

BLUE DEAL Mid-Term Review Final Report

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CONTENTS

I	REPORT	
	Acronyms and abbreviations	4
	Executive summary	5
1	Introduction	16
1.1	The Blue Deal	16
1.2	Objectives and scope of the MtR	16
1.3	Reflection on the MtR results obtained	17
1.4	Report structure	18
2	Methodology	19
2.1	Evaluation questions	20
2.2	Approach and methods	23
2.3	The MtR team	26
3	Context analysis	27
3.1	Increased attention for climate change in international development	27
3.2	The COVID-19 pandemic, from emergency response to resilient recovery	28
3.3	What next?	31
4	Findings at programme level	32
4.1	Coherence and relevance	32
4.2	Effectiveness	39
4.3	Efficiency	53
4.4	Sustainability	59
5	Findings at partnership level	63
	Part A: OECD criteria	65
5.1	Coherence	65
5.2	Relevance	66
5.3	Effectiveness	67
5.4	Efficiency	69
5.5	Sustainability	71
5.6	Part B: What can we learn for the future?	73
6	Estimating impact	76
6.1	Introduction	76
6.2	Challenges	76
6.3	Way forward	77
7	Conclusions and recommendations	79
7.1	Main conclusions	79
7.2	Headline reflection on the way forward	81
7.3	The way forward: recommendations and suggestions	82
II	ANNEXES	
Annex 1	The evaluation matrix	93
Annex 2	List of organisations/ persons consulted	103
Annex 3	Survey questions	104
Annex 4	Number of respondents on the survey	113
Annex 5	Partnership reports on the MtR results	115
	Case study partnerships	116
	ABBAY Ethiopia Blue Deal Partnership	116
	Awash Ethiopia Blue Deal Partnership	123
	Blue Deal FASO-KOOM Partnership	131
	InspirAgua, Blue Deal Partnership - Colombia.	141
	PWA-DWA Partnership - Palestinian Territories	151
	Blue dragon Mekong Delta – Vietnam	162

Non-case study partnerships	169
All Hands on Deck (AHD) Partnership -Eswatini	169
GHANA BLUE DEAL PARTNERSHIP	174
Tana Kenya Blue Deal Partnership	179
DJI DON PARTNERSHIP – MALI	183
Peru Blue Deal Partnership	190
Romania blue deal partnership	196
South Africa Blue Deal Partnership	200
Mozambique Blue Deal Partnership	204
Annex 6 Literature review	210

I Report

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Acronyms and abbreviations

- Blue Deal Penvoerders: Dutch project leaders of the partnerships
- Blue Deal governance comprises the Blue Deal Steering Committee (SC), the Blue Deal opdrachtgevers overleg (OO), WINTER and CINTER. In this report when referring to the Blue Deal governance this includes the SC and the OO, unless specified differently.
- CINTER: DWA committee for international affairs
- DWA: Dutch Water Authorities, the international branch of the United Water Authorities (UvW: Unie van Waterschappen), which unites 21 individual water boards in the Netherlands (Dutch water boards).
- FTE: Full-time equivalent
- GoN: Government of the Netherlands
- IGG: Department for Inclusive Green Growth. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- IWC: Interministerial Water Cluster
- IWRM: Integrated Water Resources Management
- I&W: Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management
- MoFA: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- MtR: Mid-term review
- NGO: Non-governmental organisation
- (N)IWA: (Netherlands) International Water Ambition
- NWB (Fund): Netherlands Water Boards Bank (Fund)
- ODA: Official Development Assistance
- OO: Opdrachtgeversoverleg
- PLs: Dutch project leaders of the Blue Deal partnership
- PMO: Programme Management Office
- PvW: Partners for Water
- SC: Blue Deal Steering Committee (Stuurgroep)
- SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
- ToC: Theory of Change
- UvW: Union of Water Authorities in the Netherlands
- Waterschap: Dutch water authority
- UN: United Nations
- UvW: Union of Water Authorities
- WASH: Water, sanitation and hygiene
- WINTER: Working Group International of the Dutch Water Authorities

Executive summary

The Blue Deal and the Mid-term review (MtR) purpose

The Blue Deal is a joint international programme of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (I&W) and the Dutch water authorities (DWA) that aims to contribute to clean, safe and sufficient water for 20 million people in 40 catchment areas by 2030. The programme started in 2018 and runs to the end of 2030 and is presently implemented through 16 partnerships in 14 countries.

The Blue Deal partnerships aim to strengthen good water management through knowledge and expertise development, organisational strengthening, and cooperation with key stakeholders in the partnership's countries.

The main purpose of the MtR is to assess the extent to which the Blue Deal programme and its partnerships have the potential to reach the Blue Deal's ambition, and identify lessons learned and practical recommendations – including quick wins – to improve the programme in moving forward. The results of the MtR are expected to feed into the design and improve the next phases of the programme.

Reflection on MtR results

The MtR results give good insights into the potential of the Blue Deal at the programme level. At the partnership level, the MtR team obtained a generic impression on the performance of the partnerships and how partnership development is evolving. However, the MtR team considers it too early to evaluate their individual performance.

Methodology

The analytical framework is based on the OECD evaluation criteria (coherence and relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability), and includes elements of the 5C model for organisational capacity, and some key features for effective partnerships. An evaluation matrix (see Annex 1) was developed that outlines the main evaluation questions, the corresponding approach, data collection methods, and sources of information for each of the criteria.

The MtR included the review of 14 partnerships in 13 countries. Out of the 14 partnerships, six were selected for a more in-depth review, the so-called case study partnerships: Colombia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia Awash, Ethiopia Abbay, Vietnam, and the Palestinian territories. In the selection of the case study partnerships, we strived for a good balance between geographical area, scale of the partnership, thematic focus, maturity of the partnership, country's governance, budget size, and coverage of different implementing boards.

Different methods and tools were used for data collection and assessment by the MtR at the programme level and for the review of the individual partnerships. At the programme level, it included (i) a desk review of Blue Deal documents and a literature review, (ii) interviews with 14 key informants, including representatives of the Blue Deal governance bodies, the Programme Management Office (PMO), and external stakeholders, and (iii) a focus group discussion with participation of Blue Deal project leaders (PLs).

Data collection at the partnership level comprised a centrally-managed survey that generated more than 300 responses from Blue Deal staff, country partners and stakeholders, a document review, and a focus group discussion with participation of DWA staff, country partners and relevant

stakeholders. For the review of the case study partnerships, additional information was collected by interviewing selected key informants.

The MtR has been implemented between November 2020 to April 2021 by a core team comprising Erma Uytewaal (team leader, MDF), René van Lieshout (institutional expert, IRC), and Mark van der Boon (MtR research assistant, MDF) and six regionally-based consultants who conducted the MtR of one or more Blue Deal partnerships.

Context analysis

Two recent trends of high relevance for the water sector and for the Blue Deal are identified and briefly, not comprehensively, described. Those concern the increased international attention to climate change in development cooperation, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The MtR notes that an explicit and documented context analysis for the Blue Deal is not available and considers that a solid context analyses by the Blue Deal partners would be helpful for reconfirming the Blue Deal’s vision and ambition and development of its (operational) strategies.

Main findings at the programme level

The findings at the programme level are visualised in the table below, showing the Blue Deal performance for each of the OECD criteria. The performance scoring should be mainly interpreted as an indication of the potential of the Blue Deal.

Coherence and relevance	Least satisfactory	Partly satisfactory	Satisfactorily	Highly satisfactory
To what extent is the Blue Deal programme aligned with and does it contribute to the existing policy priorities?				
Is the Blue Deal Theory of Change (ToC) instrumental in ensuring coherence in programme implementation?				
How well is the BD programme doing in networking and ensuring synergies with other relevant organisations or initiatives?				
Effectiveness				
What are the results achieved with the programme so far?				
To what extent are the recommendations in the inception report followed up?				
To what extent has the Blue Deal programme and its partnerships adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic?				
What (potential) contribution does the Blue Deal bring to the DWA and the Dutch water sector?				
How effective is the Blue Deal partnership and its added value for each of the Blue Deal partners and the water sector (in the Netherlands, the partner countries and internationally)?				
How effective are the PMO and the programme support functions, including the role of the coaches and the review panel?				
Functioning and capacities of the PLs				
Learning programme and professionalisation of the DWA				
How adaptive is the Blue Deal programme?				
Efficiency				

Are the Blue Deal governance and decision-making processes conducive for efficient programme implementation?				
Is the Blue Deal budget efficiently used?				
Does the Blue Deal have an adequate financial strategy?				
How cost efficiently operates the PMO?	<i>Not scored</i>			
How efficient is the annual planning and budgeting process?				
Sustainability				
Does the Blue Deal have a solid vision and adequate strategies for country partners engagement?				
Are the priority thematic areas successfully adopted by the programme?				
Are the communications successfully contributing to the Blue Deal strategic goals?				

The justification of the scores is described in the following sections.

Coherence and relevance. The MtR finds that the alignment of the Blue Deal with each of the Blue Deal partners’ policy priorities (contribution to professionalisation of staff of the Dutch water boards, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 and the Netherlands International Water Ambition (NIWA)) offers a strong potential win-win situation for the partners and a good fundament of the Blue Deal programme and partnership. This potential has been insufficiently exploited during programme design and implementation so far.

Not all of the policy priorities are fully reflected by the Blue Deal vision and ambition, and in its operational strategies. The Blue Deal ambition to ensure 20 million people in 40 catchment areas with clean, sufficient, and safe water does not sufficiently explicitly include the expected contribution of the programme to the Dutch water sector and improving water governance internationally. Strategic choices are not sufficiently made, or they are overruled in the inception phase, resulting in a bottom-up (and partnership-led) demand-driven approach in which the Blue Deal’s contribution to the broader policy goals (such as the NIWA and the SDGs) is not evident.

The Blue Deal’s Theory of Change (ToC) reflects the outcomes and intervention logic for the Blue Deal within the scope mentioned above. The ToC is a useful instrument for developing the planning, monitoring, reporting and coaching tools for the partnerships, and it supports the PLs in translating the longer-term results-based approach in project management of the partnerships. The ToC is missing a dimension of outcomes at the programme level and it is not yet sufficiently owned by the Blue Deal governance as a useful tool for regular reflection on the programme’s course.

Blue Deal networking activities and synergies at the programme level with other relevant programmes and actors take place, but they appear to be ad hoc, without a clear vision of the benefits to be achieved. The MtR sees ample scope for extending the outreach activities to the governance level by more actively using the ministries’ networks in the Netherlands and internationally.

Effectiveness. Most progress has been achieved in building the partnerships and with the professionalisation of the DWA staff involved in international development projects. However, progress towards the policy priorities of the ministries is less evident. Progress at the programme level is not monitored.

The recommendations in the inception report received extensive attention by the Blue Deal governance including the Steering Committee (SC), Opdrachtgevers Overleg (OO), and the PMO, albeit without bringing them to a conclusion. For example, the lack of clarity on the annual planning and budgeting processes has been a recurrent point on the agenda of all Blue Deal platforms.

The Blue Deal programme – particularly the Blue Deal partnerships – responded well to the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnerships discovered the added value of digital working and most processes have continued, albeit with delay. Progress and impact of the pandemic was monitored closely by PMO. However, the Blue Deal leadership did not provide strong guidance to the programme concerning how it should capitalise on the experiences for adjusting the 2021 planning and/or approach.

The Blue Deal partnership performance at the programme level is not yet satisfactory. The three partners – DWA and the two ministries – are driven by a common impact vision and an assumed complementarity of their capacities and strengths. However, this joint ambition is not sufficiently owned by the three partners in terms of agreed roles and responsibilities. Beyond the financial commitment, the contribution of the ministries to the implementation of the programme is not yet evident.

In relation to the above, the MtR identified various examples that show the added value of the Blue Deal for the DWA and individual Dutch water authorities. However, the added value of the Blue Deal for the ministries is yet less clear. What is the Blue Deal contributing to the Dutch water sector, the NIWA, and leveraging the knowledge for the SDGs beyond the immediate impact?

The MtR finds the drive by the strongly dedicated and passionate staff – including the admirable ability of the programme manager to keep all parties connected – a strong asset of the PMO. The PMO provided support in identifying and setting up the partnerships and plays an important role in keeping the programme going, despite a clear strategic direction provided by the Blue Deal governance. However, fulfilment of its functions is under pressure as existing capacities, systems and human capacities (fts) in the PMO do not match with the demand on the PMO for managing an international development programme of the Blue Deal's magnitude. The PMO's effective functioning is also hampered by its limited mandate and a complex governance structure that adds to the PMO's burden.

The MtR finds that the coaches make a positive contribution to the professionalisation of the DWA staff, particularly to skills development of the PLs in planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting. Their activities partly overlap with the role of the programme manager and the review panel. A clear definition and synchronisation of the coaches' role in the DWA learning programme is lacking. Employment of an external review panel was also useful in contributing to professionalising the PLs. However, this also partly overlaps with the responsibilities of the coaches, and it is not an explicit part of the Blue Deal learning programme. The need for the panel in the second phase of the programme will need to be re-assessed.

The PLs are mostly highly content-driven professionals who are enthusiastic about mutual learning and are not necessarily selected for their project management skills. This raises the question of whether the right people are always doing the right things, and a reshuffling of responsibilities might make the programme more effective and efficient.

Important steps have been taken in the implementation of the learning programme that are complementary to other DWA efforts to professionalise DWA staff in international development.

The programme's success is difficult to measure as it is not based on a solid capacity development needs assessment among DWA staff, nor does it have clear parameters for monitoring its results. The learning programme – financed by the NWB fund – is mainly driven by the DWA and not an integrated part of the Blue Deal programme, and it is not owned by all partners. The connection and potential synergies with other learning initiatives such as employment of the coaches and the review panel are not explicit.

The Blue Deal M&E framework is increasingly used for reflection in the partnerships. At the programme level, to date the Blue Deal leadership has not used their governance platforms for reflection and adaptive management. The earlier-described experience with the COVID-19 pandemic is an example of a missed opportunity by the Blue Deal governance to steer change in programme conceptualisation and/or implementation.

Efficiency. The MtR concludes that the governance and decision-making processes are partly satisfactory. The Blue Deal's broad governance structure was beneficial to ensure ownership for the programme by the DWA, but it also added to the complexity of the decision-making process and is causing confusion between the Blue Deal and DWA interests. The Blue Deal's complex governance structure – with overlapping mandates – makes the decision-making process too heavy and slow, hindering flexibility and timely decision-making.

Steps have been taken in improving operational financial management by the partnerships. The employment of fourteen young professionals through the YEP programme is a positive example of leveraging the Blue Deal's financial resources.

The MtR considers that the consequences of the decision to include all nineteen partnerships from the start have not been sufficiently thought through and translated into realistic parameters and guidelines for operational financial management, particularly by the partnerships.

Most of the assumptions for financing of the Blue Deal programme – as stipulated in the Blue Deal framework document – have been overruled during the inception phase. Those initial ideas on the mid- and longer-term financing of the programme have not been updated and a comprehensive vision and strategy on the Blue Deal's financing is not available.

There is a process in place with formats and guidelines and the PLs receive extensive support in the planning and budgeting process. At the same time, the annual planning and budgeting process makes a disproportionate large claim on the Blue Deal in terms of time and financial resources.

Sustainability. The setup of the Blue Deal is mainly driven from a Dutch perspective with little room for country partners' engagement, and it risks a disconnect with the expectations regarding the longer-term role and ownership by the country partners. A common vision and the necessary strategies for the long-term engagement of the country partners are not available yet.

The priority themes (gender and poverty reduction, innovations, climate change and sustainability) are important conditions for sustainable water governance. Some good steps have been taken for the introduction of these prioritised thematic areas, but the thematic areas are not an integrated part of the Blue Deal programme and the relation with the Blue Deal ambition is unclear. They also lack an operational strategy with defined results.

The communications activities are important for ensuring continued ownership for the Blue Deal programme by the governance of the Dutch water boards and in support of dissemination and

uptake of the Blue Deal results. The MtR concludes that despite the limited resources, the communication activities have satisfactorily contributed to establishing the Blue Deal brand. However, the MtR also considers that the communication activities are a largely undervalued key element of the Blue Deal programme that urgently needs appropriate and dedicated resources and a strategy and plan for more directed activities, targeting prioritised Dutch and internationally-based stakeholders (audiences).

Main findings at the partnership level

The review focused on the quality of the partnerships and the relevance for improved water governance in the countries in the long term, using the OECD evaluation criteria. The report presents the overarching findings from across partnerships. The review reports of the individual partnerships can be found in Annex 5.

Coherence. The partnerships have a strong internal and external coherence, in which some form of local participation in the water governance processes is seen as a determining factor for success. In several cases, the coordination with other programmes is already taking shape. There are also signs (for example, the Ethiopian partnerships) that actively establishing this coordination and collaboration with other initiatives may be crucial for maintaining the coherence and relevance for the sector.

Relevance. All partnerships and their activities are currently relevant for the national water governance challenges. However, concerns are also raised concerning whether the partnership will be able to make a difference for the issues that they are focusing on, in particular for those with smaller budgets. Creating leverage with other programmes and funding seems crucial to maintain the relevance of the partnerships in the longer term. Another factor contributing to long-term relevance is being well connected with national institutions and political agendas, which is not always the case yet (Colombia, Romania, Ethiopia).

Effectiveness. A formalised embedding of the partnership in the national water governance processes in the countries is a strong tool for influencing the policies and bringing lessons to scale. The example of Burkina Faso of creating a programme steering group is an interesting example to keep following. Another emerging element across the partnerships is that the partnerships may increase their effectiveness by placing capacity strengthening, learning and exchange in a more central position and as a comprehensive element and goal of the partnership.

Efficiency. The MtR team has no judgement on the efficiency of the partnerships in general. Too many partnerships remain in a phase of starting up implementation and therefore it is too early to conduct an assessment. At this stage of the programme, most of the important efficiency issues for the partnerships are discussed in the findings at the programme level.

Sustainability. The important conditions for sustainability of joint ownership and a shared vision are present in most but not all partnerships. The fact that the programme has a long-term commitment is also mentioned by different partnerships as a contributing factor for a sustainable partnership. The Blue Deal focus themes are not (yet) prioritised by the partnerships, while they are comfortable finding each other in their natural themes of sustainability and climate resilience. It is encouraging that several the partnerships have started building strategic alliances to leverage impact, in which there is a potential supporting role of the Dutch embassies and coordination with Dutch-funded programmes via RvO and WaterWorX.

Areas for improvement of the partnerships

National embedding: There is not always a sufficiently strong link with national water governance stakeholders (yet). **Sector communication:** The communication of the partnerships to the sector in the country with other stakeholders who are outside the direct partnership is often a weak point. **Mandate and roles of partners:** In some partnerships, the expectations about roles and mandate are not sufficiently clarified yet. **Linking with other stakeholders:** Closely related to the point about the need to improve sector communication is the need to strengthen the in-country networks, which has been insufficient to date. The causes mentioned are different from partnership to partnership.

Effectiveness of capacity strengthening: Some partnerships had higher expectations from capacity-strengthening activities. Although it is recognised that the impossibility of conducting face-to-face capacity strengthening has played a major role due to the pandemic, it was also mentioned that insufficient time was dedicated to the activity. **Small investments:** The fact that the partnerships have no funding available for small (innovative or quick problem-solving) investments is seen as a threat for the long-term local commitment by quite a few partnerships.

Coordination: Coordination of the partnership is mentioned as a challenge by many of the partnerships. However, the nature of the challenges differs from the lack of time of the project leader to a lack of clear political/conceptual backing by the national sector leadership. **Capacity:** Besides the limited time availability and the perception of the relatively heavy process and management burden on the PLs, language skills of Dutch experts and limited capacity on the partner side to execute their role effectively are limiting factors.

Success factors

Vision and ownership: Almost without exception, the partnerships claim a high level of ownership over a strong shared long-term vision, which is the main source of energy and provides confidence in making the partnerships successful. **Alignment with national policies:** The partnerships have in general a good fit with national policy priorities. **Continuity of in-country presence:** Many partnerships have pointed to the importance of realising continuity in presence and capacity in the countries of the partnerships. Examples include the employment of YEPs, residential Dutch managers, or local coordination and support. **Building leverage and collaboration with other stakeholders:** Some early successes with creating leverage through working with other programmes and stakeholders have been achieved.

Quick wins

Most partnerships identified several quick wins at their own level, which are mentioned in the partnership reports. These include using concrete success cases as examples for inspiration, bringing to scale training modules and guidelines, formalising mandate and partnerships, and developing partnership strategic communication plans.

Emerging lessons

Considering that most partnerships have only been in implementation for one year or less, it is early to draw already lessons. However, from the findings and early successes, the following lessons are emerging.

- For their long-term survival, the partnerships need to **invest in national embedding** through networking (also outside the water governance sector), strategic communication and creating leverage with other programmes.
- The integration and **use of local capacity** and anchoring the partnership in **national sector governance** to high-level (national) goals also have strong potential to contribute to this embedding and maintaining the high levels of enthusiasm and energy. This momentum will

likely benefit from **further maximising the participation of local partners** in governance, implementation and learning in the programme.

Main conclusions

The overall conclusion of the MtR is that the Blue Deal programme has strong potential to make a significant contribution to improved water governance and access to safe and clean water worldwide. Strong elements include the Blue Deal partner's commitment to unify their forces, the agreement on a common set of policy priorities, and the positive energy around the programme, particularly around the partnerships in the countries. These elements set a strong basis for the programme's potential.

However, weaknesses in the conceptualisation and setup of the programme jeopardise the programme delivering on its ambition. The identified overarching weaknesses include:

- **Lack of clarity about the Blue Deal ambition and strategic direction.** Having clarity about all elements of the Blue Deal ambition and its integration in the corresponding strategies is important for keeping the overall direction and maintaining the positive energy of all programme partners.
- **Sub-optimum leverage of the Blue Deal partnership.** The lack of clarity on the nature of the Blue Deal programme, the implementation model to be adopted, and the role of the partners in its implementation are limiting factors to the partnership performance. The programme therefore risks missing the opportunity to leverage the full value of the partnership.
- **Limited decisiveness and leadership by the Blue Deal governance.** Currently, the governance bodies are focused on a control function instead of taking proactive leadership. Blue Deal governance and the Blue Deal partnerships operate at a distance from each other. Progress and enthusiasm for the programme will be frustrated without a more agile structure that allows for adequate and timely decision-making, in which there is a stronger role for the Blue Deal governance in strategic leadership, and better options for connecting with the partnerships.
- **Performance of the PMO is under pressure.** However, fulfilment of its functions is under pressure as existing capacities, systems and human capacities (fts) in the PMO do not match the demand on the PMO to manage an international development programme of the Blue Deal's magnitude. Clarity on the role of the PMO and its functions versus an assessment of the required capacities will be needed.
- **Conflicting expectations on employment of the PLs.** Strengthening the Blue Deal PLs' management capacities draws relatively heavily on the programme resources. There is a tension between the DWA ambition to professionalise Dutch water authorities' staff in partnership development and management while expecting the PLs to focus and deliver on project management requirements. Another tension exists in the interest of the PLs, many of whom are content-driven experts. The different experiences and modalities with continued country presence are encouraging and merit further exploration.
- **Lack of a long-term vision on the partnerships in the countries.** The programme setup and systems are keeping the partnerships and particularly the country partners at a distance. The programme is mainly conceptualised and driven from a "Dutch" perspective. A clear vision on country partners' engagement and longer-term partnership development beyond achieving the beneficiary targets by 2030 is not available. Without a clear vision and a translation into

explicit results at the programme level, the longer-term sustainability of the partnerships and results are at stake.

- **Insufficient capacity to learn and adapt.** At the partnership level, learning and adapting is enabled through the M&E framework, which includes reflection moments among the partners in the partnerships. At the programme level, the Blue Deal governance has mainly been preoccupied with operational matters, and a higher-level reflection (zooming out) on the programme direction and functioning of the programme partnership has yet not been prioritised by the Blue Deal governance. Without a stronger learning culture in the Blue Deal across all of its levels, the programme will not be able to adjust sufficiently quickly to new opportunities and threats.

Headline reflection on the way forward

The overall conclusion is that the Blue Deal programme has strong potential to make a significant contribution to improved water governance and access to safe and clean water worldwide. At the same time, the MtR also identified weaknesses in the programme's conceptualisation and design that risks limiting the Blue Deal from reaching its ambition and achieving its full potential. The sustainability of the programme results is also at stake, as the programme lacks a vision and strategy that supports longer-term ownership for the programme results by the responsible authorities in the partner countries.

The main challenges for the Blue Deal to reach its full potential find their root causes in the lack of clarity in the conceptualisation and the gaps in the setup of the programme. This relates to the need for clarification on a number of fundamental questions by the partnership.

The MtR's main recommendation is to create sufficient space for reflection, clarify and agree on some of the fundamental issues, make the necessary strategic choices and develop the corresponding strategies before outlining and embarking on phase 2.

The fundamental questions to be addressed are as follows:

- What is the partnership's joint vision on the Blue Deal's contribution to the water sector? What are the partners' expectations towards the Blue Deal's added value for the Dutch water sector, the international water sector and in the Blue Deal partner countries?
- What kind of partnership (at the programme level) does the Blue Deal want to be? Will it be more than a traditional subsidy programme, and – if so – what is the extra aspect? What is realistically possible and how do the partners (DWA, IGG and I&W) fulfil their roles?
- How does the partnership want to position the Blue Deal in the Netherlands and internationally, and with whom and why is the Blue Deal going to work together?
- What governance setup is needed? What governance arrangements are needed that support the Blue Deal vision and enable strategic leadership, and unravel the Blue Deal and DWA symbiosis?
- How can the Blue Deal's learning strategy, communications and outreach strategy, and the financing strategy be linked to the Blue Deal's vision and ambition and make it part of the ToC?
- What do the decisions above mean for the ToC and related M&E framework?

- What do the above choices mean for the structure of the PMO, programme support functions and PL model?

The way forward: recommendations and suggestions

In line with the headline reflection and main recommendation described in the previous section, this section proposes alternatives or process and methodological suggestions for the way forward in addressing the fundamental issues identified in the previous chapter.

Clarify the Blue Deal's vision and ambition. The MtR recommends that the Blue Deal addresses the ambiguity around its ambition, referring to the expectations of the Blue Deal to contribute to the joint policy priorities, which suggests a broader role for the Blue Deal than what is reflected in the current Blue Deal ambition and approach. This clarity is needed to focus programme implementation and make the Blue Deal partnership more meaningful. Clarifying the ambitions is intimately connected with the decision on the nature of the Blue Deal Programme. This implies a common vision among the Blue Deal partners on how they see the Blue Deal programme contributing to the future of the water sector, nationally or worldwide.

Make the partnership more solid. The MtR recommends that the Blue Deal partners dedicate time and resources for improving the partnership functioning by making its foundation more solid. After the Blue Deal has clarified its ambition, the Blue Deal partners will be in a good position to define the kind of partnership it wishes to be. It is important that the ministries have their internal discussion about both their expectations and about what they realistically can contribute prior to or in parallel with the visioning exercise and defining the Blue Deal's ambition.

Update the strategic framework for programme implementation. Following the clarified ambition and partnership nature, the programme will need to update its ToC and strategic and M&E framework to guide its activities towards achieving results. The framework will need to incorporate advocacy, communication, financing and learning strategic choices by the partnership.

Simplify the governance structure and processes. To enhance the decisiveness and strategic leadership by the Blue Deal governance, the MtR recommends untangling the Blue Deal and DWA to enhance PMOs' mandate, and better position the Blue Deal governance for an enhanced strategic leadership role. It is also suggested to improve the connectedness between the Blue Deal governance and the partnerships, particularly on strategic matters.

Rethink the partnership management model. Independent of the direction that the Blue Deal adopts, the MtR recommends organising the management of the partnerships more professionally. It is important that rethinking the partnerships' management model happens with DWA and considers the DWA longer-term vision on their continued work in international development, beyond the Blue Deal. In-country presence and separating partnership development, project management, and content expert roles are options to be considered.

Make the country partners and partnerships a more integrated part of the Blue Deal vision and ambition. The MtR recommends working towards more ownership by the country partners by bestowing the partnerships a more strategic role in achieving the Blue Deal ambition and impact. This will require a joint and broadly supported vision by the Blue Deal partners on the partnerships' engagement in the longer term.

Institutionalise learning and adaptive management in the programme structure and processes. The MtR recommends that the Blue Deal partnership becomes more adaptive by placing learning

and reflection more central to the programme, aiming to foster more openness for learning and continuous reflection by all programme partners, across and at all levels. Linking learning directly to the Blue Deal vision and ambition will help this process.

1 Introduction

This document presents the results of the Blue Deal MtR, commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and implemented by MDF Training and Consultancy and IRC in the period from November 2020 until April 2021.

This introduction describes the background and purpose of the MtR and explains the scope of the review. It also includes a reflection on the results obtained by the MtR team. A description of the structure and main content of this report is presented at the end of this introduction.

1.1 The Blue Deal

The Blue Deal aims to contribute to clean, safe and sufficient water for 20 million people in 40 catchment areas by 2030. The programme is a joint international programme of the Dutch MoFA, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (I&W) and the DWA.

The programme started in 2018 and runs to the end of 2030, and it is implemented through sixteen¹ partnerships in fourteen countries. The partnerships between the DWA and country-based partners differ in size and form. Some are existing partnerships, while some are recently-formed partnerships for the purpose of the Blue Deal. The partnerships vary in the number and nature of their country partners, budget, and content focus.

The total estimated budget for the programme is €75 million. Programme implementation is structured in four main phases.

Phases	Inception phase 2018-2019	Phase 1 2019-2022	Phase 2 2023-2026	Phase 3 2027-2030
Budget €	1,942,500	16,060,000	26,260,000	26,260,000

Together with their country partners and the NWB fund, DWA finance 50% of the programme, mostly as an in-kind contribution. The other half is financed by the ministries.

The Blue Deal partnerships aim to strengthen good water management through knowledge and expertise development, organisational strengthening and through cooperation with key stakeholders in the partnership countries.

To reach its ambition, the partnerships work on strengthening the three crucial elements of good water management: sufficient knowledge and expertise, a well-functioning organisation and good cooperation with key stakeholders. These three elements are the basis of the ToC of the Blue Deal and provide the building blocks for reaching the mentioned goals in 2030.

1.2 Objectives and scope of the MtR

The main purpose of the MtR is to assess the extent to which the Blue Deal programme and its partnerships have the potential to reach the Blue Deal's ambition to enable 20 million people in 40

¹ The programme started with nineteen partnerships, three of which were stopped.

catchment areas to gain access to clean, sufficient, and safe water. Other objectives of the MtR include:

- To identify lessons learned and practical recommendation – including quick wins – to improve the programme in moving forward.
- To identify the potential of partnership-to-partnership learning at the partnership level, based on the partnership's strengths and weaknesses.

The results of the MtR are expected to feed into the design and improve the next phases of the programme.

Another objective of the MtR – which is independent of the review activities – is to develop a concept on meaningful measurement of the Blue Deal programme's impact.

The review is conducted at two levels:

- At the level of the Blue Deal programme, including the DWA, IGG and I&W partnership.
- At the level of the partnerships in the countries. The review included fourteen partnerships in thirteen countries that have been individually reviewed.

Based on the main review findings, the MtR identifies areas for improvement and suggestions for the way forward.

1.3 Reflection on the MtR results obtained

During implementation of the MtR, the team derive the following insights. Other than the quantitative target suggests, the Blue Deal ambition is **not** a hard target much depending on how the targets (and their quality) are interpreted. Measurement of the targets thus needs a qualitative explanation and underlines the importance of the OECD criteria for reviewing progress.

The OECD criteria of relevance, coherence and sustainability are helpful for gaining insights into the programme's potential to make a relevant and sustainable contribution to improved water governance (worldwide, in the partner countries and in the Netherlands). Assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency criteria are useful for insights into whether the right choices are made for achieving the Blue Deal's ambition, and whether the Blue Deal capacities and processes are adequate to deliver on the ambition.

The MtR results give good insights into the potential of the Blue Deal at the programme level, including the Blue Deal programme and the Blue Deal partnership. At the partnership level, the MtR team obtained a generic impression on the performance of the partnerships and how partnership development is evolving. However, the MtR team considers it too early to evaluate their individual performance. The partnerships only started in 2019, with some of them still in an initial stage of formalising their collaboration. Other factors include the COVID-19-related impact, which caused delays in partnerships' progress, as well as the limited time available for the review.

This report presents the main findings of the assessment, using the OECD criteria at the programme level and for the partnerships at the overarching level. It also includes quick wins, areas for improvement and emerging lessons learned based on the strengths and weaknesses of the partnerships. At the programme level, the MtR identifies critical choices to be made by the Blue Deal in advance of the next phase and provides some suggestions on next steps but does not define the choices and solutions.

1.4 Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** describes the methodology used to carry out the MtR, including the analytical framework and data sources.
- **Chapter 3** identifies two main trends and the way forward for a full context analysis.
- **Chapter 4** presents the main findings of the MtR at the programme level, structured around the OECD criteria.
- **Chapter 5** provides the results of the review of the partnerships, based on the OECD criteria. This section also includes areas for improvement, quick wins and emerging lessons learned in development of the partnerships.
- **Chapter 6** includes some thoughts on measuring the Blue Deal impact.
- **Section 7** presents the main conclusions of the MtR findings, includes the headline reflection on the way forward, and presents process and methodological suggestions for following up on the main findings.

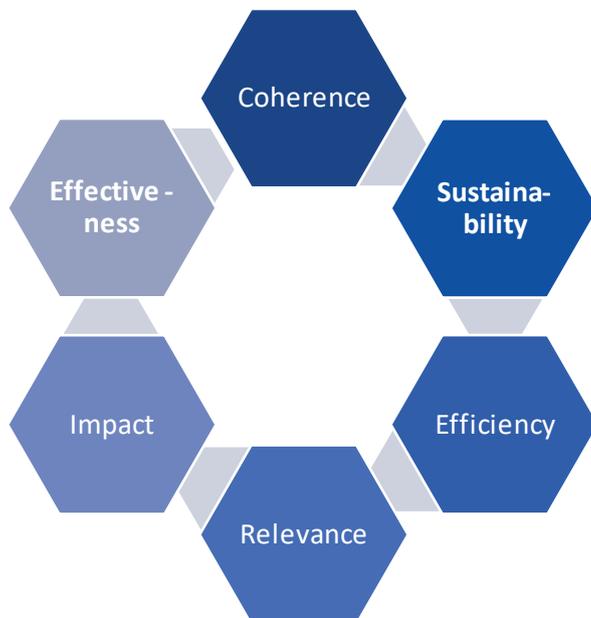
2 Methodology

This chapter describes the analytical framework, the main review questions, and the methods used for the MtR. It also includes information on the scheduling of the MtR activities and the team that was responsible for conducting the review.

2.1 Analytical framework

The primary guide in the MtR is the OECD evaluation criteria. As the programme is in its early stages, the MtR particularly focuses on the following three criteria:

- Coherence: How well does the intervention fit?
- Relevance: To what extent is the programme doing the right things to ensure its goals?
- Sustainability: Will the benefits/results last?



During the evaluation, it was found that it would also be relevant to focus on efficiency and effectiveness and that sufficient information would be available to contribute to the final conclusions on the Blue Deal's potential to reach its ambition.

- Efficiency: How well will the resources be used?
- Effectiveness: To what extent is the setup, organisation and methodology (potentially) effective?

The 5C model was useful to gain a better understanding of the organisational capacity development by the MtR. The 5C model includes the following criteria:

- Capacity to adapt and self-renew;
- Capacity to act and commit;
- Capacity to relate to external stakeholders;
- Capacity to achieve coherence;
- Motivation.

The 5C model was particularly helpful for formulating some additional evaluation questions. For the analysis of the results and particularly for assessing the potential of the partnership(s), the following seven key features² of effective partnerships provided useful guidance:

² Willetts, J., Winterford, K., Liera, C., and Dickin, S. (2020).

- shared vision;
- trust;
- participation;
- respect;
- legitimacy;
- mutual accountability; and
- rules of engagement.

These criteria have been used for analysing the individual partnerships and the Blue Deal partnership at the programme level.

2.1 Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions used in the MtR are based on the questions in the terms of reference and were further detailed during the inception phase. The questions have been classified per OECD criteria. An evaluation matrix (see Annex 1) was developed that outlines, the main evaluation questions, and the corresponding approach, data collection methods and sources for each OECD criteria.

Main evaluation question and sub-questions at the programme level:

Main question	Sub-questions
<i>Coherence and relevance</i>	
Question 1. To what extent is the Blue Deal Programme doing the right things to ensure its goals?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the Blue Deal working with Dutch and international partners and platforms to contribute to the positioning and network of the programme? 2. Did the Blue Deal programme design use an up-to-date analytical approach for participatory ToCs and programme development (starting from vision and understanding context, working backwards)? 3. Is the Blue Deal programme design based on relevant context information and was it used well to select countries and partners? 4. Does the ToC make causal steps and assumptions that were reasonable/logical at the beginning of the programme, and that still make sense? 5. Are the Blue Deal implementers (PLs) keeping track of context and performance information, feeding it to policy-makers (steering group) in a digestible form and providing opportunities for decision-making on adaptation?
<i>Effectiveness</i>	
Question 2. To what extent is the setup, organisation and methodology of the Blue Deal (potentially) effective?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 (@1): How does Blue Deal (steering group and programme office) view itself in the broader water sector and in relation to other water development programmes? What is the level of aspiration, ownership and determination? 2.2 (@2): Can the Blue Deal programme office deliver services for primary tasks (planning and control, monitoring and evaluation, coaching, the learning programme) that facilitate the partnerships? Does the programme office (facilitate) strategic planning and management? Has the programme office strong financial management? 2.3 (@2): Does Blue Deal have the methods/tools to assess whether the programme is on track to achieve its ambition? 2.4 (@3): What is done by the programme office to improve individual and partner learning, foster internal dialogue, reposition and reconfigure the partnership, incorporate new ideas, and map out a growth path? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is needed at the programme level to improve incorporation of cross-cutting themes at the partnership level? • To what extent is the role and methodology of the external review panel adequate? • To what extent can the Blue Deal programme and its partnerships adapt sufficiently to the COVID-19 pandemic/climate Change dynamics to ensure that it can reach its goals?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Blue Deal need to grow (in number or size of partnerships) to reach its ambitions in 2030? What is the flexibility to change the number of partnerships and/or projects? <p>2.5 (@4): Does Blue Deal craft, manage and sustain key relationships needed for the programme to survive/flourish? Is it earning credibility and legitimacy and earning the trust of others, such as donors and clients?</p> <p>What synergies derive from the cooperation of the direct Dutch partners (DWA, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management and MoFA, including the embassies) on the Blue Deal?</p>
<i>Efficiency</i>	
Question 3. To what extent is the Blue Deal programme efficient?	<p>3.1 Were inputs (resources and time) used in the best possible way to achieve outcomes (= in this case: committed and energised programme)? Why or why not? What could be done differently to improve dynamics of implementation, thereby maximising impact at an acceptable and sustainable cost? Has there been an appropriate balance between overhead costs/budget and outcome-related costs/budget?</p> <p>3.2 Is the planned investment realistic given the desired impact?</p> <p>3.3 Is the current programme governance structure and process efficient and fit for purpose?</p>
<i>Sustainability</i>	
Question 4. To what extent does the Blue Deal Programme facilitate or set conditions to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the capacity strengthening of partnerships?	<p>4.1 How is the capability to communicate, build connections, manage diversity among the partnerships, and manage paradoxes and tension?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the partners abroad feel that they are sufficiently enabled to decide the direction and vision of their project? Is there an appropriate balance between top-down processes (budget envelops, monitoring framework, planning and programme process) and in-country autonomy for project vision, partner selection and implementation strategies? Do the local partners see added value in the joint implementation of the programme added value? <p>4.2 How strong are enabling factors for the partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the distance between the partnership representatives and organisational decision-makers at the DWA organisation level? How predictable are the processes in place of making decisions, implementing activities and resolving conflicts for the PLs? How appropriate is the scope of the partnership (realistic budget), the potential of quick wins, and mutual understanding of the need for broad/limited stakeholder participation? <p>4.3 Have conditions been set for learning processes in one or more of the following thematic areas?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate Innovation Sustainability Gender and poverty alleviation (social inclusion) Innovation Assessing the enabling environment of the projects

Evaluation questions for the MtR at the partnership level:

Main question	Sub-questions
<i>Coherence</i>	
Question 5. To what extent is the partnership subsequent and supplementary to existing programmes	<p>5.1 Is the partnership contributing to nationally-/locally defined policy priorities, strategies, plans and targets?</p> <p>5.2 Is the partnership coordinating and collaborating with other stakeholders in achieving those goals/targets?</p>

and projects in the respective country?	
<i>Effectiveness</i>	
Question 6. To what extent is the set-up, organisation and methodology of the Blue Deal partnerships (potentially) effective?	<p>6.1 How does Blue Deal (country partner) view itself in the broader water sector and in relation to other water development programmes? What is the level of aspiration, ownership and determination?</p> <p>6.2 Can the Blue Deal country partner deliver services for primary tasks (planning and control, monitoring and evaluation, coaching, the learning programme) that facilitate the partnerships? Do the country partners (facilitate) strategic planning and management? Do the country partnership have strong financial management?</p> <p>6.3 Does the Blue Deal country partner craft, manage and sustain key relationships needed for the partnership to survive/flourish? Is it earning credibility, legitimacy and the trust of others, such as donors and clients?</p>
<i>Relevance</i>	
Question 7. To what extent is the partnership doing the right things?	<p>7.1 Is the project demand driven, based on a local vision?</p> <p>7.2 Do the programme outcomes inform the partnership outcomes?</p> <p>7.3 Is there a capacity (self-)assessment method and process in place that guides (e.g. annual) capacity action plans for the partnerships?</p> <p>7.4 Have lessons learned from previous experiences been used for the design of the partnership (for existing partnerships)?</p>
<i>Effectiveness (case study partnerships)</i>	
Question 8. To what extent is the capacity strengthening within the partnership effective, or does it have the potential to be effective over time?	<p>8.1 Is the capacity strengthening focusing on realistic capacity gaps with instruments that fit well the context and high-quality content?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How effective are the capacity-strengthening activities (potentially)? ● To what extent are the selected outcomes of partnerships realistic? ● Are there early signs of change of increased capacity? <p>8.2 What is the adaptive capacity of the partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What reflection and review tools and mechanisms have been used for annual planning?
<i>Efficiency</i>	
Question 9. To what extent is the partnership using its resources efficiently to ensure lasting capacity development of the partner organisation?	<p>9.1 To what extent is there a good balance between number and length of incoming and outgoing missions/flights and planned activities within those missions in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and carbon emissions? (Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this question may need to be replaced by: To what extent have online capacity-strengthening activities effectively replaced the planned incoming and outgoing missions?)</p> <p>9.2 What is the ratio of input from DWA and partner organisations versus hired external experts?</p> <p>9.3 What is the current status of achievements in terms of activities and outputs?</p> <p>9.4 To what extent and by whom has the monitoring and evaluation matrix been used and what are the obstacles to using it?</p>
<i>Sustainability</i>	
Question 10. To what extent does the partnership have the potential to ensure the sustainability of the programme results?	<p>10.1 To what extent is there sufficient ownership and shared vision by the partner abroad?</p> <p>10.2 How strong are the enabling factors in the partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the distance between the partnership representative and organisational decision-makers at the country partner organisation level? ● How predictable are the processes in place of making decisions, implementing activities, and resolving conflicts for the country project manager? ● How appropriate is the scope of the partnership (realistic budget), the potential of quick wins, and mutual understanding of need for broad/limited stakeholder participation? ● For those partnerships that already existed before the Blue Deal, have they been building on lessons learned from the past?

	<p>10.3 To what extent is there sufficient capacity in terms of quantity and quality to carry out the planned activities/reach the desired outcomes?</p> <p>10.4 (For selection of partnerships) How are the cross-cutting themes incorporated in the partnership project?</p> <p>10.5 (For selection of partnerships) Has the partnership carried out a risk assessment and to what extent is this used in the implementation of the partnership?</p>
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2.2 Approach and methods

The MtR focused on two levels:

- The Blue Deal at the programme level
- Individual partnerships

The review includes a total of fourteen partnerships in thirteen countries. Partnerships that were stopped or are temporary on hold are not included in the review. Out of the fourteen partnerships, six were selected for a more in-depth review, the so-called case study partnerships: Colombia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia Awash, Ethiopia Abbay, Vietnam, and the Palestinian territories.

To select the case study partnerships, several criteria were used:

- Geographical area and language
 - Scale of the partnership
 - Thematic focus
 - Nature of the partnerships (maturity)
 - Government effectiveness (percentile)
 - Budget (small, medium, large)
 - Implementing Dutch water board
- Different methods and tools were used for data collection and assessment for the MtR at the programme level, and for the review of the individual partnerships. All interviews at the programme level were held online. At the partnership level, some of the interviews and group discussions were held face to face, while for most partnerships all work was online. These choices were made considering the COVID-19 situation in the countries and how easy it was to organise sessions online or face to face.

2.2.1 Programme level

At the programme level, the method included:

- A desk review of Blue Deal documents and a limited literature review.
- Interviews with fourteen key informants, held with representatives of the SC, Opdrachtgevers Overleg (OO), PMO, WINTER/CINTER, the external review panel and external stakeholders (WaterWorX, Kernadviseur water and Waternet).
- A focal group discussion with the participation of six Blue Deal PLs representing four DWA.

2.2.2 Partnership level

An important first step in the evaluation at the partnership level was the stakeholder identification, which was done in collaboration with the Blue Deal PLs and the MtR regional consultants. This exercise contributed to understanding the partnership, and identifying respondents for the survey, interviews and focus group discussions. For both types of partnerships (case study partnerships and non-case study partnerships), Blue Deal documents were reviewed. For the case study partnerships, the document review was more extensive and included selected sector documents.

A centrally managed survey was conducted among the identified stakeholders of all fourteen partnerships. The table below shows the number of respondents per category of respondents (DWA, country partners and stakeholders) per partnership. The online survey was available in six languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arab and Vietnamese). A total of 321 responses were received, with a minimum of fifteen responses for the partnerships in Ethiopia (Abbay), Mozambique, Peru and Vietnam and a maximum number of responses for the Inspiragua Agua partnership in Colombia (34) and the Awash partnership in Ethiopia (37). The response rate varied from 25% for the partnership in South Africa to 110%, 124% and 132% for the partnerships in Romania, Colombia, and Ethiopia (Awash partnership), respectively (see Annex 4 for more details on the survey responses per partnership).

Following the survey, focus group discussions were held with 6-7 participants in each non-case study partnership. The results of the document review and the survey provided the key input for the discussions. The focus group discussions were facilitated by the MtR regionally- based consultants. They were held online with participation of selected stakeholders including representatives of the DWA and country partners as well as external stakeholders.

For the case studies, 7-10 key informant interviews were held with representatives of DWA, country partners and stakeholders for each partnership. The country pages in Annex 5 provide an overview of the interviews held. Following the interviews, a review meeting was organised to validate and reflect on the findings with 7-10 selected representatives of the DWA, country partners and stakeholders.

All activities were conducted online. For the focus group discussions and review meetings, the number of participants was kept limited to allow for maximum contribution from the participants. The focus group discussions and review meetings were conducted using Teams or Zoom in addition to participatory tools such as Sticky Notes and Miro. Some of the bilateral interviews were conducted in person and in some cases – such as in Burkina Faso – the review meeting took place face to face.

The results of the partnership reviews are available in a report for each partnership (see Annex 5).

The MtR was implemented in three phases according to the following timetable:

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April
Inception						
Selection case studies, setting up teams, inception report						
Development tools, guidelines and briefing team, Blue Deal Pls, etc.						
Prep. Partnership reviews and Blue Deal document review						
Stakeholder mapping						
Data collection						
<u>Programme level:</u> KIIs and FGD with PLs						
<u>Partnership level (all partnerships):</u> Survey						
<u>Partnership level (non-case studies):</u> FGDs						
<u>Partnership level (cases studies):</u> KIIs and validation meetings						
Assessment and reporting						
Preliminary data processing and assessment						
Continued data assessment, interpretation, reporting, and report writing						

2.3 The MtR team

The MtR team comprised a core team of three members and six regionally- based country evaluators (plus one of the core team members). The core team was responsible for the overall MtR and the review of the Blue Deal at the programme level, while the country evaluators were responsible for the review of the individual partnerships. Standardised tools, formats and guidelines were made available to the regionally- based consultants to ensure consistency in the review of all partnerships.

The core team comprised the following members:

- **Erma Uytewaal.** MtR team leader (MDF)
- **René van Lieshout.** Institutional expert (IRC)
- **Mark van der Boon.** MtR assistant (MDF)

The country evaluators and their respective responsibilities can be found in the table below.

Regional consultants	Case study partnerships	Survey partnerships	Partnerships stopped/on halt
Cesar Garay (MDF), based in Colombia	Colombia	Peru	Argentina, Ethiopia WWTP, Volta
Helene Figea (IRC), based in Burkina Faso	BF	Mali, Ghana	
Simon Thuo (MDF), based in Kenya	Ethiopia Awash, Ethiopia Abbay	Kenya	
Nguyen Duc Vinh (MDF), based in Vietnam	Vietnam		
Goufrane Mansour (IRC), based in France	Palestinian territories		
Andre Uandela (IRC), based in Mozambique		Eswatini, South Africa, Mozambique	
René van Lieshout (IRC), based in the Netherlands		Romania	

3 Context analysis

Ideally, this chapter would build on an existing context analysis and update it by identifying and interpreting the most recent trends. In the absence of such an explicit and documented context analysis for the Blue Deal, the following paragraphs are limited to a brief and non-comprehensive description of two relatively new trends with relevance for the Blue Deal, which emerged after initiation of the programme.

This chapter identifies some of the most relevant developments with important impact on international development cooperation and the water sector in the Netherlands and internationally.

3.1 Increased attention for climate change in international development

Climate change is mentioned to be the most significant challenge of the twenty-first century with the potential to cause significant human and economic damage³. It is even mentioned to be the accelerator of any crisis. The Paris Agreement⁴ is a landmark international accord that was adopted by nearly every nation during the Conference of the Parties (CoP 21) in 2015 to address climate change and its negative impacts. The Paris Agreement outlined a new course in the effort to combat global climate change, requiring countries to make commitments and progressively strengthen them.

The agreement includes commitments from all major emitting countries to cut their climate pollution and strengthen those commitments over time. The pact provides a pathway for developed nations to assist developing nations in their climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, and it creates a framework for the transparent monitoring, reporting, and ratcheting up of countries' individual and collective climate goals.

Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, subsequent CoPs and an infinite number of conferences and (inter) national meetings and events further underlined the increasing threat posed by climate change to all countries and the urgency to scale up efforts to tackle the climate change. In the meantime, states, cities, business, and civic leaders across the world have been stepping-up their efforts to meet the goals of the agreement and stop or slow down climate change. New partnerships are formed, and a growing number of multilateral climate finance initiatives are designed to help developing countries address the challenges of climate change⁵. However, in the eyes of many, political commitment and progress is yet insufficient to meet the Paris Agreement goals.

³ United Nations Security Council, (2021).

⁴ The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016

⁵ ODI (2021)

The next CoP (26) is currently scheduled for November 2021 in Glasgow (UK). The aims of CoP 26 will be to assess the progress made under the Paris Agreement and encourage countries to enhance their original national plans on climate.

Within the broader climate change agenda and leading-up to the CoP in Glasgow, the Government of the Netherlands is taking a leadership role drawing attention for more action to reduce the damages that are already eminent from climate change, such as floods, droughts, heat waves and wildfires. An important landmark was the recent Climate Adaptation Summit (CAS) hosted by the Government of the Netherlands (January 2021). The CAS kicked off a global leadership driving a decade of transformation towards a climate-resilient world by 2030. During the CAS 2021, the Adaptation Action Agenda was formed that will serve as a guide for the coming years to accelerate adaptation action⁶.

The water community is increasingly promoting the sense of urgency for climate change adaptation and the recognition of the centrality of water therein. According to UN Water this is not yet sufficiently acknowledged by the political (world) leaders and is not systematically reflected in national plans or international investment portfolios for adaptation. UN Water calls for the recognition of the pivotal role of water in adapting to climate change to increase resilience and achieve sustainable development. The recent UN High Level Meeting on Water (March 2021) highlighted that “while SDG 6 is an essential enabler of the 2030 Agenda, water issues suffer from lack of visibility in international processes”⁷.

International events such as the international water day 2020 and the Stockholm Water Week 2020 and 2021 call for collaborative efforts with the goal to use the water sector as the key enabler in the worldwide climate change dialogue. The High-Level Panel on Water urges the water sector to scale up by connecting and actively engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and initiatives.

In this light, a relevant initiative is the Water Action Track (WAT) that aims to accelerate and scale up climate adaptation using water and the water sector as an essential enabler and connector to safeguard a sustainable and resilient future for all. The WAT is a global partnership established by the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) and comprises more than 30 leading organisations active in the water sector. The GoN (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management) together with the World Bank and the World Resource Institute are core partners.

The GoN together with the Government of Tajikistan will be co-hosting the 2023 UN Water Conference to accelerate action on water for sustainable development. The aim is to make the conference and its preparatory process a truly multi-stakeholder event. The results of the CAS and promotion of water in the climate agenda will be an important point on the agenda.

3.2 The COVID-19 pandemic, from emergency response to resilient recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged globally in 2020. The pandemic drastically disrupted societies worldwide and negatively affected world economies. By the end of January 2021, over 100 million COVID-19 cases had been reported worldwide and there were, as of early 2021, over 2.5 million

⁶ CAS (2021)

⁷ UN High Level Meeting on Water (2021).

deaths⁸. COVID-19 has shaken long-held assumptions about resilience and adaptation and created new uncertainties about the economy, governance, geopolitics, and technology.⁹ The pandemic and corresponding national responses appear to be sharpening and accelerating several trends that were already underway before the outbreak.¹⁰

Across the Blue Deal countries, the most cases and deaths are reported in Colombia, Peru and South Africa, where deaths escalated rapidly in mid-2020 and more recently in Romania.

Table: COVID-19 Impact in Blue Deal partnership countries

Countries	Affected cases	Deaths
Burkina Faso	12,956	152
Mali	11,844	408
Colombia	2,536,198	65,889
Eswatini	17,376	669
Ethiopia	228,996	3,174
Kenya	145,670	2,348
Ghana	91,260	754
Mozambique	68,758	791
Palestine	unknown	unknown
Peru	1,647,694	54,903
Romania	1,006,167	25,135
South Africa	1,558,458	53,322
Vietnam	2,707	35

Source: WHO (2020)

As shown on the map below, all of the Blue Deal partnership countries implemented lockdown measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 over the last year, and strict measures have been retained in some countries including Colombia, Peru and Romania.

COVID-19 has caused major changes to the activities of nearly all organisations across the water sectors. All organisations have been affected by lockdown measures and restrictions on travel and work.

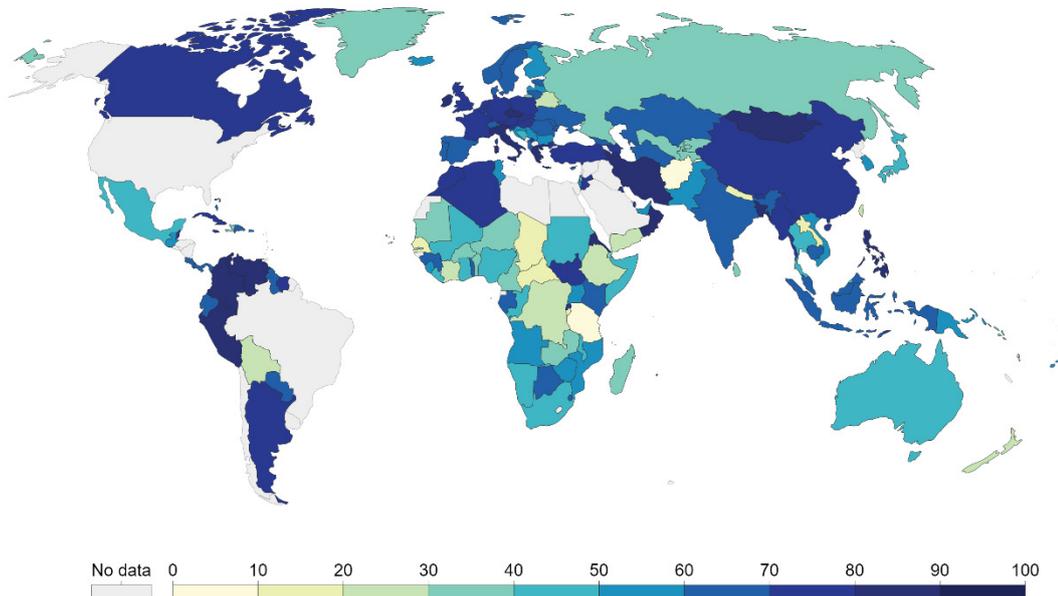
⁸ John Hopkins University & Medicine (2021)

⁹ National intelligence Council. (2021)

Map: COVID-19 stringency measures word-wide

COVID-19: Stringency Index, Apr 12, 2021

This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.



Source: Hale, Angrist, Goldszmidt, Kira, Petherick, Phillips, Webster, Cameron-Blake, Hallas, Majumdar, and Tatlow (2021). "A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker)." *Nature Human Behaviour*. – Last updated 13 April, 06:26 (London time) OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

The COVID-19 pandemic also negatively affected the water sector, with unprecedented slow down and changes to ways of working. As stated by the International Finance Cooperation (IFC), the pandemic has heightened awareness of both the extent and consequences of the existing access gap to clean, safe, and sufficient water, and could slow down progress in meeting the SDG 6 (IFC, 2020).

Next to an initial slow-down in the delivery of water projects, the pandemic also accelerated organisational practices to adapt from business as usual. After, the first shock and immediate adjustments to the stringency measures to control the COVID-19 outbreak, new insights highlight the opportunities for the water sector and the understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to produce some changes that will last and shape the future. COVID-19 has accelerated digitalisation in communications, shown the importance of the water industry for public health during a pandemic, brought to light the urgency of recognising water access as a public health priority, and has a positive impact on accelerating technology use for progressing and delivering water sector projects.

Without a full comprehension of all unanticipated second- and third-order effects of the current pandemic, COVID-19 contributed to remind the world on how uncertain the future is, herewith putting the need of building resilient systems that are adaptive to and can withstand the uncertainties of the future. This acknowledgement provides a strong ground for the water sector to adopt a systematic approach and galvanise COVID-19 actions to “build back better”.

The MtR advises the Blue Deal to conduct a more comprehensive context analysis that will be useful for confirmation and clarification of the Blue Deal’s vision and ambition and for strengthening its position in the Dutch and international water sector.

3.3 What next?

As mentioned, the above two chapters are not a comprehensive context analysis. It only provides a snapshot of two trends that are important for positioning the Blue Deal in the Dutch and international water sector. The text provides a steppingstone for the Blue Deal to undertake a full context analysis.

It goes beyond the scope of the MtR ToR to conduct a full context analysis. However, it is certainly an important activity the Blue Deal needs to develop considering the results and recommendations of the MtR.

The context analysis implies next to the identification and description of the main trends in the Netherlands and internationally, an assessment on the relevance of those trends for the Blue Deal. After identification and interpretation of the main trends (the “what?” question), Blue Deal partners will need to assess the implications of the trends for the Blue Deal (the “so what?” question).

The assessment will help the Blue Deal to understand the dynamics in the national and international context, identify the entry points and risks, and navigate in the broader context of institutions, initiatives and developments. The context analysis will be instrumental in assessing the Blue Deal’s potential for improving water governance, in the Netherlands, in the countries and internationally and the (further) prioritisation of its strategies and actions.

Realisation of a context analysis requires the involvement of the Blue Deal partners across the different levels and implies dedicated resources.

4 Findings at programme level

This chapter presents the key findings of the MtR of the Blue Deal at the programme level. The findings on each of the OECD criteria and the corresponding evaluation questions are described in subsequent sections in this chapter. To summarise the Blue Deal performance and potential on each of the OECD criteria, a score has been given on one of the following categories: least satisfactory, partly satisfactory, satisfactory and highly satisfactory. To visualise those scores, a colour coding is used.

The scoring on each of the sub-questions is mainly focused on highlighting room for improvement to strengthen the Blue Deal’s potential.

The definition of scores are:

Highly Satisfactory
Satisfactory
Partially satisfactory
Least satisfactory

- **Highly satisfactory:** exceeding planned contributions to achievement of the Blue Deal ambition, exceeding expectations as defined in programme documents and with high standards of performance.
- **Satisfactory:** good scope for contribution to the Blue Deal ambition, generally in compliance with the programme documents, achieving performance standards
- **Partially satisfactory:** limited potential for contribution to the Blue Deal ambition, partly in compliance but with weaknesses in some areas, adjustments recommended for improving performance.
- **Least satisfactory:** hardly potential for contributing to achieving the Blue Deal ambition, failing to comply with expected expectations; urgent need to improve performance.

4.1 Coherence and relevance

The MtR finds the Blue Deal overall performance on this OECD criteria, coherence and relevance, partly satisfactory. The below table presents the scores of the Blue Deal’s performance and potential for each of the review questions. The below sections present and assess the main findings for each of the above review questions.

Coherence and relevance / Review questions	Least satisfactory	Partly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly satisfactory
To what level is the Blue Deal programme aligned with and does it contribute to the existing policy priorities?				
Is the Blue Deal Theory of Change (ToC) instrumental in ensuring coherence in programme implementation?				

How well is the BD programme doing in networking and ensuring synergies with other relevant organisations or initiatives?				
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4.1.1 To what level is the Blue Deal programme aligned with and does it contribute to the existing policy priorities?

The MtR found the Blue Deal alignment and contribution to existing policies to be only partly satisfactory.

The Blue Deal framework document states the programme’s aim to contribute to the water management challenges worldwide. The document also states that the Blue Deal plans to make a tangible contribution to the following policy priorities:

- The UN 2030 sustainable development agenda by contributing to SDG goal 6, particularly targets 6.3 to 6.6 and other water- and climate-related SDGs.
- The Dutch International Water Ambition (IWA¹¹) that proposes a collaborative and international approach of the Dutch water actors for stronger resilience against climate change and better water safety and water security worldwide. IWA adopts an integrated approach to water safety and security and aims to strengthen the local capacities for water. The (N)IWA promotes building smart coalitions and international networks, employment of Dutch knowhow, and Dutch business development.
- The DWA’s objective to professionalise the implementation of its international development projects and achieve more visibility of their international work.

The above policy goals represent the main policy priorities of the two ministries IGG (part of the MoFA) that prioritises the water-related SDGs – particularly SDG 6 – and I&W that with the adoption of the IWA has a strong framework for coordinated efforts with the MoFA and the Ministry for Economic Affairs as well as with other Dutch water actors to address the complexity and urgency of the water challenges internationally. The MtR notes that it is unclear from the Blue Deal programme documents if and how DWA’s objectives “to professionalise its international work and to gain more visibility for its international work” are part of DWA’s vision on their role in international development and water governance.

In the Blue Deal partnership framework, DWA commits to contribute to the implementation of the IGG/MoFA’s and I&W’s policy priorities. At the same time, the MoFA and I&W commit to support DWA’s ambition to professionalise. However, it is unclear how those policy objectives come together in a jointly- agreed vision. The Blue Deal framework document mentions the challenges that the world faces in dealing with too much or too little water. However, the document is not explicit on how the Blue Deal partners envision the future world. It appears from the framework document that the partners’ interest for collaboration is above all driven by the expected synergies the partnership can achieve (“with joint efforts we can have more impact”) and less so by a common vision on what to achieve.

¹¹ Since 2020, the IWA has been updated by the NIWA (New International Water Ambition) and is a means of deploying Dutch water-related international policy instruments more coherently, and a platform for collaboration between public, private, social and knowledge partners. The IWA is the predecessor of the NIWA, the New Dutch International Water Ambition.

The Blue Deal's ambition reflects elements of the aforementioned policy priorities. The Blue Deal aims to help 20 million people in 40 water catchment areas to gain access to clean, sufficient, and safe water. The Blue Deal framework document stresses that *"The focus is on providing help, but also on creating opportunities for businesses and on learning from other countries so as to keep improving our own work in the Netherlands"*. In addition, the Blue Deal partners have agreed to give special attention to several themes (climate, gender, innovation, sustainability, and poverty reduction) that respond to priority areas in the policy framework adopted by the Blue Deal.

The MtR finds that the framework document only partly translates the Blue Deal ambition into concrete programme objectives or outcomes. The approach in the framework document is limited to a description on the development of the partnerships, between DWA and country partners, in contribution to improved water governance and IWRM in the countries. The broader ambition, concerning the creation of opportunities for Dutch business, learning from other countries, addressing the thematic areas by the Blue Deal partnerships, is not further concretised in the Blue Deal framework document. The document states that the Blue Deal's contribution to the policy priorities would be further assessed and defined during the preparatory year (inception phase) of the programme.

The MtR notes that the expected concretisation of the policy priorities and the broader Blue Deal ambition did not happen sufficiently during the preparatory phase. The inception report shows that the preparatory activities during the first year were almost exclusively focused on identification and shaping of the Blue Deal partnerships. Important strategic choices such as on partner and country selection, the role of the country partners, and prioritisation of collaboration with other Dutch or international partners were not made and are, to date, still pending. Likewise, the partnership did not take advantage of the preparatory year to further define and agree on a joint vision, the positioning of the Blue Deal in the broader playfield of Dutch and international initiatives and actors relevant for IWRM, and on the role of each of the partners (IGG, I&W and DWA) in achieving Blue Deal's vision.

The opportunity of the preparatory year was not used to develop the corresponding strategies that would guide the Blue Deal interventions in pursuit of its (broader) ambition and vision. As a result, the Blue Deal still lacks clarity on the programme results and corresponding outline for activities in the areas of Dutch business development, learning from other countries, introduction of the thematic areas, networking and collaboration, and other objectives. The MtR observes that, notwithstanding the ministries active participation in programme development, they have not been sufficiently effective in optimising the opportunity of the preparatory year to translate their policy goals in shaping the programme level part of the Blue Deal.

The MtR notices that in the absence of a clear strategic framework, partnership selection and country choices happened (country) mainly demand driven, herewith responding to the interests and enthusiasm in the DWA. However, the initial demand from partnerships was even higher (38 partnership were included in a first long list). From this list, the PMO steered towards a selection of partnerships that respond to the two ministries country priorities, half of them in the by IGG prioritised least developed countries and the other half in the by I&W so-called Delta countries. However, steering on partnership selection was not followed through by the SC. The adoption of this demand-driven approach put aside and undermined several, albeit limited, strategic decisions and assumptions included in the Blue Deal framework. Examples are the incremental growth model, the 50/50 financing commitment between the Ministries and DWA and the phasing of the programme. The Blue Deal programme started, de facto, as a traditional implementation programme, building on DWA's model and co-funded by the ministries. The decision to be demand

driven and start with the nineteen partnerships was subject to ample discussion between the three Blue Deal partners. The decision was taken due to the strategic value of keeping all DWA partners on board of the Blue Deal. It was anticipated that the consequences of this decision for further programme design and implementation would be addressed along the way. As will also be described in the subsequent chapters, this insufficiently happened.

The Blue Deal framework document expresses the expectation to regularly report on the programme's progress in contribution to the three policy goals. The MtR did not find evidence that this is happening. This would also be difficult as without a definition of the outcomes and corresponding strategies for each of the policy goals, it is difficult to keep track of progress on those goals. The ambiguity in the Blue Deal vision and ambition is also reflected in programme implementation as the activities at the programme level and in the development of the Blue Deal partnerships happen with no concrete contribution from the two ministries.

To conclude, the MtR finds that the alignment of the Blue Deal with each of the Blue Deal partners' policy priorities offers a clear potential win-win for each of the partners and is a strong fundament of the Blue Deal programme and partnership. This potential has been insufficiently materialised during programme design and implementation so far, the policy priorities are not fully reflected in the Blue Deal vision and ambition, and in operational strategies. Strategic choices are not made, or are overruled in the inception phase, resulting in a demand-driven approach in which the Blue Deal contribution to the broader policy goals (such as the NIWA and the SDG's) are not evident.

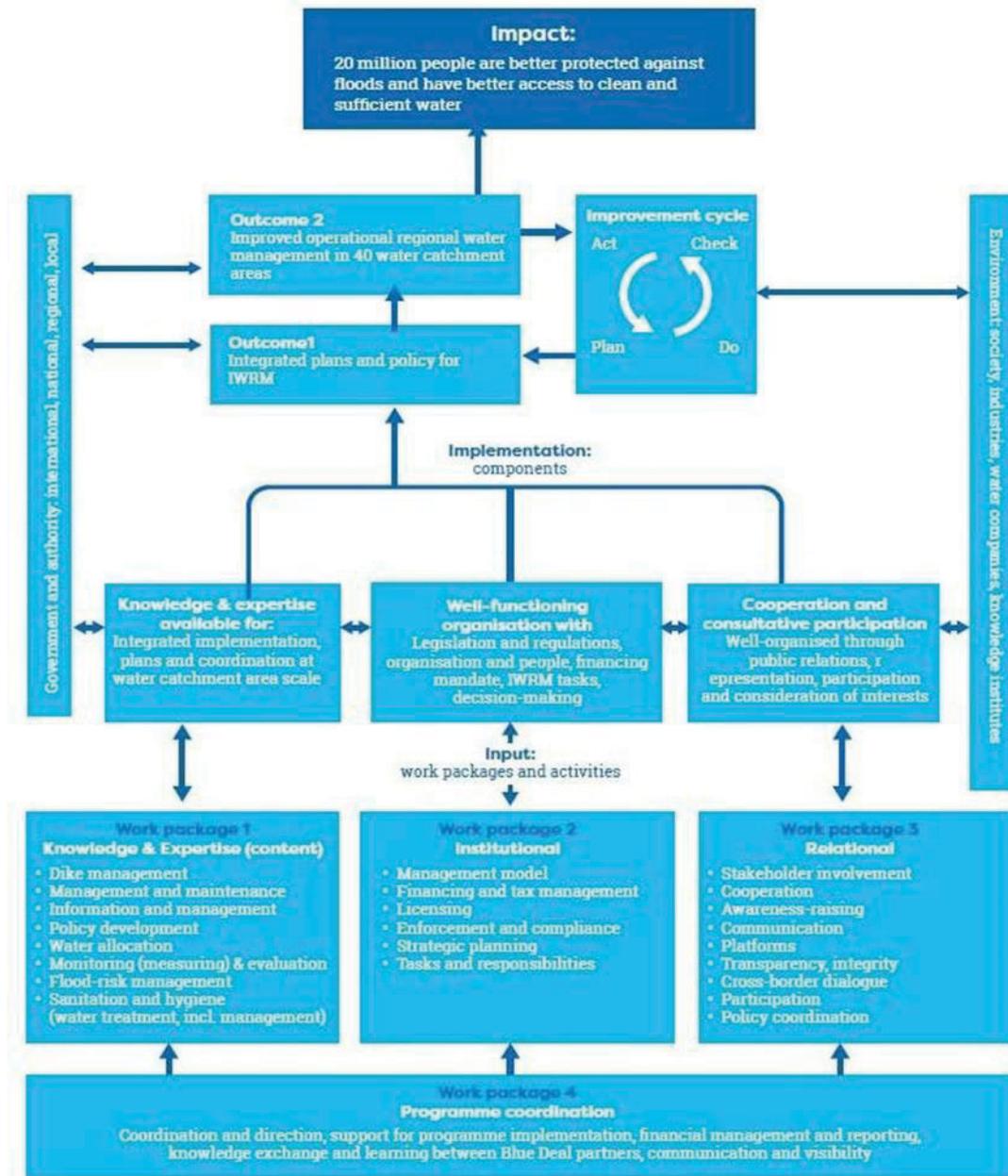
4.1.2 Is the ToC instrumental in ensuring coherence in programme implementation?

The MtR found the use of the ToC to be satisfactory, but the tool as such is only applicable at the level of the partnerships.

The ToC was created by Blue Deal taskforce¹² that included active involvement of representatives of the DWA and the two ministries and was facilitated by an external consultant.

Blue Deal ToC:

¹² The taskforce included representatives of the DWA and both Ministries and was actively involved in development of the Blue Deal conceptualisation (Blue Deal framework document) and in the inception phase. The taskforce was resolved once the Blue Deal governance structure (SC and OO) came in place.



The ToC lays out the main programme objectives at the partnership level, namely: i) strengthening and developing partners’ technological knowledge and capacity, ii) improving partners’ main institutional and organisational aspects, and iii) enabling and supporting the partners’ coordination and collaboration with relevant organisations.

A fourth objective concerns effective programme management in support to achievement of the partnership goals, within the given timeframe and budgets.

Concerning the scope and content of the ToC, the Mtr observes that the ToC focuses on the results and intervention logic for the Blue Deal partnerships in the partner countries, building on the DWA’s existent experiences and way of working. The impact chain, as well as the conditions and assumptions of the ToC, are exclusively focused on direct support to the partnerships in helping 20 million people in 40 catchment areas to gain access to clean and sufficient water, through partnerships between the DWA and country-based organisations.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Blue Deal framework document speaks about a broader ambition that includes among others, benefits for Dutch business and the Dutch and international water sector more generally. These expectations that reflect the potential added value of the partnership are not translated in envisioned results (outcomes) in the ToC. The Blue Deal ambition to pay special attention to climate, gender, innovation, sustainability, and poverty reduction are not specified in the ToC. This is unsurprising as the envisioned results of those dimensions have not been defined yet, nor what the intervention logic would be. As a result, the ToC reflects mainly the existing DWA model in which the added value of the partnership with the ministries is not evident.

Notwithstanding its limited scope, the ToC is an important and useful tool for the PMO. PMO staff feels comfortable with- and supported by the ToC in fulfilling their programme management, monitoring, and coaching tasks. The ToC is an important reference in the elaboration of the various planning, monitoring, and reporting tools and guidelines. In this way, the ToC also proves to be a valuable instrument in support of the adoption of a longer-term perspective on achieving programme results and sustainable change by the PLs. This means a shift away from the shorter-term output-oriented project approach that most PLs were familiar with. Despite this progress, full adoption and use of the ToC by the PLs is still a challenge, particularly for those who are familiar with other methods for project planning and monitoring.

At the level of the partnerships, the M&E framework enables the partners to monitor and reflect on progress made against the expected results included in the ToC. At the Blue Deal programme level, the MtR notes that the ToC is not fully used by the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) for internal reflection and assessment on the programme's progress. This may be partly due to the different levels of ownership and understanding of the ToC by the governance members. The Blue Deal SC was established during or at the end of the inception phase. This explains that not all SC members were personally involved in the ToC development process. Similarly, not all current OO members were part of the task force that played an important role in the ToC's creation.

The MtR observes that an explicit reflection on the ToC has not yet been scheduled on the Blue Deal governance agenda. This is, partly, understandable due to its limited scope the present ToC is not a helpful instrument for reflection on progress towards the broader Blue Deal ambition.

To conclude, the MtR finds that the Blue Deal ToC is a useful instrument for the PMO in developing the planning, monitoring, reporting and coaching tools for the partnerships. It is helpful in support of the PLs in the adoption of a longer-term result-based approach in project management of the partnerships. At the same time the ToC is limited in scope as it includes only one dimension of the Blue Deal ambition, namely the direct support to the DWA partnerships in the countries and is missing the dimension of outcomes at the programme level. The ToC is not yet sufficiently owned by the Blue Deal governance as a useful tool for regular reflection on the programme's course.

4.1.3 How well is the Blue Deal programme doing in networking and ensuring synergies with other relevant organisations or initiatives?

The MtR found the Blue Deal networking activities and synergies with other relevant organisations and initiatives to be partly satisfactory.

The Blue Deal framework document identifies a long list of potential organisations and initiatives including the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, RvO, NWP, WaterWorX, VNG and IPO, NGO's and knowledge institutions, for collaboration and leveraging the Blue Deal programme. The framework

document gives a short description of the main assets and/or knowledge areas of each of those organisations. It calls the MtR attention that the identified actors are mainly Dutch based or GoN funded organisations and initiatives. The framework document does not have a broader stakeholder assessment that considers relevant international initiatives and players around (integrated) water governance and IWRM.

The MtR finds that among the members of the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO), and the PMO there is awareness of the ample potential for networking and synergies with other programmes and organisations. Examples are in the context of the IWA with initiatives such as the Delta programme and PvW and with other government institutions such as with RvO, or with international actors and platforms such as those connected to the international climate change agenda.

At the programme management level, regular outreach activities to a variety of organisations and initiatives are taking place. Those include meetings with RvO, WaterWorX, NWP and various others. A concrete result of those network activities with RvO and NWP is the synergy with the YEP programme that contributes to strengthening some of the Blue Deal partnership teams through the employment of young professionals.

The Blue Deal programme staff meets regularly with the coordinators and staff of the WaterWorX programme and the SDG Consortium. Blue Deal PMO staff consider those meetings useful as it allows for learning from the WaterWorX colleagues on their experiences with IGG, and the necessary programme support regarding IGG's requirements in programme development, planning, and reporting. Those meetings also enable exchange with the SDG Consortium on their knowledge and experiences on integrating gender and poverty alleviation in programme implementation. A concrete result of collaboration with the SDG Consortium and WaterWorX is the collaboration between the Blue Deal partnerships and WaterWorX in seven countries, the organisation of joint events at international platforms such as during the Stockholm World Water Week (2018, 2021) or at the Amsterdam Water Week (2019) and CAS (2021). Other examples of the various outreach activities undertaken by the PMO are mentioned in chapter 4.2.6.

The MtR finds that the above networking activities are useful but take place at a programmatic level only without the right priority and dedicated resources in the PMO work plan. It is unclear to the MtR what activities the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) are undertaking to leverage their respective networks in support to the network activities at the programmatic level, or in support to positioning the Blue Deal more broadly.

An example are the networking activities with WaterWorX. The WaterWorX and the Blue Deal programme coincide in 7 to 8 countries. Coordination and synergies between the two programmes vary from country to country. Information exchange and coordination happens at the programmatic level, between the Blue Deal programme manager and the WaterWorX programme coordinator and in the countries by the individual partnerships. These activities are not supported or guided by a clear vision at the SC level on the synergies with WaterWorX, or a strategy that would give direction to the collaboration, the resources to be used and the benefits to be obtained.

Internationally, there is a growing recognition of the role of water in the international climate change agenda. The GoN's leadership role in climate change adaptation provides an interesting context for the Blue Deal to position itself in the international landscape relevant for IWRM and climate change. However, for the ministries to leverage their network for this purpose, clarity on the joint vision, the kind of programme and the roles of each of the partners in the Blue Deal, will

be essential. In addition, to ensuring the necessary capacities in both ministries to fulfil their respective roles.

The MtR concludes that networking activities take place, but they appear to be ad hoc without a clear vision on the benefits to be achieved. Networking is mainly taking place at the programmatic level and is not structurally reinforced by actions by the Blue Deal governance and is facing capacity limitations across the different levels in the Blue Deal. The MtR sees ample scope for outreach activities by leveraging the ministries networks, in the Netherlands and internationally.

4.2 Effectiveness

The MtR finds the overall Blue Deal performance on the OECD criteria effectiveness only partly satisfactory. The below table shows the scores for the Blue Deal’s performance and potential for each of the review questions. The below sections present and assess the main findings for each of the above review questions.

Effectiveness / Review questions	Least satisfactory	Partly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly satisfactory
What are the results achieved with the programme, so far?				
To what level are the recommendations in the inception report followed up?				
To what extent does the Blue Deal programme and its partnerships adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic?				
What (potentially) extra brings the Blue Deal to the Blue Deal partners?				
How effective is the Blue Deal partnership and its added value, for the water sector (in the Netherlands, in the partner countries and internationally)?				
How effective are the PMO and the programme support functions, including the role of the coaches and the review panel?				
Functioning and capacities of the PLs				
Learning programme and professionalisation of the DWA				
How adaptive is the Blue Deal programme?				

4.2.1 What are the results achieved with the programme, so far?

The MtR found the Blue Deal achievements to be satisfactory, given the early stage of the programme.

Due to the early stage of programme implementation, the MtR is not expected to assess the results achieved so far. Some interviewees consider that the implementation time of the programme is too short to already expect results and it is also felt that the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down progress in programme implementation. The MtR has noticed that different interviewees have different views on the achievement of the programme. Some state that due to the nature of the Blue Deal programme and its focus on governance, it is difficult to measure the results. Others

mention that it is too early to see results, and some mention results such as significant steps in professionalisation of the PLs and the DWA. These are considered in this section.

Furthermore, the MtR observes that progress at the programme level, other than progress in implementation of the partnerships, is not monitored as those outcomes are not included in the ToC and the M&E framework. This refers to the identified gap in the ToC, described in the chapter on coherence and relevance.

Notwithstanding the above caveats, the MtR, identifies results in the areas of partnership building and professionalisation of the DWA. Important steps are made in establishing new and strengthening existing DWA partnerships in the countries, but progress in partnership building between the Blue Deal partners at the programme level remains weak.

The DWA's partnership with the ministries enhanced DWA's legitimacy for its international work, and boosted ownership and enthusiasm for longer-term engagement with its country partners. To expand the availability of qualified staff for employment in the Blue Deal programmes, DWA created a pool of professionals for international development work and established the KIWI programme that aims to grow professionals in international work. Those are important achievements in professionalisation of DWA staff. Enhanced ownership by the DWA's governance for engagement in international development projects is exemplified by the high number of DWA's involved in the Blue Deal, and increased financial commitment to the Blue Deal programme. With 60% counterpart funding the DWA exceeds the initially agreed DWA contribution of 50% of the total budget.

A less tangible result is the culture shift that is happening in the DWA. A shift from individual DWA's implementing their development projects in an autonomous way, towards a sense of collectiveness and adherence to a common approach is taking place. In addition, with the development and funding of multi-annual work plans between the DWA and the country partners, the programme has made progress in setting the foundations for continued collaboration with the country partners.

The MtR concludes that the identified achievements relate mainly to progress in partnership building in the countries and professionalisation of the DWA. However, progress in the role of the ministries and towards their policy priorities is less evident. The programme lacks a common framework to monitor and assess progress at the Blue Deal programme level.

4.2.2 To what level are the recommendations in the inception report followed up?

The MtR found that the Blue Deal response to the inception report recommendations to be least satisfactory.

The Blue Deal inception report (2019) highlights (among other recommendations) the need to:

- Take more time to prepare for the program.
- Give the water boards more clarity about the process and the frameworks.
- Share more knowledge with other programmes.
- Involve the steering group earlier in the partnerships.
- Work with scenarios for the programme.
- Match the capacity of the programme office with the size of the programme.
- Work on the partnership between DWA and ministries.

- Align the learning program better to implementation of the BLUE DEAL programme.
- Free up capacity for collaborating with external organisations

The MtR finds that none of the above recommendations have yet been fully resolved:

- Despite continuous efforts by the PMO to provide more clarity to the DWA on the annual planning and budgeting process and reporting requirements, the PLs consider that it is still insufficient and are regularly surprised by new or additional requests by the PMO. The MtR notes that most of those requests are stemming from SC decisions.
- The longer-term perspective on funding from the GoN, including the ministries' commitment and level of funding for the second phase remains unclear.
- Efforts to engage the SC in an earlier stage with the partnerships is addressed by inviting a PL for a presentation on his/her partnership during the SC meeting. This has happened twice in 2020. However, the MtR finds that Blue Deal programme manager, the SC members and the OO still feel to have little connection with the partnership and the country partners.
- Explicit efforts to address the recommended improvement in the partnership relation between the DWA and the ministries has not received priority by the OO and SC, and the mismatch in expectations towards each other's contribution to the programme remains a sore point in the partnership.

The MtR concludes that recommendations in the inception report received extensive attention by the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) and management (PMO) but several of them, such as the lack of clarity on the annual planning and budgeting processes, have been a recurrent point on the agenda of all Blue Deal platforms. It is concluded that despite steps made, most of the recommendations in the inception report remain unsolved.

4.2.3 To what extent does the Blue Deal programme and its partnerships adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The MtR found that the Blue Deal – particularly the PMO and PLs – responded satisfactorily to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 2021 annual plan, all partnerships reported delays in the implementation of their 2020 work plans. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down progress, at least initially. The general observation is that it impacted the new Blue Deal partnerships more severely, some of which were still in the process of formalising their relationship.

The PMO has prepared a few scenarios on the development of the COVID-19 outbreak, anticipating the consequences of the pandemic on the Blue Deal programme implementation for discussion by the SC. The scenarios were mainly built around the anticipated duration of the pandemic and the restrictions for physical meetings and travel restrictions to the countries. Other activities developed by the PMO include intervision sessions with PLs around experiences with digital working, facilitation of budget adjustments to enable acquisition of internet facilities by the partnerships, and organisation of extra ordinary meetings with the Blue Deal PLs and Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) to keep the members in the different Blue Deal platforms, motivated.

The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated the introduction of virtual communication means and experience has been gained with online meetings, training, and field visits. The advantages of virtual working such as savings on travel costs and time, and the opportunities for a broader outreach and inclusivity are increasingly acknowledged. Interviewees consider that many elements

of the virtual way of working could and should be continued beyond the current pandemic. However, it is also felt that the virtual way of working cannot entirely replace all physical meetings, as the face-to-face contacts remain important.

The MtR considers that the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic provide a good opportunity for a new way of working that could be maintained after the pandemic. This means that the Blue Deal could invest more in new and even more innovative ways of virtual collaboration such as virtual field visits and exchange of experiences between partnerships. It also offers options for bringing the country partners closer into the Blue Deal planning and learning loop that is steered from the Netherlands.

A collective reflection on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as how new experiences and lessons learned can be capitalised on for the Blue Deal approach and programme planning has not yet been undertaken by the PLs nor the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO). From this perspective, the MtR would have expected stronger leadership by Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) in leading a proactive discussion on the impact of the pandemic, the new opportunities and assess the need for structural adjustments to the (partnership) workplan(s), instead of simply pushing the original planning forward to 2021.

The MtR concludes that the Blue Deal management (PMO) and the partnerships, responded satisfactory to the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnerships discovered the added value of digital working and most processes have continued, although with delay. The PMO monitored the PLs and partnerships closely, particularly on the impact of the pandemic on progress in implementation of the partnerships' 2020 annual plan and the (expected) financial spending. At the programme level, the Blue Deal governance did not take their leadership role in guiding the partnerships through the pandemic, or in capitalising on the experiences during the pandemic for adjusting the 2021 planning and/or approach.

4.2.4 How effective is the Blue Deal partnership and its added value for each of the Blue Deal partners?

The MtR found the added value for the partners to be partly satisfactory.

The Blue Deal initiative was initially driven by the DWA's interest to bundle their efforts and become more professional and impactful in their international activities. Once the two ministries (IGG and I&W) had agreed on their support to the Blue Deal initiative, they became actively involved in programme development, which culminated in the Blue Deal framework.

MtR finds a strong commitment to the partnership, by all of the partners. The potential complementarity between the partners and the envisioned added value of the Blue Deal are important drivers for the partners' enthusiasm and dedication to the partnership and programme.

The MtR finds that the Blue Deal's added value for DWA is demonstrated by the opportunities for professionalisation of the DWA staff, increased budget, legitimacy for DWA's work in international development projects, and increased exposure of DWA's work in national and international platforms. The MtR finds that interviewees agree on the Blue Deal's added value for the DWA in its contribution to improving their image on social responsibility and international relevance, and in becoming a more attractive employer. However, the added value of the partnership for the two ministries is less evident.

During the MtR, the partners expressed that the functioning of the partnership and the envisioned added value are not yet optimised. Representatives of all three partners state that engagement in the Blue Deal partnership implies a new way of working that takes time to grow into. The ministries are expected to shift from their traditional role of project/programme financier only, towards a more equitable role as partner with co-responsibilities in delivering on the Blue Deal programme results. For the DWA, engagement in the partnership implies, among others, a shift from a relatively autonomous and bilateral way of project implementation by individual DWA's, towards alignment to a collective approach with a longer-term vision and adherence to a common planning, monitoring, control, and reporting framework by all nineteen DWAs.

The MtR identifies several factors expressed by representatives of the Blue Deal partners that are hindering the partnership from becoming more solid in one way or another. Those factors include:

- The partners have different perceptions on each other's role and on how these roles can be carried out at the different levels (programme and partnership level). Examples are:
- The DWA are expecting a proactive role of the ministries in leveraging their position and networks for enabling strategic collaboration between the Blue Deal and GoN funded organisations and initiatives at the programme level.
- The DWA are expecting a more active involvement of the ministries in support to the partnerships in the countries. They expect the ministries to play a strategic role in positioning the programme towards the national authorities and other relevant stakeholders in the countries. Expectations include a stronger and more proactive role of the Dutch embassies.
- The DWA are expecting more focus on content discussions with the ministries and benefit more from the expertise in the ministries (including RWS) at the programme and partnership level.
- Representatives of the ministries are less outspoken about their expectations regarding the role of the DWA but express the need for the DWA to prove its capacity to deliver on the programme results, through the partnerships in the countries.
- The DWA expects a better understanding by the ministries for their organisational culture, way of working, capacities, and structures. Similarly, the ministries expect the DWA to be more understandable of their (limited) organisational capacities, limited authority over the embassies and to their internal planning, budgeting, reporting and accountability requirements.
- Trust is acknowledged as a key factor in building and strengthening the partnership. A mismatch in expectations around the financial commitment to the Blue Deal by the ministries and the ambition/demand by the DWA during the inception phase 1 has a longer-term impact on mutual trust between the partners. In addition, during 2020 confidence by the PLs in the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) was weakened by the governance's emphasis on control instead of a supportive and motivating role to the PLs and partnerships.
- The performance of the partnership has not (sufficiently) been on the agenda of the Blue Deal governance. An open reflection and constructive discussion on ways to strengthen the partnership and on how to meet each other's expectations has not happened yet.

The MtR recognises the above factors and acknowledges that it takes time for the partners to grow into their new role. However, rather than time, the MtR considers that the Blue Deal is facing some underlying and fundamental weakness that withholds the partnership to consolidate and prove its added value. Those weaknesses refer to what was concluded in the chapter on coherence and relevance, namely the lack of translation of the ministries' high-level policy goals into concrete programme objectives. This omission in the programme development phase resonates in the effectiveness of the partnership.

Admittedly, the Blue Deal framework document defines the expectations towards the contribution of each of the three partners, but as long as they are not part of an implementation strategy that explains how those roles will be performed, the added value of the partnership remains unclear. The fundamental question on what kind of partnership the Blue Deal aims to be, remains unanswered at present. A partnership that strategically focuses on the GoN policy goals and mobilises networks for them, or one of the many GoN (co-) funded implementation programmes? As long as the ministries' contribution and added value to the Blue Deal is not clarified among the partners, the Blue Deal will continue to support above all DWA business as usual.

To conclude, the MtR finds that the partners are driven by an expectation on the complementarity between their capacities and strengths, and on a common vision on the expected impact of their joint efforts. The Blue Deal's added value for the DWA is generally acknowledged. However, the joint vision and ambition is not sufficiently owned by all partners. A broad agreement on each other's role and how to perform them has not been sufficiently signed off.

4.2.5 What (potential) extra contribution does the Blue Deal bring to the DWA and the water sector, in the Netherlands and internationally?

The MtR found the added value for the Dutch and international water sector to be least satisfactory.

Interviewees from the DWA are enthusiastic about the learning opportunities through their participation in the Blue Deal. They indicate to learn from the countries through (technological) innovations they are involved in with their country partners, or in relevant thematic areas such as water management in times of draughts and floods. It remains unclear how the individual learning by DWA staff is being capitalised to strengthen the DWA's and the Dutch sector's knowledge base on IWRM. This is not part of the Blue Deal learning programme, or other outreach strategy, that establishes the networks and channels through which the Blue Deal can make new knowledge explicit for a larger audience in the Dutch water sector.

The MtR did not find evidence of the benefits of the Blue Deal for the broader Dutch sector (Dutch business, knowledge institutions and NGO's). This is unsurprising as the Blue Deal ambition and relevant policy priority, the IWA, is not translated in programme objectives that could steer the creation of concrete opportunities for the Dutch sector and how learning by DWA staff involved in the Blue Deal can be made beneficial for the water sector and IWRM in the Netherlands.

In addition to the potential added value of the MtR for the Dutch water sector, the MtR sees scope for the Blue Deal in the international (I)WRM arena. This has yet not been explored and would require the translation of the ministries policy priorities (IWA and SDG 6) into strategic goals for the partnership. The MtR considers that a role of the Blue Deal in the international water sector e.g. by dedicated policy influencing activities, will add value to the work with the partnerships in the countries. Decision-making on an international role for the Blue Deal will depend on the kind of partnership and programme the Blue Deal aims to be.

The MtR concludes the potential contribution of the programme to the Dutch, beyond the DWA, and the international water sector, is yet not materialised, and a clear vision on how the Blue Deal will contribute to the water sector is lacking.

4.2.6 How effective are the PMO and the programme support functions, including the role of the coaches and the review panel?

The MtR found the performance of the PMO – including the role of the coaches and review panel – to be satisfactory given the circumstances.

Functioning and capacities of the PMO

From the outset of the programme, it was decided that the PMO would remain lean and mean because the Dutch water boards would support the PMO in development of the various methods, tools and format for the programme.

The PMO is hosted by the Unie van Waterschappen (UvW). The PMO is staffed with a small team of professionals consisting of two UvW employees, allocated to the Blue Deal PMO, three staff members that are hired through a pay role construction, and one staff member is seconded through one of the DWA. However, none of them is engaged with the PMO on a full-time basis and several PMO staff also fulfil other DWA responsibilities. The MtR have done sufficient information to assess the hosting construction by the UvW, but the general feeling is that the PMO cannot fully benefit from UvW's office and secretariat capacities. These staffing arrangements appear to be relatively costly. It also emerged that the expected support from the Dutch water boards did not materialise as their staff was too busy with establishing the partnerships and partnership programmes.

The PMO – through the Blue Deal programme manager – plays a pivotal function in support to the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) and enabling the implementation of the programme. The PMO plays an enabling role in implementation of the partnerships and with support of the coaches are the interface with the Dutch PLs. The coaches play an important role. They guide and support the PLs in fulfilling their project management functions and are often the first point of contact for the PLs. The experiences and challenges of the PLs are filtered by the coaches and when needed channelled to the programme management. This way, the coaches (partly) alleviate the Blue Deal programme management from daily interactions with the PLs, that in practice results in a partial overlap between coaches and programme management functions.

During this first phase of programme implementation, most of the PMO staff time went into planning, budgeting, and control functions. Monitoring, evaluation, and coaching are also a substantial part of the time spent by the PMO. Learning, communications, and networking received significantly lower priority and was under pressure due to the need for attention to planning, control, and reporting processes.

Personal dedication and drive by the Blue Deal programme manager and PMO staff is recognised and highly appreciated across the different Blue Deal partners and stakeholders. Significant, and successful, efforts are made in dealing with- and satisfying expectations of the Blue Deal partners (IGG, I&W and DWA and nineteen DWA members) and keeping everybody on board, while also making progress in programme implementation.

The PMO is an important “in between” between the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) and the PLs. The PL's expect the PMO to play a stronger role in setting parameters in the planning and budgeting process, while the PMO has a limited mandate and is subject to the Blue Deal governance's inertia.

The MtR finds that the PMO agenda is mainly driven by addressing emerging and ad-hoc issues often related to the planning, budgeting, and control of project implementation by the partnerships. The PMO's ad-hoc functioning is for a large part a result of poor Blue Deal governance by the SC and OO, that resulted in unforeseen rounds of budget cuts and additional information needs. Furthermore, unexpected inputs from PLs such as higher budget requests than estimated and submission of more proposals than planned contributed to the PMO's burden and ad-hoc agenda.

This happens at the cost of the more strategic tasks of the PMO, such as the development of learning strategy and strategic communications.

Notwithstanding the limiting conditions, the PMO has been effective in ensuring additional funding for the Blue Deal, ensuring continued ownership and buy-in by the various Dutch water boards and in enhancing knowledge development and knowledge sharing around the Blue Deal programme. Examples include PMO's successful contribution to the programme by engagement of fourteen YEPers in the Blue Deal programme, ensuring NWB funding for the Blue Deal communications and learning programme, and promotion of collaboration between Blue Deal and WaterWorX by seven partnerships. Other examples include the lobby activities that resulted in inclusion of international development collaboration in the electoral programmes of most DWA, and initiation of research activities in collaboration with Dutch academia on various aspects relevant for the Blue Deal.

The MtR identified the following circumstances that make it difficult for the PMO to be more effective and efficient in its performance:

- The PMO is understaffed: 0.8 ft for management of all sixteen partnerships is unrealistic. The gap is partly filled by the coaches, but they have above all an advisory/coaching function towards the partnerships and not a management role.
- There is a limited mandate for the PMO in operational Decision-making. Currently, the PMO has too limited authority for Decision-making to ensure smooth programme implementation. An example is a request for a COVID-19-related budget adjustment of €5,000 that took several months, as it needed to be discussed and approved by the various Blue Deal governance bodies.
- The PMO can only partly rely on UvW systems and tools, e.g. for financial management. As a result, the PMO systems are not sufficiently equipped for managing an international programme as the Blue Deal. Without the adequate systems and tools, some of the PMO functions are time intensive with risk to undermine speed and quality of the processes.
- PMO staff together ensemble a broad range of expertise and professional backgrounds relevant for the Blue Deal. The programme manager's professional background in managing organisational change processes proved critical in support to professionalisation of the Dutch water boards. Many of the PMO staff have relevant experience in working in development countries. However, the joint background in implementation of a complex multi-country development programme in the international water sector is limited. The coaches and the external review panel partly compensate for this by bringing relevant backgrounds in managing/advising large-scale international programmes in the water sector.
- There is a lack of operational strategies to guide the PMO's role and provide the parameters for the PMO functioning. Important strategic decisions on matters such as country and partnership selection-, mid- and longer-term financial management, minimum and maximum budgets per partnership, budgets for (multi-) annual planning, on out-phasing of existing partnerships, have not yet been made by the Blue Deal SC.

- Confusion between Blue Deal and DWA interests and governance leads to an overlap between DWA and Blue Deal responsibilities in fulfilling the PMO functions. An example is that the Blue Deal programme manager fulfils tasks in the WINTER and CINTER. It is unclear to the Mtr whether those functions are fulfilled out of her Blue Deal role or as part of DWA?
- The Blue Deal governance is not taking full responsibility in providing clear instructions to the PMO for operationalisation of the Decision-making and by holding the PMO accountable for their annual work plans.

The Mtr concludes that despite various limiting factors, the PMOs played an important role in development and implementation of the Blue Deal programme. A major asset is the drive and commitment by the programme manager and other PMO staff. However, the PMO's effective functioning is under pressure as the demand on the PMO and the available resources do not match, in addition to their limited mandate and the shortcomings in functioning of the Blue Deal governance.

It will require a more profound assessment of the PMO functions by the Blue Deal partners in relation to the partnership model. Once this is clear, the PMO's required capacities and setup can be better defined and its potential can be better leveraged.

Functioning of the coaches

The coaches have an important role in the professionalisation of the DWA staff, particularly in support to the PLs. The coaches have a professional background in development cooperation and ample experience in advising and managing (international) water programmes and are as such a valuable addition to the existing capacities in the PMO.

The coaches, as well as other PMO staff, organise regular intervision sessions with the PLs and some additional DWA staff. The coaches take initiative in setting up bilateral coaching sessions with the PLs in follow-up on the intervision sessions or after new tools and documents are shared by the PMO. Coaching sessions also happen on demand of the PLs. The coaching sessions aim to help the PLs to improve their products and gain new insights by asking questions and prompting reflection. During 2020, intervision and coaching were mainly focused on planning and elaboration of the annual reports, the use of the M&E framework and the governance assessment tool.

As mentioned in the assessment of the PMO's functioning, the original idea was to keep the PMO as lean and mean as possible. However, the expected support from staff from the Dutch water boards did not come through and added to the pressure on the PMO. In this context, it was decided that the coaches would support the PMO in the programme management tasks. This explains the coaches' support to the PMO in the development of specific planning, monitoring and evaluation tools, guidelines, and standardised formats.

The coaches support the PLs in their management related tasks, but the responsibility for holding the PLs accountable for timely and adequately fulfilling their management tasks is the responsibility of the programme manager. Those are clearly two different roles that are rightfully invested in different bodies but in practice (partly) overlap.

The coaches are an additional and important point of contact between the PLs and the PMO. This alleviates the programme manager and programme assistant significantly from the day-to-day interaction with the PLs. At the same time, this model throws up an additional layer between the PLs and the Blue Deal governance. The Mtr wonders whether this is desirable as it puts the

partnerships at a larger distance from the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO). This point is further developed under point 4.3.1.

The coaches are not in direct contact with the country partners. Expectations are that in a next phase the coaches will be focusing on enabling learning in the partnerships and enabling peer learning among the partnerships. Involvement of the country partners is not foreseen for the near future although the PMO recognises that the recent experiences with online sessions and learning enhances the options for country partners' direct involvement.

The MtR considers that from a cost efficiency perspective, employment of the coaches – in combination with the use of the review panel – draws relatively heavily on the PMO budget, particularly compared with the available resources (0.8 ft) for programme management. At the same time, the MtR notes that the activities of the coaches interface and partly overlap with the learning programme activities but are not synchronised in a Blue Deal approach to learning and professionalisation of the DWA. Partly overlap between the activities of the coaches and the external review panel is described in the following section.

The MtR concludes that the coaches' make a positive contribution to the Blue Deal programme, particularly to professionalisation of the DWA staff. Their role in relation with the programme management tasks and in relation to other activities in support to the professionalisation of the DWA, such as the review panel and the learning programme, is not clearly defined. Employment of the coaches in the programme's second phase will need to be reviewed.

External review panel

The external review panel was established on the PMO's initiative. The external review panel comprises (four) experts who represent the Ministry (IGG + I&W) and the DWA but are not directly involved in the Blue Deal programme. The review panel members have a strong background in the DWA, which was important to ensure the panel's authority and acceptance, by the DWA and the PLs of their role and their advice on the partnership proposals and plans.

The results of the assessment of the partnerships' proposals and annual plans is shared by the review panel in a meeting with the respective PL. The meeting allows for an interaction between the panel members and the PL in which the focus is on reflection and providing inputs for improving the partnership proposals (annual planning and budgets). The feedback to the PLs is not always positively received by the PLs who in some cases defend their position rather than improving their proposals based on the panel's advice.

The review panel provides written advice to each of the partnerships based on the results of the review of the proposals and the feedback session with the PLs. This written advice is shared with the PMO and SC that both have always taken over the review panel's advice. The panel advised only in one case negatively on continuation of partnership, which subsequently resulted in termination of the partnership by the SC.

The MtR considers the value of the review panel as it comprises independent experts who can objectively assess the partnership proposals. The employment of the review panel contributed to the professionalisation of the PLs, particularly in the planning and budgeting cycle. At the same time, with a focus on reflection and providing guidance to the PL's in improvement of the partnership proposals, the functioning of the review panel partly overlaps with the role of the coaches. Alignment between the two bodies seems to have improved over time, but there is still scope for improvement.

To manage the total overhead costs, it was decided not to use the review panel for the 2021 annual planning cycle. A different form of reflection was chosen in which the coaches, controller and M&E officer fulfilled the role of the external review panel.

The MtR also observes that the review panel only interacted with the DWA PL and not with the country partners herewith keeping the country partners at distance from the partnerships planning and budgeting.

The MtR assesses the employment of the external review panel and its contribution to the Blue Deal positive but proposes to reconsider the need for the panel or an alternative setup for the second phase of the programme.

4.2.7 Functioning and capacities of the PLs

The MtR finds the functioning of the Blue Deal PLs to be partly satisfactory, given this early stage of the programme.

The Blue Deal PLs are DWA staff, appointed on a part-time basis, to fulfil the project management tasks for the partnership under the respective DWA's responsibility. The PLs are generally highly driven DWA professionals, some with a background in or with a particular interest for project management. The Blue Deal PLs are not selected based on a defined PL profile. Acquaintance with the country partners and/or with the broader (water) context in the partner countries was not a criteria in the selection of the PLs. This is particularly the case in some of the new partnerships. Not all of the PLs have the required language skills to easily communicate and connect to their country partners and country stakeholders.

During the inception and the first phase of implementation, most of the PL's attention and time was invested in partnership development, planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting. Interviewees state that less time was available for relation management, networking, and communications. Many interviewed PLs experience their time spent on planning, budgeting, and reporting requirements as burdensome, although they also acknowledge that this is inherent to the present phase of the programme. PLs express the importance of upfront clarity on the boundary conditions for the planning, monitoring, and reporting processes and would like the PMO to play a more enabling role in establishing and communicating those boundary criteria to the partnerships and monitor – at a certain distance – the partnership's performance.

Most of the PLs are gradually improving their programme management skills and are more adequately responding to the planning, reporting, monitoring and control cycle and the related requirements compared to the start of the programme. Result driven and realistic planning (based on a critical context analysis) as well as budgeting (in balance with the available resources) remains an area for improvement for some PLs. PLs are also increasingly feeling confident to use the M&E framework and tools that are purposefully used for reflection with the country partners on the partnerships' performance.

The MtR finds that most PLs are going through a steep learning curve regarding their project management skills, but at the same time, project management responsibilities continue to be a source of stress for some of them. The PLs take high value in longer-term partnership development, peer-to-peer collaboration and joint learning that contributes to improved water governance and IWRM in the partner countries, and that benefit the DWA and the broader water sector in the

Netherlands. The passion of the PLs is sometimes at odds with the way the Blue Deal is implemented and in which the partnerships are expected to act as implementing agencies, instead of a platform for peer-to-peer exchange and joint knowledge development.

The PLs consider that within the Blue Deal framing conditions and criteria, more attention and room for differences is needed between the partnerships. They expect the Blue Deal programme to offer sufficient space and freedom for partnership development according to the different characteristics of the partnerships, the level of maturity and the specific country context, herewith giving the opportunity to build on the PLs and DWA's professionalism. PLs stress the importance of the PMO and Blue Deal governance to be sufficiently aware of the developments in the partnerships so that Decision-making at the programme level bears sufficient connection with the reality of the partnerships in the countries. At the same time, the PLs also expect the Blue Deal governance and PMO to keep a healthy distance from the partnerships and the strategic and operational management of the partnership's activities. PLs stress that to make this happen, clear framing of responsibilities, performance standards and enabling conditions are needed.

The PLs acknowledge the responsiveness of the PMO to requests for information by the PLs, and the broad spectrum of support facilities the PMO offers. Some PLs express to prefer a more demand-driven approach in the use of those services, e.g. the coaching sessions and participation in specific courses.

Some of the PLs are facing challenges in keeping in touch with their country partners. Language, physical distance, and time zones differences are mentioned as challenges to maintain continued contact. Country-based resident managers are considered a helpful modality in maintaining country presence and smooth contact with the country partners. PLs do not have a uniform vision on a (gradual) transition of management responsibilities to the country partners. Nor do they have a shared vision on enhanced ownership of the Blue Deal programme by the country partners. PLs feel that country partners should not be burdened with the Blue Deal project management requirements. The MtR finds that this position does not align with the vision expressed by some PMO and OO members who foresee a gradual transfer of responsibilities and ownership of the programme to the countries.

PLs feel that the added value of the Blue Deal consists mainly in the availability of a larger budget enabling a larger scale of operations by the partnerships. They express disappointment with the lack of the ministries' concrete contributions in positioning the partnerships in the countries. Nevertheless, some PLs have expressed their satisfaction in collaboration with the Dutch embassies and GoN supported programmes such as with the Delta teams, Partners for Water (PvW), and WaterWorX in the countries. Whether this happens and to what level the engagement is successful varies across the different partnerships. It is felt to be mainly partnership driven and not so much enabled by the Blue Deal partnership in "the Hague".

The MtR considers that the Blue Deal lacks a clear vision on longer-term partnership development and the mandate and role of the PLs in it. An outline on how the PLs are expected to fulfil their management responsibilities and the required capacities is not available yet but would be essential for professional selection of new and/or performance evaluation of present PLs. At the same time significant investments are made in enhancing the project management competencies of the current PLs. Those investments include the employment of the coaches, the review panel and many of the training opportunities in the learning programme.

To conclude, the MtR finds that the PLs are mostly highly content-driven professionals who are not necessarily selected for their project management skills. The Blue Deal that implies a result driven and programmatic approach means for most of the PLs a new way of working, requiring other skills. Steps are made and the relatively high investments in PLs' professionalisation are paying off, many of the PLs go through a steep learning curve in improving their planning, budgeting and reporting skills. Steps are made in improving PLs' management skills but not all have the same level of motivation for the management tasks, as some are above all driven by their professional interest for mutual learning and longer-term partnership development that sometimes is at odds with the requirements for effective project management.

4.2.8 Learning programme and professionalisation of the DWA

The MtR found the learning programme to be partly satisfactory.

The aim of the learning programme is to enhance the DWA staff's knowledge and skills for working in international development programmes and promote a shift in the DWA organisational culture, from short-term, input-oriented projects towards a mindset that is oriented at longer-term and result-driven thinking in their international development activities. The learning programme – originally planned to be funded through the Blue Deal programme budget – was dropped during the first budget-cut round at the start of the first phase. Since then, it has been financially supported by the NWB fund for international development with the consequence that it was no longer considered an integrated part of the Blue Deal programme.

The learning programme includes the (annual) networking meetings, courses for working in another social/cultural context, and intervision sessions for the PLs and other relevant DWA staff. Communities of practice (CoP) on specific thematic areas are envisioned and to be established in 2021. The CoP are planned to include DWA staff working across different Blue Deal partnerships.

The MtR acknowledges the learning program's contribution to the professionalisation of the PLs. The learning programme is complementary to other DWA activities, such as the KIWI, which are developed in support to DWA's professionalisation. The MtR finds that the DWA takes ownership over the learning programme, but this ownership is not sufficiently shared with the other Blue Deal partners (the ministries). The learning programme's, its strategic direction and contributions of the learning programme to the Blue Deal programme, has yet not yet been a subject on the SC and OO agenda.

The MtR observes that some of the components of the learning programme are questioned on its usefulness by some of the PLs, particularly by those who have a track record in working in developing countries.

The MtR considers it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the learning programme as the programme is not based on a capacity needs assessment and does not have measurable targets that enable monitoring.

The MtR notes that the learning program and the broader Blue Deal programme are not sufficiently connected. At the programmatic level, coordination is taking place between the learning programme coordinator and the M&E officer and a learning session for PLs was jointly identified. Otherwise, the learning programme and its content is not structurally linked to the regular planning, monitoring and review cycle at the different levels of the Blue Deal programme

(governance, PMO and partnerships). Furthermore, learning sessions with PLs on the prioritised thematic areas have not taken place (yet).

The learning programme exclusively targets the DWA PLs and excludes country partners. On the other hand, the MtR finds that the learning programme, the coaches, and the external review panel all contribute to the professionalisation of the Blue Deal staff, although there are partly overlapping responsibilities and activities. A joint vision on learning in the Blue Deal, and how those components relate to each other is not available yet.

The MtR considers, from a learning and professionalisation perspective, the decision to start directly with nineteen partnerships, a missed opportunity to generate experiences. By starting with a limited number of partnerships and using lessons learned, the number of partnerships could gradually be extended. This way the programme could have benefitted from a stronger programme framework with clear strategies and a proven approach.

The MtR concludes that the learning programme in its implementation is complementary to other DWA efforts to professionalise DWA staff in international development. Its success is difficult to measure as it is not based on a solid capacity development needs assessment among DWA staff, nor does it have clear parameters for monitoring its results. The learning programme is not an integrated part of the Blue Deal programme and is not sufficiently owned by all Blue Deal partners. The connection and potential synergies with other learning initiatives such as employment of the coaches and the review panel are not explicit and part of a joint vision. From a learning perspective, the decision to drop the original incremental growth model to start at a small scale and increase the number of Blue Deal partnerships over time was unfortunate and a lost opportunity.

4.2.9 How adaptive is the Blue Deal programme?

The MtR found the Blue Deal's adaptability to be least satisfactory.

A M&E framework was introduced during the first phase of the programme. The M&E tool relates to the Blue Deal ToC and includes indicators that correspond to the intervention logic and the main results. To date, the M&E cycle has been implemented twice. PLs seem to become familiar with the tool, but it has been a steep learning curve. The PLs are showing a shift in mindset towards more openness for monitoring and continuous learning.

Nevertheless, PLs still consider the M&E framework as being too rigid, with little recognition and space for the specific development stage of the different partnerships, the particularities of the context they operate in, and other specific features of the different partnerships. The MtR notes that at partnership level the M&E cycle is showing its value in prompting reflection with the country partners.

The MtR considers the M&E framework to be a professionally managed system but limited in its scope. It has a strong content focus on monitoring progress at the level of the partnerships but does not include parameters that help keeping track of progress at the programme level towards the broader Blue Deal policy priorities and ambition. This refers to the gap in the ToC that exclusively focuses on the partnerships, described in the chapter on the programme's coherence and relevance (chapter 4.1.2).

The M&E information has not been fully used by the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) nor in the DWA (WINTER and CINTER) for reflection on the overall progress in the partnerships. Despite the PMO efforts for tabling and reviewing M&E information by the Blue Deal SC, priority was given to operational matters. As a result, the agenda of the Blue Deal governance has been occupied by executive matters, leaving little space for reflection on programme progress, partnership development or for a broader reflection on trends in the international context, relevant for the Blue Deal.

At this stage of the programme, it would have been opportune for the Blue Deal to have a clear vision on things like termination and/or inclusion of new partnerships, the Blue Deal expansion model, the financial strategy, the Blue Deal position in the broader climate change agenda. While this happens more on partnership levels, the MtR did not find examples of the Blue Deal governance taking a proactive role in steering change and adaptations.

The MtR concludes that the M&E framework is increasingly used for reflection by the partnerships. At the programme level, the Blue Deal has the platforms that could enable adaptive management. Unfortunately, these have not been used by the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO) to take its leadership role in guiding internal reflection on (new) developments and proactively steer adjustments in the Blue Deal programme. The earlier-described experience with the COVID-19 pandemic is an example of a missed opportunity by the Blue Deal governance to steer change in programme conceptualisation and/or implementation.

4.3 Efficiency

This chapter focuses on two relevant elements for the Blue Deal’s efficiency, namely the Blue Deal governance, and the Blue Deal financing (management and strategies). Noting that the review of the governance (structure, processes, and mandate) is also relevant for the OECD criteria of effectiveness.

Emphasis in the efficiency assessment is the extent to which the Blue Deal is likely to deliver results in an economic and timely way (relation inputs and results) and address some aspects of the programme’s operational efficiency (how well the interventions are managed).

The MtR found the overall Blue Deal performance on the OECD criteria efficiency to be only partly satisfactory. The below table shows the scores for the Blue Deal’s performance and potential for each of the review questions. The below sections present and assess the main findings for each of the review questions.

Efficiency / Review questions	Least satisfactory	Partly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly satisfactory
Are the Blue Deal governance and decision-making processes conducive for efficient programme implementation?				
Is the Blue Deal budget efficiently used?				
Does the Blue Deal have an adequate financial strategy?				
How cost efficiently operates the PMO?	<i>Not scored</i>			
How efficient is the annual planning and budgeting process?				

4.3.1 Are the Blue Deal governance and decision-making processes conducive for efficient programme implementation?

The MtR found the Blue Deal governance and decision-making processes to be partly satisfactory.

The main decision-making body in the Blue Deal is the SC, chaired by a DWA representative and includes representatives of all three partners. Next to the chair – who is a member of the CINTER – the SC includes two additional DWA representatives, including one representative from the WINTER. The ministries MoFA and I&W are respectively represented by the Director for Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) and the Director for Water, Soil and Marine. The WINTER and CINTER are respectively coordination and governance bodies in the DWA.

The OO has executive responsibilities and meets more frequently than the SC. The OO prepares the SC agenda and has the responsibility to oversee the operationalisation of decisions taken by the SC. The OO comprises four members. Both ministries are each represented by a senior policy officer. The DWA is represented by a member of the UvW management and the director of the NWB fund for DWA. Both have also a role in the WINTER and CINTER. OO members prepare their respective SC representatives on the topics, included in the SC agenda.

CINTER and the WINTER includes the “buitenland coordinators” of each of the individual DWA. The Blue Deal is an important and large programme for the DWA, but DWA’s agenda and thus also WINTER and CINTER address additional topics and projects, apart from the Blue Deal.

The Blue Deal’s “penvoeders overleg” happens three or four times a year. It is organised by the PMO and includes all Blue Deal PLs. The “penvoedersoverleg” is different to the WINTER and its members only partly overlap.

The PMO, hosted by the UvW, prepares the input documents for consultation and advice to the OO, before they are presented to the SC. The Blue Deal programme manager fulfils a secretary function to the SC, chairs the OO, is present at the WINTER and CINTER and convenes and chairs the PLs meeting.

The MtR finds the following positive aspects of the Blue Deal governance structure and processes:

- The Blue Deal governance has a broad structure with a strong footing in the DWA. Inclusion of the CINTER and WINTER in the Blue Deal governance structure allows for ample and direct involvement of the DWA in the Blue Deal decision-making. This has been beneficial in fostering the necessary sense of involvement and ownership by the DWA. This was important to achieve alignment between the DWA members internally and between the DWA and the other Blue Deal partners.
- The decision-making processes include consultations and discussions in the different platforms and at different levels enables a bottom-up decision-making process, building convergence in the different DWA and Blue Deal Decision-making bodies, and ultimately in the SC.

The MtR notes that the following weaknesses in the Blue Deal governance:

Governance structure:

- The Blue Deal governance structure is heavy and complex with (partly) overlapping platforms and responsibilities between the DWA and Blue Deal. Next to the formal structure including the SC, OO WINTER and CINTER, the governance also includes various informal platforms that among others include a feedback meeting to the PLs and a coordination meeting between the programme manager and the two ministries, that adds to the complexity of the governance structure.
- The distinction between strategic and operational functions by the various governance and management bodies in the Blue Deal and in DWA are not adhered to, resulting in a mix-up between strategic and operational functions.
- SC is too focused on operational matters. Most of the time and energy of the SC and the OO is invested in addressing operational matters, while little priority is given to reflection on the programme's progress and its strategic agenda setting. Topics like the Blue Deal partnership development, the learning processes and professionalisation, sustainability of the programme results, visioning on the next phase, have not been (sufficiently) addressed in the various Blue Deal governance bodies.
- Missing link between the governance and the partnerships, which puts the partnerships at a distance from the Blue Deal governance and programme management.
- The PLs interact with the Blue Deal programme manager in the "penvoeders overleg", and indirectly through the coaches, which are formally part of the PMO but do not have other links with OO and SC de facto an extra layer between PLs and the Blue Deal governance. OO members are invited to participate in the "penvoeders overleg" but hardly participate due to capacity limitations and other priorities.
- Country partners do not have a direct channel for interaction with the Blue Deal governance. The PLs are the only link between the country partners and the Blue Deal governance and the PMO.

Decision-making processes:

- Blue Deal decisions need to go through different platforms at different layers in the DWA and the Blue Deal.
- The Blue Deal decision-making cycle is rigid and bound to established agendas of meetings of the various governance platforms in both the Blue Deal and the DWA. For example, the timespan between receipt of agenda and concept documents by the OO in preparation for the SC meeting is 2.5 months. This time span is too long to effectively respond to developments.
- The decision-making loop is bottom-up with the SC at the end, whereas to fulfil a proactive leadership role the SC should be at the forefront of the Decision-making process.
- Discussion and Decision-making in the various bodies, including OO and SC, overlap and are repetitive. At the same time, SC and OO members are limited in their capacities (time and dedication) for satisfactory fulfilling their role and responsibilities.

Mandates:

- Blue Deal and DWA objectives are too intertwined, leading to repetition and confusion about mandates in decision-making.
- The limited mandate of the PMO contributes to overloading of the governance agenda. The PMO needs endorsement by the various Blue Deal governance bodies, including for smaller operational matters.
- Responsibilities in decision-making, executive functions and accountability are too intertwined, blurring the lines between executive responsibilities and accountability between the Blue Deal and DWA and between the different governance and management bodies. An example is given by the Blue Deal programme manager chairs the OO that at the same time is the body the PMO (led by the programme manager) is accountable too. However, at the same time it is noted that

the PMO's performance review is not proactively and systematically undertaken by the SC and OO.

Continued ownership for the Blue Deal by the governance of the DWA is not a given. Preparations of inputs by DWA for the OO and SC are mentioned to be sub-optimum. A clear and systematic loop back to the water authorities (through CINTER and WINTER) on the achievements and learnings of the programmes is not in place, besides the official reporting.

The MtR concludes that the Blue Deal's broad governance structure was beneficial to ensure ownership for the programme by the DWA. However, it also added to the complexity of the decision-making process and causes confusion between the Blue Deal and DWA interests. The Blue Deal complex governance structure, with overlapping mandates, makes the decision-making process too heavy and slow, hindering flexibility and timely decision-making. The platforms are in place, but the processes are not conducive to a proactive leadership role of the Blue Deal governance.

4.3.2 Is the Blue Deal budget efficiently used?

The MtR found that the Blue Deal uses its budget partly satisfactory.

The original budget for phase 1 (€ 16,060,000, of which € 9,440,000 is a contribution from the ministries) was envisioned to start the programme with six partnerships in 2019 and gradually expanding to a total of twelve partnerships (four large and eight small ones). During the inception phase and due to an overwhelming demand from the DWA, it was decided to start with nineteen partnerships. The initial expectation, as mentioned in the Blue Deal framework document, was that the ministries would double the input of the DWA in case the number of partnerships in the initial phase would increase.

While the budget contributions from both ministries for phase 1 remained unaltered, the nineteen partnerships could be accommodated by taking, among others, the following by the PMO suggested interventions:

- 25% cut on the budget for each partnership.
- Enhanced contributions (in kind) by the DWA (60 % contributions instead of the 50% as agreed)
- Taking out substantial parts of the programme such as the learning programme and communications, which are now funded by the NWB fund.
- Leverage of funding through the YEP programme
- Reducing the duration for phase 1 from 4 to 3 years

The MtR recognises that those interventions enabled a positive response to the high demand from the DWA for participation in the programme. There were justifiable reasons, such as maintaining momentum for the enthusiasm by the Dutch water boards, responding to this demand and deviating from the original planned approach.

The MtR notes that the decision to start the Blue Deal programme with nineteen partnerships, instead of the planned approach to gradually increase the number of partnerships over the years had far-reaching consequences for the programme approach, programme management capacity and programme funding. Those implications were dealt with in an ad-hoc and reactive manner, without sufficient reflection on the consequences of the mid-term financing of the partnerships and on the mid-and longer-term impact on the programme.

For example, the impact on the PMO having to manage sixteen partnerships as opposed to the initial six was not sufficiently assessed, nor were appropriate corrective actions taken to ensure the necessary capacity. It required an extraordinary effort by PMO staff to make it work. In addition, taking the learning and communications part out of the programme funds significantly altered the nature of the programme falling back to a business-as-usual approach by the DWA.

To conclude, the MtR found that steps are being made in improving operational financial management by the partnerships, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. The employment of fourteen young professionals through the YEP programme is a positive example of leveraging the Blue Deal financial resources. However, the MtR considers that the consequences of the decision to include all nineteen partnerships from the start have not been translated into realistic parameters and guidelines for operational financial management, particularly by the partnerships.

4.3.3 Does the Blue Deal have an adequate financial strategy?

The MtR found the Blue Deal's performance on a financial strategy to be least satisfactory.

The Blue Deal framework document states to expect a €75 million total budget to work with a total of fifteen partnerships, that would include small (annual budget of €300,000) and larger ones (€700,000 annual budget) that would come aboard in an incremental way (starting with six partnerships in 2019).

The Blue Deal framework document lays out the total (estimated) budget for each of the four phases of the programme until 2030. The expected contribution by the ministries is spelled out for the first phase of the programme, but their expected contribution in the subsequent phases is not made explicit in the programme document.

The budget, as included in the Blue Deal framework, does not specify a dedicated budget to the learning and communications nor to the networking, alliance building, resource mobilisation and other important programme activities.

The MtR observes that it is unclear what the vision behind the estimated budget for the different phases is, nor for the budget allocation to the partnerships over the ten-year period, as clear parameters for (annual) budgeting are not developed. Some important assumptions in the Blue Deal framework document such as the incremental growth model and the intention to allocate €300,000 p/a to small partnerships and €700,000 were abandoned during the inception phase but have subsequently not been updated. The Blue Deal framework document also suggests leveraging additional finances through – for example – the global funds for climate change.

The MtR notes that various relevant measures on mid- and longer-term financing and resource mobilisation remain unclear. Examples are: What are the minimum and maximum volumes of the partnerships? How is the volume of the partnership budget expected to develop over time? What is the vision behind the country partners' contribution and how is this expected to evolve over time? Moreover, regarding resource mobilisation, what additional resources will need to be leveraged, and from what potential sources, and how this takes place? How should these resources be mobilised?

The MtR concludes that most of the assumptions for mid- and longer term financing the Blue Deal programme, included in the Blue Deal framework document, have been overruled during the inception phase. Those initial ideas on the mid- and longer-term financing of the programme have

not been updated and a comprehensive vision and strategy on the Blue Deal's mid- and longer-term financing is not available.

4.3.4 How cost efficiently operates the PMO?

The MtR did not score on the PMO's cost efficiency.

The information collected through the MtR is too limited for a judgement on the cost efficiency of the PMO.

However, the MtR observes that:

The MtR notes that 15% budget allocation to the PMO and overhead activities is higher than the standard 10% for the implementation of larger development programmes. This relative increase can be explained due to the underspending of the partnerships. The total amount assigned to the PMO remained unaltered. The 10% for PMO would be sufficient if the Blue Deal partnerships manage to spend their annual budgets. Furthermore, during 2020, the relative spending on PMO increased due to (substantial) underspending by the partnership owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- An initial 10% of the programme budget was allocated to operational costs including the functioning of the PMO. Due to the underspending by the partnerships, this was later increased to 15% (with a maximum of € 900,000) which appears to be a significant percentage compared to the maximum norm of 10% commonly used for managing large international development programmes. It shows that linking the PMO budget to the spending capacity of the partnerships is not helpful from a financial management perspective. The PMO would benefit from a stable and predictable budget.
- Cost-efficient measures for operating the PMO include the (part-time) employment of UvW and DWA staff by the BLUE DEAL and the accommodation costs that are waived by the host organisation (UvW). On the other hand, the by UvW chosen construction for staffing the Blue Deal PMO increases the Blue Deal costs for the PMO.
- The PMO has limited (direct) access to the financial management and control systems in the UvW. Additionally, the MtR wonders to what level the existing programme management systems in the UvW are adequate for efficient management of a €75 million, multi-annual and multi-country/partner programme.
- Most of the programme management and monitoring tools are being developed by the PMO staff. This requires a relatively high level of effort as not all PMO staff has relevant experiences to bear on. Involvement of the coaches, who have relevant senior expertise, in the development of relevant tools and guidelines for project planning and reporting, does (partly) compensate for this gap in the PMO staff.
- Limited experiences in the PL's for realistic planning and result-based budgeting, requesting guidance and support in fulfilling those tasks from the PMO.

The MtR concludes that the above findings are insufficient basis for drawing a conclusion on this review question.

4.3.5 How efficient is the annual planning and budgeting process?

The MtR found that the annual planning and budgeting process is partly satisfactory.

The planning and budgeting for the partnerships and the subsequent annual planning and budgeting rounds (2020 and 2021) happens through a purely demand-driven process. Budget envelopes per partnership (large or small) or clear financial guidelines e.g. on acceptable % of anticipated over- or under-budgeting or spending are not provided. This in combination with the weak planning and budgeting skills of most of the PLs, leads each year to significant over budgeting at the programme level, requiring additional loops to bring the partnership budgets in line with the total available budget. As a result:

- PLs are asked in subsequent loops to cut down on their partnership budget causing additional work and frustration in the PLs and adding to the workload in the PMO. PLs also feel that the lack of clarity on the available annual budgets undermines the Blue Deal's credibility with the country partners.
- The annual planning and subsequent budget adjustments are a recurrent subject in the PL coordination meetings, the intervision sessions, in the bilateral sessions between the coaches and the PL's and in the review panel. It is also a central point of attention in the OO and SC meetings as well as in the DWA governance platforms.

Budget spending is monitored by the PMO. During 2020 (after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak), the PMO closely monitored actual (and forecasted) budget spending and programme progress by the partnerships. The MtR finds that, when asked, not all PLs could share accurate data on the actual budget spending by their partnership during 2020.

The MtR concludes that annual planning and budgeting processes are in place with formats and guidelines, and PLs receive extensive support in the planning and budgeting process. At the same time the annual planning and budgeting process makes a disproportionate large claim on the Blue Deal in time and financial resources.

4.4 Sustainability

The MtR understands the sustainability as the extent to which the results of the Blue Deal programme are likely to continue after programme conclusion. A full assessment of the programme's sustainability would include an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain the programme results over time. It would involve analyses of resilience, risks and potential trade-offs.

Given the short period of programme implementation it is too early for the MtR to judge the programme's sustainability. However, a few factors that contribute to the (potential) sustainability of the programme have been reviewed. Those include country partners' engagement, uptake on the priority thematic themes (gender, poverty alleviation, innovation, climate change) and the programme's communication activities.

The MtR finds the overall Blue Deal performance on the OECD criteria sustainability only partly satisfactory. The below table shows the scores for the Blue Deal's performance and potential for each of the review questions.

The MtR notes that implementation of an adequate mid- and longer-term financing strategy contributes to the sustainability of the programme results. In chapter 4.3 it was concluded that the Blue Deal lacks such financing strategy.

Sustainability / Review questions	Least satisfactory	Partly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly satisfactory
Does the Blue Deal have a solid vision and adequate strategies for country partners engagement?				
Are the priority thematic areas successfully adopted by the programme?				
Are the communications successfully contributing to the Blue Deal strategic goals?				

4.4.1 Does the Blue Deal have a solid vision and adequate strategies for country partners engagement?

The MtR finds that the Blue Deal vision and strategies for country partners engagement are least satisfactory.

The MtR finds that the programme setup and systems are designed with active participation of the DWA and from a Dutch-oriented perspective. The Blue Deal governance structure and processes lack opportunities for the country partners participation in the learning opportunities and participation in strategic agenda setting. The distance between the partnerships and country partners with the Blue Deal programme is mentioned by the Blue Deal governance members and PMO staff who indicate having limited insights on the country partners’ and their perceptions of the programme, as they are not in direct contact with them.

Examples include the learning programme and the employment of the coaches and the review panel. The country partners are not targeted in the current learning programme and the coaches or review panel only interact with the DWA PLs. The M&E system is designed with the purpose to keep track and foster reflection on progress by the partnerships, but the MtR found that country partners have difficulties to fully understand and to appreciate the Blue Deal M&E tools. Many of the Blue Deal communications and tools such as the inspirational note on the integration of the thematic areas in the work with the partnerships were initially mainly produced in the Dutch language.

The DWA PLs act as interlocutors between the country partners and the Blue Deal programme management (coaches). The DWA PLs exchange experiences and table issues at the so-called penvoedersoverleg, chaired by the PMO and they receive feedback on the annual plans, budgets, M&E formats, and reports, through the coaches and review panel. In addition, at a strategic level, there is no direct channel for the PLs and the country partners to engage with the Blue Deal governance.

Given the lack of channels for the country partners to engage directly with the Blue Deal programme management or governance, they operate at distance from each other. Members of the Blue Deal governance and the PMO indicate to be unaware of the country partners’ vision regarding their own role and future of the partnerships. At the same time, the MtR found that members of the SC, OO and the PMO have different ideas on the transfer of responsibilities towards the country's partners.

The MtR concludes that the Blue Deal setup is mainly driven from a Dutch perspective with little room for country partners' engagement risking a disconnect with the expectations regarding the mid- and longer-term role and ownership by the country partners.

4.4.2 Are the priority thematic areas successfully adopted by the programme?

The priority themes (gender and poverty reductions, innovations, climate change and sustainability) are important conditions for sustainable water governance. The MtR found the Blue Deal adoption of the priority thematic areas, cross-cutting themes, partly satisfactory.

The MtR found some positive examples of joint efforts among the Blue Deal partners for introduction of the thematic areas to the PLs. Those activities include implementation of a learning day on social inclusion (February 2019) organised by IGG/DGIS, and the joint inspirational note for PLs on the integration of the cross-cutting priority themes [Blue-Deal-klimaat-gender-armoedebestrijding-inspiratiedocument.pdf \(uvw.nl\)](#). Regular coordination meetings and organisation of joint events with the WASH Consortium, provide for opportunities for exchange of experiences on the introduction of the thematic areas.

However, it is unclear how the aforementioned activities will be followed up or are part of a mid- or longer-term strategy for inclusion of the thematic areas in the implementation of the Blue Deal programme and the partnerships' work plans. The above-described activities are mainly focused at introducing the themes to the DWA PLs but it is unclear if and how existing knowledge bases in the Blue Deal partnerships are considered. The MtR notes that the thematic areas are not part of the Blue Deal learning programme.

The MtR found that introduction of the thematic priority areas (cross-cutting themes) is not supported by a strategy with clear targets and a budget. Furthermore, the introduction or a progress review of the thematic areas have not yet been an explicit subject on the Blue Deal governance agenda. Progress and envisioned outcomes on the inclusion of the thematic areas by the partnerships is not captured in the ToC and M&E system.

The MtR concludes that some good steps are made for the introduction of the prioritised thematic areas, but the thematic areas are not an integrated part of the Blue Deal programme; the relation with the Blue Deal ambition and an operational strategy are not defined. In the meantime, it remains unclear what the expected results are, and how the inclusion of the thematic themes will benefit the programme and/or the partnerships.

4.4.3 Are the communications successfully contributing to the Blue Deal strategic goals?

The communications activities are important for ensuring continued ownership for the Blue Deal programme by the governance of the DWA and in support to dissemination and uptake of the Blue Deal results. The MtR found that the Blue Deal communications contribute partly satisfactory to the Blue Deal strategic goals.

The Blue Deal resources for communication activities – less than 0.2 ft – are extremely low for the kind of programme that the Blue Deal is. At the start of the first phase during the first round of

budget cuts, it was decided to take the allocated amount for communications from the Blue Deal programme budget. Like the learning programme, the communications were adopted by the NWB fund.

Notwithstanding the limited resources for communications, the MtR identified several positive communication activities that include a Blue Deal newsletter, the Blue Deal page on UvW's DWA website, including links to YouTube videos and vlogs on the Blue Deal partnerships, and participation of Blue Deal representatives in national, and international events. Interesting is the Blue Deal exposure at international platforms such as during Stockholm Water Week and the CAS.

In addition to the communication activities by the Blue Deal PMO, the DWA and the Blue Deal partnerships also undertake their own outreach activities. An example is given by the Waterschap Zuiderzeeland that uses, among other media, the regional radio to inform the population in the Zuiderzeeland area on their international development work, that includes their involvement with the Blue Deal partnerships. Another example is the news brief on [the Tana partnership in Kenya](#), by Waternet

The MtR notes that the communication activities successfully contributed to achieving awareness on the Blue Deal programme, mainly in the Dutch Waterschappen (beyond the DWA) and in the Dutch water sector at large. As such it helped to successfully establish the Blue Deal brand in the Netherlands water sector.

The MtR considers the decision to delete communication and its budget from the Blue Deal programme an unfortunate one. Adoption of the communications part of the Blue Deal programme by the NWB ensured a minimum funding for the communication activities but did not contribute to the necessary ownership of this component by the Blue Deal governance.

The MtR observes that the communication activities are not an integrated part of the Blue Deal programme, and it is unclear how the communication activities will be focused, now that the Blue Deal brand has been established.

The MtR concludes that the communication activities, despite the limited resources, did successfully contribute to establishing the Blue Deal brand. However, the MtR also considers that the communications activities are a largely undervalued key element of the Blue Deal programme that urgently needs appropriate and dedicated resources and a strategy or plan for more directed activities, targeting prioritised Dutch and internationally- based stakeholders.

5 Findings at partnership level

Introduction

The central question for the MtR of the Blue Deal partnerships is: *to what extent does the partnership have the potential to make a sustainable and relevant contribution to the Blue Deal programme goals?* The way in this central question has been formulated in the ToR shows that for all of the findings the MtR team has to make the reservation that the partnerships have only started in 2019 and for many partnerships the actual implementation only starting in 2020, which was hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conclusions made in this report are at best preliminary and have as main purpose to support thinking on the way forward.

For answering this main partnership evaluation question, the review has focused on the quality of the partnerships and the relevance for improved water governance in the countries in the long term, using the OECD evaluation criteria. In this chapter, overarching findings from across partnerships are presented. The review reports of the individual partnerships can be found in Annex 5.

From the fourteen partnerships covered by the review, six partnerships (case study countries) have been selected for a more in-depth assessment in the countries: Colombia, Burkina Faso, Eswatini, Ethiopia (Awash), Palestinian Territories and Vietnam. For the case studies, interviews have also been held with key stakeholders, looking for answers about why something happened or not. In the review findings, no detailed examples are described that can be found in partnership reports. Only references to the country or partnership are made where applicable.

A final caveat to the findings made in this chapter is that overall, the MtR has only been able to conduct a superficial assessment of potential of the individual partnerships. Both the qualitative reporting and the feedback to the MtR team was provided by the partnerships themselves without a possibility to independently verify. The focus of the review has therefore been mainly on lessons learned for the future only.

This chapter comprises two parts. The first part presents the findings and their interpretation using the OECD criteria. The second part looks at common learnings relevant for the future of the partnerships, including success factors, areas for improvement, possible quick wins and important considerations for the next phase, which will also cover key potential subjects for joint learning.

Overall impression

The MtR finds a high level of enthusiasm and energy for the Blue Deal programme across all partnerships, both at the side of the Dutch water boards and the country organisations. Contributing factors for this positive experience are the partnerships' concept and the long-term commitment that is underlying the Blue Deal. These factors make the programme stand out, compared to many other development programmes. At the same time, all partnerships consider that the programme's focus is on governance and capacities and has no budgets for implementing water governance measures as a major challenge. The capacity of the partnerships to generate funding for the implementation of activities is seen as a key success factor for the programme and keeping the initial momentum and enthusiasm for the Blue Deal.

Overall, the partnerships are well connected to the Blue Deal ToC. The longer existing partnerships, which are building on previous collaboration have reconsidered their focus for developing their Blue Deal proposals.

Part A: OECD criteria

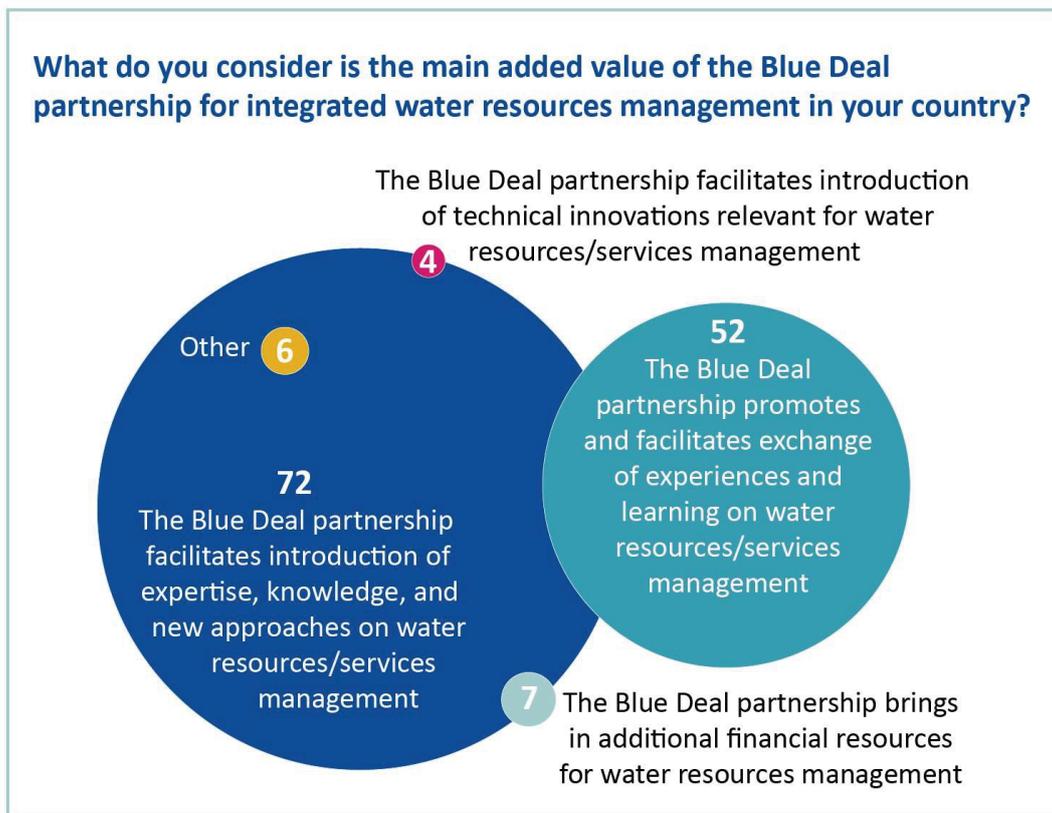
5.1 Coherence

The MtR assesses the coherence of the individual partnerships mainly by (1) its contribution to national/local defined policy priorities and (2) the level to which it is coordinating its activities with other water governance stakeholders and programmes.

In terms of internal coherence, all partnerships agreed that the stronger in-country presence (management, YEP) and the extra resources that the Blue Deal is bringing compared to the previous DWA partnerships is clearly bringing added value. The external coherence is strengthened by the Blue Deal, by emphasising the importance of focusing on engagement with external stakeholders as an innovation to water governance in the countries that are affected by and have an interest in the water governance issues (fig. below).

The MtR finds that all partnerships are well aligned with national priorities and plans and a good number of partnerships are coordinating their activities with other programmes and actors, even when most of the activities are just starting. Examples of such coordination are partnerships in Mali, Romania and Ghana.

Figure: Added value of partnership for IWRM



The MtR concludes that overall the partnerships have a strong internal and external coherence, in which some form of local participation in the water governance processes is seen as a determining factor for success. In several cases, the coordination with other programmes is already taking

shape. There are also signs (for example, the Ethiopian partnerships) that actively establishing this coordination and collaboration with other initiatives may be crucial for maintaining the coherence and relevance for the sector. However, the MtR has not been able to map or check for each Blue Deal partnership all ongoing programmes and the fit the Blue Deal projects have with these.

5.2 Relevance

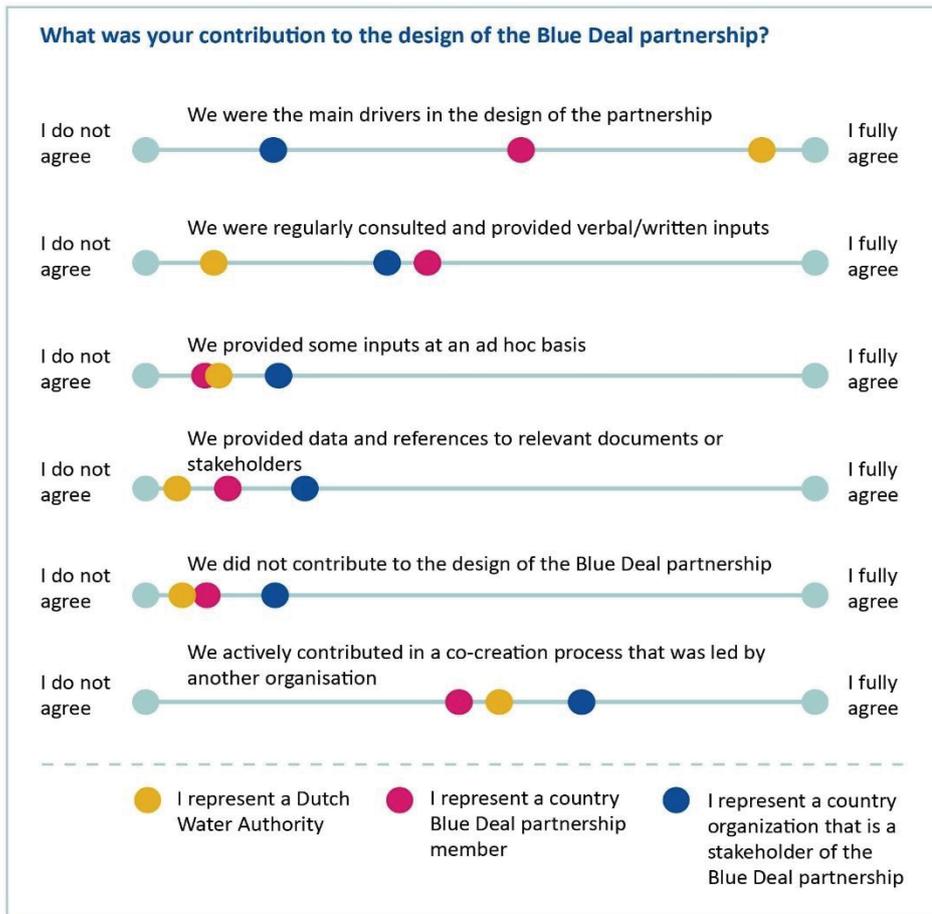
The MtR assesses the relevance of the individual partnership mainly by assessing if (1) the partnership is demand driven, (2) linked to the programme ToC, and (3) if lessons learned from the past have been used for the partnership programmes.

Related to what was already mentioned under the coherence criterion, the national and local thematic priorities have been leading across the partnerships without exception. Some of the partnerships, like Colombia and Ethiopia Abbay show strong awareness that this is (and probably will remain) challenging given possible changing political priorities and institutional uncertainties.

The design process of the projects is regarded by all as demand-driven and inclusive, although the local partners are well aware that the Blue Deal framework is very much a Dutch led framework coming with its own tools for planning and reporting (fig. 2) During the design process, the partnerships have consciously used the ToC and the M&E framework with the outcome indicators facilitates the continuation of the link. However, the ownership of the ToC is stronger on the Dutch side than in-country, which in some cases is done deliberately, to avoid troubling the country partners with an extraadministrative burden.

In those cases where the Blue Deal partnerships have been building on previous (bilateral) partnerships, the opportunity was taken to conduct a thorough review and lessons learned from these experiences to take on board for the Blue Deal partnership and projects.

Figure: Contribution to the partnership by partner



The MtR concludes that at present, all partnerships and their activities are currently relevant for the national water governance challenges. However, also concerns are raised if the partnership will be able to make a difference for the issues they are focusing on, in particular for those with smaller budgets. These concerns are largely because it is often not immediately clear how improved water governance will drive new (water infrastructure) investments, whereas a decision for increasing the agriculture production often leads directly (and quite often wrongly) to such investments. (for example, improved monitoring often creating leverage with other programmes and funding seems crucial to maintain the relevance of the partnerships in the longer term. Another factor contributing to long-term relevance is being well connected with national institutions and political agendas which is not always the case yet (Colombia, Romania, Ethiopia).

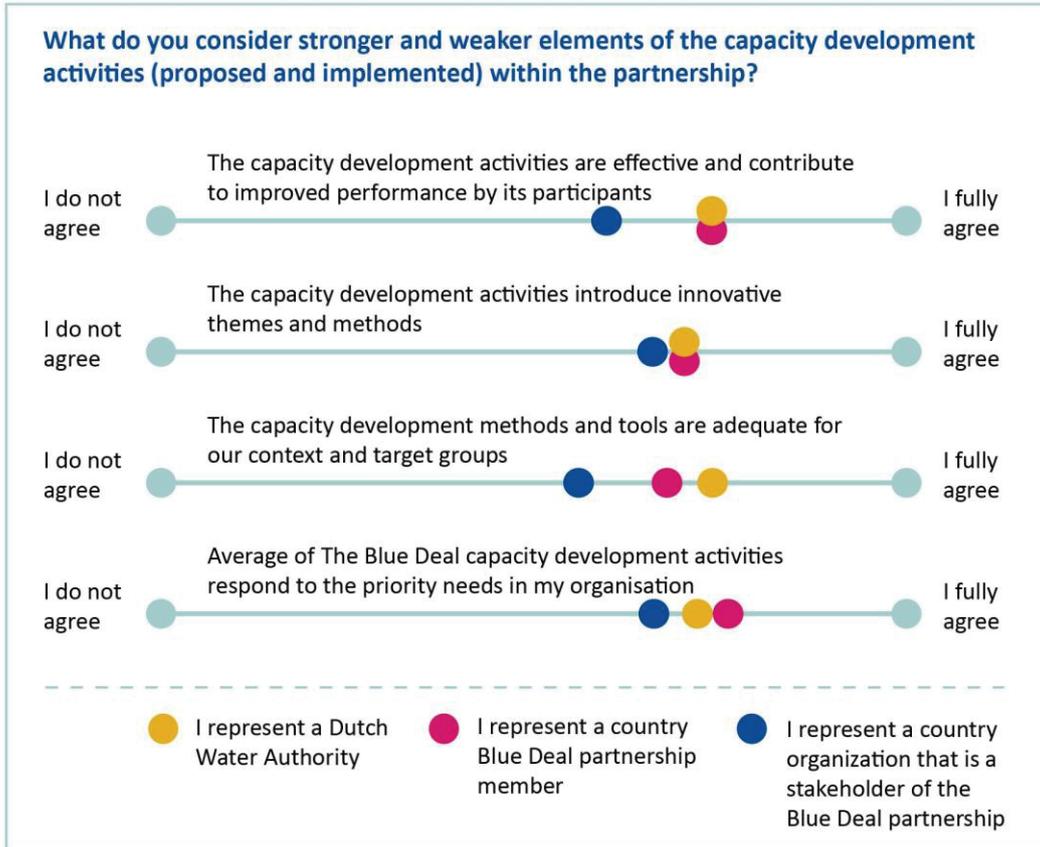
5.3 Effectiveness

For the assessment of the effectiveness of the partnerships, the MtR looks at the (1) partnership approach and setup and (2) capacity strengthening in the partnerships.

Due to relative early timing of the MtR, the delays in implementation due to COVID-19 and the limited direct interactions of the MtR team, an in-depth understanding by the MtR team of the appreciation, ownership and potential of the partnership for the country partners and local water governance challenges has not been achieved. However, what comes to the forefront is the connection with the national political level is not sufficient that for most partnerships. This means that there is little possibility to influence the political agenda on water governance and/or adapt the partnership to new (water) political realities.

A good sign in this context is that a number of partnerships (e.g. South Africa, Mozambique, Peru) appreciate learning, by reflection on achievements and progress and adaptation of their planning based on monitoring and implementation information.

Figure: Appreciation of capacity strengthening.



The above figure shows that the general appreciation of capacity strengthening is valued positively by all partners with slightly lower scores by the people of the non-partnership stakeholders, which seems logical as they will be less involved in the capacity strengthening activities. What also needs to be considered is that the DWA partners are part of a capacity-strengthening programme parallel but related to the Blue Deal. This programme funded by the NWB fund is not open and directed at the Blue Deal country partners.

Another element that is mentioned by many partnerships is the importance of engaging young professionals in the programme, as is already happening with the YEP (Young Expert Programme) from the Dutch side, although opportunities for young country professionals to participate in the programme are limited. For the effectiveness of the programme, many partnerships also mention the value of continued presence on the ground, which is already realised in different ways by engaging young professionals (Ethiopia Awash) or (a) locally- dedicated (part-time) team member(s) (Vietnam, Burkina Faso).

A more general final observation is that overall the model of capacity strengthening – the peer-to-peer model – is highly appreciated by both the in-country and Dutch partners and – for example – also recommended by the World Bank for the long-term capacity-strengthening strategy for Romania.

In conclusion, a formalised embedding of the partnership in the national water governance processes in the countries is a strong tool for influencing the policies and bringing lessons to scale. The example of Burkina Faso of creating a programme steering group is an interesting example to keep following. Another element which is emerging across the partnerships is that the partnerships may increase their effectiveness, by putting capacity strengthening, learning and exchange in a more central position and as a comprehensive element and goal of the partnership.

5.4 Efficiency

The MTR assesses the efficiency of the individual partnerships mainly by looking at (1) the adaptation to digital collaboration that is replacing physical visits due to the pandemic, (2) use of M&E tools for reflection, and (3) efficient use of Dutch and country expertise.

All partnerships report delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the partnerships appreciate the opportunities of new ways of collaboration, in particular to keep continuity of activities between physical visits and the engagement of more partners and partner staff to capacity-strengthening activities.

However, none of the partnerships have explicitly built in these learnings in their 2021 planning. Some, like Romania and Peru, report that the matter is under discussion. From the methods used across the partnerships to reflect and learn, the regular progress meeting is mentioned most frequently. Engaging/consulting other (in-country) partners and peer learning from other partnerships were less often mentioned (fig below). This points to still a relatively inward-looking approach for reflection.

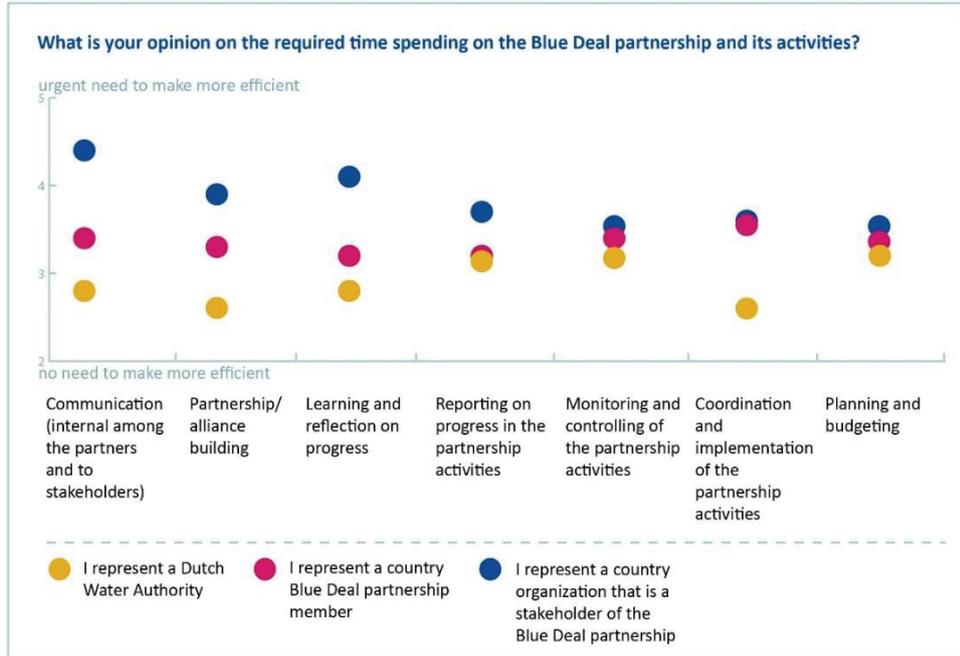
Figure: Type of activities for reflection



Almost without exception, the Dutch PLs report an excessive administrative burden that limits their capacity to focus on partnership building and content issues. Figure 5 shows that this is not the

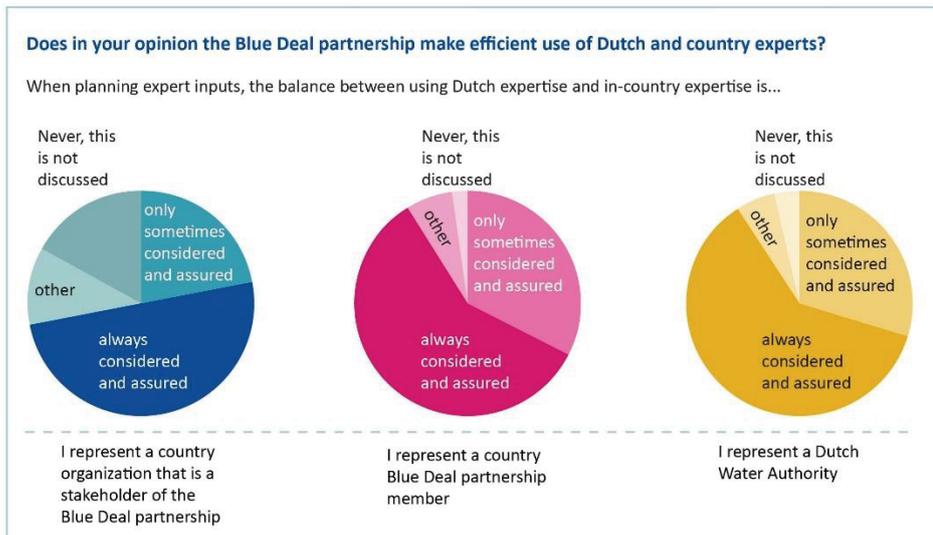
result of one of the management tasks but more across all tasks. Partnerships are actively looking for solutions. The Ethiopia Abbay partnership has recruited Ethiopian staff to engage stronger with the local partners and Vietnam has hired a local team for facilitation of continuity of the programme.

Figure: Need for more efficiency



About two-thirds of the survey respondents think that the balance of using country experts and Dutch experts is discussed sufficiently, with little difference in the responses between country and Dutch responses (fig. below), a number of partnerships (Colombia, Peru, Mali, Mozambique) have mentioned that they are considering including more local expertise to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. At the same time, the unique added value of the Blue Deal partnership of peer-to-peer learning is emphasised – for example – by the Romanian partners, which cannot and should not be replaced by a different approach.

Figure: Efficient use of Dutch and country expertise



The MtR team has no judgement on the efficiency of the partnerships in general. Too many partnerships remain in a phase of starting up implementation and therefore it is too early to conduct an assessment. At this stage of the programme, most of the important efficiency issues for the partnerships are discussed in the findings at the programme level.

5.5 Sustainability

For the assessment of the sustainability of the partnerships, the MtR looks at the (1) country partner ownership and shared vision and the (2) if there is a potential contribution to sustainability from the perspective of the cross-cutting themes.

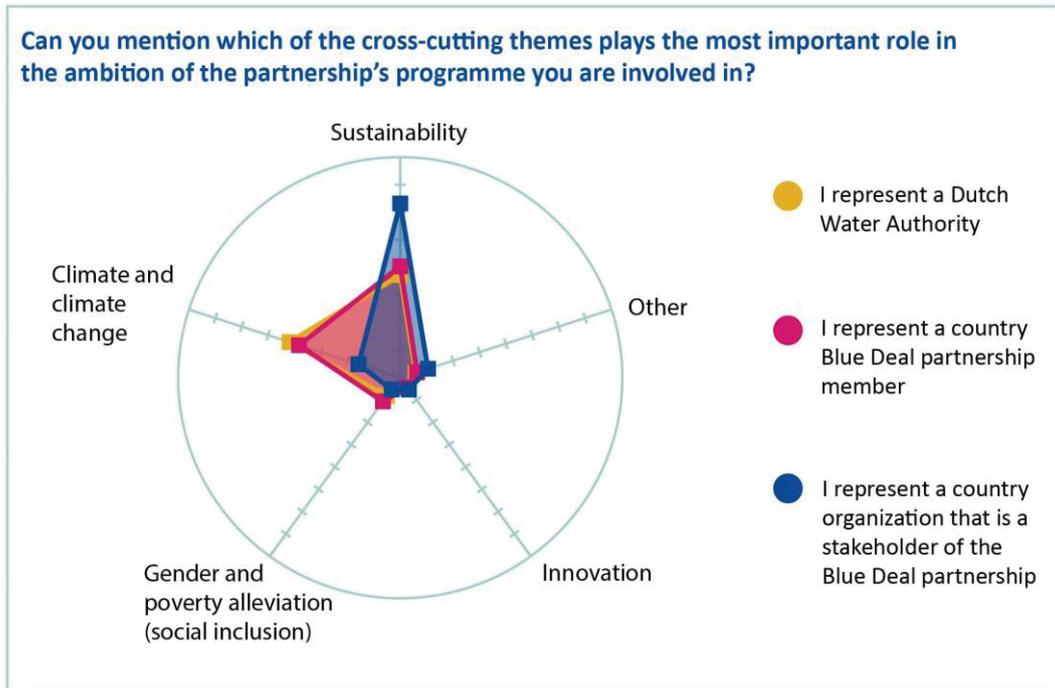
For many partnerships, there is a strong embedding in the national and local context, which contributes to strong ownership and a clear shared vision. The Kenya partnership is an example that is still struggling with national ownership. Less than 10% of the survey respondents (fig. below) indicated that they were not satisfied with their contribution to the planning and monitoring process, which overall suggests good ownership of the project plans of the partnerships.

Figure: Contribution to PMEL process



For the cross-cutting themes, sustainability and climate are mentioned by most as relevant for the ambitions of the partnerships. Gender and innovation are mentioned substantially less frequently (fig. below). What this survey answer is showing, more than anything else, is that there is a consensus between Dutch and country partners about what the thematic focus of the partnership should be: climate change and sustainability. These themes are also easily recognisable for partners from both sides and are most suitable to provide a platform for exchanging of experiences and joint learning (at present).

Figure: Importance of cross-cutting theme



It is too early in the programme to say anything about sustainability across the partnerships. One of the key conditions for sustainability, joint ownership and shared vision, is present for most but not all partnerships. The fact that the programme has a long-term commitment is also mentioned by different partnerships as a contributing factor for a sustainable partnership. A specific thematic focus has not received priority (yet) by the partnerships, and they seem to be happy finding each other on their natural themes: sustainability and climate resilience. A less obvious thematic focus, – for example, on social inclusion – may be considered to become a priority later in the programme, and may require targeted awareness raising and orientation to create a genuine demand for such a theme first. It is encouraging that quite a number of the partnerships are starting to build strategic alliances to leverage impact, in which there is a potential supporting role of the Dutch embassies and coordination with Dutch-funded programmes via RvO and WaterWorX.

5.6 Part B: What can we learn for the future?

1.1.1 Introduction

This section aims to derive a set of common learnings from the partnership reviews. During the focus group discussions with the partnerships, a light participatory SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) exercise was carried out. Partnerships were also asked to share their highlights and ideas on possible quick wins. Details can be found in Annex 5 with all of the partnership reports. This introduction is followed by a description of identified areas for improvement, success factors, and quick wins across the partnerships. At the end of this section, a few emerging general lessons learned will be discussed.

5.6.1 Areas for improvement

- **National embedding:** In a number of partnerships, it is mentioned that there is not always a sufficiently strong link with national water governance stakeholders (yet). These stakeholders are national water ministries but also other influential sectors for water governance like agriculture, industry and energy.
- **Sector communication:** The communication of the partnerships to the sector in the country, in particular to other stakeholders who are outside the direct partnership, is often mentioned as a weak point (Ghana, Peru, Romania, Colombia, Burkina Faso).
- **Mandate and roles of partners:** In some partnerships, the expectations about roles and mandate are not yet sufficiently clarified. This is particularly the case for the newer partnerships (Vietnam, Kenya).
- **Linking with other stakeholders:** Closely related to the point about the need to improve sector communication is the need to strengthen the in-country networks, which has been insufficient to date. The causes mentioned are different. In South Africa and Romania, the regular turnover of staff is stated and the limited presence of local staff was mentioned as a cause in Ethiopia Abbay. In Burkina Faso, the need to reach out to other (more powerful) sectors was mentioned.
- **Effectiveness of capacity strengthening:** Some partnerships had higher expectations from capacity strengthening activities. Although it is recognised that the impossibility of doing face-to-face capacity strengthening due to the pandemic has played a major role, it was also mentioned that insufficient time was dedicated to the activity (Mali).
- **Small investments:** The fact that the partnerships have no funding available for small (innovative or quick problem-solving) investments is seen as a threat for the long-term local commitment by quite a few partnerships (Burkina Faso, Palestinian Territories, Ghana).
- **Coordination:** Coordination of the partnership is mentioned as a challenge by many of the partnerships. However, the nature of the challenges differs from lack of time of the project leader to lack of clear political/conceptual backing by the national sector leadership (Peru, Kenya, Ethiopia Awash).
- **Capacity:** Besides the limited time availability and the perception of the relatively heavy process and management burden on the PLs, language skills (French and Spanish) of Dutch experts and limited capacity at partner side (skills, availability) to execute their role effectively are limiting factors.

5.6.2 Success factors

- **Vision and ownership:** Almost without exception, the partnerships claim a high level of ownership over a strong shared long-term vision, which is the main source of energy and provides confidence in making the partnerships successful. Longer existing partnerships have

made conscious efforts to redefine their aim and strategies, by building on previous experiences and taking inspiration from the programme vision and ToC.

- **Alignment with national policies:** Similarly as with the shared vision, the partnerships have in general a good fit with national policy priorities.
- **Continuity of in-country presence:** Many partnerships have pointed to the importance of realising continuity in presence and capacity in the countries of the partnerships. This was organised differently by YEPs (Ghana, Ethiopia Awash, Palestinian Territories), residential Dutch managers (Mozambique, Mali, Colombia) or local coordination and support (Vietnam).
- **Building leverage and collaboration with other stakeholders:** While it is also mentioned as an area for improvement, some early successes with creating leverage through working with other programmes and stakeholders have taken place (Mali, Peru, Mozambique, Romania).

5.6.3 Quick wins

Most partnerships identified several quick wins at their own level, which are mentioned in the partnership reports. Here those are mentioned that could be grouped under a common heading.

- **Learning:** Using and developing concrete success cases as examples for inspiration (Ghana, Mali).
- **Bringing to scale:** Roll out training modules and developed guidelines to other stakeholders not directly involved in the partnership (Kenya, Peru, Ethiopia Awash, Burkina Faso).
- **Formalising mandate and partnerships:** In particular the newer partnerships can benefit from clarifying and/or formalising the roles of the partners to help manage expectations (Ghana, Vietnam).
- **Develop communication strategy/plan:** Communicating about the Blue Deal partnership, especially targeting the national level professional audiences is felt a necessity (Romania, Burkina Faso)

5.6.4 Emerging lessons

Considering that most partnerships have only been in implementation for one year or less, it is early to already draw lessons. However, a few general observations based on issues that have been mentioned by several partnerships or are observed during the reviews more often than in one single partnership can be summarised.

- Partnerships are aware of the risk that they are not always sufficiently connected to the national level actors that are influential in water governance, which includes actors from other sectors. It is noticed that the DWA in the Netherlands also have limited experience with national level water governance. The potential of the steering group REGIE of Burkina Faso as an example and experiences of national water governance influenced by the Dutch Ministry of I&W and its implementing agency RWS can be explored to also start peer learning at national level water governance.
- There are already first successes of partnerships that are leveraging their efforts with other programmes with strategic alliances, including achieving additional funding for activities. Incorporating strategic alliances for leverage, resource mobilisation and integration of local capacity may help to overcome some of the challenges the partnerships face.
- A communication and advocacy strategy or plan at the partnership level that identifies messages, audiences and channels for communicating and building relations will support the partnerships in realising the above two points.
- Without formulating a high-level goal at the partnership level that articulates the added value of the partnership besides or beyond the beneficiary targets, the partnerships run the risk of losing direction and not maintaining the current level of energy and enthusiasm, because the results may not be sufficiently tangible. Some partnerships have mentioned that the unique

character of the partnership is that it is a catalyst for strategic long-term water governance improvements and has potential for triggering innovative more inclusive stakeholder processes and innovative water governance models and measurements, which are beyond implementation of the partnership but do find their roots there. For long-term sustainability of the partnership, such ambitions should be made an explicit part of the partnership-level theories of change.

- Establishing a steering group – like in the example of Burkina Faso (REGIE) – may help to anchor the position of the partnership in the sector more firmly and create the strategic leverage with other programmes and stakeholders (include key national and Dutch actors, embassy, WaterWorX).
- Partnerships should review their implementation approach and related management and implementation capacity, keeping the unique peer-to-peer knowledge development model of the DWA. Important elements to consider in this review are (1) differentiate between partnership and project management, (2) balancing Dutch and country partner capacities and management, implementation and support roles, and (3) maximise hand-on learning by young professionals from both the Netherlands and the partner country.
- Consider making intervision sessions at the programme level more inclusive for staff from countries and consider separating different peer groups for learning – for example, partnership managers/leaders, project managers, and thematic peer groups – if such specific roles are developed in the future.

6 Estimating impact

6.1 Introduction

The terms of reference of the MtR includes the following research question: “What low-cost or desk study methodology could the Blue Deal programme use to make an improved estimate of the number of people (and size of the area) that gains access to safe, sufficient and clean water due to improved water governance?”

The BD’s definition of impact and indicators is:

The BD impact target is to contribute to clean, safe and sufficient water for 20 million people in 40 catchment areas. The impact indicators are defined¹³ as:

- protected against floods (no. of people);
- increased availability of ground and/or surface water (no. of people);
- increased availability to clean water (no. of people).

In this chapter, we will first briefly discuss the main challenges of answering this research question and thereafter propose a way forward for finding an answer.

6.2 Challenges

OECD has in 2019 updated their definition of impact to “the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects”. In the case of Blue Deal, the high-level socio-economic impact is defined in availability of water and protection against floods for the end-beneficiaries, the people who live in the programme areas. Knowing what Blue Deal interventions contribute to this impact means having to deal with the following challenges:

- **Contribution:** In general, the problem of measuring or estimating any socio-economic impact due to improved water governance in a certain area is complicated by the impacts of (economic) activities which are loosely related to or separate from natural resources management decisions and water governance; for example, by infrastructure developments such as the construction of a highway infrastructure, (de)industrialisation, drinking water utilities, agricultural development, etc. In other words, there is a problem of establishing objectively the contribution of a certain water governance intervention to the impact.
- **Geographical boundaries** and which people can be counted? A second major problem is the difficulty of measuring or estimating impact in quantitative terms, is defining the area that is affected. Agreeing on a number of people impacted will require a geographical area with clear boundaries, but can we always define the area affected by a specific project? An intervention that strengthens the capacity of the national water resource management institute has the whole country as its geographical area. Are we then going to estimate its contribution to water-related improvements for the whole country population?
- **Compatible data:** A third challenge for the Blue Deal is that you want to aggregate the impact from the different partnerships, which would require using a uniform methodology with equal criteria for data collection and analysis across all countries/partnerships.
- **Purpose and for who:** What is the purpose of estimating impact? Is it only for being accountable to the funding agencies and the Dutch taxpayers? Alternatively, should the estimation be

¹³ These indicators are used in the individual project proposals of the partnerships

meaningful primarily for the in-country partners as part of their own water governance monitoring and/or as input for learning? It may also be the case that both apply.

- **Low-cost and desk study only:** The terms of reference explicitly mentions that no field data is to be collected and resources for estimating impact will be limited. This excludes sampling methods, for example.

6.3 Way forward

The challenges mentioned above make clear that there is no easy answer to the problem. In this section, we will propose several steps of a process to research the problem further and provide a process for a possible way forward to deal with estimating the Blue Deal impact. The proposals should be read as initial lines of thinking and will need further discussion and development by the programme.

1. Define the purpose of estimating impact.
 - A. If the purpose is only accountability to the funding agencies, the challenges above make clear that an objectively meaningful figure cannot be provided. The main criteria for selecting a methodology may in this case be if the agencies agree with the methodology. It is recommended that in this case the PMO will provide a simple template to the partnerships that will define the estimated project contribution to the impact. The template and the quality control by OO will provide some uniformity across the different measurements. The template and process should consider:
 - The potential number of beneficiaries in the target area for each project, which are the total number of people living in the area and affected by the project.
 - Estimate the contribution of the project when 100% successful; for example, by the budget percentage the project represents of the total of investments for water governance measures in the target area during the project duration. Instead of the percentage of water governance investments, any other proxy measurement can be applied. Of course, this approach will require an agreed definition of what type of investments are counted as part of water governance.¹⁴
 - Agree on the percentage of success of the project at the end and calculate the estimated number of people who have potentially benefitted from the water governance project.
 - Applying the outcome harvesting methodology as an evaluation method twice during a programme phase (4-5 years) – for example – could help to justify the projects' contributions to the improved water governance. Not to suggest a stronger objectivity for the score and justification but to provide an explanation of the score and making clear and explicit the actual subjectivity of the score.
 - The OO and PMO will undertake quality control of the process and estimations, also anchoring the results with the funding agencies.
 - B. If the purpose is both accountability for the funding agencies and for strengthening of the in-country water governance monitoring, "estimating impact" could – for example – become one of the learning trajectories of the Blue Deal. Steps 2-8 provide some considerations for dealing with the earlier-mentioned challenges.
2. Establish a working group at the programme level, which guides the partnerships, manages the process and facilitates a learning trajectory "estimating impact". The working group members could be one OO member (for anchoring with funding agencies), PMO (managing learning trajectory and alignment with planning and monitoring), coaches for facilitating learning, and two country representatives from the partnerships.

¹⁴ For example, use the building blocks of Good Water Governance: <https://www.uvw.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Building-blocks-for-good-water-governance-2016.pdf>

3. A working group will also be established at the partnership level, which will be responsible for guiding the impact monitoring and learning process at the partnership level, providing the impact reports and participating in the learning trajectory.
4. To identify project contributions to impact, the partnerships will analyse which outcomes with indicators from national development plans or regional/catchment/district master plans are relevant for each project of the Blue Deal partnerships. This are often indicators for agriculture, drinking water, flood protection, energy, water quality etc. An example is the indicator “value of agriculture products”. The project link to such an indicator could be “improved monitoring of water allocations provides a better distribution of water among the farmers”.
5. Developing partnership theories of change that will include the national/local outcomes will help to make the logic clear how projects contribute to these national outcomes.
6. The in-country working group will agree on the contribution to the national/local target by the project and the working group will translate this in a target number of beneficiaries.
7. Twice during each programme phase, the partnership ToC will be reviewed/updated, using outcome harvesting to understand the changes achieved and contributions of the partners to these changes. This would also be a good moment for the estimation of progress with the relevant outcome and contribution by the project.
8. At the programme level, the working group will validate and aggregate the estimates of the different projects and all partnerships and will use this for a review of the ToC at the programme level and reporting to funding agencies.

Our final remark on making a choice between option A and B is that the choice must be considered in the context of the broader learning strategy of the programme and the priorities of the country partners in this regard. It may be useful to start by asking the question whether this type of estimating impact is relevant or has priority for the national water governance monitoring. If measuring impact has little priority for most of the countries for their country’s national water governance monitoring, it may be best to set up a process along the lines of option A. In any case, our advice is for both options to first pilot and develop the approach with two or three partnerships before rolling it out throughout the programme.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Main conclusions

The overall conclusion of the MtR is that the Blue Deal programme has strong potential to make a significant contribution to improved water governance and improved access to safe and clean water worldwide. Strong elements include the Blue Deal partner's commitment to unify their forces, the agreement to a common set of policy priorities, and the positive energy around the programme, particularly around the partnerships in the countries. Those elements set a strong basis for the programme's potential.

At the same time, the MtR considers that the MtR findings point to weaknesses in the conceptualisation and setup of the programme that jeopardise the programme to deliver on its ambition. The MtR identifies the following overarching weaknesses:

- **Lack of clarity on the Blue Deal's ambition and strategic direction.** The programme is conceptualised based on a desire to contribute to the DWA's goal to professionalise, and contribute to the prioritised policies objectives by the ministries, namely SDG 6 and the IWA. However, the current design of the programme only reflects the ambition at the partnership level to improve water governance in the partnership countries, but not the international water policy ambition. This is most clearly noted in the ToC of the programme. In practice, programme implementation through partnership development is mainly (DWA) demand driven, and activities at the programme level are ad hoc with insufficient traction. Having clarity about all elements of the Blue Deal's ambition and their integration in the corresponding strategies is important for keeping the overall direction and maintaining the positive energy of all programme partners.
- **Sub-optimum leverage of the Blue Deal partnership.** There is a broad agreement on the role between the Blue Deal partners (DWA, MoFA and I&W), but how to perform that role has not sufficiently been signed off. It is not evident yet how the added value of the partnership will be leveraged, in particular the role of the ministries. Underlying this is the lack of clarity on the nature of the Blue Deal programme, the implementation model to be adopted and the role of the partners in its implementation. As long as this remains unclear, the programme risks missing the opportunity to leverage the full value of the partnership.
- **Limited decisiveness and leadership by the Blue Deal governance.** The Blue Deal governance and management structures, platforms and processes can be made more effective for making decisions, to address challenges, solve problems and manage expectations. Currently, the governance bodies are focused on a control function instead of taking proactive leadership. Blue Deal governance and the Blue Deal partnerships operate at a distance, limiting the capitalisation on the experiences and views of the partnerships in decision-making by the Blue Deal governance. Progress and enthusiasm for the programme will be frustrated without a more agile structure that allows for adequate and timely Decision-making, in which there is a stronger role for the Blue Deal governance in strategic leadership, and better options for connecting with the partnerships in the countries' programmes.

- **The performance of the PMO is under pressure.** Limited capacities in the PMO for programme management, having to manage nineteen partnerships (instead of 6-12), and the level of support needed by the Blue Deal PLs in the annual planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting processes place a strong burden on the staff in the PMO, particularly on the programme manager (0.8 ft). PMO's mandate is too restricted to adequately facilitate programme implementation by the partnerships. Furthermore, a strategic framework to focus the networking, the outreach, and the learning activities by PMO staff is lacking. It is important to bring the PMO capacities in line with the requirements in programme support and the management model the Blue Deal partners decide for.
- **Conflicting expectations on employment of the PLs.** The MtR observes that strengthening the Blue Deal's PLs management capacities draws relatively heavily on the programme and PMO resources. This is in line with DWA's longer-term objective to professionalise its staff. At the same time, this creates tension with the expectations towards the PLs to perform and deliver on the project management requirements. Some PLs also face a tension between their enthusiasm and drive for content-oriented peer-to-peer collaboration and knowledge exchange with the country partners and the demand on them to deliver on the project beneficiary results. Some partnerships are reinforcing the PL functions by models that ensure continued country presence. A review of the PL model in view of the DWA vision on its longer-term engagement with the partnerships will be helpful to assess the management functions and how they can be performed more effectively.
- **Lack of a long-term vision on the partnerships in the countries.** Programme setup and systems are keeping the partnerships and particularly the country partners at a distance. The programme is mainly conceptualised and driven from a "Dutch" perspective. A clear vision on country partners engagement and longer-term partnership development beyond achieving the beneficiary targets by 2030, is not available. Without a clear vision and a translation into explicit results at the programme level, the longer-term sustainability of the partnerships and results are at stake.
- **Insufficient capacity to learn and adapt.** At the partnership level, learning and adapting is enabled through the M&E framework that includes reflection moments among the partners in the partnerships. At the programme level, the Blue Deal governance has been mainly preoccupied with operational matters and a higher-level reflection (zooming out) on the programme direction and partnership functioning has yet not been prioritised by the Blue Deal governance. The Blue Deal setup including platforms, channels, processes and resources do not sufficiently foresee and promote an open culture based on reflection and learning from and among all of the Blue Deal partners. Without a stronger learning culture in the Blue Deal across all of its levels, the programme will not be able to adjust sufficiently quickly to new opportunities and threats.

7.2 Headline reflection on the way forward

The overall conclusion of the MtR is that the Blue Deal programme has strong potential to make a significant contribution to improved water governance and improved access to safe and clean water worldwide. At the same time, the MtR also identified weaknesses in the programme's conceptualisation and design that risks withholding the Blue Deal from reaching its ambition and achieving its full potential. Sustainability of the programme results is also at stake, as the programme lacks a vision and strategy that supports longer-term ownership for the programme results by the responsible authorities in the partner countries.

The MtR considers that keeping overall direction and maintaining sufficient enthusiasm for the programme in all Blue Deal partners is a challenge and realistic threat for the Blue Deal in reaching its ambition. Furthermore, the MtR finds that the Blue Deal has a larger potential than is currently pursued. The Blue Deal has the potential to reach a larger impact, beyond the current ambition that is translated in the beneficiary target of reaching 20 million people, in 40 catchment areas with clean and safe water by 2030.

The MtR finds that the main challenges for the Blue Deal to reach its full potential is for the programme to find the root causes of the lack of clarity in the conceptualisation and the gaps in the setup of the programme. This relates to the need for clarification on a number of fundamental questions by the partnership. The MtR recommends addressing some of the most fundamental ambiguities and gaps in the programme, before the design of phase 2.

The MtR's main recommendation is to create sufficient space for reflection, clarify and agree on some of the fundamental issues, make the necessary strategic choices and develop the corresponding strategies before outlining and embarking on phase 2. The MtR believes that in the coming months – after the conclusion of the MtR – there is the opportunity to build in a break in programme development, creating the space and ensuring focus on addressing some of the fundamental weaknesses, as well as making timely adjustments to the programme setup.

The fundamental questions to be addressed include the following:

- What is the partnership's joint vision on the Blue Deal's contribution to the water sector? What are the partners' expectations towards the Blue Deal added value for the Dutch water sector, the international water sector and in the Blue Deal partner countries?
- What kind of partnership does the Blue Deal want to be. What is realistically possible and how do the partners (DWA, IGG and I&W) fulfil their roles?
- How does the partnership want to position the Blue Deal in the Netherlands and internationally, and with whom and why is the Blue Deal going to work together?
- What governance setup is needed? What governance arrangements are needed that support the Blue Deal vision and enable strategic leadership, and unravel the Blue Deal and DWA symbiosis?
- How to link the Blue Deal learning strategy, communications and outreach strategy, and the financing strategy to Blue Deal's vision and ambition and make it part of the ToC?
- What do the decisions above mean for the ToC and related M&E framework?

- What do the above choices mean for the structure of the PMO, programme support functions and PL model?

The following sections provide process and methodological suggestions for addressing and clarifying the above fundamental matters.

7.3 The way forward: recommendations and suggestions

In line with the headline reflection and main recommendation described in the previous section, this section proposes alternatives, or process and methodological suggestions for the way forward in addressing the fundamental issues identified in the previous chapter.

7.3.1 Clarify the Blue Deal’s vision and ambition

The MtR findings and conclusions point to the ambiguity in the Blue Deal conceptualisation. It refers to the expectations of the Blue Deal to contribute to the joint policy priorities (SDG 6, IWA, and DWA’s professionalisation) that suggests a broader role for the Blue Deal than what is reflected in the current Blue Deal ambition and approach that is limited to achieving the beneficiary target of 20 million people, in 40 catchment areas in nineteen countries. The recommendation of the MtR is to clarify the Blue Deal ambition. This clarity is necessary to focus programme implementation and make the Blue Deal partnership more meaningful.

The MtR sees two options: the Blue Deal should decide to 1) keep the current ambition limited in its policy influencing contributions to the SDG and IWA, implying a limited role for the ministries in mainly funding agency role, or 2) broaden the ambition to influence the international water and climate agenda and contribute to the SDGs, with a more active role for the ministries in leveraging their knowledge and international networks.

Clarifying the ambitions is intimately connected with the decision on the nature of the Blue Deal Programme. Both imply a common vision among the Blue Deal partners on how they see the Blue Deal programme contributing to the future of the water sector, nationally or worldwide.

The table below shows the above two options and how they can reflect in the programme conceptualisation. Column one describes option 1 that reflects best the current Blue Deal implementation. Column 2 reflects option 2, the broader ambition.

The MtR considers that given the policy framework adopted by the partnership, the Blue Deal has the potential for a larger impact, beyond the current beneficial target.

Table: Blue Deal de facto and potential ambition

Ambition	Focus on the beneficial target	Focus on improved international water governance
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Main aim	Helping 20 million people around the world gain access to clean, sufficient, and safe water	Strengthen water security and water safety through long-term water governance improvements worldwide
Results	Beneficiary target 20 million people have access to clean, sufficient and safe water	In addition to the results for option 1: Improved knowledge and innovative approaches for improved water governance, better collaboration (public, business, civil society) in improving water governance, including the employment of Dutch business and organisations, enhanced priority of water governance and IWRM on the political agenda (national budgets) of national governments
Scope	People living in 40 catchment areas, in sixteen countries	Sustainable impact on water governance, beyond the sixteen partnerships, worldwide
Role of the Blue Deal programme	Beneficiary result-oriented implementation programme	Blue Deal as a catalyst for sustainable change
Approach	Collaboration with nineteen (existing and new DWA) partnerships (capacity building, organisational strengthening) towards integrated IWRM plans. Based on peer- to-peer exchange.	Country component: through the nineteen DWA partnerships Global component: international arena For both components: Networking and alliance building with strategic players (organisations, platforms, networks), knowledge development and innovation, policy influencing and advocacy.
(expected) Time spectrum	2030	Longer term, beyond 2030

A commonly- agreed vision among the Blue Deal partners on the future water sector and the contribution of the Blue Deal programme to this envisioned future will be important for a common ground, as a compass among the partners in clarifying the Blue Deal ambition and Decision-making on the nature of the Blue Deal programme.

The MtR recommends the following practical steps to clarify the Blue Deal vision and ambition:

- *Start with a context and trend analysis.*

It is recommended to conduct a global context and trend analysis. This exercise will map out the existing challenges and dynamics in the international water sector, relevant for water safety and water security, and anticipate new trends that might influence the dynamics and future. Important developments include the climate crisis, the increased importance of water on the climate agenda, the international leadership role of the GoN in climate adaptation and the current COVID-19 pandemic, including the anticipated aftermath. A useful tool to be considered is scenario building that will help to assess the positioning of the Blue Deal in the bigger picture of the water sector.

- *Consider implementing a consultation meeting with selected Dutch and international organisations.*

Part of the context analysis the MtR could consider organising a consultation meeting that will help to position the Blue Deal, and its added value, in the Dutch and international landscape of

initiatives and actors relevant for (I)WRM and water governance. It will also be helpful in collecting inputs for strategising the Blue Deal's networking and partnership development strategy.

In preparation of such a meeting, a stakeholder analysis including an importance/Influence Matrix (IIM) assessment will help to generate insights on the importance and influence of the main stakeholders. The result of the IIM will help to identify and prioritise stakeholders for the consultation meeting. It will also provide important inputs for strategy development on the Blue Deal outreach strategy (communications and advocacy).

- *Organise a visioning working session.*

The results of the context and trend analysis will need to be presented to the Blue Deal partners. This will set the basis for interpretation and discussion by the Blue Deal partners on the water sector, how its developing and what the envisioned future of the sector will look like. This exercise should help the Blue Deal partners to agree on a common vision. An agreement on the Blue Deal vision will help to value the Blue Deal programme in the bigger picture. It will also help to ensure a common ground among the Blue Deal partners for assessing the potential contribution of the programme to the envisioned future situation, considering the agreed policy goals. It is important that the Blue Deal thematic areas are included in the visioning exercise in view of their contribution to the Blue Deal vision.

- *Redefine the Blue Deal ambition and results.*

With a jointly- agreed vision, the partnership will be in a better position to update and specify its ambition.

Once the Blue vision and ambition are clearly defined and communicated, the OO with support of the PMO will need to translate the ambition into programme results. It implies defining the results to be achieved on the different dimensions of the ambition, such as for knowledge development and innovation, learning, business development and employment of Dutch organisations and for networking and partnership development. It will also need to clarify the expected results of addressing the prioritised thematic areas (gender and poverty alleviation, innovation, climate change and sustainability).

The below steps will be needed when the Blue Deal partners decide for option 2. Updating the ToC is not relevant when it is decided to keep going as in option 1.

- *Update and expand the ToC.*

Once the joint vision and ambition have been clarified and the results are defined, the ToC needs to be updated so that its (intermediate) outcomes reflect the Blue Deal's full ambition beyond the beneficiary target to be achieved with the DWA partnerships. Once the ToC includes all of the relevant outcomes, further elaboration of the intervention logic would be needed. It will need to indicate the envisioned pathways to reach the Blue Deal's ambition by 2030. Once a final ToC is in place, the programme has a solid reference for monitoring and reflection on the course and achievements of the full programme.

7.3.2 Strengthen the partnership's foundation

The MtR recommends that the Blue Deal partners dedicate time and resources to improving the partnership's functioning by making its foundation more solid. Active engagement of the Blue Deal

partners in the above-suggested activities will contribute to a common understanding and sense of togetherness among the Blue Deal partners.

After the Blue Deal has clarified its ambition, the Blue Deal partners will be in a good position to define the kind of partnership it wishes to be. It is important that the ministries have their internal discussion on their expectations and on what they realistically can contribute prior to or in parallel with the visioning exercise and in defining the Blue Deal’s ambition.

The results of those internal discussions will be an important input to discuss the type of partnership, and the roles of each of the partners. The strategic choice to be made is whether the Blue Deal programme will continue its current result-oriented implementation model that will leverage the nineteen partnerships to achieve its beneficiary target by 2030, or one that aims to engage in longer-term partnership engagement and strategically leverages the ministries knowledge and networks for catalysing sustainable change in water governance worldwide?

The below table summarises the two options, highlighting the implications for the partners’ roles and accountability.

Co-funding relationship	Partnership with joint responsibilities
<p>DWA implements the programme, building on existing and new relations with country partners and co-funds the programme (in-kind contribution)</p> <p>Ministries co-fund the programme (subsidy provision)</p>	<p>DWA implements the programme, building on their relations with country partners and co-funds the programme (in-kind contribution)</p> <p>Ministries strategically leverage their international networks, and knowledge</p>
<p>Accountability is mainly vertically in which the DWA reports to the ministries</p>	<p>Horizontal-mutual accountability that requires a joint assessment of programme progress and the partners contribution to it.</p>

A guiding question to the Blue Deal partners for making the above decision is on what points they can help each other in reaching the Blue Deals ambition and how to do this.

Another choice to be made is the management model for implementation of the programme. Various options can be considered, the table below proposes two options. The common vision of the Blue Deal programme should be an important reference and inspiration for the choices to be made on the kind of partnership and the management model to be adopted by the partnership.

Type of management models/ main features	Centrally- managed programme implementation	Decentralised, partnerships driven programme implementation
Governance	Emphasis is on planning and control and operational matters	Steers by high-level strategic leadership, establishes a common framework for partnership development in the countries
PMO	Supports governance in the planning and control function with emphasis of one size fits all formats and procedures	Provides an enabling role to the country partnerships, demand driven
Governance and Management structure and processes	Resource intensive	Lean and mean

Partnerships	Low level of autonomy	Higher level of autonomy, adaptability to the specifics of the partnerships and country context
PLs	Limited or no Decision-making authority	Authority for Decision-making within agreed framework/ parameters bearing on the PLs professional capacities
Monitoring and accountability	On established targets and centrally agreed indicators	Partnership specific indicators

Once the partnership has agreed on the nature of the partnership and the management model, the partnership will be able to think through the consequences for each of the partners' specific contributions to the programme.

- *The MtR recommends that the Blue Deal should set out a process to address the above key strategic choices, that will require a reiterative process, including internal consultations in the Ministries and DWA and some joint sessions, partly during or in parallel of the visioning exercise.*

7.3.3 Define a strategic framework for programme implementation

The programme will need a clear strategic framework that can guide its activities towards achieving results. This strategic framework will need to link with the Blue Deal ambition and be in line with the other strategic choices by the partnership.

The following steps are recommended:

- *Update some of the strategic choices made in the Blue Deal framework document.*

Those include among others the phasing of the programme, the total number of partnerships, and scale of the partnerships (minimum and maximum budgets) that have been overruled in implementation of the programme. Bring those in line with the decision on the Blue Deal ambition and set targets.

- *Identify and address outstanding strategic choices that will guide the programme to achieving its ambition.*

Several strategic choices need to be made to provide more steering to the programme and make the programme activities more purposeful. Examples of those strategic decisions include prioritisation of country choices, mid- and longer-financing of the existing partnerships and potential for expansion, and country partners' involvement.

- *Elaboration of operational strategies.*

The MtR suggests elaboration of strategies that enable a strategic approach to some of the key activity areas in the Blue Deal programme. Strategies will outline the concrete objectives and results, the activities to be developed, by who and how, the resources needed, and targets to be achieved that clearly connect with the Blue Deal vision and ambition.

Depending on the strategic choices by the partnership, on the Blue Deal ambition and implementing model, the MtR suggests the Blue Deal to consider development of the following strategies.

Strategies	Suggested elements
Financing	Guidance for operational planning and budgeting processes by the partnerships. Guidance for mid-and longer-term financing: How will the budget allocated be over the different phases, over the budget items? What are minimum budget allocations to individual partnerships? What financial resources are expected to be leveraged (from what sources?) How are the contributions from country partners expected to evolve over time?
Networking and partnership development	Who are the preferred partners for the Blue Deal, in the Netherlands, in the countries and internationally? How will the Blue Deal collaborate with them and what results should the collaboration deliver?
Communications and advocacy	That identifies priority audiences, the information and messages to be shared, products and channels to be used and results to be obtained. The Blue will need to involve an expert in advocacy and policy influencing, next to a communication specialist for development and support in implementation of the strategy.
Knowledge development and innovation	Consider development of a programme broad knowledge development and innovation strategy that builds on the demand for new knowledge and on existing experiences in the partnerships, including DWA and the country partners.
Learning	Include learning around the thematic priority areas (cross-cutting themes) Include efforts to capture the already existent knowledge base in the country partners. Include methods such as the CoP and learning with other stakeholders.

The MtR suggests consultation and involvement of (selected) country partners in strategy development.

7.3.4 Simplify the governance structure and decision-making processes

To enhance the decisiveness and strategic leadership by the Blue Deal governance, the MtR recommends simplifying the governance structure, the decision-making process and positioning the Blue Deal governance for an enhanced strategic leadership role. It is also suggested to improve the connectedness between the Blue Deal governance and the partnerships, particularly on strategic matters.

To achieve this, the MtR suggest the following:

- The Blue Deal to take initiative in uncoupling the DWA from the Blue Deal governance, by putting the DWA (CINTER and WINTER) at a distance. It will be up to the CINTER to decide how the DWA can be best represented in the SC and the OO.
- Clearly distinguish and define roles and responsibility of SC, OO and programme manager by paying attention to the accountability of the PMO to the OO.
- Make sure the SC focuses on high-level strategic Decision-making-outlining the overall programme direction and keeping oversight on programme progress towards achieving its vision and ambition in accomplishment with the prioritised policy goals.
- Make sure the OO responsibilities focus on providing guidance and operationalisation of the programme's approach and strategies. Keeping the PMO accountable for effective implementation of their work plan.

- Make sure the SC and OO members have the capacities (time and dedication) for their respective roles in both governance platforms. Reconsider the need for both platforms, its functions and the appropriate level of representation, including the right capacities of each of the partners in the Blue Deal governance.
- Expand the mandate of the PMO for Decision-making on operational management of the programme within the Blue Deal governance established strategic parameters.
- Explore options for the PLs and country partners' participation and inputs in the Blue Deal strategy development. An option is to organise (a virtual) annual programme review and learning meeting at the programme level.

7.3.5 Reconsider the PMO arrangements and setup

The MtR considers that the PMO has the potential to function more effectively, given:

- It has a mandate to act more swiftly on operational matters and more proactively in taking the lead in the development of strategic proposals such as on Blue Deal's longer-term financing, learning and communications.
- The overlap between Blue Deal and DWA tasks are made explicit and/or untangled.
- Investments are made in suitable systems and tools for managing an international development programme.
- Investments are needed in appropriate systems and software such as for financial management, M&E dashboards that better respond to the efficient management of a multi-country, multiple-million, and multiple-partner programme.

The MtR considers that investments for enhancing the PMO's capacity is needed but only makes sense after clarity on the Blue Deal's programme management model is agreed upon. Examples of strategic choices that have impact on the PMO capacity requirements are the number of partnerships, enhanced autonomy for the partnerships and increased responsibility to the PLs

The MtR recommends the following:

- *Assessing the PMO requirements (functions and capacities) in view of the Blue Deal updated ambition and management model.*

In this assessment it is recommended to separate between the requirements for programme management tasks and the support to the PLs and partnerships. The MtR suggests that coaching support is scaled down to be available on demand, for the partnerships (PL and country partner). The PMO can play a stronger role in approval of annual plans and budgets within the established parameters by the SC and OO. This will replace the need for employment of the external review panel.

- *Discussing with UvW about the interest and commitment to continue hosting the Blue Deal PMO*

The MtR recommends assessing options for strengthening the PMO linked to the DWA vision on their future engagement in development programmes, beyond the present Blue Deal. The Blue Deal governance to discuss with the UvW management their interest and possibilities to continue hosting the PMO and ensuring the required PMO functions and capacities. A reconfirmation of the

UvW's commitment to hosting and facilitation of the PMO functions considering the new requirements will be important to be obtained.

Alternatively, options for enhancing the PMO's effectiveness could include outsourcing (parts) of the PMO functions to a host organisation with relevant experiences in managing multi-country and multi-partner international development programmes.

7.3.6 Rethink the partnerships management model

Independent of the management model that the Blue Deal adopts, the MtR recommends organising the management of the partnerships more professionally. It is important that rethinking the partnerships' management model happens with DWA and considers the DWA longer-term vision on their continued work in international development, beyond the Blue Deal.

Some of the practical suggestions for improving more effective and efficient project management are:

- Reconsider the present PL model based on one PL for each partnership, on a part-time basis. Consider the appointment of dedicated PLs with the necessary interest and professional background. An option is to organise this regionally in which one PL manages several partnerships. In this way, other DWA staff can concentrate on the content by peer-to-peer engagement with the country partners.
- Define a professional profile of the PLs, including the required competencies, to be used for selection of (new) PLs and performance review by the PMO.
- Develop a training plan for PLs based on an individual capacity needs assessment.
- Make in-country presence part of the Blue Deal standardised approach. This does not necessarily mean a Dutch DWA staff member, other more cost-efficient options are also possible.

7.3.7 Make the country partners and partnerships a more integrated part of the Blue Deal vision and ambition

The MtR recommends working towards more ownership by the country partners by bestowing the partnerships a more strategic role in achieving the Blue Deal ambition and impact. This is recommended based on the MtR's assumption that the Blue Deal will embrace a broader ambition that better reflects the partnership's policy goals. In that case, the partnerships in the countries will need to be considered as longer-term strategic allies to jointly reach the Blue Deal's full potential. This goes beyond the current, more limited role in which the country partnerships are employed as an "agency" for accomplishing the Blue Deal 2030 beneficiary target. This will require a joint and broadly-supported vision by the Blue Deal partners.

The MtR recommends the Blue Deal to address the role and expectations of the partnerships when defining the vision and ambition for the Blue Deal programme. The envisioned role of the country partners and partnerships is expected to be reflected in the management model and to be adopted by the Blue Deal programme.

Suggested steps include:

- *The Blue Deal governance to request the DWA on their thinking on longer-term engagement with the country partners, beyond the conclusion of the current Blue Deal programme.*

- *The Blue Deal to consider and adopt the DWA vision on longer-term partnership engagement.* This is an important input for the visioning exercise and in clarifying the Blue Deal ambition. It will set the basis for the Blue Deal to support the DWA in the implementation of their vision on longer-term engagement with country partners.
- *The Blue Deal to translate the joint vision on the position and role of the partnerships in the programme setup.* A broader and more strategic role of the country partners and partnerships will need adjustment in the current programme setup. Examples could include the organisation of an annual planning, review and learning event with all partners, inclusion of the country partners in the Blue Deal learning and knowledge development activities, consultation and inputs in the Blue Deal strategy development and uptake of shared responsibilities in-country partnership management.

7.3.8 Institutionalise learning and adaptive management in the programme structure and processes

The MtR recommends the Blue Deal partnership to become more adaptive by putting learning and reflection more central to programme development and implementation, aiming to foster more openness for learning and continuous reflection by all programme partners, across all levels.

Hereto the MtR suggest the following:

- *Develop a learning strategy linked to the overall updated Blue Deal ambition*

Recommendations for elaboration of the learning strategy include:

- Following a learning-by-doing approach
 - Engaging staff from DWA and country partners
 - Introducing the prioritised thematic areas (by preference starting with 1 or 2 themes only)
 - Fostering learning around thematic content areas by facilitating CoPs, including relevant stakeholders
 - Including peer-to-peer exchange visits, if possible, by virtual field visits
 - Exploring the employment of virtual options and tools for interactive learning
 - Considering the facilitation of the learning strategy by an expert or an international organisation with extensive experience in facilitating learning programmes
- *Institutionalise regular reflection on the programme's course and strategy development*

The MtR recommends fostering a learning culture with open reflections on what goes well and what not, with flexibility to (continuously) adjust and improve. The MtR suggests creating dedicated space in the agenda of the different platforms for regular reflection.

In addition, the MtR suggests establishing an annual partnership meeting involving members of the Blue Deal governance (SC and OO), PMO, PLs and country partners. This would be an excellent opportunity to jointly assess and reflect on progress towards the Blue Deal ambition and collect inputs for corrective action and strategic decisions on the future course of the programme. An improved ToC and corresponding M&E framework would be helpful instruments to guide the

reflection and strategic thinking among all those who have a responsibility in the Blue Deal. At the same time, the annual meeting will also constitute an opportunity to keep the ToC and its assumptions updated.

- *Consider the use of outcome harvesting in the Blue Deal evaluation cycle.*

The MtR recommends incorporating outcome harvesting as an (external) evaluation method on the programme's process towards the envisioned change to be achieved by the Blue Deal at the programme level.

II Annexes

Annex 1 The evaluation matrix

Evaluation matrix – Blue Deal			
Question	Approach / indicator	Method and tools	Sources
Programme level: To what extent does the Blue Deal programme have the potential to reach its goal to ensure clean, safe and sufficient water for 20 million people in 40 (sub) catchments by 2030?			
<p>Relevance</p> <p>Question 1. To what extent is the Blue Deal Programme doing the right things to ensure its goal?</p>	<p>Approach: Review of the analytical approach used to establish the programme-level ToC and working methods, select priority countries, select priority partnerships, and establish the partnerships.</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>1. Is the Blue Deal working with Dutch and international partners and platforms which contributes to the positioning and network of the programme?</p> <p>2. Did the Blue Deal programme design use an up-to-date analytical approach for participatory TOCs and programme development (starting from vision and understanding context, working backwards)?</p> <p>3. Is the Blue Deal programme design based on relevant context information and was it used well to select countries and partners?</p> <p>4. Does the TOC make causal steps and assumptions that were reasonable/logical at the beginning of the programme, and that still make sense?</p> <p>5. Are the Blue Deal implementers (project leaders) keeping track of context and performance information, feeding it to policymakers (steering group) in a digestible form and providing opportunity for decision making on adaptation?</p>	<p>Desk review of programme documents</p> <p>Key informant interviews (KII's) of persons involved in the design of the programme/key programme owners, and relevant external experts in the NL and partner countries</p> <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Review (1.1, 1.4, 1.5) • KII interviews (1.2, 1.3) • Survey (1.3, 1.4, 1.5) • FGD + Stakeholder meeting (1.1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desk review: ToC, inception report, programme documents, partnership monitoring reports, M&E framework • KII program level: steering group (1.1), programme office (1.2, 1.3, 1.5) and selected project leaders (1.3, 1.4, 1.5) • KII with external consultant that facilitated ToC process (?) and DD coaches (1.2, 1.4) • Survey (project leaders (1.3, 1.4, 1.5)) • FGD + Stakeholder meeting (1.1)
<p>Effectiveness</p> <p>Question 2. To what extent is the set-up, organisation and methodology of the Blue</p>	<p>Approach: Assess the programme, using the five core capabilities of the 5C methodology. For the effectiveness assessment, the capabilities 1-4 will be used, for the sustainability assessment capability 5.</p>	<p>Desk review of programme documents</p> <p>Key informant interviews (KII's) of key programme owners, relevant external experts in the NL and partner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desk review: Guidelines and tools for partnerships (planning and reporting), monitoring tools, learning tools (from CSA to

<p>Deal (potentially) effective?</p>	<p>5C Indicator areas: capacity and motivation to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commit and engage 2. Carry out technical, service delivery and logistical tasks 3. Adapt and self-renew, 4. Relate to external stakeholders, 5. Achieve coherence <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>2.1 (@1): How does Blue Deal (steering group and programme office) view itself in the broader water sector and in their relations to other water development programmes? What is the level of aspiration, ownership and determination?</p> <p>2.2 (@2): Can the Blue Deal programme office: deliver services for primary tasks (planning & control, monitoring & evaluation, coaching, the Learning programme) that facilitate the partnerships? Do/facilitate strategic planning and management? Has strong financial management?</p> <p>2.3 (@2): Has BLUE DEAL the method/tool to assess if the programme is on track to achieve their ambition</p> <p>2.4 (@3): What is done by the programme office to improve individual and partner learning; to foster internal dialogue; to reposition and reconfigure the partnership; to incorporate new ideas; and to map out a growth path</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is needed at programme level to improve incorporation of cross-cutting themes at partnership level? • To what extent is the role and methodology of the external review panel adequate? • To what extent can the Blue Deal programme and its partnerships adapt sufficiently to the COVID-19 	<p>countries (embassies)</p> <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Review (2.2, 2.3, 2.4) • KII interviews (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5) • Survey (2.4) • FGD + Stakeholder meeting (2.1, 2.5) 	<p>webinar), M&E framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KII program level: steering group (2.1, 2.5), programme office (2.2, 2.3, 2.4) and selected project leaders (2.2, 2.4, 2.5) • KII DD coaches, embassies, other programmes (WaterWorx) (2.1, 2.5) • Survey (project leaders (2.2, 2.3, 2.4)) • FGD + Stakeholder meetings (2.1, 2.5)
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	<p>pandemic/Climate Change dynamics to ensure the Blue Deal can reach its goals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the Blue Deal need to grow (in number or size of partnerships) to reach its ambitions in 2030? • What is the flexibility to change the number of partnerships and/or projects? <p>2.5 (@4): Does Blue Deal craft, manage and sustain key relationships needed for the programme to survive/flourish? Is it earning credibility and legitimacy and earning the trust of others, such as donors and clients?</p> <p>What synergies derive from the cooperation of the direct Dutch partners (Dutch Water Authorities, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the embassies) on the Blue Deal?</p>		
<p>Efficiency</p> <p>Question 3. To what extent is the Blue Deal Programme efficient?</p>	<p>Approach: the focus of the review will be on management efficiency of a complex programme, including governance; balance between overhead and outcome related inputs (= committed and energised partnerships); relation inputs and desired impact.</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>3.1 Were inputs (resources and time) used in the best possible way to achieve outcomes (= in this case: committed and energised programme)? Why or why not? What could be done differently to improve dynamics of implementation, thereby maximizing impact, at an acceptable and sustainable cost? Balance between overhead costs/budgets and outcome related costs/budgets?</p> <p>3.2 Is the planned investment realistic given the desired impact?</p> <p>3.3 Is the current programme governance structure and process efficient and fit for purpose?</p>	<p>Desk review of programme documents</p> <p>Key informant interviews (KII's) of key programme owners, relevant external experts in the NL and partner countries (embassies)</p> <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Review (3.1, 3.2, 3.3) • KII interviews (3.1, 3.3) • Survey (3.1, 3.3) 	<p>Desk review: programme documents, listing/scoring achievements so far in terms of partnerships in place, programme level planning alignment, communication, staffing and systems (tools and templates, KM) (3.1) and documents of comparable programmes (WaterWorx) (3.2)</p> <p>KII: programme office (3.1 + 3.3))</p> <p>KII: review of use of review mechanisms (steering group) (3.3); clarity about governance structure and processes (PLs) (3.3)</p>

			Survey: (3.1, 3.3) focus on gaps
<p>Sustainability</p> <p>Question 4. To what extent does the Blue Deal Programme facilitate or sets conditions to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the capacity strengthening of partnerships?</p>	<p>The sustainability question is strongly related to evaluation question 2, provided that strengthening the capacity of partnerships is a function of the Blue Deal organization and governance. Especially focussing on the Coherence capacity element of 5C:</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>4.1 How is the capability to communicate? to build connections? to manage diversity among the partnerships? and to manage paradox and tension?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the partners abroad feel that they are sufficiently enabled to decide the direction and vision of their project? Balance between top-down processes (budget envelops, monitoring framework, planning and programme process) and in-country autonomy for project vision, partner selection and implementation strategies. Do the local partners see added value in the joint implementation of the programme added value? <p>4.2 How strong are enabling factors for the partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is at DWA organisation level, the distance between the partnership representative and organisational decision-maker? How predictable are for the project leader the processes in place of making decisions, implementing activities and resolving conflicts? 	<p>Desk review of programme documents</p> <p>Key informant interviews (KII's) of key programme owners, relevant external experts in the NL and partner countries (embassies)</p> <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk Review (4.1, 4.3) KII interviews (4.1, 4.2, 4.3) Survey (4.1, 4.2, 4.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> desk review: minutes of meetings (4.1), programme documents (4.3) KII program level: programme office (4.1, 4.3) and selected project leaders (4.1, 4.2, 4.3), partner project managers (4.1, 4.2, 4.3) Survey (project leaders (4.1, 4.2, 4.3))

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How appropriate is the scope of the partnership (realistic (budget), potential of quick wins, mutual understanding of need for broad/limited stakeholder participation? <p>4.3 Have conditions been set for learning processes in one or more of the following thematic areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate • Innovation • Sustainability • Gender and Poverty alleviation (social inclusion) • Innovation • Assessing the enabling environment of the projects 		
<p>Partnership level: Per partnership: To what extent does the partnership have the potential to make a sustainable and relevant contribution to above mentioned goals?</p>			
<p>Coherence</p> <p>Question 5. To what extent is the partnership subsequent and supplementary to already existing programmes and projects in the respective country?</p>	<p>Approach: The answer to this question will be qualitative, relying on the judgement of people informed on the funding and programme landscape for water management in the given countries.</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>5.1 Is the partnership contributing to nationally/locally defined policy priorities, strategies, plans and targets?</p> <p>5.2 Is the partnership coordinating and collaborating with other stakeholders in achieving those goals/targets?</p>	<p>Desk review of programme documents</p> <p>Key informant interviews (KII's) of key programme owners, relevant external experts in the NL and partner countries (embassies)</p> <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Review (5.1) • KII interviews (5.1, 5.2) • Survey (5.1, 5.2) • FGD + Stakeholder meeting (5.1, 5.2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desk review: national sector documents, partnership project proposal/programme document (5.1) • KII, in case study countries: KII's with staff from Dutch Water Authorities, partner organizations abroad, and government / local government stakeholders, others such as Dutch Embassies other donors or independent resource persons country partner (5.1, 5.2) • Survey (5.1, 5.2) • FGD + Stakeholder meeting (5.1, 5.2)

<p>Effectiveness</p> <p>Question 6. To what extent is the set-up, organisation and methodology of the Blue Deal partnerships (potentially) effective?</p>	<p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>6.1 How does Blue Deal (country partner) view itself in the broader water sector and in their relations to other water development programmes? What is the level of aspiration, ownership and determination?</p> <p>6.2 Can the Blue country partner: deliver services for primary tasks (planning & control, monitoring & evaluation, coaching, the Learning programme) that facilitate the partnerships? Do/facilitate strategic planning and management? Has strong financial management?</p> <p>6.3 Does the BLUE DEAL country partner craft, manage and sustain key relationships needed for the partnership to survive/flourish? Is it earning credibility and legitimacy and earning the trust of others, such as donors and clients?</p>	<p>Desk review of programme documents</p> <p>Key informant interviews (KII's) of key programme owners, relevant external experts in the NL and partner countries (embassies)</p> <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● KII interviews (6.1,6.2,6.3) ● Survey (6.1, 6.3) ● FGD + Stakeholder meeting (6.1, 6.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● KII country partner manager: 6.1, 6.3 ● KII project leader: 6.2 ● KII external (e.g. embassy): 6.3 ● Survey (6.1, 6.3) ● FGD + Stakeholder meeting (6.1, 6.3)
<p>Relevance</p> <p>Question 7. To what extent is the partnership doing the right things?</p>	<p>Approach: Review of the analytical approach used to establish the partnerships' objectives and working methods, and systems, such as context, needs, and capacity analysis, translating the programme TOC in the partnership TOC/strategy and setting a capacity building plan, and building relationships with stakeholders.</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>7.1 is the project demand-driven: based on a local vision?</p> <p>7.2 do the programme outcomes inform the partnership outcomes?</p> <p>7.3 is there a capacity (self) assessment method and process in place that guides (e.g. annual) capacity action plans for the partnerships?</p> <p>7.4 (for existing partnership) have lessons learned from previous experiences been used for the design of the partnership?</p>	<p>Desk review of partnership-level documents (7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4)</p> <p>KII's with country project managers and project leaders (7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4)</p> <p>FGD and Stakeholder meeting (7.4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● desk review: project proposal/project document; project methods (7.1 – 4) ● KII, in particular 7.4: in case study countries: KII's with project leader, country project manager, external person like embassy (7.4) ● FGD + Stakeholder meeting (7.4)

<p>Effectiveness (for selection of partnerships)</p> <p>Question 8. To what extent is the capacity-strengthening within the partnership effective or has it the potential of being effective in time?</p>	<p>Approach: Review of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whose capacity is being strengthened? 2. How is it being strengthened? 3. What capacities are being strengthened? 4. And whether the connection between capacity and actual discharging of partnership functions is realistic. <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>8.1 Is the capacity strengthening focusing on realistic capacity gaps with instruments that fit well the context and high-quality content?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective are the capacity-strengthening activities (potentially)? • To what extent are the selected outcomes of partnerships realistic? • Are there early signs of change of increased capacity? <p>8.2 What is the adaptive capacity of the partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What reflection and review tools and mechanisms have been used for annual planning? 	<p>Desk review of partnership-level document (8.1)</p> <p>KII's with country project managers and project leaders (8.1, 8.2)</p> <p>Survey (8.1, 8.2)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desk review: project plans and reports (8.1) • KII's with country project managers and project leaders (8.1, 8.2) • Survey (8.1, 8.2)
<p>Efficiency</p> <p>Question 9. To what extent is the partnership using its resources efficiently to ensure lasting capacity development of the partner organisation?</p>	<p>Approach: Were inputs (resources and time) used in the best possible way to achieve outcomes (= in this case: committed and energised partnership)? Why or why not? What could be done differently to improve implementation, thereby maximizing impact, at an acceptable and sustainable cost. A qualitative (light) assessment will be carried out of a number of operational processes (communication, monitoring and reporting, balance use of national and international expertise).</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>9.1 To what extent is there a good balance between number and length of incoming and outgoing missions/flights and planned activities within those missions in</p>	<p>Desk review of partnership-level documents (9.1-4)</p> <p>For case study partnerships: KII's with project leads and country project managers (9.1-4)</p> <p>Survey (9.1, 9.4)</p>	<p>Benchmarking partnerships: based on desk review/develop a few partnership indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desk review: using programme documents: listing/scoring achievements so far for the partnerships: contacts; partnership level planning, communications provided, staffing and systems (tools and templates, KM) (9.1-9.4)

	<p>terms of effectiveness, efficiency and carbon-emissions?</p> <p>At 9.1: Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this question may need to be replaced by: to what extent have online capacity strengthening activities effectively replaced the planned incoming and outgoing missions?</p> <p>9.2 What is the ratio of input from Dutch Water Authorities, partner organisations versus hired external experts?</p> <p>9.3 What is the current status of achievements in terms of activities and outputs?</p> <p>9.4 To what extent and by whom has the monitoring & evaluation matrix been used and what are obstacles for using it?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● KII interviews project leads and country project managers (9.1-4) ● Survey (9.1, 9.4)
<p>Sustainability</p> <p>Question 10.</p> <p>To what extent does the partnership have the potential for ensuring the sustainability of the programme results?</p>	<p>Approach: It is very early stage to assess the likelihood of sustainability of partnership/programme benefits. The answer to this question will be qualitative, relying on the judgement of people informed on the context/partnership about the extent to which the approach to sustainability adopted by the partnership, if it exists, is reasonable and likely to maintain relevance under future, changing conditions.</p> <p>We will use a few features that can be assessed that indicate the quality of conditions for sustainability in partnership programmes: shared vision, adaptive capacity (monitoring and learning processes) and processes for knowledge management and transfer. In addition, we will assess a few enabling factors for the partnership.</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p>10.1 To what extent is there sufficient ownership and shared vision by the partner abroad?</p> <p>10.2 How strong are the enabling factors in the partnership?</p>	<p>Desk review of programme documents</p> <p>Key informant interviews (KII's) of key programme owners, relevant external experts in the NL and partner countries (embassies)</p> <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Desk Review (10.1, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5) ● KII interviews (10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5) ● Survey (10.1, 10.3, 10.4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● desk review: project proposal/document, plans and reports (10.1, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5) ● KII's with country project managers and project leaders (10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5) ● Survey (10.1, 10.3, 10.4)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is at country partner organisation level, the distance between the partnership representative and organisational decision-maker? • How predictable are for the country project manager the processes in place of making decisions, implementing activities, and resolving conflicts? • How appropriate is the scope of the partnership (realistic (budget), potential of quick wins, mutual understanding of need for broad/limited stakeholder participation)? • For those partnerships that existed already before BLUE DEAL, have they been building on lessons learnt from the past <p>10.3 To what extent is there sufficient capacity in terms of quantity and quality to carry out the planned activities/reach the desired outcomes?</p> <p>10.4 (For selection of partnerships) How are the cross-cutting themes incorporated in the partnership project?</p> <p>10.5 (For selection of partnerships) Has the partnership carried out a risk assessment and to what extent is this used in the implementation of the partnership?</p>		
Estimating impact:			
<p>Question 11. What low-cost or desk-study methodology could the Blue Deal programme use to make an improved estimate of the</p>	<p>Approach: the consultant will propose at least 2 alternative concepts for estimating the number of people (and size of the area) that gains access to safe, sufficient and clean water due to improved governance. The concepts will focus on linking governance indicators to the access indicators and what</p>	<p>Desk review of water governance indicator frameworks. KII's with external resource persons and the Blue Deal programme office and country managers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literature review • KII with BLUE DEAL programme office (governance indicators) • KII external resource persons (impact monitoring)

<p>number of people (and size of the area) that gains access to safe, sufficient and clean water due to improved water governance?</p>	<p>governance data may be required for informing the access figures.</p> <p>The draft concepts will be discussed with a representative group of the Blue Deal programme with the objective to identify a preferred approach and rate its potential. The consultant will develop a process and guide for how the concept can be developed in a full access impact monitoring method.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KII country project managers (national data) and selected project leads
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Beste lezer,

Onderzoeksbureaus MDF en IRC hebben tussen december 2020 en mei 2021 een Midterm review (tussentijdse evaluatie) uitgevoerd naar de Blue Deal. We kijken als Stuurgroep positief terug op het verloop van het onderzoek en de deskundigheid van beide bureaus. Het rapport laat zien dat ze de context, het doel en de unieke aanpak van het programma goed begrijpen. We hebben met veel interesse het rapport gelezen en delen graag onze reactie op het rapport met u.

*Grote potentie Blue Deal*

Het onderzoek toont aan en benadrukt dat het Blue Deal-programma een grote potentie heeft om op mondiaal niveau waterbeleid te beïnvloeden. En dat het programma uniek is in zijn soort. We zijn er trots op dat het gelukt is om in een relatief korte tijd, en ondanks de Corona-pandemie, toch een stevig programma neer te zetten waarvan de potentie gezien wordt. De individuele partnerschappen boeken goede resultaten, het programma-bureau is effectief en de aanpak van de Blue Deal is uniek. Via de Blue Deal professionaliseerden de 21 waterschappen daarnaast in korte tijd hun internationale werkzaamheden. En werd er inhoud gegeven aan de partnerschappen met de 2 ministeries.

*Van opstartfase naar een volwassen programma*

We zijn blij met waar we nu staan met het programma, maar het rapport laat ook de verbeterpunten zien die nodig zijn om de potentie van de Blue Deal waar te maken of te vergroten. We erkennen als Stuurgroep dat de Blue Deal vanuit de opstartfase nu door moet groeien naar een volwassen programma. Hiervoor zijn een aantal veranderingen nodig, met name op het gebied van de governance. We willen als Stuurgroep hierin het voortouw nemen en samen met alle betrokkenen op korte termijn aan de slag gaan om het programma verder te laten ontwikkelen. Dit moet eind 2021 samenkomen in een aangepast Raamwerk Blue Deal voor de 2<sup>e</sup> fase.

1. De MTR adviseert om uit twee ambities te kiezen als toekomstige richting van het programma: een uitvoeringsorganisatie of programma met wereldwijde beleidsbeïnvloeding.

Het programma heeft de ambitie om 20 miljoen mensen wereldwijd te bereiken. Wij zijn er van overtuigd dat de kennis en ervaring van zowel de waterschappen als de ministeries nodig zijn om dit te bereiken. We houden daarom vast aan de Blue Deal als regionaal uitvoeringsprogramma wat versterkt wordt door nationaal beleid. Het voelt te beperkt om van de Blue Deal alleen een uitvoeringsprogramma te maken en tegelijkertijd vinden wij het te voorbarig om de ambitie nu te vergroten naar een mondiaal programma omdat er nog verbeterpunten zijn die eerst aangepakt moeten worden.



2. De MTR adviseert de stuurgroep een keuze te maken uit een partnerschap tussen de waterschappen en ministeries of een cofinanciering (subsidiërelatie).

Wij zien als Stuurgroep het belang een partnerschap. De kennis en het netwerk van de ambassades in het land zijn een waardevolle aanvulling op het werk van de waterschappen. Het werken in en met de Deltateams en de ambassades wordt als verrijkend ervaren. De Stuurgroep wil de partnerschapsrelatie vasthouden, maar wil tegelijkertijd de rollen en verwachtingen tussen alle kernpartners in de Blue Deal verduidelijken voor fase twee. Dit nationale partnerschap is juist ook een voorbeeld voor de partnerschappen in de verschillende landen.

3. De MTR adviseert de stuurgroep de governance van het programma te herzien om de slagkracht te vergroten.

Wij erkennen als Stuurgroep de noodzaak om de governance te verbeteren, en zien dit als één van de belangrijkste verbeterpunten voor de tweede fase. Het besluitvormingsproces met meerdere adviseerende organen is - zoals de MTR beschrijft - nuttig geweest in de opstartfase om draagvlak te creëren voor het programma, maar houdt nu de slagkracht van het programma tegen. Tegelijkertijd willen we het draagvlak bij alle betrokken organisaties behouden. Concreet betekent dit dat we samen met onze achterban op korte termijn gaan verkennen welke governance-modellen mogelijk zijn.

4. De MTR adviseert om de lange termijnvisie op het partnerschap in de landen te verbeteren

Het programma is een succes voor ons als Stuurgroep als het waterbeheer in de partnerlanden ook na 2030 op orde blijft. Lokaal draagvlak en lokaal eigenaarschap zijn daarbij voor ons een verder uit te werken begrippen. Een lange termijnvisie hoe dat bereikt wordt is daarom cruciaal. In samenwerking met de lokale partners en penvoerder willen we op basis van de MTR bekijken wat de lokale succesfactoren zijn van de aanpak van het programma (Theory of Change) zodat we die verder kunnen versterken. Daarnaast willen we het aantal bereikte mensen monitoren (Monitoring & Evaluation Framework) en de lokale partner een stevigere rol kunnen geven in de vormgeving van het programma. De lokale partner is de vragende partij en bepaalt samen met de penvoerder waar het programma zich op richt.

De komende maanden zal de stuurgroep de tijd nemen om samen met de betrokken organisaties, het programabureau en de penvoerders de aanbevelingen verder uit te werken. In 2021 gaan we stapsgewijs de ambitie met strategische keuzes verhelderen, het partnerschap en de governance verbeteren, de aanpak en meting van resultaten optimaliseren en dit vertalen naar een verbeterde lange termijnvisie voor de partnerlanden en een financiële strategie. De Stuurgroep heeft hiervoor een plan van aanpak opgesteld. Om het mogelijk te maken dat er meer tijd wordt genomen voor de voorbereiding van de tweede fase, is een financieel overbruggingsjaar nodig voor het jaar 2022 om het programma op volle kracht intussen door te laten draaien. We zijn ervan overtuigd dat de Blue Deal met deze aanpassingen in de tweede fase zijn potentie vollediger gaat benutten.

Voor meer informatie over de MTR kunt u terecht bij Emilie Sturm via [info@bluedeal.nl](mailto:info@bluedeal.nl).

Met vriendelijke groet,

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