

The objective “**accountability**” is aimed at reporting on the programme results, the implementation efficiency and so on to the people who are entitled to this information. In this context, e.g., accountability is due to the DGD, the Minister, the Parliament, the tax payer, the partner countries, the local partners, the target group etc.

The objective “**support to decision-making**” is aimed at learning lessons from a policy, a programme or a project in order to be able to help decision (by the NGO, the DGD or others) upon a solid factual basis about which change(s) might have to be made to future action. Here, we remain within the strict context of the evaluated policy, programme or project.

The objective “**capitalizing on knowledge and sharing lessons**” is aimed at learning *transferable* lessons from a policy, a programme or a project in order to share them with a larger public than the programme's target group and thus use the capitalized knowledge for other policies, programmes or projects.

In terms of the first type of objective (**accountability**), DGD should, in all cases, draw up a coherent approach for evaluating results with a view to results-based management, as required by the new Development Cooperation Law. To that end, it will be necessary to ensure that the system is representative, that it consolidates data and that it is credible; it must also align, as much as possible, with NGA monitoring and evaluation systems. (R2)

Concerning the second type of objective (**support to decision-making**) it is recommended that **DGD** is able to find, in some way, the ability to commission evaluations on subjects which are key for its decision-making. This is (practically) no longer possible since the reorganisation in 2010, in spite of the fact that a more strategic role was assigned to DGD in Belgian cooperation. (R3) Furthermore, **NGAs** had a proven interest in using evaluation as a decision-making tool; it is important for an evaluation with this type of objective to offer them great freedom of action so that they are able to adapt it to their needs as much as possible. (R4)

For the third type of objective (**capitalising on knowledge and sharing lessons**), it would be useful if DGD and NGAs drew up a mechanism to favour the active sharing of all experience acquired with a view to improving aid effectiveness. (R5)

DGD and NGAs must also ensure that all **actors** have **solid evaluation capacities**, in particular with regard to effective planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. It is therefore recommended that a strong mechanism be designed, combining (i) strict quality requirements and (ii) support for the quality of evaluations and the strengthening of the skills of the actors. Concrete examples exist, such as in the Netherlands or in France. (R6) **DGD**, too, should ensure that it has sufficient expertise in evaluation. (R9)

Finally, DGD and NGAs should be particularly attentive to the **main factors affecting the quality of evaluations**. Firstly, this means ensuring that the request is clear and realistic, which implies, among other things, clarifying the priority objective and adapting certain provisions of the current regulatory framework (especially on the budget). It is also necessary to ensure that evaluations examine the intervention logic, take account of appropriate evaluation criteria, and evaluate the results, sustainability and (potential) impact of interventions on the target population. (R7) The evaluations should also be organised at the right time in terms of the objective targeted. (R8)

This study was commissioned by the Office of the Special Evaluator for International Cooperation (OSE). It carries out the strategic evaluation of Belgian federal activities which the OECD's Development Aid Committee (DAC) recognizes as official development aid (ODA). The objectives are here to give account of the use of public funds as well as to draw lessons to improve the effectiveness of Belgian development cooperation.

The full version of the evaluation report is available in French and Dutch on the CD-ROM attached, on the website www.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/development_cooperation/evaluation/, and at the Office of the Special Evaluator + 32 2 501 38 34 -ses-dbe@diplobel.fed.be



Meta-evaluation of the programmes of the Non-Governmental Actors

Executive Summary

Introduction

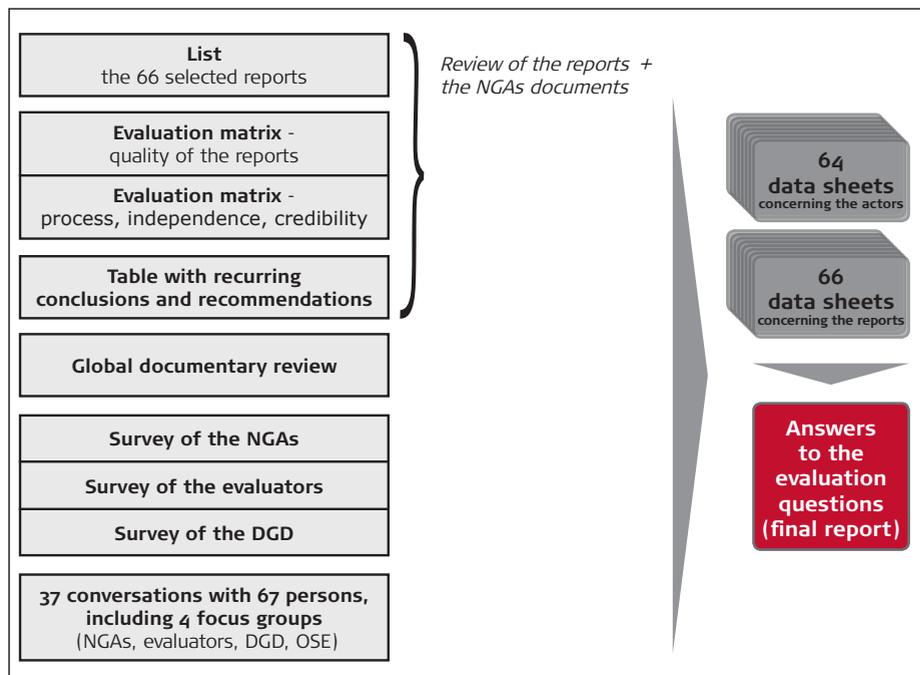
A meta-evaluation is an “evaluation designed to summarise the conclusions of several evaluations”. The term is also used to refer to “the evaluation of an evaluation with a view to judging its quality and/or assessing the performance of evaluators”.

This meta-evaluation studies the **evaluation policies and practices** of the **Belgian development cooperation (DGD)** and of **non-governmental actors (NGAs)**, in the context of **DGD's co-financing of NGAs programmes**. In particular, it aims to determine the **quality** of the evaluation, its **independence**, its **credibility** and its **utility**. It also identifies **recurring lessons** in those programme evaluations.

Methodology

The meta-evaluation concerns **64 NGAs**, and therefore almost all of those which have had a programme co-financed: **NGOs, universities, scientific institutions, trade unions, local authorities, etc.** It studies the **2008-2011** funding period, which, therefore, *pre-dates* DGD's internal reform of 2012, the new Development Cooperation Law of April 2013 and the future royal decree which aims to redefine the legal and regulatory framework of DGD subsidies to NGAs for the coming decade.

This meta-evaluation is based on a **solid and innovative methodology**. It comprises a systematic review of evaluation reports based on 88 quality indicators. It also includes, among other instruments, three surveys: one among NGAs, one for the evaluation teams, and one for DGD's desk officers.

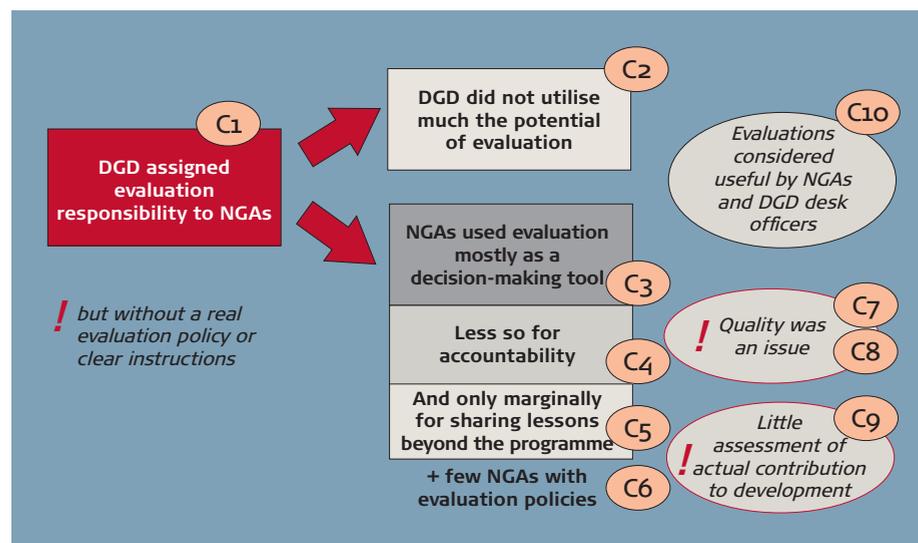


These were the **evaluation questions**:

Q1	Policies	Which monitoring and evaluation instructions have been issued by the DGD? To what extent are they followed by the NGAs? Do these instructions help to gain crucial information about the results achieved? How could these instructions and their implementation be improved?
Q2	Quality	Do the evaluations meet the needs and the quality criteria? Did the evaluation process contribute to the lesson-sharing and improvement process? How could the quality be improved?
Q3	Independence	Are the evaluations independent?
Q4	Credibility	What is the level of credibility of the evaluations?
Q5	Content	Are there any recurring findings, conclusions or recommendations in the reports of non-governmental actors? What are the main positive or negative points of the evaluation reports globally?
Q6	Utilization by NGAs	How do the NGAs utilize these programme evaluations?
Q7	Utilization by DGD	How does the DGD utilize these evaluations?

Conclusions

The study's main conclusions are summarised in the figure below and are described thereafter.



The study shows that **DGD did not have a real evaluation policy** setting goals, defining modalities and providing for the resources required. It was largely limited to transferring responsibility for evaluation to the NGAs themselves. This was despite the fact that Belgian non-governmental cooperation represented no less than €901 million, or 18% of DGD's total aid for the four years studied. (C1)

DGD has thus only used very little potential of evaluation for its own needs, whether in terms of accountability to taxpayers and beneficiaries about results, supporting its decision-making, or capitalizing on and sharing the lessons learned from programmes. For example, it did not have many of the evaluations in its possession, owing to the fact that the regulatory framework did not require NGAs to submit evaluations to DGD. (C2)

NGAs largely appreciated the flexibility offered. They mainly had evaluations carried out for use as a **decision-making tool**, in order to have a solid basis for reviewing the approach of the programme in progress, or for preparing the next one. (C3) They **used it much less for accountability (C4) or for sharing the lessons learned** with third parties (C5). Furthermore, there are indications that **NGAs evaluation capacities have progressed, but in a limited manner**, despite the fact that they were given responsibility for evaluation. (C6)

The study shows that **the quality of evaluation reports is often a problem**. Although these reports are generally good for a large majority of programmes by universities and scientific institutions, they are less so for half of the NGO and other partner programmes. The weaknesses observed relate to all quality criteria. (C7) The **credibility** of the evaluations aiming at accountability on results is **affected** by the fact that the NGAs are themselves the commissioning bodies, and that guarantees of their independence are not always sufficient. (C4)

Nevertheless, despite the afore-mentioned weaknesses in evaluation policy and reports, the recommendations which they contain were considered to be **useful** by most NGAs. DGD desk officers also appreciated the complementarity and the added-value of evaluations in relation to annual reporting by the NGAs. (C10)

Finally, the examination of all reports' conclusions shows that one of the positive points frequently highlighted is the fact that **programmes met clearly identified needs and were coherent with national strategies**. Also, the reports often confirm that **the planned activities/outputs were achieved** in most cases. They are, however, more critical about the **formal design of strategies which often appears to pose problems**, as well as the **monitoring and evaluation systems, which are rarely effective**. (C8) The evaluations regularly did not study 'outcomes' at the level of target populations. Half of the reports did not examine the action's sustainability or impact (potential). Therefore, it is **not possible to determine the extent to which DGD non-governmental cooperation as a whole has effectively contributed to development** (C9)

Recommendations

DGD is currently facing some major challenges as a governmental donor, even more so with the country's acute budgetary crisis. It is obliged to account for the efficient and effective use of the public money which it devotes to development cooperation. It must also improve the effectiveness of its aid, consistent with international commitments of recent years, such as the Busan Partnership (2011); for that matter, civil society has also endorsed this.

Thus, it is recommended that DGD **defines a clear evaluation policy** for non-governmental cooperation. This should distinguish clearly between three types of potential evaluation objectives: (i) accountability; (ii) support to decision-making; and (iii) capitalising on knowledge and sharing lessons. (See hereafter for more information.)

DGD should define its approach for each of the types of objectives pursued. On this basis, it should determine the appropriate methods and plans and a regulatory framework, as well as the appropriate allocation of responsibilities and resources. (R1)