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**Swiss Agency for Development
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SDC culture and development in Latin America and the Caribbean (2000-22) Capitalisation of Experience Review

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Abbreviations

CapEx	Capitalisation of experience
COSUDE	The Spanish abbreviation for SDC
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
SDC	Swiss agency for cooperation and development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

1   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the findings of an external Capitalisation of Experience exercise undertaken before the closure of Swiss bilateral cooperation programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2024. Its purpose is to identify key transferable learning from cultural programmes supported by SDC since 2000. The review took place between April and August 2023 through documentary research, remote meetings and workshops, interviews and visits to Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba, where face to face workshops for staff and grantees were also held.

The review concludes that SDC's investment in cultural programmes has been valuable in direct project outcomes, in building the capacity and resources of cultural actors and in extending Swiss Cooperation to partners and beneficiaries not otherwise reached. Cultural programmes align with and contribute to Swiss development goals, notably in gender equality, human rights, democratic norms, social cohesion and freedom of expression, as well as supporting education and community development processes. They contribute to SDC's high reputation among partners, where its engagement with culture is unusual.

There are wide variations in priorities and operations between countries and over time, with multi-annual programmes in Bolivia, Nicaragua and, at certain times, in Cuba, while work in Haiti and Honduras has relied on Small Actions funds. The combination of strategic and responsive funding is most effective, but changes of priorities and key personnel can lead to discontinuities and loss of knowledge. The increasingly authoritarian and/or fragile contexts in which SDC has supported cultural programmes have imposed serious constraints but, perhaps because the arts are underestimated by some state actors, projects have still been able to work in sensitive areas and embody Swiss values.

Cultural work is relatively low cost and low risk but the gap between available resources and actual costs is often bridged by additional, unrecognised work by those involved. This reliance on people's commitment to their projects creates vulnerabilities at project level and limits long-term development of the cultural sector. The report suggests a meta-review of the cost-benefit ratio of cultural projects to establish actual costs and identify benchmarks that can set locally-sensitive standards for support and investment.

In considering the place of culture in SDC's work, the report notes several critical aspects including strategy, the people managing programmes and delivering projects, integration with other development initiatives, the strength of cultural organisations and networks, and the value of active learning about impact and the factors behind success.

The report ends by proposing five principles associated with effective culture and development work, namely: Responsiveness, Trust, Empowerment, Coherence and Sustainability. It proposes that these could be used to guide decision-making about cultural programmes by Swiss Cooperation Offices in other priority countries.

2   INTRODUCTION

2.1   SDC in Latin America and the Caribbean

Switzerland's official development aid of CHF 11.25 billion[1] was approved by Parliament in 2020, with an [International Cooperation Strategy 2021-24](#) whose priorities are: creating decent local jobs; addressing climate change; reducing the causes of forced and irregular migration; and promoting the rule of law. The Swiss agency for cooperation and development (SDC) retains a broad remit, with programmes in health, agriculture and food security, education, human rights, gender equality, governance, water and emergency relief, among others.[2] Swiss cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) dates back over 50 years, but is focused on a few countries, principally Bolivia, Cuba, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua. In 2022 the region received 10% of [Swiss bilateral aid expenditure](#), compared to 44% in sub-Saharan Africa and 26% in Asia. However, the 2021-24 International Cooperation Strategy reduced SDC's priority countries from 46 to 35 in North Africa and the Middle East; Sub-Saharan Africa; Central, South and South-East Asia; and Eastern Europe. SDC's bilateral cooperation programmes in the LAC region will therefore end in December 2024 though support will continue at through thematic programmes, multilateral contributions and humanitarian aid, while cultural work will be supported at a smaller scale by Swiss Embassies. For partners in the countries concerned, this is a major loss of support, especially after the withdrawal of several other European countries from the region in recent years. The phasing out period has allowed partners to begin to adapt and the Swiss cooperation offices in the countries to explore alternative sources of support.

2.2   The place of culture in SDC's development cooperation

SDC is unusual in having adopted the principle of assigning [one percent of its budget to culture](#), a substantial figure in Switzerland's aid. The culture percent applies in all operational domains, including humanitarian aid, and is regarded as a minimum: it can be supplemented by including culture in delivering other programme themes. The rationale is set out in the [SDC Culture and Development Policy](#) and summarised in a brief narrative:

 – Culture is part of international cooperation, contributing to various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
 – Cultural rights are human rights;
 – Arts and culture are an engine for social change;
 – Free artistic expression is the basis for a strong civil society;
 – Artists expose grievances and stimulate debate and can contribute to social cohesion;
 – Art and culture must be considered as important components of a democratic system;
 – Intercultural exchange and dialogue can form the basis for peaceful coexistence and promote tolerance.

These ideas have underpinned SDC's cultural programmes in the LAC region and inform the Capitalisation of Experience exercise reported here.

2.3   Capitalisation of Experience (CapEx)

> The term 'experience capitalization' refers to the process by which a specific project or pro-
> gramme (or 'an experience' in general) is described and analysed, and from which lessons are
> identified, shared and used to improve development interventions.[3]

Capitalisation of Experience identifies transferable learning from past work so that it can be applied to future interventions, often in other contexts. It differs from evaluation, which is concerned with the outcomes, value and cost-effectiveness of specific projects. CapEx takes a broader view, less concerned with individual outcomes than the reasons behind results of all kinds, including negative ones. It could be said that while evaluation focuses on trees, CapEx aims to see the forest as a whole. Its purpose is not to monitor, report and assess projects but rather to seek learning in programmes that can be applied elsewhere.

In this CapEx review, emphasis was placed on human experience and learning, building on a review of programme documents and evaluation reports, to focus on broader lessons. SDC staff, grantees and others were invited to respond to open questions about culture, development and SDC programmes. As far as possible, the aim was to help them reflect on how their experiences have shaped their understanding and actions from the perspective that seemed best to them. By keeping a focus on the larger picture we hoped to identify learning that was readily transferable to other contexts, principally SDC's cultural programmes in Africa, the Middle East, Central and Southern Asia and Eastern Europe.

2.4   Review methodology

The review was undertaken by François Matarasso and Mercedes Giovinazzo, consultants with long experience in culture and development, evaluation, policy and international co-operation. SDC provided Terms of Reference and assigned 60 days for the review, which was undertaken between April and August 2023. The work comprised four main stages: desk research and planning, including a questionnaire for SDC staff; research trips to Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua, and online sessions with Haiti and Honduras; analysis; and reporting. Face to face workshops with project partners and SDC staff were held in La Paz, Managua and Havana. Conditions in Honduras and Haiti meant that these had to be online discussions, which, while valuable, were necessarily limited in time and scope.

The project faced logistical, conceptual and human challenges, some anticipated, others not: key issues relevant to future CapEx exercises are noted in the conclusions. However, it is worth saying here that the authoritarian context made interpretation of what was said more than usually complex; this issue is considered more fully in section 3.6 of this report. Travelling to and in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba was difficult, time-consuming and costly, and the organisation of work had to fit around the availability of local staff and partners. Workshop participants also made long journeys, because of the geographical distribution of projects. The value of face-to-face meetings and first-hand experience cannot be over-stated but more preparation and research time might have helped ensure that the greatest value was gained from the investment made, especially within the very real constraints of working in fragile and authoritarian countries.

2.5   Reporting

This report presents the Capitalisation of Experience review's principal findings, structured according to the Terms of Reference, which also limit its length. It will be evident, especially to SDC staff who have worked on cultural programmes in the region, sometimes for long periods, that much detail has necessarily been omitted. Over the period, SDC has supported hundreds of projects, with many different goals and partners, and it would take far more time and resource to do justice to that vast body of work. However, the focus here is to understand what has been done, where it has been most effective and, above all, why. The strategic priorities and operational processes used by SDC to support cultural activity in the different countries, and the thinking behind them are key to this learning. It is here that the lessons of good practice can be considered and acted upon by SDC staff in other priority countries. A short Communication Note has been prepared alongside this report so that the learning from SDC's experience in Latin America and the Caribbean is effectively shared within and beyond the region.

3   OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTRIES IN THE REVIEW

3.1   Bolivia

Bolivia is the fifth largest country in South America with a few large cities (La Paz, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cochabamba and Sucre) and vast underpopulated areas in the Andes and Eastern Lowlands. Its diverse population includes 20% indigenous people[4] and its official name, Plurinational State of Bolivia, was adopted in the 2009 Constitution to acknowledge more than 30 native ethnic groups. Between 2006 and 2019, the government of Evo Morales increased the country's GDP, reduced extreme poverty to 15% and put in place free basic health care for all. However, this record is contested, notably with respect to equity between indigenous peoples, democratic norms and human rights. The 2019 crisis that ended the Morales government has left a divided country.

Swiss cooperation has been present in Bolivia for over 50 years, supporting development through a cultural programme implemented in collaboration with Solidar Suiza, a Swiss NGO with a coordination office in Bolivia. This arrangement is unique in the LAC region. Solidar Suiza's local staff manage the Fondo Suizo de Apoyo a la Cultura (FSAC) including calls for proposals, contracts, grantee support and training. In 2016-19, the Fund allocated US $944,700 in three lines: the Responsible Fund (80% of the budget), for civil society groups to develop arts projects prioritizing women and young people; the Artistic Excellence Fund (10%), to support community-based artistic projects; and the Direct Action Fund (10%), for Swiss artists to work in Bolivia. In 2020-23, the FSAC had a budget of CHF 550,000 and SDC rebalanced fund distribution to support heritage and ethnographic projects and reach all Bolivian regions, including remote rural areas. For example, in the southern department of Tarija, SDC has supported Lilian Katterin Carvajal, an artist who works with women in prison, and the Centro Cultural Ñandereko a collective of indigenous artists who work in a new district of the city with high levels of migration.

SDC's systematic support has strengthened many cultural organisations and enabled them to carry out strong programmes. The CapEx workshop in La Paz was attended by 20 people supported in different funding rounds and reflecting Bolivia's cultural diversity. They spoke of the importance of Swiss cooperation both in financial terms and in strengthening the sector in a country with little governmental support for independent culture. There is potential to develop a network of cultural actors in Bolivia that might, with SDC support, provide effective mutual assistance and advocate for culture in public policy.

3.2 Cuba

Switzerland has had a cooperation programme in Cuba since 2000 but its importance increased significantly after it became a priority country in the 2013-16 International Cooperation Strategy: the programme budget grew from CHF 3 million in 2011 to CHF 12 million in 2020. SDC has focused mainly on local governance, economic development, technical and vocational training and gender and inclusion. Cuba is a socialist state where civil society associations are regulated and foreign NGOs and government agencies need permission to operate. This creates administrative burdens (e.g. for employment and finance) and makes complex partnerships necessary.

SDC began to support cultural programmes in Cuba in 2006, providing funds to a range of organisations with development goals. For example, the creation of audio-visual materials about food culture reinforced a programme around food security, while support for Quisicuaba, a social and cultural centre in Havana, has safeguarded work with young and vulnerable people. Respect for human rights has been primarily in women's equality and sexual diversity, e.g. through Palomas, a feminist film organisation, and AfroAtenas, which provides safe platforms for LGBT+ people. SDC has had a long partnership with the Centro de Intercambio Iniciativa Comunitaria (CIERIC), supporting community development at municipal level through cultural initiatives. CEIRIC also coordinates the Plataforma de Participación y Equidad (PYE), a network of 15 organisations working for participation, gender and sexual rights, which contributed to the 2022 Family Code which includes provision for same sex marriage and for prevention of family and gender-based violence.

Cuba is currently experiencing a severe economic crisis, with high inflation and shortages of basic goods such as medicines and fuel, conditions that encourage corruption and emigration. In response, SDC launched a two-year cultural programme, the Fondo para la Promoción del Arte Joven (FAJ) with four partners: Comité Internacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos (CISP), Centro de Intercambio Iniciativa Comunitaria (CIERIC), Fundación Carbonell (FC), and Asociación Cultural Habana Clásica (ACHC). The FAJ is framed by Terms of Reference approved by the Cuban government for an existing EU creative sector project ('A ritmo de inclusión'). With a CHF 550,000 budget, the FAJ offers young artists access to exhibition spaces, grants for creative work, promotion, logistical support, training and new work opportunities. There have been two open calls and about 25 awards made to individual artists and organisations. In the context of SDC phasing out its work in Cuba, FAJ marks a change in direction, focusing on artistic expression. The cooperation office is discussing its future with other potential donors, including private sector sponsorship, to secure the programme after 2024.

3.3 Haiti

Haiti is undergoing a period of high insecurity following catastrophic earthquakes in 2010 and 2021 and the assassination of President Moïse in July 2021. Government is struggling to function and gangs control of large parts of the capital and regional cities. Switzerland has provided humanitarian aid and support to risk reduction in Haiti since the 1990s, and began supporting the cultural sector in 2014. There have been three phases of CHF 2 million before the final investment of CHF 500,000. Grants of up to 80% of costs have been made to cultural organisations, including Festival Nèges Mawon, Fondation MWÈM, Fondation Haiti Jazz, Rencontres Musiques du Monde, Vagues Littéraires, Le Centre d'Art and Caracoli. This has strengthened an independent cultural sector presenting festivals, concerts, theatre, exhibitions and film production in difficult conditions.

The CapEx online workshop included a dozen Haitian cultural actors, passionate about the place of culture in protecting a cultural identity fragilized by the country's problems. They saw culture as celebrating the positive aspects of Haiti, balancing the unavoidable focus on its dysfunctions. Working in culture is 'an act of resistance' that reveals the country's beauty and pride. Festivals are important public moments, but SDC's partners are as focused on year-round programmes with social, sometimes radical goals and they are committed to training the next generation of creative workers. Their experience, they said, showed that there is a market for culture in Haiti in which it is possible to earn a living. They mostly knew each other and saw networking as vital; it was also relatively easy in this small densely populated country. SDC's experience in Haiti also shows the effectiveness of Small Action grants when they are used strategically.

The end of Swiss bilateral cooperation programmes and small actions for culture is a blow because it has been a 'safe haven' for cultural operators: a constructive relationship with a respected country which understands the context, and whose support gives confidence to other donors. Workshop participants were not aware of the ACP-EU Culture Programme Supporting the Cultural and Creative Sectors in the Caribbean. This programme held open calls in 2022 and 2023, offering grants of up to €20,000. Of the 26 projects funded in 2022 only one was from Haiti, and none from Cuba. The unfamiliarity of this fund shows that, despite a close-knit local network, Haitian cultural operators still need support in international connections (the lead organisation of the programme is in Jamaica). This is not unusual in the Caribbean where there is a need for regional integration initiatives.

3.4 Honduras

Honduras has one of the lowest GDP rates in Latin America, and the UNDP, calculates that 14.8% of its 10 million people live below the income poverty line. Like other Central American countries, it has experienced political instability, violence and corruption, including a coup d'état in 2009; the homicide rate (36.3 per 100,000) is still very high. SDC has been present in Honduras since the 1980s with the Cooperation Office in Tegucigalpa. It focuses on governance and the rule of law, economic development, humanitarian aid and, more recently, climate change and transversal issues including gender equality. In recent years, SDC has supported a limited number of Honduran cultural projects with the aim of strengthening the capacities of key organisations. Between 2018 and 2022, it

funded 7 organisations through the Fondo Suizo para la Cultura and Small Actions, with grants of US $10-50,000 towards festivals, documentaries and gender equality projects. The multiannual funding granted to the [Asociación Cultural Memorias](#) is an exception, with the organization receiving CHF 350,000 over four years. A historic memory project in Honduras was also included in the first (2017-18) and second (2019-23) phase of the [Society, Culture and Memory](#) programme.

Security concerns prevented SDC grantees in Honduras from travelling to Managua to take part in the CapEx workshop with peers from Nicaragua, so a discussion was held online with three participants and the SDC representative in Honduras. This was less productive than the workshops because it was difficult to achieve an open dialogue between the participants. Funding and sustainability were discussed and the participants spoke of the value of SDC support, but the conversation remained abstract rather than engaging with people's experience of managing projects and working with SDC. Some projects have been funded several times through the Small Actions line but it is not clear whether this was a strategic choice or expediency. It highlights a dilemma of such funding— whether to strengthen a smaller number of organisations through long-term funding or to reach a larger number of projects with more infrequent grants.

3.5   Nicaragua

Nicaragua is the second-poorest country in the Western hemisphere, with [30% of the population living in poverty](#), and [remittances](#) accounting for 20.6% of its GPD in 2022.[5] The legacy of the Sandinista Revolution continues to shape politics and society and, after violent protests in 2018, government has limited many rights and closed many NGOs. Detentions and exile, including of artists, have increased markedly. In this context, the commitment of interviewees to the principle of culture as tool for development and a structural element of democratic public policies was remarkable.

The Swiss Cooperation Office for Central America in Managua has managed SDC's action in the country, focusing on governance and the rule of law, economic development, humanitarian aid, climate change and gender equality. SDC has offered support to cultural organisations since 2005. Since 2017, this has been via the ['Sociedad, cultura y memoria'](#) programme. The programme budget in 2019-23 was US$ 4 million, and it aimed to support social cohesion by promoting a culture of peace through artistic and cultural practice, especially for children and young people; supporting and making accessible diverse artistic and cultural expressions; and strengthening citizenship through historic memory. The programme is focused principally in Nicaragua but extends to the wider region, where it deals with historic memory and supports work in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador as well as Nicaragua.

The Managua workshop participants saw SDC as vital because it has financed projects with a social purpose and has helped build organisational capacity. SDC's withdrawal leaves few alternative sources of funding but participants remained hopeful: the issue of funding was secondary to the threat of government restrictions. The social and political engagement of Nicaraguan cultural operators supported by SDC is impressive. Their

cultural practice is an effective means of education, empowerment and social inclusion. That is clear in the music education work of Chispas Musicales and the education programme of Teatro Justo Rufino Garay: both see access to culture and artistic practice as fundamental to young people's development and well-being. They also involve young professionals they have trained in programme delivery. The Delegation of the European Union to Nicaragua has committed €1 million for cultural projects to sustain this work, with grants managed by the Alliance Française. However, the programme faces some risks, most obviously, in requiring the government's continued agreement. It is also a new venture for the Alliance Française, which will face a steep learning curve, and a change of senior personnel in both organisations presents challenges. SDC could usefully share its experience and assist the EU and the Alliance Française to implement the new programme.

4 CAPITALISATION OF EXPERIENCE FINDINGS

4.1 Relevance

4.1.1 Pertinence of SDC programmes in different countries

SDC has operated in different ways in each LAC country at different periods. In Bolivia and Nicaragua, cooperation has been through multi-annual strategic programmes. This approach was also used in Cuba between 2011 and 2014, to support cultural engagement with municipalities, and again in 2022 with the Youth Arts Fund (FAJ). Elsewhere, notably in Haiti and Honduras, Small Actions funds have been the means of supporting cultural projects, and they have also supplemented the strategic programmes in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba. However, funding mechanisms do not necessarily define the relationship between cooperation offices and local cultural actors. In Cuba and Haiti, some organisations have received support through Small Actions over several years, enabling them to grow in strength, while SDC's Open Fund in Bolivia has not usually repeated grants. There are also differences in funding administration: in Bolivia, the open application fund is run by Solidar Suiza, while in Nicaragua it is directly managed by the cooperation office.

The point is not that one approach is necessarily better than another. SDC's own priorities and the local context and opportunities will always require flexibility in design of support measures. This is especially so in the case of culture because there is such a wide range of possible activities, while the field itself, with the exception of institutions such as theatres, is generally flexible and responsive. An unduly rigid approach to cooperation might miss new or innovative opportunities and risk making the work of independent artists adapt to donor expectations. However, it is not always clear why specific measures were adopted in some countries and not in others (especially if programmes were established years ago by staff who have since left). The rationale for establishing a strategic programme is normally set out in a credit proposal, but the reason for not doing so and relying instead on Small Actions funds is not similarly explained.

This is not a matter of outcomes. It is important to review successful initiatives because situations change over time and alternative approaches might be more productive. Small Actions have the advantage of being quick and light touch, and they often produce good results. But unless they are reviewed as a whole, annually or biennially, it is difficult to identify lessons or their development value beyond immediate outcomes. It is normal to evaluate project impact and management. SDC's own cultural programmes should be evaluated to test the continuing efficacy of priorities, methods and processes.

4.1.2 Responding to specific demand or challenges

SDC has been responsive to changing conditions. In Bolivia, for example, a decision to support cultural actors in every region has diversified and extended the reach of open access funding. In Nicaragua, consolidation of work in the Society, Culture, Memory programme has contributed to social cohesion and enabled projects to touch on sensitive subjects, such as corruption, without provoking hostile responses from the authorities. The Youth Arts Fund in Cuba is a strategic response to underemployment and other difficulties contributing to the emigration of young creatives. Even in Haiti, where the security and economic crises severely limit strategic cooperation, SDC has offered stability to cultural organisations by providing repeated funding. The difference in approach between countries has been possible because of the knowledge of SDC's programme officers and their close contact with cultural actors. Employing local nationals, whose period of work on the cultural programme is often longer than Swiss staff, ensures a valuable understanding of the context and continuity over time.

4.1.3 The appropriateness of priorities and instruments chosen

Priorities for cultural cooperation have been consistent and aligned with SDC's strategic priorities and goals. This is partly because cultural activities are flexible and can meet a wide range of objectives at the same time. So an initiative such as Circomunitario (CEIBO) supports social cohesion, education and capacity building while enacting human rights and democratic values in the activities themselves. Likewise, projects in Cuba have used the arts to facilitate dialogue between municipalities and inhabitants, to communicate about healthy food and to defend women's and sexual rights. New opportunities, e.g. heritage in Bolivia or young artists in Cuba, have been met as they have been identified. The approach in Nicaragua changed more than elsewhere. Between 2009 and 2017, priority was given to culture and young people, art and equity, classical music in neighbourhoods, and a poetry festival. Since SDC fixed social cohesion as the goal of the Society, Culture, Memory programme the results have been consistently strong and coherent.

A commitment to nurturing the independent cultural actors on whom the work depends underlies these non-cultural priorities. That involved striking a balance between building the capacity of the same organisations through regular funding and encouraging new and emerging ones. Both approaches have value and when they can be combined—the first with strategic funds, the second with Small Actions—SDC can be at very effective. That said, more attention could have been given to strengthening the independent cultural sector as a whole, for instance by building networks for mutual assistance. The CapEx

workshop held in Bolivia showed the interest and potential of cooperation between cultural actors but such activities could have been organised regularly during the previous years. Building the sector's capacity alongside that of individual organisations is vital for long-term sustainability. It could also help establish the independent cultural sector as a legitimate interlocutor with local and national government.

4.2 Coherence

4.2.1 SDC's relationship with the cultural sector

SDC is well regarded by cultural actors in the five countries included in this review. It is seen as trustworthy and responsive, more concerned with local needs than some donors, and committed to culture in development rather than cultural diplomacy. Partners describe a relationship of confidence, and see the support of SDC staff as added value in areas like finance, management and evaluation. Local staff have strong interest in and knowledge of the conditions in which cultural activities take place. The commitment to reaching beyond major cities and working with grass-roots organisations in remote or rural areas is also seen as a distinctive aspect of SDC's approach. SDC's development priorities and values are understood by grantees, and there is shared purpose on key issues such as women's, children's and minority rights, education, freedom of expression, tolerance and democracy. Art and culture is valued in itself, but equally for its contribution to social goals, such as strengthening social cohesion, protecting cultural identity, especially among minorities, and advocating for human rights and dignity. Both SDC and cultural partners recognise the importance of artistic projects in providing good images and stories that can raise their profile and legitimacy.

4.2.2 Integration with development

SDC's cultural programmes in the LAC region have not generally had strong links with the cooperation offices' principal development projects. There are exceptions, such as videos produced around food security in Cuba, or the CEIBO puppet workshop to educate residents about water and waste management in Nicaragua, but such direct connections are unusual. This might be a missed opportunity in areas such as gender equality, human rights and climate change, where culture has a role in communication and learning. Cultural actors can be concerned about instrumentalization of their work but art and culture, almost always fulfils several purposes at the same time. Culture brings a distinctive added value to development, in its own right and in supporting social and economic change.

4.3 Effectiveness

4.3.1 Impact and Sustainable Development Goals

The effectiveness and impact of cultural activity supported by SDC is confirmed by the project reports. The variety of work is huge: from classical music tuition to neighbourhood murals, film training to street art, theatre festivals to documentary video. Behind this

diversity, the goals are consistent: education and training, tolerance and social cohesion, respect for human, women's and minority rights, capacity building of NGOs and local government, democratic life and care for the environment. The project evaluations show that work has positive impact, making a real difference to the lives of individuals and communities. This can be hard to quantify but should not be underestimated. The reading activities of Libros para Niños promote tolerance, respect for diversity and solidarity (though they may be felt by children simply as a time of daydreaming and peace). The effect may not be measurable in learning outcomes but after the civil violence to which many young people have been exposed, space for healing is truly vital.

The CapEx was tasked with giving particular attention to cultural projects' value in relation to UN Sustainable Development Goals 5, 10 and 16. The SDGs are global initiatives and local programmes can only support grass roots activity aligned with and supportive of international efforts; still, the review does show this alignment between SDC's cultural spending and the goals in question, especially in the area of gender equality.

Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality
Cultural projects on gender equality and awareness of violence against women have been a major part of SDC's work in Latin America and the Caribbean. More than half the countries with a high rate of femicide are in the region, and SDC projects in Bolivia, Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua have addressed the issue directly. The work has focused on sensitisation, as in the case of an art project in Viacha (Bolivia) which saw the installation in the park of sculptures based on young people's images of women overcoming the effects of violence. In Port-au-Prince, the artistic and social activity of Nègès Mawon has raised awareness of and confidence in women's rights. Cultural projects are especially suited to exploring and communicating this kind of sensitive experience in ways that are acceptable to local communities and authorities, since the causes are rooted in cultural ideas and values. In Cuba, this work has extended to other gender and sexual equality issues, for instance in the documentary film work of Palomas, and made it possible for SDC and its cultural partners to contribute to adoption of the new Family Code, which strengthens protection against family and gender-based violence and legalises same-sex marriage. This was approved by referendum on 25 September 2022 and several of the organisations supported by SDC were strong advocates for the new law in communities.

Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduced inequalities
There is very high social inequality in all the countries under review (though public services once offset the effects in Cuba). SDC's culture and development work contributes to mitigating these inequalities in small, local ways, first by supporting activities and opportunities that would not otherwise exist, and secondly by capacity building through those projects. While the outcomes of individual projects may be important, they are limited in time and numbers. Projects like Chispas Music Academy in Nicaragua help young people discover their aptitude for classical music, while the Youth Arts Fund (FAJ) in Cuba is giving more experienced musicians and visual artists life-changing opportunities to develop professional careers. In Tarija, Bolivia, the murals of Ñandereko Art Collective celebrate the diversity of a new community and make a visual statement of social cohesion. Valuable as these projects are, it is by helping NGOs to develop their capacity over time

that SDC's cultural support contributes most to reducing local inequalities. The growing strength and autonomy of Chispas is a case in point: having survived for eight years since its origins as an initiative of some musician friends, the organisation now has a regular daily programme, staff and its own premises, so local children have chances that did not previously exist. Other Nicaraguan projects such as Asociación Movimiento de Teatro Popular Sin Fronteras (Movitep-Sf), Grupo de teatro Justo Rufino Garay and CEIBO R.L Art Cooperative show equally impressive resilience as organisations that have survived difficult conditions over decades, ensuring their lasting presence in areas of need.

Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

It is a distinctive strength of artistic projects in development that they offer experiences which, while simple in themselves, offer multiple and complex forms of engagement. They involve rationality and dialogue—thinking, listening and speaking—but also possibilities of emotional meaning-making through ritual, metaphor and symbolism. In 2018, SDC launched the Society, Culture, Memory programme, operating from Nicaragua but with projects also in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. It aimed to 'expand the voices and spaces of civil society through culture and memory to promote reflection, dialogue and social cohesion.' Since then, it has created opportunities for tens of thousands of people to work together on civic values for a more inclusive and peaceful society. With an emphasis on children and young people, and accessible activities, the projects have offered valuable experiences as well as bringing visibility to sensitive issues. In Cuba, through organisations such as CEIRIC, SDC has been able to consolidate the place of community cultural activity in local government outside the capital, including through the adoption of local cultural strategies by municipalities. Having demonstrated the effectiveness of their local development methodology in culture CEIRIC has trained people who have taken the approach to higher education and small enterprises.

4.3.2   Evidence of good practices and lessons to be drawn

SDC's support for culture and development in Bolivia, Cuba, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua has been strategic, consistent and effective, and may be considered good practice by international standards. This is to be expected given SDC's high standards and long experience in the field. Specific instances of good practice can be singled out, notably the open fund in Bolivia and the Society, Culture, Memory programme in Central America. Though on a different scale, Small Actions funding has been used effectively in Cuba and Haiti, where it has supported long-term relationships with key cultural actors. The nature, approach and standard of cultural projects in the LAC region is consistent with SDC programmes with which the consultants are familiar in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and parts of Africa. The lessons of this long experience are set out in the Conclusions but they are mostly well understood within SDC, especially by staff working on cultural programmes.

4.4 Efficiency

4.4.1 Cost-benefit of investment in culture

SDC's commitment to the cultural percent legitimises culture in international development cooperation. Relative to other programmes, the sums invested in cultural projects are small, but may be substantial in the local context: CHF 10,000 can make a festival happen, CHF 50,000 can deliver a programme for a year. However, such investment levels are not sufficient to permanently transform the cultural sector or secure its longevity. There is often a tendency to underfund cultural programmes, especially in a development context where the opportunity costs are evident. Cultural actors are also liable to underestimate the actual costs of their work in the hope of increasing their chances of securing funds, and because their passion for their work encourages a degree of self-exploitation. Given SDC's extensive funding for cultural programmes it could undertake a meta-review of funding in relation to outputs with a view to establishing benchmarks for costs and delivery that could be standardised in local contexts. It should then be possible to know with some precision whether the staff days allowed for a project are actually sufficient, and whether the anticipated outputs are realistic.

The goals of cultural projects often work in subtle, indirect ways, engage people not involved in conventional development programmes, and communicate Switzerland's values attractively. The projects produce valuable outcomes, especially in terms of human development, because they build skills, knowledge and confidence. They are also important in social and community development, opening spaces for dialogue and exchange, building the capacity of NGOs and creating opportunities for positive representation by marginalised groups and minorities. The indirect and varied outcomes of cultural projects add value and can reach parts of civil society that would not otherwise be engaged by SDC programmes. Cultural projects can also test new partnerships and ways of working. Compared to other development initiatives, they tend to be low cost. They rarely risk a worse outcome than disappointment, and even then the work that has gone into the production can still be beneficial. In short, cultural programmes produce a lot of value for the relatively small sums invested, which is both a strength and weakness, if it means that funders neglect to invest sufficiently to build sustainability.

4.4.2 Efficiency of support mechanisms

The review identified two issues with respect to the efficiency of SDC's support mechanisms. The first relates to open call funds, such as those made available to the independent cultural sector in Bolivia. This has received as many as 240 applications for 10 project grants, which is a huge investment of resource on all sides (and of hope from applicants). It takes staff time to manage the process and since they estimate that as many as 40% of applicants are eligible for funds, there is also a large unmet need.

There are ways of making this process more efficient, such as tightening the criteria to reduce the number of applicants. Other possibilities include setting annual priorities, increasing the budget or even using simpler systems to choose between applicants. The

efficiency and social effects of competitive grant schemes has been questioned: an [Australian study](#) found that 97% of scientists spent more time on proposals than research. It has been argued that awarding funds by lottery among eligible applicants, would reduce costs and the negative social consequences of competition.[6] SDC staff and applicants have differing views about how complex the application process is, but a simpler approach could direct more resources to the projects themselves. This review found no evidence of fraud or misuse of SDC's cultural funding in the region. The huge goodwill felt by people SDC has supported translates into a strong commitment to deliver good work in return. It would be worth testing lighter-touch processes, relying more on trust, to reduce management costs and release more funds for the work itself.

The second area where change might be efficient is in multi-annual funding. Some grants are intended from the outset as one-off support for 12 months (in some cases 18 or 24 months) but organisations in Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua and Honduras have received successive short-term grants. However, since grantees do not know that they will receive further help, they have to plan and operate as if funding will not be available in future. This uncertainty is stressful and prevents them from making the best use of existing resources. Where multi-annual funding exists *de facto*, it would be more efficient to plan and manage it accordingly. Where there is a strategic interest, Small Action grants could be extended to cover three years.

4.4.3   Non-financial support

Money is always important to cultural projects, especially in countries where cultural policy is weak or politicised and funding sources limited. It would be unreasonable to expect cultural actors in the global South to thrive more easily than their counterparts in prosperous countries, such as Switzerland, where long-term funding is the norm. But a grant can also be a relationship, and that has been a strength of SDC's work in the LAC region. All the project leaders spoken to during the review placed a high value on the non-financial support they had received from SDC. That included help given to improve their project proposals, develop plans and put in place systems to manage financial reporting and evaluation. For many grantees, this was transformative. It built the capacity of young organisations so that they became stronger, more self-reliant and often able to secure funds from other sources. The relationship with SDC brought other benefits too. In some cases, it gave confidence to other donors, acting as a kind of mark of quality. It also brought more visibility, for instance by helping projects from peripheral regions to have a national profile. The human dimension should not be underestimated either. The trust placed by SDC in grantees gave them confidence in themselves and their work. The quality of this relationship, even among past grantees, has often left a very positive legacy.

The added value of the support given to the cultural sector may not be fully recognised by SDC. Some staff reported not having sufficient hours for their cultural work, which suggests that time invested in delivering the programme may be underestimated internally. Recording direct expenditure on grants is normal, but an accurate assessment of programme costs and benefits in kind should take account of the true cost of its management, including the support and assistance that makes those grants more productive.

4.4.4   Evaluation

The primary purpose of the CapEx process in reviewing project reports was to understand activities and results in the context of programme goals. In doing that, we were also able to reflect on SDC's reporting and evaluation processes for cultural projects, which are generally effective. SDC has well-established monitoring systems. In Nicaragua, for instance the programme theory of change and logical framework defined indicators that all grantees used in their reporting, thus ensuring consistency and comparability between projects. Project evaluations are thorough and informative, though narratives are sometimes lengthy. They currently focus on outcomes (the change produced) and less on how they were produced, although lessons learned are sometimes reported. The readership of these reports is limited, and might not extend beyond the staff involved in approving grants, but they often contain insights that could be shared among peers. Asking every project partner to complete a standardised evaluation form with or, for small grants, instead of a narrative report could help with sharing knowledge of the work. These forms could include factual information about a project and short answers to key questions such as 'What factors led to the positive results?', 'What problems were encountered and how did you respond?', 'What advice would you give to anyone beginning a similar project?'. Limited to two sides of A4, such summaries could be shared with other grantees as part of the process of capacity-building, networking and even promotion. They could also be the subject of regular internal review, so that patterns are more easily identified across the programme and potential improvements made.

4.5   Sustainability

4.5.1   Supporting sustainability in a sector with little access to financial resources

In Nicaragua, Cuba and, more recently, Haiti, longer term funding has strengthened the skills and resilience of many grantees, and most expect to continue after SDC leaves, albeit in different ways and within the constraints of local conditions. In Bolivia, SDC's engagement with national cultural bodies has sought to influence thinking about cultural policy, and engagement with municipalities here and in Cuba has also brought results. There has been work in Nicaragua to engage new donors (notably the EU), while in Cuba discussions are underway to raise business sponsorship for the Youth Arts Fund. There are three aspects of sustainability where lessons might be drawn.

First, the potential of networks has been unevenly exploited. The most formal approach is probably the PYE Platform in Cuba, while two events have been held in Nicaragua to bring grantees together; on the other hand, in Bolivia, the CapEx workshop was the first such meeting. The practical and geographic problems are real, but it was notable that cultural organisations supported by SDC did not always know each other and had not previously met to share experiences and ideas. In situations where there is little national or local support (or where policy is unfriendly towards an independent cultural sector) networking is a crucial aspect of sustainability. The need goes beyond organising meetings. Networks become effective when they have common purpose, resources and the capacity to offer

mutual aid. In a development context, the support of stronger, more mature organisations can be transformative for the next generation, and develop a sector stronger than the sum of its parts. Together they can build knowledge, contacts and experience, as well as offering solidarity and moral support. Finally, they can be legitimate interlocutors with public bodies, and other actors, advocating for policy and operational changes that can facilitate their work. The PYE Platform underlines the value of such networks.

Secondly, organisational sustainability could be a long-term objective of SDC's work in culture and development. The cultural partners financed by SDC are the indispensable element of the work. Without these local actors, nothing can happen, and even good projects are limited to short term success that may turn stale if it cannot be sustained. The reality is that, as in Switzerland itself, cultural projects with social goals rarely survive without some financial support, even if they are often entrepreneurial in how they add to that. The amount and nature of that support may change over time, but it is long term. The implication is that cooperation offices need to consider the long-term future of the organisations they are enabling to develop.

Thirdly, Swiss cooperation officers can be legitimate interlocutors in the development of national cultural policy, bringing expertise and authority to a field where ideas can be slow to change. Cultural policy is a field that has seen the emergence of many new ideas and practices in the past 30 years, as the social and economic dimension of culture have become better recognised. By involving itself in policy dialogue SDC can help foster positive developments that can bring long-term change for the cultural sector and society as a whole. That said, it must be recognised that the authoritarian character of government limits the possibilities of policy development in the countries reviewed here.

4.5.2   SDC's legacy in the countries

SDC's withdrawal is a blow to the cultural organisations it has supported in the LAC countries. Switzerland was one of a diminishing number of international donors still present in the region and unusual in being committed to culture. The grantees interviewed felt strongly that SDC is important in sustaining the independent cultural sector and many were concerned about the future. That concern was not only or always financial. Some organisations have grown significantly during the period they have been supported by SDC and have been able to strengthen their work and diversify their sources of revenue. For others, funding is an existential matter, and their work may be curtailed or cease without SDC's support.

All, however, feel the loss of the relationship with an organisation and individual programme officers they trust and whose interest in their work has brought confidence and encouragement. Being able to turn to SDC for advice, information and contacts has been very important to them. SDC's support for the development of independent cultural actors in Bolivia, Cuba, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua has been profound, sometimes transformative. It leaves a very important legacy in terms of the organisations it has strengthened. At the same time, its withdrawal cannot but leave a gap commensurate with the size of its achievements.

4.6 Authoritarian or fragile contexts

4.6.1 Cultural projects in an authoritarian context

All five countries included in the CapEx review may be considered fragile and/or authoritarian. The 2023 Democracy Report published by the V-Dem Institute ranks Haiti at 130, Cuba at 164 and Nicaragua at 174: for comparison, North Korea is at 179 and Switzerland at 4. The Human Rights Watch 2022 World Report gives a grim account of repression, arbitrary detention, violence against women and minorities, and attacks on freedom of expression in all the countries under review. Interviews with SDC staff and grantees made current realities very clear and suggest that they are becoming worse. This political and security context is the single most important factor affecting SDC's programmes in the region and the successful delivery of so much cultural activity must be counted a shared achievement of the cooperation offices and their cultural partners. When cultural actors are at risk of imprisonment, exile or just being prevented from doing their work, it takes a great deal of courage and resilience to keep going.

The risks have been skilfully handled by SDC and its cultural partners. The review did not identify cultural projects that had been blocked but some faced obstacles and delays, most recently in the establishment of the Youth Arts Fund in Cuba. There is a degree of self-censorship as cultural actors adapt projects to avoid fruitless confrontation. If it is impossible to promote human rights or democracy directly, SDC has supported projects focused on gender equality, citizenship and peace-making, effectively enacting values of tolerance and free expression. In Bolivia, several projects have addressed femicide and women's rights, while in Cuba the LGBT+ community has gained visibility and confidence through SDC supported projects. In Nicaragua and Cuba state oversight of foreign funding increases costs and administration. Everywhere, but perhaps especially in Haiti, violence, insecurity and shortage of basic resources add to culture's usual challenges. The psychological strain on artists and cultural workers in such uncertain, risky situations must be significant and they deserve the highest respect for their courage.

4.6.2 Successful cultural activity

Independent cultural actors face huge challenges from the authoritarian regimes in Cuba and Nicaragua. In Cuba, where all associations must be sponsored by a ministry, it is meaningful that organisations such as CEIRIC, Palomas and AfroAtenas have maintained a high degree of artistic autonomy while dealing with sensitive issues such as women's rights and sexual diversity. Members of AfroAtenas have been imprisoned and exiled in the past, and the risks are real. The Nicaraguan government has closed at least half of the country's NGOs and forced many artists to flee. Nonetheless, organisations like MOVITEP, Libros Para Niños and Escuela Regional de Artes Plásticas have been able to continue their work, perhaps because it is seen as educational and youth oriented. This is also evident in CEIBO Circomunitario which pitches a circus tent in a small town before turning it into a free space for creativity, play and learning. Activities include theatre, dance, circus skills and painting, with psychotherapeutic support: the latest phase involved 1,200 children and their families in 10 regional municipalities. Like so much of the work SDC

supports, it is quietly empowering because it enacts peaceful relationships and builds local capacity to sustain activities. Because the activities involve innocuous forms of art, they can work on sensitive issues of trauma and memory in ways that are accepted by the authorities. But even here, MOVITEP has shown that it is possible to touch on sensitive issues like corruption through plays that were enthusiastically received by audiences. Building alliances with grass roots community partners, such as schools, was essential to the acceptability of this work. According to some interviewees, some degree of protection is also offered by SDC's support, since it is seen as a long-term and reliable actor in local development with an international profile and constituency.

Authoritarian regimes are only part of the difficulties faced by cultural projects in the region. Insecurity and violence are major threats in Haiti and elsewhere, while economic problems, lack of resources, fragile institutions and corruption can create all sorts of everyday obstacles. Fuel and food shortages in Cuba and Haiti are among the obvious current problems. Such challenges are common in development work and SDC has protocols, such as Conflict Sensitive Project Management, to guide responses. But culture, despite its ability to pass discreetly, can also be divisive and become unexpectedly controversial. Since the risks are much greater for local partners, it is right in such conditions to support them in their judgments about the cultural work they consider strikes the right balance between safety and impact.

4.6.3 The limits of expression and interpretation

The review was constrained by the authoritarian and insecure context in which it took place, which could make it difficult for participants to speak freely about their experience, including in some of the workshops. Opinions were difficult to assess when people were wary of expressing their views or were committed to a political line. It was not always possible to have confidence in what we heard, especially when the subject moved from the specificities of running projects to broader questions of development and impact. A degree of self-censorship was exercised, but some people spoke more freely in one-to-one interviews. As foreign consultants, we took care to frame our questions and comments neutrally so that people remained in control of their input. We are also conscious of the limits of our own knowledge and understanding, for instance with regards to the influence of state actors on artists' work and how that might affect their voice.

There is no easy way around this reality for external actors such as SDC. The risks of intervention in authoritarian and fragile contexts are complex but it is especially important need to support independent cultural actors and thus keep open, even in a limited way, the possibility of free exchange of ideas. Without such assistance, the space for alternative voices continues to shrink and with it the practice of artistic expression and democratic dialogue. In the LAC region, SDC has protected these values by acting with care, wisdom and humility, gaining the trust of local partners and maintaining a visible and positive alternative to repressive hegemony.

5   CONCLUSION

5.1   General assessment

SDC's support for cultural projects in Latin America and the Caribbean has been important to individual grantees, to the many communities they have involved in their artistic work and to the wider context of cultural development in the countries concerned. Cultural projects have had positive effects in many lives, especially among young people, women, indigenous people and others at risk of social or economic exclusion. The work has contributed to development in several fields, including human rights, social cohesion, education and women' equality, and has reached beyond major cities to provincial and rural communities. It has supported a diverse range of cultural expression from contemporary visual and performing arts to heritage, indigenous culture, craft and archaeology.

Over decades, these cultural programmes have reached many thousands of people who might not otherwise have benefited from Switzerland's development work. They have been able to operate in difficult, sometimes dangerous conditions, thanks to the skill and judgement of cooperation office staff and especially of the local partners delivering projects with communities. In countries that have experienced political instability, endemic violence and natural disasters, cultural projects have enabled people to celebrate their strength and identity, to make visible sensitive issues, to bridge social and ethnic differences, and to imagine other ways of living. With relatively small amounts of money, they have demonstrated the distinctive value of culture in the development process. SDC's cultural programmes in the LAC region fully vindicate its principle of a percent for culture and should be a source of pride to all concerned.

5.2   Learning from experience

5.2.1   Culture matters: The value of SDC's cultural programmes

> What is equally important is the development of culture: the deliberate enhancing of cultural resources, capabilities, education and career opportunities that give meaning, depth, dignity, and sense of cultural rootedness, while safeguarding cultural diversity, and accepting that artistic creativity can spill over into many other areas of social, cultural, political, and economic life.
>
> John Clammer[7]

The place of culture in SDC's work is secure thanks to the principle of a percent for culture, although the target is not always reached. Culture enriches the organisation's work, but its diversity and complex relationship with development can make it hard for those who do not have expertise in the field to understand its distinctive role. Some SDC staff, particularly those with least direct involvement, see culture as a secondary issue in development—added value, but not essential. This reflects Maslow's theory of human needs, but ideas of progression and hierarchy are giving way to new ones centred on networks and interdependence. Everything happens at once and affects everything else. As Manfred Max-Neef wrote:

> Human needs must be understood as a system: that is, all human needs are inter-related and interactive. With the sole exception of the need of subsistence, that is, to remain alive, no hierarchies exist within the system.[8]

Thinking about human development has also evolved through the Capabilities Approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Experts like John Clammer see culture as integral to human development, not only enabling its processes but giving it meaning, purpose and shape.

Our evolving ideas about culture and its interdependence with development may explain the differences in its deployment by SDC in the LAC region over the past decades. There is not (yet) a standard theory or practice of culture and development. That has allowed offices to experiment in response to local needs and conditions but there has been less opportunity, before this review, to assess practice and learn from success. The experience and interest of senior diplomatic and SDC staff has often had a positive influence, as the Youth Arts Fund in Cuba, and heritage projects in Bolivia show. On the other hand, without such support, culture can slip down the list of priorities and departure of key staff produces discontinuities. Overreliance on Small Actions also makes culture vulnerable to changing priorities, sometimes aligning it closer to cultural diplomacy or exchange than development. Such variations, which probably would not occur in programmes for human rights or democracy, are best seen as symptoms of the changing understanding role and value of culture in the 21st century world, and in development itself.

5.2.2   Strategy matters: Balancing strategic and responsive approaches

As this report has shown, there is value in both long-term strategy of Country Programmes and the flexibility of Small Actions, and they have been especially effective when they are mutually supportive, as they have been in Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua. Reasons for the variations in approach over time and between countries have been suggested in the preceding subsection. Ideally, SDC would be able to use both funding approaches to support cultural development in its priority countries. Although Small Actions funding has been used to support medium-term cultural development, notably in Haiti, long-term strategy matters. The strongest results in the LAC region have been achieved when SDC has identified clear priorities and followed them for at least five years. The strategy itself may be ambitious (e.g. Society, Culture, Memory) or simple (long-term support for a network of effective organisations in Cuba). The commitment over time has been the key to building confidence, capacity and impact.

5.2.3   People matter: Managing resources and support

Perhaps even more than in other sectors, cultural development depends on relationships between people. The trust evident between individual grantees and SDC staff was striking and facilitated an efficient, responsive working process. There was little evidence that it had led to biases or dependency: on the contrary, it was mutually respectful. These relationships depend on SDC staff who understand and are committed to the role of culture

in development, something that should not be assumed. In this it is also important to recognise the knowledge and skills of local staff who are critical to the programmes' success.

Both SDC's funding and non-financial assistance are essential. The non-financial support is in itself developmental, building the capacity of grantees and strengthening the cultural sector as a whole. In practice it is often informal and dependent on how programmes operate in each country as well as the expertise and interests of individual staff members. It could be strengthened if it were recognised, planned and budgeted as an integral part of cultural programmes. At the same time, a review of application, grant-making and evaluation processes might identify ways of simplifying processes and administrative burdens for both applicants and SDC. The risk of fraud or default by small cultural organisations working in development is very low and the benefits of light-touch processes are significant in management and human terms.

5.2.4 Integration matters: Connecting with other development work

Culture is rightly treated as a distinct aspect of SDC development programmes, with its own priorities and ways of working. This is also a sector in need of development in its own right, as well as a means of achieving other development. That said, its small proportion of the budget and its own specificities risk leaving culture on the margins of SDC's work, parallel but separate. In fact, it has the potential to add value to SDC's main development work, so it would be useful to review culture's potential as a transversal issue in the planning stage of programmes. There is, after all, no reason why the proportion of SDC's budget designated for culture should be fixed at one percent. However, since cultural programmes are evaluated in their own silo it is not easy to compare their operation or impact with that of other programmes, although culture may be among SDC's most cost-effective ways of reaching large numbers. Without such value comparisons, the percent for culture policy risks becoming a celling rather than the floor it is intended to be.

5.2.5 Durability matters: Securing sustainable cultural development

SDC has supported many projects and organisations since 2000, contributing to development priorities and strengthening the independent cultural sector. Nonetheless, with limited national or local support, many cultural actors are reliant on external assistance and funding. The closure of cooperation offices will leave a gap and limited ways to fill it. SDC has given some attention to building resilience, but a more strategic commitment might have done more to protect the long-term sustainability of the valuable projects supported in recent years. Such an approach could include:

– Building the organisational capacity of grantees;
– Strengthening their networks of mutual assistance and knowledge sharing;
– Supporting better national and local policies for culture; and
– Developing alternative sources of internal and external finance.

The action taken in respect of these, has been described, but there is scope for more investment in capacity-building, training and networking. Cooperation offices in other regions might consider their own approach to networking and sectoral resilience.

Resilience is also an internal matter. Organisational memory is essential and is generally strong in SDC's cultural partners, whose staff often stay for very long periods. It is less so in cooperation offices where Swiss staff often serve in their posts for a few years before moving to another role in another country. While such change is normal and desirable, there is a danger of losing knowledge and trust when people move on. There are no simple ways of ensuring that organisational memory is not lost, but investing in workshops and experience sharing to ensure a wider distribution of knowledge is worthwhile.

5.2.6 Learning matters: Lessons for future capitalisation exercises

SDC evaluates strategic programmes towards the end of each phase, as well as individual projects, but to our knowledge this is the first CapEx commissioned to learn from cultural programmes in a whole region over a long period. As explained at the start of this report, capitalisation of experience is distinct from evaluation and has value in considering how institutional ideas and methods can adapt to evolving situations and knowledge. As such, it is a tool that could be used more widely as part of a learning strategy, perhaps every five years in the absence of the strategic projects that trigger their own regular reviews, and every ten years where they do exist. If further such exercises are envisaged, some lessons about the process itself are worth noting:

– The timescale (2000-22) was too long. Even where data was accessible, changes in strategy, programmes and context made it difficult to make useful comparisons. Staff changes can also make organisational memory difficult to maintain.
– Wide differences in geography, history, politics, economy, society and culture made comparisons between the countries' experiences complex and unreliable.
– Online meetings are useful but limited. If it is unsafe or too costly to travel, videoconferencing can allow people to meet; the intimacy of the medium even has advantages. However, long video calls are tiring and are not comparable to a workshop.
– The context of closure was delicate, as participants were naturally more focused on future problems than lessons of the past. Feelings of disappointment and anxiety were evident, as people were unsure of their own future. It was also difficult to expect people to give their time and travel long distances to a workshop that offered them little benefit.
– The political and security situation made interviews and workshops more than usually sensitive and some actors may also have been circumspect in expressing their views, since their relationship with SDC was ending.

This limited CapEx exercise could be the start of a strategic approach to learning how SDC's practices best support culture in development and the relationship between that and the rest of SDC's work. A review of how SDC learns about and through its cultural spending, in the context of the rest of the programme, would be a good way to consider next steps.

5.3 Principles of good practice for SDC cultural programmes

5.3.1 Why principles?

While it is vital to learn from the experience of SDC's long support for culture in the LAC region, this report notes the differences between countries and their influence on the work. Transferring ideas to the even more different contexts of countries in Africa, the Middle East or Southeast Asia is far from straightforward. Society, Culture, Memory in Central America or the Youth Arts Fund in Cuba respond to local needs and opportunities: they cannot be transferred to another context and be expected to succeed. This is where principles can help. They encapsulate the reasons that underly successful initiative: they offer guidance that can improve the likelihood of success future action. The five proposed principles are high-level, concerned less with projects that with how things are done.

5.3.2 Responsiveness

In the LAC region, SDC has responded to the needs, opportunities and constraints it met in each country, adapting not only its strategy but its offer and the operational methods through which it managed the work. Rather than impose an existing model or expectations, its starting point has been to understand the context where it is working. It has built a reputation for listening to local actors and taking their ideas into account. Its relationships with grantees have therefore been very positive, with a high degree of mutual respect. The success of the projects supported stems directly from the care with which it has heard and responded to local experience and ideas. It has also shown flexibility (a kind of everyday responsiveness) when projects have experienced difficulties.

5.3.3 Trust

Trust is an efficient resource for development, first because it can reduce the time and intrusion associated with certain types of monitoring, and secondly because it can be empowering and therefore contribute directly to the development process. SDC has used trust effectively in cultural programmes in the LAC region, and we were consistently impressed by the relationships between grantees and the cooperation office. It was clear that the project leaders felt trusted and that helped them work with confidence. Cultural programmes generally involve little risk, and what risk exists can often be anticipated and mitigated. Unless they overtly address controversial issues, they are often seen as benign by state actors who underestimate the ability of artists to communicate subversive ideas and of audiences to interpret them. There is also little financial risk, since the funding is generally low, at least when compared with an agricultural or economic development project, and the spending and results transparent. For these reasons, it is possible to manage cultural spending with a lighter touch than might be needed in other areas of development.

5.3.4 Empowerment

Cultural action can lead to a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals and groups, most of which are evident in the work supported by SDC in the LAC region. The complexity

of culture's impact—on learning, health, values, training, creativity, social relations, for example—can make it hard for outsiders to understand and appreciate, but in the end it relates to empowerment, which 'implies a process of self-realisation and emancipation of individuals, recognition of groups and communities, and social transformation.'[9] Cultural projects that contribute to development empower the people who participate in them. Whatever else they aim at, this is a key test for the work that SDC needs to support. And in doing that, SDC needs also to empower the artists and organisations it does support. That happens through being responsive and flexible, through trusting people's experience and ideas, and by ensuring that they have the resources, including non-financial support, to achieve success.

5.3.5 Coherence

SDC's cultural programmes can sometimes be complicated, as in Bolivia where several lines of funding are in place, including the open fund and support for cultural institutions and heritage, or in Cuba where the PYE Platform which focuses of community development and human rights, stands alongside the Youth Arts Fund and the diverse work supported through Small Actions. This complexity can be a sign of responsiveness, and it is not a problem if the focus remains on alignment with SDC's core development priorities and the principle of empowerment. These ensure that there is a coherence to the work that transforms a programme from the sum of a series of grants into a transformational strategy. The principle of coherence balances that of responsiveness, so that the purpose and impact of cultural projects is as clear as possible to everyone, including those who only see ethe work from outside.

5.3.6 Sustainability

Cultural projects with a social purpose are always likely to need financial help, though they are often imaginative in their business models and income streams. Building their capacity and resources to become more self-reliant, individually and as a sector, is an essential aspect of development, without which change, however positive, will be limited and short term. The sustainability of change must be planned as the foundation of all SDC work in culture so that when a period of funding comes to an end, whether after a year or a decade, the investment made has achieved lasting change.

Notes

1   https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/official-development-assistance.htm The OECD calculates that Switzerland dedicated 0.56% of GNI to Official Development Aid, although SDC's own figure is 0.46%. The difficulty of determining even that statistic may serve as a warning about the complexity of data in this field.

2   See for example, Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central America 2013 -2017

3   http://experience-capitalization.cta.int/home/index.html

4   CIA World Factbook, Bolivia. See note: '*results among surveys vary based on the wording of the ethnicity question and the available response choices; the 2001 national census did not provide 'Mestizo' as a response choice, resulting in a much higher proportion of respondents identifying themselves as belonging to one of the available indigenous ethnicity choices*'.

5   https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=NI

6   See Avram Alpert, 2022, *The Good Enough Life*, Princeton University Press, p. 190ff; Alpert identifies several negative social consequences of competitive awards including internalisation of feelings of entitlement and failure, and how a grant can legitimise an applicant in the eyes of other donors so that funds tend to go to the same receipients.

7   John Clammer, 2015, Art, Culture and International Development, Humanising Social Transformation, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 139

8   Manfred Max-Neef et al., 1989, 'Human Scale Development: An Option for the Future', *Development Dialogue*, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 1989:1, p. 19

9   '[L'empowerment] implique une démarche d'autoréalisation et d'émancipation des individus, de reconnaissance des groupes ou des communautés et de transformation sociale', Bacqué, M-H, & Biewener, C., *L'empowerment, une pratique émancipatrice?* Paris, 2015