

Chapter 6: Results-based management, learning and accountability in the Belgian programme

Policies, strategies, plans, follow-up and notification

Indicator: A results-based management system has been implemented to evaluate performance in line with partner countries' priorities, development objectives and systems

Belgium is in the process of strengthening its results culture and developing a more comprehensive follow-up and management system beyond BTC's project results measurement. Belgium wants to make results management the responsibility of its implementing partners; however, the mechanisms for consolidating the results information have yet to be clearly defined which could undermine the objective of country-level results management. Consolidating monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will be important in overcoming this challenge. In this context, Belgium should not lose sight of its current approach to using partner countries' monitoring systems to the maximum extent possible.

Belgium is investing in improving its system for managing for results, which is currently limited to projects

Following the 2010 peer review recommendation (Annex A), Belgium has been developing its approach to results-based management. The importance of this issue has been validated at the highest level and is cited in the 2013 Law on Development Cooperation.¹ In line with this, Belgium will track the results being achieved by its co-operation partners,² policy evaluations will pay greater attention to the measurement of results,³ and a results department has been created at DGD.

In addition to the legal and policy framework, Belgium is striving to promote a results culture. By carrying out joint staff training in DGD and BTC, and launching a consultative process for drafting the results policy, it has fostered a shared understanding of the ideas and approach to be adopted. The results agenda has not yet been internalised, however, and there seems to be weak demand for results among the public and parliamentarians, with greatest attention being given to spending. Extra effort will be needed to strengthen this culture and translate managing for results into a daily reality for Belgian co-operation officials.

The “development results” policy, which was recently signed off by the Minister, states that a results approach should be rolled out at programme and country level, partly by drawing up a results matrix for Indicative Cooperation Programmes (DGD, 2015). At present, key concepts for managing for results are not applied universally or consistently. They are only applied at the project level.⁴ Mechanisms for consolidating results frameworks are needed, otherwise Belgium runs the risk of developing a fragmented approach that will not allow it to gather the information it needs to support policy decisions.

It is currently hard to use information generated by DGD's tracking and evaluation mechanisms due to the lack of consolidated information and clear guidance for processing reports provided by partners. This can give rise to important differences in decisions taken on the basis of results. The mission to Rwanda confirmed that staff in the field do not always have a clear view of how information they provide is used. This, coupled with the

fact that Belgium's sector strategies are not particularly oriented towards results, weakens DGD's ability to steer Belgian co-operation. It still needs to give clear a signal about the use of results. Extending results-based management from intervention level to sector and country level will require a more pervasive results culture.

Results measurement actively involves the partner country but is limited to projects and is rarely used to increase transparency

BTC's system for measuring project results is put together with the stakeholders and, wherever possible, uses the partner country's indicators and information systems, as confirmed during the Rwanda field visit. Information generated by the results matrix is discussed by the projects' steering committee every year and provides useful input to project management. A final monitoring report and internal evaluations are then used for communication between the field, BTC headquarters and DGD. The officials responsible for monitoring highlight the difficulty, in practice, of measuring results beyond physical outputs – a problem accentuated by the trend in Belgian co-operation towards activities focused on behaviour change rather than the provision of goods and services.

Belgian co-operation is also struggling to measure and report the results of its co-operation at a more consolidated level, as illustrated by the weak results focus of country monitoring reports. Evaluations are either done for projects⁵ or at a very strategic level,⁶ and cannot support decision making at programme or country level. In addition, the monitoring system does not yet inform evaluation needs. The problem could doubtless be solved by reforming the evaluation function within BTC and introducing a country-level results matrix, provided that the evaluations and completed matrix are then used.

There is no specific results approach for fragile contexts

Belgium has no specific approach to measuring results in fragile environments and the development results policy does not plan for a specific approach.

Evaluation system

Indicator: The system complies with DAC evaluation principles

Belgium's evaluation system complies with DAC principles and guarantees the independence of evaluations. Current efforts to increase the evaluation capacity of Belgian co-operation should lead to greater coverage of the portfolio, although the planned reforms may not be sufficient to ensure that evaluations are carried out at a strategic enough level. Belgium should also continue to pursue its efforts to build the evaluation capacity of partner countries, including through evaluations carried out by its partners.

Belgium has a results-focused evaluation policy

The 2013 law on development co-operation draws a distinction between external and internal evaluation, with the latter now under the responsibility of partners implementing governmental and non-governmental co-operation. Since May 2014, external evaluations have been carried out in line with the evaluation policy of the Special Evaluation Service (SES), which is aligned with the DAC's principles and quality standards, and is clearly designed to encourage the measurement of development results and the impact of Belgian co-operation. The policy also clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Special Evaluation Service, which is now the sole body in charge of evaluation within FPS Foreign Affairs.⁷

The Special Evaluation Service is responsible for carrying out both strategic and policy evaluations, and standardising and certifying the evaluation departments of implementing partners in charge of internal evaluations. The SES has its own budget line, outside the

DGD budget, to ensure that it has the financial resources it needs to carry out these evaluations. While the SES budget seems sufficient to carry out complex, high-quality evaluations, uncertainty surrounding its staffing, combined with its new certification role, could restrict its capacity to fulfil its new mandate.

Implementing partners are in charge of their own internal evaluations. BIO and BTC are expanding their evaluation capacity but have yet to finalise their strategies in this area.

Belgium prioritises independent evaluations

Responsibility for ensuring the independence of evaluations falls largely to the SES, which is separated from the processes of policy formulation and implementation. It may consult DGD and the various partners when planning evaluations, but because it has its own budget, it is completely free to select, carry out and disseminate its evaluations. Calling on independent external evaluators should further increase the independence and impartiality of its evaluations, which are themselves evaluated during partners' certification process. For example, BTC's new evaluation department will report directly to the Managing Board. The department's independence would seem to be secure, but it must be provided with sufficient resources to fulfil its function.

There is scope to conduct sector and country-level evaluations

While mechanisms are in place for strategic and project evaluations, evaluations at the sector and country level are lacking.

BTC's interventions are subject to systematic internal evaluations. Strategic and policy evaluations are set out in a five-year programme, updated every year. A full cycle should cover a significant part of ODA and the range of partners, sectors and aid distribution channels. In practice, however, the last cycle of evaluations mostly covered aid distribution channels. Since these evaluations are designed for political decision makers and senior management, they do not examine pertinent questions at the country level,⁸ where management for results really takes place.

The mandate of DGD's new results department should help ensure better alignment between evaluation programming and the needs of DGD. Moreover, the planned creation of an evaluation department at BTC should help fill the gap in country and sector evaluations, although clarification of the department's financing and evaluation programming is needed to ensure strategic coverage of the portfolio and provision of the right resources.

Belgium conducts joint evaluations but could involve partner countries better

Part of the SES's mandate is to increase the evaluation capacity of partner countries. In practice, this means involving them in evaluation exercises, usually within the wider framework of reporting exercises and joint evaluations. SES is actively engaged in carrying out joint evaluations with other donors and, to a lesser extent, with recipient countries.

Very strict rules governing BTC's internal reviews, however, give partner countries little involvement in determining the terms of reference. It must be pointed out, however, that conclusions and recommendations are discussed with partners through project steering committees. Greater strategic involvement of partner countries in evaluations will therefore need to be considered in future certification processes, allowing Belgium to increase mutual responsibility and local capacity.

Institutional learning

Indicator: Evaluations and the right knowledge management systems are used as management tools

There is scope to step up efforts to capitalise in a strategic and systematic way on the information, knowledge and expertise embodied in Belgian development co-operation. DGD and BTC are working on institutional learning, but to transform their institutions so that they better value and share knowledge they need a strategy, support from senior management and to address the challenge of getting people to use the systems for knowledge sharing.

DGD underuses evaluation findings for learning and overall programme management

DGD's success at using and learning from evaluations is mixed – despite the recommendation in the 2010 peer review. For example, the Special Evaluation Service systematically disseminates the results and lessons of the evaluations it commissions, and management responses are mandatory for all its evaluations. Yet the peer review team has heard that there is resistance to management responses in DGD: it takes longer than the agreed two months to deliver a response, which tends to be vague and lacking a timeline for action.⁹ Finally, the Special Evaluator does not systematically follow up on management responses. There is scope, therefore, to review the use of evaluation feedback mechanisms so that they serve their purpose.

According to the Memorandum, “the evaluation reports sent to DGD from the different parties are automatically discussed by the managing departments” (FPS, FA, 2014). BTC and the project steering committees also discuss the recommendations made by external and internal reviews of interventions, but the evaluations and reviews are not circulated beyond these circles. This is a missed opportunity given their value as a source of lessons and good practice.

To become a knowledge centre, DGD needs a clear strategy for managing knowledge and learning from experience

One of the seven objectives in DGD's management plan is to become a knowledge centre in order to take decisions that are more evidence-based and to make projects and programmes more effective (DGD, 2014). The need to create an institutional culture that values and shares knowledge is particularly urgent: staff numbers are decreasing and fewer staff have field experience. Existing knowledge is precious (Chapter 4). An audit of DGD's internal communication recommended that it needs to “improve the management and dissemination of knowledge within DGD” (FPS Personnel and Organisation, 2013). While it does generate and share knowledge through formal and informal activities¹⁰ and has the technology for storing information and knowledge products, it is hard to get people to use them beyond exchanging information. A strategic approach to knowledge management involving the systematic application of lessons learned would provide DGD with useful management and decision making tools.

Communication, accountability and development awareness

Indicator: The member communicates development results transparently and honestly

DGD and BTC work strategically and closely with Belgian non-governmental actors to build public awareness of development issues and support for development co-operation. DAC members can learn from this good practice. At the same time, Belgium is not on track to meet its transparency commitments. DGD needs to secure adequate capacity to maintain, update and use its new aid database to ensure greater accountability for results.

Implementing a strong commitment to transparency and accountability is proving challenging

DGD is carrying out several initiatives to increase transparency and publish timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information in line with its Busan commitments. For example, in 2011 it launched the government’s open data portal and set out a timeline for publishing to the International Aid Transparency Initiative standard by 2014. However, Belgium has some way to go in achieving its transparency objectives as agreed in the Busan Partnership for Effective Development co-operation and risks missing the December 2015 deadline. Belgium rated as “very poor” in the 2014 Aid Transparency Index.¹¹ It has since published its first data in IATI format, however, and it plans to publish more.

DGD’s online database does not contain up-to-date information about programmes, projects or ODA spending – problems it is currently addressing. And although DGD has invested resources in designing a new database, it has just one member of staff to manage all matters related to statistics and reporting. A key challenge for DGD now will be to ensure it can maintain a high-quality database over the long term, that it has the capacity to analyse the data, and that it uses results information for programme management and accountability to parliament and taxpayers.

DGD and BTC could improve communication on the results and risks of development co-operation

Communicating Belgium’s contribution to development results is a priority for DGD, which has solid, evidence-based strategies for communication and development education, backed up by a relatively high budget. Yet its communication on results and risks remains weak. For example, the annual reports produced for Parliament and the public are the main channel for communicating results, but are largely based on reports by development attachés and project managers. They make only passing reference to evaluations, problems and challenges, and to the results recorded by non-governmental organisations and multilateral organisations (FPS FA, 2014: 39).

BTC’s communication team has been working closely with the monitoring and evaluation team and staff based in partner countries to gather results information that can be communicated strategically to the public. Nevertheless, BTC recognises that it could also improve how it communicates its results.

DGD’s approach to raising public awareness is good practice

Belgium’s approach to raising public awareness of development issues (enshrined in Article 7 of the 2013 Law on Development Cooperation) shows several strengths and good practice. For example:

- The development education and communication strategies are separate but both aim to strengthen public support. Regular co-ordination between DGD’s Communication and Development Education Units and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Central Unit for Communication builds synergies.

- DGD took a consultative approach to preparing its development education strategy (DGD, 2012); this was a key strength given that civil society organisations, BTC, schools and the regions of Flanders and Wallonia are central to implementing it.
- DGD is collaborating with NGOs to develop criteria and indicators for measuring the impact of development education (Box 6.1). Being able to show results helps justify the ODA invested in raising public awareness. In 2014, the total annual budget for communication and development education was EUR 30 million.¹²

Box 6.1 Belgian public-awareness strategies are evidence-based

In line with the DAC's lessons for engaging with the public (OECD, 2014), Belgium focuses on gathering evidence of what works and why in its development communication and education work. For example, DGD supported a multi-disciplinary study on public support for and attitudes towards development co-operation (PULSE, 2012). The research findings fed into the ministry's new communication and development education strategies. Awareness-raising projects and activities were mapped by target groups, comparing the supply of and the demand for information. In 2012, an in-depth study measuring the effects of development education programmes was financed by DGD in the framework of the research platform on public support (PULSE)

The 2013 mid-term evaluation of the *Annoncer la Couleur* programme¹ assessed its implementation and progress, and drew conclusions with a focus on education (Peeters et al., 2013). Changes were made in response to its recommendations.

Source: OECD (2014), *Engaging With the Public: Twelve lessons from DAC Peer Reviews*, OECD Publishing, Paris; Peeters, B. et al. (2013), *Évaluation à mi-parcours, Annoncer la couleur*, Kleur Bekennen, South Research CVBA-VSO, Kessel.

*Notes:*¹ For details see www.annoncerlacouleur.be/.

Notes

1. This law requires that the results of Belgian co-operation be evaluated and a consistent approach be taken to report the results and adopt results-based management. The DGD management plan restates the administration's intention to focus on results obtained in the field "with a view to exposing the link between the resources put in and the results achieved" and has defined results-based management as one of its seven goals for 2013-19 (DGD, 2014).
2. The latest management contract between DGD and its operatives includes the obligation to track and evaluate results. The fourth management contract between the government and BTC introduced a "best endeavours" clause for achieving the intervention's specific goals over and above a performance requirement concerning outcomes (delivery of goods and services).
3. The Belgian Development Cooperation Special Evaluation Service points out that evaluations are geared towards results analysis.
4. At project level, the baseline information and the results matrices drawn up for each intervention serve as the basis for dialogue with the partner, in order to formulate quantifiable objectives, track results and support decision making. The use of the reference situation in connection with a results matrix was developed by BTC in 2012 and implemented in 2013.
5. In this case they are carried out by co-operation operatives and are termed internal evaluations, or internal BTC reviews.
6. These evaluations refer to the exercises carried out by the Special Evaluation Service: i.e. external evaluations.
7. After the last peer review, the Special Evaluation Service merged with the DGD's evaluation units.
8. With the exception of a very few country evaluations carried out jointly with other donors.
9. A study conducted by the *Groupe de Recherche en Appui à la Politique par la DGD et la CUD* (GRAP, 2013) came up with similar findings: "a majority of management responses remain relatively vague and not very operational".
10. For example, by pooling resources in cross-directorate teams which include outside experts and people from the field in specific partner countries, such as Mali and Niger.
11. More details on the rating are available at: <http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/donor/belgium/>
12. The budget is broken down as follows: EUR 21 million for development education by NGOs, EUR 3 million for corporate communication and EUR 3 million for the *Annoncer la Couleur* programme.

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