

FINAL EVALUATION

SVD/024

Support and Monitoring of Bilateral
Cooperation Projects in El Salvador

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	El Salvador
Long project title	Support and Monitoring of Bilateral Cooperation Projects in El Salvador
Short project title	N/A
LuxDev Code	SVD/024
Version of the Report	December 2021

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	3 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance)
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: 2 Coherence: 2 Efficiency: 2 Impact: 2 Sustainability: 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Luxembourg cooperation with El Salvador entered a new stage, in which El Salvador directly executes the projects financed by Luxembourg. The mandate of the SVD/024 project that is the object of this evaluation, indicates that the Luxembourg contribution will no longer be channelled by Lux-Development (LuxDev), but would be disbursed directly to the respective national counterparts, namely, the for Joint Program Support Fund (*Fondo Común de Apoyo Programático*), the Vice Ministry of Development Cooperation for support to civil society and South-South Cooperation, and the National Development Foundation for fiscal transparency. The mandate also establishes that LuxDev's role in the SVD/024 project is limited to monitoring and accompanying direct support from Luxembourg to El Salvador, and focuses on administrative and financial aspects, while the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs is in charge of strategic aspects and decision-making through its Embassy in Managua. It will also have a role of representation of the Luxembourg Cooperation in El Salvador and of liaison with the Embassy in Managua. The project will be led by a Chief Technical Adviser, whose function will be to provide technical assistance and ensure monitoring of the implementation of bilateral projects.

The overall objective of the SVD/024 project is to provide the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the Salvadoran institutions responsible for the execution of the bilateral projects, a technical assistance mechanism for accompanying and monitoring those projects established in the mandate and complemented by the lessons and recommendations of projects SVD/022 and SVD/023 and Competitive Fund (*Fondo Concursable*), which are executed at the national level. This project contemplated two responsibilities:

- the formulation and implementation of bilateral projects; and
- the accompaniment and monitoring of the implementation of bilateral projects.

This project started in 2016 and the final evaluation was carried out by FLACSO El Salvador (Oct. 25 – Dec. 26, 2021). by Lisandro Pérez-Hernández, PhD; as head of the Mission, Marcela Escobar, M.Sc as an evaluation specialist and Roberto Rodríguez, PhD as an advisor in his capacity as Director of “Flacso Programa El Salvador”.

The evaluation methodology has a qualitative-descriptive and non-experimental design, with a theoretical, participatory, and use-oriented approach to understand the evolution of the categories of analysis of the project interventions from the perspective of key actors. No type of quantitative or statistical analysis of the information was carried out. The information was collected in virtual mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic protocols. Information gathering techniques included document review; work sessions with the LuxDev team; semi-structured individual and collective interviews with relevant actors. Some limitations were:

- the current political and social context of El Salvador and the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented work in situ and a more strategic proximity to information sources;
- limited time and conditions for the application of quantitative instruments with key actors; and
- the limitations of the political conjuncture and the lack of a national development plan to which government institutions can align.

Main Findings (F). The main findings of the evaluation are based on the evidence found in the documents reviewed and, on the interview, responses obtained by the actors. The findings are presented below with the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, identifying the factors of relevance, coherence, as well as the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the actions undertaken and of the sustainability management mechanisms, considering the adequacy of the strategies designed. Furthermore, the effects caused by the project were identified, assessing their continuity and, finally, proposing recommendations for future actions.

Relevance:

(F1) Technical support in capacity development has had a high level of acceptance by partner institutions, mainly due to its strategic contribution during periods of economic and institutional transition, positioning the SVD/024 project as an intervention highly relevant in the execution of bilateral projects.

(F2) The project multi-stakeholder structure has made it easier to address change and facilitated the monitoring and accompaniment of LuxDev thanks to the empowerment of local actors.

(F3) The project has presented a highly relevant level in terms of its flexibility and capacity of application with local contexts.

Coherence:

(F4) The work dynamics and support implemented by the project allowed to strategically focus the key needs in each scenario presented in its execution time, which also facilitated the development of essential capacities of the actors involved.

(F5) LuxDev has positioned itself as a key strategic partner for cooperation actions at a national level and must likely can continue to be so in the future. However, this role must propose an organizational model that directly articulates relationships with important partners linked to the project through its components.

Efficiency:

(F6) The project satisfactorily carried out the activities initially established in terms of formulation and implementation of bilateral projects, as well as in the accompaniment and monitoring of the implementation of these.

(F7) The delays in the execution of the bilateral funds and the technical assistance fund were mainly due to external factors: the central government entities that slowed down the activities of the projects and the entrapment of the approval of funds in the Legislative Assembly, having to resort to deadlines extensions.

(F8) The change in local governments further affected coordination at the local level with Civil Society Organisations and, the trend towards centralization evidenced by the non-disbursement of Local Development Fund for the Municipalities of El Salvador does not augur well for the capacity of local counterparts to be strengthened.

(H9) Given that the project does not have in itself a system of results indicators, but rather of a process, progress is measured through the follow-up and monitoring systems of bilateral projects. In the case of Joint Program Support Fund, a monitoring system had been designed but is no longer published by the current government administration. In the case of South-South Cooperation Fund (*Fondo de Cooperación Sur-Sur*) and Competitive Fund, an area for improvement is precisely the registration and monitoring processes of the action plan.

Efficacy:

(F10) The project strengthened the capacities of its counterparts during the first years of its execution (2016-2019), but after June 2019, limitations were observed for a time to resume the capacity development dynamics due to the significant government reorganization, both in managerial and technical personnel, as well as new operating guidelines.

(F11) The project's success relies on the Chief Technical Adviser leadership who was able to navigate diligently and correctly a challenging new scenario linked to external negative factors caused by the change in political conditions that limited the pace of execution and the strengthening of capacities that had been gained.

Impact:

(F12) In general terms, there is evidence of impact on capacity building and a positive assessment of the counterparts and beneficiaries of the bilateral projects: The responses of key informants reflect different forms and aspects of institutional strengthening such as advice and technical assistance, practical training, accompaniment, equipment, all very well appreciated in the cooperation of SVD/024 both in what corresponds to the Foreign Affairs and El Salvador Agency for International Cooperation counterparts and other government agencies such as National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises (*Comisión Nacional de la Micro y Pequeña Empresa*), National Youth Institute (*Instituto Nacional de la Juventud*), Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (*Ministerio De Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología*) at the different organizational levels and operations, as well as Civil Society Organisations.

Sustainability:

(F13) Sufficient evidence was found of articulation and alignment of the SVD/024 project with national and sectoral development plans and with technical references to strengthen, which ensured significant levels of commitments to institutionalize capacity development and, therefore, sustainability.

(F14) Despite the positive evaluations of the expected results and the capacity to adapt to changes reflected in the execution of SVD/024, due to the change in the political and institutional context with the change in government administration, it is difficult to estimate at term, both the continuity of the main actions of the bilateral projects, carried out and their lasting impact, key factors for evaluating sustainability under the specific support figure of the project.

Conclusions (C):

(C1) The support generated from the implementation of the project is recognized as relevant by its interlocutors based on a horizontal logic and contribution to bilateral projects, however, this has come together in a changing political and organizational context, which has represented various challenges for continuity and effectiveness in achieving the objectives that originated the intervention. In this sense, it has been possible to overcome these situations satisfactorily due to the flexibility of the project and the capacity of adaptation of the part actors (government and civil society); which from the technical support of LuxDev have generated good practices and lessons learned.

(C2). The needs identified from the project have been consistent with the context in which they have been carried out. Its identification process has been the results of a multi-actor's articulation, which allowed multiple perspectives, even the territorial point of view. In such a network of actors, LuxDev has emerged to be particularly relevant regarding the development of capacities both from a technical and human perspective, but it is necessary to formally articulate decision-making and multidimensional incidence in local governmental organizations and not governmental.

(C3) Regarding the fulfilment of the assigned responsibilities, it is concluded that the project has been efficient. This has been due more to the diligence the Chief Technical Adviser has shown in adapting to changing circumstances, especially following the change in government administration. However, the efficiency in the execution of bilateral projects in terms of deadlines has been questionable, due to factors such as delays in budget execution, political impasses, changes in management, and technical staff in charge of bilateral projects. This doubled the project execution time, showing low efficiency in terms of technical execution capacities by the Salvadoran partner.

(C4) Both, the short technical assistance and the support provided by the nature of SVD/024 have been relatively effective in developing planned capacities. Until 2019, there was a low level of evolution, even though it was positive in terms of strengthening the technical teams that executed the bilateral projects. However, the schism created by the change of administration caused the dismantling of the management and technical teams of the counterpart institutions. This generated a setback that is still noticeable in institutions such as National Youth Institute for example. Other institutions such as El Salvador Agency for International Cooperation, which have been closely accompanied by the Chief Technical Adviser, are slowly beginning to walk on their own in aspects linked to the objectives of the bilateral projects. Others, such as Presidential House of El Salvador (*Casa Presidencial de El Salvador*) and the Plan Social team, have had a sub-execution during the last three years due to political situations that have trapped funds, but also due to the disarticulation of the teams that execute in the territories, as is the case of the Social Investment Fund for Local Development (*Fondo de Inversión Social para el Desarrollo Local*) in the past few months. It becomes necessary to improve the participation mechanisms of those involved in Technical Assistance initiatives, to have a not only bilateral link between the Chief Technical Adviser or LuxDev in front of the actor participating in the Technical Assistance, but also a multilateral or multi-actor panorama, from different priorities or axes of operational action, as well as the organizational logic that they are participants. Although this will not impact immediate interventions, in the medium term, it will allow to have enough good practices and lessons learned to better adapt to the changing dynamics of the Salvadoran environment of the last decade, as well as to the priority needs of the final beneficiary population.

(C5) Although it is difficult to measure the impact on a project with the characteristics of the SVD/024, the contribution to this criterion is identified to the extent that the bilateral interventions it assists pay for this purpose. Therefore, it is concluded that there was a satisfactory level of contribution to the impact, given that even with the changes in managerial and technical personnel of the institutions, because of the change of government in mid-2019; SVD/024's intervention in the figure of its representative generated appropriation and innovation in mechanisms, that were transferred to the new technical bodies, enabling the strengthening of individual, organizational and institutional capacities. Despite the changes in the political and technical variables of the cooperation based on SVD/024, one key factor in this contribution remains the technical assistance model. The Technical Assistants highly appreciated and their continuity under a new ad hoc figure can contribute to planning for development that reinforces institutional and local development capacities in the areas supported by bilateral projects within the framework of SVD/024.

(C6) In terms of sustainability, it is considered complex to continue with capacity building within the framework of the assumptions that originated SVD/024. Even though the project has been aligned with what could be called “national priorities”, these are not framed under a government strategy, many of them have arisen because of the pandemic and although the project and the bilateral project have been flexible in adapting, the redirection of funds is not due to a strategic logic on the part of the government, but to circumstantial needs. Therefore, the assumption under which the SVD/024 was born and the shift in the focus of Luxembourg’s cooperation towards El Salvador, which privileged sustainability, based on the figure of budget support, in the case of Joint Program Support Fund, is not identified as ideally feasible. Notwithstanding the foregoing, there may be sectorial plans such as early childhood policy, in which cooperation could be aligned, if there are monitoring, transparency and accountability mechanisms. In the case of the Competitive Fund, where the participation of civil society and local governments constitutes one of the bets after the evaluation of SVD/023, it does not seem to have a relevant place in the short or medium term for the current government administration. On the contrary, spaces for participation and control have been closed, and there is a centralizing tendency, which is evidenced in the drastic reduction of the Local Development Fund for the Municipalities of El Salvador (*Fondo para el Desarrollo Local de los Municipios de El Salvador*). Against this background, sustainability projections under the current cooperation management model become unviable. In the case of South-South Cooperation Fund, a greater margin of sustainability is perceived in the project since the SDV/024 made possible a shift in the items of expenses replacing air tickets and per diem with videoconferencing equipment, within the framework of confinement due to COVID-19. This creates the possibility of continuing with some exchanges related to the South-South cooperation approach with other countries. It is important to mention that despite the suspension of disbursements during the first semester of 2021 of funds from Luxembourg, the project continued with government funds.

Recommendations (R):

(R1) Support mechanisms in the development of planning, management and monitoring capacities should be formally strengthened through permanent technical assistance between LuxDev towards the institutions responsible for cooperation in El Salvador (Presidential House of El Salvador, El Salvador Agency for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

(R2) The needs identification process has been highlighted from the participation of multiple actors at the territorial level, accompanied by their experience, empowerment, and the leadership of the LuxDev representation. This element must have an organizational systematization, which allows a more direct and articulated contact with all the actors involved.

(R3) It is recommended to strengthen the technical and organizational capacities of the counterparts in terms of a more strategic orientation of the technical assistance that allows a more orderly and systematic structure in the granting of these.

(R4) Strengthen a mechanism for the exchange of good practices among the implementing partner institutions.

(R5) Before starting a new project such as SVD/024, it is necessary to count, from the design of the intervention, with a results-based monitoring and follow-up framework, since it is not possible to measure achievements and effectiveness without an adequate system of indicators. It is recommended to resume articulation mechanisms of international cooperation, of the Partners for Development, around a defined plan to strengthen capacities that obeys a logic of strategic priority, at least on a sectoral basis, since there is no national strategy.

(R6) In the absence of the institutional conditions for strategic planning and specific strengthening of technical capacities of the Government of El Salvador counterparts that supported the design of the SVD/024 support mechanism and that present substantive changes with the change in government administration, and given that institutional links and anchors are maintained with the main decision centers of Government of El Salvador: Presidential House of El Salvador and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is recommended to evaluate a new figure of cooperation that adjusts to the new orientation of Government of El Salvador in terms of new approaches to national priorities, governance and regulatory frameworks, new institutional framework, rethinking of attributions and competences and the necessary recreation of technical capacities in the new institutional framework.