

Workshop Title: The future role of Swiss NGOs in education in the current context

Convener's name :

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Main issues, questions discussed:

In light of recent funding cuts—particularly affecting basic education—and ongoing shifts toward localization, what is the evolving role of Swiss NGOs? How are they rethinking their positioning and strategies in response to these changes? With basic education funding declining, will Swiss NGOs begin to deprioritize the sector? Is there a likely shift toward areas such as vocational skills development or education in emergencies (EiE)? What are their emerging perspectives on how to remain relevant and impactful within this evolving landscape?

Conclusions

- Talking for decades on localization, now the process is speeding up also in the context of cost-effectiveness.
- Some NGOs in the context of the localization debate, move thematic positions to the field, becomes more difficult to justify thematic positions in donor country offices, are hired locally, some have only fundraising functions in donor countries. More generally, NGOs won't have the same human resources anymore in Europe going forward.
- Work with local NGOs: good decision in countries where civil society is developed, in other countries, capacity of local NGOs and civil society might not be at the level of donors' expectation e.g. accountability measurement, reporting as donor requirements mostly remain unchanged.
- Added value of Swiss NGOs: for some donors working with fundraiser of Swiss NGOs only, there is no added value, which lies in expertise, dialogue, joint work on concepts, capacity sharing, networking in the country that adds value to the strengthening of the local NGOs, translating role. Swiss NGOs can contribute to building the capacities of local NGOs, not yet meeting donor requirements and needs.
- It is key to speak about the future of local NGOs and from there about the future of Swiss NGOs around how the national education system can be supported.
- Important to have conversations between donors and NGOs around the added value and how the collaboration should look like going forward.
- Cannot deliver the work that is needed without a certain number of roles in CH, e.g.:

- Policy and institutional level roles
- Advocacy
- Fundraising
- Technical roles: translate donor expectations and requirements, AI could support local partners in that in the future (with certain risks)?
- Change in donor expectations compared to 20 years before, including advocacy and policy change, more demands are more costly.
- Implication on Swiss NGOs from Switzerland's phase-out from basic education: some NGOs need to close countries.
- Limited resources require more coordinated funding strategy between donors and enhanced collaboration among implementers. Local colleagues are already stretched in the context of the need to create efficiencies; some shared a high staff turn-over. Some donors request civil society actors/NGOs to work together in the field if active in the same countries with similar programs. Shared ideas include approaching of donors together. Smaller NGOs working in consortium, as a requirement of SDC's core funding is a relevant experience to learn from.
- Do you have any concrete recommendations? (to yourself, to participants, to RECI, to other actors?)
 - Promote commitments to localization while redefining the role of Swiss-based NGO staff
 - Advocate with donors to recognize and adequately fund technical / advocacy positions (be it at HQ or local level)
 - Promote collaboration between NGOs, possibly merge country programs/operational platforms in some contexts.