

ANNEX H: A COHERENT M&E FRAMEWORK

H1. Observations and findings on monitoring and evaluation

- **A regional programme managed out of Copenhagen presents special M&E challenges** – it also raises an issue of resources and type of partnership as it is not possible to have the same level of monitoring flying in from Copenhagen as is possible with a representation office. It is not easy to find partners to delegate to who are independent of the implementation processes and whose strategy and agenda is close enough to serve the needs of the Danish neighbourhood strategy.
- **There is a difference in delegation to a donor partner and an implementing partner.** The close working relations with the Swiss Development Cooperation SDC in Kosovo is a good example of how a delegated partnership to another donor (in this case to SDC) brings strong monitoring and evaluation advantages. Through these arrangements DNP had influence but could also rely on a day-to-day supervision of a complex programme by a like-minded donor entity that was independent of the implementation process. A similar effect could be observed in Moldova with Sida and EFF where a small-scale parallel financing arrangement had a similar effect of benefitting from the supervision of another donor (civil society support, # 27).
- **Projects with unrealistic aims made monitoring difficult.** Unrealistic aims led to a disjoint between activities, outputs and outcomes. In particular outcomes were too far removed from outputs to allow for a practical application of the theory of change that could, in principle, lessen the monitoring burden by allowing monitoring of outputs to suffice for monitoring outcomes (example: #33, central and local government reform in Ukraine).
- **M&E results were sometimes available but they were not used** to guide the project or inform new projects in the same country and area of work (example: #23 promotion employment in rural areas in Kosovo where lessons learned did not inform sufficiently the support to the Kosovo Agricultural and Rural Development Plan). Where M&E was particularly weak it was associated with projects where the information was not used for decision making (an example is the media programme, # 3). Monitoring tends to be demanded by Danida but not actively used by Danida (or the project) except during mid-term reviews, when it takes everyone by surprise.
- **There was considerable variation in the level of project monitoring and evaluation.** The frequency and level of detail of monitoring varied considerably across the projects.
- **There was a mix of hands on and hands off approaches** - generally but not always the degree of hands on/off monitoring was linked to the nature of the partners and programmes (strong partner hands on, weak partner hands off). But in some cases “hands on” external monitoring consultant set-ups were overly resource intensive for all involved (#4, regional civil society programme) and there were also cases of unjustifiably “hands-off” approaches (#27, parliamentary support project in Moldova).
- **Some of the complex mini-programmes made monitoring difficult and projects with multiple partners lacked a clear M&E owner** – the mini programmes often put together projects that were under the same theme but where there was not a strong operational link. Understandably the monitoring took place at component/engagement level and the intended

programmatic effect was not reflected in the monitoring and reporting. Where projects involved multiple partners and even where one of the partners was designated a lead role, it was sometimes difficult for that partner to take that role if not accepted as a first among equals by the other partners (example IOM for the Anti-trafficking # 1,2; civil society programme, #4).

- **International organisations did not always mobilise the level of head office supervision necessary** - on occasion this potentially led to double work as the DNP then had to substitute with its own monitoring. The contractual expectations on what the delegated partner organisation had to do in terms of head office supervision were not clear. The, often necessary, use of partially delegated partnerships to compensate for inadequate attention to monitoring (or lack of independence from implementation) led to unclear division of responsibility for monitoring.
- **Some evaluations managed by the international organisations were not sufficiently independent**, for example the evaluation of ProMali in Albania (#8) and of the Council of Europe project in Ukraine (#33).
- **Project level M&E tended to improve considerably from first to later phases** – example (#1,2) the regional anti trafficking project after many years ended up with a results matrix that was concise and highly informative. However more generally there was a pattern of one-off projects that were then not extended and instead other areas were chosen. This made monitoring at a programme level difficult. It also meant that the effect of improving M&E over several phases did not happen.
- **Some outcomes especially within human rights and democracy were inherently difficult to measure** – the monitoring and evaluation did not use the theory of change approach to distinguish the monitoring of those outcomes that were straightforward and those that were too difficult to measure and where a case should have instead have built up for monitoring at the output level (as a proxy).
- **Partner systems were used but not systematically and when used did not seem to be supported by an assessment of how well the partner system functioned in practice** – in some cases this led to a tendency of double reporting where an implementing partner would report using their internal system and then also report on Danida specific indicators, the CoE project in Ukraine (#33), the SARED project in Albania (#10).
- **Projects managed by consultants or private sector entities tended to be highly accountable and provided strong monitoring at activity and output level** – but the wider outcome reporting which falls out of the contractual responsibility of the contractor was often weak. A distinction is not drawn between being responsible for delivering an outcome and being responsible for monitoring the outcome (but not necessarily being responsible for delivering it).

H2. Lessons learned and implications for the future monitoring

The implications of these and other findings of the evaluation point to some lessons learned and potential improvements, which in some cases are already being implemented:

- **A real time evaluation approach adapted to the particular country and partners involved would respond to many of the M&E issues** arising from the evaluations so far.
- **Developing a country strategy and annual reporting on outcomes could sharpen the incentive at the project level to report in a timely fashion**, and would potentially trigger the feedback loop. Preparation of country and programme wide reporting would create a forum for internal discussion, and learning and application of the lessons learned. A more specific theory of change arising from a country strategy could help in developing the pipeline and set up the monitoring and evaluation, and indicators for capturing cumulative results for the programme as a whole, within specific themes and across a number of ongoing, planned and future projects.
- **Robust and realistic project design is crucial for successful monitoring and evaluation.** Project design is undoubtedly the single most crucial aspect for successful monitoring (and at least necessary even if not sufficient), and there is a key role for Danida to play here as evidence suggests that even some established organisations benefit greatly from specialised assistance in M&E, such as UNDP Moldova's part in the Human Rights and Democracy Programme (#31). Similar issues arose with regards to the Council of Europe and the organisation's overall challenge to align project design, monitoring, and evaluation to international best practices and standards.¹
- **Feedback loops don't happen by themselves** and a deliberate sharing of information and interchange on the implications of M&E findings needs to be made. The mid-term reviews have in some cases served as forums for the feedback loop, as have active participation on steering committees (this was particularly noted by partners in Albania). A check list of issues to put into feedback loops and an annual follow up and reporting would help to formalise and make the feedback loops work.
- **Clear incentives and practical means for carrying out the M&E need to be in place.** Agreements need to be specific, for example GIZ have a strong model for the contractual formalising of indicators. There should be specific funds allocated in the budget for monitoring. Additionally, there should be a clear accountability chain with a well-defined allocation of who has responsibility for the M&E, and if possible integrated into the job description.
- **Indicators need to be chosen and screened against the availability of robust data**, and where possible the indicators should be based on data that is already being collected through national processes or partner systems.

¹ See, for example, the synthesis report of the external evaluation of the Council of Europe-Ukraine 2008-2011 Action Plan, published in 2013, and which highlights specific project design, monitoring, and evaluation issues of concern.

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016800d513a>

H3. Practical features of a robust results framework for the next phase

The findings from the evaluation also brought forth ideas for crucial and practical recommendations to further develop a robust results framework for the next phase of the Danish neighbourhood programme:

- a) **Develop programmatic and project specific indicators.** Based on the overall theory of change, a set of indicators that reflect the attainment of selected measurable outcomes at programme level should be developed. The indicators will reflect tangible progress towards programme objectives. The indicators will reflect the two main themes (most likely human rights and democracy and, sustainable and inclusive economic growth) and possibly be complemented by an indicator on engagement of Danish competences and/or advances in economic diplomacy. The programme indicators can be made country specific and thus should reflect and support the country strategy. Where possible the number of programme indicators should be kept to 10 or below. Each project should also develop outcome indicators that represent selected and measurable outcomes of the project. For all indicators baselines and targets should be set.
- b) **Use partner systems where possible.** The monitoring and evaluation systems, results framework and indicators of potential and current partners should be thoroughly assessed. Where the system is sufficiently robust, the partner system of monitoring and evaluation should be adopted including where relevant, the partner's indicators. Where the partner's system is not found to be sufficiently robust, remedial support action can be considered, either in terms of external monitoring expertise or support to internal improvement of the monitoring and evaluation system.
- c) **Ensure quality at entry.** Considering that one of the weak points noted in the evaluation was in project design, it is essential that both the formulation and appraisal phases ensure that a robust results framework is in place. It is important to strike a balance in the number of indicators, which should where possible, be kept below 10 at the project level.
- d) **Undertake real-time evaluation at country level.** A lean real-time evaluation at country level, which has desk involvement at the initiation of a new country programme, and an involvement each year in order to measure and report on the programme level indicators in the form of a short annual report, should be considered. The real time evaluation will be supported by the monitoring of the underlying project indicators, undertaken and reported on by the individual partners.
- e) **Establish a feedback and learning mechanism.** At country and programme level, a feedback and learning mechanism should be established. This can take place in relation to the annual real time evaluation reporting, with a learning and exchange meeting between key partners and EUN where all parties can discuss and internalise the findings. The annual meetings will most likely be on a bilateral level, unless there are genuine advantages in bringing several partners together, for example if they are supporting similar thematic objectives.