



# Management response to the final evaluation of the r4d programme

The r4d Steering Committee mandated the final evaluation of the r4d programme to BSS Volkswirtschaftliche Beratung AG. BSS submitted the final evaluation report on 8 December 2023.

The **objectives** of the final evaluation of the r4d programme were: To appraise the programme management, set-up and organisational arrangements, including structure and processes (**Efficiency**). To assess the outcomes and results of the r4d programme and the impact of the research projects against the objectives stated in the r4d programme framework and to assess the contribution of the r4d programme to development (**Effectiveness**). To appraise the programme's place in the Swiss and the global research context related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in relation to other organisations (**Coherence**). To assess the sustainability of the achieved results (will the benefits of r4d programme research last)? (**Sustainability**)

This management response appraises the results of the evaluation in general and addresses every recommendation (10 in total) individually.

## 1 General comments

The evaluation of the r4d programme has been conducted as an ex-post evaluation at the end of the programme which lasted from 2012 to 2023. The Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d programme) is a joint funding initiative by the SDC and the SNSF. In parallel to the final phase of the r4d programme, a new collaboration between these two partners started in the form of the Solutions-Oriented Research for Development Programme (SOR4D). The SOR4D funds trans-disciplinary research projects that produce better knowledge, solutions and innovation and open up new ways for advancing sustainable development and reducing poverty in the least developed, low and lower middle-income countries. The development of this programme has been informed by learnings from the r4d programme, including the findings of the Mid-Term Review conducted in 2017. Therefore, in the management response to the recommendations there are numerous references to the SOR4D. The first phase of the SOR4D programme runs from 2021 to 2027 and a second phase is currently in elaboration and discussion between the two partners. Some of the recommendation from this evaluation are considered in these discussions and the development of a 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the SOR4D programme.



## 2 Response to recommendations

	Recommendation	Response
<b>Programme-level recommendations</b>		
1	<i>We recommend that the type of funding provided by the r4d programme (transformative and SDG-oriented) is continued. Conventional research funding alone is not going to deliver the results that we need to achieve the SDGs. Without sufficient funding, the capacity building impacts of the r4d programme are likely to be lost. The r4d programme can be seen as the proof of concept that demonstrates that transformative research works: It is both scientifically excellent and impactful. Therefore, we argue that transformative sits firmly within the mandate of the SNSF. To the extent that the SNSF wants to strengthen its commitment to the SDGs, we therefore strongly encourage the SNSF to reflect on the experiences gained with the r4d programme, and, ultimately, allocate more funding toward sustainability-oriented trans-formative research.</i>	<p>The r4d Steering Committee agrees that continuation of transformative and SDG-oriented programmes like the r4d programme is important to make transformative research and capacity-building of researchers in this field sustainable – especially in a North-South context. Joint funding from different agencies is necessary for this kind of research as it brings together different expertise and enlarges ownership and impact of the programme.</p> <p>The r4d programme supports the mandates of the SNSF and SDC. The r4d Steering Committee agrees that transformative research needs to be sustained and supported and encourages the two organisations to strive to continue and in the case of the SNSF possibly increase funding for transformative research programmes.</p> <p>We positively note that the r4d programme is innovative and has led the way for other programmes, such as the Solution-Oriented Research for Development Programme (SOR4D) and SDC’s Transform Programme. The SOR4D builds on the experiences of the r4d and is currently one of the important transdisciplinary research programmes in Switzerland.</p>
2	<i>We conclude that – while not without challenges – the collaboration between the SNSF and SDC was effective. We argue that neither one organization would have been able to achieve the same impacts without the other. We therefore recommend that the SNSF and SDC continue to collaborate. To maximize organizational commitment and visibility, however, we recommend that such programmes are co-funded by both organizations. The collaboration between the SNSF and the SDC may also serve as a blueprint for similar collaborations on transformative research programmes between the SNSF and other government actors, such as the Federal Office for the Environment, the Federal Office for Energy, the Federal Roads Authority etc.</i>	<p>The r4d Steering Committee agrees that the SNSF should underline that transformative research is an integral part of its mission to contribute to sustainability and to promote excellence and should commit itself to its development. Furthermore, one of the strategic priorities of the SNSF is to promote diversity in research. Programmes such as r4d and SOR4D are highly innovative and can serve as a laboratory for the SNSF to learn from and develop its expertise further. The r4d Steering Committee recognizes the value added of the cooperation between SDC and SNSF and advises that the two institutions continue to build on their respective expertise in extending the outreach and scope of research for development.</p> <p>The r4d Steering Committee further takes note of the recommendation and will explore</p>



		ways to further develop collaborations taking into account the interests of the partners and involved stakeholders. Furthermore, synergies between the SNSF and other actors and agencies should be explored. There may be further potential for collaboration in terms of scaling up and implementation of results through other funding initiatives.
3	<i>Valorisation of the programme level experiences: To ensure that the lessons learned from the management of the programme are documented and analysed, we recommend that in the future, transformative research programmes are accompanied by an accompanying evaluation or research project (“Begleitforschung”). An ex post evaluation alone cannot achieve this. Transformative research is still new and innovative, and we expect that there still are a lot of lessons to be learned.</i>	<p>One of the objectives of this evaluation was to learn about the impact and success of the r4d in order to integrate these lessons learned in the design of future programmes. Some of them have already been integrated into the design of the SOR4D programme.</p> <p>The r4d Steering Committee partially agrees with this recommendation. While it agrees that capitalisation is particularly important with regard to knowledge management and knowledge transfer within institutions and to ensure day-to-day running of the programme, the Steering Committee believes that a separate “Begleitforschung” may be too resource intensive. Instead, the steering committee suggests addressing this recommendation with the inclusion of a chapter on “knowledge management” in the yearly programme reports and a closer follow-up and monitoring of project implementation and results achieved.</p>
4	<i>Research funders across the world are currently trying to work out how to best design and manage transformative research programmes. Therefore, we recommend considering options for collaborating with other research funders to share the experiences gained in Switzerland and to learn from the experiences of other countries. The SDG are about providing global public goods. It thus stands to reason that research funders collaborate.</i>	<p>The r4d steering committee acknowledges the importance of exchanging with and learning from other agencies and partners. The SNSF and SDC already interact with a number of partners, e.g. the IRDFF, and the SDC holds regular political dialogues and exchanges with partner agencies. It is SDC’s intention to further strengthen this exchange in the future.</p> <p>There are several multilateral platforms and initiatives in the domain of sustainability and transdisciplinary research and the SNSF already participates in some of them such as the Belmont Forum. The Steering Committee encourages the SNSF to explore further the potential for collaboration either in terms of exchange of expertise or in terms of possible co-funding.</p>
5	<i>To increase the relevance and to strengthen the solutions-orientation of transformative research programmes, we recommend including more practitioners, stakeholders and beneficiaries from the Global South in the programme management, steering committees, and review panels. This group could include,</i>	This recommendation has already been taken up in the composition of the SOR4D review panel, which includes representatives from the North and South from academia, development practitioners (e.g. representatives from NGOs as well as the private sector) and two SDC delegates. This new composition has



	<i>among others, development experts, representatives from civil society (NGOs), policy-makers from the Global South, industry or international organisations etc. Their involvement would be particularly important in the definition of thematic focal points and the assessment of the relevance and impact potential of proposed projects.</i>	proven to be beneficial in terms of assessing the development and poverty relevance as well as the transdisciplinarity of the projects selected.
6	<i>We recommend strengthening the involvement of the SDC in transformative research pro-programmes like r4d in the future because a) the SDC can be a direct beneficiary of the research that is being funded and b) the SDC has a lot of expertise it can contribute to the programme and its projects. This could be done first by providing the involved SDC representatives more time and resources to engage with the programme. To facilitate knowledge transfer from the programme into the SDC, we, secondly, recommend a stronger integration in the SDC's internal knowledge management systems. Finally, we recommend that the SDC tries to look for new ways to engage its field offices more systematically.</i>	The r4d Steering Committee agrees that the link to the SDC regional/country offices and experts in HQ is important. This aspect will be further strengthened in the SOR4D programme. The participation of SDC's experts in the SOR4D review panel has proven to be a good practice to enable a closer follow-up on the different projects from the start. The engagement with relevant stakeholders in the Swiss Country Representations as well as at SDC HQ in the thematic and geographic divisions will be facilitated at the different stages of the supported projects by the respective SDC programme officer responsible for the SDC/SNSF partnership.
<b>Project-level recommendations</b>		
7	<i>Transformative research projects should be required to involve stakeholders and beneficiaries from the beginning, ideally by making them part of the project consortium.</i>	The r4d Steering Committee fully agrees with this recommendation. This has already been taken up in the SOR4D programme, where project consortia are composed of both researchers and development actors from practitioner organisations.
8	<i>Transformative research projects should also be required to conduct a systematic stakeholder mapping in the beginning of their projects. To ensure relevance and maximize impact potential, they should identify the needs of local communities, beneficiaries, and stakeholders at the beginning of their projects. And they should continue to engage them throughout the project.</i>	<p>The Steering Committee fully agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>The SOR4D programme partly addresses this issue by promoting transdisciplinary consortia including practitioners, who contribute strongly to defining the research needs and to ensure that the solution-oriented research addresses local needs and sensitivities. We recognise that a stakeholder mapping could be implemented more systematically and included specifically in the evaluation criteria.</p> <p>This could also be included more systematically in the monitoring of the projects through progress reports and possibly site visits.</p>
9	<i>The projects should be required to develop a realistic ToC describing how they will generate impacts. The ToC should encourage the projects to develop realistic and measurable objectives, milestones, and indicators. This could then also form the basis for a more</i>	This point has already been taken up in the SOR4D programme, where projects have to submit a theory of change which is part of the evaluation process of the proposals. It has however been found that training on using



	<p><i>comprehensive monitoring of the projects. In transformative research there are many different pathways to impact. Therefore, the monitoring should also be project specific.</i></p>	<p>these concepts needs to be offered because researchers are not always familiar with them.</p> <p>With regard to monitoring: The Steering Committee agrees that the project monitoring has to be strengthened. The evaluation report demonstrated that in the r4d programme, close interaction from programme management and review panels with researchers, including early site visits and mid-term reviews, were appreciated by the r4d researchers.</p> <p>For the SOR4D programme, a closer monitoring with regular exchanges with the research teams will be sought, including requests for project progress reports.</p> <p>In response to this recommendation, the SOR4D Supervisory Body plans to introduce a pilot monitoring in the 2<sup>nd</sup> SOR4D call in the form of a progress review after 12-15 months. The goal of this progress review will be to ensure that the project is set-up for success, that collaboration is effective, financial management is correct and generally that preconditions for delivering results are given.</p> <p>Furthermore, it is planned to involve SOR4D review panel members more strongly in the monitoring of projects and to have regular and institutionalised exchanges with the projects.</p>
<p><b>10</b></p>	<p><i>Our findings suggest that both the smaller open call projects and the larger thematic call projects had benefits. We therefore recommend that in the future, researchers are therefore provided with the flexibility to propose projects of shorter duration and smaller budgets but also products with larger budgets and longer duration. We conclude that the latter is critical for projects to a) have sufficient time to first conduct a systematic stakeholder mapping and engage with stakeholders during the early stages of the research projects and b) secondly have time to communicate results at the end. Concerning impact, both are important contributing factors. However, we also saw that smaller and shorter projects achieved impacts. Therefore, we recommend that projects are provided with the flexibility to do both.</i></p>	<p>The evaluation report has illustrated that for some research consortia project duration might be an issue. The Steering Committee agrees that project duration is an important element and that there should be more flexible duration options. A project duration of 3 years is indeed short for transdisciplinary research projects. The Transformation Acceleration Grants (TAGs) offered as part of the SOR4D Programme are one way of overcoming the problem of too short project duration. They offer the researchers the opportunity to receive additional funding to communicate and implement results and scale their knowledge and solutions.</p> <p>As SNSF and SDC are in the process of planning a second phase to the SOR4D, this need for flexibility in the project size and duration will be taken into account in defining the framework conditions of this follow-up programme.</p>