

External Evaluation of the SDC Support Mandate for Mobility

Submitted by

Heather Creech, IISD

July 2006



Executive Summary

Brief description and background of activities evaluated

The objective of this assignment was to review the functioning of the SDC support mandate in mobility that has been outsourced to SKAT; SKAT's achievements from 2004 to 2006, and options for SDC's future support to international development.

SKAT's principal activities in servicing the mandate include producing the Focus on Mobility newsletter; developing SDC Guidelines for Rural Roads, preparing a highly selective, annotated list of sources of information on mobility and development, maintenance of the Transweb website, coordinating Transnet, the network of Swiss practitioners involved in the sector, support for development of "hot" topics such as health and mobility, maintenance of a small documentation centre at SKAT, and answering questions on demand.

The International Forum for Rural Transportation and Development is seen as an equal partner in supporting SDC's needs for mobility knowledge, although for the purposes of this assignment, only SKAT's activities have been reviewed in detail.

The methodology consisted of

- Desk review of program documentation
- In person or phone interviews with key informants selected by SDC/SKAT in consultation with the evaluator
- Scan of trends in international development assistance for mobility
- Presentation and discussion of initial findings with SDC and SKAT
- Final report

Major findings (achievements and challenges)

The evaluation recognized several **achievements** with activities

- Excellent development of an annual program of work and delivery against the annual plan. Expectations are formulated together and periodically adjusted as necessary. The reporting is professional; performance is within budget.
- A sound team at SKAT that has legitimacy and credibility within the Swiss practitioner community.
- All products and services contracted for have been delivered.
- The mandate promotes Swiss expertise in mobility and has preserved some attention to mobility at SDC

The evaluation recognized the following **challenges**

The reorganization of themes at SDC has led to a diminished profile for mobility. It is unclear whether mobility in general is due to experience a resurgence of interest among the development banks and the bilateral agencies.

There would appear to be little demand from the country desks for input from SKAT. Although desk officers and those in the field are aware of and use the newsletter, other products are less well known. The products lack communications /

dissemination strategies and therefore may not be reaching audiences as effectively as they could be.

Transnet is shifting away from its original base of hard core technical experts to a broader interdisciplinary community of practitioners interested in a range of mobility issues. As a result, some of the original base has eroded, but the new constituency is not yet well established.

There is a lack of clarity about the role of IFRTD in the support mandate, and the respective roles and relationship between SKAT and IFRTD.

Recommendations

1. The Mobility mandate should be continued.
2. A number of steps should be taken to strengthen the delivery of the mandate, including putting a program framework in place to monitor whether individual activities are contributing towards the goal of demonstrating the role of mobility in poverty reduction. Communications strategies should be developed, and some products should have value added (eg, translation into French; or put on CD ROM together with the full text of relevant documents).
3. Two areas for new work should be considered:
 - a. Conduct an in-depth capitalization of 25 years of Swiss experience in mobility
 - b. Further expand the integrative work into other sectors, such as the building and maintenance of roads and trails in environmentally sensitive and protective areas, or in the context of social services (health / education) and in rural development in general.
4. Operationalize the role of IFRTD in the mandate to more clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and working principles.
5. In response to the reorganization of themes at SDC, some consideration should be given to broaden the mandate to an infrastructure mandate that includes mobility, water, and energy as key enabling factors in rural development.

In addition to these specific recommendations on the Mobility mandate, the evaluator would like to make two additional suggestions related to the mandate model.

1. Establish benchmarks for good practice in managing these mandates, against which performances across all mandates can be more uniformly assessed.
2. The mandate model has been in service for a number of years. It may be timely to review the model in the context of trends in public-private partnerships and networking innovation. The linkage between SDC, Swiss practitioners, international networks AND local capacity on the ground warrants exploration in determining whether there are new ways to secure external expertise, and to provide the necessary evidence to support policymaking and program development.