



Meta-evaluation - MTR reports strategic partnerships

FINAL REPORT

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Acronyms

CoPs	Communities of Practices
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of OECD)
EQ	Evaluation Question
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (of the MFA)
JC	Judgment Criterion
L&A	Lobby and Advocacy
LFS	Leading from the South
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFA (or MoFA)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of The Netherlands)
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RG	Reference Group
SCS	Strengthening Civil Society
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights

ToC Theory of Change

ToR Terms of Reference

Y/P/N Yes / Partly / No

Executive summary

Purpose and scope

This is the final report of the meta-evaluation of the reports of strategic partnerships' mid-term reviews (MTRs).

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned this independent study to the consultancy company ADE.

This meta-evaluation focuses on the mid-term reviews of an MFA grant instrument aimed at strengthening civil society (SCS) in their role of lobby & advocacy, the "Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society".

This grant instrument is subdivided into five grant instruments: Power of voices, Power of Women; Sexual and Reproductive health & Rights Partnership Funds (SRHR); Women Peace and Security, and Leading from the South (LFS). It provides funding to civil society organisations during the period 1/01/2021 – 31/12/2025.

In January 2021, a total of 42 partnerships and four LFS funds started their five-year programmes in over 65 countries. This concerned a total budget of 1.371 billion EUR.

The meta-evaluation covers the MTR reports of the 42 partnerships and four LFS funds. It has three main objectives:

1. Assess the quality of the MTR reports, and disaggregate them according to the overall level of confidence.
2. Synthesise from (sections of) MTRs with a sufficient level of confidence the findings and lessons learned per grant instrument and per confidence disaggregation level.
3. Formulate lessons and recommendations to inform the remainder of the policy framework and the development of future ones.

Methodological approach, challenges, and limitations

The Terms of Reference (ToR) outlined specific evaluation questions (EQs) to be addressed for each of the three principal objectives of this meta-evaluation (7 for objective one; 14 for objective two; and 2 for objective three). The study is based on a review of the 46 Mid-Term Reviews (MTRs) provided by the strategic partnerships' consortia to the MFA as part of their reporting requirements, as well as the Terms of Reference of these MTRs when these were provided. As requested by the MFA, no interviews were conducted by the evaluators and the present final report is hence based on a desk review only, and on a conclusionary validation session with stakeholders that was organised to discuss the finding of the draft final report of this meta-evaluation. The evaluation process was guided by the MFA in close collaboration with a reference group.

The evaluation took place in two major stages. In a first stage the evaluation team reviewed the MTRs based

on a series of quality criteria that the team defined in the inception report of the evaluation. This review allowed to assess the quality of the MTRs, and to address the evaluation questions related to objective one. In a second stage the team synthesised the findings of the MTRs, making sure that findings used were robust enough to be used for the synthesis. This synthesis allowed to address the evaluation questions of objective two. This served as a basis, together with the results of stage one address the questions of objective three, and to formulate overall conclusions and recommendations.

There were several challenges and limitations for this meta-evaluation: (i) it was limited by the quality of the MTRs themselves, and the fact that it was entirely based on secondary information; (ii) MTRs are reviews at programme and sometimes anecdotal level, whereas the meta-evaluation aims at a more strategic, global assessment; (iii) The meta-evaluation has a comprehensive ambition with 23 evaluation questions to be addressed: it was key to have a well-structured and pragmatic approach and make sure that a strategic focus was always maintained; (iv) there was a certain discrepancy between the technical nature of the quality requirements to assess the MTRs and the extent to which reports had – explicitly – taken on board such sometimes high technical aspects. Compliance with requirements could not always be measured through a ‘yes or no’ approach; (v) It was important to avoid bias, and notably the evaluator bias as reports were analysed in parallel by different reviewers. This was done by structuring the entire exercise, and by several control mechanisms applied in the work process; (vi) A final important challenge was the timeframe, with a time span of 10 weeks between the approval of the Inception report and the submission of the draft Final report.

Conclusions

The meta-evaluation defines a set of 10 conclusions, divided in two main parts: the first part relates to the quality of the MTRs; the second one concerns conclusions that are based on the findings and lessons learnt from the initiatives.

1. Related to the quality of the MTRs

The Terms of Reference for the MTRs were generally clear and consistent on overall methodological requirements, but in some cases, requirements were too ambitious and not in line with good practices (C1).

Terms of Reference (ToR) were available for 26 of the MTRs. These were generally clear, outlined the programme objectives, and defined evaluation questions. The Theory of Change of the programme was in most cases annexed to the ToR. The ToRs specified in most cases (more than 80%) the required schedule, the deliverables to be produced and the necessary qualifications of the team, and provided specifications on data collection. But ToRs were also regularly ‘over-ambitious’. Many of them (40%) formulated more than 10 EQs (up to 21). The planned timeframe for such a complex MTR was often quite short, and maximum eight months for more than half of them. Some other requirements in terms of country visits to be conducted were also very high, with most of them requiring six to 11 country visits.

The MTRs had weaknesses in terms of reaching relevant and well-founded conclusions and recommendations that would allow to strategically improve the implementation of the current and future initiatives, even if they also contained useful information (C2).

Overall, the meta-evaluation revealed weaknesses of the MTRs. A **mapping of the funding** available for the partnership or the LSF, was generally absent in nearly all MTRs. Such mapping would include an overview of funding used, offering a breakdown in terms of objectives pursued, activities, 'subsectors', beneficiaries, and geographical location of the spending (countries, regions). It should be a first step in an evaluation. There were often **flaws in assessing effectiveness**. MTRs formulated a causal chain hypothesis before collecting data in nearly all cases, and collected data related to this causal chain. But in more than half of the cases the causal chain was not validated step by step, and results were attributed to activities without a validation along the causal chain (more than 60% of the cases). There were also difficulties with some other issues to be investigated, notably with efficiency, which was rarely very explicitly addressed. Also, other issues like gender, inclusion and intersectionality were not always addressed. Similarly, localisation was not addressed in most MTRs. These issues were also very rarely explicitly defined. '**Outcome harvesting**' and '**most significant change**' are cited with contribution analysis as the two main methods used by the MTRs to measure effectiveness, which is surprising as both approaches are referred to by the IOB as less suitable for substantiating claims on effectiveness. Reviewers noted also **other flaws** in the MTRs, which can be summarized in three categories: (i) overall MTRs remain anecdotal with few synthetic claims; (ii) the reports are often not clear, with long narratives, and little substantiation; (iii) the reports often contain reasoning errors, such as generalising unduly from one example; considering an input (e.g. a training) as a result (increased capacity).

There was a discrepancy between the requirements and expectations for the MTRs, the size and complexity of the programmes they needed to review, and the means provided to conduct the MTRs (C3).

The scope of the MTRs was ambitious, and expectations in terms of methodology high, which is understandable given the size and the scope of the programmes they needed to review (which amounted on average to 31.5 million EUR). A closer examination of the means provided for these exercises, suggest that they were not commensurate to the magnitude of the task. Indeed, the budgets for the MTRs were in nearly 50% of the cases for which information was available of maximum EUR 60,000. All the MTRs were conducted with a budget that was below 0.85% of the budget of the evaluated programme, and most of them were below 0.44%. This can be considered low both in absolute and relative terms. Also, the time frame seemed not commensurate to the task, with about 1/3 of the evaluations that needed to be conducted in maximum six months to be conducted.

2. On the partnerships and LSF

Partnerships were based on complementarity and show overall a good coordination within the partnership. Still, partnerships were also confronted with specific coordination issues and few synergies were noted. Several lessons emerge (C4).

Overall, the partnerships have been constituted based on their (potential) complementarities. Most partners were engaged in coordination, mostly in terms of sharing experience, best practices, and allocation of technical and financial resources, and to use respective competencies, notably to enhance capacity strengthening of CSOs. Specific difficulties reported were for instance partners feeling sidelined by the lead member, increased complexity due to the number of and differences between partners, language barriers, and a perception that coordination diverted time and resources from other priorities. Few synergies were observed and in such cases with few or no details.

There was little coordination between partnerships, despite clear potential and specific opportunities, nor with other stakeholders (C5).

Very few partnerships (six) engaged in the collaboration with other MFA-funded SCS partnerships. In many countries, several partnerships were active, including four countries with ten partnerships or more. There was room in these countries for potential complementarities between partnerships, as testified in some MTRs. Still, more than half of the programmes (60%) reportedly coordinated with external stakeholders, including with other programmes and NGOs not funded by the Dutch MFA.

Complementarities between the work of the implementing partners and the diplomacy efforts of the MFA were limited, with a lack of direct contact between the embassies and the partnerships, and the MFA being repeatedly considered as a donor rather than a strategic partner (C6).

Fewer than 40% of the MTRs mention complementarity between partners and the diplomacy efforts of the MFA. When it occurred, it was mostly in terms of exchange of information or participation in common conferences. In many cases there was a lack of direct contact between the embassies and the partnerships, with the MFA being perceived solely as a donor.

Overall, partnerships were well aligned to the SCS objectives, and nearly all pursued CSO strengthening as a central goal, mainly through the enhancement of L&A capacity, but also to the development of management capacity and the sensitization to inclusion. Also additional to the SCS ToC is the implementation of thematic lobby and advocacy by partnerships themselves (C7).

More than 95% of the MTRs mention the strengthening of CSOs as a goal pursued. This focused very often on enhancing lobby and advocacy capacity, but also on other skills such as management capacity, monitoring capacity, and inclusivity, which were not foreseen in the SCS Theory of Change. Management capacity skills were mostly targeted with a view of supporting CSOs' access to funding additional to the SCS funds, which is not yet always the case, generating a risk related to the sustainability of the results regarding their reinforced capacity and presence on the lobby and advocacy scene.

Shrinking civic space was mostly considered as a contextual element requiring mitigation strategies, not something the avoidance of which the programmes needed to target as an objective. Lobby and Advocacy were unevenly used to 'pushback against the pushback'. However, change in contextual factors were identified as a key challenge to sustainability (C8).

Shrinking civic space is largely acknowledged as a key context element and implementation challenge. It is mostly considered that it falls within the consortium partners' responsibility to contribute to mitigate the negative effect on CSOs' ability to lead on activities expected to contribute to building a supportive environment for CSOs' lobby and advocacy activities. There is scattered evidence of partners contributing to a conducive environment at local level, in particular by involving local leaders such as religious leaders. However, change in context and risk of losing acquired results are noted as key risk factors for sustainability of the results.

As reported by the MTRs investigated, the programmes overall contributed to CSO capacity strengthening, favouring CSO networks, making them more inclusive and improving brokering; results on enhancing the lobby and advocacy varied, with examples of results and of the lack thereof (C9).

There is overall convergence on the fact that CSOs were strengthened regarding their capacity to conduct lobby and advocacy. There are, however, mixed results regarding the increase in implementation of lobby and advocacy activities, with evidence that it happened in several cases, and at the same time evidence on other cases that no progress was made. Hence, it is not possible to conclude on a clear effect at the level of the SCS as a whole.

Most initiatives addressed issues related to gender, in line with the expected focus of the grant instruments. No reference was found, however, to the MFA's recent feminist foreign policy framework. Attention was given to youth too, but much less to LGBTIQ+ persons, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. A few good practices were highlighted.

Most initiatives addressed issues related to gender, by the very nature of their grant instruments or by incorporating a gender perspective at least to some extent. Many supported the promotion of women's rights, in the broader context of civil society strengthening, and about half of initiatives adopted strategies in line with a gender transformative approach. Regarding feminist principles, no direct reference was found to the recent feminist foreign policy framework of the MFA (2022) and its 4R principles although the objectives supported by the initiatives were in principle consistent with them; the adoption of a feminist approach was mostly stated but different concepts were used to assess it. Regarding attention to other structurally excluded groups, youth followed women and girls; LGBTIQ+ persons and people with disabilities figured in the reports comparatively less, and ethnic minorities only in a few cases. This was in line with the expected focus of the initiatives as defined in the different grant instruments. A few examples of good and bad practices were reported, such as for the former the inclusion of gender resources and marginalised groups in the Consortia themselves, or integration of gender/inclusion-related training and toolkits.

Recommendations

The meta-evaluation defines a set of seven recommendations. The first one is related specifically to monitoring and evaluation, and the subsequent ones concern the policy framework.

When conducting evaluations, make sure requirements and expectations are in line with state-of-the-art rules and means commensurate to the requirements. It might also be envisaged to revisit and refine the evaluation cycle (R1).

The meta-evaluation allowed to identify, some weaknesses of the MTRs and concluded that there was a discrepancy between the expectations for MTRs and the means provided. On that basis it is recommended to ensure for future evaluations that (i) they start with an inventory of the funding; (ii) the scope is well defined and its coverage feasible; methodological requirements are realistic and evaluation methods and tools used are sufficiently solid; (iii) the process is in line with the requirements and the means; (iv) sufficient budget is foreseen given the size and scope of the programme evaluated and the expectations and what percentage of the programme size should be covered by an evaluation; (v) clear instructions are given to partnerships to design, and conduct evaluations, including specific guidance and possibly a helpdesk; (vi) there is due consideration of and thinking on the evaluation cycle and how to optimize the approach.

Continue building on the good practices of coordination / synergies within partnerships and make sure they are shared within partnerships (R2).

Continue and promote further extension of good practices repeatedly observed thus far between consortium members of partnerships. Reflect with the partnerships on possible solutions to difficulties met, for instance in terms of complexity of the number of and differences between partners, language barriers, and resource-intensiveness of coordination efforts. Also encourage synergies whenever relevant.

Promote actively coordination between partnerships, examining how to do this best (R3).

Actively promote coordination (and synergies) between partnerships, notably on specific themes or in countries with several of them involved – and more largely also on working on the MFA’s Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society and more broadly on lobby & advocacy matters in the Global South. Create experience-sharing opportunities and provide incentives. Include experience-sharing on opportunities for mutual learning identified in MTRs, such as on climate justice, civil society local contexts, effective approaches to movement building, or experiences about managing consortium-led programmes. Also consider exchanging on good practices identified in MTRs on working with other actors, such as on building personal and institutional relationships also with government agents, religious leaders, and grassroots activists.

Explore how complementarities between diplomacy efforts of the MFA and the implementing partners could be enhanced (R4).

Consider promoting complementarity between partners and the diplomacy efforts of the MFA in more cases. Build on good practices observed, such as in terms of exchange of information or participation in common conferences. Encourage direct contacts of partnerships with the embassies and the MFA, e.g. through networking events. Explore to what extent and how partnerships, embassies and the MFA would favour such closer collaboration.

Review the SCS Theory of Change to define the role of partnerships in conducting lobby and advocacy next to CSOs (R5).

The SCS ToC did not foresee implementation of thematic lobby and advocacy by partners as all changes are assumed to go through the reinforced civic society organizations, whereas partners largely implemented lobby and advocacy in their area of interest. The SCS framework should reflect on this difference, including implications in terms of the channel through which higher level results happened or are expected to happen in the future.

Define clear objectives in terms of pushback against shrinking civic space (R6).

Define a clear position and objectives for the SCS on pushing back against the pushback on civic space, including whether it belongs to the programme key objectives or to context element requiring mitigation strategies that can possibly be implemented at a more local level. The position should consider both the risk in terms of sustainability posed by shrinking civic space, and the risks in terms of unintended backlash effect posed by visibly acting on shrinking civic space. It is also recommended to reflect this in the Theory of Change.

Promote consideration by the strategic partnerships of the MFA's feminist foreign policy framework (R7).

Promote consideration by the strategic partnerships of the MFA's recent feminist foreign policy framework. Encourage for instance using its concepts and definitions, and the 4R principles (rights, representation, resources, reality check). This may also include deciding on specific issues such as the extent to which specific sections on gender are to be included in evaluations of gender specific programs. Envisage asking reporting on this to the partnerships. Consider hereby matters of feasibility and buy-in, given that the 2021-2025 strategic partnerships are ongoing while the feminist foreign policy framework was introduced in 2022.

1. Introduction

1.1. The meta-evaluation

This is the final report of the meta-evaluation focused on the mid-term reviews of an MFA grant instrument aimed at strengthening civil society (SCS) in their role of lobby & advocacy, the “Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society”. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned this independent study to the consultancy company ADE.

This grant instrument is subdivided into five grant instruments, including Leading from the South (LFS). Under this grant instrument, funding has been made available for civil society organisations from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2025. After a selection procedure in 2020, a total number of 46 partnerships started their 5-year programme in over 65 countries¹. The meta-evaluation covers the MTRs of the 42 partnerships and four LFS funds. It has three main objectives:

1. Assess the quality of the MTRs, and disaggregate them according to the overall level of confidence.
2. Synthesise from (sections of) MTRs with a sufficient level of confidence the findings and lessons learned per grant instrument and per confidence disaggregation level.
3. Formulate lessons and recommendations to inform the remainder of the policy framework and the development of future ones.

This report contains the following sections:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the methodological approach used to carry out this meta-evaluation as well as a discussion of the limitations, avoidance of bias and approaches to risk management.
- Section 3 provides the answers to the Evaluation Questions (under objectives 1 and 2).
- Section 4 presents the overall draft conclusions.
- Section 5 presents the preliminary recommendations (related to objective 3).

The Annexes provide detailed information, including: the Terms of Reference, the assessment and extraction grids, and the SCS theory of change.

The report is concisely written, in line with ToR requirements.

¹ Notably, a total of 63 countries is referred to in the MTRs, the two countries making up the difference were not identified.

1.2. The Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society

The SCS grant instrument is divided in five grant instruments focusing on strengthening civil society and lobby and advocacy. They are included in the table below also indicating the number of partnerships.

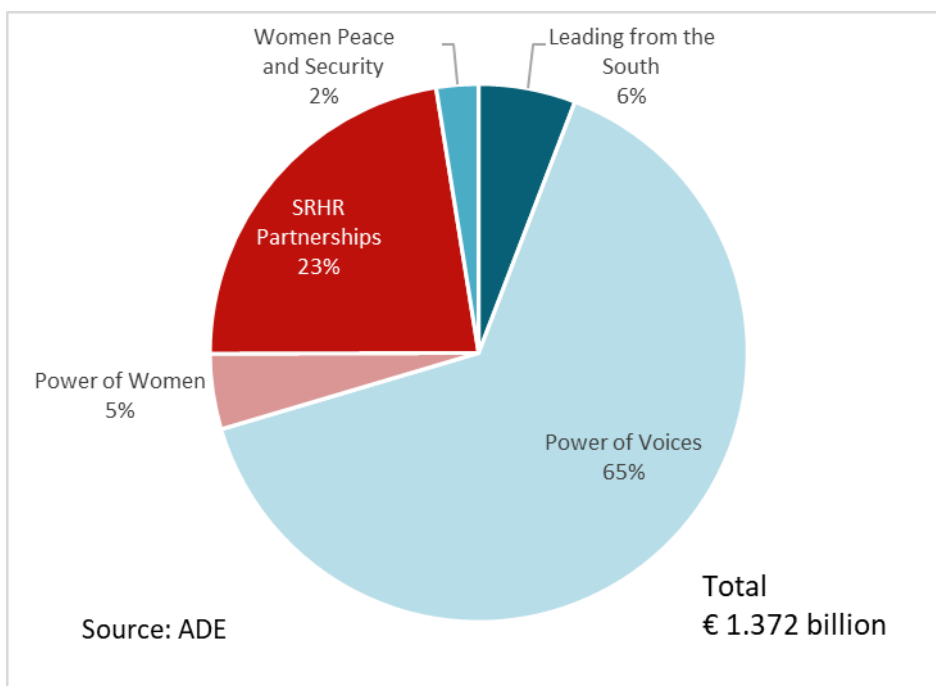
Table 1. Type of grants and partnerships/grant

Grant	Number of partnerships
Power of voices	22
Power of Women	6
Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights Partnership Funds	7
Women Peace and Security	7
Leading from the South	4

Source: ADE

The total SCS budget amounted to EUR 1.372 billion. This was allocated through five instruments, with by far the largest share of the support allocated to the Power of Voices instrument (54%), as shown in Figure 1 below. The SCS was implemented in 63 countries. The top 20 countries had at least five different consortia active in the country, with the most targeted countries being Kenya and Uganda. In more than ten countries, there are seven partnerships or more, even up to 21.

Figure 1. Budget share by instrument.



Grant	Sum of the budget per grant instrument
Power of voices	80 million EUR
Power of Women	885 million EUR
Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights Partnership Funds	62 million EUR
Women Peace and Security	308 million EUR
Leading from the South	34 million EUR

Source: ADE

More than half of the partnerships had a budget above EUR 25 million and 20% above EUR 50 million.

Figure 2. Partnership's budget (in million EUR).

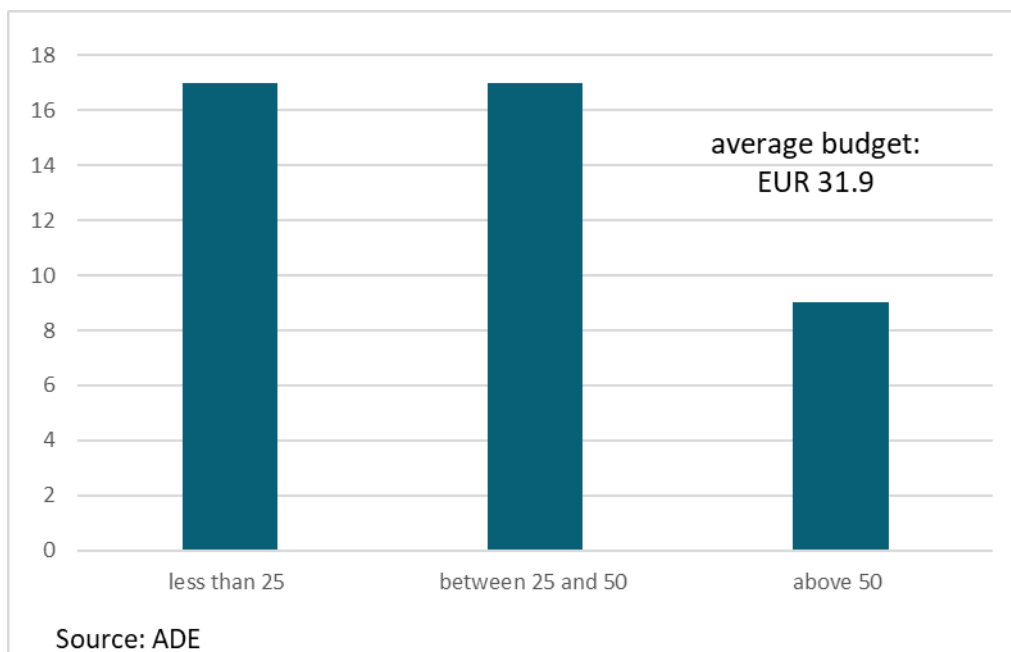


Table 2. Number of consortia active by country, top 20 countries.

Country	Occurrences
Kenya	25
Uganda	25
Ethiopia	18
Indonesia	15
Mozambique	14
Burkina Faso	11
Mali	11
Nigeria	11
Tunisia	11
Lebanon	10
Occupied Palestinian Territories	10
Bangladesh	9
Ghana	9
India	9
Burundi	8
Congo, Dem. Rep.	8
Jordan	8
South Sudan	8
Egypt, Arab Rep.	7
Iraq	7
Myanmar	5

Source: ADE

2. Methodology

2.1. Brief overview of the methodology

The Terms of Reference (ToR) outlined specific evaluation questions (EQs) to be addressed for each of the three principal objectives of this meta-evaluation (7 for objective 1; 14 for objective 2; and 2 for objective 3). The study is based on a review of the 46² Mid-Term Reviews (MTRs) provided by the strategic partnerships' consortia to the MFA as part of their reporting requirements, as well as the Terms of Reference of these MTRs when these were provided. As requested by the MFA, no interviews were conducted by the evaluators and the present final report is hence based only on a desk review.

A conclusionary validation session on the findings of this study took place with key stakeholders and served to complement the findings presented in the present report. A meeting with the Reference Group established for this meta-evaluation took place after the validation session.

As foreseen in the Inception report, the methodology applied relied on a series of steps to assess the quality of the MTRs (objective 1), synthesise their findings (objective 2) and provide recommendations (objective 3). The table below summarises the planned methodological approach, including a few changes made to it.

Table 3. Overview of the methodological approach

Objective 1: Assessment of MTRs and disaggregation
<p>Step 1: Assessing MTRs in terms of quality / level of confidence.</p> <p>1.1 The team constructed an Assessment grid to screen MTRs and assess confidence in reported results. Assessment criteria were based on the guidance document provided by MFA to the partnerships and the evaluation criteria of the MFAs Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB). The grid defined <i>what</i> was to be examined and how it was to be assessed. What was examined was based on: 1) the criteria provided in the MFA guidance; 2) the subjects to be covered by the EQs under objective 1 and 2; 3) the IOB evaluation quality criteria. The <i>how</i> of the assessment was based on the logic of the IOB evaluation criteria, i.e., defining required conditions for a specific criterion to be considered good, adequate or inadequate. This was intended to serve to build inclusion / exclusion criteria, which would allow the team based on a scoring method to exclude certain reports or parts thereof for the assessment.</p> <p>The grid (presented in Annex 2) was used for assessing and scoring the reports in a consistent and well justified manner. It had a "tick the box" and qualitative approach (leaving room to detail the appreciation).</p> <p>1.2 Clear guidance on how to complete the assessment grid was provided. Grids were tested first on a handful of MTRs randomly selected. During this test, and during the entire review process, reviewers</p>

² The team for the meta-evaluation has received 46 MTRs.

closely interacted, and regular meeting with the team leader and/or quality controller were organised to ensure consistency of the application of the grids among team members.

Step 2: Addressing the seven evaluation questions (EQs):

2.1 The questions were structured by indicators, evaluation methods, and information sources. This was done during the Inception phase and guided the structuring of the assessment grid.

2.2 The team provided an answer to each EQ based on the defined structure and using the outputs from step 1.

Step 3: Disaggregating MTRs based on the level of confidence.

3.1 Based on the assessment grid and scoring method developed during the Inception phase, it was foreseen to disaggregate the MTRs, i.e., identify the reports or sections which have a sufficient level of confidence to answer the questions under Objective 2 below.

However, the assessments of the reports using the criteria agreed during the Inception phase (IOB criteria) showed that the team would have had to exclude most reports, except for two. The team considered that this would lead to exclude reports which, while not meeting IOB criteria or MFA guidance, were assessed by the team to still contain information that was relevant for the synthesis of findings under objective 2. Indeed, a report can contain findings that are sufficiently well substantiated even if the report as a whole or specific sections are not in line with state-of-the-art rules. It appears also that some of the state-of-the-art rules were very (too) strict or demanding. It was hence decided to use all the reports and sections for the synthesis exercise of objective 2 presented hereafter.

Findings of the report were however only used when they were sufficiently relevant, based on reliable and sufficiently triangulated sources and justified based on a clear and convincing argumentation. By relevance we refer to the fact that findings were sufficiently in line with the needs of the meta-evaluation. Findings that were too anecdotal or too much specific to an individual programme were hence not included. The MTR had also to clearly refer to the sources used and make sure several sources were used. A finding needed also to be substantiated, i.e. not just a statement but a statement rooted in a clear argumentation, providing the reasons that allowed to make the statement. These elements guided the reviewers to take findings on board or not. The use of the findings throughout the report was furthermore carefully checked by the team leader and the quality controller.

Objective 2: Synthesis of findings and lessons learned per grant and per disaggregation level and identification of data-gaps

Step 4: Gathering findings and lessons learned per grant instrument and per confidence disaggregation level:

4.1 Extraction of relevant information related to the six criteria defined in the ToR (coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, locally led development, and gender, inclusion, and intersectionality).

4.2 Structuration of the 16 EQs under objective 2.

4.3	Based on these outputs, preparation of an “Extraction grid” (see Annex 2); to be used to gather the information relevant to conduct the synthesis, with both a “tick the box” and qualitative approach.
4.4	Development of specific guidance on how to use the extraction grid.
Several evaluation questions requested a disaggregation of findings by grant instrument. The evaluation team conducted such disaggregation systematically. However, this did not always lead to the identification of specific patterns by grant and hence relevant findings in this respect. When such patterns were observed, the information is provided in the report. Other patterns linked to the budget of the evaluations, the processes followed, or the nature of the partnerships were also not observed (see also evaluation question 1.3 in this respect).	
Step 5: Synthesising findings and addressing the EQs related to objective 2	
5.1	Based on the information gathered in the extraction grid, synthesis of findings and answering to the evaluation questions related to objective 2.
Objective 3: Providing recommendations	
Step 6: Formulating recommendations:	
6.1	Formulation of recommendations based on the outputs related to objectives 1 and 2 are well rooted in the findings and conclusions emerging from objectives 1 and 2. The assessment and extraction grids also considered the need to formulate recommendations.
6.2	Animation of a conclusionary validation workshop with key stakeholders before finalising the Final report.

As these sections refer to some key notions, we propose hereunder some operational definitions, aware that other definitions exist, and that any definition is debatable.

Table 4. Key definitions

Term	Definition	Source
Gender	<i>Gender “refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. (...) They are context/ time-specific and changeable.”</i>	European Institute for Gender Equality & UN Women
Inclusion	<i>“Active inclusion means enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job.”</i>	European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion

Intersectionality	<i>Intersectionality "refers to how people in all their diversity embody multiple identities, face intersecting oppressions and suffer differently from the same structural and institutional power imbalances."</i>	IOB Evaluation, Gender mainstreaming in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021
Localisation	<i>"In the humanitarian sector, localisation means empowering local responders in affected countries to lead and deliver humanitarian aid. It aims at strengthening the capacity and resources of local organisations to respond to crises and promote long-term sustainability."</i>	European Commission, DG ECHO
Gender transformative approach	<i>"This means examining, questioning, and changing rigid gender norms and imbalances of power which disadvantage women and girls and generate discriminations at all ages, starting from early childhood, in societies."</i>	European Commission, DG INTPA, EU Gender Action Plan III, 2020
Efficiency	<i>"The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way."</i>	OECD, DAC Criteria
Sustainability	<i>"The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue."</i>	OECD, DAC Criteria
Effectiveness	<i>"The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups." Unintended effects and "what works" (the causal relationship between the programmes and the results/outcomes)."</i>	OECD, DAC Criteria TOR Meta-evaluation

2.2. Limitations, avoidance of bias and risk management

The section summarises what the team considers as challenges and limitations to the meta-evaluation, and what approaches were adopted to avoid bias, and manage risks.

1. First, there is the limitation **linked to the quality of the MTRs themselves**. The entire synthesis dimension of the meta-evaluation is based on secondary sources and information and hence it depends on the quality of these. For certain issues, where there is not sufficient quality, this limited the exercise. The low quality for certain dimensions provides a useful finding for the evaluation, as the answers to the respective evaluation questions and conclusions illustrate.
2. Another limitation is linked to the fact that the **MTRs are reviews at programme level**, whilst the meta-evaluation aims to provide an assessment and draw lessons across partnerships, programmes and at policy level. As the meta-evaluation is based on secondary information only, much of the information available is programme specific and sometimes anecdotal, making it difficult to bridge the gap with a more strategic, global assessment. In this sense, the sum of individual reviews does not equal a global review. Another challenge was to make sure that the evaluation **maintained the right focus given the amount of information requested. The meta-evaluation had a comprehensive ambition**. There are indeed in total for the three objectives, 23 evaluation questions, some of which have several sub-questions. Moreover, for many of these questions, many IOB criteria needed to be verified. The tools have been designed with a view to optimize the management of such large amounts of information, notably by a tick the box approach, and by making sure that the indicators, per question, are limited in number and not unnecessarily multiplied. It was hence important to always make sure that the focus was maintained on what the evaluation was looking for, avoiding that the exercise became too “theoretical”. The team adopted a pragmatic approach, making sure it could identify sufficient useful information for the synthesis, even when a report was not strong on certain aspects.
3. An additional challenge that had been anticipated and that materialised is a **discrepancy between the technical nature of the requirements** (as expressed notably in the IOB criteria) **and the extent to which reports have taken on board such technical aspects** and have done so explicitly. It was often difficult to decide, based on the information contained even in a ‘good’ report, whether the expectations as expressed in the detailed (IOB) criteria of the assessment grid and the criteria of the extraction grid were really met. Some of the requirements expressed too high technical expectations compared to what was included in the reports. In this sense, the **completion of the grids was not always so straightforward using a mere “yes or no” approach**. The team, therefore, expressed compliance with a criterion or the lack thereof using the options of: ‘yes’; ‘probably yes’; ‘probably no’; ‘no’.
4. It was also important **to avoid bias**, and notably the evaluator bias. Indeed, reports both in terms of assessment and synthesis were examined in parallel by different reviewers. It was important to make sure that judgements on the reports and on the usefulness of information were as objective as possible. Several elements in the proposed approach aimed at avoiding such bias:

- a) First, there was the **entire structuring of the exercise**, which defined indicators for each evaluation question and criterion to be used (and how to appreciate them) for both the assessment and the extraction grid. This common structure and notably the use of IOB evaluation criteria ensured a common, non-biased approach.
 - b) To avoid bias by individual team members analysing the reports, **several initiatives in terms of work process** were foreseen: (i) The Team leader provided specific guidance / training to team members; (ii) Team members worked in parallel and in close interaction with each other to make sure they coordinated if there were questions in terms of potential bias; (iii) The Team leader was available to act as a 'helpdesk' when a team member was not clear on how to complete a criterion. The Team leader also checked the outputs provided, notably to make sure there was no bias; (iv) During the pilot assessments, Team members compared and discussed their findings to ensure alignment. Finally, the Quality controller also checked the outputs for possible bias.
5. A final important challenge was the **timeframe**, as noted at the start of this study. The timing for this comprehensive meta-evaluation was very short as shown also in the calendar drafted in line with the requirements of the ToR. It was about 10 weeks (starting in December) between the approval of the Inception report and the submission of the draft Final report. The team has drawn the attention of the Reference group to this issue but understood also that there were important constraints in terms of timing. The reports have been delivered in line with the calendar.

3. Responses to the Evaluation Questions

This section contains the answers to the evaluation questions. Section 3.1 covers the questions of Objective 1, while section 3.2 concerns the questions of Objective 2. For reasons of readability and conciseness, the questions have in some cases been regrouped. The Recommendations (objective 3) are covered in section 5. The findings are mostly presented at a global level covering all grants. They are only differentiated by grant when results vary significantly from one grant to another³.

Several evaluation questions requested a disaggregation of findings by grant instrument. The evaluation team conducted such disaggregation systematically. However, this did not always lead to the identification of specific patterns by grant and hence relevant findings in this respect. When such patterns were observed, the information is provided in the report.

3.1. Objective 1 – Assessment of quality of MTRs

EQ 1.1 Did the methods applied in the MTRs meet the selection of IOB criteria? What evaluation methodologies were used in the evaluation reports? Were the proposed methods adequately applied to answer questions on effectiveness? To what extent have the applied MTR methodologies paid attention to unintended (positive and negative) effects?

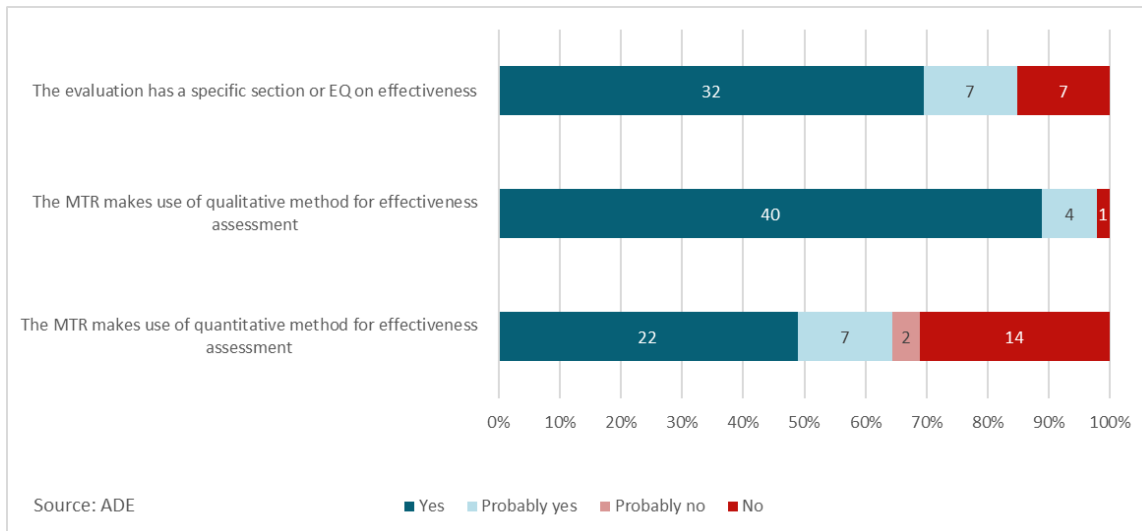
The reports generally addressed effectiveness. Most of the reports used similar methods to assess effectiveness and relied mostly on qualitative methods. At best, these did meet what could be considered 'minimal' IOB criteria. Two of the three most used methods (outcome harvesting and most significant change) are considered by the IOB as less suitable for claims on effectiveness.

As illustrated by the chart below, the MTRs generally (85% of the reports examined) have a **specific section** devoted to the analysis of effectiveness or one or more specific evaluation questions on effectiveness. In seven of the 46 reports examined this was not the case. But here also effectiveness was examined in one way or another, albeit not in a specifically dedicated section or question.⁴

³ Such differences by grant are rarely observed. This is in part also linked to the fact that there only 'Power of Voices' represents 22 partnerships, while the other grants concern four to seven partnerships, which is mostly too little to allow to conclude on different trends by grants, as figures are too small to be representative.

⁴ In some cases, reports had a section titled effectiveness but then under this heading there was no real or only partial information on effectiveness (hence the 'probably yes').

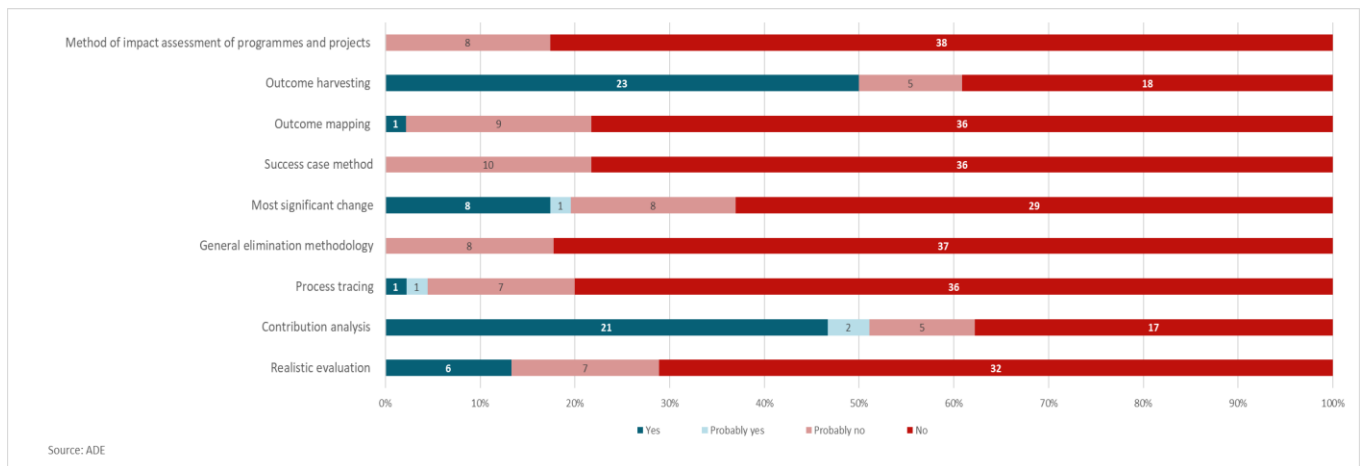
Figure 3. Effectiveness assessment: presence and type of method.



To assess effectiveness, the reports relied more often on qualitative (98%) rather than on quantitative (64%) approaches.

In terms of **qualitative approaches**, most reports referred to the same methods, contribution analysis (51%), outcome harvesting (50%), and most significant change (20%). Other methods were hardly used, as shown by the summary table below.

Figure 4. Effectiveness: qualitative tools used.⁵



The frequent reference to outcome harvesting and most significant change is surprising. Indeed, most significant change is explicitly mentioned by the IOB (referring to the framework created by White and Phillips) as one of the ‘four qualitative methods that are less suitable for substantiating claims of effectiveness’.⁶ This

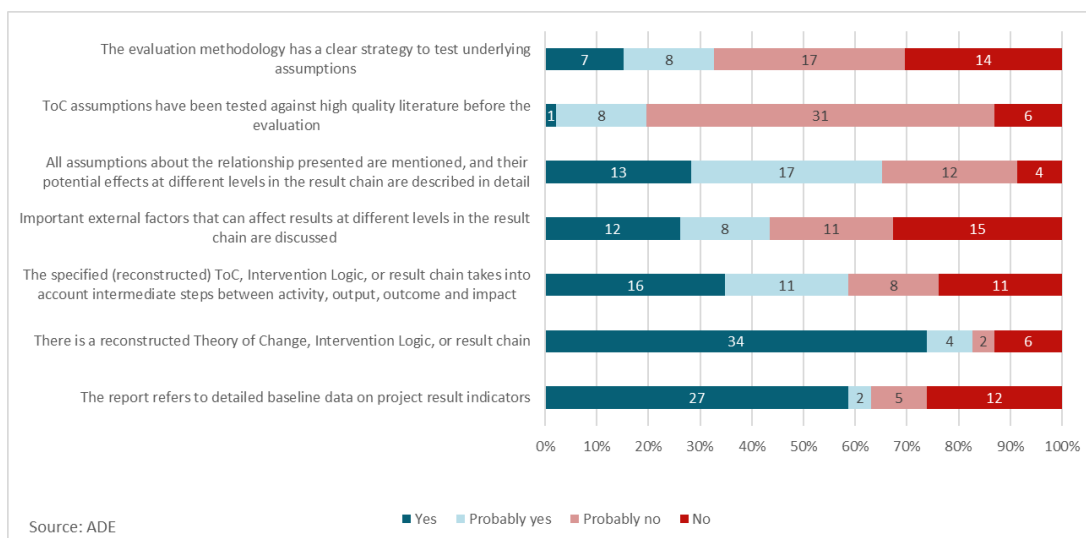
⁵ As elsewhere in the report MTR reviewers have answered ‘probably yes’ or ‘probably no’ when there were some indications that something did or did not occur, but with not enough clarity to take a more clearcut position. As an example, some reports announced a contribution analysis, but further reading left some doubts about whether the approach applied could entirely be qualified as a contribution analysis.

⁶ This does not mean these methods cannot be used or do not have specific advantages. They can help understanding specific mechanisms or illustrate why and how specific changes took place in a given context. Their limit concern specifically the extent

also applies to ‘outcome mapping’. Although this is not identical to outcome harvesting, both are very close, the first one being used during planning and after implementation, whereas the latter is not used during planning, but is rooted in outcome mapping principles.

MTRs referred to Theories of Change, but with weaknesses, most of the reports referred to a reconstructed Theory of Change, intervention logic or results chain (74%). The ToC were of varying quality as appears from Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Quality of the Theories of change

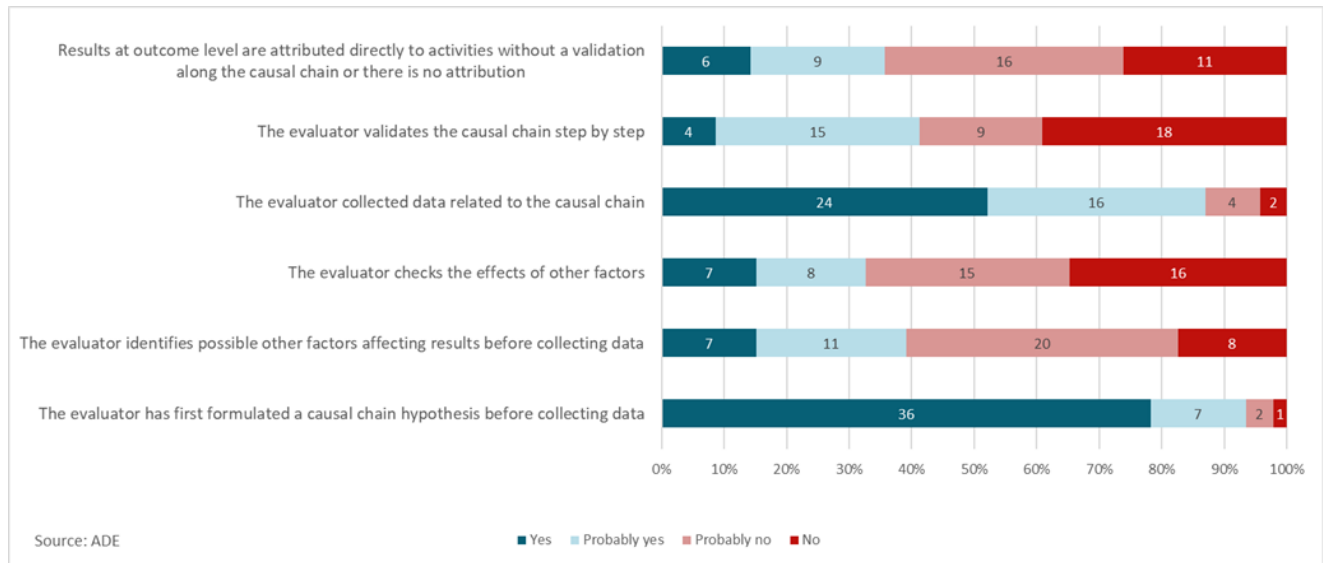


In about 59% of the cases the ToC considered intermediary steps between activity, output, outcome and impact, but they did not in about 41% of the cases. 63% of the MTRs also referred to detailed baseline data on project result indicators. The MTRs also mostly mentioned (2/3 of the cases) the assumptions of the links and described in detail the potential effects at different levels in the results chain. However, generally assumptions had not been tested against quality literature before the evaluation (in about 80% of the cases), and the evaluation had no clear strategy (about 2/3 of the cases) to examine underlying assumptions. External factors that can affect results at different levels in the results chain were not discussed in about 57% of the cases.

Figure 6 concerns the appropriateness of methods for effectiveness assessment. It shows that in 87% of the cases the evaluators collected data related to the causal chain, but it also reveals weaknesses in this respect.

to which they can serve to make general claims. In a context of the MTRs which aim at assessing effectiveness generally they can have their specific use but are not sufficient and would need to be complemented by other methods.

Figure 6. Appropriateness of qualitative methods for effectiveness assessment.

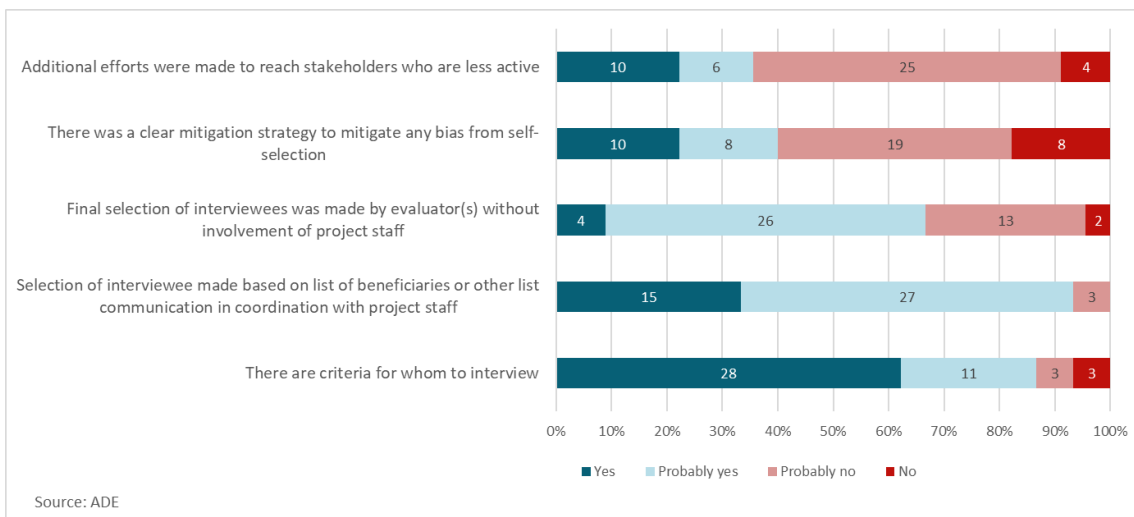


Indeed:

- The evaluator did not validate the causal chain step by step in almost 60% of the cases, and only did this very explicitly in 9% of the cases (41% when counting the less clear cases).
- The effects of other factors were only checked in about 33% of the cases were in about 67% of cases there was no real analysis of other factors; in about 61% of the cases the evaluator did not identify possible other factors affecting results before collecting data.
- In 36% of the cases the link between the activity and the result was not clear.

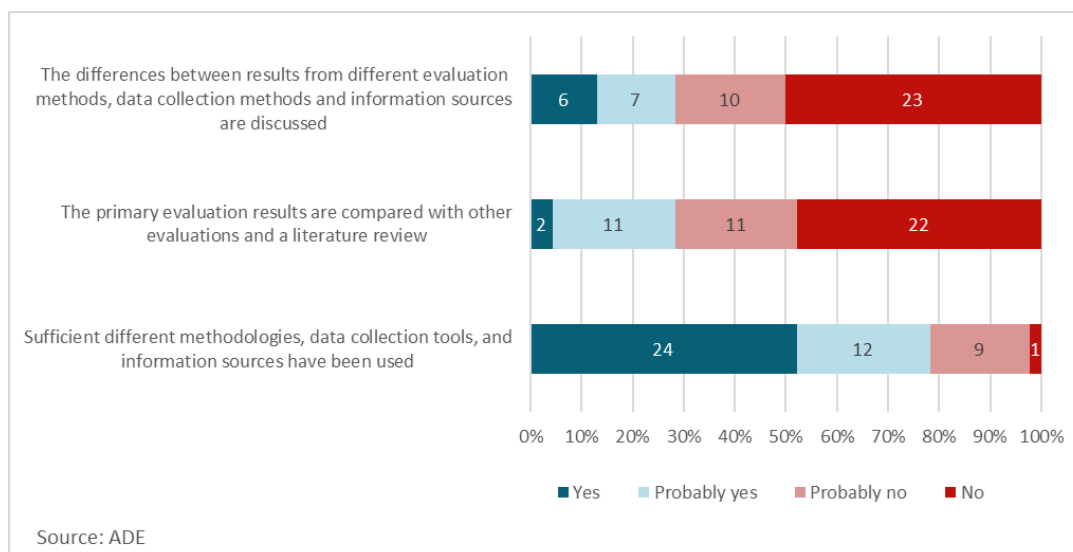
In terms of quality of the evaluation conduct, the approaches were acceptable, without a logic of optimization. For *interviews* for instance, the vast majority (about 87%) of MTRs had clear criteria about whom to interview and how to proceed (see the chart below), even if in most cases there was no mitigation strategy or approach to make sure fewer active stakeholders were reached. But most of the MTRs did not make additional efforts to reach stakeholders who are less active and did not have a clear strategy to mitigate any bias from self-selection.

Figure 7. Interviews.



Similarly, with respect to *triangulation*, the MTR considered that in most cases (78%) sufficient different methodologies, data collection tools, and information sources had been used (with a clear yes in about 52% of these cases), but little was done (in 72% of the MTRs) to discuss differences between results from different evaluation methods or information sources.

Figure 8. Triangulation.

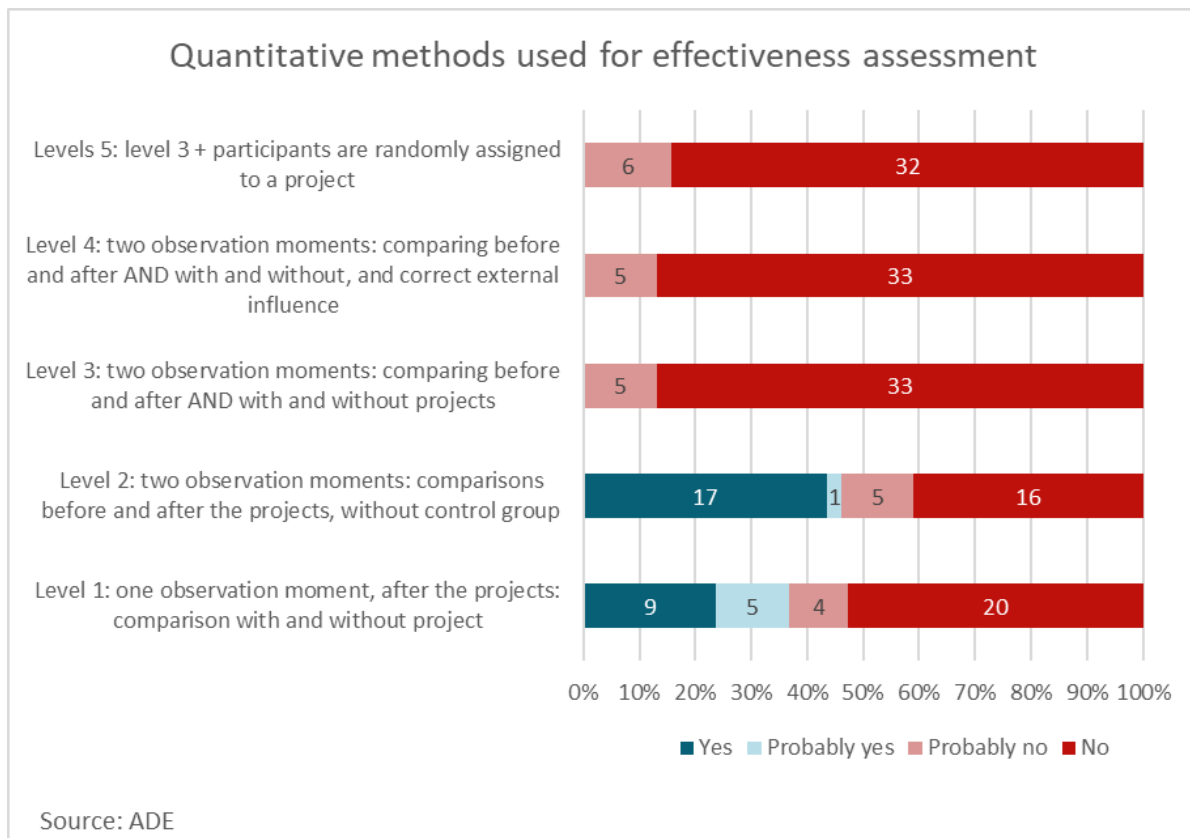


Finally, when it came to case study selection, it appeared that in almost 60% of the cases, the MTRs had not set criteria for the selection of cases studies.

Quantitative approaches used were mostly of level 1 (37%) or level 2 (46%), as shown in figure 9 below. Level 1 consists of one observation moment after the project and a comparison with and without the project; whereas level 2 consists of two observation moments, before and after the project, but without a control group. More complex or 'rigorous' approaches of level 3, 4, and 5 were never applied.

In about two third of the reports, quantitative indicators were linked to different levels in the ToC or results chain.

Figure 9. Quantitative methods used for effectiveness assessment



Several other recurring weaknesses or errors made it difficult to understand the assessment of effectiveness.

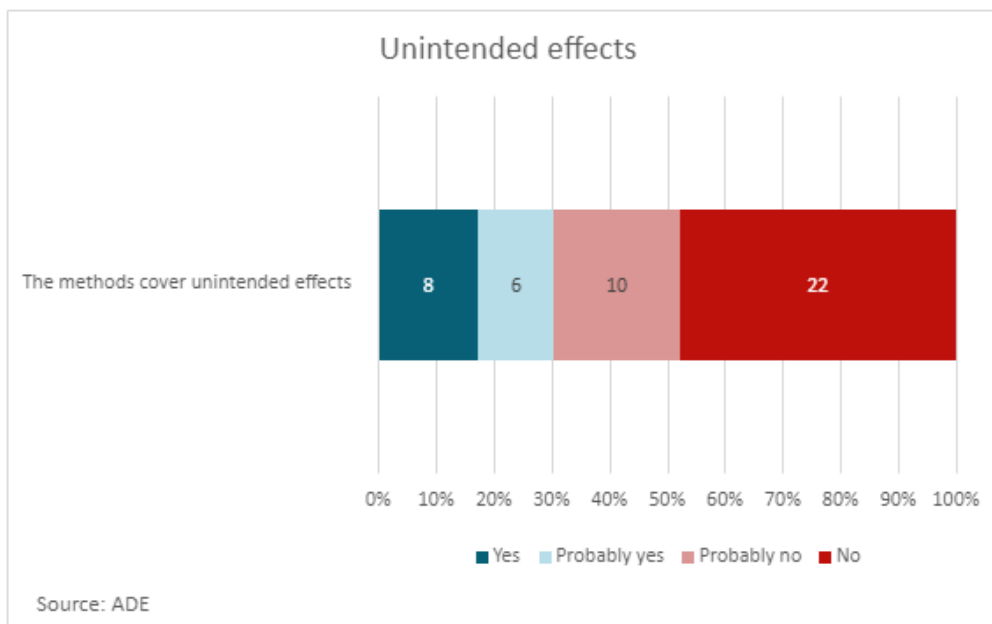
- In many reports, the drafting was cumbersome, with a lack of synthesis;
- There were recurrent reasoning mistakes or weaknesses, for instance:
 - A lack of triangulation with, for instance, a general claim based on just one example;
 - Impact-level claims (for instance regarding changes in terms of laws or at policy level), but without sufficient substantiation in terms of linkage with the intervention;
 - A confusion between findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
- A striking element is the overall absence of a mapping of the funding provided. There are few or no examples of MTRs that provide an overview of the amounts of funding provided, how it has been used, for what priorities, what beneficiaries, in what countries, etc.
- Similarly, MTRs do not provide information on the totality of the partnerships, and their activities in different countries, although this could be considered basic information.

Overall, the MTRs methods devoted little attention to unintended effects.

Indeed, as appears from the graph below, in 70% of the reports unintended effects were not covered. When MTRs referred to unintended effects, this included both positive and negative ones, relevant elements but also elements that were anecdotal, vague or not very relevant. 'Unintended effects' were used as broad

umbrella for different types of elements, which could not always be considered effects of the programmes.⁷

Figure 10. Taking into account unintended effects



EQ 1.2 How did processes surrounding the conduction of the MTRs (planning/ organization and rollout) take shape according to the MTR ToR, inception- and reports? What good /poor practices can be identified with regards to processes surrounding the conduction of the MTRs?

The meta-evaluation focused on the following process for conducting the MTRs⁸:

- The use and clarity of the ToR;
- The timeframe foreseen and its application;
- The requirements in the ToR in terms of Coverage/scope, and of the specific questions or issues to be addressed;
- The budget foreseen;
- Whether the MTR was done externally or internally.

For most of the MTRs, there were ToRs, and these were overall consistent in the type of information they provided, and clear on the requirements.

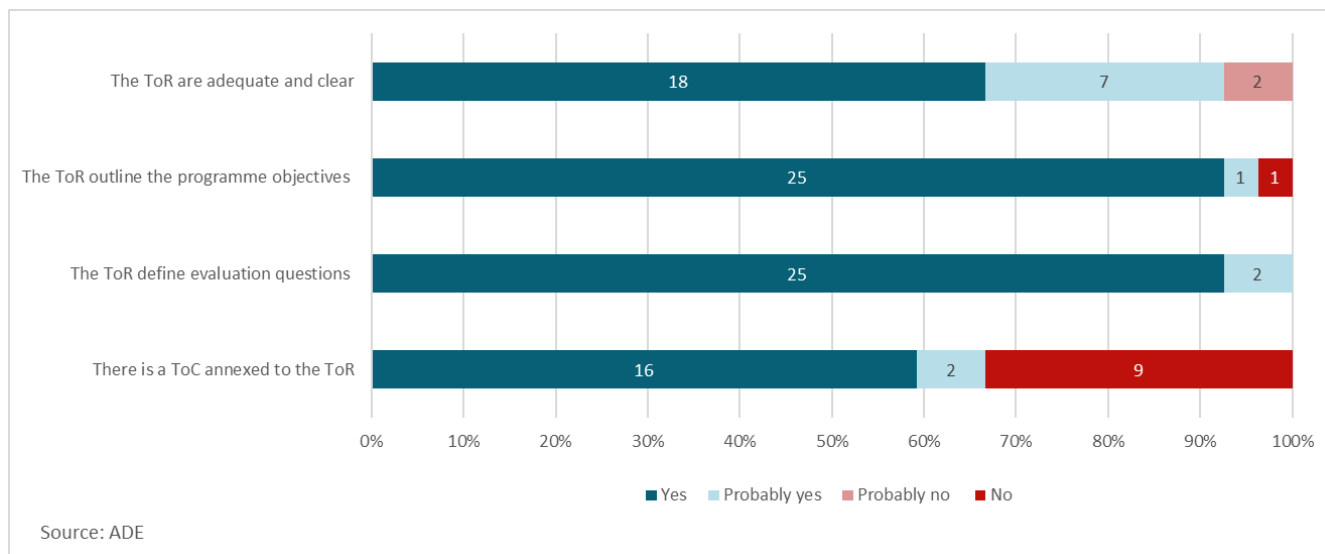
For most of the MTRs, ToRs were available. The meta-evaluation received them for 60% of the MTRs (27/46). As shown in the chart below, the meta-evaluation found the ToRs clear in most (93%) of the cases (25/27), even if in some cases there was more hesitation (seven 'probably yes' answers). Other elements for which there seem to be good practices is the fact that most ToRs outlined programme objectives (one exception);

⁷ Examples of such effects included the empowering of young women to initiate new projects and integrate programme components into other trainings (MTR 36); implementation challenges (MTR 15); more participants than expected (MTR 13).

⁸ The analysis is based on the MTRs and the available TORs of MTRs. Inception reports would only be examined if a specific need arose, but this was not the case.

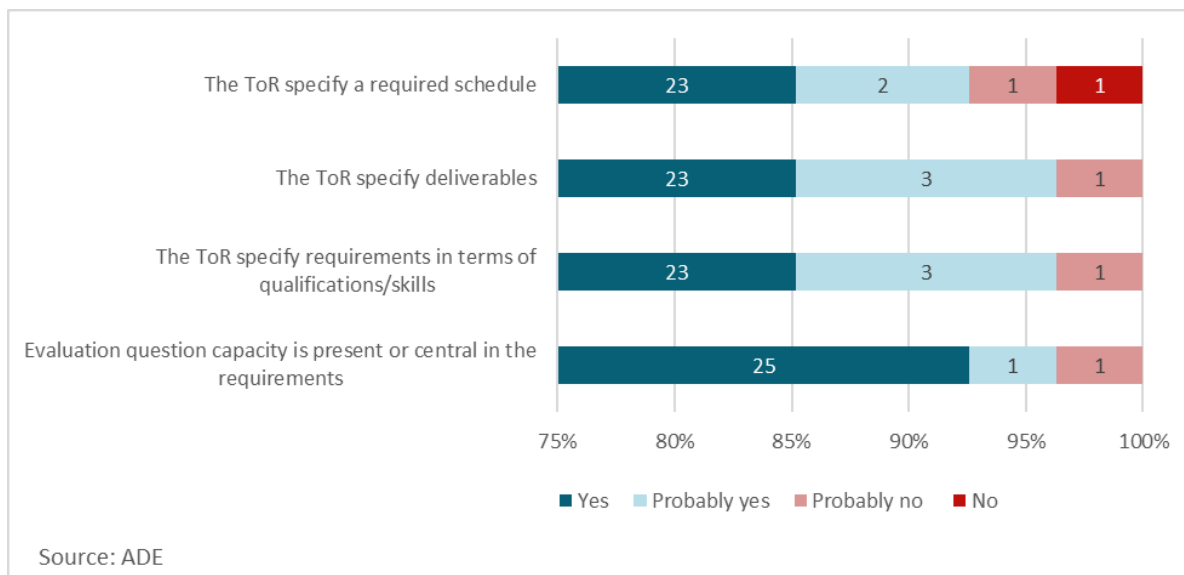
and defined evaluation questions (all, with some unclarity in two cases). In about 67% of the cases a ToC was annexed to the ToRs.

Figure 11. ToR features.



The ToRs were generally coherent in the type elements they specified for the MTRs to follow. As shown in the table below, most of them were clear on the schedule, on the deliverables to be provided, and on the requirements for the team. Under requirements for the team to conduct the MTRs, they strongly emphasized the need for evaluation capacity. This was explicitly required in all but one of the examined ToRs.

Figure 12. ToR requirements.

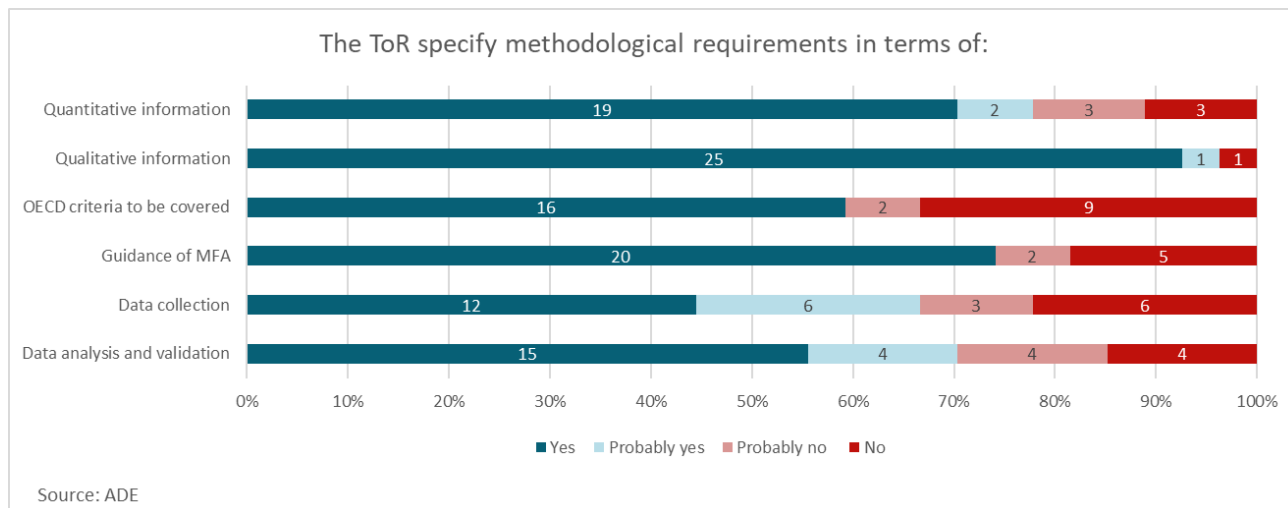


The ToRs also specified, in most cases, what the methodological requirements they had for the MTRs.⁹ The emphasis was mostly on qualitative information (more than 95% of the cases), but there were requirements

⁹ This could concern for instance the need for project teams to “focus on outcome harvesting” (MTR 4) or to provide choices in the inception phase with respect to methods to be used that could include “peer learning review workshops, survey, KIIs, case studies, outcome harvesting, process tracing” (MTR 30).

in terms of quantitative information (78%). However, they were less often clear on the coverage of the OECD DAC criteria (not specified in close to half of the cases) and on requirements in terms of data collection and data analysis and validation (not specified in around 33% of the cases).

Figure 13. ToR specific methodological requirements.



Although overall clear, the requirements of the ToRs were very ambitious, and with insufficient strategic focus. Furthermore, they also not always specified on what issues to concentrate.

- The number of evaluation questions to be covered was in some cases very high. There is no absolute rule that defines a specific standard for the number of evaluation questions to be covered. But often figures between 5 and 10 questions are invoked to clarify the expectations, while making sure the evaluation remains geared to priority or strategic issues. In most cases, there were at maximum 10 questions. But in 44% of the available ToRs (12 of the 27 cases) there were more than 10 EQs, with in half of those 15 or more EQs (up to 32).¹⁰
- The average contract duration was 7 months, with durations varying between 2 and 13 months. In most cases (85% or 27 reports displaying this information), the duration was of maximum 8 months, with nearly half (47%) in less than 6 months. About 1/4 of the MTRs were conducted in less than 6 months. Several reports mentioned challenges with the duration of the evaluation. These were linked to the fact that not only the total period was short but that the Inception phase was delayed, leaving very little time for data collection.

Table 5. Contract duration

	Contract duration (in months)						Total
	2-4	4-6	6-8	8-10	10-12	12-14	
Number of MTRs	5	10	12	1	3	1	32
Share of total	16%	31%	38%	3%	9%	3%	

¹⁰ It is striking to note that despite these requests in terms of evaluation questions, in some reports the questions were in fact not explicitly addressed as such.

Country visits were explicitly required in about half of the ToRs available, with between three (with one exception where only one visit was required) and nine visits to be conducted. Considering the duration and budget (cf. below) of the MTRs this can be considered a high number.

Most evaluations were done by external reviewers (82%), some with a mixed approach (16%), and only exceptionally in-house (1 case).

Budgets varied strongly and were often not commensurate to the requirements and below what could be consider common practices.

The average budget of the MTRs in the available ToRs was of EUR 69,000. The amounts varied strongly between 15k (for a mixed approach) and 151k. The table below shows the number of MTRs by tranche of 30k. As shown, almost half (46%) of the reports for which the information is available had a budget of 60k or below, while only 20% had a budget higher than 90k.

Table 6. MTR budget

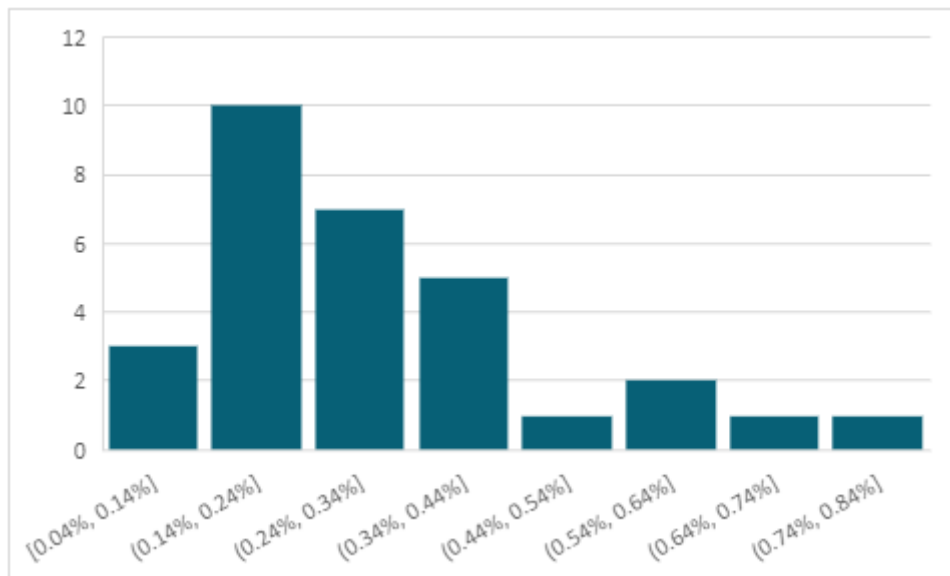
	MTR budget (in 1000 EUR)					Total
	0-30k	30-60k	60-90k	90-120k	120-150k	
Number of MTRs	4	10	11	2	4	31
Share of total	13%	33%	35%	6%	13%	

These budgets were not really commensurate with the tasks to be implemented.

Moreover, as shown in figure 14 below, none of the MTRs had a budget that was above 0,84% of the programme amount, and 2/3 of them had a budget that was less than 0,44% of the budget of the evaluated programme. The budgets for the MTRs were in nearly 50% of the cases for which information was available of maximum EUR 60,000. Even if there is no gold standard, this is low both in absolute and relative terms. Some donors foresee between 1 and 3% of project or programme funding for evaluation¹¹. Even if the above figures concern only the MTRs (hence not the entire evaluation cycle), they remain below these targets, and at best approximate the lowest level.

¹¹ USAID for instance states that it 'will devote approximately 3 percent of total program dollars, on average, to external performance and impact evaluation. This is distinct from resources dedicated to monitoring' (<https://www.usaid.gov/pmp-budget>). Similarly, The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia suggests allocating approximately 1-2% of the total project budget for evaluation purposes. This allocation is aimed at ensuring accountability, learning, and improvement within Australia's aid programs.

Figure 14. Budget for the MTR as a share of the overall programme budget



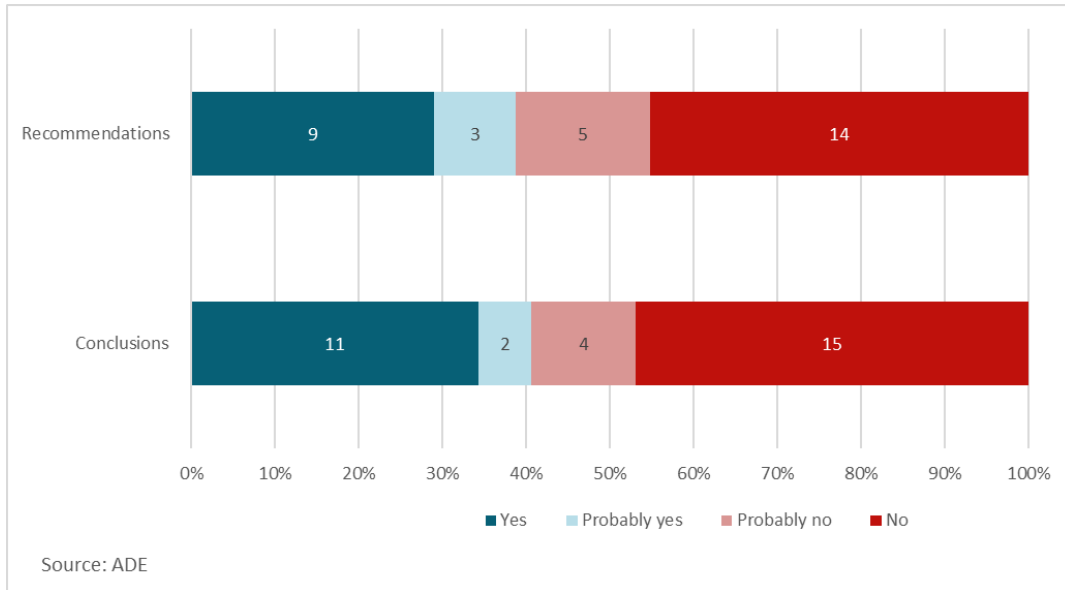
EQ1.3 Do patterns exist in the level of confidence regarding findings and effectiveness regarding processes; budget/size of partnerships and its interventions; location(s) of partnerships programme(s); type of consortium lead organisation; MTRs conducted by partnerships themselves or an independent party?

The meta-evaluation has not been able to identify specific patterns as referred to in evaluation question 1.3. This is linked in the first place to the fact that the level of confidence for the reports overall and for specific sections was low across the board. Indeed, as explained in the section on methodology, only two reports met the thresholds in terms of compliance with the predefined quality criteria. In that context, it has not been possible to detect patterns. The team has also attempted to nevertheless link notably the budgets with several quality criteria, but here also no specific patterns were observed.

EQ1.4 How and to what extent is efficiency dealt with in the MTRs?

Most of the MTRs had no specific section or evaluation questions related to efficiency. But efficiency issues were regularly addressed in one way or another in the MTRs. Indeed, only 22% of the MTRs (10 on 46) had a specific section on efficiency. In 78% of the cases there was not such section. This is not to say that the MTRs did not address efficiency issues. Indeed, reports addressed them regularly, but more indirectly or as part of other analyses. In a few cases, it was not clear whether efficiency was addressed. As noted by one reviewer: *'it is not clear whether efficiency is really addressed, although the term appears in the text about 20 times'*. Similarly, and in the same logic, most of the reports had no conclusions or recommendations on efficiency, as summarised in the graph below.

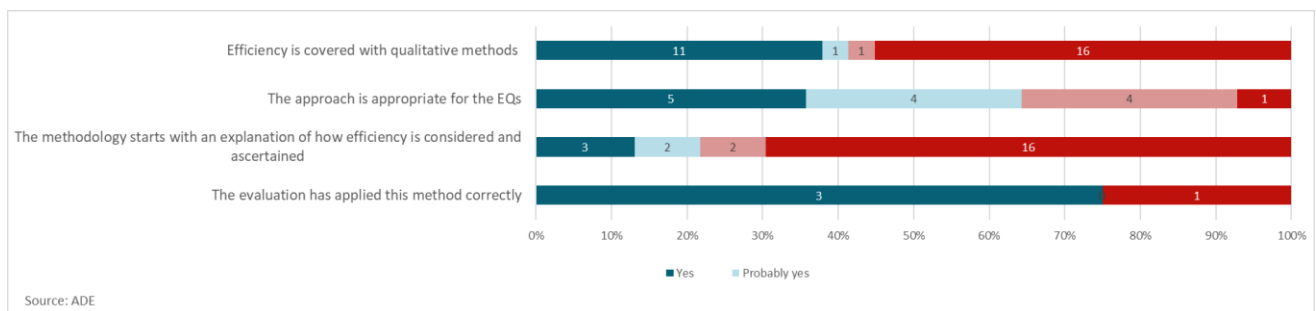
Figure 15. Share of MTRs with conclusions and recommendation on efficiency:



When analysing efficiency, the MTRs often used qualitative approaches more than quantitative ones. But in both cases, there were methodological flaws. Efficiency was covered with ‘qualitative methods’ in 59% of the MTRs, with quantitative methods used in fewer than 1/4 of the cases.

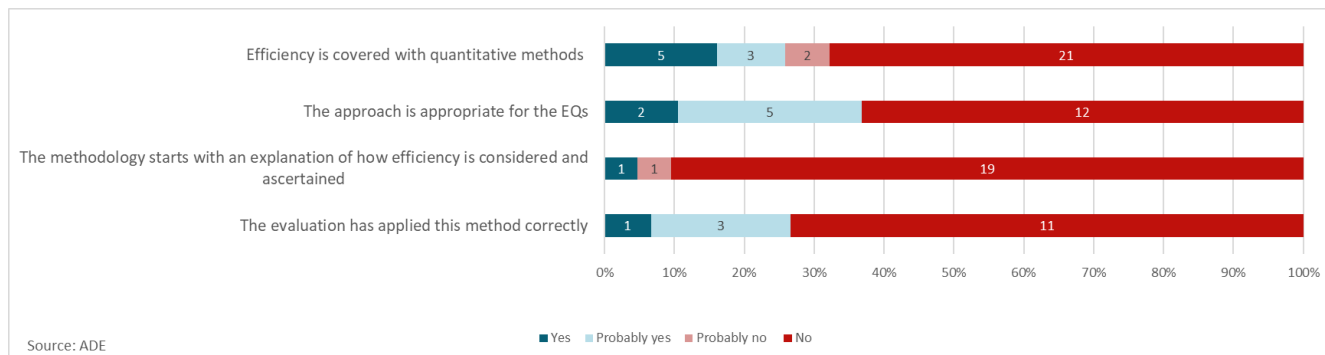
With respect to the qualitative approaches, the MTRs were in most cases not very explicit on how they intended to assess efficiency. The meta-evaluation considered that approaches were ‘probably’ appropriate, and methods ‘probably’ well applied. As shown in the graph below, more than 80% of the MTRs did not explain how efficiency was considered. In most cases methods were considered appropriate and well applied, but with hesitation. This means that only a minority of reports were clear on their methods, so that it was difficult for the MTR reviewer to have a firm judgment.

Figure 16. Efficiency: typology of qualitative methods.



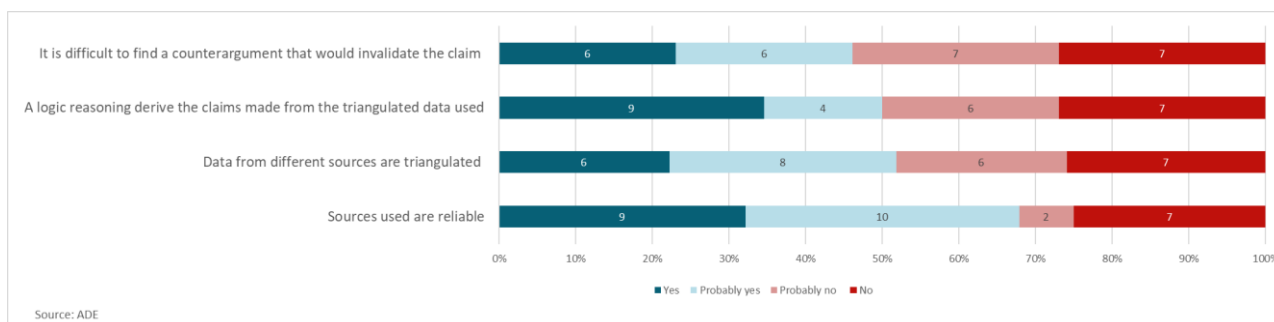
As for the quantitative approaches, they were applied in 8 MTRs, but these did not start with explaining how they would have proceeded to assess efficiency.

Figure 17. Coverage of efficiency with quantitative methods.



Overall, the meta-evaluation found that claims with respect to efficiency were convincing in about 1/3 of the MTRs. As shown in the table below, the review showed that in about 13 of the MTRs (on a total of 27 reviewed on efficiency), a logical reasoning derived the claims from the triangulated data used. In even more cases sources were considered reliable (19) and triangulated (14). But reviewers also specified that they found claims unclear or often anecdotal.¹² For half of the MTRs concerned, reviewers found that it would be difficult (or probably difficult) to find a counterargument to invalidate the claim; while they found the opposite for the other half.

Figure 18. Quality of the assessment of efficiency.



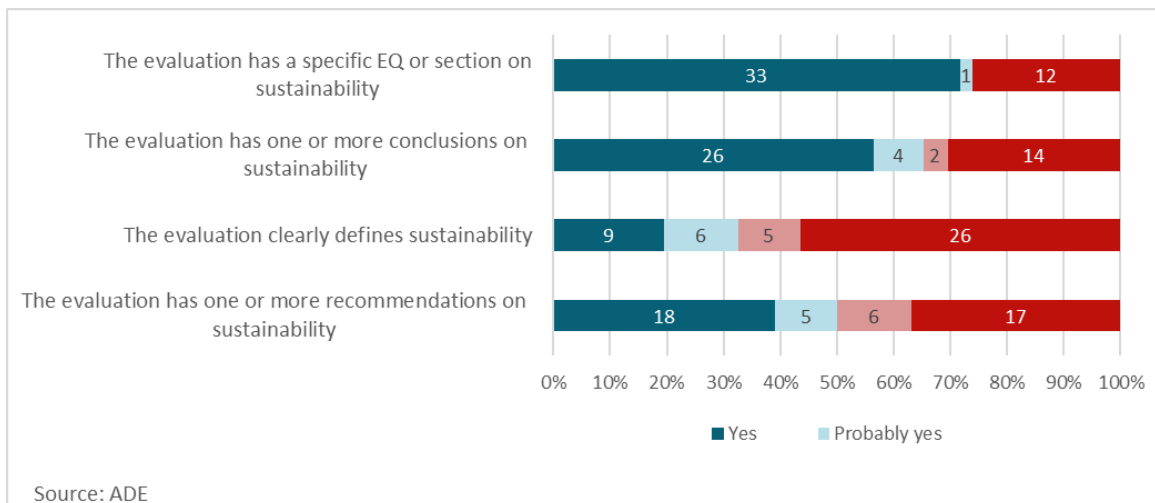
EQ1.5 How is progress towards sustainability conceptualized, measured, and evaluated in the MTRs?

The MTRs generally addressed the issues of sustainability, even if they did not provide a clear definition of the issue. Indeed, about 74% of the MTRs (34/46) had a specific section or evaluation question on sustainability. 65% of them provided one or more conclusion on sustainability, and half of them provided recommendations on the subject matter. Only about 1/3 of the reports supplied a clear definition on the concept of sustainability¹³.

¹² Reports even when they deal with efficiency are not very explicit on the way they analyse it. Statements may be relevant, but explanations on the approach chosen remain minimal. The following quote is an illustration of what seems a reasonable statement, but not grounded in a systematic methodological approach: 'On the other hand, the delays experienced during Year 1 were influenced by both external factors such as the pandemic and internal factors including staff turnover and accountability measures.' (MTR 36).

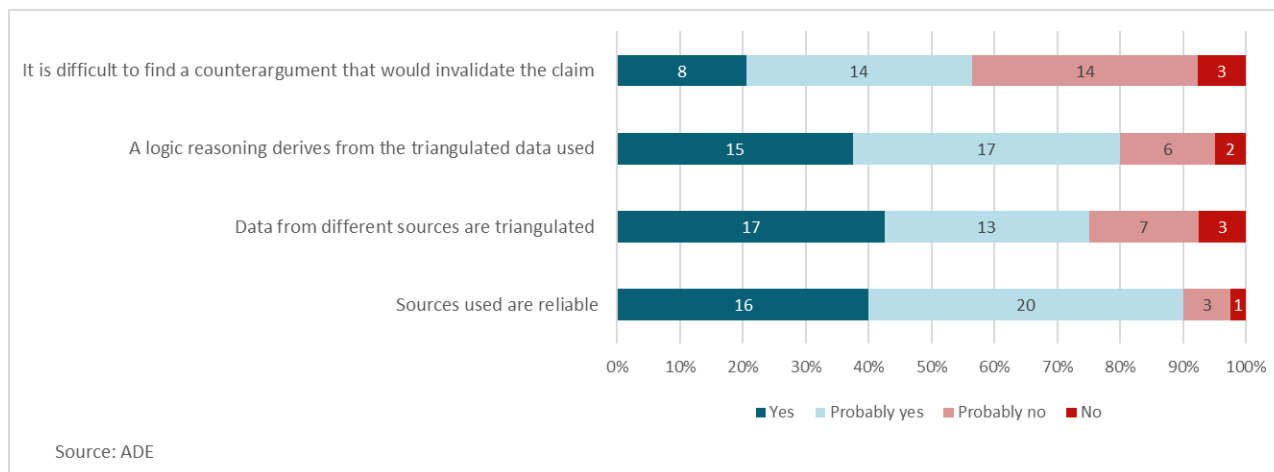
¹³ Examples of such definitions are: 'the extent to which programme outcomes (improvements in fair value chains), as well as partners' efforts to continue working towards fairer value chains, are likely to last beyond the programme.' (MTR 8); 'At the sustainability dimension, the evaluation addressed the gender equality achievement sustained after the intervention, the internal

Figure 19. Coverage of sustainability.



In most cases, the MTRs considered the sustainability analysis to be based on reliable and triangulated sources, which nourished a logic reasoning, even if a substantial number considered that it was not so difficult to find counterarguments to invalidate claims. The meta-evaluation found that sources used were reliable, data has been triangulated in most cases and that a logic reasoning was derived from the triangulated data used. Most found that it was difficult to find counterarguments to invalidate claims but still about 44% found that this was possible. Here also reviewers specified that claims were often vague, not very strong.

Figure 20. Quality of the coverage of sustainability.



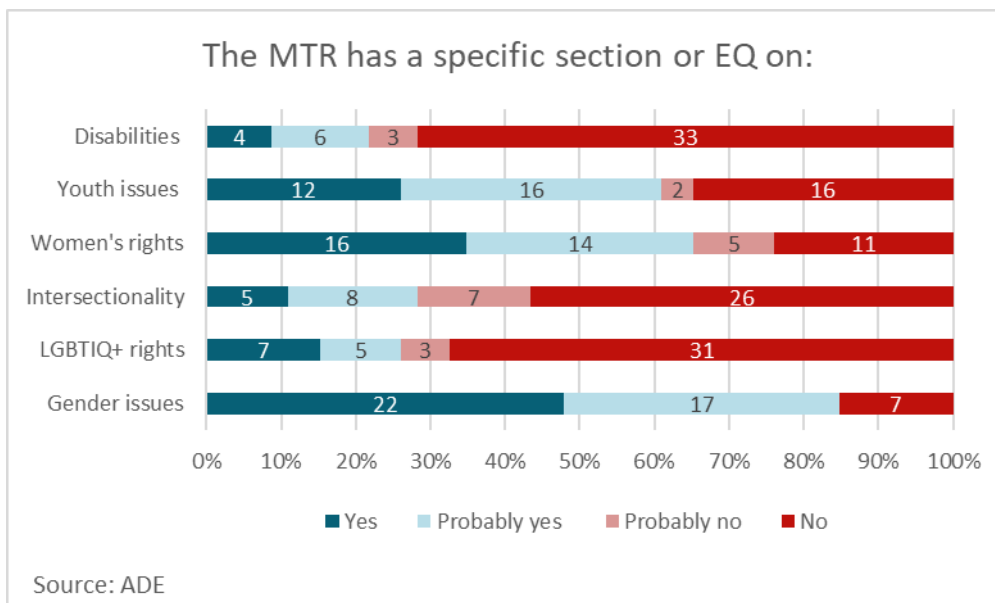
EQ1.6 How are gender, inclusion and intersectionality conceptualized, measured and evaluated in the MTRs?

Most of the MTRs had no specific sections or EQ on gender, inclusion, or intersectionality, but these issues were nevertheless addressed. Indeed, between 15 (gender) and 78% (disabilities) did not contain a section or an evaluation question specifically devoted to these subject matters. But that did not mean these subject matters were not addressed in the reports. In fact, these themes were at the heart of many partnerships, so

mechanisms in place to support the achievement of gender equality in the longer term and the contextual factors that supported the impact of the gender results achieved.’ (MTR 9); ‘The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.’ (MTR 11).

that basically the entire initiative and hence also the MTR concerns them without treating them as a specific (cross-cutting) theme in the context of a broader intervention.

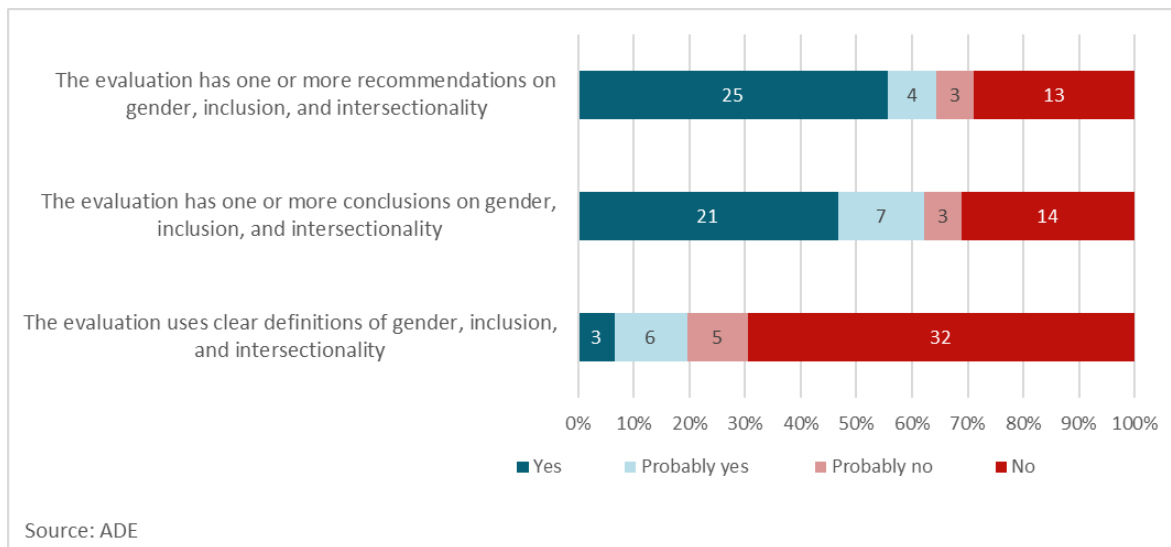
Figure 21. Coverage of cross-cutting issues.



About 60% of the MTRs had conclusions and/or recommendations on gender, inclusion, and intersectionality. The MTRs reviewed showed that in most cases the MTRs **did not use clear definitions** of gender, inclusion, and intersectionality. In fact, reviewers considered that only three of the 46 reports had clear definitions in this respect (and some may even give rise to discussion).¹⁴

¹⁴ MTR 21 states in this respect: "Throughout the programme, we apply a gender and inclusive lens that takes into account and/or examines: power relations and gender inequality; patriarchy as a system of oppression that organises our societies; how systems of oppression work together (intersectionality) to limit and impact the ability of different social groups, especially women, to control resources, voice opinions and make decisions, etc; how violence is used as a tool of control against women; and why and how women are differentially impacted by the challenges we work on and their roles in building and strengthening solutions and alternatives." MTR 26 defines intersectionality as follows: "Women are not a homogenous group and can experience multiple forms of discrimination (including based on race, caste, class, age, health status, social status, sexual orientation and gender identity, health status, etc.), which combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of individuals or groups in situations of marginalisation."

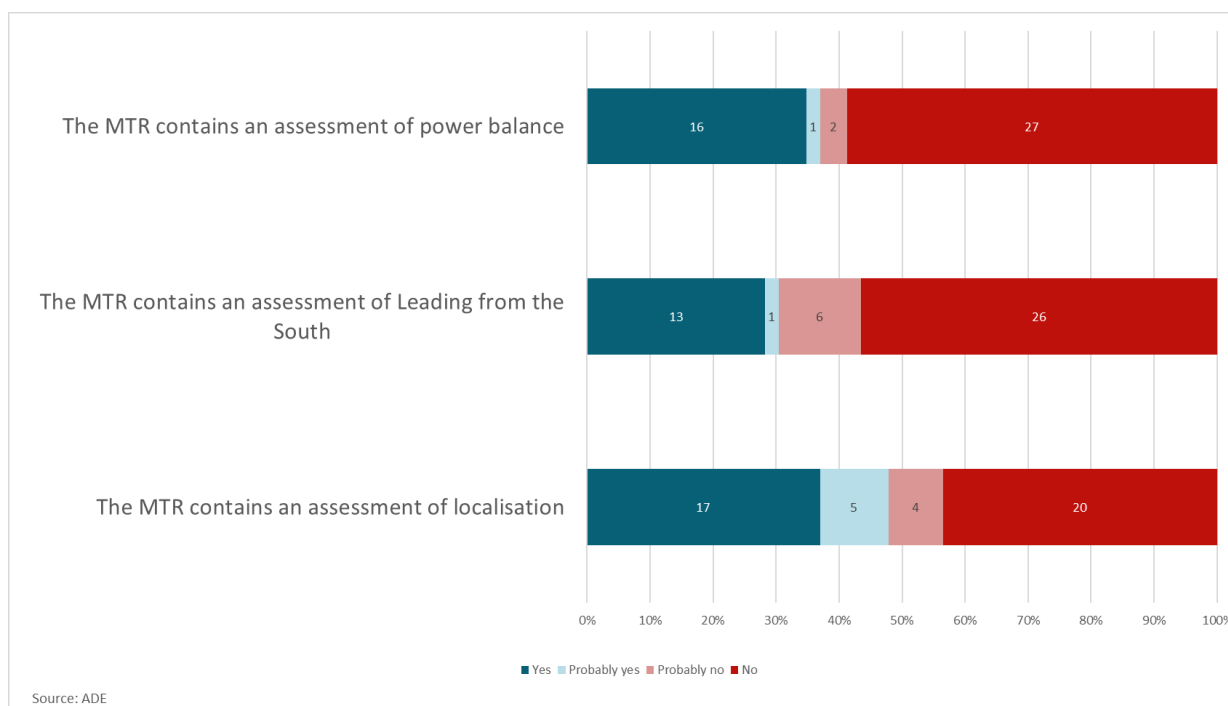
Figure 22. Coverage of cross-cutting issues in conclusions and recommendations.



EQ1.7 How was localisation conceptualized, measured, and evaluated in the MTRs?

As shown in the graph below, about half of the MTRs included an assessment of strategic partnerships on localisation, power balance or leading from the South. This took place indeed in respectively 22, 17, and 14 of the MTRs.

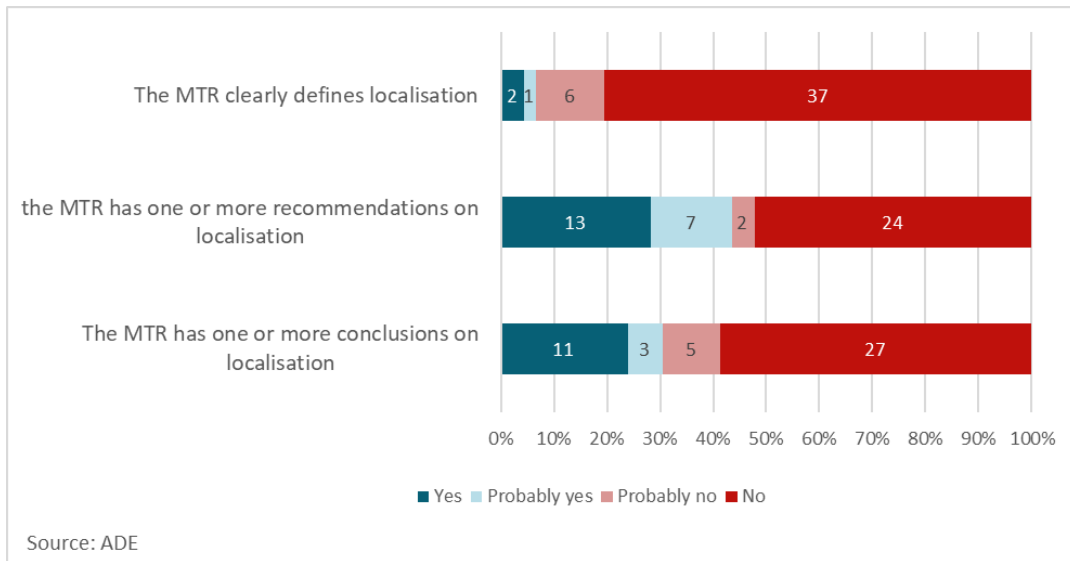
Figure 23. Coverage of aspects of partnership assessment.



The MTRs did not provide a clear definition of localization. In 37 cases reviewers indicated there was no clear definition and in six cases the stated there was 'probably no' clear definition. But even among those who gave a positive answer (three, including a 'probably yes'), definitions were very weak, and can in fact not be considered as clear definitions. For instance, MTR 6 conceptualized localization as localization of

development, but did not explore the topic further. Most reports (69%) did not conclude on localisation.

Figure 24. Coverage of Localisation in conclusions and recommendations.



3.2. Objective 2 – Synthesis of MTR findings

3.2.1. Coherence

This section covers EQ 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

EQ 2.1 What good-and/or poor practices and lessons learned, in achieving synergy and good collaboration for joint results, within partnerships, between partnerships, and with other stakeholders can be identified? Are there examples of added value of coordination between different partnerships?
EQ 2.2 Did partnerships coordinate with other partnerships under the SCS policy framework and/or with external actors? If so, how and with who(m) did coordination take place, what explains their need to coordinate, and what explains the level of success of coordination efforts?
EQ 2.3 Did the lobby and advocacy work by SCSs SPs complement the diplomacy work of the NL MFA and how is complementarity or non-complementarity of the lobby and advocacy work explained?

Summary response:

- Partnerships were generally constituted based on complementarity, showcasing strong collaboration and coordination within partnerships.
- However, there was a strong will to improve it further. Coordination challenges included issues with the lead organisation's role and interaction, as well as language issues. Synergies within partnerships remained meagre.
- Despite the significant potential for synergy, only a small number of partnerships have pursued collaboration with other SCS partnerships.
- Limited complementarity is reported between the work of implementing partners and the diplomacy efforts of the MFA.
- An encouraging part of the programmes coordinated with various external stakeholders.
 - a. Coordination within partnerships

Overall, partnerships were based on complementarity and that there was a good collaboration and coordination within partnerships.

The collaboration within partnerships was overall strong, as reflected by in 85% of the MTRs that indicated that partners actively engaged in coordination. There was notable improvement during the first phase, spanning 2.5 years, while partners learned and adapted throughout this first phase. But this is also because the programmes faced a challenging pandemic context at the beginning of the implementation, hampering coordination. Collaboration varied across different levels – national, regional, or global – with no consistent pattern observed. Coordination mostly consisted in sharing experience, best practices (MTR 3), and skills via joint learning sessions for instance, as well as in the shared allocation of technical and financial resources. Some MTRs highlighted the role of specific units within partnerships - like steering committees – that

facilitated effective collaboration.

"Collaboration within the programme is also manifest in the Communities of Practice (CoPs) on digitalisation, comprehensive sexuality education, dealing with oppositions and meaningful and inclusive youth participation. The CoPs have proven to be quite useful in sharing experiences and best practices." (MTR 3)

There was a will to further enhance this. There were also issues in terms of coordination that related to the role of and interaction with the lead organisation, specific difficulties like language barriers.

Despite strong coordination mentioned in most MTRs, there was a prevailing desire among most partnerships for further and deeper collaboration. Reports frequently highlighted a lack of alignment as a notable challenge. Within partnerships, issues arose regarding the lead organization. Several MTRs explained that partners were perceived only as a donor (for instance in MTRs 11, 15, 18, and 24). It was also explained that the lead often had better knowledge of MFA requirements. High staff turnover within different partners was identified in 14 MTRs¹⁵. This led to changing focal point and therefore difficulties to coordinate among them. While the diversity of partners allowed for complementarity strengths (MTR 10), it also introduced complexity, notably in terms of organisational differences, that were viewed as a burden by some partners (MTR 6). Language barriers posed a significant challenge: collaboration tended to be more effective when partners shared a common language across different programme's levels or countries. Coordination efforts were sometimes seen as diverting time and resources from other priorities (MTR 3). Although some reports noted partnerships forming based on comparative advantages, one MTR indicates that some partners joined solely for funding purposes, despite benefiting from knowledge sharing opportunities (MTR 23).

MTR	Quote
3	"Participating in a Community of Practice (CoP), however, takes considerable resources for country representatives who also have a range of other demands within the programme. Additionally, further work can be done to better disseminate learnings from the CoPs"
6	"The added value of consortium partners derives from their diversity. But these differences also complicate coordination and cooperation. These are not only differences in focus or thematic areas, but also in organisational ways of working (...). These different cultures and modes of working contribute to difficulties in cooperation and undermine trust."
10	"Each consortium partner brings different but complementary expertise and capacities to the programme, and the theory of change and programme activities aim to capitalize on these different but complementary roles. Partners have been able to support each other with different tasks as well as networking, which has helped the Consortium to maintain momentum and pursue its objectives despite challenges and setbacks."
23	"Some regard the entire programme as a vehicle for different Alliance partners to access funding, mostly in order to pursue their own goals and strategies, albeit with some cross-learning and cooperation."

Source: ADE

¹⁵ MTRs 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 23, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 36, 40, and 44.

Synergies within partnerships remained limited.

Most MTRs (70%) indicated that collaboration efforts resulted in specific added value. This primarily stemmed from complementarity, mostly in terms of expertise, but also in complementarity of geography, levels, and strengths. Complementarity between partners led to resource optimisation, and enabled for instance the tackling of cross-border issues. This collaboration allowed some partners to improve their reputation, credibility, and visibility – although in some cases, association with certain partners may be viewed negatively. Moreover, prior working relationships between partners have smoothed coordination in some instances. However, despite the benefits observed, the added value often appeared to be about complementarity, failing to surpass the sum of efforts of individual partners. A few MTRs noticed strong potential for more effective coordination, although the added value was not effective yet. While 65% of reports mention synergies within partnerships, there is limited evidence of strong synergistic outcomes.

"The combination of skills and resources held by each partner has the potential to achieve significant outcomes and make a substantial impact. However, this potential added value is not felt yet." (MTR 10)

Most reports highlighting good practices and recommendations advocated for further collaboration (MTR 9, MTR 12), suggesting various approaches such as increasing joint planning sessions, providing trainings, and sharing knowledge and experiences. Others mentioned good practices included collaborating with partners based on their core mandates and comparative advantages, organising workshops involving all partners to deepen understanding or co-create the ToC, maintaining physical contact alongside digital contact to bridge cross-cultural boundaries, and establishing well-defined roles between partners with integrated strengths and interests. Conversely, poor practices observed include 'parachuting' leaders of local communities from the central organisation¹⁶, weak linkage with some consortium-contracted partners not aligned with common goals, power imbalances between lead organisations and other consortium members, operating in silos (consortium partners working in parallel).

"Nonetheless, there is a continuous need for further collaboration between international and local NGOs in the area of international advocacy and influencing." (MTR 9)

"Although the exchange of expertise and capacity is rated positively, more linking and learning could be explored in the next two years." (MTR 12)

"Another important lesson learned is that physical contact between consortium partners and country offices remains necessary, despite the progress made in digital (collaboration) during the Covid-19 period. It provides the bond between partners in a way that is not possible through digital means." (MTR 28)

¹⁶ MTR 2 explains that 'another issue regarding the hiring process of the Community of Action (CoA) leads, is the fact that initially it was planned that the host organisations would hire the CoA lead. However, during the inception phase, there were no host organisations identified in all countries. Therefore, the central organisation started hiring CoA Leads and placed them later in the host organisation, with the result that some CoA leads felt more part of the central organisation (also due to contractual matters) then connected to the host organization'.

b. Coordination between partnerships

Very few partnerships have engaged into collaboration with other SCS partnerships, despite high potential of synergy.

Regarding coordination between partnerships of the Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society, only seven MTRs¹⁷ provided clear evidence of such relationships. Eleven referred to such collaboration but in a less clear manner. As some reports identify, there was potential for more collaboration opportunities with other programmes funded by the MFA, especially with partners involved in multiple partnerships. Moreover, MTRs noticed several missed opportunities for coordination between partnerships. The meta-evaluation also allowed to see that in several countries, several programmes were implemented, suggesting an opportunity for such collaboration that has not been exploited (MTR 42). This concerns for instance Kenya (25), Uganda (25), Ethiopia (18), and Indonesia (15). The MTRs did not identify the factors responsible for missed opportunities and a majority overlooked this topic.

"There is room for improvement in seizing opportunities for learning and benefiting from other MOFA partnerships. There is enormous opportunity for [] programme partners and stakeholders to benefit from experiences, information and resources of other CSOs in partnership with the Dutch government, whether on climate justice or funded for other pursuits. Learnings can include effective approaches to movement building from other CSOs, knowledge about specific country contexts and how to deal with them, and experiences about managing consortium-led programmes among others." (MTR 42)*

One notable example illustrates extensive networks with other partnerships, particularly within the same grant instrument (SRHR). This kind of collaboration has been facilitated by overlapping partnerships (some partners taking part of different partnerships of the SCS programme) (MTR 3). This coordination mostly encompassed sharing knowledge, good practices, but there were also some cases of operational coordination, i.e. organisation of various activities such as advocacy, campaigns, and research. Another report highlights synergies primarily in terms of resource mobilisation.

"The [] partnership actively collaborates with other partnerships funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) to avoid duplication of efforts and promote coordination. This alignment involves participation in working groups, WhatsApp groups, and formalised communication structures. The programme also links with other MoFA SRHR partnerships through ShareNet and Partos, facilitating knowledge sharing and learning. Some programme partners are involved in multiple partnerships (for example, [***]), leading to overlaps and opportunities for collaboration. These collaborative efforts encompass activities such as advocacy, campaigns, research, and mutual learning." (MTR 3)*

A good practice mentioned in the MTRs is to actively seek out other partnerships on similar or complementary topics, whether funded by the Dutch MFA or not.

¹⁷ These included two from 'Power of Women'; three from 'Power of voices'; one from SRHR and one from LFS.

c. Complementarity between partners' work and MFA diplomacy work

The reports show that complementarity between the work of implementing partners and the diplomacy efforts of MFA was limited.

Fewer than 40% of the programmes addressed such complementarity. When collaboration did occur, it primarily consisted in exchanging information on ongoing activities and participating in common conferences (MTR 23). While there was a lack of direct contact between the embassy and partnerships in many cases, with the MFA being often perceived solely as a donor, few MTRs identified this issue as a recommendation. Some anecdotal instances of real complementarity exist, including joint advocacy on specific policies, diplomatic visits to projects, networking support provided by embassies, and co-organised side-events (MTR 38, MTR 11). Recurring factors contributing to low complementarity included non-alignment of embassy priorities with project targets, limited embassy resources, and diplomatic risks for the embassy of being associated with sensitive issues like LGBTIQ+ rights and for the CSOs for being associated with Northern donors. However, these insights should be nuanced by the fact that few MTR teams reached out to MFA or embassy representatives to collect their perspective.

"Generally, it seemed that the relationship was more one of exchange of information (which is very useful in many countries, particularly where there is conflict), rather than at a more strategic level." (MTR 23)

"The Dutch Embassy to Cambodia is covered from Thailand, thus the relation is often one of exchange of information from time to time. 'The programme' contributed to visits by the Dutch, Belgian and Swiss ambassadors to Cambodia where they met with (...) partners." (MTR 38)

"The respondents reported that at the country level, the [] project has a good relationship with Dutch embassies. For example, in Uganda, [*] initiated the first meeting, then the country team conducted regular meetings to update the programme commitments to MFA. The country teams are tasked to give the embassies briefs on the progress. The Dutch embassy also collaborates with the country teams to implement activities such as celebration of national days that are relevant to the program. Even countries like Malawi that do not have a Dutch Embassy have managed to meet with the emissaries from the embassy and continue to work with them on the programme." (MTR 11)*

For the remainder of the programme implementation, MTRs recommended to establish at least minimal contacts at the country level. Other recommendations for the end-term evaluation included evaluating complementarity at the strategic level, assessing the alignment of partnerships with MFA global positions and policy objectives, and how it translates into alignment of country-level objectives. Additionally, the final evaluation should involve embassies and MFA actors.

d. Coordination between partnerships and external stakeholders

An encouraging part of the programmes coordinated with various external stakeholders.

Coordination between partnerships and external actors was mentioned for 61% of the programmes, and synergies for 52% of the programmes, with variations across grant instruments. While the grant instruments Leading from the South, SHRH, and Power of Voices have coordinated extensively with external stakeholders (respectively 75%, 71%, and 71%), the MTRs related to the grant instruments Women, Peace, and Security and Power of Women indicated much less coordination (respectively 29% and 33%). When coordination occurred, it primarily involved sharing experiences, knowledge, and joint learning, occasionally extending to joint actions and initiatives aimed at facilitating public mobilisation, sensitisation, and broader impact (MTR 4). Such collaboration with external actors was considered in some MTRs crucial for shifting power from institutions to communities.

"These measures include a heightened focus on strategic partnerships with [] CSOs, UN organisations, faith-based actors, key government ministries, and the media to facilitate public mobilisation, sensitisation, and lobbying efforts." (MTR 4)*

Regarding the stakeholders that collaborated, MTRs revealed that some partnerships collaborated with other programmes and NGOs not funded by the Dutch MFA (MTR 3). These connections have been eased when a partner or implementing fund was involved in multiple programmes. In other cases, various types of actors were involved, including United Nations organisations, community-based organisations, funds, NGOs, faith-based actors, local governments, and media. Moreover, 14 reports discussed interventions focusing on engaging men/males, often involving religious and local leaders and male champions.

"Additionally, the programme benefits from alignment with complementary initiatives and movements beyond MoFA-funded initiatives. Many programme partners are IPPF Member Associations, allowing alignment with IPPF initiatives at both the global and country levels, focusing on diverse young people's SRHR needs. Collaborations with various initiatives involve activities related to comprehensive sexuality education, dealing with opposition, and strengthening relationships with key government stakeholders." (MTR 3)

Regarding coordination between partners and external stakeholders, good practices included building personal and institutional relationships with government agents and religious leaders, connecting with grassroots activists involved, implementing local programming with local stakeholders, and collaborating with embassies and donors to create synergies.

3.2.2. Effectiveness

This section covers EQ 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and additional EQ on L&A activities in the Netherlands, which were all centred around effectiveness of the SCS policy framework.

EQ 2.4 To what extent are the overall SCS policy framework goals being pursued and is progress achieved?
EQ 2.5 Were there unintended effects caused by the implementation of the policy framework? If they occurred, what were these effects, why did they occur and what were the consequences in general and for different groups?
EQ 2.6 In relation to international L&A: What worked (and what didn't work) to effectively 'pushback against the pushback' in terms of, women's rights, gender equality, civic space and equal rights for LGBTIQ+ persons and why?
Additional EQ: Extent to which the MTR pays attention to L&A activities in the Netherlands: what is described and lobbied and advocated for in the Netherlands? How does L&A in the Netherlands take shape? To what extent is L&A in the Netherlands successful and what is the definition of success?

Summary response:

- Aligned with the SCS Theory of Change, CSO strengthening was a central goal in almost all partnerships, was largely implemented and displayed clear results. The extent of the results reached is less clear, as the reach of capacity strengthening activities reported in MTRs varies greatly between programmes.
- CSO strengthening also included effective brokering of alliances between CSOs, either as a targeted result or as a by-product of common training sessions, as well as mainstreaming inclusiveness in CSOs. Both brokering and inclusiveness mainstreaming were implemented with clear evidence of success, although less than for capacity strengthening.
- The MTRs report several stories of linking capacity strengthening to increase in L&A activities by CSOs, as foreseen in the SCS ToC, however there is no strong evidence of the extent of the results at the level of the SCS as a whole. Factors of success of lobby and advocacy initiatives conducted by CSOs included brokering, funding, and provision of technical expertise/knowledge. Limiting factors included the need for more coordination, with other CSO and with diplomatic efforts, and time.
- Besides actions led by the supported CSOs, consortium partners also conducted lobby and advocacy (L&A) themselves. In a few cases the MTRs report on the reach of the L&A activities conducted by partners. However, challenges in monitoring of L&A results and methodological weaknesses in the MTRs reviewed do not allow to derive conclusions on results reached at the level of the Strengthening Civil Society Policy Framework as a whole.
- While MTRs reported results on influencing norms and decision making (outcome), and inclusive laws and policies (impact), at this stage contribution of the SCS is only weakly established in MTRs.
- While not foreseen in the SCS ToC, a few MTRs report on partnerships providing services themselves that directly support inclusive sustainable development.
- Shrinking civic space was mostly not directly addressed by CSOs but rather considered as a by-product

of CSO strengthening in general.

- Partnerships themselves are reported to have been more active than supported CSOs in pushing back against the pushback on civic space through their lobby and advocacy activities, although the extent of the results reached is unclear. In other fields, pushback against the pushback was even less developed.
- Few MTRs report unintended effects of the programme, and the only effect recurrently quoted is backlash (observed or risked) against activists, including verbal, physical and online threats from individuals involved in coordinated and systematic pushback against women's rights or equal rights for LGBTIQ+ community members.

Aligned with the SCS Theory of Change, CSO strengthening was a central goal in almost all partnerships.

More than 95% of MTRs mention this goal as being pursued, and this is corroborated by statements and evidence in the MTRs, as well as the partnerships' ToCs presented in MTRs. Notably, some of the strengthening activities were targeted at individual activists rather than CSOs, including for instance individual women political leaders (MTR 28) and "selected women peace ambassadors" (MTR 31). Activist and CSO strengthening activities were targeted to lobby and advocacy capacity but were not limited to it. The MTRs report strengthening on at least three other topics: management capacity, including financial management and fundraising, monitoring capacity, and inclusivity, including through sensitization to intersectionality and integration in CSOs of marginalized groups (people with disability, young people, migrants, LGBTIQ+ community members). Strengthening was conducted mostly through **training** (topics included thematic knowledge and technical knowledge, for instance on the use of online spaces), dissemination of **toolkits** through online platforms and **coaching** from the partnership and from peers. In some cases, the partnership directed **funds** (sub-grants) at CSOs with which the CSO organized their own strengthening. **Networking** between the various CSOs and activists involved in the activities, when it happened, was most often quoted by MTRs as highly appreciated by beneficiary CSO and activists.

CSO strengthening activities have largely been implemented and MTRs suggest evidence of results in this area. The type of evidence provided in the MTRs varies largely and includes self-declared improved capacity by individual activists and CSO representants as well as inference of enhanced capacity from observed successes in L&A activities that MTRs authors linked to the programmes. There are also references to toolkits having been developed to support CSO activities (including for instance in MTR 4; MTR 8; MTR 9). It is important to note that there were no systematic assessments of capacity existing before the programme, hence limiting the contribution analysis that can be made. One example of successes used to illustrate the improved capacities include women setting up social network platforms and women nominating themselves for election (MTR 7). Other examples of the MTRs positive judgement on the success of programmes are presented with quotes below. There are very few MTRs that have negative judgement, and in all cases strengthening is described to have happened but to have been insufficient to lead to improved lobby and advocacy activities.

"CSOs whose capacities have been built are taking collective actions through active political engagement and lobbying and as result of increased capacities, the CSO space has attracted more legitimacy" (MTR 8)

"36 out of 58 grantees reported strengthened internal institutional capacities, of which 22 women-led" (MTR 18)

"65% of partners had improved their overall lobbying and advocacy capacity" (MTR 23)

"(the programme) is particularly strong in capacity building of young and women leaders. The evidence of change in terms of attitudes, self-confidence, and the courage to raise their voices is overwhelming." (MTR 28)

"1962 women reported increase confidence, political skills and consciousness" (MTR 30)

"MTR noted significant progress in terms of: (i) improvements in capacities of CSOs to engage in policy making processes; (ii) increase and quality of engagements between CSOs and government/policy makers" (MTR 42)

The extent of the results reached in terms of CSO strengthening is less clear, as the reach of capacity strengthening activities reported in MTRs varies greatly between programmes. Table 4 below presents a sample of quantitative information provided in MTRs which reflects the variations observed in the reported reach of the programmes, ranging from a handful of CSOs to several thousands. The type of activities conducted also remains unclear (length, scope, depth of activities/training sessions/'events').¹⁸ Also, around 40% of MTRs did not use quantitative information for the assessment of effectiveness. While the absence of result quantification is a weakness in many MTRs, there is no evidence of whether this reflects a methodological issue of the MTRs, a weakness of the programme MEL system, or a weakness of the programme. There is only one case of a programme weakness being reflected in an MTR (MTR 23: only four CSOs has increased L&A capacities).

Table 7. Quantitative data on the scope of CSO strengthening activities.

MTR reference	Quantification of the activities conducted in terms of strengthening CSOs and activists
3	427 capacities strengthening and linking and learning events were organised
10	85 CSOs were strengthened
11	169 CSOs were strengthened
18	58 CSO were granted funds for capacity strengthening
21	1,300 participating organisations in capacity strengthening activities
23	Number of CSOs with increased L&A capacities: Target 2025=29 / Actual 2023=4
30	150 CSO; 1962 women reported increase confidence, political skills and consciousness

¹⁸ This lack of information makes it hard to judge whether reported quantitative data refers to comprehensive (capacity strengthening activities (e.g. events of several days) or limited ones (for instance a two hours training).

31	259 women trained in one of the countries
33	more than 1,533 Women Rights Organization (WROs) and 5,184 WHRDs
34	over 200 grants to 186 diverse actors
42	1455 people were targeted by capacity strengthening activities

Source: ADE

CSO strengthening included effective brokering of alliances between CSOs, either as a targeted result or as a by-product of common training sessions. At least 10 MTRs report concrete results regarding reinforced network of CSOs. Results are however less clear than for CSO capacity strengthening, with more MTRs mentioning insufficient effort in this area. In some cases, network building was directly targeted by programmes, including through the setting up of multiple alliances or communities of action (for example: MTR 7, MTR 15, MTR 30, MTR 31) and setting up of strategic platforms (for example MTR 28). In other cases, networking was rather a by-product of organizing joint training sessions for CSOs. In all cases, networking and the resulting enhanced coordination between CSOs were presented as determining factors in achieving successes in lobby and advocacy and several MTRs recommended further developing CSO brokering.

CSO strengthening also included successfully mainstreaming inclusiveness in existing organizations. At least nine MTRs¹⁹ (out of 46) reported improved inclusiveness of CSO towards marginalized groups, including youth, people with disabilities, indigenous people, and women, and in most cases at the intersection of at least two of these categories. Among other results of capacity strengthening, at least five MTRs mention results in broader management capacity, including “MEL aspects, financial management, infrastructure, human resources, operational efficiency” (MTR 24), “financial management and compliance” (MTR 18), “conflict management training” (MTR 6) and “internal processes” (MTR 14). As a result, two MTRs report increased ability to attract funding, a finding that will be further discussed in section 3.2.4 Sustainability.

The MTRs report several stories of linking capacity strengthening to increase in L&A activities by CSOs, as foreseen in the SCS ToC, however there is no strong evidence of the extent of the results at the level of the SCS as a whole. Indeed, there are very large variation in the results reported regarding lobby and advocacy by CSOs, as illustrated in Table 5 below.

Table 8. Results reported on L&A activities conducted by CSOs

MTR	Presence of evidence	MTR	Absence of evidence
4	Youth-led organisations drafted a memo and presented it to duty-bearers	2	little activities were conducted in the field of influencing government, business and societal actors
10	Each CSOs implemented an average of 2.5 advocacy initiatives (...) the total number	6	improved capacity of CSO was a minor factor

¹⁹ Other MTRs did not reflect on inclusiveness mainstreaming and it is hence not possible to know whether this was not considered in the scope of the MTR or whether the programme did not implement such inclusiveness mainstreaming.

	reported is 42		
11	234 L&A initiatives carried out by CSOs. 195 reported number of times government at any level included CSO position in their agenda.	9	laws blocked, adopted or improved target=3 / midline value=0 (due to counter campaigns, viewed as western agenda)
12	Capacity building (...) is bearing fruit and is already leading to contributions by the WRAs/WROs to law, policy and social norm change. (total:16)	15	there are no activities related to supported CSO directly influence government
18	submission of petitions, submission to courts, representations of marginalized groups at conferences (...) are reported by 33 out of 58 grantees	22	limited policy advocacy because CSO were unsure of how to approach the work and too preoccupied with forming communities in the first years
20	74% of supported organisations (target: 100%) indicate having actively participated in key advocacy events	26	the implementation of accompanied advocacy processes at local level, led by grassroots organisations and the structurally excluded groups they represent, has yet to get started
23	# of laws, policies blocked, adopted, improved for sustainable and inclusive development as a result of CSO engagement. Target: 43/ Actual: 27	34	movement building appears nascent in most contexts and reach and impacts on broader public debate are unclear
37	reported number of L&A initiatives by (CSO) towards government actors in 2022: over 550		

Source: ADE

Factors of success of lobby and advocacy initiatives conducted by CSOs included **brokering** (supporting networking between CSOs), **funding** (supporting existence and staffing of CSOs) and the provision of **technical expertise/knowledge**. Among other factors presented in the SCS Theory of Change, diplomatic support was mostly absent, as evidenced in section 3.2.1 above on coherence and coordination. While very few MTRs presented a comprehensive analysis of the limiting factors regarding CSOs' lobby and advocacy activities, sufficient time and good coordination were always quoted as key contribution factors of the results observed. In the context of the SCS partnerships, both factors have been present to a very limited extent only, with the MTRs covering a period of two years only and coordination rated as overall low. The ability of the partnerships to coordinate CSOs between them through brokering and networking that happened naturally during training sessions could be a promising element for future results.

Besides actions led by the supported CSOs, partnerships also conducted lobby and advocacy (L&A) themselves, a channel of action which was not explicitly foreseen in the SCS Theory of Change. At least half of the MTRs report that lobby and advocacy was conducted by the consortium partners in addition to actions led by CSOs. This channel of action is not explicitly foreseen in the SCS Theory of Change. It involves a direct link from the SCS ToC outputs (the setting up of the partnerships) to the outcomes (influencing norms and decision-making), skipping the intermediary step of CSO strengthening. Topics covered by the L&A activities are reported to be in the thematic field of interest of the partners, including SRHR, access to health for marginalized groups, climate change and labour conditions. Lobby and advocacy took various forms and

included **lobbying** (personal relationship with decision-makers at various levels, local and national), sensitization **campaigns** (radio, TV, social media), production and dissemination of **information** (memorandum), participation to **conferences**. There is no specific trend in the type of activity conducted, although this analysis is limited by the lack of systematic and comprehensive description of activities (such as a mapping or inventory) in MTRs. Also, the MTRs rarely differentiate between activities led by CSOs and activities led by consortium partners, often referencing to lobby and advocacy being conducted by “partners” as a generic term for both consortium partners and supported CSOs. In all cases, the L&A activities were conducted more frequently at local and national levels (reported in more than 80% of MTRs) than at regional and international levels (reported in more than 60% of MTRs). Examples of L&A at regional level include support to African Union policy initiatives. Some partners (notably the Women Fund Asia) also conducted L&A in LFS countries. Such L&A was conducted by both North-based and South-based consortium partners. The evaluation did not find any evidence that this caused issues to Southern partners. MTRs did however not provide much information on this topic (as localisation was mostly not covered).

In a few cases, the MTRs report on the reach of the L&A activities conducted by partners, with large variation and impossibility to aggregate or summarize progress made. In some cases, the MTRs report on very specific success stories (for example, MTR 32 reports that *“In Burundi, the MTR confirmed two examples of internal changes by political parties; however, only one is attributable to (the programme)”*) while in two cases the MTR reports on the audience of the L&A activities: MTR 32 quotes that

“The programme reached over 39M people across all countries, reaching diverse groups through campaigns on television, radio, print and online” (MTR 32)

and MTR 3 mentions that

“On- and offline campaigns were organised across countries, targeting students, teachers, and government representatives amongst others, measuring a reach of EUR 139 million to date. (...) 208.000 represents the reach of offline campaigns, which included creative methods such as interactive theatre.” (MTR 3)

These two MTRs are the only ones using the audience size to quantify reach. A limited number of other MTRs presents the numbers of laws or policies influenced, and most MTRs only presents a few success stories. As was mentioned regarding CSO capacity strengthening, it is not clear whether the absence of reported results reflects a weakness of the MTRs methodological approaches, challenges in monitoring the results of lobby and advocacy, or weaknesses in programme implementation in this regard, or a combination of these three elements.

Box 1. Lobby and Advocacy in the Netherlands

Eight MTRs report lobby and advocacy activities in the Netherlands, two of them related to the same Dutch-based organization. In all cases, these L&A activities in the Netherlands were linked to a partner with a history of lobbying in the Netherlands that pre-dates the SCS partnerships and hence the contribution of the SCS partnership is limited. Focal areas of the L&A conducted in the Netherlands

included a broad range of topics such as the development of a feminist foreign policy, EU regulations related to due diligence and sustainability in commodities, and unintended pregnancies as a global issue. Most topics were identified only once in the MTRs and should hence be considered as anecdotal evidence. L&A activities in the Netherlands took place under the form of mobilizing activists from the South (two cases refer to activists flying to the Netherlands to share their testimony) and taking part to large events (international conferences and event at the Dutch Parliament). In one case, a South-based activist from one of the supported CSO was mobilized for a testimony at a broader event in the Netherlands. The MTRs do not report on results of these L&A activities nor define success.

While MTRs reported results on influencing norms and decision making (outcome), and inclusive laws and policies (impact), at this stage contribution of the SCS is only weakly established in MTRs. Several factors played a role in this respect. Absence of comprehensive review of activities, of clear identification of other factors relevant to the measured impact variables and of mapping of stakeholders limited the validity of the contribution stories of most MTRs. At outcome level (influencing norms & decision making), a few MTRs present substantiated stories of contribution. These results are further discussed under EQ 2.14 (section 3.2.6). At impact level, in the best cases, the MTRs acknowledged that the measured impact (mostly “improved laws, policies, norms, attitudes and practices”) was the result of years of advocacy that largely predated the partnership or could not be disentangled from the effect of other programmes²⁰. In many cases however, impact-level indicators were presented but the contribution was not discussed.

A few MTRs report on partnerships providing services themselves that directly support inclusive sustainable development, which does not appear to be an intended programme activity in the SCS ToC²¹. Examples of services provided include starting grants for women entrepreneurship projects. Other MTRs point to the impossibility of using the SCS funds to provide services as a factor limiting impact, as the L&A supported demand for specific services that are not provided, leading to fading demand and ensuing fading effect of the advocacy efforts.

“At national level, a consistent challenge across all countries is that lobbying, and advocacy activities generate substantial demand. However, the scope of the programme does not encompass the provision of SRHR services. Also, where (the programme) has created demand for services, stock outs of commodities for SRHR services, and limited human and financial resources sometimes pose challenges.” (MTR 40)

Still, in one programme which more largely used service provision, the MTR concluded that more lobby and advocacy efforts would be required to significantly increase the reach of the programme:

“The impact of these direct activities is limited by their low reach and high vulnerability to external factors. the combination of direct food security interventions and advocacy is a

²⁰ Including MTRs 4, 6, 18, 34, 37.

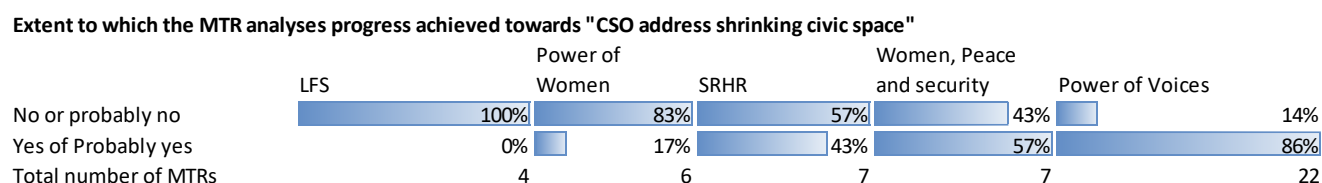
²¹ The conditions for service delivery are the following: under the Power of Voices instrument, no service delivery is allowed. Under the Women for Peace & Security and SRHR instruments, service delivery is allowed. Under the Power of Women and LFS instrument, service delivery may be eligible under conditions and may not exceed 20% of budget.

strength, expansion of reach can rather be reached by continuing or intensifying the focus on strengthening support structures and policy frameworks that would support a much larger number of persons with disabilities." (MTR 6)

Overall, while few MTRs touch upon the issue of direct service provision, those that do tend to conclude that a mix of lobby and advocacy with service provision would be the ideal set up. MFA rules regarding service provision vary by grant instrument, a key element which was not reflected in the MTRs, which focused on individual partnerships as opposed to the SCS as a whole. Still, while service provision is allowed, or allowed under conditions, for more than 50% of partnerships, a few MTRs only report service provision (MTR 6, MTR 22, at least to some extent, including on food security and seed funding) while other MTRs report on the difficulties encountered as a consequence of not being able to use the funding for service provision as per MFA rules (MTR 34, MTR 40).

Shrinking civic space was mostly not directly addressed by CSOs. Only six MTRs²² reported that pushing back against the pushback by CSOs was an explicit objective of the programme, even fewer MTRs document progress in this respect ("notable progress" (MTR 21), "a few stories" (MTR 15) and "CSOs managed to explore innovative approaches to influence civic spaces in unique ways" (MTR 17)). One MTR concluded to the absence of result in the area. An additional seven MTRs reported that while civic space was not targeted by CSOs in their L&A activities, their reinforced presence and increased level of activity contributed to maintaining the civic space open and alive. MTRs refer to civic space with expressions that are vague like being "indirectly pursued", "not explicitly addressed", or the subject of "spill overs" of CSOs' activities. Yet, in most cases, the MTRs conclude that civic space was not targeted by CSOs, nor by consortium partners. Notably, only slightly more than 50% of MTRs judge progress made in this regard, with differences between grants: no MTRs for LFS or Power of Women analyse progress on this topic, while more than 40% of MTRs for the SRHR instrument, 60% for the WPS, and more than 80% for the Power of Voices analyse progress on the topic. Overall, there is no strong evidence of contribution of CSO towards addressing shrinking civic space.

Table 9. CSO addressing shrinking civic space



Source: ADE

Partnerships themselves are reported to have been more active than supported CSOs in pushing back against the pushback on civic space through their lobby and advocacy activities, although the extent of the results reached is unclear. Almost 40% of MTRs (15 out of 46) describe L&A actions in this area, with half of them (7 MTRs) linked to the Power of Voices instrument, proportional to the share of partnerships funded under

²² MTRs 9; 15; 17; 21; 31; 33.

this instrument. **Shrinking civic space was however largely acknowledged as a context element that, in some contexts, required a risk mitigation strategy** (including training sessions to help CSO deal with increased insecurity, including digital insecurity, adoption of context-appropriate language). Several MTRs pointed out in their recommendation the need for partnerships to carry out more efforts in contributing to civic space for CSOs.

In other fields, pushback against the pushback was even less developed. Less than a third of MTRs describe action in pushback against the pushback on women's rights, gender equality or equal rights for LGBTIQ+ persons. In the field of women's rights and equal rights for LGBTIQ+ persons, most partnerships targeting these areas identified the pushback as a context element involving higher risk for their staff and higher costs of implementation (for example associated to the re-scheduling of activities), affecting the effectiveness of their programmes as well as efficiency and sustainability. However, in most cases the partnerships preferred a safeguarding approach, implementing mitigation measures for staff protection and avoiding confrontation and hence did not frame their action as a pushback against the pushback.

Few MTRs report unintended effects of the programme, and the only effect recurrently quoted is backlash against activists. Backlash, including verbal (in person and online) and physical violence was reported to be mostly targeted towards activists from marginalised groups that were supported for inclusion. As such, the backlash did not affect programme implementation but required strong protection measures. A limited number of MTRs also reported a negative effect of the programme on the mental health of CSO staff and activists, arguing that the request to carry on even more lobby and advocacy in an unsupportive environment led to loss of motivation and burnout. Notably, other MTRs reported positive effect of the programme on mental health through networking and coaching. The analysis of unintended effect is however limited by the type of method used (half of MTRs at least partially relied on outcome harvesting) and the lack of involvement in the MTR process of external stakeholders.

3.2.3. Efficiency

This section covers EQs 2.7 and 2.8.

EQ 2.7 What lessons can be drawn from the comparison between inputs (capacity, funding, network building) and outputs (results achieved until now) towards the SCS overall and grant specific goals?

EQ 2.8 Are difficulties in implementation (e.g., operational, technical, in relation to country contexts and coordination between partnerships) identified in MTRs? If so, what are these difficulties and how were they mitigated?

Summary response:

- MTRs largely cover implementation challenges, which most often related to country context and in particular shrinking civic space.
- Besides shrinking civic space, challenges pertaining to country context mostly related to security and conflict.
- Implementation challenges also regarded operational issues, including communication between consortium members including technical aspects such as translations.
- A few MTRs reported issues with the MFA MEL and reporting requirements, which echoes with challenges in measuring results identified in the analysis of effectiveness.
- Efficiency envisaged as the comparison between inputs (resources, including budget, time, human resources) and results, was mostly not covered in MTRs.
- The MTRs identify several factors that have positively influenced efficiency at programme level, including the adoption of innovative approaches, ability to adapt to local context and the quality of partners involved in consortia.
- While not in the scope of the MTRs taken individually, this meta-evaluation also identifies efficiency challenges faced by the SCS as a whole, including regarding missed opportunities in synergies. On the other hand, several MTRs recognize the potential high efficiency of working through CSOs and lobby and advocacy to advance toward the long-term target of “inclusive sustainable development”.

MTRs largely cover implementation challenges, which most often related to country context and in particular shrinking civic space. Contextual challenges were reported in more than 85% of MTRs. The most often reported challenge was shrinking civic space (at least 16 MTRs have an explicit mention of it in a section dedicated to implementation challenges) and pushback on the rights of specific categories of people (such as LGBTIQ+ community members in Uganda), associated with the criminalization of the activities of CSO working for the rights of these categories of people. Some MTRs report broader negative attitude or hostilities towards the programme activities. The main consequence of this unfavourable environment is the backlash (including increased harassment and arrests) experienced or risked by activists, CSO and consortium partner staff members. Also, high vulnerability to context factors was also identified as a key driver of the risks to the sustainability of the programmes, involving a risk to lose acquired results, hence affecting efficiency in the

longer term. While most programmes identify shrinking civic space as a key contextual element, the area was not often targeted as programme objective. In addition to the programmes implementing a pushback against the pushback on civic space as part of their objectives, other programmes implemented a mitigation measure approach, including creation of safe space and implementing lobby and advocacy at local level to improve CSOs' environment. Example of such local level L&A include the following examples of acting on administrative hurdles for CSO activities (MTR 22) and lobby among local leaders (MTR 42). Other MTRs considered as mitigation measures elements such as reviewing expectations ("*even small achievements are significant*", MTR 10), monitoring the situation (MTR 33).

"The program adopted a proactive approach by engaging closely with local administrative bodies, advocating for streamlined processes, and offering support to community leaders in navigating administrative hurdles". (MTR 22)

"Programme partners in Senegal indicated that the mitigation measures to counter the shrinking of civic space included use of interpersonal relationships with the various stakeholders, setting up a digital platform which provides safe and secure space for activists to convene, campaign, link and learn from one another in the context of shrinking and precarious civil society spaces at country level." (MTR 42)

Besides shrinking civic space, challenges pertaining to country context mostly related to security and conflict.

At least eleven MTRs reflect explicitly on conflict situation which hampered programme implementation, including armed conflict in Sudan (where eight consortia are active), the instable situation in Sahel countries (for instance, eleven consortia are active in Burkina Faso) and overall violent conflict, state fragility and political instability. Regarding this challenge, reported mitigation measures included reorganisation of activities, including reducing their publicity and scale and security protocols and policies, which generated additional costs²³. In addition, there are a few stories of adaptation of programming, including "*shift in activities including work on protection and to a lesser extent advocacy, at the local level*" (MTR 7) and "*refining new advocacy targets which are now the new Government, the new transitional legislative assembly and the new delegations at local level*" (MTR 42). Lastly, eight MTRs explicitly referred to the Covid 19 pandemic as a context factor that affected the results reached as mitigation strategies related to smaller scale events and delays.

After contextual factors, **implementation challenges mostly also regarded operational issues, including communication between consortium members including technical aspects such as translations.** Language and communication issues were reported in 12 MTRs, in particular where the consortia operate in non-English-speaking countries and in countries where context prevented in-person meetings between the consortium leader and country teams. In one MTR, the language issue was exemplified in the incorrect translation of indicators from the monitoring framework which was then source of issues with the monitoring.

"Machine translation of key document led to misunderstanding of the monitoring reporting framework" (MTR 40)

²³ "Extreme measures should be taken to prevent and mitigate operational disruptions, especially those related to the safety and well-being of our staff and partners" (MTR 18).

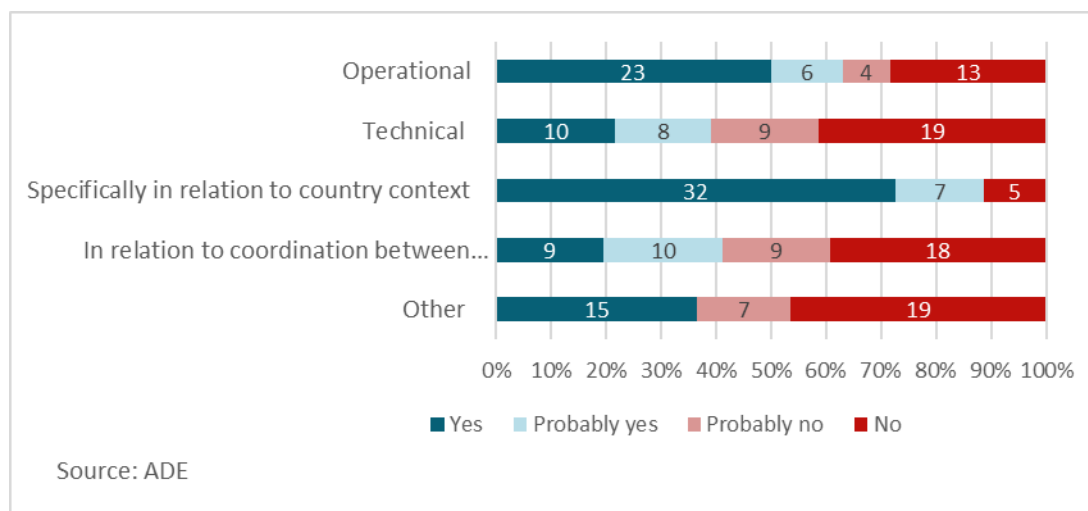
Many MTRs consider these communication difficulties to be inherent to the setting up of new international consortia, including references to cultural preferences, difference in work culture and various level of experience working with the MFA. Corroborating this finding, MTRs covering consortia in which partners had an history of working together pointed out the established collaboration as a success factor in timeliness of implementation. In one case, the consortium requested an external consultant to identify tensions and make recommendations (MTR 28).

A few MTRs reported issues with the MFA MEL and reporting requirements, which echoes with challenges in measuring results. While the number of MTRs referring to this type of implementation challenge is anecdotal, it strongly echoes findings related to result measurement for the SCS as a whole. In one MTR, the issue is described as follows:

"Some aspects, like the basket indicators, have been recognised as highly relevant by the (programme). However, other aspects seem to assume a structure of planning and monitoring that is not aligned with the way in which the (programme) is set up. For instance, the reporting formats reflect country-level programming, while (the programme) has global scope and does not work with country-based planning. (...) the introduction of sub-indicators in the results framework had not been originally planned by the (programme) and was introduced on initiative of the Ministry. The (programme) has felt that reporting in IATI has created a significant workload, with very limited feedback on the content files and little value for the (programme)'s own reflection." (MTR 21)

Finally, other implementation challenges include **staff turnover, termination of partnership** with one of the consortium partners (two cases reported in MTRs), without that the MTRs allow to identify a cause specifically related to the SCS programme as a whole.

Figure 25. Typology of implementation challenges reported in MTRs.



Efficiency envisaged as the comparison between inputs (resources, including budget, time, human resources) and results, was mostly not covered in MTRs. Notably, as discussed in section 3.1 above, efficiency was largely

left unrequested in MTR Terms of References (6 out of 20 ToRs²⁴ only mention efficiency as being part of the MTR's scope) and efficiency was hence tackled in less than 25% of MTRs. In the context of the SCS grant instruments, outputs listed in the ToC include CSO strengthening and support to CSO, including in terms of promotion of civic space. As discussed in the section dedicated to effectiveness above, the activities effectively implemented also included lobby and advocacy implemented by the consortia partners themselves but were limited in terms of promotion of civic space. In all cases, quantitative results extracted from the programmes' MEL systems, when reported in MTRs, mostly belong to higher levels in the result chain, including number of people reached by L&A actions or laws or policies that have been influenced. The MTRs are also limited in their coverage of programmes inputs, with almost none of the reports mentioning the programme's budget, and even fewer analysing budget committed or spent or allocated to various types of activities or geographic zones. At the level of the SCS globally, inputs can be measured by the overall budget (EUR 1.372 billion) and other resources devoted to the programme, which included very limited diplomatic support (as evidenced in section 3.2.1 Coherence). Unknown to this meta-evaluation are resources at MFA regarding coordination, support and monitoring and evaluation.

The MTRs identify several factors that have positively influenced efficiency at programme level, including the adoption of innovative approaches, ability to adapt to local context and the quality of partners involved in consortia. Among innovative approaches, MTRs quote collaborations with social media influencers and gamification (both anecdotic in MTRs), online advocacy campaigns and online platforms providing safe space for marginalized groups, all of which allowed to broaden the reach of the programme or deepen its results. Ability to adapt to local context, with programming by country and involvement of local partners in programming was identified as contributing to better fit with the local context, improved relevance, and positive impact on the receptiveness to lobby and advocacy campaigns. The MTRs also contain several references to the quality of the partners involved, including mentions of *"the consortium has utilized the strengths and expertise of each member effectively"*; *"programme partners with vast technical expertise"*; *"Attitude, competence, productivity were praised"*; *"The most important asset of the (...) programme relates to human resources and the high quality of staff members"*.

While not in the scope of the MTRs taken individually, this meta-evaluation also identifies efficiency challenges faced by the SCS as a whole, including missed opportunities for synergies across consortia active in the same country or region, synergies with diplomatic efforts and synergies with other programmes oriented toward service provision. **On the other hand, several MTRs recognize the potential high efficiency of working through CSOs and lobby and advocacy to advance toward the long-term target of "inclusive sustainable development"**. A few MTRs reflected on the SCS as a whole and included reflection on the fact that the SCS partnerships, as programmes addressing root causes of inequalities in sustainable development and targeting norms, behaviours, and decision-making, have the potential to generate an impact on many people within their given resources.

"(...) while the combination of direct food security interventions and advocacy is a strength, expansion of reach can rather be reached by continuing or intensifying the focus on

²⁴ This report is based on 46 MTRs; however, ToRs were made available for only 20 of them.

strengthening support structures and policy frameworks that would support a much larger number of persons with disabilities and create more enabling conditions for their inclusion; or by persuading others to take up the successful interventions at a much larger scale". (MTR 6)

"The ecosystem approach adopted by (the partner) is well suited to supporting a global movement with relatively few resources". (MTR 37)

3.2.4. Sustainability

This section covers EQ 2.9.

EQ 2.9 To what extent and, if so, how have measures to achieve sustainability been put in place? What are good and poor practices or partnerships in their work towards safeguarding the effects of implementation in the long run? What are the lessons from their experiences up to now and what needs attention during the second half of policy implementation?

Summary response:

- By their very nature and the type of activities supported, the programmes aimed at attaining sustainable results through targeting underlying causes of inequalities, and by the design of the SCS, which included a strong emphasis on local ownership.
- Some good practices related to the sustainability of the results were identified in the MTRs, including mostly factors of effectiveness and local ownership.
- Few measures have been taken to address specific sustainability issues, including access to diversified sources of funding.
- Factors that hamper sustainability of the conduction of L&A actions by CSOs included the 'pushback' context and access to diversified sources of funding for CSOs.
- A key factor highlighted in MTRs to guarantee sustainability of inclusive sustainable development is the provision of services in parallel to addressing root causes of inequalities.

By their very nature and the type of activities supported, the programmes aimed at attaining sustainable results. The programmes were indeed focused on capacity building, changing norms and behaviours, and influencing laws and policies. More than 80% of MTRs identified good practices in ensuring sustainability of results and among them, a vast majority considered that the results of the programme were indeed sustainable by essence. The presence of higher-level results, including reported changes in laws and policies, can be considered as evidence of sustainable effect of the SCS programmes, with the caveat (discussed in the section dedicated to effectiveness above) of the limited analysis of the programmes' contribution to such higher-level results. Many MTRs present recommendations to enhance sustainability which however are not clearly linked to sustainability but tend to rather belong to effectiveness of programmes and MEL system's ability to capture such effectiveness, including multiple references to increasing efforts to reach higher level

results and to develop monitoring systems that allow capturing such results as evidence of sustainable impact. Recommendations related to obtaining sustainable results include the following:

"Qualitative data gathered suggest that more investment is needed to ensure sustainability in female leadership."

"Measure long term effects of capacity strengthening."

"Adjust the instruction on outcome harvesting to capture observable changes in political or social actors' conduct or policies."

Besides sustainability generated by design, the MTRs report few measures taken explicitly to guarantee sustainability, which most often relate to local ownership and to mainstreaming of inclusiveness of marginalized groups within CSOs. 60% of MTRs only report on specific measures to favour sustainability. Among measures reportedly taken to support sustainability are factors of local ownership, as an underlying factor of sustainability. The key factor related to ownership is the involvement of local stakeholders in programming to ensure enhanced alignment to context specificities and local buy-in, including buy-in by targeted beneficiaries. Next to local ownership, partners' effort to increase inclusivity in established CSOs through mainstreaming and integration of issues specific to marginalized groups can also be considered as a factor driving sustainable inclusiveness, though at lobby and advocacy level and not at laws and policies level. Notably, mainstreaming of inclusivity issues in CSOs to support inclusivity in L&A was not foreseen in the SCS Theory of Change.

The MTRs identified several factors that hamper sustainability, including a context of 'pushback'²⁵ on various rights (women's rights, civic rights, LGBTIQ+ rights), **financial dependence** on the SCS programme by CSO and activists, the **time** needed for partnerships to generate synergies, and the **need to act on service provision** in parallel to acting on root causes. Overall, less than 30% of MTRs identified risks on sustainability, most often not grouped together in a section dedicated to risk and challenges. First, financial dependence of CSO on the SCS funding related to difficulties diversifying sources of funding is the most frequently quoted risk factor for sustainability of the results reached so far. MTRs acknowledge that the SCS tended to address a funding gap, in particular regarding access to funds for CSO led by or focused on the issues of marginalized groups. While the programme supports the capacity of these CSOs, it is not clearly established that it will be sufficient to guarantee access to a more diversified pool of funding. Second, in the cases where the consortia were created for the purpose of the SCS, time is required for the partners to establish efficient collaboration, which in some cases remained very limited with a risk of the partnership common actions disappearing if the SCS programme ends. Third, several MTRs point out that lobby and advocacy activities, to have lasting effect, need to be accompanied by enhanced service provision (such as health services, financial services). In case service provision does not follow, the demand resulting from awareness raising is at risk of fading away, as exemplified in the case of SRHR in the quote below:

²⁵ 'Pushback' refers to losing grounds/counter-progress for women's rights, civic rights, equal rights for LGBTIQ+ community members. In particular, "pushback on civic space" refers to efforts that aim to restrict or limit the freedom of civic engagement, activism, or participation in civil society. The "pushback against the pushback on civic space" signifies efforts to counter these restrictions and defend the principles of open and free civic engagement.

"At national level, a consistent challenge across all countries is that lobbying, and advocacy activities generate substantial demand. However, the scope of the programme does not encompass the provision of SRHR services. Also, where (the programme) has created demand for services, stock outs of commodities for SRHR services, and limited human and financial resources sometimes pose challenges."

Other examples include demand for seed money (small grants linked to starting micro-enterprises) for women entrepreneurship activities in the context of raising awareness on rights to financial independence and own resources. There appear to co-exist various understandings or rules of whether or to what extent service provision can be funded under the SCS grants, but all MTRs agree that a condition for sustainability lies in having a systemic approach that addresses root causes while also attending needs.

3.2.5. Locally led development

This section covers EQ 2.10.

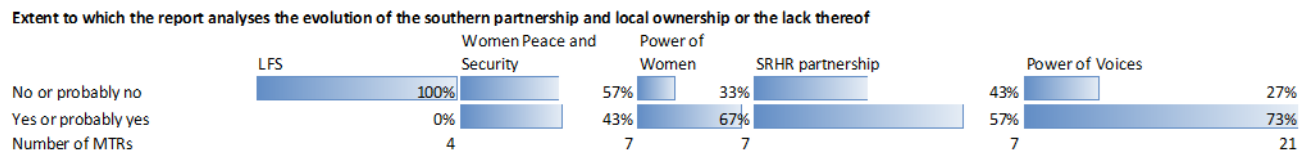
EQ 2.10 Did southern leadership and local ownership evolve under the implementation of the policy framework and for each specific grant instrument? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

Summary response:

- Southern leadership and involvement of south-based consortium partners is a specificity of the SCS framework; however, a very limited number of MTRs identify this as a specificity of the programme and analyse it as such.
- Southern leadership at the level of the consortium is not part of the ToC and is not listed as an objective per se but is rather treated as a cross-cutting issue of governance.
- Fewer than 40% of MTRs have an assessment of the topic, with listed practices that favour ownership and southern leadership including autonomy in programming and involvement of all partners in management bodies.
- Budget management and MEL implementation capacity were the most often quoted challenge related to local ownership.

The involvement of South-based consortium partners and leaders, and the availability of direct funding of South-based CSOs is a specificity of the SCS programme and identified as such by MTRs to a limited extent only. Around 50% of MTRs only assessed localisation aspects of the programme and analyse the evolution of the southern leadership and local ownership. Under the LFS grant instrument, Southern Leadership is ensured by definition. While MTRs recognize this fact, none of the report analyses evolution in southern leadership. Also, most MTRs lack a presentation of the programme's stakeholders, including who is being referred to as south-based partners, hampering the analysis that can be made for this EQ.

Table 10. Evolution of the southern partnership



Source: ADE

Southern leadership and local ownership were not objectives *per se* of the SCS programme and were rather regarded as a cross-cutting issue related to governance. While several MTRs described the governance structure, little attention was given to evolutions, excepted regarding communication issues and related improvements or need thereof, which is treated under the efficiency section. Notably, this absence of specific attention is corroborated by the fact that while ownership is one of the key principles of feminist implementation principles, good and/or bad practices related to feminist principles are identified in less 25% of MTRs.

Challenges emerged on evolving towards more Southern leadership, mostly related to the “central” management of budget. This should be understood as control over budget from the lead partner who is most often a North-based organization, with as a consequence some local partners that were “waiting for instructions”. Difficulties also emerged in sharing budget responsibilities with organizations that lacked the experience, and sometimes capacity, to deal with budget management and budget reporting requirements of the MFA, in particular given the large budget size. Other specific challenges emerged in the operationalization of the North-South consortia, which are detailed under the efficiency section.

“The imbalance perceived by some partners is related to the fact that (the North-based leader) has greater financial strength and is obviously better connected to the donor. The latter also relates to the fact that (the North-based leader) has a clearer picture of MFA expectations.”

Listed practices that favoured ownership and southern leadership include autonomy in national programming and transparent governance structures which ensures equal involvement of all consortium partners (North- and South-based) in governance structures, including management-level committees. Several MTRs pointed to the relatively large degree of independence of country teams in elaborating country programme, which contributed to a better fit to the local context.

“the South (...) has leadership over the programme, and the North (...) has leadership over the finances, given that none of the platforms had previous experience of managing a similar budget”

3.2.6. Gender, Inclusion and intersectionality

This section covers EQs 2.11, 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14.

EQ 2.11 What are good and/or poor practices in mainstreaming gender (through a transformative and/or rights-based and/or intersectional approach) in the implementation of the programmes? To what extent have/will the applied methods prove effective and what reasons for effectiveness, or a lack thereof, are identified?
EQ 2.12 What are good and/or poor practices in guaranteeing meaningful participation of groups and persons in vulnerable and/or marginalized situations and conditions (as defined per specific grant instrument) within the different grant instruments?
EQ 2.13 Have feminist principles been included in the implementation of programmes after the programme design? If so, in what way and what are good and/or bad practices identified in the MTRs?
EQ 2.14 What can we learn from the SCS programmes with regards to interventions on gender norms and behavioural change and is engagement of men/males sufficiently operationalized?

Summary response:

- Gender mainstreaming was addressed in most initiatives, but only a minority of MTRs explicitly discussed practices, and even fewer demonstrated effectiveness. Good practices in gender mainstreaming included having gender resources (e.g. gender mainstreaming tools, trainings, gender focal points) within Consortia, collaborating with Women CSOs, and integrating gender-related training in capacity-building activities. Irregular or limited gender capacity strengthening did not yield the expected results.
- Many initiatives supported women's rights within civil society strengthening, but only a minority explicitly adopted a rights-based approach.
- About half of the projects were consistent with a gender transformative approach, but evidence on outcomes and effectiveness on gender norms, related behaviours and institutions was limited. Positive changes were noted at individual, community, and national levels, including increased self-confidence, behaviour changes towards gender equality, and impacts on legal reforms, although contribution could not be clearly established especially for the latter. Engagement of community and religious leaders, as well as boys and men, was highlighted as beneficial, though evidence on the broader operationalization of boys and men's engagement was limited.
- Very few reports clearly and comprehensively substantiated the adoption of an intersectional approach in the implementation of the projects and presented some good practices. In others, intersectional approaches were mentioned, but sometimes confused with inclusion and context-based approaches.
- There were several examples of inclusion of marginalised groups, especially women and youth, and people with disability and LGBTIQ+ to a lesser extent. Good practices were the inclusion of marginalised groups in the Consortia or among the partners, the provision of safe spaces, and tailoring engagement approaches while ensuring accessibility.
- Few MTRs commented on applying feminist principles, with some examples of projects aligning with the feminist foreign policy framework, although this was not explicitly stated.

Gender

a. *Gender mainstreaming*

Most of the initiatives addressed issues related to gender. This is not surprising as three out of the five grant instruments targeted gender initiatives, explicitly incorporating objectives on gender equality and women's rights (Power of Women, Leading from the South, Women Peace and Security). One grant instrument focused on fostering rights that typically concern women (SRHR Partnerships). These already make up over half of the initiatives. Most of the non-targeted gender initiatives under the Power of Voice grant, constituting the remaining half of the projects, also incorporated a gender perspective at least to some extent.

While the gender dimension was covered in most of the MTRs, only a minority of them explicitly discussed good or poor practices on gender mainstreaming. Even fewer showed that gender issues were better mainstreamed and proved whether and how this resulted in greater effectiveness. The great majority of the MTRs did not have a specific evaluation question or section covering gender. However, gender considerations were included in the review because of the gender focus of most of the initiatives (paragraph above). Good practices for effective gender mainstreaming were only discussed in around 30% of the cases. Poor practices for effective gender mainstreaming were only discussed in less than 20% of the cases. The MTRs clearly or somewhat show that the approaches used resulted in better mainstreaming of gender only in around 30% of the cases. This was seldom accompanied by a discussion regarding the related results and the reasons for greater effectiveness or a lack thereof.

Identified examples of good gender mainstreaming practices related to (i) gender resources in the Consortia themselves, (ii) collaboration with Women CSOs, (iii) integration of gender-related training as part of the capacity-building activities provided by the Consortia. Strategies to make Consortia more aware, inclusive, and responsive concerning gender issues included for instance promoting the inclusion of more women in the Consortium's decision-making process, appointing gender focal points, producing gender mainstream toolkits, and organising training on how to mainstream gender in their activities. Some Consortia also deliberately engaged with women's rights organizations as partners for the implementation of their activities and for lobbying and advocacy efforts. Several partnerships carried out gender training and gender awareness sessions as part of their capacity-building efforts for partners and directly affected beneficiaries. In a few cases, the MTRs reported that this resulted in greater gender awareness and capacity, as in the project below.

"According to partners, the gender training series and technical support of ('Project X') has led to an enhancement in the knowledge and awareness of their staff regarding gender-related issues". (MTR 8)

Irregular or limited gender capacity strengthening on the other hand did not lead to the expected results. In at least two cases MTRs reported that one-off capacity-building events were insufficient to ensure the adoption of gender sensitive, responsive, or transformative practices. In other cases, gender-related concepts and approaches were not clear to partners. For instance, some MTRs reported there was no common understanding among partners, and sometimes also among consortium members, on what 'gender',

‘transformative’, or ‘feminist’ meant in theory and practice.

b. Right-based approach

Many initiatives supported the promotion of women’s rights in the broader context of civil society strengthening, in line with a rights-based approach to gender. Most gender-targeted projects focused on boosting women’s representation rights. This included activities in support of women’s leadership and political participation through the Power of Women and Leading from the South grants, as well as women’s participation in conflict prevention, resolution, and state-building through the Women, Peace Security grant. In order of magnitude, this was followed by projects sustaining women’s SGBV-related rights, mostly through the Power of Women grant and to a lesser extent through the Leading from the South grant, and by those addressing SRHR through the SRHR Partnership. Only a minority focused on protection rights (Women, Peace and Security grant) and on women’s economic empowerment (Leading from the South). Most of the other projects under the Power of Voice grant integrated gender rights as cross-cutting issues in their interventions.

However, only a minority (18%) of the MTRs explicitly mentioned the adoption of a rights-based approach in the implementation of the projects, and without further discussion. Some MTRs related to projects under the Power of Voices and Leading from the South grants acknowledged that the initiatives implement a rights-based approach. In at least one case the MTR reported the perception of the partners themselves, which believed that the programme operated in a right-based approach. In other instances, the MTRs simply stated it with no explanation of how the approach is inscribed in the programme, as in the quote below.

“(Project X) espouses a rights-based approach including full achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as essential elements to address the urgency of the climate crisis, along with pursuit of viable, inclusive and gender-just climate approaches.” (MTR 37)

c. Gender transformative approach

The MTRs explicitly or implicitly discussed the adoption of a gender transformative approach in around half of the cases. Notably, many projects implemented activities tackling – at least to some extent - gender norms, related behaviour and institutions, which resonate with the key features of a gender transformative approach. This was especially prominent in the case of projects under the Power of Women and Women Peace and Security grant instruments. Comparatively higher results for the latter grant instruments are not surprising as these are financing gender-specific interventions on boosting women’s representation. The Women Peace and Security instrument also has a specific objective on gender norms, notably to “subvert harmful underlying gender norms, which are obstacles to sustainable peace”.

For the above-mentioned projects, strategies and related outputs tackling gender norms, related behaviour and broader power structures were described in the MTRs. Mobilisation (coalition building, allyship, demonstration), advocacy and awareness raising challenging harmful gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality at different levels (community, national) were the most reported practices. Engaging communities in dialogue and activities was also done in several cases. Affected individuals were also directly targeted through training and skill-building activities to directly empower them to challenge stereotypes and

negotiate power dynamics. There were few examples of role model promotion, highlighting positive role models defying traditional norms. Finally, directly tackling policy and legal frameworks fostering discriminatory norms.

However, reported effective examples for which evidence on outcomes was presented are limited and the contribution of the programmes is often hard to assess. Fewer than ten MTRs presented at least some evidence of progress regarding gender norms with individuals, communities, and policymakers actively contributing to positive shifts in attitudes, behaviours, and legal frameworks. At the individual level, some projects increased self-confidence and empowerment among women, fostering the courage to speak up within their families and beyond, and to aspire to leadership roles. There were also some positive changes in the attitudes of project participants towards gender equality, leading to greater awareness of gender-based violence and reduced acceptance of violence against women. At the community level, some initiatives had evidence of behaviour changes towards gender equality, including increased reporting of gender-based violence, reduced conflict between couples, verbal assault toward women and active involvement of community leaders to address harmful practices issues. At the national level, there were in some instances impacts on legal reforms and policies supporting the rights of marginalized women and girls. However, contribution stories are not always clear and the MTRs themselves acknowledge difficulties in this sense, and the broader difficulty of witnessing norm change in the short period of the projects.

Good practices are therefore also difficult to identify and mostly anecdotal, although some examples were mentioned across the MTRs. Explanatory factors for success were often not well explained in the MTRs and are difficult to assess ex-post, also because several of the above-mentioned strategies have been applied simultaneously in the initiatives. Still, several MTRs pointed to the positive effects of the engagement of community and religious leaders, resulting in a shift of beliefs and behaviours at the community level as highlighted in the example below. Some MTRs also highlighted the engagement of boys and men as a good practice, although overall evidence regarding the engagement of boys and men is limited (see Box 2).

"Leaders, religious figures, and young men have played crucial roles in advocating for gender equality. e.g. promoting GYW rights and addressing harmful practices such as FGM." (MTR 14)

Box 2. Engagement of boys and men

Engagement of boys and men

A low share of MTR reported on the engagement of men and boys and only a minor share of the reports confirmed the operationalisation of such engagement, and the extent/magnitude of the engagement was often unclear. Only 29% of MTR reported on the engagement of men and boys. Men and boys were actively involved in the projects in at least 8 cases. In MTRs for which sufficient information is reported, engagement of men/boys included (i) training male's members of CSOs topics such as positive masculinity, gender bias, SGBV and related to then facilitate community dialogue; (ii) community engagement and sensitisation on the above-mentioned issues specifically targeting men; (ii) engagement of men in lobby & advocacy campaigns. Even when the engagement of men/boys was reported and took place, supporting evidence was sometimes insufficient or mixed with women's engagement, fully or partially lacking

appropriate sex-disaggregated data. This makes it difficult to assess the extent of men's involvement.

Evidence regarding outcomes brought by the engagement of men and boys is relatively limited, but some results at the individual and community levels could be gathered. Only four projects presented outcomes, although explanations were not as comprehensive. Results were linked to changes in attitudes and perceptions of gender norms within a certain community, and men's behavioural shifts to actively support women's rights and representation.

d. Intersectional approach

The MTRs comprehensively discussed intersectionality in a minority of the cases. Less than 30% of the MTRs had an EQ, a section, or some cross-section discussion on intersectionality. The MTRs explicitly discussed the adoption of an intersectional approach in less than 20% of the cases. Issues concerning intersectional approaches - such as diversity in stakeholder engagement, inclusive decision-making processes, integration, and empowerment of structurally excluded groups - were included in broader discussions around project relevance and effectiveness in more cases, but still less than half of the MTRs.

When intersectionality was explicitly discussed it was not always clearly explained or substantiated. In at least four cases, the adoption of an intersectional approach was stated but not further explained. Sometimes the application of an intersectional approach is assumed because of the nature of the initiative, notably in cases where the projects targeted structurally excluded groups with more than one identity. Some examples are provided below.

"Most partners apply principles consistent with feminist theory, including inclusivity, power analysis, and intersectional analysis" (MTR 31)

"The leadership of women – both cis- and transgender women – and transgender persons, as well as intersectional feminist perspectives to SRHR/HIV underlie ('Project X')s governance and ToC" (Project 39)

In some MTRs where explanations were provided, supporting evidence was mostly discussing the inclusivity or diversity approach of the projects. While these concepts are related to intersectionality, they are not synonymous. Inclusion relates to the meaningful participation of all individuals, while an intersectional approach aims at understanding how various forms of oppression intersect and shape individuals' experiences and tackling related systems of power and inequality. Similarly, in at least two cases evidence presented was rather related to a context-based approach, while in one case the MTR only mentioned data disaggregation as evidence of the application of the approach. **A few reports clearly and comprehensively substantiated the adoption of an intersectional approach in the implementation of the projects and presented some good practices.** One initiative developed clear intersectional advocacy strategies from the project's outset, translating the goal of promoting 'intersectional SRHR' into actionable strategies. These included steps, processes, and tools for conducting intersectional policy analysis and self-assessments, ensuring all organizations could implement intersectional approaches effectively. Other projects offered tailored support that addresses the diverse needs of different groups, considering the multilayered oppressions witnessed by the individuals. The latter also echoes some good practices highlighted under the section inclusion of marginalised groups provided below.

e. Feminist principles

A minority of MTRs commented on the application of feminist principles. While there was no direct reference to the feminist foreign policy framework of the MFA, some of the identified examples were consistent with the framework. No MTR had a specific EQ or section on the topics, but around one-third of the reports commented on the application of the feminist principles or approaches at least to some extent, either referring to its presence or absence. In several MTRs initiatives were referred to as “feminist” without a comprehensive explanation. This was mostly stated, and it was not clear which characteristics of how the initiatives were implemented qualified them as feminists. An example is provided below. Other MTRs simply reported that initiatives were supporting feminist movements and organisations.

“The consortium’s work is grounded in a gender, women’s rights and feminist participatory approach with the aim to impact lives of women and girls who are at the primary beneficiaries of all our project interventions.”

(MTR 12)

In some cases, further discussion was provided but was not explicitly and comprehensively related to the 4R principles (rights, representation, resources, reality check) guiding the MFA feminist foreign policy (see Box 3). This may be linked to the fact that the framework was only adopted in 2022. In several MTRs the adoption of a feminist approach was mostly related to inclusivity, consideration of power relations and ownership by local communities, which resonate with the 4R framework.

“Most partners apply principles consistent with feminist theory, including inclusivity, power analysis, and intersectional analysis.” (MTR 31)

However, it is also worth mentioning that the objectives supported by the different types of grant instruments and the related initiatives – notably upholding women’s right and representation - are consistent with the application of the above-mentioned principles. Box

Box 3. Feminist foreign policy

Feminist foreign policy means protecting human rights and promoting meaningful participation in decision-making by women and LGBTIQ+ people. The focuses of feminist foreign policy are **rights, representation, resources and reality check**:

- 1) women all over the world must be able to claim their universal rights and know that they are safeguarded from violence (rights);
- 2) they must be represented and take part in political decisions (representation);
- 3) there must be sufficient resources to achieve these goals (resources);
- 4) circumstances differ around the world, and a particular approach will not have the same effect everywhere. We therefore must implement our policy goals in a way that is appropriate to the local context (reality check).

The MTRs explicitly identified very few good or bad practices. The insufficient contextualization of gender-related support was among the poor practices mentioned at least three times, which deviates from the reality

check principle, advocating for context-appropriated initiatives. Some interventions were assessed as lacking local relevance with respect to gender issues, insufficiently considering the specific socio-cultural contexts and needs of the communities they aim to serve. For instance, one MTR reported that the gender mainstreaming tools (e.g. manuals provided to train partners) should have been better contextualised to the MENA and Africa realities. Similarly, an MTR highlighted that gender-related training were not sufficiently tailored to local partners' needs and contexts. Another review underscored the need to have context-responsive strategies varying for national, regional level and community level advocacy, and addressing various forms of gender-based violence. However, there were also good counterexamples in this sense. For instance, one MTR considered that the project design incorporated an approach that "responded well to the differences and complexities of national structures, social systems and communities" (MTR 9).

Inclusion of marginalised groups

Most MTRs commented on the participation of structurally excluded groups, mostly women and youth. Almost 80% of the reports at least mentioned the participation of structurally excluded groups in the interventions. Women and girls were by far the group mostly tackled – as mentioned in previous sections – followed by the youth. LGBTIQ+ groups and people with disabilities figured in the reports comparatively less. Other ethnic minorities such as indigenous groups were also mentioned, but only in a few cases. This was in line with the expected focus of the initiatives as defined in the different grant instruments.

Fewer reports however were explicit on how participation was operationalised, with some differences across grant instruments. Overall, half of the reports explicitly discussed how the relevant structurally excluded groups were involved in the initiatives. When looking at differences across grant instruments involvement of marginalized groups was explicitly tackled comparatively more under SRHR Partnership, under Power of Women, and under Women Peace and Conflict. Power of Voices and Leading from the South-related MTRs only directly addressed this in less than half and a quarter of the cases respectively.

Only about over a third of the reports presented some lessons, which were not always clearly explained. Overall, lessons concerning good or poor practices were highlighted more or less explicitly in the MTRs only in around 30% of the cases. However, only a few MTRs had sufficient description and substantiation of such good or poor practices.

Identified examples of recurrent good practices of integration of structurally excluded groups beyond women only consisted in (i) the inclusion of marginalised groups and their issues in the Consortia or among the partners, (ii) the provision of safe spaces, (iii) tailoring engagement approaches and ensuring accessibility. Several initiatives purposely included organisations focusing on marginalised groups e.g. youth and disabled in the Consortia or as beneficiaries of the programmes. There is some evidence that this has supported inclusion as explained in the quote below.

"The very act of partnering WROs and DWROs in each country has increased the integration of disability issues into the mainstream women's rights movement." (MTR 19)

Others supported policies promoting the recruitment of disabled people or conducted accessibility audit and

training to enhance understanding of disability, gender dynamics, legal frameworks, and inclusive programme delivery. At least four initiatives underscored the benefit of creating physical or online safe and open spaces for awareness raising and exchanges where marginalised individuals (women, youth, disabled, LGBTIQ+) could freely express themselves.

"The evaluation found that the creation of safe spaces for dialogue by ('Project X') in the form of coffee sessions was another good practice as it provided a platform for WWDs to talk about issues that affect them in spaces that they are used to and where they feel comfortable. This creates a supportive space away from the mainstream environment, which often hinders women from freely expressing themselves" (MTR 19)

"the 'X' web-based interactive platform was developed to provide inclusive, sex-positive information for young people aged 15 and above. It created a safe digital space for LGBTIQ+ and disabled individuals." (MTR 3)

Tailoring engagement methods to the targeted vulnerable group and ensuring accessibility of the training provided by the partners was another reported good practice in several cases. Whole-school approach²⁶, peer-to-peer engagement, digital engagement, gamification, and other creative approaches were highlighted as successful practices for the extensive inclusion of young people.

"The use of interactive theatre and creative methods, particularly among young people, helped raise awareness. This approach successfully engaged young audiences, sparking their interest in SRHR topics and gender issues." (Project 3) This also involved understanding the unique challenges faced by these communities and tailoring participation methods accordingly. For instance, some projects made sure that venues of training were accessible to disabled people, including the provision of accommodations and sign language interpreters, and that material provided during awareness-raising sessions was available in braille and audio-visual formats.

Among the negative examples, some structurally excluded groups were comparatively less included than others, notably LGBTIQ+ persons and rural or indigenous communities. Several MTRs underscore how projects struggled to integrate LGBTIQ+ individuals. This was often linked to contextual factors, as countries had restrictions on activities and training for the LGBTIQ+ community and some considered it a serious crime. Other MTRs also explicitly highlighted limited inclusivity efforts concerning "the most marginalised", which often face several types of discrimination simultaneously. The remoteness of the communities and the language barriers were also mentioned as factors limiting inclusion.

"The target group is not the most marginalised, and rural and more traditional / tribal women are less present." (MTR 7)

²⁶ A strategy involving the different members of a school community - including students, teachers, parents, and community members to foster student well-being. In this case, it entailed combining classroom and extracurricular activities and involving parents and trained sexuality education teachers.

4. Conclusions

This section contains the conclusions of the meta-evaluation. They are divided in two main parts: the first one relates to the quality of the MTRs; the second one concerns conclusions that are based on the findings and lessons learnt from the initiatives.

The conclusions based on the findings and lessons learnt from the initiatives (section 4.2) depend upon the quality of the MTRs, which as appears from section 4.1 was often low.

4.1. Conclusions related to the quality of the MTRs

Conclusion 1 – The Terms of Reference for the MTRs were generally clear and consistent on overall methodological requirements, but in some cases, requirements were too ambitious and not in line with good practices.

The meta-evaluation could examine the ToRs which were available for 26 of the MTRs. In most cases these were considered clear. They generally outlined the programme objectives, and defined evaluation questions. The Theory of Change of the programme was often annexed to the ToRs, but not in all cases (it was missing in close to 30% of the cases). The ToRs also specified in most cases (more than 80%) the required schedule, the deliverables to be produced and the necessary qualifications of the team (with an emphasis on evaluation expertise). They also provided in most cases specifications on data collection.

But ToRs were also regularly 'over-ambitious'. Many of them (40%) formulated more than 10 EQs, with a substantial share more than 15 and up to 21. The planned timeframe for such a complex MTR was often quite short, and maximum eight months for more than half of them. Some other requirements in terms of country visits to be conducted were also very high, with most of them requiring six to 11 country visits.

Conclusion 2 – The MTRs had weaknesses in terms of reaching relevant and well-founded conclusions and recommendations that would allow to strategically improve the implementation of the current and future initiatives, even if they also contained useful information.

Overall, the meta-evaluation revealed weaknesses of the MTRs.

A first element is the **absence of a mapping of the funding** available for the partnership or the LSF. An inventory of funding, showing how much funding has been used, and offering a breakdown in terms of objectives pursued, and, among other things, activities, 'subsectors', beneficiaries, and geographical location of the spending (countries, regions) was absent in nearly all MTRs (with 4 exceptions). Having an overview of the funding used seems like a first step in its evaluation.

Although effectiveness was examined in one way or another in all MTRs, there were often **flaws in assessing effectiveness**. Indeed, the MTRs formulated a causal chain hypothesis before collecting data in nearly all cases, and collected data related to this causal chain. But in more than half of the cases the causal chain was not validated step by step, and results were attributed to activities without a validation along the causal chain

(more than 60% of the cases), and even fewer showed effectiveness in terms of engaging with intermediate steps along the causal chain to prove effectiveness. Effects of other factors (such as shrinking civic space) were furthermore rarely examined. In 38% of the cases reviewers found that the link between activity and results was not clear. There were also difficulties with some other issues to be investigated, notably with efficiency, which was rarely very explicitly addressed. Also, other issues like gender, inclusion and intersectionality were not always addressed. Similarly, localisation was not addressed in most MTRs. These issues were also very rarely explicitly defined.

Finally, it is useful to note that **'outcome harvesting'** and **'most significant change'** are cited with contribution analysis as the two main methods used by the MTRs to measure effectiveness. As noted under EQ1, this is surprising as both approaches are referred to by the IOB as less suitable for substantiating claims on effectiveness.

The reviewers noted also **other flaws** in the MTRs, which can be summarized in three categories: (i) overall the MTRs do not make a lot of clear and synthetic claims, but remain very anecdotal; (ii) the reports are often not clear, with long narratives that touch upon the subjects to be evaluated without addressing them in a clear, substantiated and straightforward manner; (iii) the reports often contain reasoning errors, such as generalising unduly from one example; considering an input (e.g. a training) as a result (increased capacity).

Conclusion 3 – There was a discrepancy between the requirements and expectations for the MTRs, the size and complexity of the programmes they needed to review, and the means provided to conduct the MTRs.

The scope of the MTRs, as also noted under Conclusion 1, was ambitious. Also, expectations in terms of methodology as outlined notably in the document 'Extra information on the SCS MTRs' were high. This can to a certain extent be understood also given the size and the scope of the programmes they needed to review (which amounted on average to EUR 31.5 million). The MTRs were asked to deal with an important number of issues, on complex programmes, and with the expectations to reach high quality standards in terms of methodology. On the other hand, a closer examination of the means provided for these exercises, suggest that they were not commensurate to the magnitude of the task. (i) Indeed, the budgets for the MTRs were in nearly 50% of the cases for which information was available of maximum EUR 60,000. All the MTRs were conducted with a budget that was below 0.85% of the budget of the evaluated programme, and most of them were below 0.44%. Even if there is no gold standard, this can be considered low both in absolute and relative terms. (ii) The time frame also seems not commensurate to the task. About 1/3 of the evaluations had maximum six months to be conducted. In some cases, the inception phase was extended, leaving little time for data collection and analysis.

These elements led the meta-evaluation to conclude that the means provided were not commensurate to the expectations and requirement for the MTRs.

4.2. On the partnerships and LSF

4.2.1. Coordination

Conclusion 4 - Partnerships were based on complementarity and show overall a good coordination within the partnership. Still, partnerships were also confronted with specific coordination issues and few synergies were noted. Several lessons emerge.

Overall, the partnerships have been constituted based on their (potential) complementarities. The MTRs showed that most partners were engaged in coordination, mostly in terms of sharing experience, best practices, and allocation of technical and financial resources. They were well coordinated to use respective competencies, notably to enhance capacity strengthening of CSOs. In some cases, specific units like steering committees within partnership were found to be a good practice that facilitated coordination. There was furthermore frequent willingness within partnerships to further and deepen collaboration. Specific difficulties reported were for instance partners feeling sidelined by the lead member, increased complexity due to the number of and differences between partners, language barriers, and a perception that coordination diverted time and resources from other priorities. Although added value of complementarities between partners (in terms of expertise, geography, etc.) are highlighted in MTRs, few synergies were observed and in such cases with few or no details.

Conclusion 5 – There was little coordination between partnerships, despite clear potential and specific opportunities, nor with other stakeholders.

Very few partnerships engaged in the collaboration with other MFA-funded SCS partnerships. Only in six cases was there evidence of such collaboration. A closer look shows that in many countries, several partnerships were active, including four countries with ten partnerships or more (e.g. at least 25 partnerships in Kenya). Although very few MTRs analysed this topic, there was room in these countries for potential complementarities between partnerships, as testified in some MTRs. Still, more than half of the programmes (60%) reportedly coordinated with external stakeholders, including with other programmes and NGOs not funded by the Dutch MFA. Good practices highlighted in this respect in some initiatives include personal and institutional relationships also with government agents, religious leaders, and grassroots activists.

Conclusion 6 - Complementarities between the work of the implementing partners and the diplomacy efforts of the MFA were limited, with a lack of direct contact between the embassies and the partnerships, and the MFA being repeatedly considered as a donor rather than a strategic partner.

Fewer than 40% of the MTRs mention complementarity between partners and the diplomacy efforts of the MFA. When it occurred, it was mostly in terms of exchange of information or participation in common conferences. In many cases there was a lack of direct contact between the embassies and the partnerships, with the MFA being perceived solely as a donor. Still, few MTRs provide recommendations in this respect.

4.2.2. Results of partnerships under the SCS policy framework

Conclusion 7 – Overall, partnerships were well aligned to the SCS objectives, and nearly all pursued CSO strengthening as a central goal, mainly through the enhancement of L&A capacity, but also to the development of management capacity and the sensitization to inclusion. Also additional to the SCS ToC is the implementation of thematic lobby and advocacy by partnerships themselves.

More than 95% of the MTRs mention the strengthening of CSOs as a goal pursued. This focused very often on enhancing lobby and advocacy capacity, but also on other skills such as management capacity, monitoring capacity, and inclusivity, which were not foreseen in the SCS Theory of Change. Management capacity skills were mostly targeted with a view of supporting CSOs' access to funding additional to the SCS funds, which is not yet always the case, generating a risk related to the sustainability of the results regarding their reinforced capacity and presence on the lobby and advocacy scene. Also, additional to the SCS ToC is the broad scope of the lobby and advocacy activities conducted by partners themselves on thematic topics (and not solely on the civic space topic).

Conclusion 8 – Shrinking civic space was mostly considered as a contextual element requiring mitigation strategies, not something the avoidance of which the programmes needed to target as an objective. Lobby and Advocacy were unevenly used to 'pushback against the pushback'. However, change in contextual factors were identified as a key challenge to sustainability.

Shrinking civic space is largely acknowledged as a key context element and implementation challenge. It is mostly considered that it falls within the consortium partners' responsibility to contribute to mitigate the negative effect on CSOs' ability to lead on activities expected to contribute to building a supportive environment for CSOs' lobby and advocacy activities. While fear of backlash daunted consortium partner's willingness to pushback against the pushback at country level, there is scattered evidence of partners contributing to a conducive environment at local level, in particular by involving local leaders such as religious leaders. However, change in context and risk of losing acquired results are noted as key risk factors for sustainability of the results.

Conclusion 9 – As reported by the MTRs investigated, the programmes overall contributed to CSO capacity strengthening, favouring CSO networks, making them more inclusive and improving brokering; results on enhancing the lobby and advocacy varied, with examples of results and of the lack thereof.

As reported by the MTRs investigated, there is overall convergence on the fact that CSOs were strengthened regarding their capacity to conduct lobby and advocacy, which contributed to increase their legitimacy and enlarging their network. There are, however, mixed results regarding the increase in implementation of lobby and advocacy activities, with evidence that it happened in several cases, and at the same time evidence on other cases that no progress was made. Hence, it is not possible to conclude on a clear effect at the level of the SCS as a whole. It is not clear at this stage whether this uncertainty on results reached reflects methodological flaws in the MTRs, weakness of the monitoring system, or actual implementation challenges.

Regarding influence on norms and decision making, contribution analysis is too weak to conclude.

Conclusion 10– Most initiatives addressed issues related to gender, in line with the expected focus of the grant instruments. No reference was found, however, to the MFA’s recent feminist foreign policy framework. Attention was given to youth too, but much less to LGBTIQ+ persons, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. A few good practices were highlighted.

Most initiatives addressed issues related to gender, by the very nature of their grant instruments for half of the initiatives (4 out of 5 grant instruments relating to gender), or by incorporating a gender perspective at least to some extent for the other half of the initiatives (under the Power of Voice grant instrument). Many supported the promotion of women’s rights, in the broader context of civil society strengthening, and about half of initiatives adopted strategies in line with a gender transformative approach. Regarding feminist principles, no direct reference was found to the recent feminist foreign policy framework of the MFA (2022) and its 4R principles although the objectives supported by the initiatives were in principle consistent with them; the adoption of a feminist approach was mostly stated but different concepts were used to assess it. Regarding attention to other structurally excluded groups, youth followed women and girls; LGBTIQ+ persons and people with disabilities figured in the reports comparatively less, and ethnic minorities only in a few cases. This was in line with the expected focus of the initiatives as defined in the different grant instruments. A few examples of good and bad practices were reported, such as for the former the inclusion of gender resources (e.g. gender mainstreaming tools, trainings, gender focal points) and marginalised groups in the Consortia themselves, partnering with organisations focusing on women and other marginalised groups, integration of gender/inclusion-related training and toolkits, the provision of safe spaces, and tailoring engagement approaches.

5. Recommendations

This section contains the recommendations of the meta-evaluation. It covers both recommendations that concern the remainder of the policy framework and for the development of future policy frameworks. All the recommendations are addressed to the MFA, including when in the end the purpose is to promote certain practices within and among partnerships.

5.1. On monitoring and evaluation

Recommendation 1 – When conducting evaluations, make sure requirements and expectations are in line with state-of-the-art rules and means commensurate to the requirements. It might also be envisaged to revisit and refine the evaluation cycle.

The meta-evaluation allowed to identify, some weaknesses of the MTRs (see also conclusion 2) and concluded that there was a discrepancy between the expectations for MTRs and the means provided.

On that basis it is recommended to make sure the following elements are considered for future evaluations, whether they are conducted ex ante, at mid-term or ex post. It is important to ensure:

R1.1 ... that the evaluation starts with an **inventory or ‘mapping’ of the funding**, providing an overview of the funds used by the programme, the evolution, the allocation to specific objectives / priorities, the activities, the countries or regions benefitting, the beneficiary organisations, etc. This appears to be an important prerequisite to better understand the subject of the evaluation, which was missing in the current MTRs. Where useful this could be linked to the theory of change of the programme.

R1.2 ... that the **scope of the evaluations is well defined**, relevant, specific enough, and that its coverage is feasible. We would recommend a maximum of 5 to 10 strategic evaluation questions that allow to specify the coverage of the OECD criteria and define well what the evaluation is looking for. Make sure that the ToRs are explicit on specific topics that need to be covered by the evaluations, such as for instance feminist principles, local development, the measuring of existing CSO capacity (whether collected at baseline or using recall methods), or the need to address properly issues such as efficiency, intersectionality or localization.

R1.3 ... that **evaluation methods and tools** that are not considered sufficiently solid by the MFA (such as for instance most significant change), are not applied or are applied with specific validity checks.²⁷ Ensure also **that methodological requirements are realistic** given the subject and scope of the evaluation, and the means provided. Methodological requirements should not be pursued in their own right. It is also important to make sure that reporting on the adequate implementation of methodologies is ensured.

R1.4 ... that the **process is in line with the requirements and the means**. This would entail notably the importance to plan sufficient time for such complex evaluations as the MTRs (but also ex post evaluations),

²⁷ If used, they should build on specific methods to ensure they can engage with alternative explanations for results, like careful selection of interviewees including those not directly benefiting from the programme.

and notably for the data collection and synthesis phases. It is also important to make sure that the number of country visits required is realistic given the time frame and budget provided (see also R1.5).

R1.5 ... that **sufficient budget** is foreseen given the size and scope of the programmes evaluated and the expectations with respect to the evaluations. The meta-evaluation found that the budgets were in general too low compared to the programmes they covered and the requirements for the evaluations. It is therefore recommended to **define what percentage of the programme size should be covered by an evaluation**, as well as a minimum threshold for the budgets of evaluations. Indeed, several tasks of an evaluation are impossible to 'compress', independently of the size of the intervention they concern. More concretely, establishing guidance for budgets should go beyond the definition of benchmarks and aim at showing what kind of elements should guide the establishment of the budgets. A specific exercise on how to define budgets could be conducted. Budgets should for instance also take due account of the need to have a clear and useful mapping of the funding as referred to under R1.1. For country visits, it is possible to define a budget using several parameters (number of days, number of participants, combination of national / international experts, daily fees and other costs, in-country travel requirements, and expected duration of the country visit (a few days, one or several weeks). It could also be envisaged to conduct a survey among evaluators to better understand the constraints they met to conduct the evaluation, including in terms of budget.

R1.6... that **clear instructions** are given to partnerships to design, and conduct evaluations, and notably how to define the scope, the methodological requirements, the timeframe and what minimum budget should be foreseen. This could also entail drafting specific **guidance** in this respect and possibly setting up a **helpdesk** to ensure support to partnerships.

R1.7 ... that, finally, there is due consideration of and thinking on the **evaluation cycle and how to optimize the approach**. Indeed, it might for instance be envisaged not to ask the partnership to organise themselves the evaluations (at mid-term, end term, or ex post) but to differentiate between programme-specific and policy-level information needs. In the latter case, overarching evaluations could for instance be designed with a view to assessing the support provided by the MFA and drawing lessons *across* partnerships, hence at a more general and strategic level. This would allow bridging the gap between assessments and lessons that are programme specific and an assessment and lessons overall at the level of the policy framework. Such evaluations could concentrate on certain geographic zones, certain grants, certain themes, or other focus areas, depending on where information needs are deemed highest and most important for policy purposes.

Based on Conclusion 2 and the meta-evaluation overall

5.2. On the policy framework

Recommendation 2 – on Coordination within partnerships: Continue building on the good practices of coordination / synergies within partnerships and make sure they are shared within partnerships.

Continue and promote further extension of good practices repeatedly observed thus far between consortium members of partnerships, such as sharing of lessons and experiences and of allocation of technical and financial resources. Consider also promoting steering committees within partnerships, as identified in an MTR to have facilitated coordination.

Reflect with the partnerships on possible solutions to difficulties met, for instance in terms of complexity of the number of and differences between partners, language barriers, and resource-intensiveness of coordination efforts. Also encourage synergies whenever relevant. Envisage increasing experience-sharing opportunities between partnerships on increased coordination and synergies within partnerships.

Based on Conclusion 4

Recommendation 3 – on Coordination between partnerships: Promote actively coordination between partnerships, examining how to do this best.

Actively promote coordination (and synergies) between partnerships, notably on specific themes or in countries with several of them involved – and more largely also on working on the MFA's Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society and more broadly on lobby & advocacy matters in the Global South. Create experience-sharing opportunities and provide incentives. Consider what specific instructions could also be given to partnerships, with a view to focus on those actions ultimately benefitting most the local civil society.

Include experience-sharing on opportunities for mutual learning identified in MTRs, such as on climate justice, civil society local contexts, effective approaches to movement building, or experiences about managing consortium-led programmes. Also consider exchanging on good practices identified in MTRs on working with other actors, such as on building personal and institutional relationships also with government agents, religious leaders, and grassroots activists.

Based on Conclusion 5

Recommendation 4 – on Coordination with MFA and embassies: Explore how complementarities between diplomacy efforts of the MFA and the implementing partners could be enhanced.

Consider promoting complementarity between partners and the diplomacy efforts of the MFA in more cases (currently reported in less than 40% of the MTRs). Build on good practices observed, such as in terms of exchange of information or participation in common conferences – address this in experience-sharing moments such as those mentioned in Recommendations 2 and 3. Encourage direct contacts of partnerships with the embassies and the MFA, e.g. through networking events. More broadly, explore to what extent and how partnerships, embassies and the MFA would favour such closer collaboration; indeed, while few MTRs provided recommendations in this respect, few did reach out to MFA and embassies to gather their views.

Based on Conclusion 6

Recommendation 5 – on lobby and advocacy and effectiveness: review the SCS Theory of Change to define the role of partnerships in conducting lobby and advocacy next to CSOs.

The SCS ToC did not foresee implementation of thematic lobby and advocacy by partners as all changes are assumed to go through the reinforced civic society organizations. The reality shows that lobby and advocacy was largely implemented by partners themselves in their area of interest. The SCS framework should reflect on this difference, including implications in terms of the channel through which higher level results happened or are expected to happen in the future. The channel through which results were achieved will be important to determine the efficiency of the SCS programmes.

Based on Conclusion 7

Recommendation 6 – on pushing back against shrinking civic space: define clear objectives in terms of pushback against shrinking civic space.

Define a clear position and objectives for the SCS on pushing back against the pushback on civic space, including whether it should be addressed as a key objective of the programme or as a context element requiring mitigation strategies that can possibly be implemented at a more local level. The position should consider both the risk in terms of sustainability posed by shrinking civic space, and the risks in terms of unintended backlash effect posed by visibly acting on shrinking civic space. It is also recommended to reflect this in the Theory of Change.

Based on Conclusion 8

Recommendation 7 – on Gender: Promote consideration by the strategic partnerships of the MFA's feminist foreign policy framework.

Promote consideration by the strategic partnerships (and their upcoming reviews/evaluations) of the MFA's recent feminist foreign policy framework. Encourage for instance using its concepts and definitions, and the 4R principles (rights, representation, resources, reality check). This may also include deciding on specific issues such as the extent to which specific sections on gender are to be included in evaluations of gender specific programs. Envisage asking reporting on this to the partnerships. Consider hereby matters of feasibility and buy-in, given that the 2021-2025 strategic partnerships are ongoing while the feminist foreign policy framework was introduced in 2022.

Based on Conclusion 10

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Meta-evaluation - MTR reports strategic partnerships

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Abbreviations

AWDF	African Women's Development Fund
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DSO	Social Development Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
FIMI	Indigenous Women's Fund AYNi
FMS	Fondo de Mujeres del Sur
HQ	Headquarters
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
L&A	Lobby and Advocacy
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer
LSF	Leading from the South Funds
MEL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NL	the Netherlands
PoW	Power of Voices
SCS	Strengthening Civil Society
SDGs	Social Development Goals
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SP	Strategic Partnerships
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	the United Nations
VAT	Value Added Tax
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFA	Women's Fund Asia
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRGE	Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Introduction

Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society

This assignment focuses on the mid-term evaluations of the “**Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society**”¹. Under this grant instrument, funding has been available for civil society organisations from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2025. The grant instrument is subdivided into six grant instruments all focusing on strengthening civil society and lobby & advocacy:

- Power of Voices;
- Power of Women;
- Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights Partnership Fund;
- Women Peace and Security;
- Leading from the South;

More information on the grant instruments can be found in **annex 1**.

After a selection procedure in 2020, a total number of 42 partnerships and 4 Leading from the South Funds (LSF) started their 5-year programmes in January 2021, in over 65 countries. These partnerships and Leading from the South Funds will submit their mid-term review (MTR) reports at the latest by November 1st to the Ministry including a:

- Programmatic focus on: Theory of Change, context analysis and risk analysis (including SEAH, fraud and corruption), achievements to date on the output and outcome indicators that are linked to the Strengthening Civil Society and thematic Result Framework basket indicators, crosscutting themes (gender, youth, climate), challenges, lessons learned and good practices, sustainability
- Partnership collaboration focusing on: leading from the south, partnership with the Ministry and the Embassies, lessons learned and good practices

To ensure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has provided extra guidance and transparency on the assessment process for which a selection of the IOB evaluation quality criteria is used. This guidance can be found in **annex 2**.

These Terms of Reference (ToR) provide the outline for a meta-evaluation synthesizing the MTR reports of the 42 partnerships and the 4 LFS funds. The meta-study will assess the quality of the MTR reports produced by the partnerships under the SCS policy framework by assessing the level of confidence of reported effectiveness of partnerships interventions, will synthesize their contents and formulate lessons and recommendations to inform the development of a successor policy framework.

Objectives

The meta-evaluation has multiple objectives but should mainly revolve around an assessment of the MTR reports produced by the partnerships and the synthesis of their contents to gain insights in the progress of the overall SCS policy framework. The findings from this assignment will be aggregated at partnership level and are aimed at improving the understanding of MFA on MTR processes and outcomes to allow further improvement of policy implementation and future policy frameworks.

The meta-study has the following principal objectives:

¹ All grant instruments and policy documents can be found here: [Beleidskader Versterking Maatschappelijk Middenveld | Beleidsnota | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)

1. **To disaggregate the MTR reports according to the overall level of confidence in reported findings and to assess the specific level of confidence in the reported effectiveness of partnership interventions in the MTR reports²** with regards to applied methods, relevance and utility of information gathered and conclusions formulated in the MTR reports produced by the strategic partnerships;
2. **To aggregate/synthesize the findings and lessons learned³ from the MTRs per grant instrument and per confidence disaggregation level⁴** to provide insights in the progress per grant instrument of the policy framework and to identify possible data-gaps (i.e. data required for the answering of MTR questions that was not collected/available in the MTRs).
3. **To provide recommendations regarding good practices and challenges** for the remainder of the policy framework and for the development of future policy frameworks.

Evaluation questions per objective

This sections provides the evaluation questions per objective

1. To disaggregate the MTR reports according to the overall level of confidence in reported findings and to assess the specific level of confidence in the reported effectiveness of partnership interventions in the MTR reports.
 - Did the methods applied in the MTRs meet the selection of IOB criteria? What evaluation methodologies were used in the evaluation reports? Were the proposed methods adequately applied to answer questions on effectiveness? To what extent have the applied MTR methodologies paid attention to unintended (positive and negative) effects?
 - How did processes surrounding the conduction of the MTRs (planning/organization and rollout) take shape according to MTR ToRs, inception- and reports? What good/poor practices can be identified with regards to processes surrounding the conduction of the MTRs?
 - Do patterns exist in level of confidence regarding findings and effectiveness regarding:
 - processes
 - budget/size of a partnership and its interventions
 - location(s) of partnership programme(s)
 - type of consortium lead organization
 - MTRs conducted by partnerships themselves or an independent party?
 - How and to what extent is efficiency dealt with in the MTR reports?
 - How is progress towards sustainability conceptualized, measured and evaluated in the MTR reports?
 - How are gender, inclusion and intersectionality conceptualized, measured and evaluated in the MTRs?
 - How was localisation conceptualized, measured and evaluated in the MTRs?

²A selection of IOB evaluation quality criteria is used to assess the MTRs.

³ From MTRs assessed to be of sufficient quality.

⁴ The section on methodology further outlines disaggregation requirements.

2. To aggregate/synthesize the findings and lessons learned from the MTRs to provide insights in the progress of the policy framework and to identify possible data-gaps per grant instrument and per confidence disaggregation level

Based on the evaluation reports and the assessment of the evaluation methodologies, what can be said about⁵:

Coherence

- What good- and/or poor practices and lessons learned, in achieving synergy and good collaboration for joint results, within partnerships, between partnerships and with other stakeholders, can be identified? Are there examples of added value of coordination between different partnership?
- Did partnerships coordinate with other partnerships under the SCS policy framework and/or with external actors? If so, how and with who(m) did coordination take place, what explains their need to coordinate, and what explains the level of success of coordination efforts?
- Did the lobby and advocacy work by SCS SPs complement the diplomacy work of the NL MFA (HQ, Embassies and Permanent Representations⁶) and how is complementarity or non-complementarity of the lobby and advocacy work explained?

Effectiveness

- To what extent are the overall SCS policy framework goals being pursued and is progress achieved?
- Were there unintended effects caused by the implementation of the policy framework? If they occurred, what were these effects, why did they occur and what were the consequences in general and for different groups?
- *In relation to the international L&A: What worked (and what didn't work) to effectively 'pushback against the pushback' in terms of, women's rights, gender equality, civic space and equal rights for LGBTIQ+ persons and why?*

Efficiency

- What lessons can be drawn from the comparison between inputs (capacity, funding, network building) and outputs (results achieved till now) towards the SCS overall and grant specific goals?
- Are difficulties in implementation (e.g. operational, technical, in relation to country contexts and coordination between partnerships) identified in the MTR reports? If so, what are these difficulties and how were they mitigated?

Sustainability

- To what extent and, if so, how have measures to achieve sustainability been put in place? What are good and/or poor practices of partnerships in their work towards safeguarding the effects of implementation in the long run? What are the lessons from their experiences up to now and what needs attention during the second half of policy implementation?

⁵ In case of insufficient quality MTR reports should not be used to answer the research questions under objective 2 and 3.

⁶ UN Geneva, UN Vienna, UN New York, UN Rome, Council of Europe in Strasbourg, EU in Brussels, OECD in Paris, UNESCO in Paris. NATO in Brussels, OSCE in Vienna and ICC in The Hague

Locally led development

- Did southern leadership and local ownership evolve under the implementation of the policy framework and for each specific grant instrument? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

Gender, Inclusion and intersectionality

- What are good and/or poor practices in mainstreaming gender (through a transformative and/or rights-based and/or intersectional approach) in the implementation of the programmes? To what extent have/will the applied methods prove effective and what reasons for effectiveness, or a lack thereof, are identified?
 - What are good and/or poor practices in guaranteeing meaningful participation of groups and persons in vulnerable and/or marginalized situations and conditions (as defined per specific grant instrument) within the different grant instruments ?
 - Have feminist principles⁷ been included in the implementation of programmes after the programme design? If so, in what way and what are good and/or bad practices identified in the MTR reports?
 - What can we learn from the SCS programmes with regards to interventions on gender norms and behavioural change and is engagement of men/males sufficiently operationalized?
3. To provide recommendations regarding good and/or poor practices and challenges for the remainder of the policy framework and for the development of the future policy frameworks.
- What recommendations can be formulated for the remainder of the policy framework in general and more specific on the role of the Ministry and its Missions/Embassies?
 - What recommendations can be formulated for future SCS and thematic policy making, funding mechanisms and policy implementation, including MEL ?

Methodology and Scope

The meta-evaluation will be based on a desk-research approach investigating MTR reports, other programme/partner documents (e.g. MTR ToRs and inception reports for the questions regarding process) combined with a conclusionary validation session involving representatives of the partnerships, some of the embassies in partnership countries and the MFA. The assignment will not involve any primary data collection with partnerships to avoid the overburdening of partners due to them being engaged in multiple other MEL activities.

In answering the research questions under objective 2 and 3, the contractor is expected to analyse the contents of MTRs and associated documents **per grant instrument** based on level of confidence. Only the MTRs in which there is sufficient overall confidence in the reported results regarding effectiveness, and other findings, will form the basis for formulating conclusions and recommendations on the effectiveness (and the **first three** research questions under effectiveness) of the SCS policy framework. MTRs that are deemed as not inspiring sufficient confidence in the reporting of effectiveness are expected to be separated and analysed on the basis of an assessment of confidence on other topics and the remaining research questions. In this separate analysis, the contractor is expect to also assess the level of confidence on the remaining topics of coherence, efficiency, sustainability, locally led development and gender, inclusion and intersectionality. MTRs wherein the level of confidence is deemed as sufficient enough on a specific topic need to be used for the answering of the research questions corresponding to this topic. The reports which are deemed as inspiring insufficient confidence should be put aside.

⁷ Referring to the 4R approach of the feminist foreign policy: rights, representation, resources and reality check.

Disaggregation of reports

For the assessment of confidence in reported results in the MTRs and the disaggregation of reports on the basis of level of confidence, the contractor will utilize both the guidance document provided by MFA to the partnerships, named *Extra information on the SCS MTRs (including its assessment by MFA)* and attached in annex 2, next to the [IOB evaluation quality criteria](#).

To conduct this disaggregation, the contractor is expected to develop and operationalize inclusion/exclusion criteria, based on the IOB criteria and develop an approach for coding these criteria. The contractor will also develop and rollout an approach for data extraction, synthesis, analysis, interpretation and reporting clustered by confidence level and OECD-DAC criteria.

In the development of a disaggregation strategy, the contractor is free to propose how many levels of disaggregation (e.g. high-, medium- or low) to use in the assessment and to introduce criteria additional to the guiding IOB criteria and MFA guidance.

Scope

Concerning the scope of the meta-evaluation, all 42 partnerships and 4 LFS funds are expected to be covered during the study.

The desk-research of the meta-evaluation will, at least, cover the following documentation:

- 46 MTR reports (of 42 partnerships and 4 LFS funds) and corresponding annexes.
- MTR terms of reference documents and inception reports.
- Contextual partnership documents such as annual plans and other reports.

Especially in cases wherein MTR reports do not provide adequate insights in set objectives and applied methods in the MTRs, the inception reports of these MTRs will need to be taken into account. All final versions of the MTR reports will be submitted by November 1st 2023 and will be made available immediately upon receipt from the partners.

A detailed study design will be developed and further refined during the inception phase of this assignment together with the MFA and the reference group.

Budget,

A total budget of EUR 150,000,- excluding VAT is available for the conduction of this assignment.

The assignment will take place between 01 September 2023 and 31 January 2024

Deliverables and timeline

1. A draft & final inception report (max 30 pages) including:
 - detailed methodology including data sources and data analysis;
 - detailed discussion on in- and exclusion criteria for disaggregation of MTR reports per confidence level;
 - discussion on planned analysis of MTR contents
 - per grant instrument,
 - per confidence disaggregation level
 - discussion of limitations of the methodologies chosen & avoidance of bias;
 - detailed work plan including timeline and number of working days;
 - detailed risk management section;
 - draft outline for the final report

2. Draft evaluation report;
3. Organisation & facilitation of a validation meeting with partnerships, Mission(s)/Embassies, MFA & other stakeholders with the following topics:
 - Presentation of findings and conclusions from the assignment
 - Interactive discussion on findings and conclusions for validation purposes with the ministry & partnerships;
4. Validation meeting report with key discussion points and conclusions (max. five pages);
5. Short discussion paper/summary outline (3 pages) the main findings and conclusions of the assignment for dissemination at the MFA learning events;
6. Final evaluation report (max. 60 pages excluding annexes) in English adhering to the IOB evaluation quality criteria including:
 - summary in English
 - methodology including the limitations of the methods used and discussion of bias;
 - presentation of results per grant instrument and within the grant instrument:
 - o presentation of results from reports awarded a good/high/sufficient confidence level;
 - o answers to posed research questions
 - conclusions & recommendations.
7. Interactive presentation/session/workshop during the SCS learning event
 - PowerPoint presentation on the findings of the meta-study
8. Communication materials (for public communication) outlining main results, lessons learned and best practices:
 - two pager;
 - policy brief (max 5 pages);
 - 3-5 infographics suitable for social media (Instagram/Twitter etc.).

Key Deliverables	Timeline	By
Contract signed	18 September 2023	MFA & Consultants
Draft inception report	4 October	Consultants
Discussion draft inception report	17 October	Reference group and MFA
Final inception report	31 October 2023	Consultants
Approval final inception report	10 November 2023	MFA
Data collection & analysis	November - December	Consultants
Draft Evaluation report	10 January 2024	Consultants
Validation meeting with representatives of the partnerships, embassies and MFA.	In the week of 15 January	Organised by consultants, attended by representatives of the partnerships, embassies and MFA.
Discussion draft evaluation report	23 January 2024	Reference group and MFA
Short discussion paper/Summary	26 January	
Interactive presentation/session/workshop during the SCS learning event	End January/beginning February (depending on planning learning event)	Consultants
Final Evaluation Report	9 February 2024	Consultants

Roles and responsibilities

For this assignment, roles and responsibilities are divided as follows.

Roles and responsibilities of the Contractor:

- Deliver above mentioned deliverables;
- Written reaction to advise from reference group on inception report and draft report;
- Ensure compliance with the Ministry's ethical standards and informed consent policy regarding respondents. Immediate notification of the Ministry about any safeguarding issues;
- Data collection (both quantitative and qualitative)
- Insurance of adequate triangulation and validation of collected data;

Roles and responsibilities of the Department of Social Development(DSO) of the Ministry:

- Provide the available background documents (proposals, MTR reports etc.)
- Conduct a review of and provide timely feedback of draft and approval of final deliverables (listed above under 'Deliverables');
- Oversee that the consultancy team adheres to research ethics and safeguarding policy;
- The evaluation management team facilitates connections to the partnerships and other relevant stakeholders;
- Coordinate the external reference group.

Roles and responsibilities of the external reference group

- Provide written feedback to the evaluation management team on:
 - o draft inception report
 - o draft evaluation report
- Participate in the reference group meetings to discuss the:
 - o draft inception report
 - o draft evaluation report
- Provide written advice on approval/disapproval of the final report

Roles and responsibilities of the strategic partnerships & funds:

- Provide requested information to the consultant(s);
- Provide answers to clarifying questions from the contractor regarding the assignment and the contents of the MTRs;
- Participation in validation meetings;

Selection Criteria

Submitted proposals need to present a broad approach on how assessments of confidence will be undertaken and what in- and exclusion criteria will be utilized. This approach will, in collaboration with MFA and the reference group, be further elaborated and fine-tuned in the inception phase of this assignment.

Furthermore, contractors interested in this assignment will need to be independent of/not involved in the MTR processes that are being conducted by the partnerships.

The assignment will be awarded to the contractor who has submitted the best proposal based on the below-displayed assessment criteria including the relevant weighting. Only proposals that receive at least 65 points out of 90 points under the criteria *Quality of the Technical Proposal*, *Experience and Knowledge of Proposed Team* and *Planning* as well as a total score of at least 70 points out of the total 100 points will be considered.

Assessment criteria	Max. Pts	Key issues/Allocation methodology
Quality of the Technical Proposal	45	<p>The technical proposal will be scored on the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the assignment (5 points) • Quality of the approach and methodology (30 points): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summary of the methodology in an evaluation matrix translating evaluation questions into criteria, indicators and information sources ○ The methods are appropriate to evaluate/answer the research questions • Discussion of the limitations of the evaluation & avoidance of bias (5 points) • The extent to which the evaluation methodology is sufficiently gender sensitive, and integrates Do-No-Harm and safeguarding principles (5 points) <p><i>* In case a contractor has been involved in a MTR of the partnership and/or LFS programmes this will result in 0 points.</i></p>
Experience and Knowledge of Proposed Team & planning	45	<p>The proposed team will be scored as follows:</p> <p>Experience with and knowledge of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meta-studies and/or Meta-evaluations of large/multi-country programmes including quality assessments (15 points) • Qualitative evaluation methodologies to measure complex social change programmes such as contribution analysis, process tracing etc (10 points) • Solid experience in MEL of lobby & advocacy of multi-stakeholder programs on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthening Civil Society ○ Women Rights' & Gender Equality; ○ Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; ○ Other themes under the SCS grant instruments

		<p>(10 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Proven) Excellent writing skills (2 points) • Diverse team including junior consultants (2 points) • Clear and adequate division of tasks between the team members (4 points) • The proposed calendar includes an extent of flexibility, while also taking into account the final deadline, in case unforeseen circumstances impact the evaluation (2 points)
Total price (excl. VAT of all non-optional deliverables)	10	<p>To be eligible the following should be provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed budget with a break-down of working days/rate per person and other anticipated expenses <p>Scoring regarding the budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lowest offered price will receive 10 points. Other proposals will receive points calculated in comparison with the lowest offer (i.e. lowest offered price divided by the budget of the proposal multiplied by 10).
Total	100	

Annex 1 The different grant instruments

1. Power of Voices

The Power of Voices Partnerships grant instrument has a budget of EUR 825 million for which 22 partnerships have been established with alliances of civil society organizations for five years, beginning on the 1st of January 2021. It aims to strengthen civil society organisations to lobby and advocate at local, national and international levels to achieve all the SDGs and more inclusive and sustainable society. Partnerships are focusing on one of the following seven themes while attention to gender equality is mainstreamed throughout:

1. Climate mitigation and adaptation (five partnerships);
2. Trade and making value chains more sustainable (four partnerships);
3. Food security, sustainable water management and/or WASH (including water, sanitation and hygiene) (two partnerships);
4. Women's rights and gender equality (four partnerships);
5. Freedom of speech or Freedom of Religion and Belief (two partnerships);
6. Equal rights LGBTIQI+ (two partnerships);
7. Security and Rule of Law (three partnerships).

These seven themes link to thematic theories of change and related results frameworks developed by the various thematic directorates of the Ministry, presented in Annexes B & C. Program management of partnerships on the different teams is taken care of by the relevant thematic directorates.

2. Power of Women

Power of Women grant instrument has a budget of EUR 64 million, for which 6 partnerships have been established with alliances of civil society organisations for five years, beginning on the 1st of January 2021. It aims to strengthen the capacity of women's rights organisations in the area of lobby and advocacy. In turn, these women's rights organisations can foster social, economic and/or political transformation to achieve equal rights and opportunities for women and girls. The programme's main objectives are the following:

1. Prevention and elimination of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls;
2. Strengthening women's leadership and women's participation in (political) decision-making;
3. Strengthening women's economic empowerment and improving the economic climate for women.

3. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Partnership Fund

The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Partnership Fund has a budget of EUR 315 million for which seven partnerships have been established with alliances of civil society organisations for five years, beginning on the 1st of January 2021. This instrument aims to strengthen the capacity of lobby & advocacy for the universal fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). There is a need for greater freedom of choice for young people about their sexuality and information and education, including sexuality education and promoting meaningful youth participation in decision making. It is the mission of MFA(DSO/GA) to contribute to lower maternal and child mortality (SDG3.1 and 3.2), contribute to halting the AIDS epidemic (SDG3.3), contribute to universal

access to acceptable and affordable sexual and reproductive health, including safe abortion and HIV Services (SDG3.7) and universal access to reproductive health and rights, including fighting sexual harassment, gender-based violence, child marriage and other discrimination and criminal practices (SDG5.6). Whereas Power of Voices and Power of Women focuses totally on capacity building of civil society and lobby & advocacy, service delivery is to a small extent allowed under the SRHR Fund.

4. Women, Peace and Security

The grant instrument Women, Peace and Security has a budget of EUR 40 million, for which seven partnerships have been established with alliances of civil society organisations for five years, beginning on the 1st of January 2021. With the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), women's rights and gender equality were embedded for the first time in the international peace and security agenda. UNSCR 1325 recognises the important role of women in achieving peace and security; as peacemakers, leaders within local communities, breadwinners. The resolutions that followed UNSCR 1325 also recognised the adverse impact of sexual violence on peace and security in a country. These resolutions consider sexual violence a tactic of war and a war crime that must be prosecuted in every case and call for protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

This instrument aims to strengthen civil society organisations so that they are capable of lobbying and advocacy, with a specific focus on further implementing the Dutch NAP1325. The sub-objectives as laid down in the Policy Document Women, Peace and Security are:

1. Enhanced protection of women and girls in conflict and post conflict environments;
2. Decrease of harmful gender norms which are obstacles to sustainable peace;
3. Creating equal leverage in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, relief and recovery.

Whereas Power of Voices and Power of Women focuses totally on capacity building of civil society and lobby & advocacy, service delivery is to a small extent allowed under the WPS grant instrument (similar to the SRHR fund).

5. Leading from the South

The Leading from the South funding of EUR 80 million for 2021 - 2025 is made available to strengthen the lobbying and advocacy role of women's rights organisations, movements and networks at regional, national or grassroots level. To set in motion an empowerment process to improve women's social, political and economic participation and remove barriers for participation; and to provide women's rights organisations, movements and networks with the tools to reduce exclusion, discrimination, violence and unequal treatment. Leading from the South, like Power of Women, focuses on the three objectives listed below:

1. Prevention and elimination of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls;
2. Strengthening women's leadership and women's participation in (political) decision-making;
3. Strengthening women's economic empowerment and improving the economic climate for women.

The Leading from the South programme, alongside other programmes focusing on women rights and gender equality (PoW & WPS) and the Power of Voices partnerships, aims to realise SDG 5. The four Leading from the South Funds directly support women's rights organizations in the global south,

including small grassroots organizations. These organizations, based in the global south and rooted in local women's rights movements, are best placed to influence and hold to account local, regional and national governments, local leaders, communities and businesses.

The four funds are:

- 1) Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS);
- 2) African Women's Development Fund (AWDF);
- 3) Women's Fund Asia (WFA) (formerly known as South Asia Women's Fund);
- 4) Indigenous Women's Fund AYNI (FIMI).

Three of these are regional funds and are active in Latin America (FMS), Africa and the Middle East (AWDF), and Asia (WFA) respectively. FIMI focuses specifically on supporting (mainly small) indigenous women's organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. This fund was selected because indigenous women are often overlooked and suffer disproportionately from discrimination, exclusion and violence.

Annex 2 Extra information on the SCS MTRs (including its assessment by MFA)

1. Introduction

The strategic partnership Mid Term Review/Evaluation (MTR) reports are important documents for the Ministry. The MTR reports will contribute to learning within the different strategic partnerships, but also at country and policy level within the Ministry. The MFA aims to take the findings of the MTRs into account for the development of a new policy framework and grant instruments (whereas the end evaluation will be submitted when the new policy should already be endorsed).

As per grant decision the focus of the MTR should be two-fold:

- Programmatic focusing on: Theory of Change, context analysis and risk analysis (including SEAH, fraud and corruption), achievements to date on the output and outcome indicators that are linked to the Strengthening Civil Society and thematic Result Framework basket indicators, crosscutting themes (gender, youth, climate), challenges, lessons learned and good practices, sustainability
- Partnership collaboration focusing on: leading from the south, partnership with the Ministry and the Embassies, lessons learned and good practices

The MTR can be conducted internally or externally.

Based on the MTR findings and results, partnerships are allowed to change the 5-year outcome targets. If applicable, the request for adjustment of targets should be submitted to MFA together with the MTR supported by a rationale based on the MTR.

Purpose of this document

This document aims to provide transparency about the way MTRs are reviewed by the MFA, which will focus on completeness and methodological strength. It also provides a non-mandatory MTR format.

2. Assessment steps and criteria

Assessment steps/criteria – completeness

1. Completeness of the MTR - programmatic focus

Does the MTR contain the following both at overall partnership programme level as well as at relevant implementation level (i.e. country, regional):

- Context analysis
- Risk analysis (including SEAH, fraud & corruption)
- Assessment of ToC – including validation of assumptions
- Assessment of cross-cutting themes
 - o Gender
 - o Youth
 - o Climate
- Assessment of sustainability
- Actual values for the output and outcome indicators linked to the SCS and thematic Result Framework indicators
 - o Quantitative and qualitative information
 - o Outcomes at country/regional level as well aggregated level
 - o Disaggregated as per the [SCS IATI indicator guidelines](#).

- Discussion of the contribution of the partnerships towards achieved outcomes
- A reflection on progress towards achieving the 5 year targets

NB. Although the grant decision indicates “achievements to date on output and outcome level” **focus of the assessment will be on outcome level as outputs for 2023 will be reported in the annual report 2023.**

2. Completeness of the MTR – partnership focus

Does the MTR contain:

- Assessment of strategic partnership collaboration including at least:
 - Partnership with MFA and Embassies
 - Localisation/ Leading from the South /power balance

3. Completeness of the MTR – lessons learned & recommendations

Does the MTR contain:

- Lessons learned related to
 - programme
 - partnership collaboration
- Recommendations for the remainder of the programme

Assessment steps/criteria – methodological strength

The IOB evaluation quality criteria were shared by letter (December 2020) including the following recommendation:

“To ensure a high quality end evaluation, these evaluation criteria should also advise the design and reporting of the baseline study and midterm review”

To assess the methodological strength of the MTRs MFA will use a selection of the IOB quality criteria, whereas for the final external evaluations all criteria will apply. As mentioned in the introduction the MTR can be done internally or externally and no knock-out criteria will be applied for the MTRs.

4. Methodological strength - Description of programme and MTR objectives

The MTR complies with the following [IOB evaluation quality criteria](#):

Description and background of the intervention

3. Description of the context of the intervention
4. Description of the intervention
5. Validation of the assumptions underpinning the ToC

Objective and delimitation of the evaluation

6. Description of the objective of the evaluation

Evaluation questions

9. Clear set of evaluation questions

5. Methodological strength – methods

The MTR complies with the following [IOB evaluation quality criteria](#):

11. The methods are appropriate to evaluate effectiveness: attribution and / or contribution (if effectiveness is an evaluation criterion/question)

Please note that the following methods are considered less suitable for making claims of effectiveness:

- *Most Significant Change*
- *Success Case method*
- *Outcome Mapping*
- *Outcome Harvesting*
- *Method for Impact Assessment of program and projects*

These methods can be used but not as unique evaluation methods, they can be used as one evaluation method next to methodological strong methods such as contribution analysis, general elimination methodology, process tracing and/or realist evaluation.

13. The indicators or result areas are appropriate to capture the planned results along the different levels in the ToC

14. Justified choice of sample, cases and information sources (e.g. choice of countries, projects, organisations and persons)

Information at the level where programme implementation takes place is recommended, therefore it is recommended to include all countries/regions in the sample.

If your partnership is active in a very large number of countries, MFA invites you to propose an innovative approach to handle the MTR and to discuss this with your focal point during TOR development.

17. Sufficient independent information sources

18. Triangulation of results from different information sources

19. Discussion of bias

21. Discussion of the limitations of the evaluation

6. Methodological strength – Results and conclusions

The MTR complies with the following [IOB evaluation quality criteria](#):

22. Conclusions answer research questions

23. Conclusions follow logically from the research findings

7. Methodological strength – Usefulness and readability of the report

The MTR complies with the following [IOB evaluation quality criteria](#):

25. Recommendations should be useful and practical, given the evaluation objectives and its intended users

26. The report is well readable, consistent, and includes a clear summary with evaluation objectives, evaluation questions, conclusions and recommendations

Adjustment of targets

Based on the MTR findings and results, partnership are allowed to change the 5-year outcome targets. In case adjusted targets are submitted, MFA will assess them using the following criteria

- Are adjustment based on MTR findings?
- Are adjustment acceptable?
- Are adjusted targets realistic in light of available budget and country context?

3. Non-mandatory proposed format for MTR

Below a **non-mandatory** format for the MTR partnership reports is proposed. Partners have the liberty to adjust or use a different format.

Proposed MTR format

1. Introduction
 - Background of the partnership programme
 - Objectives of the MTR
2. Methodology
 - Methodology and approach
 - Challenges, bias and limitations
3. Programmatic focus of the partnership programme (overall) (approx. 25 pages)
 - Relevant changes in context
 - Changes in (appreciation of) risks and mitigating measures (including SEAH, fraud and corruption)
 - Review of ToC
 - Overview table of indicators – quantitative – [see below for suggested format](#)
 - Discussion of progress towards achieving the 2025 targets
 - Cross-cutting themes (gender, youth, climate)
 - Sustainability
4. Partnership collaboration (overall)
 - Ownership by local organizations/Leading from the South/power balance
 - Partnership with the Ministry and the Embassies
5. Information per country/region/international component (approx. 10 pages per country/region etc)
 - 5.1 Country X
 - Relevant changes in context
 - Changes in (appreciation of) risks and mitigating measures
 - Review of ToC at country level
 - Results achieved linked to the SCS and thematic MFA indicators
 - Table of indicators at country level - quantitative and qualitative - [see below for suggested format](#)
 - Discussion of the partnership's contribution towards the results
 - Discussion of progress towards achieving the 2025 targets
 - Cross-cutting themes (gender, youth, climate)

- Partnership collaboration
 - Sustainability
- 5.2 Country Y
- Relevant changes in context
 - Changes in (appreciation of) risks and mitigating measures
 - Review of ToC at country level
 - Results achieved linked to the SCS and thematic MFA indicators
 - Table of indicators at country level - quantitative and qualitative - [see below for suggested format](#)
 - Discussion of the partnership's contribution towards the results
 - Discussion of progress towards achieving the 2025 targets
 - Cross-cutting themes (gender, youth, climate)
 - Partnership collaboration
 - Sustainability
- 5.3 Country Z
- ...
- 5.4 Region A
- ...
- 5.5 Region B
- ...
- 5.6 International lobby & advocacy
- ...

In case the MTR uses a sample at least the following information should be provided per country/regional/international component:

Results achieved linked to the SCS and thematic MFA indicators

- *Table of indicators at country level - quantitative and qualitative - [see below for suggested format](#)*
- *Discussion of the partnership's contribution towards the results*
- *Discussion of progress towards achieving the 2025 targets*

6. Lessons learned & good practices

- Programmatic
- Partnership collaboration

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Annexes

- ToR
- Information sources

[Adjustment of targets](#)

The adjustment of 5- year targets can be taken up as a chapter of the MTR or as a separate document. Please provide information about:

- Actual value
- Initial target
- Proposed new target

- Explanation for change

[see below for suggested format](#)

Adjustment of annual targets for indicators to be reported annually can be communicated as part of the annual reports

Reporting on indicators at alliance level for multi-country programs:

Indicators to be reported during baseline, MTR, end evaluation⁸

			Country X		Country Y		Country Z		Region A		Alliance level (TOTAL) ⁹	
			Target 2025	Actual 2023	Target 2025	Actual 2023	Target 2025	Actual 2023	Target 2025	Actual 2023	Target 2025	Actual 2023
Indicator title	IATI code	Disaggregation level 1										
	IATI code	Disaggregation level 2										
	IATI code	Disaggregation level 3										
	IATI code	Etc										
Indicator title	IATI code	Disaggregation level 1										
	IATI code	Disaggregation level 2										
	IATI code	Etc										

Indicators to be reported annually do not need to be displayed in a table, however these should be taken into account in the discussion of progress towards achieving the 2025 targets

⁸ See below for frequency of reporting

⁹ Please prevent double counting

Per country/region/international component

Indicators to be reported during baseline, MTR and End evaluation¹⁰

Per indicator:

	IATI code	Disaggregation	Baseline 2021	Actual 2023	Target 2025
Quantitative		Level of disaggregation 1			
		Level of disaggregation 2			
		Level of disaggregation 3			
		Etc			
Qualitative					

Reflection on progress towards achieving 5 year target taking into account the indicators to be reported annually and their contribution to achieving the targets.

Reflection on the partnership's contribution towards the achieved results.

Frequency of measuring indicators

For the Strengthening Civil Society Indicators (see [SCS-IATI-indicator-guidelines-PoV-with-the-exception-of-partnerships-focusing-on-WRGE.pdf](#)) the reporting frequency is as follows:

- Baseline, MTR and end evaluation: SCS1 – SCS2 – SCS3 – SCS4 – SCS9
- Annually: SCS5 – SCS6 – SCS7- SCS8

For Women's Rights and Gender Equality (WRGE) indicators (see [SCS-IATI-indicator-guidelines-WRGE-PoV-PoW-WPS-LFS](#)) the reporting frequency is as follows

- Baseline, MTR and end evaluation: all outcome indicators (i.e. WRGE 1.1-1.3, WRGE 2.1-2.3, WRGE 3.1-3.3, WRGE 4.1-4.3)
- Annually: all output indicators (i.e. WRGE 5.1.2 and WRGE 5.2.2)

For SRHR indicators, the reporting frequency is as follows (see also [SCS-IATI-indicator-guidelines-SRHR-updated.pdf](#))

- Baseline, MTR and end evaluation: all outcome indicators (1 up to 4)
- Annually: all output indicators (A up to K)

Results on thematic indicators which are linked to SCS indicators can be reported under the thematic (WRGE/ SRHR) indicators, no need to double report.

¹⁰ See below for frequency of reporting

Adjustment of targets

Per country/region/international component for indicators to be reported during baseline, MTR and end evaluation:

			Actual 2023	Initial target 2025	New target 2025	Qualitative description of new target
Indicator title	IATI code	Disaggregation level 1				
	IATI code	Disaggregation level 2				
	IATI code	Disaggregation level 3				
	IATI code	Etc				

Explanation of the change in target :

Annex 2: Assessment grid

Table 11. Assessment grid

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Assessment grid											
Please indicate for each of the following elements whether they are included in the MTR											
Links	Eqs			Ref. crit	Yes	No	Part		Good	Adeq	Inadeq
1.1	2.4-2.6	1	Effectiveness								
		1.1	Typology of method								
		1.1.1	Qualitative methods								
		1.1.1.1	The MTR makes use of a qualitative method	ADE							
		1.1.1.2	<i>Realistic evaluation</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.3	<i>Contribution analysis</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.4	<i>Process Tracing</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.5	<i>General Elimination Methodology</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.6	<i>Most Significant change</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.7	<i>Success Case Method</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.8	<i>Outcome Mapping</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.9	<i>Outcome Harvesting</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.10	<i>Method of Impact Assessment of Programmes and Projects</i>	IOB							
		1.1.1.11	<i>Other method: ...</i>	ADE							
		1.1.1.12	The use of the method is duly justified	ADE							
		1.1.2	Quantitative methods								
		1.1.2.1	The MTR makes use of a quantitative method	ADE							
		1.1.2.2	<i>Level 1: one observation moment, after the projects: comparison with and without project</i>	IOB							
		1.1.2.3	<i>Level 2: two observation moments: comparisons before and after the projects, without control group (cg)</i>	IOB							
		1.1.2.4	<i>Level 3: 2 observation moments: comparing before and after AND with and without projects (dble diff)</i>	IOB							
		1.1.2.5	<i>Level 4: 2 observation moments: comparing before and after AND with and without, and correct extern infl</i>	IOB							
		1.1.2.6	<i>Levels 5: level 3+ participants are radomly assigned to a project</i>	IOB							
		1.1.2.7	The use of the method is duly justified	ADE							
		1.2	Choice of method aligned to IOB standards								
		1.2.1	The methods are appropriate to evaluate effectiveness: attribution and/or contribution								
		1.2.1.1	Methods appropriate for qualitative analysis								
		1.2.1.1.1	The evaluator has first formulated a causal chain hypothesis before collecting data (or used an existing one)	IOB					Y*	Y	N
		1.2.1.1.2	The evaluator identifies possible other factors affecting results (alternative hypotheses) before collecting data	IOB					Y	Y	N
		1.2.1.1.3	The evaluator checks the effects of other factors	IOB					Y		
		1.2.1.1.4	The evaluator collected data related to the causal chain	IOB					Y	Y	
		1.2.1.1.5	The evaluator validates the causal chain step by step	IOB					Y	N	
		1.2.1.1.6	Results at outcome level are attributed directly to activities without a validation along the causal chain or there is no attribution	IOB							Y
		1.2.1.2	Method appropriate for quantitative analysis								
		1.2.1.2.1	Level 4	IOB					Y		
		1.2.1.2.2	Level 5	IOB					Y		
		1.2.1.2.3	Level 1	IOB							
		1.2.1.2.4	Level 2	IOB						Y	
		1.2.1.2.5	Level 3	IOB						Y	
		1.2.1.2.6	The evaluator demonstrates and presents evidence that nothing would have changed without the project	IOB						Y	N
		1.2.1.2.7	The evaluator demonstrates and presents evidence that the control group is similar to project group before project	IOB						Y	N
		1.2.2	The indicators or result areas are appropriate to capture the planned results along the different levels in ToC								
		1.2.2.1	Appropriateness of qualitative indicators if								
		1.2.2.1.1	Results areas are well described by making abstract results more concrete	IOB					Y		
		1.2.2.1.2	Result areas reflect the different results levels between interventions and final results in the ToC	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.2.2.1.3	Result areas of the ToC have been further refined into measurable results of a local proj. specific ToC	IOB					Y		
		1.2.2.2	Appropriateness of quantitative indicators if								
		1.2.2.2.1	Indicators are linked to different levels in the ToC or result chain	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.2.2.2.2	Indicators exist for non-project factors that are likely to affect the results	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.2.2.2.3	Indicators are SMART:	IOB					Y	Y	N

ADE - Meta-evaluation of MTR reports of strategic partnerships

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Assessment grid											
Please indicate for each of the following elements whether they are included in the MTR											
Links	Eqs			Ref. crit	Yes	No	Part		Good	Adeq	Inadeq
		1.3	Quality of method implementation								
		1.3.1	Prerequisite								
		1.3.1.1	Detailed baseline data (quanti or quali) on project result indicators	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.1.2	There is a (reconstructed) ToC, IL or result chain	IOB							
		1.3.1.3	The specified ToC (or reconstructed ToC), intervention logic, or result chain takes account of intermediate steps between activity, output, outcome and impact	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.1.4	Important external factors that can affect results at different levels in the result chain are discussed	IOB					Y		
		1.3.1.5	All assumptions about the relationships presented are mentioned, and their potential effects at different levels in the result chain are described in detail	IOB					Y	P	
		1.3.1.6	ToC assumption have been test against high quality literature before the evaluation	IOB					Y		
		1.3.1.7	The evaluation methodology has a clear strategy to test underlying assumptions	IOB					Y	Y	N
		1.3.1.8	No assumptions are mentioned	IOB							N
		1.3.1.9	The ToC has undergone critical reflection	IOB							N
		1.3.2	Justified choice of sample, cases and information sources								
		1.3.2.1	Interviews								
		1.3.2.1.1	There are criteria for whom to interview	IOB					Y		
		1.3.2.1.2	Selection of interviewee made based on list of beneficiaries or other list communication in coordination with project staff	IOB					Y	P/Y	N
		1.3.2.1.3	Final selection of interviewee made by evaluator without involvement of project staff	IOB					Y	Y	N
		1.3.2.1.4	Clear mitigation strategy to mitigate any bias from self-selection	IOB					Y	Y	N
		1.3.2.1.5	Additional efforts were made to reach stakeholders who are less active	IOB					Y	Y	N
		1.3.2.2	Case studies								
		1.3.2.2	Evaluator has set criteria for case study	IOB					Y		
		1.3.2.3	Case study final selection is made by evaluator based on criteria and information on possible cases provided by project staff	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.2.3	Quantitative analysis								
		1.3.2.3.1	sample size based on power calculation (based on 1 important indicator of interest, variance and minimum effect size that was targeted)	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.2.3.2	justification of sampling strategy	IOB					Y	Y	N
		1.3.3	Independence of information sources								
		1.3.3.1	A mix of dependent and independent information sources has been used, including external people who can provide critical reflection on the project	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.3.2	Subjective information on perceptions has been complemented with objective information (data from secondary sources, own field observations, measurements)	IOB					Y		
		1.3.3.3	The evaluator has used opportunities to add more information when possible and relevant, aiming for information saturation (snowballing, adding additional documents, interviews during the evaluation)	IOB					Y		
		1.3.3.4	There is enough flexibility for the evaluator to adjust and add information sources during the evaluation, to reach saturation (extra time and support have been factored into the planning)	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.3.5	Representative of the organization were present during interviews	IOB					N	N	Y
		1.3.4	Triangulation of results								
		1.3.4.1	Sufficient different methodologies, data collection tools, and information sources have been used	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.4.2	The primary evaluation results are compared with other evaluations and a literature review	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.4.3	The differences between results from different evaluation methods, data collection methods and information sources are discussed	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.5	Discussion of bias								
		1.3.5.1	The evaluator discusses in detail the possible biases involved in the process of data collection and analysis (sampling bias, self-selection bias, attrition bias, observation bias, ...)	IOB					Y		P/N
		1.3.5.2	Bias listed are: ...	ADE							
		1.3.6	Discussion of limitations								
		1.3.6.1	There is an elaborate discussion about all of the limitations of the evaluation (including reliability, internal & external validity)	IOB					Y	P	N
		1.3.6.2	Limitations listed are: ...	ADE							
		1.3.7	Discussion of attribution and contribution								
		1.3.7.1	The report discusses the contribution of the partnership towards achieved outcomes	IOB							
		1.3.7.2	The report includes a reflection progress towards achieving the 5 years targets						Y	P	N
		1.3.7.3	Actual values for the output and outcome indicators linked to the SCS and thematic Results Framework Indicators See specific table (appreciation: good is outcome level most; adequate: output little outcome: in adequate no outcome)								
		1.4	Coverage of unintended effects								
		1.4.1	Methods covers unintended effects	ADE					Y	P	N

ADE - Meta-evaluation of MTR reports of strategic partnerships

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Assessment grid											
Please indicate for each of the following elements whether they are included in the MTR											
Links	Eqs			Ref. crit	Yes	No	Part		Good	Adeq	Inadeq
1.4	2.7-2.8	2	Efficiency								
		2.1	Efficiency is covered with qualitative methods	ADE							
		2.2	Efficiency is covered with quantitative methods	ADE							
		2.3	The evaluation has one or more conclusions on efficiency								
		2.4	The evaluation has one or more recommendations on efficiency	ADE							
		2.1	Qualitative methods								
		2.1.1	The description of the methodology starts with an explanation of how efficiency is considered and ascertained	IOB					Y	Y	N
		2.1.2	The approach is appropriate for the evaluation questions	IOB					Y	P	
		2.1.3	The evaluation has applied this methodology correctly	IOB					Y	P	N
		2.2	Quantitative methods								
		2.2.1	The description of the methodology explains how efficiency is considered and ascertained	IOB					Y	Y	N
		2.2.2	The approach is appropriate for the evaluation questions	IOB					Y	P	
		2.2.3	The evaluation has applied this methodology correctly	IOB					Y	P	N
1.6	2.11-2	3	Gender, inclusion and intersectionality								
		3.1	Coverage/scope								
		3.1.1	The evaluation has a specific section or EQ on Gender issues	ADE					Y	P	
		3.1.2	The evaluation has a specific section or EQ on LGBTIQ+ rights	ADE					Y	P	
		3.1.3	The evaluation has a specific section or EQ on intersectionality issues	ADE					Y	P	
		3.1.4	The evaluation has a specific section or EQ on women's rights	ADE					Y	P	
		3.1.5	The evaluation has a specific section or EQ on Youth issues	ADE					Y	P	
		3.1.6	The evaluation uses clear definitions of the notions of gender, inclusion, and intersectionality (to be distinguished + examples to be provided)	ADE							
		3.1.7a	The evaluation has one or more conclusions on gender, inclusion and intersectionality	ADE							
		3.1.7b	The evaluation has one or more recommendations on gender, inclusion and intersectionality	ADE							
		3.2	Quality of coverage								
		3.2.1	Data presented from secondary sources is Gender and age disaggregated data (GADD)	ADE							
		3.2.2	Data collected by evaluator (if present) is GADD	ADE							
		3.2.3	The assessment of gender is based on convincing arguments and data	ADE					Y	Y	P/N
		3.2.4	The assessment of youth is based on convincing arguments and data	ADE					Y	Y	P/N
1.5	2.9	4	Sustainability								
		4.1	Coverage								
		4.1.1	The evaluation has a specific EQ or section on sustainability	ADE					Y	P	N
		4.1.2	The evaluation clearly defines sustainability	ADE					Y	P	N
		4.1.3a	The evaluation has one or more conclusions on sustainability	ADE							
		4.1.3b	The evaluation has one or more recommendations on sustainability	ADE							
		4.1.3	The evaluation analyses innovative approaches to inclusion of vuln. Women and youth	ADE							
		4.2	Quality of coverage								
		4.2.1	The analysis of sustainability is based on convincing arguments and data	ADE					Y	P	N
1.7	2.10	5	Localisation								
		5.1	Coverage								
		5.1.1	The MTR contains an assessment of strategic partnership including on localisation	ADE					Y	P	N
		5.1.2	The MTR contains an assessment of strategic partnership including on Leading from the South	ADE							
		5.1.3	The MTR contains an assessment of strategic partnership including on Power Balance	ADE							
		5.1.4	The MTR clearly defines localisation	ADE							
		5.1.5a	The evaluation has one or more conclusions on localisation	ADE							
		5.1.5b	The evaluation has one or more recommendations on localisation	ADE							
		5.2	Quality of coverage								
		5.2.1	The analysis of localisation is based on convincing arguments and data	ADE							
	2.1-2.3	6	Synergies and coordination								
		6.1	The MTR contains an assessment of strategic partnership including with MFA	ADE					Y		
		6.2	The MTR contains an assessment of strategic partnership including with Embassies	ADE					Y		
		6.3	The MTR assessments are based on solid arguments and reliable data	ADE					Y		
		6.3	The MTR contains lessons learned related to partnership collaboration	ADE					Y		P/N
	3.1-3.2	7	Usefulness of recommendations								
		7.1	The recommendations reflect the objectives of the evaluation	IOB					Y	n.a.	N
		7.2	The recommendations follow logically from the evaluation's conclusions and findings	IOB					Y	n.a.	N
		7.3	The recommendations are realistic and match the sphere of influence of the user(s)	IOB					Y	n.a.	N
*Legend											
Bold All in bold need to be present											
Grey Those in grey are linked											
Italics At least one of the two in italics needs to be fulfilled											
Blue Cells to be filled in											
Orange Lines the evaluation team suggest to suppress (or to consider as optional)											
Yellow Line added in revised inception report											

Annex 3: SCS Theory of Change

