



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Federal Public Service

**Foreign Affairs,
Foreign Trade and
Development Cooperation**

How green is our development assistance?

Thematic evaluation of Belgian cooperation in the Field of Environment

Synthesis



Introduction and context

Since 1999, environmental protection has been one of the cross-cutting themes of Belgian development cooperation.

In 2002, Belgian development cooperation elaborated a strategy to integrate the environment into its interventions. This strategy was developed in the “Environment” strategy paper. As the context has changed greatly since 2002, the DGD has launched a new strategic approach. It was therefore the right time to review the results of the strategy followed in recent years.

The evaluation’s objective was to assess the quality, relevance and usefulness of the Belgian development cooperation policy in terms of the environment and to estimate the extent to which this policy was consistent and effective and helped to achieve an ecologically sustainable development. The evaluation also aimed to provide data, observations and conclusions that could be useful in developing the new strategy.

A cross-cutting theme is one that is applicable to any cooperation intervention whatever the specific sector of that intervention.

Since every activity uses resources and places pressure on the environment, in one way or another, all sectors are affected by environmental issues, sustainable development and climate change. It is therefore important to consider the measures to be taken for each intervention to ensure its environmental sustainability. This is what we call cross-cutting integration of the environment.

Methodological approach

The “Environment” strategy paper was both the framework and the main subject of the evaluation. Next to the paper, the consultants examined other strategic documents such as the report on *“Climate Change and the Belgian Development Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities”*, the paragraphs on the environment in the general policy papers of successive ministers and indicative cooperation programmes with partner countries.

The evaluation covers all Belgian development cooperation interventions over the 2002 to 2011 period. Firstly, a critical inventory was carried out on the information contained in the database on Belgian official development assistance, based on the application of the “environment” and “Rio” markers.

The “environment” marker can take the following values:

- Value 0 : the environment plays “no role” in the action;
- Value 1 : the environment is “not the main theme but, nevertheless, is indicated to be an important secondary objective”;
- Value 2 : the environment is “indicated in the intervention’s documentation as a decisive principal objective”;
- Value N : the importance accorded to the environment is undetermined.

The four “Rio” markers are numbered in the same way and focus on:

- the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- the objectives of the Convention to Combat Desertification;
- climate change adaptation;
- climate change mitigation.

Secondly, a “documentary” phase focused on the study of strategic documents, interviews with Belgian stakeholders and the review of documentation relating to seventy interventions and the environmental policies conducted in and with five countries chosen to be the subject of case studies.

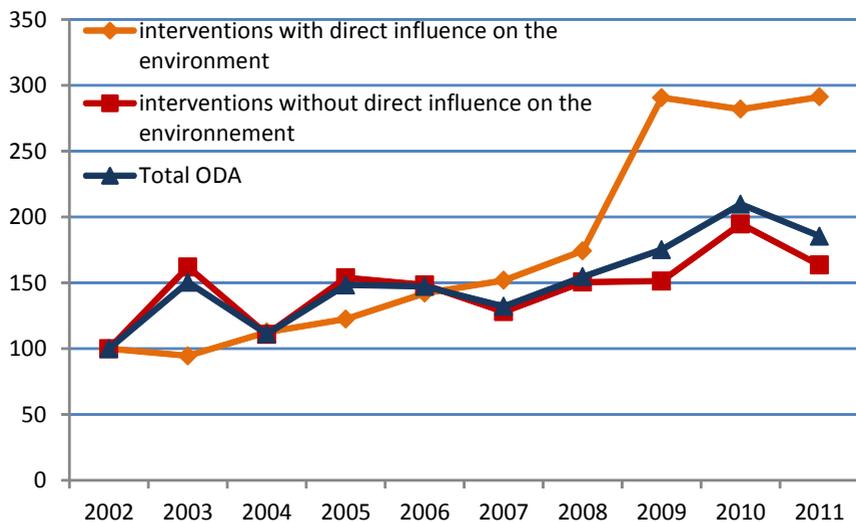
Lastly, field missions took place in these five countries, namely Burkina Faso, Peru, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Vietnam. In each of these countries, at least 10 interventions were reviewed. These were chosen from among the 70 studied based on the documentation.

Critical inventory

The inventory focuses on the resources implemented between 2002 and 2011 and on their intentions rather than the field results. The main observations are as follows:

- Although the environment is a cross-cutting theme of Belgian development cooperation, there are few interventions where it is actually taken into account as an objective.
- Interventions where one or several Rio conventions (biodiversity, desertification, climate change) are taken into account among the objectives are still the exception.
- Expenditure for sectors identified as having a direct influence on the environment accounts for only 20% of all Belgian development cooperation expenditure but is growing faster than other expenditure.

Compared evolution of the Belgian development cooperation expenditures (base 100) (source ADE from ODA.be)



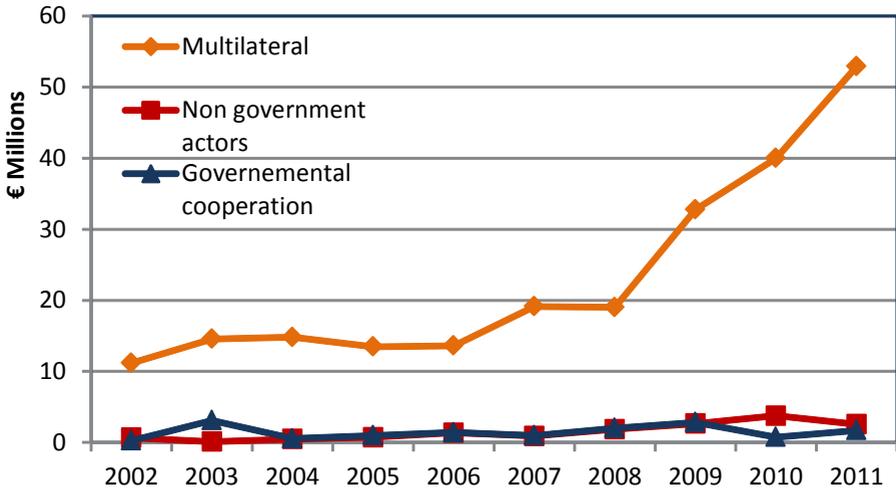
- These sectors present specific dynamics; expenditure related to transport and agriculture is showing a modest growth; spending in the “environmental protection” sector and that regarding water and sanitation has grown strongly since 2008; support for the energy sector has increased since 2010.

- “Environmental protection” expenditure is low but growing faster than other expenditure. It goes mainly to multilateral organisations (GEF, UNEP). This choice is substantially widening the gap between the cooperation channels (governmental, non-governmental and multilateral) for this sector.

Sectors with a direct influence on the environment

For the purposes of the evaluation, we considered sectors such as agriculture, agro-industries, water & sanitation, industry, mining, fishing, energy generation and supply, environmental protection, forestry, transport & storage as having a direct influence on the environment.

Evolution of expenditure in the "environnement protection sector" for the 3 main cooperation chanel (source ADE from ODA.be)



- The six most important countries with regards the incorporation of environmental objectives into Belgian development cooperation are, in decreasing order of importance, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Vietnam, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania. The most important non-partner country is Burkina Faso.

The evaluation's observations

On the usefulness of a strategy paper...

Aside from the Directorate General for Development Cooperation, the partners of Belgian development cooperation hardly used the strategy paper on the environment. Consequently, this paper had very little effect on either the content of cooperation programmes, on coherence between the different actors, on the long-term planning for cooperation, or finally on the environment being taken into consideration as a cross-cutting aspect of cooperation. However, it has had a positive influence on the number of interventions with an environmental purpose and on the budget dedicated to such interventions.

Changes in the context and in particular the growing awareness of climate disturbances related to human activity, have made the 2002 strategy paper obsolete and led to the development of a new strategy.

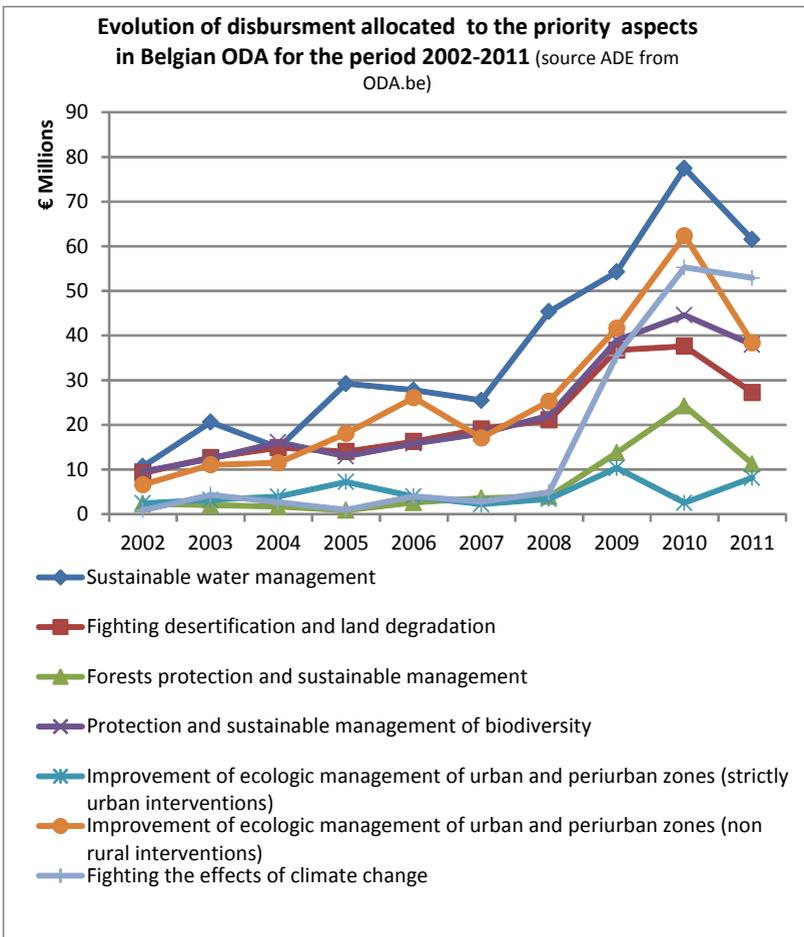


On the level of integration of environmental protection at all levels of Belgian development cooperation...

In accordance with the first specific objective of the strategy paper, environmental protection is now integrated at policy, political and cooperation intervention levels. This integration produces positive effects on the environment and on development, but does not fundamentally guide the development plans towards greater sustainability. Climate change or environmental adaptation is often taken into consideration but only implicitly, with a low level of anticipation regarding expected future climate changes.

On respecting the priorities defined...

Together, the priorities of the strategy paper (see table below) represent almost all possible environmental aspects. Together and individually, they have benefited from increasing importance in terms of budget allocations.



Among these priority aspects are those related to water supply and urban zones which have benefited from the highest funding, followed by protection of biodiversity, fighting desertification and finally fighting the effects of climate change (mitigation and adaptation). However, all interventions related to water have been filed under "sustainable water management", without any particular attention to environmental sustainability. Since 2008, the theme of the fight against climate change has emerged very clearly following the publication of the alarming IPCC report in 2007.

On Belgian support to establish the necessary conditions for the protection and sustainable management of the environment in partner countries...

The second specific objective of the strategy paper targets the conditions for the protection and sustainable management of the environment in partner countries. Efforts dedicated to these issues largely involve multilateral cooperation (GEF, UNEP), with results that are satisfying but not focused on the partner countries of the Belgian Cooperation.

In the partner countries bilateral cooperation still makes various contributions (training, awareness raising campaigns, research and development, waste management, etc.) which are not always mentioned in the intervention objectives though.

It is impossible to determine precisely to what extent these efforts have led to effective practices for the protection and sustainable management of the environment. Their impact is likely to be modest at the most because these interventions are seldom based on an accurate diagnosis of the pre-existing conditions. They lack a baseline to decide what to do and in which order to meet the conditions for the protection and sustainable management of the environment

On the contribution of Belgian aid to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal 7 (ensure environmental sustainability)...

None of the bilateral cooperation partner countries has reached all the targets set at the beginning (in 2000 or 2002 as appropriate). Only a few countries have reached some of the MDG 7 targets.

These targets are not purely environmental but also have an important social character: access to water, sanitation and decent housing. The specific contribution of Belgian cooperation to the achievement of MDG 7 is difficult to establish because it merges with the contributions of other donors. The main efforts of Belgian cooperation concern access to water supply and sanitation. Overall, we can talk of success because over 24 million people in 18 partner countries have, for the first time, had access to drinking water; in terms of Belgium however, we must remain aware that our contribution represents just a fraction of these achievements and results.

Cross-cutting observations

Besides the critical inventory and the specific responses to evaluation questions, the study addresses, next to a review of the strategy documents that are the subject of the evaluation, the environmental marking, other donors' environmental cooperation, multilateral environmental cooperation and trends observed during the evaluation period.

The evaluators also comment on the internal consistency of the strategy paper and on the environmental marking of the interventions where they suspect errors and a systematic overestimation of the environmental dimension.

Furthermore, they observe the legitimacy of the support given through the GEF and UNEP (for which the critical inventory had shown progress) and significant progress in the consideration of the environment by Belgian cooperation over the decade from 2002-2011 that is not only quantitative (as suggested by the critical inventory) but also qualitative.

Principal conclusions

The complexity of environmental integration issues has been an obstacle to the success of environmental integration efforts in Belgian development cooperation interventions. The scarcity of reliable information also complicated the evaluation process itself.

The conclusions cover both dimensions, cross-cutting and sectoral, of environmental consideration. The evaluators argue that the first dimension should be extended and the latter refocused. Indeed, the evaluation confirms the legitimacy of the cross-cutting integration of the environment in interventions targeting other objectives; this integration should be differentiated from one sector to another. However a sectoral approach to the environment is only justified insofar as it does not oppose the principle of concentration of bilateral cooperation in the priority sectors, the evaluators say.

Eventually, the evaluation shows that the environmental consideration of Belgian development cooperation is giving positive results. On the one hand the pressures of Belgian cooperation on the environment have been reduced and, on the other hand, the conditions for sustainable environmental management have been improved. Despite these encouraging results, the evaluation also shows that major progress is still possible.



Recommendations

The evaluation proposes three recommendations with a **strategic scope**:

- 1°) Clarify the conceptual framework, particularly the distinctions between 'environment', 'sustainable development' and other aspects of sustainable development, between worldwide environmental governance and the environment as a contribution to the development of the Southern countries, between the cross-cutting and sectoral dimensions of the environment and between the aspects of environmental protection and adaptation to environmental changes (including climate change). The evaluators recommend integrating the environmental strategy into a broader sustainable development strategy (a strategy aimed at meeting current human needs without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs).
- 2°) Refocus environmental spending: the evaluators propose concentrating spending on our obligations under international conventions, voluntary contributions to the GEF and UNEP, the support for cross-cutting integration, the response to requests from partners and the pursuit of environmental objectives associated with the main sectors of concentration.
- 3°) In accordance with the law of 19 March 2013 on development cooperation, integrate the environmental issue in a cross-cutting manner into all our development cooperation interventions. This integration requires at least one systematic review of what to do (or not to do) to improve the effects on the environment, adapt to environmental or climate change and environmental capacities.

Four other recommendations cover a more **operational scope and aim at**:

- 1°) Improving the weight of the environment in all interventions, and this from the early stages of the project cycle (identification, formulation); with a view to sustainable development cooperation, pay greater attention to the interactions between environmental, social and economic problems.
- 2°) Facilitating and supporting cross-cutting environmental integration with Belgian development cooperation through capacity building of the various actors, maintaining the concentration on priority sectors (to improve the cross-cutting integration of the environment), widespread access to a support and advice service and through the obligation to tackle the issue in all relevant documents.
- 3°) Improving the information about the environment and its integration in interventions, particularly through the 'environment' and 'Rio' markers reported to international bodies.
- 4°) Strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of interventions from an environmental point of view, particularly by considering the strategic indicators and, with regards the interventions, by choosing appropriate environmental indicators and establishing a baseline that can be used to monitor environmental effects.



Consider the environment before printing these documents

For easier on-screen reading, we suggest you read and print the reading notes (see CD-ROM) before starting.

This study was commissioned by the Special Evaluation Office of Development Cooperation (SES), an entity responsible for conducting the strategic evaluation of the activities of the Belgian Federal State recognised as Official Development Aid (ODA). Its objectives are to account for the use of public funds and draw lessons with a view to improving the effectiveness of Belgian development aid.

The full report of the evaluation (management response of the competent authorities included) is available in French, Dutch and English on the CD-ROM above or on the website: http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/development_cooperation/evaluation/ or from the Special Evaluation Office on +32 (0)2 501 38 34 - ses-dbe@diplobel.fed.be

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Responsible editeur : Dirk Achten
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