TESTING REAL-TIME EVALUATIONS FOR ENHANCED ADAPTABILITY IN DANISH AID PROGRAMMES

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
CP	Country Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDD	Doing Development Differently
DE	Development Engagement
DfID	Department for International Development
DMDPP	Danida Market Development Partnership Programme
DoF	Department of Fisheries
ELK	Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (in Danish: Evaluering, Læring og Kvalitet)
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
EVAL	Danida's Evaluation Department
GLAM	Global Learning for Adaptive Management
IDEAS	The International Development Evaluation Association
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MTR	Mid-term Review
Norad	The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PDIA	Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation
RTE	Real-Time Evaluation
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (EVAL) decided to pilot-test a new concept for continuous evaluation of Danida Country Programme – the so-called Country Programme Real-Time Evaluations (RTEs). The complexity and flexibility of the Danida Country Programme approach led to a wish to enhance information-based feed-back to programmes during implementation, as well as to improve the identification of results. The pilot projects were intended to assess whether the RTEs were viable as means to this end. The current review of the RTE experience was commissioned in 2019 to provide a status for the testing of RTEs with a view to capturing lessons learned.

APPROACH

The review assessed whether the RTE pilots managed to deliver the expected benefits, and it identified enabling and hindering factors. From the outset, Danida has been aware that the RTE exercise would be challenging. A 2014 RTE approach paper stressed that a successful application of such a "real-time" analytical instrument was contingent on a set of assumptions, or prerequisites, being fulfilled. These assumptions ranged from evaluators being able to build on a common understanding with stakeholders regarding a solid, well-elaborated 'Theory of Change' and having access to monitoring data of sufficient quantity and quality. Further, it was seen as fundamental to strike an appropriate balance between on one hand a close engagement with the programme in order for the RTE to be relevant and up to date when assessing progress and challenges, and on the other hand staying independent and critical in order to be a credible, external evaluation.

The RTE assumptions are used by the review as an assessment framework to investigate possible enabling and hindering factors. The review is based on document review and key informant interviews. It should be noted that although all RTEs ran for long enough to deliver various reports, they all encountered delays. Further, for various reasons the three country programme evaluations were either discontinued or finalised sooner than originally planned. Thus, the review addresses a series of pilots that were not implemented as originally intended, which implies that the RTEs did not establish the full iterative process of providing inputs to the programmes.

The review sees the Danida RTE experience as embedded in a broader international push towards more learning-oriented, flexible and adaptive development assistance. This international debate is reflected in the Doing Development Differently (DDD) Manifesto from the autumn of 2014, which called for aid to be more adaptive to contextual changes and to adjust rapidly to lessons learned. Danida initiated the RTE pilots prior to the DDD Manifesto, but the rationale behind the RTEs is seen as clearly related to the DDD considerations. Thus, rather than viewing the strengths and weaknesses of the Danida RTE experience in isolation, it is discussed with input from literature and experts regarding the broader agenda of adaptive aid and experience from the international development community. This way, common challenges and potential solutions may be considered, creating a more nuanced backdrop for assessing the RTE experience and identifying salient lessons.

KEY FINDINGS

RTEs have added value, but less than hoped for, and at significant costs

All RTEs delivered outputs in line with their ToRs. However, findings are mixed with regard to the usefulness of the output. The stakeholder assessment of the value ranged from some RTE outputs being superfluous or minimally useful to others that were found to be highly relevant and expected to be useful, also in the longer term. Transaction costs have been substantial for all involved. In this light, the added value is seen as limited, compared to the invested resources. It should be noted that a range of barriers to results were linked to factors outside the control of the RTE teams, and that none of the RTEs was able to run the full cycle as it was planned originally. Thus, the review cannot assess whether better results may have materialised over time after more iterations were added revisiting programmes and following up on earlier work assessed. The fact that the three country programme RTEs were discontinued is in itself noteworthy, but it must be stressed that each situation was different, as were the factors leading to stopping the RTEs. In the case of the Myanmar RTE, the programme Mid-term Review (MTR) expressed doubts regarding the fit between the information needs of the programme and the RTE outputs and suggested a need for a different approach to monitoring and evaluation. In other cases, the decision to discontinue RTEs was related to a larger rethinking of programmes and set-up. The overall assessment is that the RTEs have not realised their expected potential.

The rationale behind the pilots remains valid

The RTE pilots have come with a range of challenges, which suggests that the tested RTE approach is not seen as a blueprint for future work. However, at the same time, the RTE experience has illustrated that "real-time oriented" analysis has the potential to deliver analytical work with added value for adaptive aid. Further, during the review stakeholders expressed the continued need for an instrument that delivers what the

RTEs set out to do. The relevance of real-time analytical approaches is also mirrored by international experience, where there is a strong focus on enhancing evidence-based adaptation of aid, building on real-time oriented monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks.

Delays and timing issues have been obstacles to achieving the expected results
In all RTE pilots, the design and timeframes ensured early engagement that was in line with the original intentions. However, delays were encountered (both in country programme roll-out and in some of the RTE processes themselves) and, consequently, the RTEs were unable to produce the expected series of consecutive analytical products. This led to a protracted process with longer time span between dialogue and engagement than originally envisioned. The issue of timing is crucial for the RTE teams to stay engaged with programmes and stakeholders and to maintain an updated understanding of context and recipient needs. With delays it became more challenging to ensure this.

Getting the scope right: Staying flexible to stay relevant
The RTEs have marked differences regarding their scope; from a full country programme to selected projects. The pilot RTEs exemplify challenges with getting the scope right. On one hand, a very broad scope was linked to an analysis found to be of little value due to large coverage with limited depth, leading to a more focused, in-depth analysis of a specific issue in the next round of RTE work (as in the Kenya case). On the other hand, initial attempts to focus the scope by excluding selected engagements from the RTE led to a later need to widen the scope to be able to cover the issues and linkages seen as relevant by the RTE team and the embassy (as seen in the Mali case). These examples highlight the difficulty in striking a balance between a bird's-eye overview with in-depth analysis, as well as the need to be able to adjust scope, in order to match changing needs and priorities. Flexibility with regard to focus is well in line with both the rationale of the real-time approach and the practical need to deal with delays, etc., but it may be important to ensure buy-in to such more open-ended approaches from the start, given continuous staff rotations and the often complex and emergent contexts of aid programmes.

Monitoring data has been useful but may not be sufficient for adaptive aid
The RTEs were expected to draw on data collected as part of programme M&E with limited data collection of their own. The total amount of resources set aside by the programmes for monitoring and evaluation has been substantial. The RTE teams' experience of collaboration with M&E teams has generally been positive. However, it has been challenging to ensure the availability of relevant data at the right time once RTE work was planned. Further, more time and effort than expected was needed for planning, coordination and – to paraphrase the Mali RTE team – "staying on the ball" during periods when the RTE process was in principle dor-

mant in order to stay updated and ready. Further, it is noteworthy that the RTE products that were seen to have the most added value were based on considerable additional information gathering as the questions explored went beyond the scope of the monitoring data.

International experience highlights similar concerns regarding how to make M&E fit for adaptation purposes. Both the international debate and the Danida RTEs point to the fact that in order to be truly useful for adaptation purposes, data and analysis must reflect the complex and critical issues and contextual changes that programmes face, and that this type of information goes beyond what most monitoring systems deliver. However, when assigning a key role to partners vis-à-vis monitoring, it must be a priority to ensure that the system is workable and that there is a match between capacity and demands. Further, a key point in M&E for adaptive aid is that it cannot necessarily be foreseen what specific analyses will be needed, nor when. Taken together, it is clear that providing information for adaptive purposes requires a careful assessment of what input to expect from partners, whether information is "need to know" or "nice to know", and whether the M&E system strikes the proper balance between support for accountability and learning.

Theory of Change and the need for de-mystification
Applying 'Theory of Change' (ToC) was expected to be important as a foundation for both the programme engagements and for the RTEs as a common core against which to discuss progress or lack thereof. However, ToC-related dialogue has not played the role expected during the RTE processes. In some cases, RTE teams wanted to avoid re-opening discussions if stakeholders had moved on or if partners found it too challenging. In other cases, issues of timing and roles/mandates made ToC engagement more limited than expected. In the Myanmar case, the RTE ended up working with a different ToC than the thematic engagement, indicating differences of opinion regarding how to understand and track the engagement that had not been reconciled at the outset of the RTE.

At the same time, international experience highlights that ToC thinking is central to understanding interventions and clarifying the need for adjustments. By implication, even though dealing with ToC is challenging, it fits well with adaptive approaches and can be an important driver for the adaptive management process. The key element embedded in any ToC, namely critical reflection regarding how engagements are expected to contribute to change in a given context, is clearly of importance for the design, investigation and adaptation of development aid. However, if the concept of ToC is alien and creates confusion, focusing on the practical points embedded in a ToC approach should be considered, namely the thorough exploration of "how aid is expected to work in the current situation", including the complex issues of context, uncertainties, etc.

The multi-actor set-up has created challenges
The set-up of actors around the RTEs was complex with many different roles and responsibilities. Danida-stakeholders included the embassies, EVAL and various review teams, to name a few, in addition to national ministries, internal and external M&E teams, local and multilateral implementing partners, other donors, etc. This has meant multi-pronged lines of communication and engagement, which have complicated coordination and created a need to clarify roles vis-à-vis partners. In some cases, it has contributed to less effective engagement with stakeholders. A key lesson is that if analytical efforts are to be carried out alongside programme implementation, a set-up with clearer expectations regarding roles, engagement and ownership is important for a more effective process.

Clearly, this is easier said than done. The RTE process has shown how embassies are working hard to support new partners and establish good working relationships, and how it has been difficult at times to match the RTE process to this. Integrating additional steps of communication and learning loops will require more time and effort. Similarly, international experience highlights that information-based dialogue and critical reflection involving all stakeholders is essential to adaptive aid, but that it is challenging to realise in practice. When looking at the RTE experience, up-front consideration of who, specifically, will use the information and how the information will get to them, as well as an effort to minimise the number of external teams and processes involved, may be a step forward.

Stakeholder engagement has been challenging, but is a key factor for RTE usefulness
All RTE teams and stakeholders stressed that the stakeholder involvement was crucial, but difficult to achieve in practice. While stakeholder engagement in an evaluation is always important and rarely easy or straightforward, it can be of particular concern for evaluation processes that are expected to facilitate learning and adaptation such as the RTEs. Challenges encountered were linked to the issues of multi-stakeholder set-up and delays as outlined above. In cases where coordination and timing were challenging, or where the division of roles and responsibilities was less clear to stakeholders, the RTE process was found to be less effective. In contrast, where RTE inputs were seen to have relevance and potential for use in programme work, stakeholder engagement was highlighted as a key contributing factor. While the approach of the RTE team may influence the stakeholder engagement, it is also linked to the number as well as the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved. Even though both embassies and RTE teams focused on establishing positive engagement, it has been a challenge.

The issue of engagement is also highlighted in the international debate on adaptive aid, both in relation to ensuring the critical dialogue needed for learning, and for fostering ownership for follow-up and adaption. A key lesson is that it is essential to prioritise dialogue with stakeholders

and to address the potential barriers to engagement up front. Especially in relation to national implementing partners, it is important to clarify expectations and processes to lay the groundwork for later collaboration.

The merits of flexible and dialogue-based approaches
In line with the point on stakeholder engagement, RTE users have the most positive assessments of analytical work that has been defined in a close collaboration between RTE team and embassy (regarding the Kenya study) or where there has been a strong emphasis on dialogue with stakeholders (as in the case of Mali). In contrast, pre-defined notions about scope or focus have had to be reconsidered. The lesson is that real-time approaches must be dialogue-based and flexible to be able to respond to user needs. While this is not surprising considering the focus on adaptive aid, it is nevertheless a challenge. While an RTE is not the only way to respond to emergent needs, the existence of the RTE as a framework contract was pointed out as being useful for reducing the costs of initiating evaluation-style analytical work. Similarly, respondents have emphasised that the dialogue around RTE processes and their findings has been highly valuable, sometimes more so than the written products.

In parallel, international experience emphasises that adaptive aid should avoid detailed planning too far into the future, and this may also be said to apply to the evaluative work needed to underpin the adaptive aid. A framework must clearly be in place, but there must be enough flexibility to allow for adaptation to changing user needs. Dialogue is also highlighted both as a critical element for staying attuned to user needs in delivering analytical information, and for translating information into reflection and learning. This indicates that there is a potential to lighten the process by considering where, why and for whom a written product is needed, and where lighter-touch products and dialogue are more efficient tools for adaptive aid.

RTE contributions and use – follow-up systems and the need for local flexibility
In line with the assessment of the added value of the RTEs, indications of use and follow-up vary. Examples of RTE contributions range from building on RTE baseline work to having RTE-oriented dialogue concerning challenges and solutions, identification of problems, etc. At the same time, the RTE pilots illustrate a range of barriers to use and follow-up, from the timing and relevance of the recommendations to the broader issues of stakeholder engagement and ownership.

Here, the follow-up system should be considered. Only the final RTE reports were to be covered by Danida's formal system for follow-up, while the annual reports and their recommendations were to be considered by the programmes and EVAL. In a forward-looking perspective, the advantages as well as disadvantages of this should be considered. On one hand, the formal model ensures a process of deliberation on

follow-up to evaluation recommendations, which may otherwise risk being downplayed when time is scarce. Further, it comes with a clear definition of roles and responsibilities for evaluators, evaluation management, programme staff and the different headquarters departments regarding the follow-up process. On the other hand, if the different "RTE-style" outputs such as annual reports, etc. were to be covered by the formal follow-up system, it would most likely add to response times, due to the different formalised steps involving various headquarters departments. This may be a barrier to prompt use of evaluation findings for adaptation. International experience emphasises the need for sufficient local space for decision-making when working with adaptive aid, including the use of results of RTE-style analysis. This again implies that dialogue and engagement as well as a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities are core elements in laying the foundation for use of evaluative work for adaptation, especially if working with a decentral approach to follow-up.

Pilot RTEs, but not pilot development programmes for adaptive aid
It is noteworthy that while the Danida RTEs were pilot projects for "adaptive" evaluations, the programmes involved were not particular pilots for more adaptive programming or implementation.

An important message from the international debate on adaptive aid is that while evaluation work can be important in order to support adaptive aid, there are limits to the changes it can bring about in its own right. International experience stresses the importance of considering not only the monitoring and evaluation frameworks, but also the broader aid system, in which learning is expected to take place and influence implementation. It is consistently highlighted that adaptive approaches must consider all the different elements of aid planning, management and implementation as well as the M&E – and that this is a challenging exercise. It is noteworthy that the obstacles encountered by the Danida RTEs are to a large degree reflected in international experience.

Even though, per definition, all aid programmes are subject to change, some may be set in a more fluid and dynamic context and, therefore, be more amenable to a developmental evaluation approach. The Danida RTE experience and the international debate both highlight the need to consider the prioritisation and the room for adaptive practices amongst programme stakeholders when deciding on evaluation approaches and, vice versa, to consider how to ensure timely information for decision-making when deciding on approaches for adaptive aid.

Since the initiation of the RTE pilots, Danida has entered a process considering how to strike a different balance between the need for documentation at the planning stage and for upstream accountability, and the room for planning after political approval, as this is important to ensure flexibility for the various adjustments that may be relevant during implementation considering changing contexts. Interestingly, these considerations mirror a "blurring of the edges" between monitoring and evaluation efforts that is highlighted in the international debate as a promising element in adaptive approaches. The learning and adaptation need to take place continually during implementation. Thus, it is relevant to move towards a more fluid relationship between programming and implementation, and with an emphasis on how to supply information in support of learning and adaptation during implementation. This points towards a more integrated or "blurred" approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL), which could potentially reduce the complexity of the set-ups and thereby minimise the transaction costs and facilitate coordination.

A more integrated approach would not be a panacea, and it would come with its own set of challenges, including the importance of ensuring an adequate M&E team that is able to cover a broader set of tasks with sufficient analytical quality, and addressing the balance between (more internal) learning and a (more independent) accountability focus. In the context of Danida, this would entail a discussion of the roles and contributions of the embassies and the new Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (ELK) to ensure that the different relevant competencies are utilised with a clear and fruitful division of labour.

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In 2014, the Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (EVAL) decided to pilot-test a new concept for continuous evaluation of Danida Country Programme – the so-called Country Programme Real-Time Evaluations (RTEs). The complexity and flexibility of the Danida Country Programme approach led to the identification of the need to enhance the feed-back provided for the adjustment of the programmes during implementation. Further, it was seen as relevant to improve the capture of results, especially with regard to contributions at the outcome and impact level. Consequently, EVAL tested the RTE approach in different settings to determine the extent to which this type of evaluation could help meet these targets. The RTE tests started with an evaluation aiming at the entire Kenya 2015-2020 Country Programme, followed by an RTE focusing on the Sustainable Coastal Fishery Engagement under the thematic area of "Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth" (one of three thematic areas in the Myanmar 2016-2020 Country Programme). More recently, an RTE was commissioned to cover selected engagements from two out of three thematic programmes in the Mali 2017-2022 Country Programme and the latest RTE set out to evaluate five projects from the 2016-2020 Danida Market Development Partnership Programme (DMDPP).

These RTE pilots emerged in parallel with a broader international development community debate regarding the need for more adaptive aid. This is reflected in the Doing Development Differently (DDD) Manifesto from the autumn of 2014, which called for aid to be more responsive to needs, as well as be adaptive to contextual changes and able to adjust rapidly to lessons learned. The resulting dialogue on how to make aid more adaptive also highlighted the need for information to support adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making, which underscored the importance of the systems for monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL).

Danida initiated the RTE pilots prior to the DDD Manifesto, but the rationale behind the RTEs is seen as clearly related to the DDD considerations with a similar analysis of challenges and possibilities for enhancing aid effectiveness. As Danida has since embraced the DDD principles and wishes to make aid more adaptive, the RTE experience may thus be a relevant input to the process of ensuring that monitoring and evaluation efforts not only support accountability and longer-term learning, but also facilitate an effective adaptation process.

To this end, a review has been carried out as a stock-taking exercise that investigates positive and less positive aspects of the pilot RTEs regarding the process as it has unfolded, and the results delivered so far. This paper presents the findings of the review together with some forward-looking perspectives on lessons learned. The paper is commissioned by the Evaluation, Learning and Quality Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark/Danida and prepared by Eva Brandt Broegaard.

2 OBJECTIVE AND APPROACH OF THE RTE REVIEW

The objective of the RTE review according to the Terms of Reference (ToR) is to *"provide a status for the testing of RTEs within Danida country programmes (and other interventions) with the view to capture lessons learned and provide strategic and operational guidance for the way forward".*[1]

As part of this, it is clearly important to assess whether and how the RTE pilots have managed to deliver the hoped-for benefits. Here it is important to note that none of the RTEs has run their full course, as originally planned. By implication, the RTEs are not assessed against a complete set of RTE results or the anticipated complete process. Rather, the review considers the contributions made by the different RTEs so far and assesses the RTEs against a set of key assumptions or expectations regarding the workings of the RTE process with the aim of exploring the enabling and hindering factors behind the RTE results.

Danida's RTE concept is built on aspirations to create "An evaluation process, which from the start of an aid programme defines an independent, external evaluation process that follows the programme and regularly makes evaluation findings available for the on-going implementation and adjustment of a programme".[2]

2.1 Assumptions for the RTEs and key questions for the RTE review

It was clear from the outset that the ambition for the RTE concept would require more than simply contracting evaluations with a longer timeframe. A 2014 RTE approach paper stressed that while a "real- time" analytical instrument presented a clear potential to contribute to learning and adaptation, it would also pose high demands on all involved: evaluators, programme staff and management at embassies, recipient partners and EVAL. A range of assumptions regarding prerequisites served to point to potential bottlenecks or challenges for RTE processes when confronted with the "messy" reality.

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[1]   Danida, 2018: Terms of Reference: See Annex 1.
[2]   Ibid.

The intersection between the aims and aspirations of the RTE pilots on one hand, and the "messy" and complex reality on the other, is an important focus for the present study. The ToR for the review set out a range of questions linked to the assumptions, and the review has considered the RTE process as it has unfolded in practice against these assumptions and questions. The key questions are presented below, with an outline of the related assumption:[3]

Question 1: What were the purpose/aim and objectives of the RTE, and how was it designed with an aim to achieve its objectives?

Assumption: There is no specific assumption linked to the first question. Rather, it is a more descriptive question aimed at ensuring an understanding of the point of departure of the four RTEs, as part of the backdrop for assessment.

Question 2: Was the programme ToC perceived to be a common, solid and well-elaborated understanding of the intervention logics, assumptions and risks by both programme staff and RTE actors? What issues can be identified that led to this being the case (or not)?

Assumption: A successful RTE process was expected to be highly dependent on a solid and well-elaborated ToC for the intervention. It was seen as important that there was a common understanding among all stakeholders (recipients, programme staff, the embassy, etc.) of the programme's ToC and the theory-based approaches to analysis of credible contributions for results. Ideally, the RTE evaluators should be part of the programme discussion and help with critical reflections by bringing evaluative and analytical perspectives to the table.

Question 3: Were the scope, timeframe and resources for the RTE appropriate in relation to the aims and ambitions of the RTE?

Assumption: It was stressed that an RTE could not be expected to be a quick fix or panacea for capturing results and cannot cover everything in equal depth. Even if an RTE has the advantage of being data-neutral in the sense of being able to use both qualitative and quantitative data and building on both process and results information, it is nevertheless just as prone to data constraints as any other ambitious evaluation.

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[3]   By agreement with EVAL, the sequence of the questions in this note differs from the numbering in the ToR. The issues are interlinked, and a degree of cross-referencing is unavoidable. However, the aim is to be able to first address the issues linked to the initial approach and design, as expressed in the ToR, and from this basis move to the issues of the practical implementation. This has led to a slight change in sequence and division of efforts between the different questions.

Thus, the need for prioritisation and limitations to analytical coverage or depth must be addressed, as a broad and more superficial approach would typically not allow for adequate analytical use of the ToC-based framework. Balancing scope, resources and expectations was therefore seen as important for a successful RTE.

Question 4: Was the RTE able to access monitoring data of a sufficient quantity and quality when needed, or were bottlenecks encountered?

Assumption: A successful RTE was expected to be dependent on good data collection (monitoring) for capturing results within the programme. At the same time, it was acknowledged that even the best monitoring system neither could nor should cover everything. Monitoring data may be less tailor-made than would be ideal, if only seeing things from an evaluation perspective.

Question 5: Could the RTE process capture ongoing considerations on realising the ToC in collaboration with the programme M&E in a manner that adds value? Does it work in reality?

Assumption: The RTE was expected to define its contribution and added value in relation to monitoring systems of varied extent and quality. The interface and division of responsibilities between the RTE process and the programme M&E system were seen as important and needed to be defined up front. For instance, the RTE would have to be able to capture progress or lack thereof as well as challenges, etc. in a manner that added value and not just mirrored what was delivered by the M&E System.

Question 6: Have the RTEs been able to balance the engagement in the programme with the role as an "independent, external evaluation process"?

Assumption: The RTEs were assumed to be close to and stay engaged with programme staff and other stakeholders. This would imply strengths if successful, but also the risk of not being able to do so. Staying engaged was seen as a prerequisite for a successful evaluation to deliver assessments and inputs of immediate relevance to programme staff and other stakeholders, but it also implied a risk that the RTE process (and the evaluators) could be expected to deliver more and different answers than could reasonably be expected.

In many cases, the responses to the six review questions reflect a combination of factors ranging from the original scope to issues of timing, to the transaction costs of implementation and partner capacity. In order to present a sufficiently comprehensive picture of the experience of the RTEs, the study will first present the four pilots before moving on to the different aspects of implementation and assessment of results.

2.2   Scope and documentation for the review

The scope of the study is focused on the RTE experience. This implies that it has not been part of the task to investigate the design or functioning of the development programmes which the RTEs evaluated, or to assess the functionality of M&E systems which the RTEs were to draw upon, even if this is of importance to the working of the RTE. By implication, there are limits to the depth of assessment the study can deliver; first and foremost in the sense that it cannot assess just how well the various RTEs could in principle have performed, and if shortcomings could, for instance, have been remedied by access to more M&E data. At the same time, it is clear that the RTEs cannot be seen in isolation and that the interplay between RTE, programme, partners, etc. was an important part of the functioning of each RTE. Thus, the study aims to collect, systemise and reflect on the experience with a point of departure in the design and implementation of the different RTEs, but with consideration of the linkages to programme and partners as far as relevant and feasible. In line with the ToR for the review study, the emphasis will be on the two longest-running RTE pilots (Kenya and Myanmar). However, the study has also considered the other two RTEs although in less depth.

The study is based on document reviews and key informant interviews regarding the four pilot RTEs supplemented with input from literature and experts regarding the broader agenda of adaptive aid, developmental evaluations and experience from the international development community.

The document review covers the material pertinent to each pilot RTE, from ToRs over preparation notes, RTE outputs in various versions as well as meeting summaries, debriefing notes and communication between the parties regarding outputs and process. In addition, documentation regarding the programmes and projects covered by the RTEs has been included, but with the limitations mentioned above.

The key informant interviews have played an important role in relation to providing insights into stakeholder experience and assessment of the processes and products, as well as perspectives on challenges and solutions encountered. In order to cover the different perspectives and the variation in viewpoints and experience that stems from different positions vis-à-vis the RTEs, different types of stakeholders have been interviewed. Key informant interviews have covered:

*   RTE consultants
*   Programme management at embassies
*   EVAL staff responsible for managing RTEs
*   Selected other actors, such as MTR team leaders at HQ.

While the written documentation presents considerable information that is helpful in presenting the key elements of the process as well as the variation in scope and resources between the RTEs, the interviews are highly valuable in adding depth to the investigation. Stakeholder information has been important for unpacking and clarifying issues emerging from the document review and for understanding the process, the challenges experienced, and the assessment of valuable and less valuable RTE results.

Finally, a brief outline of broader perspectives related to the international debate on how to facilitate adaptive aid has been included in the study. This has provided a broader background for reflection on the Danish experience. It is important to note that this has not been used as a yardstick for the specific RTEs, but rather as input to reflection on typical challenges and potential inspiration for ways forward in light of common aspirations, experience and dilemmas.

3. THE RTE PILOTS

This section responds to the first question regarding the overall design and plan for implementation of the RTEs. The RTEs are characterised by several key similarities with regard to objective and approach as well as important differences, for instance with regard to scope and timing. The section does not provide a detailed description of each RTE but highlights the parallels as well as key differences as they are important to understand the challenges encountered.

3.1   RTE purposes and objectives

The ToRs for all four pilots reflect Danida's overall ambitions for the test as described above. All ToRs point to the need for strengthening the information regarding programme outcomes and impacts as well as doing this in a manner that allows for assessing whether the engagements are on track to achieving the impacts and providing feedback on how to improve performance. This includes revisiting assumptions relating to the intervention logic/ToC as well as the implications of changes in context. This indicates a need to focus on identifying challenges and options beyond just following the result chains of the various engagements. The ToRs have different specific wordings, but a few examples can illustrate both the aspirations as well as the commonalities:

The ToR for the Mali RTE states that *"the purpose of the RTE is to provide independent evidence regarding the achievement of outcomes and regarding relevant changes in the programme context in relation to key engagement areas. This assessment is primarily intended for the country programme management (the embassy and the national authorities in Mali) and should allow them to revise the theory of change and adapt the interventions accordingly", and continues "The real-time evaluation is distinguished from the programme monitoring work (including the work of the M&E team) primarily by being external to the programme management and in having a focus on assessing higher level results (outcomes and outcome to objective levels), and in assessing developments in selected risk factors and assumptions for the programme. The RTE allows for early feedback and reflection on the course towards achieving outcomes thereby providing an opportunity to revisit the programme intervention logic, assumptions and risks".*[4]

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[4]   Danida: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of Mali Country Programme 2017-2022.

Similarly, the Kenya RTE ToR highlights the focus of the RTE to be on *"assessing progress so as to identify and support any programme adjustments needed, rethinking of theories of change and their assumptions, and continuous learning as well as on capturing selected (prioritised) results at outcome and impact level in a relevant and timely manner".*[5]

For the Myanmar RTE, the ToR states that the RTE was to *"supplement the output monitoring undertaken by the engagement management by assessing progress towards achievement of outcomes at community level. Furthermore, the RTE will assess key risks and assumptions related to the achievement of engagement outcomes and objectives. The RTE will work with the theory of change for the engagement and provide recommendations for possible revisions during programme implementation. The purpose of the RTE will therefore be to provide input for learning and course correction during the implementation process and document the intervention towards the end of the four years".*[6]

Finally, the ToR for the RTE working alongside the implementation of the Danida Market Development Partnership Programme presents the objectives of the exercise as follows: *"The objective of the Real-Time Evaluation is to enable learning at project level and at the overall programme level during the implementation and document interim results of the partnerships. The pilot nature of the programme calls for an early capture of results and challenges and a learning attitude across the programme. (...) The RTE will also provide lessons learned in regard to the implementation process, which is important not only for the immediate results, but also for the sustainability of the projects. On the basis of the theory of change of each project, the RTE will select context-related aspects, which are important for the achievement of outcomes and related to assumptions for successful partnerships. These aspects will be assessed during the implementation".*[7]

The RTEs were thus intended to track progress towards results as well as explore the working of the programme with consideration of contextual issues. This was to be done in a manner that supported adaptation and learning as well as contributed to a more summative assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the programmes. In addition, it was also part of the objectives to gain experience of the strengths and weaknesses of the RTE approach.

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[5] Danida 2014: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danida Country Programme for Kenya.

[6] Danida 2016: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danish Support to Sustainable Coastal Fisheries in Myanmar.

[7] Danida 2016: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of Danida Market Development Partnerships 2016-2020.

3.2 Scope of the RTEs

While the rationale behind the RTE pilots is quite similar, the scope varies more. The table below provides an overview of the scope in both qualitative and quantitative terms:

RTE	Type of scope	Engagements covered by the RTE	Budget for engagements; (million DKK)	RTE budget; (million DKK)	Expected evaluation period
Kenya	Entire CP; with the task to identify areas for in-depth study.	i) Implementing the constitution towards a prosperous and equitable Kenya; ii) Inclusive green growth and employment; iii) Promoting regional cooperation and stability.	970.5 [8]	3.51 (2.5 original budget + addendum)	2015-2020
Myanmar	Engagement level; one engagement under "Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth" (one of three thematic areas).	The Sustainable Coastal Fishery Engagement, to be implemented by the Department of Fisheries (DOF)	66 [9]	2.45.	2016-2020 (terminated 2019).
Mali	Engagement level, selected engagements under two out of three thematic programmes.	Selected engagements within the i) Peaceful coexistence thematic programme and ii) The Decentralisation thematic Programme. Main RTE focus within these: The Fund for Reconciliation and Resilience of Civil Society (FAMOC), the centre for humanitarian dialogue, and decentralisation in Sikasso.	RTE focus programmes: total: 701.5. The focus engagements only: 221.7 [10]	3.38	2017-2022 (terminated 2020).
DMDPP	Selected projects	Five selected projects in Myanmar, Ethiopia, Kenya (two projects) and Nigeria.	101 for the first two years. [11]	1.1	2017-2020

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[8]   Amount based on Grant Committee meeting minutes, October 2015.
[9]   Amount based on Development Engagement Document, draft July 2016.
[10]   Amounts based on Programme Document, draft version October 2016, Annex D, budget at output level.
[11]   Amount based on the Updated Programme Document, Danida Market Development Partnerships Programme, 2017-2020; final draft, April 2017.

As appears from the above, there is a marked difference in scope (as well as differences in budgets) linked to different expectations regarding how the RTE would function. In the case of the Kenya RTE, the expectation was that the team would cover the entirety of the CP and use this both to provide overall information on progress and to identify areas where additional analysis was relevant. In the case of the Mali RTE, a more selective scope was chosen, in principle allowing a more focused use of RTE resources. In the case of Myanmar, the scope focused on a specific engagement, the Sustainable Coastal Fishery Engagement, which was part of the thematic programme "Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth". Two of the four RTEs are ongoing. In the case of the Myanmar Country Programme, it was decided to discontinue both the RTE and the M&E contract in 2019 as part of following up on recommendations from the MTR. In the case of the Mali RTE, it was decided to discontinue the RTE in the spring of 2020.

Without diving into an investigation of the programmes and projects, it should also be noted that the context and conditions for the evaluated programmes differ with the Kenya Country Programme (CP) building on a long-standing engagement and a certain familiarity with partners, but a complex setting, and Myanmar and Mali involving newer partnerships as well as highly complex and volatile settings.

3.3.   Key elements of the RTE approaches

In line with the shared overall ambition, all four RTE approaches included the following key elements.

Getting on board early
The RTE teams were to be launched early so that the evaluation work could run alongside the programme from the very outset. In the words of the ToR for the Kenya CP: "… the evaluation will be able to follow the programme from the end of the programming phase to the final stages of programme implementation". The Myanmar RTE was aimed at carrying out baseline work in late 2016 in line with the expectation that the CP was to be approved in the second half of 2016. For the Mali RTE, which covered selected engagements under the 2017-2022 CP, the RTE team was expected to start work in late 2016, and it was expected that an output of the 2017 inception phase work would be a "description of the theory of change for the engagements under evaluation", indicating that the RTE team would engage early on. Finally, the ToR for the Danida Partnership RTE was drawn up at a time when the projects had been selected, but not yet fully formulated. Here, part of the RTE inception work was to describe the theory of change for the pilot projects under evaluation as well as provide a description of the baseline situation regarding the parameters selected for the baseline study.

Getting on board early was seen as important for allowing RTE teams to familiarise themselves with the programme, the possible challenges, etc., and if possible, to allow dialogue to minimise the risk that evaluators, if entering the process at a later stage, would find barriers to either evaluability or engagement effectiveness that could have been remedied if identified earlier. With earlier engagement, evaluators were expected to speak up if problems or risks to evaluability were found and to be aware that limitations to evaluability later on would also be their own responsibility.[12]

Building on Theory of Change for enhancing evaluability and the basis for dialogue
All four RTEs were expected to apply a theory-based approach to assess programme progress. In the words of the ToR for the Kenya RTE, the theory-based approach was seen as important for both the formative and the summative elements of the evaluation work:

"The overall approach of the evaluation is expected to be Real-time, working from a theory-based approach and with a clear focus on the achievements and assessing results. It is expected to contain both formative and summative elements in an integrated manner. The formative elements pertain to following the Programme and its progress and provide evaluative assessments so as to contribute to its working and achievement of results. Further, by following the causal pathways and the results chain from outputs towards outcomes and impacts based on a thorough understanding of the theories of change and the contextual conditions, more summative assessments of credible contributions should be established".[13]

Depending on the country programme and the timing, the role of the RTEs in relation to the development and description of the ToCs varied. In the case of the Kenya RTE, the ToCs for the different strategic focus areas were expected to be developed prior to the deployment of the RTE team, but the team was expected to review the ToC "with regards to their use not just for programming but for the evaluation". Further, it was expected that ToCs would "have to be confirmed, revisited and refined as part of the evaluation process".[14]

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[12] This was explicitly outlined in the ToR for the Kenya RTE: "In order to establish the necessary foundation for the evaluation with regards to data, it is important that the evaluation team is part of the process from the outset. This will provide an opportunity to consider the division of labour between monitoring and evaluation efforts so as to tailor-make and continuously refine the evaluation approach in light of the data collected by the programme and its partners. It will also be an opportunity to raise issues of baseline data and options for impact evaluations within the design of the Country Programme."

[13] Danida 2014: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danida Country Programme for Kenya.

[14] Danida 2014: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danida Country Programme for Kenya, pp. 4-5.

Similarly, the Myanmar RTE was expected to work with a point of departure in the ToC. [15] For Mali and Danida Partnerships, the ToR indicated that RTE teams may engage closer in describing the ToCs. Apart from these differences, the ToCs were seen as central to all RTE processes as the backdrop against which to understand programme working and assess progress. This turned out to be a challenging part of the RTE process (more on this below).

Design for staying engaged

All four RTEs shared the commonality of repeated missions in order to be able to follow development and provide assessments of challenges. In light of limited resources, the ToRs indicated annual missions (or in the case of the Kenya RTE, "at least" annual visits). For the CP RTEs, it was not expected that the teams would have resources to collect much information, and they were expected to largely build on the M&E data collected with only supplementary data collection. For Danida Partnerships, the RTE had to supplement project monitoring by collecting information regarding progress towards outcomes.

All RTEs were to provide annual reports providing information on progress, contextual issues, challenges, etc. Different feed-back elements were highlighted. In the case of Mali, briefing and debriefing and quick delivery of reports are mentioned. For Myanmar, the RTE reporting was expected to include the participation of the team in annual programme workshops to facilitate dialogue. In the Kenya case, it was suggested that evaluation visits could be planned to coincide with the Annual Stakeholder Consultation of the Country Programme. For the Danida Partnership RTE, it was mentioned that besides annual reports, it could be relevant to provide feedback to Danida Growth and Employment Department concerning the implementation of the on-going projects as well as input to selection procedures and criteria for possible future funding.

Looking at the budgets, the scope and the timeframe for the RTEs, it is clear that there was a limit to how often RTE teams could carry out in-country missions. For the CP RTEs, there was an emphasis on the need to ensure a strong element of local knowledge through the participation of national/regional consultants and engagement with stakeholders. Even so, however, it is evident that the resources have only allowed for recurrent, rather than continuous engagement.

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[15]   For the Myanmar RTE, it is simply stated that "the RTE will work with the theory of change for the engagement and provide recommendations for possible revisions during programme implementation", and that it is to provide a description of the ToC. See Danida 2016, Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danish Support to Sustainable Coastal Fisheries in Myanmar.

Organisation, management and follow-up
The four RTEs were commissioned by EVAL and as such contracted out of the MFA headquarters in Copenhagen. However, it is clear that the use and relevance of the evaluations was aimed at support for programme management and key partners in the programme countries. For the three CP RTEs, Evaluation Reference Groups (ERGs) were organised, tasked with providing feed-back on evaluation findings and engaging in dialogue.

In principle, this set-up is similar to other types of evaluation where lessons and recommendations are not for EVAL but aimed at programmes and partners, and where ERGs are important for both quality assurance and dialogue around findings and recommendations. However, the fact that the RTEs were to run alongside programme implementation and provide input on a more continuous (or at least frequent) basis implies a closer and more long-term relationship with implemented programmes and stakeholders than found in most "one-off" evaluations. This is also reflected in the various considerations on how to link RTE visits and outputs to workshops and consultations mentioned above.

Further, the need to ensure collaboration with other partners and stakeholders beyond the ERG members was also highlighted. To quote the ToR for the Kenya RTE: "...special emphasis will be on ensuring the contact and continued engagement between evaluation team and programme staff and stakeholders. Thus, in addition to a core ERG, the programme staff and stakeholders should be considered a main audience and an important partner throughout. This will be reflected in the cooperation within the ERG and must be a guiding principle for the team with due consideration of independence". [16] Similarly, the ToR for the Mali RTE stresses that stakeholders beyond the ERG may be consulted "at strategic times". [17]

The intention was that the final RTE reports were to be presented to the Danida Programme Committee for debate on follow-up in line with other evaluation reports. There, findings and recommendations are discussed based on a well-established procedure, leading to a formal response regarding the assessment of the validity and relevance of findings, and decisions on whether and how to implement follow-up initiatives. For the annual reports, the ToR contains no specific stipulations regarding follow-up beyond the considerations regarding how to deliver, link to workshops,

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[16] Danida 2014: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danida Country Programme for Kenya.
[17] Danida: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of Mali Country Programme 2017-2022.

etc. This indicates that the use of the evaluation findings throughout the process was expected to be driven by need and relevance. If relevant and convincing findings were presented, the embassy (and partners) had the discretion to consider whether and how to follow up.

Independence
Another common element for the RTEs is that the evaluative independence has been maintained in the set-up. While the emphasis on the continued presence and engagement is a defining characteristic of the RTEs, independence is a common trait for evaluations in order to allow them to convey impartial assessments of the merits and worth of the evaluated engagements. Independence is especially important for the ability to not just provide input for learning, but also to carry out end-assessments of the contribution to change as mentioned in the RTE ToRs. The fact that there were different roles is reflected in the outline of the management structure mentioned above, but without any indication of specific requirements or considerations for handling the balance between the different tasks.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RTEs

In the following section, the different assumptions and the related questions are addressed as they played out during the practical implementation of the RTEs. Some issues have proved more significant than others, some are interlinked, and the emphasis is on the most salient issues.

4.1 Timeframe, scope and resources for the RTEs

As outlined above, all four RTEs were commissioned in time to be able to follow the programmes and projects from the early stages. However, in all four cases, delays in programme roll-out were encountered, which had implications for the expected timeframes and created a range of challenges.

The three CPs all encountered various delays. This is not uncommon or surprising when dealing with large, complex programmes in challenging settings. For the RTEs, it meant that the teams had to stay ready, which – beyond logistical challenges – does not appear to have been a large problem as the teams were all experienced and understood the issue of programme delays. However, once the process was underway, the delays led to a number of challenges.

First, it was difficult to get the timing right. Programme activities did not start as originally envisioned. Therefore, staff for the different programmes were naturally busy dealing with getting the programmes running. This meant that it was more challenging to match RTE work to the programme phases. Second, it led to protracted inception periods, which again meant that the plans agreed during the inception phase were less relevant or had to be revised once the timing was agreed for the next visit.

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[18] ITAD 2019: Note for RTE seminar, Kenya RTE note; ITAD 2016: Real-Time Evaluation of Danida's Kenya Country Programme, Inception Report and ITAD, 2018: Scoping Discussion Note – Devolution and local accountability assessment for Danida Country Programme Kenya.

It cannot be concluded that a smoother initiation would have hindered this, but the protracted start-up phase with the RTE team maintaining a "holding pattern" in order not to spend scarce resources too soon made it difficult to maintain a presence and be aware of developments.

For the Myanmar RTE, delays were also encountered. The RTE team was contracted in October 2016 but with the inception visit postponed to May/June 2017 and an additional RTE mission in June 2018.[19] This was due to delays in the implementation of the engagement – delays, which were related to the novelty of the engagement in the context of Myanmar, and the role of the Department of Fisheries (DoF) as implementing partner. According to the RTE team, this was not a problem in terms of logistics, but it limited the ability of the RTE to build relationships and involvement with the project implementers. Again, it cannot be concluded that this would have been solved in the absence of delays, but delays increase the risk of being "out of sync". While waiting for an appropriate timing for following up on the inception visit, the RTE team provided input to the engagement baseline contractors to make use of the information gathered during the inception period. This led to amendments that were seen as relevant by staff posted at the embassy at the time.

For the Mali RTE, there were also delays with consequences for the RTE. The RTE kick-off meeting was in September 2017. The M&E framework which was expected to help deliver a large share of the input for the RTE was, however, delayed.[20] The RTE team has highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptation from the side of the RTE to be able to match the different phases of the programme. In order to be able to do this, for instance when faced with delays, more pro-active communication for better planning was viewed as necessary from all involved parties. Significant efforts were needed also in "inactive" periods to be ready and staying à jour so as to be able to respond when the time was right.

For the Danida Partnership RTE, delays have also been encountered in getting projects off the ground, creating a lengthy inception phase. Further, in some cases implementation has taken longer than expected, especially when projects were dependent on national political processes, which again required the RTE to stay flexible.

With regard to how the different RTEs handled the scope, it is particularly interesting to contrast the Kenya and the Mali RTEs. For the Myanmar RTE and the Danida partnership RTE, no changes have been

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[19]   Niras 2019: Note for RTE seminar for the Myanmar CP RTE; Niras 2018: Technical Report, Real-Time Evaluation of Danish Support to Sustainable Coastal Fisheries in Myanmar.
[20]   Particip 2019: Note for RTE seminar for the Mali CP RTE; Danida 2017: Minutes, discussion between Mali RTE team and Danida HQ.

made to the scope during the process, and scope does not appear to have been a key challenge. However, for the two RTEs with the broader coverage, scope has been an issue.

In the case of the Kenya RTE, the intention was to cover the whole of the CP but not everything in equal depth. The RTE could suggest areas for more in-depth assessment: *"The selection of results focus areas to be dealt with either by the RTE itself or by additional analysis must be transparent and defendable, implying that any selection of cases, geographic or thematic result areas, beneficiary groups etc. must be explained and based on sound criteria. The evaluation team is expected to elaborate this selection in collaboration with the Danish Embassy in Nairobi and EVAL during the inception phase, and contingent on EVAL approval".*[21] Beyond the RTE resources, which were limited when considering the scope, the CP was expected to set aside funds that could be used for such additional studies. After the 2017 mission, it was found that this broad approach did not convey information that was perceived as relevant by the embassy. Thus, the RTE team and the embassy engaged in a dialogue regarding scope, which led to the 2018 mission focusing on the issue of devolution. This allowed the team to go more into depth in a manner leading to a product that the programme management found to be much more relevant (more on this in the section regarding added value below).

In the case of Mali, the RTE was intended to cover a large share of the CP but with selected engagements left out. However, it was decided in consultation between the RTE team, the embassy and EVAL that there was a risk of losing sight of important elements and their interplay, and more of the CP was included. At the same time, when discussing current information needs, the embassy pointed to specific issues that could be of particular interest, and where a solid overview of engagements and contextual factors was expected to be essential, if (hypothetical) investigations were to deliver sound analytical results.

4.2 Working with programme ToC

Working with programme ToC has shown to come with challenges for the RTEs. This is to some degree linked to problems with timing and delays, but the issues go beyond this:

While the Kenya CP had developed overall ToCs early on, it was the intention that the RTE team should engage in dialogue in relation to possible fine-tuning of the ToCs, enhancing the links to the M&E system, etc. According to the RTE team, there was an interest in working with the ToC from the programme staff in 2017, but at this point the planned

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[21]   ToR, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danida Country Programme for Kenya, p. 3. Danida, 2014.

scope was so broad that it was not feasible to go into sufficient detail. In planning the 2018 mission, it was a priority to establish a tighter focus on issues of particular relevance to programme staff. This was carried out in a fruitful manner according to the team, but the new focus implied less attention to further investigation of the ToC of the different engagements. By implication, there was little interplay between the RTE team and the programme staff with regard to the ToC and to the establishment of a deeper, common understanding. While ToC issues do not appear to have been a key bottleneck for the Kenya RTE, interviews point to the fact that programme staff and local partners did not find the ToC work very beneficial. It does not follow that deeper dialogue around a shared analysis would necessarily have remedied this, but a deep, common understanding of a ToC does not appear to have been present.

In Myanmar, the ToC and the related result framework had been developed when the delayed RTE inception mission was carried out. When reviewing the ToC as part of the inception work, the RTE team found that improvements should ideally be made. However, the RTE team had insufficient time during the inception mission and no clearly established mandate to fully engage with stakeholders to support them in revising the ToC and indicator framework. Further, the RTE needed to respect the fact that the ToC and framework should be stakeholder driven/prepared, in order for partners to experience ownership. As a consequence, the engagement utilised a ToC and M&E indicator framework that the RTE did not consider very robust, and RTE assessments were carried out against a distinct ToC that was different from the one used by the engagement. It cannot be concluded that the differences of opinion expressed in the use of different ToCs led directly to later problems. However, it is noteworthy that discussions around recommendations and follow-up to later RTE reports also showed differences of opinion. In 2019 the MTR recommended that the Myanmar RTE should be discontinued (together with the M&E contract).[22]

In the case of the Mali RTE, the team started working at a time when elements of the ToC and results frameworks were in place. While it was originally intended that the RTE team should contribute to the work on the ToC, it was assessed that the concept of ToC was challenging especially for the partners, and that it would be counterproductive for the RTE to re-open debates and engage in revisions during a short mission. Rather, it was decided that the M&E support team, which had a steady presence in the country, could support partners in the further development of the ToC.

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[22]   Danida (2019): MTR Report, Myanmar Country Programme 2016-2020, p. 5.

For the Partnership RTE, it should be kept in mind that project preparation has been protracted, and limited RTE work had been carried out at the time of data collection for the current review. However, the lengthy inception phase has been spent on reviewing both the concept of the RTE as well as the project ToC, the drivers and barriers to progress, etc. This has been seen as a necessary and important part of the preparation.

4.3 Data availability

A key consideration in relation to the RTEs has been to ensure that sufficient data was available for the types of analytical work required. As indicated in the ToRs for the RTEs, the resources available did not allow for substantial independent data collection, and especially for the CP RTEs, teams were expected to largely build on M&E data. For the three CPs, separate M&E teams were contracted by the embassies. The M&E contracts and the work of the M&E teams fall outside the scope of this study, but in brief, the tasks included supporting partner M&E, collecting additional data, preparing reports, etc. While varying in size, the budgets for the M&E support were substantially larger than for the RTE teams.[23] This can also be seen as an indication of the expected division of labour, where the RTEs were expected to benefit from the resources set aside for M&E data collection and reporting.

Based on interviews with the RTE teams, the M&E data has been useful and cooperation with M&E teams has been constructive. However, data availability and resources for analysis have nevertheless been a bottleneck in different manners.

In the case of the Kenya RTE, the initial bottleneck appears to have been when data was available, and how to deal analytically with the broad scope to be covered rather than the amount of available data. The cooperation with the M&E team has been positive and constructive, and data has been shared when available. However, the RTE team found that there was limited data available in advance of missions when it was most needed. While it was the initial plan to have the RTE and M&E teams work together for annual joint meetings, this did not happen, which limited joint working and learning. The first "real" output of the

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[23]   In Kenya, a contract for M&E support over 54 months was set at DKK 11.4 million (according to the M&E contract and tender document). In Myanmar, the CP budget covered input to reviews, monitoring and studies, with a total amount of DKK 19 million. Of this, DKK 4 million was set aside for use in 2016 in relation to the Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth thematic programme (see Myanmar Country Programme document). For Mali, the budget for M&E technical assistance was DKK 12 million (Mali Country Programme output level budget). With regard to Danida Partnerships, programme level monitoring was lodged with the MFA, and DKK 4.5 million was set aside in the budget for monitoring and reviews.

Kenya RTE was not seen to be of much use to the programme manage-ment, leading to changes in both RTE team and approach. While there are likely many factors behind this, one part of the problem appears to be the broadness of scope and the limited resources, which led to a product that did not add much value for the programme management. The second round was more focused, cutting across different develop-ment engagements (DEs), and entailed additional data collection and fieldwork beyond what could be supplied by the M&E system.[24]

For Mali, a key issue has been how to ensure coordination between the different streams of data collection and analysis. There, the issue again has been not so much the amount of data but getting the timing right and being able to match the planning of the RTE to the pace of the programme. According to the team, documents that were expected to be available were still in production during the first mission and could therefore not be consulted. Access to stakeholders and interview partners has mainly been good throughout the process, but the team felt a certain hesitance by some actors, possibly being overburdened or confused by the number and variety of missions and data collection systems. A clear point made by the embassy, RTE team and EVAL is that the transaction costs of ensuring not just the collection of data, but also sufficient coordination around data collection were an important chal-lenge, and that multiple accountability streams have created difficulties.

For the Myanmar RTE, the data availability does not appear to have been an important bottleneck. Further, the frequency and timing of RTE visits were generally found to allow for gathering sufficient information. This can be seen as a consequence of the focused scope of the RTE and the resources available for the RTE team to investigate and gather additional data if needed. Interviews reflect that partner capacity for monitoring was limited, and that considerable effort from the monitoring team was required to support and build capacity. Likewise, the RTE team sup-ported the baseline study. That data was not a bottleneck is therefore not necessarily an indication of the ability of the monitoring system to supply the information needed, but rather that the scope was overall more manageable.[25]

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[24] Danida Kenya RTE Scoping discussion note and design draft, and interviews with RTE team, embassy and EVAL.
[25] It should be noted that this is not a critique of the M&E team. It is merely an observation of challenges related to the monitoring capacity of a new part-ner. Indeed, the MTR that suggested the termination of both the RTE and the M&E contracts, notes that this is not a consequence of critique of the work of the M&E team.

For the Danida Partnership RTE, it was too soon to judge data availability issues at the time of data collection for the current review. As the consultant was tasked with collecting data for programme level monitoring and tracking drivers and barriers, the RTE had direct influence on the data quality and quantity. However, gathering the data so the value added would match the effort required, and avoiding the risk of overlap between the RTE and other M&E-related activities becoming an additional burden on partners was flagged by the RTE consultant as a focus area throughout the process.

The time span between the RTE visits led to additional bottlenecks in relation to ensuring adequate data. All RTE teams stressed that it was crucial to spend sufficient time with stakeholders in the country to ensure coordination and planning, but that in practice it was challenging. The fact that visits were planned for once a year, but that delays may have contributed to spacing missions further apart, made it more challenging to be sure that the right questions were asked and the relevant data was available in a timely manner.

4.4 Stakeholder involvement

The issue of stakeholder engagement has been a key element and a core challenge for the RTEs. Regardless of the type of evaluation, stakeholder engagement is always important and rarely easy, but it is of particular importance for learning-focused exercises that aim at supporting adaptation. Ensuring the continued relevance and usefulness of the work requires a clear and current understanding of programme needs and concerns in relation to contextual change. While the concept paper for the RTEs as well as the individual ToR and intentions of the teams all focus on the importance of close stakeholder contact and engagement for achieving positive RTE results, practical experience has indicated a number of barriers.

The barriers are to some degree linked to planning difficulties, which again are linked to the simple fact that partners encounter challenges and programmes encounter delays. While this is no surprise to anyone involved, it does imply that coordination and planning becomes more demanding. In several cases, the original plans for ensuring that the RTE had joint meetings with M&E teams (Kenya) or participated in annual meetings with partners (Myanmar) were not realised.

In addition, the CPs and their partners would typically not only have to engage with the RTE team and the M&E team but also teams tasked with other reviews and studies. For the partners, other donor activities were present as well, creating large and potentially confusing set-ups of M&E-related activities. All RTE teams have clearly been aware of the risk and focused on both clarifying their own role and on minimising the burden for partners. Even so, however, it was clearly acknowledged as a

barrier to optimal stakeholder engagement. The number of actors made it difficult to get everyone on board and clarify whom to engage with, when, and who should take which initiatives, etc.

The roles of the different stakeholders were important parts of this. As mentioned, the RTEs are commissioned and managed by EVAL out of the MFA headquarters in Copenhagen, but the key intended user of RTE findings and the practical counterpart in terms of planning, etc. has been the embassy managing the different CPs. With regard to the content of the RTE findings, there is often a clear link to the implementing partners, which further means that their participation in the dialogue is important as well. For instance, the Myanmar RTE pointed to a range of issues related to the activities and planning of the Department of Fisheries (DoF). This has added to the complexity regarding who does what in order to ensure stakeholder engagement. The resources, experience and political will of partners may or may not allow for strong engagement, and this is something that embassies and RTE teams may be able to nudge or influence but cannot control.

The RTE teams indicated that embassies have been supportive and engaged, but that it has been difficult to ensure a similar degree of partner engagement (mainly in Kenya and Myanmar). While access to partners and stakeholders has not been a problem, ensuring participation and ownership has been challenging. It should be kept in mind that the partners and stakeholders constitute a very diverse group, from civil society organisations (CSOs) to partner ministries, and that barriers to participation are equally varied. Transaction costs, the efforts required for daily implementation, lack of clarity regarding the many different actors and the role and potential use of the RTE as well as competing political or practical demands may all be part of the explanation for limited engagement. In Mali, the team had a very strong focus on stakeholder engagement from the outset, and according to both the embassy and the team, this has had positive effects, but even so, the complex set-up has reportedly led to some confusion and uncertainty amongst stakeholders.

It is worth noting that when the Kenya RTE was re-oriented towards a more in-depth assessment of devolution as a cross-cutting issue of importance to the CP, a key element was a close dialogue with both the embassy and EVAL regarding scope, questions, timing, etc. It has also been stressed by RTE teams and by embassies that the dialogue in itself is important regarding the delivery of RTE findings in a useful and efficient manner. This is for example the case for the Mali RTE where the RTE team and the embassy agree that the dialogue, both with the embassy and other stakeholders, is a key element. Indeed, the embassy has indicated that the critical dialogue has been most helpful, rather than necessarily the written input.

With respect to maintaining the independence of the RTEs, there is nothing to suggest that this has been a problem in the process. However, such a problem would also be most likely to materialise at the end of a longer-term process, when relationships between evaluators and programme staff had been built over time, and recommendations given and followed (or not). With the present material, it cannot be assessed whether this would have been the case or not.

5. RESULTS AND ADDED VALUE

The following section addresses the assumption and question concerning the added value of the RTEs. The question focuses on whether the RTEs have managed to capture ongoing considerations and progress in a manner that has added value. This is related to both the interlinked issues of the RTE products in terms of timing, quality and relevance, etc., and to whether the products are actually considered and used for follow-up.

5.1 Outputs of the RTEs

All four RTEs have delivered results even if all were delayed when comparing to the original plans, and even if they did not follow a full programme circle as intended. The delays imply that it is difficult to assess the progress made in relation to responding to criticism from the early rounds. However, various outputs and the stakeholder assessment of relevance and use are available.

For the "oldest" RTE dealing with the Kenya CP, the outputs from the baseline visit were deemed to be of little use. The political economy analysis was too overlapping with the information already at hand for the embassy. The investigation of the engagements maintained the broad coverage indicated by the ToR, but it was found to be of limited depth and did not add much of value to the knowledge of the programme management. The RTE team acknowledged that this round had not worked as intended. This led to a very different approach for the second round, where the focus was on investigation issues related to devolution across CP engagements. This output was assessed in a much more positive light and was seen to have provided a solid and thought-provoking analysis with a clear potential for use in deliberations on future aid. Amongst positive factors mentioned by the embassy is that while the point of departure was actual Danida experience from the different engagements, the investigation managed to look beyond the individual engagements and the immediate steps in implementation and provided an analysis that could contribute to longer-term learning and reflection. The embassy has pointed to the analytical approach and quality as something that set the devolution study apart from – for instance – monitoring reports or technical reviews. In this sense, the study was seen to have clear added value.

Interestingly, the study was seen by interviewees (both the RTE team and the embassy) as a deviation from the planned RTE approach. However, it can be argued that while it may be different from the outputs that were

envisioned by the original RTE team, it is consistent with the ToR, which pointed to the need to move from the broad (and potentially shallow) coverage to identifying areas where deeper studies were relevant. The identification of the devolution as an area of importance was not made by the RTE team alone. Rather, it entailed a much closer dialogue with the embassy, which was seen as a key enabler for the positive result by both the RTE team and the embassy. While it may in principle have been possible for the embassy to commission the study, it was stressed that it would likely not have been done if it had entailed a full tender process. The fact that a qualified RTE team with knowledge of the programme was available and could start working with limited additional preparation was presented as an important enabling factor. The independence of the team seems to have been less important for the usefulness of the study. The point was not to provide verdicts regarding the performance of the programme. Rather, the relevance and analytical quality was in focus, and here close dialogue with the users, familiarity with the context and analytical capacity mattered more than formal independence.

The Myanmar RTE represents a very different situation with regard to enabling and hindering factors for added value. The early work contributed to improving the baseline, which was perceived as valuable. However, for later outputs, challenges related to the process and the set-up appear to have hindered the potential usefulness of the outputs. Already in relation to the inception report, it is clear that different opinions regarding risks and how to handle them were present, and as mentioned above, different views led to a situation where different ToCs were in play. It is beyond the scope of the present study to assess the accuracy of RTE findings regarding for instance the working of the DoF, but there is no indication that they were seen as wrong per se. Rather, the interviews with the embassy staff (at the time of the early RTE work) and the MTR team indicate that the barriers to use of RTE input and thus added value for management were related to a lack of workability and lack of agreement regarding timing, roles and responsibilities. In working with a new partner, issues were prioritised or dealt with in a different manner than suggested by the RTE team, and the recommendations were thus seen as less relevant. It is worth noting that this also illustrates a dilemma with regard to independent analysis. Being a critical voice may be important, but without sufficient agreement regarding a common point of departure, roles and responsibilities and key issues, the likelihood of findings being used by stakeholders is diminished, especially in the absence of a system for follow-up. Further, the Myanmar case illustrates a potential risk. When carrying out a final evaluation as part of an RTE, the team would also be tasked with evaluating the follow-up – or lack thereof – to their own recommendations. The differences of opinion present in the Myanmar case may have led to a situation where the end-evaluation's impartiality could be questioned due to earlier tensions over ToC and follow-up to recommendations. This is a hypothetical scenario, as the RTE was terminated, but the tensions illustrate the risk.

For the Mali RTE, the first mission and output were seen to be sound and relevant. While it did not necessarily bring surprising perspectives forward, it was found to present solid reflections and a thorough consideration of the context, which supported management deliberations. The second round was seen as less useful, partly due to delays in finalisation and in clarifying issues in the written report. This again illustrates that process issues and timing are crucial for the degree to which the RTE outputs deliver added value in practice. It is worth noting that in a forward-looking perspective, the embassy mentioned areas where analytical work would be welcome. This related to critical assessment of, for instance, the longer-term value and sustainability of selected engagements or a study of the conflict and security situation with particular focus on the South. These issues were regarded as relevant for considering how to potentially adapt the implementation of thematic programmes in a conflict-sensitive manner as suggested by the recent MTR. It must be stressed that this is not an example of added value to be provided by the RTE or a specific suggestion for later RTE work. Rather, it is an example of how there may be a need for studies that are neither M&E reports nor technical reviews, but – as in the case of the devolution study in Kenya – consider the context and the engagement in a different light and with different tools. Whether or not an RTE or similar approach is seen as suitable to meet the need is a matter apart.

The Danida partnership RTE does not have a key counterpart in the way that the embassies are counterparts for the CP RTEs. Examples of added value so far are based on the experience from the RTE consultant and the response presented to her during fieldwork. Added value was found in for instance the ability to engage in dialogue with project stakeholders, including being an external voice that could bring sensitive issues to the table in a manner that local actors may not always be able to do.

An additional expected contribution of the RTEs was to support better identification of results and thus stronger assessment of contribution and attribution. No firm assessment of the added value with regard to end evaluation and result assessment can be made at this point as this was linked to a later assessment of outcomes and impacts. However, some indications are found which point towards both positive contributions and limitations.

On the positive side, it can be noted that RTEs are found to have contributed to baselines (for instance Myanmar and Danida Partnerships), which is an important element for later evaluation of results. The recurrent presence of the RTE teams and the focus on engaging with partners could likely have allowed for the establishment of a stronger contribution story upon the finalisation of the programmes. On a less positive note, experience has also indicated that if RTE resources are spread too thinly, the analytical work provides less analytical added value, and will thus be less of a resource for the end evaluation. This does not mean

that there is no value in status reports, but considering the resources spent, a shallow RTE represents a missed opportunity.

5.2 Follow-up and contribution of the RTEs

A particular aspect of the RTEs relates to follow-up to the findings and recommendations from the evaluation RTE teams. Follow-up to findings and recommendations of any evaluation is related to the perceived quality and relevance of the evaluative work as well as the system for follow-up. In the case of Danida evaluations, a system is in place where evaluation reports are discussed in the Programme Committee at headquarters level, leading to a follow-up note which outlines the assessment of the recommendations and how follow-up will be ensured. Once a follow-up action is outlined in the note and is endorsed by the Danida Programme Committee, the responsible implementing actors are responsible for initiating the necessary activities.

The final RTE reports (which were not completed) were also expected to be subject to this system. For the annual reports, follow-up to findings and recommendations was expected to take place based on dialogue with embassies, programme partners and relevant stakeholders. The practical approach to follow-up was thus more flexible than the formal model. It was also dependent on not only the soundness and relevance of the recommendation, but also potentially on the resources available for follow-up, the priorities of the different stakeholders, etc.

This decentralised and less formalised model comes with potential advantages and disadvantages. First, avoiding the formal system for the annual RTE report may leave more room for decision-making at the programme level with fewer requirements regarding the follow-up process, the involvement of headquarters departments, etc. By implication, it may provide more flexibility and allow for a swifter use of evaluation inputs in line with the rationale of the RTEs and adaptive aid. However, it also makes follow-up more vulnerable to barriers beyond the quality and relevance of the recommendations, as it is generally acknowledged that follow-up action may be hindered by a variety of other factors. These span from time and resource constraints over political or practical disagreements on incentive issues. This is why the OECD-DAC stresses both the need to clarify the role of evaluations as well as the need to have procedures in place to support follow-up, to mention just one point.[26]

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[26]   See for instance OECD-DAC 2013: Evaluating Development Activities – 12 Lessons from the OECD DAC.

When asked about use and follow-up to the recommendations of the RTEs, informants indicate a variety of challenges. These challenges cut across a range of the issues mentioned above, but will nevertheless be highlighted here:

• Relevance: In some cases, the relevance of the recommendations for specific follow-up was seen as limited. This has for instance been the case when the RTE output has been too broad and not been able to provide new and sufficiently deep analysis (as was the case with the first RTE analysis for the Kenya CP).

• Timing: In other cases, usefulness may have been reduced due to timing being "off"; for instance, if the process of clarification of a draft report is protracted by delays. The dialogue leading to the draft report, debriefings, stakeholder workshops, etc. may still be valuable, but in terms of actual follow-up, a protracted process of clarification may lead to missed opportunities, if questions are not clarified quickly (as was the case for the second Mali RTE report).

• Stakeholder engagement and set-up: In all three CP RTEs, the set-up has in several ways been a challenge. For instance, in a formal sense, the recipient of the report was EVAL in Copenhagen, in a practical sense, the main users of the report were the embassies dealing with the country programmes. Further, the recommendations may deal with issues that remain within the remits of the partner govern-ments. In such a situation, Danida may have no direct control over follow-up, but is better placed to facilitate and advocate.

• Resources and ownership: While the RTE processes were discussed with embassy staff at the time of initiating the process, staff rotate and situations change, meaning that establishing roles and owner-ship is not a one-off, but may rather have to be renegotiated and reconfirmed as actors and contexts change. Further, because of the complexity outlined above, defining not just the specific follow-up actions but also the dialogue with stakeholders around it is a con-siderable task for the embassies. As time is a scarce commodity also for embassies, this presents a challenge, which may be exacerbated if expectations regarding roles and responsibilities are not fully clear to all involved.[27]

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[27] An RTE consultant highlighted that some organisations delegate part of the responsibility for pushing for follow-up to recommendations to the M&E teams. However, this would have wide-ranging ramifications, as follow-up needs to consider not just technical issues but also political realities, partner priorities, etc.

It should be kept in mind that the use of evaluations is not limited to follow-up to specific recommendations. Evaluation utility may also materialise before the formal initiation of evaluation activities due to the preparatory dialogue, or the expectation of scrutiny during the evaluation process. In addition, evaluation processes may contribute to change by providing both input and opportunity for reflection and communication between stakeholders and being an external party that can voice issues that local actors may feel reluctant to raise. The RTE experience contains various examples of the latter forms of broader use. For instance, in the case of the Mali RTE, the dialogue, bringing stakeholders together, and facilitating the sharing of experience and challenges have been mentioned as useful elements of the process by both the embassy and EVAL. In comparison, the written output was seen as less important for learning purposes – an assessment that is shared by the RTE team. Further, when looking at the Kenya devolution report that received clear praise for relevance and perceived longer-term usefulness, the positive assessment was not due to the content of specific recommendations. Rather, the analytical insights and the discussions of their implications were highlighted as very positive contributions in their own right.

6. PERSPECTIVES FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Internationally, there is a growing emphasis on adaptive development aid. As earlier mentioned, the concept "Doing Development Differently" is part of this broad trend, and a range of reports and studies regarding different approaches as well as the challenges encountered are increasingly available. Donors and researchers pilot a range of related approaches, such as the "Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach, originating with Harvard's Kennedy School,[28] the "adaptive programming", which was popularised by ODI through its work with DFID in relation to the DDD movement,[29] the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) practices used by USAID,[30] and the DFID/USAID-funded and ODI-managed Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM).[31] Other donors such as Norad have commissioned studies of the different experience as input to their own work with adaptive practices.[32] Further, in the evaluation literature, developmental evaluation receives much attention as an approach that explicitly focuses on providing more continuous guidance for adaptive management when dealing with uncertainty. In May 2019, Danida hosted a workshop on "Adaptive and flexible Development Aid – the role of Evaluations" where a range of these approaches as well as experience gained from them were shared. Further, The International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) focused on how M&E can support transformational change in its latest conference, and highlights M&E for adaptation.[33]

Without diving deeply into the emerging material on approaches and lessons learned, it is noteworthy that the international debate reflects a range of similarities to the Danida RTE experience. This provides an important context for understanding the Danida RTEs and the challenges encountered. The following section outlines a range of these points with an emphasis on the experience and approaches presented at the Danida workshop.

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[28]   See for instance Andrews, Matt et al (2015): Building capability by delivering results: Putting Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) principles into practice. https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/publications/building-capability-delivering-results-putting-problem-driven-iterative-adaptation

[29]   Valters, Craig et al. (2016): "Putting learning at the centre – Adaptive development programming in practice". ODI. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10401.pdf

[30]   See for instance https://usaidlearninglab.org/qrg/understanding-cla-0

[31]   See for instance https://www.odi.org/projects/2918-global-learning-adaptive-management-initiative-glam

[32]   See https://www.itad.com/norwegian-aid-adaptive-programming

[33]   https://ideas-global.org/me-in-adaptation/

First, there is a broad acknowledgement of the need to find ways in which to ensure that information is made available for critical reflections in a manner that supports timely adjustments. Again, this is linked to a need for a more continuous feedback on contextual changes, challenges and potential solutions in a manner parallel to the rationale behind the Danida RTE experiment.

Second, some typical key elements brought forward in the international literature mirror the Danida RTE approach. These include involving evaluators early, working with a nuanced ToC as a common backdrop for intervention design, monitoring and evaluation, and providing regular feedback to implementers and managers. ToCs are seen as an important tool to facilitate the critical dialogue that is a prerequisite for learning and adaptation. [34] This is again linked to the understanding of the needs for information and the prerequisites of providing sound analysis that is able to address pertinent and difficult questions in a manner that runs parallel to the Danida RTE approach. International experience also highlights that working with ToC can be a challenge because it requires a reflective and critical approach to answer difficult questions about how efforts might influence change given the political realities, uncertainties and complexities that surround all development initiatives. While this is stressed as a key feature of working adaptively, it is also clear from the debate that it is far from an easy task when it comes to real-world practice.

Another common element in the international work with adaptive approaches is how to move from classical monitoring work that focuses on progress against targets and log frames to more integrated approaches for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL, or MEAL, if accountability is included). As highlighted at the aforementioned Danida workshop and reflected in the literature, there is a persistent tendency in many M&E systems to focus on quantitative indicators that can (fairly) easily be reported and used to demonstrate accountability. To support more adaptive work, more nuanced, context-rich qualitative data is found to be needed to help better understand what changes are happening (or not), and why and what adaptive responses may be viable. Such a shift is likely to require more investment in M&E budgets as well as spending more manpower in relation to the analytical work.[35] While M&E systems do not by nature have to be focused on upstream accountability, they often are, and it takes a conscious effort to ensure a design suited to adaptive aid.[36]

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[34] See for instance: Putting learning at the centre – Adaptive development programming in practice. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10401.pdf, p. 8 ff.

[35] For an overview of this debate, see presentations from the Danida workshop at https://um.dk/en/danida-en/results/eval/

[36] See for instance Craig, 2016: Putting learning at the centre – Adaptive development programming in practice, p. 19 ff. for reflections, and Pasanan 2020: Getting intentional about M&E; both ODI.

It is noteworthy that breaking down the barriers between design, implementation, accountability and learning has been flagged by ODI as part of the way forward for an adaptive approach. If information leads to learning and learning leads to adaptation in a more continuous manner, then a fruitful blurring of the edges may occur. While Danida's RTEs maintained a more classical division of labour between monitoring and evaluations, with separate tasks, separate contracts, etc., the RTE teams also supported monitoring and baseline studies and were involved in discussions around ToC in various ways. It should be mentioned that recent Danida debates on DDD also consider having less clear boundaries between programming and implementation with more space for adjustments of plans in light of changes in contexts or information on emerging difficulties or opportunities.[37]

Third, the challenges encountered also have similarities. It is common experience that while information is essential, it may not be enough to enable adaptive approaches to aid. Other important bottlenecks range from resource constraints to internal incentive structures and issues related to partner capacities and priorities. It is worth noting that the matter of resources required for moving from receiving information to actual reflection and learning is flagged repeatedly, together with the fact that working adaptively is labour intensive.[38] This again resonates with the experience from the Danida RTEs, and as time is always a scarce resource, it is a real concern – albeit far from surprising. While all types of learning are essential to working in an adaptive manner, second loop learning is worth highlighting. This entails the critical reflection on assumptions and expectations in a manner that helps avoiding that adaptation becomes too focused on "fixing" specific problems, with the risk of overlooking more rewarding approaches or becoming better at doing the "wrong thing". It should be clear that creating space – and ensuring time – for critical reflection is a prerequisite for this type of learning. To quote ODI: "Revisiting analytical foundations, creating mechanisms for different forms of information-gathering, reflecting regularly on learning and using it to change activities are time-intensive tasks that ultimately have a cost".[39]

Further, international experience reflects on the division of labour between the donor headquarters and the decentral donor representations or implementing partners. The experience presented points to a difficult balance between wishing to facilitate adaptive aid (which entails action space and flexibility at the decentral level), while maintaining suf-

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[37]   See for instance the thematic discussion paper: Doing Development Differently, submitted to the Council for Development Policy, November 2019 (Danish version).

[38]   See for instance ODI 2016: Putting learning at the centre – Adaptive development programming in practice, p. 17 ff. for reflections.

[39]   Ibid, p. 17.

ficient accountability (where different levels may have varying opinions on how much is needed, and what level of risk is seen as acceptable). Indeed, a recent paper highlights how even with strong buy-in from the donor, requirements and procedures stemming from the donor headquarters may still present substantial obstacles for adaptive aid.[40] Ensuring consistency amongst the many process elements from programme design to procurement and monitoring in a manner that facilitates adaptation is a serious challenge.

This links to the issue of organisational incentive structures and culture. In many organisations, there is a need to justify decisions and an element of risk aversion, which again may lead to information gathering for a wide range of accountability functions rather than for learning. While an emphasis on learning and adaptation does not make accountability irrelevant or impossible, a strong focus on accountability may in practice be an obstacle to adaptation. First, scarce resources are directed towards documentation for accountability rather than learning.[41] Especially for partners, the need to provide sufficient information for both purposes may be a substantial strain. Second, international experience highlights that the ability to adjust and adapt requires working with planning in a flexible manner, which again entails a higher degree of uncertainty and risk.[42] A key message has been that unless there is a real willingness to accept this uncertainty and risk and to overhaul organisational procedures and requirements to reflect this, there is little hope that attempts at more adaptive approaches will lead to the desired results. Even with willingness and buy-in, the real-world challenges can be expected to be significant.

Finally, it is relevant to draw attention to the trivial but nevertheless important point that the best programme design, the strongest ToC or the most fine-tuned M&E system will not make the realities of aid less messy or less challenging. Rather, it may make it clearer how daunting and complex the tasks and ambitions often are, especially when dealing with complexity.

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[40] Puntons and Burge, 2018: Adaptive Programming in Fragile, Conflict and Violence-Affected Settings.

[41] Indeed, Magnussen goes as far as to see accountability mechanisms as often being counterproductive to learning. However, this is closely linked to the matter of balance, and of whether there are adequate incentive structures in place to support experimentation and adaptation, rather than risk-avoiding accountability focus. See Magnussen 2019: "Can evaluations support a more adaptive and flexible development approach?" Norad.

[42] Workshop presentation by Chris Perry, summing up common key elements of USAID Learning Lab and its Collaboration, Learning and Adaptive (CLA) Toolkit and the DFID/USAID-funded and ODI-managed Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM). See also Magnussen 2019: "Can evaluations support a more adaptive and flexible development approach?" and Norad 2016: Norwegian Aid and Adaptive Programming. Evaluation Brief.

To paraphrase evaluation expert Patricia Rogers: When development engagements are working with well-known mechanisms and partners in a fairly stable context, a good analysis may be able to provide clear results with indications of steps to take in order to move forward. Rogers' metaphor for this is a transport map or a timetable.[43] In contrast, complexity implies a different degree of uncertainty and emergence, which is a strong part of the rationale for adaptive aid and a call for ongoing knowledge generation, but also, at the same time, a challenge for any analysis tasked with providing input to adaptation. Clearly, complexity should not imply that the direction of adaptation processes must be left to the elements and the shifting winds without a foundation of knowledge and evidence. However, it does imply that the types of answer that the systems set up for monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning can deliver may be less specific and clear-cut, and that expectations must be realistic. When dealing with the complexity of modern aid, there will be situations where guidance from MEL systems may be likened to a topographical map and a compass. While it may not provide much in terms of specific recommendations on next steps, it is still helpful in moving forward in an unknown landscape.

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[43] See for instance Rogers 2008: Using Programme Theory to Evaluate Complicated and Complex Aspects of Interventions. Evaluation, Sage.

7. LESSONS LEARNED AND FORWARD-LOOKING REFLECTIONS

7.1 The RTEs have added value, but less than hoped for and at significant costs

The overarching assessment of the RTE experience from Danida's country programmes is mixed. Although the RTEs have delivered some pertinent contributions, the RTEs have not realised their expected potential. Some outputs have not been useful, and transaction costs have been substantial for all involved. In this light, the added value is seen as somewhat limited when compared to the resources invested, not just for commissioning RTE consultants, but also the time spent by embassies and other stakeholders.

It must be stressed that a range of barriers to demonstrating added value relate to factors outside the control of the RTE teams, and that none of the RTEs has run as long as expected or gone through the whole planned cycle. Delays have been encountered (both in country pro-gramme roll-out and in some of the RTE processes). As a consequence, the RTEs have been unable to produce the originally expected series of consecutive analytical products. This has led to a protracted process with longer between moments of dialogue and engagement than originally envisioned. As delays in programme roll-out are common, these must be factored in when planning for an RTE or any RTE-like approach to allow for a flexible approach.

7.2 The rationale behind the pilots remains valid

The RTE pilots have come with a range of challenges implying that the tested RTE approach is not found to be a blueprint for future work. How-ever, at the same time the review has found a clear expression of a need for an instrument that delivers what the RTEs set out to do. Further, the RTE experience has illustrated that "real-time oriented" analysis has the potential to deliver analytical work with added value for adaptive aid. This is also mirrored by international experience where there is a strong focus on enhancing the evidence-based adaptation through real-time oriented approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

7.3 Monitoring data is useful but may not be sufficient for adaptive aid

Key informants highlighted that monitoring information and technical reviews are not necessarily sufficient to deliver the kinds of analysis most needed to adapt and revise aid in response to the complexity and the contextual changes that donor programmes face. Further, M&E data has been highly useful and important for the RTEs, but the monitoring information has not been sufficient for driving the RTE work. When looking at the RTE outputs receiving the highest praise, the RTE team had to carry out additional data collection to be able to deliver analytical depth. In other cases, the monitoring data delivered by partners has been limited, or not available at the expected time, and RTE analysis has been dependent on their own information. It is worth emphasising that the types of studies having most potential usefulness according to the key informants were found to require a different amount and type of information than most M&E systems are designed to deliver. At the same time, it has been highlighted by both embassies and RTE teams that keeping monitoring systems simple and not to overburden partners should continue to be a priority.

International experience also highlights a range of concerns regarding M&E that must be balanced. When tasking partners with a key role vis-à-vis monitoring, there is a need to ensure that the system is workable for them, and that capacity and demands match. This again requires a careful focus on what data to demand from partners, whether information is "need to know" or "nice to know", and whether the monitoring system reflects concerns for accountability and learning in a fruitful manner. This implies that in many cases it will be important to consider how to ensure that mechanisms are in place that can deliver deeper analysis quickly when called upon. International experience as well as the Danida RTEs point to a need for analysis that feeds into reflection on the complex and critical issues facing programmes to be truly useful for adaptation, and that this again requires more and different information than most monitoring systems deliver. This indicates that either "monitoring +" approaches or a flexible system for analysis is needed. A key point in adaption is that it cannot necessarily be foreseen what specific analysis will be needed, or when. Current experience points to the benefit of being able to deploy a knowledgeable team quickly and at lower transaction costs.

7.4 The multi-actor set-up has created challenges

The set-up of actors around the RTEs was complex with many different roles and responsibilities. This reflected both the internal organisation and division of labour within Danida and the different local and international partners. Danida stakeholders included the embassies, the EVAL and various review teams, to name a few, in addition to national minis-

tries, internal and external M&E teams, local and multilateral implementing partners, other donors, etc. This has implied multi-pronged or even unclear lines of communication and engagement, which may lead to less effective engagement with stakeholders. This has created substantial coordination challenges despite the best intentions and efforts of all involved as well as a need for a continuous clarification of roles and responsibilities. All actors involved in the RTEs shared their considerations regarding the risk of overburdening programme and partner staff, and how the enabling environment for use of evaluative input could be challenging (for instance in relation to timing, user "appetite", political issues, etc.). A key lesson is that a more manageable set-up with clearer expectations regarding engagement and ownership is important for a more effective process.

Clearly, this is easier said than done. The RTE process has shown how embassies are working hard to support new partners and establish good working relationships, and how it has at times been difficult to match the RTE process to this. Integrating additional steps of communication and learning loops will require more time and effort. Similarly, international experience highlights that information-based dialogue and critical reflection involving all stakeholders are both essential to adaptive aid. It is however, challenging to realise in practice. When looking at the RTE experience, up-front consideration of who, specifically, will use the information, how, and how the information will get to them, as well as an effort to minimise the number of external teams and processes involved may be a step forward.

7.5 Stakeholder engagement – challenging, but a key factor for use

Engagement with stakeholders comes across as a key factor. Although the RTEs have had varied experience in terms of the enabling factors and barriers they have encountered, all pilots highlighted that the stakeholder involvement was crucial but challenging. While stakeholder engagement in an evaluation is always important and rarely easy or straightforward, it should be noted that it is of particular concern for evaluation processes that are expected to facilitate learning and adaptation for programme staff and partners such as the RTEs. As outlined above, challenges encountered are linked to the issues of multi-stakeholder set-up and delays. In cases where timing was difficult, or the division of roles and responsibilities had been unclear, the RTE process was found to have been less effective, whereas stakeholder contact and engagement was found to be a key factor in facilitating that the RTE input could be useful in programme work. This links both to the number of actors involved, and to the role of national implementing partners.

A key lesson is that it is essential to prioritise dialogue with stakeholders and to address the potential barriers to engagement up front. Especially

in relation to national implementing partners, it is important to clarify expectations and processes to lay the groundwork for later collaboration. The issue of engagement is also highlighted in the international debate on how to facilitate adaptive aid, both in relation to ensuring the critical information-based dialogue needed for learning, and for fostering ownership for follow-up to findings regarding needs for adaptation and adjustment.

7.6 Theory of Change and the need for de-mystification

Across the RTEs, the concept of Theory of Change has emerged as somewhat contested, especially to partners, but also other stakeholders. The key rationale behind the concept of ToC is linked to critical reflection and clarification of expectations concerning the working of aid in a specific context, and as such the core of ToC should remain relevant. This is also reflected in international experience, where ToC thinking is seen as central to understanding interventions and clarifying the need and relevance of adjustments. By implication, even though dealing with ToC is challenging, it fits well with adaptive approaches, and it is hardly contentious to stress that aid is not likely to be effectively adaptive without a nuanced understanding of how development engagements are expected to contribute to positive change in a certain context. However, if the concept of ToC is alien and creates confusion, focusing on the practical points embedded in a ToC approach should be considered, namely the thorough exploration of "how aid is expected to work in the current situation", including the complex issues of context, uncertainties, etc.

This links back to the questions regarding what to monitor, and who to task with carrying out the monitoring. The ambition of adaptive aid and, by implication, the need to provide information to support this calls for an understanding of the interplay between engagements and context and for following both programme progress and contextual change in a manner similar to theory-based monitoring. As this is a substantial task, and the key issues may lie outside or between engagements, it is worth considering how best to ensure that the combined M&E effort delivers the pieces of the puzzle necessary to follow the development of the programme and the potential need for adaptation. If the information is indeed only available in the form of a jigsaw puzzle, then the issue of how to ensure that the pieces are put together in a timely and useful manner becomes key. By implication, it is important to consider roles and resources in terms of who puts the analytical pieces together (what will be done by partners, embassies and programme staff or external teams, respectively), and how to ensure that information on whether and how programmes progress or not is activated in dialogue and learning.

7.7 Getting the scope right

The RTE pilots had marked differences regarding their scope. The pilots contain examples of how a very broad scope may lead to an analysis that is of limited value due to large coverage with limited depth as well as examples of including more in the scope than originally envisioned to be able to cover the issues and linkages seen as relevant by the RTE team and the embassy.

There is no single right approach to define the scope but, clearly, the broadness of scope, the type of analytical work envisioned must be considered together with the available resources. The RTE experience highlights how a solid overview is an important part of the foundation for delivering timely, analytical results, but also that having only the overview is insufficient. By implication, the scoping is difficult as it needs to allow analysts to establish and maintain a sufficient overview as well as to focus and go deeper into the questions of importance for adaptation. The work required for the overview can thus have less direct use value but may still be important. How best to solve this will depend on the specific division of labour between monitoring and evaluation (or evaluation-style analysis), but it will be important to build flexibility and dialogue into any set-up aimed at delivering analytical information to programme staff and managers "real-time", to be able to respond to changes in contexts or user priorities.

7.8 The merits of flexible and dialogue-based approaches

When looking at the Danida RTE experience, the most positive assessments from users have been when there has been a strong emphasis on dialogue and a successful engagement with stakeholders (as in Mali), and where the analytical work has been defined in a close collaboration between RTE team and embassy (as in the Kenya study). In contrast, pre-defined notions have had to be reconsidered. For instance, there was a need to redefine the envisioned scope soon after launch in the case of the Mali RTE, and to re-define the output in the case of the Kenya RTE. The lesson is that a real-time evaluation must maintain flexibility to be able to adapt to user needs. While this is not surprising in light of the focus on adaptive aid, it is nevertheless a challenge. The existence of the RTE as a framework contract has been useful in reducing the costs of initiating evaluation-style analytical work by allowing to build on existing knowledge and established relationships. Similarly, respondents have emphasised that the dialogue around RTE processes and their findings has been highly valuable, sometimes much more so than the written products. This indicates that there is a potential to reduce time spent by considering where, why and for whom a written product is needed, and where dialogue is a more efficient tool towards learning and adaptation.

In parallel, international experience emphasises that adaptive aid should avoid detailed planning too far into the future. This may be said to go for the evaluative work to underpin the adaptive aid as well. A framework must clearly be in place, but there must be enough flexibility to allow for adaptation to changing user needs. Dialogue is also highlighted both as a critical element for staying attuned to user needs in delivering analytical information, and for translating information into reflection and adaptation.

7.9 Pilot RTEs for adaptive aid without adaptive aid programmes

It is a key message that while evaluation work may be important to support adaptive aid, there are limits to the changes it can bring about in its own right. Rather, adaptive evaluation and learning-oriented M&E can be part of a broader consideration of how to work with adaptive aid. This reflects international experience, which consistently highlights that adaptive approaches must consider all the different elements of aid planning, management and implementation – and that this is a challenging exercise. International perspectives on adaptive aid stress the importance of considering not only the monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks, but also the broader aid system in which learning is expected to happen and be put into practice.

Even though per definition, all aid programmes are subject to change, some may be set in a more fluid and dynamic context and are therefore more amenable to a developmental evaluation approach. The Danida RTE experience and the international debate both highlight the need to consider the prioritisation of adaptivity as well as the room for adaptive practices amongst programme stakeholders when deciding on evaluation approaches (and vice versa, to consider how to ensure timely information for decision-making when deciding on approaches for adaptive aid).

7.10 A case for an integrated approach to M&E for adaptive aid?

International experience and literature stress that although "real-time" analytical information will not in itself be sufficient to achieve the goal of adaptive aid, it is nevertheless an essential prerequisite hereof. Both the Danida RTE experience and the international debate point to a need for information that goes beyond "standard" M&E. This again raises the question of how to supply the information needed for learning in an effective manner in line with the intention behind the RTE pilots. An important point from the international debate is that the focus on upstream accountability is often deeply embedded in institutions and organisations, and that this may hinder the system-level flexibility and risk willingness that adaptive aid entails. Emphasising learning and

adaptation does not imply that accountability stops being important but, rather, that care must be taken to strike an appropriate balance, and that this may require a continuous focus on avoiding (back)sliding towards too heavy an emphasis on accountability at the expense of learning. By implication, donor organisations have to deal not only with the challenge of establishing the informational basis for adjustments, but also to balance learning and accountability and to safeguard the space for reflection and decision-making that allows information and reflection to be translated into learning and adaptation.

Since the initiation of the RTE pilots, Danida has entered a process of doing just that in a way that reflects the different considerations brought forward in the international debate. The current efforts for moving Danish aid towards a more flexible, learning-oriented and adaptive model are beyond the scope of this review. It is worth mentioning that the process has included considerations on how to strike a better balance between documentation at the planning stage and upstream accountability on one hand, and room and resources for learning, follow-up and adaptation throughout the programme cycle on the other.[44] There are indications of changes to programme management that aim to create more space and flexibility, for instance in the testing of a different approach to programme approval based on less detailed and documentation-heavy programme descriptions (programme concepts, policy papers, etc.). The hope is to leave more room for detailed planning after political approval as this is important not least for the adjustments of plans, expected outputs, etc. that may be relevant during implementation in light of changing contexts. Interestingly, this can be seen as linked to a more integrated approach with less clear boundaries between programming and implementation with an emphasis on how to support learning and adaptation during implementation.[45]

Interestingly, these considerations mirror the "blurring of the edges" between monitoring and evaluation efforts that is highlighted in the international debate as a promising element in adaptive approaches. As the learning and adaptation needs to take place continually during implementation, it is relevant to move towards a more integrated approach with a more fluid relationship between programming and implementation and with an emphasis on how to supply information in support of learning and adaptation during implementation. In the context of Danida, this would entail a discussion of the roles and contributions of the embassies and the new Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (ELK) to ensure a clear and fruitful division of

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44 See for instance the thematic discussion paper: Doing Development Differently, submitted to the Council for Development Policy, November 2019 (Danish version).

45 Ibid.

labour. In terms of use, engagement and thereby ultimately ownership, the embassies are key players, and their role, mandate, resource use, etc. may be addressed more up front when considering how to establish and use information for adaptive aid. When it comes to supporting and backstopping the analytical work from a more methodological perspective, ensuring quality of processes and products, ELK has a key position.

A more integrated approach would not be a panacea, and it would come with its own set of challenges, including the importance of putting together an adequate, multi-disciplinary team in order to cover a broader set of tasks and handle principal-agent issues. In addition, it should be noted that independent assessments of contributions, impacts, etc. would still have to be ensured, and cannot necessarily be expected to fit seamlessly within an integrated approach. By implication, the division of labour between (more internal) learning and (more independent) accountability focus would still have to be addressed. However, if focusing solely on support for adaptation, the analytical independence is arguably less important than timeliness, relevance and coordination. Thus, based on the Danida RTE experience as well as the international debate, a more integrated or "blurred" approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) merges as a potential way forward in order to supply an analytical, evidence-based foundation for adaptive aid.

ANNEX 1. TERMS OF REFERENCE
USE OF COUNTRY PROGRAMME
REAL-TIME EVALUATIONS
LESSONS LEARNED STUDY

1. Background

In 2014, the Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (EVAL) introduced a new concept for continuous evaluation of Danida Country Programme – the so-called Country Programme Real-Time Evaluation (RTE).

With the complexity and flexibility of the Danida Country Programme approach, a need was identified to rethink ways to improve the capturing of results, especially with regard to outcomes and impact, and to ensure timely feed-back into the implementation and adjustment of the programmes to enhance the achievement of results. EVAL decided to pilot the RTE to test how far this approach could help achieve these aims. The testing started with the RTE for the Country Programme in Kenya 2015-2020, followed by RTE interventions in Myanmar 2016-2020 and recently in Mali 2017-2022. In addition to this, the RTE concept is being tested in another context: the Danida Market Development Partnership Programme 2016-2020.

The RTE concept applied by Danida builds on the aspiration to create: *An evaluation process, which from the start of an aid programme define an independent, external evaluation process that follows the programme and regularly make evaluation findings available for the on-going implementation and adjustment of a programme.* It is believed there are several assumptions that need to be in place for this to materialise.

1. A successful RTE process will be dependent on a solid and well-elaborated Theory of Change (ToC) for the intervention. Among all stakeholders (recipients, programme staff, the embassy, etc.) there needs to be a common understanding of the programme's ToC, and the theory-based approaches to analysis of credible contributions for results. Ideally, the RTE evaluators should be part of the programme discussion and help with critical reflections by bringing evaluative and analytical perspectives to the table.

2. An RTE is no quick fix or panacea for capturing results and cannot cover everything in equal depth. Even if it has the advantage of being

data neutral in the sense of being able to use both qualitative and quantitative data and building on both process and results information, it is nevertheless as prone to data constraints as any other ambitious evaluation. Thus, the need for prioritisation and limitations to analytical coverage or depth must be encountered as a broad but more superficial approach will typically not allow for adequate development and analytical use of the ToC-based framework.

3. A successful RTE will be dependent on good data collection (monitoring) for results capturing within the programme. It must be acknowledged that even the best monitoring system neither could nor should cover everything. Monitoring data may be less tailor-made than would be ideal, if only seeing things from an evaluation perspective. As such, the RTE is often a "real-world" exercise.

4. The RTE has to define its contribution and added value in relation to monitoring systems of varied extent and quality. The interface and division of responsibilities between the RTE process and the programme M&E system are important to define up front.

5. The RTE needs to be close to and stay engaged with programme staff and other stakeholders. This has its strengths and risks as well. It is a prerequisite for a successful evaluation to deliver assessments and inputs of immediate relevance to programme staff and other stakeholders, but it also creates a risk that the RTE process (and the evaluators) are expected to deliver more and different answers than can reasonably be expected.

The overarching message of the 2014 approach paper was that the RTE presents a clear potential to move programme evaluation forward in important ways. At the same time, it poses high demands on all involved: evaluators, programme staff and management at embassies, recipient partners and EVAL. Thus, the assumptions or prerequisites mentioned above also serve to point to potential bottlenecks or challenges for RTE processes when confronted with the "messy" reality.

The present study will assess current lessons learned from the implementation of pilot RTEs within Danida interventions and put these into perspective with regard to recommendations for the way forward. As the backdrop for this, the study will explore selected current international practices for use of RTEs in development assistance. In addition, the study serves as the basis for an announced reporting to the Danida Council for Development Policy (UPR) in spring 2019 on the piloting of RTEs within Danish Country Programmes.

2. Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to provide a status for the testing of RTEs within Danida country programmes (and other interventions) with a view to capturing lessons learned and providing strategic and operational guidance for the way forward.

3. Output

A technical report (in English, max. 30 pages plus annexes), to be published as an "Evaluation Study Report" by the Evaluation Department.

4. Scope of Work and approach

The study will take its point of departure in the design considerations for the use and testing of Country Programme RTEs as outlined in the approach paper prepared by EVAL in 2014. It will consider assumptions and risks outlined in the paper and how these have been realised within the four RTE pilots currently being implemented.

The focus will be on the added value of RTEs to follow progress within the various programmes as well as capturing results at outcome and impact level. As the RTEs are still under implementation, and the development programmes being followed in several cases have been subject to adjustments, it is likely still early days to fully assess the effectiveness and relevance of the RTE approach within Danida country programmes. However, the study will assess a number of the challenges and lessons learned until now. The emphasis will be on the two longest-running RTE pilots (Kenya and Myanmar), but the study will also collect information from the other two RTEs, but in less depth.

The consultant will take into consideration the international literature regarding the use of ToC for programme development and M&E as expressed in the studies of ToC practice and theory-based approaches for identification of results that were published at the time leading up to the RTE. In addition, literature regarding additional experience with respect to the use of RTEs within development assistance programmes (outside the sphere of humanitarian aid) should be included as relevant. As the development and use of ToCs is deemed essential for the implementation of RTEs (also within Danida country programmes), the operational experience regarding ToC methodology within development programmes should be included. This applies specifically to the country programmes linked to the pilot RTEs and to selected new practices amongst other donor agencies (expectedly DfID and Sida), if deemed relevant based on a preliminary assessment. The ToC investigation will mainly focus on the ways to communicate and create ownership and understanding for the ToC process, and whether new and relevant experience can be identified.

The consultant will interview stakeholders within the four Danida RTEs (relevant programme officers at embassies and departments, RTE consultants, Danida advisers, staff at EVAL, etc.) and will assess relevant progress reporting.

The report from the consultancy will focus on major lessons learned, results achieved and challenges realised. It will also make recommendations on the way forward for the use of RTEs within Danish Country Programmes as well as on the usefulness of the RTE approach within other development aid programmes and interventions. This should be seen within the context of increased flexibility and adaptability of Danish development assistance.

There is per definition a clear link between the RTEs and the country programme they address, and by implication the RTEs are expected to have been both shaped by and to influence the programme ToCs and the M&E systems. While the study focuses on the RTE experience, it should consider the interplay with the programmes as feasible and relevant. It should be noted that the study builds on existing reports and documents as well as on information regarding RTE processes, approach, experience and assessments from involved stakeholders. As such, there will be limitations to the degree to which the study can include in-depth assessments of for instance programme M&E systems. Similarly, due to both the timing and approach of the study, there will be limitations to the assessments of the outcomes and impacts of the RTEs. Here, the study must explore early signs of results and the enabling and hindering factors behind them based on a balanced investigation of stakeholder experience and other relevant sources of information.

5. Key Questions

The study will be guided by a range of key questions that focus on identifying key traits for each of the RTE processes included in the study as well as on understanding whether and how the RTE processes in the different contexts were carried out so as to achieve their aims and fulfill their potential. Here, a number of questions link to the assumptions and prerequisites mentioned above, partly as issues that the planning and implementation of the RTE may influence, and partly as factors that may be beyond the control of the RTE. In order to provide guidance for the study, a range of potential sub-questions and issues are outlined for each of the main questions. While it is not expected that all questions and sub-questions will be dealt with in depth for all RTE pilot processes, they outline some of the interlinked issues that the study must consider and reflect as relevant.

Overall design and implementation of the RTE process – setting the stage.
Overall questions: What were the purpose/aim and objectives of the RTE, and how was it designed with an aim to achieve its objectives?

Sub-questions

  - What were the methodological and design-related considerations behind the RTE set-up? Was it embedded in programming processes – how, and with what positive or negative implications?

  - Were any specific evaluation methods used by the RTEs to track, identify and improve the achievement of results (e.g. contribution analyses)? How well has it worked in reality and has it been possible to establish the basis for "credible contribution stories"? Which factors can be identified as contributing to success or lack thereof?

An RTE is no quick fix or panacea for capturing results and cannot cover everything in equal depth. **Overall question:** Were the scope, timeframe and resources for the RTE appropriate in relation to the aims and ambitions of the RTE?

Sub-questions:

  - How have programme issues to be covered and followed by the RTE process been identified?

  - Has the RTE process been designed with sufficient flexibility and adaptability?

  - What resources were set aside? What were the deciding factors, what was the rationale behind and how flexible/adaptable was the resulting approach?

  - Is the current timeframe (fem years) and often one annual assessment sufficient to capture trends? Is there a need to intensify the dialogue between the RTE and programmes in between the annual (often field) assessments?

A successful RTE process will be dependent on a solid and well-elaborated Theory of Change (ToC). **Overall questions:** Was the programme ToC perceived to be a common, solid and well-elaborated understanding of the intervention logics, assumptions and risks by both programme staff and RTE actors? What issues can be identified that led to this being the case (or not)?

Sub-questions:

  - How was the process of developing the programme ToC and what level of depth was achieved (for instance for new vs well-established engagements)?

- How were issues of developing a sound and relevant programme ToC and ensuring its trackability through M&E/RTE addressed (dialogue, up-front involvement of M&E/RTE teams, engagement of programme staff, etc.)?

- What strengths and weaknesses can be found in the programme ToC in relation to its use as a foundation for RTE analysis (and other forms of learning-oriented M&E for better results)?

- Have flaws/weaknesses in programme logics and ToC been identified during the RTE process?

A successful RTE will be dependent on good data collection (monitoring). **Overall questions:** Was the RTE able to access monitoring data of a sufficient quantity and quality when needed, or were bottlenecks encountered?

Sub-questions:

- How was the interplay and delineation between RTE and M&E processes, and how was it decided?

- What were the deciding factors, and what were the rationale/expectations behind? Was this considered up front during programme design, e.g. specifying clear linkage to M&E system?

- Has additional information been collected by the RTE? If yes, what and why?

- Has it been possible to "synchronise" reporting and data feed-back between RTE and programme M&E systems? If room for improvement, where and how?

The RTE has to define its contribution and added value. **Overall questions:** Can the RTE process capture ongoing considerations on realising the ToC in collaboration with the programme M&E in a manner that adds value? Does it work in reality?

Sub-questions:

- Were the expectations and ambitions for the RTE processes clear to all involved, and to what degree were they seen to materialise?

- To what degree are benefits perceived to represent added value when comparing with for instance M&E information? Why/why not?

- How could benefits or synergies have been strengthened? Possible benefits to consider, depending on the context, include:

- Contribution to improved results matrix and capturing of outcomes/early impacts/change processes, implementation challenges.

- Analysis of issues of special concern; adaptation to needs? Has it been possible to free up resources for more in-depth analyses (e.g. counterfactual analyses)?

- Input from the RTE process into the programme M&E systems (for instance discussion on appropriateness and measurement of key indicators, or information regarding the causal chain linking outputs to outcomes ("the missing middle").

- Facilitation of improved dialogue around programme ToC both in relation to content and use among stakeholders.

- Providing a framework for regular, recurrent and annual consultations on development process, trajectory towards results, challenges, etc?

The RTE needs to be close to and stay engaged with programme staff and other stakeholders. **Overall questions:** Have the RTEs been able to balance the engagement with the programme with the role as an "independent, external evaluation process"?

Sub-questions:

- How has the RTE process been perceived by embassies and national implementing partners? Has there been a buy-in and what has been the challenge?

- Have RTEs created a "parking space" for difficult and critical discussions regarding programme progress? Has the RTE been seen as an advantage and opportunity and not a burden for the programme?

- How have the roles and responsibilities around the RTE been defined and how have they worked in practice (programme staff/embassy, ERG, EVAL, RTE team, M&E team (if relevant), etc.) Were they clear or ambiguous; did they facilitate a flexible process and relevant dialogue or were bottlenecks encountered?

- Can examples of tools and approaches for dialogue with national partners on the RTE process and performance assessment be identified – e.g. to support adjustments during implementation?

- What are the implications of the recruitment of the external RTE team, both in terms of qualifications, terms (period), organisation

of team, resources and dialogue, etc., and in relation to the risk of principal-agent type problems? What have we learned?

6. Resources and timetable

The study will be conducted by:

- Eva Broegaard, evaluation expert, external consultant to Danida

Resources set aside for the assignment will be 250 man-hours plus reimbursables.

The study will be initiated on 21st December 2018.

EVAL will facilitate contacts to the involved Danish embassies and programme staff, as well as contact information/introductions to other donor organisations with experience and models of relevance to the study.

EVAL contact person for the study is Henning Nøhr, the Evaluation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

ANNEX 2. SELECTED DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Andrews, Matt et al (2015): Building capability by delivering results: Putting Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) principles into practice. In A Governance Practitioner's Notebook: Alternative Ideas and Approaches. OECD.

Danida 2014: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danida Country Programme for Kenya

Danida 2015: Grant Committee meeting minutes, October 2015, Kenya Country Programme

Danida 2016: Denmark-Myanmar Country Programme 2016 – 2020; Country Programme Document

Danida 2016: Development Engagement Document Denmark-Myanmar Country Programme 2016 – 2020, Thematic Programme: Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth; Engagement: Sustainable Coastal Fisheries

Danida 2016: Letter of Invitation, Tender of Real-Time Evaluation of the Danish Support to Sustainable Coastal Fisheries in Myanmar.

Danida 2016, Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of the Danish Support to Sustainable Coastal Fisheries in Myanmar.

Danida 2016: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of Danida Market Development Partnerships 2016-2020.

Danida 2016: Strategic Programme Management and M&E Support, Kenya Country Programme

Danida 2016: Mali Country Programme Document, draft version October 2016, Annex D, budget at output level.

Danida: Terms of Reference, Real-Time Evaluation of Mali Country Programme 2017-2022 (no date)

Danida 2017: Updated Programme Document, Danida Market Development Partnerships Programme, 2017-2020; final draft, April 2017

Danida 2017: Minutes, discussion between Mali RTE team and Danida HQ

Danida, 2018: Terms of Reference: Use of Country Programme Real-Time Evaluations –Lessons learned

Danida 2019: Mid-term Review Report, Myanmar Country Programme 2016-2020

Danida 2019: Thematic Discussion Paper: Doing Development Differently, submitted to the Council for Development Policy, November 2019 (Danish version).

Grønbech 2019: Note for RTE seminar for the RTE of Danida's Market Development Partnership

ITAD 2016: Real-Time Evaluation of Danida's Kenya Country Programme, Inception Report

ITAD, 2018: Scoping Discussion Note - Devolution and local accountability assessment for Danida Country Programme Kenya.

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Pasanan, Tiina (2020): Getting intentional about M&E: choosing suitable approaches for adaptive programmes. ODI.

Valters, Craig et al. (2016): "Putting learning at the centre – Adaptive development programming in practice". ODI. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10401.pdf

Young, Stacey (2014): CLA for More Effective Development Programs; USAID presentation. https://usaidlearninglab.org/qrg/understanding-cla-0

Puntons, Melanie and Richard Burge, 2018: Adaptive Programming in Fragile, Conflict and Violence-Affected Settings. What Works and Under What Conditions? The Case of PERL, Nigeria. Submitted by Itad and Oxfam as part of the DFID-funded Action for Empowerment and Accountability

Rogers, Patricia J (2008): Using Programme Theory to Evaluate Complicated and Complex Aspects of Interventions. Evaluation, Vol 14(1): 29-48; Sage Publications.