



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

IOB Evaluation

Policy review of Dutch cooperation with UN development agencies

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English summary of the IOB policy review *Beleidsdoorlichting van de Nederlandse samenwerking met de ontwikkelingsorganisaties van de Verenigde Naties*

July 2017

Foreword

The Ministry of Finance requires all ministries to review their most important policy areas at least once every seven years, to account for their main budgetary expenditures. In line with this, the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, known as IOB, has conducted a policy review of Dutch cooperation with the United Nations Development System (UNDS). The aims of the review are to:

- render account for the effectiveness and efficiency of the Dutch government's policy on cooperation with relevant UN organisations in the area of development cooperation;
- identify specific ways of improving policy in the future.

The study was led and carried out by IOB evaluator Nico van Niekerk, who also wrote the final report. IOB evaluator Joep Schenk analysed the data on Dutch financing and IOB evaluator Rafaela Feddes helped coordinate two component studies.

The report was written in Dutch. This publication in English contains a selection of its main findings and conclusions which are deemed of interest to an international audience.

The study was supervised by the reference group led by IOB director Wendy Asbeek Brusse and comprising Prof. Rolph van der Hoeven (Institute of Social Studies), Erwin van Veen (Clingendael Institute), and Simone Zwijsen (Ministry of Finance). The members from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were Bert Vermaat (Financial and Economic Affairs), Wilma van Esch (Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department), and Ronald Wormgoor and Heino van Houwelingen (both of the Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department).

The internal peer reviewers were IOB colleagues Wendy Asbeek Brusse, Paul de Nooijer, Rita Tesselaar and Kirsten Mastwijk.

The thematic studies were carried out by IOB colleague Ferko Bodnár (food security), Mariska van Beijnum (security and the rule of law), Esther Jurgens (sexual and reproductive health and rights), and Christine Sijbesma (drinking water and sanitation). Jups Kluyskens contributed to the chapter on reforms at the UN. The English-language consultant and translator was Joy Burrough.

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1

Introduction, background and set-up of the policy review

1.1 The UN development organisations

The so-called UN Development System (UNDS) comprises 34 UN institutions responsible for development and humanitarian work. The UNDS has grown into a complex entity comprising numerous organisations, 12 funds and programmes, 13 specialised UN organisations and nine other institutions (Report of the Secretary-General, 2015).¹ The largest organisations are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), each with an annual budget of about USD 5 billion. Together, these two organisations disbursed USD 26.4 billion in 2014: 57 per cent of total UN expenditure.

There is general agreement about the importance of the UN's development organisations for international consultation and for cooperation and standardisation for global problems relating to socioeconomic development. Good examples are the UN's contributions to the millennium development goals (MDGs) and, more recently, to the sustainable development goals (SDGs). But the UN's complex organisational structure and bureaucracy have drawn much criticism, and there have been frequent critical reports on UN organisations' lack of effectiveness when implementing activities and programmes. External committees set up by the UN itself have criticised the current working method and organisation of the UN and have advocated drastic reform of the UN's development system.

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At the heart of the debate about the UN is the question of how to better equip the UN to contribute to solutions for major challenges such as climate change, peace and security, migration and development. The UN is also faced with rising expectations about the role it should assume in order to contribute to solutions for these international challenges, yet at the same time its Member States are reluctant to provide the financial and political support it needs to be able to fulfil its role.

This review focuses on UN organisations with a mandate primarily or mainly concerned with development cooperation and peacebuilding. UN organisations involved in humanitarian aid were not included in the evaluation because they were dealt with in the policy review on humanitarian aid conducted by IOB in 2015. It should be noted, however, that organisations related to development may also engage in humanitarian work. Two examples: UNICEF expends an average of some 28 per cent of its budget annually on emergency aid (UNICEF, 2015) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) steps in when there are acute health crises, such as the Ebola epidemic.

¹ Within the UN, the term UN Development System (UNDS) is used for all UN funds and programmes, as well as for the specialised institutions responsible for the operational development activities of the UN (UN Operational Activities for Development: UNOAD) and that implement humanitarian as well as development-related activities (Report of the Secretary-General, 2015). UN jargon for the activities of these organisations is 'operational activities'.

1.2 Policy principles

The Dutch government attaches great importance to cooperation with UN development cooperation agencies on the basis of the following arguments:

- The UN organisations are important for approaching and managing global problems that cannot be solved by national governments alone
- The UN has a global mandate for peacekeeping and peacebuilding,
- The UN contributes to strengthening development frameworks at international level, as in the case of the MDGs and, since 2016, when implementing activities related to SDGs.

The collaboration with UN organisations and the financial support they receive from the Netherlands arise from the following expectations about their role and comparative advantages vis-à-vis other actors and channels:

- 1) UNDP fulfils a *broad system function* for international coordination and policy development relating to development and peacebuilding, and plays a key role in coordination and in the reforms within the UN. UNICEF is also relevant to the principles underlying Dutch policy on development cooperation, because it is active in several areas and has broad UN responsibility for important crosscutting themes.
- 2) *Thematic cooperation with UNDP, UNICEF and other specialist UN organisations, UN programmes and UN funds* makes it possible to achieve the objectives of the Dutch priorities in development cooperation. The cooperation is based on the following expectations:
 - 2.1 *The thematic system function each of these organisations fulfils in the domain of its mandate:*
 - a) as a platform for consultation between countries and other actors about specific global problems;
 - b) as a knowledge and expertise centre for international and national advisory work and technical assistance; and
 - c) for developing norms and regulating global problems.
 - 2.2 *The comparative advantages of these organisations in their role as implementers of programmes and suppliers of services.*

This includes expectations about their coordinating role in providing aid, their impartiality, their capacity to work with national governments and the scale at which they operate.

1.3 The policy review

In this policy review, IOB investigates the extent to which Dutch policy intentions relating to cooperation with the UN have been realised and whether Dutch expectations about the added value of the UN channel as described above have been met in practice. The emphasis is on the effectiveness and efficiency of the UN contributions to the attainment of Dutch development cooperation priorities. The policy review does not include a general evaluation of the organisational and management aspects of individual UN organisations, as these aspects are included in the score cards for each organisation that the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation submits to the House of Representatives every two years.

The policy review comprises an analysis of the development of Dutch policy relating to the UN and the financing of its development organisations. It includes the findings from four studies conducted by IOB on Dutch–UN cooperation on the four priority themes of Dutch development cooperation policy: water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); food security; and security and the rule of law. For each of these, the most significant UN organisation (or organisations) in terms of financial contribution and other forms of cooperation (substantive cooperation) was selected. See Table 1.1.

Theme	UN organisation(s)
WASH	UNICEF
SRHR	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
Food security	Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
Security and rule of law	UNDP

The desk study of the theme of security and rule of law investigated only the programmes for peacebuilding and for furthering the rule of law. It did not consider Dutch financing or military support of peace missions, as responsibility for evaluating these rests with the Ministry of Defence. However, where relevant, efforts relating to peacebuilding have been placed in the broader context of the so-called integrated approach.

Each of the four studies comprised a desk study in which relevant evaluations and other reports were systematically reviewed to ascertain: (a) the effectiveness and efficiency of the programmes carried out by the organisations in question, and (b) the extent to which these organisations have been able to meet the expectations and assumptions underlying the Dutch decision to work with them. Both programmes funded wholly or partly by the

Netherlands and those financed indirectly with core funding were considered. The desk study was based on secondary material obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives, UN organisations, independent research and public websites. Evaluations were reviewed following an evaluation framework and were included if they met the quality criteria set by the IOB or by the organisations themselves and were relevant for the period under review. In addition, key informants from within and outside the UN were interviewed by Skype/phone, or in person during field visits to New York and Geneva.

The findings of the desk studies are presented in four English-language reports, one per theme ('spearhead'), which are available on the IOB website (see annex 1).

Most desk studies shed light (but to different degrees) on the effectiveness of the UN programmes and their contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the Dutch priority themes. They also give insight into the quality of the UN's accountability for its activities. However, they revealed some shortcomings. As had already been established in the preliminary study for the policy review, the research material available per theme varies in quality. Many of the evaluation reports studied are based on limited fieldwork or have other shortcomings that make it difficult to establish the impact of the development cooperation programme on the population. When the objectives of the programmes are more abstract (as is the case, for example, for the spearhead security and rule of law), it is possible to report on the direct outcomes of an intervention, but it is more difficult to report on the sustainable outcomes and effectiveness in a broader context. Furthermore, because of the great diversity of interventions and variable quality of the evaluation reports, the findings of the individual reports were of only limited use for drawing conclusions at aggregated level per spearhead.

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Despite the shortcomings of the sources used for this policy review, IOB did not carry out its own fieldwork in the countries in which the UN works, because the conducting of evaluations by individual donors contravenes the agreement that donors will jointly monitor and evaluate as far as possible. Not only are there substantive reasons (scope and representativeness) for the Netherlands not conducting research in the countries concerned, but it would also be very costly to conduct research on the four priority themes in so many countries.

As far as possible, efficiency was assessed using three criteria: (1) the cost efficiency of the implemented programmes and projects, (2) the efficiency of the management of the financing and of the supervision of the programmes, and (3) the efforts made to improve the efficiency of UN intervention across the board. During the literature review, it emerged that information on these criteria was not systematically present.

To validate the findings of the literature study, relevant internal and external informants were interviewed in New York and Geneva.

Although the period evaluated was 2012-2015, some of the information has been updated to 2016, to better reveal the trends.

2

The changes in Dutch policy on development cooperation and Dutch funding of the UN development organisations

2.1 Changes in Dutch policy on development cooperation since 2010

In 2010, after conducting a thorough review of the Netherlands' policy for development cooperation, the new coalition government announced a shift from aid to investment, focusing on economic growth and promoting trade, and concentrating Dutch activities on fewer countries and sectors. There were also financial reasons behind these policy changes. Due to the global financial crisis and the European debt crisis, the Dutch budget deficit had increased to nearly 4 per cent of GDP, well above the European Union's (EU) deficit limit of 3 per cent of GDP. Large cuts to government expenditure were deemed inevitable. The government reduced the budget for Official Development Assistance (ODA) by EUR 750 million per year. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands had to downsize Dutch presence abroad and closed ten embassies.

As part of its new aid agenda, the coalition government cut the number of countries with which the Netherlands had a structural bilateral development relationship from 33 to 15. The new policy focuses on four themes ('spearheads') in which the value added by Dutch development aid was assumed to be highest: security and rule of law, food security, water, and SRHR. The education and health sectors were assigned lower priority. In addition, the coalition stated it intended to 'drastically cut back' the provision of (general) budget support.²

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These changes have affected policy relating to the UN: the UN's importance for addressing global problems has continued to be endorsed, but less priority is given to supporting the UN's broad system role, particularly UNDP's role in strengthening the multilateral frameworks for international policy. The Dutch government's policy document of 2011 on cooperation with multilateral organisations notes that because of the budget cuts, contributions to priority institutions for the UNDS organisations UNDP and UNICEF must be reviewed: 'contributions that are relatively very large belong to the past.'³

Dutch cooperation with multilateral organisations is now linked directly to Dutch priorities relating to development cooperation. In the 2011 policy document, the government also announced that it intended funding to be concentrated on the priorities of Dutch development cooperation. The general contributions to multilateral organisations were to be lowered but thematic activities of multilateral organisations would be eligible for funding from the budgets for the spearheads. Furthermore, when funding multilateral organisations the Netherlands would adhere to the principles of selectivity, added value and effectiveness. Fewer organisations would be funded, in an effort to reduce the excessive fragmentation of expenditure via the multilateral channel.

² IOB (2016), *The gaps left behind: An evaluation of the impact of ending aid*. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

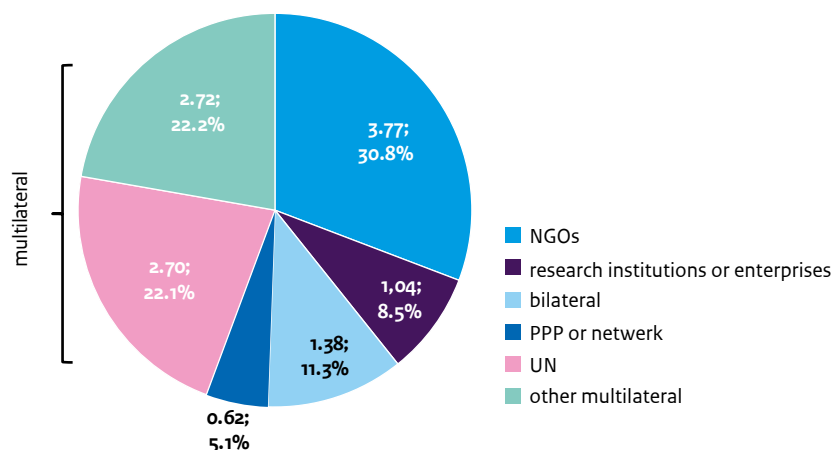
³ Letter to the House of Representatives from the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 7 October 2011: *Multilateraal OS-beleid*.

2.2 Dutch funding of UN development organisations

Choice of channel and total disbursements to the UN

Dutch expenditure on ODA (excluding cost of equipment and allocations) amounted to EUR 3.12 billion in 2012, but had declined to EUR 2.98 billion by 2015.⁴ Figure 2.1 shows the distribution of the disbursements among the different channels for the period 2012-2015.

Figure 2.1 Expenditure on ODA, excluding allocations, from the budget of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, per channel, for 2012-2015, in EUR billion and as a percentage of the total ODA expenditure for that period, but excluding the treaty contribution to the UN and crisis management operations



Source: Dashboard/Piramide (administration systems). This figure contains data on ODA activities implemented under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the exception of the equipment costs and the allocations (first reception year of asylum seekers, EU budget and the cancellation of export credit debts).

Total Dutch *multilateral aid* in 2012-2015 was EUR 5.42 billion, of which roughly half (EUR 2.7 billion) was disbursed via the UN. Expenditure on the UN remained fairly stable.

Table 2.1 summarises the most important Dutch disbursements to the UN.

⁴ Since 2013, expenditure by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been split between two separate budgets: Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. Total ODA is higher and includes expenditure by other ministries, such as the contributions from the Ministry of Finance to the World Bank.

Table 2.1 The most important Dutch ODA- and non-ODA-disbursements to the UN in 2015 and 2012-2015, in EUR million ⁵			
	Minister	2015	2012-2015
Treaty contribution to the UN	Foreign Affairs	35.5	107 (excl. 2012)
Contribution to UN for crisis management operations	Foreign Affairs	73	236 (excl. 2012)
UN humanitarian organisations (e.g. UNHCR, WFP, OCHA)	Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation	320.5	911.8
UN organisations for development cooperation and peacebuilding ⁶	Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation	365	1,761

Source: Government annual reports V Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013, 2014, 2015; government annual report 2013 XVII Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, and Dashboard (administration system) database. No data were available for 2011 and 2012.

Dutch financing of the UN in the period 2012-2016 saw an increase in humanitarian aid vis-à-vis aid to the activities for development cooperation and peacebuilding. As noted earlier, the distinction between humanitarian and development UN organisations is not always clear-cut. This policy review deals solely with activities relating to development cooperation and peacebuilding.

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In the period evaluated, 21 UN development cooperation organisations received a total of EUR 1,761 million from the budgets for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (see Table 2.2). The three largest recipients (UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA) received 70 per cent of the total; the remaining 30 per cent was divided among 18 organisations, ten of which received small sums annually, ranging between EUR 0.6 million and EUR 30 million.

⁵ Official Development Assistance:

<http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm#Definition>.

⁶ UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UN Women, FAO, IFAD, ILO, PAHO, UNEP, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNCTAD, UN-Habitat, UNAMA, UNCCD, UNDESA, UNDPKO UNODC and UNOPS. The overview in Table 2.2 includes other (mostly smaller) UN organisations, together accounting for a total of EUR 1.768 billion.

Table 2.2 Annual contributions from the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to UN development organisations 2011-2016, in EUR million

Organisation	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2012-2015	2016
UNDP	158.3	125.2	135.9	133.4	88	482.5	129.1
UNICEF	117.9	117.6	140.5	111.5	87.8	457.4	145.5
UNFPA	73.1	73.0	81.6	72.7	69.1	296.4	74.7
IFAD ⁷	22.3	39.0	26.0	22.3	22.5	109.8	45.8
WHO	17.1	30.0	19.4	20.0	14.9	84.3	18.3
UNAIDS	25.4	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.1	80.1	2.00
ILO	28.3	12.1	10.1	12.8	12.0	47.0	12.2
UN Women	6.0	10.7	11.8	8.4	8.2	39.1	10.2
UNEP	7.7	9.4	9.7	9.5	9.6	38.2	8.2
FAO	6.5	8.1	8.3	9.9	8.3	34.6	15.2
UNOPS	2.6	5.6	12.3	9.4	7.1	34.4	11.7
UNESCO	15	6.1	7.7	10.0	7.0	30.8	10.2
UNODC	2.4	2.6	2.4	4.3	5.1	14.4	4.6
UNIDO	3.4	0	1.9	1.4	1.9	5.2	1.6
UN-Habitat	1.4	0.8	0	0	2	2.8	1.8
UNCTAD	0	0.41.76	0.5	0.6	1	2.5	0.9
UNDPKO	0	0	0.1	0.5	0	0.6	0
Other	5	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	1.3	0.4
Total	492.4	460.9	488.6	447	364.9	1761.4	510.4

Source: Dashboard/Piramide (administration systems).

Discrepancies in the totals are attributable to rounding-up of the figures.⁷

Changes in the financing of the UNDP and UNICEF UNDS organisations

As noted above, in 2010 the Dutch government's intention was to reduce the general voluntary contributions to two of the UNDS organisations: UNDP and UNICEF. This has been achieved: the voluntary contribution to UNDP declined from EUR 64 million in 2012 to EUR 26.8 million in 2015,⁸ and for UNICEF it declined from EUR 50.8 million in 2012 to EUR 34 million in 2015. However, in 2016 the contributions were slightly increased.

⁷ The contribution to IFAD in 2016 was larger because of the financing of a multi-year programme on climate change.

⁸ The contribution in 2012 was also slightly lower than in 2011, when the non-earmarked contribution had been EUR 67.1 million. In 2016 the non-earmarked contribution to UNDP rose slightly to EUR 39 million; the UNICEF non-earmarked contribution rose to EUR 58.5 million.

There are two explanations for the decline:

- 1) the general cuts to the development cooperation budget;
- 2) the decision to concentrate Dutch aid on the four spearheads and on the priorities of Dutch development cooperation policy.⁹

The general voluntary contributions to UN organisations are an obvious target for cutbacks because they are large sums of money that are not always easy to attribute to spearheads – for example, the contributions to UNDP, which has a broad mandate. Furthermore, there is no active lobby in the House of Representatives or the Netherlands in general for maintaining the core contributions to UN organisations like UNDP.

Yet despite the reduction in the general contributions, both UNICEF and the UNDP have remained eligible to be financed for activities relevant to the priorities of Dutch development cooperation policy. As can be seen from Table 2.2, the total financing to the UNDP has fluctuated appreciably. It fell from EUR 125.2 million in 2012 to EUR 88 million in 2015. The increase in 2016 is partly attributable to a new large contribution (EUR 22.5 million) to the Iraq Stabilisation Fund. Moreover, the contributions to UNDP also include the financing of broad UN funds like the common humanitarian funds and the Peacebuilding Fund (see chapter 7). UNDP administers these funds but has limited or no access to their budgets.

The total Dutch contribution to UNICEF fell from EUR 117.6 million in 2012 to EUR 87.9 million in 2015. In 2016 the total contribution to UNICEF rose again because of new additional funding for humanitarian aid via this organisation. An important part of this additional EUR 52 million has gone to programmes for the education of refugees, mainly because of the crisis in Syria.

Financing modalities

In principle, the Netherlands supports non-earmarked financing of UN organisations. In a letter on multilateral cooperation submitted to the House of Representatives in 2011 the government wrote: ‘The policy of non-earmarking unless the contribution of Dutch added value is required will be continued’.¹⁰ The pros and cons of earmarking financing are acknowledged in Dutch policy: earmarking can promote alignment with bilateral priorities, but can also reduce the effectiveness of the UN organisations. However, the Dutch government sees non-earmarked support as essential because it enables organisations to carry out their core tasks and strengthens the multilateral system. For this reason, the presumption is that the better organisations function and the closer they remain to their mandate, the sooner non-earmarked contributions can be given. In this way, the number of activities per organisation can be reduced. Interviewees from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that ultimately the aim is to find a good balance between both financing modalities.

⁹ Communication of 8 October 2014: ‘Verslag bezoek UNDP assistant SG’.

¹⁰ Letter to the House of Representatives from the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 7 October 2011: *Multilateraal OS-beleid*.

Box 2.1 *The bilateralisation of the UNDS*

In 2014, core funding accounted for a total of only 24 per cent of total expenditure by the UNDS (Report of the Secretary-General, 2015). Throughout the entire period, there was a marked tendency for donors to earmark more of their financing, thereby shifting an important part of the decision about the use of the financing to the bilateral donors – a phenomenon known as ‘the bilateralisation of the UN development system’ (Jenks, 2014). The result is that the UN’s multilateral character has been weakened. The countries united in the Group of 77 (G77) are critical of the increase in earmarked contributions from Western countries, believing that earmarking could enable these countries to influence UN policy.

Donors use the following arguments to justify the greater emphasis on earmarked financing:

- a) By earmarking they are implicitly expressing criticism about the UN’s efficiency. As both the UN’s management of programmes and their results leave much to be desired, donors earmark the contributions in the expectation that this will give them a better overview and more control of ‘their’ financing.
- b) Bilateral donors are required to make their aid visible and to be accountable for their spending.
- c) Better alignment with the donor’s priorities is possible. Many bilateral donors have therefore formulated concrete objectives for their earmarked contributions to specific MDGs.

The developments described above have led to fragmentation of the activities and financing within the UNDS,¹¹ which in turn is resulting in the loss of overview over and control of the total budget of the entire UN system. Project implementation is becoming more important than the system function. Furthermore, the unpredictability of earmarked funding hampers the planning of activities and personnel policy in the medium term. The earmarking of funding also leads to high transaction costs that are only partly compensated for by the agreed reimbursement of overheads.

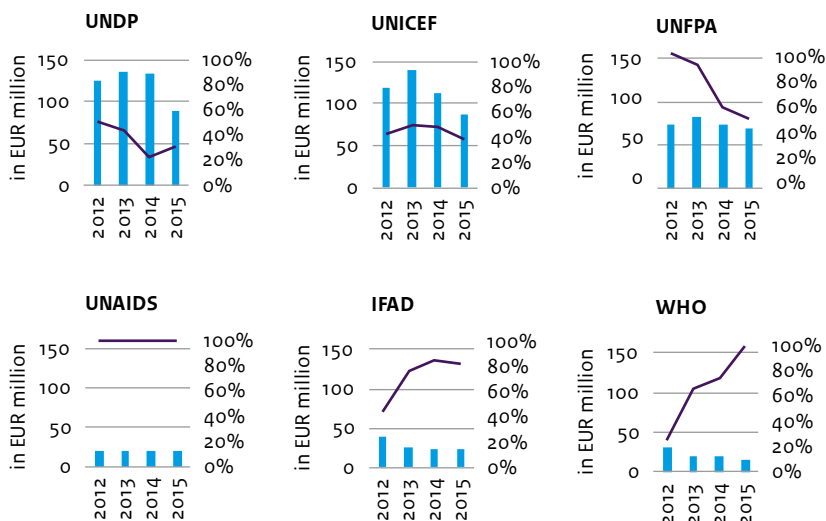
The analysis of the evaluation period revealed that 52 per cent of all Dutch contributions to UN organisations is earmarked.¹² In this period, total non-earmarked financing fell from EUR 260.5 million in 2012 to EUR 172.9 million in 2015. Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of the Dutch contributions given as earmarked financing to the six largest recipients of Dutch financing, which together account for 86 per cent of Dutch spending via the UN.

¹¹ This fragmentation has not been limited to the UN but has also occurred because of the lack of coordination in bilateral development cooperation. At country level, it has led to a loss of national ownership because a significant part of the allocation of development aid has taken place outside the national budget. The reaction to this has been the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005 (see <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>): an initiative to improve coordination and alignment with national governments.

¹² This is thus more than the general voluntary contributions mentioned earlier, because these contributions are based on the OECD-DAC criterion that when a donor fails to meet the conditions relating to the expenditure, the money is deemed to be non-earmarked. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/faq.htm>.

Figure 2.2 shows there are big differences between the percentages of non-earmarked and earmarked financing. As the activities of UNFPA and UNAIDS focus almost entirely on a single priority theme of Dutch development cooperation (SRHR), these organisations receive a high percentage of core funding from the Netherlands. In 2015, the non-earmarked financing of UNDP was never more than a third of total Dutch financing of UNDP. During the period evaluated, the non-earmarked Dutch contribution to WHO remained largely constant at around 25 per cent, with a spike in 2013 to 60 per cent.

Figure 2.2 Overview of Dutch financing in 2012-2015 of the six UN development organisations receiving the most Dutch funding: blue bars show annual totals, purple line shows percentage that is non-earmarked Dutch core financing



Source: Dashboard/ Piramide (administration systems).

In recent years, the predictability of Dutch financing has improved because the core funding received by the UN organisations is now fixed for two years instead of for only one year.

More focused and concentrated financing

The intention to limit the number of activities of the multilateral financing and the financing of the UN has largely been achieved. The 2010 ministerial letter stating the principles of Dutch development cooperation states that in the period 2006-2009, on average the Netherlands funded 710 activities of multilateral institutions each year. Table 2.3 shows the decline in the number of activities financed via the multilateral channel and via the UN channel.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Multilateral	459	410	407	325	315	266	262
UN	275	234	233	202	198	158	169

Source: Dashboard/Piramide (administration systems). The UN's humanitarian organisations have been included under UN.

The activities financed per organisation nevertheless remain high: 64 for UNDP and 31 for UNICEF.¹³ But by comparison with, for example, the financing of the Co-Financing System (MFS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the new grant scheme for NGOs, the transaction costs for financing UN organisations are low.

Financing the UN for activities relevant for Dutch priorities

Table 2.4 shows the spending per channel for the four spearheads.

Spearhead	World Bank ¹⁴ & other multilateral	UN	NGO	Research institution	Government	Public-private partnership	Total
WASH	11 (3.2)	141 (40.6)	52 (14.8)	49 (14.2)	38 (11)	56 (16.1)	348
SRHR	399 (25.9)	486 (31.5)	397 (25.7)	46 (3)	132 (8.6)	82 (5.3)	1542
Food security	271 (23.4)	183 (15.8)	280 (24.2)	161 (13.4)	155 (13.4)	108 (9.4)	1159
Security and rule of law	188 (18.8)	271 (27.1)	345 (34.5)	37 (3.8)	152 (15.2)	6 (0.6)	998

Source: Dashboard/Piramide (administration systems).

In absolute terms, the largest sums spent via the UN are those for SRHR and for security and rule of law. In terms of percentage of total expenditure per priority theme, the largest recipient of Dutch financing by far is the UN in the WASH subsector, followed by the UN in the SRHR sector. For food security and for security and rule of law, NGOs account for an appreciably greater percentage than the UN.

¹³ The UNDP's donor financial report for the Netherlands includes financial accountability for 74 separate activities that received direct earmarked funding, in addition to 12 contributions to trust funds. In the case of UNICEF, there were 45 separate activities, including the regional WCARO water programme; the activities in the context of the Peacebuilding Fund were excluded because for this fund there is also general accountability at fund level. Source: UNDP Financial Report to the Government of the Netherlands 2014 and UNICEF Statement of Accounts 2014.

¹⁴ The World Bank is formally part of the UN but has its own management and organisational structure.

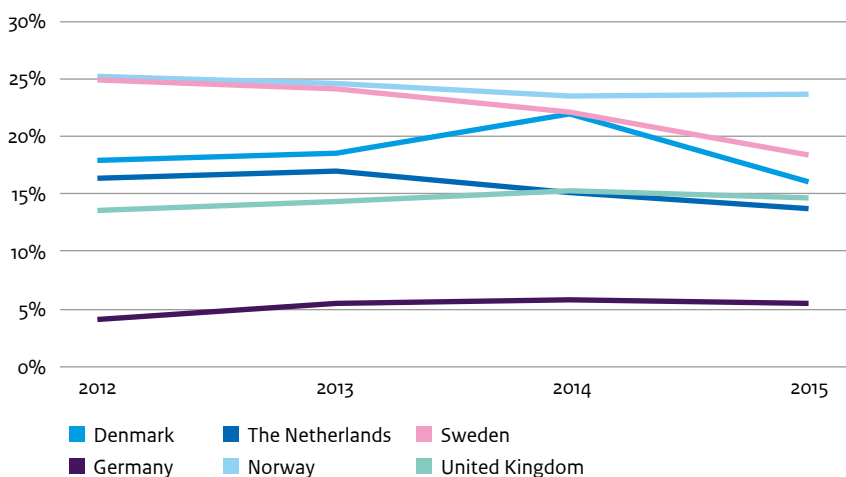
With regard to the findings on channel choice, it should be noted that in many cases the UN primarily coordinates and manages the spending of funds for the implementation of programmes, so as to align the aid to the national governments and achieve a good division of tasks between the implementing organisations. In this way, NGOs often act as UN-funded implementing organisations.

2.3 Comparison with other donors

The only source available for comparing the channel choice of the Netherlands with that of other donors is the database of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) database. These data express the channel choice as a percentage of the total ODA, i.e. including all allocations, revealing that on average about 35 per cent of Dutch expenditure goes via the multilateral channel, which is less than for the United Kingdom (UK) and Scandinavian countries, but more than for Germany. Furthermore, the only figures available to enable comparison of the expenditures via the UN channel are those for the total spending via the UN, i.e. including humanitarian aid. For this reason, the percentages shown in Figure 2.3 differ from the data in section 2.3.

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Figure 2.3 Expenditure on UN organisations as percentage of total net expenditure on ODA for six donor countries 2012-2015



Source: OESO-DAC-database.¹⁵

¹⁵ The data used in Figures 2.3 and 2.4 are for total ODA and not, as was earlier the case, for corrected ODA, so the figures shown sometimes differ from those in Table 2.1.

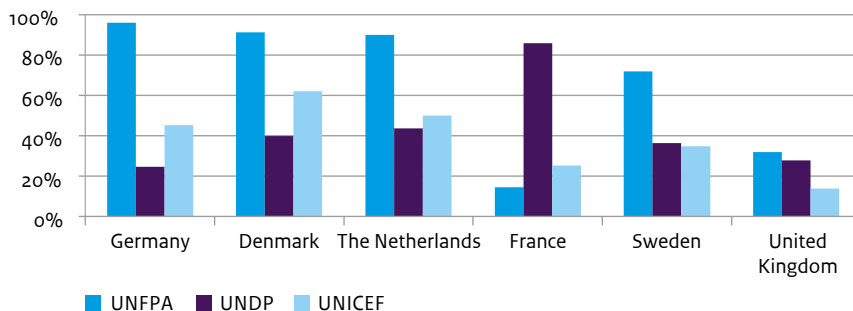
In the period 2012-2015, Dutch expenditure on ODA via the UN fell from 16.3 per cent to 13.6 per cent. Dutch ODA expenditure via the UN channel was less than that of the Scandinavian countries but more than that of the UK and Germany.

The US, Japan and the UK are the largest financiers of UNDP, while the US, UK and Germany are the largest financiers of UNICEF. For many years the Netherlands was among the top ten largest donors of non-earmarked financing to both UNDP and UNICEF. But as a result of cutbacks, it fell from sixth largest donor to UNDP in 2012 to thirteenth place in 2015.¹⁶ In 2015, the Netherlands was still in the top ten donors to UNICEF, but in ninth place.¹⁷

In 2015, the Dutch contribution to total non-earmarked funding of UNDP was only 2.8 per cent, and for UNICEF it was 3.9 per cent, which means that the Netherlands is no longer a major supplier of core funding. Norway and Sweden together accounted for about 25 per cent of the core funding of UNDP in 2013 and for 20 per cent in 2015, and recently called for a broadening of the donor base and less dependence on a small number of donors.¹⁸

The 2015 report on multilateral aid from the OECD-DAC countries contains a comparison of total expenditures and the extent of earmarking for the three largest UN organisations (OECD-DAC, 2015). Figure 2.4 gives an overview.

Figure 2.4 Comparison of six donor countries in terms of non-earmarked financing as percentage of total expenditure via three UN organisations (UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF) in 2013



Source: OECD-DAC (2015).

¹⁶ In 2011, the Netherlands even ranked third in the list of donors of non-earmarked contributions.

¹⁷ UNDP (2016), Funding Compendium 2015; and UNICEF (2016).

¹⁸ Source: UN – UNDP – Ontwikkelingssamenwerking – Uitvoerende Raad geeft UNDP groen licht voor uitwerking Strategisch Plan 2014-2017, Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department, 19 June 2013.

Figure 2.4 shows that in 2013 the percentage of Dutch core funding to UNFPA was high, similar to that for Germany and Denmark but much higher than that of the UK. Core funding made available to UNDP by the Netherlands and the other donors except for France accounted for less than 50 per cent of the total. The Netherlands ranked second to Denmark in terms of the highest percentage of non-earmarked financing to UNICEF.

The decline in non-earmarked financing by the Netherlands is part of the general trend: non-earmarked financing of UNDP has continued to decline. In 2014, it accounted for 20 per cent of total financing. It is clear that many programme countries want to retain as much latitude as possible in order to be able to influence UNDP to implement their national priorities and are unwilling to commit to a general UNDP programme because this limits the opportunities to pursue their own policy.

In 2016, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) developed new policy relating to the UN: in exchange for multi-year financing of the UN organisations, the sums involved in 30 per cent of the financing have been linked to attaining a certain number of concrete objectives relating to the organisation's effectiveness, its improvement and its efficiency. Large donors such as Norway, however, continue to finance on a yearly basis (DFID, 2017).

2.4 Conclusions

- Total expenditure on the UN remained fairly stable between 2012-2015, but total contributions to UN development organisations declined from EUR 460 million in 2012 to EUR 364 million in 2015.
- An important objective of Dutch policy is the strengthening of multilateral involvement via the general contributions to UNDP and UNICEF. Since 2011, willingness to contribute financially to this aim has fallen appreciably and has been replaced by more focus on Dutch priorities.
- Both the modality (core funding and broad programme support) and the predictability of Dutch financing to UNFPA, UN Women and UNAIDS in relation to SRHR, and to IFAD in relation to food security greatly influence the opportunities for these organisations to work more efficiently and more effectively. But in recent years, the continuity and predictability of the aid to UNDP and UNICEF have greatly declined.

3

Cooperation with the UN on priorities of Dutch development cooperation policy

The subject of this chapter is cooperation with the UN on the four priorities of Dutch development cooperation: WASH (3.1), SRHR (3.2), food security (3.3) and rule of law (3.4). A desk study was conducted for each of these, to assess the contribution of the UN organisations concerned to the achievement of the sector goals and targets of Dutch policy. Below, the main findings of these studies are summarised. The argumentation, supporting evidence and sources can be found in the reports on the studies, which are available on the IOB website.

3.1 WASH: the cooperation with UNICEF

Dutch policy and funding

‘Water’ (water resources management and WASH) is one of the four spearheads of Dutch development cooperation. The targets for WASH set by the Netherlands are 25 million new users of improved sanitation by 2015, and 25 million new users of safe water by 2018.¹⁹

From 2012 to 2015, total expenditure on WASH was EUR 348 million. In that period, UNICEF was the main multilateral channel for WASH financing: financing for UNICEF WASH programmes amounted to EUR 105.5 million.

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Desk study

The desk study on WASH examined the cooperation with UNICEF for improved water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), focusing on the two main regional WASH programmes of UNICEF supported by the Netherlands: the programme under UNICEF’s East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and the programme under UNICEF’s West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO). Together, these programmes account for 66 per cent of total Dutch WASH financing to UNICEF. The main findings are summarised below.

Effectiveness of the UNICEF programmes

The evaluation of the two regional programmes confirmed their effectiveness. With one to two more years to go in nine of the 11 countries, the targeted outputs for improved water supply and promotion of sanitation and hygiene had already been achieved and were likely to be surpassed. Together, ESARO and WCARO had achieved 4.5 million people given access to safe drinking water, 4.4 million people in programmes for sanitation, 4.1 million people educated in basic hygiene and 1.1 million primary school children benefiting from WASH facilities. This means that by 2015, these two regional programmes had already achieved 17 per cent of the entire abovementioned 2018 WASH target for water users and 18 per cent of the 2018 target for sanitation. Almost 1,600 schools (72 per cent of the programmes’ target) had had WASH facilities installed, benefiting almost 1.1 million pupils (90 per cent of the target). Only the 61 per cent output for WASH facilities in rural health centres was not satisfactory. This was due to the low output (46 per cent) in ESARO. In WCARO, output was on track: 65 per cent had been achieved half-way through the programme.

¹⁹ IGG is developing a new WASH SDG6 policy document, aiming at access to safe drinking water for 30 million new users and access to at least basic safe sanitation for 50 million people.

Independent studies confirmed that the facilities mentioned were indeed present in the field. Water and sanitation outcomes (numbers of new people served) were well on track and likely to be reached or surpassed (for sanitation, in terms of freedom from open defecation). However, because baseline data in programme districts were not collected or reported, no hard data could be found on the numbers of new people who obtained toilets supplied via the promotion programmes. For schools, the target of pupils given access to WASH – with separate toilet blocks for girls and boys – had also been met, surpassed or were likely to be surpassed. The only targets not to have been met were ESARO's for health centres. In WCARO they were on track.

In the ESARO region, technical sustainability indicators (functionality, water quantity and quality) were mostly satisfactory. In the WCARO region the facilities had been constructed more recently, the functionality and quantity of water supply were very satisfactory and the quality was satisfactory. Here, measured water point downtime had not exceeded two days. However, the institutional, environmental and financial sustainability of the water services was still weak. Sustainability goals had not yet been met, particularly for the social and organisational aspects. They were too complex to be achieved in four or five years, requiring huge outputs and outcomes to have been achieved simultaneously.

Efficiency of the UNICEF programmes

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The results in ESARO had been achieved within the agreed time and budget. WCARO performed less well: here the only outcomes on track were for water supply. The reasons were generally understandable: teething problems with a new drilling method, increased costs of materials necessitating new designs, civic unrest in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali, and priority being given to remote, small and underserved communities in CAR, Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritania.

The overheads and organisational costs of both programmes were acceptable, as they remained well below the accepted international standard of 20 per cent. UNICEF used no fixed ceiling, administrative costs were not included in financial reports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands had no clear agreements on these costs, including on which could be booked as organisational costs or which as overheads. UNICEF did account transparently for the use of the earmarked funding.

The comparison of financing modalities found no difference between the types of channels in terms of programme effectiveness. On outputs/outcomes, all four channels (bilateral, multilateral, NGOs and private sector) scored equally well. However, this finding was based on only one evaluation, which used a small, non-representative sample.

UNICEF's system function

UNICEF's international functions brought advantages: advice on SDG 6, and standard-setting for and monitoring of worldwide progress on WASH in the annual Joint UNICEF/WHO Monitoring Reports. At programme level, the main advantage was the long-term cooperation with national governments on WASH, with UNICEF using its core income to bridge any gaps in programme funding. This and its UN mandate for all child-related

development, meant that in the programmes evaluated, national governments trusted UNICEF and adjusted their policies and programmes when effectiveness and efficiency had been demonstrated to be good.

Dutch contribution

Dutch support to UNICEF's large regional programmes to national and local governments was an example of good donorship: long-term commitment, full and timely payment, and policy. Another strength was the predictable funding over several years, which maximised efficiency and effectiveness and benefited users.

UNICEF Headquarters and regional officers commended the quality of the partnership between UNICEF, the Netherlands and the national governments, in which the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff contributed both financially and with the technical expertise of the water team and Dutch WASH organisations. Points to be addressed were that the grants should have equivalent aims of developing local government capacity, and that the predictability of new funding linked to bridging the gaps in the strategic WASH plan should be assured. Another challenge was matching local demands to the capabilities and skills of Dutch NGOs.

UNICEF's effectiveness and good output efficiency made it an excellent partner for the Netherlands with whom much work could be done, given the limited human resources available on the Dutch side (2 FTE in the Inclusive Green Growth Department for a EUR 90 million programme) and with whom rapid action was possible. The downside side was that other, more problematic WASH programmes took up all the available capacity from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which impacted negatively on the monitoring and internal reporting of the UNICEF WASH programme.

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Influence on policy

The cooperation of the Netherlands with UNICEF WASH has facilitated new partnerships between UNICEF and other donors: for example, DFID's willingness to co-fund the WCARO-programme in Mozambique and Zambia.

In 2008, the Netherlands introduced the annual sustainability check in Mozambique, to provide hard data on the continued functionality and use and the underlying conditions (good institutional and financial management and environmental safety). It has since been expanded to all Dutch-funded UNICEF WASH programmes. The checks are a separate and independent monitoring tool financed by the Netherlands. Sustainability checks have been a very valuable innovation, but because of their complexity and cost, until recently it has been difficult to integrate them in national systems. However, it is gratifying that the data themselves are now slowly becoming part of national databases. In the UK, after questions from a House of Commons parliamentary committee, DFID agreed to introduce a similar review.

In 2015, the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation took the initiative to deploy UNICEF WASH funds in countries affected by the Ebola crisis, to improve hygiene and thereby curb the spread of the virus. Other donors followed with contributions, thereby helping to contain the epidemic.

Conclusions

For the Netherlands, the high effectiveness and good output efficiency made UNICEF an excellent partner, with whom much work could be done, given the few human resources available on the Dutch side (2 FTE in the Inclusive Green Growth Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for a EUR 90 million programme) and with whom very quick action was possible (funds for the Ebola crisis released in two days' time). The negative side was that the programme got little support as other, more problematic programmes took up all available capacity from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as evidenced by weaknesses in monitoring and internal reporting.

3.2 SRHR: the cooperation with UNFPA and UNAIDS

Dutch policy and funding

The Netherlands has a long history in promoting and supporting interventions in SRHR, including the prevention of HIV and the provision of treatment and care for people living with HIV. Over the years, the Netherlands has positioned SRHR more prominently in its foreign affairs policy, thereby underlining the link between SRHR and human rights, and the links between SRHR and HIV/AIDS.²⁰

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The 2011 policy document of the Netherlands defines the four outcome areas of the SRHR: (1) Adolescents and youth SRHR; (2) Better access to SRH commodities; (3) SRH as part of an accessible, affordable basic health care system; and (4) More respect for the SRH rights of key populations.

In the period under review, the Netherlands' financial commitment to SRHR (including HIV/AIDS) amounted to EUR 890 million, of which 31 per cent (EUR 486 million) was spent through the UN. The largest UN recipients were UNFPA and UNAIDS (the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS), and the Netherlands is among the top five donors for each. In the period under review, its average annual contribution to UNFPA was EUR 70 million (core and non-core funds), and to UNAIDS it was EUR 20 million (predominantly core funding). See Table 3.1.

Organisation	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
UNFPA	72.5	79	66.7	65.1	283.3
UNAIDS	20	20	20	20	80

Source: Piramide/Dashboard (administration systems). All the contributions to UNFPA were assigned to SRHR, and therefore there is a slight discrepancy compared with the figures in Table 2.2.

²⁰ IOB (2013). *Balancing ideals with practice: Policy evaluation of Dutch involvement in sexual and reproductive health and rights 2007-2012*. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands/IOB.

The trend of providing funds in the form of core funds remained relatively stable from 2012-2015, with the exception of non-core funds for UNFPA's flagship programme, the Global Programme on Reproductive Health Commodity Security (GPRHCS, in 2014 renamed UNFPA Supplies). The exceptions to this general rule were justifiable because certain areas required additional strengthening (such as reproductive health commodities, or the support to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) review process); in the past, exceptions had been made for strategic reasons, as in the case of support to the Maternal Health Thematic Fund.

Desk study

In the desk study, relevant evaluations relating to UNFPA and UNAIDS were reviewed, with the aim of ascertaining and assessing the extent to which UNFPA and UNAIDS were able to meet the Dutch government's expectations and assumptions underlying Dutch support to these organisations. The evaluation was based on secondary materials obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UN organisations, and public websites. In addition, key informants from within and outside the UN were interviewed by Skype/phone, or in person during field visits to New York and Geneva.

For the evaluation framework followed, see annex 2 in the SRHR report. Evaluations were included if they met the quality criteria set by the IOB or by the organisations themselves and were relevant to the period under review. In a few cases, evaluations before 2012 were included, as they provided relevant context or information regarding the evolution of a programme.

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Main findings on the effectiveness of the UNFPA and UNAIDS programmes

The great diversity of SRHR interventions of UNAIDS and UNFPA and the very different characters of both organisations make it difficult to generalise the findings of the various studies on the effectiveness of programmes.

For each of the abovementioned Dutch policy outcome areas, the main findings are as follows:

- UNFPA and UNAIDS both increased their *focus on the SRHR of adolescents and youth* (result area 1). UNFPA – with other UN organisations – has proven its worth in promoting the inclusion of Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) in national curricula, which in interplay with NGOs has helped position adolescents' needs and concerns more prominently on national development agendas. Another priority area of Dutch policy that has been taken up by UNFPA is early marriage. UNAIDS has successfully worked on increasing access to HIV testing and counselling, and on establishing youth networks around HIV/AIDS.
- The UNFPA Supplies Programme has boosted *access to SRH commodities* (result area 2), despite the many challenges on the ground. Dutch support to UNFPA must be seen in the context of the commitment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to supporting increasing access to family planning. UNFPA and UNAIDS both contribute to improved access to other

SRH commodities, achieving positive results in increasing access to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) – with the support of UNAIDS in collaboration with the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) – and in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

- To what extent the expectations of the Netherlands regarding SRHR as part of an *accessible and affordable basic health system* (result area 3) have been met is not clear, as strengthening a health system goes beyond the specific area of SRHR and requires commitment and major inputs from national governments. Specific results of strengthening the health system (in particular, midwives) have been noted, particularly those reported under the UNFPA Supplies Programme (supply chain strengthening). Although strengthening of midwifery services (under the maternal health programmes) is also part of system strengthening, sustaining the improvements is challenging. Health system changes require multi-year and multi-partner investments, hence there are also problems of attribution. The work and the successes of UNFPA in maternal health, especially in maternal health at community level, are commendable, but the knowledge and lessons learned need to be disseminated more widely. UNAIDS has achieved successes in systems strengthening, particularly in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission.
- In terms of *advocating for the SRH rights* of key populations (result area 4) UNAIDS has demonstrated how the promotion of the rights of key populations can successfully influence the debate and the national agenda. Successes are hard to achieve, and many discriminatory laws and practices still exist. Promising initiatives are the HIV Stigma Index – introduced by UNAIDS – as well as information and education campaigns and the work of both UNFPA and UNAIDS on increasing the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections among sex workers.

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Several reports and evaluations acknowledge that some of the activities, such as advisory work and lobbying, are not always easy to evaluate in terms of their concrete results. An appreciable number of studies and evaluations nevertheless conclude that both UNFPA and UNAIDS should do more to improve insight into the direct results of this work (MOPAN, 2017a; DFID, 2017). For example, not enough is known about whether the national governments have anchored SRHR in law and regulations, or about the results achieved by the advisory work done by UNAIDS for national governments in formulating policy and implementing programmes.

As with other result areas, it is not possible to attribute results directly to the work of UNFPA and UNAIDS. It is possible, however, to illustrate their work (in terms of outputs and outcomes) that has contributed to results, and the successes they themselves report, most notably on access to family planning, antiretroviral treatment, counselling, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Evaluations note that sustainability – a prerequisite for development effectiveness – is a key challenge for UNFPA and is being addressed by focusing on developing the capacity of implementing partners and giving sustained attention to policy development in SRHR and advocacy: working strategically at national level on policy and legislative frameworks, while

at the same time building capacity at all levels. However, much of the work in SRHR still suffers from excessive donor dependence, and much still needs to be done on integrating programme costs into national budgets. Global thematic evaluations note that a major threat to sustainability has been the lack of funding after UNFPA support ceases. In the case of UNAIDS, much depends on the strengths of the national frameworks, which in turn the organisation also influences significantly, as it is frequently the closest partner of the government when these are developed. A particular challenge is to keep the combating of HIV/AIDS on the political agenda, but it is one in which UNAIDS has been particularly successful. The number of Heads of State and Governments and Ministers that have attended the UN General Assembly High-level Meetings testifies to this.

Main findings on the efficiency of UNFPA and UNAIDS programmes

No definite conclusions can be drawn on cost-effectiveness; few evaluations have reported on the efficiency of programmes, as most have not related input to results. Both organisations have addressed these weaknesses by investing in systems that link investments to outputs. Exceptions are the programmes on commodities; these have proved to be cost-effective. In addition, the Supplies Programme is considered essential, as it fills vital gaps in meeting the need in disadvantaged areas.

UNFPA has worked with UNDP, UN Women and UNICEF to develop a new cost recovery policy. In 2014, UNFPA was among the organisations to approve and implement a new harmonised methodology for determining cost recovery rates, with a new cost recovery rate of 8 per cent.

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UNFPA and UNAIDS have increased their efforts to make their operations more transparent and less burdensome. More attention has been placed on efforts to harmonise and align procedures. The two organisations have improved their procedures for measuring results and accountability and have introduced new tools and systems to facilitate programme management and results tracking.

Both organisations see human resources as an area of concern, especially in the context of the decentralisation processes. Staff capacity in the country offices of UNFPA and UNAIDS varies, and rapid staff turnover has undermined the effectiveness of the advisory work.

System function: the fulfilment of the comparative advantages of UNFPA and UNAIDS in achieving the development objectives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in SRHR

- The expectations of the Netherlands regarding the comparative advantages of UNFPA and UNAIDS have been met. In terms of *economies of scale and outreach*: both organisations have a worldwide presence, which gives the Netherlands opportunities to exert influence via the UN, even in the non-focus countries. The UNFPA Supplies Programme has demonstrated the economy of scale, as considerable progress has been achieved with relatively small investments. Because of their independence and impartiality, both UNFPA and UNAIDS have been in a favourable position to complement the work of the Netherlands in addressing sensitive issues in SRHR in international forums.

- UNFPA and UNAIDS have both proven to be in a *strategic position to partner with governments* on key issues in SRHR and broker with other actors in SRHR. They have been able to use this position – albeit to a different extent, depending the country context. For example, UNFPA has been instrumental in the promotion of the vital role of midwives in maternal and neonatal care and in the reduction of maternal mortality at international and national levels. UNAIDS has been instrumental in promoting the rights of key populations – a good example is how it has exploited its position as lead agency in combating HIV/AIDS.
- *Norm setting:* Both organisations have been instrumental in the development and dissemination of international norms, standards and guidelines in SRHR, largely in close collaboration with WHO. Both organisations are key in producing reference materials and guidelines on important SRHR issues. UNAIDS is considered to be the reference base for information and updates on trends, and in collaboration with WHO the UNAIDS secretariat produces material to guide key players in the field.
- *Policy dialogue and agenda setting:* UNFPA and UNAIDS have demonstrated their ability to provide leadership, in the case of UNFPA most manifestly in its work in the ICPD review processes. UNAIDS has shown its leadership by voicing concerns regarding stigma and discrimination and overall by promoting a human rights agenda. UNFPA has played an important role in organising and participating in international conferences and review processes: the ICPD Beyond 2014 International Conference on Human Rights; the post-2015 development Commission on the Status of Women (CSW); and the Commission on Population and Development (CPD). In UNFPA and UNAIDS, the Netherlands has found partners to join in relentlessly lobbying for attention to be paid to the Cairo Agenda and to sensitive issues in SRHR. In light of the rise in conservative views, it is crucial not only to advance the agenda, but also to secure the progress that has been made.
- Both UNFPA and UNAIDS have been influential in the creation of the SDGs relating to SRHR, and their implementation. Faced with growing opposition to SRHR, both UNFPA and UNAIDS have demonstrated that they are important allies in counteracting these conservative voices and in joining forces at national and regional levels with partners, and at the level of the Executive Board through the Member States.

Policy influence of the Netherlands on the organisation and performance of UNFPA and UNAIDS:

In the period under review, the Netherlands made use of various channels and ways to influence UNFPA and UNAIDS, mostly by a combination of input in meetings, theme sessions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff regularly organised these to coincide with UNAIDS board meetings) and by formal representations to the Board²¹ submitted by Ministry experts and staff, theme experts from the embassies (in countries where SRHR is a thematic priority), and the Permanent Representations in New York and Geneva.

²¹ Formal representation on the Board (seat or represented) and in the UNAIDS Friends of the Board.

In addition, the Netherlands invested in strategically positioning experts from the Ministry within both organisations.

The Netherlands is committed to the Busan agreements on aid transparency by improving countries' access to and use of aid information so as to enhance aid effectiveness. In 2015, the Netherlands used its position as chair of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) to further fine-tune IATI standards and enhance their worldwide use. During two consecutive meetings of the UNFPA Annual Board, the Netherlands – jointly with other donors – emphasised the need to improve evaluations, particularly the collection of data and presentation of results on outcome levels, as well as the monitoring and evaluation capacity within UNFPA.

The Netherlands participates in the Steering Committee of UNFPA Supplies. This enables it to contribute to strategic dialogue and discussions on directions and models for improvement.²²

Some examples of Dutch cooperation with UNAIDS and UNFPA are:

- The tripartite programme 'NL-UNAIDS Cooperation on key populations in selected countries', a joint project which started in 2012 and is valued because it shows how the parties complement each other; at the same time, it strengthens the collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the embassies, civil society and UNAIDS.
- In 2013 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and UNFPA organised the ICPD Beyond 2014 Conference on Human Rights.²³ The Netherlands and UNFPA actively worked together to prepare the conference and disseminate the results and insights. The Netherlands considered the conference as being particularly important because it provided an opportunity to schedule human rights on the agenda and to discuss the findings of the ICPD review and the embedding of SRHR in the post-2015 agenda.
- Given the context of increased opposition to a progressive SRHR agenda – including safe abortion and access to sexuality education for young people – the Netherlands is working together with UNFPA and UNAIDS to influence Member States through diplomacy. The Netherlands has appointed a Special Ambassador for SRHR and Human Rights to set the agenda and discuss SRHR issues.

²² Internal memo on the support to UNFPA GPRHCS (November 2014). The document outlines areas for improvement: better collaboration with other donors in this domain; effective distribution in recipient countries; more emphasis on qualitatively good generic products. The Netherlands is the second largest donor to this programme (after the UK).

²³ 7-10 July 2013 in Noordwijk, the Netherlands. Under the tagline 'All Different. All Human. All Equal', the conference provided a platform for dialogue among the diverse range of participants to address human rights commitments and identify opportunities to strengthen the operational links between human rights and implementation of the ICPD agenda, with particular emphasis on SRHR and its intersection with gender equality (see: <http://www.unfpa.org/events/icpd-beyond-2014-international-conference-human-rights>).

Dutch contributions

UNFPA and UNAIDS consider the Netherlands to be a dependable partner, not only in financial terms but also because of the Dutch consistency in prioritising SRHR, its policy commitments, and its experienced and committed staff. UNFPA and UNAIDS see the Netherlands as a reliable and knowledgeable partner in planning and implementing their policies. In both organisations, the provision of Dutch financial support as core funding helps to create better conditions for more flexible and rational planning.

General conclusions

For the Netherlands, channelling funds through UNFPA and UNAIDS has proved to be cost-efficient in terms of human resource capacity, particularly by comparison to working with a number of smaller NGOs.²⁴

The expectations of the Dutch government regarding the comparative advantages of UNFPA and UNAIDS have largely been met. In terms of *economies of scale and outreach*, both organisations have a worldwide presence, which offers the Netherlands an opportunity to exert influence via these UN organisations, even in the non-focus countries. The UNFPA Supplies Programme has demonstrated economy of scale. Because of their independence and impartiality, both UNFPA and UNAIDS have been favourably placed to complement the work of the Netherlands in addressing sensitive issues in SRHR in international forums.

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In UNFPA and UNAIDS, the Netherlands has found partners to collaborate on keeping the spotlight on the Cairo Agenda and sensitive issues in SRHR. Given the rise in conservative views, it is crucial not only to advance the agenda, but also to secure the progress that has been made.

3.3 Food security: FAO and IFAD

Policy and funding

Food security has been one of the four Dutch development policy spearheads since 2011. The food security policy letter of 2014 emphasised the collaboration between governments, private sector, knowledge institutes and civil society as an approach for achieving agricultural development and food security. The letter set three objectives: (1) eradicating existing hunger and malnutrition, (2) promoting inclusive and sustainable growth in the agricultural sector, and (3) creating ecologically sustainable food systems.

In the period under review, total Dutch ODA expenditure on food security²⁵ was about EUR 290 million per year on average. Of this, 55 per cent was spent through central funding from The Hague, and the remaining 45 per cent was delegated to the Dutch embassies, mainly in

²⁴ Interviews with key informants; no cost-effectiveness analysis was conducted.

²⁵ This is limited to the strict 'food security' labelled expenditure, and excludes expenditure on e.g. sustainable water use, private sector development, or capacity building of civil society organisations, which may also contribute to food security.

the 15 partner countries. From 2012 to 2015, EUR 271 million (16 per cent) of Dutch expenditure was channelled through UN organisations. Of this 16 per cent, 73 per cent was spent on FAO and IFAD. Table 3.2 shows Dutch contributions for food security to FAO and IFAD.

Organisation	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
FAO	3.9	5	8.5	7	24.4
IFAD	38.2	25.9	22.3	22.5	108.9

Source: Own calculations based on Dashboard/Piramide (administration systems).

For a long time, Dutch support to FAO came under pressure from the international community because of criticism of FAO's management. So, despite the importance of FAO to the Netherlands, the Dutch contribution to FAO has been modest. The Netherlands is a small donor to FAO, ranking nineteenth in 2014. Twenty per cent of the Dutch contributions to FAO under the Dutch food security policy article in 2012-2015 were core contributions, the rest were voluntary contributions to various projects funded directly by the Dutch embassies in partner countries. FAO was chosen to implement Dutch-funded projects in South Sudan because of the politically sensitive context, in the Palestinian Territories because of good collaboration with the authorities, and in Bangladesh because a good FAO proposal fitted well into the Dutch food security programme in that country.

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The Netherlands is a large donor for IFAD, ranking second in 2012-2015. Sixty-nine per cent of the contribution to IFAD in that period was core funding, the remainder comprised voluntary contributions to a few projects, disbursed from The Hague and from Dutch embassies in partner countries. Table 3.2 gives an overview of the FAO and IFAD projects funded from voluntary contributions. The funding to the IFAD Agricultural Smallholder Adaptation Programme (ASAP) is thematically earmarked but IFAD has flexibility about its use. IFAD is mainly the administrator of the Global Land Tool Network, transferring the Dutch contribution to UN-Habitat and UNOPS to support the network.

²⁶ This table excludes the 50 per cent core contribution of EUR 7.5 million per year by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs to FAO, which counts as ODA. Also excluded are contributions to FAO and IFAD not contributing to the food security policy article. Total Ministry of Foreign Affairs expenditures in the period 2012-2015 channelled through FAO and IFAD are EUR 34.6 million for FAO and EUR 109.8 million for IFAD. Core financing as a percentage of total expenditures was 29 per cent for FAO and 68 per cent for IFAD.

FAO

The IOB FAO Desk study

For the IOB desk study, 13 evaluation reports relating to FAO were selected, based on three criteria: the evaluation took place between 2012 and 2016; food security was a major project objective; the project took place in one of the 15 Dutch partner countries. In addition, a few recently evaluated Dutch-funded FAO projects in Palestinian Territories and Bangladesh were included, plus reports relevant to the assessment of the 'system function'.

Effectiveness

FAO's intervention in partner countries varies, from policy dialogue and strategic coordination, to field-level project implementation.

The desk study and the interviews IOB conducted confirm FAO's role in policy dialogue at national level. FAO has good relationships with national governments, who see it as an impartial, honest broker. FAO often has staff within ministries and other government offices, and often co-chairs agricultural technical working groups in which government and other developing partners meet. FAO brings new issues to the attention of governments, such as climate-smart or nutrition-sensitive agriculture. Sometimes, government sets policy and asks FAO for practical advice on how to implement it. FAO has also supported national government decision-making by setting up strategic information systems. The evaluation of FAO's role and work in food and agricultural policy (2012), which is very positive about FAO's role in the global policy debate, is critical about FAO's role in national policy dialogue. It notes that although FAO is better positioned for policy dialogue than any other organisation, it does not always take the leading role it could and should play. Policy work is of uneven quality, due to limited willingness and ability at country level and insufficient 'policy intelligence' at FAO HQ that the country teams can rely on. The evaluation concludes that there is limited accountability and few incentives to deliver on policy advice at country level. Since then, the situation has improved and FAO has put more emphasis on national policy dialogue: the EU-funded FIRST project has placed policy experts in 34 country offices, and strategic programmes, 1, 3 and 5 put more emphasis on policy dialogue.

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The 2012 evaluation notes that during country visits, FAO representatives explained to the evaluators that FAO's status prevented it from being as critical of governments as other development partners can be. Other development partners have sometimes mentioned this as a weakness, noting that in some cases, the World Bank, the EU, or IFPRI are more important in policy dialogue than FAO. However, development partners could involve FAO more strategically by addressing policy issues that an individual development partner cannot address. Interviews we carried out for the present report revealed, for example, that in Bangladesh it was difficult for the Dutch embassy to interest the government in discussing the poor performance of the Bangladesh Water Development Board that was hampering field implementation of several water management projects. The Dutch embassy requested FAO to raise this issue, expecting that the government would be more receptive of an FAO approach. In other words, developing partners could make more use of FAO, and complement bilateral operational fieldwork with strategic policy dialogue through FAO.

The EU has funded FAO by giving seed money to assist governments in setting policies, after which these governments could apply for larger grants for implementation. The World Bank has a similar strategy with FAO.

Some of the evaluations reviewed for the present report are positive about some of FAO's implementation of programmes in the field, noting that FAO country programmes are well aligned with national government policies. However, some evaluations are critical of the large number of fragmented and scattered projects in field implementation, many of which do not clearly contribute to results at national level. This fragmented approach is partly the result of the different requests from different donors.

The Dutch embassy in Bangladesh supported FAO in developing a food safety policy and set up the infrastructure (a laboratory), piloting this with a limited number of food enterprises. This is a good example of how FAO combines its normative work, national policy dialogue and capacity building with strategically chosen work on the ground.

The review and interviews reveal that other donors are especially positive about FAO's work to improve the resilience of vulnerable farmers. Several project evaluations mention that limited attention has been given to the criterion of gender and inclusiveness, which despite the FAO network of gender experts and gender focal points had the lowest score of all criteria reviewed.

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The abovementioned evaluation of FAO's role and work in food and agricultural policy (2012) raises questions about whether the benefits of FAO programmes are sustainable, because continued donor support is uncertain, an exit strategy is often lacking, and often monitoring and evaluation are below par, partly due to the fragmentation of projects. The evaluation gives examples of expected poor sustainability due to low involvement, low capacity, or low commitment on the part of the public organisations that were supposed to take over the FAO's work.

From the desk study and interviews it became clear that the balance between FAO's global strategic work and FAO's country-level project implementation on the ground is much debated. Some would like to see FAO focusing on the strategic global tasks that other organisations do not perform and point out that FAO is too expensive and bureaucratic to undertake fieldwork that other, national or local organisations can do equally well. FAO's local-level projects run the risk of becoming fragmented and having limited impact. Others see FAO as having a role in both types of work, as long as the relatively small-scale, innovative fieldwork is clearly linked to and informs strategic and policy-related work, at least at national level. Most Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff would prefer FAO to limit its fieldwork solely to what is needed for strategic input.

FAO's efficiency

In general, the evaluation reports studied provide insufficient information to enable a blanket judgement about cost-benefits and efficiency. The review revealed several examples of field-level projects having low cost-effectiveness due to the small number of

beneficiaries. The 2015 evaluation of FAO's contribution to knowledge on food and agriculture concluded that greater orientation on users would increase outreach and cost-effectiveness (FAO, 2015).

Staff costs account for about 75 per cent of FAO's regular programme budget, which is financed by compulsory contributions from Member States. In recent years, FAO has attempted to reduce these costs, but the savings so far have been modest.

FAO's systematic function

FAO is important and unique for its impartial convening role in the global debate about agriculture and food security. It carries out that role convincingly in various forums, including the Committee on World Food Security, and this contributes to the Dutch food security objectives.

Our review found that the knowledge function was one of the most appreciated functions of FAO. The abovementioned 2015 evaluation is positive about this core FAO function and about FAO's publications and databases, noting that these serve international organisations, national governments, research and academia well (FAO, 2015). However, the evaluation points out that users in developing countries are served less well because of limited internet connection and the limited context-specific information and services. FAO's technical content is especially appreciated and acknowledged, and contributes to national policy, strategy and programmes. FAO's learning products are also appreciated. More attention could be given to improving content on social issues (e.g. inclusiveness, gender) and environmental issues (e.g. climate change).

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From our desk study and interviews it emerged that there is general appreciation of the technical support from FAO staff, who draw on regional and Rome-based expertise. Knowledge sharing within FAO has improved since 2011, when it adopted a knowledge strategy. According to some, FAO risks its knowledge function losing credibility, partly as a result of the staff exodus following FAO's decentralisation, partly because other organisations, especially those engaging in research, are now increasingly disseminating their knowledge. There is scope for collaboration between the Centres for International Agricultural Research as knowledge generators and FAO as knowledge broker, because FAO has better outreach in developing countries, thanks to its wide network of country offices.

The evaluations and all interviewees stress the need for FAO to further modernise and shift from being a knowledge generator to being a knowledge broker.

FAO also has a leading role in compiling statistics, providing essential data on food security for the SDGs.²⁷

²⁷ For example, FAO's Statistics Division was indispensable in the June 2015 conference 'Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics' that had as its aim the expansion of developing countries' capacity to generate reliable data on food and agriculture. See also *Raadsoverleg Financiën internal report 8 July 2015: VN-FAO: 'Meten is weten, betere landbouwstatistieken en monitoring van de SDG's'*.

IFAD

The IFAD desk study

The IFAD desk study is based on the IFAD-9 Impact Synthesis, the mid-term review of the ASAP programme, the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness of 2014, and country evaluation reports for Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda.²⁸

Effectiveness

IFAD's emphasis is on large-scale field implementation and results for smallholder farmers. Its approach is delivering convincing results and contributing to the Dutch objectives relating to agricultural production and markets (subsidiary objective 2) and sustainable agriculture (subsidiary objective 3). These also contribute to three SDGs: 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger) and 13 (climate action).

The country evaluation reports for Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda, which are based on available project documentation and evaluations and on additional qualitative fieldwork, score relatively well on the impact of IFAD projects. In Bangladesh, the impact of the project activities on agricultural production and income was positive. In Ethiopia, positive results were found for livestock and agricultural production, but the impact on income and wealth was not assessed.

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In the period 2012-2015, IFAD made efforts to aggregate the results of individual projects. For example, taken all together, the ongoing projects in 2014 were reaching 2.4 million people via training in crop practices, 1.1 million via training in entrepreneurship and 4.8 million people who were active borrowers; in addition, 191,000 ha had been provided with a new or rehabilitated irrigation system and 2.3 million ha common land had been brought under improved management.²⁹ Annually reported results cannot be totalled over several years, as the same people may undergo training more than once. Neither should figures from all closed projects be aggregated, again because the same people may be involved in successive projects.

The Synthesis of lessons learned from the IFAD-9 Impact Assessment Initiative (2016) attempts to aggregate results from about 38 impact evaluations and link them with the ambitiously formulated indicator: pulling 80 million people out of poverty. Although it reveals that results can indeed be aggregated and extrapolated using impact evaluations, it is clear that the indicator of pulling a specific number of people out of poverty is difficult to report on. Some of the aggregated results confirm the large scale of IFAD programmes (whether closed or ongoing) between 2010 and 2015. Aggregated results have two dimensions: number of beneficiaries, and average impact size per beneficiary (Table 3.3).

²⁸ These countries were chosen as they provided the case studies for the IOB policy review on food security due to be published at the end of 2017.

²⁹ IFAD (2014), *Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness*. IFAD: Rome.

Reach in number of beneficiaries (categories are not mutually exclusive)		Impact**	
Persons	139 million		
Households	14 million		
Active borrowers	18 million		
Voluntary savers	26 million		
Persons trained in:			
• Crop production	4.4 million		
• Livestock	1.6 million		
• Business	1.4 million		
Persons with increased agric. revenue	44 million	Yields	+ 3.8%
		Agric. income	+ 18.0%
		Income	+ 4.0%
Persons with improved assets empowerment, resilience, diet	10 million	Asset index	+ 6.6%
		Reduced exposure to shocks	- 4.5%
		Diet diversity	+ 4.6%

* Source: IFAD (2016) *Synthesis of lessons learned from the IFADg Impact Assessment Initiative*.

** The impact evaluations have been selected in an effort to quantify the effect that can be attributed to the IFAD intervention.

The modest effect found in a certain year of evaluation may continue in subsequent years, and IFAD's intention is to assist producers to move out of poverty over time.

IOB's review confirms IFAD's focus on remote rural areas, targeting smallholder farmers, as highly relevant. IFAD spends 53 per cent of its resources in the countries in the top quartile of the poverty index. Its contributions include large sums spent on big countries with high absolute poverty, such as India, Ethiopia and Pakistan.

IFAD often works in remote and difficult areas in which other organisations do not work, such as the flood-prone areas in Northeast Bangladesh: here IFAD works on village-level protection, whereas other organisations work on large-scale infrastructure. Another example is the pastoral area in Ethiopia, where no other development partners are working. In principle, IFAD works with smallholder farmers. In a few exceptional cases, IFAD works in estate-outgrower schemes (e.g. with sugar in Tanzania). The target group has shifted slightly, from the ultra-poor subsistence farmers to poor but productive farmers with a per capita income of USD 1-4 per day. This means that social safety nets will be needed for the ultra-poor. IFAD's assistance to smallholder farmers in the formation of groups and cooperatives is more than that given by FAO or the World Bank.

After IFAD support stops, some of IFAD's projects are continued by the national government, or continue to receive World Bank support. However, internal IFAD project reviews also found sustainability to be the lowest-scoring criterion: it was often rated as less than satisfactory. Project impacts can be sustained by committed national governments that have capacity, for example for maintaining infrastructure, or for setting up commercially interesting activities such as value chains and saving and loan schemes. To improve sustainability, IFAD tries to move away from government programmes with free or subsidised products, (e.g. fertiliser subsidies).

Environmental sustainability is certainly addressed by IFAD. For example, IFAD's annual Results and Development Impact reports show that 2.3 million ha communal land was under improved management in the projects running in 2014. In addition, IFAD is putting more emphasis on climate change adaptation, using the ASAP fund to do so.

Efficiency

Our review found that one of IFAD's strengths was that its performance-based allocation system resulted in transparent decisions on funding. Transparency improved during the period reviewed, thanks to better financial management: the loan portfolio increased yet administrative costs remained stable. IFAD trains partners in financial management, encouraging a focus on value for money.

The fact that programmes are financed by a loan negotiated with the Ministry of Finance of the recipient country ensures a more careful budgeting than when providing a grant to the country's Ministry of Agriculture. The total budget in 2016 was about EUR 1 billion, with 14 per cent being overhead costs (IFAD has about 600 staff on the payroll). IFAD is well aware of the costs per beneficiary, and makes ex-ante calculations of the economic and societal costs and benefits (IRR, ERR) for all programmes. Planning and progress can be slow, often due to lengthy government procedures, resulting in delayed disbursements, but this does not necessarily mean that programmes are inefficient.

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Interestingly, there is no discussion about to what extent IFAD loans should contribute to increasing government revenue that can be used to repay the loan. The same applies to World Bank loans.

The IFAD results for 2010-2015 presented in Table 3.4 can be used to estimate the average benefits per beneficiary reached, and to compare these with the average costs per beneficiary (not reported in IFAD reports). The costs over the preceding six years include the investments by IFAD 8 and 9, plus co-financing. This rough estimate serves as simple illustration of the cost-effectiveness (Table 3.4). The average investment of USD 130 per beneficiary would result in an additional income of USD 29 per beneficiary, which should be sustainable over several years. This is considered a reasonable rate of return. As a comparison, the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme estimates the investment needed at USD 250 per person, based on various USAID benchmarks for previous agricultural projects, and aspires to achieve an income increase of 20 per cent.

Costs		Benefits	
IFAD 8 and 9: USD 7 billion + USD 11 billion co-financing	18 billion	Per capita income (assuming USD 2 per day)	730 per year
Number of beneficiaries reached	139 million	Income increase after 6 years of project	4%
Costs per beneficiary*	130 over 6 years	Additional income per beneficiary*	29 per year

* This is a representative average from the impact studies reviewed. Some projects (e.g. the Char Development and Settlement Programme in Bangladesh) invested substantially more per household per household, which was justified because the benefits were also substantially larger. Some projects had little or no measurable effects on household income.

IFAD's financing approach, mainly through conditional loans to governments, assures ownership by the government and alignment with national policies. It includes a critical review of costs and expected benefits, and has a reasonable rate of return.

Influence on policy

The Dutch Permanent Representative in Rome has helped to bring several issues relevant for Dutch policy to the attention of FAO and IFAD, such as climate change, environment, and public-private partnerships.

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The Netherlands, known for its agricultural development, innovation and exports, is seen by FAO as an important partner, even though it is a very modest donor to FAO. For some topics, the Netherlands collaborates with other donors or through the EU to influence FAO. For example, the Netherlands was an active member of the EU Working Group on Land, which in 2011 and 2012 was instrumental in a range of negotiations on land governance principles between FAO Member States, the Civil Society Mechanism and the Private Sector Mechanism of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). With the help of FAO, these negotiations resulted in the adoption in May 2012 of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests, Fisheries in the Context of National Food Security.³⁰

Together with IFAD, DFID initiated ASAP: a fund with the objective of making climate change and environmental finance work for smallholder farmers. The Netherlands welcomed and supported ASAP by adding climate change adaptation project components to loan-financed agricultural development projects. This convinced IFAD and, later, national governments, of the relevance of climate change adaptation. It is expected that future loan-funded projects will include climate change adaptation activities even without an ASAP grant.

³⁰ The VGGT were endorsed by CFS at a Special Session in May 2012, and since then implementation has been encouraged by G20, Rio+ 20, United Nations General Assembly and Francophone Assembly of Parliamentarians. They are also used as a reference by donor institutions.

The Netherlands would like to see a larger role for the private sector in FAO and IFAD's operations. FAO is slowly moving in that direction; IFAD has made more progress. Some would like to see FAO and IFAD working more with the private sector. These paths may be pursued, but there are also other Dutch private sector development instruments for supporting the private sector. Other organisations, such as the World Bank, have much more experience in policy dialogue on improving the business climate and may be more fit for purpose than FAO or IFAD.

Conclusions

Overall: FAO is relevant for the Dutch food security objectives and lives up to expectations, especially as a global platform and knowledge and data broker. FAO could perform better in policy dialogue at national level and in evaluation. There is less agreement about to what extent FAO should work beyond the strategic level and implement or coordinate field-level projects in recipient countries, and to what extent FAO should work on PPP.

Overall: IFAD is relevant for the Dutch food security objectives and lives up to expectations, especially in reaching smallholder farmers on a large scale, in working through governments, in being aware of cost-effectiveness, and in monitoring and evaluation. It is relatively small and flexible and responds well to issues raised by donors, such as climate change adaptation. There is room for improvement in IFAD's policy dialogue and coordination with other development partners, which are currently constrained by limited in-country presence, although it could be argued that other organisations are better suited to carry out these tasks.

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3.4 Security and rule of law: UNDP

The Netherlands has a long track record in the area of peace, security and development, and is in favour of an integrated approach to tackle issues of conflict and fragility. The security and rule of law spearhead, as presented in a letter to the House of Representatives in 2012,³¹ encompasses five key elements:

- security for people;
- a functioning legal order;
- political processes in which every group in society can participate, including peace processes, post-conflict reconciliation and democratisation;
- a legitimate, capable government; and
- employment and basic services.³²

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Brief over het speerpunt veiligheid en rechtsorde*, The Hague, 2012 (EFV-190/2012).

³² On the basis of these five elements, in 2015 a Theory of Change was developed, which identifies the following overarching objective: To promote 'legitimate' stability in fragile countries with a view to resolving and preventing armed conflict, protecting people and laying the foundations for sustainable development'. During 2015, elements 3 and 4 were combined into one element: inclusive peace processes and political governance (see: <https://www.government.nl/documents/regulations/2015/12/10/theory-of-change-for-the-security-and-rule-of-law-policy-priority-in-fragile-situations>).

Dutch policy and engagement

In the period 2012-2015, a total of EUR 998 million was spent under the security and rule of law spearhead of the Dutch trade and development cooperation budget. In addition, in that period, EUR 165.6 million was spent from the Stabilisation Fund administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When broken down into specific UN recipients, the main recipient of the total Dutch expenditure on the UN in the period under review is UNDP (EUR 120 million, which is 44 per cent³³), followed by UNICEF (EUR 91 million: 34 per cent). The remaining contributions are divided over 16 UN organisations and entities, such as World Food Programme (WFP), UN Women and UN-Habitat.

Table 3.5 shows the expenditures to the largest UN programmes in the area of security and rule of law.

	Activity	Selected for review	Organisation	Country	Total 2012-2015
1	Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme	x	UNICEF	Worldwide	83.0
2	Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan 2014-2015	x	UNDP	Afghanistan	25.0
3	UNDP/BCPR 2012-2015 (Global Rule of Law Programme)	x	UNDP	Worldwide	24.0
4	Crisis Prevention and Recovery (CPR) Thematic Trust Fund (BCPR)	x	UNDP	Worldwide	16.0
5	Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan 2013	x	UNDP	Afghanistan	10.0
6	UN Peacebuilding Fund 2012-2015	x	UNDP	Worldwide	10.0
7	National Area-Based Development Programme	x	UNDP	Afghanistan	9.8
8	Sistema de la Integración Centroamericano (SICA)		UNFPA	Central America	9.5
10	Strategic Stabilisation East DR Congo		UNDP	DR Congo	9.0
11	Access to Justice and Rule of Law	x	UNDP	South Sudan	8.0
12	Elect II		UNDP	Afghanistan	7.7
14	Democratic Governance		UNDP	Kenya	5.1

Source: *Piramide/Dashboard (administration systems)*.

³³ Includes EUR 19.96 million of contributions to trust funds managed by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office.

EUR 75.81 million of the Dutch security and rule of law contributions to trust funds is administered by UNDP, of which EUR 55.85 million by UNDP itself (e.g. the South Sudan Recovery Fund (SSRF South Sudan)), and EUR 19.96 million by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office (e.g. the UN Peacebuilding Fund).³⁴

The desk study

The desk study aimed to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of efforts to which the Netherlands contributed financially or had a direct political interest in, specifically those programmes and initiatives implemented by UNDP.³⁵ The review is based on relevant evaluations, reviews, UN Secretary-General reports, etc., and on interviews conducted with key stakeholders in The Hague and New York.³⁶

Effectiveness

The evaluations and studies reviewed are generally positive about the effectiveness of UNDP projects and programmes in fragile and conflict-affected settings, though this judgement is mostly based on output assessments. The main challenge remains how to achieve longer-term results and impact in fragile and conflict-affected settings (though this applies to all international engagements in such settings, given their complexity and challenging nature).

From the country-specific evaluations (e.g. of the LOTFA in Afghanistan, and the SSRF in South Sudan) it can be concluded that UNDP has effectively promoted dialogue between government and civil society at national and local levels. By engaging a wider range of stakeholders, this has enabled a broadening of the constituency for peacebuilding and improvements in programme design in priority areas.³⁷

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UNDP's projects and programmes score well primarily in terms of contributing to strengthening government capacity, and strengthening rule of law. The 2013 evaluation of UNDP efforts in the context of UN Peace Operations, for instance, finds that UNDP has been effective in providing timely technical and financial assistance to national rule-of-law projects, and refers specifically to UNDP efforts to address the challenge of bridging traditional dispute resolution and formal justice systems, and furthering transitional justice in post-conflict contexts. Varied success is reported in its disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration efforts, which reflects the diverse context-specific factors in conflict settings and a tendency to concentrate on immediate outputs rather than longer-term impacts.

³⁴ The Netherlands contributed to five trust funds administered by the MPTF Office: the Yemen National Dialogue and Constitutional Reform Trust Fund; the Trust Fund to Support Initiatives of States Countering Piracy off the Coast of Somalia; the Democratic Republic of the Congo Stabilisation Coherence Fund (ISSSS); the South Sudan Recovery Fund; and the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

³⁵ Other elements of the Dutch integrated approach to security and rule of law – such as support to peacekeeping and political missions, mediation, and hybrid initiatives such as joint programming between e.g. UNDP and the DPA or the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) – have not been considered in the thematic desk study. It would be useful to conduct a more integrated analysis in the near future, to complement the findings of this policy review.

³⁶ The interviews conducted were non-attributable. Annex 1 in the report of M. van Beijnum lists the organisations that the interviewees represented.

³⁷ UNDP (2013), p. xiv; UNDP (2014b); Barnes, S. et al., *South Sudan Recovery Fund, Round 3: UN Joint Stabilization Programmes – Outcome Evaluation*, 2015.

Also, UNDP efforts to bolster civilian oversight in security sector reform require better sequencing and coordination between reform of the security sector and other sectors. UNDP is found to have made progress in supporting opportunities for women to participate more fully in the emerging political and legal landscape of post-conflict countries (UNDP, 2013, pp. xii-xiii).

As is the case for all entities operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings, the effectiveness of UNDP programming support in these countries is often contingent upon events in the realms of politics and security, which are largely beyond UNDP's power to influence. Where a modicum of political settlement has been reached and peacekeeping has maintained security, UNDP interventions have been able to support a broader conflict resolution and peacebuilding agenda, and ultimately a development agenda. It is interesting to note that some of the greatest UNDP (and admittedly UN) achievements in post-conflict peacebuilding have been in states that are either: (a) geopolitically less prominent and hence the UN's role is greater vis-à-vis other actors; or (b) beset with geopolitically charged environments (like Kenya or Georgia), where political and security influences have become so polarised by internal/external influences that UNDP is able to take on a 'non-threatening' mediation role. Where the semblances of political reconciliation have been scant and violence ongoing, UNDP interventions have had limited impact, and progress has been frequently reversed due to low national buy-in for development interventions, or to the resumption of conflict (UNDP, 2013, p. xvi).

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Overall, evaluations find that UNDP needs to strengthen its capacity to conduct conflict analyses as the basis of its security and rule of law programming. Two elements are considered to negatively impact on this: (1) the lack of standard operating procedures; and (2) the lack of expertise and capacity within UNDP Country Offices.³⁸

The review yielded a mostly positive picture in terms of the extent to which the UN provides the assumed added value as implementer of security and rule of law activities (i.e. scale, impartiality, expertise). As noted above, there is a clear need to strengthen the field-level expertise on security and rule of law. Also, it is fair to note that in many conflict-affected settings there is no viable alternative to the UN – most local organisations are not capable of adhering to the donors' requirements in terms of fiduciary rules and regulations and the need to show results. Also, given the security constraints and issues of access, the UN is most often the best placed and most suitable channel for international support. For this reason, in conflict-affected settings it is neither very useful nor relevant to simply 'compare' the multilateral aid channel with the bilateral aid channel; it is the complementarity of the multilateral channel to the limited capacity of the bilateral channel that is indispensable – the channels ought to strengthen each other and are not mutually exclusive.

³⁸ BCPR's surge capacity used to fill this gap to a certain extent. This is where the recent merger of BCPR with the Bureau for Development Policy – and the fact that the specific area of expertise covered by BCPR is now 'mainstreamed' in the organisation – are disconcerting. Time will tell what the results of this reorganisation will be, but the Netherlands has indicated its scepticism.

The desk study's findings on the Peacebuilding Fund were generally positive. The fund is designed to address immediate needs in countries emerging from conflict at a time when sufficient resources are not available from other funding mechanisms; it supports interventions of direct and immediate relevance to a peacebuilding process and contributes to addressing critical gaps in that process. The Peacebuilding Fund supports activities by channelling money through UN entities, and is reliant on voluntary contributions by Member States for its survival.

The 2015 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (and the two subsequent resolutions on peacebuilding in the General Assembly and Security Council in April 2016) praised the Peacebuilding Fund. The fund is seen to be carrying out the crucial task for which it was created in 2006, namely filling the gap in existing development aid that arises when there is a need for speedy and flexible financing at critical moments of transition from war to peace (Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of UNPBA). Since the 2016 resolutions, the fund's role has widened beyond prevention of relapse into violent conflict; it now includes sustaining peace in general.

The most recent evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund (2014) assesses the effectiveness of the fund overall as good. Peacebuilding Fund activities are directly and immediately relevant for country-specific peacebuilding processes, and are aimed at funding critical peacebuilding activities that cannot be funded or implemented otherwise (including a focus on so-called 'aid orphan' countries, like CAR). The achievement of catalytic effect in terms of fundraising is assessed less positively.

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Efficiency

The country and programme evaluations do not provide sufficient evidence to allow general conclusions to be drawn about efficiency or the cost-benefit balance of activities. Most findings relate to capacity to manage and implement programmes.

Although it is stated that UNDP has invested in strengthening its financial management procedures, overall the organisation is nevertheless found to be rather slow and to lack sufficient capacity (specifically at field level). Interviewees refer to the difficulty of UNDP being the 'agency of last resort', in combination with its tendency to say 'yes' first, and think about how to actually undertake activities second. Also, UNDP's procurement rules and regulations are notorious for being cumbersome and time-consuming. The fact that UNDP's donors (who are working with risk-averse parliaments) stipulate that UNDP follow many of these rules and regulations places UNDP in a somewhat 'catch-22' position, and underlines the need for UNDP to develop less cumbersome procedures in collaboration with its donors.

UNDP is a reasonably efficient administrator of large multi-donor programmes financed by the Netherlands and others. Criticism is levelled at its often long and bureaucratic procedures for approval and payment. But these are also the result of the exacting demands on accountability for expenditure set by the donors.

System function

As a system-wide organisation, UNDP is generally appreciated for its convening power and contribution to international policy dialogues.³⁹ UNDP is found to play a vital role in UN peacebuilding architecture at field level, with a capacity to operate ‘at scale’ across multiple programme areas before, during and after the outbreak of conflict. UNDP is well positioned to ably serve as an integral partner in peace operations, providing coordination (via the UN Country Team), programme management and technical expertise, especially during transitions to peacebuilding and post-conflict development (UNDP, 2013).

In terms of the assumed added value of the UN as convening power, this is where the limited scope of this review comes into play as it does not take into account the work of (and actions directed towards) the Security Council – arguably the most relevant convening power in the area of peace, security and development (and which is currently facing its own challenges).⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the review finds that the security and rule of law activities supported by UNDP have contributed to some extent to strengthening collaboration across the three UN pillars (peace and security, human rights, development) and by so doing have strengthened the organisation’s overall convening power. Overall, however, it is fair to state that the UN still needs to make its approach to peace, security and development more coherent and more strategic. The main challenge will be to achieve a clear and balanced division of labour across the peace and security and development pillars; for UNDP, the main challenge will be to identify a sharp focus and set clear priorities so as not to fall into the trap of the ‘agency of last resort’ again.

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UNDP has positioned itself as knowledge broker and centre of expertise in the area of peace, security and development, and underlines its impartiality, long-term engagement and broad coordination as key assets in being the lead organisation in this area. The Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Reconstruction (BCPR) has been crucial in this regard – specifically at field level. The CPR-TTF evaluation finds that BCPR’s support of UNDP Country Offices has resulted in stronger conflict-sensitive programming (Kunzmann Briefel, 2014).

In collaboration with the Netherlands (with which it co-chaired the OECD/DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility), UNDP helped to bring about the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. It has also helped to implement the New Deal, taking the lead at field level in developing the country-specific New Deal frameworks – i.e. conduct of conflict analysis and the development of an overarching list of priorities and action plan (the Compact), including a monitoring and evaluation framework. It now remains to be seen how the New Deal will relate to the SDG agenda being rolled out in the field and to the upcoming operationalisation of the sustaining peace agenda. However, as UNDP has been a frontrunner in developing the SDGs, including SDG 16, and is now the lead coordinating agency in relation to the implementation of the SDGs, it is to be expected that UNDP will continue to be at least a key player in these processes.

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *UNDP scorecards 2011, 2013, 2015*.

⁴⁰ See also the very critical observations on the UN in Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the UNPBA (2015).

Influence on policy

The Netherlands has maintained its track record of being an innovative donor, specifically by earmarking part of its contribution to UNDP's Global Rule of Law Programme to be implemented in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (under the Global Focal Point on Police, Justice and Corrections). As such, the Netherlands is trying to encourage UN agencies to work together across the three UN pillars and increase their effectiveness. Along the same lines, the Dutch contribution to the Peacebuilding Fund can be seen as an effort to stimulate cross-pillar cooperation in the UN system. And the support to UNICEF's Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme can be seen as an effort to not only strengthen the engagement of a more traditionally development-oriented UN organisation in the area of peace, security and development, but also to encourage this organisation to work together with other UN organisations active in this area (an ambition that was not achieved, partly due to the 'one-off' type of funding, partly because UNDP tended to perceive UNICEF as a competitor rather than as a partner).

The Netherlands' engagement in security and rule of law vis-à-vis the UN is not limited to financial contributions. It has made numerous diplomatic and political efforts, both at UN headquarters and in the field, in an attempt to achieve the overarching objective of strengthening UN coherence – and through that UN effectiveness – in the area of peace, security and development.

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One way the Netherlands has exerted influence is through its membership of the Executive Board of UNDP, where it has aimed to guide and influence UNDP so that organisation can best fulfil its system-wide coordinating function and be an effective implementing partner. As a member of the West European and Others Group (WEOG), the Netherlands sits on the UNDP Board for 12 out of a period of 15 years (due to the rotational scheme agreed upon in the Group). It was a Board member in three of the years in the period under review: 2013, 2014 and 2015. It coordinates its input to the Board in the WEOG, which includes key like-minded countries such as the UK, the Nordic countries, Australia, Canada and, as observer, the United States. The Netherlands was one of the donor countries behind the initiative that resulted in the Executive Board requesting UNDP to produce a more specific results framework for the next Strategic Plan⁴¹; this was indeed done in the UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

The new UN Secretary-General has announced he will roll out the sustaining peace agenda in combination with SDG implementation; in this process there is an opportunity for the Netherlands (especially given its upcoming seat in the Security Council) to reposition itself as a leading Member State in the area of peace, security and development – a position that has declined somewhat because the overall cuts in financial contributions from the Netherlands have not been accompanied by a further sharpening of priorities and expectations vis-à-vis the UN.

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *UNDP scorecard 2011*, The Hague, 2011.

Overall conclusions

The Netherlands has channelled the bulk of its UN security and rule of law funding through UNDP, which is in line with its policy on this theme. In general, these activities are assessed as being effective, though mostly at output level; the main challenge remains how to achieve longer-term results and impact in fragile and conflict-affected settings (though this challenge applies to all international engagements in such settings, given their complexity). In terms of efficiency, the evaluations do not provide a clear cost-benefit analysis.

The review yielded a mostly positive picture in terms of the extent to which the UN provides the assumed added value as implementer of security and rule of law activities (i.e. scale, impartiality, expertise). As noted above, there is a clear need to strengthen field-level expertise in security and rule of law. Also, it should be noted that in many conflict-affected settings there is also no viable alternative to the UN: most local organisations are not capable of adhering to the donors' requirements in terms of fiduciary rules and regulations, and the need to show results. Furthermore, given the security constraints and issues of access, the UN is most often the best placed and most suitable channel for international support.

3.5 Overall conclusions on Dutch cooperation with UN development organisations on the priorities of Dutch development cooperation policy

As a result of the scale at which the UN operates and because many of its programmes are implemented at regional or national levels, UN organisations have much more scope to achieve the objectives of the spearheads than is possible via bilateral aid or NGOs. The best examples of this are the IFAD programmes for small farmers, UNICEF's WASH programmes and the UNFPA programme for purchasing and distributing goods and medicines.

- The anticipated comparative advantages of channelling funds for the implementation of programmes and projects have largely been realised. UN organisations work closely with national governments, ensuring more favourable conditions for integrating the activities in national policy.
- However, the organisations vary in their transparency about the effectiveness of their activities: the most transparent are UNICEF's WASH programmes, UNFPA's programme for the purchase and distribution of goods and medicines, and the IFAD programmes. It is much more difficult to establish the effectiveness of the activities concerned with advising and lobbying national governments. Although the direct results of the programme activities relating to security and rule of law are reported, little insight is available on the longer-term impacts.

- Cooperation with the UN organisations offers the Netherlands opportunities to exert influence on its priority themes. The best example is the cooperation relating to SRHR, as the Netherlands is an important donor in this area and in addition to providing finance also collaborates closely on substantive matters with UN organisations.
- The quality of the organisations' accountability and the transparency of the information on their activities and budgets have improved. UNDP and UNICEF score very high on the AID Transparency Index, ranking first and third respectively in the list of most transparent organisations and donors; the other UN development organisations do not participate in this ranking.
- Channelling financing via the UN is an efficient way of operating for the Netherlands: the transaction costs are lower than those for other channels, such as NGOs. Yet despite this, the Netherlands still finances many UN activities relating to the security and rule of law spearhead that are insufficiently aligned with each other.

4

**Dutch support intended
to promote coherence
and coordination within the
united development system**

The Netherlands greatly values the efforts made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the UN's development work. UNDP's efforts in this area are dealt with in section 4.1; section 4.2 discusses the progress made by efforts to improve efficiency in the UN. Section 4.3 gives a brief overview of the efforts made by the Netherlands to contribute to this.

4.1 UNDP's contributions

As noted in chapter 2, the Netherlands pays a general contribution to UNDP, expecting this organisation to be important across the UN in:

- a) developing the international policy frameworks for global development goals (MDGs and SDGs);
- b) peacebuilding in fragile nations; and
- c) developing and implementing reforms intended to promote coherence and coordination within the UN.

What can be concluded from the available reports about the extent to which these three aims have been achieved is discussed in broad terms below.

a) UNDP's contribution to the implementation of the MDGs

The Netherlands expects UNDP to take the lead in coordinating the implementation of the MDGs and (since 2015) the SDGs, and in supporting national governments to achieve development goals in their countries.

The evaluation of UNDP's efforts on behalf of the MDGs points out UNDP's contribution to developing and conceptualising the goals (UNDP, 2015a). The report also commends UNDP's contribution to creating public support for the MDGs. As chair of the group of UN development organisations, UNDP has contributed to the coordination of the efforts made by the individual organisations to achieve the MDGs. Its 130 country offices give UNDP a broad geographical influence. In addition, the organisation has taken the lead within the UN in supporting national governments when developing national development strategies for implementing the MDGs. Many of UNDP's activities at country level relate to capacity building and technical support. Although the evaluations report that the results achieved in certain countries indicate that implementation capacity has indeed improved, they are critical of the implementation of the plans. The review of relevant reports and evaluations of UNDP in the 2017 study by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) concludes that UNDP has a positive but not always visible influence on national policy and national programmes. However, it is rarely possible to give a systematic general assessment of the effectiveness of its advisory role because there is insufficient information on this and UNDP's interventions are very diverse.

The evaluations of certain regional programmes and the evaluation of UNDP's role in the attainment of the MDGs provide further evidence to support the conclusion that UNDP's interventions have contributed to the coordination of UN efforts to strengthen national

governments and their organisations. UNDP coordinated the discussion of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and of the SDGs in particular. Its most important contributions to implementation have been international coordination and mainstreaming within the UN and, as in the case of the MDGs, giving advice and support at national level (UNDP, 2016). Other development organisations have also aligned their planning for the coming period to achieving the SDGs.

b) UNDP's bridging function in the area of peacekeeping and conflict management

The reports and evaluations studied for this policy report particularly commend UNDP's support to the broader UN activities in conflict countries. For example, the evaluation of UNDP support to conflict countries in the context of UN peacekeeping operations (2013) states that the organisation has been crucial in coordinating UN efforts in these countries. UNDP is well placed to act as a partner in peacekeeping missions, particularly by coordinating programme management (together with the UN Country Team) and by supplying technical expertise – especially in the transition phase from peacekeeping to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction (UNDP, 2013). To what extent UNDP succeeds in its function within the UN to create bridges between efforts in humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and development varies regionally and per country.

UNDP positions itself as a knowledge broker and expertise centre in both the broader field of development cooperation and, specifically, in the area of security and rule of law. Various reports commend UNDP's contribution to linking development to peacebuilding and its work in strengthening government institutions and administration in post-conflict situations. One example is UNDP's collaboration with the UN's Department of Political Affairs (DPA) in implementing programmes promoting conflict prevention (DFID, 2017, p. 11). Thanks to its presence in over 160 countries – over 60 of which are fragile or conflict countries – UNDP is perceived as a good source of information for the Netherlands and other donor countries. In addition, UNDP has been instrumental in, for example, the creation of OECD's New Deal for Engagement in Fragile Settings (in collaboration with the Netherlands), by co-chairing the OECD-DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) and implementing the New Deal at country level by developing the country-specific framework (i.e. implementing context analyses and developing an overarching list of priorities and action plan – including a results framework). Earlier, the organisation was a prime mover in the creation of the SDGs; its BCPR was instrumental in the creation of SDG 16, which focuses specifically on peacebuilding and reconstruction.

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Those interviewed for the present report did question whether UNDP will prove capable of maintaining its position as knowledge broker and expertise centre in the area of security and rule of law after the demise of the BCPR. However, it is still too early to draw any conclusions on this.

Bilateral donors like the Netherlands make much use of UNDP's support services and its implementing capacity in fragile countries, particularly for activities for which the donors themselves lack legitimacy and/or capacity. But this results in UNDP's activities being expanded in the conflict countries, causing the donors to insist on more focus.

c) *UNDP's contribution to internal UN coordination*

In the various UN discussion forums, the Netherlands has advocated greater coordination between UN organisations and a more integrated approach and working method. It argues that the UN should operate more as a single and coherent entity in the programme countries, and sees strengthening of the cooperation at country level by appointing a UN coordinator (the Resident Coordinator system) and promoting communal planning and implementation ('Delivering as One') as important instruments for achieving this. The Netherlands has also asked that more attention be given to avoiding internal duplication, opining that the UN should restrict itself to areas to which it brings clear added value.

It is difficult to give a systematic overview of the contributions of UNDP in this area on the basis of the various reports and evaluations. Conclusions on several topics can be found in relevant reports.

Various studies have noted that UNDP is well placed to fulfil its broad UN role.

- UNDP has the broadest mandate of all UN organisations and also the most wide-ranging presence: 170 countries;
- The recent strengthening of the regional offices has given national offices easier access to expertise and services (MOPAN Assessments 2015-2016 UNDP, 2017);
- The MPTF Office gives UNDP an important function in the administration of UN-wide funds and financing mechanisms.

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In addition, UNDP has facilitated the implementation of other components of the UN reforms, such as introducing common support services for the UN organisations working in the same country.

UNDP plays a key role in coordinating UN activities at country level. Its capacity as convenor at country level and its collaboration in partnerships are assessed as good. Its work on policy and its technical work are integrated in the work of other UN institutions (MOPAN, 2017b, p. 9). Its annual reports on human development and the quantitative and qualitative analyses done for these reports are useful in the debate on developing development strategies at country level.

UNDP is responsible for the management and financing of the UN's resident coordinators (RCs), who are expected to lead the joint action of the UN organisations. To date, RCs have been appointed in 130 countries.

The most important findings about the results achieved by the RCs are as follows:

- The progress made in various countries with the Delivering as One approach is partly attributable to the effectiveness of the RCs.
- In most countries, the RC has been instrumental in the development and implementation of shared UN–country plans drawn up jointly with the government (the United Nations Development Action Framework: UNDAF). Box 4.1 gives a critical overview of the quality of these UNDAFs.

- Successful leadership varies somewhat per country and largely depends on the situation in the country in question and on the leadership qualities of the appointed RCs. In countries receiving much humanitarian aid and in conflict countries, the RC is often important in financing and consultation with the government.⁴² In effect, each situation requires a customised mandate.

Box 4.1 *UNDAF in four Netherlands partner countries: findings from evaluation reports*

The findings are based on the evaluations and literature relating to the application of UNDAF in four of the countries that are partners for Dutch development cooperation: Bangladesh, Rwanda, Mozambique and Ethiopia. The most important findings are:

- without exception, the UNDAF was drawn up in consultation with the government of the recipient country;
- the UNDAFs have many general aims (poverty reduction, economic growth and suchlike) and are not adjusted yearly to take account of changes in government programming and budgeting;
- the government representatives questioned were grateful to have a single point of contact for a certain theme instead of having to speak to each organisation separately;
- the evaluations report that the composition of the UNDAFs initially promotes intensive cooperation between the UN organisations but that this then slackens again;
- the budgets linked to the UNDAFs are very ambitious but appear to be unrealistic. It is unclear to what extent organisations actually fundraise jointly; and
- the reports give little insight into implementation. The monitoring and evaluation of the UNDAF are problematic. All four countries have comprehensive frameworks for monitoring and evaluation, often consisting of dozens of result categories, each with separate indicators. Problems in measuring progress that are mentioned are: indicators that are too complex; a shortage of resources to research these; a lack of data; and inadequate reports from the participating organisations.

Source: Kluyskens and Clark (2014) (Rwanda), <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/8522> (Mozambique), and <http://et.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/ethiopia/docs/Other%20docs/UNDAF%20Ethiopia%20Mid-term%20review%20-%20Volume%201%20-%202014%20October%202014.pdf> (Ethiopia). Unfortunately, the mid-term review on Bangladesh is not available anymore at the internet.

⁴² Moreover, in certain countries in which UN peacekeeping missions are active, there is a special representative of the Secretary-General. Possible overlap between the roles of the RC and of the director of the UNDP country office creates a separate problem. To prevent a conflict of interest, agreements are therefore made.

However, there are also structural factors that hamper the RCs from properly fulfilling their remit:

- a) *Obstacles to coordination*: The relatively large size of the country teams: on average, 15 organisations. This hampers coordination. In Ethiopia, for example, where 26 UN organisations are active, the RC notes that coordinating so many organisations brings the risk of focusing too much on internal functioning.⁴³ Large organisations like UNICEF draw up their own plan and there is much unequal cooperation. Mutual competition and disputes relating to competence are common. The transaction costs of the coordination with and within the country teams are high – some believe they outweigh the benefits (Mahn, 2013).
- b) *Lack of authority*: RCs have no power to enforce coordination, nor do they have authority over the individual organisations.
- c) *Accountability*: The accountability mechanisms remain focused on the headquarters of the organisations involved and there are few incentives to integrate them at country level.
- d) *Inadequate resources*: The RCs mostly work with a very small staff and a small budget, which hampers the implementation of the planned activities. In 2014, almost half the RCs were operating with an annual budget of less than USD 200,000. Agreements for the financing of the RCs and their staff have been made with all the organisations in UNDS; they came into force on 1 January 2014, but the organisations have not kept to them, resulting in UNDP paying an important part of the costs (Report of the Secretary-General, 2016).⁴⁴

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From the literature reviewed, it can be concluded that although progress has been made with the expansion of the RC system and with leadership in the conflict countries, there is still a big gap between what is expected of an RC and what an RC can actually achieve. In the absence of structural reforms at headquarters level, the constraints mentioned above will continue to prevent RCs from functioning effectively (Report of the Secretary-General, 2015, p. 55). Moreover, donors are themselves part of the problem, because the trend to more earmarking not only makes it more difficult for the UN organisations to plan and work more rationally but also gives rise to competition for scarce resources rather than promoting cooperation.

As chair of UNDS, which has as its aim a better division of tasks and more coherence between the UN development organisations, UNDP has a key role because of its broad mandate for coordinating and integrating the UN's development work. UNDP administers several funds for joint UN programmes and bears much responsibility for the coordination of UN activities at country level. Tension has been identified between UNDP's UN-wide role and its role as implementer of activities in specific areas such as security and rule of law. For this reason, it has been attempted to create a sort of firewall, to prevent the two roles from mixing.

⁴³ Internal memorandum of 27 May 2014: *Utstein-overleg grote donoren met VN-fondsen en -programma's*.

⁴⁴ The shorter-term objective is to solve the budgetary shortfall of USD 17.5 million for 2016-2017. However, the UN Secretariat's contribution (USD 13.5 million) was not honoured by the Fifth Committee, because of the resistance within the G77.

One obstacle to more collaboration and coordination of activities is that the individual UN organisations each have their own policy, plans and implementation modalities and are only partly prepared to subsume these under common policy and financial management. As each individual organisation has its own administration and accountability structure, collaboration with the other organisations is not strongly developed. Moreover, governments and donors represented in these organisations have their own priorities and interests to pursue.

4.2 Progress made by efforts to economise and improve efficiency in the UN

Aims of Dutch policy

The Netherlands has pressed for measures to control costs and for zero growth of the UN budget⁴⁵ Dutch priorities relating to cost control are:

- 1) human resources policy;
- 2) financing of general costs and innovative financing;
- 3) promotion of common support services;
- 4) accountability and supervision.

For each of these, the outcome in practice of Dutch interventions is discussed below.

1) *Human resources policy*

Standpoint of the Netherlands

As it is estimated that some 70 per cent of the UN's expenditure is on staff, the standpoint of the Netherlands is that good human resources policy is crucial to ensure the UN organisations are effective and efficient. The efforts made by the Netherlands are directed at:

- a) promoting the mobility of UN staff;
- b) improving the UN's assessment system;⁴⁶
- c) a prudent salary policy within international organisations, including the UN;⁴⁷
- d) a simple, overseable and financially viable remuneration package.

The Netherlands supports the proposals for modernising human resources policy so as to achieve an effective, relevant UN. Furthermore, the Netherlands takes the stand that costs associated with the proposals for reforming human resources policy should initially be met from the existing budget.

⁴⁵ VN – VN-hervormingen – Instruction to the Geneva Group 21 April from the Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 20 April 2015.

⁴⁶ There is currently no effective evaluation procedure; UN figures reveal that over 95 per cent of UN officials perform above average, but the evidence is disputed.

⁴⁷ Explanatory Memorandum, Budget for the Ministry for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation 2014.

Progress

Human resources policy is negotiated in the Fifth Committee, which deals with financial and administrative themes that are related to the UN's regular budget and the financing of the peacekeeping missions. The two topics discussed most often in this Committee are the freedom the UN has to establish its human resources policy and the problem of reconciling the need to attract qualitatively good staff with the need for geographical representativeness. Resistance to changes in the human resources policy is partly political in nature.

The UN's common system compensation package terms and conditions of employment had not been reviewed for decades, so had become a complex system of salaries, remuneration and reimbursement. The terms of employment were finally revised and aligned in 2015, but the resulting savings have so far been very limited (see Box 4.2).

Box 4.2 *The revised UN terms of employment*

In 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations requested the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) to report on the possibilities of modernising and simplifying the common system compensation package (resolution 68/253). This common system, which applies to all UN staff, has been worked out to establish the terms and conditions of employment for the period 2016-2018. It applies to 52,000 people in 600 duty stations. Each change in the remuneration system thus has major financial repercussions on the UN's regular budget. The ICSC came up with three general recommendations: (1) simplify the system; (2) pay more attention to performance management (employees' performance should count for more than their personal circumstances); and (3) budgetary savings in the long term (High Level Committee on Management, 2015). The lengthy negotiations about the ICSC's 2015 proposals have been primarily about the budgetary repercussions, but have also included policy considerations, such as the aim of achieving a diverse UN staff. The most important controversial topics are the mandatory retirement age, the scrapping of the distinction made between childless staff and staff with children, and the hardship and mobility allowances.

At the end of December 2015, the Fifth Committee agreed to almost all the ICSC's recommendations about the modernising of the terms of employment of UN staff. Reporting on the results of the decision, the Netherlands expressed its satisfaction that the outcome of the negotiations was a small step forward in the process of modernisation.⁴⁸ It also noted that the planned reforms would lead to modest savings. Before the reforms, the total annual budget for UN staff was USD 5,105 billion; since the reforms it has been only USD 113 million less, i.e. USD 4,992 billion (International Civil Service Commission for the year 2015, 2015, pp. 119-120).

⁴⁸ Internal Memorandum Permanent Representation-NY of 31-12-2015.

Of the most important UN organisations working in development cooperation, the two with the largest number of staff are UNICEF and UNDP.⁴⁹ In both organisations, the number of permanent employees has stabilised in recent years.

Under pressure from a decline in core funding and so as to better link up with the new priorities, UNDP underwent a drastic reorganisation that resulted in staff numbers at head office being reduced from 1,591 at the end of 2013 to 1,396 at the end of 2014. During the reorganisation, the skills framework dating from 2008 was also adjusted to accommodate the new structure and function profiles. In addition, the advisory and support services were relocated to the regions.

2) *The financing of general costs and innovative financing*

Standpoint of the Netherlands

The Netherlands has several times expressed its concern in UN forums about the rise of earmarked contributions. This increase in earmarked funding has resulted not only in the UN organisations being left with less money for their core tasks, but also in the overhead costs of the earmarked contributions being subsidised by the countries that give core funding – one of which is the Netherlands.

Progress

Diminishing core funding has made it difficult for the UN organisations to finance their indirect costs, such as the regional and country offices and the tasks that fall under an organisation's system function. The functioning of the organisation as a whole is essential for the implementation of the projects, but the overhead costs of the earmarked funding are insufficient to recover these costs. Several General Assembly resolutions therefore stress that the core funding must not be used to finance the overhead costs of projects and programmes. As a result, UN organisations are coming under increasing pressure to apply a fixed percentage to finance the general costs they incur, to facilitate project implementation: the General Management Support (GMS) fee. UN organisations have therefore been more transparent about what the GMS fees are used for. See Table 4.1.

⁴⁹ Salaries of UNICEF and UNDP staff are paid from sources other than the regular budget, whereas other organisations pay their staff partly (WHO for 25 per cent) or almost entirely (IFAD for 98 per cent) from the regular budget. UNAIDS employs the most staff on a project basis. Of the total UNDP staff, 17 per cent work at headquarters; the figure for UNICEF is 19 per cent.

Function/Activity	Office
General management and guidance	Executive Office Regional bureaus
Corporate Oversight and Assurance	Office of Audit and Oversight
Financial, ICT and administrative management	Bureau of Management OFRM/OIST/ILSO/OHR
External relations and partnerships, communication and fundraising	Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy
Corporate Staff and premises security	Bureau of Management/Security

Source: UNDP Annual Report 2014; cost recovery from other resources.

UNDP emphasises that the GMS costs are not solely overhead costs, but costs for maintaining the basic structure of the organisation, that thereby frees up resources to finance the organisation’s programmes (other than the programmes and project in the field).⁵⁰ In this way, the payments are used, among other things, to recover the general costs of the regional and country offices.

Since 2014, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA have used the same rates for calculating the GMS cost recovery fee. This is otherwise a complicated and time-consuming exercise, because each of the four organisations uses a different business model. The advantage of uniform rates is that they reduce transaction costs and prevent unfair fundraising competition among UN organisations by offering lower overhead costs.

Since 1 January 2014 the rates have been fixed as follows:

- an 8 per cent GMS fee for projects and programmes financed with resources other than regular incomes, and for the administration of trust funds;
- a 7 per cent fee for thematic contributions at world, regional or country level, which is intended to stimulate light or only partial earmarking of external funding;
- a fee of 3-5 per cent for Government Cost Sharing and for programmes that will promote South-South exchange.⁵¹

To date, the GMS fee has been only moderately successful in recovering costs. UNICEF’s effective cost recovery was 6.4 per cent for the period 2014-2015, which is below the planned 7.6 per cent.

⁵⁰ The costs of ‘development effectiveness’ fall into a separate category. They are essential in order to deliver development results and should actually be included under core and non-core programmes and projects, but these costs are not included in the cost recovery calculation.

⁵¹ As a result of the existing Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the EU and UN, the rate for the EU remains 7 per cent.

3) *Economising by intensifying common support services*

Standpoint of the Netherlands

The Netherlands wishes to promote the use of common support services at country level, referring to the guidelines and timeline for this drawn up and approved by the General Assembly.⁵² In the governing bodies the cabinet has urged the UN organisations to monitor the progress of this. The efficiency can be promoted by using the common support services and by being more cost-conscious. General Assembly Resolution A/RES/67/226 of 22 January 2013 gives guidelines for these reforms, accompanied by timelines.

Progress

The resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations (Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, QCPR) obliges UN missions that participate in the Delivering as One approach to aim to achieve the following objectives:

- improve the programme's implementation/support services;
- reduce the operational costs by exploiting economies of scale and avoiding duplication;
- improve the quality of the support services; and
- increase the transparency and quality of the accountability.⁵³

In 2013, the so-called Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) were developed for implementing these objectives, in order to support the Delivering as One approach at country level by setting up common procedures for programming, leadership, management, financing and communication. These procedures are intended to improve work efficiency and to reduce transaction costs. The SOP are mandatory in countries where the Delivering as One approach is followed. To improve efficiency, common management is encouraged for non-programme activities such as strategic planning, support services, procurement, provision of accommodation, human resources policy, ICT, security and maintenance.

The action plan developed for the SOP has been largely implemented. Progress has been made in staff management, ICT, tendering and acquisition and the centralisation of administrative services. A recent interim evaluation concludes that important gains have been made as a result of faster provision of crucial services and the avoidance of duplication of procedures of multiple organisations. There have also been appreciable price reductions thanks to collaboration in procurement: 50 per cent of all UN country teams have common security services, 41 per cent have common provision of medical services, and 27 per cent a common travel agency service (Report of the Secretary-General, 2015, p. 66).

⁵² Resolution A/RES/67/226 of 22 January 2013.

⁵³ Source: VN – VN-hervormingen – Instruction to the Geneva Group 21 April from the Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 20 April 2015.

On the basis of interviews with key informants, a recent study concluded that comprehensive cooperation in the management of the UN organisations could bring savings of between 10 and 20 per cent in the operational costs.⁵⁴ To date, little is known about how much the Delivering as One approach has actually contributed to reducing transaction costs. However, in several countries UN organisations working under the Delivering as One UN approach have set themselves targets in terms of savings to be achieved by common management.⁵⁵

4) *Accountability and supervision*

Standpoint of the Netherlands

The Netherlands advocates the promotion of result-focused programming and better accountability for activities and expenditures. Priority themes in the Dutch contribution are the strengthening of the evaluation function in UN organisations and the promotion of reporting that complies with the IATI standard.

Progress

To promote transparency and to be accountable it is essential to make audit reports public. Resolution 67/258 of September 2013 granted the Secretary-General permission to publish the audit reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the OIOS website in 2014 (as a pilot).

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In recent years, the central evaluation services of UNDP, UNICEF and IFAD have appreciably improved their working methods. They score well on the most important criteria for this (independence, use, management response and accessibility) (Joint Inspection Unit, 2014). The quality of a large number of thematic and meta-evaluations is assessed as good, but the evaluation function of UNDP and UNICEF at country level remains weak, in terms both of quality and of coverage. The evaluation function of the other organisations included in this policy review (FAO, UNAIDS and UNFPA) scores lower, and the sources consulted are more critical.

According to the AID Transparency Index 2016, both UNDP and UNICEF score 'very good' on transparency – an improvement by comparison with 2014, when both organisations scored 'good'. 2016 was the second consecutive year that UNDP headed the ranking for the most transparent development organisation; it was the only organisation to score more than 90 per cent. UNICEF was ranked third. The Netherlands and Sweden both scored well, but below both UN organisations and were ranked joint sixteenth. FAO and IFAD were some way behind, but this is attributable to ongoing reorganisation of their management systems.

⁵⁴ Helgason (2014, § 4): "Besides the above indicative figure, the 2006 High-level Panel of the Secretary-General on System-wide Coherence estimated that such savings could amount to some 20 per cent of expenditures on operational activities based on findings of background studies and consultations with experts. The annual cost savings from full interoperability across UN entities and reduction in duplicative activities could therefore potentially be in the order of magnitude between USD 2.4 billion and USD 4.8 billion per year."

⁵⁵ In Rwanda, for example, the aim is to have saved USD 13.6 million by 2018.

4.3 Input from the Netherlands and Dutch influence on policy

The Netherlands has actively supported the Delivering as One approach and other reforms to promote coherence. In the period 2009-2011, the Netherlands contributed a total of EUR 12 million to the Delivering as One funds (country funds for joint activities of UN organisations). In the evaluation period (2012-2015), the Netherlands also made contributions, but these were small and diminishing. After 2015, the Netherlands stopped contributing to these funds, on the assumption that they would gradually be integrated into regular UN financing. The co-funding of the Delivering as One approach UN funds has helped to support and promote their application at country level. The resulting experiences have been drawn on in the ongoing implementation of UN reforms. Dutch financing of several large multi-trust funds can also be seen as a stimulus for more collaboration.

The Netherlands has supported the implementation of the RCs politically and financially, and is active in several forums for consultation and for monitoring the reforms to promote coherence, such as the Geneva Group, ECOSOC, and the discussion of the progress reports of the UN's official monitoring in the QCPR.

The reports and reviews consulted reveal that the Netherlands has actively pursued a policy to promote financial and administrative reform of the UN. This takes place primarily in the Fifth Committee. The Netherlands also takes advantage of individual consultations with the various UN organisations to put forward its standpoints and proposals. From the reports of the meetings of UNDP's Executive Board and the reports on the instructions for Dutch input, it is clear that the Netherlands follows UNDP critically.⁵⁶

Thanks to input from the Netherlands, progress has been made on certain themes, such as the support to the RC system and accountability in accordance with the IATI standards. The Netherlands has consistently requested attention be paid to strengthening the UN's accountability and evaluation functions. It is likely that the progress made in these in most UN organisations is partly due to contributions from the Netherlands and other donors.

Recent internal reports have expressed disappointment about the lack of progress made in the negotiations about the UN reforms. The negotiations in the Fifth Committee about the themes that the Netherlands deems important (implementing the 2030 agenda and financing the RC system) appear not to have been very successful. The Netherlands attributes most of the blame to resistance from the G77, especially from China and Russia.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The Netherlands spoke out critically in the Board meeting of 2015, also on behalf of the US and UK, about the results of the MDG evaluation of UNDP. The Netherlands also criticised the lack of attention given to implementation and the results obtained at this level, and the lack of collaboration with the private sector. See also the Statement by the Kingdom of the Netherlands UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board Annual Meeting NY, 10 June 2013.

⁵⁷ Internal memorandum from the Permanent Representation-NY of 29 December 2016: VN – Vijfde Commissie: eindresultaat onderhandelingen.

But the definition of the new frameworks for the UN's development activities (the QCPR for the next four years) does include themes important to the Netherlands (gender, a stronger role for the RC, partnerships, and suchlike).

It has always been assumed that its financial contributions to the UN organisations would enable the Netherlands to exert influence on their policies. 'Although the Netherlands is not one of the largest players internationally, it can achieve relatively much for its own policy agenda through its policy input and financial contributions.'⁵⁸

There are two reasons for expecting the influence of the Netherlands on the reforms as a whole will decline:

- a) The Netherlands has always wanted to use its financial contribution as a lever to exert influence. This link has been made directly in policy letters on the UN.⁵⁹ Thanks to the active input and size of its financial contributions, the Netherlands has indeed for a long time been able to exert great influence in relation to its size. Although the influence exerted by the Netherlands does not depend solely on the size of Dutch financial contributions, it is clear that cuts to general voluntary contributions from the Netherlands to organisations such as UNDP will reduce the country's leverage.
- b) Changes in the international balance of power and the politicising of the consultation on the reforms are eroding the influence of the individual European Member States.

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The above does not alter the fact that at the level of individual organisations the Netherlands can still make its voice heard and can stimulate or support changes around specific themes.

The Netherlands has endeavoured to strengthen its influence by forming coalitions. The coalition partners used mainly to be drawn from the group of like-minded countries, but increasingly they are countries within the EU. The Netherlands also participates in the Geneva Group, in which the 16 largest donors to the UN are represented. To improve the policy accountability and transparency of the financing and the results, the Netherlands joins forces with like-minded donors such as Belgium, Germany, the European Commission, the UK and Sweden. An example concerns the recent preparation of the new QCPR. To coordinate the input to this, the Netherlands organised a meeting with this large group of like-minded Member States in The Hague in November 2016. This initiative also contributed to the like-minded EU countries acting together in December 2016 in the negotiations about the priorities most important for them in the new QCPR resolution.

⁵⁸ Letter from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the House of Representatives, 19 June 2015, on *Multilaterale scorekaarten*.

⁵⁹ An example of this is the letter to the House of Representatives on 7 October 2011, on multilateral development cooperation policy. It states that the high ranking of the Netherlands on the list of largest donors has given the country much influence.

In 2012 and at the end of 2016, the Netherlands – together with like-minded donors – succeeded in influencing the formulation of specific priorities in the QCPR, such as a section specifically on partnerships, the appeal to apply innovative forms of financing and the use of common financing funds. However, the implementation of these and other priorities (such as the reform of the composition and working methods of the executive boards of the UN institutions) is slow.⁶⁰

4.4 General conclusions

Implementation of the reforms desired by the Netherlands and other EU Member States to promote the UN's coherence and effectiveness is proceeding slowly. Results have been achieved in some parts only. The problems relating to efficiency focus on the costs arising from lack of cooperation and from overlap.

UNDP is a key player in coordinating UN activities at country level, including via the management and financing of the UN's RCs. Although UNDP does its best to meet the expectations relating to coordination and reforms, it is constrained by current circumstances.

The UNDS agencies have achieved savings through expanding common support services at country level: for example, by common procurement. However, there is little or no insight into the savings that have resulted. As personnel costs are estimated to account for 70 per cent of the expenditures, the reform of the human resources policy is an important precondition for increasing efficiency. However, so far, the savings achieved have been modest.

The greatest problems relating to efficiency focus on the costs emanating from the lack of cooperation and from overlap. The reforms aimed at improving efficiency have stagnated, mainly because of the political differences between the Member States and because the separate organisations and their supervisory bodies have continued to promote their own institutional interests. At present, there are few prospects of a more structural approach to the problems.

The influence the Netherlands exerts on its own on the wider reform process is currently limited. The greatly changed international political relations have left European Member States with less room to influence policy. The Netherlands has therefore justifiably made great efforts to work together with like-minded Member States and in an EU context.

⁶⁰ Internal memorandum, Permanent Representation-NY 17 December 2016: VN-hervormingen – QCPR-resolutie.

5

Conclusions and points of attention for future policy

The changing international context

The launch of the SDGs sparked wide-ranging discussion within and outside the UN about whether the UN has sufficient capacity to be able to be a key player in implementing the activities needed to achieve the targets set. For many of the SDGs, the UN is not the only relevant actor, and for some of the objectives it has insufficient or no expertise in-house (Hulme and Wilkinson, 2014). The need to strengthen global governance has increased in all areas and is also very important for Dutch development cooperation. Therefore, UN's development organisations are increasingly expected to do more, yet the UN's budget is shrinking. The UN cannot continue to operate with the same intensity in all countries; it will have to differentiate more.

The UN nevertheless still has an important added value vis-à-vis other actors:

- 1) The UN has a unique position in this because, as it represents the Member States, it can achieve agreement about norms and standards, introduce them in practice and enforce them.
- 2) The UN has a worldwide presence and remains crucial as the last authority that can carry out development and humanitarian work in fragile and conflict countries. Thanks to its broad expertise, the UN can give support in very many areas in these countries.
- 3) The UN is expected to help coordinate and align aid, especially in the case of conflict countries. The growing reluctance of donors to align development cooperation efforts as established in the Paris Declaration of 2005 has made this role even more relevant.

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The need to update the policy for cooperation with the UN

In recent years, the development cooperation policy of the Netherlands relating to the UN has been strongly influenced by domestic political considerations and by the decision to reduce the general support to the UN-wide tasks in the area of development cooperation in favour of financing themes for the UN that match the priorities of the Netherlands. The attention paid to the changed context and discussions about the future role of the UN organisations has therefore receded somewhat.

The stance the Netherlands should adopt in relation to these issues should take account of the following points:

- In the recent peer review of Dutch development cooperation, OECD-DAC pointed out the risk that the increased focus on Dutch priorities will be at the expense of the traditional great emphasis on strengthening the multilateral system – a conclusion also shared by this policy review. How Dutch support for the intrinsic added value of the UN (convenor, platform, norm-setter, and so on) relates to the thematic financing for programme implementation requires further elaboration and more details on the options available.
- The need to update policy is particularly acute in the area of conflict and fragility. Here, an integrated strategy is needed in relation to the input of the Netherlands vis-à-vis the UN to make that input more strategic and coherent.

- Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has elaborated instructions and score cards per organisation, there is no UN-wide framework in which to situate the views and expectations relating to the UN's future role alongside the way the Netherlands will cooperate with the UN's development organisations and the role the Netherlands sees itself playing in this with like-minded countries.

Financing and monitoring

The Netherlands wishes to support the UN's broad role in the area of development cooperation and peacebuilding but at the same time wishes to focus mainly on financing its policy spearheads. It has proved to be difficult to combine these aims in the current climate of economising on development cooperation.

This raises the question of how committed the Netherlands still is to supporting multilateral frameworks via the UN. Underlining UNDP's importance for strengthening multilateral frameworks yet reducing the general voluntary contribution in 2015 to EUR 17.5 million (which is only about one third of the contribution in 2012) sends out a mixed signal.

The Netherlands remains a champion of non-earmarked funding yet has itself reduced its general voluntary contributions to UNICEF and UNDP, thereby compromising the predictability and quality of the financing of UNDP and UNICEF.

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There remains scope for the Netherlands working more efficiently. Despite the reduction in development activities supported by the Netherlands there are still numerous instruments and projects for achieving the sometimes overlapping policy objectives, especially in the case of activities in the conflict countries. In the area of security and rule of law there is a risk of fragmentation and insufficient coordination of Dutch support for activities in the conflict countries. This has to do with the diversity in instruments, channels and project funding, which are not always well coordinated at country level.

Insight into the effectiveness of the activities of UN organisations can be increased and improved by:

- a) Urging the evaluation services of the organisations in question to give more attention to evaluating implementation in the field.
- b) Carrying out selective joint donor evaluations in countries where numerous activities are financed separately by multiple donors, with the aim of obtaining greater insight into the effects of the combined activities at country level. This is particularly true for the evaluation of activities in the conflict countries.

Choice of channel

Decisions about financing cannot be made by comparing the effectiveness of the different channels; they should be based on assessments of whether the expected comparative advantages of each channel have been achieved. Contrary to what is sometimes suggested, it is not really possible to compare the effectiveness of, for example, NGOs, with the effectiveness of the input via the UN. Research attempting to compare the cost efficiency of each channel often stalls because the activities are not comparable. A framework clearly

showing the principles underlying the expected advantages of the various channels and the criteria for monitoring them should therefore be used to help decide which channel to use, so that review and evaluation can be based on these principles and criteria. This already happens to an appreciable extent for cooperation with the UN in the area of SRHR, including in relation to HIV and AIDS.

This review has confirmed that many of the anticipated comparative advantages of channelling funds via the UNDS agencies have largely been realised, but has some critical observations on the effectiveness of the resulting activities, including on how this is assessed and reported.

Capacity

Successful cooperation with the UN and the opportunities for exerting influence also depend on the willingness to free up sufficient capacity in terms of the number of staff deployed and their expertise. In this policy review, cooperation in the area of SRHR has been positively evaluated because the financial input has been significant and has been accompanied by intensive substantive cooperation. However, the magnitude and quality of the input in other priorities has been variable.

Channelling large sums of money via the UN has meant low transaction costs for the Netherlands. However, the responsible managements have insufficient time and capacity to monitor the financed activities; this should be remedied. As suggested above, the time that can be gained by rationalising the large number of independent activities can better be spent on preparing, monitoring and evaluating larger programmes and consulting with the implementing agencies.

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Embassies should also play an important role in monitoring the cooperation with the UN at country level, but to do so they must have sufficient capacity available. Consultation at headquarters level is severely handicapped by the lack of insight into how the UN tackles the problems of internal coordination at country level. As this policy review has noted, the evaluation reports contain far too little information on this. The contributions from the Netherlands and the EU would be more effective if based on better information from practice and on insight into the activities on the work floor.

Influence on policy

Despite their relatively small staff numbers, the Permanent Representations in New York, Geneva and Rome have done much to ensure Dutch input to a large number of themes, both broadly and to specific themes. It is important to be able to give sufficient attention to the Netherlands' input to UN-wide topics in the future too. Given the political and institutional obstacles to reforming the UN, it would be useful to ascertain which themes the Netherlands, together with others, could make a difference to in the future. Such a contribution would have to be sufficiently underpinned by expertise and contributions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies.

The Netherlands and the G77

The Netherlands' input should be aimed at achieving reforms to make the UN more inclusive and more effective (ESA and SBA, 2016). In recent years, the Netherlands has been aware of the need to expand contacts with like-minded countries from the South and to work with changing coalitions during negotiations on standpoints. Many obstacles to the necessary UN reforms are primarily political and are only secondarily technical in nature, which is one reason why it is important to put more effort into seeking more structural cooperation with strategically chosen developing and emerging countries outside the consultations at headquarters level.

Annexes

Annex 1 Thematic reports

The following four thematic reports can be found on the IOB website:
<https://english.iob-evaluatie.nl/publications>.

Beijnum, M. van (2017). *Policy Effectiveness Review of Dutch Cooperation and Contribution to the United Nations (2012-2015), Security and Rule of Law study*. The Hague: IOB.

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Evaluation reports published before 2012 can be found on the IOB website: www.government.nl/foreign-policy-evaluations or www.iob-evaluatie.nl. The reports below can also be downloaded there.

IOB no.	Year	Report	ISBN
416	2017	Shifting Interests, Changing Relations, Support Under Pressure: Policy review of Dutch support to Southern civil society development	978-90-5328-489-6
415	2016	The gaps left behind: An evaluation of the impact of ending aid	978-90-5328-484-1
414	2016	Voorkomen is beter dan genezen. Nederland en de WHO (2011-2015)	978-90-5328-482-7
413	2016	Policy Review Public Diplomacy 2010-2014	978-90-5328-491-9
413	2016	Beleidsdoorlichting publieksdiplomatie 2010-2014	978-90-5328-487-2
412	2016	How to break the vicious cycle: Evaluation of Dutch development cooperation in the Palestinian Territories 2008-2014	978-90-5328-483-4
411	2016	Cultuur als kans. Beleidsdoorlichting van het internationaal cultuurbeleid 2009-2014	978-90-5328-480-3
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409	2015	Evaluation of the Matra Programme in the Eastern Partnership countries 2008-2014	978-90-5328-475-9
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406	2015	Policy Review of Dutch Humanitarian Assistance, 2009-2014	978-90-5328-481-0
406	2015	Beleidsdoorlichting van de Nederlandse humanitaire hulp 2009-2014	978-90-5328-473-5
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398	2014	Navigating a sea of interests: Policy evaluation of Dutch foreign human rights policy 2008-2013	978-90-5328-460-5
397	2014	Riding the wave of sustainable commodity sourcing: Review of the Sustainable Trade Initiative IDH 2008-2013	978-90-5328-464-3
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392	2014	Good things come to those who make them happen: Return on aid for Dutch exports	978-90-5328-456-8
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