

# Audit of development cooperation in vocational and professional education and training

## Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

### Key facts

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The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) has examined support for the development of vocational and professional education and training (VPET) within the framework of projects run by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Acquiring vocational and professional skills helps young people enter the labour market and contributes to poverty reduction, which is a priority for the SDC. Its strategy and activities are based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in 2015.

The range of activities carried out by the SDC is broad. Projects aim, for example, to provide young people with guidance through employment agencies or to support schools by supplying equipment, training teachers or updating curricula. Other projects focus on strengthening framework conditions to improve the VPET governance. The SDC devotes some CHF 40 million a year to this sector, which spans more than forty countries. Nearly 120 projects are underway or planned for the period 2017-2024.

The audit findings are mixed. Promoting VPET is complex and demanding because the SDC has to integrate both educational and economic concerns, as well as those of many players. Once projects are completed, the long-term sustainability of activities is uncertain without external support and own funding. The SFAO is of the opinion that it is unwise to pursue projects without a clear willingness on the part of those involved to ensure that the actions undertaken have a lasting impact. It made seven recommendations.

### **Project strategy and design: SDC takes a pragmatic approach with plenty of room for manoeuvre**

Taking into account the various dimensions, the multitude of players and stakeholders, and the desire to bring about in-depth change in the VPET system, are a challenge and complicate the activities involved. Improving governance is a long-term task that requires the will of the players involved and political stability. The reforms have a long-term horizon that is not always compatible with short-term political interests.

Understanding of VPET varies from country to country. References to the dual model, i.e. alternating between different training locations, clash with local realities and generate expectations that are not always realistic. In many countries, training takes place primarily in schools and colleges, and not in companies.

In practice, there are many possible approaches. Each project can be considered relevant to the local context. The SDC acts pragmatically according to the needs identified by the cooperation offices. Combining strategic priorities with the reality on the ground is a real challenge.

### **Prioritise projects with a view to scaling up results and develop public-private partnerships**

On the basis of the projects examined, the SFAO found that their traceability is assured. The cooperation offices have the knowledge and expertise, as well as considerable latitude in selecting and implementing projects. Monitoring is carried out on an ongoing basis. The SDC does not hesitate to stop a project if it is not working properly or if the results do not match the expected outcomes.

Scaling up the results of a project is a practice that should be encouraged. This involves starting a project at local level and then reproducing and extending the measures to other regions or even the whole country. This approach encourages players to assume responsibility for the results.

VPET is a sector dedicated to the commitment of private companies and foundations. This makes it possible to obtain additional financial resources, benefit from innovations and promote Swiss skills. However, despite this being a priority for the SDC, the number of public-private partnerships remains low.

### **Difficulty in continuing activities once projects come to an end**

There is little prospect of continuing activities without external support once projects have ended. Securing their own sources of funding is difficult. The same applies to guaranteeing the regular and autonomous development of skills and expertise. It takes time to adapt the framework conditions, and the outcome is uncertain.

The involvement of the local private sector is the keystone of the system, but it is often insufficient. Companies do not always see the added value of supporting VPET. They see the cost rather than the potential benefit, and are therefore reluctant to take on apprentices and mentor them. Added to this is the lack of private sector organisations in some countries, and the fact that players have diverging interests.

More often than not, schools and colleges remain dependent on external sources of funding. They are faced with a lack of resources to finance infrastructure work, the maintenance and upkeep of equipment, teacher training and the updating of curricula. This is why they seek financial support from a wide range of donors. Moreover, schools and colleges are faced with the problem of being unattractive to teachers.

### **A multitude of steering instruments: a challenge to ensure coherence**

The SDC has a multitude of tools at its disposal for monitoring projects and programmes, such as controlling, monitoring and evaluation. It has introduced a new system of indicators and a database which should ensure greater coherence between the operational level of projects, the programme level and the strategic perspective.

There is limited interest in analyses of long-term project sustainability, even though this is an evaluation criterion defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These analyses would be useful in view of the high risk of activities ending once the SDC withdraws. Similarly, trajectory analyses are rarely used to monitor recipients. They are, however, an essential tool for tracking career paths over time.

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