



2022 Annual Report on Evaluation – Selected Highlights

From the Director's desk

It has been a great six-month's dive into to the MFA's development evaluation function as a new director. Fortunately, it is more like a train on rails than a "mission impossible". The previous years of good work and efforts to develop evaluation capacity, culture and quality of the whole evaluation process by earlier directors and our professional team have laid solid foundations for our work. **Through this continuous progress, the function has earned an appreciation both for enhancing learning and for strengthening accountability.** The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) has quite strong evaluation culture.

We have a reason to be and a clear mandate that guides us. However there is always need and room for improvement. Our approach to strategic evaluations is participatory; we always **focus on timely evidence and emphasize ownership and usability of the evaluations.** For this reason, we can only do as many evaluations as the owners can meaningfully participate in.

Our review and metaevaluation underline that the findings and recommendations have been well received and applied at the level they were directed to, but they also found out that the **knowledge created does not reach other potential users in and outside the MFA.** This limits our potential impact and lifecycle of our products.

This year with the help of the review we have commissioned on the use and utility of our strategic evaluations, **we will put emphasis on communicating more effectively and having more impact on development policy dialogue in and outside of our ministry.** The feedback also indicates that it is not enough that the reports and summaries are publicly available, but we need to facilitate search engine and produce new kinds of tailored information packages for different users, for example different kinds of meta and synthesis analyses.

How to maintain required coverage on the accountability and knowledge needs concerning development policy and cooperation? One way is to **have a variety of assessments, reviews and evaluative methods.** A strategic evaluation that takes a full year might not always be the best tool, at times more focused and timely process would work better. We are developing and piloting these methods and monitoring the value added they bring to our toolset.

Finally, we are also **piloting data science methods** in two evaluations. We are learning when and how they are most effective, the value they add to evidence and analyses. At the same time, we are testing what kind of service providers are capable to cater our field of work.

We strongly feel that the train is moving on and are happy to be on board with all the MFA colleagues and stakeholders of development evaluation function.

Antero Klemola
Director, Development Evaluation

Introduction

The most important task of the Development Evaluation Unit in the MFA is to provide the MFA with **useful and timely information as well as recommendations to improve development policy and cooperation**. In addition, we value international cooperation in the field of evaluations, which is an excellent way to learn and influence and which benefits the whole MFA.

In 2022, three policy level evaluations and one assessment were completed. In addition, we participated in the [Joint Evaluation of the Fundamental Rights of Refugees during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) and [System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Socio-economic Response to COVID-19](#).

Besides strategic evaluations, we support development of evaluation capacity and culture both in Finland and in partner countries.

The 2022 Annual Report on Evaluation showcases the spectrum of our evaluation activities over the past year. This brief presents some selected highlights from the report that is available in Finnish on [the MFA's website](#).

Metaevaluation of Project and Programme Evaluations in 2017–2020

The purpose of the metaevaluation was to support the evaluation activities and learning of the MFA and to produce information for the Development Policy Results Report submitted to the Parliament. The metaevaluation included project and programme evaluation reports completed in 2017–2020 and their Terms of references (ToRs).

The metaevaluation consisted of three parts: 1) quality of the evaluations and their ToR, 2) lessons learned and recommendations made in the evaluations, and quality of the content of development cooperation, and 3) usability and usefulness of the evaluations.

The metaevaluation showed that approximately half of the evaluation reports were satisfactory in quality, and a few were essentially incomplete. Weaknesses were found in methodology and in high-quality and evidence-based findings. In addition, there was room for improvement in the evaluation criteria of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), especially in the assessment of coherence, sustainability and effectiveness.

However, the evaluation reports were fairly reliable as they included a comprehensive context analysis and sufficient data collection. **There were no qualitative differences between evaluations commissioned by the MFA and other actors.**

Two out of three ToRs were satisfactory in quality. There is a clear link between the ToR and the quality of

the report: **a good ToR produces higher-quality evaluation reports**. The ToRs described well the purpose, objectives and evaluation questions. The biggest shortcomings were related to evaluation methods and the systematic consideration of cross-cutting objectives and human rights-based approach (HRBA). The metaevaluation showed that while evaluation guidelines are available, they are not followed.

All in all, the quality of development cooperation projects was deemed fairly good. Approx. 20% of the projects are of high quality, approx. 60% are of moderately high quality and approx. 20% are of low quality. **The strengths of Finland's development cooperation include relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. Sustainability, coherence and impact need improvements the most.** The main development policy priorities, cross-cutting objectives and HRBA have not been comprehensively covered in the projects or their evaluations. Gender equality is covered the best.

The majority of the evaluation reports were deemed useful, but the information remains at the individual level and does not benefit the organisation more widely. The timeliness of the evaluations and the relevance and feasibility of the recommendations were generally assessed as good.

The metaevaluation recommended to improve knowledge-based management to promote internal learning in the MFA and to enhance the usefulness of the evaluations. The MFA should also ensure that the instructions for drawing up the ToRs for the evaluations are followed. Development cooperation projects should pay more attention to sustainability, coherence and impact as well as cross-cutting objectives and HRBA. The units responsible for projects and programmes should ensure that the lessons and recommendations captured in the evaluation reports are implemented.

Catalysing Change – Finland's Humanitarian Assistance 2016–2022

The purpose of the evaluation was to **assess the management and administration of humanitarian aid and to give recommendations on how to improve their effectiveness**. The evaluation examined the importance of different partnerships and cooperation in Finland's humanitarian aid and studied to what extent Finland has been able to promote its humanitarian policy priorities through different partners.

The evaluation also examined the relevance of Finland's humanitarian assistance in relation to the beneficiaries' needs and the link between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation and peacebuilding. The results were also assessed from the

viewpoint of the recipients. In general, the evaluation stated that Finland's assistance responds to the needs of people in distress.

The evaluation showed that the **assistance provided by Finland follows humanitarian principles**, which is particularly important in order to avoid politicization of humanitarian assistance. Finland's **support for gender equality and the inclusion of persons with disabilities**, for example, contributed to its good reputation.

The key conclusion of the evaluation was that **Finland's choice to channel the majority of humanitarian funding through multilateral organizations specialised in humanitarian aid is correct**, but the number of organisations should be reduced. Similarly, the **importance of Finnish civil society organisations in channelling aid is worth preserving**, but practices related to the management of funding should be streamlined.

Another main observation was that the **amount of Finnish humanitarian assistance has not increased in relation to the global need for assistance**, which threatens the relevance of Finnish assistance. The evaluation also stressed that humanitarian work and its principles are not sufficiently well known within the MFA.

The evaluation made **eight recommendations to improve the effectiveness of Finland's humanitarian assistance**. The recommendations are both at strategic and operational level. The evaluation recommended streamlining allocations to a more limited number of multilateral agencies and adopting a more strategic approach to civil society engagement in humanitarian assistance. At the operational level, the recommendations include clarifying thematic focus areas, better monitoring of results and promoting awareness of Finland's humanitarian assistance policy.

Evaluation of the Finnish Development Policy Influencing in the European Union

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of the MFA's influence on the European Union (EU) and its institutions in 2014–2021. The **evaluation aims to support the MFA's learning and the effectiveness of multilateral influencing**. It examined some key EU negotiation processes in these years, such as Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2019, the new funding instrument (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument; NDICI), the negotiations and the Team Europe approach. In addition, the evaluation had Nepal, Tanzania and Ukraine as country cases and collected experiences of influencing from six peer countries.

The evaluation showed that **Finland's process of exerting influence within the EU is relevant, consistent, reasonably efficient and fluent**. The practical implementation of Finland's policy for influencing the EU generally operates well, and **Finland makes good use of the opportunities and mechanisms commonly used for this advocacy work**. The evaluation harvested **18 outcomes in advocacy work**. A quarter of them involved policy shifts endorsed by the three key EU institutions and is therefore of major significance.

During both the process moments of the EU Presidency and the NDICI-GE negotiations Finland successfully achieved various outcomes it was seeking. The EU Presidency was an important moment during the evaluation period where the MFA officials could showcase their organisational skills, which was widely acknowledged. Finland regularly and proactively participates in other governance structures in EU settings, be it working groups in Brussels or other EU coordination groups in Europe or in partner countries. However, only some limited instances emerged of EU financial decisions at the partner country level that have clearly been in line with Finnish interests.

Finland is considered to be extremely competent in building coalitions and to engage in good cooperation with the European Commission. Representatives of the Member states and EU institutions also considered Finns well organised and prepared, professional, honest and very easy to approach. Finland's long-term and constantly evolving approach and strong experience were also assessed positively. Finland has built a positive image for itself in development cooperation.

Finland's positions on policy issues are generally well known and it has **a well-recognised leading and influencing role particularly in the areas of gender equality, human rights-based approach and social inclusion and support for Africa**. In addition to these thematic priority areas, forestry and education are sectors where Finland's expertise is widely recognized and respected. Equally, its **know-how and stance on disability inclusion is recognised, but less prominent**, which may partly be explained by the contrasting use made of coalitions in this area (low) relative to gender equality (high). Equally, climate action emerged as a less prominent feature of Finland's profile, though this may be because MFA activities in climate diplomacy only increased towards the end of the evaluation period.

The **MFA's EU influencing strategies are coherent with its development policy** and generally well understood, **but they are complex, not always well focused, and prioritised, nor always farsighted enough**.

Institutionalised Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems are almost non-existent.

The evaluation recommended that the MFA further expands the strategic use of the EU as a cooperation

and influencing channel, through strong leadership and clearer priorities; forward-looking influencing strategies; increased staff skills; presence and engagement; supportive organisational management and coordination set up; collaboration with stakeholders; and organisational learning mechanisms in support of strategizing on EU influencing.

From Reactivity to Resilience – Assessment of the Response of Finnish Development Policy and Cooperation to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The assessment studied the MFA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to learn from it and thereby **enhance MFA's ability to respond and adapt development policy and co-operation and humanitarian assistance in crisis situations.**

The assessment covered both the acute and early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and elements of the longer-term response to build forward. It focused on the period from March 2020 up till the end of 2021.

The MFA's activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic were analysed along six dimensions: 1) financial response, 2) policy dialogue response, 3) policies and procedures, 4) risk management, 5) knowledge management, and 6) staff.

The assessment concluded that MFA's **COVID-19 pandemic response was relevant both with respect to – and beyond – Finland's explicit development policy priorities and changed partner country needs.** While health is not an explicit development policy priority, Finland nevertheless mobilised significant funding for vaccines. Within its parameters, the **MFA's COVID-19 pandemic response was quick and flexible.**

Coherence was ensured by building on MFA's long-term strengths in policy dialogue and influencing, partnerships with multilateral organisations and coordination with like-minded countries and by adding new elements like Team Europe.

The assessment found that **the response owes a large debt to the motivated, devoted and at times overburdened staff.** The resulting increased workload and the pandemic strained managers and staff in embassies and in Helsinki, but the organization could not fully secure the safety and well-being of all staff despite efforts made.

The **assessment recommended** to enhance crises response by integrating crisis response in development policy; clarify the decision-making structure; enhance information sharing; rely on multi-bi but also transfer authority and responsibility towards local stakeholders; bridging the knowledge gap on the impact of the pandemic; and enhancing staff resilience during the crises.

Development of evaluation capacity and culture

We **promoted evaluation capacity development** with [Global Evaluation Initiative \(GEI\)](#), [International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation \(IOCE\)](#) and [EvalPartners](#) in order to cooperate with partner countries to enhance the use of good evidence and data for decision-making.

Furthermore, we advanced the **evaluation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, in partnership with the UNICEF, German Institute for Development Evaluation (Deval), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and EVALSDGs, by developing [a guidebook on how to evaluate the SDGs](#). The guidance has been complemented by a series of workshops and other knowledge products.

Our mandate includes **enhancement of evaluation culture and capacities in the MFA.** We have a [web-based evaluation manual](#) and an [on-line basic course](#) that are open to all. Furthermore, we organize face-to-face evaluation training to complement the web-based training and to deepen knowledge in certain evaluation topic. In 2022 the topic was digital tools and data science.

We carry out our evaluations through a framework contract with Particip-Niras consortium. This arrangement also includes **Emerging Evaluator Programme** that provides an opportunity to participate in evaluations as part of the team and to enhance evaluation capacity and thereby build new evaluation professionals.

Ongoing and upcoming evaluations

Ongoing evaluations:

- Influencing through development communications
- Right to education, right to learning. Evaluation of the education sector
- Human rights and a human rights-based approach in development policy and cooperation
- Finland's international climate finance
- Finland's initiatives focused on enhanced domestic resources mobilization (DRM)

Others:

- Review of the use and utility of centralized evaluations
- Review of the MFA's support to international recruitment
- Strategic Joint Evaluation of the Collective International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Response to COVID-19

Upcoming reviews to be started in 2023:

- Meta-analysis of country programmes
- Review of development policy as part of foreign and security policy

For the full annual report and evaluation reports, see [MFA's website](#).