results that are both user-friendly and relevant for the development community. Existing thematic focal points and networks will be utilised wherever possible for diffusion of relevant r4d thematic results and products as well as for enabling various forms and processes of dissemination.

Favouring Uptake
SDC Institutional Support

RECOMMENDATION 4

To take advantage of the current window of opportunity, the SDC needs to provide adequate institutional support, and this in a number of important ways.

- SDC SteCo members and Review Panel members should pursue engagement with the SDC Board of Directors, to advance the strategic value of the Programme and elicit their vocal institutional commitment for the remainder of the Programme life-time.
- The r4d Programme should be included in the SDC's annual planning cycle as part of its Management by Objectives. This would entail the provision of appropriate resources for SDC staff to perform functions related to the Programme (e.g. as Review Panel members, in support of uptake activities, etc.).
- Towards favouring that this commitment filters down consistently through the institution and is strengthened, SDC should clarify its human resource commitment to the Programme. This could be done specifically through the allocation of Resources for Duty for working on the r4d Programme.
- To counter the challenge of staff rotation at SDC, handovers/knowledge transfer processes should be pursued, ensuring continuity in institutional memory.

MTR Report, pp. 26-27

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Partially agree.

Justification
The SDC Board of Directors has regularly been informed and invited to contribute key messages from Swiss development cooperation to the r4d programme. A first meeting between the Advisory Board of the r4d programme and the SDC Board of Directors took place in 2016 and a second one is planned for 2019. Bi-annual meetings between the director or one of the vice-directors of the SDC and the director of the SNSF are organised to exchange on the strategic orientations of research for development and more specifically on the developments in the joint funding instrument, the r4d programme.

Measures
To continue this engagement, the MTR report and the Management Response of the Steering Committee will be presented to the SDC Board of Directors and the question of the human resources allocated to this programme will be discussed at this level. Knowledge transfer processes exist as rotation is a regular feature of the

working life at the SDC, but still require specific individual efforts to ensure the continuity of institutional memory.

Favouring Uptake
Communications

RECOMMENDATION 5

Though Communication Budgets are generally being spent in ways that are appropriate to their trajectory, the review undertaken of Food Security project communication-related spending suggests that a small proportion of projects may be underspending on communication-related activities. Thus, it is recommended that r4d Programme Coordinators review the entire portfolio of projects' communications spending, and provide additional guidance and support to those projects whose communications' strategies and practices reveal themselves to be underdeveloped.

MTR Report, p. 27

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Fully agree.

Justification
The Steering Committee already discussed the communication-specific monitoring and came up with steps to be undertaken to fully utilise the potential for an effective communication already planned within existing project proposals and budgets.

Measures
The r4d Steering Committee has instructed the r4d programme management to:

- review the entire portfolio of projects' communications spendings,
- monitor and closely follow the implementation of the spendings and meeting of the provided conditions.
- provide additional guidance and, if needed, advice (through the Review Panels) to projects whose communications' strategies and practices are under-developed and not convincing in meeting the set conditions.

Furthermore, synergies with the synthesis process will be explored and created wherever and whenever possible. The r4d programme management is in direct dialogue with the projects on how to improve and poten-

tially how to gain from synergies with the synthesis processes. The SDC, through its communication specialists, thematic focal points and networks, can also support specific r4d programme communication activities whenever such an engagement is helpful and desired.

Favouring Uptake
Targeting the private sector

RECOMMENDATION 6

An under-developed area of this programme for the outreach, use and uptake of research has been the private sector. Given the growing role of the private sector as a development actor, including multinational corporations, the Swiss private sector and private sector actors in developing countries, the r4d Programme (and the projects it supports) should focus on a strategic and targeted engagement with the private sector, especially but not limited to projects that address the private sector. This can be done through strategically engaging with the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the Competence Centre for Engagement with the Private Sector (CEP).

MTR Report, p. 27

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Partially agree.

Justification
We take note of this important recommendation and encourage the research teams to invest more efforts into information and cooperation with non-academic actors, including the private sector stakeholders. This concerns especially project teams that are directly working on topics where private sector issues, stakeholders and/or regulatory frameworks are under research scrutiny and/or play a decisive role.

Measures
The r4d management will ask Review Panel members to provide advice or contact information that may facilitate the work of researchers in this respect to relevant project teams.

In some modules engagement with the private sector could start in the context of the synthesis process. The SDC Competence Center for the Engagement with the Private Sector (CEP) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs should be brought on board as soon as specific matters of interest are being identified.

Monitoring and Instruments

RECOMMENDATION 7

Some ambiguity persists for Review Panel members about expectations, roles and parameters of monitoring overall. It is thus essential that the r4d Programme clarifies the role of Review Panel members in monitoring projects, with clear distinction of what differentiates mandating the direction and form of research relative to providing possibly useful advice and recommendations during site visits, when providing feedback on progress reports and then in the Mid-Term Evaluations. In particular, it is important to clarify for Panel members how to manage perceived "ownership" of research projects and providing advice along with their decision-making role in recommending funding continuation (or not).

RECOMMENDATION 8

While monitoring has been in many ways appreciated by researchers and Review Panel members alike, it is quite understandable that in some cases conflicts should emerge, especially given the multiple roles of the Review Panel members. The r4d Programme is encouraged to establish a light conflict resolution process in the short-term, especially one that relates to potential conflicts in monitoring, while crafting a more elaborate conflict resolution policy and process for any future r4d programme.

RECOMMENDATION 9

While there are no formal, project reporting requirements on the SDGs and Gender, these are nonetheless important areas of interest and concern at project and Programme level. Thus, it is recommended that project proponents are encouraged (but not required) to report on their alignment with the SDGs and on the gender-sensitivity of their projects in their scientific reports (e.g. in the section on ethical considerations). Doing so would provide the r4d Programme with insights on these matters, which could inform future programming meaningfully. It must be emphasised that project performance should not be gauged against such report, and that this remains a learning exercise.

MTR Report, pp. 27-28

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Fully agree.

Justification
We are aware that some ambiguity in the role of Panel members is inherent and cannot be completely resolved. To avoid formal escalations of conflicts, a conflict resolution mechanism will be developed and employed.

We second the recommendation to encourage introduction of SDGs and Gender as additional elements of reporting. Alignment with the 2030 Agenda is already part of the methodological approach of the synthesis work.

Measures

With respect to recommendations 7 and 8, the r4d programme management informs the Review Panel and the projects in good time about expectations, roles and parameters. It will establish a light conflict resolution mechanism, based on experiences with previous processes. This includes early communication of potential conflict resolution possibilities and defining contact persons for mediating a conflict.

With respect to recommendation 9, the r4d programme management included two sections on SDGs and gender in the reporting guidelines to enable transversal learnings about these points in the r4d programme.

Contribution to the Literature

RECOMMENDATION 10

Many projects are undertaking research in conflict areas, taking risks and addressing challenges that frequently result in methodological adjustments. Given the important and growing body of literature on researching in conflict environments, the r4d Programme should encourage its researchers to consider pooling insights and publishing on such matters, in addition to their publishing and dissemination that is thematically focused.

MTR Report, p. 28

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Fully agree.

Justification

This recommendation will be taken into consideration and further reflected upon during the synthesis process, especially within the Social Conflicts module.

Measures

A review article or collection of practices (reflective, concerned, contextualised science) on research in fragile contexts is planned in the Social Conflicts module as a synthesis product. Furthermore, cooperation and synergies with other relevant stakeholders, such as the Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries (KFPE) and the Academies of Sciences, will be actively sought in order to create synergies and to avoid overlap.