

# Management response of the DGD on the ex-post impact evaluation of four projects of the governmental cooperation

## **Introduction**

The DGD is satisfied with the fact that the Special Evaluation Office organised an impact evaluation for the first time in its history. This evaluation is in many ways innovative compared to previous evaluations : on the one hand because of the fact that the projects have been looked at several years after completion, on the other hand because of the fact that quantitative methods were used. The first aspect makes it possible to see to what extent effects can still be found (sustainability), the second aspect reinforces the credibility of the findings, which in the past were often based exclusively on qualitative methods. The DGD finds this a positive evolution and hopes that the Special Evaluation Office will continue doing this type of evaluations.

The findings of the individual projects are commented on below, followed by an assessment of the methodology.

## **Réhabilitation et conservation des sols des périmètres irrigués de petite et moyenne hydraulique in the Province of Tiznit (PMH Tiznit)**

The objectives that were related to infrastructure are realised to a large extent, as was mentioned in the evaluation report. The irrigation network was rehabilitated, which led to achieving the expected results : more irrigated surface and a higher share of beneficiary income from agriculture as a result of the project. These are good results that can be attributed to the project.

As far as the long term objectives are concerned, the evaluators come to the conclusion that there is no impact. No effects were found on rural exodus nor on social living conditions in the area. It needs to be said that the global objectives of projects from that period of time were often too ambitious. As the report confirms, it is impossible to influence a complex phenomenon such as a rural exodus with just one project of modest size. This, however, does not mean that the project did not have a positive impact. There are no data in the evaluation report on the socio-economic evolution of the beneficiaries in the report. It is said in the report that too few data were available to make any analyses. These data would have been of great interest to make a real assessment of impact on beneficiaries. Moreover, two indirect positive consequences were mentioned in the report but hardly further developed : the extensions to the rehabilitated infrastructure, and the positive consequences for ground water in the region of Tiznit. There is little elaboration on

these effects, but their importance is not to be neglected in terms of impact : the first one shows that a project can have a multiplier effect or can lead to new developments. If the results of the project were not appreciated by the local population, it would probably not have been decided to extend the existing network. The positive consequences for the ground water nuance the negative findings in the report on the environmental impact and deserve to be looked at in more detail.

The aspects of this project related to capacity reinforcement and training are more problematic. Especially the problematic role of the user associations is one of the factors that limited the sustainability of the project, since they were responsible for the maintenance of the infrastructure and any repairs that were needed. The report mentions that much attention was given to doing the formulation in a participatory approach, but that the user associations were not given enough attention during the implementation of the project since the Moroccan authorities did not prefer this way of working. This leads the evaluators to conclude that more attention should go to participation. The DGD accepts that recommendation, but is also interested in a broader reflection on sustainability and the role of beneficiaries. It is reasonable to ask whether or not more participation of the user associations would have solved the problem of sustainability. The user associations suffered a lack of resources and technical know-how. More training might have helped to deal with the latter, but a solution for the financial resources for the user associations is also to be found with the local partner. Moreover, the report mentions more than once the rather passive behaviour of the user associations. If the use of such structures is to be made effective and sustainable, a combination of several elements will have to be found in which there is sufficient attention for making them more dynamic. Nevertheless the question remains relevant whether user associations in general are the key to better sustainability. Dealing with issues of sustainability remains a challenge in many developing countries, and one for which there is rarely a satisfactory solution. In the case of PMH, for example, hardly anything is said about the responsibility of the local authorities in guaranteeing the sustainability. This aspect of the project was underdeveloped in the report. The DGD therefore welcomes the initiative of the Special Evaluation Office to do an evaluation on the theme of sustainability, hoping that effective measures will be identified to improve it.

Concerning the 'results-orientedness' of the project and the criticism that the focus was mainly on doing the rehabilitations, we want to draw the attention to the fact that the socio-economic study that was supposed to be organised, did not take place. This study could have offered interesting baseline data, on which a monitoring and evaluation system could have been grafted, and valuable insights on the effects on beneficiaries. The mid-term and final evaluations also failed to take place. It is correct that at the time of execution there was no policy to

systematically measure baseline data and to organise evaluations. The DGD will shortly publish a strategy note on development results in which these elements will be emphasized and imposed systematically on our Belgian partner organisations.

To conclude we briefly want to draw attention to the next indicative country program with Morocco in which there will be more focus on the soft side of development cooperation. Much technical expertise is already available in Morocco, which is why the focus will no longer be on infrastructure, but on coaching and training local technical experts. This will address the justified criticism in the report that attention mainly went to realizing infrastructure.

### **Projet d'amélioration et de renforcement des points d'eau dans le bassin arachidier (PARPEBA) in Senegal**

The DGD accepts the conclusions in the report. On the positive side we noted that the infrastructure is of good quality and is still functional. Also the conclusions concerning the infrastructure management by the local user associations are more positive than it was the case for the PMH project. It would have been interesting to have an idea of why the use of such structures works in one case but not in another. Finally the project was found to have a positive effect on freeing up time for beneficiaries, in particular for women, who no longer have to walk for hours to other water sources. There were some indications that this has led to an increase in small-scale businesses. Unfortunately the evaluators have not sought to confirm this, despite the fact that this could be an important long term effect.

There are also important negative findings about the quality of the water, both in terms of the chemical composition as the bacteriological quality. The consequences of this were underestimated. At that time the decision was taken to respect the will of the Senegalese partner whose priority was quantity (number of beneficiaries) over quality. The complementary measures to address quality issues turned out not to be effective.

In subsequent project efforts were made to learn from the experiences with PARPEBA, for instance in the Programme Eau potable et Assainissement du Millénaire (PEPAM 2005-2015) which is subdivided in two projects : PEPAM-BA (bassin arachidier) and PEPAM-AQUA (Appui à l'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'eau dans le bassin arachidier). Also there, however, there were many challenges that remained to be dealt with. Belgium is not the only donor facing these specific problems. That is an element that is not touched upon in the evaluation, namely the fact that nearly all projects in this sector in Senegal are confronted with the issue of the chemical composition of the water (no "bench marking"). This problem is to be dealt with by all donors together. That is why donors in Senegal agreed to

divide the work, every donor focusing on one aspect of this complex issue, in collaboration with the Senegalese authorities.

The most recent program (PASEPAR : programme d'amélioration de la qualité des services d'eau potable et d'assainissement en milieu rural) is organised along the following main lines, addressing the issues raised in the evaluation report :

(1) PASEPAR will adopt a more programmatic and integrated approach than PARPEBA, based on three pillars : drinkable water, hygiene and sanitation, and integrated resource management ("gestion intégrée des ressources en eau" (GIRE)). By creating an institutional link with the coordination unit of the Senegalese program PEPAM (Programme d'Eau Potable et d'Assainissement du Millénaire), Belgium wants to support the local partner, mainly to guarantee the quality of the water, but also to help coordinating and striving for more complementarity and harmonisation in the sector.

(2) The quality of water will become one of the main criteria in PASEPAR : a best-fit approach will be followed in which a specific solution will be sought for each type of situation : small treatment units using reverse osmosis, middle distance water supply systems, chlorination of drinking water in existing supply systems in combination with a coaching and advisory function targeting all stakeholders. The new program will focus also on introducing norms and reinforcing the equitable access to water of good quality.

(3) As far as hygiene and sanitation are concerned, important efforts will be made to stimulate behaviour change through more and better awareness raising. Capacity reinforcement of the relevant actors (administration, NGO's, private sector) will be at the heart of this. Local and international NGO's will be the main actors working together with PASEPAR to raise awareness and promote good hygiene for the local communities.

(4) In order to improve monitoring PASEPAR will be working with the data collected for PEPAM. To improve the 'results orientedness', however, reliable sector indicators are needed. A baseline study will be done by BTC in the first year of execution. The indicators at the level of socio-economic impact on beneficiaries will need to be defined during that study.

### **Projet d'appui à l'enseignement technique et professionnel (AETP phase2) in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

The conclusions in the report are severe and give food for thought. The policy of Belgium in the field of education generally focuses on basic education, in accordance with Millennium Development Goal 2 ("to achieve universal primary education"). In DRC, however, it was decided to invest in technical and vocational education because of the virtual absence of other donors in this sub-sector, because of the expected increase of pupils securing employment after they

graduate, and because the Congolese partner was asking for support in this particular sub-sector. It is clear from the evaluation findings in Kisangani that this support created little added value. New projects in this sector clearly need to be adapted. Changes have already been made at two levels : in the formulation of the new programs in the ICP 2010-2013 and the strategic orientations of the new ICP 2014-2015. The changes that were made are explained below.

### ICP 2010-2013

Support to technical and vocational education is foreseen in the 2010-2013 ICP in four concentration zones of the bilateral cooperation. The Belgian State committed to this in 2009 and will respect its commitments. Every zone will have one program.

The evaluation report appeared on a moment when the formulation of the new programs were all but finished. However, a mid-term evaluation report of the programme Appui à l'enseignement technique et à la formation professionnelle (AETFP) was available in which a number of findings correspond to the ones of the impact evaluation of AETP2. The recommendations of that mid-term evaluation were used as follows during the formulation of the new programs :

- The geographical coverage of the new programs is limited to potential "bassins d'emploi" in the four provinces
- The duration of the projects is extended to five years
- The programs will no longer be focused on rehabilitation and delivery of equipment, but will be based on the concept of "resource centers" which aim at improving the quality of technical and vocational education by offering more practice, systematically organising apprenticeships, offering additional training to teachers, and organising management courses for schools and centers.
- More emphasis is put on the quality of education, rather than delivering materials of which it appeared in AETP2 that they were not used or not used for long. More attention will also go to monitoring the pupils.
- Clear agreements have been made between the two parties (Belgium and DR Congo) in the technical financial files of the new programs and in the specific agreements. Procedures, for example, are foreseen in case one of the parties does not respect the agreement. The Congolese partner pledged to finance the working costs of the "resource centers", to contribute to improving the business climate, etc. The partner therefore needs to be involved more closely in the execution of the projects.
- The trades that will be supported are chosen in function of the possibilities to secure employment, with special attention for girls (eg. jobs in agriculture)
- The programs are conceived in a way that they allow for thorough and regular follow-up of the beneficiaries. AETP2 was monitored from Kinshasa.

The new programs will have bigger teams that are based locally and that will be composed of people with different profiles so they can monitor the good execution of the rehabilitations/delivery of the materials, the socio-professional integration, the organisation of practical training and apprenticeships, good governance and the coordination of the different actors (both public and private). In addition to that there will be more reporting to the partner committee, where any problems that might come up will be discussed and given follow-up. During the formulation the DGD insisted on more investment in monitoring that is really focused on results. Relevant indicators are developed and baseline values will need to be measured. The BTC committed to making the monitoring system operational and to measuring the baseline indicators during the first year of execution.

#### New provisional cooperation program with DR Congo

A new provisional cooperation program with DR Congo is prepared for the period 2014-2015 with plans for a new project in this sector : Appui à la transformation des écoles d'enseignement secondaire général en ETEP in Bandundu (10 million €). The project, however, can only be approved once a national strategy for the sub-sector of technical and vocational education is approved. It only makes sense to start up a new project if the Congolese policy for this sub-sector is sufficiently clear and articulates how technical and vocational education will be developed and supported by the local authorities. The existence of a national vision and an operational framework is one of the basic conditions for the DGD to be met before a sustainable and balanced way of collaboration can be set up in which the responsibilities of the Congolese state are clear, allowing the donors to align on that policy. The DGD wants the Congolese Ministry of Education to be in a position where it has real capacity to lead and coordinate all activities in the sector. The evaluation points to the importance of awareness raising at the level of the Congolese authorities and of clear agreements to which all the parties are held. The lack thereof in the past was one of the elements that led to the conclusions in the evaluation report. Belgium and DR Congo therefore agreed that a national strategy for technical and vocational education, and an operational framework containing action plans and resources, is a precondition for new programs. In order to further the development of such strategy, Belgium is giving technical support to DR Congo. Finally, Belgium also wants to learn from the projects in the IPC 2011-2013 before a new program is planned.

#### **Methodological considerations**

As mentioned above, the DGD welcomes the fact that the Special Evaluation Office organised an ex-post impact evaluation for the first time in its history and the DGD

is looking forward to more evaluations of this type in the future. At the same time thorough consideration needs to be given to the frequency and the subjects of impact evaluations. The cost of this type of evaluation is significantly higher than the cost of previous evaluations organised by the Special Evaluation Office. The evaluation of four projects of the bilateral cooperation was a test case. A similar evaluation of projects in the non-governmental cooperation is on its way. Despite the fact that the DGD recognizes the importance of such evaluations, there also needs to be a more profound reflection on the criteria that could guide decisions on new impact evaluations. The DGD is interested in participating in such a reflection together with the Special Evaluation Office and any other parties that might be interested in taking part.

The lessons learned in the synthesis report are interesting and provide a good basis for further reflection. Caution needs to be taken, however, to generalize these lessons from four projects to the Belgian bilateral cooperation. The recommendations in the report are addressed to all actors without a systemic analysis of the current situation in the bilateral cooperation. The synthesis report should have been limited to recommendations for any follow-up phases to the projects that were evaluated, and should have avoided generalizations on the bilateral cooperation as a whole (the sample not being representative). Even though the recommendations are valuable, especially the ones on methodology, they do not take recent changes into account, such as the approval of a new strategy for monitoring and evaluation at the BTC. The DGD validated this strategy and is convinced important progress will be made if this new policy is applied. The DGD will therefore follow up closely the implementation of the new policy at the BTC.

As far as the evaluation methodology is concerned, we note that there were limitations, a lack of resources probably being at the root of those. The evaluation of AETP2, for example, focused on Kisangani, whereas the program's coverage was national. Conclusions for the entire program were based on extrapolations. The evaluators indicated themselves that this was not the best way of working. This illustrates that even with a relatively high budget, or at least high for Belgian standards, it was still impossible to do an evaluation that was methodologically 100% sound. And yet, the evaluators recommend to make systematic use of quantitative methods. This raises the question of the financial consequences for the Belgian development cooperation if this recommendation were to be followed. Despite the evaluators making this recommendation, they did not make an assessment of the financial consequences nor did they question whether the recommendation was realistic or not.

Apart from the fact that there was a lack of resources, the evaluators had to use methods such as the "recall" method to reconstruct baseline data. The report does not elaborate on the limitations of this method, which is based on beneficiaries' recollections. The use of this method allows to calculate the statistical significance of the qualitative data that were collected and transformed into quantitative data, but it remains impossible to make a thorough assessment of the precision of the recollections. This is a weakness for which it is difficult to determine the consequences for the validity, but it is a weakness that exists. The systematical measure of baseline data should avoid the use of such methods in the future.

## **Communication**

S4 decided to make a short summary of the evaluation reports. The DGD understands the need to be able to communicate more broadly about evaluations, but asks for a dialogue in the future so that a procedure for drafting and revising these summaries can be agreed on. Not all nuances that are used in the evaluation reports to provide context, can be found in the summaries. That is especially the case of PARPEBA (Senegal) and AETP2 (DR Congo), where the local context is important to understand why results were not achieved as planned. That context was largely left unveiled in the summary, which is why the impression could exist that not having achieved the results was entirely due to the way the projects were formulated and implemented. The evaluation reports on the contrary indicate that the national policy, or the lack of one, played an important role as well.

It is fair to say that a summary will never reflect all the details that are to be found in the full report. We plead, however, for sending out the summaries for comments in order to avoid that comments need to be made in the management response. An alternative could be envisaged in which the summaries are copies of the executive summary made by the evaluators for the full report. Provided that the executive summary is available on the moment that the draft final report is sent out for comments, the possibility would exist to comment on the summaries.