

ORDER OF THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF 27 MAY 2019, NO. MINBUZA.2019.3926-31, FURTHER ESTABLISHING THE INVESTIGATIVE FUNCTION OF THE POLICY AND OPERATIONS EVALUATION DEPARTMENT.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, acting in agreement with the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation,

Orders:

Article 1. Description of function

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department is tasked with contributing to knowledge about the implementation and effects of Dutch foreign policy. To this end, the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department provides independent evaluations of policy and implementation for all policy areas within the scope of the Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation. It also provides advice on the planning and execution of evaluations carried out under the responsibility of policy departments and missions.

Article 2. Execution of duties

The Policy Operations and Evaluation Department carries out its work in accordance with the protocol in the schedule accompanying this Order.

Article 3. Repeal of order

The order of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of 1 July 1977, no. PLVS/AOR-161082, is repealed.

Article 4.

This Order enters into force on the day after the date of publication of the Government Gazette in which it appears.

This Order will be published in the Government Gazette with the explanatory notes and schedule.

J. Brandt

Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
For the Minister of Foreign Affairs

EXPLANATORY NOTES

In 1977 the Minister of Foreign Affairs ordered¹ the establishment of what would later become the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (hereafter IOB). Since its establishment, IOB has become an independent (in terms of the content of its work) evaluation service within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Over time a number of documents containing guidelines and instructions have been drawn up regarding the investigative function of IOB. These documents have been compiled into a protocol describing the investigative function of IOB and the way in which IOB carries out this function. The protocol is in the schedule accompanying this Order.

J. Brandt

Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
For the Minister of Foreign Affairs

¹ Order of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of 1 July 1977, no. PLVS/AOR-161082.

SCHEDULE TO ARTICLE 2

Protocol of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department

Duties of IOB

IOB contributes to knowledge about the implementation and effects of Dutch foreign policy, and provides independent evaluations of policy and implementation for all policy areas within the scope of the Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation. IOB also provides advice on the planning and execution of evaluations carried out under the responsibility of policy departments and missions.

In the light of this mandate, IOB has the following duties:

- carry out high-quality evaluations for the purpose of learning and accountability;
- ensure balanced evaluation planning in the field of foreign policy;
- contribute to strengthening the quality of evaluations carried out by or under the responsibility of policy departments and implementing organisations, and by institutions and multilateral organisations funded by Ministry of Foreign Affairs grants;
- expand knowledge and disseminate evaluation results;
- provide advice on current and new policy on the basis of policy and other evaluations;
- support capacity building in the area of evaluation in developing countries through grants.

This is done by:

- carrying out and supervising or having another party carry out and supervise evaluations, policy reviews and other studies;
- gathering knowledge and evaluation results from other sources;
- establishing and employing general quality requirements and guidelines for conducting evaluations;
- providing advice on the design and execution of individual evaluations through the systematic assessment of the quality of these evaluations or peer reviews of the evaluation services;
- sharing this information with relevant organs of the ministry, implementing organisations and other relevant parties;
- training relevant parties for the purpose of policy learning and capacity building.

Guarantees of independence

IOB is independent in terms of the content of its work. This means that regarding its choice of evaluation methods, its assessment of data and its consideration of alternative interpretations, as well as its assessment of evaluations and evaluation proposals by others IOB is not influenced by considerations unrelated to the content of its work (such as those of a political or commercial nature). Ministers and government employees take note of the outcomes of the evaluations, policy reviews and other studies carried out by or on behalf of IOB. They do not provide any instructions regarding the formulation, outcomes, evaluation methods or assumptions on which the evaluations are based.

An essential aspect of IOB's independent position within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is its unobstructed access to all of the policy departments' and implementing organisations' data. Furthermore, investigators working for or on behalf of IOB are free to ask for specific information in interviews with relevant actors and stakeholders, including relevant policy officers.

The terms of reference of evaluations that are to be published are posted on the IOB website as soon as they have been approved by the IOB director. Every IOB publication states that IOB is solely responsible for the document's content. The Executive Support Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures that evaluations and policy reviews are forwarded to parliament in a timely manner.

If this is not done within three months, the Executive Support Department will make public those evaluations and policy reviews that are part of the public evaluation planning by sending them to parliament on the minister's behalf, even if the policy response is not yet ready.

Position of the IOB director

Ultimate responsibility for the content of policy reviews, evaluations and other studies published by IOB in its own name lies with IOB's director. The director is brought in from outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is appointed for a fixed term and is not eligible for re-appointment within the ministry.

Guarantees of content quality

As a rule, IOB evaluations and reports are supervised by an internal focus group and an external reference group. The latter advises the IOB director on the quality of the evaluation. The group is composed of at least two experts in the given field as well as representatives of the policy departments and/or implementing organisations concerned in the evaluation. The reference group meets at least three times at key moments to discuss the terms of reference, the sub-reports and the draft of the final report. Minutes are taken at every reference group meeting and are distributed to the group's members for approval.

Evaluation planning

A careful and transparent decision-making process is beneficial to the quality and relevance of policy reviews. This starts with the planning of evaluations. Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Financial and Economic Affairs Department (FEZ) is responsible for planning the rolling evaluations of the entire ministry. Together with IOB, FEZ holds annual planning discussions with the departments to determine which evaluations to plan and what parties (the policy department itself or IOB) will be responsible. IOB publishes the approved evaluation schedule on its website. FEZ ensures that the evaluation schedule is included in the central government budget in accordance with the applicable central government budget regulations.

IOB has ultimate responsibility for the planning of its own evaluations in all policy areas (ODA and non-ODA) covered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation. Together with the external reference group, IOB formulates the definition, evaluation questions and methods for its own evaluations, which it can adjust over the course of the evaluation.

When it comes to evaluation planning, a distinction is made between three types of evaluations: policy reviews (policy evaluations), ex post impact studies and other evaluations. Policy reviews and ex post impact studies fall under the Order on Periodic Policy Evaluations (RPE), which states that every policy area must be subject to periodic policy review or policy evaluation at the level of the operational objectives.

In addition to the RPE, IOB also considers other aspects when planning evaluations. In principle, the comprehensive policy reviews are carried out by IOB. Other evaluations are carried out in their entirety by IOB only if they:

1. are too complex for the departments themselves to carry out properly, for example because the evaluation cuts across topics, departments, directorates-general and/or ministries;
2. contain relevant evaluation topics that are new to the department and for which the IOB's involvement would provide added value.

Aspects of foreign policy can, at certain times, be subject to political or social debate. In such cases, it may be necessary to introduce into the debate insights gained on the basis of a solid and independent IOB evaluation.

Following up on recommendations from the policy reviews and evaluations

No more than 12 months after IOB's submission of a policy review or larger evaluation to the minister, FEZ schedules a follow-up meeting with the most relevant directors-general and directors, as well as with the directors of FEZ and IOB, to discuss how the recommendations in the review or evaluation are/will be followed up in terms of policy. Minutes of these meetings are taken and include any additional follow-up points. The minutes are then shared with the Senior Management Board.

Communications and public information

IOB shares information with other parts of the ministry. Staff who represent IOB at public appearances arrange this ahead of time with IOB management. In public appearances, they focus on descriptions, analyses and recommendations of the evaluations and do not express any personal positions on policy or on policy alternatives. Staff who appear in the media on behalf of IOB inform IOB management and the Communications Department of this ahead of time.