



Peer Review of the Evaluation Function at the Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

Final Report | February 2010



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Foreword

This report presents the findings of a Professional Peer Review of the evaluation function at the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Belgium. The Review was carried out in 2009 at the request of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. Working closely with the two evaluation offices, a Panel of international evaluation experts assessed the strengths and weaknesses of these offices' evaluation function at the federal level.

The Panel comprised:

- Ted Kliet, Acting Deputy Director, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Carlos Rodríguez-Ariza, senior evaluator, Evaluation Unit of the Directorate-General of Development Policy, Planning and Evaluation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain.
- Goberdhan Singh, Director-General of Evaluation, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

It received invaluable assistance from Roland Rodts, an independent advisor with broad experience in the evaluation of development policies, programmes and projects.

The Panel took as its normative framework the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance and the 'pilot version' of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards. It used three main criteria to assess whether an evaluation function and its products can be considered to be of high quality: independence, credibility and utility.

The Review aimed to provide input in order to stimulate reflection and discussion about the possibilities of further improving the two major purposes of evaluation: learning and accountability. Consequently, where the Panel identified challenges and weaknesses in the evaluation function, the report gives suggestions for improvement.

A Peer Review such as this is conducted on a non-adversarial basis and relies on mutual trust among those involved. Both evaluation offices engaged with the Panel in an open and constructive manner. The Panel wishes to thank all the other respondents who gave of their time and insights and by so doing greatly facilitated its work.

The Panel hopes that its findings and suggestions for improvement will contribute usefully to ongoing discussions and future decisions regarding the evaluation function in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

Ted Kliet
Coordinator of the Peer Review

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Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
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| APEFE | Association for the Promotion of Education and Training Abroad |
| BSF | Belgian Survival Fund |
| BTC | Belgian Technical Cooperation |
| CIDA | Canadian International Development Agency |
| CIUF | Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté Française |
| Do.o | Secretariat and Support Unit (of the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation - DGDC) |
| Do.1 | Policy Support Unit (of DGDC) |
| Do.2 | Quality Control and Evaluation Office (of DGDC) |
| Do.3 | Budget/ODA Unit (of DGDC) |
| D1 | Directorate of Governmental Programmes (of DGDC) |
| D2 | Directorate of Special Programmes (of DGDC) |
| D3 | Directorate of Non-Governmental Programmes (of DGDC) |
| D4 | Directorate of Multilateral and European Programmes (of DGDC) |
| D5 | Directorate for Awareness-Raising (of DGDC) |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (OECD/DAC) |
| DACH | Network of German-speaking Evaluation Departments |
| DGDC | Directorate-General for Development Cooperation of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Belgium |
| DGPOLDE | Directorate-General of Development Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain |
| EDF | European Development Fund |
| EUHES | Heads of Development Evaluation of the European Member States and the European Commission |
| FAO | United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GNP | Gross National Product |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| IFAD | International Fund for Agricultural Development |
| MOPAN | Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| OECD | Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OIOS | United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services |
| RBM | Results-based management |

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| S4 | Special Evaluation Office (of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation) |
| UNCDF | United Nations Capital Development Fund |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNIDO | United Nations Industrial Development Organisation |
| UNRWA | United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East |
| USD | United States Dollar |
| VLIR | Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (Flemish Interuniversity Council) |
| VVOB | Flemish Society for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance |
| WFP | World Food Programme (of the United Nations) |

Executive summary

1. The Peer Review

The purpose of this Peer Review is to provide the senior management of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office of this Service with an independent assessment of the functioning of both offices and the quality of their work. The report is intended to inform future discussions and decisions on the evaluation function in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

The Review focused on the central evaluation function at the federal level, which is performed by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. Since these two entities do not operate in isolation, the other evaluation activities in Belgian development cooperation were also taken into account, but were not assessed separately. The actual investigations took place in the second half of 2009, when a plan to restructure the evaluation function was being discussed in the Federal Public Service.

The Peer Review Panel which conducted this Peer Review at the request of the two evaluation offices consisted of Ted Kliet, Acting Deputy Director, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Coordinator of the Review); Carlos Rodríguez-Ariza, senior evaluator, Evaluation Unit of the Directorate-General of Development Policy, Planning and Evaluation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain; and Goberdhan Singh, Director-General of Evaluation, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The Panel was assisted by an independent advisor, Roland Rodts, with broad experience in the evaluation of development policies, programmes and projects.

The Panel took as its normative framework the OECD/DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance as well as the 'pilot version' of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards. It used the following three main criteria to assess whether evaluation functions and products can be considered to be of high quality:

- The evaluation function and evaluation process should be impartial and **independent** from policy making and programme management as well as from the intended beneficiaries of development assistance. Impartiality and independence are pre-conditions for the credibility, legitimacy and utility of evaluation.

- Evaluation should be **credible**. The prerequisites for credibility are the independence and expertise of the evaluation unit and those commissioned to conduct the evaluation: the evaluators. It can only be achieved if the evaluation unit has a critical mass of professional staff. Evaluation should be undertaken with honesty and integrity and should report successes as well as failures. Credibility also depends on the degree of transparency of the evaluation process, which should be as open and inclusive as possible, with its results made widely available. Partner countries should fully participate in the evaluation process, in order to promote commitment, ownership, credibility and mutual accountability.
- Evaluation should be useful and be used. The **utility** of evaluation is determined by ascertaining whether the evaluation findings are regarded as being relevant and useful for decision-making and organisational learning as well as for accountability. The findings of the evaluation should be reported clearly and concisely. They should reflect the interests and needs of the different parties involved in development cooperation. The evaluation process should foster communication, increase learning, and provide the basis for follow-up action. Evaluation offices can foster the utility of their evaluations by producing reports that are credible and of high quality. The utility (and use) of evaluation is primarily ensured by political leadership and senior executives and other stakeholders showing an interest in programming, accepting and utilising evaluations.

These three main elements guided the investigation by the Peer Panel. They provided the structure for data collection from documentary sources, for a self-assessment conducted by the two evaluation offices and for the issues raised by the Panel in the interviews and discussions with different categories of stakeholders.

The Review involved the following activities:

- A desk review of relevant documentation and initial discussions with the heads and staff of the two evaluation offices.
- A self-assessment conducted by the two evaluation offices, in which they identified their perceived strengths and weaknesses (this served as an input for the Peer Panel).
- A review of the quality (validity, reliability, and usability) of 21 evaluation reports published by the two evaluation offices in the period 2003 – 2009. The review was conducted on the basis of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards (version 2006).
- The above three steps resulted in a factual report which presented a first analysis of findings. The report pointed out a number of issues and questions which required follow-up through interviews.
- Interviews with selected stakeholders representing key parts of the Federal Public Service, the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), the heads and staff of both evaluation offices and other stakeholders including NGO umbrella organisations,

a Member of Parliament and a number of evaluation consultants. The purpose of the interviews was to solicit the opinions and views of the interviewees on the structural aspects of the functioning of both evaluation offices and on the three quality assessment criteria. The interviews allowed the Panel to take into account opinions on evaluation within and outside the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. A total of 40 interviews were conducted.

- The drafting of a report in which the Panel provided its preliminary assessment of the evidence gathered throughout its investigations. In November 2009 a draft version of the report was submitted to both evaluation offices, for their comments. The report was revised in light of the comments, and the resulting draft was discussed with the evaluation offices and the management of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in a Review Meeting on 12 February 2010. The Panel took account of this discussion when producing the final report.

2. Main findings and conclusions

General

The Panel concludes that the independence and impartiality of the evaluation function is adequate. The credibility of the evaluation process is satisfactory, but could be further improved. The credibility (quality) of the evaluation reports has been varied. A comparison of older and more recent reports revealed that the quality has improved. The criteria for the utility of the evaluation function are only partially met. There is no evaluation culture inside or outside the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in which it is widely understood why evaluation is needed and its role and utility for learning and accountability is accepted.

Both evaluation offices have committed and motivated leadership and staff. During the past six years, efforts have been made to strengthen the evaluation function. Over time, the programming of evaluation has become more coordinated. However, it could have been more strategic by taking into account the aspect of coverage. Efforts have been made to enhance the quality of the evaluation process and the quality and utility of the evaluation reports. Both offices have also tried to encourage senior management to pay more attention to the follow-up to evaluations. While commending these efforts, the Panel has also identified a number of weaknesses and challenges which must be addressed in order to strengthen the evaluation function of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

Independence

The Panel concludes that at federal level the evaluation function is sufficiently independent. The structural independence of the Special Evaluation Office is statutorily protected by the Royal Decree under which it was set up. Although the Quality Control and Evaluation Office does not enjoy such structural and statutory independence, it functions on the basis of *de facto* independence. The Panel found no evidence of professional or career risks preventing the office or its staff from conducting its work in an independent and impartial manner as required.

The two offices do not operate a formal code of conduct for evaluators but they do ensure that the evaluation teams have the professional competence necessary for achieving credible evaluation reports. To avoid any conflict of interest among the contracted evaluators, due attention is paid at the selection stage and through quality control of the evaluation process.

Regarding the independence and impartiality in programming, carrying out and reporting of evaluations the Panel concludes that the current evaluation programming process lacks a strategic and long-term perspective and that this is detrimental to sufficient evaluation coverage.

Under the current system, both evaluation offices ensure that the evaluations are of sufficient quality in terms of their design, methodology, the conduct of the evaluation and reporting. The evaluators have conducted their tasks in an independent and impartial manner; when necessary, this independence is safeguarded by the leadership and staff of the two evaluation offices.

There are no structural obstacles hampering the evaluation teams' access to available information. The reporting of evaluations is fully independent. A system is in place to review and ascertain the quality of the evaluations and to ensure that the evaluators perform competently.

Credibility

The Panel assessed credibility in terms of the process through which evaluations are managed and in terms of the quality of the evaluation reports. The reports were assessed on the basis of formal OECD/DAC evaluation quality standards. In addition, the stakeholders' perceptions of the reports' credibility were taken into account.

Both evaluation offices have based their approach and methodologies on the general evaluation principles and evaluation quality standards of the OECD/DAC. The internal document 'cadre de reference pour le suivi et l'évaluation au niveau de la DGDC' provides information on evaluation types and evaluation processes. In addition a

Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit was developed by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. Although these instruments are useful, a comprehensive document setting out an overall evaluation policy and strategy in the context of Belgian development cooperation is lacking. Equally there is a lack of a document which provides guidance on the approaches and methodologies to be applied in all evaluations undertaken at the different levels (federal and otherwise).

The overall competency and professionalism of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office is adequate, but could be further strengthened. Current procedures and practice governing the staff recruitment have posed a threat to maintaining or reinforcing the competence level of both offices. If continued, they may undermine the capacity and credibility of the Special Evaluation Office, which was re-established in January 2010 by Royal Decree.

The selection process of evaluation teams is credible, transparent and adequate. Nevertheless, it does not pay sufficient attention to ensuring an adequate balance between international experts and those from partner countries.

The evaluation process is adequate and ensures stakeholder involvement in all stages of the evaluation. Both evaluation offices pay attention to and promote active stakeholder involvement in reference groups established for each evaluation. The stakeholders from the partner countries play a less prominent role than their counterparts in the donor country and implementing agencies.

Both evaluation offices are firmly committed to ensuring the quality of the evaluation process and evaluation reports. With one or two exceptions, external and independent experts are not invited to participate in evaluation reference groups. This prevents these groups from playing a prominent role in helping to ensure evaluation quality and credibility. Adequate arrangements are made to handle stakeholders' comments and disagreements regarding evaluation findings, whilst at the same time safeguarding the independence of the evaluation teams.

The aggregation of evaluation results in the tri-annual reports of the Special Evaluator, which also include information on the evaluations of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office, provides useful information on the accomplishments of the evaluation function at the federal level. However, the Panel feels that the quality of the discussion on the results of Belgian development cooperation and the utility of the evaluation work are not adequately served by issuing summary reports once every three years instead of reporting annually.

The Panel concludes that the quality of evaluation reports has been varied, but has noted an improvement in the quality when comparing older and more recent reports. The main factors responsible for the variable quality of the evaluation reports include

i) a lack of suitable performance and results indicators and of sufficient baseline information and monitoring data needed to measure progress and results; ii) the time and manpower constraints faced by evaluation teams, which prevent them from adequately cross-checking and triangulating different sources of information; and iii) a disconnect between the ambition, scope and complexity of certain evaluations and the resources allocated to them. This results in relatively limited possibilities for fieldwork and for the structured collection of primary data if needed.

Bearing in mind the abovementioned weaknesses, which are often mentioned as constraints for evaluation in the reports, the quality of the analysis and formulation of conclusions and recommendations can be considered as adequate. Most of the reports provide findings, conclusions and recommendations which are supported by a sufficient level of analysis.

Utility

The Panel has concluded that the criteria for utility of the evaluation function are only partially met, as a result of a weak evaluation culture in and outside the Federal Public Service. There is no corporate evaluation policy and strategy providing a framework for the independent evaluation of the Belgian contribution to international development and setting standards to apply to evaluations undertaken at the federal level.

Both evaluation offices have tried to increase the utility of their evaluations by paying due attention to producing reports that are credible and of high quality. In the planning and preparation of evaluations, however, more attention could have been paid to inclusive stakeholder mapping. Individual evaluations do not include a strategy for proactive and inclusive dissemination of their findings. This is not conducive to ensuring greater ownership and improved learning amongst stakeholders in the Federal Public Service and other institutional stakeholders, including those in partner countries.

The evaluations produced by the two offices are underutilised in policy development, the development of strategies and in operational decision-making. The contribution of the evaluations to internal learning is limited because of the absence of a well-defined corporate knowledge management strategy.

The current practice of management response to evaluations is not grounded in robust and unequivocally clear procedures and guidelines. Staff and managers in the Federal Public Service and external stakeholders are not sufficiently aware of the function and status of this instrument. As a result, it is not clear how the management responses to evaluations formally feed into policy making and developing strategies, relate to decision-making at the operational level, and more generally inform reflection and organisational learning.

3. Recommendations

The recommendations presented below provide suggestions for improving the evaluation function at the federal level where the Peer Panel has identified challenges and weaknesses in relation to the OECD/DAC evaluation principles and evaluation quality standards.

Evaluation culture

The Panel has observed a rather lukewarm if not sometimes defensive attitude to evaluation in the Federal Public Service. It advises the political leadership and senior management to promote conditions in which independent and high quality evaluation is widely regarded as a basic instrument for learning, and to strengthen accountability to the general public and partners in international cooperation. Strengthening of the 'evaluation culture' will require time and effort. Management should take advantage of the basic requirements for evaluation which are already in place (such as the Royal Decree) and build on initiatives currently being undertaken to foster results-based management in the programme and project cycle in Belgian development cooperation.

More specifically, the Panel recommends that i) evaluation becomes closely integrated with policy-making and strategic planning; ii) evaluation becomes regarded and is used as an important instrument for knowledge management; iii) the accountability function of evaluation becomes widely recognised; and iv) incentives are provided and systems are created to ensure that lesson-learning from evaluation becomes institutionalised in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

These overarching recommendations are further detailed below.

Evaluation policy and strategy

The re-established Special Evaluation Office should develop an evaluation policy that meets the OECD/DAC Principles for Aid Evaluation as well as the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards and aims at: i) maintaining independence; ii) ensuring quality; and iii) strengthening a culture of learning.

Amongst other things, the evaluation policy could include: the mandate of the Special Evaluation Office; a description of the concept of evaluation, the roles of evaluation in the Federal Public Service, and the different types of evaluations applied in Belgian development cooperation; leading principles and ethical norms for evaluation; a brief description of evaluation programming and the evaluation process including communication and feedback; and a description of the mechanism of the management response to evaluations and other follow-up mechanisms.

The policy document should include concise evaluation guidelines for the work of the office and that of the contracted evaluation teams. It should include a strategy setting out how the Special Evaluation Office will deliver on the policy, what this means for the stakeholders and how progress in the implementation of the evaluation policy will be assessed.

Mandate of the Special Evaluation Office

The current Royal Decree which forms the statutory basis for the newly established Special Evaluation Office includes a general description of the mandate of this office and the Special Evaluator. The Panel suggests that the evaluation policy elaborates this mandate in operational terms, for example by stating that the mandate should be achieved by:

- i) Undertaking strategic and thematic evaluations of Belgian development policies and programmes, with a focus on processes, results and impacts.
- ii) Engaging in joint evaluations in instances where Belgian ODA is provided as part of joint financing and programming with other donors, agencies and partner countries.
- iii) Fostering the use of evaluation findings, recommendations and lessons in policy development and programme/project formulation.
- iv) Ensuring that evaluation findings are easily accessible in the Federal Public Service as well as for other stakeholders. This may include a diversification of evaluation products aimed at specific groups of stakeholders.
- v) Developing methodological tools and systems to support results orientation in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The Special Evaluation Office should establish a close working relation with the network (and possible future unit – see below) in the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) currently responsible for fostering and mainstreaming results-oriented work.
- vi) Interacting with the BTC, NGOs and other Belgian organisations engaged in the implementation of development cooperation, in order to foster the application of evaluation standards.
- vii) Preparing an Annual Evaluation Report which is submitted to the Minister for Development Cooperation through senior management of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. In conformity with the new Royal Decree, the Annual Evaluation Report should be presented to the Parliament. It should include a section on how lessons and recommendations of previous evaluations have been followed up in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and – if applicable – by other organisations involved in Belgian development cooperation.
- viii) Maintaining and developing partnerships with international evaluation networks and communities of practice, in order to foster further development of evaluation quality and harmonisation of evaluation approaches.

To safeguard the evaluation function's independence, credibility and utility, the Special Evaluator should be empowered to: i) select evaluation topics that are relevant in terms of providing insight into the effectiveness of Belgian ODA and ensure adequate coverage; ii) ensure the quality of evaluations; iii) protect the independence of the Special Evaluation Office and its contracted evaluation consultants; and iv) negotiate adequate resources for the evaluation function.

Management response

The current Royal Decree points out the importance of management responses to evaluations. It states that the responsibility for management response rests with the administrative entity whose activities have been evaluated. The Panel suggests that a management response protocol be drawn up.

The following aspects are considered to be important:

- i) There should be a clear division of responsibilities between line management and the Special Evaluation Office with respect to the development and adoption of the management response. After an evaluation has been completed and the report has been signed off by the Special Evaluator, the Special Evaluation Office should not be involved in the drafting of the management response. It should, however, review the response, to ascertain that the evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations are correctly represented. In view of the strategic and political nature of management responses, it might be worth considering whether these responses should in future be confirmed and signed by the Minister for Development Cooperation. The Minister could submit the response to Parliament together with the evaluation report.
- ii) The management response mechanism should include rules about the timeframe for the response and procedures for follow-up of the management response (for instance an action plan indicating who is responsible for its implementation and the timeline for such implementation), and how the results of the follow-up will be reported.
- iii) In the management response, any disagreement with a specific evaluation finding or conclusion must be justified and reasons must be given for not accepting a specific recommendation.
- iv) The management response and follow-up mechanism should be transparent, with relevant documents easily accessible and posted on the web.
- v) In order to facilitate the preparation of management responses, the Special Evaluation Office should continue to pay attention to ensuring the quality, credibility and ownership of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations which form the basis for these responses.

Evaluation quality

As mentioned earlier, the Panel acknowledges the efforts undertaken by the two evaluation offices to continuously improve the quality and utility of their work. In addition to these efforts the Panel recommends that the newly established Special Evaluation Office pay attention to the following:

- i) The Terms of Reference for the evaluations should always explicitly stipulate that the evaluation teams need to adhere as much as possible to the evaluation quality standards developed by the OECD/DAC. Evaluators should justify why key standards could not be met or were inappropriate for a particular evaluation.
- ii) The Terms of Reference should pay attention to balancing the resources to be allocated to conduct the evaluation and the evaluation's level of ambition and scope.
- iii) Institutionalising the practice of preparatory missions by evaluation managers and evaluation team leaders, in order to increase the 'buy-in' and contribution by primary stakeholders in partner countries to the evaluation as well as to further focus and scope the evaluation if needed.
- iv) Engaging external and independent experts in the evaluation reference groups, in order to ensure the quality and credibility of the evaluations.
- v) Ensuring that all reports contain a comprehensive description of the methodology applied and the technical and methodological constraints encountered during the implementation of the evaluation.
- vi) Exploring the possibilities of commissioning synthesis studies of selected evaluations commissioned by operational departments of DGDC and elsewhere in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the BTC, NGOs and other organisations involved in the implementation of Belgian development cooperation. Given that a large share of Belgium's ODA budget is implemented by its multilateral partners, better use could be made in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the evaluations these partners produce. The Special Evaluation Office may advise on the quality and credibility of such evaluations.
- vii) Establishing a 'help desk function' within the Special Evaluation Office, to provide advice on evaluation to operational departments of DGDC and elsewhere in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the BTC, NGOs and other organisations in Belgium involved in implementing Belgian development cooperation. This advisory function could build on the experiences of the former Quality Control and Evaluation Office with the Monitoring and Evaluation Tool Box and should be demand-led, in order to foster an evaluation culture and improve the quality of 'decentral' evaluations.

Organisational Learning

The complementarity of and synergy between the accountability and learning functions of evaluation appear not to be widely recognised in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The Panel advises paying more attention to this issue. Ideally, the learning function of evaluation should be part of a well-articulated knowledge management strategy at the corporate level.

The Panel recommends that:

- i) The Special Evaluation Office systematically synthesises the major lessons learned from selected evaluations produced by other donors and development agencies and shares them within the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. It may also alert operational departments to evaluation synthesis reports produced elsewhere, which provide such lessons.
- ii) The office explores more innovative methods to distil and share lessons from its own evaluations and those of other donors and development agencies. The office could i) develop communication tools and evaluation products tailored to specific stakeholder categories; ii) identify and build on emerging initiatives within the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to improve learning and knowledge management; and iii) intensify the role of evaluation reference groups as a platform for discussing preliminary and final evaluation results which may create greater ownership of these results and could facilitate the preparation of management responses to evaluations.
- iii) The possibility of establishing a Panel of Advisors on Evaluation, similar to those instituted by other bilateral donors, be explored. This Panel's task should be to advise the leadership of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation on the utility of the evaluations produced by the Special Evaluation Office and the actual use made of these evaluations at the federal level as well as by other stakeholders.

Selection and contracting of evaluation teams

Both evaluation offices follow a transparent and rigorous process to commission evaluation teams, involving competitive tendering. A quality and cost based selection is applied, in which a weight of 70% given to the technical component of the proposal and a weight of 30% given to the price component. While this selection process and the quality of the evaluation teams is satisfactory, the Panel notes that this particular procedure may result in the selection of contractors who have not necessarily submitted a proposal of the best substantive quality or the most appropriate evaluation team. In addition, there is room for improvement in terms of a better balance between international experts and experts from the partner countries.

Staffing of the Special Evaluation Office

The mix of senior and less senior internal career staff and an externally recruited Special Evaluator is suitable. At the same time, the Panel has noted some weaknesses in the capacities of the current Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office resulting from the current process of staff recruitment.

In view of the technical nature of evaluation and professional skills required for evaluation managers, it is recommended that the Special Evaluator be able to select internal staff by means of a professional recruitment process. The selection process should take into account the applicant's interest in evaluation work, the extent to which his or her background and competencies match the profile set by the Special Evaluation Office, and a 'competency-based interview' of short listed candidates. In the event that no suitable internal candidate is available, external recruitment should be considered.

The capacity of the newly established Special Evaluation Office is increased as a result of the integration of the staff of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. It is important that the proposed staff levels (8 fulltime staff equivalents) are maintained. Of equal importance is the provision of sufficient opportunities to staff to pursue a career in evaluation, including promotion prospects. This will stimulate their professional interest, and also help to build further professionalism and capacity in the Special Evaluation Office. The current practice of providing newly appointed staff with opportunities to participate in international evaluation training courses should be continued. Sufficient time should be allocated to all staff to allow them to remain informed of new developments in the field of evaluation.

Budget for evaluation

The Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office have been able to programme their evaluations in an independent manner whilst taking into account requests for evaluations and the need to conduct mandatory evaluations, e.g. the annual evaluations to be conducted as part of the management contract between the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the BTC. The annual evaluation budgets of the evaluation offices are set via the regular budget process applied in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. These budgets have proved adequate for achieving the planned evaluations.

The Panel nevertheless wishes to suggest investigating the possibility of establishing a separate budget category for evaluation as part of the overall budget for Belgian development cooperation, in order to underline the importance of evaluation. Making use of this budget category, the Special Evaluation Office should base its annual budget on an annual plan set within the framework of a strategic multi-annual programme of evaluations.

Results-based management

In view of the integration of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office in the Special Evaluation Office, the Panel suggests that a small Quality Control Unit is set up in DGDC, to continue the work of the Network on Results-Based Management and the efforts undertaken in this field by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. This Unit could step up the current efforts of the Federal Public Service and its cooperating partners regarding results-based programming and monitoring, in order to mitigate the observed weakness of baseline information, and the lack of performance and results indicators. Solving these issues is not only important for managing the implementation of Belgian development aid, but will also facilitate its evaluation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of the Peer Review

The Special Evaluation Office (S4) and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2) of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation¹, Belgium requested a Professional Peer Review to be conducted of their activities which comprise the evaluation function at the federal level.² The purpose of the Review was to provide the senior management of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the two evaluation offices of this Service with an independent assessment of the functioning of both offices and the quality of their work. Such an assessment could inform future discussions and decisions of the positioning and work of the two offices.

The Review was conducted taking as its normative basis or framework the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance and the ‘pilot version’ of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.

It should be noted that this Peer Review is not a formal evaluation. Though it is a less comprehensive and in-depth assessment, it adheres to a rigorous methodology, applying the key principles of evaluation while taking full advantage of the particular benefits of a peer mechanism. The device of professional peer assessment can be described as *‘the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of an entity by counterpart entities, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed entity improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. The examination is conducted on a non-adversarial basis, and it relies heavily on mutual trust among the entities involved in the review, as well as their shared confidence in the process.’*³

As such, the peer mechanism goes beyond fact-finding, to include an assessment of the performance, and is characterised by dialogue and interactive investigation. Peer

¹ In this report the names ‘Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and ‘Federal Public Service’ are used interchangeably.

² The English version of the website of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation refers to these two evaluation units as the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. In this report the names Special Evaluation Office and Quality Control and Evaluation Office are used.

³ Pagani, F. (2002), Peer review: a tool for co-operation and change: An analysis of an OECD working method.

pressure does not take the form of legally binding acts such as sanctions or other enforcement mechanisms. Instead, it is a means of peer persuasion which can become an important driving force to stimulate organisations to change, achieve goals and meet standards.

1.2 The Review

In January 2009, the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs was approached by the Head of the Special Evaluation Office to lead and coordinate the Review. Over the next months the process was planned in collaboration with the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office of DGDC, and also the Peer Panel was established and a consultant was recruited as advisor.

The nature of the Peer Review process is interactive. Consequently, discussions on the Panel's findings as presented in a draft report took place on 12 February 2010 with the Head and staff of the newly established Special Evaluation Office⁴. In addition, a meeting took place to which senior management and staff of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, senior management of the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) and other stakeholders involved in the Peer Review were invited. On the basis of these discussions and comments received by the Peer Panel, the draft report was revised for factual accuracy. The final report was also translated into French and Dutch and submitted to the Special Evaluation Office in order to make it available to senior management of the Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The report will be widely disseminated in the organisation, the Belgian Technical Cooperation and among other users, including the Belgian Parliament.

The Peer Panel received excellent support from the two Evaluation Offices and from other stakeholders involved in the process. Full access was given to all requested documentation and assistance was provided in identifying and arranging contacts with the various stakeholders (see annexe 4 for persons interviewed). The Panel was able to conduct its work in an independent manner without any interference from management or staff.

1.3 The Peer Panel members and advisor

A number of considerations were taken into account when composing the Peer Panel:

- Relevant professional background as head or senior staff of an evaluation department of a bilateral donor;

4 In January 2010 the Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2) had merged into the newly established Special Evaluation Office (S4).

- Experience with different types of evaluations and evaluation arrangements in varying international settings;
- Independence, to avoid any potential conflict of interest or partiality.

The combination of these criteria, together with the voluntary nature of service on the Panel resulted in the following composition:

- Ted Kliet, Acting Deputy Director, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Coordinator of the Review);
- Carlos Rodríguez-Ariza, senior evaluator, Evaluation Unit of the Directorate-General of Development Policy, Planning and Evaluation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain;
- Goberdhan Singh, Director-General of Evaluation, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The Panel was assisted by an independent advisor, Roland Rodts, with broad experience in the evaluation of development policies, programmes and projects. The advisor was responsible for collecting and analysing primary and secondary data and information. He also took part in the interviews with the different stakeholders conducted by Panel members and was involved in reporting the results of the Review.

1.4 The focus of the Review

The Peer Review focused on the central evaluation function at the federal level which is formed by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. Since these two entities do not operate in isolation, the other evaluation activities in Belgian development cooperation were taken into account, but not assessed separately.

When assessing the evaluation function of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Panel applied three core criteria that had to be satisfied for evaluation functions and products to be considered of high quality. These criteria are derived from the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (OECD, 1991) and the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards ('pilot version'), OECD, 2006).⁵

The principles set out below provide general guidance on the role of evaluation in the aid management process, with the following central messages i) the evaluation process

5 The approach of the Panel was largely based on experience gathered in similar peer reviews of the evaluation functions of UN agencies (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF, World Food Programme - WFP, Global Environment Facility - GEF, United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services - OIOS and United Nations Industrial Development Organization - UNIDO). See DAC/UNEG Joint Task Force on Professional Peer Reviews of Evaluation Functions in Multilateral Organizations, Framework for Professional Peer Reviews, Paris, January 2007.

should be impartial and independent from the process concerned with policy-making, and the delivery and management of development assistance; ii) the evaluation process must be as open as possible, with the results made widely available, and iii) for evaluations to be useful, they must be used. Feedback of evaluation results to policy-makers and operational staff is essential.

The framework for the Review which guided the work of the Peer Panel covered three main aspects:

- Impartiality and independence of evaluations and the evaluation system(s);
- Credibility of evaluation; and
- Utility of evaluations

Impartiality and independence of evaluations and the evaluation system(s)

The evaluation process should be impartial and should function independently from the processes concerned with the policy making, delivery and management of development assistance. Impartiality contributes to the credibility of evaluation and the avoidance of bias in findings, analyses and conclusions. Independence provides legitimacy to evaluation and reduces the potential for conflict of interest which could arise if policy makers and managers were solely responsible for evaluating their own activities. The requirement for impartiality and independence exists at all stages of the evaluation process, including the planning of the evaluation programme and individual evaluations, the formulation of the Terms of Reference and the selection and approval of evaluation teams. This does, not, however, preclude actively engaging users of evaluations (clients or stakeholders) in these processes. The independence of evaluation can be further enhanced by issuing the reports in the name(s) of author(s), i.e. the consultant(s) who has/have conducted the evaluation, or the evaluation department.

The Review took into account that the appropriate guarantees of the necessary independence are determined according to the nature of the work of both evaluation offices, their organisational position in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and relevant decision-making arrangements governing the programming and conduct of evaluations. Both offices aim to foster the use (application) of their evaluations at all management levels of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Belgian Technical Cooperation Organisation (BTC) and other relevant entities. This implies that systemic measures for ensuring the objectivity and impartiality of their work have received attention in the Peer Review.

Credibility of evaluation

The credibility of evaluation depends on the expertise and independence of the evaluators and the degree of transparency of the evaluation process. Credibility requires that evaluation should report successes as well as failures. Recipient countries should, as a rule, fully participate in evaluation in order to promote its credibility and commitment. Donors and aid agencies need a critical mass of professional evaluation staff in order to have sufficient expertise in their various fields of activity and to ensure the process is credible. Transparency of the evaluation process is crucial to its credibility and legitimacy. To ensure transparency, the evaluation process as a whole should be as open (and inclusive) as possible, with its results made widely available, and relevant information to support findings should be included in a way that does not compromise sources.

Utility of evaluations

To have an impact on decision-making and organisational learning, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful and be presented clearly and concisely. They should fully reflect the different interests and needs of the many parties involved in development cooperation. Easy accessibility is also crucial for usefulness. The evaluation process itself should promote a further clarification of objectives, improve communication, increase learning, and lay the groundwork for follow-up action. Obviously, ensuring the utility of evaluations is only partly under the control of the two evaluation offices. It is primarily a function of, and will depend on, the interest of the political leadership and senior executives of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Belgian Technical Cooperation and other stakeholders in programming, accepting and using evaluations.

1.5 Methodology

The Review Framework with these three main elements guided the aspects to be investigated and provided a structure for data collection from documentary sources, for a self-assessment conducted by the two evaluation offices and for the subsequent development of questions to be raised by the Panel in interviews with different categories of stakeholders. The methodology was designed so as to allow new issues to be taken into account as the Panel's understanding deepened, as well as to enable triangulation, i.e. cross-checking of data sources to verify the information gathered. The Review applied qualitative methods and an inductive approach in order to establish patterns.

It should be noted that the three main criteria applied in the Review to assess the evaluation function, i.e. independence, credibility and utility, enable objective and subjective judgements. Moreover, the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development

Assistance and the related standards for evaluation quality applied in the Review are to be considered to be a mixture of corporate, cultural and perception-based standards. The information provided by the Review is based on the analysis of organisational structure of the evaluation function at the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, as well as on the analysis of the managerial practices and perceptions of managers and staff about the independence, credibility and utility of evaluation. These perceptions are important, since they largely define how senior management and staff use evaluation results in policy making and in administering the aid programme. Consequently, the perceptions are a significant source of the Review.

A total of 40 persons were interviewed. Interviewees were chosen to represent key parts of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, as well as other entities such as the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), in order to solicit opinions on and experience from evaluation that reflect the use of evaluations and how they may influence decisions. In consultation with the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office, the Panel selected the interviewees as representatives of the organisational units with which these two evaluation offices interact or which are major stakeholders in the evaluation function. In addition, external stakeholders were selected on the basis of the same criteria. These two groups of stakeholders enabled the Panel to provide an adequate reflection of the views on evaluation within and outside the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

The Panel was substantively and managerially responsible for the conduct of its review. This entailed i) defining the normative framework for and approach of the Review (in cooperation with the two evaluation offices); ii) collecting information; iii) validating evidence and findings; iv) formulating judgements, conclusions and recommendations; and v) presenting the results of the review in a concise Peer Panel report.

1.6 The scope and limitations of the Review

In carrying out its assignment the Panel examined and commented on:

- Structural aspects of the functioning of both evaluation offices in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. This included assessing whether the current functional arrangements in the Federal Public Service effectively ensure that both offices can contribute to learning and accountability in Belgian Federal Development Cooperation.
- The corporate evaluation policy (and mandate of both evaluation offices) and other policies, procedures and practice which have a bearing on the evaluation offices and their activities.
- Organisational relationships between the two evaluation offices, and between them and other relevant units in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

- Relationships and responsibilities of the evaluation function at the federal level vis-à-vis partners collaborating in the implementation of Belgian Development Cooperation, e.g. the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), multilateral organisations, Belgian non-governmental organisations (NGOs); universities, scientific institutions and other partners.
- The coverage of evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by both evaluation offices, relative to the expenditure of Belgian Federal Development Cooperation.
- The quality of the evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by both evaluation offices and the ways in which the offices safeguard that quality. The assessment includes the conduct of the actual evaluations (the evaluation process), the quality of evaluation reports (the evaluation products), the independence of contracted evaluation teams and their team leaders (consultants), and the ways in which the evaluation offices enable these evaluation teams to produce credible reports. Also covered were the ways in which stakeholders are facilitated to comment on draft Terms of Reference for the evaluations and draft evaluation reports.
- The utility and actual use of evaluations and their results, including follow-up in terms of accountability and learning. Aspects are the ways in which evaluation results are disseminated and also the lessons used within the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The Review did not include an analysis of the actual use of evaluations by the BTC or by other stakeholders such as NGOs, Parliament⁶, and the press.
- The support provided to DGDC's operational departments, to foster their monitoring and evaluation capacities and encourage the active use of evaluation results.
- The formal arrangements and responsibilities for the follow-up of evaluation results and recommendations by the political and managerial leadership of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. How this follow-up is undertaken and monitored by both evaluation offices (to the extent that these tasks are within the mandate of these offices).

As mentioned, the Peer Review focused on the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. Links with other functions in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, for instance the audit function and to external entities such as the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, were examined only to the extent that they are relevant for assessing the quality of the work of both evaluation offices.

The Peer Panel took note that evaluations are also conducted by the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), by Belgian NGOs and other institutions and organisations involved

6 However, the Panel discussed how evaluations and management responses to them were used in the Belgian Parliament with a Member of Parliament, and reviewed written sources on the subject.

in the implementation of Belgian ODA.⁷ Such evaluations are used by the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and may provide useful ‘building blocks’ for evaluations commissioned by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. However, neither the evaluation functions and evaluations of these organisations nor the evaluations commissioned by operational units of the Federal Public Service (‘decentral’ evaluations) were assessed separately.

The Panel sought to obtain views from a wide spectrum of people and to maximise opportunities to be informed and influenced by stakeholders (participation). By triangulating the information and opinions received it tried to reach a balanced and objective analysis of the main issues. The views and interpretations provided in this report are those of the Panel members.

1.7 The review process

The following major steps and activities were undertaken during the Review.

Preparation of the Approach and Work Plan for the Review

The preparatory activities were conducted collaboratively by the Peer Panel, the advisor and the two evaluation offices. The Panel held its first working meeting in Brussels on 7 May 2009, during which it presented its draft Approach and Work Plan to the two evaluation offices. The document described the key elements of the Peer Review: background, purpose, scope, general approach and methods, composition of the Peer Panel and the proposed time schedule. Following a discussion with both evaluation offices it was formally agreed that the document would constitute the Terms of Reference for the Review. The Terms of Reference for the advisor to the Panel were similarly discussed and finalised. The meeting also served to familiarise the Panel and the advisor with the evaluation function at the federal level. Subsequent to the first working meeting, a self-assessment template was prepared, for gathering factual information from both offices, including their views on their position in the Federal Public Service and their opinion on the three criteria forming the basis for the Review.

Collection of factual information

Subsequently, the advisor collected the necessary information for the Review by means of a desk study. He reviewed relevant documentation giving general information on the Belgian development cooperation programme and the organisational structure of the

7 Many evaluations are carried out by the BTC, NGOs and the Belgian Survival Fund as part of the project or programme management cycle. The number of such evaluations is not known by the Panel.

Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the statutory framework of the Special Evaluation Office, as well as the documents underlying the establishment and function of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. The study also served to gain insight into the processes governing the programming, conduct, reporting and feedback of evaluations commissioned by the two evaluation offices. Both offices were invited to prepare a brief self-assessment report identifying their perceived strengths and weaknesses. The information contained in the reports provided the Panel and the advisor with additional insights into the actual functioning of the two offices. Following a first round of interviews with the heads and staff of both evaluation offices, the advisor prepared an inception report which outlined a more detailed work plan and approach for the Review.

Assessment of the quality of evaluations of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office

The quality of the evaluation reports of both evaluation offices published prior to the Peer Review was analysed on the basis of the 'pilot version' of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards assessment framework. The framework, which is appended as Annexe 6, contains a checklist to identify i) the general characteristics of the evaluations concerned and ii) the quality of the evaluations in terms of their validity, reliability, and usability. Each of these criteria is operationalised by specific indicators.

Understanding facts and perspectives: interviews with stakeholders

The first three steps of the Review process resulted in a factual report which was drafted by the advisor. This report presented a preliminary analysis of findings and pointed out a number of issues and questions which required follow-up. From 14 – 19 September 2009, the Panel and the advisor conducted semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders at the Federal Public Service, the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), the heads and staff of both evaluation offices, and other stakeholders including NGO umbrella organisations, a Member of Parliament and a number of evaluation consultants. The list of interviewees is appended (Annexe 4).

The basic purpose of the interviews was to gauge the opinions and views of the interviewees on the structural aspects of the functioning of both evaluation offices and on the three main quality assessment criteria. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed new questions to be introduced during the interview in response to the interviewee's answers. At the end of each day of interviews the Panel members and the advisor shared their findings, suggested interpretations and identified gaps in knowledge. This facilitated the understanding in the Panel and helped its members to establish a shared stance early on in the process. To conclude the week of interviews, the Panel discussed its initial findings with both evaluation offices during a feedback meeting.

Validation of preliminary findings

The Peer Panel presented its preliminary assessment of the evidence gathered through its investigations in an initial draft report, which was submitted to both evaluation offices in November 2009 for their feedback. The comments received were taken into consideration when the Panel finalised its report. On 12 February 2010 the Panel discussed its final draft report with the heads and staff of both evaluation offices and with senior management and staff of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, senior management of the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) and other stakeholders involved in the Peer Review. The outcome of these discussions – the actual Peer Review – is reflected in the final report

1.8 Organisation of the report

After the introductory chapter on background and approach and chapter 2 briefly describing the evaluation function in the Federal Public Service, the report discusses in turn each of the dimensions which define the evaluation function: independence (chapter 3), credibility (chapter 4) and utility (chapter 5). Different facets pertinent to these dimensions are described under separate headings and their importance is examined. Each of the three chapters ends with a conclusion. The final chapter of the report (chapter 6) provides recommendations which are organised along the main issues the Panel has identified.

2. Evaluation at the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

This chapter provides a brief overview of Belgian development cooperation (section 2.1). It then goes on to describe the evaluation function at the federal level, namely the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office (section 2.2). The final part of the chapter describes the offices' approach to and conduct of evaluations.

2.1 Belgian Development Cooperation – a brief overview

During the period 2003 – 2008, the Belgian annual ODA remained fairly stable at around € 1.5 billion. This represents roughly 0.5 percent of the Belgian GNP. A breakdown into main components is given in table 1.

Belgium's development cooperation policy is based on the Law on Belgian International Cooperation of 25 May 1999, in which the primary objective of this policy is described as sustainable development, to be achieved by combating poverty, on the basis of the concept of partnership and in accordance with the criteria for determining relevance to development as defined by DAC. The Law introduces the principle of concentrating direct bilateral assistance geographically on a maximum of 25 partner countries, territories or regional organisations. It also establishes a focus on the following five sectors: i) basic healthcare, including reproductive health; ii) education and training; iii) agriculture and food security; iv) basic infrastructure; v) conflict prevention and societal consolidation. The Law also establishes the principle of focusing multilateral cooperation on twenty or so organisations and indirect cooperation on partners selected in ways that comply with established criteria. Three cross-cutting themes are mentioned: gender equality, environmental protection and the promotion of a social economy.

| Table 1. Belgian ODA, 2003-2008, in € million | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Government Cooperation | 127 | 151 | 198 | 207 | 214 | 269 |
| Technical cooperation/scholarships | 88 | 81 | 114 | 120 | 129 | 161 |
| Financial cooperation/budget support | 19 | 21 | 18 | 29 | 31 | 48 |
| Operational costs BTC | 19 | 9 | 23 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| State to state loans | 0 | 23 | 20 | 27 | 26 | 16 |
| Other | 1 | 17 | 23 | 12 | 8 | 23 |
| Non-Government Cooperation | 247 | 174 | 187 | 187 | 188 | 193 |
| NGO programme financing | 80 | 78 | 81 | 84 | 86 | 83 |
| University cooperation | 47 | 47 | 48 | 53 | 50 | 52 |
| Other non-governmental | 120 | 49 | 58 | 50 | 52 | 48 |
| Multilateral Cooperation | 196 | 303 | 371 | 335 | 331 | 475 |
| European development Fund | 86 | 92 | 103 | 105 | 105 | 133 |
| World Bank Group | 13 | 82 | 152 | 78 | 76 | 175 |
| Regional development banks | 21 | 20 | 18 | 30 | 27 | 31 |
| Other international | 76 | 109 | 98 | 122 | 123 | 136 |
| Belgian Survival Fund | 14 | 20 | 20 | 27 | 30 | 34 |
| Humanitarian aid | 43 | 24 | 21 | 30 | 29 | 31 |
| Private sector support | 25 | 31 | 28 | 19 | 27 | 45 |
| Other expenditure | 32 | 18 | 22 | 29 | 29 | 42 |
| TOTAL DGDC | 684 | 721 | 847 | 834 | 848 | 1,089 |
| | | | | | | |
| Non-DGDC | 27 | 77 | 83 | 89 | 90 | 101 |
| | | | | | | |
| TOTAL Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs | 711 | 798 | 930 | 923 | 938 | 1,190 |
| | | | | | | |
| Other ODA | 877 | 376 | 641 | 650 | 489 | 439 |
| European Commission (excl EDF) | 165 | 184 | 202 | 221 | 226 | 248 |
| Debt relief | 665 | 149 | 358 | 285 | 71 | 70 |
| Flemish Region | 27 | 29 | 30 | 32 | 41 | 43 |
| Walloon Region | 18 | 20 | 21 | 23 | 23 | 26 |
| Other | 28 | 6 | 30 | 89 | 128 | 52 |
| | | | | | | |
| TOTAL ODA | 1,588 | 1,174 | 1,571 | 1,573 | 1,427 | 1,629 |

Source: Directorate-General for Development Cooperation, Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

New aspects and elements have been introduced in development policy since 1999. They include a fourth theme, children's rights, added following the Law's amendment on 19 July 2005.⁸ Belgium made a commitment in March 2002 at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey to increase the country's ODA to 0.7% of GNP by 2010. Current development policy focuses on 18 priority countries and territories.⁹ Underlining the importance of development cooperation in government policy, a Minister for Development Cooperation was appointed as of 2003, to replace the Secretary of State for Development Cooperation – a post that had been responsible for this policy field in the Cabinet prior to that date.

Organisation

The Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) is one of the Federal Public Service's six Directorates-General and the main administrative entity for development aid. In 2008, the DGDC administered a cooperation budget of € 1.1 billion, roughly 67 percent of the total € 1.63 billion Belgian ODA. The balance is administered by other Directorates of the Federal Service (for instance: conflict prevention, emergency aid), the Flemish and Walloon Regional Governments, the Federal Public Service Finances (contributions to the European Union development assistance budget), the National Ducroire Office (debt relief) and provinces, municipalities and local authorities.

The DGDC is headed by a Director-General whose office is supported by four 'services' i.e. Secretariat and Support (Do.0), Policy Support (Do.1), Quality Control and Evaluation (Do.2) and Budget/ODA (Do.3). Since its most recent reorganisation in 2003, the DGDC has had four main directorates: the Directorate for Governmental Programmes (D1), the Directorate for Special Programmes (D2), the Directorate for Non-Governmental Programmes (D3) and the Directorate for Multilateral and European Programmes (D4). In addition there is a Directorate for Awareness-Raising Programmes (D5).

The Directorate for Governmental Programmes (D1) and the counsellors for international cooperation (attachés) at Belgian embassies in partner countries are jointly responsible for planning, guiding, supporting and follow-up on governmental development cooperation programmes (also called direct bilateral programmes). The main objective of the overall bilateral cooperation programme is to help to implement the poverty reduction strategies of the partner countries. Since 2003,

8 At the time of writing of this report a new Law on International Cooperation was in preparation.

9 Belgium's partner countries are: Algeria, Benin, Bolivia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Palestinian territories, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam (http://www.dgci.be/en/publications/presentation_folder_cooperation_engl.pdf).

Belgium has concentrated its governmental cooperation in 18 countries. The bilateral programmes are monitored by the Belgian embassies' development cooperation attachés and are implemented by the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), the agency responsible for executing all government development programmes, monitoring sector budget support, and managing study grants and traineeships awarded by the DGDC (on average 1,000 per year). The BTC currently employs 650 people: 180 at headquarters in Brussels and 470 in the countries where projects and programmes are executed.

Putting up a sustainable fight against poverty has become the primary objective of government cooperation, and a range of initiatives have been taken, with a view to using the available resources more effectively and achieving sustainable results. There has been a clear trend away from providing services and towards developing the skills of partner agencies (capacity building). New forms of aid have also been developed. The execution of projects is entrusted to the partner country, or sector budget support is provided if the country complies with a number of quality criteria related to public finance management and procurement.

The Directorate for Special Programmes (D2) manages DGDC's emergency, rehabilitation and food aid programmes. In the context of the 1999 Food Aid Convention, and in accordance with the agreements entered into with the European Union, Belgium is committed to supplying a minimum of 30,000 tons of cereal equivalent to developing countries each year. Emergency and rehabilitation food aid is supplied in situations arising from unforeseeable natural phenomena and phenomena of human origin. The main actors involved in emergency aid are United Nations' specialist organisations (e.g. the World Food Programme - WFP, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - UNRWA), the International Committee of the Red Cross - ICRC, the BTC and NGOs.

D2 also manages the Belgian Survival Fund (BSF), which was established on the initiative of the Belgian Parliament. The BSF received an initial allocation of USD 230 million paid out in a number of annual instalments by Belgium's national lottery. The aim of the Fund is to improve food security in countries in sub-Saharan Africa that face chronic food shortages. The Fund provides financial support to long-term programmes which tackle the roots of food supply problems by adopting a multi-sector approach. Activities funded by the Belgian Survival Fund are implemented by the BTC, Belgian NGOs and multilateral organisations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development - IFAD, the United Nations Capital Development Fund - UNCDF, the United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF, or the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation - FAO.

The financing and oversight of non-governmental cooperation initiatives is the responsibility of the Non-Governmental Programmes Directorate (D3). The term

‘indirect cooperation’ applies to operations conducted by third-party organisations in three categories: i) officially recognised NGOs; ii) Belgian universities and research institutions; and iii) specialist bodies established under private law, trade unions, towns and communes.

Non-governmental cooperation agreements are currently signed with 135 recognised non-governmental Belgian organisations.¹⁰ University cooperation has always played a key role in Belgian development cooperation. This cooperation is governed by two general agreements between the Federal State and the Flemish universities represented by the Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (VLIR), and between the Federal State and the francophone universities represented by the Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté Française (CIUF). The two general agreements are accompanied by five-year plans that determine the objectives and resources specified for university cooperation. In 1997, the foundations were laid for a new approach to cooperation with scientific institutions. As is the case for all other players, this approach is based on multi-annual programmes instead of a variety of small projects. The Antwerp Institute of Tropical Medicine, the Tervueren Royal Museum of Central Africa and the Royal Belgian Institute and Museum of Natural Sciences are the main research institutions benefiting from financial support. The main specialised bodies supported by the D3 Directorate are the Association for the Promotion of Education and Training Abroad (APEFE), and the Flemish Society for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB).

DGDC’s multilateral cooperation budget has more than doubled: from € 200 million in 2003 to € 474 million in 2008. It currently accounts for some 30 percent of total ODA. The budget is administered by the Multilateral and European Programmes Directorate (D4). It rests on three pillars: i) the United Nations and related institutions, ii) the European Union and iii) the International Financial Institutions, including the World Bank in particular. The Multilateral and European Programmes Directorate publishes an annual Yellow Paper which provides a comprehensive overview of its activities. As of January 2009, Belgium decided to fund multilateral organisations almost entirely through core funding.

The Directorate for Awareness-raising (D5) aims to provide information to the Belgian public in order to raise its awareness of the importance of development cooperation and values such as global solidarity. This directorate communicates directly or indirectly (via partner organisations) with the public in various ways: issuing publications and organising or supporting awareness-raising events and structural programmes. The magazine ‘*Dimensie 3*’ and the electronic newsletter *DGDC Info* (available in French and

10 Some 50 of those receive funding (subsidies) on the basis of a rolling three-year programme.

Dutch) are well-known publications which, like the website of DGDC, contain up-to date information on international development cooperation and related issues.

2.2 Overview of the evaluation function at the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

General

Evaluations have long been part and parcel of Belgian development cooperation. Prior to 2000 the evaluation function was characterised by evaluations of projects; there was no permanent central evaluation office or department. Currently, many evaluations are carried out at the operational level by the directorates and services managing the implementation of Belgian development assistance, i.e. the BTC, NGOs and other entities. Although these ‘decentral’ evaluations represent an important part of all evaluations conducted, they are not a formal part of the evaluation function at the federal level.¹¹

Nearly all of the ‘decentral’ evaluations are project/programme evaluations assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of a single intervention (project or programme) or set of interventions in achieving the intended results. They also assess the relevance and sustainability of outputs as contributions to medium-term and longer-term outcomes. Basically, the evaluations serve to reinforce the accountability of project/programme managers. In general, these evaluations are not designed on the basis of a centrally prescribed conceptual, methodological or technical format. Their programming is largely based on autonomous decisions related to the needs and interests of the agencies concerned. In the case of the BTC they are also governed by implementation agreements. The reports of ‘decentral’ evaluations are mainly internal documents with limited distribution and available only through the internal documentation system of the organisations concerned. They are, however, shared with DGDC units. In the case

¹¹ The BTC commissions a large number of evaluations. The Panel was informed that each intervention is in principle to be evaluated at the mid-term stage (mid-term review) as well as upon completion. The number of evaluations commissioned by the operational units of DGDC is reported to be low. NGOs, especially the larger ones, also commission quite a large number of evaluations. However, the Panel was informed that the importance of evaluation seems to have waned since the current arrangement between the Federal State and the NGOs has discontinued the obligation for NGOs to reserve one per cent of the programme budget allocated to them, for evaluative activities. The Belgian Survival Fund stipulates that each intervention co-financed by the Fund be evaluated at the mid-term stage and upon completion. Multilateral organisations also conduct evaluations of activities funded through voluntary contributions by Belgium.

of the BTC, the evaluation reports need to be provided to the attaché(s) at the Belgian embassy in the partner country/ies at issue.¹²

To strengthen public accountability of the Belgian international cooperation effort, the Special Evaluation Office (known as S4) was established by a Royal Decree of 4 May 1999 in the context of the restructuring of the Belgian international cooperation. Immediately upon taking up his duties, the Special Evaluator undertook a preliminary study and prepared an evaluation plan for the year 2000. The plan was only partly executed. In April 2001, the Court of Audit found that the appointment of the Special Evaluator was irregular. Subsequently, his nomination was invalidated by a commission of senior civil servants in December 2001. The Special Evaluation Office was re-established by the Royal Decree of 17 February 2003, as an independent body 'administratively attached' to the Office of the President of the Governing Board of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. A newly appointed Special Evaluator took office in May 2003 and the Special Evaluation Office became fully operational one year later.

Upon the appointment of the Special Evaluator in 1999, the existing Monitoring and Evaluation Unit within the DGDC was discontinued. However, following recommendations of the OECD/DAC Peer Review of Belgium in 2001, this unit was re-established in 2003, with the aim of supplementing external evaluation conducted by the Special Evaluation Office. The unit, initially named Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Office, was to conduct evaluations, provide support to internal evaluation and monitoring conducted by the operational departments of DGDC, and to ensure that quality control of aid activities is exercised on the basis of standardised procedures and indicators. It was restructured in 2006 and in 2008 was renamed the Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2). Do.2 is attached to the DGDC Director-General's Office and its Head reports to the Director-General.

The Special Evaluation Office (S4)

At the time of the Peer Review, the Special Evaluation Office was staffed by a Special Evaluator (senior level) and three evaluation officers varying in seniority¹³ and a secretariat. Apart from the Special Evaluator, who has a mandate (contract) for six years, all positions are permanent.¹⁴ The potential staffing level has remained constant

12 During the interviews it became clear to the Panel that the operational units of the DGDC appear not to use these reports systematically. Some units indicated that they review these reports routinely; others stated that they did not have sufficient time to do so.

13 At the time of the Peer Review, the staff had respectively one, two and three years of experience in evaluation.

14 One staff member had been appointed on an annual contract which was renewed at the time of the Peer Review.

over the past six years, but there have been vacancies during long periods of time, especially at the senior level. Staff is funded from the Federal Service budget category which covers all regular core staff and support costs. The Royal Decree of 2003 does not contain information on the level of the operational budget of the Special Evaluation Office. However, when the Office was re-established in 2003, it was given a 'ring-fenced' operational budget of about € 1.0 million.¹⁵

Under the Royal Decree of 2003, the Special Evaluation Office is charged with:

- Planning and executing evaluations regarding all ODA activities of the Federal Public Service;
- Promoting the quality of the internal evaluation work¹⁶;
- Developing and producing useful and usable evaluation results;
- Participating in international evaluation initiatives.

Since its establishment in 2003, the office has commissioned a total of nine large-scale evaluations (see box 1). Apart from implementing its own evaluations, S4 participates in a growing number of evaluations undertaken jointly with the evaluation services of other bilateral donors and agencies. The most important ones are:

- The joint evaluation of general budget support led by the evaluation department of DFID (2006);
- The evaluation of the 3 C's (Complémentarité, Coordination et Cohérence) which was conducted under the auspices of the European Commission and the EU Member States (2008);
- The evaluation of the Paris Declaration (Phases 1 and 2), jointly undertaken by a large group of partner countries, donors and development agencies (ongoing); The joint evaluation of Citizen's Voice and Accountability (2008), where S4 was involved in the case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- A Review of the World Trade Organisation's technical assistance (2006).

In addition to participating in these joint efforts, the Special Evaluation Office is currently leading two joint evaluations: the multi-donor/agency evaluation of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the joint evaluation of the development cooperation programmes of a number of donors in Niger. Finally, the office led the Peer Review of the evaluation function of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 2008-2009.

¹⁵ This budget proved to be sufficient and in fact was never completely spent. The Panel has noted that posts have been vacant for considerable time, which influenced the capacity of the office to programme and commission evaluations, which in turn resulted in underspending of the budget.

¹⁶ In practice this requirement was to be met by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office Do.2.

Box 1. Evaluations produced by the Special Evaluation Office in 2003 – 2008

- Evaluation du programme 2001-2003 d'Avocats Sans Frontières en Afrique Centrale (2005).
- Lumières et Ombres sur la Coopération entre la Belgique et la Bolivie 1992-2004. Octobre 2005.
- Etude du Rôle et des Fonctions des Coupoles et Fédérations d'ONG en Belgique. Juin 2006.
- Evaluation des Programmes de Coopération Syndicale 2003-2005. Juillet 2006.
- Evaluation de la Coopération Bilatérale Directe au Développement 1999-2005. Décembre 2006.
- Belgian Humanitarian Assistance. Evaluation 2002-2006. February 2008.
- BIO, Société Belge d'Investissement pour les Pays en Développement. Evaluation. Février 2008.
- Belgian Cooperation in Rwanda. Evaluation 1994-2006. July 2008.
- Evaluation de la Loi du 25 mai 1999 relative à la Coopération Belge Internationale. Juillet 2008.

The office participates in a number of professional networks such as the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation¹⁷, the European Union Heads of Evaluation Services (EUHES) network, the Network of German Speaking Evaluation Departments (DACH), the Société Wallonne d'Evaluation and the Flemish Evaluation Platform.

According to its mandate, the Special Evaluation Office is required to prepare an annual report for submission to the Minister for Development Cooperation and Parliament. This requirement has not been met. Instead, two tri-annual reports have been issued i.e. the Report 2005 covering evaluations conducted in the period 2003-2005 and the Report 2008 covering evaluations in the period 2006-2008.

The Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2)

The Quality Control and Evaluation Office had five fulltime positions in 2003. This comprised the Head of the office, evaluation managers and staff specifically tasked with other activities.¹⁸ At the time of the Peer Review the staffing level had fallen to three positions: a Head of office (senior level) and two evaluation officers (one senior and one junior). Administrative support is provided by the Secretariat Pool of the Federal Public Service. Staff is funded from the Federal Public Service budget category for regular core

¹⁷ The Special Evaluator is one of the co-chairs of the Network.

¹⁸ These activities related to capacity-building in monitoring, evaluation and RBM.

staff and support costs. The operational budget for 2009 amounted to € 1.2 million and the budget proposed for 2010 stands at € 800,000.¹⁹

In the updated DGDC management plan for 2009 the mission of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office is stated to be:

- Producing quality evaluations;
- Mainstreaming the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function in DGDC and strengthening M&E capabilities at the level of DGDC and among the embassy attachés involved in development cooperation activities²⁰;
- Developing monitoring, evaluation and results-based management knowledge and expertise.

The Quality Control and Evaluation Office closely cooperates with the Special Evaluation Office in the planning of its evaluations and sharing evaluation results. Its Head is also a member of the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation. Apart from implementing its programme of evaluations, the office plays an active role in mainstreaming M&E practices and coordinates the Network on Results-Based Management (RBM²¹) in DGDC. This Network was established in February 2008 to foster the use of performance information for the purpose of internal learning and decision-making in DGDC, as well as to enable the reporting of results to external stakeholder audiences (accountability). Its main objective is to foster the implementation of an efficient results-oriented organisational culture in DGDC, which implies achieving some drastic changes in the management system and in the ‘mindset’ of management and staff.

As an internal service of DGDC, the Quality Control and Evaluation Office gives insight into evaluation results by posting its evaluation reports on the DGDC website. Also, DGDC’s annual reports provide summary information of such evaluations and other activities of the office on an *ad hoc* basis. Finally, the periodical on Belgian Development Cooperation, *Dimensie 3*, has featured the results of major evaluations of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office.

Since its establishment in 2003, the office has commissioned 12 evaluations (see box 2).

19 This budget is part of DGDC’s budget for operational costs on which several units draw. Commonly, Do.2 prepares a budget proposal taking into account the current year’s budget and the expected expenditure based on its annual evaluation programme. This proposal may be amended by the so-called bilateral meeting of DGDC’s directors and the Director-General. Ultimately, the Minister for Development Cooperation decides on the budget. In past years its budget has never been totally spent.

20 It is unclear whether the ‘Quality Control’ function of Do.2 should be interpreted as overseeing whether administrative procedures regarding M&E have been adhered to.

21 Results-based management is a life-cycle approach to management that integrates strategy, people, resources, processes and measurements to improve decision-making, transparency, and accountability. The approach focuses on achieving outcomes, implementing performance measurement, learning and changing, and reporting performance (see www.tbs.sct.gc.ca).

Box 2. Evaluations published by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office in 2003 – 2008

- Evaluation of the awareness raising programmes ‘Annoncer la Couleur’ and ‘Kleur Bekennen’, January 2005.
- Evaluation of the ‘Migration and Development’ Programmes. April 2005.
- Evaluation of the ‘1% devoted to Evaluation in NGO 5-year programming. April 2005.
- Evaluation of Belgian Cooperation in the Health Sector. Thematic Evaluation. April 2005.
- Institutional Evaluation of Africalia. An Organisation for Belgian Cultural Development Cooperation in Africa. April 2006.
- Evaluation du Thème ‘Appui a la Décentralisation et Gouvernance Locale’. Avril 2006.
- Evaluation de Système de Financement Direct d’Organisations Non-Gouvernementales Locales. Avril 2006.
- Evaluation de la contribution Belge aux Programmes d’Aide Budgétaire Pluriannuelle. Août 2007.
- Thematic Evaluation of Belgian Development Cooperation in the Education Sector. August 2007.
- Evaluation de la Qualité des Prestations de la Coopération Technique Belge (CTB). Janvier 2008.
- Mid-term Evaluation of the Belgian Survival Fund. February 2008.
- Evaluation de la qualité des prestations de la Coopération Technique Belge (CTB). Décembre 2008.

Apart from implementing its own evaluations, Do.2 has collaborated with S4 in several evaluations jointly undertaken with evaluation services of other bilateral donors and agencies. The most important ones are:

- The joint evaluation of general budget support led by the evaluation department of DFID (2006);
- The evaluation of the 3 C’s (Complémentarité, Coordination et Cohérence) which was conducted under the auspices of the European Commission and the EU Member States (2008);
- The Joint evaluation of the development cooperation programmes of a number of donors in Niger.

The office also participated in the Peer Review of the evaluation function of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 2008-2009.

More recently the office took the initiative to foster collaboration with the Flemish Evaluation Platform.

A restructuring of the evaluation function at the federal level

At the time of the Peer Review, a plan to restructure the evaluation function in the Federal Public Service was under discussion. This restructuring was considered necessary in view of the factual overlap of the mandates of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office and the need to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the evaluation function.²² The Panel was informed of the intention to integrate the Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2) into the Special Evaluation Office with the aim of strengthening the Office's evaluation capacity and capability.²³ The Royal Decree describing the establishment of the new Office was approved by the Belgian Council of Ministers in November 2009.

2.3 Evaluation approach and procedure

Types of evaluation

The types of evaluations produced by the two evaluation offices during the past five years (see boxes 1 and 2) can be characterised as a mix of country programme evaluations, thematic evaluations, evaluations of specific programmes, evaluations of operational aspects of Belgian development cooperation, and institutional evaluations. In terms of their coverage, it is noteworthy that no evaluations of multilateral aid have been conducted, although the multilateral cooperation channel absorbs as much as 30 percent of the total Belgian ODA.²⁴

The programming of evaluations to be included in the respective annual work plans of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office and the Special Evaluation Office involves consultation with immediate stakeholders as well as senior management of DGDC and the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The process of deciding about the evaluations to be undertaken, however, appears to be complex and not very transparent. In the period 2003 – 2005 in particular, this resulted in a lack of clarity about which office should conduct certain evaluations. The Panel notes that this situation arose because of the rather broad formulation of the mandate/mission of the two evaluation offices at the time they were established. Subsequent efforts to formally clarify their specific tasks and functional relationship resulted in the document 'Suivi & Évaluation dans le cadre de la gestion axée sur les

22 A number of interviewees informed the Panel that they were not clear about the difference in the mandates or missions of the two evaluation units. It was also pointed out that the subject and scope of their respective evaluations did not differ much.

23 In its interviews with senior management and staff in September and October 2009, the Panel discussed the merits of the proposed integration.

24 Multilateral aid may, however, be covered by the evaluations conducted. In fact, most of the thematic and sectoral evaluations also covered activities funded through the multilateral channel. See for instance the evaluation of Belgian Humanitarian Assistance, 2002-2006 published in 2008.

résultats. Élaboration du cadre de référence pour le suivi et l'évaluation au niveau de la DGDC SPF Affaires Étrangères, Commerce extérieur et Coopération au Développement'. This document of May 2006 describes, among other things, the different remits of Do.2 and S4.²⁵ However, in practice much of the overlap in the types of evaluations conducted by the two evaluation offices remained, and during its interviews the Panel noted that operational staff were unclear about the respective roles of the two offices.

In principle, the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office carry out programme evaluations independently. However, their programme evaluations are subject to practical constraints in that their evaluation budgets and their staffing levels are decided by the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation management. In addition, the 'absorption capacity' for evaluations is reportedly perceived by a number of stakeholders inside and outside the Federal Public Service as being rather limited.²⁶

Conduct of evaluations

The Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office do not have either a consolidated evaluation policy or detailed evaluation procedures and guidelines that are readily available to stakeholders outside the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. Both offices pointed out that they adhere to the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance and that they apply the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards in their work. The abovementioned 'cadre de reference pour le suivi et l'évaluation au niveau de la DGDC' also describes the different types of evaluations conducted by the two evaluation offices and by other actors involved in Belgian development cooperation.²⁷ It also contains relevant information on the evaluation process, including the ways in which the different stakeholders can be involved in this process. Finally, the document provides information on the follow-up of evaluations, including the preparation of a management response to the evaluation findings. In practice the two offices apply a uniform process which guides the development and implementation of their evaluations. The major steps in this process are:

- 25 This document, which was the outcome of a consultation involving directors and heads of units of DGDC, was approved by the Governing Board of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. It is an internal and not widely known document.
- 26 Reported to the Panel by a number of interviewees. A number of them explicitly stated that there was an overload of evaluations of a 'similar kind'; others mentioned the lack of a culture that fosters a demand for and use of evaluations.
- 27 These are i) evaluations of policies and strategies at the institutional level, conducted by S4; ii) 'tactical' evaluations conducted by Do.2 focusing on specific thematic strategies and/or the internal management of specific programmes; iii) evaluations focused on operational and strategic aspects commissioned by operational units of DGDC ('decentral' evaluations); and iv) operational evaluations commissioned by implementing organisations and/or their partners in developing countries.

- Development of the Terms of Reference for the evaluation through a process characterised by the involvement of the immediate stakeholders, which may include the attaché for development cooperation at the Belgian embassy in the partner country. S4 and Do.2 discuss preliminary ideas and take the comments of the various key stakeholders into consideration in drafting the Terms of Reference. This process may also include a preparatory visit of staff to the partner country/ies, which is common practice in S4.
- All evaluations are carried out by teams of independent consultants contracted through a process of competitive bidding. Tenders are organised in accordance with general regulations governing procurement of goods and services by the Federal Public Service. The tender documents contain a section with general provisions and technical specifications.²⁸ The general provisions section mentions the selection and contract-awarding criteria, and other basic requirements. The technical specification section contains the final Terms of Reference of the evaluation which, *inter alia*, include the objective(s) of the evaluation, the key questions, and the necessary management aspects.
- For each evaluation a reference group (comité de pilotage) is established. These groups consist almost exclusively of key stakeholders of the evaluation, i.e. staff of the Federal Public Service, DGDC, executing agencies such as BTC and NGOs. Reference groups for evaluations commissioned by S4 are commonly chaired by the Special Evaluator; those for evaluations commissioned by Do.2 are chaired by the officer in charge of the evaluation at issue. In the case of the Bolivia country programme evaluation commissioned by S4 it was decided to also establish a reference group in-country, in order to facilitate the participation of counterparts. In another case (Evaluation de la Coopération Bilatérale Directe au Développement 1999-2005) it was decided to establish two reference groups: a 'technical' one and a 'political' one. The latter involved senior managers. Generally, the reference groups meet four to five times during the evaluation process, to review the progress of the work of the evaluation team and discuss its draft products, including the draft final report. It should be noted that these reference groups have no decision-making power, but serve mainly as a 'sounding board' for the evaluation teams, provide comments on the accuracy of factual information, and exercise a certain level of quality control of the evaluation process.
- During the evaluation process the evaluation team commonly provides an inception report outlining a more detailed work plan. Briefings are provided at the beginning of the team's fieldwork in the country in question and debriefings occur prior to the team's departure from the country. Separate briefings and debriefings also occur in Brussels.

²⁸ This implies, *inter alia*, the application of the principle of quality and cost-based selection in which a weight of 70 per cent is given to the technical component of the proposal and a weight of 30 per cent to the price component. The Panel notes that this approach may result in the selection of contractors who have not necessarily submitted a proposal of the highest quality.

- The heads of both offices decide when an evaluation has been completed satisfactorily; their endorsement of the evaluation report signals they are satisfied with its quality. Once the evaluation has been finalised the evaluation team is commonly invited to discuss its findings with the relevant stakeholders. Such discussions normally take place in a seminar setting. Where relevant, feedback sessions are also organised with stakeholders in the partner country/ies.
- No formal mechanisms or procedures exist regarding the follow-up of evaluations conducted by the Special Evaluation Office or the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. A practice has developed whereby, depending on the evaluation at issue, either the management of the Federal Public Service or DGDC prepares a management response to the evaluation findings and recommendations. These responses outline the areas in which management agrees with the evaluation findings or recommendations, and discuss areas of divergence. After their content has been discussed with the Cabinet of the Minister for Development (and in certain cases with the Minister) the management responses are signed-off and issued by senior management. If evaluations involve the BTC, there is a separate response of the BTC management. For further details regarding the detailed modalities and character of the follow-up of evaluations and the ways in which both evaluation offices communicate the results of their evaluations, see paragraph 6.3 in chapter 6.
- The evaluation reports are published in the name of the consultant(s) involved in conducting the evaluation. Their distribution is decided by the Heads of S4 and Do.2. As a matter of policy and principle, all evaluation reports are public and posted on the websites of the two offices.

3. Independence and impartiality

The motivation to create an independent evaluation function at the federal level stemmed from a desire to enhance internal learning, foster a more broadly-based understanding of evaluation in the organisation and bolster the credibility of evaluation in general. It was felt that assuring its independent status would lend greater legitimacy to evaluation and reduce the potential for conflict of interest which could arise if policy makers and managers were solely responsible for evaluating their own activities. Impartiality contributes to the credibility of evaluation and the avoidance of bias in findings, analyses and conclusions. The Panel's findings on this subject are summarised in the following paragraphs, which discuss the independence and impartiality of the evaluation managers and evaluators and the evaluation process.

3.1 Independence and impartiality of the evaluation offices, evaluation managers and evaluators

Interviewees internal and external to the Special Evaluation Office acknowledged that whoever is appointed Special Evaluator faces a challenge with regard to their relationship with senior management of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and other stakeholders. However, being externally recruited and not a career officer, the Special Evaluator is, in principle, less subject to internal career pressures than might otherwise have been the case. The Evaluator's independent position is statutorily safeguarded under the Royal Decree by which the Special Evaluation Office was set up. This position is reconfirmed by the current Royal Decree, which again makes clear that in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation the evaluation function is distinct from management. This implies that evaluation is structurally independent. In contrast, the Quality Control and Evaluation Office's position is not structurally independent. Its Head is an internally recruited career officer and is accountable to DGDC management. This may impinge on independence.²⁹ However, the Panel found no evidence of professional or career risks preventing the Head of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office from acting independently and impartially as required.

²⁹ The heads of the evaluation departments of donors and development agencies are usually recruited from internal candidates.

Both offices adhere to the general rule of conduct that their staff may not evaluate a project, programme or policy if they have been responsible for its design, implementation or supervision. The Panel found no evidence of staff acting as task managers or being assigned to manage evaluations of activities or policies in which they had been previously involved.

Staff of the two evaluation offices and the members of the evaluation teams reported receiving good support from the Special Evaluator and the Head of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office in order to safeguard their independence. They noted that the Special Evaluator and Head of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office had, if necessary, adopted an uncompromising stance to protect staff and evaluators from undue pressure.

A limited number of Federal Public Service staff and other stakeholders interviewed perceive the issue of independence to lie in the lack of impartiality of some external evaluators who are mentioned to have 'preconceived ideas and concepts'. When questioned further on this, interlocutors indicated that in some evaluations the issue was not the evaluators' lack of impartiality but their apparently insufficient understanding of the subject to be evaluated.³⁰

With regard to the independence and impartiality of the external evaluators, the Panel recognises that the pool of high-quality consultants with relevant expertise is relatively limited. All evaluations require the reading of internal documents drafted in French and in Dutch, and this requirement generally discourages major anglophone and francophone consultancy firms from tendering for evaluation work on the Belgian market. In such a situation, evaluators may have a vested interest in securing future contracts. The Panel reviewed the ways in which the tender and recruitment procedures have been implemented and notes that both evaluation offices have given due attention to the issue of conflict of interest and impartiality. Both offices continue to pay attention to this issue while the evaluation is in progress, by exercising quality control of the consultants' work and their reports. No cases of conflict of interest were found by the Panel. Nevertheless, the Panel welcomes the recently introduced requirement for consultants to report any previous or current association or relationship with the stakeholders involved in the evaluation at issue in order to avoid a conflict of interest.

The Panel's assessment of the quality of the evaluation reports reveals that the quantitative and/or qualitative analysis is conducted acceptably. In most cases, cause-and-effect links between the intervention and its effects are clearly explained and, where relevant, comparisons are made explicit.

30 Lack of knowledge of the subject to be evaluated can be avoided by stipulating in the call for tenders that the evaluation team requires specific knowledge and expertise, and by reviewing the submitted tenders accordingly.

3.2 Independence in programming, carrying out and reporting of evaluations

All evaluations of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office are carried out by independent consultants.

The programming of the evaluations is a complex process. In principle, both evaluation offices have the authority and autonomy to propose their own programme of work.³¹ In practice, several aspects affect programming, such as: i) the budget available for evaluation (set by the Governing Board in the case of the Special Evaluation Office and by DGDC in the case of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office); ii) the staffing of both offices; iii) the capacity of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation³² and other stakeholders to absorb evaluations; iv) specific requests from stakeholders for an evaluation; v) a relatively large number of mandatory evaluations; and vi) the existence of two evaluation offices with a rather similar mandate.

The Panel has noted that evaluation programming is not conducted in isolation, but involves a sufficient level of stakeholder participation which, in turn, is conducive to the stakeholders' 'buy-in' or acceptance of evaluations. Proposed evaluations are sometimes contested by stakeholders, but this only occurs if there are too many other priorities and activities at a given time. No cases were reported of stakeholders blocking a certain evaluation or refusing to cooperate.

The credibility of evaluations depends, amongst other things, on the degree of transparency of the evaluation programming process. The Special Evaluation Office is currently working towards achieving a procedure for a more strategic, longer term and representative programming of its evaluations. The Panel supports such a move.

In principle, the level of financial resources available to both evaluation offices may form a constraint for the coverage and scope of evaluations. However, this is not felt to be a problem. On the whole, both evaluation offices and the management of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation consider the resources provided to be adequate to enable the evaluation function to operate effectively and independently. Given the financial constraints currently facing the public administration, the Panel is encouraged by the pledge of the Federal Public Service management to strengthen the re-established Special Evaluation Office both in terms of staff and its operational budget.

31 It should be noted that the offices are subjected to the regular public service accounting and auditing controls.

32 Some management staff mentioned to the Panel that there is an 'overload of evaluations'.

The evaluation consultants interviewed by the Panel confirmed that they were able to carry out their assignment without interference from the evaluation offices, staff or management of the Federal Public Service, or implementing agencies. Two isolated ‘incidents’ were reported where the evaluation process was slowed down, but was not compromised.

The selection of country case studies, projects and field sites is commonly left to the evaluation offices but is discussed with stakeholders during the preparation of the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, and also in the first meeting of the evaluation reference group. In case the final choice was left to the reference group or to the consultants the different alternatives were discussed with the evaluation offices.

Staff and leaders of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office have participated in evaluation missions to learn from the field experience and to provide quality control of the work done. Such participation in the field phase of evaluations is not perceived to have affected the independence of the evaluation teams. No cases of undue interference or intrusion in the evaluation process have been reported. Neither have any structural obstacles preventing access to available information been reported. In general, deficiencies in available information appear to stem from reliable information being lacking due to ineffective monitoring and insufficient baseline information.

Evaluation consultants have been able to discuss their findings and experiences with staff and management at the federal level and with other stakeholders without undue interference. All draft reports, including the key evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations, are shared with all stakeholders.³³ The reports are also extensively discussed in the respective reference groups. Both evaluation offices keep records of the feedback provided by stakeholders. An analysis of the evaluation files conducted as part of the Peer Review reveals that comments of stakeholders are generally taken into consideration and followed up by the evaluation teams and evaluation offices, but without compromising the independence and impartiality of the evaluation process.

3.3 Conclusions on independence and impartiality

The Panel concludes that the independence and impartiality of the evaluation function is adequate.

Regarding the independence and impartiality of evaluation managers and evaluators it is concluded that:

³³ Draft reports are commonly shared electronically in order to solicit comments on their content and factual accuracy.

- Structural independence is achieved in the case of the Special Evaluation Office and is statutorily protected by the Royal Decree under which this office was set up. The Quality Control and Evaluation Office does not enjoy such structural and statutory independence but instead functions on the basis of *de facto* independence. The Panel has found no evidence of professional or career considerations preventing the office or its staff from conducting its work in an independent and impartial manner as required.
- Neither office has a formal code of conduct for evaluators. However, a system is in place to ensure that the evaluation teams have the professional competence to guarantee the credibility of their evaluation reports.
- Due attention is being paid to precluding conflict of interest, both when the evaluators are selected as well as during the evaluation by controlling the quality of the evaluation process and the reports of the evaluation teams. No cases of conflict of interest were found by the Panel.
- A limited number of Federal Public Service staff and other stakeholders perceive that there is a problem associated with independence: it is that some evaluators are regarded as not being impartial (they may have ‘preconceived ideas and concepts’). However, these allegations could not be substantiated by the interviewees.

Regarding the independence and impartiality in the programming, carrying out and reporting of evaluations it is concluded that:

- The current evaluation programming process lacks a strategic and long-term perspective; this is detrimental to ensuring sufficient evaluation coverage.
- A system is in place whereby both evaluation offices ensure the quality of the evaluations by means of the design of the evaluation, its methodology and conduct, and its reporting.
- Due attention is paid to ensure that conflict of interest is avoided in the identification, selection and contracting of consultants.
- No structural obstacles preventing access to available information have been reported.
- Evaluators have conducted their tasks in an independent manner; when necessary, this independence is safeguarded by the leadership and staff of the two evaluation offices.
- A system is in place to review and ascertain the quality of the evaluations and to ensure that the evaluators perform in a competent way.
- Stakeholder consultation and participation is ensured throughout the evaluation process.
- The reporting of the evaluations is fully independent. Conclusions and recommendations are generally in line with the evidence provided in the reports.

4. Credibility

The Panel assessed credibility in two ways: by reviewing the processes through which the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office manage their evaluations, and by assessing the quality of their evaluation reports by means of a format based on the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards (pilot version 2006). For an overview of the criteria applied in the assessment, see annexe 6. The Panel also took into account the perceptions held by Federal Public Service staff and management and other stakeholders on the credibility of the processes and evaluation reports. Although these perceptions may differ from the Panel's assessment of the quality of the evaluation processes and reports, they nevertheless give an indication of stakeholders' respect for evaluation and the evaluation function. They also greatly influence the individual and organisational use made of the results of evaluations.

The Panel notes that the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office consider credibility a crucial prerequisite in order to be able to optimise performance and thereby achieve evaluation reports whose quality is nationally and internationally acknowledged. In general, the Panel observed a high level of satisfaction among staff and senior management about the ways in which both offices manage their evaluations and the quality of the evaluation reports. In section 4.1 observations are made on the evaluation process; section 4.2 provides information on the quality of the evaluation reports; the final section (4.3) provides general conclusions on credibility.

4.1 Credibility of the evaluation process

Evaluation policy and guidelines

As mentioned earlier, the 'cadre de reference pour le suivi et l'évaluation au niveau de la DGDC' describes the different types of evaluation applied at the federal level, contains information on the evaluation process, including the tasks of the different stakeholders involved in the evaluation, and provides information on the follow-up of evaluations. This internal document cannot, however, be considered to be a formalised evaluation policy. The Quality Control and Evaluation Office has developed a Monitoring and Evaluation Tool Box which is made available on the intranet in order to support operational units in DGDC who commission 'decentral' evaluations. Neither evaluation office operates specific evaluation guidelines stipulating the approach and possible methodologies and methods to be applied in their evaluations. Instead, both

offices have based their approach and methodologies on the guidelines of evaluation departments of other donors, particularly on the OECD/DAC Principles of Evaluation for Development Assistance (1991) and the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards (2006).³⁴

While both offices seek to follow relevant international standards and guidance in their work, interviews with stakeholders revealed the need for a comprehensive evaluation policy or strategy document and an evaluation guideline setting more specific standards for the evaluations to be undertaken. The target audience for such a document comprises i) staff and management of the Federal Public Service, ii) evaluators (who need to know what is expected from them when they conduct evaluations), iii) external stakeholders (including Parliament), partner countries, and others. All may wish to be informed about the specific objectives of the evaluation function at the federal level and how this function operates.³⁵

Competency and capacity of staff and evaluation consultants

There is a widely held view, shared by the Panel, that the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office are competent and professional. Although most of the staff have participated in international evaluation training courses, e.g. the International Development Evaluation Training offered by the World Bank and Carleton University, the skills of recently appointed staff could be further improved, mainly through on-the-job training. The post of current Head of the Special Evaluation Office was advertised externally as stipulated by the Royal Decree. The Panel considers this particular recruitment procedure important in order to attract candidates who meet certain requirements, including sufficient expertise and experience in evaluation.³⁶ The position of the Head of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office was filled through internal recruitment, using criteria of seniority as well as requirements related to monitoring and evaluation.

The Panel has observed two factors which may have jeopardised the competence levels of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. The first is the number and calibre of staff of both offices. At the time of the Peer Review, the Special Evaluation Office consisted of the senior-level Special Evaluator, a newly

34 A copy of the Principles of Evaluation for Development Assistance is annexed to the Royal Decree of February 2003 which forms the statutory basis for the Special Evaluation Office. They are not annexed to the current Royal Decree.

35 It should be noted that the current Royal Decree which forms the statutory basis for the newly established Special Evaluation Office provides a number of important parameters for the Special Evaluation Office and its Head. The suggested evaluation policy and strategy document and the evaluation guidelines should build on this Decree.

36 The current Royal Decree provides a clear competency profile for the Head of this office. However, the Panel notes that the requirements (expertise in and experience with evaluation) are less stringent than those of the previous Royal Decree.

appointed mid-career staff member with no evaluation or research background and three relatively junior evaluation officers. The capacity of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office had been gradually limited to two senior staff (the Head of the office and one senior evaluation officer) and one relatively junior officer. The second factor relates to the recruitment or posting of staff who match the competence profile in both offices. It has proved difficult to attract the appropriate staff, especially for the Special Evaluation Office; this resulted in a senior post remaining vacant for a long time.³⁷ A contributory factor is that permanent staff cannot be recruited from outside the Federal Public Service.³⁸ In principle, the staff recruitment procedures and practice remain a potential threat to the competence level (and for that matter the credibility) of the newly established Special Evaluation Office.

With respect to the consultant teams contracted to conduct the evaluations, no major problems were identified. The selection process of consultants is credible and transparent and takes place according to federal rules and regulations for procurement. Most evaluation contracts have been awarded on the basis of public competitive tenders.³⁹ The bidding process is open to any qualified bidder, and sealed bids are opened in public for scrutiny and chosen on the basis of price and quality. Tender documents, in three languages, are well documented, and the selection criteria, including the required competencies of the evaluation teams, are clearly spelled out.

To avoid over-reliance on a limited pool of evaluators, the Heads of both evaluation offices have encouraged new (often non-Belgian) consultants to tender. However, although the number of non-Belgian evaluation consultants has gradually increased, opening up the process to non-Belgian consultants has not been very successful. This may be because in order to be able to review internal documents the evaluation teams need to include persons fluent in French and Dutch. As a result there has been a tendency to rely too heavily on a limited pool of evaluators and evaluation consultants. A number of firms have been engaged in subsequent large-scale evaluations, which raises the question of whether evaluators participating in consecutive evaluations lack an ‘open mind’ regarding Belgian development cooperation. However, it is the Panel’s opinion that consecutive engagements of the same consulting firms have not negatively influenced the independence or credibility of the work of the evaluation teams. A few staff interviewed by the Panel questioned the quality and experience of the externally recruited evaluation teams. However, as noted in chapter 3, this disapproval

37 There were two sticking points: matching the proposed candidates with the required competence profile, and differences between the Special Evaluation Office and the Personal Affairs Division of the Ministry in the consultation process regarding less suitable potential candidates.

38 The Panel was informed that only persons employed in the Federal Public Service or who have passed the Federal Public Service exam are eligible.

39 In the case of restricted tendering, at least six firms were requested to tender in accordance with a directive from the Inspector of Finance, who oversees all contracting processes.

appeared to be mainly inspired by their dissatisfaction with the critical nature of the findings of the evaluation.

Although both the selection process of evaluation teams and their quality are generally satisfactory, the Panel considers that there is room for improvement mainly in terms of a better balance between international experts and experts from the partner countries.

Preparation and implementation of the evaluations

The Special Evaluator and the Head of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office are responsible for a balanced and impartial evaluation design as laid down in the Terms of Reference for evaluations. Both evaluation offices ensure there is stakeholder participation in the design of the evaluation. Stakeholders are consulted in the early stages of the formulation of the Terms of Reference, are invited to participate in the reference groups guiding each evaluation, and their involvement in so-called kick-off workshops allows them to contribute to the design of the evaluation.⁴⁰

The evaluation process, including the reporting (final and interim), is transparent and adequate. As members of the evaluation reference groups, stakeholders are in a position to be well informed about the progress of the evaluation; they also have the opportunity to actively engage with the evaluation team and to discuss the evaluation's findings. This reinforces the evaluation's learning function as well as the acceptance and internalisation of its findings. Towards the end of the evaluation process, workshops are organised to foster reflection on the evaluation's findings⁴¹ and to promote their dissemination. Typically, a reference group meets four to five times in Brussels during the course of the evaluation; for a number of evaluations, separate reference groups are established in the partner country.

Despite these procedures, a number of interviewees pointed out that both evaluation offices do not fully engage with partner country stakeholders regarding the programming of evaluations and their design where this is relevant.⁴² There is a perception that the decision to undertake an evaluation is mainly unilateral and not based on consultation. Even when a 'kick-off workshop' is organised in the partner country at the start of the evaluation, the involvement of the in-country stakeholders and their active participation is somewhat limited. Rather than being active partners in the evaluation, they seem to be primarily engaged as 'hosts' for the evaluation and play a role as key informants. This is less than appropriate in view of mutual accountability

40 The Panel notes that stakeholders in the partner countries are involved, but their participation is not as intense as that of the stakeholders on the side of the donor.

41 This reflection process helps the management to develop a formal response to the evaluation report.

42 Obviously, the involvement of partner country stakeholders is not relevant in the case of evaluations focusing on institutional arrangements among actors in Belgium.

and learning. The Panel considers that there is room for improvement in the early upstream contacts with the partner country in order to actively engage national stakeholders in the evaluation process whilst ensuring that such involvement does not jeopardise the independence of the evaluation.

Quality assurance

Both evaluation offices consider that ensuring the quality of the evaluation process and the evaluation reports is an important aspect of their work. They assess the quality of the evaluation process and evaluation reports by means of a checklist.⁴³ This list is internal and is seldom shared with the stakeholders and evaluation consultants, and therefore evaluators and stakeholders are not always sufficiently clear about the expected quality of the evaluation reports. Two other shortcomings are the lack of specification of the expected evaluation quality in relation to the resources (time and funds) reserved for field investigations, and the lack of baseline data and monitoring information, which hampers effective evaluation.⁴⁴

The reference groups fulfil an important quality assurance function. Both evaluation offices deal adequately with any comments, suggestions and disagreements voiced by reference groups and other stakeholders. Criticism by and disagreements of stakeholders are part and parcel of any evaluation. The evaluation offices ask the evaluation teams to handle comments in an appropriate manner but at the same time recognise the independent position of these teams. Well-substantiated comments and disagreements of the reference group members and other stakeholders are usually taken into consideration by the evaluation teams and addressed when finalising their reports. However, it is left to both evaluation offices to judge the overall quality and acceptability of an evaluation report. It is the Panel's impression that where conflicts and disagreements have occurred during the course of an evaluation, the issues have been handled appropriately by both evaluation offices in the best interest of all parties concerned.

While there is thus a strong commitment to quality assurance through 'in-house screening' and a review of evaluation reports by reference groups, the Panel is of the opinion that involving independent and external experts in these reference groups would enhance the credibility of both the evaluation process and the reports.

43 The Quality Control and Evaluation Office pointed out that this checklist is applied when its staff take part in the field study carried out by the evaluation team.

44 This problem is not unique to Belgian development cooperation, but the Panel observed that many evaluation reports point out that the evaluation team was hampered in their work by a lack of baseline information as well as of monitoring data. As noted above, the objective of the Network on Results-based Management is to foster a results-oriented organisational culture which may lead to improvements in this respect.

The evaluation reports of both evaluation offices are publicly available in printed form and on the web. They are also submitted to the OECD/DAC Secretariat, to be included in the Network on Development Evaluation's database, thus enabling sharing at the international level and interagency learning.

The aggregation of evaluation results in the tri-annual reports of the Special Evaluator, which also include information on the evaluations of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office, provides useful information on the accomplishments of the evaluation function at the federal level.⁴⁵ These reports are important, as they reinforce the credibility of the work done by the offices and serve as a useful bridge between individual evaluation activities and the oversight function of the Federal Public Service/DGDC as well as Parliament. However, the Panel feels that the quality of the discussion on the results of Belgian development cooperation and the utility of the evaluation work are not adequately served by issuing summary reports once every three years instead of reporting annually, as stipulated in the Royal Decree of 2003 and the current one.

The credibility of the evaluation process is also defined by the ways in which management deals with the findings of the respective evaluations in terms of using them to improve policy and practice as well as to account for successes and failures. This topic is discussed in chapter 5 Utility.

4.2 Credibility of the evaluation reports

The Panel reviewed the evaluation reports of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office and assessed their quality by means of a checklist based on the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards. The checklist consists of two parts. First it lists the general characteristics of the evaluation concerned: the subject evaluated, the evaluation conducted, the actors concerned, and the final report. Subsequently, the quality of the evaluation is examined by applying three quality criteria: Validity, Reliability, and Usability. Each of these criteria is operationalised by specific indicators, which in turn are further specified into components (for details, see annexe 6).

Major assessment criteria were:

- Presentation of evaluation's purpose and scope, design, process and methodology and tools of investigation;

⁴⁵ The Royal Decree of 2003 stipulates that the Special Evaluator should produce an annual report presenting the results of individual evaluations as well as an overview of planned evaluations. However, due to time constraints and because a limited number of evaluation reports were completed annually, only two reports have been produced (2005 and 2008). These reports were discussed in Parliament.

- Presentation of evidence or results (outputs, outcomes and/or impact of the subject evaluated);
- Analysis and formulation of conclusions;
- Formulation of recommendations.

The Panel did not have detailed information on the background of the policies, programmes and projects or institutions evaluated, or of their context.⁴⁶ It was difficult to reach definite conclusions about the quality (and credibility) of the evaluation reports solely on the basis of a review of their content. Where possible, the assessment of selected evaluation reports was triangulated with information from the files and records related to the evaluations supplemented by insights gathered through interviews with evaluation team leaders and staff of both evaluation offices.

The Panel has the following observations regarding the overall quality of the evaluation reports:

- The introductory chapters of the evaluation reports dealing with the evaluation purpose, and scope of work are informative and generally their quality is reasonable to good. The criteria applied in the respective evaluations are clearly spelled out, as prescribed and described in the respective Terms of References. In almost all cases the ‘traditional’ OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact have been applied.
- Interestingly, not all evaluation reports include the full Terms of Reference. Where this information is missing, it is difficult for the user of the report to assess whether the evaluation team has conducted its work according to plan.
- The evaluation’s design, methodology and tools applied in the investigation are generally sufficiently described.
- Most reports provide an indication of restrictions and challenges confronting the implementation of the evaluation. This allows the reader to form an opinion about the value of the evaluation’s findings and conclusions.
- It has become clear that the application of suitable performance indicators and the availability of baseline information and monitoring data needed to measure progress and results pose a major challenge affecting the quality of the evaluations. Though there has been a certain improvement over time, the evaluation reports demonstrate that the evaluators have struggled to identify and apply specific, measurable and time-bound criteria. This issue is by no means unique to the evaluations commissioned by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office and is caused by the absence of sufficient baseline information on programmes and projects and by a non-optimal monitoring and reporting system.
- The reports indicate that the evaluation teams have often faced severe time and

⁴⁶ Gathering such information was beyond the scope of the Peer Review.

manpower constraints which prevent them from cross-checking (or triangulating) different sources of information, including the points of view of different stakeholder groups. Primary data collection through research or surveys is often not possible.

- When the scope and complexity of certain evaluations and the resources allocated to them were compared it became clear to the Panel that the fieldwork phase of these evaluations was limited and did not allow sufficient opportunity for structured collection of primary data.
- Taking into account the issues mentioned above, the quality of the analysis and formulation of conclusions and recommendations is generally adequate. The majority of the evaluation reports provide substantiated findings and conclusions which are supported by a sufficient level of analysis.
- The recommendations generally appear to be supported by analysis and conclusions.⁴⁷

The Panel has discussed its findings on the quality of each individual evaluation report and the general findings itemised above with the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. Both offices acknowledged the weaknesses identified. They pointed out their own efforts to improve the quality of the evaluation reports, as well as the steps taken at operational level. The latter include the current emphasis to improve and mainstream results-based management in Belgian development cooperation, both at headquarters as well as in the field.

The Panel also invited various stakeholders involved in the evaluations and those using the evaluations in their own work to give their opinion of the quality and credibility of the evaluation reports. The impression gained from these interviews is that the staff and management of the Federal Public Service and other stakeholders consider the evaluations to be credible on the whole. At the same time, many noted the lack of hard data to support the findings in some of the reports and expressed concerns about evaluation methods. In addition, concerns were expressed about reports presenting unrealistic and non-prioritised recommendations. It was also pointed out that evaluators do not sufficiently take into account the financial and organisational implications when formulating their recommendations.

⁴⁷ The Panel does not consider its task was to give an opinion on the feasibility of recommendations in the evaluation reports. However, it has noted that some reports seem to provide a very large number of recommendations, not all of which may be actionable.

4.3 Conclusions on credibility

The evaluation process:

- Both evaluation offices have based their approach and methodologies on the general evaluation principles and evaluation quality standards published by the OECD/DAC. The internal document ‘cadre de reference pour le suivi et l’évaluation au niveau de la DGDC’ provides information on evaluation types and evaluation processes. In addition a Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit was developed by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. Although these instruments are useful, a comprehensive document setting out an overall evaluation policy and strategy in the context of Belgian development cooperation is lacking. Equally there is a lack of a document which provides guidance on the approaches and methodologies to be applied in all evaluations undertaken at the different levels (federal and otherwise).
- The overall competency and professionalism of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office is adequate, but could be further strengthened. Current procedures and practice governing the staff recruitment have jeopardised the maintenance or reinforcement of the competence level of both offices. If continued, they may undermine the capacity and credibility of the newly established Special Evaluation Office.
- The selection process of evaluation teams is credible, transparent and adequate. Nevertheless, it does not yet pay sufficient attention to ensuring an adequate balance between international experts and those from partner countries.
- The evaluation process is adequate and ensures stakeholder involvement in all stages of the evaluation. Both evaluation offices do pay attention to and promote active stakeholder involvement in reference groups established for each evaluation. Compared with their colleagues from the donor and implementing agencies, the stakeholders from partner countries play a less prominent role.
- Both evaluation offices are strongly committed to ensuring the quality of the evaluation process and evaluation reports. With one or two exceptions, external and independent experts are not invited to participate in evaluation reference groups. This precludes these groups from playing a prominent role in helping to ensure evaluation quality and credibility.
- Both evaluation offices have made adequate arrangements for handling stakeholders’ comments and disagreements regarding evaluation findings, whilst at the same time safeguarding the independence of the evaluation teams.

The aggregation of evaluation results in the tri-annual reports of the Special Evaluator, which also include information on the evaluations of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office, provides useful information on the accomplishments of the evaluation function at the federal level. However, the Panel feels that the quality of the discussion on the results of Belgian development cooperation and the utility of the evaluation work are not adequately served by issuing summary reports once every three years instead of reporting annually, as stipulated in the Royal Decree of 2003 and the current one.

The evaluation reports:

The Panel concludes that the quality of evaluation reports has been varied but has noted an improvement of the quality when comparing older and more recent reports. The main factors responsible for the variable quality (and hence inconsistent credibility) of the reports include:

- A failure to apply suitable performance and results indicators.
- The lack of sufficient baseline information and monitoring data, which are needed in order to be able to measure progress and results.
- Time and manpower constraints faced by evaluation teams, which have prevented them from adequately cross-checking and triangulating different sources of information.
- A disconnect between the ambition, scope and complexity of certain evaluations and the resources allocated to them. This results in limited opportunities for fieldwork and for structured collection of primary data if needed.

Bearing in mind the abovementioned weaknesses, which are often mentioned as constraints or limitations to the evaluation in the reports, the quality of the analysis and formulation of conclusions and recommendations can be considered adequate. The majority of the reports provide findings, conclusions and recommendations which are supported by a sufficient level of analysis.

5. Utility

To have an impact on decision-making, evaluation findings must be perceived by users of evaluations as relevant and useful, and should be presented clearly and concisely. Evaluations should fully reflect the different interests and needs of the many parties involved. One has to bear in mind that the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office cannot ensure that users perceive the utility of evaluations and actually use them: they can only attempt to influence the users. Both offices need to produce quality evaluations, but their actual utility and use primarily depend on the interest of the political leadership and senior management of the Federal Public Service, of senior management of the Belgian Technical Cooperation and of other stakeholders. Senior management and political leaders can foster a culture conducive to evaluation by showing an interest and actively engaging in the programming of evaluations, and by accepting the implications of evaluation results for learning and accountability.

The Panel notes that the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office are committed to producing evaluations that are useful and – as mentioned in the previous chapter – to trying to ensure that these evaluations are of adequate quality.

The potential use of the evaluations commissioned by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office is facilitated in three ways. All evaluations are made available throughout the Federal Public Service. Secondly, evaluations of the Special Evaluation Office are – as indicated above – provided to the Belgian Parliament, together with a management response. Thirdly, the Special Evaluator provides periodic reports to Parliament which contain the results of evaluation of his office and those conducted by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office.

On the basis of the interviews conducted, the Panel has observed that the actual use made of evaluations and their results is far from optimal. This chapter provides a number of reasons for this observation. Section 5.1 describes general views encountered during the Peer Review of the overall purpose of evaluation. Section 5.2 provides observations on the actual use made of evaluations for decision-making at policy and programme levels. Section 5.3 discusses the current practice of formulating management responses to evaluations. The final section (5.4) provides general conclusions on utility.

5.1 Purpose of evaluation

The current evaluation practice largely clarifies the purpose of evaluation within the Federal Public Service. However, as mentioned earlier, there is no comprehensive policy or strategy document providing detailed information on the objective(s) of evaluation and its potential use, its guiding principles, the mandate and responsibilities of the evaluation office, the ways in which evaluations are programmed, the evaluation process and its different steps, the ways in which evaluations are disseminated and the process of follow-up.⁴⁸ Consequently, the users of the evaluation as well as those who are contracted to conduct evaluations do not have a sufficiently detailed and comprehensive insight into how the current evaluation function operates at the Federal Public Service in terms of corporate learning and public accountability.

The interviews conducted during the course of the Peer Review reveal a certain tension between the learning and accountability functions of evaluation. Many within the Federal Public Service perceive the accountability function of evaluation to be almost synonymous with audit or control, which is a reflection of a limited and internally oriented interpretation of accountability. In the view of the Panel there is clearly an imbalance between the objectives of learning and accountability. The former is considered by many respondents as the most ‘desirable’ function and, as pointed out earlier, one that is not fully utilised. Accountability is currently regarded as the major objective of evaluation, particularly of the evaluations commissioned by the Special Evaluation Office. It is the view of the Panel that both objectives are two sides of the same coin. They should be balanced in order to allow evaluation to fulfil its potential.

5.2 Use of evaluation for decision-making at the policy and programme levels

From the interviews with staff and management, as well as from the analysis of the content of management responses to the different evaluations, it becomes apparent that the impact of evaluations on decision-making at the policy and programme levels leaves much to be desired.⁴⁹ Evaluations are accepted as a necessary if not unavoidable instrument for accountability. They are not primarily considered to be a major instrument for supporting and informing decision-making as well as learning

48 The Royal Decree of 2003 provides the general mandate for the Special Evaluation Office. Internal documents of DGDC (such as the already mentioned ‘cadre de référence pour le suivi et l’évaluation au niveau de la DGDC’ which clarifies the concepts of monitoring and evaluation and the evaluation function in DGDC and at the federal level) give insight into the function and responsibilities of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office as well as the Special Evaluation Office.

49 As mentioned in chapter 1, the Peer Review did not include evaluations commissioned by the BTC. The objective of these evaluations is mainly to provide information for management purposes (mid-term evaluations) or accountability (end-of-project/programme evaluations).

in the wider sense. A number of respondents specifically mentioned the absence of a conducive or enabling evaluation culture within as well as outside the Federal Public Service. The lack of a positive evaluation culture may, in the eyes of the Panel, lead to evaluation operating in isolation. This, in turn, may reinforce the notion among potential users that it merely serves to ensure accountability.

The respective thematic and country programme evaluations conducted by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office provide insights into thematic and cross-cutting issues which are useful for decision-making at the programme and policy levels. Both offices have made efforts to foster the uptake of evaluation results, amongst other things by organising workshops and restitution meetings. The Panel acknowledges these efforts.⁵⁰

When questioned by the Panel, many interviewees found it difficult to point at specific evaluations which have had a real impact on policy and practice. Some elaborated their point of view by indicating that the focus of some of the evaluations was not on policy or strategic levels. Those who thought otherwise would have liked to see evaluations that provide findings and lessons which could be useful for and used by operational staff in their day-to-day work.

The Panel wishes to emphasise that underutilisation of evaluation is a more general phenomenon experienced in many donor organisations and aid agencies. This is not to say that this phenomenon cannot be changed, since it is also related to the ways management and political leadership regard evaluations as a tool enabling them to review and adapt policies, strategies and programmes. This particular issue is dealt with in section 5.3 Management response to evaluation.

Both offices have made significant efforts to make evaluations available in the organisation⁵¹ and have put emphasis on engaging different stakeholders in the evaluation process. They have been less successful in convincing senior management of the Federal Public Service of the need to proactively promote the use of evaluations for learning and to enable evaluation results to be fed into the corporate knowledge management system.

Recently there has been an emphasis on strategic and policy level evaluations as exemplified by the integration of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office into the Special Evaluation Office in January 2010. In the view of the Panel, this not only provides

50 At the same time there appears insufficient 'harvesting' of evaluation findings (including those from evaluations conducted by entities other than the two evaluation offices) to gather insights into thematic or cross-cutting issues.

51 For instance, the 'E-valuator', an electronic newsletter which is available on the intranet, provides amongst other things information about the results of completed evaluations.

possibilities for reinforcing the evaluation function in terms of its quality but may also be instrumental for enhancing evaluation utility.

Meeting the needs of different users of evaluations

There are several categories of potential users of evaluations in the Federal Public Service, ranging from political leadership and senior management to thematic and regional management and staff, both at headquarters levels and in the Belgian embassies in partner countries. Generally, these different user categories are considered important by the two evaluation offices, as demonstrated by the Terms of Reference of the various evaluations. At the same time, judging from the Terms of Reference, the evaluations tend not to be explicitly focused on other categories of users including Parliament, the wider public in Belgium, or partner country institutions. A factor which may have contributed to a relative neglect of the last category is the relatively large number of evaluations which have focussed on internal processes in Belgian development cooperation rather than on programme outcomes.

The Panel notes that the lack of an inclusive stakeholder mapping as part of the planning and preparation of individual evaluations and of a proactive and inclusive strategy to disseminate evaluation findings is not conducive to ensuring greater ownership and improved learning amongst stakeholders external to the Federal Public Service.

Twelve out of the twenty-one evaluation reports produced by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office during the period 2003-2009 were published in the two main official languages of Belgium (Dutch and French). Publication of full or summary reports of evaluations in the official language of partner countries involved in or covered by these evaluations is important, if not essential, to enable appropriate dissemination of evaluation results, thereby simultaneously ensuring transparency and accountability on the part of the donor.

The Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office have not developed a dissemination approach which also includes evaluation products specifically focused on certain groups of users. Though they organise workshops to discuss evaluation findings and they make the reports of individual evaluations available on the web and as printed copies⁵², neither office follows the practice of many evaluation units of other donors and development agencies of producing separate summary reports, evaluation briefs or evaluation information sheets. Such focused

52 As mentioned earlier, the Special Evaluator has published two reports which contain the results of several evaluations of the Special Evaluation Office and of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. These reports have been discussed in Parliament. In addition, DGDC's annual reports include major findings of evaluations of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office.

evaluation products provide an opportunity for specific stakeholders (e.g. members of parliament, the press, the general public) to digest the most important findings and issues emanating from evaluations relatively easily.⁵³

In sum, efforts regarding follow-up for learning are not yet well developed, which in the opinion of the Panel is a missed opportunity to positively affect the potential utility (and use) of evaluations. Although it is evident that it takes considerable and long-term efforts to establish a culture conducive to evaluation, in the short run, the utility and actual use of evaluations are likely to become more effective when a well-articulated dissemination and communication strategy is in place. Such a strategy might also foster more ownership of evaluation and learning from evaluations amongst internal and external stakeholders.

Contribution of evaluation to knowledge management

Knowledge management can be understood to comprise a range of practices used in an organisation to identify, create, represent, distribute and enable adoption of new insights and experiences. Such insights and experiences comprise knowledge either embodied in individuals or internalised through organisational processes. In order that the evaluation function may contribute to knowledge management, the knowledge generated by evaluations needs to be credible, usable and accessible. Whereas interviewees confirmed that the contribution of evaluation to internal learning is limited, and taking into account the overall evaluation culture, the Panel considers that the current quality of evaluations offers a good basis for the potential use of the evaluations for knowledge management in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development. At the heart of the problem, however, is the absence of a well-articulated knowledge management strategy. Developing such a strategy would provide the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the way the organisation operates, and the challenges that confront it. The best way to achieve this would be by identifying staff needs and issues and by supplementing the ‘bottom-up’ approach with a strategic focus that ensures alignment with broader organisational directions.

5.3 Management response to evaluations

The credibility of the evaluation function and the use of evaluations by the different stakeholders are defined by the ways in which political leadership and senior management react to evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. Since management responses to evaluations form the most visible way in which senior management and political leadership view evaluations as a tool for learning

53 The already mentioned electronic newsletter ‘E-valuator’ provides an example of an evaluation product which is easily accessible to management and staff of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development.

and accountability, the Panel has reviewed the management responses to each of the evaluations conducted by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office during the period 2003-2009.

The current management response mechanism can be considered to be an informal one and its development in practice has not yet led to a consolidated procedure setting out its objective, ownership and oversight, or follow-up activities and actions to be undertaken once the management response has been finalised and adopted. It is not clear how the management response formally relates to decision-making at the operational level, feeds into policy making and developing strategies, or provides for reflection and long-term learning. This has resulted in staff and managers in the Federal Public Service and external stakeholders being unclear about the function and status of management response.

The Panel considers the current management response practice to be in contrast with formal statements of the Federal Public Service/DGDC management in support of evaluation. Management responses to evaluations, whether commissioned by the Special Evaluation Office or the Quality Control and Evaluation Office take considerable time to be produced. Their content is often very general, some are rather evasive if not defensive with regard to the evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations. In the view of the Panel, a proper management response should include a motivated reaction (positive or negative) to the evaluation's findings and conclusions and should give reasons why certain recommendations will or will not be taken into account. Ideally, a management response can be supplemented by an action programme setting out how policy and practice will take into account the results of the evaluation.

The Panel has observed that the situation regarding the use and function of the management response will change as a result of the current Royal Decree which redefines the function of the Special Evaluation Office and its Head, the Special Evaluator. In article 8, the Decree stipulates that each evaluation of the Office of the Special Evaluator will be published together with the management response drawn up by the entity whose activities have been evaluated. Article 9 mentions that the Special Evaluation Office will prepare an annual report for the Minister of Development which includes a synthesis of the results of evaluations conducted during the previous year as well as a summary of the management responses to these evaluations. In addition, the report of the Special Evaluator needs to provide an insight into the implementation of recommendations of previous evaluations.

5.4 Conclusions on utility

The Panel's conclusions on utility can be summarised as follows:

- There is a lack of an evaluation culture within and outside the Federal Public Service whereby management and staff i) accept the role and utility of evaluations; ii)

understand why the organisation needs evaluation; iii) can design or get advice on the design of necessary evaluations; and iv) use evaluation, particularly to support change and development.

- There is no corporate evaluation policy and strategy providing the framework for independent evaluation of the Belgian contribution to international development and setting standards to apply to all evaluations undertaken by the Federal Public Service.
- In the planning and preparation of evaluations insufficient attention is paid to inclusive stakeholder mapping. Nor do individual evaluations include a strategy for proactive and inclusive dissemination of their findings. This is not conducive to ensuring greater ownership and improved learning amongst stakeholders in the Federal Public Service and other institutional stakeholders, including those in partner countries.
- Evaluations are underutilised in policy development, strategy development and also operational decision-making. The contribution of evaluation to internal learning is limited because of the absence of a well-defined corporate knowledge management strategy.
- Current practice of management response to evaluations is not grounded in robust and unequivocally clear procedures and guidelines. As a result it is unclear how the management responses to evaluations formally feed into policy-making and developing strategies, relate to decision-making at the operational level, or more generally inform reflection and organisational learning. This has resulted in staff and managers in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and external stakeholders not being sufficiently aware of the function and status of this instrument.

6. Main Recommendations

The recommendations presented below are based on the findings and conclusions presented in the previous chapters of this report. For the convenience of the reader and to avoid repetition, the recommendations are presented under the headings of a number of issues identified by the Peer Panel rather than according to the main dimensions applied in the Peer Review – independence, credibility and utility. In principle, all recommendations are directed at the leadership of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation for its consideration. Where they concern issues that can be handled by specific administrative entities, e.g. the re-established Special Evaluation Office or the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC,) they address those entities directly

6.1 Fostering an evaluation culture

The Panel has observed a rather lukewarm if not sometimes defensive attitude to evaluation in the Federal Public Service. It advises the political leadership and senior management to promote conditions in which independent and high quality evaluation is widely regarded as a basic instrument for learning and to strengthen accountability to the general public and partners in international cooperation. The strengthening of such an ‘evaluation culture’ will require time and effort. Management should take advantage of basic requirements for evaluation which are already in place (such as the Royal Decree) and build on initiatives currently undertaken to foster results-based management in the programme and project cycle in Belgian development cooperation.

More specifically, the Panel recommends that:

- Evaluation becomes closely integrated with policy-making and strategic planning at all levels of the organisation;
- Evaluation becomes regarded and used as an important instrument for knowledge management;
- The accountability function of evaluation becomes widely recognised;
- Incentives are provided and systems are created to ensure that lesson-learning from evaluation (including evaluations conducted outside the Federal Public Service) becomes institutionalised in the organisation.

These overarching recommendations are further detailed below.

6.2 Evaluation policy and strategy

The re-established Special Evaluation Office should develop an evaluation policy that meets the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Cooperation as well as the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards and aims at: i) maintaining independence; ii) ensuring quality; and iii) strengthening a culture of learning.

The evaluation policy may include:

- A description of the concept of evaluation, the roles of evaluation in the Federal Public Service and the different types of evaluation applied in Belgian development cooperation;
- Leading principles and ethical norms for evaluation;
- A description of the responsibilities regarding the evaluation function in Belgian development cooperation, i.e. the central evaluation function in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the 'decentral' evaluations commissioned by its operational departments and by the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), Belgian NGOs and other organisations involved in the implementation of Belgian Official Development Assistance;
- The mandate of the Special Evaluation Office (see also 6.3 below);
- A description of the ways in which the Special Evaluation Office develops its multi-annual and annual evaluation programme, and how this programme is adopted;
- A description of the way in which Special Evaluation Office's evaluation budget (operational budget) is defined;
- A description of the ways in which individual evaluations are planned, budgeted, organised, and managed, and also how the evaluation reports are adopted;
- A description of the mechanism of the management response to evaluations, as well as how the follow-up to evaluations is organised;
- A description of the adherence to evaluation guidelines and of a system to support the quality of evaluations commissioned by operational departments of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the BTC, NGOs and other implementing organisations.

The policy document should include concise evaluation guidelines for the work of the Special Evaluation Office and that of the contracted evaluation teams. It should include a strategy setting out how the Special Evaluation Office will deliver on the policy, what it means for the stakeholders and how progress in the implementation of the evaluation policy will be assessed.

6.3 Mandate of the Special Evaluation Office

The current Royal Decree includes a clear description, albeit in general terms, of the mandate of the Special Evaluation Office and the Special Evaluator. It is suggested that the evaluation policy elaborates this mandate in operational terms. These may include:

- Undertake strategic and thematic evaluations of Belgian development policies and programmes with a focus on processes, results and impacts;
- Engage in joint evaluations in instances where Belgian ODA is provided as part of joint financing and programming with other donors, agencies and partner countries;
- Foster the use of evaluation findings, recommendations and lessons in policy development and programme/project formulation;
- Ensure that evaluation findings are easily accessible in the Federal Public Service (via its knowledge management system) as well as for other stakeholders. This may include a diversification of evaluation products aimed at specific groups of stakeholders;
- Develop evaluation guidelines, methods and tools for the staff of the Special Evaluation Office. It is suggested to share such evaluation guidelines with organisations which commission ('decentral') evaluations.
- Develop methodological tools and systems to support results orientation in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The Special Evaluation Office should establish a close working relation with the network (and possible future unit) in the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) currently responsible for fostering and mainstreaming results-oriented work (RBM);
- Interact with the BTC, NGOs and other Belgian organisations engaged in the implementation of development cooperation, in order to foster the application of evaluation standards;
- Prepare an Annual Evaluation Report which is submitted to the Minister for Development Cooperation through senior management of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. In conformity with the Royal Decree, the Annual Evaluation Report should be presented to Parliament. It should include a section on how the lessons and recommendations of previous evaluations have been followed up in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and – if applicable – by other organisations involved in Belgian development cooperation;
- Maintain and develop partnerships with international evaluation networks and communities of practice in order to foster further development of evaluation quality and harmonisation of evaluation approaches.

To ensure that the evaluation function's independence, credibility and utility are protected, the Special Evaluator should be empowered to: i) select evaluation topics that are relevant in terms of providing insight into the effectiveness of Belgian ODA; ii) ensure the quality of evaluations; iii) protect the independence of the Special Evaluation Office and its contracted evaluation consultants; and iv) negotiate adequate resources for the evaluation function.

6.4 Management response

The current Royal Decree points out the importance of management responses to evaluations. It states that the responsibility for management response rests with the administrative entity whose activities have been evaluated. The Panel suggests that a management response mechanism be established and documented in a specific procedure.

The following aspects are considered to be important:

- There should be a clear division of responsibilities between line management and the Special Evaluation Office with respect to the development and adoption of the management response. After an evaluation has been completed and the report has been signed off by the Special Evaluator, the Special Evaluation Office should not be involved in the drafting of the management response. It should, however, review the draft response to ascertain that the evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations are correctly represented. The Royal Decree implies that, in principle, the responsibility for the management response lies with the entity whose activities have been evaluated. In practice this will imply that senior management of the Federal Public Service bears the overall responsibility for the content of the management response, whereas the actual drafting of the response is delegated to other parts of the organisation. In view of the strategic and political nature of management responses to evaluations of the Special Evaluation Office, it might be worth considering whether these responses should be confirmed and signed by the Minister for Development Cooperation. The Minister could submit the response to Parliament together with the evaluation report.
- The management response mechanism should include rules about the timeframe for the response and procedures for follow-up of the management response (for instance an action plan indicating the responsibilities and timeline for its implementation), and how the results of the follow-up will be reported.
- Where appropriate, there should be a distinction between short-term and long-term responses and actions. Similarly, one may differentiate between operational measures directly related to the subject matter of the evaluation and general lessons to be learnt by the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, its cooperation partners and Belgium's partner countries.
- The management response should justify any disagreement with a specific evaluation finding or conclusion, and provide reasons for not accepting a specific recommendation.
- The management response and follow-up mechanism should be transparent, with relevant documents easily accessible and posted on the web.
- In order to facilitate the preparation of management responses, continued attention should be given to ensure the quality, credibility and ownership of evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations which form the basis for these responses.

6.5 Evaluation quality

The Panel acknowledges the efforts undertaken by the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office to continuously improve the quality and utility of their work.

In addition to these efforts the Panel recommends the following:

- The Terms of Reference for the evaluations should structurally stipulate that the evaluation teams need to adhere as much as possible to the evaluation quality standards developed by the OECD/DAC. Evaluators should justify in their report when key standards could not be met or were inappropriate for that particular evaluation.
- The Terms of Reference should pay attention to balancing the resources to be allocated to conduct the evaluation and the evaluation's level of ambition and scope of work. More particularly, the scope and intensity of the fieldwork should more closely match the need for structured collection of primary and other data.
- The current practice of preparatory missions by evaluation managers and evaluation team leaders should be institutionalised in order to i) increase the 'buy-in' and contribution by primary stakeholders in partner countries to the evaluation; ii) further focus the evaluation if needed; and iii) detail the scope of the evaluation work plan and subsequent inception report.
- Engage external and independent experts in the evaluation reference groups, in order to ensure the quality and credibility of the evaluations.
- Ensure that all reports contain a comprehensive description of the methodology applied and the technical and methodological constraints encountered during the implementation of the evaluation.
- The Federal Public Service and its cooperating partners should step up the current efforts on results-based programming and monitoring, in order to mitigate the observed weakness of baseline information, and the lack of performance and results indicators. Solving these issues is not only of importance to managing the implementation of Belgian development aid, but will also facilitate its evaluation.
- In addition to implementing its own evaluation programme, the Special Evaluation Office should explore the possibilities of commissioning synthesis studies of selected evaluations commissioned by operational departments of DGDC and elsewhere in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the BTC, NGOs and other organisations involved in the implementation of Belgian development cooperation. In view of the relatively large share of Belgium's ODA budget that is implemented by its multilateral partners, attention should be paid to the use made in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of evaluations produced by these partners. The Special Evaluation Office may advise the Directorate for Multilateral and European Programmes (D4) on the quality and credibility of such evaluations.

- Finally, it is suggested that possibilities are explored to establish a ‘help desk function’ within the re-established Special Evaluation Office, for providing advice on evaluation to operational departments of DGDC and elsewhere in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the BTC, NGOs and other organisations in Belgium involved in the implementation of Belgian ODA. This advisory function could build on the experiences of the former Quality Control and Evaluation Office with the Monitoring and Evaluation Tool Box and should be demand-led in order to foster an evaluation culture and improve the quality of ‘decentral’ evaluations. It should be avoided that the ‘help desk’ is regarded as a control mechanism or just another bureaucratic layer.

6.6 Organisational learning

The complementarity of (and synergy between) the accountability function and the learning function of evaluation appear not to be widely recognised in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The Panel suggests that more attention be paid to this complementarity. Ideally, the learning function of evaluation should be part of a well-articulated knowledge management strategy at the corporate level.

The Panel recommends that the Special Evaluation Office:

- Systematically synthesises the major lessons to be learnt from selected evaluations produced by other donors and development agencies and shares them within the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. It may also alert operational departments to evaluation synthesis reports produced elsewhere which provide such lessons.
- Explores more innovative methods to distil and share lessons from its own evaluations and those of other donors and development agencies. The office could i) develop communication tools and evaluation products tailored to specific stakeholder categories; ii) identify and build on emerging initiatives within the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to improve learning and knowledge management; and iii) intensify the role of evaluation reference groups as a platform to discuss preliminary and final evaluation results, thereby possibly creating greater ownership of these results and facilitating the preparation of management responses to evaluations;
- Explores the possibility of establishing a Panel of Advisors on Evaluation. Several donors have instituted such a body of independent experts. The Panel’s task should be to advise the leadership of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation on the utility of the evaluations produced by the Special Evaluation Office and the actual use made of these evaluations in the Federal Public Service as well as by other stakeholders.

6.7 Selection and contracting of evaluation teams

To commission evaluation teams, both evaluation offices follow a transparent and rigorous process involving competitive tendering. A quality and cost based selection is applied, in which a weight of 70% given to the technical component of the proposal and a weight of 30% given to the price component. While this selection process and the quality of the evaluation teams is satisfactory, the Panel notes that this particular procedure may result in the selection of contractors who have not necessarily submitted a proposal of the best substantive quality and the most appropriate evaluation team. In addition, there is room for improvement in terms of a better balance between international experts and experts from the partner countries.

6.8 Staffing of the Special Evaluation Office

The Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office are competent and professional. The post for the current Head of the Special Evaluation Office was advertised externally, as stipulated by the Royal Decree of 2003. The Panel considers this particular recruitment procedure important, in order to allow application and selection of candidates who fulfil certain requirements, including sufficient expertise and experience in evaluation. The position of the Head of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office was filled through internal recruitment using criteria of seniority as well as requirements related to monitoring and evaluation.

The Panel considers it appropriate to continue the mix of senior and less senior internal career staff and an externally recruited Special Evaluator, as is currently the case in the Special Evaluation Office. At the same time, the Panel has noted some weaknesses in the capacities of the current Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office resulting from the current process of staff recruitment.

In view of the technical nature of evaluation and professional skills required for evaluation managers, the Panel recommends that the Special Evaluator is allowed to select internal staff based on a professional recruitment process. This should include a selection process based on the applicant's interest in work in evaluation, the extent to which his or her background and competencies match the profile set by the Special Evaluation Office, and a 'competency-based interview' of shortlisted candidates. In the event no suitable internal candidate is available, external recruitment should be considered.

The capacity of the re-established Special Evaluation Office will be increased as a result of the integration of staff of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. It is important that the proposed staff levels mentioned in the 'Report to the King' by which the new Royal Decree was submitted to the King, namely 8 fulltime staff equivalents, is maintained over time. Of equal importance is the provision of sufficient opportunities

to staff to pursue a career in evaluation, including promotion possibilities. This will stimulate their professional interest, and also help to build further professionalism and capacity in the Special Evaluation Office.

It is recommended that the current practice of providing newly appointed staff with opportunities to participate in international evaluation training courses is continued and that sufficient time is allocated to all staff to allow them to remain informed of new developments in the field of evaluation.

6.9 Budget for evaluation

The Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office have been able to programme their evaluations in an independent manner whilst taking into account requests for evaluations and the need to conduct mandatory evaluations, e.g. the annual evaluations to be conducted as part of the management contract between the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the BTC. As mentioned, the annual evaluation budget of both evaluation offices is determined through the regular budget process applied in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

Although these budgets have proved to be sufficient in terms of realising planned evaluations, the Panel points out that the way in which the budgets are set may – in principle – influence the number of evaluations which can be undertaken. Or, put differently, it may affect the independence of evaluation programming. There are no indications that this has actually occurred. Nevertheless the Panel would like to suggest investigating the possibility of establishing a separate budget category for evaluation as part of the overall budget for Belgian development cooperation. Making use of this budget category, the Special Evaluation Office should base its annual budget – as stipulated by the current Royal Decree – on an annual plan set within the framework of a strategic multi-annual programme of evaluations.

6.10 Results-based management

Continued attention should be paid by the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) to retaining the momentum in reinforcing the results-orientation of Belgian development cooperation, in particular the work carried out by the Network on Results-Based Management facilitated and led by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office.

In view of the integration of the Quality Control and Evaluation Office in the Special Evaluation Office, the Panel suggests that DGDC establishes a small Quality Control Unit to continue the work of the Network on Results-Based Management and the efforts undertaken in this field by the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. This Unit

could step up the current efforts of the Federal Public Service and its cooperating partners regarding results-based programming and monitoring, in order to mitigate the observed weakness of baseline information and the lack of performance and results indicators. Solving these issues is not only important for managing the implementation of Belgian development aid, but will also facilitate its evaluation.

Annexe 1.

Approach Paper and Work Plan for the Peer Review

1. Introduction

The Special Evaluation Office (S4) and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2) of the Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, have requested that a Professional Peer Review will be conducted of their activities. This Peer Review will help to inform possible improvements in the work of both Offices.

This Peer Review will be conducted by a Panel consisting of Peers from the Evaluation Directorate of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); the Evaluation Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, Spain; and the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands. The Peer Panel will be assisted by an evaluation expert (advisor).

The Special Evaluation Office was established by Royal Decree on 17 February 2003 as an external evaluation entity, in accordance with article 5 of the Belgian law on International cooperation dated 25 May 1999. The office is administratively situated directly under the Chairman of the Governing Board and is tasked to evaluate strategies and policies relating to all types of federal cooperation interventions carried out within the framework of Official Development Assistance (ODA). In consultation with other stakeholders in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the office establishes an annual evaluation programme. The Special Evaluator is required to submit an annual report with evaluation findings and lessons to the Minister for Development Cooperation. The Minister submits this report to Parliament.

The Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation also operates a separate Quality Control and Evaluation Office. This is an internal unit that reports directly to DGDC's Director-General. Its main aim is to enhance DGDC's ability to learn from previous experience through evaluations. The Quality Control and Evaluation Office manages evaluations that are contracted to teams of independent evaluators and supports efforts of DGDC's managers to focus more on results by fostering the organisation's monitoring and evaluation capacities and encouraging the active use of evaluation results. In that respect it is exercising quality control over evaluations that

are conducted decentrally, i.e. by operational departments of DGDC. The office also participates in evaluations organised by these departments.

The Quality Control and Evaluation Office cooperates with the Special Evaluation Office in the planning of evaluations and sharing evaluation results. They also work together at the international level and their Heads are members of the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation and attend its periodic meetings.

2. Purpose of the Peer Review

The purpose of the Peer Review is to provide the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office, senior executives in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Minister for Development Cooperation and Parliament with an independent assessment of the evaluation function established in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The results of the Review will be presented to the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in the last quarter of 2009. They may be used to inform discussions and possible decisions about the further development of the evaluation function of Belgian Federal Development Cooperation. The Review report will be publicly available and be shared with the Members of the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation.

3. Objective of the Peer Review

It should be noted that this Peer Review is not a formal evaluation. It is a less comprehensive and in-depth assessment but adheres to a rigorous methodology applying the key principles of evaluation while taking full advantage of the particular benefits of a peer mechanism.

The Review will be conducted to judge the independence of the two evaluation services, the credibility of their evaluation processes and products, and the utility and utilisation of their evaluations.

The Review will apply the following documents as a normative basis:

- The OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (OECD, 1991);
- The OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards ('pilot version'), OECD, 2006).

4. Scope and limitations of the Peer Review

The focus of the Peer Review is on the Special Evaluation Office (S4) and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2) of DGDC. Linkages of these two offices to other functions in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, for instance the audit function and to external entities

such as the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, will be examined only to the extent that they are relevant for assessing the quality of the work of S4 and Do.2. The Peer Review will also take into account the relation of these two offices with the Quality Management Unit of the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC). However, the functioning of the latter or of other evaluation entities in Belgian Development Cooperation will not be subject to separate assessment.

The review will be conducted in Brussels. Field visits are not envisaged, but (telephone) interviews may be held with staff of Belgian embassies in developing countries and other stakeholders which have been involved in evaluations.

The Peer Review will examine and comment on:

1. Structural aspects of the functioning of both evaluation offices in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. This includes an assessment of whether the current functional arrangements in the Federal Public Service are effective in ensuring that both offices can contribute to learning and accountability within Belgian Federal Development Cooperation.
2. The evaluation policy (or mandate) of both evaluation offices and other policies and procedures which have a bearing on them and their activities. In particular, attention will be paid to the extent the evaluation mandate, policy, and procedures governing both offices are in conformity with international standards (i.e. the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance and the (pilot) OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards). In addition, it will be assessed whether other policies of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation are relevant to the functioning of the evaluation offices. These are, for instance, policies and guidelines for 'decentral' evaluations (evaluations conducted by operational departments or at the field level); policies and arrangements for monitoring (including results-based management); and policies and arrangements for operational audit.
3. Organisational relationships between the two evaluation offices on the one hand, and between them and other relevant units in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and development cooperation, on the other;
4. Relationships and responsibilities regarding the evaluation function of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation vis-à-vis partners in development cooperation, e.g. the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), the multilateral organisations, Belgian Non-governmental organisations (NGOs); universities, scientific institutions and other partners.
5. The coverage of evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by the S4 and Do.2 relative to the expenditures of Belgian Federal Development Cooperation;
6. The quality of the evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by both evaluation offices and the ways in which they safeguard that quality. The

assessment includes the conduct of the actual evaluations (the evaluation process), the quality of evaluation reports, the independence of contracted evaluation teams and their team leaders (consultants), and the ways in which the evaluation offices enable these evaluation teams to produce credible reports. Also covered will be the ways in which stakeholders are facilitated to comment on draft Terms of Reference for the evaluations and evaluations reports. More in particular, how the positions of these stakeholders and their comments are dealt with in relation to the independence and credibility of the evaluations.

7. The utility and actual use of evaluations and their results, including follow-up in terms of accountability and learning. Aspects are the ways in which evaluation results are disseminated and lessons used within the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the BTC, as well as by other stakeholders including NGOs, the Parliament, the press, etc.
8. The support provided to DGDC's operational departments to foster their monitoring and evaluation capacities and encourage active use of evaluation results.
9. The formal arrangements and responsibilities for the follow-up of evaluation results and recommendations by the political and managerial leadership of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the BTC. How this follow-up is undertaken and monitored by both offices (to the extent that these tasks are within their mandate), or by other entities.

5. Key Assessment Questions

The Peer Review will apply three main criteria, derived from the abovementioned publications of the OECD/DAC, that need to be satisfied for evaluation functions and products to be considered to be of high quality.

These are:

1. Independence of evaluations and the evaluation system(s)

The evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the process concerned with the policy making, the delivery and the management of assistance. A requisite measure of independence of the evaluation function is a recognised pre-condition for the credibility, validity and usefulness of evaluations. The review needs to take into account that the appropriate guarantees of the necessary independence are determined according to the nature of the work of both evaluation offices, their organisational position in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and relevant decision-making arrangements governing the programming and conduct of evaluations. Both evaluation offices aim to foster the use (application) of their evaluations at all management

levels of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Belgian Technical Cooperation Organisation (BTC). This implies that systemic measures for ensuring the objectivity and impartiality of their work should receive attention in the Peer Review.

2. Credibility of evaluations

The credibility of evaluation depends on the expertise and independence of the evaluators and the degree of transparency of the evaluation process. Credibility requires that evaluations should report successes as well as failures. Recipient countries should, as a rule, fully participate in evaluation in order to promote credibility and commitment. Whether and how the organisation's approach to evaluation fosters partnership and helps to build ownership and capacity merits attention.

3. Utility of evaluations

To have an impact on decision-making, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful and should be presented in a clear and concise way. They should fully reflect the different interests and needs of the many parties involved. Importantly, the Review will have to bear in mind that ensuring the utility of evaluations is only partly under the control of the evaluation offices. This is primarily a function of, and will depend on, the interest of the political leadership and the executives in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Belgian Technical Cooperation in programming, accepting and utilising evaluations

The advisor to the Peer Panel will, together with the Panel, prepare a detailed set of assessment questions related to each of the core criteria, after having reviewed the basic documents delineating the position and functioning of the two evaluation offices. This set of questions will be shared with both offices before being finalised.

6. Normative framework for the Peer Review

S4 and Do.2 are both members of the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation. This Network is composed of the heads of the evaluation departments of the OECD/DAC donor countries and the European Commission; the heads of evaluation of the UNDP, the Multilateral Banks and the IMF are observers to the Network. The Peer Panel will apply the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (1991) and the pilot version of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards (2006), as well as other relevant guidance documents of the Network on Development Evaluation to develop a normative framework for its work. This includes the criteria mentioned in section 5.

7. Peer Panel composition

A number of considerations were taken into account in establishing the Peer Panel. These are: 1) relevant professional background as head or senior staff of an evaluation department of a bilateral donor, 2) broad experience with different types of evaluations and evaluation arrangements in varying settings, and 3) independence, to avoid any potential conflict of interest or partiality.

These criteria resulted in the following Panel composition:

- Mr. Goberdhan Singh, Director-General of Evaluation, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA);
- Mr. Carlos Rodríguez-Ariza, Evaluator, Evaluation Unit, Directorate-General for Planning and Evaluation of Development Policies, Secretariat for International Cooperation, Spain;
- Mr. Ted Kliet, Acting Deputy Director, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Ted Kliet will function as the coordinator of the Peer Review.

The Panel has the substantive and managerial responsibility for the Peer Review process. The Panel will:

- Define in collaboration with the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office the normative framework for and approach of the Review;
- Collect information;
- Validate evidence and findings;
- Form judgements, conclusions and recommendations;
- Present the results of the review in a concise Peer Panel report.

During the conduct of the Review, the Panel will be assisted by an advisor who will be responsible for primary and secondary data collection, data analysis and information gathering and report drafting.

The advisor, Mr. Roland Rodts, has been selected in consultation with both offices taking into account:

- His professional background as an evaluator / evaluation expert, having been involved for over 25 years in evaluations of projects, sector programmes and country programmes for bilateral donors and multilateral agencies; and
- His independence from both evaluation offices, to avoid any potential conflict of interest or partiality (Mr. Rodts has not been contracted as an evaluator by S4 or Do.2).

The advisor will provide the Panel with a factual report which includes a consolidated information base, specifying the sources, and a preliminary assessment of the collected data and information.

The information included in this report will be reviewed (validated) by S4 and Do.2. It will form the basis for more detailed information gathering by the Peer Panel and the advisor through structured and semi-structured interviews with executive and senior staff as well as other staff of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) and other stakeholders (to be defined).

8. Reporting

The Peer Panel will submit its report to the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office. These, in turn, will provide the report to the political leadership and senior executives of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC).

It is expected that the report will be provided to the Belgian Parliament together with a management response from the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and (possibly) the Belgian Technical Cooperation Organisation (BTC).

The report will also be provided to the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, with a view to fostering 'cross agency' learning.

9. Responsibility of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office

It is suggested that the Head of the Special Evaluation Office serves as the main contact point within the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation for the Panel and its advisor. He will provide requested information and data, including the names and details of contact persons whom the Panel or its advisor may wish to contact.

S4 and Do.2 will conduct a brief self-assessment of their respective evaluation work. This serves as an input for the Panel and its advisor

The Head of S4 in collaboration with the Head of Do.2 will brief the senior executives and other senior staff of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) about the Peer Review. Both are also responsible for submitting the Panel's report to the

senior executives of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), and for reporting on follow-up action.

Finally, the Heads of S4 and Do.2 will provide the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation with feedback regarding the Peer Review to enable the members of the Network to learn from the Belgian experience.

10. Peer Review Process

The Peer Review will consist of the following steps:

- 1) Preparation of the Approach and Work Plan, which serves as the Terms of Reference for the Peer Panel – the draft Approach and Work Plan will be discussed with both evaluation offices before being finalised;
- 2) Preparation of the Terms of Reference for the advisor – the draft Terms of Reference for the advisor will be discussed with the two evaluation offices before being finalised;
- 3) The advisor will, in conjunction with the Peer Panel, prepare an inception paper which outlines the detailed plan and approach of the Review, background information on both evaluation offices, detailed assessment questions based on the three main dimensions of the Review (independence, credibility and utility), an overview of the major stakeholders of both offices, an assessment matrix for assessing evaluation reports, and topic lists for interviews with stakeholders in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), as well as other stakeholders;
- 4) The evaluation offices conduct a self-assessment of their functioning (self-assessment matrix to be developed by the Peer Panel and advisor);
- 5) The advisor reviews the quality of a sample of evaluation reports and carries out a number of interviews with staff in Brussels and with a selected number of evaluation team leaders;
- 6) Based on the review of documentation, the assessment of the selected evaluation reports, the interviews mentioned under point 5, and the results of the self- assessment (see point 4), the advisor will produce a factual report to be presented to the Panel (and both evaluation offices) for review and discussion. This report will generate issues to be followed up by the Peer Panel (see point 7);
- 7) Taking into account the findings presented in the factual report as well as issues identified, the Peer Panel, supported by the advisor, will interview selected stakeholders in the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), including the Heads and staff of both evaluation offices. Interviews, including telephone interviews are also planned with other stakeholders.

- 8) The interviews and discussions will be concluded by the Panel, considering the evidence and findings gathered in order to come to its judgement and arrive at draft conclusions and recommendations;
- 9) The Panel agrees on an outline and general content of the final report, which will be drafted by the advisor and finalised in collaboration with the Panel;
- 10) The Panel will submit the draft final report to the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office in the last quarter of 2009.

Peer Review Panel, May 2009

Annexe 2.

Background data of the Peer Panel members and the advisor

Ted Kliest is currently Acting Deputy Director of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands. His responsibilities are to carry out and report policy evaluations in the field of Dutch development cooperation and other fields of foreign policy. During the past fifteen years he has managed several joint evaluations led by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department and has participated in joint evaluations led by other development partners, among those the evaluation of Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan 2001-2005, the multi-agency evaluation of Humanitarian Support to Internally Displaced Persons (2005) and the Joint Donor Evaluation of Managing Exit Strategies (2008). He also chaired the management group of the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education (2003). He currently chairs the Evaluation Management Group of the Multi-donor Evaluation of Support to Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities in Southern Sudan and co-chairs the Evaluation Management Group of the Joint Evaluation of the Paris Declaration (phase 2). Mr. Kliest is a member of the OECD Development Cooperation Directorate's Network on Development Evaluation and is co-chair of the OECD/DAC-UNEG Task Force on Peer Reviews of Evaluation Functions of International Organisations. He was a member of the Peer Panels which assessed the evaluation function of UNDP in 2005 and of WFP in 2007.

Carlos Rodríguez-Ariza is senior staff member in the Evaluation Unit of the Directorate-General of Development Policy, Planning and Evaluation (DGPOLDE) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain. He holds a PhD in evaluation and is specialised in participatory methods, organisational analysis and evaluation methodology. Prior to joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs he was a senior research fellow in the Polytechnic University of Madrid, specialising in agriculture and rural development, and environment as well as organisational management. In the latter field he published the report 'Information Management in Development Organisations, the case of Spanish Public Administration'. He has also worked as an independent evaluation consultant for several clients, including NGOs and the Region of Castilla La Mancha. In DGPOLDE he was responsible for managing the Evaluation of the Second Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation (2005-2008). His involvement in joint evaluations includes the evaluation of the programmes of the European Commission and Spain in Senegal, and the evaluation of the Paris Declaration (phase 2). He is a member of the

OECD Development Cooperation Directorate's Network on Development Evaluation. Mr. Rodrigues-Ariza is engaged in impact evaluation through his participation in the World Bank–Spanish Impact Evaluation Fund and the Network of Networks for Impact Evaluation. He represents the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network - MOPAN.

Roland Rodts, advisor to the Peer Panel, has a Master of Science in Agricultural Engineering and Master of Arts in Economics. He is a Belgian national who has spent his professional life in development cooperation. In 1970, he started his career in the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) for which he worked for 3 years as principal economist in the Senegal River Basin master plan study. In 1974, he joined the Netherlands Economic Institute of Erasmus University, Rotterdam. This was the beginning of a ten-year career as fulltime project economist and evaluation specialist in diverse fields of development in some ten countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. His assignments involved the identification, design, appraisal, supervision and evaluation of development projects, drawing on his expertise in institutional and environmental assessments, impact evaluations and national policy formulation. Since 1984 he has worked as independent consultant and carried out several policy and programme evaluations for organisations such as the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the European Union.

Goberdhan Singh is currently Director-General of Evaluation at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Since joining the Agency in 1981, he has served in different parts of CIDA in a variety of capacities such as Senior Policy Analyst, Program Manager for the East Africa Program, Evaluation Manager, and, more recently, Director of Evaluation. He has been a member of the OECD Development Cooperation Directorate's Network on Development Evaluation since 2000. Mr. Singh is also a member of the Canadian evaluation community of practice, made up of the Heads of Evaluation from the Canadian Federal Government Departments and the Canadian Evaluation Society. Under his leadership, the evaluation function of CIDA has been re-positioned to add better value to the Agency's work. Besides managing numerous CIDA-only evaluations, he has participated in joint evaluation initiatives such as the Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of UNICEF (2006), the Joint Evaluation of General Budget Support (2006), the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education (2003), the Joint Evaluation of the Implementation of the Comprehensive Development Framework Principles (2003). He is currently leading the work, initiated by Canada, on developing a new approach for jointly evaluating the effectiveness of multilateral partners, and is participating in the steering committees for the Joint Evaluation of the Paris Declaration (phase 2) and the Multi-donor Evaluation of Support to Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities in Southern Sudan.

Annexe 3.

Self-assessment questionnaire for the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office

| SUBJECT | Response |
|---|----------|
| 1. General information | |
| 1.1 Name of Evaluation Unit (S4 or Do.2) | |
| 1.2 Annual evaluation budget (€) | |
| 1.3 Position in organisational structure of the Ministry | |
| 1.4 Reporting line of the Head of unit | |
| 1.5 Evaluation staff (by number) | |
| 1.6 Evaluation staff with permanent position (by number) | |
| 1.7 Professional evaluation experts on temporary contract (by number) | |
| 1.8 Are adequate human resources allocated to the evaluation unit in order to comply with its tasks? | |
| 1.9 Are adequate training resources allocated to the evaluation unit in order to build its capacities? | |
| 1.10 Are adequate budgetary resources allocated to the evaluation unit in order to comply with its tasks? | |
| 1.11 Do formal job descriptions and selection criteria for evaluation staff exist? | |
| 1.12 Do formal personal performance assessment for evaluation staff exist? | |
| 2. Independence | |
| 2.1 To whom does the unit report? (see 1.4) | |
| 2.2 Can the evaluation unit function with sufficient independence from line management? | |
| 2.3. Can the evaluation unit function with sufficient independence from the Minister and the Minister's Cabinet and other levels of senior management? | |
| 2.4 What is the relation of the unit with other control functions, such as internal audit, RBM, monitoring? | |
| 2.5 Does the Head of unit establish (and decide upon) the (annual) evaluation budget? What is the position of other units (e.g. Finance Department or the Cabinet of the Minister)? | |
| 2.6 Is the budget adequate in view of the evaluation programming or mandate of the unit? | |
| 2.7 Is the content of the budget line (what can be spent from it) adequate? | |
| 2.8 How is the Head of unit involved in appointments of new staff of the unit? Can the Head reject staff suggested by the Personnel Division? | |

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 2.9 | How is programming of evaluations arranged? How are priorities identified and set? | |
| 2.10 | Does the unit prepare an annual or multi-annual work programme for its evaluations? Who determines the evaluation programme? | |
| 2.11 | Is the evaluation programme linked into the overall policy cycle(s) in Belgian Development Cooperation? | |
| 2.12 | Is the evaluation programme shared with Parliament? | |
| 2.13 | Does the Head of unit have full discretion to select evaluation subjects? | |
| 2.14 | Can anyone stop an evaluation when e.g. poor performance is an issue? | |
| 2.15 | What are the formal and actual drivers ensuring/constraining the evaluation unit's independence? | |
| 2.16 | What are the formal and actual drivers ensuring/constraining the independence of the evaluation unit's staff? | |
| 2.17 | What are the formal and actual drivers ensuring/constraining the independence of contracted evaluators/evaluation teams? | |
| 2.18 | What is the evaluation unit's experience with exposing success and failures of aid policies, programmes and projects? | |
| 2.19 | Do procedures or mechanisms exist allowing evaluators to report discreetly on cases of wrongdoing or fraud? If so how do these function? | |
| 2.20 | To whom are evaluation reports submitted? By whom are they cleared? | |
| 2.21 | Is there scope for exercising influence on the content of the evaluation report; and if so, of what nature, e.g. undue? | |
| 2.22 | How are comments on draft and final evaluation reports treated by the unit? | |
| 2.23 | Is independence of the unit explicitly supported and promoted within the Ministry, e.g. in an audit committee or otherwise? | |
| 2.24 | How is the independent position of the unit balanced with the need to integrate the evaluation programme and the unit's activities in the overall planning cycle of Belgian Development Cooperation? | |
| 3. | Credibility (Quality aspects) | |
| 3.1 | Does the unit apply evaluation guidelines? | |
| 3.2 | Do these guidelines include quality standards for evaluations? | |
| 3.3 | Are these standards broadly consistent with the (pilot) DAC Evaluation Quality Standards? | |
| 3.4 | Is on-the-job training available for evaluation staff? Which possibilities? | |
| 3.5 | How does the evaluation unit manage its evaluations to ensure quality? Is there an internal quality assurance mechanism? | |
| 3.6 | Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluation design and methodology is shared with stakeholders? | |
| 3.7 | Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluation process is clear and transparent to stakeholders in order that they understand how the evaluation is being conducted and how conclusions are reached and recommendations are being formulated? | |
| 3.8 | Is a system in place to ensure the professional competence of the evaluation team? | |

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| 3.9 | Is a system in place to ensure that evidence collected during the evaluation process and findings are truthfully reported in the deliverables (evaluation report or otherwise)? | |
| 3.10 | Has the unit adopted standards or benchmarks to assess and if necessary improve the quality of its evaluations? | |
| 3.11 | Does the unit use peer reviews or reference groups composed of external experts? | |
| 3.12 | Are evaluations contracted out (i.e. conducted entirely by non-staff) or does evaluation unit staff also participate? If both models occur what are the reasons for applying one or the other? | |
| 4. | Utility | |
| 4.1 | Is there a clear notion among the Ministry's managers about the function and purpose of evaluation? | |
| 4.2 | Is a system in place to select subjects for evaluation with the intention to contribute to decision-making, and accountability (see also question about programming)? | |
| 4.3 | Is a system in place to select subjects of evaluation with the intension to contribute to learning? | |
| 4.4 | If so, how is the learning from evaluations shared within the Ministry (and elsewhere) and what are the experiences on the part of the evaluation unit? | |
| 4.5 | Is a system in place to ensure timely delivery and sharing of evaluation results? | |
| 4.6 | Are mechanisms in place to respond to evaluation recommendations? | |
| 4.7 | How do links between the evaluation function and decision-making processes to promote (ensure) the use of evaluation in policy formulation function? | |
| 4.8 | What is the disclosure policy and practice of the unit? Are all evaluation reports easily retrievable? | |
| 4.9 | Is the evaluation unit engaged in the monitoring of the follow-up of evaluation recommendations? If so, how does this monitoring operate? | |
| 4.10 | Does the unit have a policy for disseminating its evaluation findings and reports? | |
| 4.11 | How are the evaluation findings disseminated? Are there other communication tools used in addition to reports (e.g. press releases; press conferences; workshops, evaluation abstracts; annual reports providing a synthesis of findings of individual evaluations, etc.)? | |
| 4.12 | Is a system in place to generate and share evaluation knowledge to the Ministry's overall knowledge management system? | |
| 4.13 | Is the way the evaluation results are to be utilised determined at the stage of preparing the ToR? If not, when and by whom is utilisation determined? | |
| 4.14 | Is there a complementarity and/or functional linkage between operational evaluations commissioned by the BTC and those of the unit? | |
| 4.15 | Are there any mechanisms in place to foster (ensure) complementarity between the evaluations of S4 and Do.2? | |
| 5. | Any other remarks/observations | |
| | | |

Annexe 4.

Persons interviewed

Office of the Special Evaluator (S4)

Special Evaluator - Dominique de Crombrugghe de Looringhe

Evaluation Officer - Ivo Hooghe

Evaluation Officer - Andrée François

Evaluation Officer - Sofie Dirkx

Evaluation Officer - Jan Vermeir

Secretariat - Corinne Machet

Quality Control and Evaluation Office (Do.2)

Head: Jacqueline Liénard

Evaluation Officer - Karel Cools

Evaluation Officer - Olivier They

Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Cooperation

President of the Governing Board - Dirk Achten

Cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
- Karl Dhaene

Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation - Bruno van der Pluijm and Johan Debar

Director of Finance - Patrice Couchard

Directorate-General Development Cooperation (DGDC)

Director-General (D) - Peter Moors

Attaché Change Management (Do.0) - Alain Baetens

Counsellor Policy Support (Do.1) - Sophie de Groote

Secretariat Accountability (Do.3) - Andrea De Witte

Director Governmental Programmes (D1) - Marc Denys

Attaché North Africa & Middle East (D1.1) - Natacha Durieux

Attaché East & Southern Africa (D1.3) - Florence Deschuytener

Attaché International Cooperation Central Africa (D1.4) - Mélanie Schellens

Attaché Latin America and Asia (D1.5) - Guido Schueremans

Director Special Programmes (D2) - Jean-Pierre Loir

Director Belgian Survival Fund (D2.2) - Roland Provot

Attaché International Cooperation at the Belgian Survival Fund - Theofiel Baert

(interviewed in his capacity of former Attaché Development Cooperation in the Belgian

Embassy in Kigali)

Director Non-Governmental Programmes (D3) - Philippe Jalet

Director ONG programmes (D3.1) - Guy Beringhs

Counsellor Other partners (D3.3) - Edgard d'Adesky

Director Multilateral and West European Programmes (D4) - Kris Panneels

Director Awareness-Raising Programmes (D5) - Marc Buys

Inspector General of Finance - Frank Blomme

Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC)

President - Carl Michiels

Head of Sectorial and Thematic Expertise - Paul Verle

Non-Governmental Organisations

Flemish Federation of Development Cooperation Organisations – Jean Reynaert

Fédération Francophone et Germanophone des Associations de Coopération au

Developpement – Etienne Van Parys

Federal Parliament

Member of Parliament - Sabine de Bethune

Evaluation consultants

ECORYS - Anneke Slob

SEE - Luc Lefebvre

Independent consultant - Bruno Kervyn

Annexe 5.

Questions for management and staff of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and implementing agencies

Independence

What is your opinion on the structural independence of S4 and Do.2?

- To whom does the director report/where is the office located in the organisational structure?
- Is the evaluation function distinct from management functions, such as RBM, policy-making, monitoring, etc.?
- Who is responsible for ensuring the independence of the evaluation function?
- Is the independence of S4 and Do.2 affected by the independence (or lack thereof) of the evaluation units of the executing and implementing agencies?

What is your perception on the institutional independence of S4 and Do.2?

- What is your opinion on the independence of S4 and Do.2 in the selection of evaluation subjects?
- Do you think resources are adequate? Are financial resources adequate to ensure adequate evaluation coverage?
- Is a system in place to ensure evaluations are conducted/undertaken independently?
- Who clears the reports before distribution?
- How do you feel your comments on evaluation reports are treated? Is there scope for discussion and exercising influence and, if so, of what nature?

What is your perception on the behavioural independence and integrity of S4 and Do.2 and the evaluation consultants?

- Are you satisfied with current provisions that ensure evaluators have the right competencies?
- Have there been any problems in this field? Are you satisfied with current provisions for preventing or managing conflicts of interest?
- Do you think behavioural independence and integrity of S4 and Do.2 are safeguarded?
- Do you think S4 and Do.2 staff and contracted evaluators take professional/career risks by acting independently and with integrity?

Credibility

What is your perception on the impartiality of S4 and Do.2 evaluations?

- Is a system in place to ensure that conflict of interest is avoided in the identification and selection of consultants?
- Is a system in place to ensure the impartiality of the evaluation design and methodology, the conduct of the evaluation and its reporting?

What is your perception on the quality and accuracy of S4 and Do.2 evaluations?

- Is a system in place to ensure the professional competence of the evaluation team that is necessary for arriving at accurate and credible evaluation reports?
- Is a system in place to ensure the quality of the evaluations in their design, methodology, the conduct of the evaluation and reporting? What does the quality assurance system entail and how reliable is it for ensuring the credibility of evaluations? Do you have a role in quality assurance, especially of the technical content of evaluations?
- Is a system in place to ensure that your views are considered in the process of finalising evaluation reports? Do you have an opportunity to comment? How are dissenting views handled? Does the process balance well the issue of independence and credibility/accuracy?
- Do the S4 and Do.2 evaluation reports present credible, well-substantiated conclusions? If not, what provisions should be made to ensure findings are qualified?

What is your perception on the transparency of S4 and Do.2 evaluations?

- Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluation design and methodology is shared with you?
- Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluation process is clear and transparent to you, that you understand how the evaluation is being conducted and how conclusions are arrived at?
- Is a system in place to ensure transparency in the reporting of evaluation findings and how comments are dealt with?

What is your overall appreciation of the credibility of S4 and Do.2 evaluations?

- Do you find the evaluations to be unbiased, substantiated with the necessary evidence including enough credible counterfactuals, presenting a 'good argument' and making valid recommendations?
- Were there any examples of S4 and Do.2 evaluations that you found particularly credible or that you found not trustworthy? To what do you attribute this?

Utility

What is your perception on the intentionality of the S4 and Do.2 evaluations?

- Is a system in place to choose subjects of evaluation with the intention to contribute to decision-making, accountability and learning?
- Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluation design and methodology have a clear intent, and if so which?
- Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluations are carried out with a clear intent, and is that intent the same as stated in the evaluation design?
- Is a system in place to ensure that formal, corporate, substantive and timely management responses are given and that follow-up actions to evaluation recommendations are taken, recorded/tracked, and reported on? Does this reporting provide evidence of the impact of evaluation results? If so on which part of the organisation (policies, strategies, operations, etc.)?

What is your perception on the timeliness of the S4 and Do.2 evaluations?

- Is a system in place to consider the timing of the evaluation and its relation to decision-making processes? How are potentially divergent schedules reconciled?
- Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluation design and methodology considers milestones when evaluation information is needed and can be fed back into decision-making processes?
- Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluations are carried out in a timely manner?
- Is a system in place to ensure that the evaluation reports are produced and shared in a timely manner?

What is your perception on accessibility of the S4 and Do.2 reports?

- Are you satisfied with the disclosure policy and practice of S4 and Do.2?
- Are evaluation reports written in clear, concise and understandable ways?
- What is your opinion on S4/Do.2 policy/practice of disseminating evaluation findings and reports?
- Is a system in place to generate and share knowledge or contribute evaluation knowledge to your organisation's knowledge management system?
- Do you think the dissemination strategy or practice is effective? Could it be improved?

What is your overall appreciation of the utility of the S4 and Do.2 evaluations?

- Have the evaluations been useful to your decision-making and/or work? Please give examples of how you have used the findings and/or recommendations of an evaluation and what follow-up action you have taken.
- Have the evaluations had any impact on your organisation as a whole? In what ways?
- Have the evaluations had any impact on other organisations? In what ways?
- Are there ways in which the utility (usefulness) of evaluation could be enhanced from your perspective? If so, how?

Annexe 6.

Checklist for assessing the quality of evaluation reports of the Special Evaluation Office and the Quality Control and Evaluation Office

This assessment checklist is based on the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards⁵⁴. It consists of two parts. First it lists the general characteristics of the evaluation concerned: the subject evaluated, the evaluation conducted, the actors concerned, and the final report. Subsequently, the quality of the evaluation is examined applying three quality criteria: Validity, Reliability, and Usability. Each of these criteria is operationalised by specific indicators, which in turn are further specified and divided into components. The assessment applies a four-point rating scale: poor – mediocre – satisfactory – good.

| General Characteristics of the Evaluation (see explanatory notes) | |
|---|---|
| SUBJECT evaluated | |
| Title | |
| type of subject | |
| country/countries, region(s) | |
| financial value | |
| evaluation period | |
| Evaluation | |
| purpose | |
| type of evaluation | |
| costs of the evaluation | € (= ... % of the costs of the subject evaluated) |
| financing source | |
| throughput time | |

⁵⁴ The assessment framework is used by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has been adapted for the purpose of this Peer Review.

| ACTORS | |
|--------------------------|--|
| commissioning authority | |
| guidance or supervision | |
| evaluators | |
| qualifications | |
| selection criteria | |
| Evaluation report | |
| date | |
| author(s) | |
| main evaluation question | |
| ToR | |
| size | |

Explanatory notes for the general characteristics of the evaluation

The general characteristics of the evaluation are described in order to assess whether the evaluation report contains a minimum level of information.

| title | the name of the evaluation as given on the final evaluation report |
|------------------------------|---|
| type of subject | e.g. a programme, a project, a sector, a theme, an instrument, a strategy, or an organisation |
| country/countries, region(s) | the territorial area(s) covered by the evaluation |
| financial value | the amount of funds spent on the subject evaluated during the period concerned |
| evaluation period | the period covered by the evaluation |
| purpose | i) accountability reporting and/or ii) policy development (learning) and/or iii) management-level decision-making |
| type of evaluation | e.g. ex-post / interim / evaluation / review ⁵⁵ / evaluation and formulation ⁵⁶ |
| evaluation costs | in euros and as a percentage of the financial value of the subject evaluated |
| financing source | the budget (or sub-budget) from which the evaluation was financed. It is possible that the evaluation has been jointly financed |
| throughput time | the period during which the evaluation was conducted |
| contracting authority | the official or public body that has adopted the Terms of Reference and decides on the approval of the final report |

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| guidance/supervision | guidance/supervision of the evaluation provided by a specially designated team (peer reviewers/reference group/steering committee) |
| evaluators | the names (and possibly job descriptions/tasks) of the evaluation team leader and team members |
| qualifications | are the highest educational qualifications and levels of experience of each of the evaluators given? yes/no |
| selection criteria | are the explicit criteria given whereby the evaluators were selected (e.g. in the Terms of Reference)? yes/no |
| date | the publication date of the final evaluation report |
| author(s) | Names (+ job descriptions) if other than the evaluators themselves |
| evaluation questionnaire | are the questions from the Terms of Reference also provided in the evaluation report? yes (page. ...+....) / no |
| ToR | Is the complete or abridged version of the Terms of Reference attached to the evaluation report as an annexe: yes (complete/shortened)? p. ... / no |
| size | number of pages of the evaluation report (including annexes) |

55 A review is a ‘thumbnail evaluation’, based mainly on existing information.

56 An evaluation and a formulation are combined if the evaluation contract instructs the evaluators to make such explicit recommendations for the continuation of the evaluated activity that the recommendations risk influencing the evaluation’s results rather than vice versa.

| Assessment criteria, indicators and components | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | Validity (does the evaluation measure what it was meant to measure?) | score |
| 1.1 | Problem definition | |
| 1.1.1 | Clarity with which the problem is defined and further developed in evaluation questions [The problem definition is a concise expression of the criteria on which the activity was evaluated. The evaluation questions arise from the problem definition] | |
| 1.1.2 | Definition of evaluation criteria [A clear and comprehensive description of the evaluation criteria – e.g. effectiveness – applied in evaluating the activity] | |
| 1.2 | Subject evaluated | |
| 1.2.1 | Definition, functionality, and parameters of the subject evaluated [A detailed description of the component activities evaluated (type, target group, location, period, organisation, financial value, etc.) – the ‘evaluation population’] | |
| 1.2.2 | The place of the subject evaluated in its policy and institutional context [An account of relevant policy contexts and principles and of the institutional environment in which the subject evaluated operates] | |
| 1.3 | Policy theory | |
| 1.3.1 | Account or reconstruction of intervention logic and result levels [An account of the theory behind the policy, including the assumptions about causal and final relationships underpinning the activities evaluated, and the assumptions about the input/output/outcome hierarchy] | |
| 1.3.2 | Operationalisation of results measurement via indicators [The extent to which the indicators defined at the various result levels can be regarded as specific, measurable, and time-bound] | |
| 1.4 | Analysis | |
| 1.4.1 | Information sources, information collection, and information processing [The care with which the information sources used were selected, as well as the precision and transparency with which the information was processed and analysed] | |
| 1.4.2 | Underpinning of conclusions by results [The extent to which the conclusions arose from the evaluation results - findings] | |
| 2 | Reliability (how reliable are the evaluation results?) | score |
| 2.1 | Evaluation methods | |
| 2.1.1 | Specification of and justification for evaluation methods applied [A precise description of and justification for the evaluation methods and techniques applied] | |
| 2.1.2 | Verification of information / triangulation [The extent to which information was checked, various sources used, and various methods applied to collect information about the same features and phenomena] | |
| 2.2 | Scope | |
| 2.2.1 | Representativeness of sample or case study selection [The extent to which the conclusions drawn from the sample evaluated or case study conducted apply to the entire ‘evaluation population’] | |
| 2.2.2 | Limitations of the evaluation [An explanation of shortcomings in the evaluation and limitations regarding the extent to which the results and conclusions can be generalised] | |

| | | |
|-------|--|-------|
| 2.3 | Independence | |
| 2.3.1 | Of the source material (with regard to interested parties) [The extent to which the selection of information sources and their content – especially documentation and respondents – were independent of other parties (stakeholders) with an interest in the evaluation: parties such as contracting authorities, implementing agencies, and beneficiaries] | |
| 2.3.2 | Of the evaluators (with regard to interested parties) [The extent to which the evaluators operated and reported independently from parties (stakeholders) with an interest in the evaluation: parties such as contracting authorities, implementing agencies, and beneficiaries] | |
| 2.4 | Evaluation procedure and quality control | |
| 2.4.1 | Justification for evaluation procedure [Description and explanation of the evaluation procedure, including any modifications to the original structure (plan) of the evaluation] | |
| 2.4.2 | Quality control via internal or external supervision [Review of the design and/or conduct of the evaluation by a guidance or supervisory body within or external to the entity/entities which commissioned the evaluation] | |
| 3 | Usability (of the evaluation results) | score |
| 3.1 | Presentation | |
| 3.1.1 | Clarity of the evaluation's objective(s) [The clarity with which the evaluators specified the objective(s) for which their results are to be used] | |
| 3.1.2 | Accessibility of the evaluation results [The clarity and completeness with which the evaluation report and its summary reflect the essence of the evaluation, especially its main results] | |
| 3.2 | Connections (logic) | |
| 3.2.1 | Evaluation questions answered by conclusions [The completeness with which all the evaluation questions were answered by the conclusions] | |
| 3.2.2 | Feasibility of lessons or recommendations [The feasibility of the recommendations presented and the extent to which they lie within the remit of those responsible to act, especially the entity that commissioned the evaluation] | |

A four-point rating scale: 'poor – mediocre – satisfactory – good' should be applied. Ratings given should be explained.

Annexe 7.

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