



Final
evaluation



SWITZERLAND PROGRAMME

1994-2022



159
CONTRACTED
PARTNERS

100 CHF
MILLION
BUDGET

310
PROJECTS



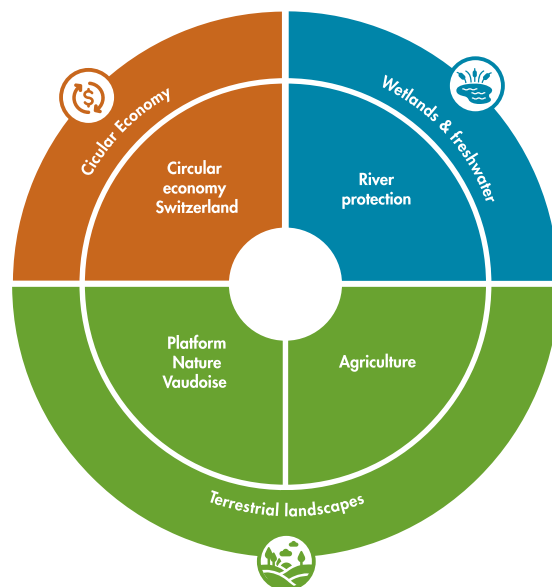
PROGRAMME IN A NUTSHELL

Regardless of a country's state of development, delivering environmental sustainability, restoring nature, and securing a stable climate is a task akin to moving mountains. Engaging with it in Switzerland not only served MAVA's home country but also provided credibility and legitimacy for the foundation to support work abroad.

From its earliest days, MAVA supported conservation in Switzerland and the Alps. What started as a collection of local projects grew into a larger programme covering priority conservation areas across the entire Alpine Arc. But as it grew, our portfolio developed a strong bias toward Swiss projects which we then consolidated in a Switzerland-only programme.

MAVA engaged with and supported partners in Switzerland around four main themes:

1. promoting a shift towards environmentally and biodiversity friendly agricultural policies and practices;
2. advocating river protection and restoration alongside sustainable hydropower development;
3. creating and strengthening multistakeholder groups in areas important for biodiversity and ecological connectivity;
4. promoting circular economy (for the last four years of the programme).



These themes were chosen based on scientific understanding of the environmental challenges facing Switzerland. About one third of the country's biodiversity depends on river ecosystems and associated habitats. Of equal import are the agricultural practices that shape most of Switzerland's productive landscape and its ecosystems. And exceeding its regenerative capacity by a factor of three, the country's overall resource consumption is very high.

Our size and willingness to make substantial grants, and offer support to organisations addressing politically controversial issues such as agriculture and hydropower, gave us a unique position in the Swiss context. It was rare that we found similar co-funding partners.

Policy work, which made up a substantial part of our grant making, was strongly shaped by and delivered in response to prevailing societal and political attitudes and values. In general, these were rather conservative, focused on stability and consensus, and mostly unfavourable for advancing progressive ideas and sustainability.

APPROACH AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Overall, the Switzerland programme delivered great results for habitat restoration, local conservation initiatives, and promotion of the circular economy.

On politically and societally controversial issues, results were more mixed. Examples here include good progress made on agricultural policies, including a significant increase in performance-based environmental payments in 2013, but less progress since; good integration of nature restoration in planning for both the third correction of the Rhône and the revitalisation of the Rhine, but slow implementation; and strong support for the creation of regional natural parks but rejection of two new national parks. In addition, river protection and hydropower development were in constant opposition with alternating successes and setbacks for conservation.

Attitudes are slowly changing and there is increased understanding that we need to work more with nature instead of against it. Consistent MAVA funding allowed the conservation community in Switzerland to grow and contribute meaningfully to key debates, challenging the status quo, and eventually shaping the collective mindset.

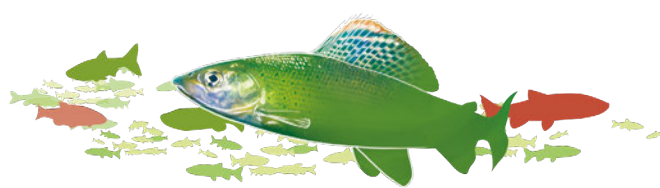
River protection and restoration

With Switzerland's remaining natural rivers and river ecosystems under constant threat from hydropower development, success, realistically, meant saving the most valuable and preventing the worst from happening. By this measure, the programme achieved good results - the last natural water bodies are still flowing freely, and in some cases, water management regimes became more natural through improved environmental flows. In other sites, the quality of river habitats has been enhanced through revitalisation work, creation of fish passes, and removal of barriers. The expected return of Salmon to Switzerland is a promising sign of such improvements.

Regulatory frameworks were maintained and partially improved despite pressure from hydropower and agriculture. For example, the protection of free-flowing water bodies was strengthened through cantonal protection and land use planning, as was that of biotopes of national importance.

Hydropower subsidies were changed to exclude small-scale projects and focus on bigger installations. And ecological standards for small hydropower, flow rehabilitation, and flood control were improved through numerous negotiations and ground-breaking legal cases. A Federal Court ruling to repeal legacy (or grandfathered) water rights, for example, led to hundreds of small-scale installations being dismantled or having to comply with modern environmental laws.

Organisations supported by MAVA over many years have become important, credible, and respected stakeholders in water management. This is evident from the role they play in river basin planning and regional restoration projects, and their participation in the national hydropower roundtable.



Agriculture

Agricultural policies and associated payment schemes are key levers that shape agricultural practice. Securing and scaling environmental improvement and biodiversity conservation relies on using them to drive change.

MAVA's engagement in sustainable agriculture began in 2007 with support for the creation of [Vision Landwirtschaft](#), an independent thinktank and advocacy group. Its White Book was a landmark publication that established Vision Landwirtschaft as a provocative but credible voice which, together with other MAVA partners, has played an important role in securing many policy improvements. The most notable of these were in the agricultural policy framework 2014-2017 which saw a significant shift from general to performance-based payments for the environment and biodiversity.

The latest policy framework scheduled to start in 2022 is currently suspended. Nevertheless, a major achievement was the approval of reduction paths for the two most detrimental pollutants, pesticides, and ammonium. Also, application of the right of recourse led to the prohibition of sixty-seven active substance in pesticides.

Regular and sometimes highly public communications at key moments during public policy or initiative development, brought deficiencies in Switzerland's agricultural practices to light. Biodiversity- and climate-friendly agriculture now has a positive public image and it is widely accepted that agriculture must be transformed, although views on timescales and parameters differ.



With the emergence and growth of [Landwirtschaft mit Zukunft](#), a new, young movement entered the arena, stimulating public and political debate through [the citizen council for nutrition](#).

Improving the scientific understanding, assessing current status, and proposing real solutions formed the basis for policy and communications work. Examples include the development of a new methodology for [measuring and rewarding biodiversity](#) improvements at farm level; improved indicators for measuring agricultural policy performance; and a scenario for locally-adapted and [climate-friendly agriculture](#).

On the ground, [Pro Terra Engiadina](#) implemented best agricultural practice in the biodiverse cultural landscape of the Engadin. And in the agricultural heartland of *Grosse Moos*, a new vision for sustainable regenerative agriculture and nature restoration was developed.

Collaboration for Ecological connectivity

When the programme covered the entire Alpine Arc, creating and maintaining ecological connectivity was the overarching approach for rivers and priority conservation areas. An Alpine-wide network was set up and on-the-ground activities strengthened ecological connectivity, and enhanced local and regional understanding of its importance. Since then, some of these seed initiatives have grown into connected landscapes such as the [Network Nature Forest](#) in Austria.

The focus on enhancing ecological infrastructure in Canton Vaud during MAVA's final phase of grant-making delivered a step change in conservation in the foundation's home canton. The creation of Plateforme Nature Vaudoise, brought the main conservation actors – governmental ([DGE](#)) and non-governmental – together for the first time. The Plateforme nurtured a new way of thinking about local conservation across different organisations through insight sharing, strategic planning, and a commitment to work hand-in-hand over the long term.

Ecological infrastructure results over the last six years include the restoration of more than 10 km of rivers, the creation or restoration of 59 water bodies, the creation of 33 forest habitats, the planting of 265 hedges and groves, and the construction of 78 small structures for wildlife (stone and wood piles, etc.).

The total investment in this work was only made possible through smart leveraging of existing public funding programmes. This multiplied MAVA's own investment by a factor of five, and a public-private partnership between MAVA and Canton Vaud doubled the canton's annual conservation budget.

Circular economy

Having had a good experience with and gained insights from our circular economy work in Europe, we identified an opportunity for Switzerland to become a circular economy leader – building on its track record for innovation and high quality products that last, and, in time, reducing its overall resource use. To this end, we helped create [Circular Economy Switzerland](#) (CES) which has since grown as a movement and become a central hub for circular economy in the country. An expanding community made up of all kinds of different actors, CES promotes circular economy through events, debates, research, advice, and action. By creating a space for these activities, CES has played a catalytic role for circular economy, placing it firmly on public, political, and economic agendas.

In the private sector, alliances and collaboration along the value chain have been forged, some directly stemming from work supported by MAVA, others as part of growing interest in circular economy. Examples include renting schemes for garments and household appliances; reuse of steel beams for construction; and a centralised take back scheme for mattresses. Incubator programmes have also supported dozens of young entrepreneurs to design products and scale their businesses using and promoting circular economy principles.

In politics, a parliamentary group on circular economy was set up and provides new knowledge, insights, and exchange opportunities for interested politicians. The revised Environmental Protection Act includes measures to advance the circular economy. Material flow assessments offered a starting point for cantonal and city circular economy plans to emerge. And public procurement criteria are now more aligned with sustainability, and public institutions can access technical support for procuring products and services that include reuse and refurbishing.

On the civic side of things, a coalition of environmental and consumer protection organisations, trade associations, unions, and CES members was formed to demand the right to repair. And the national [second-hand day](#), now celebrated in more than 600 locations, has happened three times and is growing bigger every year.



Broader actions

Over its lifetime, MAVA has contributed to various projects and initiatives outside its main thematic areas of work. Many, such as the reintroduction of the Osprey, or the building of the Swiss Ornithological Station Sempach, stem from the interests and passions of our funder in research and bird conservation. Others grew from opportunities to advance conservation more broadly, or to address threats that would have undermined the environmental movement as a whole, such as defending the right of recourse for environmental organisations. Close to home, we actively supported iconic local initiatives that gave citizens the opportunity to experience and learn about nature, including the Arboretum Aubonne and the Zoo der la Garenne.

LOOKING AHEAD

The relevance of all the programme's four themes is likely to increase in Switzerland due to the changing climate and increasing population. Natural rivers have a better chance of adapting to changing water regimes and withstanding severe weather events. Healthy, toxic-free soils, rich in organic matter, will maintain their productivity and better resist droughts. A landscape with ecological infrastructure will provide more ecosystem services for agriculture, such as pollination and pest control. And an economy and products built on circular principles will reduce material dependencies and contribute to achieving emissions targets. Below we identify some specific priorities for continuing work under each theme.

River protection

Round table recommendations should be promoted and followed, with a focus on developing high output, low impact hydropower, and financing river restoration and revitalisation at scale. These recommendations are especially critical in the context of today's increased demand for renewable energy.

Sustainable agriculture

Agriculture should be seen and understood as part of a food system that promotes healthy nutrition. When back on the agenda, it is critical that AP22+ delivers a significant step towards food system transformation. And there is an opportunity for new actors that are open to new ideas, such as the citizen council on nutrition, to step up and find solutions.

Ecological connectivity

Efforts to strengthen ecological connectivity should be maintained through continued collaboration that delivers and multiplies critical restoration work. Using philanthropic funds to leverage public funds many times over should be replicated by other foundations.

Circular economy.

Emerging roadmaps and strategies for circularity should be complemented with measurable targets. And circular economy should be presented and understood as a delivery mechanism for emissions reduction and resource security. This requires promoting core principles such as sharing, reusing, and repairing through a dynamic movement.

Lessons and recommendations

MAVA's *modus operandi* was to do everything possible to deliver impact and advance its mission in the most effective way. Playing different roles and applying different funding mechanisms added value. And in Switzerland, our approach offers a number of operational recommendations and lessons.

1. Select one strong partner and delegate re-granting

Lesson: A partner that understands the advantages of shared roles and responsibilities, and how to combine and deploy distinct abilities and competencies through collaboration, can become an effective re-granter and build a powerful alliance of complementary actors.

2. Create a re-granting mechanism to bring together key actors and expertise, and allocate funding based on shared insight and intelligence

Lesson: Bringing strong actors together in a grant maker function enhances the ability to select strategic projects that deliver maximum impact and value for all actors.

3. Bring together key conservation actors, formulate joint priorities, and provide funding for implementation

Lesson: Working towards a commonly defined strategy leads to better conservation outcomes but might be compromised by competition for funding (post MAVA).

4. Take the lead with a co-funder to launch (and fund) a new movement

Lesson: As established actors, foundations can be a driving force and lend credibility to a new issue or endeavour.

5. Fund good projects

Lesson: Remain open to new and innovative ideas.

Over 28 years, we have had the pleasure and privilege of working with a large number of people from many different walks of life, all of whom have been dedicated to improving the state of our environment. With a heartfelt thank you, we wish them all continued success.