



EVALUATION OF THE PBL- DGIS COVENANT

Client: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands

Date: August 30th, 2021



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Evaluation of the PBL-DGIS covenant over the period 2018- May 2021



Client: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands

(Directorate Inclusive Green Growth)

Date: August 30th, 2021

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List of abbreviations

AIV	Advisory Council on International Affairs
ARQ	Advisory Review Question
BHOS	Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
BZK	Ministry of the interior and Kingdom Relations
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBS	National statistics office of The Netherlands
CE	Circular Economy
CPB	Central Planning Bureau
DDE	Department of Sustainable Economic Development (of DGIS)
DG BEB	Director General Foreign Economic Relations
DGIS	Directorate General for International Cooperation (of the MFA)
DGPZ	Director General Political Affairs
DIO	Directorate of International Business
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EQ	Evaluative Question
ERBS	Erasmus Research & Business Support
EUR	Erasmus University Rotterdam
EZK	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate
FNS	Food Nutrition Security
GEO	Global Environment Outlook
GLO	Global Land Outlook
I&W	Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management
IAA	Independent Assessment Agency (Planbureau)
IGG	Directorate Inclusive Green Growth (of DGIS)
ILM	Integrated Landscape Management
IOB	International Research and Policy Evaluation
IOP	Inter-ministerial Deliberation Independent Assessment Agencies (Interdepartementaal Overleg Planbureaus)
IPBES	Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LNV	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of the Netherlands)
NCA	Natural Capital Accounting
NCEA	Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (Commissie MER)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
PBL	Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency
SCP	The Netherlands Institute for Social Research
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TSU	Technical Support Unit
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UU	Utrecht University
VU-IVM	Amsterdam University - Institute for Environmental Studies
WAVES	Wealth Accounting and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services
WRI	World Resources Institute
WUR	Wageningen University & Research

Summary

The objective of the present study is to evaluate the Covenant 2018-2021 between the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Directorate-General for International Cooperation (MFA/DGIS). The objective of this Covenant is (1) contributing to vision/strategic policy development at DGIS, including embassies, with the aim of realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (2) making sure the international and development dimension of the sustainable use and governance of natural resources is well contained within PBLs knowledge development for interdepartmental policy processes; (3) realising a scientific basis for IGG-policy. The covenant allocates a budget of in total EUR 4.950.000 for a period of four year that represents approximately 3.5-4.0% of the total PBL budget.

To make a well-informed decision on the possible funding of a next phase, the MFA would like to know how the covenant is relevant, coherent, effective, and efficient. Furthermore, the MFA would like to know if/how improvements could be made related to the cooperation between the MFA and PBL.

Backward looking assessment

Relevance and effectiveness

The covenant between DGIS and PBL should be relevant for DGIS's mandate, the sustainable development of developing countries. It should also be relevant for PBL's mandate and scope: the development of environment, nature and space and its link with social developments and with Dutch policies, in their international context. They both relate to the early agenda setting stages of the Dutch policy cycle in its international context. Relevance and effectiveness are, in this combination, difficult to separate¹.

- 1) The covenant is both policy-relevant and creates sufficient relevant outcome to address current and future dilemmas. This justifies its continuation in some form. It is relevant for supporting and formulating (not implementing) DGIS policies, but also for other parts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), other ministries, and international policy arenas². In recent years, its relevance has included themes like desertification, biodiversity, energy transition, circular economy, sustainable value chains, water challenges and translating natural capital accounting and land assessments to policy in developing countries. For food systems, this is emerging.
- 2) PBL's unique mandate (its niche in the knowledge ecosystem) enables it, more than commercial or academic knowledge providers, to draw the attention of policy makers to overarching sustainability themes of the future. It invests in being an independent policy-science interface and directly addresses "inclusive" policy arenas relevant to DGIS. Since it provides scenarios for the future, it supports DGIS development cooperation orientation, having a potential indirect effect on sustainable development in developing countries. It helps DGIS to focus on themes that matter from a sustainable development perspective.

¹ And, in consequence difficult to evaluate separately. Even if a PBL activity were not to influence any policy arena today, that does not mean that it could not become relevant and effective in the future – today being "ahead of the policy curve".

² We usually prefer the term "arena" over "audience" to emphasise that one must foresee to stir something up that might be controversial at first.

- 3) PBL has found a balance between gradual building up of its knowledge base (the outputs that have their own dynamics), and agile valuation of this knowledge base in policy processes (the outputs of which need to be timely and framed to the audience). If needed, it has broadened its knowledge base by subcontracting other (both academic and private) knowledge institutes.

Coherence

Coherence is seen here as different SDG-related policy objectives strengthening one another (rather than weakening).

- 4) PBL's work in the covenant has – through its “nexus” approach - coherence at its core. It looks for potential synergies among objectives, and it identifies risks of trade-offs.
- 5) It did so for coherence of different objectives within IGG, within DGIS, and with the rest of MFA and the other ministries, as well as between Dutch policies and those of its international partnerships. It did this wherever coherence was important from a point of view of sustainable development of developing countries (SDGs).

Efficiency

Efficiency, in this case, foremost relates to the work programming: whether DGIS and PBL spend their financial and human resources on the most promising activities in terms of sustainable development of developing countries.

- 6) The covenant is efficient as it leverages different dynamics in the regular PBL work, overarching policy fields. It leverages with relatively small funding - compared to the overall PBL budget relevant for developing countries - more focus on the sustainable development of developing countries in national policies at large. (By mainstreaming the position or interests of developing countries into PBL's regular work. Non-DGIS policy fields are also enabled to mainstream these interests).
- 7) Efficiency is more difficult to assess for activities supposed to have more direct relevance for (future) DGIS development programmes. The decisions to pursue certain DGIS-demand-driven activities and not others, have not been explicitly substantiated. The imagined impact pathways for the sustainability potential of activities have not been documented³. Respondents suggest that this was discussed in practice, however. For example, the discontinuation of covenant-support to international water assessments was based on a mix of arguments, including insufficient relevance to the programming of future development cooperation.

Forward looking assessment: lessons learned and recommendations

- 8) The temporary nature of the covenant is somewhat problematic, as indicated by the 2017 evaluation⁴. The transfer of funds that forms part of the covenant provides flexibility to DGIS and matches the ODA funding principle of temporariness, but it is an impediment to PBL to sustain human capacity. Staff contracted from this temporary budget cannot be added to

³ We take “impact pathway” as an envisaged sequence of policy arenas that PBL may influence with its assessments; it is a sequence of arenas that may influence each other until there is momentum in arenas powerful enough to intervene for sustainable transitions. The concept of impact pathways is implicitly helpful for assessing how a potential activity has a chance of success and deciding which activities to undertake under the covenant.

⁴ APE Onderzoek & Advies, 2017. Evaluatie covenant DGIS-PBL 2013-2017. rapportnr. 1548. Juni 2017

the staff formation and has to be dismissed after four years (“Wet normaliserende rechtspositie ambtenaren”). Prior to the current covenant (2017), PBL requested for structural transfers, repeated by PBL managers when it refers to the post 2021 collaboration. Since IGG disposes of ODA funds for interventions that cannot be deployed for structural finance, the evaluators see no feasible solution in the short term other than continuing the covenant, while increasing its running time to 6 years. That longer duration would enable a better match between the programming cycles of two of PBL’s sectors. It is recommended to maintain the same financial annual contribution to PBL, since this represents a sizeable share of the 20% paring of PBLs structural budget and is hence solid enough in terms of competition for time. The option of extending the support would imply stressing both research manpower capacity in PBL and management capacity in DGIS.

- 9) The evaluators recommend that, whilst nothing is fundamentally wrong with the current covenant’s objectives and scope, the next covenant’s scope could be simpler. It may do so by defining PBL’s added value in two ways: a nexus approach and a landuse approach, each with their own geographic scale of assessments and target arenas. That would leave room for a more flexible joint work programme for developing countries. The evaluators recommend:
 - a. The nexus-oriented approach reduces complexity by putting one specific SDG central to the assessment. This is done, e.g., for SDGs related to food, water, energy, biodiversity – each having their own international arena. Then the assessment is linked to other SDGs. At this “nexus of” SDGs, PBL looks for synergies with these other SDGs to promote, and for trade-offs to prevent. PBL’s nexus work addresses the policies of actors interested in the SDGs that are (also) subject in these assessments (public, private and civil society).
 - b. The landuse-oriented approach reduces complexity by downscaling to smaller-than-global areas. This enables taking more SDGs into consideration at the same time, making the assessment more relevant for all public, private, and civil society actors in that area. This is a step towards inclusive country-owned landscape governance⁵. The assessment uses natural boundaries rather than jurisdictional, to expose coherence issues that overarch jurisdictions. If local (cross-jurisdictional) governance capacity is weak, a landuse approach (“integrated landscape management”) may serve the donor community active in these regions to design their development support programmes. Approach b is not structurally applied now; but it is seen as potentially relevant for defining future development cooperation at the level of DGIS’s focus regions and focus countries. To determine its future importance, some dilemmas need to be resolved (see Box 1).
- 10) The evaluators recommend making the narrative behind the covenant more explicit, as that would make it easier to make well-substantiated decisions about PBL work priorities. Respondents suggest that this narrative may include, amongst other things, the following elements:
 - a. PBL connects different policy fields in the government from the perspective of sustainable development in developing countries, within IGG, within DGIS, within

⁵ See van Oosten, C. (2021). Landscape governance: from analysing challenges to capacitating stakeholders. Wageningen University. <https://doi.org/10.18174/540838>.

MFA, and among ministries. It can do so credibly, as it is independent from any policy field in this arena.

- b. DGIS helps PBL to make their work relevant for the objectives of development cooperation, and reversely PBL provides a fact base that helps DGIS to:
 - i. shape strategic direction for future development assistance. It does so with a view to the transitions needed to achieve coherence between elements of sustainable development, important for developing countries (currently the SDGs).
 - ii. co-create, with its partners, small steps towards these transitions (policy and diplomacy); embassies may mainly be involved in a downscaled land use approach or value chain nexus approaches (like circular economy, footprints).
- c. PBL does so by:
 - i. Addressing, in independent outlooks and associated communications, the national and international audiences (“target arenas”) that can make steps toward sustainable transitions (these arenas form part of the context for the relevant national policy fields).
 - ii. Involving DGIS where needed (and its partner policy fields), as stakeholder in these arenas, and where possible in terms of timing and modes of communication and involving Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from the earliest stages.
 - iii. Making PBL findings tangible for policy makers in DGIS by doing demand driven studies that translate transitions to concrete development cooperation themes.
 - iv. Where PBL’s modelling and expertise insufficiently covers certain themes, by partnering with complementary high-profiled knowledge institutes. Or, for one-off demand-driven studies, subcontracting.
- d. PBL and DGIS with their partners reflect on the impact pathways; foremost identifying the arenas that have the highest potential to take action relevant for sustainable development of developing countries and identifying ways of linking these arenas to PBL’s outlooks.

11) The evaluators recommend keeping the current coordination and governance system, but to finetune some elements to align it more with the above narrative:

- a. A flexible work programme enabling more frequent adjustment of the details and hence requiring more frequent meetings between PBL and DGIS (coordinators, with their soundboard group in DGIS and other ministries and in PBL with other sectors as needed) to reflect together on priorities and impact pathways.
- b. Make broad orientation choices upfront (“tour d’horizon”). These choices may have consequences for the budget within the total allocation. Box 1 shows key dilemmas. The evaluators do not have well underpinned conclusive recommendations on such choices.

- c. There can also be multi-policy field soundboard groups for specific activity streams, such as on energy transition or circular economy headed by a DGIS staff and a PBL staff, reporting to their coordinators.
 - d. The responsible manager of the covenant in DGIS may work together with those departmental managers responsible for future elaboration of coherent development programmes. This may be done in the context of knowledge management, preparing for future policy development. Such knowledge management may build up a capacity in the Dutch government to continuously improve support to the developing countries with a view to sustainable transitions. This may imply adjustments in cooperation programmes and interventions.
 - e. As the DGIS-PBL covenant is not well known in DGIS, wider communication is useful. Potential stakeholders can be invited to meetings to discuss the work under the covenant. The annual articulation workshop might be prepared in subgroups, elaborating ideas about specific impact pathways.
 - f. DGIS staff, including change agents with high personal motivation, may not be able to liberate enough of their time. In that case an impact pathway (i.e., PBL's attention) may first turn to arenas more distant from DGIS, which later may reflect on DGIS (example: biodiversity). In the early phase of transitions, political attention will be low, and spending time can also be legitimised as knowledge management, necessary to translate SDGs into coherent future policies. If, however, the effectiveness of a possible PBL activity depends on more IGG staff input than IGG has available, the impact pathway is not promising, and the activity may have to be "posteriorised".
 - g. Keep a record of choices made in the recurring adjustments of the covenant work. Use impact pathways to substantiate choices made. Do this by indicating relevance for sustainable development of developing countries, target arenas, expected effectiveness, resources needed, who has time and convening power to bring national stakeholders together.
- 12) The evaluators recommend shifting the focus of the covenant's monitoring process to "learning about effectiveness":
- a. Abstain from input steering (with funds) and use one or two outcome indicators (key performance indicators - KPIs) only, while agreeing upon cumulative objectives of the work programme at the start and monitor the efficacy and effectiveness by external reviews or visitation (by an independent scientist or team).
 - b. Adding a transition perspective to outcome monitoring, fitting PBL's mandate:
 - i. Taking into consideration that outcomes of the covenant are its influence on dynamics and quality in targeted policy arenas (agenda-setting).
 - ii. Making choices about impact pathways including imagining these outcomes and how these will be monitored as a fact base that is not ignored in the debate. Examples of such outcomes are presented in Annex E.

- iii. One step further, it may include not only monitoring of agenda-setting, but also the small steps these arenas make (ref. the “small wins approach” to transitions⁶).
- iv. The evaluators advise to consider if and how such outcomes can be simplified into KPIs and widely shared.

BOX 1 DILEMMAS FOR THE SCOPE OF WORK UNDER THE COVENANT

Some reflection about the work programme for developing countries needs early attention. Standing out are ambitions to make PBL relevant in the global food systems arena and the downscaling of the landuse approach to DGIS focus regions and focus countries. Might PBL’s method for downscaling also be applied by others, perhaps guided by PBL? How does this use of covenant funding compare to use for alternative themes - perhaps closer to The Netherlands’ own policies- like circular economy, ecological footprint, etc? Should PBL be available as an independent knowledge referee in politicised coherency debates?

⁶ Termeer & De Wulf (2018), “A small wins framework to overcome the evaluation paradox of governing wicked problems”

1. Introduction

1.1 The objective of the study

The objective of the present study is to evaluate the covenant between the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (Dutch abbr. PBL) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Directorate-General for International Cooperation (MFA/DGIS). The objective of the current agreement between MFA/DGIS and PBL is threefold:

- 1) To contribute to vision/strategic policy development at the Inclusive Green Growth Department and other departments within MFA/DGIS, including embassies, with the aim of realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 2) Making sure the international and development dimension of the sustainable use and governance of natural resources is well contained within PBLs knowledge development for interdepartmental policy processes (mainstreaming).
- 3) Realising a scientific basis for IGG-policy. PBL consolidates and strengthens its knowledge base to realise this objective.

The Covenant 2018-2021 concerns additional tasks for PBL enabled by additional financial contributions by MFA⁷ to PBL's core funding by the Ministry for Infrastructure and Water Management.⁸ PBL realizes these tasks through five workstreams:

- 1) Mainstreaming development dimension in PBL's products.
- 2) Contribute to strategic, international assessments and strengthening of their development component.
- 3) Projects requested by DGIS relating to specific DGIS policy dossiers, including ad hoc requests from DGIS.
- 4) Strengthening PBL's knowledge basis regarding development in order to execute the above-mentioned analyses.
- 5) Strengthening policy interactions between PBL and DGIS, knowledge infrastructure and coordination.

To make a well-informed decision on the possible funding of a next phase, the MFA would like to know how the covenant is relevant, coherent, effective, and efficient. Furthermore, the MFA would like to know if/how improvements could be made related to the cooperation between the MFA and PBL.

In general, the objective of evaluation is twofold: accountability ('the prove') and learning ('the improve'). The Terms of Reference encompass these two objectives by referring to both a *backward-looking* assessment and a *forward-looking* assessment.

⁷ To the covenant, DGIS has allocated approximately EUR 1 million annually in ODA resources reported to OECD under CRS code 41082.

⁸ Source: Staatscourant nr.41074. Convenant 2018-2022 inzake additionele taken voor het Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving. 23rd July 2018.

1.2 Scope of the study

The scope of the evaluation has encompassed the following:

1. A backward-looking assessment of the aggregated outputs and outcomes of the covenant (did it succeed in achieving the agreed objectives and did it live up to the parties' expectations? what practices have proven to be valuable; how did the cooperation materialize and what could have been done differently; how were lessons and recommendations from previous covenants adopted; examples of best-practices and shortcomings).
2. A forward-looking assessment, based on lessons learned from the current covenant, which will address the following questions:
 - a. "Is a covenant the most suitable model for cooperation between PBL and MFA or should other forms of cooperation be considered?"
 - b. "How can the collaboration be improved?"
 - c. "What suggestions can be done for cooperation and use of knowledge/analyses for policy making within DGIS?"

In this final report we limit to the backward-looking and forward-looking findings of the evaluation, with in the annexes the preliminary findings in the inception report.

To conduct both the backward and forward assessment, a Theory of Change (ToC) was reconstructed (see Annex C) while the questions raised in the Terms of Reference (see Annex G) were regrouped – according to this ToC). For these groups of questions, an evaluation matrix was elaborated (see Annex D). The groups of questions, the Evaluation Questions (EQs) for the backward assessment and the Advisory Review Questions (ARQs) for the forward-looking questions compose the main structure of this report.

In this report the programme cycle terminology is used (input, output, and results/effect/ outcome). The ToR did not require any impact assessment since the attribution gap is considered too wide for doing so.

1.3 Structure of the report

The methodology applied is briefly explained in Annex D. In practice, it consisted of documentation and interviews mainly. Next to documentation, 48 interviews were conducted, of which contents and perceptions expressed are sometimes interpreted and/or summarized at a high abstract level, made explicit by a sub-heading "evaluator's review".

The report is structured as follows: chapter 2 answers the backward-looking evaluation questions (EQs), chapter 3 answers the forward-looking Advisory Review Questions (ARQs). In the annexes we present subsequently document analysis, summary of the financial reports, the reconstructed Theory of Change, Methodology, Brief summaries of some activities under the covenant, List of stakeholders interviewed, Terms of Reference (short version), and information about ERBS.

2. Backward looking questions

EQ 1 Relevance

To what extent did the activities resulting from the PBL-DGIS covenant contribute to policy development about achieving the SDGs?

According to OECD, a distinction can be made between “policy relevance” and “relevance in relation to the problem to be solved - or end user”. DGIS contributes by means of development assistance and diplomacy. The covenant, therefore, should be relevant to these “policies”. In the evaluation of this covenant, the “problem to be solved or end user” is interpreted as “relevant in terms of the global SDGs which are in the PBL-scope, and the contribution of developing countries to these goals”. MFA⁹ has an inter-ministerial coordinating role for the global SDGs (not to confuse with the coordination of the Dutch contribution to the SDGs).

PBL’s scope limits to nature, environment, landuse-related SDGs, and social SDGs linked to that. Achieving the global SDGs are seen as “the problem to be solved”. Developing countries are seen as “end-users” - as the goal of DGIS is to help developing countries achieve the SDGs. However, the impact pathways¹⁰ of the covenant towards these end-users are highly indirect and long-term. These depend on transitions that require a slow build-up of momentum until a tipping point is reached. The whole donor community may need to be addressed, or communities implementing UN conventions, or trade negotiations. Developing countries are member of these arenas, but not the only members. Outcomes of the covenant may seem insignificant at first, but still be extremely relevant for the SDGs in the long term.

EQ 1.1 Relevance for policies in MFA

In which way has the PBL-DGIS covenant been relevant with regard to implementing and developing policies of the MFA? To what extent did the covenant contribute to the operational objectives contained in the Ministry’s budget memorandum?

- 1) All main activities which were partially or fully financed from this covenant were relevant for developing new policies. PBL’s work overall may have been relevant for all SDGs in their scope (environment, nature, space and linked social SDGs).
- 2) In the MFA at large, the relation with PBL through the covenant was hardly known, while at the level of DGIS the covenant has rarely been relevant to implementing policies i.e., for development cooperation programmes. The specific context of these programmes is too distant from the PBL’s mandate. This relates to all operational objectives of the budget memorandum 2018 (having 2020 as horizon). The subject matters covered by the covenant

⁹ The Directorate Multilateral Institutions and Human Rights at the DG Political Affairs coordinates the Dutch input into the UN SDGs process. The director of IGG is ambassador for sustainable development (<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-buitenlandse-zaken/organisatie/organogram/directeur-generaal-internationale-samenwerking>)

¹⁰ We take “impact pathway” as an envisaged sequence of policy arenas that PBL may influence with its assessments; it is a sequence of arenas that may influence each other until there is momentum in arenas powerful enough to intervene for sustainable transitions. The concept of impact pathways is implicitly at the core of deciding which activities to undertake under the covenant.

were related to articles 1 (sustainable trade) and 2 (sustainable development, food security and water) of the Budget Memorandum 2018 (and hence not to the articles 3, 4 and 5).¹¹

To what extent was this contribution ODA relevant?

- 3) All PBL activities that were co-financed from the covenant were at least partially relevant to ODA. As the covenant aimed to contribute to mainstreaming, its budget blended with other budgets to engage in projects that were not exclusively aimed at future ODA. This blending makes it impossible to unravel which part of the covenant's budget contributed to ODA. In many cases, relevance extended also to parts of the world that don't receive Dutch ODA, which sometimes is responsibility of other ministries (e.g., biodiversity: LNV).
- 4) To increase relevance for global SDGs in the DGIS focus regions and countries, increasing attention is given to the prospect of making downscaled assessments for focus regions and focus countries.

EQ 1.2 Relevance of work streams

To what extent were the five identified workstreams, coherent, relevant towards achieving the goals of the covenant?

The covenant identifies five work streams to structure PBL's activities (see section 1.1 above). This is about relevance of PBL's work streams for DGIS, disregarding how much of it was financed from the DGIS allocations to the covenant.

- 5) Work stream 1 (mainstreaming) was highly relevant for global SDG-related policies in the responsibility of other ministries. The development-dimension was better represented there. Examples are biodiversity-related work under responsibility of LNV, for the interdepartmental programme on circular economy (CE) led by I&W, and for the interdepartmental water cluster / the Water Envoy.
- 6) In work stream 2 (international assessments) the Global Land Outlook, several energy scenarios and the Synthesis of Environmental Outlooks were co-financed from the covenant and they were directly relevant for DGIS. Other international assessments (like GEO, IPBES) were also relevant. They are all believed relevant for the context in which DGIS develops its development cooperation.
- 7) Work stream 3 (demand driven work) activities were demanded by DGIS itself to inform its



Alice: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

Cheshire Cat: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

Alice: "I don't much care where."

Cheshire Cat: "Then it doesn't matter which way you go."

policy making. It is difficult to evaluate whether the available budget may have been dedicated to more relevant activities. A few respondents observed that this demand was rather disconnected, lacking a clear common orientation. The SDGs may serve as common orientation but are multi-

¹¹ Article 3 refers to social development, article 4 to peace and security and article 5 refers to capacity building mainly.

faceted and need to be prioritised. On the other hand, in this agenda-setting phase of the policy cycle, there should also be free space, or room for manoeuvre, for exploring new issues and impact pathways (see the illustration, taken from Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland).

- 8) Few respondents contested the relevance of work stream 4 (building a knowledge base). Some indicated that the need to invest in work stream 4 is part of the reason why PBL’s work is a public task.
- 9) Without work stream 5 (coordination), the other work streams, as far as relating to the ODA and international dimension, would not have been possible.
- 10) Respondents did not refer to any incoherencies between the five work streams of the covenant. PBL is used to organising nexus work internally (i.e., collaboration across the organisation). This is not to say that internal mainstreaming of the development cooperation dimension into PBL’s regular work reaches its full potential. Respondents outside PBL said that relevance is increased if PBL itself makes the decision how the covenant budget and the budgets of each work stream are combined.
- 11) PBL’s integrated analysis based on broad multidisciplinary subjects (‘beyond the boundaries of administrative responsibility’) is consistent with the idea behind the Cabinet-wide “Insight in Quality” process and the corresponding Strategic Evaluation Agenda (SEA).

EQ 1.3 Relevance of outcomes

What are the most relevant achieved outcomes? Why were these most relevant?

- 12) From the point of view of **global achievement of the SDGs**, the PBL contribution to international assessments done in the context of UN conventions are highly appreciated. These contributions are partly made independent from the covenant and partly related to it. The high appreciation confirms the findings of the synthesis of assessments activity, which has inspired IGG (with water envoy, I&W, LNV) to use global conferences on food systems (in 2021) and on water systems (in 2023) to promote integrated assessments for these nexuses as well. The UN arenas that use outputs coproduced by the PBL as accepted base for discussion are broad. Potential impact of PBL work in these arenas is therefore significant. Respondents from both IGG and PBL see downscaling (i.e. zooming in) of GLO to regions as promising.
- 13) From the point of view of **NL’s contribution to the global achievement of SDGs**, most relevant outcome is the agenda setting effect of PBL’s work, potentially leading to the mainstreaming of findings into policies. It is about topics that today are not always on the political agenda, but in the long term may have significant effect. PBL is difficult to ignore, yet political implications in the short term are not always clear. Circular Economy (CE) is an example. Such initiatives can be taken by either DGIS staff (e.g., in the case of CE) or by PBL staff (e.g., in the case of consequences of post 2020 CBD for NL). The work may then influence the agenda after which more visible joint action can be taken under the covenant. New topics for DGIS may also originate in PBL’s studies for other ministries (e.g., biodiversity).
- 14) PBL may have been relevant for not only influencing the agenda of global and national policy arenas (the 2 previous points), but also influencing the ensuing policy making processes.

However, once a new policy item is widely accepted, the PBL mandate becomes less relevant. Knowledge providers without that mandate may take over. Once the adopted policies on development cooperation are in their implementation phase, PBL's contribution was limited (a possible exception, the implementation of programmes using the Integrated Landscape Management approach, appeared more relevant for future programmes than for running programmes.)

EQ 1.4 Relevance of PBL's scope and mandate

What makes PBL's mandate and scope as a public institution relevant? Does PBL's mandate and scope as a public institution make a difference for the relevance of the covenant?

PBL's general mandate (mapping the quality of the environment, nature and space and evaluating the policies pursued, independently of any other actor) is refined to SDGs in the covenant, as derived from the responsibility of DGIS.

BOX 2. PBL'S MANDATE

Since the covenant is sourced from ODA resources, this evaluation should also be accessible to an international (OECD) audience who might not be acquainted with PBL's tasks (national and international). Its core tasks are, as indicated on [its website](#):

- 1) "mapping the current quality of the environment, nature and space and evaluating the policy pursued.
- 2) exploring future social developments that affect the quality of the environment, nature and space, and evaluating possible policy options ex-ante.
- 3) identifying and putting social issues that are important for the environment, nature and space on the agenda.
- 4) identifying possible strategic options for achieving government goals in the areas of environment and nature and space."

"The PBL conducts its analyses, evaluations and explorations primarily as input to improve the quality of decision-making by the cabinet and parliament. In addition, the research also focuses on other governments, international organizations, and civil society organisations. PBL conducts this research both on its own initiative and at the request of external parties, usually a ministry or an international organization such as UNEP (United Nations Environment Program) and the European Commission. Requests from the central government mainly come from the ministries of Economic Affairs and Climate, Infrastructure and Water Management, Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries, Home Office, MFA, General Affairs, and Finance."

To warrant the sound implementation of this task, organisational dispositions are taken (see the same webpage): "The PBL is an organizational part of the national government, namely the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. This special positioning makes guaranteeing its independence essential for the PBL. The substantive independence of the PBL and its fellow independent assessment agencies CPB and SCP is guaranteed in the [Instructions for the Independent Assessment Agencies](#)¹², Staatscourant 3200, 21 February 2012. These stipulate, among other things, that the PBL itself determines its work programme.

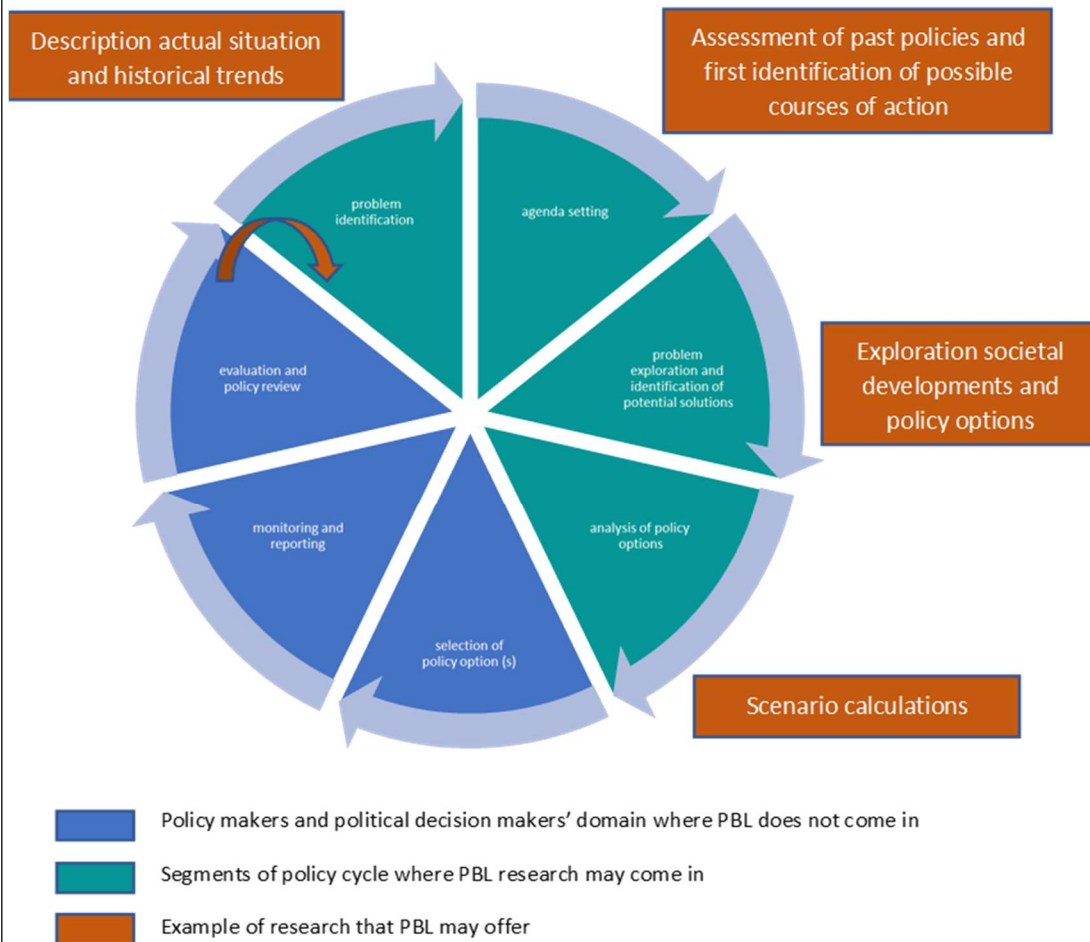
¹² https://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/rest/cms/Aanwijzingen_Planbureaus_2012.pdf

- 15) Respondents find the mandate relevant as it enables PBL to be a science-policy interface: it can directly address long-term issues and emerging (in)coherence in the policy arena as a whole, without approval (ruggenspraak). This requires investments that no other knowledge institute can make, as investing in nexus models in close connection with policy processes, giving returns in the long term mainly, is difficult to finance either commercially (without losing independence) or academically (without impeding academic outcomes); respondents therefore see it as a public task or public good.
- 16) PBL's mandate makes its work less relevant for the quality of implementation of ongoing development programmes (both centrally managed (DGIS) and delegated programmes (embassies)).
- 17) The existence and merits of the covenant and the PBL mandate are not known or clearly understood by all DGIS staff (and wider MFA). In addition, the way in which PBL itself interprets its mandate if it must make choices, is not clearly understood. Can and will PBL become an internationally influential science-policy interface in certain areas that are (perhaps only) relevant for DGIS' own efforts to assist these countries? (Specifically related to water and food systems in developing countries, linked to downscaled landuse outlooks)
- 18) Respondents believe that potentially relevant PBL outputs sometimes do not lead to follow-up action in DGIS due to a lack of capacity. These outputs were seen as either ineffective or were not demanded in the first place. These respondents raised the question how strategic, long-term oriented DGIS wants to be (or can be)?
- 19) Respondents do not see a significant grey area in PBL's mandate where it does demand driven work under the covenant that potentially could have been done by other knowledge institutes. There are no clear indications that IGG staff have used the covenant to finance studies that might have been done by commercial firms (see also section 4.2). Nor are there boundary issues mentioned with DGIS partners WRI, NCEA, AIV. The reasons why DGIS staff engages with PBL are mostly that PBL, given its nexus models and political sensitivity, is influential in their arena and that it is a flexible long-term partner. In situations where policy coherencies might become politically sensitive, its independence is important.
- 20) The SDGs, as refined scope for PBL's general mandate, are important to IGG staff as fundamental criterion for relevance, and in setting priorities in PBL's work programme. This ranges wider than the SDGs that have been selected as national priorities and priorities for development cooperation.
- 21) Despite the potential inconvenience of PBL's outputs for policy makers in case PBL demonstrates incoherencies, there are no indications that PBL has been put under pressure by DGIS policy makers to modify or amend output. When biodiversity returned to IGG as a task, after PBL work for LNV, it was not easy to make space in the work programme. Examples that became, or may become, inconvenient were discussions around fossil fuel development, and sustainable trade agreements.
- 22) When PBL engaged in downscaled assessments, zooming in on focus countries, it is easy to imagine that this may have supported ODA priorities.

BOX 3. PBL'S MANDATE IN THE POLICY CYCLE (IDEALISED)

The covenant had the intention to mainstream development cooperation into the science-policy interface, not to affect the boundaries of PBL in relation to the policy cycle. Not all PBL stakeholders had the same perception however and some felt to have been somewhat pulled into the decision-making parts (blue in the diagram below). A few PBL researchers appreciated to work closely with the IGG policy makers and become 'co-responsible' (by means of policy briefs and 'at the table consult', others however qualified that as crossing the division line between Integrated Assessment Agencies (IAAs) and policymakers. However, internal PBL procedures should assure that it makes no recommendations for specific policy choices. This division line can be illustrated by the kind of research conducted by IAAs in relation to the policy cycle, as summarized in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. POLICY CYCLE AND PBL'S ROLE



Source: own elaboration based on PBL internal presentation.

EQ 2 Effectiveness / Outcome (mainstreaming)

Did the covenant contribute to the mainstreaming of the development cooperation dimension in PBL's work programme and products?

- 23) Respondents indicate that the covenant has been of influence on the further internationalisation in PBL's work programme and products. This also applies to development cooperation (workstream 1 of the covenant), but slightly less pronounced, although this varies by activity cluster.
- 24) The awareness that major problems in our society are not restricted to national boundaries is also increasing among the Dutch ministries that maintain direct relations with PBL. The Work Programmes over the period 2018-2021 illustrate the increase in international work, amongst others with UN organisations and OECD.
- 25) The covenant could be made more relevant as strategic instrument for MFA in its entirety, as these links are not yet strongly developed. The ecological footprint, sustainable trade and circular economy may have relevance for the ministry as a whole.

EQ 2.1 Mainstreaming into PBL's non-DGIS work

What role did the covenant play in securing uptake of the international and development perspective/dimension in PBL's (national/interdepartmental) work (mainstreaming)?

- 26) The incorporation of the specific perspective of development countries in the same themes (climate change, energy transition, food systems) is a subcomponent of the internationalisation, but still less developed and less mainstreamed. The development perspective as well as inequality is most prominently present in relatively new subjects to PBL, such as circular economy. While a gradual shift towards internationalisation cannot be attributed to the covenant, the attention for developing countries can. In various cases the same researcher(s) conduct studies with UN and DGIS at the same time or are complementary to each other.
- 27) In interviews the following features of the mainstreaming were mentioned:
 - a. The covenant has contributed that PBL integrates the social aspects more in models and research. PBL has learned to integrate the social environment with the physical one in particular for developing countries.
 - b. By its attention to the global SDGs, the covenant is perceived essential to keep the global aspects on the PBL agenda with a particular focus on developing countries.
 - c. As 'by-product' of the covenant, PBL has worked with case studies in developing countries (circular economy; the coffee value chain). The PBL researchers indicated that this was new and valuable as case studies only (i.e., taking a country as example for other countries as *pars pro toto*). Country specific studies are not PBL's area of expertise and there are no ambitions at that level.
 - d. In their research with other ministries and/or UN organisations, PBL ensures DGIS is consulted at an early stage; this refers to -amongst others, topics like circular economy, the Netherlands footprint at global level and biodiversity.

- e. Mainstreaming requires to exert pressure in two direction (i) internally, PBL has to actively involve those sections that do not directly work on international themes with the aim to broaden their scope to a 'beyond the Netherlands, including developing countries context, if applicable; (ii) at the same time, MFA in general and DGIS in particular, have to exert pressure on other ministries (mainly focused at the national context) to allow PBL doing so.
- 28) As a kind of "collateral" to the mainstreaming respondents referred to the better understanding between PBL researchers and DGIS policy makers about each other's constraints and requirements.
 - 29) The focus of the covenant has a spin-off to other Dutch ministries through the DG Deliberation (Overleg) and the PBL work programme. This can be interpreted as investment towards Dutch policy makers (and politicians) who are hardly aware of the relation between 'national' subjects and those of developing countries. Examples are the circular economy studies and the natural resource extraction for the energy transition.

Evaluator's review

- 30) Mainstreaming of the attention for developing countries implies both institutional and individual internalisation, both required to sustain knowledge and focus. The institutional internalisation is modest, but not absent. The activities related to the covenant depend on a limited number of researchers, some of these exclusively working on these subjects and fully funded by the resources made available by DGIS (be it temporary contracted staff or staff 'liberated' from 'regular' research). This is a kind of 'niche' speciality in PBL, mainly in the sectors 'Natuur en Landelijk Gebied' (NLG) and 'Klimaat, Lucht en Energie' (KLE). PBL researchers indicated that there is 'still a lot to do to reach other sectors' within PBL.
- 31) The internalisation of the development perspective in individual researchers could not be assessed, but there are only 6-10 staff members (3-5% of the formation) with a permanent contract involved in covenant related activities.
- 32) In sum, mainstreaming has progressed but did not reach all sectors of PBL, also since all research in the context of the covenant is implemented by a limited number of researchers, of which only part is permanent staff. On the other hand, not all PBL sectors need to be relevant for the SDGs in developing countries.
- 33) The spin-off to other ministries (and beyond) is a sign that managers enable long-term knowledge management and agenda-influencing by PBL. This enhances the strategic capacity of government.

EQ 2.2 Most appreciated work

What are the developments/activities that parties involved (PBL/DGIS) are most positive about? Did parties expect more of the covenant in certain areas? Did parties involved have similar expectations/views on this?

- 34) Respondents were asked to make a first association about the covenant, be it positive or negative and / or to indicate the most significant change.
- 35) In continuation some of the positive observations are listed:

- a. The use of models in policy positioning is now more accepted within the MFA; the PBL products contributed to a gradual change in thinking about -and acceptance of- integrated modelling about subjects like climate change adaptation / environment / energy transition.
 - b. The covenant has set in motion, and has propelled, the debate about change and transition within the MFA.
 - c. The covenant has contributed to the thinking behind the models. Models are dependent on the input and the variables considered. DGIS staff and PBL researchers alike appreciated to have more knowledge and insight in these variables and have contributed to model improvement.
 - d. The covenant products are contributing to paradigm shifts. In energy, for example the move away from support to gas exploration, extraction and distribution; in GLO, a stronger focus on land restoration.
 - e. To DGIS staff, the advantage of having a covenant has been that it lowered the threshold to embark upon research of which the direct and immediate use is not clear. It triggers reflection about the future of the subject area, be it water, energy, circular economy, or others.
- 36) Taking an institutional stand, both PBL and DGIS were most positive about the following:
- a. The international assessments, aimed at global arenas, are most often mentioned as successful, and IGG is now trying to reach more arenas in this way. Some themes are perhaps still marginal but may grow out to become highly impactful (CE, sustainable value chains, land use approach).
 - b. The “two-way” interaction of mutual enforcement and cross-fertilisation, for example in the area of energy in a triangle relation: PBL-DGIS-international organisations.
 - c. PBL has taken the initiative to involve DGIS at an early stage in its regular interdepartmental work. DGIS has been involved through PBL-mediation in studies about circular economy, footprint, and biodiversity.
 - d. The smooth relations between PBL and DGIS in terms of management, coordination, and financial administration.

Did parties expect more of the covenant in certain areas and did the parties have similar expectations/views on this?

- 37) Like respondents made positive remarks (see above), there was criticism as well. The main critical remarks can be summarised as follows:
- a. PBL staff: The ministry lacks a knowledge agenda and shows reluctance to think about the long term, since all policy demand is short term.
 - b. DGIS staff: PBL is strong in their models but has limited knowledge of the practice in ODA countries. This situation sometimes leads to misunderstanding and even irritation and/or denial of PBL products.
 - c. PBL staff: “The audience” at IGG is small. There is response from individual IGG experts. No idea whether that represents a DGIS view, an IGG view or just the expert’s

view. Since contacts are rather bilateral and personal and insufficiently “institutionalised” that implies a challenge to the use of the knowledge contained in the studies.

- d. PBL staff: It is not practical and powerful to have a range of small demand driven projects, isolated from the rest of PBL, instead of broader, more multidisciplinary, and integrated studies.
- e. International organisations contacted observed that DGIS invest significant resources on PBL research and that PBL produces leading studies of which international organisations are eager to make use of, but that these reports sometimes have - apparently- little influence on the Dutch development policies.
- f. Insufficient change in the use of the covenant after the previous evaluation of the covenant.

38) Areas where PBL and DGIS had more expectations from each other can be summarised as follows:

- a. Both parties, especially DGIS, hoped for more direct relevance for DGIS’s development programmes. PBL assessments were too abstract in relation to the context of programmes in their implementation phase. The relevance of global assessments is indirect, while environmental global arenas are poorly linked to global development arenas like WB, let alone to global subregional arenas.
- b. Where IGG is focused on specific IGG topics in the short term, PBL is focused on the broader government policy options in the long term. Both parties understand this tension and often this gap has been bridged. Nevertheless, DGIS staff observed that there are limited strategic policy windows and that PBL reports are insufficiently useful for immediate changes to the programming or design of interventions in their field.
- c. PBL had expected a more strategic capacity from DGIS at the front-end, the capacity to formulate a knowledge agenda, e.g., when it comes to the coherence between SDGs in the long term. This is an internal process to prepare for future programmes that contribute to sustainable development, prior to making any policy. The articulation of demand within DGIS could have been instrumental to that.
- d. Similarly, PBL staff expected more from DGIS’s capacity to formulate its demand for the work stream 3 (direct requests). There is no consistent building up of knowledge, most are requests in isolation and sometimes based on assumptions close to ‘average public opinion’.
- e. Comparable, PBL staff expected more from DGIS at the tail-end, the reflection about the product, the dissemination of the message, not only within IGG, but also in the entire MFA, other ministries and external organisations involved.
- f. The case where both PBL and DGIS had more expectations from each other was with the “green recovery” study, considered to have a window of opportunity and hence unmissable on the agenda. While DGIS expected a product that could play a role in the policy debate, PBL started with a conceptual inventory. Both DGIS and PBL had the intention to produce an input to the policy theme (beleidsthema). For presentation and dissemination IGG organised a workshop, but only few interested persons

attended the presentation and on top many left. In hindsight, PBL researchers concluded that the topic was probably no theme of importance to MFA, showing no agreement on the pathway of change in the ministry. DGIS concludes that PBL's presentations in the ministry should be appealing, for example through a presentation by the director PBL and / or in a manner the DGIS policy maker would consider as useful for his/her work.

Evaluator's review

- 39) In general, both parties as well as the direct stakeholders (DGIS staff and PBL researchers) appreciate the relationship and the kind of studies conducted. To quote a PBL manager "the covenant makes me happy".
- 40) Obviously, there are mutual misunderstandings, criticism, and irritations, but not a single respondent considered it an option or necessity to discontinue the covenant.
- 41) Nevertheless, there are few points that merit attention:
 - a. The topics that need shared attention in DGIS. That is not an overnight exercise but should clearly distinguish between long term research requirements (with the highest weight in terms of time) and the strategy for the short-term demand. Here, the strategy should encompass questions like whether coherence and consistency are required or not.
 - b. The audience / arena for products (assessments). Although IGG has its role in relation to the SDGs, it cannot be just for IGG staff, since it is only one (and possibly a small one) among the many participants in the arena. In the awareness that every innovative theme starts small (could be IGG) one needs a clear pathway on how to resonate the theme in which arenas (audiences)? This could be in first instance through interested individuals (call them change agents) with DGIS and the other MFA directorates. And subsequently within the ministry's networks and other institutional contacts, amongst them with "like-minded" countries for example, for demand articulation. But there has been a lot of variation. The users of thematic products are not restricted to DGIS or MFA, but encompass international organisations, such as UNEP, UNCCD alike. The scientific publications have their own academic audience.
 - c. As the example of the green recovery study illustrated, the question is who has the convening power and responsibility to bring PBL assessments to attention of relevant arenas, usually to begin with DGIS itself. Some IGG staff indicated to depend on PBL's convening power, for example by bringing together ministries. In the case of the "beyond certification" study for coffee, PBL played a mediating role between IGG and DDE. The covenant coordinator in IGG is the accountholder and hence the broker for all these contacts. Once there is momentum between the ministries, PBL's covenant coordinator can also involve the PBL staff involved in regular work for these ministries to take the international dimension into consideration.

- d. But this can only be successful if both the message itself and the presentation of the message are appealing enough to the policy makers (i.e., using infographics)¹³ and windows of opportunity are well chosen (conference, seminar).

EQ 2.3 Mainstreaming output

What results in PBLs work were realized within the framework of the covenant? How is the quality and timeliness of these results assessed?

- 42) The output of the covenant is presented in Annex A of this report; the quality assurance system is presented in EQ 4.3.
- 43) Both the kind and number of activities related to the covenant, as envisaged by both DGIS and PBL were largely achieved. In particular, the thematic studies produced a large volume and variety in output (research reports, scientific publications, presentations).

Timeliness

- 44) After having agreed on the Work programme and in the context of the flexible organisation the subjects of study are defined. For each of these studies PBL elaborates a 'project' with a corresponding budget, human resource identification and time schedule.
- 45) Since the programming over a year for the same expert encompasses usually more than a single project, the researchers are keen to stick to their time schedules. The time schedule is based on contents, not on the (policy) moment that it is opportune to present a study, although one takes window of opportunity into consideration.
- 46) The time schedule encompasses the time required for the internal peer review and in the case the material is used for scientific publication also the time required for external review.
- 47) In the case of scientific publications, not the authors, but independent academic peer review process determines the time schedule.
- 48) Some DGIS staff observed 'long delays' in the presentation of reports. This appreciation is based on a comparison with reports produced by commercial companies. PBL does not work with deadlines based on either contracts or financial resource availability but based on contents. Since PBL sticks to its rather extensive and precise quality control system (see EQ 4.3) that does require more time.

¹³ An outstanding example is The People and the Earth document (but that cannot be expected for every study).

EQ 3 Effectiveness / Outcome (international assessments and demand driven)

Have the results of PBL's contribution to international assessments and knowledge questions been incorporated into IGG/MFA's policy and intervention portfolio? (Work streams 2 and 3).

EQ 3.1 Results for IGG

What results for IGG/MFA were realized within the framework of the covenant? (Distinguish directly relevant to NL national policies / IGG development programmes / directly relevant to diplomatic work)

- 49) The analysis of the documented outcomes and discussion with respondents mainly expressed their influence on debates in relevant policy arenas, in turn influencing the policy agenda. Direct results on IGG policies were observed in the value chains ("beyond certification") and energy transition ("discontinue support to natural gas projects" (see the annex E).
- 50) Outcomes in terms of the IGG policy and diplomatic agenda are, for example, influence on the BHOS policy note, influence on its biodiversity-related work, influence on NL's ambitions in the international food system and water arenas.
- 51) Outcomes helped to reinforce the importance of the inter-ministerial CE programme coordination. Attention and focus on the international dimension of Dutch implementation of the global goals is relevant to DGIS, particularly in the long term.
- 52) Outcomes on water systems, food security, landuse outlooks and WAVES reveal the potential relevance for the agenda setting of the international community and strengthen the Dutch contribution at the global level.
- 53) Outcomes regarding the energy sector and transition are potentially relevant to both DGIS, other directorates of MFA and other ministries. Lessons drawn from the comparison of international reports (EIA, IRENA) have been translated into the local context and benefit policy makers to stay informed about the implications of different scenarios.

EQ 3.2 Work PBL and DGIS appreciate most

What are the developments/activities that parties involved (PBL/DGIS) are most positive about? Did parties expect more of the covenant in certain areas? Did parties involved have similar expectations/views on this? (MFA policies)

- 54) In general, respondents have only limited overview of PBL activities. Still some activities stand out as salient successes. In case either PBL or DGIS expected more than this, it is because there was insufficiently shared view on relevance, high-potential impact pathways and associated activities required.
- 55) The successes that stand out are of two kinds:
 - a. Activities having significant influence on the discussions that precede and shape the policy making in large arenas are relevant to DGIS, like the UNCCD and the CBD. See hereafter for details.
 - b. Activities that succeed to "ignite" modest policy processes in small arenas with policy makers and NGOs, and which are seen as highly relevant and potentially impactful in

the future. An example is the Circular Economy activity, which is slowly working its way to the “international trade” arena.

- 56) Many respondents’ personal impact stories relate to the “resonance” between large and small arenas. One example is GEO PBL draws insights from GEO and translates them into lessons for the Netherlands, having as target group policy makers at the MFA, I&W, EZK and LNV. Effectiveness on the international arenas in turn influences and transcends IGG.
- 57) Respondents particularly appreciate the relevance of PBL’s synthesis of global environmental outlooks. PBL worked closely with lead authors from the assessments, therefore triggering the expansion and strengthening of its international network. By organizing workshops with multiple stakeholders (policy makers, researchers, social and interested parties). The before mentioned interactions initiated by PBL granted a co-creation environment enabling broader discussion among different stakeholders indirectly influencing policy development.
- 58) An example of the effectiveness on the international arena stems from the close collaboration with UNCCD. PBL expertise on scenario modelling is highly valued and has a heavy but indirect impact on decision making for the countries that UNCCD works closely with. While the Netherlands is not officially part of the G-20, the global initiative on reducing land degradation and enhancing conservation of terrestrial habitats (a project that extends over the next 20 years) relies heavily on the scenarios that PBL has developed. The trust in their quality standards and transparency is high.
- 59) Some respondents perceive that the covenant’s potential to integrate and support specific arenas that are relevant for global SDGs and developing countries, remain largely unexploited. Examples mentioned are Natural Capital Accounting, the water nexus, the nexus around food systems, the nexus around conflict, safety, and migration. Sometimes activities are not started, or discontinued early, due to the uneven perception of the potential impact pathways. This is further detailed in EQ 3.3.

EQ 3.3 International assessments and demand driven output

In which areas did PBL contribute to vision/strategic policy development? In which areas was PBL unable to contribute to this objective? Are there concrete examples? How is the quality and timeliness of these results assessed?

- 60) The outputs are listed in Annex A, and clustered according to the areas where they are supposed to have contributed to vision and strategic policy development. The relevance of activities for these areas is discussed in EQ 1.
- 61) Where Annex A lists what has been done, the potential was higher. Some activities were proposed but not funded, others were not observed in the first place. PBL rarely rejected IGG demands; a few cases where this may have played are energy / climate (green recovery), ecological footprint for water, and the integration of water into the “synthesis of environmental outlooks”.
- 62) It is difficult to say how many other opportunities have been missed, as there is no record of decisions made with their reasons (as discussed in EQ 3.2 and in ARQ6). Rarely a lack of budget was the real problem. One DGIS respondent mentioned that a proposed activity under the covenant was never discussed; other such cases might not have surfaced in the

interviews, especially if staff is not aware of the covenant. With a more coordinated and explicit description of the objectives and intentions of the covenant, such decisions may have been different.

- 63) There were few complaints about quality or timeliness related to the success stories. These are the policy arenas and audiences where IGG, and in its slipstream PBL, are well connected. However, some respondents indicated that PBL may miss opportunities as neither IGG nor PBL itself is sufficiently connected to a potentially important arena. Some of the examples mentioned referred to the international arenas dealing with conflict, safety, and migration, as these arenas can benefit from an integrated outlook.
- 64) On the other hand, for the nexus around food (i.e., food systems) and the water nexus (i.e., water systems), IGG is now partnering with PBL to explore the potential of investing in the “development-oriented international arenas”. Some respondents emphasised that PBL’s authority as independent assessor in international arenas depends on the reputation of its experts. It is a strategic decision for PBL and DGIS together whether PBL should invest in building into that reputation depending on the potential impact pathways in new international arenas, where PBL has no reputation yet.
- 65) The UNCCD case (Global Land Outlooks) is exceptional. Respondents expressed the potential to consider the GLO as a model that can be downscaled to sub-regions and country level. An example of this methods is the experiment done in the Horn of Africa (for UNEP). Respondents find approach promising as it might bridge the gap between global arenas and developing in subregions and countries. Respondents refer to this idea in different ways. Most frequently it is called landscape approach, but others see that term as confusing: Integrated Land Management (ILM) is also seen as a landscape approach that may benefit from an Independent Assessment Agency or comparable. However, ILM is widely seen as belonging to a form of governance that depends on local ownership, which may not be realistic at the intermediary scale (sub-regions and countries). At intermediary scales, assessments will have to be jointly driven by donors and local governance networks; to avoid confusion we propose the term “landuse approach” for downscaled GLO-like approaches, such regional scale approaches that require and collaboration of local governance networks, the international donor community involved and knowledge centres.

EQ 4 Effectiveness / Outcome (knowledge base and knowledge infrastructure)

Did the covenant strengthen the PBL knowledge base available to DGIS (and others) and knowledge infrastructure? (Mainly workstream 4).

- 66) The covenant did strengthen the PBL knowledge base indeed in the sense that it helped to redirect it to gradually take the perspective of developing countries into consideration. The more notorious improvement, however, is that the covenant stimulates a continuous interaction (interface) between DGIS and PBL, enabling to identify opportunities to bring SDG (in)coherencies to the attention in corresponding arenas.
- 67) Most respondents refer to this role as a science-policy interface. PBL is in itself a “first-order” science-policy interface; its functioning depends on two “second-order” interfaces: one with policy arenas (IGG and others) and one with knowledge arenas (academic, public and

commercial). To assess effectiveness, these three “worlds” and their interfaces must be taken into consideration.

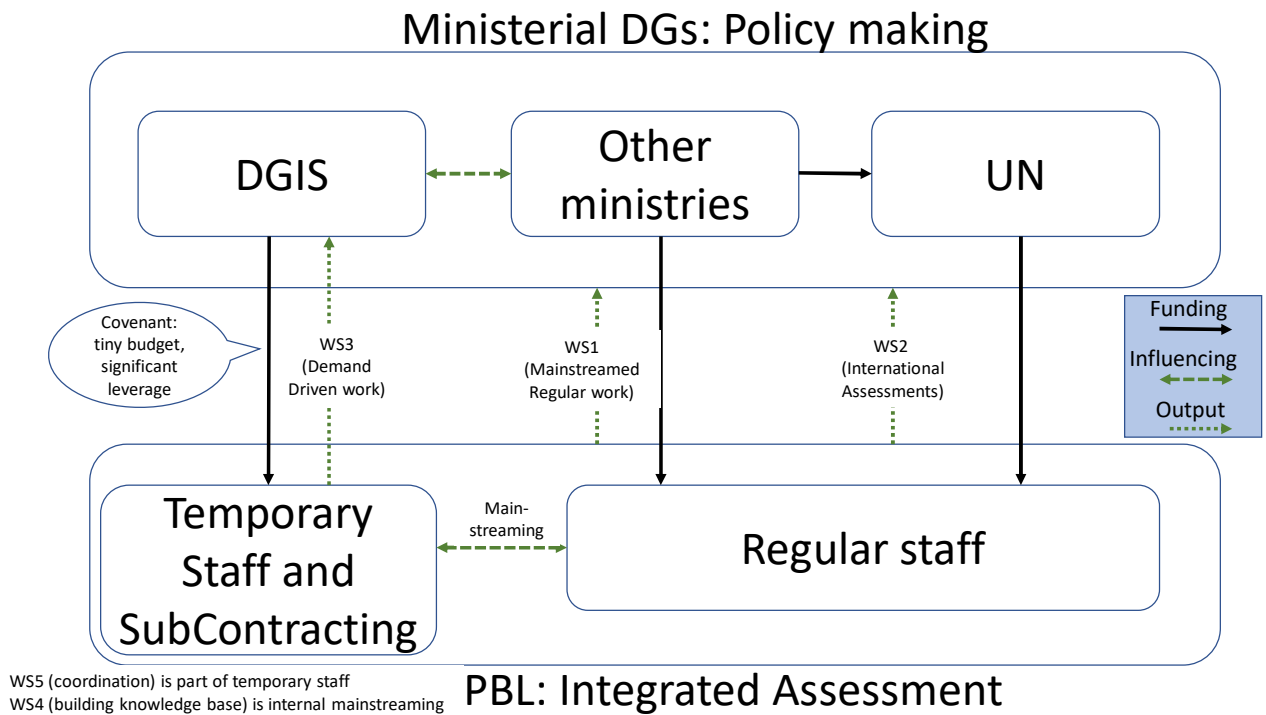
- 68) The analytical side of the assessment of the interfaces may help to define more clearly the scope of activities under the covenant. Several respondents observed that the covenant’s analytical theory of change evolves, not only by an emerging language about impact pathways to connect resonating arenas, but also by distinguishing two ways in which PBL structures its knowledge: nexus-oriented and landuse-oriented. Both reduce complexity of the assessments in different ways:
- a. The **nexus-oriented approach** reduces complexity by putting one specific SDG central to the assessment. This is done, e.g., for SDGs related to food, water, biodiversity – each having their own international arena. Then the assessment is linked to other SDGs. At this nexus of SDGs, PBL looks for synergies with these other SDGs to promote, and for trade-offs to prevent. PBL’s nexus work addresses the policies of actors interested in the SDGs that are subject in these assessments (public, private and civil).
 - b. The **landuse oriented approach** reduces complexity by downscaling to smaller areas. This enables taking more SDGs into consideration, making the assessment more relevant for the whole of public, private, and civil actors in that area. This is a step toward inclusive country-owned landscape governance. The assessment uses natural boundaries rather than jurisdictional, to expose coherence issues that overarch jurisdictions. Cases studies with downscaling have been done with the landuse approach, partly to calibrate the global outlooks, partly to see how this approach may serve local programmes. PBL does not systematically apply the landuse approach, and its size remains much smaller than the nexus approach.

EQ 4.1 Capacity in PBL

Did PBL create additional capacity to support the science-policy interface?

- 69) With covenant funding, the PBL hired additional staff for the duration of the covenant, for doing demand-driven work for DGIS, for coordination and for contributing to mainstreaming into other PBL work. International assessments are driven by other ministries which makes that also mainstreaming; only the Global Land Outlooks were mainly driven by IGG and covenant funding.
- 70) To alleviate internal capacity constraints, PBL has outsourced part of the demand-driven work. Figure 2 provides a simplified diagram of relations between DGIS and PBL. This is not a formal model, but it is the evaluators’ interpretation from the information captured.

FIGURE 2. THE COVENANT LEVERAGE



- 71) In case the covenant is discontinued, there is a fair chance that the development dimension will get less attention. In that sense, the built-up capacity has not been sustainable. The covenant is additional to the ‘regular budget’ activities of PBL. These ‘additional’ activities are being implemented by ‘additional’ staff (be it temporary researchers and / or subcontracted). This additional knowledge is not ‘incorporated’ in the PBL system (and hence not sustained).
- 72) However, the mainstreaming objective (work stream 1) of the covenant has triggered that part of the activities are implemented by PBL ‘permanent’ researchers, who are (in part) liberated from other duties. For the DGIS – PBL covenant this implies that 2-3 researchers are working on temporary contracts. Next, there are a variable number (6-7) PBL researchers involved in covenant related subjects. These subjects are administratively expressed in projects and the time devoted by these researchers to these projects (9100 hours/ year)¹⁴ is compensated -based on a per unit cost- by the transfer of financial resources by DGIS.

If so, in what areas and to what extent did this contribute to the effectiveness of the covenant? Did it improve the relationship and interaction between PBL-DGIS?

- 73) The coordination workstream is the responsibility of one PBL staff and one IGG staff (see also EQ 8). This joint capacity proved invaluable in making the covenant “work”. It certainly improved the relationship compared to the situation without a covenant. In PBL this staff is temporary.
- 74) Otherwise, whether this enhanced capacity contributed the effectiveness of the covenant, is hard to assess. With outsourced research, the question arises whether that same study

¹⁴ 9100 hours in the year 2020.

could have been conducted in absence of PBL and whether a direct contracting by DGIS of the same researchers would have produced a similar result. One research entity interviewed indicated two differences: PBL is better equipped to raise the right questions for subjects ‘in the far future’ and PBL has a direct monitoring over the progress and direction of the study, based on its own knowledge and -if necessary- contracting of others.

- 75) While in PBL there are specialists that are well acquainted with the subject they are dealing with, that is not always the case in DGIS, where there are only few specialist experts (outside the staff rotation system) who possess a deep understanding of the subjects they are involved in, but work under severe time pressure.
- 76) The functioning of this PBL-DGIS interface, in the sense of joint strategic, learning or knowledge management capacity, is also difficult to separate from the covenant’s cooperation and governance. The reader is referred to section EQ8 for details.

The place of the covenant in DGIS’ overall knowledge management

- 77) Another matter is covenant’s role in the DGIS’ capacity to manage the sources of specialised knowledge needed to achieve DGIS’ objectives. There is no doubt that PBL’s role to clarify incoherencies and synergies between SDGs, which often require transitions, creates a conceptual “umbrella” that may inspire DGIS policies under preparation (and other flows of knowledge into DGIS’s policy arenas) This would relate to knowledge flows outside of PBL’s mandate. This can be done by means of knowledge platforms that are convened primarily for other purposes than PBL’s mandate.

Evaluator’s review

- 78) Without the DGIS covenant, the PBL’s knowledge is not necessarily kept and sustained within PBL. The international dimension would weaken the specific perspective of developing countries. Respondents in DGIS (IGG) leverages attention to the international dimension interface in the whole of government, but this also reflects to DGIS (and MFA) as their regular policies are sometimes affected (e.g., ODA, UN and EU diplomacy, trade).

EQ 4.2 PBL added value

Did PBL fulfil a role that other partners of the NL-MFA could not fulfil? In which areas was PBL able to fill a specific niche? Are there examples of how PBL is fulfilling this niche? In which areas could they – in hind side - have played this role?

PBL’s added value has already been assessed in EQ1 (relevance of PBL’s role and mandate). With respect to the effectiveness of its own knowledge base, we add some minor observations.

- 79) Alternatives to PBL in this role are rare. Respondents mentioned the European Environment Agency and the Joint Research Center of the European Commission as having a similar nexus function, independence, and political sensitivity.
- 80) PBL, according to respondents, develops several basic models for nexus around robust environmental themes like climate change and biodiversity. It invests in these models and the expertise needed to apply them in practical situations. They use external expertise that they do not have in house, and they only take it in house if necessary to be agile and credible. This is a strategic choice: respondents indicate that not for all “targeted” global arenas PBL has an international figurehead in its ranks.

- 81) How far PBL expertise in a specific field extends is to some extent pragmatic and historically grown. If it does not have the knowledge itself, it looks for external knowledge of high quality. It also works in international consortia for more international credibility as well as unique knowledge. In some fields WRI may be better positioned in a network relevant to DGIS (as WRI has its main office in Washington, close to the World Bank for example). In other fields – general SDG work, for example, PBL is better positioned as it works together, also scientifically, with the Stockholm Resilience Institute, the Potsdam Institute. In the case of biodiversity, with IDDD in France.

EQ 4.3 Quality control

What research quality control mechanisms applied? Did these function as expected?

- 82) Research quality control mechanisms exist in both PBL and -to a lesser extent- in DGIS.
- 83) PBL applies various systems of quality assurance to grant the highest scientific quality of its research products.
- 84) PBL as organisation is (voluntary) subject to external scientific visitation on scientific quality, relevance and preparedness for the future. The most recent visitation took place in 2017 (a new visitation is coming up, prepared by the Chief Scientist) and qualified the scientific quality as “excellent” (“world class”).
- 85) Internally, PBL counts with a Counselling College (Begeleidingscollege) that serve as a reflection board to the directors of PBL. It also informs the ministry of I&W about the functioning of PBL. The Counselling College assesses and advises about the PBL Work programme in general and the work programme of the Chief Scientist in particular.
- 86) PBL invests continuously in strategic knowledge development aimed at permanent updating of methods that keep the PBL work scientifically up to the ‘state-of-art’, as well as societal relevant.
- 87) Next, PBL employs a part-time Chief Scientist (CS) (professor at a Dutch university) to ensure scientific quality in research as well as quality assurance of the instruments and tools. He does so by identification of specific knowledge holders at (international) universities.
- 88) PBL has subscribed the LOWI (Landelijk Orgaan voor Wetenschappelijke Integriteit) integrity standard to confirm its integrity, independence, and transparency.
- 89) PBL has protocols for the use of its instruments and working methods.
- 90) At the level of the *products*, there are quality assurance instruments as well:
 - Peer review among colleagues as part of the work procedures of PBL.
 - Peer review in case of publication.
 - External review by experts (i.e., from universities) of reports and policy advice.
 - Organisation of seminars with either internal PBL researchers and/or (also) with external subject matter specialists.
- 91) At the side of DGIS, the quality assurance of the PBL studies and reports consists of:
 - Participation in the seminars organised by PBL at an early stage.

- b. Dissemination and discussion of the reports or studies among DGIS colleagues, and within the networks (other ministries, international organisations).

EQ 4.4 Consultation-induced output

Did annual consultation about new knowledge questions materialize and how did the consultation take place? Which studies or advisory services were agreed upon?

The annual consultations about new knowledge areas did take place. EQ8 details the process of how the consultations (and at which level) take place. Here we present a summary of the agreed output of these consultations, which -as a rule- were materialised as planned.

Overview of agreements achieved in annual consultations:

2018
- IGG 2018: Agreements were made to work more closely with WRI and NCEA in particular, but also to seek cooperation with IGG knowledge partners in other PBL projects.
- At the request of MFA, PBL and the National water envoy organized as of a session at the Stockholm world water week around the report “the geography of future water challenges”
2019
- At the request of IGG, the director of PBL gave a presentation on recent developments in Dutch and international climate policy during the 2019 ambassadors conference.
- During the PBL-DGIS work meeting (December) PBL pitched various studies, after which a broad discussion took place about priorities and interests for 2020.
2020
- IGG, DDE, and I&W organized a webinar to discuss the insights from the following 3 publications: ‘CE national abroad’, ‘Consequences of CE in NL and in OS countries’ and ‘The integration of CE in policy in other countries’
- At the PBL-DGIS work meeting (November) PBL pitched the various studies, followed by presentations from IGG/DDE clusters (Climate, Food Security, Water, Trade, and Circular Economy) to discuss priorities and interests for 2021.
2021
- As a result of the outsourcing of a study, ECDPM was invited to reflect about a new environmental strategy for DDE as potential contribution to the World Circular Economy Forum in 2021
2018, 2019, 2020, 2021
- Account meetings and bilateral contact at directors’ level DGIS – PBL

EQ 4.5 Coordination-induced output

Did coordination among knowledge partners lead to actionable knowledge in the identified subject matter areas: food, water, energy, biodiversity, and climate?

- 92) According to respondents, coordination, workstream 5, was an important element in the definition of new activities. It is not clear if there are cases where coordination actually “led” to these outputs. That their outputs were actionable is shown by the outcomes (see EQ 2 and 3).

EQ 5: Effectiveness / Outcome (coordination, dialogue, and communication)

Did the coordination, dialogue and communication lead to enhanced human capabilities of IGG and partners?

EQ 5.1 New relationships between MFA and PBL

To what extent did the covenant facilitate new relationships between the MFA and PBL?

- 93) Most relations between MFA and PBL have been among the directly involved departments within DGIS, being IGG and to a lesser extent DDE and in PBL, the account holding sector NLG and to a lesser extent the sector Climate, Air and Energy, as well as the sector Water, Agriculture and Food.
- 94) An ambition expressed by both parties at the end of the previous covenant to come to an institutionalization of regular discussions parallel to the annual work program meeting did materialize, but the frequency of moments of contact has proven to be low and occasionally complex since many of the subjects pertain to different departments. Although the aim has been to have those discussions at technical level mainly, convening power does play a role here, in particular if one aims at involving other directorates -general (i.e., DG BEB).
- 95) While at the start of the covenant it was the intention to come to mutual internships (IGG-PBL), this did not occur. Currently neither IGG, nor PBL have expressed an explicit intention to use the relationship as instrument for a structural enhancement of human capabilities. There are no specific training programmes for members of staff, so the enhancement of capabilities is product of work-related contacts (dialogue, exchange of information) and presentations, seminars, workshops, and the like. In this evaluation it has not been assessed whether this has led to enhanced capabilities.
- 96) Based on interviews, a few observations can be made however:
 - a. With some variance among the clusters of activities there are frequent contact moments. For example, the agenda-setting is an iterative process with front-end discussion at technical level, a process that requires contact and dialogue.
 - b. This process of contacts is even more intense when a new subject is tabled, such as circular economy and developing countries. PBL needs to know what is considered important for decision making, for example what is the role DGIS would like to have in the circular economy in both developing countries and in the Netherlands? That question is not to be addressed by PBL, but by policy makers, but is important to set the boundaries to the research by PBL.
 - c. New studies, that may require different expertise do facilitate new contacts between MFA and PBL. Explicit examples have been the circular economy study that triggered more contacts with DDE, but also with DG BEB (DIO - Internationaal Ondernemen- who were not interested, or only informally). Something similar applies to value chain studies, for example in the context of trade and deforestation ('beyond certification') that is not only subject to IGG, but also to DDE and DGBEB and other ministries.

EQ 5.2 Cooperation between PBL and other DGIS' knowledge partners

How is PBL cooperating with DGIS's knowledge partners in the field of sustainable development? Was this cooperation policy relevant, effective, and coherent? Are there examples of such cooperation?

- 97) Both DGIS and PBL have ample network partners and work with many different stakeholders, including knowledge centres. Beyond doubt, a substantial number of these knowledge centres pertain to the networks of both (i.e., WUR, EUR, UU, VU-IVM, UNDP). PBL approaches these networks in an ad-hoc manner, according to the subject and the need and usually based on personal contacts.
- 98) The covenant "proposal" mentions a small number of specific, perhaps "strategic" and "structural", DGIS knowledge partners (WRI, AIV, NCEA). Cooperation with these was a target, but it has been almost absent. Respondents indicate that such cooperation was not without potential, but synergies with these potential strategic knowledge partners appeared complex to achieve. It may have played a role that PBL prefers to partner with organisations having a similar mandate with a complementary scope.
- 99) This situation could well change if PBL more systematically were to work with the "landuse approach"¹⁵. In the landuse approach, contextual knowledge, especially about local governance, becomes more relevant.
- 100) Looking wider than the select group of strategic DGIS knowledge partners, knowledge partners are universities, international organisations and (semi-public) research institutes. Most of these offer services on contracted assignments only. Academics may - to an extent - be seen as independent, but they are not financed to "be" a science-policy interface: to build nexus models, to spend time close to politics, without becoming a stakeholder of it. Interdisciplinary science is already difficult to manage, making it policy-relevant and agile even more so. Precisely for this reason, PBL may be needed to fill the gap between academia and politics.

EQ 5.3 WAVES

How did the addition of WAVES to the covenant contribute to its effectiveness?

- 101) PBL activities in the WAVES programme provided technical assistance in the Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) annual forums (3rd Forum on NCA for better decision making and the 4th forum on NCA for better policy); to prepare background reports for the annual WAVES workshop; to develop S-world model (soil accounts) were developed in collaboration with UN-Statistics and additional input from WUR; and funding research for developing NCA (WUR).
- 102) It was relevant to DGIS, as sustainable policy making in developing countries is supposed to be easier in the presence of NCA. Such policies form again a favourable context for Dutch development cooperation programmes. As a major donor of the WAVES project, MFA expected from the start to have a strong influence in the international arena concerned with

¹⁵ As explained before: this is how we define Integrated Landscape Management at intermediary scales – global sub-region, country - and without full country ownership (otherwise it would be called landscape governance).

NCA. Based on the discussion with the involved parties, such diplomatic relevance was achieved, and the knowledge is preserved at least in the WB annual synthesis of events.

103) Main outcomes co-leveraged by the covenant were:

- a. PBL played an important role in shaping the debate and setting the background scene, informing this international arena on what can be done with NCA in policy making. PBL's background reports (notes) were made accessible for statistic offices in developing countries, policy makers and research institutes implement that knowledge within their local context. This was referred to as structural basic support in institutional capacity building for developing countries. It was highly appreciated by the World Bank and its NCA-stakeholders.
- b. Without the covenant, involved parties like the WB would have had a lower ambition on both the annual NCA forum and its annual report, due to the human and economic capacity that such entails. The scope and the audience were therefore successfully larger.

How does that relate to the Ministry's policy line on WAVES?

104) The DGIS funding to WAVES will be discontinued for pragmatic reasons, not because it is not relevant or effective. The PBL contribution thus far will however remain available, and the studies will remain relevant for years. WAVES will continue to be a platform to that end with global meetings, facilitated by World Bank and with active contributions of CBS. It is up to World Bank and CBS to mobilize the knowledge.

EQ 6 Efficiency

What resources were made available for the covenant (NL-MFA plus PBL resources) and how were these used? Were the funds used efficiently used (and not wasted)?

- 105) The covenant is an agreement about tasks 'additional' to the resources allocated by the Ministry Infrastructuur en Waterstaat (I&W).¹⁶ The funding distribution in the budget among the five work streams implies a modest earmarking. The covenant allocates a budget of in total EUR 4.950.000 for a period of four year¹⁷ that represents approximately 3.5-4.0% of the total PBL budget, comparable with the contribution by EZK to PBL.
- 106) The first year's (2018) allocation was equal to an invoice presented for EUR 825,000 for activities already realized. For the WAVES -project (environmental accounting), implemented by CBS in collaboration with PBL, EUR 1,000,000 had been set aside.
- 107) In 2020, 3-4 PBL staff worked on temporary contracts directly funded by the DGIS transfer. Parallel to that there are PBL researchers with a permanent PBL contract that have been 'liberated' -in part or totally- from their 'regular' PBL work to covenant related research and activities. In 2020, PBL registered approx. 9100 hours for staff time to the covenant. Since the working time of a PBL researcher is 1388 hours, this would imply approximately 6.5 fte

¹⁶ DGIS. Proposal Covenant DGIS-PBL 2018-2021, p.17.

¹⁷ This includes EUR 100.000 for evaluation, not included in the EUR 4.850.000 mentioned in the Staatscourant 41074, 23rd July 2018.

(or in financial terms approximately EUR 700,000 annually). In terms of continuity and sustainability the temporary staff is reason for concern.

- 108) There are no significant differences between the allocation and expenditure, while no significant expenditure overrun took place (no precise info about WAVES). From an IGG financial administrative perspective there have been no problems with the covenant¹⁸. PBL has no financial administrative system to determine efficiency of relations with third parties.
- 109) In relation to efficiency respondents raised questions about the discontinuation of WAVES and questioned the efficiency of working with many global assessments. Reference was made to possible overlap with work done on biodiversity outlook (PBL next to IPBES). In hindsight one may question the efficiency of the DGIS resources for its contributions to WAVES, but the relevance of the subject in general is beyond doubt. There are no signs or indications of waste of resources.
- 110) Efficiency foremost relates to the work programming: are DGIS and PBL spending their time and other resources on the most promising activities in terms of sustainable development of developing countries? In practice, efficiency is not judged on financial grounds, but on contents by the responsible coordinators (DGIS and PBL).
- 111) Efficiency is more difficult to assess for activities supposed to have more direct relevance for (future) DGIS ODA programmes. Decisions on the demand-driven work agenda have not been explicitly documented taking the “sustainability potential” of imagined impact pathways into consideration. Interviews, however, suggest that this was done in practice. For example, international water assessments at a point were discontinued based on a mix of arguments, including that addressed arenas were esteemed insufficiently relevant to the programming of future development programmes, and the covenant’s budget being close to depletion.
- 112) PBL researchers indicated that it would be more efficient to focus on a limited number of robust models as investment on (future) strategic decisions that can be envisaged as core subjects: Examples mentioned were climate change and energy transition, biodiversity, circular economy and urban/rural landuse, but the core subjects must be decided upon at a later stage. The implication would be that some short-term requests cannot be addressed anymore, while probably some answers may come automatically from the longer-term strategic studies. While focussing on a limited number of long-term research might be more efficient, there is a threat of affecting the support base in the ministry, since the demand is frequently short term and less long term.
- 113) This impinges on the observation that IGG’s capacity is limited (i.e., observations about long reports, discontinuation of WAVES, PBL observations about ‘small audience’) and hence the number of subjects, as well the allocation of resources should be proportional to what IGG can handle.
- 114) The covenant can be seen as efficient as it leverages different dynamics in the regular PBL work, overarching DGIS. It leverages with relatively small funding more focus on the sustainable development of developing countries in national policies at large.

¹⁸ Interview IGG Controller, June 2021.

EQ 7 Coherence

To what extent did the PBL-DGIS covenant succeed in supporting policy coherence for sustainable development and providing a nexus perspective? Did PBL succeed in taking up the role of an independent assessment agency (planbureau) that can link multiple policy areas?

- 115) PBL succeeded to a significant extent. PBL's a-political nature is seen as crucial in promoting policy coherence.
- 116) (In)coherence becomes transparent through PBL's nexus approach. The implications of a lack of coherence may often become societally and politically manifest in the long term, but still require attention in the short term for a sense of opportunity to grow to make goals coherent. To that end, PBL's contributions are often a push for policy departments to work together even if they have other priorities in the short term.
- 117) MFA's Action plan on policy coherence focuses on some such incoherencies to address in the short term. However, MFA's letter to Parliament (May 2021) and in the associated annual report policy coherence of development 2020-2021 make no reference to PBL work. PBL has made efforts to link to the action plan process but failed.
- 118) Complex incoherencies may only be solvable by societal transitions and associated transitions in several policy fields at the same time (i.e., these are nexus issues). Transitions can take a generation: they are long-term issues.
- 119) PBL has, however, a dilemma in cases where DGIS is incapable of organising a matching policy process that bridges policy fields. The question emerges if such a transition should start in the ministries, or in society, and where PBL's audience then should be. And which policy field is responsible for initiating the process. With such questions pending, there may be unfulfilled potential. Also, not all DGIS staff equally pay attention to long term coherence issues that require transitions.
- 120) One case is known where PBL assessments mediated in a coherency debate triggered during the implementation of ODA. This is an exception to the rule that PBL is not involved the implementation phase of development interventions, perhaps as this was a case of more general significance.
- 121) Better understanding of coherence seems to be a defining outcome of PBL work. Salient discussions on coherence in the interviews related to PBL activities related to a. o. water systems, food systems, landuse, circular economy, integrated landscape management. These focus usually on incoherencies between SDGs that drive the economy at odds with each other, and at odds with SDGs that preserve environmental and social qualities.
- 122) Footprint work (for DDE and LNV) and Natural Capital Accounting work (under the WAVES programme) are both conceptual integrators, bringing incoherencies to the light at the level of the impacts of societal development. In the case of footprint work this reflects (in)coherencies in Dutch policies. In the case of WAVES, this reflects on (in)coherencies of policies in recipient countries (and their donors).
- 123) Water has not been included in the activity "synthesis of environmental outlooks", as for water there is no worldwide international government network working with an international assessment consortium and having clear objectives for water systems. Water

is also left out in the footprint work, PBL indicates that this reflects strategic and methodological dilemmas that deserve more reflection.

EQ 8 Governance

How was the covenant managed? To what extent was this appropriate to the type of cooperation?

- 124) The covenant is institution broad between DGIS and PBL. In the context of the institutional contact, there are bilateral meetings twice a year between the Director PBL and the DG International development cooperation about the overall PBL work-programme. This is not specific or restricted to the covenant.
- 125) The account management rests within DGIS with IGG and within PBL with the sector “Natuur en Landelijk Gebied” (NLG). Overall, the covenant has been managed in a flexible, simultaneous process according to both a formal management structure (with a process of decision making at higher level - and an informal management structure (on day-to-day basis) between technical staff of PBL and DGIS. The technical coordinators both at DGIS and PBL can be perceived as brokers for their respective organisations
- 126) There are two more or less parallel programming streams. The first one is the regular PBL planning and management cycle in which DG DGIS participates and concerns all activities of PBL (from the regular budget and from the additional budget). The activities envisaged for the covenant DGIS-PBL are component of that process, but -compared to the rest- it is small only and has never been subject of discussion. In sum, for the covenant this formal process is of little practical importance.
- 127) The second process is of a “bilateral” nature, in which DGIS and PBL meet annually (but in practice twice a year) and discuss the Annual Report as well as the Work programme for the year to come. Based on an Annual Progress report, the Annual work programme is determined what subsequently will be integrated in the PBL overall work programme. To a large extent the agenda is “pre-discussed” within DGIS, while PBL brings in the long-term vision. During the period 2018-2021, the programming has been of a framework nature where both parties bring in ideas; the final agreement is product of interaction. DGIS leaves space to PBL to fill in how the research will be conducted.
- 128) Next to these two processes, and product of bilateral contacts between PBL researchers and DGIS staff- there is an equally important informal process. During the year, in the context of ongoing research, ideas for complementary research pop up and grow to proposals for the upcoming year’s work programme. This is combined with the internal consultation process by the DGIS account managers with stakeholders in the ministry.
- 129) Although equally important as indicated above, at the technical level, DGIS lacks a clear “problem ownership”, (is it the covenant coordinator or the thematic expert?) what constrains some steering towards matching of the (more general, long term) PBL studies with actual DGIS policy questions. A few DGIS thematic experts interviewed felt disentangled or alienated from the PBL research.
- 130) For the day-to-day management, the coordinators at both sides are the spokespersons and liaison officers at the same time, as well as the brokers to their respective organisations. In practice the ‘reach’ is rather limited. The reach of the coordinator in IGG is limited to DGIS

(at the best) and hardly extends to the other directorates of the ministry, while the reach of the PBL coordinator is mainly those researchers that are directly working on projects related to the covenant. Internally, both DGIS and PBL have their own processes and management.

- 131) Within PBL, the covenant does not know a very strict management culture, neither in relation to DGIS, nor internally. There is no strict performance measurement (although the time registration is linked to a kind of dashboard monitoring). The steering of PBL is on contents rather than on budget. Internally, PBL counts with monthly meetings among the researchers working on the different DGIS projects.
- 132) Both DGIS and PBL operate in an ample variety of networks, that – to a certain extent – become available to each other through the covenant.
- 133) Since IGG coordinates global public goods, there is a “natural” brokerage role for IGG, that should not be restricted to DGIS, but could reach out to other directorates as well. Stakeholders in both the ministry and PBL observe that this role could be fulfilled stronger.

To what extent was this appropriate to the type of cooperation?

- 134) The flexible ‘framework’ planning with some broad work streams and mutual contributions in an agreed upon planning system is appropriate for this form of cooperation. While DGIS is ‘in the lead’ as financier, PBL is not the entity that fulfils assignments on behalf of the financier. The work programme is jointly agreed upon with input from both sides.
- 135) In interviews, stakeholders did not express serious complaints about governance issues, except the following:
 - a. The demand by DGIS is broad and not always easy to respond by PBL. A more reduced number of subjects would be welcomed by PBL.
 - b. The temporary nature of the covenant is a constraint for maintaining research staff at PBL.
 - c. The smooth coordination between the parties is bound by friendly and professional relationships between the parties. Hence, it depends on persons and there is no real back up to more formal procedures in case the smooth relations melt away.

EQ 8.1 Promoting the covenant

How did both parties contribute to the PBL-DGIS covenant? What did they do to promote the relevance of the covenant’s output?

- 136) Both parties have contributed. DGIS with human resources (coordination), financial transfers and transaction costs. The ministry does not register its own costs per project or activity; there is no time registration mechanism. The ministry contributed with expert staff as counterpart to PBL, with its network of contact and access to information. The contributions by PBL that are not covered by the gross tariff encompass issues like networks, its capacity to publish in academic journal, the spin-off of PBL’s “own research” for example on behalf of international organisations (UN).
- 137) The promotion of the output was done by distribution of reports in networks, discussion sessions, organisation of events and seminars (webinar during COVID restrictions), publications in journals, etc. While the development cooperation perspective (the poorest

countries, inclusion) is predominant in the covenant, the subjects of PBL research touch upon the domains of other departments and directorates in the ministry (DDE, DSO, DGBEB). PBL indicated that its “audience” was sometimes restricted to IGG and/or DDE, but that it would welcome an “extension of the audience” to other departments and even the diplomatic area (DGES, DGPZ) on issues like climate change, international footprint, energy transition and sustainable trade and value chains.

EQ 8.2 Decision-making

How and by whom were decisions made on the allocation of funds?

- 138) Some very general input steering took place by financial allocations among the 5 work areas, but that has not been an earmarking straitjacket and has been applied with flexibility. According to respondents this never affected quality of research.
- 139) For the broad allocations, these are decided upon during the Annual Meeting discussing both the Annual Report of the previous period and the work programme and budget for the upcoming year. Within this broad allocation, PBL has the freedom to allocate funds over the various “projects” (activities) considering the gross tariffs per person agreed upon.
- 140) In the covenant agreement 2018-2021 an indicative total budget, as well as budgets per workstream were agreed upon. According to controllers interviewed in both DGIS and PBL, the covenant is a smooth-running programme that has not required any specific attention. Since real expenditure stayed close to the budget allocation, also in the distribution among work streams, there has never been any financial problem.

EQ 8.3 Outcome indicators

To what extent were the formulated outcome-indicators achieved? Were these indicators well suited to measure the effectiveness/results of the covenant?

- 141) The annual progress reports reported on effect indicators specified in the covenant. These were virtually all achieved.
- 142) As financier of activities, DGIS requires instruments to monitor progress and control over expenditure in relation to the “products”. While for the financial part that is mainly restricted to Annual Reporting, the monitoring over contents is both formal (annual and using KPIs) and informal (at the level of the researchers and coordinators).
- 143) Both the steering by input as well as the monitoring using key performance indicators of a covenant about the science-policy interface is of limited value. The performance indicators do neither reveal the degree of change propelled by the PBL studies, nor the transition processes it intended to set in motion.

EQ 8.4 Lessons taken up

How have lessons learned been taken up? (In particular those of the previous evaluation)

The evaluation over the period 2013-2017¹⁹ referred to several governance issues where improvements could be made.

- 144) The central observation was that “DGIS should think about the strategic use of the relationship with PBL in the long term”. Interviews with DGIS stakeholders did not reveal that currently there does exist an agreed upon vision on how best the relationship with PBL could be shaped in the long term. No decision has been taken on how to position the covenant in relation to the large societal and political questions (climate, energy transition, circular economy) and for which period such a relation would be required.
- 145) Another observation made that in the context of policy coherence, both account managers and PBL researchers could consult other departments within DGIS in the process of the formulation of programme. Interviews with DGIS staff from different departments indicate that some consultation does take place, but at the same time observe that it has a rather ad hoc character and is insufficiently participatory and transparent in coming to a final proposal to PBL.
- 146) A third observation referred to the clear determination of responsibilities within DGIS when it comes to steering and programme definition. This was to be done by more “interim steering” with more directly involved stakeholders at the level of covenant. The “interim” steering does take place but is rather informal and based on mutual trust and hence depends on personalities. There is no formal back up in case relations turn sour.
- 147) A fourth observation referred to the lack of strategic reorientation of the programme based on changing policy priorities. The framework structure introduced has sufficient potential to reorientate the programme, but over the last four years there was no need to demonstrate that flexibility, also since policy priorities remained relatively stable.
- 148) A fifth observation was that after the previous evaluation there was no significant change, neither in the sense of identifying long term strategic pathways that could merit to consider a longer time and structural relationship, nor that the demand-driven workstream has a broad support in its articulation within DGIS.
- 149) And a last observation referred to suitable feed-back mechanisms to PBL researchers regarding the usefulness and application of research results.
- 150) The feed-back mechanisms are largely informal and depend on the individual member of staff in DGIS and the PBL researchers involved. In a few topics this feedback was direct and smooth (energy), in others it led to some misunderstanding (i.e., value chains – coffee) that could have been taken away with some more frequent contact and communication.
- 151) Most of the observations made by the previous evaluation are still valid. Apart from the first observation most of all other observations have a kind of similar remedy, being regular meetings and consultations.

¹⁹ APE, p 52-56

To what extent was this appropriate to the type of cooperation?

- 152) The flexible “framework” planning with some broad work streams and mutual contributions in an agreed upon planning system is appropriate for this form of cooperation. While DGIS is “in the lead” as financier, PBL is not the entity that fulfils assignments on behalf of the financier. The work programme is jointly agreed upon with input from both sides.

3. Forward-looking questions

ARQ 1: Covenant as strategic mechanism

Did the covenant become, as envisaged, a more strategic mechanism than the previous covenant, with PBL in its role of independent assessment agency? Is the specific role of PBL – that can be considered as a public good- of influence on this assessment?

“Strategic mechanism” is seen as closely linked to PBL’s mandate: PBL makes environmental outlooks, not recommendations for political choices. It links to - not competes with - other knowledge providers. In this way, PBL can have an impact on policy debates linked to coherence between SDGs. This impact is seen as a strategic influence on how policies shape up.

- 153) The covenant - to a significant extent - contributed to a strategic (i.e., long-term) policy orientation on topics that are relevant for DGIS (and wider MFA and other ministries). The fact that the covenant does not contribute directly to the implementation of ongoing development programmes confirms its strategic position.
- 154) The following points give flavour to the “strategic mechanism”. It is, however, difficult to tell from the interviews whether this mechanism is more significant than before, in previous covenants.
- 155) The PBL’s independent public mandate made it possible to be an enabler of policy processes driven on content that is relevant to many policy fields (siloes), which makes it strategic.
- 156) The covenant specifically helped to position the international dimension of the SDGs, where these were not yet represented by other ministries, into relevant Dutch national policy processes. This positioning took place, both via mainstreaming into PBL’s regular work and via enabling DGIS to bring relevant studies in at the table in inter-ministerial policy processes.
- 157) The report “synthesis of international environmental assessments” and its follow—up study “keeping global environmental assessments fit for purpose” stand out as having helped the Netherlands to develop its global governance capacity in the field of food systems (the nexus around SDG2). However, more coordination between ministries and PBL may be needed to agree on a more general strategy to optimize the use of PBL’s capacity.
- 158) Respondents believe that PBL’s integrated assessment reports, and associated communication tools like policy briefs, are a useful, even crucial, contribution to debate in public, private and civil policy arenas about policy coherence, measures and transitions required to make SDGs synergetic. However, much of this debate has remained politically marginal in The Netherlands itself.
- 159) Many coherence issues may play out in the long term only and overarch distant policy fields. PBL helps to put this on the agenda between these policy fields – by convening the ministries (i.e., in soundboard groups) where they share responsibility for certain themes, addressing overarching (hence long-term, strategic) topics. It succeeded for themes like biodiversity and circular economy. However, for example, it has not yet succeeded to effectively connect to DG BEB (sustainable trade and value chains), DGIS / DSO (landscape approach), or MFA’s Action plan policy coherence. The question is whether this is PBL’s responsibility or IGG’s?

PBL may put policy issues on the agenda on its own initiative if these issues touch its scope and if it has the capacity. DGIS can organise the arena needed for debate on these issues if this arena is not yet organised for debate. DGIS also requires capacity to do that. If these elements are both lacking, either one of both can start a new activity, but it will only work if the other can respond. It therefore is a strategic choice that only can be made together, and which may need some study to assess the options. The interviews give no clear guidance, and mainly show that mutual expectations are not aligned.

- 160) The covenant has helped to give those IGG staff who are interested in overarching themes like the landscape approach and CE a soundboard, to forward their argument. However, there might be an unfulfilled potential of topics where PBL's special role is fit for purpose, but where DGIS staff does not have the absorption capacity or does not understand what PBL can offer. Reversely, there may be topics where there is demand for PBL's role, but doubts exist as to PBL is capable to deliver (food systems and sustainable trade relations were mentioned in this respect).
- 161) There is wide agreement that PBL's role cannot be fulfilled commercially as the political process is short-term and unpredictable, and resources-intensive long-term investments in knowledge and in nexus-bridging networks are required. This also does not belong to the rationale of the academic world. And foremost, independence requires financial independence.
- 162) A strategic mechanism was also discussed in the evaluation by APE (2017). No respondent referred to specific discussions about alternative scenarios for future collaboration as were then recommended to explore. Implicitly however, all these scenarios were discussed in interviews (see ARQ6 and ARQ7).
- 163) It should be noted that, by their nature, complex collaboration in policy processes is difficult, especially if any flagged (in)coherencies are politically inconvenient. The PBL, which is not bound by any policy field or the haphazard division of roles among ministries, is a natural connector. Its effectiveness depends on how close it can get to policy processes in arenas to understand which interventions are constructive. It is commendable that DGIS lets PBL "in", as PBL cannot be controlled. DGIS should stretch strategic collaboration to its limits, PBL should indicate where the priorities are from the point of view of the SDGs.

ARQ 2: What can be learned from the most relevant outcomes?

Outcomes in relevant policy arenas are primarily considered in EQ 3, dealing with international assessments and demand driven work. Lessons to draw from these outcomes are so entangled with questions about relevance, effectiveness, cooperation, and governance that answers to ARQ2 would completely overlap with the other ARQs.

Outcomes of many of the subject matters (and integrated combinations thereof) addressed by PBL require societal transitions prior to the impacts become manifest in the global society. Transitions are well-known to take time, sometimes a generation. To which extent outcomes of public efforts can be expected in the shorter term depends on many variables, being 'on the political agenda' in the first place. There is a large attribution gap if one would like to link that to the PBL, as shown in the ToC. In

literature, the “small wins approach” offers a language that may help to monitor progress at early stages of transitions.²⁰

ARQ 3: Embassies

How can the (intercultural) relationship between PBL-IGG/DGIS/MFA and the embassies be improved?

In general, embassies do not make policies. As diplomats they channel information from and to The Hague, they represent the policies and can facilitate multilateral aid activities. A limited number of embassies actually implement policies through interventions funded by delegated resources for development cooperation.

- 164) The relationship may be improved in case of mutual interest. The covenant may, in theory, be useful to all embassies having either a diplomatic role where there is a trade relationship, or if there is development cooperation, or both. In particular embassies with delegated funds. Or a high presence of centrally managed programmes (i.e. those through RVO, FMO or NGOs) stand out. Reversely, embassies may be facilitators to PBL in case that is meaningful for its work.
- 165) Such win/win propositions were rare. The relationship was fruitful in the case of circular economy. A significant number of embassies, some in focus countries, participated in a worldwide workshop. CE is seen as an economic opportunity for developing countries, as it relates to trade relationships and innovation. It may be possible to improve the relationship with embassies by looking for more trade-related themes like CE (i.e., natural resource extraction in relation to energy transition), or by further elaborating CE itself.
- 166) The covenant can hardly be made relevant to development cooperation in its implementation phase. PBL does not dispose of knowledge of local context, in particular of areas in countries where ODA funded interventions are implemented. It has no ambition to acquire that knowledge.
- 167) Over the last decades, each new minister has (re-)defined the development policy and corresponding bilateral programmes. Within the ministry there is a growing awareness that deepening of existing strategies are required to stability in the current policy. Multilateral agencies are also regularly redefining their programmes. At such moments, PBL might be relevant if it has downscaled its approach to world sub-regions (like the Horn of Africa, West Africa, Middle East) and even to countries to support the shaping of next generation development programmes. Downscaled land use assessment may help set ODA priorities within a given choice of countries and certain SDGs to focus development assistance.
- 168) PBL has done some work under the covenant to develop methods donors can apply in landscape governance or Integrated Landscape management; not PBL, but these donors then, take PBL’s special role; PBL functions like a kind of role model to these donors. It seems not feasible for PBL to take that role itself, as landscape governance by the local actors themselves (i.e., country ownership) is only realistic where such a governance arena viably

²⁰ See [Termeer & De Wulf \(2018\)](#), “A small wins framework to overcome the evaluation paradox of governing wicked problems”. [Nooteboom \(2020\)](#) captures the essence of the observable contribution of independent (environmental) assessment agencies to small wins in transitions.

exists. This is feasible only in relatively small areas (some experts say the size of a small Dutch province, and then building collaborative governance can still take more than a decade before the first significant land use improvements are achieved). This goes beyond PBL's expertise and respondents from PBL suggest that it cannot justify expanding its capacity to meet this demand.

- 169) PBL's role might, however, limit to evaluating to what extent ILM is applied in larger areas. It can make outlooks of what this means for sustainable development of that larger area. Some respondents believe that PBL should consider downscaling global land outlooks to geographic scales not smaller than countries, and only in countries where NL itself is one of the interested actors (donors). As full country ownership of ILM is not realistic at national or larger scales, PBL may address the development arena of these areas, donors and their partners. Multilateral support to PBL counterparts in such areas was mentioned as a possibility to study; these may need to have a similar mandate and financing structure to PBL's. Note that this is not the same as taking a national border as boundary for research or advisory services.

ARQ 4: Efficiency

What recommendations would be in place in order to strengthen the efficiency of the covenant?

- 170) As indicated in EQ6 the temporary character of the covenant has consequences for the recruitment and contracting of staff in terms of continuity and sustainability. It implies also an obstacle to the structural mainstreaming within PBL (workstream 1). Since investments in staff (building up human capabilities) are made -at least partly- in temporary staff. This part of the investment) is lost to PBL (not to society). This inefficiency could be overcome with structural funding of PBL (as elaborated in ARQ 7).
- 171) The strength of PBL is its broad, multidisciplinary future-oriented analysis about sustainable development of environment, nature and space. This analysis supports policy making. The analysis is not only based on the generation of own knowledge, but also by making use of research by others and networking (brokerage). It is recommended to enhance the efficiency in a next covenant if PBL resumes its core business and would focus on a limited number of robust models as investment on (future) strategic decisions that can be envisaged as subjects for the longer term: climate change and energy transition, biodiversity, and urban/rural landuse.
- 172) While focussing on a limited number of long-term research, it should not entirely close the openings for short term demand driven specific research, since 'only long term strategic research' may undermine the support base within the ministry, where the demand is frequently short term and specific.
- 173) The volume and magnitude of subjects and research products should match the capacity to make best possible use of it in IGG (time constraint, dissemination, networking) and (human) resources in PBL.
- 174) It is recommended that in a next covenant, PBL explores the opportunities to make more use of its network instead of conducting most studies with own PBL staff. However, this may not be that simple. Cooperation may be ad hoc at first, but if activities become more

protracted, there may be a need for horizontal partnerships rather than subcontracting. That could require similar mandates, but with different scopes.

ARQ 5: Effectiveness

What recommendations would be in place to strengthen the effectiveness of the covenant? This in particular regarding research questions, research method, research presentation and knowledge management.

- 175) There is no clear need for further improvement of research methods.
- 176) Rethink the work method for the IGG-PBL (and other ministries) cooperation, as here the research questions, research presentation and knowledge management are shaped in the interaction: PBL staying true to its mandate and assessments, IGG indicating how policy processes could match that.
- 177) Look for improvements of knowledge management on the interface of policy and science appears more on the policy side than on the science side. It requires a continuous policy process, inter-ministerial where needed, and is not exclusively seen as something that is outsourced to knowledge organisations.
- 178) With a view to long-term effectiveness of development cooperation, we advise to “anchor” the networked policy-making component of knowledge management of the international dimension of PBL’s work close to IGG’s management.
- 179) A more explicit discussion of impact pathways at the start of new activities is needed, where needed inter-ministerial. Impact pathways should identify the arenas (global, in the developing world, in The Netherlands) that need to be inspired by PBL work, and which order of reaching these audiences is most effective.
- 180) Effectiveness can also be increased by building in quality-stimulating feedbacks into the process of covenant implementation. This includes inviting someone independent from PBL to observe outputs and outcomes and their causality (impact pathways / pathways of change), and feeding these observations back into the DGIS-PBL cooperative process.
- 181) It should be noted that “incoherency themes” often start small in the administration (or in society) before any larger arena can be inspired. Initially it may therefore not be easy to find an audience for a PBL output. An example that started small but gradually became more successful is the coherence between the Dutch inter-ministerial programme for circular economy and the global SDGs in developing countries. The role of IGG may be to initiate this theme, whilst the outcomes are relevant for other arenas / ministries. Involving NGOs may increase leverage in other policy fields.
- 182) DGIS may consider including in IGG’s mission more explicitly guarding global SDGs against Dutch burden shifting to developing countries. IGG may connect, with support of DGIS and MFA management, to other parts of MFA, and with other ministries. The international SDG dimension of the annual IOP meeting may be prepared by an interdepartmental group. A formal mechanism for the governance of the implementation of this mission might be created, especially in view of job rotation which makes the system perhaps too dependent on individuals.

ARQ 6: Cooperation

What challenges exist in the current cooperation? Are they like issues identified in earlier evaluations? What has improved and which new challenges materialized? Will prolongation of the cooperation between MFA/DGIS and PBL deliver added value?

- 183) Despite significant outcomes from PBL activities, one must conclude that the take-up of PBL results in short-term strategic policy processes within the MFA and with other ministries is weak or modest at the best. This is no surprise as many incoherencies can be resolved by a transition: in the early stages of the transition S-curve, political tension is still to build up by a civil – private – public coalition (which may benefit from PBL work).
- 184) A similar observation was made by the 2017 evaluation of the previous covenant. The recommendations made by the previous evaluation (see Box 4) are still valid, when it comes to strategic policy development, ownership by DGIS, the dilemmas of relevance to day-to-day work (see EQ1). And, equal to the previous evaluation, it is difficult to measure improvement, although most notably the 2020 PBL report “Keeping global environmental assessments fit for purpose. Challenges and opportunities for a changing context” has catered to important (though early) initiatives in IGG.
- 185) Despite a lack of strategic capacity, a limited number of energetic IGG staff has created significant leverage in arenas outside of the Dutch ministries. Respondents find these international outcomes invaluable, for two reasons. First, teachings of other arenas (co-inspired by PBL) eventually may return to the relevant policy field in the Dutch ministries, like has happened in the case of biodiversity. Second, IGG is by some seen as the conscience of the Dutch ministries for the coherence of global SDGs.
- 186) The essential recommendation of the previous evaluation therefore still stands: increase strategic capacity in DGIS. This implies a dilemma: learning to prepare for the future may not be relevant for the present-day political process. This orientation on the future should encompass the joint complex discussions of impact pathways (consecutive arenas to inform, including the national policy arena). It may benefit from a growing energetic minority interested in sustainability diplomacy.
- 187) The successor of the covenant might become a vehicle of such kind of knowledge management. This can include the downscaling of international assessments to DGIS focus-regions and focus-countries, making it more relevant as fact-base for future development programmes.
- 188) Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in the framework of the covenant then becomes integrated into knowledge management itself. Adaptive governance on the input side becomes easier in that context. Main discussions will be about impact pathways and outcomes. Outcomes may be put in the perspective of PBL’s role: creating a fact base that is widely accepted in relevant policy arenas.
- 189) As regards the downscaling of assessments, at smaller scales it is easier to make assessments context-specific and to take more SDGs into consideration. This increases the potential synergy with other leading institutes active in the same regions. The next covenant may be specific about “layers” in the knowledge management process, and at each layer invite other relevant knowledge institutes and NGOs.

BOX 4: MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

APE's starting point to the evaluation of the 2013 – 2017 (the second) covenant was “. the evaluation of the first covenant period, the recommendations contained therein, and the changes made during the second covenant period. In consultation with the reference group, it was decided to also zoom in on the (possible) role of the PBL covenant within the knowledge policy of the MFA.”

Our summary of APE's conclusions and recommendations:

Regarding the implementation of the recommendations (of the 2012 evaluation) for the second covenant:

Increasing attention to the interests of the poorest countries as a specific group in the international work of the PBL: according to APE, this had largely succeeded.

A shift from direct support of bilateral development policy on international environmental policy to more integrated, strategic analysis. This was also implemented.

The discontinuation of capacity building in developing countries as component of the covenant. This component was not taken on anymore in the 2013-2017 covenant

More flexibility in the work programme. This flexibility was enhanced by the annual work programmes and less 'earmarking' of funds.

The APE evaluation covered the previous covenant 2014-2017 and concluded and recommended:

Contributing to strategic policy development and - monitoring within the DGIS/DME: this was difficult to assess, since some studies were relatively recent at the time, while the merits of explorative PBL studies of higher levels of abstraction were not generally shared in DGIS. At the same time, added value of demand—driven and thematic studies was not always clear to everybody. Possible root causes: lack of ownership in DGIS, not seen as relevant for day-to-day work, poor governance (not well thought out articulation of demand nor adaptive governance).

A strategic approach: ways to lift the effectiveness of the covenant to more strategic levels – i.e. overarching more policy fields - had not enough been implemented. Not enough explicit positioning of PBL among knowledge partners. Closer cooperation between policy fields to discuss their (in)coherencies. More mainstreaming of ODA into regular work of PBL.

APE combined its recommendations into four scenarios:

Scenario 1: an **ambitious scenario for the long term:** PBL becomes part of an overarching DGIS knowledge policy aiming at MFA-wide policy coherence, clearly setting boundaries for the PBL. PBL gets financed structurally. MFA represents the international dimension in the IOP, and its role is clearly defined in the inter-ministerial process.

Scenario 2: **reinforcing collaboration in the short term.** MFA divides internal roles more clearly, to enable internal collaboration. IGG's covenant manager coordinates, actively supported by its director where useful, for example by making enough time available. Other ministries are invited to participate where there are coherence issues, and more frequent “account deliberation”.

Scenario 3: **focus on what works.** Limit the scope of the covenant to where the energy in IGG concentrates without necessarily investing in more than that. IGG leads rather than follows the joint agenda. International assessments which are less in IGG's interest remain driven by other ministries.

Weakness of this scenario is that incoherencies remain unaddressed, i.e. that ODA in its definition phase is less oriented toward coherent SDG achievement in the long term.

Scenario 4: **collaboration on project basis only**. The built-up ODA-relevant knowledge base in PBL will erode.

APE recommended DGIS to continue the covenant, to consider strengthening interim management and clarifying responsibilities within DGIS and consider a more strategic approach in the long term.

ARQ 7: A covenant as model

Is a covenant the preferred model for cooperation between PBL and MFA?

PBL is part of the Central Government with full subject matter independence under the budget of the ministry for Infrastructure and Water (I&W). The subject matter independence of PBL is granted by the “Aanwijzingen voor de Planbureaus”.²¹ The I&W ‘regular’ budget covers 80% of PBLs operational costs. In addition, there is a ‘flexible’ 20% budget shell for assignments on behalf of third parties, such as the DGIS resources that accompany the covenant. Since the 20% implies a cap on what PBL can accept in requests for research, there is a certain competition for PBL time among the international and national partners. In contrast, both LNV and EZK supplement the core funding by means of structural support.

- 190) For cooperation between and among public sector entities different legal forms exist, determined by the objective of the relation (delegation of functions for example).²² The covenant between DGIS and PBL is a so-called ‘light arrangement’.²³ The Central Government has published ‘Instructions for Covenants’ in 2003²⁴, indicating that the covenant is a temporary arrangement with an determined start and end date.
- 191) The covenant is the indicated legal form for collaboration since the IGG can allocate ODA earmarked resources for its investments mostly. ODA resources can be used for temporary activities only. The temporary character of funding, however, is not PBL’s preferred relationship. It has consequences for PBL’s work planning, as well as human resources management. Some PBL sections work with pluri-annual research programming in three-year cycli; in that sense a 4-year period is not pragmatic. PBL observes an increasing pressure on its ‘permanent staff’, while temporary funding enables to contract temporary staff only. The maximum duration of this contracting is determined by the WNRA.
- 192) Prior to the start of the current covenant, PBL requested to come to a more structural support by DGIS.²⁵ and this was repeated to the evaluation team in interviews with PBL

²¹ Source: Regeling van de minister-president, Minister van Algemene Zaken, houdende de vaststelling van Aanwijzingen voor de Planbureaus. Staatscourant 3200, 21 februari 2012.

²² For details about the forms of agreements between public sector entities see: Zijlstra, S. E., Peters, J. A. F., & van der Ploeg, T. J. (2006). Samenwerking door en met de overheid in privaat-rechtelijke en publiekrechtelijke rechtsvormen. Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties. VU Research Portal.

²³ Kenniscentrum Wetgeving en Juridische Zaken. Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid

²⁴ Rijksoverheid: Instructie convenanten. 2003. A covenant should be explicit about (i) the coverage; the considerations to come to a covenant (‘why’), the procedures; (ii) should contain achievable, feasible and results-based objectives; (iii) the duration should be explicitly agreed upon with a start and end date determined. (iv) Parties are legally bound to the covenant they have signed. In principle, the commitments are legally enforceable, but that is not the case in this covenant (see: Covenant, art.9. Staatscourant 41074, July 2018.)

²⁵ See: Appraisal Memorandum Covenant DGIS- Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving, 2018-2021, p.10.

management. According to PBL a structural funding would contribute to build up internal capacity in the field of development cooperation and enhance the influence of DGIS in the contacts with other ministries.

Covenant and ODA eligibility

- 193) The nature of various PBL studies is international, but not necessarily focused entirely at developing countries. For example, in FNS the PBL research is important for the global assessments, but not necessarily to ODA eligible countries in particular. IGG argues that in those PBL studies with a world-wide character, the importance to incorporate and bring to the fore the development dimension²⁶ justifies the ODA classification.
- 194) The current covenant is funded by 100% ODA resources,²⁷ Using OECD CRS code 4182, Environmental research. The covenant was the main expenditure under this code in 2018 and 2019.²⁸ According to IGG this code represents the subject purpose best. It should be noted that the Netherlands does not apply the CRS codes for multipurpose activities (that probably would have expressed the heterogeneity of the research subjects better)

Covenant for next period

- 195) According to the Instruction Covenants 2003 for the Central Government, the covenant is not meant to be an instrument for the long term and is supposed to have a clear expiry date, while at the same time ODA earmarked funds cannot be to embark upon structural funding of PBL.²⁹
- 196) Since some sections of PBL work with pluri-annual research programming in three-year cycles, a 4-year period is not pragmatic. PBL notes an increasing pressure on limited human resources when it comes to research in the 20% shell PBL has for funding (next to the 'regular' funding) for research at the request of third parties. The evaluators over the period 2013-2017 recommended the search for a form of cooperation that provides sufficient security for longer term capacity building at PBL, while maintaining sufficient room for adjustment to DGIS, i.e., in case of policy changes.³⁰ That search was either not done or did not lead to practical results.
- 197) In follow-up of the 2017 evaluation, three options for the post 2021 period have been identified, each with its advantages and disadvantages being:
 - a. To continue the covenant for the next 4 year, basically extending the current relation between DGIS and PBL
 - b. A covenant with a longer duration matching PBL programming cycles better (for example 6 years).

²⁶ In accordance to the Voorstel Covenant DGIS-PBL 2018-2021.

²⁷ The expenditure related to the covenant complies with the general eligibility criteria (undertaken by the official sector; promotion of economic development and welfare; at least 25% grant component - concessionality).

²⁸ See: OECD.Stat; ODA by the Netherlands.

²⁹ The evaluation of the covenant 2013-2017 observed the same dilemma and recommended to insert a clause in the covenant expressing the intention to prolongation. (APE, p.50). This would not have helped to overcome the constraints to PBL of temporary funding.

³⁰ APE 2017, p.50.

- c. A covenant with a structural financial support component. Various options or combinations are possible, for example one part structural (non ODA) funding and one part temporary (ODA) funding. The structural part could be earmarked for long lasting research (i.e., climate change and environment; energy transitions, for example).

Table 1: Three options for the post 2021 period

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages	Other considerations
Continue covenant for the next 4 years	Well known to both parties. Annual Reporting and programming process is relatively smooth. Activity is ODA eligible.	After 12 years, a certain tension with the Instructions for Covenants, 2003. Constraint to PBL human resource management. Difficult match with PBL programming.	No incentive to further mainstreaming of development cooperation in PBL. Threat of competition for time within the PBL 20% component.
Covenant for a longer period of time	Enables PBL to match covenant better with longer research programming. Incentive to mainstreaming and sustain knowledge (institutional memory).	Longer duration does not overcome the HR constraints.	May trigger extended relations with MFA (other directorates).
Covenant with a structural support component to PBL	Responds to PBL preference (multiannual programming, HR management). May improve the sustainability of development cooperation knowledge within PBL. Enables the institutional memory.	Reduces freedom to DGIS to explore alternative ways of expanding its knowledge base. Funding with ODA resources not possible. Requires other financial administrative procedures (but PBL is acquainted with that).	Desincentive to PBL to search for alternatives to conducting research by own staff mainly (more networking approach).

- 198) The introduction of a more structural financing component would basically express the intention to enter a long-term relation. For several subjects (climate change and environment, energy transition, circular economy) that could be a step to take. However, in DGIS there are no signals of the intention to embark upon structural financing of PBL yet. In consequence, it is recommended to maintain the covenant but extending its duration to six years, in line with programming horizons within PBL (two programming cycles of 3 years). The six years will ensure PBL a support enhancing its planning of resources and hence studies. However, to achieve the objectives of mainstreaming and the sustainability of building up the knowledge base, it is recommended that DGIS explores opportunities for a (partly more) structural form of funding.
- 199) For its day-to-day operations the covenant should remain as simple as possible and maintain its framework character with space for flexibility. It is recommended to abstain from input steering (with funds), but to agree upon cumulative objectives at the start (doelstellingenladder). From the same perspective, there is little merit in using various outcome indicators for monitoring purposes. Apart from one or two well identified KPIs³¹, the monitoring of effectiveness (performance) and assessment of quality could best be done

³¹ The indicator for the current covenant, referring to references to PBLs work for the PBL-DGIS covenant in policy documents of the Ministry, including information provided to Parliament (incl. Memorie van Toelichting) has its merits, since this indicator reveals the Ministry's effort to enhance the quality of its policies. However, this KPI should not have a quantitative target (this is in the current covenant 10 references), since this may lead to 'target as objective' (Goodhart's Law).

by an independent scientist (or in a team with an evaluator) comparable to the PBL visitation (but focused on the covenant activities only).

- 200) Equally important is the informal monitoring by launching “regular meetings” among the most involved stakeholders. That can be done at two levels:
- a. The first level is more of a “tour d’horizon” character with experts and change agents of ministries like I&W, LNV, EZK and MFA to discuss the international dimension of PBL work in general, and to consider two “work streams”:
 - i. What is the knowledge base to invest in questions that will be politically /societal relevant in the middle-term future?
 - ii. What are the questions that need to be answered in the short term to influence politics?
 - b. The second level is with directly involved and interested parties in ongoing research by activity cluster, each having its own "soundboard group". This process could be led by delegated leaders of activity clusters in PBL and in DGIS.
 - i. Is the research what we expected?
 - ii. Is there a need to add other or combine research from within the different networks?
 - iii. How to present and disseminate results; choice of “windows of opportunity” in time.

Annex A Document analysis

Output synthesis from progress reports 2018-2020

Cluster of Activities	Output	Workstream	Activity	Entities
2018				
Global country outlook				
	GLO2	2	Assessment of assessment (2016-2020)	
	GLO2	2	Presentations and expert discussion (New York)	
	Improved land management and recovery of depredated systems	2	Development of database and modeling	
WAVES				
	NCA for the Sustainable Development Goals	3	Publication of proceedings of the annual policy forum 2017	PBL-CBS
	NCA for the sustainable development goals	3	Publication of policy letter on NCA	PBL-CBS
	NCA for better policy	3	Scientific article	PBL-CBS
	Rol van rekenkamers bij het monitoren van SDGs	3	Presentation (June, The Hague)	PBL-CBS
	NCA for mainstreaming climate change in decision-making	3	Background report Presentation at annual policy forum Paris	PBL-CBS

	NCA for mainstreaming biodiversity in public policy-making	3	Background report Presentation at annual policy forum Paris	PBL-CBS
	Setting and testing method to include soil accounts in the SEEA	3	Financed and outsourced research	WUR
Energy transitions				
	Developing future scenarios to see how universal access to clean energy can be achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa	3	Scenario modelling	RVO
Integrated landscape Management				
	Stakeholder scenario	3	Workshop (Kilombero landscape, Tanzania)	African wildlife foundation
	Landscape investment financial tool (LIFT)	3	Session (Tanzania)	UCN-NL
	Food landscapes	3	Presentation at NLandscape (Amsterdam)	
	Lessons learned and forward looking	3	Seminar (The Hague)	NLandscape, MFA
	SDG Conference	3	Session	WCDI, NCEA, WUR
	Solidaridad Landscape Practitioners	3	Presentation (Gouda)	
	Landscape governance scenario analysis	3	Session (Utrecht University)	WCDI
	Global landscapes forum	3	Sessions	
	Spatial modeling and participatory landscape scenarios	3	Publication	EcoAgriculture
	Lessons learned from spatial planning in the Netherlands	3	Background Report	PBL
Sustainable Value chains				

	Transparency and non-financial reporting	3	Policy study	
SDG's				
	Towards a safe operating space for the Netherlands – Using planetary boundaries to support national implementation of environment related SDG's	3	Publication	PBL, MFA, I&W, EZK
	NCA to support SDG implementation	3	Publication	
	The role of cities in SDG implementation	3	Article	
	Global challenges for inclusive green growth	3	Note	
	Landscape approach for SDG implementation	3		
	Future water challenges	3	Report	I&W, MFA, EZK, VU, WUR, UU, IHE
Strengthening Science-policy interface				
	Global challenges for IGG	5	Memorandum	IGG
	Knowledge and management infrastructure	5	Meeting	IGG
	Water-related risks	5	Buza-PBL Sofa-session at Stockholm World Water Week	
	Who benefits from SDG partnerships?	5	Interview	
	Trade on good intentions alone will not get us there	5	Interview	
2019				
Synthesis of Global Environmental Outlooks				
	GLO2	2	Scenarios and models	
	GEO	2	Lecture	MFA and I&W
	IPBES Global environmental assessment	2	Publication	TSU, IPBES,

	Insights for theme integration	2	Workshop (June)	IPBES, IPCC, UNCCD, UNEP
	Decision making on future assessments	2	Workshop (December)	
WAVES				
	NCA to Integrated Landscape Management	3	Background report presentation (Kampala)	
	Developing of NCA	3	Funding and outsourcing research	WUR
Energy transitions				
	Experimental ecosystem accounts	3	Consultation	UN Statistics
	Cleaner fuel cooking in sub-Saharan Africa	3	Policy report	
	Comparison of 2'C scenarios	3	Policy report	IRENA, WEC, EC
	Africa Energy Outlook- High level IEA	3	Workshop (April, Paris)	
Integrated Landscape Management				
	Governance and scenario tools	3	Workshop	Solidaridad,
	Ethiopia research	3		WUR
	Lessons and future Dutch spatial landscape planning Paper	3	Presentation conference (July)	VU
	Synergies and trade-offs between global top down and local bottom-up sustainability scenarios	3	Publication	
	Landscape finance tools	3	Workshop	RVO, Tropenbos, Solidaridad, IUCN
	PBL GLOBIO project FAO EX-ACT tool	3	Contribution	

	Mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem services	3	Session (Accra, November)	WII (India)
	Bringing ILM and NCA together	3. WAVES	“Setting a scene” background paper	
	“Integration of actor perspectives in landscapes”	3	Session	UVA, LandAC
	‘Project food systems and urban/rural linkages’	3	Presentation (June)	LNV, DGIS, MFA
Strengthening Science-policy interface				
	Recent developments in Dutch and international climate policy	5	Presentation ambassadors conference	IGG
	Building food systems of security and conflict reduction in Africa	5	Workshop (February)	
	Priorities and interests for 2020	5	Work meeting (December)	PBL-DGIS
2020				
Synthesis of Global Environmental Outlooks				
	IPBES Technical support	2	Models and scenarios	MFA, I&W, EZK, LNV
	UNEP Assessment Synthesis Report	2	Contribution	IPCC, IPBES, GEP, IRP
WAVES	(Discontinued)			
Energy transitions				
	Paris-aligned energy transition pathways for India.	3	Publication	
	Actors and governance in the transition toward universal electricity access in Sub-Saharan Africa.	3	Scientific Article	PBL, CISD-UU
	‘Benchmarking long-term scenario comparison studies for the clean energy transition’	3	Presentation	IRENA

Integrated Landscape Management				
	Dutch commitment to global forest conservation and restoration	3	Letter to parliament	BHOS, LNV
	Strengthening international commitment to biodiversity	3	Letter to parliament	BHOS, LNV
	Ethiopia research: governance aspects commitments to diverse landscapes	3	Support	WUR
	Contextualizing local landscape initiatives in global change: a scenario study for the high forest zone, Ghana.	3	Publication	VU-IVM
	Potential contribution to landscape initiatives	3	Session at Global landscape forum	Satoyama, WCDO
	What users of global risk indicators should know	3	Article	
Future water challenges				
	Towards sustainable groundwater use in African drylands	3	Publication	Acacia water
Circular Economy				
	Potential effects of Dutch circular economy strategies on low- and middle-income countries: the case of electrical and electronic equipment.	3	Publication	UNU/UNITAR
	Insights from Global Environmental Assessments: Lessons for the Netherlands.	3	Publication	PBL
Strengthening Science-policy interface				
	Circular economy national, national abroad and foreign policy	5	Webinar	IGG, DDE, I&W
	IGG/DDE cluster discussion on priorities and interests	5	Work meeting	PBL-DGIS
Food Systems				
	Food Security conference Montpellier December	2	Presentation	
2021				
Sustainable Trade				

	Reducing Deforestation and Enhancing Forest Conservation Through International Trade Policy	5	Webinar	IISD, IPCC
Future Water Challenges				
	Security dimensions of climate change adaptation (in press)	2	Book chapter	
Food Systems				
	Urbanisation as driver of food system transformation and opportunities for rural livelihoods	1	Article	VU IVM
	Urbanising food systems: exploring opportunities for rural transformation In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Background report	WUR
	Project food systems and urban/rural linkages	1	Presentation	LNV, DGIS, MFA
Global Land Outlook				
	Understanding Land-use change conflict: a systematic review of case studies	5	Article	VU-VIM

Output synthesis - list of publications

Publication	Workstream	Covenant work field	Cooperating organisms	International organizations
1. CBD Post-2020 (Biodiversity)				
(2021) Realising the Urban Opportunity: Cities and the Post-2020 Biodiversity Governance, PBL Policy Brief	2	4	Durham University, NATURVATION	
(2020). Moving Towards Transformative Change for Biodiversity: Harnessing the Potential of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. An EKLIPSE Expert Working Group report for the European Commission	1	4	EKLIPSE, EWG	

(2019). Bedrijfsmodellen en natuurlijk kapitaal. Hoe valt de inzet van bedrijven op biodiversiteit en natuurlijk kapitaal in kaart te brengen en strategisch te begrijpen? Erasmus, Rotterdam	3	4	EUR	
(2019), Opportunities for the Action Agenda for Nature and People.	1	4	IVM	
(2017). Investors and Companies' Biodiversity and Natural Capital Reporting and Performance. Assessing the request for and use of company reporting on biodiversity and natural capital by asset managers and fund managers	3	4	IPBES	
(2018), From Paris to Beijing. Insights gained from the UNFCCC Paris Agreement for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.		4		IDDRI, FNI
(2020). A good working basis in the making. How to handle the zero draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework		4		IDDRI
(2020). Perspectives on area-based conservation and what it means for the post-2020 biodiversity policy agenda	1	4		UNEP-WCMC, CMEC
(2018). Biodiversity and natural capital: investor influence on company reporting and performance. Journal of Sustainable Finance & Investment	4	4	EUR, SFL Utrecht, NYENRODE	
(2020). Bending the curve of terrestrial biodiversity needs an integrated strategy.	1	4		WWF
(2019). Towards a Global Biodiversity Action Agenda	1	4	VU-IVM	
2020. Developing multiscale and integrative nature–people scenarios using the Nature Futures Framework	3	4		IPBES-TSU
2. Synthesis of Global Environmental Outlooks				
(2018). Mondiale opgaven voor Inclusieve Groene Groei.	3	5		
(2018). Using planetary boundaries to support national implementation of environment-related Sustainable Development Goals.	1, 4	5	I&W, MFA, EZK	
(2019). Van mondiale SDG-ambities naar nationale beleidsdoelen	3	5		
(2020). Insights from Global Environmental Assessments: Lessons for the Netherlands.	3	5	IPBES, MFA, EZK	IUCN

(2020). Inzichten uit mondiale milieuverkenningen: Lessen voor Nederland.	1	5		
(2020). Keeping global environmental assessments fit for purpose. Challenges and opportunities for a changing context.	2	5		
(2019). 6th Global Environment Outlook: Healthy Planet, healthy People.	2	5		UN, MIT, CEDARE, ESA, WCMC
(2021). Making Peace With Nature. United Nations Environment Programme	3	5		UNEP
(2021) Effectively empowering: a different look at bolstering the effectiveness of global environmental assessments.	2	5	WUR, CISD-UU,	University of Oxford, MCC
(2019). IPBES Global Assessment	2	5		IPBES
3. Global Land Outlook				
(2020) Contextualizing local landscape initiatives in global change: a scenario study for the high forest zone, Ghana.	2	5	VU-IVM	WSL
(2021/2). Global Land Outlook 2 (te verschijnen, PBL-bijdrage juni '21).	2	5		UNCCD
(2018) Planetary security: In search of drivers of violence and conflict	(1)(4)	5		UN, MIT, CEDARE, ESA, WCMC
4. Circular Economy				
(2020) The integration of climate change and circular economy in foreign policies.	4	5		ECDPM
(2020). Exploring the global environmental and socio-economic effects of pursuing a circular economy: case study on jeans and mobile phones	4	5		Circle Economy
(2021) Potential effects of Dutch circular economy strategies on low- and middle-income countries: the case of electrical and electronic equipment.	3	5	UNU/UNITAR	WB, Global LPG SCYCLE
5. Sustainable Value chains (trade chains/international footprint NL; coffee sector/raw materials/deforestation)				
(2019) Maatschappelijke betrokkenheid bij natuur in het beleid en de praktijk. Verkennende studie naar groene initiatieven van burgers en bedrijven.	(1) (4)	5	WUR, LNV	

(2018) Transparantie verplicht Verwachtingen over het instrument transparantie om maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen te stimuleren	4	5	EZK, LNV, SFL Utrecht, MVO Nederland
6. Energy transitions (non-diplomatic party of climate change/green recovery/ sustainability/ Energy transition paths for developing countries)			
(2019) Insight into Energy Scenarios - A comparison of key transition indicators of 2 °C scenarios. PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, the Hague.	1, 3	3	
(2020). Paris-aligned energy transition pathways for India. PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, The Hague.	2	3	SNV, HIVOS, WB
(2020). Actors and governance in the transition toward universal electricity access in Sub-Saharan Africa.	2, 4	3	CISD, Utrecht University
(2020). Trade-offs and synergies between universal electricity access and climate change mitigation in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2018.	2	3	CISD, Utrecht University
(2020). Scenario analysis for promoting clean cooking in Sub-Saharan Africa: Costs and benefits.	2, 4		CISD, Utrecht University
(2018) Towards universal access to clean cooking solutions in sub-saharan Africa	3	3	SNV, HIVOS WB
(2021) Global Green Recovery, from global narrative to international policy	2, 3	3	ECDPM, MFA
(2017) Towards universal electricity access in Sub-Saharan Africa: A quantitative analysis of technology and investment requirements	3	3	
(2020). Afforestation for climate change mitigation: Potentials, risks and trade-offs. Global Change Biology	4	3	University of Utrecht, CISD, WUR
(2021) Towards a global green recovery: the cases of Denmark, the EU, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK	3	3	ECDPM
(2018). Foreign-Funded Adaptation to Climate Change in Africa: Mirroring Administrative Traditions or Traditions of Administrative Blueprinting?	2	3	WUR, EUR

(2017). The role of decentralized systems in providing universal electricity access in Sub-Saharan Africa – A model-based approach	2	3	University of Utrecht, CISD
7. Food Systems			
(2020). The impact of urbanisation on food systems in West and East Africa: opportunities to improve rural livelihoods	2	1	MFA, WeUR
(2021). Urbanising food systems: exploring opportunities for rural transformation	3	1	IFAD
(2021). Reflections on the global science-policy interface for food systems.		1	WUR
(2018). Making sense of land-use change in light of food production in Africa: the role of governance, institutions, and public administration	3	1	
(2020). How Food Secure are the Green, Rocky and Middle Roads: Food Security Effects in different world development paths.	3	1	WUR
Institutional diagnostics for African food security: Approaches methods and implications.	3	1	NJAS
8. Future Water Challenges			
(2018) Linking water security threats to conflict	3	2	I&W, EZK Blueland, Clingendael
(2018) The Geography of Future Water Challenges	3	2	I&W, MFA, EZK, VU, WUR, UU, IHE Clingendael Institute, DELTARES, Blueland
9. Integrated Landscape Management (geographic scenarios/urban development)			
(2021). Understanding land use change conflict: A systematic review of case studies	4	5	VU-IVM
(2019). Integrated Landscape Management and Natural Capital Accounting: working together for sustainable development	2	5	ALTUS IMPACT, ANU- (AU)

(2019) Future impacts of environmental factors on achieving the SDG target on child mortality—A synergistic assessment	4	5	RIVM, University	Utrecht	Shanghai University, IIASA, Liverpool school
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Annex B From the financial reports 2019 and 2020

Listed in the financial reports 2019 and 2020 are:

Workstream 1: Mainstreaming development dimension in regular PBL work program

- Structural products: Balance for the living environment (especially chapters food and circular economy), Broad Prosperity Survey and National Energy Survey
- Within strategic theme "Climate change and energy transition" in global climate mitigation and adaptation projects.
- Within the strategic theme 'Food, agriculture and nature in transformation' in projects to make the Dutch food system more sustainable, CBD post 2020 Biodiversity policy and global nutrient cycles.
- Within strategic theme 'Greening and making the economy circular' in projects Circular economy and Ecological capacity and national tasks SDGs

Workstream 2: Contribute to strategic, international assessments, strengthening the development component herein

- Contributions to Global Land Outlook (GLO-2) and Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem services (IPBES)
- Start-up reporting 'assessment of assessments'
- Insight into the use, uptake and impact of assessments based on evaluations of international assessments (reporting)

Workstream 3: Demand-driven projects linked to specific DGIS policy files, including ad hoc questions with a short turnaround time

- WAVES (with CBS, see annex to the covenant proposal)
- Energy transition paths for developing countries (clean cooking)
- Integrated Landscape management
- Role of fast-growing African cities as Agrohubs
- Art of finance / art of partnerships
- Tools to make trade more sustainable
- Measuring the SDGs (business / trade)
- Raw materials need for energy transition
- WRI v. Scoping study CE international
- SDGs and Planetary boundaries
- Circular economy internationally

- Feasibility study signal report. "SDGs, sustainability and the Dutch. foreign policy " ??
- Transparency

Workstream 5: Strengthen PBL-DGIS policy interaction, knowledge infrastructure and coordination

- Translating GLO-1 to embassies (with WRI and Cie MER (NCEA))
- Community of Practice Nexus Policy
- Explore follow-up IWC hotspot analysis
- Targeted feedback and translation of assessment results to IGG / MFA policy (ministry and embassies): GLO-1, IPBES regional assessments, IPCC 1.5 report
- Communication
- Coordination

Annex C Theory of Change

Reconstructed ToC

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a basic description of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is filling in the ‘missing middle’ between change actions, interventions, and initiatives and how these may lead to the desired goals to be achieved.³²

As far as known, no formal theory of change has been developed at the start of the covenant (or the current period).³³

With the aim to structure the main OECD³⁴ evaluation criteria, the evaluators reconstructed a ToC based on five sources: (i) the Terms of Reference, (ii) the Proposal for the Covenant 2018-2021 (iii) the publication of the covenant in the Staatscourant 23rd July 2018, and (iv) the Appraisal Memorandum 2018³⁵ and (v) the PBL draft self-assessment of the covenant.³⁶

For the reconstructed ToC, the ‘desired goals to be achieved’ were derived from the Appraisal Memorandum: “support to PBL to provide a knowledge base for DGIS policy in sustainability theme’s”. Although this description is rather unprecise, it does reflect that the ‘desired goals’ are instrumental in terms of quality for policy making. The ‘desired goals’ are not directly related to the subjects of the policies, being the interventions / activities / beneficiary population groups of the Directorate Inclusive Green Growth - IGG. The overarching objectives of DGIS are the achievement of, or contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In fact, the partnership DGIS-PBL can be interpreted as an operationalisation of SDG 17.³⁷

A broad and substantial ‘attribution gap’ exists between the ‘desired goal’ : quality of policy and the result of that enhanced quality on the overarching objective. PBL uses the Dutch word “*doorwerking*” (transmission mechanism) for this relation to the overarching objectives.

The impact of supply (or transfer) of knowledge to policy makers is when this knowledge is actually being used for the improvement of the decision making³⁸ and hence culminated in higher quality and more coherent policies and better interventions.

In sum, the covenant is the instrument that provides the framework³⁹ for both ‘actions’ (tangible activities, projects) and ‘processes’ (demand articulation, collaboration) that shape the science-policy interface.

The Proposal for the covenant 2018-2021 disaggregates the ‘desired goal’ / objective into three components⁴⁰:

³² There is no single ‘model’ for a ToC. We opt for using a five-layer structure that separates ‘processes’ from ‘products’ (conform the European Commission. Guidelines Budget Support 2017: Comprehensive Evaluation Framework).

³³ The DGIS Appraisal Memorandum does refer to policy relevance and the covenant objectives, outcome and output, but does neither refer to the causal relationships nor to the underlying assumptions.

³⁴ See: OECD-DAC Evaluation criteria, 2019.

³⁵ DGIS Appraisal Memorandum ODA over EUR 1 million, Covenant DGIS-PBL, nr. 4000001404. 2018.

³⁶ Timo Maas, PBL. Reflectie op de PBL-DGIS Science-policy interface. Zelfevaluatie. Concept Mei 2021 (not published)

³⁷ SDG 17: “Inclusive partnerships — at the global, regional, national and local levels — built upon principles and values, and upon a shared vision and shared goals placing people and the planet at the centre”.

³⁸ Arts et al. 2021. This coincides with the draft ToC developed

³⁹ DGIS. Voorstel voor een PBL-DGIS overeenkomst 2018 t/m 2021, Vs 05-12-17. p.4.

⁴⁰ DGIS. Voorstel voor een PBL-DGIS overeenkomst 2018 t/m 2021: p.3.

- Contribution to the vision and strategic policy development of IGG (in specific) and the MFA (in general) in its effort for realizing the sustainable development goals (SDGs). PBL contributes by forward looking strategic studies, policy analysis and evaluations in areas where poverty alleviation / development and living environment meet.
- To encourage that the international and development dimension of the sustainable use and management of natural resources becomes an integrated component of PBL's knowledge development for interdepartmental; policy processes (mainstreaming). As Planbureau, PBL will contribute to coherence in the Dutch policies for development and SDGs.
- To provide a scientific knowledge base for the IGG policy. PBL consolidated and strengthens het knowledge base to that end.

This operationalisation (actions, initiatives, and interventions) are described in the Appraisal Memorandum and ToR. The latter describes five 'workstreams':

- Mainstreaming development dimension in PBL's products.
- Contribute to strategic, international assessments and strengthening of their development component.
- Projects requested by DGIS relating to specific DGIS policy dossiers, including ad hoc request from DGIS.
- Strengthening PBL's knowledge basis with regard to development in order to execute the above-mentioned analyses.
- Strengthening policy interactions between PBL and DGIS, knowledge infrastructure and coordination.

The five categories provided the 'starting point' and structure for the Annual Work programmes, as well as Annual progress and financial reports.

In terms of the ToC, the assumption is that the five workstreams together will finally lead to an enhanced quality in strategic policy making and better policy coherence.

Each of these five workstreams are being operationalised by both 'activities' (development of models, reporting, evaluations and assessments, lectures, direct short assistance) and 'work processes' (demand articulation, joint covenant work programme development, communication, and dissemination)

These activities produce 'output' in terms of reports, analysis, lectures, contributions to meetings, as well as 'induced output', being the (sustained, institutionalised) work processes that are conducive to the achievement of the 'desired goal'.

Reconstructed ToC of the covenant DGIS-PBL 2018-2021

Overarching objective / impact

Realisation of Sustainable Development Goals
Through interventions and diplomacy
(food, water, energy security; bio-diversity, climate)

Attribution gap

MFA and Government broad: Enhanced Vision and high quality strategic policies and policy coherence (use and governance of natural resources)

Outcome

PBL output ('regular' reports, models) encompasses international agenda

Input to intern. assessments. Knowledge questions and results assessments by intern. organisations 'translated' for IGG / MFA policy preparation as well as national policy (coherence). IGG / DGIS use and uptake for strategies and intervention portfolio, incl. delegated to embassies

Enhanced scientific basis / capabilities for IGG / MFA policy making
Knowledge infrastructure strengthened

Output and induced output are conducive for information flows, communication and coordinated interaction

Induced Output (process)

Enhanced interaction PBL-DGIS with co-responsibilities

Informed approach to interact. Regular consultation PBL- IGG (and others) concerning demand articulation, envisaged future knowledge questions / actionable knowledge for DGIS agenda setting

Coordination, interaction and networking knowledge partners (i.e. cieMER and WRI)

Output

Output triggers interaction and integrated approach. It is functional to knowledge based IGG / DGIS policies

Regular PBL Reports, policy briefs with development component

PBL contributions to international assessments.
Assessment of assessment report

Short 'on the spot' advisory services and reports

Models and modelling results;
Annual academic publications
Background studies

Presentations, workshops; webinars; outreach
Participation in knowledge platforms and policy dialogue

Activities

Implementation of activities (producing identifiable output) is not confined to specific workstreams.

Mainstreaming of development dimension in regular PBL Work programme and products

PBL knowledge supports the Netherlands' input to agenda setting by / with multilateral organisations

Demand driven projects, specific to IGG / DGIS policy dossiers

Strengthening development component in PBL knowledge base on 5 international themes

Strengthening interaction PBL - DGIS (incl. embassies)
Communication policy planning; knowledge infrastructure; and networking

Input

Five workstreams (mentioned in covenant)

DGIS additional funds to PBL
DGIS, PBL time and manpower (own budgets)

PBL knowledge; interaction and exchange of information

Intra-ministerial consultations
Annual intra-ministerial programme definition

Input

The input to the covenant consist of (i) financial transfers from the MFA to PBL and (ii) the knowledge of PBL made available in combination with the DGIS information to PBL about policies, strategies and upcoming agendas at international fora, and (iii) intra-ministerial consultations and Annual programme

planning of the activities under the covenant umbrella. In practice, there is another kind of input being the (unregistered) time destined to the covenant as well as other (unregistered) transaction costs that are carried by the operational budgets of both DGIS and PBL.

The total budget for 2018 – 2021 made available by MFA for the covenant with PBL was EUR 4.850.000, of which EUR 1 million for the WAVES programme with the World Bank. This was about evenly distributed over the 4 years of the covenant. In the annual budgets, there was a predetermined distribution over the five workstreams with different weights.⁴¹ For the 2018 budget this implied: 1) mainstreaming approx. 7% 2) international assessment approx. 24%, 3) demand-driven work approx. 44 % (of which almost half for WAVES), 4) Strengthening of PBL knowledge base approx. 16%, and 5) coordination approx. 8% of the financial resources.

Concerning the mainstreaming, this is supposed to be incorporated in the annual planning of the general PLB annual work plan. For demand-driven work there is an annual workshop between DGIS and PBL at the working level in which ideas are exchanged (i.e., the researchers and policy officers) *and* a meeting between the (deputy) director of IGG and the PBL-NLG head of sector in which the draft annual plan is discussed (and then finalized). Implementation was done in a flexible way, making adjustments during the year if and when necessary.

Expenditure per workstream according to financial reports

Grouping of activities by workstream of PBL to MFA/DGIS	2019	2020	2021 (*)
(1) Mainstreaming development dimension in PBL's products	-	-	134,200
(2) Contribute to strategic, international assessments and strengthening of their development component	395,060.86	203,630.43	402,500
(3) Projects requested by DGIS relating to specific DGIS policy dossiers, including ad hoc request from DGIS	528,485.58	709,605.02	402,500
(4) Strengthening PBL's knowledge basis with regard to development in order to execute the above mentioned analyses	177,936.76	267,554.72	268,400
(5) Strengthening policy interactions between PBL and DGIS, knowledge infrastructure and coordination	164,768.81	161,440.69	134,200
Total	1,266,252	1,342,231	1,341,800

Source: DGIS-PBL Financieel verslag 2019. Financieel verslag 2020 and for 2021: Verslag en werkplan 2020 pp. 26-36

*Budget is in accordance with the relative distribution of the different budget lines in the original proposal.

⁴¹ DGIS. Voorstel Covenant 2018-2021.

Activities and outputs

The reconstructed Theory of Change identifies “activities” as the concrete work done in the workstreams i.e., “where the covenant’s resources go to” (mainly man hours at PBL).

Key documents to identify activities are the annual progress reports and the annual financial reports elaborated by PBL and presented to MFA. Activities can also be identified from their published output, such as publications. During inception interviews, other activities were mentioned as well, while respondents made other classifications and distinctions. Some activities combine more than one workstream, which expresses well the intention of the covenant, the search for integration and establishing nexus.

Many activities do not only overarch several work streams, but also mix covenant funding with funding from other sources. PBL does not keep record at a detailed level of the funding of activities (being this mainly man hours) from either one or more sources.

Disregarding how they have been financed, for a deeper understanding of relevance, effectiveness etc. it is not useful to define activities just by their individual visible outputs (as one output being produced by one activity). The number of communicated activities (like workshops, report writing, .) can be large, are implemented in relation to each other, predominantly within a subject matter area. Such clusters of activities may be assumed to have a joint logic of relevance, effectiveness, etc.

Distinguishing concrete activities as a level of analysis for the present evaluation is not straightforward. Clusters of activities are not well-defined, and documents consulted use a variety of terms to indicate groups of activities, for example “projects”, or “impact narratives”,⁴² while the terminology and clustering used in interviews during the inception phase deviated from that.

As a first step we have synthesized outputs mentioned in the progress reports and the publications list within the PBL draft self-assessment of the covenant (see annex A). The progress reports, however, do not specify activities that produced directly linked outputs as one activity may produce several outputs. With the aim to avoid confusion about classifications and to have a single inventory framework as the PBL self-assessment (and without going into debate whether a classification based on organisational structure of PBL is the optimal form for doing so) the outputs have been grouped according to “impact narratives” (which we will call “clusters of activities”⁴³):

- 1) CBD Post-2020 (Biodiversity)
- 2) Synthesis of Global Environmental Outlooks
- 3) Global Land Outlook
- 4) Circular Economy
- 5) Sustainable Value chains (trade chains/international footprint NL; coffee sector/raw materials/deforestation/ measuring SDGs)

⁴² Term used in the PBL draft self-evaluation by PBL (unpublished, 2021).

⁴³ The reason for not using the term ‘impact narrative’ is that it suggests -beforehand- that there was an impact. These “clusters of activities” do not appear in the ToC. They are in between the “activities” (workstreams) and the “outputs” in the ToC. They cannot be demarcated in the ToC as the clusters evolve all the time, like species in an ecosystem. It should be noted that “workstreams” are also sometimes referred to in PBL-documentation as “clusters”.

- 6) Energy transitions (non-diplomatic part of climate change/green recovery/sustainability/
Energy transition paths for developing countries)
- 7) Food Systems
- 8) Future Water Challenges
- 9) Integrated Landscape Management (geographic scenarios/urban development)

As a second step we have added the following clusters of activities that are referred to in the financial reports (see Annex F for the full list) (but only if the inception interviews gave indications that these activities are significant enough to justify an effort to assess their effectiveness and efficiency):

- 10) Mainstreaming into structural PBL products: Balance for the living environment (especially chapters food and circular economy), Broad Prosperity Survey
- 11) Strengthening policy interaction PBL-DGIS
- 12) WAVES (with CBS, see annex to the covenant proposal)

In Annex A, the output has been classified according to the clusters of activities, the workstreams, the covenant work field, and cooperating entities. Subsequently, the different types of output derived from each cluster of activity have been summarized. The overview reveals focus and approach followed during the covenant⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ No 10 (mainstreaming) is not included as these outputs coincide with other clusters of activities.

Type of output per cluster of activity number (numbers see above)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12
Publications	12	11	3	4	5	13	6	2	7		2
Scientific Article					1	1					1
Presentation	1		1			2			4	1	2
Background report									1		2
Outsourcing research						1			1		2
Scenario modeling		2				2					
Work meeting			1							3	
Workshop		2				2			3	1	
Session									7	1	
Seminar									1		
Memorandum										1	
Letter to parliament	1	3			1				2	1	
Lecture		1									
Webinar										1	
Interview										2	

Source: Own elaboration, 2021.

Effects (outcomes and impacts)

The annual progress reports reported on effect indicators specified in the covenant. These have been summarized in PBL's draft self-evaluation (May 2021) :

Target: 10 references to PBL work for MFA/DGIS in policy documents of the ministry (including IOB), other ministries and the House of Representatives in the period 2018-2021

- Letter to Parliament: IPBES report in Parliamentary Paper 33576/166
- Letter to parliament: WAVES in Parliamentary Paper 33576/166
- Letter to parliament: GEO-6 in Parliamentary Paper 26407/127
- Letter to parliament: PBL, IPBES and IPBES-TSU in 26407/134
- Parliamentary Paper: Insights from Global Environmental Outlooks, Report of a Written Consultation, 21501-32 no. 1251
- Letter to Parliament: PBL Insights from global environmental foresight, Parliamentary Paper 28663-76
- Reference Insight into Energy Scenarios in activity 'The importance of looking ahead and scenario work at Shell' of the Academy of International Relations.

- Letter to Parliament Pricing in the agro-nutrition chain. Joint letter of the ministers of LNV and BHOS to Parliament on 2 April 2020, requesting the coffee sustainability study. File 32 266.
- IOB evaluation Mind the governance gap, mind the chain: PBL Transparency Mandatory
- IOB Terms of Reference policy review BHOS Art. 2: PBL People and the Earth.
- Parliamentary Paper: Government response to the PBL Integrated Circular Economy Report, Kamerstuk 32266-11.

Target: At least 3 references per international assessment on which PBL has participated in international policy documents of e.g. UNEP, conventions etc. and related follow-up actions in the period 2018-2021

- GEO6 in UNEA-4 resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.1 and UNEP/EA.4/Res.23. Follow-up through study Role of Assessments, PBL participation in Steering Group for the future of GEO and UNEP assessment synthesis report.
- References to GEO-6 and IPBES Global Assessment in Global Sustainable Development Report
- References to IPBES Global Assessment in CBD SBSTTA decisions, Open Ended Working Group
- References to IPBES Global Assessment, Global Environment Outlook, in UN DESA Recovery better High-Level Advisory Board. Input for Global Green Recovery.

Target: 10 references to PBL work in documents from social partners of DGIS (knowledge institutions, NGOs, companies, etc.) and related follow-up actions in the period 2018-2021.

- DNB: Valued (references to Future of Water Challenges and Sector contributions to sustainable biodiversity use & conservation). Collaboration between DNB & PBL (2020), Indebted to Nature, exploring biodiversity risks for the Dutch financial sector.
- UNEP: Countries commit to restore land area the size of China, based on policy brief Global Land Outlook.
- IIED: Biodiversity Mainstreaming. References to publication mainstreaming biodiversity governance and natural capital accounting/WAVES publication
- Letter from the UNCCD secretariat to the PBL with thanks for GLO's contribution to G20
- Webinar IISD Zero-deforestation supply chains
- Solidaridad: Landscape Approach: Lessons Learned. References to two PBL publications from the ILM project.

This is not yet complete for 2021, but PBL's self-evaluation expects that the targets of the covenant term will be achieved. This shows that the PBL's work under the covenant does not go unnoticed by the target users (in particular national politics), but the question remains how informative these indicators are to evaluate the effects of PBL's activities in the five workstreams and their outputs.

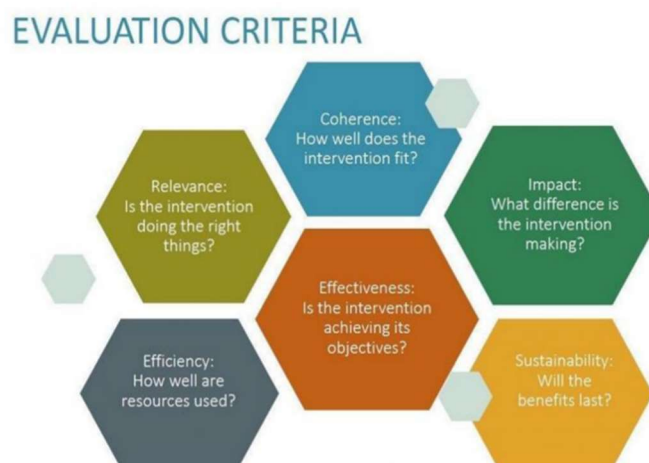
Annex D Methodology

The Terms of Reference (ToR, see Annex G) indicate that the *objective* of the external evaluation is basically twofold:

- (i) A backward-looking assessment of whether the covenant has been relevant, coherent, effective, and efficient. This was to be done by using the OECD-DAC criteria (see Figure 3)
- (ii) A forward-looking assessment addressing questions like whether a covenant is the most suitable model for cooperation between PBL and NL-MFA; and how collaboration can be improved for the years to come; and what knowledge/analyses for policy making would be required than.

In the Inception Report it has been indicated that the starting point of the evaluation would be the Theory of Change (ToC) (see Annex C). Guided by the logics of the ToC, the questions in the ToR were regrouped into Evaluation Questions (EQs) (backward looking) and advisory questions (forward looking) and corresponding evaluation matrices were elaborated for the Evaluation Questions (EQs) and the Advisory Review Questions (ARQs) (see tables 2 and 3 below) The EQs and ARQs served as frame for the list of contents of this report.

FIGURE 3. OECD DAC CRITERIA 2019



In the regrouping of the questions raised in the ToR, four criteria were applied:

- (i) A first distinction was made between:
 - Evaluative backward-looking questions
 - Forward looking questions
- (ii) A second distinction was made between
 - Substance, subject matter, and
 - Form, governance
- (iii) Relation to the five workstreams

(iv) Grouping according to OECD-DAC criteria

This resulted in the following two matrices: Table 2 presents the evaluation matrix for EQs and Table 3 the matrix for the ARQs.

Table 2 Evaluation matrix for EQs

Criteria/ elements	Judgement criteria/ indicators	Main methods	Information sources
EQ 1 Relevance: <i>To what extent did the activities resulting from the PBL-DGIS covenant contribute to policy development with regard to achieving the SDGs?</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the covenant relevant for quality improvement of policies of the NL-MFA? Did the covenant contribute to the operational objectives contained in the Ministry's budget memorandum? Are the quality improvements ODA relevant? Were the five identified workstreams relevant to the overall MFA policies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observable changes in Dutch policy notes; ODA eligibility criteria for knowledge based contributions to SDGs / five subject matter areas 	Review Budget memorandum 2018 Review of IGG policy notes 2018-2020 Review of PBL – DGIS Annual Work programmes and reports Interviews Views by external stakeholders other ministries	IGG / DGIS policies and programmes. IGG Notes to Parliament PBL Annual Work programmes and reports. PBL publications. External documentation Interviews DGIS stakeholders
EQ 2: Effectiveness / Outcome: <i>Did the covenant contribute to the mainstreaming of the development cooperation dimension in PBL's work programme and products?</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uptake of the international and development perspective/dimension in PBLs (national/interdepartmental) work (mainstreaming)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observable inclusion of development cooperation / internationalisation in PBL Annual Work programme and Annual Reports Any <i>binding</i> constraint (i.e. institutional culture?) 	Analysis of PBL Work programmes and Annual Reports; Inventory of PBL publications 2018-2020 In-depth interviews	PBL Work programmes 2018-2020; PBL Reports; previous evaluations, PBL self-assessment, Publications; Interviews direct stakeholders DGIS, PBL and I&W.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the developments/activities that parties involved (PBL/DGIS) are most positive about? Did parties expect more of the covenant in certain areas? Did parties involved have similar expectations/views on this? (PBL and products) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registered and perceived effects Perceptions by stakeholders in terms of additional input, output, and/or effects that would not have existed in absence of the covenant Identification of value added through collaborative activities and additional cross-institutional activities. Factors contributing to success or constraints hindering achievements of the targets 	In-depth interviews	Interviews PBL, DGIS (IGG and other Departments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Output:</i> What results in PBLs work were realized within the framework of the covenant? How is the quality and timeliness of these results assessed? 	Results mentioned in PBL-DGIS Proposal 2018-2021: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributions to 4 international assessments; Assessment of Assessments Report; At least 2 policy studies 	Verification of products mentioned in Proposal 2018-2021	Annual covenant Work programmes; Annual progress reports; publications made 2018-2020. PBL self-assessment; Financial Reports; interviews with direct stakeholders.

Criteria/ elements	Judgement criteria/ indicators	Main methods	Information sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signals report concerning sustainability and foreign policy • Annual Report about products • Two background studies annually • Two academic publications annually • 2 presentations; 2 workshops 		
EQ 3: Effectiveness / Outcome: <i>Have the results of PBL's contribution to international assessments and knowledge questions been incorporated into IGG/MFA's development policy and intervention portfolio?</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What results to IGG/MFA were realized within the framework of the covenant? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions by stakeholders in terms of additional input; benefits, regulations and other outputs, swiftness in procedures that would not have existed in absence of the partnership 	Registration of results / product from Annual progress reports. Interviews IGG / DGIS / MFA	Documentation, Annual covenant Work programmes, Annual progress reports; previous evaluation and Interviews with direct stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which developments/activities are parties involved are most positive about? • Did parties expect more of the covenant in certain areas? • Did parties involved have similar expectations/views on this? (MFA policies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered and perceived effects • Perceptions by stakeholders in terms of additional input, output, and/or effects that would not have existed in absence of the covenant • Identification of value added through collaborative activities and additional cross-institutional activities. • Factors contributing to success or constraints hindering achievements of the targets 	In-depth interviews	Interviews PBL, DGIS (IGG and other Departments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output: In which areas did PBL contribute to vision/strategic policy development? • In which areas was PBL unable to contribute to this objective? Are there concrete examples? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relation knowledge (publications, reports) and DGIS policy • Factors contributing to success or constraints hindering achievements of the targets 	Inventory publications; Inventory direct short advisory services	Annual Report, Interviews direct stakeholders
EQ 4: Effectiveness / Outcome: <i>Did the covenant strengthen the DGIS knowledge base and knowledge infrastructure?</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did PBL create additional capacity to support the science-policy interface? • If so, in what areas and to what extent did this contribute to the effectiveness of the covenant? • Did it improve the relationship and interaction between PBL-DGIS? • How did the communication and interaction take place? 	Demarcation of 'capacity'; understanding of 'additionality'; Direct relation between DGIS knowledge needs and PBL contributions; Any changes in the intensity of interaction (interviews)	Inventory list publications and reports Inventory short advisory services. Additional fte's?	Annual Reports Interviews direct stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did PBL fulfil a role that other partners of the NL-MFA could not fulfil? 	Identification and demarcation PBL 'niche'	In-depth interviews	Interviews direct and boundary stakeholders

Criteria/ elements	Judgement criteria/ indicators	Main methods	Information sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In which areas was PBL able to fill a specific niche? Are there examples of how PBL is fulfilling this niche. In which areas could they – in hind side - have played this role? 	Identification plausible alternatives (NL)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What research quality control mechanisms were applied? Did these function as expected? 	Peer reviewed publications Think tanks? Others? Structural review mechanism?	In-depth interviews	Interviews direct stakeholders List of Publications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induced output: Did annual consultation about new knowledge questions materialize? Which studies or advisory services were agreed upon? 	Existence correspondence / agenda / of consultation meetings	Archive, notes, Work Programme	Interviews direct stakeholders Notes of annual consultations? Work programme 2018-2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induced output. Did coordination among knowledge partners lead to actionable knowledge in the identified subject matter areas : food, water, energy, bio-diversity and climate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observable inclusion of development cooperation / actionable knowledge in each subject matter area Inventory of <i>binding</i> constraints (i.e. institutional culture?). 	Documentation, reports, identification of projects / programmes in each subject matter areas	Documentation, interviews direct stakeholders; Notes / agenda of meetings
EQ 5: Effectiveness / Outcome: <i>Did the coordination, dialogue and communication led to enhanced human capabilities of IGG / MFA and partners?</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extend did the covenant facilitate new relationships between the NL-MFA and PBL? 	New committees, working groups?	In-depth interviews, short interview	Interviews direct stakeholders; Short interview different depts PBL, DGIS, others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is PBL cooperating with DGIS's knowledge partners in the field of sustainable development? Was this cooperation policy relevant, effective and coherent? Are there examples of such cooperation? 	Existence of examples	In-depth interviews, short interview	Interviews direct stakeholders; Short interview different depts PBL, DGIS, others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the addition of WAVES to the covenant contribute to its effectiveness? How does that relate to the Ministry's policy line on WAVES? 		Documentation	Appraisal document, Progress reports Financial reports Interview direct stakeholders
EQ 6: Efficiency : <i>What resources were made available for the covenant (NL-MFA plus PBL resources) and how were these used? Were the funds used efficiently used (and not wasted)?</i>			
Resources made available: financial, human, time	Financial budget DGIS, PBL	Analysis budget	Interviews with project staff/ research staff
Part of the IGG budget is delegated to posts. How did posts make use of the covenant and for what kind of activities?			Interviews embassies. Webpages embassies
What factors are expected to influence the continuation of innovative practices applied and transfer of knowledge?	Financial and operational prospects of transfer of knowledge centres. (Dependency on additional budget resources)	Preliminary assessments of the continuity of the research and transfer centres involved.	Project documentation/ evaluation reports; Interviews with project staff/ research staff.
EQ 7: Coherence: <i>To what extend did the PBL-DGIS covenant succeed in supporting policy coherence for sustainable development and providing a nexus perspective?</i>			

Criteria/ elements	Judgement criteria/ indicators	Main methods	Information sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy coherence for sustainable development and providing a nexus perspective 	<p>The objectives and approach of plans, programmes and projects are not contradicting internally or with those of other departments MFA and other ministries.</p> <p>The policies trigger synergies with others</p>	Desk study; evaluation report 2013-2017; In-depth interviews	Policy documents; Interviews direct stakeholders. Progress reports;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did PBL succeed in in taking up the role of an assessment agency (planbureau) that can link multiple policy areas 			Project documentation; Evaluation reports. Direct stakeholder interviews

Table 3 Matrix for Advisory Review Questions

Criteria/ elements	Judgement criteria/ indicators	Main methods	Information sources
ARQ 1: Did the covenant become, as envisaged, a more strategic mechanism than the previous covenant, with PBL in its role of national assessment agency?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the specific role of PBL – that can be considered as a public good- of influence on this assessment? 	<p>‘More strategic’ to be understood in terms of (i) positioning of the Netherlands in the international for a (2) quality of policy proposals and formulation and (3) agenda setting and policy relevance of interventions (programmes / projects)</p>	Evaluators assessment based on stakeholder perceptions. Comparison with conclusions and recommendations made by previous evaluation(s)	Evaluation 2013-2017. Interviews
ARQ 2: What can be learned from the most relevant outcomes?			
	Registration of outcomes and processes	Evaluators’ assessment; Reflection with direct stakeholders	Interviews direct stakeholders. Survey among boundary stakeholders
ARQ 3: How can the (intercultural) relationship between PBL-IGG/DGIS/MFA and the embassies be improved?.			
Mutual understanding		Evaluators’ brainstorming; Reflection with main stakeholders	Direct stakeholders. Survey among boundary stakeholders, including selected embassies
ARQ 4: What recommendations would be in place in order to strengthen the efficiency of the covenant?			
	Efficiency in OECD terms: how well are financial and human resources being used? Could the same have been achieved with less resources, or could the same resources have produced more results?	Evaluators’ assessment; Reflection with direct stakeholders	Financial Reports
ARQ 5: What recommendations would be in place in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the covenant? This in particular with regard to research questions, research method, research presentation and knowledge management.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should PBL cover global processes only, or also specific processes in DGIS regions or 10 SDG countries or the 27 cooperation countries? Can this be expressed in terms of added value? 		Evaluators’ assessment; Reflection with direct stakeholders Comparison with conclusions and	Evaluation 2013-2017. Interviews

Criteria/ elements	Judgement criteria/ indicators	Main methods	Information sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should PBL partner with others as well in a similar relation? 		recommendations made by previous evaluation(s)	
ARQ 6: What challenges exist in the current cooperation? Are they similar to issues identified in earlier evaluations? What has improved and which new challenges materialized? Will prolongation of the cooperation between MFA/DGIS and PBL deliver added value?			
		Analysis findings and conclusions previous evaluation (s). Interviews. Evaluators assessment based on stakeholder perceptions	Interviews direct stakeholders Short interview boundary stakeholders
ARQ 7: Is a covenant the preferred model for cooperation between PBL and MFA?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the legal forms of cooperation between public entities 		Interviews and documentation.	Interview legal Department MFA; Interview legal Department PBL Documentation and web search
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are alternatives to the covenant? 	Existing viable legal options	Interviews and documentation. SWOT between current covenant and potential alternatives	Interview legal Department MFA; Interview legal Department PBL Documentation and web search
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any implication for the ODA eligibility? 	Alternatives should remain ODA eligible	Interviews and documentation	Interview legal Department MFA; Interview legal Department PBL Documentation and web search (incl OECD ODA Regulations)

Interview Guide and first inventory of potential respondents

Based on these two matrices, an interview guide was elaborated and presented in the Inception Report.

Simultaneously to the elaboration of the interview guide, a first inventory was made of (potential) key informants and boundary stakeholders.⁴⁵

During the evaluation, a distinction was made between:

(i) the covenant as an aggregate, a black box that operates in its institutional context and is influenced by its environment (national policies, institutional embedding) and possibly how the black box itself influences its environment (i.e., policy advice, strategic alliances) and

(ii) the different components that comprise the covenant (expressed in the five work streams, clusters of activities and individual activities).

⁴⁵ Key stakeholders are those directly involved in the Covenant, both in MFA-IGG and in PBL, but also the staff of implementation programmes and projects in each of the five clusters. Boundary stakeholders are those stakeholders within the network of PBL and BuZa, with no direct involvement in the Covenant, such as embassies, other ministries (e.g. LNV, EZK) and international organisations (i.e. WRI, UNEP, UN Habitat, UNFCCC, others), research institutes, NGOs.

At covenant level (as black box) *relevance*, *process* and *governance* aspects were evaluated, while the criteria of *effectiveness* and *efficiency* were assessed at work stream / cluster of activity level mainly.

Selection of clusters of activities

Since there is no defined 'population' of clusters of activities at Inception stage it was agreed to use the list of 11 clusters of activities, as in use by PBL. The ToR did not provide criteria for selection for in-depth analysis of clusters of activities.

Based on a classification of clusters of activities according to their potential relevance for PBL work in relation to DGIS policies as presented in the Inception Report, it was agreed to focus on the following clusters:

- Synthesis of Global Outlooks (nexus themes and landscape approach)
- Biodiversity
- Circular economy in relation to sustainable trade and sustainable value chains
- Food and Nutrition Security (FNS)
- Energy security / transition
- WAVES
- Water futures

Interviews

The two matrices provided the main parameters for the interview questionnaire(s), while the combination of 'the covenant as black box' and the seven 'clusters' provided the subject matter boundaries for the evaluation.

During Inception it was assessed that -next to documentation- approximately 25-27 interviews would be needed.

The interview guide was intended to raise a limited number of structured questions -next to entirely open questions- in order to carry out some 'outcome harvesting' by asking respondents to express their views on outcome and change. It was the intention that through the structured questions and idea would emerge of the 'most significant change' that was produced as result of the covenant.

In practice, mainly as a result of 'snowballing' the number of respondents increased significantly.

The 'structured' component of the interview guide did not produced the envisaged results and was – after the first week of interviews- largely abandoned for three reasons: i) most of the interviewees did not have an overview over the activities that were related to the covenant and could refer only to their specific subject matter area (cluster activity), while on only few respondent had an overview in time and were able to compare a previous period with the current one ii) planning a large number of interviews in a short period implies some time stress and respondents preferred to come straight to the core questions; and iii) throughout the process -and with increasing emphasis- **triangulation** and **verification** (against documents, by means of additional interviews) required more time at the expense of the structured interview questions.

Of all interviews conducted relatively ample notes were elaborated.

Analysis of information

During the period of interviews, the need for triangulation and verification increased constantly. That also implied that the interviews focused more on specific clusters or topics or were deliberately

concentrated in time (i.e., energy transition) and/or dealt with specific topics only (i.e., the ODA eligibility) and were not part of the broader interview guide anymore.

For the analysis of the information, the interviews and documents were related to the various questions in the two evaluation matrices. No specific method of balancing or weighting among the pieces of information from interviews has been applied

Annex E Brief summaries of some activity clusters

Notes in advance:

- this is mainly based on triangulated interviews
- all clusters are connected to each other and boundaries between them are arbitrary (nexus are connected with each other)
- structuring PBL's work is a challenge as PBL has interfaces with several somewhat volatile "policy arenas", whilst in the PBL back office its knowledge base is structured according to long lasting themes

Biodiversity

- Activities
 - Mainstreaming DGIS interests into PBL work for LNV, related to the NL contribution to the UN Convention on Biodiversity (CBD)
 - The international assessments of IPBES (not the same countries as CBD)
 - Assessing the ecological footprint of the Dutch economy
- Closest connections with other activity clusters (nexus)
 - Global Land Outlooks for the UNCCD (deforestation and desertification)
 - Climate change (mainly IPCC-related work)
 - Integrated Landscape management (nourishing area-based multi-actor, multi—level governance)
 - Future water challenges (wetlands, mangroves, building with nature)
 - Potentially: food systems (this activity cluster is newly emerging)
- Relevance to DGIS
 - Impacts of ODA on biodiversity (all bilateral and multilateral ODA)
 - If it belongs to DGIS's mission:
 - MFA's own contribution to the ecological footprint
 - Overseeing the Dutch contribution to the global SDGs in general (the 2030 agenda for sustainable development)
- Main outcomes co-leveraged by the covenant
 - Increased attention in DGIS for the mainstreaming of LNV's biodiversity goals into ODA (and possibly in the future also trade policies)
 - Invaluable impact on international arenas, culminating in the 2021 summit in Kunming (UN) and a UNCCD fund

- Impact on NL discussions on specific topics like palm oil and biomass trade; potential policy incoherencies become transparent at early phases enabling dialogue and substantiated political choices when it is not yet too late

Sustainable value chains / footprints

- In 2020 LNV simply forgot to include water, and PBL did not insist. LNV needed the footprint so they had a reason to propose a reaction from the minister – and they have an interest in deforestation and biodiversity effects of soy and palmoil. IGG was hardly involved – biodiversity was a posteriority. Still strange, as in 2015 IGG has asked a PBL report about the water footprint, as the Party of the Animals had asked in parliament.
- Now in 2021, water is added to the LNV footprint. Also, DDE is interested in a water footprint for the textile sector, in combination with water stewardship and the broader water footprint of value chains. This will feed into a global water conference of 2023, as a Global Water Review. DGIS wants to provoke more UN regular activity on water futures.

Circular economy

- Activities
 - Case studies for electronic waste and textile (demand driven)
 - Assistance in communication with many embassies interested in CE
- Closest connections with other activity clusters (nexus)
 - Energy, as fuels are also potentially circular materials
 - Biodiversity (via the palm oil, soy cycles etc.)
 - Potentially: raw materials and mining
- Relevance to DGIS
 - Anything having to do with international trade and value chains where SDGs can be mainstreamed into the material flows in the economy
 - Electronic waste and textile are only examples, chosen because they are directly relevant for ODA focus countries
 - If part of DGIS's mission: overseeing the international dimension of Dutch implementation of the global goals, as other ministries may not have this on their radar yet (the 2030 agenda for sustainable development)
- Main outcomes co-leveraged by the covenant
 - Emerging attention for the international dimension in the inter-ministerial programme for CE
 - Significant attention by embassies for bilateral ODA and diplomatic opportunities offered by the international dimension of CE
 - Note the long-term significance of this theme is thought to be potentially large; small outcomes today may lead to large outcomes in the future

Food systems

- Activities
 - Analysis of long-term developments with regard to food security with translation into possible implications for current DGIS policy
 - Reflections on the global science-policy interface for food systems.
 - A more general reflection on such global interfaces, called “Keeping Global Environmental Assessments fit for purpose”
- Closest connections with other activity clusters (nexus)
 - The food system approach is by nature a nexus approach. The international community has understood that food and nutrition security cannot be achieved by the agricultural sector alone. It has to cooperate with biodiversity protection, water management, climate change funding, etc.
 - It also has a link with the landscape approach, as food production has to be in harmony with other functions of landscapes.
- Relevance to DGIS
 - Potentially very significant relevance for the agenda of the international community, including bilateral and multilateral ODA countries.
 - No relevance for the quality of implementation of ODA programmes *en cours*
 - Relevance for the Dutch contribution to global food security
- Main outcomes co-leveraged by the covenant
 - The ministries were reassured that international assessments are valuable and that PBL’s role in them was also valuable. The Synthesis of GEOs showed the link between international developments and the three main transition in The Netherlands, including the Dutch food systems. It showed that international assessments (the GEOs) empowered governments to take action, learning some lessons on how impact (leverage) is generated.
 - Inter-ministerial consensus also, that despite having no UN Convention on food systems it will be helpful to dispose of an international thinktank to do assessments, where PBL can play a leading role
 - PBL documents are now being shared in the international arena. It will be input to the Global Food summit in 2021, and the Glasgow COP of the Climate convention, also in 2021.

Water systems

- Activities
 - No known clear co-finance from the covenant, but still outcomes for DGIS.

- Preparing integrated assessments of the global water futures, to help facilitate a joint unambiguous perspective between ministries on water internationally. As there are no UN outlooks for water futures, this was a Dutch endeavour.
- Closest connections with other activity clusters (nexus)
 - Food systems, biodiversity, land outlook, landscape approach, energy (mainly hydropower)
 - Water was not included in LNV's ecological footprint work, in 2020 LNV did not ask for this as the issues was then mostly related to palm oil and soy. This is corrected in 2021. This is also in the interest of DDE
 - Water was not included in the synthesis of GEOs, as that study was intended to assess the effectiveness of outlooks as assessments done in international knowledge consortia, for multilateral clients.
- Relevance to DGIS
 - PBL's water footprint work (not co-financed from the covenant) will feed into a global water conference of 2023, as a Global Water Review. DGIS wants to provoke more UN regular activity on water futures.
 - MFA is part of the "Interdepartmental Water Cluster". It formulated an international water ambition in 2016: "(The three Ministers) have committed themselves to the International Water Ambition and to further bringing together networks and partners. There is broad support for the IWA within the government and the water sector. The private sector, knowledge institutes, civil society and government all share one goal: realizing flood risk management and water security in urban delta's worldwide"
 - MFA's water-related interests touch in particular their international water and climate diplomacy, and international trade (water is a so-called "top sector"). Water ODA programmes are also components of the international water ambition where often both objectives count.
- Main outcomes co-leveraged by the covenant
 - The Interdepartmental Water Cluster found the first water futures report useful for international agenda setting, needed for the staying power of water issues in the political minds.
 - The water Envoy, I&W and IGG are now trying to benefit from the upcoming major 2023 global water forum, to put a global water assessment on the international agenda.
 - PBL is also seen as a potential partner of the newly established Global Center for Adaptation, as climate adaptation is closely related to water management.

Waves / natural capital accounting

- Activities
 - Provide technical assistance in the NCA annual forums (3rd Forum on NCA for better decision making and the 4th forum on NCA for better policy)

- Preparing background reports for the annual WAVES workshop.
- S-world model (soil accounts) were developed in collaboration with UN-Statistics and additional input from WUR
- Funded research for developing NCA (WUR)
- Closest connections with other activity clusters (nexus)
 - Integrated land management?
- Relevance to DGIS
 - As a major donor of the WAVES project, MFA expected from the start to have a strong influence in the international arena. Based on the discussion with the involved parties, such diplomatic relevance was achieved.
- Main outcomes co-leveraged by the covenant
 - PBL played an important role in shaping the debate and setting the background scene, informing people on what can be done with NCA in policy making. The background reports (notes) were made accessible to participants that work for statistic offices in developing countries, policy makers and research institutes implement that knowledge within their local context. This was referred to as structural basic support in institutional capacity building for developing countries.
 - Without the covenant, involved parties like the WB would have had a lower ambition on both the annual NCA forum and its annual report, due to the human and economic capacity that such entails. The scope and the audience were therefore successfully larger.

Annex F Stakeholders Interviewed

Stakeholders of governance and management of the covenant

PBL, vice director

PBL, Coordinator covenant activities

DGIS, Strategic Policy Advisor Inclusive Green Growth, coordinator covenant activities

DGIS, IGG, Controller

PBL, Senior advisor finance

PBL, Controller

MFA, FEZ, Evaluation coordinator

PBL, Head of sector nature and rural areas

PBL, Programming of research (Executive secretary)

I&W, Senior policy advisor innovation and transitions

PBL, Sector Head Integrated Env. Policy Analysis

PBL, Senior Researcher Integrated Env. Policy Analysis

MFA, Senior Policy Advisor OECD DAC/WPStat

Science-policy interface in general

Groene Brein, Director

MFA, IGG, Advisor Monitoring Evaluation & Learning

PBL, Expert on working at the interface IGG - PBL

MFA, Special Envoy knowledge policy

Embassies

EKN Ethiopia, Senior Policy Officer (Food security & sustainable Development)

EKN Egypt, Agricultural council at the Dutch embassy in Cairo

EKN Pakistan, First secretary economic affairs

Boundary stakeholders involved in topics (potentially) relevant to the covenant

MFA, National SDG coordinator

I&W, Coordinator of the work programme

I&W, NL Water Envoy

WUR, Senior economist

WRI, Director WRI The Hague

NCEA, Commission m.e.r., director

Clingendael, Head of Unit EU & Global Affairs Senior Research

TNO, Senior Economist/ Senior Strategist & Futurist

Cluster Biodiversity

DGIS/IGG, Biodiversity focal point

PBL, Biodiversity focal point

LNv, Coordinator CBD / IPBES focal point

Commonland, CEO

Cluster sustainable value chains

DGIS/IGG, Thematic Expert

PBL, Researcher international biodiversity policy

MFA, Deputy Head of Mission and Head of Economic Section at Netherlands embassy in Kuala Lumpur

Cluster circular economy

DGIS/IGG, Coordinator Circular Economy and Commodities Policies

PBL, Scientific researcher circular economy

I&W, International Lead Interdepartmental Program Circular Economy

DGIS/DDE, Circular economy expert

EZK, Senior Policy advisor

Cluster Food and Nutrition Security

DGIS/IGG, Senior Advisor Food Security

PBL, Research associate Global water and food systems

WUR, Advisor Multi-stakeholder engagement

WUR, Associate Professor

Cluster energy transition

DGIS/IGG, Policy coordinator climate finance and energy

PBL, Scientific Researcher energy

PBL, Deputy head of sector climate, air and energy

Cluster water

DGIS, Theme expert land, water, and ecosystems

PBL, Sector Water, Agriculture and Food

I&W, Water Envoy of NL

MFA/I&W, Lead Water Programmes

AidEnvironment, ex researcher at AidEnvironment Water expert

Cluster Waves (focus on durability of results)

DGIS/IGG, Coordinator Circular Economy and Commodities

PBL, Scientific Researcher Environment and Development

World Bank, Coordinator, GPS and WAVES programmes

CBS, Project leader environmental accounts

PBL, WAVES-PBL Coordinator

Cluster Synthesis of outlooks

DGIS, Strategic Policy Advisor

PBL, Scientific Researcher Environment and Development

I&W, Coordinator of the work programme

EZK, Senior Policy advisor

DGIS/IGG, Dept Director

Cluster land degradation / land outlook

PBL, Scientific researcher, Biodiversity and Finance

UNCCD, Managing Director

Clingendael, Head of Unit EU & Global Affairs Senior Research

Commonland, CEO/Founder

Cluster Landscape approach

DGIS/IGG, Theme expert land, water and ecosystems

PBL, Researcher Department of Nature and Rural Areas

Solidaridad, Knowledge management and learning advisor

I&W, Consultative body Physical Living Environment

Annex G Terms of Reference

Evaluation of the PBL-DGIS covenant

Terms of Reference (ToR)

➤ Rationale and goal of the evaluation

In line with the appraisal form, the covenant between the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (Dutch: Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving – abbr. PBL) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Directorate-General for International Cooperation (BZ/DGIS) is due to be evaluated by an external expert in (the first half of) 2021. In order to make a well-informed decision on the possible funding of a next phase, the NL-MFA would like to know how the covenant is relevant, coherent, effective and efficient. Furthermore, the NL-MFA would like to know if/how improvements could be made related to the cooperation between the NL-MFA and PBL, and whether a covenant is most suited model for this kind of cooperation.

➤ Background of the PBL-DGIS covenant

The covenant between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Directorate-General for International Cooperation (BZ/DGIS) and PBL arose out of the former's desire to broaden and strengthen PBL's work programme as it relates to foreign affairs and development cooperation. In this way the covenant would contribute to strategic policy development and strengthening of the scientific basis for policy work in this field. At the time, the overall PBL work programme was funded by the then Ministries of Housing, Spatial Planning & the Environment and Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality. With the covenant, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released funds on a structural basis for PBL and became party to the inter-ministerial consultations at director-general level in which the work programme was discussed.

An evaluation of the first three years of the covenant (2009 to 2012) produced a positive conclusion. The covenant was subsequently prolonged for a period of four years (2013-2016), with a budget averaging €1 million a year. In 2016, it was prolonged for another year, to 31 December 2017. This concerned a budget-neutral extension. At the end of 2014, the partnership programme between PBL, Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and the World Bank-led partnership WAVES became part of the covenant. A budget of €701,000 was added to the covenant for this work stream.

After a positive evaluation of the second phase of the covenant (2013-2017) a new phase (activity number 4000001404) started in May 2018. The current covenant runs from May 2018 until 31 December 2021, with a total budget of EUR 4.850.000 of which around 1 million euro is allocated to WAVES.

The objective of the current agreement between BZ/DGIS and PBL is:

- **To contribute to vision/strategic policy development** at the Inclusive Green Growth Department and other departments within BZ/DGIS, including embassies, with the aim of realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Making sure the international and development dimension of the sustainable use and governance of natural resources is well **contained within PBLs knowledge development for interdepartmental policy processes** (mainstreaming).
- Realising a **scientific basis for IGG-policy**. PBL consolidates and strengthens its knowledge base in order to realise this objective.

PBL has identified five work streams in order to realize these objectives:

1. Mainstreaming development dimension in PBL's products;
2. Contribute to strategic, international assessments and strengthening of their development component;
3. Projects requested by DGIS relating to specific DGIS policy dossiers, including ad hoc request from DGIS.

4. Strengthening PBL's knowledge basis with regard to development in order to execute the above mentioned analyses;
5. Strengthening policy interactions between PBL and DGIS, knowledge infrastructure and coordination.

Annual reporting by PBL to NL-MFA

- Annual narrative and financial reports on the implemented activities and financial implications are provided.
- Annual work plan of intended activities – in addition to overall PBL work program.
- Reporting per implemented outcome. The following outcome-indicators were developed:
 - 10 references to PBL's work for the BZ/DGIS covenant in policy documents of the ministry (including IOB), other ministries and the parliament in the period 2018-2021;
 - A minimum of 3 references per international assessment to which PBL contributed, in international policy documents from e.g. UNEP, conventions etc and related follow-up actions in the period 2018-2021.
 - 10 references to PBL's work in documents from DGIS partners (e.g. knowledge institutions, NGOs, companies) and related follow-up actions in the period 2018-2021.

➤ **Objectives of the External Evaluation**

The NL-MFA would like to know how the covenant is relevant, coherent, effective and efficient. And if/how improvements could be made related to the cooperation between the NL-MFA and PBL, and whether a covenant is the most suited model for this kind of cooperation.

Results of the evaluation could be used to inform decision making on if and how the relationship between DGIS and PBL is to be continued.

To this end, the evaluation will provide an advice/interpretation of the following:

1. **A backward-looking assessment** of the aggregated outputs and outcomes of the covenant (did it succeed in achieving the agreed objectives and did it live up to the parties expectations?; what practices have proven to be valuable; how did the cooperation materialize and what could have been done differently; how were lessons and recommendations from previous covenants adopted; examples of best-practices and shortcomings);
2. **A forward-looking assessment**, based on lessons learned from the current covenant, which will address the following questions:
 - a. "Is a covenant the most suitable model for cooperation between PBL and NL-MFA or should other forms of cooperation be considered?";
 - b. "How can the collaboration be improved?";
 - c. "What suggestions can be done for cooperation and use of knowledge/analyses for policy making within DGIS?";

This evaluation will be guided by a set of criteria, as laid out in the [OECD DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance](#). The evaluators are encouraged to further develop the guiding questions presented below under each objective and to include additional questions they may deem important. The list of questions will be finalized in the inception report.

Relevance: The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries.

- In which way has the PBL-DGIS covenant been relevant with regard to implementing and developing policies of the NL-MFA?
- To what extent did the covenant contribute to the operational objectives contained in the Ministry's budget memorandum? To what extent was this contribution ODA relevant?
- How did both parties contribute to the PBL-DGIS covenant? What did they do to promote the relevance of the covenant's output?
- Did PBL fulfil a role that other partners of the NL-MFA could not fulfil? In which areas was PBL able to fill a specific niche? Are there examples of how PBL is fulfilling this niche. In which areas could they – in hind side - have played this role?

- What role did the covenant play in securing uptake of the international and development perspective/dimension in PBLs (national/interdepartmental) work (mainstreaming).
- Did the covenant become, as was foreseen, a more strategic mechanism than the previous covenant, with PBL in its role of national assessment agency?

Coherence: The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in this area.

- Like the NL-MFA, PBL's work concerns different thematic areas. To what extent did the PBL-covenant succeed in supporting policy coherence for sustainable development and providing a nexus perspective?
- To what extent did the covenant facilitate new relationships between the NL-MFA and PBL?
- There are multiple knowledge partners in the field of sustainable development. Some are active in specific thematic areas and some take broader (nexus) perspective. How is PBL cooperating with these partners? Was this cooperation policy relevant, effective and coherent? Are there examples of such cooperation?
- Did PBL succeed in taking up the role of an assessment agency (planbureau) that can link multiple policy areas?
- To what extent were the five identified work streams, coherent, relevant and effective towards achieving the goals of the covenant?

Effectiveness: The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.

- What results were realized within the framework of the covenant? What are the most relevant achieved outcomes? Why were these most relevant and what can be learned from these? How is the quality and timeliness of these results assessed?
- To what extent were the formulated outcome-indicators achieved? Were these indicators well suited to measure the effectiveness/results of the covenant?
- By whom (which policy domains) and in which way were the above mentioned results used?
- To what extent did the PBL-DGIS covenant contribute to policy development with regard to achieving the SDGs? In which areas did PBL contribute to vision/strategic policy development? In which areas was PBL unable to contribute to this objective? Are there concrete examples?
- What are the developments/activities that parties involved (PBL/DGIS) are most positive about?
- Did parties expect more of the covenant in certain areas? Did parties involved have similar expectations/views on this?
- How did the addition of WAVES to the covenant contribute to its effectiveness? How does that relate to the Ministry's policy line on WAVES?
- Did PBL create additional capacity to support the science-policy interface? If so, in what areas and to what extent did this contribute to the effectiveness of the covenant? Did it improve the relationship and interaction between PBL-DGIS?
- What challenges exist in the current cooperation? Are they similar to issues identified in earlier evaluations? What has improved and which new challenges materialized?
- How can the (intercultural) relationship between PBL-IGG/DGIS/MFA and the embassies be improved?
- How have lessons learned been taken up?

Efficiency: The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.

- What resources were made available for the covenant (NL-MFA plus PBL resources) and how were these used? How and by whom were decisions made on the allocation of funds?
- Are there indications that the funds were efficiently used (and not wasted)?
- How was the covenant managed? To what extent was this appropriate to the type of cooperation?
- What research quality control mechanisms applied? Did these function as expected?
- What recommendations would be in place in order to strengthen the efficiency of the covenant?

Lessons learned and recommendations:

- What lessons can be learned from the covenant about relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency?
- Will prolongation of the cooperation between BZ/DGIS and PBL deliver added value?
- Is a covenant the preferred model for such cooperation or should other models be considered, taking into account the role and position of the PBL as national assessment agency?
- Which recommendations can be done to further improve the cooperation between PBL and DGIS?
- What recommendations can be made in order to strengthen policy coherence and create added value of the PBL-DGIS covenant?
- How can the effectiveness of the cooperation be improved? Particularly with regard to:
 - Research questions (*What will PBL be researching*)
 - Research method (*How will the research be conducted*)
 - Research presentation (*How is research disseminated by PBL*)
 - Knowledge management (*How does DGIS integrate knowledge and knowledge production in its policy-making processes*)

Annex H About ERBS BV

This report has been elaborated by Sibout Nootboom (team leader), Willem Cornelissen and Estefania Espinosa Miranda of [Erasmus Research & Business Support](#) (ERBS).

ERBS was established in 1995 and is affiliated to the Erasmus School of Economics. It is a subsidiary of the Erasmus Enterprise Holding, of which the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) is the single shareholder. ERBS is the linking pin between the scientific knowledge of the Erasmus University and knowledge demand from both private and public entities. While ERBS responds to demand in the market, at the same time ambitious and passionate scientists can valorise their innovative ideas through the incubator facility of ERBS.

ERBS is active in policy-related economic research and advisory services for both national and international clients – next to three other activity fields. In the field of international co-operation, it offers expertise in areas such as education, the labour market, public finance management and, particularly, monitoring and both quantitative and qualitative evaluation of public policy. ERBS leads or participates in teams which also comprise other scientific staff of the Erasmus University Rotterdam and/or external subject-matter specialists.

The professional staff of ERBS operates in various languages and has conducted assignments in an array of low- and middle-income countries worldwide on behalf of international development organisations, development banks, the European Commission and various ministries in the Netherlands. In its research activities, ERBS strives for applying the best methods at the highest academic standards.

On behalf of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, ERBS currently manages the framework agreement for impact evaluations of Dutch development co-operation that was signed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

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