

► The Netherlands

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB)

Mandate

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) was established in 1977 and sits within the “cluster of control” along with the audit and inspection units of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. IOB conducts independent evaluation of all foreign affairs policy and operations, including, but not limited to, development co-operation. IOB focuses on evaluating broad policy and cross-cutting themes, while advising policy departments and embassies on the planning and implementation of project and programme evaluations. IOB serves a “help-desk” function for these evaluations, though it does not have a full quality assurance role.

Independence

The Policy and Evaluation Department has independence from operations. The department works in close collaboration with operational departments to develop the evaluation work programme. The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department has responsibility for the programming evaluations of official development assistance (ODA), but final decision-making power rests with the director of IOB. This helps to ensure that evaluations are client-oriented, whilst retaining independence and credibility. Evaluations are conducted by IOB staff with the help of externally recruited evaluators and research assistants. Joint evaluations are conducted by external teams.

Co-ordination

The department works from an annual six-year rolling programme (four years ahead, two years back) which is publicly available and regularly shared with the members of the DAC Evaluation Network and other partners. Many of IOB’s evaluations involve other donors. Partner country stakeholders are involved in the decision to undertake an evaluation and in the design process. Consultants from partner countries are included as members of the evaluation team. For certain types of evaluations partners will be included in a reference or steering group.

Quality

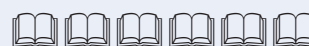
In 2010 an advisory panel composed of external experts was hired to advise the Minister for Development Co-operation and IOB on the utility and use of development evaluations. A special review (carried out by external experts contracted by the Ministry’s Financial Department) was largely positive about the utility and use of IOB evaluations, but also suggested improvements. Among other quality assurance mechanisms, IOB sets up a reference group for each evaluation to monitor its quality. Reference groups typically include both Dutch civil servants and external (independent) members. Where applicable, in-country reference groups are also set up.

Snapshot of evaluation resources – Netherlands



USD 5 million

0.075% of Ministry of Foreign Affairs budget



IOB produces an average of 5 to 6 evaluations of development assistance per year, about 28% of which are multi-donor or partner country-led. About two evaluations of non-ODA foreign policy topics are also carried out each year.

Relevance and programming

IOB has independence over its development evaluation programme. Each major policy objective of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must periodically be covered by evaluation. To ensure relevance, planning is done through the Ministry's objective-setting system and evaluation topics are selected to address foreign affairs policy objectives. During an intense dialog process every year, the IOB, the directors-generals and directors of departments discuss potential evaluation topics. Parliament can, and does, propose evaluation topics, but IOB has the final say on what will be evaluated.

Reporting and use

All reports are submitted by the relevant Minister to Parliament with his or her policy response attached. Evaluation findings are shared through internal workshops and seminars with staff and the Directors of the Development Co-operation Directorate. Local presentations are also held in partner countries. Reports and policy reactions are shared with the media and the general public in the Netherlands and civil society may be invited to workshops on the evaluation findings. Reports are available for download on the IOB website and are regularly submitted to DEREc.

The evaluation budget covers activities aimed at promoting the use of evaluation findings and there is a management response mechanism. However, there is no organised system for checking whether or not action is in fact taken.

Summary of the evaluation and reporting process

