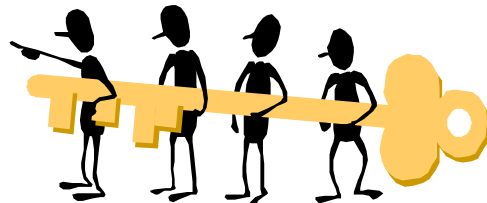
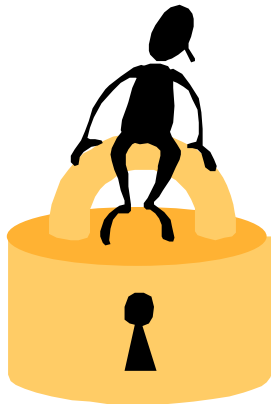




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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs  
Departamento Federal de Asuntos Exteriores

# GUIDE FOR THE RAPID APPRAISAL OF REGIONAL INITIATIVES



**BERN, SWITZERLAND  
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# GUIDE FOR THE RAPID APPRAISAL OF REGIONAL INITIATIVES

## The advantages and opportunities of working through regional initiatives

Choosing to work through a regional initiative is an important strategic choice, both for potential member institutions or country as well as for cooperating agencies.

### Regional initiatives have a strategic role in development co-operation

- Regional initiatives can help to reach critical mass and facilitate complementarity. When resources are scarce and problems are common to several countries, a regional approach can help development or research activities reach a critical mass of participants in order to come to a meaningful sharing of burdens, make more efficient use of the members' different capacities and thus reach a solution in shorter time. This has been recognised by the European Commission, which requires research proposals to include a critical mass of relevant partners within the region.
- Regional initiatives can help capitalise on specific experiences. By allowing formal and informal mechanisms of peer review as well as a certain competition between members to take place, regional initiatives make more of the individual experience of members. They also help underpin a regional "institutional memory".
- Regional initiatives can facilitate consensus building and participation. The development of a "common language" within regional initiatives allows for more efficient collaboration across national and cultural frontiers. Regional initiatives facilitate the identification and definition of common problems, as well as agreement about common approaches to solving these problems. They also allow the setting of common standards at regional level.
- Regional initiatives can make investment into development more efficient. Member institutions jointly participate in the identification of problems and selection of approaches to solving these. Significant benefits can arise from this common undertaking (simultaneous problem solving in the member institutions or countries). As long as the context is comparable and the problem shared among several countries, a regional initiative can allow considerable economies of scale and speed up the diffusion of successful solutions.
- Regional initiatives can foster empowerment. If well oriented and managed, regional initiatives emphasise the contribution and value of each member towards the common objectives. The visibility and the influence of the member institutions can thus be enhanced at the regional and at the national level. By taking a common stand, the members of a regional initiative can obtain a voice in forums in which they would not normally be heard. E.g. regional groups in large international conferences. In development agencies, we are frequently reluctant to strengthen national (or national level) institutions. However, their empowerment needs to be seen as complementary to the empowerment of the end-beneficiaries.

Based upon a study of the regional initiatives (networks, regional projects, regional programmes, etc.) in which it is involved, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has drafted the present *Guide for the Rapid Appraisal of Regional Initiatives*. The purpose of this tool is to highlight the principal risks related to various forms of regional initiatives and to suggest avenues for the resolution or avoidance of such problems.

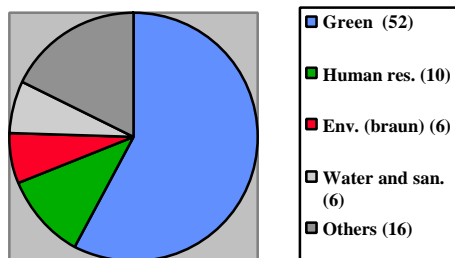
The rational underpinning the present tool is that the success of a Regional Initiative depends heavily on the **coherence between the objectives, the internal factors and the frame conditions** of the regional initiative. For this reason the questions of this Guide refer firstly to the objectives, to the internal factors and then to the frame conditions.

This tool **does not pretend to capture the whole diversity** of forms and approaches of existing regional networks and programmes. Its objective is to draw the attention of the user upon possible risks and solutions related to the main traits of the regional initiative. It should furthermore help donors in assessing the coherence between their expectations of regional initiatives, and the means provided for their support.

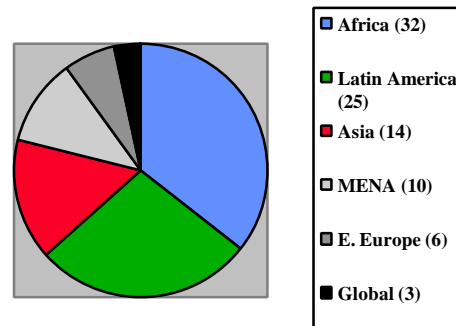
## SDC and Regional Initiatives

SDC has a long history of involvement in and support of regional initiatives. A recent study has identified 90 Regional initiatives, excluding core financing to regional or international centres of expertise. Figures 1 and 2 show how these regional initiatives are distributed thematically and regionally.

**Figure 1: Thematic distribution of Regional initiatives in which SDC is involved**



**Figure 2: Regional distribution of Regional initiatives in which SDC**



## How to use this Rapid Appraisal Guide

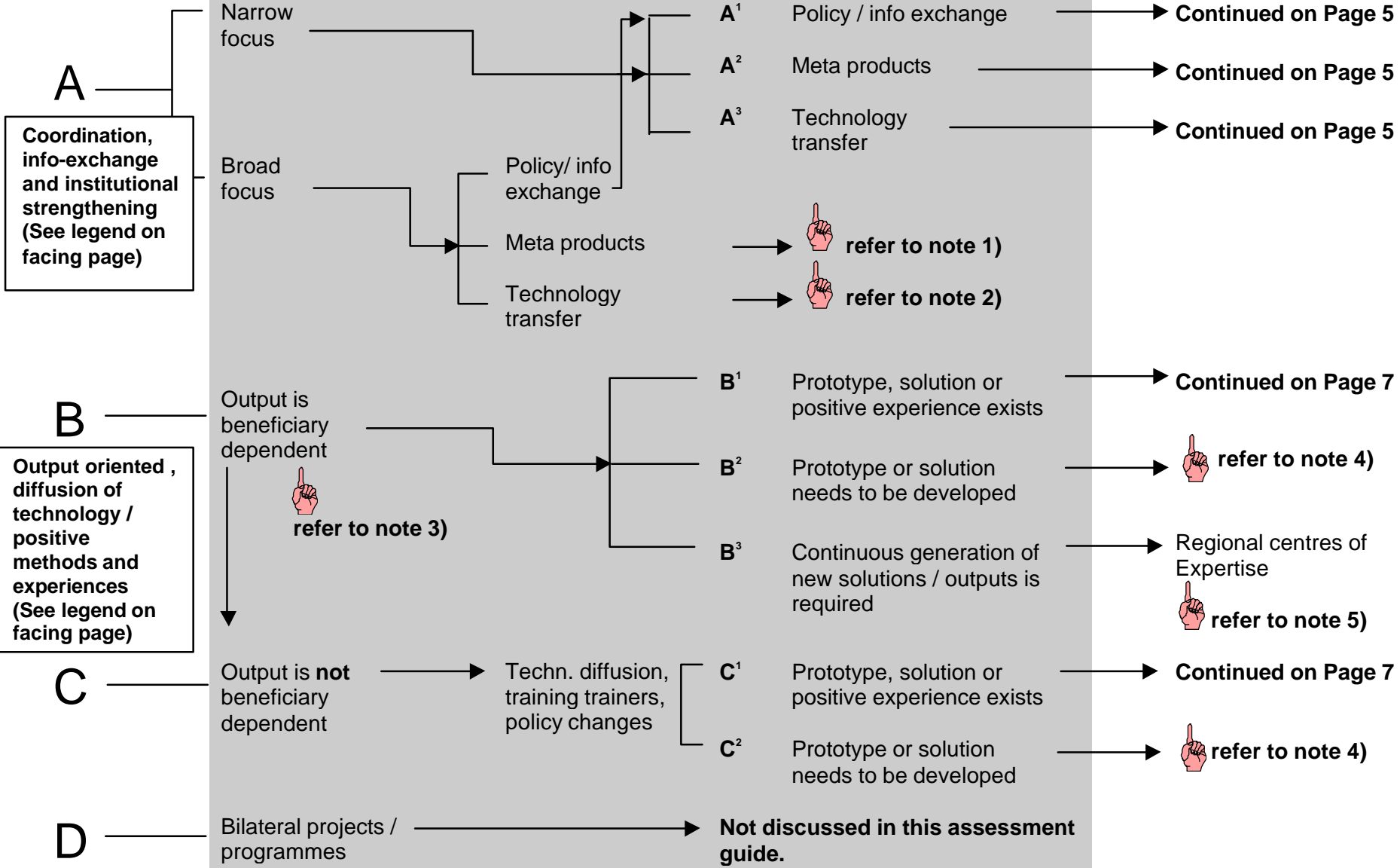
1. Obtain **background information** about the regional initiative. Obviously the more is available the higher the reliability of the assessment. However, the purpose of this tool is to facilitate a preliminary assessment to identify potential risks and critical issues, on the understanding that these would then require further verification. Typically, an SDC *Credit Proposal* should provide a sufficient basis to make this assessment.
2. **Are the preconditions for a successful project met?** The success of a regional initiatives is strongly predetermined by two factors which determine the success of any project, namely:
  - The **quality of the management** of the regional initiative, including charisma and leadership quality, as well as management tools for planing and monitoring.
  - The general **attitude of the donor agency towards the project** (its themes, its people, its institutions). It would be dishonest to pretend that a donor's attitude towards a regional initiative (or any project for that matter) is totally free of prejudices and unbiased. The personal preferences of a programme officer may strongly determine the continuation of support to a project irrespective of the objective results achieved by the latter.

If the two above-mentioned criteria can be answered positively, the analysis that follows may point to a number of critical issues without pretending to be neither exclusive nor totally comprehensive.


3. **Determine the path which best corresponds to the situation/description of the regional initiative at a given moment in time**, by using the chart and the corresponding notes. A "👉 - symbol" along the path will point to potential difficulties or to critical factors, or may redirect you towards a new path. Reaching the "☑ - symbol" would mean that the main critical issues and potential risks have been steered clear off, and that a high degree of coherence exists between objectives, internal and external factors. Frequently it will be necessary to test several paths in the guide to determine the one best describing a given regional initiative. Also changes in time or complexities within a regional initiative may make more than one path relevant for a given initiative.
4. **Notes about consequences for funding.** It was noted during the study that the duration of the donor's funding commitment is a very frequently debated issue. For the donor, financial self-sufficiency of the regional initiative is implicitly or explicitly an important objective and a proof of sustainability. At the end of each "successful path", a note preceded by the "💰 - symbol", attempts to draw a number of conclusions regarding funding implications for donor agencies.

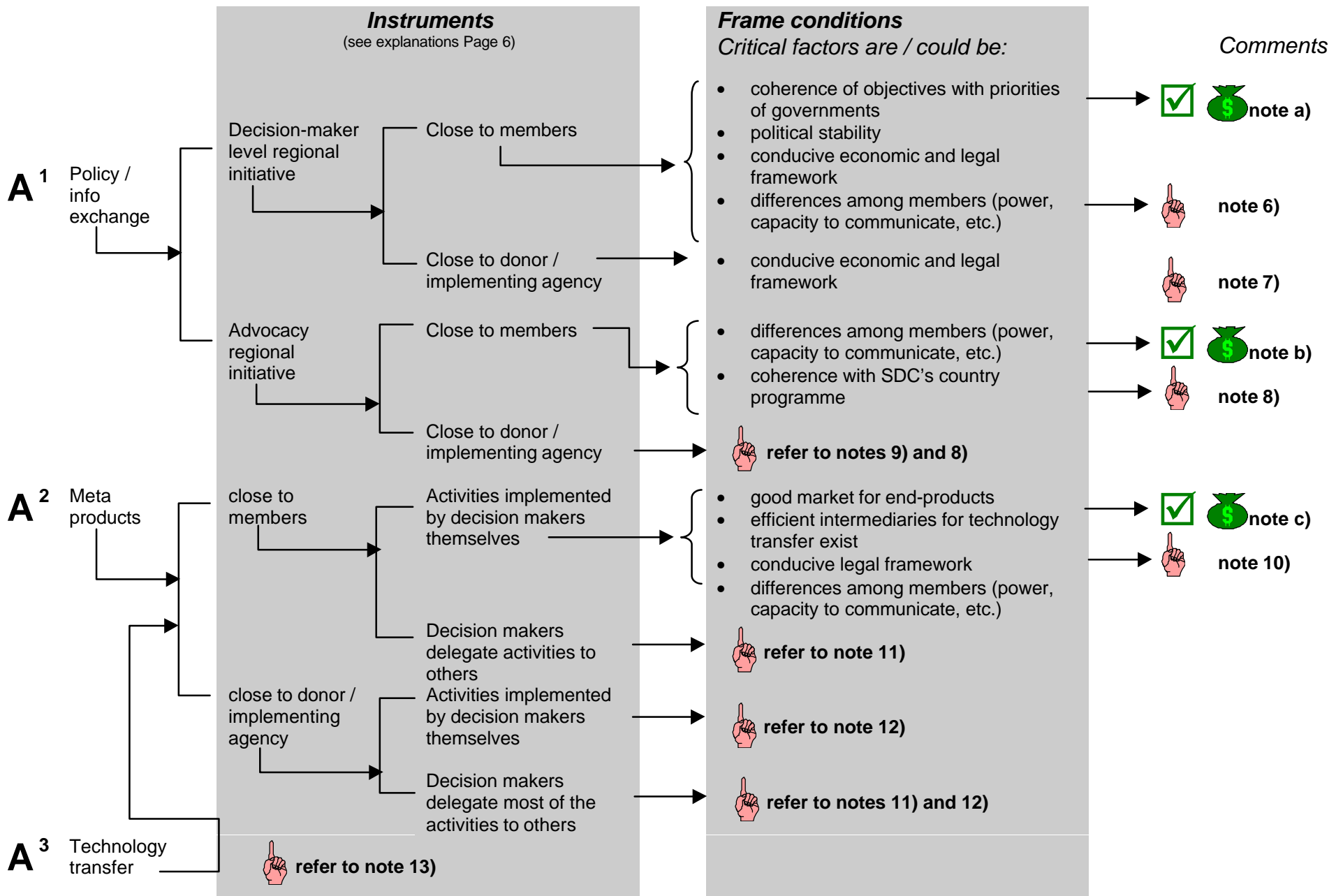
**Type of regional initiative**  
(see explanations Page 4)

**Focus and objectives**  
(see explanations Page 4)



<b>Type A</b>	Regional initiatives concentrating on information exchange, co-ordination and institutional strengthening. Low involvement in output-oriented operations.
<b>Type B</b>	Output oriented regional initiatives (generation or transfer of technologies); <u>the output is beneficiary dependent</u> - that is, the contribution or adoption by beneficiaries is essential for the success of the initiative (e.g. use of a new technology by entrepreneurs).
<b>Type C</b>	Output oriented regional initiatives in which <u>the output is not beneficiary dependent</u> – that is, the contribution or adoption by the end-beneficiaries is <b>not</b> essential for the success of the initiative (e.g. biological pest control by inundation, establishing pollution standards for imported cars, training trainers programmes, etc.).
<b>Focus</b>	Does the regional initiative focus on a specific topic (e.g. malaria, beans, training) or on complex issues (e.g. sustainable resources management)?
<b>Policy/Info</b>	Regional initiative concentrating on policy dialogue within the region, on awareness raising, advocacy, etc. implying mainly decision makers at political level
<b>Meta-products</b>	Products such as research results, methodologies, prototypes, enhanced germplasm, etc.

<b>Note 1 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
In the case of complex themes (e.g. natural resources management; rural development, urban development, etc.), achieving the "meta-products" will require more time and resources than for simple themes. It is likely that donors' commitment will decline as the expected results are delayed, especially if the regional initiative is not strongly linked to similar activities/projects at the bilateral level.	1a) Reduce the initiative to a bilateral project and restrain to countries in which good coherence with the overall bilateral programme exists. 1b) Focus the objectives to achieving results at policy/info exchange level. 1c) Provide sufficient funding to enhance level of operations and choose a mode of operation within Category B.
<b>Note 2 – diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
Same comments as under Note 1 (above), <u>but in addition</u> the link of the regional initiative to existing and effective intermediaries at the national level (NGOs, business centres at meta level, efficient extension service, private professional advisors, etc.) is essential in order to ensure impact at the target population level.	2a) Reduce the initiative to a bilateral project and restrain to countries in which coherence with donor's bilateral programme is high. Ensure intermediaries either exist or are strengthened by the project. 2b) Reduce or focus the objectives to achieving results at policy/info exchange level. 2c) Provide sufficient funding to enhance level of operations and choose a mode of operation within Cat. B.
<b>Note 3 – comment</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
For initiatives in Category B, the quantity of outputs and the level of impact are highly correlated with the operational funds being invested by the donor (as long as the strategy is right – of course). In this type of initiative, "sustainability " means that an increasing part of the operational costs are being taken care of by the project partners (members or other donors) in order to maintain the same output level. The big challenge is to avoid that the level of operations falls back when the funding agency withdraws from the project.	
<b>Note 4 – diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
The regional initiative is oriented towards concrete outputs, but the solutions or technology to produce these products still needs to be developed before diffusing them. In this case, one should distinguish and clearly separate the <u>solution finding phase</u> of the project (see 4a and 4b), from the <u>diffusion or multiplication phase</u> of the project (see 4c).	4a) If each member has something essential to contribute towards the development of the solution or the "prototype", consider a regional initiative of the Type A1, but leave sufficient control of funds to the members to avoid the problem flagged at Note 12 (on Page 6). 4b) If members have nothing essential to contribute to the development of the solution, concentrate efforts for the development of the solution <u>in one country</u> or <u>in a regional centre of expertise</u> . A regional initiative of Type A1 may be useful, as "sounding board" to ensure need orientation, testing and relevance of the solution or prototype being developed. 4c) Once the solution or the "prototype" has been developed, or the positive experience in the pilot country has been achieved, restart the path at the Letter B1 (or C1).
<b>Note 5 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
If the continuous generation or development of technological solutions or meta-products is needed, the key question to ask is whether this activity corresponds to a public or to a private good. If the development of the meta product is a public good, end-beneficiaries will not be prepared to pay for them. Long term commitment from donors will therefore be essential (see 5a and 5b). If the development of the meta-product corresponds to a private good, heavy donor involvement may distort the market for that meta-product (see 5c).	5a) Option I: The national institutions could be strengthened to become able develop the needed solutions through a combination of bilateral projects and perhaps a regional initiative of type A <sup>2</sup> . 5b) Option II: There may be a need to establish or to work through an existing regional or international centre of competence, since the long term donor involvement is most efficient in this way. 5c) If the development of the meta-product corresponds to a private good, it is worthwhile to first test the approach through a bilateral project. In any case, donor funding should only be in the form of starting funds or seed money – that is, operational costs should not be subsidised in the long term.
	See also  note f)



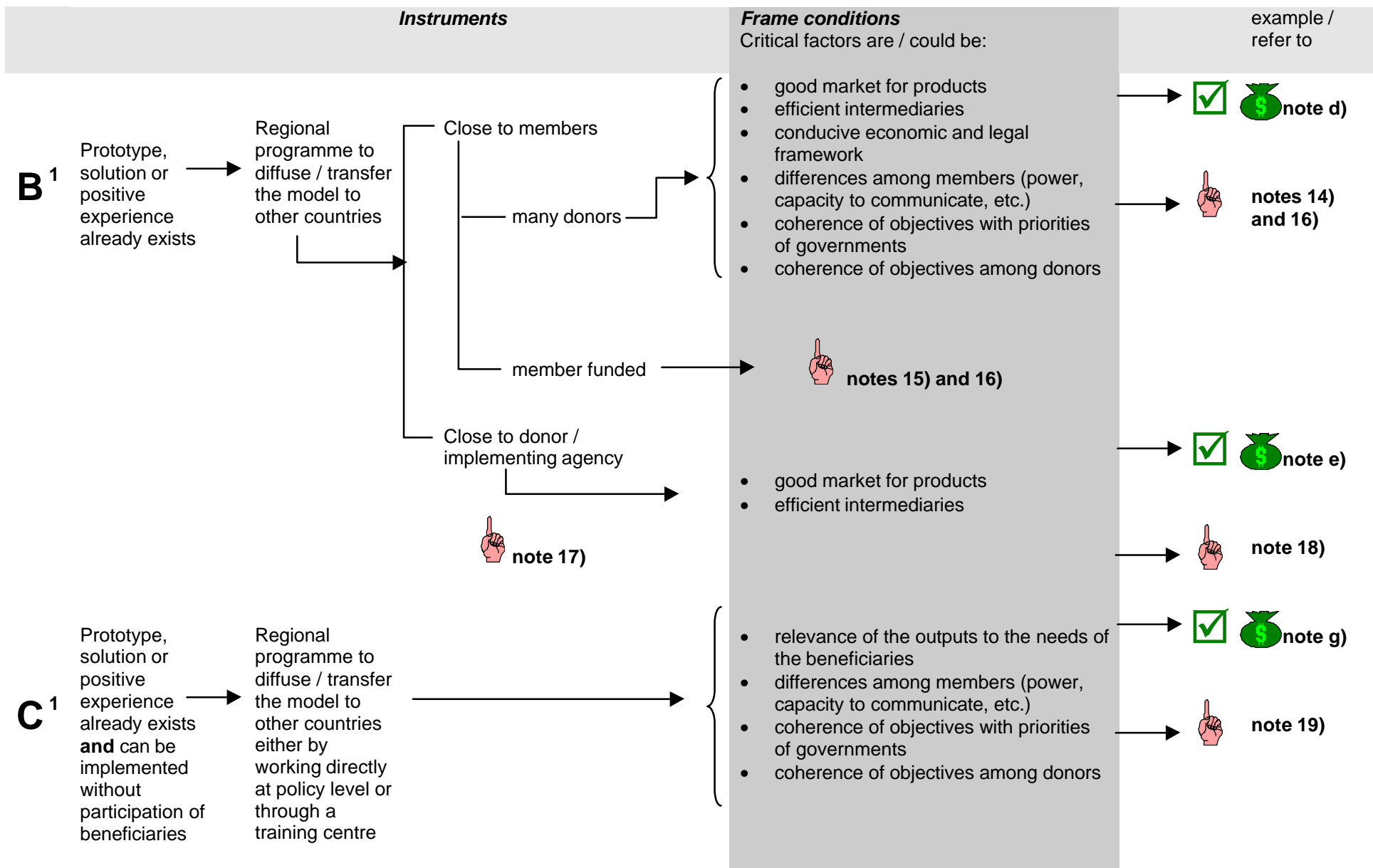
**Decision-maker level regional initiatives** are those in which meetings and communication prevails at the level of those taking the operational decisions which are essential to reach the impact thought by the regional initiative.

**Advocacy regional initiatives** are those in which meetings and communication prevails among persons and institutions who need to convince policy makers to take certain decisions in order for the regional initiative to have an impact (e.g. Regional environment or human rights lobbies)

**Close to donor / implementing agency** is meant to describe regional initiatives in which substantial funding or a very proactive role gives the donor a disproportionate influence on strategy and priority setting of the regional initiative.

**Close to members** is meant to describe regional initiatives in which the members (countries or national institutions) set the agenda themselves with at most minor influence from donors (e.g. when the initiative is mostly self funded, funded through many donors, or funded by one donor on a discretionary basis)

<b>Note 6 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
If the mentioned frame conditions are negative, this "constellation" of factors will probably lead to endless discussions but to no positive changes. The regional initiative will probably soon die due to lack of funding and support by the members.	6a) Monitor and try to influence in a favourable way the external factors: coherence of objectives with priorities of governments and stakeholders; conduciveness of legal framework; differences among members.
<b>Note 7 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
There is a risk that the donor/implementing agency involvement "dopes" the negative effects of the external factors such as coherence of objectives with priorities of governments and stakeholders; conduciveness of legal and economic framework; and differences among members. The donor could be manipulating the members of the regional initiative. If this is the case, the regional initiative will not survive long after exit of the donor.	7a) Monitor very carefully the following external factors mentioned in Note 4 and try to influence them favourably. 7b) the donor agency may "justify" its continued involvement by the need to "catalyse" policy changes in the countries of the region, for example compliance with international conventions, WTO, IMF, etc..
<b>Note 9 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
In this case the donor support/influence should remain at a minimum (e.g. funding of only 50% of the <i>common services</i> – such as salary of the co-ordinator, publications, etc.). If this is not so, that is, if the donor funding is quite substantial, there is a strong risk that this kind of network does and speaks what it thinks the donor would like.	9a) The funding/support could be reduced to a level which would oblige the members to themselves substantially contribute to the regional initiative. In this way it can be ensured that the regional initiative serves the needs of the members and not those of the donor.
<b>Note 8 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
If differences among members are great, the regional initiative could be dominated by a few of its members. In addition, the regional initiative could be advocating or lobbying for something which is contrary to government policy. This could bring the donor's bilateral programme into a difficult situation.	8a) Training and institutional strengthening can be provided to correct differences among members. 8b) In the case of political incoherence with the donor's bilateral programme, the regional initiative could be supported indirectly through a Swiss NGO.
<b>Note 10 – diagnosis</b>	
As long as only "Meta-products" (e.g. technological solutions, enhanced germplasm, etc.) are expected, this type of regional initiative is quite successful, as it can fully make use of the advantages of a networking structure. The level of activities however depends on the level of funding available to the members at their own discretion. This determines the amount of voluntary (in-kind) contributions they can make towards the core objectives of the regional initiative. If more than "meta-products" are expected, the external factor "links to effective intermediaries" very becomes critical.	
<b>Note 11 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
In this case, primary outputs such as meeting reports and awareness raising activities are usually satisfactory, but the real opportunities related to networking can not be capitalised upon because the people/institutions taking the operational decisions and actually doing the work, do not meet/interact directly. If the regional initiative is close to the members it tends to remain superficial. If the regional initiative is close to the donor or implementing agency (e.g. because of substantial operational funding), the mode of operation is very "centrifugal" (or top down).	11a) Consider restructuring the regional initiative to have more interaction/meetings of those (people or institutions) who are implementing the activities. This can be obtained through the activation of specific working groups and a reduction of the number of meetings of the Steering Committee - that is, by bringing more of the networking activities to the "operational" level.
<b>Note 12 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
There may be incoherence between the objectives for this regional initiative. If a donor agency invests a lot of funds it usually expects more than meta-products, namely concrete impact. The regional initiative is probably being taken by the donor or implementing agency from a Cat. A to a Cat. B or C type of regional initiative (that is, towards a stronger output orientation). If this is the case, start the algorithm again at the letter B or C.	12a) If the objective of the regional initiative is "self-management" in order to empower the member institutions, the funds should be given with very few conditions. Note also that if the members of the regional initiative, are obliged to create or mandate an institution, to manage large amounts of funds, this institution may begin to act as an implementing agency and compete with the member countries own national programmes instead of strengthening them. In this case the algorithm should again be started from the letter B or C.
<b>Note 13 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
If the success of the regional initiative is measured in terms of "adoption of technology", the link of the regional initiative with effective intermediaries is essential. Within Cat. A, the lack of such intermediaries can usually not be imputed to the project itself, unless it had funds and the mandate to establish/strengthen such intermediaries.	13a) If intermediaries are lacking or weak, consider strategies to establish/strengthen them either through the regional initiative itself, or through complementary bilateral activities. Start the algorithm again at the letter B or C



<b>Note 14 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
<p>These critical factors can impede the regional initiative in various ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of market for end-products; lack of efficient intermediaries and a restrictive economic and legal framework will hinder the adoption of the solutions or technological options proposed by the regional initiative. This can result in a lack or absence of impact. See 14a)</li> <li>• If the differences among members (power, capacity to communicate, etc.) are great, the initiative could be dominated by one or few members, or the governance will <i>de facto</i> be given up to the coordination unit or institution. See 14b)</li> <li>• Lack of coherence of objectives among donors can lead to continuous restructuring and resetting of the agenda, and finally to the paralysis of the regional initiative. See 14c)</li> </ul>	<p>14a) Monitor and try to influence these factors. If these factors remain negative, the project will be expensive without having impact. There is little justification for further support, except perhaps to change from a Cat. B1 to a Cat. A1 Type of regional initiative until these factors have become positive. Note that changing to a Cat. A1 Type of regional initiative would require a reduction in funding and possibly the dismantling of a heavy project implementation unit.</p> <p>14b) This problem can sometimes be resolved through training and institutional strengthening.</p> <p>14c) Differences between donors need to be settled as much as possible away from the Board or Steering committee of the regional initiative.</p>
<b>Note 15 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
<p>In developing countries, this case (high member involvement, low donor involvement and high level of outputs) probably represents the unattainable ideal situation. A high level of member funding can sometimes be reached through linking to debt-conversion programmes or if the perceived benefit/cost ratio is so high that a country would invest into the regional initiative instead of solving its own problem directly. This may be the case with some regional activities in Category C, in which impact/benefits from the initiative are not dependent on numerous factors at national/local level.</p>	<p>15a) It may be worth testing an approach whereby, the member countries buy services from the regional initiative – contributing in this way to its funding (<i>ref. "Invertir la mirada" at the regional level</i>).</p>
<b>Note 16 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
<p>If the members are forced by the donors to establish or mandate an institution, to manage the funds and co-ordinate the project, this institution may begin to act as an implementing agency and compete with the member countries' own national programmes instead of strengthening/empowering them.</p>	<p>16A) The management of large funds by network members at a regional level is unrealistic. A certain institutionalisation of the management of such initiatives is unavoidable. Donors should be aware of the possible competition with national institutions.</p>
<b>Note 17 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
<p>In the case of regional expansion, every new country added to the regional initiative, means additional costs and complexity. Since the regional initiative functions in a centrifugal way, additional members/countries are additional users/consumers but not really contributors. The key question in this case is whether several bilateral projects would not be more effective than one regional one, as it would then be easier to adapt to and influence the frame conditions.</p>	<p>17a) This question mainly needs to be answered on the basis of management efficiency. Each new member needs to be assessed carefully (total funds available; additional costs versus additional impact).</p>
<b>Note 18 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
<p>If the price of the end product is declining, the demand for the "meta-product" (research result, technical solution, enhanced germplasm, etc.) may also be declining. Technology adoption and impact will be hindered. See 18a)</p> <p>If efficient intermediaries at meso level are lacking or not well linked to the regional initiative, it will not reach the criteria for success (adoption of technology), the link of the regional initiative with effective intermediaries is essential. See 18b)</p>	<p>18a) This may be a constraint which impossible to overcome. It may be necessary to change either the meta-product, the countries involved or close the project.</p> <p>18b) Consider strategies to establish/strengthen such intermediaries either through the regional initiative itself, or through complementary bilateral activities.</p>
<b>Note 19 - diagnosis</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
<p>Output oriented regional initiatives in which the outputs can be "imposed" on the beneficiaries, have the disadvantage that the feedback about relevance of the product to the beneficiaries may not occur automatically or may be difficult to obtain. (e.g. biological pest control by inundation, establishing pollution standards for imported cars, training trainers programmes). The project can not rely on "lack of adoption" to protect it from diffusing non-relevant or even harmful solutions.</p>	<p>19a) It may be useful to collaborate with a broadly based network of the Type A1, to ensure that the products are relevant. In the case of a training centre or a training-the-trainers programme the Board or Steering Committee can take this role as long as its members are sufficiently aware of the realities in their respective countries.</p>



### **Notes for discussion about consequences on funding and donor commitment**

- a) Regional coordination to exchange information, harmonise positions and raise awareness of policy makers is extremely important for the empowerment of institutions and organisations in a country. The need for this type of regional initiative is frequently long-term. Donor commitment to such initiatives should be long-term, restricted in quantity (part of the coordination costs), made dependent on a proven demand by members (i.e. preparedness to contribute at least in kind to the coordination costs), re-evaluated at rather longer intervals (not more frequently than every 3 years), and provided with little “strings attached”.
- b) Justification for support is similar to a), but this type of regional initiative is probably more sensitive to donor influence and less dependent on long-term commitment by donors. Funding should only cover part of the coordination costs; donor profile should be low (initiative could even be supported indirectly through a Swiss NGO); and funding duration could be linked to certain milestones (e.g. international conference) or the achieving of specific results (e.g. countries of a given region join an international convention on Human rights).
- c) The generation of meta-products can make very good use of the opportunities of regional coordination. However it requires more than just funds for coordination. The challenge is for the donor agency to provide funds for operations without “taking full control” of the network. This means that the funds need to be quite discretionary or distributed through a competitive funding mechanism for which the rules are established with the network members. Commitment needs to be long-term (time needed to develop meta-products). Donor agency needs to be aware that it is too much to ask of this type of network to “establish the intermediaries” needed in order for the meta-products to achieve an impact in the field. These are additional activities which may need to be supported bilaterally.
- d) In this Type of regional initiative, multi-donor support is usually preferred for donors to avoid risk or because the costs are too high for one donor. In both cases it is difficult to achieve a real empowering effect at the level of member institutions / countries, because the quantity of funds involved usually require a separate regional or international institution to be mandated with the management of these funds (e.g. UN programmes). The cost / benefit ratio of these initiatives is not very high but donor participation is frequently motivated by multilateral obligations.
- e) As is mentioned in Note 17 (Page 8), the choice whether to go regional depends on management efficiency. Several bilateral projects with good information exchange between them may be just as effective. Duration of donor support can be linked to the achievement of specific objectives. Phase out and “privatisation” of the project needs to be considered from the beginning.
- f) When continuous generation or development of technological solutions is needed in the case of a public good, donor commitment must be long-term (> 10 years). This is true whether the donor chooses to strengthen national institutions or whether the work is to be done through a regional centre of competence. Excessive restrictions to the funding (earmarking) will prevent the implementing institution to follow strategic long-term goals and force it to be opportunistic. The result is that soon none of its donors are satisfied.
- g) In this Type of regional initiative, multi-donor support is usually preferred for donors to avoid risk or because the costs are too high for one donor. In both cases it is difficult to achieve a real empowering effect at the level of member institutions / countries, because the quantity of funds involved usually require a separate regional or international institution to be mandated with the management of these funds.