



SDC - Employment and Income Division
Small Enterprise Development Workshop 2006

**Reforming the Business Environment:
Current thinking and future opportunities**

12 - 13 January 2006 Gerzensee (Bern), Switzerland

Workshop Report

Contents

1. Programme	p. 1
2. Background	2
3. Opening and thematic overview	2
4. Experiences of the World Bank Group in Latin America	3
5. Experiences of EBRD and Swisscontact in transition countries	3
6. Overcoming administrative barriers by interaction of authorities and businesses in the Nizhny Novgorod Region of Russia	4
7. Panel: Is size relevant for the reform of the business environment?	4
8. Reforming inspections in Tajikistan: The experience of seco/IFC	6
9. Experiences of Swisscontact in Indonesia	6
10. The roles of 'champions' and development agencies in achieving reform	6
11. Final discussion	7
12. Workshop evaluation	8
11.1 General	
11.2 Comments	

Annex A: List of participants

Cambridge and Zürich, 28.02.2006

Jim Tanburn
Bernhard Wenger



1. Programme

Objectives

- To present the current picture of the approaches, instruments and lessons learnt in the field of Reforming the Business Environment, with a focus on Small Enterprises
- Based on concrete cases, initiate a reflection: How donor-supported initiatives can best achieve meaningful reforms and build capacity to sustain reform process, for the benefit of women and men in Small Enterprises?

Methods

- Presentation and discussion of case studies in plenary
- Thematic discussion in plenary
- Conclusions at conceptual level

Thursday 12 January 2006		
10:00 – 10:15	Welcome Programme, working methods	Beate Wilhelm, Head Thematic Department (SDC) Bernhard Wenger (Moderator)
10:15 – 11:15	Thematic Overview Conceptual Input and discussion	Jim Tanburn (Resource Person)
11:15 – 12:15	The experiences of the World Bank Group in South America	Liliana de Sa (IFC, USA)
12:15 – 13:45	Lunch	
13:45 – 15:30	Benchmarking EBRD's Business Environment and Enterprise Performance (BEEPS) Survey	Samuel Fankhauser (EBRD, UK)
	A Case Study: Overcoming Administrative Barriers by Interaction of Authorities and Business in the Nizhny Novgorod Region of Russia	Olga Yasinovskaya (Swisscontact, Russia)
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break	
16:00 – 17:30	Panel: Does Size Matter? Is size relevant for the reform of the Business Environment? Is Donor support for these reforms size-neutral or size-specific?	Liliana de Sa (IFC) Samuel Fankhauser (EBRD) Paul Vandenberg (Consultant) Thierry Buchs (seco) Peter Tschumi (SDC) Bernhard Wenger (Moderator)
Friday 13 January 2006		
08:30 – 09:30	Implementing reform From benchmarking to reform implementation: The Tajik SME Policy Project as a case study	Manizha Sharifova (IFC Tajikistan) Florentin Blanc (IFC Tajikistan)
09:30 – 10:30	Sustaining reform Creating an enabling environment in Indonesia	Warso Widanarto (Swisscontact Indonesia)
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break	
11:00 – 12:15	The roles of 'champions' and development agencies in achieving reform	Richard Waddington (Bannock Consulting, UK)
12:15 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:20	Final Discussion How to create local ownership for Business Enabling Environment Drivers and barriers to formalisation How pro-poor is BE Reform?	Peter Bissegger (SC Indonesia) Ulrike Pokorski (GTZ, Germany) David Elliott (Springfield, UK)
15:20 - 15:40	Wrap-up	Jim Tanburn
15:30 – 16:00	Conclusion	Peter Tschumi, Head E+I (SDC)

The powerpoint presentations are available on the SDC website, and should also be posted on www.businessenvironment.org. They have therefore not been summarised in any detail in the description below, which mainly focuses on the discussions following each presentation.

2. Background

The enterprise development community is increasingly interested in supporting reform of the business environment in developing countries; the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (of which SDC is a very active member) organised an international conference on this theme at the end of 2005. The Conference featured about 60 presentations, and was attended by 300 participants. SDC elected to feature a similar theme for its annual SED Workshop in January 2006, and this report summarises the discussions in that Workshop. The findings of the Cairo Conference are summarised as a separate document.

The 10 speakers, as mentioned in the timetable above, were drawn from various organisations, including EBRD, IFC and seco; they were chosen to give as much institutional and geographical coverage as possible. The 66 participants similarly came from both Switzerland and projects around the world: SDC and seco headquarter staff and field-level staff, partner organisations and other agencies. A list of participants is annexed to this report.

A range of terms are used to describe the Business Environment (e.g. investment climate, business climate, enabling environment) and its definition is more often that not rather loose. It is often found to contain policies, laws and regulations that generally "set the rules" for the private sector, and small enterprises in particular, to operate. These rules are also influenced by institutions that represent social, economic and political spheres (all of which are interrelated).

The combined effect of these influences and rules is reflected in the performance of markets, that shape opportunities and incentives for small enterprises to invest productively, create jobs, and expand. While many donors have not officially defined the term Business Environment reform, others focus on those elements they believe to be most relevant (macro-economic strategies; governance issues; policy, legal and regulatory framework; organisational framework).

3. Opening and thematic overview

Beate Wilhelm welcomed participants to the Workshop, noting SDC's interest in this area, and the enthusiastic response received to the announcement of the theme for this year's event. She expressed her strong support for the programme, touching on the rationale and the key themes identified in its design.

Jim Tanburn gave a brief presentation summarising some of the key findings from the Cairo Conference; a number of additional slides were included in the hand-outs to participants. He outlined the scale of the problem, the different approaches being adopted by development agencies, and some of the impacts being observed. The discussion included the following observations from participants:

- the World Bank's Doing Business report will next year have a new feature on "how to reform"
- the EBRD has been able to link productivity with reform of the business environment, for example in the case of Estonia

- there might be a gap between perception and reality. For example, surveys of business perception in Central Asia show that business owners believe that access to finance has improved, yet statistically, there has not been any change in the rate at which business owners actually access finance in practice
- agencies should ask how the situation became as it now is: why are there so many regulations? Unless the root causes are addressed, streamlining will ultimately be ineffective, since more regulations will surely be introduced in future
- there seem to be a lot of surveys - and indeed of survey methodologies. Is there a danger of survey fatigue among businesses?
- the attraction of accession to the European Union has led to substantial reform of the business environment in South East Europe

In his comments at the end of the session, Peter Tschumi reflected on possible ways to make knowledge of reform processes available to the agents of change in each developing country - including the private sector, the administration and the political level. There is a need to 'join up' these different stakeholders, and donor harmonisation is crucial. The reform process must, however, be driven locally, and this makes public-private dialogue particularly important.

4. Experiences of the World Bank Group in Latin America

Liliana de Sa presented the work of the IFC in Latin America, with particular reference to the work of IFC on reducing the costs of business registration in La Paz, Bolivia. She noted that, typically, the World Bank implements broad reform processes, while the IFC targets rather specific and focused reforms that can be implemented rapidly - typically within a two-year timeframe. In La Paz, the average time required to obtain a business license had successfully been reduced from 30 days to 2.3 days, with the average number of steps being reduced from 157 to 19. Revenues from business licenses for the Municipality had increased by 79% since the reform. Following her presentation, participants raised the following points:

- reducing the costs of registration is important, but the total costs of formalisation may still be significant; what are the benefits?
- what have we learned from the World Bank's experiences over the years in reforming tax systems, for example?
- GTZ / EC were involved in a similar project, which had also found that municipality revenues had increased - despite their original fear that reform would reduce revenues.

5. Experiences of EBRD and Swisscontact in transition countries

Samuel Fankhauser presented EBRD's findings from the recent Business Environment and Enterprise Performance (BEEPS) Survey of transition countries; this survey asks managers for their views of the business environment. In general, this is seen to have been improving in recent years; there is no obvious correlation between most aspects of regulation and business size. The main exception to this was access to finance, where small businesses reported greater difficulties than larger businesses. The subsequent discussion touched on the following points:

- BEEPS has made public-private dialogue more systematic; however, EBRD does not consider work with business associations to be a core strength. The Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses was cited as an example of a successful association of smaller businesses; how might it be replicated in transition countries?

- BEEPs has also stimulated demand for reform, since many transition governments monitor their rankings carefully; Doing Business published a ranking of countries for the first time this year. These rankings might, however, generate pressure for cosmetic 'quick fixes' that improve the country's ranking without addressing underlying constraints.
- the findings are subjective, and levels of tolerance vary substantially. Nonetheless, and while some judgements also had to be made in developing the data, the rankings which they reveal are quite robust; for example, defining productivity per unit of labour cost rather than per worker did not change the ranking (EBRD did both).

6. Overcoming administrative barriers by interaction of authorities and business in the Nizhny Novgorod Region of Russia

Olga Yasinovskaya then presented the experiences of Swisscontact in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia. She noted the support of the President for business environment reform, and also the various levels of government at which this support is applicable. She then described the recent achievements in an on-going reform process at the local level; the subsequent discussion covered the following points:

- how are the reforms affecting the smaller businesses? and women in business? 75% of entrepreneurs in Russia are women, but politics has traditionally included social opportunities at which women would typically not be present. Swisscontact will investigate whether their current data can be disaggregated by gender.
- before it can address corruption issues, a development agency must first build credibility over time - which Swisscontact managed to do. Maybe this is a niche best suited to smaller agencies.
- there were apparent discrepancies between the corruption data presented by EBRD and those presented by Swisscontact, even though they were both covering Russia. Clearly, this is a very difficult phenomenon to measure, for obvious reasons. Nonetheless, EBRD is unusual among IFIs in having an explicit commitment only to lend to countries committed to multi-party democracy.

7. Panel: Is size relevant for the reform of the business environment?

Panelists presented their views on whether development agencies should take into account the specific needs of smaller businesses, when designing and implementing programmes for the reform of the business environment. Liliana de Sa pointed out that for SMEs, risk was an important lens through which to view the need for reform. Diagnostics are needed to identify areas where smaller businesses are disadvantaged (e.g. where they have more paperwork).

Samuel Fankhauser considered that the idea of 'small is beautiful' is over-estimated; in practice, several areas of the business environment, including for example tax, are size-neutral. Other areas, such as access to finance and business registration, are however more critical for smaller businesses. Nonetheless, many larger firms are not fully formal, for example often under-reporting the number of employees. Dynamic firms of all sizes are more likely to be targeted by corrupt officials.

Peter Tschumi noted that perhaps 90% of businesses are informal, but need to become formal in order to be competitive globally. Small businesses are more likely to be owned and managed by women, so there was an important gender dimension to the discussion;

keeping the smallest businesses very much in mind while designing and implementing technical assistance was very likely to benefit women in particular.

In the important discussion about donor harmonisation, SDC does not play a primary role, but does play a strategic one. In particular, SDC often had a comparative advantage in working with local economies, associations and agriculture. SDC is very committed to working in a systemic manner, to support local leaders as champions of change. Such changes can be rapid and substantial; in Bolivia, for example, an association of small businesses which used to be illegal is now in government.

Thierry Buchs pointed out that there is no consensus about the definition of 'small' across countries, sectors or agencies. seco is size-neutral, but constantly considers what its activities will mean for SMEs. Intuitively, one might expect reductions in compliance costs to benefit SMEs most. seco is particularly interested in access to finance, through integrated products. To stimulate markets for leasing or mortgage products, for example, it works with business associations, to change the relevant laws and raise awareness. In this way, it develops whole market segments.

In his view, there was no need to create special conditions for small business, except in taxation; tax administration in Africa and Latin America represents a very large hurdle. This should be reduced, not through exemptions, but rather by having progressive tax regimes, to broaden the tax net. Regulations need to be sectoral; for example, bank licensing needs proper regulation. Various joint SDC-seco initiatives were mentioned, in Bolivia, Mozambique and Serbia & Montenegro.

The rest of this Section has been contributed by Paul Vandenberg, a consultant who has written a major Paper on this topic, and who also was a panelist in the Session.

Two main points

- Different agencies within a donor government may target different levels of the policy environment. An agency dealing with overall economic policy and growth may focus on policies for all enterprises. Conversely, a more aid-oriented, pro-poor organization may target the environment for smaller firms. There appears to be such a division of labour between seco and SDC, whose work complements each other.
- Evidence suggests that smaller firms face greater policy environment obstacles than large firms. However, this does not mean, necessarily, that reforms should focus on small firms. General reforms may remove obstacles for small firms and larger firms at the same time. This approach removes the danger of creating size traps in which a size threshold is created (i.e. enterprises above the threshold are exempt from regulations or otherwise receive preferential treatment). Such thresholds can create unfair competition between firms just above and below the threshold, while it may discourage firms just below the threshold from growing.

Other points

- There was some disagreement over the evidence of whether corruption affects smaller enterprises more than larger ones. Evidence from transition countries, presented by the EBRD representative, suggests that there is no difference. However, the background paper for the panel cited a multi-country study that found that small firms were more adversely affected than large firms.
- If smaller firms are not surveyed or otherwise taken into account, the policy reform effort of a donor or a government may miss important areas in need of reform. This does not

mean, however, than the reforms (or the surveying) should focus exclusively on small firms.

- Governments should consider introducing progressivity into their policies. This includes the area of taxation where small firms would pay lower rates because tax is often the biggest (and most feared) hurdle for firms considering a move from the informal to the formal economy.
- The SME segment of the economy often creates many jobs and therefore this segment should be supported. However, some participants noted that the quality of employment is often low in smaller enterprises and job creation is really just people doing whatever they can to survive in the absence of social security.

8. Reforming inspections in Tajikistan: The experience of seco/IFC

Florentin Blanc and Manizha Sharifova presented the work of IFC, supported by seco, in Tajikistan; this work was in the process of streamlining the inspections procedures, which had been a major burden for businesses for some time. A new law should be enacted in the first quarter of 2006 as a result. Already, the reported frequency of inspections had gone down very substantially.

While very supportive of the work, participants wondered how the vested interests of the inspectors were being taken into account, so that they did not find expression elsewhere instead. Also, what other measures may now be needed, beyond the change to the law; what about communicating the change through the use of media, and reducing the costs of compliance in other ways?

9. Experiences of Swisscontact in Indonesia

Warso Widanarto presented the experiences of Swisscontact in reforming the business environment in Indonesia, through looking at the whole system at the local level, in Yogyakarta. Different instruments had been applied at different points in the regulatory cycle, taking into account the needs of stakeholders (e.g. of local government to generate its own income from fees and taxes).

While Swisscontact did not yet have impact data, it was possible to point to anecdotal evidence of change. For example, since the Complaints Centre had opened, and become a channel for businesses to communicate their problems, there had been far fewer street demonstrations. Participants appreciated the extent to which the programme had become embedded in local institutions and processes. Also, Swisscontact had been able to introduce Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) skills from the beginning; it had been helped throughout the reform process by the active support of the Mayor, who had a business background.

10. The roles of 'champions' and development agencies in achieving reform

Richard Waddington presented some of the possible hazards of Public-Private Dialogue, according to a recent study by Bannocks for DFID; the rest of this Section was written by him about the Session (with editing for consistency):

The presentation focused on 3 main areas: i) an overview of research for DFID into processes and mechanisms for public private dialogue, ii) a consideration of why the voices of

MSMEs are often not heard in public private dialogue, and iii) a consideration of how donor agencies might engage with these “drivers” of the reform process. He noted that pressures on donors to reduce overheads could conflict with the need to focus on the human dimension of reform processes. In the subsequent discussion, participants raised the following points:

- do donor staff receive sufficient training in “softer” skills such as relationship management, stakeholder engagement and communication?
- concern was expressed that a focus on champions early on in the reform process ran the risk of donors “backing the wrong horse”, or alternatively finding that the champions they chose to support subsequently went off message. The presenter suggested that any strategy that incorporated a champions-based approach should not just focus on one type of champion, but instead should recognise champions as a multi-dimensional concept and act accordingly.
- donors need a methodology to understand the motivational factors influencing the behaviour of actors in the reform process.
- there may be a distinction between champions and blockers of a reform “process”, and champions and blockers of a reform “issue”. A champion of a particular issue was not necessarily likely to champion the whole reform process.

11. Final discussion

In the final discussion, three participants were asked to present their thoughts on key themes arising from the Workshop's discussions so far. Peter Bissegger from Swisscontact addressed the question of how to create local ownership for business environment reform; he argued that time was needed, more than large amounts of funding. Agencies should spend several years in the local community, to understand the issues and complexities. Some participants insisted, though, that results, and indeed impacts, were expected, so agencies may not have the luxury of such a timescale.

Ulrike Pokorski from GTZ spoke about the drivers and barriers to formalisation, identifying the drivers as including access, corruption and risk minimisation - while the barriers include gender and compliance. The motivation for growth and profit maximisation is effectively in between these two. One participant pointed out that this was very much gender-related; in India, for example, the men are typically not keen for women to form formal businesses.

The discussion led David Elliott from the Springfield Centre to ask: How pro-poor is business environment reform? Perhaps smaller donors could usefully focus on value chains, while larger agencies focused on broader reforms, for example around governance issues. Participants felt that growth was necessary but not sufficient; for example, government Ministries had to have the capacity for reform, too.

Jim Tanburn presented some final thoughts arising from the discussions, noting the contrast between some organisations focusing on the achievement of fast results, and others preferring to focus on achieving systemic and sustainable change. Some of the comments had implied that this was an 'either-or' choice, yet development agencies probably had to do both, to satisfy all stakeholders. While locally-led, systemic change was clearly the ultimate goal, sponsors generally looked for early reassurance that their funds were achieving results. Interventions therefore needed to make sense within several different, and parallel, systems.

Despite the enormous regulatory burdens in many countries, therefore, participants did not express great interest in radical approaches, such as the regulatory guillotine; instead they preferred to think about capacity-building, public-private dialogue and other information-related interventions. Benchmarking may create pressure for reform, but not necessarily in ways that were useful or pro-poor. Corruption was clearly hard to measure; there seemed to be discrepancies even between presentations made during the Workshop. But corruption-related inertia within the system had not been considered in much detail, so far.

Finally, he asked how the discipline of business environment reform could link to other communities of practice, for example around value chain development and making markets work for the poor. Clearly, there were commonalities and synergies, but the various communities did not necessarily communicate with each other on a regular basis.

Peter Tschumi closed the Workshop with some additional reflections; he noted that there was much demand from operational divisions for expertise in value chain development. Also, the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development now had a Working Group covering this theme. Meanwhile, there was clearly great interest in business environment reform, and an Orientation Day was planned for 17th May. Local Economic Development and conflict resolution were also topics of great interest to his colleagues. As an outcome of the Workshop, he informed participants that SDC would sponsor the publication of a short summary of the Cairo Conference materials, so that they could find additional information more easily.

12. Workshop evaluation

At the end of the event, the participants made a generally positive evaluation of the 2006 Small Enterprise Development Workshop. The Workshop responds to a wide range of expectations of a heterogeneous group and provides plenty of information in a good mixture. For some participants however it is not clear, how they could make use of this information in their work. Speakers represented a good mixture, but it was not easy for everybody to follow the red line of the workshop. Proposals for future SED workshops cover a broad area and show a continuous big interest. The attendants had diverging opinions about the Workshop formula: Whereas some welcomed the conference style of this year's edition, others regretted the lost opportunity for direct exchange in working groups. The participants were happy with the documentation and very pleased about the excellent organisation.

12.1 General

	<i>n = 29</i>	(++)	(+)	(0)	(-)	(--)
Are your expectations fulfilled?	8	9	9	2		
Will your participation in the WS be useful in your work?	8	6	12	1		
How do you assess the programme of the workshop?						
Choice of the main topics	3	17	6	2		
Proportion of presentations, discussions, working groups	5	13	8	2		
Possibilities of exchanging experience	7	15	3	4		
How do you assess the speakers?						
Thematic competences	11	14	2	1		
Comprehensibility of the topic	4	16	6	1		
How do you assess the moderation?	12	10	2	4		
How do you assess the workshop documentation?	17	8	1	1*		
How do you assess the workshop's organisation?	24	4				

* too late arriving (have the folder distributed prior to wish

12.2 Comments

1. Which expectations did you have from the workshop?

- To learn more about the relevant factors of a business enabling environment (BEE), get the latest experiences on BE Reform in other countries, different perspectives and tools
- To get an idea of the level & quality of discussion about BEE
- To have an overview on current discussion on Enabling Environment
- To understand if influencing Business environment could have an impact on micro business, on economic growth and on poverty alleviation.
- To get a better idea of the mainstream of donors discussions and on SDC's views.
- To exchange views/experience with other experts/practitioners
- To meet people for networking

2. What are the most relevant knowledge/insights you gained during the workshop and how do you intend to apply them in your professional activities?

- Donors cannot do everything: Analyse possibilities and limits of the donor community in linking BE reform with poverty alleviation unless big business & politics tackle the problem.
- Things are country specific: analyse different approaches for change and network with colleagues from different countries/departments
- The debate about approaches and trends is evolving: use the results of the Cairo conference to get an overview
- Context matters: use a mix of surveys, benchmarks and studies at country and local level to understand the context and to prepare projects
- BE reforms are a matter of local ownership: no quick fix, involve local civil society!
- There is plenty of useful information about tools/methods available (e.g. one stop shop, complaint centres, inspections reform): Make sure not to overlook important new experience in project design
- Becoming "formal" is not the ultimate: analyse the cost of formality vs. of staying informal
- BE reforms need systematic process approach: shape a Public-Private Dialogue, use champions, analyse blockers, create policy pressure through publication of surveys e.g. BEEPS analysis

3. How do you assess the speakers?

- Different rhetoric competences: knowing your project doesn't make you necessarily a good speaker
- Differences (in a good mixture): some presentations too descriptive, lacking analysis - others too theoretical, lacking concrete examples; some broad – others very focused
- In general more statistical information about project starts than results.
- Presentations too balanced, too little controversial.
- Good discussions compared to Cairo
- Missing link (red line) in the presentations and debates.
- It would be good to have a) better audio technics and b) to give presenters some principles – speak not too quickly, look to the audience and not to the screen etc.

4. Which thematic proposals do you have for a next workshop?

- Business environment reform and exports? Filling the gap between Trade policy and SME's
- Cluster development
- Collaboration donors – NGO
- Commercial law reform in the Developing World;

- Competition regulations reform for Foreign Direct Investment
- Corporate Governance
- Development cooperation projects and private business initiatives (e.g. remittances)
- Impact of free market on SME in specific African countries and regions, ex. West Africa
- Impact of SED with regard to MDG and PRSP?
- Impact of the Development Economic Promotion Initiatives
- Micro-insurance – experience worldwide
- Private Sector Development: Corporate Social Responsibility
- Pro poor growth, impacts and results
- Public-private development partnerships
- Relation between education / capacity building and SME development
- Regulatory Impact Assessment
- Start up support esp. related to access to finance
- Value Chain Development Approaches
- Role of donors (support without generating biases, role in Policy dialogue)
- Social responsibility, sustainable development and BE

5. Personal comments or suggestions

Topic of the Workshop

- This years topic is more important for donor agencies than for implementing NGOs
- Provide better core issue presentations at the beginning of the Workshop in order to raise controversial discussions

SDC position

- Employment and Income Division should have a more active role weighing different approaches and putting them in a SDC perspective. What is SDC doing and why? Which trends is SDC following and why?
- A more profiled contribution by the Thematic Resources Department should provide a prominent positioning of SDC's principles, concepts, experiences, policy in this domain

Preparation

- Save paper by printing on both sides (also weight!)

Methods

- This was more of a conference, not a workshop. Get group work in adequate form back into the workshop methodology
- Lots of audience input, very good: The workshop is too short for working groups

Moderation

- Keep discussions short and provide more field experiences (examples)
- Include more interactive methods to make it lively
- Use flipcharts as Parking Bays for better use of limited questioning
- Make a proper introduction to the topic of the panel discussion

Organisation

- 2 days workshop in this frame is good and makes a lot of sense.
- Overall a very good organised and interesting workshop. Good location, though difficult to reach!
- Very competent speakers, smooth organisation, useful discussions

Annex A: List of participants

Name, Firstname	Company
PARTICIPANTS	
Baertschi Daniel	World Vision Schweiz
Bünteli Erwin	SDC Bern
Beez Peter	SDC Bern
Bhana Jayesh	Swiss-South African Co-operation Initiative SSACI
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Bissegger Peter	Swisscontact Indonesia
Bonin Peter	GTZ
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Chavez Regula	Swisscontact Bolivia
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Keller Cristina	Verein Cielo Azul
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