Final Report

Strategic Evaluation of

German Red Cross's Social Structure Funding Programs since 2011

Carried out
on behalf of the German Red Cross (GRC)
by

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October 2023 to February 2024

Abbreviations

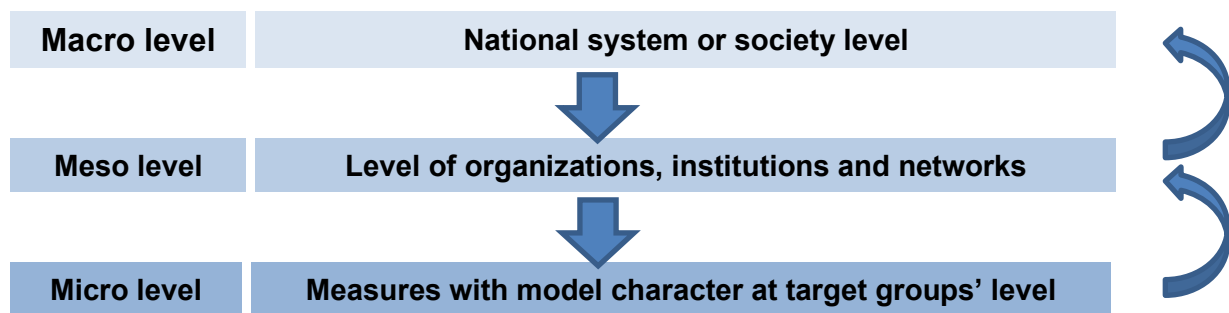|	
AWO	*Arbeiterwohlfahrt International*
BDRCS	Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CRC	*Cruz Roja Columbiana*
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
DeGEval	German Evaluation Society *(Deutsche Gesellschaft f. Evaluierung*)
DGRV	*Deutscher Genossenschafts- und Raiffeisenverband*
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DVV-I	*Deutscher Volkshochschulverband International*
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EQ	Evaluation Questions
FFS	Farmer Field School
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIZ	German Technical Cooperation *(Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit)*
GFFO	German Federal Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*)
GRC	German Red Cross *(Deutsches Rotes Kreuz)*
HNS	Host National Society
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LA	Latin America
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NS	National Society
NSD	National Society Development
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PNS	Partner National Society
RC	Red Cross
RCRC	Red Cross Red Crescent
SOD	Standing Orders on Disaster
SNS	Sister National Societies
SRCS	Somali Red Crescent Society
SSF	Social Structure Funding (*Sozialstrukturförderung*)
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
USD	American Dollar

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Executive Summary

I.   Project description

The German Red Cross (GRC) commissioned a strategic evaluation of the implementation of BMZ´s Social Structure Funding (SSF) programs. SSF activities are typically composed of three consecutive three-year funding cycles. The evaluation was carried out between October 2023 and February 2024 and was looking at eleven programs, implemented between 2011 and 2022. Within this timespan a total of eleven (11) projects were implemented under the SSF funding mechanism. The evaluation covered eight (8) projects, with primary data collection taking place in four (4) country programs. Due to various reasons, not least the political situation in the Middle East, it was not possible to travel to Lebanon and the data collection was largely carried out with the help of online interviews.

Together with the long implementation terms of usually three consecutive projects with three year duration each, the three-level model (macro-meso-micro) is a characteristic of the BMZ's social structure funding (SSF). In particular, the macro level often appears to be somewhat challenging, as this has to do with political and legislative aspects at the respective national level, and can often be influenced by SSF programs only to a limited extent.

The following illustration shows a model of the operating principle:

Macro level	National system or society level
Meso level	Level of organizations, institutions and networks
Micro level	Measures with model character at target groups' level

In addition to the project contents and activities of the respective levels, especially the linkage and synchronization between the different levels in particular, and their logical linkage were closely examined during this evaluation - in view of the longer-term overall impact of the projects and programs.

Where other German SSF organizations first have to find or establish operational structures in the partner countries, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (SNS) are already in place in 191 countries worldwide -- albeit with very different capabilities and capacities.

The following table shows the GRC projects examined, whereby the first four were visited during the evaluation[1].

Country/Region	Project/Program Title
Somalia Country Program	Enabling the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) to increase Resilience of Somali communities.
Latin America Regional Program	Institutional strengthening of Red Cross Societies in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia.
MENA Regional Program	Assisting community-based institutional structures for conflict-sensitive disaster-preparedness and enhanced resilience in selected countries of the MENA region.

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[1]   The political situation in the Middle East did not allow traveling to Lebanon and the data collection was thus largely carried out with the help of online interviews only.

Bangladesh/Myanmar Regional Program	Strengthening the disaster risk management (DRM) structures and capacities in Bangladesh and Myanmar.
Central Asia Regional Program	Strengthening the Red Crescent structures in Central Asia in their function as national aid organizations for vulnerable population groups.
Mozambique Country Program	Support for rural communities in Disaster risk reduction for extreme natural events in Mozambique.
Togo Country Program	Institutional strengthening of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation capacities in Togo.
Uganda Country Program	Increasing the importance and capacity of the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) as a national aid organization supporting the refugee response in Northern Uganda.

The selection of the four countries for primary data collection, to be examined in-depth and based on field visits, had been done by GRC according to the following criteria:

- Regional nature of project (to gauge cross-country cooperation)
- Thematic field of interest or unique thematic field
- Completed at least one phase by 2022
- Possibility of implementing learnings in running SSF program
- Cooperation with Host National Societies (HNSs)
- Region
- Access and presence.

II.   Purpose and key questions of the evaluation

The key objective of this strategic evaluation was (i) a specific organizational learning for GRC and involved National Societies (NS) with regards to strategic planning and implementation of SSF programs, and (ii) it also aimed at contributing to improving the planning and implementation of ongoing and upcoming SSF programs and projects, as well as (iii) identifying factors for sustainability of outcomes and impacts of SSF projects.

Since 2017/2018, a more systematic approach in the planning of new SSF programs has been applied by GRC, aiming at an increased exchange between SSF program managing staff in different countries. Another positive aspect represents the logframes, which clearly and systematically distinguish the three intervention levels - micro-meso-macro.

The following users of the evaluation are named in the ToR:

- GRC International Cooperation staff, HQ and field, foremost members of Team 61 (Operations) but also other teams involved in planning and implementation of SSF programmes;
- Host National Society management and staff involved in planning and implementation of SSF programmes;
- BMZ, division in charge of SSF grant recipients/evaluation unit.

The core of the ToR have been the following 18 evaluation questions (EQs), formulated according to the OECD DAC criteria. In consultation with GRC, these questions were further specified in the course of the evaluation. Already in the technical offer for this evaluation and again in the inception report, it was suggested to answer the EQs systematically in a separate chapter of the evaluation report.

III.   Evaluation design and methodology

Altogether, the evaluation cycle was ultimately divided into three phases, the inception phase, the implementation of the evaluation in-countries phase, and the reporting phase. The focus was on the planned visits to initially four SSF programs that have been implemented and/or are currently implemented.

The Inception Report finally defined the methodological approach of the field visits, based on a review of existing project documents, thus including the results of the first documentary phase.

The first documentary phase showed the need for some adjustments. It was therefore suggested to supplement the desk review with interviews of about one hour each with the responsible GRC country managers in order to be able to understand the respective project processes more quickly. Besides the overview of the logframes of the eleven SSF projects/programs, as well interviews with thematic key GRC staff took place.

In preparation for the various country visits, a list of discussion partners and groups was drawn up by the evaluator in each case and sent to the respective country teams. They then developed a preliminary agenda for the field visits along their ideas and the respective feasibility and communicated it before the evaluator was leaving Germany. Before and after each country visit an online briefing and debriefing meeting with GRC and country staff was held.

The fine-tuning of each visit was then done together with the particular project teams within a joint briefing on site. At the beginning of each field visit, the view and assessment of the particular project team was first ascertained in a detailed discussion - in the group but also with individual team members.

It was agreed that the field work should be based primarily on three instruments:

- Discussions with the project teams of the Sister National Societies (SNS) at headquarters and branches;
- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with intermediaries and beneficiaries.

Within focus group discussions with final beneficiaries a participatory approach, constant involvement of the project team and regular feedback were self-evident. Focus groups were composed in a more or less homogeneous manner, avoiding different internal levels of hierarchy. In addition, if suitable, discussions with female and male groups were organised separately.

Already during the desk phase, it was decided to conduct interviews with the GRC country managers in Berlin for all eight pre-selected projects. Finally, all interviewees described the respective project objectives as fully relevant. These assessments were also reviewed again during the country visits and confirmed the results shown in the table below. Since according to statements of all country managers interviewed, the macro level has so far been described as the least achieved target level, in-depth interviews have been conducted in particular on government/ministries' and on the management levels of the SNS.

Ranking 1 to 10 (10 is best and 1 is poor)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
micro								▬	▬	▬
meso						▬	▬	▬		
macro					▬	▬	▬			
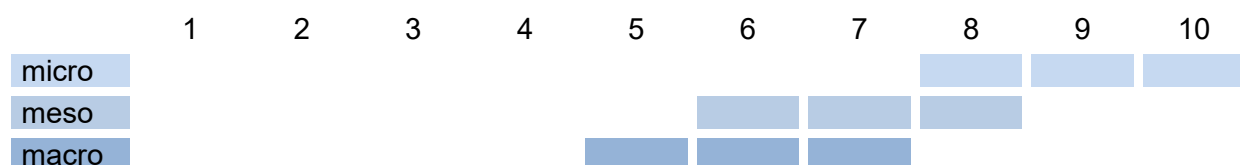
Altogether a total of 21 interviews were conducted on TEAMS within this evaluation cycle, which can be found in annex 2 of the main report.

IV.   Key findings and conclusions

General remarks

1. The German Red Cross (GRC) is a comparatively new member of the group of SSF implementing organizations and is only represented there since 2010. The GRC projects were therefore not part of the evaluation commissioned by the BMZ in 2010. A kind of internal stocktaking and conceptual review of the practiced concepts therefore seems appropriate after this time.

2. In contrast to other SSF implementers, who first have to look for and/or build up their partner structures in the project countries abroad, the Red Cross has sister national societies (SNS), with different capabilities, almost everywhere in the world.

3. Legally, the GRC is the National Society of the Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany and a voluntary aid organization of the German authorities in the humanitarian field. The specific German Red Cross Law applies exclusively in Germany, and the German mandate goes far beyond the function known as "auxiliary role" and as the respective roles of the SNS abroad.

Promotion of social structures (SSF) and the three-level model

4. Even though the GRC emphasizes that the eligibility criteria for SSF projects have changed since 2011 (in particular the 2021 guidelines), the official SSF definition of the BMZ also calls for the work of social structure providers (SSF) to strengthen self-help and the initiative of civil society, and to promote the participation of disadvantaged population groups[2]. This requirement focuses primarily on the micro-level of the SSF projects with their three-level model[3].

5. Looking at the macro level of the projects examined, ultimately two groups of activities can be found that are sometimes both visible at the same time:

    o Political advocacy, including conferences, round table discussions, meetings and/or workshops, media events etc. which, among other things, have the effect of achieving strong visibility in the respective public.

    o Measures to negotiate with the particular governments certain rights and mandates, sometimes also with the option of new income-generating measures (e.g. operation of blood banks, laboratories, clinics, ambulance transports, regulatory tasks at major mass events, etc.).

6. Per definition (see chapter 4) all of the projects under consideration are strongly aimed at strengthening the national societies' own organizational structures (meso level). Sometimes - particularly in the case of regional projects - the proportion of the projects' potential invested in this appears disproportionately high compared to activities at the micro level.

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[2] See: https://www.bmz.de/de/service/lexikon/sozialstrukturtraeger

[3] And even if the aforementioned requirements are considered "outdated" by the GRC, they have been consistently present in four SSF evaluations, carried out by the evaluator since 2019 in Uganda, Laos and Cambodia.

Nature of the GRC SSF projects under consideration

7. All eight projects/programs examined have mentioned the strengthening of national socie-ties already in the project title - with the exception of Mozambique, where this component is, however, as well a project goal. The difference to other evaluated SSF projects of (4) other implementers lies in the fact that there the strengthening of partner structures was ultimately practiced as an instrument for achieving concrete predefined development goals, whereas in the present case the focus is more on strengthening partner structures as such - for eventual emergencies.

8. There are ultimately two SSF project types at the GRC:

    o   Projects that (also) pursue clearly defined technical development goals[4] (e.g. WASH, agriculture, climate change adaptation, infrastructure, etc.) in order to "improve the par-ticipation of disadvantaged population groups" (e.g. in Mozambique, Somalia, Togo, and Uganda) (focus on micro level).

    o   And there are others (regional projects) whose objectives are sometimes to a large extent the inherent strengthening of a NS and in particular the volunteer structures (e.g. Colombia) to strengthen the national disaster risk management structures (focus on meso level).

    In Africa, the focus on the micro level is significantly stronger than in Asia and in Latin America.

9. The four SSF country projects (all in Africa) pursue a clearly defined technical development goal.

10. Compared to the country projects (with their technical development goals), the regional projects focus far more on training, on volunteers and their support. The strengths of the GRC-SSF regional projects lies in their potential, to provide support at very short notice in the event of catastrophic and disaster events, especially with a large number of volunteers, and as a humanitarian organization (preparedness for crisis).

11. Working as a "development agency" - and the technical activities of the projects in Africa at the micro level allow this designation in full - requires advanced technical expertise. This is not always sufficiently available compared to professional development organizations. This assessment is the result of several discussions with representatives of NGOs, working specifically on CCA (e.g. Care in Bangladesh and Welthungerhilfe in Somalia)[5].

Regional SSF projects

12. Among the projects examined, there are also four projects (two of which were visited in Bangladesh and Colombia) that are referred to as regional projects and implement activi-ties in several countries at the same time[6].

13. These regional projects now seem to be the preferred project type at the GRC. This as-sessment was repeatedly communicated by GRC employees in Berlin and abroad. In par-ticular, the GRC officer for strategy development, based in Kuala Lumpur, emphasized in an online interview the increasing pressure from donors for (i) larger, (ii) regionally oriented projects, (iii) implemented in consortia of several implementing organizations. Officially, the GRC speaks about a mix of single country and multi-country projects.

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4   Just as it is done by "traditional" development agencies in the NGO sector.

5   In addition, the evaluator has also been working in the field of climate sound agriculture for more than 30 years and developed as well two project concepts for the GRC during this time.

6   Lebanon, as part of the MENA regional project, was also scheduled to be visited, but this was not possible due to the current political situation. An attempt was made to obtain as much information as possible using online interviews.

14. The advantages of regional projects are mentioned (i) with possible synergy effects, (ii) exchange opportunities, (iii) the better use of so-called lessons learned, and (iv) the more economical use of financial resources (especially personnel).

15. Of the four regional projects examined, the two in Bangladesh/Myanmar and the MENA regional project in particular do not meet these requirements. Ultimately, only limited added value was found in these regional connections of different countries. Even if the aspects mentioned above (conclusion 14) that speak in favor of regional projects could not be fully recorded in the case of the MENA program, due to the online interviews (instead of a country visit) , the advantages of this set-up were only seen to a very limited extent, and in the case of Bangladesh/Myanmar not at all.

Project management and organization

16. Practically all SSF projects are accompanied by an expatriate delegate (or a GRC country representative). The tasks of the delegates lie mainly in financial controlling and management, usually not in technical expertise and support[7] (e.g. in sectors like agriculture, climate change, WASH, infrastructure, etc.).

17. The deployment of expatriate delegates is undisputedly an essential measure for the quality assurance of projects. However, the expenditures can quickly amount to a third of an available budget. The dilemma is well known and also affects almost all implementing organizations abroad.

18. The true understanding of what the Red Cross actually is and wants to be was (and still is) not really clear to the evaluator within this evaluation. Some of the National Societies examined can be viewed as humanitarian organizations. The designation as a development agency is strictly rejected. However, a look at the logframes of all African SSF country projects clearly shows that all of them act as development agencies at the micro level. And it can stay that way. Only in terms of self-definition and self-image more clarity should be achieved.

19. Altogether, the meso-level appears to be well understood and well organized in all examined projects, especially with regard to knowledge transfer.

20. Training courses in which the acquired knowledge of the participants is passed on to third parties, who in turn pass this on to fourth parties (so-called cascade trainings), pose a specific problem: there is a high risk that such trainings end up with something rather different than what was intended at the beginning[8] (applied in Bangladesh, Columbia, MENA etc.)

21. In some SSF projects under consideration, the objectives change between the different phases. Often only the intervention zones change. As best practice models can be mentioned Colombia and Bangladesh, where substantial as well as regional changes - with regard to an exit strategy during the last three-year phase - are particularly visible.

22. In general, the applied wording in the GRC project documents is stamped by a large number of abbreviations, acronyms and very abstract key terms. (e.g. with the term "disaster" in the context of Bangladesh one can find CBDRM-Community Based Disaster Risk Management, CBDRR-Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction, DDM-Department of Disaster Management, DMC-Disaster Management Committee, DRM-Disaster Risk Management, DRR-Disaster Risk Reduction etc.) Altogether, the GRC SSF project documents are

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[7] One exception is the project in Mozambique, where it was reported that the delegate was a proven expert in tropical agriculture.

[8] Cascade training is a way of efficiently training many people, especially in large programs or organizations. A group of master trainers are trained on a topic, then they train smaller groups on the same topic, and so on, until all necessary staff have been trained. The main weakness of the approach is the distortion of the messages transferred during the training, because they are passed down through many different levels of personnel. The intended messages are often altered and their effects are diluted through miscommunication and different interpretations of the same messages.

full of these sector-related technical terms, which make it difficult to understand what specific activities are being referred to.

23. Presumably as a result of intensive training, the logframes of all GRC SSF projects, without exception, follow the assignment of results and activities to the three levels (micro-meso-macro). On the other hand, (i) indicators used are not always meaningful, (ii) terminology used is often not uniform and (iii) the descriptions of planned activities only give a limited impression of what is actually to be done[9].

V.   Major recommendations and lessons learned

General remarks

1. The structural improvement of the respective RC national societies is a core objective of SSF promotion (meso level), which is also well covered in all the projects considered. However, organizational strengthening should not become an exclusive end in itself for the SSF projects and sometimes more visible activities on the ground (micro level) would be desirable.

2. Strengthening self-help and the participation of disadvantaged population groups as fundamental aspects of SSF projects should be more visible in at least some GRC SSF projects. (The GRC takes a different view here than the evaluator, who has, however, carried out evaluations of four SSF projects of other project executing agencies in recent years.)

Promotion of social structures (SSF) and the three-level model

3. The macro level of GRC SSF projects is generally considered to be the weakest by far. This is partly a systemic problem of the SSF concept, but nevertheless the macro level targeting should be planned in more detail by designing both, concrete goals and the necessary steps to achieve them. (e.g. celebration of the International Volunteer Day should not represent a macro level activity).

4. At the macro level in particular, lobby and advocacy work is seen as important. However, every national society must also be able to make a "financial living". Thus, there should also be more systematic and persistent negotiations with government agencies for the awarding of income-generating activities[10].

5. Some national societies also carry out numerous other projects on behalf of different donors in parallel with SSF projects (e.g. 49 projects in Bangladesh). In the interest of transparency, the implementation of SSF programs should continue to be clearly kept separate from other humanitarian, transitional and/or development projects.

6. When transferring knowledge (meso level), increasing attention should also be paid to the use of modern and, where possible, online-based tools and techniques -, without neglecting classroom and/or face-to-face courses.

7. When practical/technical development goals are planned (micro level), sufficient and continuous professional expertise on the ground should be taken into account (e.g. when working with the farmer field school approach (FFS) a consistent presence for at least one agricultural growth cycle is essential). The reference to relevant technical expertise being available at GRC is of little relevance in this context.

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[9]   All of the aspects mentioned have already been addressed at various points in the report.
[10]   See e.g. chapter 5.4, Impact and the example of Columbia in the answer to question 9.

Nature of the GRC SSF projects under consideration

8. In contrast to other SSF implementers, Red Cross has sister national societies (SNS) almost everywhere in the world. And in the respective partner countries, the SNS have decentralized structures in the form of branches and/or district offices. These existing widespread decentralized RC structures should continue to be intensively used as a corporate advantage over INGOs.

9. GRC project proposals should be formulated more clearly and comprehensibly and make explain to the reader what should be done where, by whom, when and why.

10. Continuous recruitment, training and retaining of volunteers appears to be a key component of RC projects, which should be maintained as a central added value.

11. However, in addition to training and further education, concrete activities of volunteers should also play an important role in view of gaining practical professional experience (e.g. implementation of social micro projects such as in Colombia and Bangladesh)

12. In the run-up to their planning, regional projects should be assessed according to a catalogue of key criteria. These should include questions such as:
    o What is the added value of a regional set-up? (Effectiveness)
    o To what extent does a project concept make equal sense in several countries? (Relevance and Coordination)
    o Is the financing of a regional project more cost-efficient? (Efficiency)
    o Is a uniform overall management ensured? (Coordination)

13. Technical development components (particularly with regard to investments in hardware, e.g. seeds or infrastructure) make projects more expensive in the end. These elements are pursued far less in regional programs than within country projects. Accordingly, regional programs seem at first glance to be cheaper, but at what price? Further discussions for an appropriate balance between "software" and "hardware" components of projects are recommended.

14. Overall, regional programs focus more on internal strengthening of RCRC structures and on further education and training components (meso level). Country projects include more development related activities on micro level. Further internal discussions and evaluations of the respective pros and cons appear to make sense - regardless of what is apparently propagated by the donor BMZ.

15. The budgets of the regional projects - with the exception of the MENA project - are not several times higher than those of country projects. As a result, the available budgets per country are significantly lower than the ones of a country project.

16. The defined SSF objectives at the micro level should be given greater emphasis, particularly in regional projects. Because, regardless of different definitional understanding - with more or less reference to poverty reduction and vulnerability - the micro level is still an integral part of SSF projects.

Project management and organization

17. SSF projects must be applied for by the GRC and the GRC is also fully liable to the BMZ. Wherever possible, project implementation should be based on partnership principles, but essential and/or also controversial decisions, particularly with regard to efficiency and effectiveness, must be clearly taken by the GRC.

18. Every project concept must be based first and foremost on efficient implementation criteria and priorities should not be sacrificed to local/regional proportional representation.

19. In general, personnel costs appear too high (over 50% in each case). In addition to the option of allocating even more personnel costs on a pro rata basis, intensive coaching of

local finance staff on site could also reduce the permanent presence of delegates – at least to a certain extent.

20. Avoiding the excessive use of abstract keywords, meta-terms and abbreviations in project proposals would be helpful.

21. The logframes, structured according to the three-level model of the SSF projects, represent a major step forward. In addition, a more standardized terminology (outcome or result?) would also be helpful, as would more qualitatively formulated indicators.