

From evidence and learning to steering

Documentation on Swiss Church Aid's strategy, progress and perspectives related to MONITORING, EVALUATION, LEARNING.

Zürich/Lausanne, June 2019

WHY MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING MATTER

Globally

The requirements for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) have steadily risen in the last decades. There is a critical view on the value and use of NGOs work, which resulted in increased requirements of the general public and donors for NGOs to be able to show results, progress and impact for accountability and learning purposes. This is an opportunity for NGOs to invest in MEL in order to improve Learning for Steering within the organization. At the same time, the context of development cooperation and humanitarian aid is complex, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory and messy. This makes it difficult to illustrate and analyse progress in a simple and understandable way, and, at the same time, be able to use the monitoring efforts to improve programmes and projects for the sake of the people and communities. To undertake meaningful MEL needs time, resources and qualified staff.

To HEKS/EPER

HEKS/EPER International Division has a global programmatic approach and operates according to the programme’s theory of change and objectives, at the global, country, and project level. For institutional decisions and programmatic steering, HEKS/EPER uses principals of adaptive management and learning for steering to increase the relevance and effectiveness of projects and programmes and to constantly reflect upon the results, progress and impact of our work. According to these principals, projects and programmes plan interventions based on sound analysis and evidence (evidence-based programming) and, at the same time, also remain flexible and permanently observe, analyse, learn and adapt strategies and activities to the changing – often fragile – context.

KEY ELEMENTS OF HEKS/EPER’S GLOBAL MEL SYSTEM

KEY INDICATORS & DIGITAL DATA

In 2018, HEKS/EPER’s **digital data collection and analysis tool** for global **performance assessment** was fully implemented for development projects. Qualitative and quantitative data for 28 pre-defined key indicators and harmonized questionnaires is collected directly from project participants. The customized online platform enables aggregation and analysis.

PROJECT CYCLE MANAGEMENT & MONITORING

HEKS/EPER applies a **global monitoring system** building on quantitative and qualitative data on project, country program and institutional level. HEKS/EPER evaluates set objectives and observation fields according to defined indicators and derives steering decisions.

EVALUATIONS & IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Through external consultants, **HEKS/EPER evaluates** its works according to specific criteria, such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability or impact. For strategically relevant projects, HEKS/EPER undertakes **impact assessments** to analyse the causal contribution of projects to social change.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

HEKS/EPER strives to be a **learning organisation** that strengthens individual and team capacity and skills through trainings, incorporating external expertise, spaces for reflection and analysis, sharing knowledge and promising practices. Knowledge sharing shall enhance best possible steering decisions and increase flexibility, relevance and effectiveness of projects, approaches and strategies.

EVOLUTION OF HEKS/EPER'S MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING SYSTEM

Approach: Adaptive management through a global MEL system

Since 2014, HEKS/EPER has consistently been striving for setting up a comprehensive approach to MEL that facilitates **global performance assessment and enables evidence-based steering decisions**. The main building blocks for a global MEL approach got set till 2017 with adapted programme and project cycle management (PCM) guidelines, a sound monitoring system for projects and programmes including digitalised key indicators, project and program cycle management, external evaluations and impact assessments.

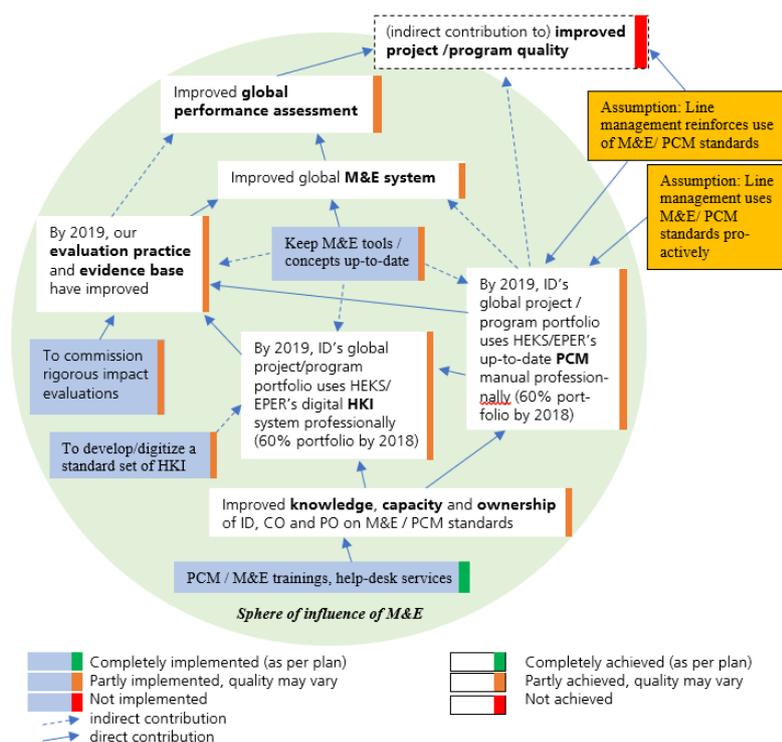
HEKS/EPER aims to progress according to the set theory of change and the objectives of the HEKS/EPER international programme, the country programmes and the projects as well as to create the best possible effect with its interventions. HEKS/EPER wants to increase its relevance and effectiveness meeting the needs of people and communities. Therefore, projects and programmes shall not only plan interventions based on sound analysis and evidence (evidence-based programming), but while implementing it is key to remain flexible and permanently observe, analyse, learn and adapt strategy and activities to the changing fragile context. Therefore, MEL processes assure that HEKS/EPER systematically reviews the interventions logic and results doing a sound **performance assessment** providing also info to fulfil the HIP principle **Learning4Steering**. Learning4Steering means to have a system in place to grasp promising practices, failures, risk, opportunities, enabling or disabling factors of success etc. to allow **innovation, adaptive management** of a project, but also to share learnings with other stakeholders in and around the project (including beneficiaries), with HEKS/EPER staff and project teams all over the world as well as with other partners, donors and networks.

Monitoring Evaluation Learning shall ...

- Promote **learning**
- Facilitate **steering**
- Contribute to **accountability**

Enable effective and relevant projects/ programmes for the benefit of people and communities now and in the future.

Theory of Change of HEKS/EPER institutional MEL efforts



The theory of change of all institutional investments towards MEL and PCM, is that improving the global MEL system and the 'evidence base' will gradually lead to improved global performance assessment and contribute to increased project and programme quality. Main implemented strategies (blue boxes) to reach these objectives include:

- **Impact evaluations** in collaboration with local and international research institutes.
- A standard set of **digitalized HEKS/EPER Key Indicators**.
- Up-to-date **PCM guidelines** and MEL concepts.
- **PCM capacity building**.
- Technical **MEL help-desk services** at all institutional levels.

Figure: Theory of change (and progress status) of the M&E investment / project

PROMISING MEL PRACTICES

Going live of HEKS/EPER key indicators digital data collection system and online platform

One of the essential elements of HEKS/EPER global evidence base is the digital key indicators system. The real-time operating system is developed for digital data collection and analysis. Intended to improve monitoring, evaluation, learning and steering processes as well as accountability the system demonstrates evidence-based results from projects and programmes and assists to measure performance on project, country and global level.

The data is collected during interviewing beneficiaries through key indicator digital questionnaires by means of mobile device and application. The collected data is automatically aggregated, processed and available at online platform for further analysis through customised dashboards and tables visualising main key indicators metrics. Project partners, HEKS/EPER country offices and head quarter have direct access to the data in real-time. The findings and learning obtained through the system contribute to monitoring and evaluation process, efficient steering and decision-making.

The implementation of digital system improves data quality, facilitates the progress measurement, increases visibility, transparency and reduces analysis costs.

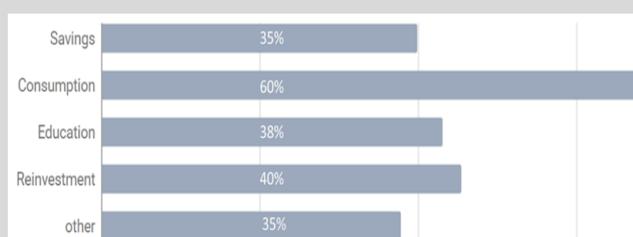
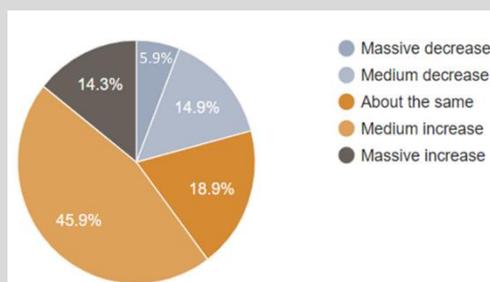
HOW HEKS/EPER USES ITS DIGITAL KEY INDICATORS SYSTEM – ILLUSTRATED THROUGH THE HEKS/EPER KEY INDICATOR 'SELF-PERCEIVED INCOME'

Based on data from 30 projects in 15 countries, about **60.2% of the targeted beneficiaries** state that their income increased in 2018 (45.9% medium increase and 14.3% massive increase) due to project interventions (see image right above). The global target for 2018 was 45%.

Out of the persons stating a positive change in their incomes **nearly 60% explain this increase by increased yields/outputs** and about 50% by the increase of market prices.

The additional income **was used for consumption purposes by about 60%** of interviewed people and **40% have reinvested** the money, about **38% used it for education purposes** and **35% used it as savings** for later; respondents can select multiple answers (see image right below).

About 20% of the sampled individuals stated a decrease of their incomes, mainly due to decreased production because of diseases, unfavourable weather conditions and increased production costs – especially transportation, animal feed and other input costs.



Expenditure areas of generated income.



Evaluation of the MOLI M4P project in Georgia: evaluation shows effectiveness of M4P approach

In 2018, a project for the development of rural communities in Georgia was evaluated. It was financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by HEKS from 2011 to 2018. The aim of the project was to improve the livelihoods of families with small and medium-sized livestock farms in the Kacheti region by improving access to the market, increasing milk and meat production and developing a market system that enables livestock farms to sell higher quality products that meet EU standards at better prices. HEKS/EPER followed a systemic approach: a total of 73 service

enterprises were supported, with which the livestock farmers cooperate: village mills, dairies and slaughterhouses, but also veterinary pharmacies and agricultural advisory services.

The study, carried out by the Agricultural Research Centre of the Tbilisi University of Economics and Business, revealed that the cooperation between the two sectors is very limited, but the dairy and meat industries are now flourishing in the Kacheti region. By improving the production conditions of feed mills, dairies and slaughterhouses and intensifying the cooperation of livestock farms with veterinary surgeons and pharmacies, it was possible to improve the nutrition and health of the animals, increase milk and meat production and increase the income of livestock families by 190 percent. These families now benefit from more affordable services and profitable sales opportunities. In addition, they are now networked in a national dairy industry association and can better represent their interests to the authorities. A total of around 39'300 livestock farmers improved their livelihoods.

Impact assessment on the country programme in Bangladesh

HEKS/EPER has started to apply impact assessment since 2015, with the aim to reflect and analyse the impact of our work in strategically important projects. In its new impact assessment policy HEKS/EPER establishes to conduct one impact assessment per year with qualified research institutes. An example is the impact evaluation on the country programme Bangladesh which started in 2016.

The country programme Bangladesh pursues the approach that minorities such as the 'untouchables' (Dalit) can broaden their income opportunities and improve their economic situation by building value chains. The aim is to improve their relationship with the Muslim majority society. In other words, they are less discriminated against, have more access to state institutions and services and feel more secure in everyday life. In particular, the HEKS/EPER programme would like to make a contribution to improving the social status of women.



The impact assessment analysed: Is the impact hypothesis (theory of change) of the country programme correct? Can the people in the projects really improve their income? Will these improved economic relations also result in better social relations with the majority society (diapaxis approach)? And do HEKS/EPER activities really have an influence on the social status of women?

The intermediate results of the study show ...

- The impact assessment was able to show that 84% of the project participants were actually able to increase their income in the past five years thanks to HEKS/EPER activities. In contrast, only 19% of the peer group, i.e. those who did not benefit from HEKS/EPER, were able to increase their income.
- However, the study showed that the project participants were not really able to diversify their income as intended, but that the increase in income was due solely to the activity of bull fattening.
- The study was also able to show that the project participants actually have better access to government schemes and feel more secure in everyday life.
- The study also showed that the social status of women has improved thanks to project activities. Families who benefited from the project also tend to marry their daughters less early.

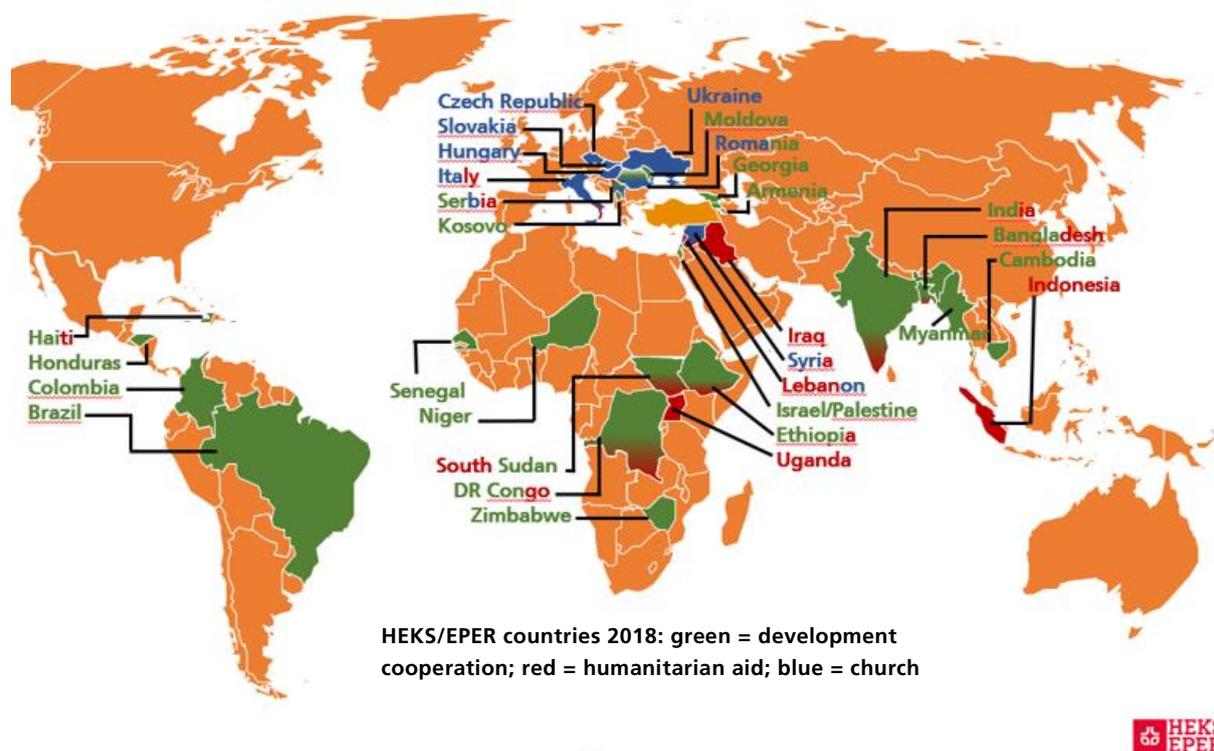
WHAT WERE THE BENEFIT OF THE STUDY?

'The impact study provided us with detailed information about our programme and our project participants. It confirmed some of our assumptions, but also showed us the unexpected: What we did not count on to this extent is how much women's standing has improved as a result of their contribution to household income'. *Annika Klotz, HEKS/EPER MEL officer*

'The impact study is an important tool for steering and later on for elaborating a new Country Programme. The outcomes of the study will guide HEKS/EPER programmatically but also in terms of alliance building and networking in Bangladesh. It will confirm or not the direction of the current country program and help us to re-align it if needed in the future. The impact study is also important for fundraising as it shows the professionalism of HEKS and the impact of a country strategy towards potential donors.' *Anik Asad, HEKS/EPER country director Bangladesh*

PROGRESS 2018 & PERSPECTIVES

Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning: achievements in 2018



20 project **evaluations** completed in **14** countries.

4 ongoing **impact assessments** in **4** countries.

4 regional thematic meetings on access to land, conflict transformation and diapraxis, inclusive business and social inclusion Eastern Europe.

87% projects using **key indicators** and **digital data. 75%** of the projects collected **primary digital data at beneficiary level.**

Digital monitoring system

The introduction of the new digital monitoring system in 2017 required capacity building to staff and partner organizations provided through workshops and online courses. In 2018, the focus laid on the consolidation of these achievements, professionalize its implementation, promoting ownership and a learning culture on all levels: project, country programme, globally and also within thematic priorities. In November and December 2018, 15 country offices and its respective desks were trained on how to collect, analyse and document data of the 28 HEKS/EPER key indicators; and more than 200 requests on usage of digital indicators from countries were answered and many feedbacks processed for further improvements of the system. 37 new users of partner organisation and HEKS/EPER offices registered, in November/December 2018, alone.

High standards for evaluations and impact assessments

In 2018, HEKS/EPER issued a new evaluation policy that put a stronger focus on the use of the evaluation results for steering and knowledge sharing. In 2018, HEKS/EPER conducted 18 evaluations in development

cooperation and two in humanitarian aid. HEKS/EPER launched a meta-analysis to evaluate the quality of the evaluation methods and reports during the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. The report of the meta-analysis will be available in 2019. First results show that recommendations and evidence of these evaluations have been well taken up in the planning of the next phase and standard evaluation practice has improved to some extent (better TOR, introduction of inception reports, more management responses – 10% in 2016, 36% in 2017, 37% in 2018). However, these improvements do not reflect a critical mass of evaluations yet. Moreover, management responses and their capitalization need to be further promoted on the part of line management. Also, methodological standards of evaluations are not yet met as aimed on level rated good or very good.

Accordingly, HEKS/EPER also developed a new impact assessment policy based on an experience capitalization of the five already conducted impact assessment since 2014. It adheres to the OECD-DAC definition of impact which considers impact to be “the positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended”. Consequently, any assessment of impact should not only describe or measure the changes that have been observed but should also identify the role of the project or programme in producing these changes. This is often referred to as causal attribution, causal contribution, or causal inference.¹ HEKS/EPER acknowledges that there are various causal approaches and impact evaluation designs, only some of which rely on a counterfactual.

L4S: learning for steering

HEKS/EPER strives to be a learning organisation promoting individual and team capacity, skills through trainings, incorporating external expertise, space for reflection and analysis, sharing knowledge and promising practices. It enables meaningful target-oriented planning and adequate implementation of our programmes and projects with people and communities we are working with benefitting in the long-term. In the countries, capacity building touched in 2018 topics such as building resilience, disaster response plans, conflict-sensitivity, human rights-based approach, conflict transformation or inclusive market.

REGIONAL THEMATIC MEETINGS

Key learning milestones in 2018 were the 4 thematic meetings held: in Berlin (Germany) on inclusive business, in Entebbe (Uganda) on conflict transformation, in Cape Town (South Africa) on collective land rights and on Inclusion Eastern Europe (Serbia).

Overall, 50 staff members participated to learn from each other in order to do even more effective work – for the benefit of people and communities in the projects, but also for an effective use of the donations.



Perspectives on MEL

The current institutional objectives for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning of the HEKS/EPER International Division have been adjusted in 2018 towards: i) From M&E to MEL: incorporating Knowledge Sharing into the unit; ii) innovation and leading M&E agency; iii) quality assurance (proposals, evaluations, reports, HKI, etc.); iv) enlarged HKI system with performance assessment and longitudinal tracking). This has its effects on the staff pool. As HEKS/EPER wants to be a front-runner in Switzerland regarding MEL creating ownership within HEKS/EPER to apply MEL and its tools (HKI system) and to create credibility with the NGO community and towards donors (especially SDC) enough human resources are needed. Networking and exchange with other Swiss NGOs as well as research institutes are key to continue to be a progressive ‘MEL organization’.

The MEL unit would stand for the full programme/project cycle with knowledge sharing as an inclusive part of it. Therefore, the team set-up may be adapted towards a decentralized global MEL unit with a small team at HHQ and 3-4 MEL hubs in the countries covering the programmes providing MEL advisory services backing up projects/programmes – e.g. helpdesk project planning (logframe, m&e plan, etc.), evaluation (ToRs, IR, etc.), digital data helpdesk.

¹ ‘Overview: Strategies for Causal Attribution’. Methodological Briefs. Impact Evaluation 6. Patricia Rogers. UNICEF Office of Research. Florence, 2014.

THIS IS HEKS/EPER (SWISS CHURCH AID)

HEKS/EPER – Swiss Church Aid is the aid organization of the Swiss protestant churches and campaigns for a more human and equitable world supporting in 2018 with 100 partner organizations people and communities in economic and social need with 200 projects in 32 countries.

HEKS/EPER is active in **development cooperation** ameliorating in 2018 with 23 M (net costs) the life of 1'146'000 people focusing on access to land and resources, securing basic services, fostering sustainable production and inclusive market systems. It promoted also social inclusion of marginalized, inclusive governance structures and conflict transformation. HEKS/EPER's **humanitarian aid** supported with 9.5 M 290'000 people affected by disasters with emergency interventions, restoring livelihoods and rehabilitating infrastructure. In the frame of **Church Cooperation** HEKS/EPER enabled with 3.6 M social work of Reformed Churches in Eastern Europe and Middle East reaching out to 35'000 people. Striving for a **systemic change** and the **human rights-based approach** are the guiding principles – HEKS&EPER is cultivating constant dialogue with all relevant development and Government actors enabling civil society to advocate for their needs and rights.

In Switzerland, HEKS/EPER supported with 25.7 M CHF 60 projects in 15 cantons disadvantaged people in becoming socially and economically integrated by promoting equal opportunity, and assists jobless people, refugees and other individuals with providing day structures, legal advice, vocational trainings, language courses, dialogue platforms etc.

OTHER HEKS/EPER PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO MEL

- HEKS/EPER (2019). Impact Assessment Policy & Guideline, Zurich, June 2019.
- HEKS/EPER (2018). Evaluation Policy. Zurich, April 2018.
- HEKS/EPER (2018). Capex on impact assessments conducted 2015-2018, Zurich, October 2018.
- HEKS/EPER (2017). Global Monitoring System Policy. Zürich, May 2017.
- HEKS/EPER (2015). Meta-Analysis of HEKS/EPER evaluations, Zurich, February 2015.
- HEKS/EPER (2015). HEKS/EPER Programme and Project Cycle Management. Zürich, 2015; revised in 2016 and 2017.



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