



# SDC Guidance on Results Indicators

The present guidance sets the requirements for results indicators used at different levels and for different purposes. They are integral part of SDC's results-based management (RBM) system.

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1.0	May 2021	New guidance	QSiD
1.1	March 2022	Minor changes	QSiD
1.2	June 2023	Chapter 3: Change reference to SDC Guidance Cooperation programmes	QSiD
1.3	July 2024	Updated sections related to RDM. Replaced Annex with IC 21-24 indicators with link to RDM indicator browser.	KRS

## **1. Introduction**

The 2016 Guidelines on the Use of Aggregated Reference Indicators are replaced by the present guidance which is more comprehensive as it covers all the types of results indicators. It refers to Switzerland's Strategy for International Cooperation (or Dispatch, further referred to as the IC Strategy) and to the 2030 Agenda.

This guidance is a reference document for all SDC staff, in particular the thematic staff and focal points who are responsible for defining result indicators and the thematic learning in particular, staff using result data to plan and steer programmes and projects, and staff reporting on results achieved.

For staff preparing a cooperation programme (CoPr), chapter 5 provides the practical orientation required.

Implementation of the Strategy for IC is done through CoPr in partner countries, through programmatic frameworks and SDC contributions to thematic institutions, multilateral organisations and Swiss NGOs. Monitoring the achievements of the IC Strategy is consequently based on the annual reports and reporting of results indicators. The present guidance sets the requirements for results indicators used at different levels and for different purposes. They are integral part of SDC's results-based management (RBM) system.

### **The evolution at the SDC in terms of specification of results indicators**

Until 2015, the SDC left to its country, programme and project staff the full responsibility to define results indicators. This approach emphasised the use of results at the local level for steering and learning. It enabled the SDC to respond to the local context and circumstances which is positive. On the other hand, this also led to a multitude of indicators, for cases of similar or even same results. Disadvantages included a) re-inventing the wheel each time with time spent for formulating indicators, b) a lack of comparable data between projects and programmes, c) not being able to aggregate results achieved (at country, thematic or corporate level), and d) having a multiplication of indicators.

In 2016, the SDC introduced Aggregated Reference Indicators (ARIs), based on a decision of its Directorate to better report and communicate overall achievements to the Swiss Parliament and stakeholders. Indicators were made available by the thematic networks to facilitate the definition of indicators based on good international practice and on SDC's experience. The possibility of having specific indicators was maintained, in accordance with context specific needs. The aggregated results presented in the mid-term and in the final reports of the Dispatch 2017-2020 generated very positive feedback from parliamentarians and stakeholders in Switzerland. This encouraged the SDC to maintain the ARIs with some adaptations based on experiences made. In 2019, the SDC also decided to prepare a set of Thematic Reference Indicators (TRIs) which are described in chapter 3. ARIs and TRIs constitute the SDC's standard results indicators.

### **Finding an appropriate balance in using results and their indicators**

RBM serves three main objectives: steering projects and programmes, learning and accountability. The OECD DAC peer review conducted in 2019 recommended a rebalancing to decrease the pressure to report on the SDC's achievements for domestic accountability purposes as this focuses on short term outputs, places an increasing burden on staff and diverts efforts from steering in order to achieve actual development outcomes and impact on the ground. The SDC management response agreed to this recommendation as RBM and results indicators are to be used first and foremost for steering and learning, while enabling domestic accountability. This led to clarify better the types of results indicators according to the different purposes, whereby all indicators are useful for accountability purposes.

### **The 2030 Agenda and the SDG indicators and targets**

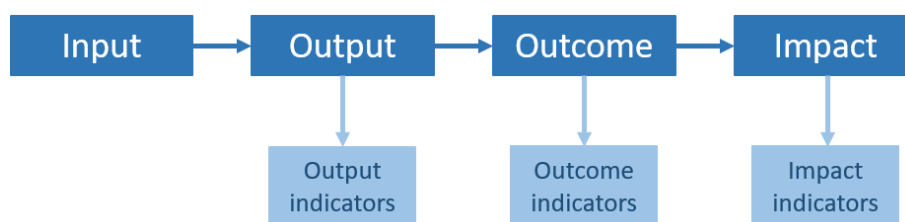
The adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015 represents considerable progress in several aspects, including in terms of harmonisation and alignment of results. This Agenda is supported by 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators, agreed by all UN member states and universally applicable. Member states such as Switzerland and our partner countries are invited to present Voluntary National Reviews at the UN High Level Political Forum held every year. This is being successfully taken up with a growing number of states presenting their progress on the SDGs. The SDC partner countries are increasingly orienting their development plans on the 2030 Agenda, by including SDG targets and integrating SDG indicators. This further enables development agencies to align and harmonise their support in contributing to the SDGs. For the SDC this means that the ARIs and TRIs for the IC Strategy should show that they contribute to SDG targets (not only to SDG goals as in the past). SDG indicators should ideally be used as TRIs.

## 2. Definition and role of results indicators

The OECD defines **an indicator as** a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable **means to measure achievement**, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. Meaningful indicators are the core element and foundation of measurement, assessment **and evidence-based decision-making**. It is essential to involve stakeholders to define indicators and create a common understanding of a project or programme to ensure ownership and enable accountability.

Results include outputs, outcomes and the impact of an intervention. Results chains demonstrate the intervention logic and define the cause-effect hypotheses between the inputs of an intervention and the different results. Theories of change capture more comprehensively the results chain by including risks and assumptions and may be represented in various ways, for example through a logframe matrix (cf. FHB, [area 5.1](#), normative) or a results framework (cf. FHB [area 3.1](#), normative).

Figure 1: Simplified results chain



In the project cycle, planning, implementation and monitoring as well as evaluations and learning are based on the theory of change with suitable results indicators providing relevant information throughout the project cycle.

### The relevance of results indicators

Having result indicator baselines and target values enables us to plan realistically and also to carry out ex-ante financial or economic analyses during the planning stage. Progress can be monitored through milestones with data collected during implementation. The effectiveness of a project/programme can be reviewed and evaluated while lessons can be drawn. At the end of a project/programme, or thereafter, its final outcomes and impact can be assessed and learning can take place. The ex-post financial or economic efficiency can also be estimated. All of these contribute to more evidence-based and scientific work, in line with the IC Strategy 21-24, and enables better accountability; first towards the populations we serve and partner governments, second towards stakeholders in Switzerland - in particular the Parliament - and internationally.

Every result needs

<b>Indicators</b>	What is to be measured
<b>Baseline</b>	First measurement of an indicator
<b>Targets</b>	The desired value or direction for progress
<b>Milestones</b>	The path to monitor progress towards the target (e.g. as reported in annual reports)
<b>Sources</b>	Where will the information come from

### Quantitative and qualitative indicators

A combination of both quantitative and qualitative indicators is most appropriate to capture different aspects of results.

*Table 1. Main features of quantitative and qualitative indicators*

<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
Often objective facts that can be easily counted	Often subjective appreciation
Numerical	Can be numerical
Measures the scale of an intervention	Measures quality, opinions, perceptions, systems development
e.g. % of population who voted # of people with access to justice services # of people trained	e.g. stage reached in the adoption of a new law or policy Proportion of the population satisfied with justice services Status of implementation of a new action plan

### The relevance of SMART indicators

A good indicator is a SMART indicator; it is

- **Specific:** The indicator should describe accurately what is intended to be measured, and should not include multiple measurements in one indicator.
- **Measurable:** The indicator should be replicable and measurable, that is, it has the capacity to be counted, observed and clearly defines the measurement such that two people would measure it in the same way.
- **Attainable:** Collecting data for the indicator should be simple, straightforward, and cost-effective.
- **Relevant:** The indicator should be closely connected with each respective input, output or outcome.
- **Time-bound:** The indicator should include a specific time frame.

### The need for baselines and targets

To measure intended change, reference point baselines and targets are needed. All indicators must have baselines and target values.

Baseline data is the first critical measurement of an indicator and provides a specific value against which the performance of a project/programme is measured. It should be collected before the project implementation, ideally during the project design.

A target specifies a particular value, or at least a range of values that is to be realistically achieved by a specific date in the future. Targets provide benchmarks against which performance of a project can be judged and provide tangible and meaningful points of discussion.

### 3. Cooperation result indicators at the SDC

**Cooperation results cover the results which are attributable to SDC-supported interventions or for which the contribution is plausible.** This means that if the SDC intervenes for instance at the level of a hospital, the maternal mortality rates recorded by the hospital can be used; if the SDC intervenes at the national level (national health policies or sector support), then the national mortality rates can be applied. The SDC continues to monitor the **development results achieved by the partner country, which are most important.** Swiss cooperation results contribute to the partner country's development results (country results) as described in the results frameworks of cooperation programmes (see SDC Guidance Cooperation programme and programmatic framework, FHB, [area 3.1](#), normative).

#### Aggregated reference indicators

The SDC introduced aggregated reference indicators (ARIs) in 2016 to complement the indicators used in the results frameworks of cooperation programmes and global programmatic frameworks. ARIs are proposed by the thematic focal points (FPs) and allow communicating on selected achievements, across a wide range of situations and countries where the SDC intervenes. ARIs primarily serve accountability and communication needs and are linked to the main SDG target they contribute to.

They are mainly outputs as they allow assessing results attributable to SDC interventions. However, they represent a selected and limited part of SDC's results. ARIs should be collected with little additional effort and be relatively easily quantifiable. Experiences made have shown that outreach indicators - which measure the number of beneficiaries - are best suited to collect data and communicate.

As a reminder, outputs achieved are important to monitor and assess cooperation performance but should not be considered alone (e.g. number of students trained in vocational schools) as developmental changes take place at the level of outcomes (e.g. percent of vocational school students having a decent employment).

#### Thematic reference indicators

Thematic reference indicators (TRIs) are outcome indicators proposed and prioritised by the thematic FPs in consultation with their networks. The FPs have drawn upon international best practices and standards and on the SDC's experience. The SDC directorate decided to introduce TRIs as binding indicators and to identify ideally five TRIs for each theme officially covered by SDC FPs or thematic networks. This is a help to SDC staff who can find readily well formulated indicators and contributes to focus interventions and harmonisation for the digitalisation of results data. TRIs are linked to the main SDG target they contribute to and thus show SDC's contribution to the 2030 Agenda. The TRIs include as far as possible SDG indicators which reinforces the SDC's harmonisation and alignment to the 2030 Agenda.

TRIs are outcomes to which the SDC contributes to, but are not attributable to the SDC only. The work of the partner government and other development partners contribute also to these. The TRIs are the effects aimed at by SDC interventions, at the level of the geographic zone or of the concerned beneficiaries. For instance in health, if the TRI is the mortality rate, this would concern the zone covered by the hospital supported by the SDC or, if the SDC support covers the national health system, the mortality rate at national level would be appropriate.

As a reminder outcomes and impacts are the results which matter in terms of development: changes in the lives of the targeted population (e.g. mortality rates) or systemic changes at the institutional level (e.g. smallholder perception of agriculture and food security policies).

## Context specific indicators

Context specific indicators (CSIs) are those defined by programme and project staff, in line with specific local requirements. Some thematic networks propose other indicators which can be applied similarly to the context specific indicators. Both these types are, however, only to be applied in cases where no ARI and none of the proposed TRIs are relevant. It is assumed that ARIs and TRIs will cover most SDC needs and situations. Staff can therefore simplify their work by drawing upon the SDC thematic expertise through the ARIs and TRIs, as most relevant indicators have been identified based on international best practice and SDC experiences. Context specific indicators can be either outputs or outcomes.

*Table 2: Application and main purposes of the various types of indicators at the SDC*

Indicators	Application	Main purposes
Aggregated reference indicators (ARIs)	Mandatory if a project, a Swiss cooperation or global programme addresses the concerned sub-objective of the IC Strategy or the thematic area and if relevant These establish contribution links to SDG targets	Communication of aggregate results at corporate level, mainly for domestic accountability
Thematic reference indicators (TRIs)	Mandatory if a project, a Swiss cooperation or global programme addresses the concerned sub-objective of the IC Strategy or the thematic area and if relevant These include SDG indicators as far as possible and if relevant	Steering of projects and programmes Thematic learning Thematic and broader accountability
Context specific indicators (CSIs) and other thematic indicators	To be applied only if no aggregated or thematic reference indicator covers the specific issue aimed at	Steering of projects and programmes Learning Accountability

A binding list of ARIs and TRIs has been established by the thematic FPs, consulted and reviewed by QA and approved by the directorate. The full list is provided in annex 1. Full details of the indicators are described in factsheets, providing the required information. If an aspect pertaining to a specific ARI or TRI is unclear, please contact the concerned FP for clarification.

## 4. Key questions to ensure the quality of indicators

When selecting indicators, answering the following questions is important to ensure their quality:

- Are the indicators SMART?
- Is there an SDG indicator which can be used?
- For context specific indicators: is there a partner country indicator which can be used?
- Which is the data source (administrative collection, regular survey data, bespoke studies, project files, audit reports, beneficiary feedback, etc.)?
- What are the data collection methods?
- Who will collect the data?
- How often will the data be collected?
- What is the cost and difficulty to collect the data?
- What capacity strengthening measures are needed?

## 5. Use of Indicators in the SDC programmes and projects

Each CoPr defines **Swiss portfolio outcomes** which contribute to a CoPr **overall goal**. Each **portfolio outcome** contributes also to a) **selected (specific) objective(s) of the IC Strategy** and b) a **development goal of the partner country**.

Ideally, 3 portfolio outcomes should be identified. If SECO or the Peace and Human Rights Division also participate in the CoPr, it is important to define common outcomes to which all Swiss partners contribute. If this is not possible, one additional portfolio outcome might be considered. **A CoPr can thus be composed of 3 or 4 portfolio outcomes, depending on the number of Swiss IC partners participating.**

Each portfolio outcome is supported by a results framework which is based on a sound theory of change (cf. How-to Note Theory of Change FHB, [area 5.1](#), Working Aid), which includes the outcome statement(s), the main assumptions made at the time of planning and ideally 3-4 outcome indicators complemented by 2-3 output indicators (see the example below). ARIs and TRIs are included in all results frameworks coming into effect and should be selected wherever they are relevant and make sense in the concerned situation<sup>1</sup>. **The indicators in the results framework should ideally be composed of at least 50% of ARIs and TRIs.** This means that out of a total of 5-7 indicators per portfolio outcome at least 3-4 should be ARIs and TRIs; if this is not feasible, please aim to have 50% at the level of the cooperation programme as a whole.

Once a CoPr is established, the results indicators should be substantiated by results which are tracked and achieved by the concerned projects. As a logical consequence, the project level should therefore also apply indicators from the CoPr.

### The application of ARIs and TRIs at project level

The standardised result indicators (ARIs and TRIs) are to be applied in SDC-financed projects, as soon and as far as possible. Indicators included in the relevant cooperation programme or programmatic framework are a priority. Application of ARIs/TRIs holds, however, for new projects or phases whether the relevant cooperation programme or programmatic framework contains the proposed ARI/TRI or not. This is also valid for projects mandated and for project contributions. In the latter case, as the project ownership lies with the partner institution, the use of the standardised indicators is not compulsory but strongly recommended. ARI and TRI results will be aggregated by using the Results Data Management system.

### Digitalisation and the management of results data

The SDC has developed a digital system (Results Data Management) to record, manage and use results data for more efficient steering, learning and accountability, covering the three levels from project, portfolio (CoPr) to the corporate level. The ARIs and TRIs contribute to this effort as they introduce more harmonisation in the indicators used. The level of disaggregation of data collected per indicator also needs to be accounted for to manage the complexity of the system. Data for each indicator is therefore **limited to a maximum of five figures (see example below)**. In the case of ARIs and TRIs that report on results at the population level, this enables the SDC to disaggregate according to gender and one targeted left behind population group (to be determined in each context), in line with the necessity to mainstream gender and disaggregate population (see Guidance Leave no one behind, FHB, [area 1.3](#), normative). **This disaggregation at target group level is harmonised and mandatory for all ARIs and TRIs.** The example below illustrates the case:

***EDU TRI 3 Average proportion of children/youth achieving proficiency level in reading/mathematics at the end of primary/secondary education***, disaggregated for a) Number of female pupils at the end of primary education that achieved proficiency level in reading/mathematics b) Number of male pupils at the end of primary education that achieved proficiency level in reading/mathematics c) Number of female pupils at the end of secondary education that achieved proficiency level in reading/mathematics d) Number of male pupils at the end of secondary education that achieved proficiency level in reading/mathematics e) Total number of pupils at the end of primary/secondary education.

**To complement the data collected, important descriptive information can be recorded in a comment field where text can be captured for each indicator.**

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<sup>1</sup> An ARI does not necessarily have to lead to a TRI of the same theme.

## List and definition of ARIs and TRIs

Each indicator has a factsheet containing detailed information. You find the complete list of ARIs and TRIs and the corresponding factsheets in the [RDM indicator browser](#).

Please note that **mobilisation of private finances** is an important objective to achieve the SDGs and this is also a priority for the SDC and will be monitored by SDC Directorate. Achievements in mobilising private finances **overall, for different themes and Climate Change** in particular are **to be reported in the annual reports of cooperation programmes and programmatic frameworks**. This enables a comprehensive reporting, which would not be possible otherwise. Result indicators on mobilisation of private finances are not included in the list below because such an ARI/TRI would not be applied systematically by every project and programme supported by the SDC.