

From Evidence and Learning to Steering

Documentation on Swiss Church Aid's strategy and achievements related to monitoring, evaluation, learning.

Zürich/Lausanne, May 2021

Why Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Matter

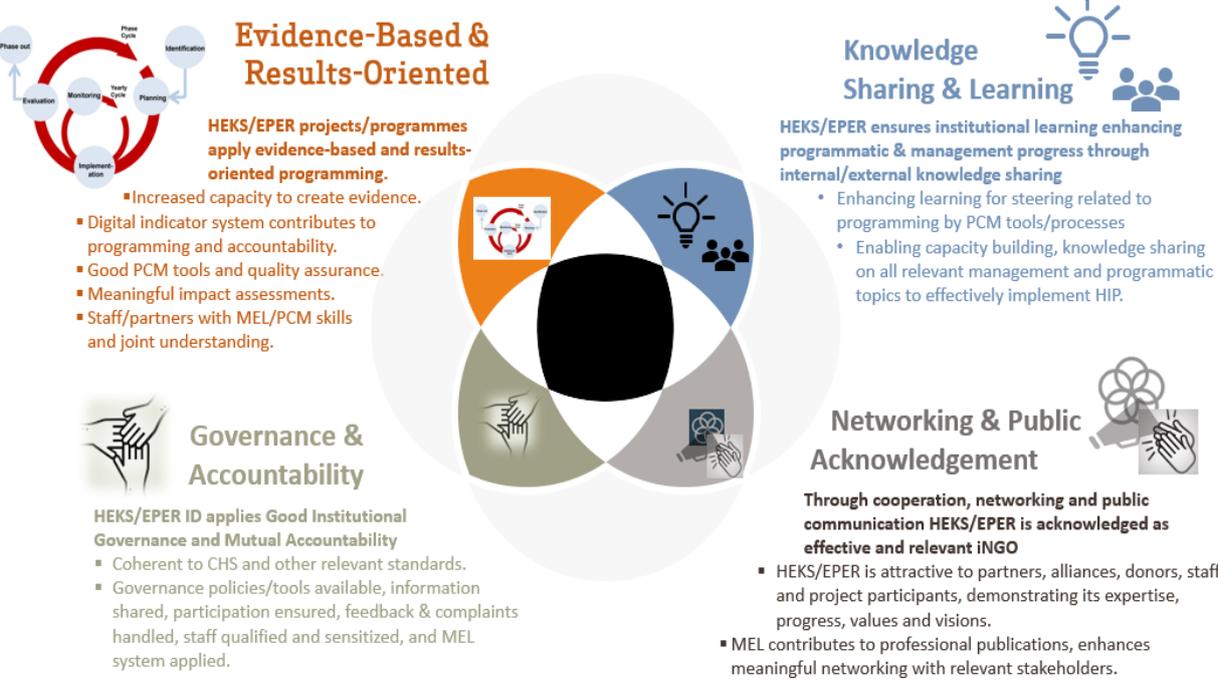
Global MEL challenges

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, but distinctively different requirements of the general public and donors for NGOs to show results, progress and impact for accountability and learning purposes. This trend is an opportunity for NGOs to invest in MEL, improve 'Learning 4 Steering', contribute to the **Agenda 2030** and its central pledge of 'leaving no one behind', and adapt their strategy and implementation accordingly.

At the same time, the context of development cooperation and humanitarian aid in an increasingly complex and multipolar world is dynamic and sometimes contradictory and messy. This makes it difficult to illustrate and analyse progress in a simple and understandable way. Recent global trends such as digitalisation, private donor engagement, the GPEDC¹, and the pledge for impact investing, financial returns and value for money have influenced how NGOs, governments and donors understand MEL. There is still significant pressure for rigorous impact measurement, such as Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs). However, many donors, universities, research centres, think tanks, and NGOs encourage more flexible approaches such as adaptive management and 'theory of change'-based approaches, which allow real-time analysis and course correction in the project and programme steering.

How HEKS/EPER responds

The international programme (HIP 21-24) sets the global vision, and a results framework, to which country programmes and projects contribute with their specific objectives. Each level manages its planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, learning, steering/adaptation and reporting cycle. The Programme Cycle Management (PCM) sets clear responsibilities, timings and requirements. In the very complex and dynamic context of international cooperation, HEKS/EPER relies on a global MEL system based on four pillars marked by the four outcomes summarised in the graphic below:



HEKS/EPER MEL strategy: 4 fields of work in the phase 2020-2022.

¹ GPEDC: UN Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation: <http://effectivecooperation.org/>

The MEL vision is ...

... to maintain and further develop a high-quality MEL system and tools **promoting evidence-based and results-oriented programming and adaptive management**. The **Learning 4 Steering** approach allows for effective, relevant and high-quality HEKS/EPER International Programme implementation with the ultimate goal to cover the needs and foster the participation of people and communities.

In addition, institutional efforts in the field of MEL foster **good institutional governance** and **mutual accountability**, demonstrate progress and impact and contribute to high **acknowledgement** by project participants, partners, civil society and donors as a professional and trustworthy organisation. HEKS/EPER participates in **networks and alliances** to build and manage strategic cooperation to foster participation, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, and increase effectiveness, visibility, relevance and systemic change.

All HEKS/EPER programmes and projects are **planned** based on risk-informed, gender-sensitive context analysis and internal as external evidence to increase relevance, effectiveness, and success probability. During **implementation**, it is paramount to constantly observe, analyse, learn and adapt strategies and activities to the changing context to ensure progress and impact.

HEKS/EPER's transparent **reports** serve **mutual accountability** towards donors, project participants and the public by documenting progress, effectiveness and sustainability. Reporting includes annual reports at the project, country and global level and annual thematic factsheets. This yearly review facilitates HEKS/EPER and its partners to constantly adapt their strategies and activities to maximise the benefit of the people and communities.

Once interventions have been running for a few years, internal and external specialists perform **evaluations** or comprehensive scientific **impact assessments** of key projects, programmes, topics or approaches to examine their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. HEKS/EPER has a specific *evaluation policy* and *impact assessment policy* to understand the main changes and the contribution/attribution of HEKS/EPER. Evaluation and impact assessment reports, policy briefs and management responses are published, and evidence is included in the following phase or interventions in other contexts as appropriate.

Undertaking professional MEL needs time, resources and qualified staff and partners, both demonstrating ownership towards meaningful activities and skills thanks to internal trainings, external expertise and their own experience. IT systems and an approach of 'communication 4 development' shall provide instruments enabling data analysis, knowledge sharing and capacity building. The emphasis lies on digital and online tools to foster worldwide exchange and cooperation.

Promising MEL practices

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

One of HEKS/EPER's essential elements of the global evidence base is the digital key indicators system. The real-time operating system is developed for digital data collection and analysis. The system assists in monitoring and measuring performance, demonstrates evidence-based results from projects and programmes, improves efficiency and accountability on the project, country and global level.

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

Implementing a digital system improves data quality, facilitates progress measurement, increases visibility, transparency and reduces analysis costs.

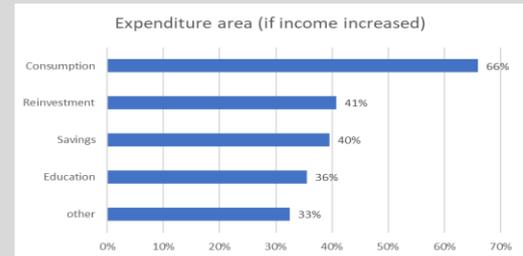
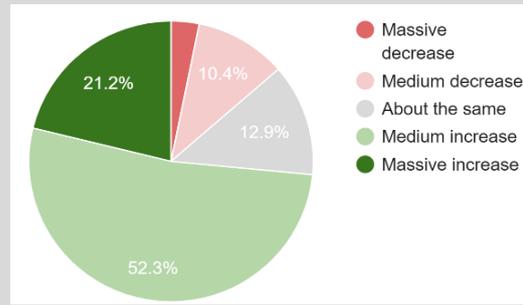
How HEKS/EPER uses its digital key indicators system – illustrated through the HEKS/EPER key indicator ‘self-perceived income’

Based on data from 29 projects in 12 countries, **73.5% of the targeted beneficiaries** state that their income increased in 2019 (52.3% medium increase and 21.2% massive increase) due to project interventions. The global target for 2019 was 42%.

Out of the persons stating a positive change in their incomes, **nearly 63% explain it by increased yields/outputs** and about 56% by increasing market prices.

The additional income **was used for consumption purposes by about 66%** of interviewed people, **41% have re-invested** the money, **40% used it for savings** and **36% for education purposes** (respondents could select multiple answers).

About **14%** of the sampled individuals stated a **decrease in their incomes**, mainly due to decreased production because of diseases, unfavourable climate factors, insect attacks and decreased market prices.



Capitalisation of experiences (CapEx) of the India country programme

For 60 years, HEKS/EPER has been working with marginalised groups such as Dalit and Adivasis in four southern states of India. The main focus of the India country programme was on access to land and rural development. HEKS/EPER decided to phase out from India by the end of 2020.



India: Process of the CapEx of the country programme

To capture the wealth of experience gained during the implementation of the India country programme, HEKS/EPER commissioned a Capitalisation of Experience (CapEx). The purpose of the CapEx was to contribute to shaping recommendations for future HEKS/EPER interventions. As the COVID-19 situation in India escalated about the time the CapEx review commenced, it was deemed unsafe for the consultant team to visit the HEKS/EPER project areas and hold discussions with various stakeholder groups. Therefore, the CapEx was conducted almost entirely online, except for one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) held by the HEKS/EPER India Country Director. The CapEx returned a large number of recommendations for key areas of intervention of the HEKS/EPER India country programme: (1) land mobilisation & land development, (2) the project implementation set-up known as ‘Forum approach’, (3) capacity building at the grassroots level & community engagement, and (4) income generation.

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Document Review Annual Reports, Evaluations, Literature, etc.
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Online Survey (33/42 responses) Questionnaire to HEKS Partners, HEKS Project Officers, HEKS Coordination staff in India + Switzerland (former + current)
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23 Interviews / 1 FGD with HEKS Partner Organisations, HEKS Staff (current + former), other stakeholders (e.g. consultants, govt officials)
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Kick off meeting + Sense making workshop with HEKS Partner Organisations

India: Data collection steps for the CapEx of the country programme

Between March and July 2020, a team of three consultants conducted an impact assessment of the '**Open Forum**' project within the Israel / Palestine country programme. The impact assessment aimed to explore **what factors influence which outcomes** and the **influence that external factors** had on achievements. The data collection and analysis process used two main analytical tools and concepts – qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and participatory assessment of development (PADev). A notable conclusion reached by this assignment is that instead of determining which pattern of conditions guarantee a result, the data collected has shed light on the issues that must be explored during the planning stage of future interventions. Indeed, rather than searching for a fool-proof model, organisations can explore the **conditions that are necessary, but insufficient on their own, to achieve a positive outcome**. Then, they can explore which factors may complement these conditions.

Impact (light) assessment of an access to land project in Senegal

Background: At HEKS/EPER, *impact* is understood as the changes *produced by* an intervention. Thus, any assessment of impact should not only describe or measure the observed changes 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**.

Objective: The objective of this particular impact evaluation was to provide learnings on the contribution of the project to securing land for the local communities – in a context of increasing land grabbing and land insecurity in the urbanisation belt of Dakar. The evaluation used the qualitative and theory-based approach of contribution analysis (Mayne 2001, 20112) to examine the **project's contribution to observable effects**. This approach seeks evidence of whether the different stages of the theory of change (TOC) of the project have occurred. Also, this approach collects data on alternative and external explanations to the project that could explain the impact.

Results: The impact evaluation found that the population sensibilisation strategy regarding land rights, land titling support, and political advocacy made plausible contributions to the impressive changes. The observed changes are considered necessary steps for securing the communities' land in the seven target municipalities. For instance, thanks to the project, **peasant proposals were integrated into the land reform document**. However, it also became clear that **political advocacy needs a long-term commitment**, as important actors in the government have blocked the land reform process up to the current day. In summary, the project's results are essential and influenced the dynamics around land in these areas in a decisive way.

HEKS/EPER and its partners also learned from this impact evaluation that **land titling and raising awareness of land rights are insufficient to counteract land grabbing**. People need to valorise their land, especially in view of water shortages and climate impacts. In addition, an increased focus on local governments capacities in land governance is needed in the next project phase.

Policy brief IA Senegal, May 2020: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15e3cfBZKewLiB_nxsGelO5XxAOC5yEz/view



HEKS/EPER Working Paper Series Access to Land - Policy Brief

Comment sécuriser le foncier au Sénégal

Une Analyse de Contribution de l'EPER en collaboration avec swisspeace

Chercheurs : Stefan Bächtold (swisspeace), Kader Fanta Ngom et Maimour Ngalane (consultants locaux)

Introduction

Le Sénégal observe une pression de plus en plus accrue sur les terres ; l'axe entre les grandes villes -Dakar-Thiès-Mbour- est particulièrement touché. Dans cette zone, le phénomène de

Recommandations-clés

- 1 Le plaidoyer politique collectif de la société civile a permis d'atteindre une étape décisive dans la réforme foncière en intégrant les propositions des petits paysans.
- 2 Le plaidoyer doit se poursuivre sur le long terme, s'adapter au contexte et être ouvert aux fenêtres d'opportunités. Le processus de réforme foncière est actuellement bloqué par le gouvernement.
- 3 La titrisation et la sensibilisation sur le foncier ne suffisent pas pour

² Mayne, J (2001). Addressing Attribution Through Contribution Analysis: Using Performance Measures Sensibly. Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 16(1), 1-24. Mayne, J. (2011). Contribution Analysis: Addressing cause and effect. In R. Schwartz, K. Forss & M. Marra (eds.), *Evaluating the Complex: Attribution, Contribution, and Beyond* (pp. 53-96). New York: Transaction.

Achievements & Perspectives

The original MEL strategy 2014-2016 was designed to renew the PCM system, including necessary guidelines, policies, templates and tools, and a key indicator system with a simple digital data tool. In the 2017-2019 MEL strategy, 'Knowledge Sharing' was incorporated into the MEL unit. The HEKS/EPER MEL unit positioned itself as one of the **leading MEL agency in Switzerland**, including the advanced digital HEKS/EPER Key Indicator (HKI) system and performance assessment and quality assurance system.

In 2019/2020, HEKS/EPER performed a **meta-analysis to evaluate the quality of the evaluation methods and reports** from 2016 to 2018. Results show that recommendations and evidence of these evaluations have been well taken up in the planning of the following phase, and standard evaluation practice has improved to some extent with better quality of TOR, the introduction of inception reports, and more management responses. Accordingly, HEKS/EPER also developed a new impact assessment policy based on an experience capitalisation of the five already conducted impact assessment since 2014, also adhering to the OECD-DAC definition of impact.

Achievements 2020

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

1 ongoing and **1** completed **impact assessments** in **2** countries.

1 **global** digital roll-out of HEKS/EPER new International Division strategy (HIP 21-24)

83% projects using key indicators digital system

10'500 interviews conducted by our partners

In 2020, in 14 countries, 24 mostly external project and programme **evaluations** were completed, and 2 **impact assessments** were active, 1 ongoing, and 1 completed. Most evaluations were end-of-phase to enable analysis and learning for the next programme phase. 9 had an explicit management response document outlining the steering decisions. HEKS/EPER will review the proposals 2021 to check if evaluations' findings were part of the evidence used to identify and plan the follow-up phase of the other projects. 83% of DC projects use the digital HKI system, which is a great result, given that new partners joined HEKS/EPER and it takes some time to introduce those. Compared to last year, where 17'000 interviews were held with project participants, in 2020 only 10'500 face-to-face interviews were done, mainly due to COVID-19 measures which restricted access of partners and HEKS/EPER offices to the people on the ground.

HKI digital system for monitoring, performance assessment and analysis

Since the introduction of the digital monitoring system in 2017, significant efforts were put into capacity building, professionalising implementation, promoting the ownership and learning culture at all levels: project, country, globally and also within thematic priorities. The feedback received from system users after two years of intensive running was thoroughly processed. As a result, extended analysis features were introduced in 2019. At the same time, staff rotations and the introduction of new features required additional trainings efforts. Data quality and reliability remain a challenge. Auxiliary tools, such as checklists, focal points assignment, etc., need to be developed, tested and implemented in the coming years. In 2019, the HKI digital system was distinguished by the Swiss Digital Economic Award as a finalist in the 'Digital Transformation Award – Government and NGO sector'.

In 2020, the MEL unit started the **revision of the HEKS/EPER Key Indicators (HKIs)** to match the requirements of the HIP 21-24 with new outcomes and outputs. The amendments are based on the partner and country office staffs' feedback. The MEL unit also launched a webinar series on effectively choosing, using, and applying HKIs for 'learning 4 steering'. The HKI digital system was updated technically and contextually to flexibly facilitate various data collection, monitoring and analysis needs of all stakeholders.

HEKS/EPER was acknowledged by SDC, donors and other Swiss INGOs as an organisation that has made particular progress in digital maturity, striving for more effective results-based programming.

High standards for evaluations and impact assessments

Evaluations: In 2020, 24 evaluations were conducted in 14 countries, out of which 4 were evaluations of humanitarian aid projects. An evaluation aims to provide a credible analysis of an intervention’s results and/or processes, focusing on one or several of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria *relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact*. Evaluations enable us to learn what works and what does not. They are an important source of information for decision-making and steering processes and provide the information required for accountability towards relevant stakeholders. Evaluations complement continuous monitoring activities and contribute to HEKS/EPER’s institutional learning.

At HEKS/EPER, specific criteria determine which interventions need to be evaluated, when and whether the evaluation needs to be conducted by an external evaluator or if an internal evaluation is possible.

HEKS/EPER has introduced a **quality assurance checklist** to improve the quality of evaluations, which is used to assess the Terms of Reference, Inception Reports, and final Evaluation Reports against extensive quality criteria. These quality criteria include the suitability of the evaluation approach/design to answer the given evaluation questions or whether two or more complementary and distinct data collection methods and types of data have been used for answering the same evaluation question (i.e. triangulation).

Impact assessments: At HEKS/EPER, impact is understood as the changes *produced by* an intervention. 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.

Country & design of the impact assessment (IA)	Thematic focus	Status
Honduras	Conflict transformation, access to land	A planning workshop was conducted in 2019 to set up the project’s Theory of Change and identify a design of the IA. After completing the evaluability assessment, it was decided that an IA of this project would not be suitable at this time. Furthermore, the project won an EU tender changing the modalities of work.
Senegal: Theory-based with contribution analysis and process tracing	Access to land	Final report completed.
Palestine/Israel: Combination of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and participatory assessment of development (PADev)	Right to return, including access to land and strengthening civil society	Preparatory steps for the 2020 endline assessment, such as developing the Terms of Reference and designing the methodology, were initiated in 2019. The data collection tools were in place in March 2020, and the final report was completed in July 2020.
Bangladesh: Combination of theory-based approach (applying contribution analysis) and counterfactual approach (applying quasi-experimental design) using quantitative and qualitative methods.	Social inclusion of Dalit and Adibashi in Northwest Bangladesh	The qualitative data collection and parts of the quantitative data collection have been completed in March 2021. The data collection had to be stopped due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. Data collection will resume at a later stage.

Learning 4 steering

The **new HIP 21-24** submitted to SDC received a very positive rating from the independent assessment panel boosting HEKS/EPER staff’s motivation to working towards the vision and set outcomes coherently. Hosted by HEKS/EPER’s MEL unit, an intensive **capacity building** on the core topics of the new HIP with 6 digital webinars (planned already in 2019 before COVID-19) accompanied by 6 in-depth workshops in each

country from September to December 2020 reached more than 60 staff members. These workshops did not only increase professional knowledge yet brought the HQ and country staff closer together.

Digitalisation and ICT were already identified as key opportunity during HIP 21-24 context analysis. In 2020, they proved to be effective tools in managing programmes, bridging COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Since 2019, MEL maintains a regularly updated and often visited intranet website on Sharepoint promoting internal and external online courses, learning events, webinars, including a wide range of links to platforms for knowledge sharing and capacity building relevant for HEKS/EPER's work.

Since 2019, MEL hosts a **public website on HEKS/EPER's Institutional governance** (https://en.heks.ch/Institutional_Governance). Publishing almost all HEKS/EPER reports, factsheets and evaluations, strategies, programmatic, administrative, managerial and thematic policies and guidelines was well received by donors, partner organisations, media, public, and HEKS/EPER own staff as a pioneer practise demonstrating transparency and enabling learning. The investments in a cloud server system (operative since 2017 and accessible for all HEKS/EPER staff at HQ and in countries), in an intranet and in a webinar series on various programmatic and managerial topics during the last three years paid off in 2020. HEKS/EPER aims at further facilitating efficient, effective, CO₂-friendly, remote management of offices, partners, programmes, and projects.

Perspectives of MEL

With its new MEL strategy 2020-22, HEKS/EPER builds on the context evolution and its long-standing experiences to make MEL an inherent part of each project/programme, thanks to ongoing capacity building and joint global reflections. Main adaptations and continuations are:

- More emphasis on **supporting** staff and partners during the **planning phase** focussing on a sound **vision, LogFrame, and MEL plan** to increase the project's or programme's quality and relevance. Also, thanks to new specialised staff.
- **Modular, flexible (online) capacity building on PCM tools and MEL** for HEKS/EPER staff and contracted partner organisations. They shall be capacitated to identify, plan, implement, monitor, evaluate and learn effectively and in good quality.
- Contributing to **HEKS/EPER's public acknowledgement**, enhancing cooperation of the whole ID with research and other IC actors and supporting acquisition endeavours is a clear mandate of the MEL unit.
- Enhancing in cooperation with IDMT and controlling unit **'Good Institutional Governance', PSEAH, Mutual Accountability** with MEL being the CHS focal point enhancing CHS self-assessment.
- Revision of the results framework and the (digital) indicator system according to new HIP; and in general support IDMT and thematic advisory unit to **smooth roll-out of the following strategy**.
- **Enhancing own ICT tools for monitoring, analysing and reporting on achieved results**. Considering needs of all stakeholders, MEL develops and tailors state-of-art ICT tools for comprehensive data collection, processing and analysis.

Support ID's endeavours to intensify a **joint institutional learning culture including countries and HHQ embracing new ICT, digitalisation** (with its opportunities of remote management and knowledge sharing) and promoting **decentralisation** of capacities, competencies, tasks, etc..

This is HEKS/EPER

HEKS/EPER is the aid organisation of the Swiss protestant churches and campaigns for a more peaceful and equitable world supporting in 2020 jointly with 100 partner organisations and strategic global alliances with 143 projects in 33 countries people and communities in economic and social need, investing worldwide 37.58 million CHF.

HEKS/EPER is active in **development cooperation** ameliorating in 2020 with 16.14 M CHF the life of 205'000 people directly – indirectly, 2.63 M people were reached. HEKS focusses on access to land and resources, securing basic services, fostering agroecological production and inclusive market systems. It promoted conflict transformation and inclusive governance structures in the countries as well as social, economic and political inclusion of disenfranchised people.

With a budget of 17.49 M CHF, HEKS/EPER's **humanitarian aid** supported 3'388'000 people affected by disasters and crises with emergency aid, to save lives, restoring livelihoods and rehabilitating infrastructure. In the frame of **Church Cooperation** HEKS/EPER enabled with 3 M CHF social work of Reformed Churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East reaching out to 38'700 people. Additional 0.94 M CHF were invested in cross-sectional IC activities such as capacity building of partners and communities. **Systemic change** and the **human rights-based approach** are guiding principles, also promoting the **nexus** between humanitarian and development activities. HEKS/EPER cultivates constant dialogue with all relevant development and Government actors, protecting civil society actors and enabling them to advocate for their needs and rights.

In Switzerland, with a budget of 28.8 M CHF, HEKS/EPER supported 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 in 14 cantons.

Other HEKS/EPER publications related to 'Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning'

- HEKS/EPER (2020). Impact Assessment Policy Brief – Access to Land Senegal, Zurich, May 2020.
- HEKS/EPER (2019). Impact Assessment Policy & Guideline, Zurich, June 2019.
- HEKS/EPER (2019). Meta-Analysis of HEKS/EPER Evaluations. Zurich, November 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.

Strategies, policies, guidelines, reports published on ID's Governance Website: https://en.heks.ch/Institutional_Governance



HEKS/EPER – Swiss Church Aid

Headquarters	Phone	+41 44 360 88 00
Seminarstrasse 28	Fax	+41 44 360 88 01
Postfach	Email	info@heks.ch
8042 Zürich	Web	www.heks.ch

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