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MANAGEMENT RESPONSE SYSTEMS IN AID ORGANISATIONS; CASE STUDIES OF SIDA, IFAD AND EUROPEAID

Abstract

It has been recognised that the management response systems that many aid organisations have introduced to link evaluation findings to future activities is an area in much need of improvement. The primary objectives of these systems usually relate to increasing the constructive use of evaluation findings and to ensuring that evaluations are considered in ongoing or future decision-making processes. A less explicit – perhaps indirect – objective of the systems is to increase learning and knowledge generation as a result of the evaluations. Other intermediate objectives can include increasing awareness of evaluation findings and clarifying lines of responsibility and accountability of the organisation.

To achieve these objectives several components are crucial. The involvement of stakeholders in the response process and the provision of sufficient time for reflection are essential for ensuring that follow-up actions are both susceptible to implementation and relevant. Having in place both a follow-up tool to assess the implementation of agreed actions, and a focal point to supervise this process, help to ensure that the actions are carried out. Making the response document easily accessible the organisation is held accountable. This adds weight to the stimulus for implementation. Finally, a quality control mechanism ensures that only evaluations of sufficient quality are responded to.

Further, a number of organisational features should be considered in the design of an optimal response system: the overall policy making processes, the existence of a dual evaluation system, the role of the evaluation unit and whether or not partners should be included.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACP	Agreement at Completion Point (IFAD)
DAC	Development Co-operation Directorate (of the OECD)
EuropeAid	the Directorate-General of the European Commission responsible for implementing external aid programmes and projects
FC	Fiche Contradictoire (EuropeAid)
IFAD	the International Fund for Agricultural Development
OE	The Office of Evaluation (at IFAD)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRISMA	President's Report on the Implementation Status
RELEX	Directorate-Generals for Development, External Relations and EuropeAid
SEK	Swedish kronor (the Swedish currency)
Sida	The Swedish International Development cooperation Agency
USD	US Dollar

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1 Introduction

Evaluation within aid organisations is generally undertaken with a dual purpose: i) to contribute to learning about how to improve reviewed activities, both in the short- and the long-term; and ii) to promote organisational accountability. Evaluation often seeks answers to what does and does not work, and the reasons why. If these questions are answered, evaluations could promote accountability, inform decision-making and allow the organisation to improve management in order to achieve its objectives. The extent to which an evaluation is successful in contributing to these objectives depends upon a number of factors, including how effectively the organisation uses the evaluation results, and the extent to which it incorporates lessons learned into future activities.

In order to facilitate the process of making evaluation an integral part of the organisation's decision-making process, most organisations have introduced a formal system that will govern the procedures dealing with a completed evaluation. These processes are usually called "management response systems", and represent an effort to ensure that evaluation recommendations are implemented in a systematic and timely manner. A management response system can be understood as a way of "linking evaluation findings to future activities" (OECD/DAC 1992:133) and of increasing the extent to which evaluation recommendations are integrated into policies and programmes.

1.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess how effectively three aid organisations have organised their follow-up to evaluations. The three organisations selected for this evaluation are: The Swedish International Development cooperation Agency (Sida), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Directorate-General of the European Commission responsible for implementing external aid programmes and projects (EuropeAid). This selection was based on three considerations:

- The organisations each have formal response systems that have been in place for some years. This allowed an assessment about how effectively the systems have been implemented and their possible effects.
- The organisations operate in different spheres within the international aid architecture, and their organisational differences were likely to provide different perspectives.
- The evaluation systems within these three organisations differ: Sida has an evaluation system with one centralised and one decentralised component; IFAD has only a central unit based at headquarters, with no field presence; EuropeAid has both a centralised and a decentralised evaluation system, but the management response system is only applied to centralised evaluations.

The response systems are assessed against two evaluation criteria: effectiveness and relevance. The assessment is followed by a comparative analysis and a discussion about how components of response systems relate to, and may affect the achievement of, various objectives.

1.2 Methodology

The *effectiveness* of the management response systems refers to the extent to which their objectives have been achieved. These objectives exist at two levels: the implementation of the systems (their outputs), and the intermediate effects of them (their outcomes). To assess the outputs of the systems the study aims to answer the following types of questions: Is a formalised response given to all evaluations? Are responses completed within the stipulated time? Are responses followed-up to a sufficient extent?

The objectives at the level of outcomes are seldom stated explicitly, but must be derived from formal documents such as policies or strategies or from interviews with key staff. This study reconstructs the logics of the systems assessed and their intended outcomes, and then assesses the extent to which the outcomes have been achieved.

Relevance refers to the extent to which the management response systems are adapted to suit their objectives. The assessment of relevance in this paper is based upon the conclusions of the systems' *effectiveness*.

A number of data collection methods were used in the study to allow for triangulation of the results:

- Focus group interviews with staff from the organisations. Each group comprised staff from the same department or level of the respective organisations.
- Individual interviews with key people involved in designing the management response systems.
- Document analysis of guiding principles and policies.
- Quality assessment of a number of evaluation and management response documents.
- In-depth study of a number of evaluation and response processes. The respective processes were followed up through both documentary analysis and interviews with relevant stakeholders, both from within the organisations and from partner government and organisations.

2 The management response systems

2.1 Sida

The Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (Sida) is the government agency that administers the bilateral component of the Swedish foreign aid budget. In 2006, Sida disbursed approximately USD 2.5 billion – more than half of Sweden's total aid budget.

The evaluation system at Sida consists of two parts: a decentralised system for evaluations carried out by Sida's operational departments and Swedish embassies; and a centralised system for evaluations commissioned or executed by Sida's Department for Evaluation (UTV). Evaluations of the departments and embassies focus on the implementation of activities within their respective responsibilities. UTV evaluations are normally of a thematic or strategic nature, and are frequently undertaken jointly with other donor agencies (Sida 2008: 3). UTV is an independent organisational unit and reports directly to Sida's Board of Directors, which also approves the annual Evaluation Plan and Report (Sida 1999:1).¹

Sida published 253 evaluations² from 2001 to 2006; UTV conducted 29 of these. The costs for evaluations for the period 2002-2006 was estimated at SEK 181 million³, of which UTV accounted for SEK 71 million⁴.

2.1.1 Sida's Management Response System

Sida launched its management response system in 1999 as a consequence of the establishment of UTV in 1995.⁵ As the assessment of Sida's management response system was made in 2005, changes made to system after the end of 2005 have not been taken into account in this evaluation.

The management response system is divided into a centralised and a decentralised sub-system. Irrespective of level of evaluation, the response process should start with an overall assessment of the relevance, accuracy and usefulness of the evaluation and its findings. Sida should clarify whether it accepts or rejects the recommendations and provide due explanations. Possible implications of the evaluation lessons and how they could be effectively utilised should also be considered.⁶

An action plan should then be drafted to explain Sida's intended responses to each accepted recommendation. This should include a completion date for each action and clearly stated responsibilities, detailing who will follow up what. The action plan should normally be prepared by the concerned department or departments within six weeks of the completion of an evaluation.

¹ Until January 2008, UTV had an independent status within Sida, reporting directly to the Board of Directors. UTV was nonetheless subordinate to the Director-General who chaired the Board of Directors. UTV also had to follow the same procedures as other departments when applying for annual budget allocation, limiting its independence to some extent. On and from 1 January 2008, Sida's Board of Directors was replaced by an Advisory Board. The main difference is that the Advisory Board has no decision-making authority, but is intended only to provide advice to the Director-General. It is too early to assess the full consequences for the evaluation function, but it is clear that the independent role of UTV will be impossible to maintain as all decisions regarding evaluation are transferred to the Director-General.

² Reports presented in one of the two series of Sida Evaluations and Sida Studies in Evaluation. Other publications such as Evaluation Newsletters and Working Papers have not been included.

³ Respective departments report their costs for evaluation to the Evaluation Department annually. Since this information is sometimes incomplete, only estimated expenditures can be provided.

⁴ This also includes costs for other activities such as working papers, newsletters and seminars.

⁵ In 1995 Sida was reorganised, resulting in a need for a separate and independent Evaluation Secretariat. Before 1995 SIDA had a specific evaluation unit, which was part of the Planning Secretariat.

⁶ GD 158/98.

Summary recommendations	of	Agreed actions	Responsible actor	Period (timetable for implementation)	for
Recommendation # 1					
Recommendation # 2					
Recommendation # 3					

Figure 1: Template for Sida's action plans

All evaluations completed by UTV should be submitted directly to the Director-General, who issues instructions to the relevant departments or embassies. UTV has no responsibility for the response process, but is invited to comment on the draft response and action plan before it is presented to Sida's Board of Directors.⁷ Sida's Director-General then approves the response and action plan, and the Board is informed (Sida 1999: 6).⁸ Implementation of the actions is verified bi-annually by the Director-General (or delegate), and the respective department or embassy is notified if sufficient actions have not been taken. UTV should regularly review the extent to which the agreed actions are implemented and should be informed about the results of the monitoring process.

For evaluations undertaken by the operational departments and embassies, the desk officer managing the evaluation is generally responsible for coordinating the response process. Heads of department or embassy counsellors are responsible for ensuring that the results of evaluations are taken into consideration in policymaking or in decisions about ongoing or new activities. The controller of the relevant department or embassy follows up implementation of the action plan bi-annually.

2.1.2 Purpose of Sida's management response system

The primary purpose of Sida's management response system⁹ is to strengthen learning and knowledge generation, and to ensure that findings and recommendations of evaluations are taken into account appropriately (Sida 1999: 6; Fallenius 1997: 6; GD 158/98). The system is further intended to meet a number of intermediate goals (GD 158/98), which can be ranked in the following order of priority:

1. Sida's positions on the evaluation are clarified. The response process forces Sida to assess the evaluation and to clarify whether or not it agrees with the findings and recommendations. For evaluations undertaken by UTV, the response could be important for clarifying Sida's positions on issues of a strategic nature.
2. Clear lines of responsibility are created for responding to the evaluation and implementing the agreed actions. By establishing an action plan a point-by-point response to each accepted recommendation is given, specifying responsibilities and deadlines.
3. Accountability is increased. The follow-up of the implementation is intended to hold management accountable for implementing the agreed actions.
4. The system should ensure that findings and recommendations are acted upon in an appropriate manner, and that knowledge about Sida's activities increases.

The response activities, and the corresponding expected effects, of the system are shown in figure 2 below.¹⁰

⁷ From January 2008, the Board of Directors has been replaced by an Advisory Council. The Director General chairs the Advisory Council.

⁸ Note that the Board of Directors has no decision-making authority regarding the content of management response; the decision is directly taken by the Director-General.

⁹ The objectives are the same for the two systems.

¹⁰ The purposes of the two management response systems are almost identical; the main difference is that the effects of the system on the departmental level should have a considerably smaller impact and involve fewer people.

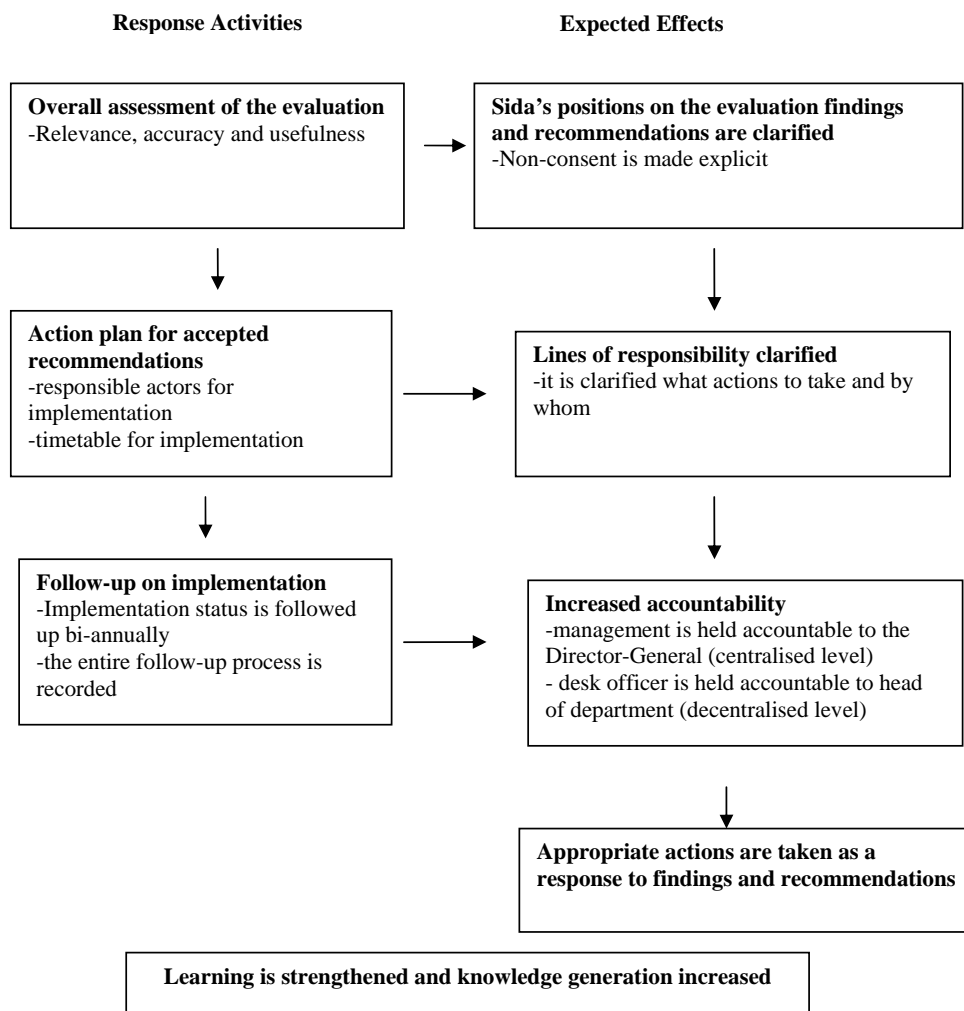


Figure 2: Sida's Management Response System - activities and expected effects

2.2 EuropeAid

EuropeAid is the Directorate-General of the European Commission responsible for managing and implementing EU external aid activities. In 2005, the value of programmes administered by EuropeAid was USD 7.1 billion.

The Directorate-Generals for Development, External Relations and EuropeAid (the RELEX family) have established a common Evaluation Unit to evaluate their activities. The Evaluation Unit manages sectoral and thematic evaluations, as well as country and regional level evaluations, while evaluations of Commission activities in partner countries are carried out by the respective country office. The role of the Evaluation Unit in relation to country level evaluations is limited to providing methodological guidelines. During the period 2002-2006, the Evaluation Unit published an average of 10 evaluation reports a year.

The Evaluation Unit reports its findings directly to the RELEX family of Commissioners, in order to underline its independence and to ensure regular feedback of recommendations to the policymaking level. The Commissioners are responsible for taking action on the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations. Evaluation is separated from line management, and the evaluation budget is separated from other activities of EuropeAid.

2.2.1 The Management Response System – the Fiche Contradictoire

The management response system of EuropeAid was formally approved in November 2001 by the RELEX Commissioners, and is here referred to as the Fiche Contradictoire (FC)

system. The system was designed internally within EuropeAid and applies only to evaluations carried out by the Evaluation Unit.

The FC is primarily an administrative device, which consists of a three-column table to be filled in for all completed evaluations. In the first column, the responsible evaluation officer summarises and lists the main recommendations of the evaluation. The second column outlines and clarifies the agreed actions to be taken as a response to the recommendations by the concerned departments. It should be clearly stated whether the organisation accepts, partly accepts or rejects the recommendations. The responses are formally determined by the relevant unit head. The two-column FC-matrix is subsequently published on EuropeAid’s public website. One year after the response has been approved the evaluation manager requests a follow-up to the response. The third column shows how agreed actions have been implemented by the relevant departments. The staff member responsible for coordinating the responses by the various departments is also responsible for follow-up of the implementation of the agreed actions.

The evaluation manager at EuropeAid is responsible for the entire evaluation process, for disseminating evaluation findings and recommendations to relevant stakeholders and for ensuring that there is a follow-up of the recommendations. At the completion of an evaluation, the evaluation manager makes a quality assessment based on a set of pre-defined quality standards.¹¹

Summary of recommendations	Response of Commission Departments	Follow up on implementation (one year later)
Recommendation # 1		
Recommendation # 2		
Recommendation # 3		

Figure 3: The Fiche Contradictoire matrix

An important aspect of each evaluation process is the reference group, which provides assistance to the evaluation manager in controlling and supervising the evaluation. Its role involves discussing and commenting on the terms of reference for the evaluation team, validating the evaluation questions and discussing and commenting on notes and reports produced. When the evaluation is completed, the reference group has a key role to play in formulating actions and ensuring that findings, conclusions and recommendations are communicated back to the departments and delegations.

Evaluation results may be presented at seminars and workshops and discussed through existing thematic networks within EuropeAid in order to incorporate findings into the programmes of relevant departments and delegations. The Inter-Service Quality Support Group is important for ensuring that actions agreed as a result of the FC process will be taken into account in new strategies and programmes.

2.2.2 Purpose of the Fiche Contradictoire system

The overall purpose of EuropeAid’s management response system is “to support the uptake of evaluation lessons and recommendations in new operations and in the decision-making processes” (EuropeAid Co-operation Office: 4). To achieve this goal, the different components of the system are intended to achieve the following results:

1. Enhance awareness of evaluations within the affected and concerned departments and delegations. It is assumed that this will be achieved when the summary of key information in column one of the FC matrix is communicated to relevant stakeholders.

¹¹ The quality criteria assess whether: the objectives of EuropeAid are met, the evaluation scope is relevant, the design is defensible, the data are reliable, the analysis is sound, the findings are credible, the recommendations are valid, and the evaluation is clearly reported.

The reference group is to be informed about the key issues, which will trigger a deliberation process.

2. Create personal and organisational responsibility. The second column of the FC template is intended to clarify what actions to be taken, by whom and when. This should clarify the lines of responsibilities in order that the response process is effective.
3. Increase accountability and enhance transparency. The third column provides a checklist of agreed actions. It is inherently an accountability component, but also adds a dimension of increased transparency to the overall system. The publication of the FC matrix on the website also increases transparency.

These expected effects and corresponding activities are shown in figure 4, below.

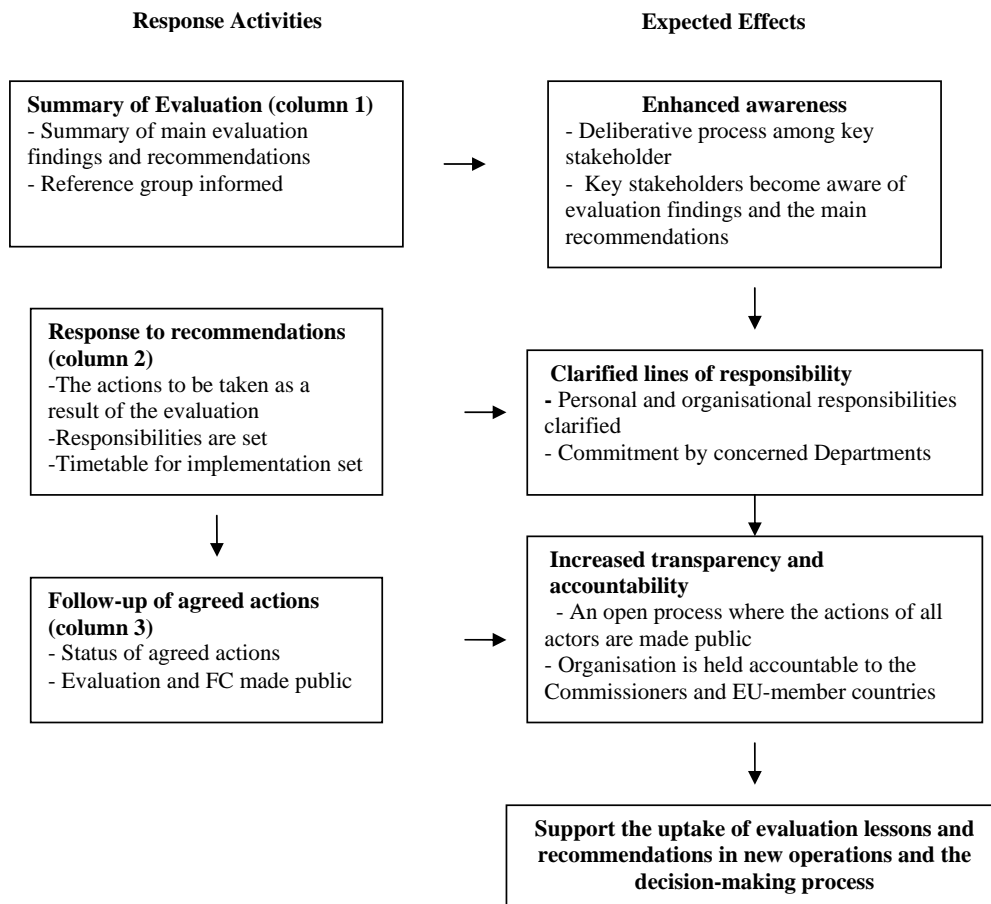


Figure 4: The Fiche Contradictoire system – activities and expected effects

2.3 IFAD

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is a specialised agency of the United Nations that works with governments to develop and finance programmes and projects through low interest loans and grants. In monetary terms, IFAD is a relatively small development actor. By the end of 2006, IFAD provided USD 2.9 billion¹² to 186 programmes and projects.

The Office of Evaluation (OE) is an independent body that reports directly to the executive board of IFAD. Evaluation in IFAD is separated from line management, and the evaluation budget is separate from other budget lines. OE formulates its work plan without interference from either IFAD management or the President's office. During the period 2003-2006, OE produced a total of 60 evaluation reports. Of these, 39 were project evaluations, 10 country programme evaluations, four corporate level evaluations and six thematic evaluations.

2.3.1 The Management Response System – the ACP

The management response system at IFAD is referred to as the Agreement at Completion Point (ACP). The system, as it is manifested today, was formally introduced in 1999.¹³ But it was not until 2003, when the OE was made fully independent, that the ACP system came into full effect. Since then, all evaluations at all levels are processed in the ACP system.¹⁴

At the completion of an evaluation, the main findings and recommendations are summarised by the OE in an Issues Paper. The Issues Paper is communicated to the stakeholders of the evaluation and then discussed at a workshop. As a result of the workshop, the OE drafts a response – the ACP document – which is then approved by IFAD management and partner governments. The ACP should:

- document the recommendations that are found acceptable and feasible, and those that are not, and make the former more operational;
- specify the response by the stakeholders (both IFAD and the partner government) on how they intend to act upon the recommendations within the framework of an action plan that assigns responsibilities and deadlines; and
- highlight evaluation insights and learning hypotheses to further future discussions and debate.¹⁵

All recommendations agreed upon in the ACPs should be followed up on annually by the Programme Management Department, and then presented to the Executive Board in the President's Report on Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Action (PRISMA). IFAD management is responsible for producing the PRISMA report. The OE provides comments on the analysis and the content of the report.

The administrative procedures are summarised in matrix format, in figure 5.

Issues Paper (Summary of evaluation findings and recommendations)	Workshop	ACP document (agreed	PRISMA (PMD follow-up of implementation status)
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¹² IFAD Annual Report 2006.

¹³ New Evaluation Processes, 26/01/2000 Doc. 71502.

¹⁴ IFAD's evaluation system is highly centralised. The Office of Evaluation initiates and commissions all evaluations of IFAD operations.

¹⁵ IFAD Evaluation Policy 2003.

		actions)	
Recommendation # 1			
Recommendation # 2			
Recommendation # 3			

Figure 5: ACP administrative procedures

Evaluation at IFAD has a participatory approach through the Core Learning Partnership – a type of reference group. The main objective of the Core Learning Partnership is to bring together relevant evaluation stakeholders at the commencement of a new evaluation so that they can contribute and steer the process throughout its various stages.

2.3.2 Purpose of the ACP system

The main purpose of IFAD's management response system is to ensure a process that enables learning from evaluations, and that increases the use of evaluation findings in new programming activities. To achieve this, the system is built upon a number of components that are intended to achieve the following:

1. Create awareness of the main evaluation recommendations. The Issues Paper – containing the main findings and recommendations – is an instrument intended to create *awareness* among the key evaluation stakeholders.
2. Lead stakeholders towards reaching a consensus about what actions to take. Based on the Issues Paper, the discussions of the final workshop are intended to enable stakeholders to understand the evaluation findings and recommendations, and the methods used to reach the conclusions, and to provide the opportunity to contribute to the discussions that will determine appropriate actions. Through this process, the main stakeholders are assumed to have reached a *consensus* about appropriate actions.
3. Engage management to commit to and take action. As the ACP document articulates the response to the evaluation and stipulates what actions to take, by whom, and when, it should trigger a *commitment* by IFAD management and the partner government. IFAD management and the government are both signatories to the ACP document and bear full ownership of agreed actions.
4. Enhance transparency of IFAD-funded activities and hold management accountable. The PRISMA report is the final step of the ACP system, and provides additional transparency to it. IFAD management is conscious that the PRISMA report will check whether recommendations are being implemented; it therefore knows that its actions will be scrutinised and that it will be held accountable. The follow-up of the agreed actions thus increases accountability, and the publishing of the report visits additional transparency to the process.

The activities and expected effects of the ACP system are shown in figure 6, below.

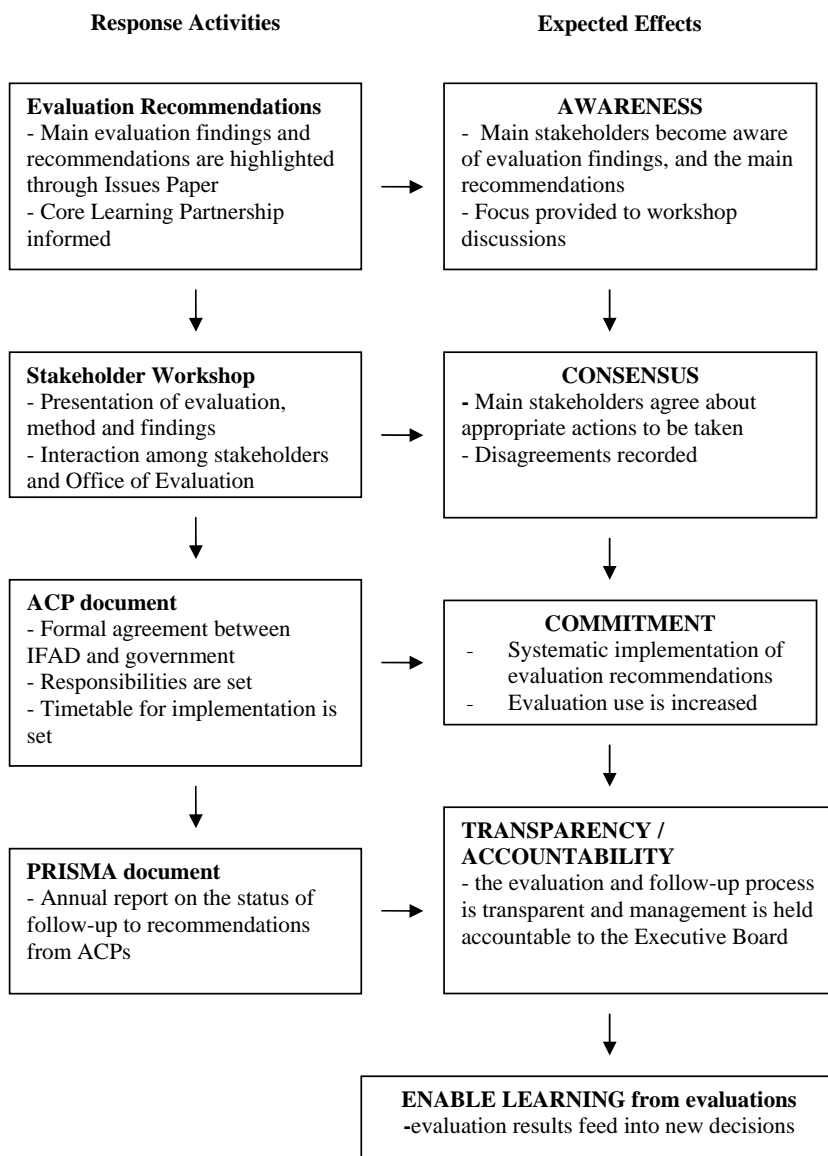


Figure 6: The ACP system – activities and expected effects

3 Effectiveness and relevance of the systems

3.1 Sida

3.1.1 Implementation of the system –effectiveness at the output level

For evaluations commissioned by UTV, the response process follows the administrative procedures well. Over 90 per cent of the evaluations have a corresponding response, and most include an action plan. UTV-initiated evaluations are of relatively high quality and time is given to discuss the findings.

The decentralised system has not been as successfully implemented and is not well known among Sida staff. Only one-third of all evaluations during the period 1999-2003 had a formal response attached, although this has improved over time; in 2003 over 50 per cent of all evaluations had a response. There are considerable differences in how comprehensively departments have implemented the system, but no differences were found between evaluations of differing type, quality or of different size and scope.

The response documents prepared by operational departments and embassies provide limited information about how Sida assesses the relevance, accuracy and usefulness of the evaluation. In contrast, almost all responses contain a detailed action plan about how the accepted recommendations are to be implemented, although they do not always clarify who is responsible for the follow-up.

The follow-up of the action plans is probably the weakest part of the whole system. Follow-up appears to be ad hoc, and if implementation failures occur, they rarely lead to any critique or sanctions. Only 15 per cent of the responses are published on Sida's website, and this lack of documentation further limits the extent to which actions can be followed up.

There appear to be several reasons for the slow and partial implementation of the decentralised system. The most important is the lack of commitment from management. Compared to other administrative procedures at Sida, the management response system receives little attention, and managers endeavour to minimise the added workload it creates. A second explanatory factor is that the system was introduced with unclear guidelines and regulations regarding the administrative procedures. This created confusion among staff and is likely to have reduced the number of responses. High staff turnover rates and inexperienced staff could also have impacted upon implementation. Moreover, there is no specific unit with the responsibility of publishing and documenting evaluations. These procedures are handled individually by each department, and the lack of coordination could explain the lack of documentation to some extent.

3.1.2 Achievement of objectives – effectiveness at the outcome level

Sida's position is clarified: Evaluations carried out by UTV are generally responded to, the overall assessment is quite detailed, and the response documents often include a review of the quality and validity of the recommendations. The responses to decentralised evaluations, however, contain limited information and often lack sufficient explanations about why recommendations were or were not accepted. Since only a small number of evaluations are responded to, the objective of clarifying positions on evaluation findings and recommendations is not met for the decentralised system.

Clear lines of responsibility for how to respond: The responses to evaluations carried out by UTV usually include detailed action plans that identify specifically what actions to be

taken, by whom, and by when. The Office of the Director General is responsible for following up on implementation, which in most cases is done.

Kommentar: Who eller Whom?

For the decentralised response system, insufficient guidelines of the administrative procedures creates confusion among staff about who is responsible for writing the response and whether the system is compulsory. Controllers at the departments are unaware of the requirements of their roles, and at what stage of the process their participation is relevant. The majority of action plans established identifies deadlines for implementation and clarifies responsibilities. For the relatively large number of evaluations where no response is given, there are consequently no responsibilities clarified. Hence, responsibilities for the decentralised system are not sufficiently clarified; neither for the system itself, nor for individual action plans.

Enhanced accountability: Elementary conditions exist to increase accountability through the follow-up of management responses; in particular the cross-checking of the extent to which the action plans are implemented. This is done in most cases for evaluations carried out by UTV. Since the Office of the Director-General is responsible for the follow-up, attention is usually paid to the implementation of the actions by the concerned departments. There are however no sanctions if decided actions are not implemented.

For evaluations carried out by the departments and embassies, action plans are not routinely followed up and used. Management does not request response documents, and response documents are not recorded and filed properly, which reduces the extent to which they can be followed up and the organisation held accountable.

Appropriate actions are taken in response to the evaluation: Neither of the two management response systems has been well integrated with existing decision-making forums. There are no explicit channels for using evaluation findings in decision-making, and responses are not being used in forums where important decisions are made. Some decentralised evaluations, such as mid-term evaluations, do however feed into decisions about the continuation of the project or programme even without a formalised follow-up process.

Strengthened learning and knowledge generation: Evaluations carried out by UTV contribute to learning to a certain extent. The evaluations are of relatively high quality and more time is devoted to discussing the findings. The management response does, however, provide little additional learning as compared to the evaluation report itself. Its contribution to the learning that is taking place is marginal.

Sida's decentralised response system does not incorporate the conditions necessary to strengthening learning. Firstly, the evaluations do not fulfil minimum quality requirements. This study indicates that approximately half of the sample of evaluations from Sida's departments and embassies were of poor or inadequate quality.¹⁶ The weakest section of the evaluations is invariably the analysis and methodology; the conclusions and recommendations are generally of higher quality. Further, there is no mandatory quality control mechanism built into the evaluation and response system, and consequently, subsequent actions risk being based on incorrect evaluation findings.

Secondly, staff are rarely given sufficient time to reflect upon the evaluation findings and recommendations. Often the time devoted by staff members is limited and only a relatively few people are involved in the process.

¹⁶ Another study found that approximately 20 per cent of Sida's evaluations were of low quality (Forss & Carlsson, 1997).

Finally, the response documents may contain distorted or incomplete information; the limited information contained in the responses renders them inadequate for sharing knowledge on the evaluation to Sida staff.

3.1.3 Relevance of the system

When assessing the relevance of Sida's management response system it is important to make a distinction between the centralised and the decentralised systems. Evaluations carried out by UTV are responded to in most cases, and Sida's position is clarified. Often the evaluation contributes to a broader discussion about issues of strategic relevance and responsibilities are clarified to a high extent. The follow-up by the Office of the Director General adds accountability, and improves the propensity for staff members to act upon the recommendations.

Within Sida's operational departments the objectives of the system are only partially met. This is mainly explained by implementation failures, but also by unrealistic objectives. Although it may be desirable for all responses to contribute to learning, this is probably neither possible nor feasible. The objectives of a centralised response system for evaluations of strategic relevance should be different from project level evaluations of a decentralised system.

The more immediate objectives of the system – to clarify positions and responsibilities, increase accountability and ensure that adequate actions are taken – are still relevant and feasible. However, as this evaluation has indicated, none of these objectives were satisfactorily achieved. Since the system has not become sufficiently institutionalised, effective implementation depends upon the use of experienced staff and interested management – and not on the system as such.

Since Sida aims at incorporating partners in all its activities it is surprising that the management response system, at any level, does not engage partner countries or cooperating organisations. The response system is designed for evaluations initiated and monitored by the evaluation unit or the operational departments and does not promote mutual accountability and responsibility.

To attract more relevance to the management response system at both levels its administrative procedures must be strengthened and partners involved to a higher extent. It is also important to review the objectives of the system, and to acknowledge that the objectives may legitimately differ between the centralised and the decentralised systems.

3.2 EuropeAid

3.2.1 Implementation of the system – effectiveness at the output level

The response system at EuropeAid has been effectively implemented, in the sense that most evaluations completed in the period 2002-2004 have corresponding FCs. This means that all columns have been completed and the agreed actions in response to the evaluations have been followed up and approved. The follow-up of the agreed actions in the third column have not yet been taken for all evaluations in 2005, and almost none have been taken for 2006. Since the follow-up of the agreed actions usually takes longer than the suggested time of one year it is doubtful whether the designated time frame is realistic. Aside from the delays in follow-up, the utilisation of the system follows standard procedure.

3.2.2 Achievement of the objectives – effectiveness at the outcome - level

Awareness: The management response system has the necessary components to enhance the awareness of evaluations. A summary of the main findings and recommendations is provided for almost all evaluations, which is used as a basis for the discussions that

determine the response. The reference groups are often active in the response process, although high turnover among members of the reference groups reduces the dissemination of evaluation findings to the various departments and delegations. Most evaluations are also discussed at a dissemination seminar, which further increases awareness among the departments and delegations.

As part of the dissemination process, all FC documents are published on the external website, along with the evaluation report.

Personal and organisational responsibility: In column two of the FC-matrix, EuropeAid must indicate how the evaluation recommendations will be implemented. This study has found that the actions to be taken are often unclear, and the FC document rarely specifies detailed responsibilities. The response system is deficient to the extent that it fails to explicitly identify who is responsible for the completion of actions that are entered in the second column of the matrix. Instead the responses often refer to ongoing activities or actions already taken that are not consequent upon the evaluation.

Transparency / Accountability: As all evaluations and FC documents are published externally, the system has clear elements of transparency, which contributes to legitimacy and external accountability. Notwithstanding that the system compels management to respond to evaluations; the accountability feature is deficient to some extent. The identification of those responsible for following up the implemented actions is rarely explicit. Further, there are no sanctions if decided actions are not implemented. With no clear lines of responsibility, and a system that will not sanction non-commitment, there lacks effective incentives to implement a recommendation. The lack of clarity of the system leaves the process and the procedures lacking in transparency for scrutiny by outside observers.

Support the uptake of evaluation lessons and recommendations in new operations and the decision-making process: It is uncertain whether the overarching goal of the system is met. A number of weaknesses associated with the FC system render this goal difficult to achieve. The system is not calibrated to match the policy and programming cycles, which reduces the relevance of evaluation results. One manifestation is the inordinate passage of time that passes between the completion of the evaluation and the response. This manifests in a lack of interest in the evaluation when it comes to formulating follow-up actions.

The existing channels for feeding evaluation results into future activities and policies, such as the Inter-Service Quality Support Group or the thematic networks, are not extensively used. Reference group members are generally active during both evaluation and follow-up phases; however the high staff turnover rate has the effect of eroding the level of commitment before the evaluation has been completed.

Nonetheless, the system ensures that all evaluation reports are quality-checked prior to being acted upon. All evaluations carried out from 2002 to 2004 were assessed against the set of quality standards, and EuropeAid responds only to evaluations fulfilling minimum quality conditions.

3.2.3 Relevance of the system

The FC system has clear benefits, in that it provides structure to the latter part of the evaluation process. It is evident that the system needs to be developed in terms of designating roles and responsibilities more clearly, but the foundation and overall structure of the system is a healthy addition to the evaluation process. The FC system adds legitimacy to the evaluation process but it cannot be expected to increase the interest in the evaluation findings. The system ensures that evaluations are read and are given some kind of formal

Kommentar: Elisabeth undrar vad som ligger bakom detta påstående

response but it is questionable to what extent the FC-system supports the uptake of evaluation recommendations into new programmes and policies. Its role in the business model of EuropeAid is, at best, vague.

EuropeAid staff appreciate the FC system, because it gives the organisation an opportunity to consider evaluation findings. If the organisation does not agree to a recommendation, it is given the opportunity to explain why and to make these views public.

A significant problem with the FC system is that it does not engage all concerned departments and delegations, partner countries or cooperating organisations. The response system is designed for evaluations initiated and monitored by the Joint Evaluation Unit for the RELEX family. Hence, the response system does not promote mutual accountability and responsibility, an overall objective of EuropeAid.

3.3 IFAD

3.3.1 Implementation of the system –effectiveness at the output-level

The Response system at IFAD has been effectively implemented in that all published evaluations in the period 2003-2006 have an ACP document attached. All evaluations and their corresponding ACPs have been published on the IFAD public website in accordance with IFAD disclosure policy and a Core Learning Partnership is created for all evaluations.

The analysis in the PRISMA document is systematic as the recommendations from the different ACPs are organised and classified according to: i) level, ii) nature, and iii) theme.¹⁷ The PRISMA tool has made it easier for the IFAD executive board to understand to what extent recommendations have been followed up.

The PRISMA analysis has also contributed to changes in how the OE proposes recommendations and how the recommendations are articulated. In earlier versions of the PRISMA it was evident that a large number of the recommendations were operational with little strategic value for IFAD.

The implementation status of the recommendations is impressive: in 2006, 74 per cent of all recommendations had been fully followed-up, while 21 per cent were awaiting a response. In 2007 a total of 166 recommendations, or about 60 per cent, have been fully incorporated into new operations, strategies and policies. This ratio is much higher in the case of recommendations applicable to the IFAD corporate level, and slightly lower in the case of recommendations extended to IFAD at the country level.¹⁸

3.3.2 Achievement of objectives – effectiveness at the outcome-level

In order to meet the objectives of IFAD's management response system, evaluations must be of sufficiently high quality and must allow stakeholders to participate actively in the evaluation and response processes. The OE works with peer review mechanisms to assure high quality standards. This involves external peers as well as internal reviews among OE staff.

Participation by stakeholders is intended to be facilitated through the Core Learning Partnership. Whether or not stakeholders participate actively in these depends mainly on the individual's interest and stake in the project and programme, but also on whether the OE allows members to comment and steer the process. Those directly responsible for a project or programme are generally more active. Higher-level evaluations, such as corporate or country evaluations, attract more attention than project level evaluations, and hence these attract more involvement of stakeholders. In practice, the involvement of IFAD staff is often

Kommentar: Elisabeth föreslår „guide“

¹⁷ Level (i.e. whether it is project or country level, or if the recommendation is directed to government or IFAD); nature (i.e. whether it is an operational or strategic recommendation); theme (i.e. whether it is a recommendation that concerns gender, rural finance, decentralisation etc.).

¹⁸ PRISMA 2007.

restricted to comments on the approach paper and draft evaluation reports, and participation in the final workshop. Involvement of partner government representatives is in most cases limited to participation in the final workshop.

The objectives are attained in varying degrees.

Awareness: IFAD's management response system incorporates the necessary components for creating awareness of the evaluation findings and recommendations among stakeholders. The opportunity for key stakeholders to participate in the Core Learning Partnership, in combination with the Issues Paper and workshop discussions, ensures awareness of at least the main recommendations of the evaluation.

Consensus: The system's focus on joint responsibilities could enable stakeholders to reach consensus on future activities. Although the workshops are important in bringing relevant stakeholders together to discuss and reflect upon different opinions, the content of the ACP document is determined well in advance. The limited time available, and the sheer size of the events (often more than 100 delegates are invited), make consent and agreement on realistic future actions problematic. The workshops appear to contribute to an increased consensus only in a minority of cases. Achieving consensus depends more on the quality of interaction during the entire evaluation process and on the type of evaluation that is being undertaken.

This study has shown that due to the fact that stakeholders, in particular government representatives, do not participate actively during the evaluation process, consensus is rendered more difficult to achieve.

Commitment: Commitment is formally achieved when IFAD management and the partner government sign the ACP document. Although this is a necessary step, the formal agreement does not guarantee sincere commitment by all parties. According to both the OE and programme management department staff, the interaction between stakeholders throughout the process is decisive in determining that they act upon the evaluation findings and recommendations. To increase commitment the OE tries to engage senior level staff from both IFAD and the partner government with decision-making authority. Both IFAD and the partner government are free to disagree with the recommendations, although the ACPs rarely include any clear statements of disagreement.

ACP actions may sometimes be beyond the control of either IFAD or the partner government, despite a formal agreement to carry out the actions. These cases indicate a resistance by the parties to take responsibility to actively participate in the process and to ensure that the actions can be implemented. They could also indicate that the OE has too much control over the formulation of what actions to take. The level of commitment increases in cases where OE lets the two main stakeholders be in charge of formulating the ACP.

Transparency/Accountability: The objective of enhancing transparency and holding IFAD management accountable is largely fulfilled through the ACP system. There is a high degree of transparency since the ACP document is published together with the evaluation report, and the agreed actions are made public. An effective accountability mechanism is in place to ensure the accountability of IFAD management, in that the Executive Board can easily cross-check the extent to which the evaluation recommendations have been implemented. The introduction of the PRISMA has resulted in more attention given to evaluation recommendations by IFAD's operational department, and in increased involvement of that department in the development of action plans.

The accountability of IFAD to the Executive Board has been strengthened with the introduction of the PRISMA. The PRISMA requires managers to explain how

recommendations were implemented, or to explain, and be accountable for, why they were not. Country programme managers must take the actions into account in designing new projects. If they do not, they must answer to the board and explain why the design deviated from the recommendations.

The performance of the partner government is not explicitly followed up through the PRISMA¹⁹, and it is difficult to assess whether the present system sufficiently contributes to holding partner governments accountable. Informally, country programme managers are responsible for supervising the implementation of actions directed to partner governments.

Create conditions that enable learning; evaluation results feed into new decisions: The overall purpose of the ACP system is achieved to some extent, since evaluation has been brought closer to the decision-making bodies and its place in key strategic documents such as country strategies has been guaranteed. As a consequence evaluation results usually feed into new decisions.

There are elements of the ACP system that could potentially contribute to learning in a more general way, such as the stakeholder involvement and the joint discussions about evaluation results. However most stakeholders agree that evaluations rarely contribute to new knowledge, but rather tend to confirm what is already known. Still individual country programme managers perceive that evaluations – and the ACP system itself – give them confidence in formulating new country strategies.

3.3.3 Relevance of the system

This study has found that there are two main defects in the ACP system that limits its relevance to the stated objectives. There appear to have been difficulties in reaching consensus about appropriate actions when formulating the ACPs and sufficient commitment to carry these out. The OE clearly has the advantage of being the producer and owner of the evaluation report and the analysis upon which the recommendations are based. Therefore IFAD management is at a disadvantage in being truly active throughout the response process. This disadvantage occurs at all process stages: in understanding the OE's position, in building arguments, and in determining its own independent position. It is important for IFAD management to overcome this disadvantage and find ways of becoming more active throughout the process, in order for the system to work as intended. IFAD management has come to appreciate this imperative only recently.

Kommentar: Elisabeth kommenterar att det ju faktiskt ligger i OEs roll. Men vi menar väl även responsprocessen? Kolla upp

Further, the lack of commitment from partner governments diminishes the relevance of the system. The incentive structure does not compel governments to adopt changes following the recommendations of an evaluation. This is possibly one of the more intractable problems identified in this evaluation, and indeed perhaps goes beyond a realistic expectation of a response system. If appropriate incentives to act upon recommendations do not exist, the response system will have little or no effect upon the behaviour of partner governments. Considering that IFAD is a small donor, that partner governments are not necessarily dependent upon IFAD resources, and that IFAD itself needs to foster a good relationship with partner governments, there is not a compelling pressure upon governments to adopt changes.

Nonetheless, the system is effective in creating awareness of the main evaluation recommendations by key stakeholders. Moreover, the system is highly transparent, and the accountability mechanism is strong. The management of the process and its expected outputs are highly transparent, and information appears to be shared in a timely and open manner.

¹⁹ Implementation is followed up through non-project activities.

4 Comparative assessment of the management response systems at Sida, EuropeAid, and IFAD

4.1 Objectives of the Systems

The analysis of the three management response systems reveals that, although they operate differently, their objectives largely coincide. The main common objectives (although articulated differently in each case) are to increase the use of evaluation findings and to guarantee that evaluations are considered in ongoing or future decision-making processes

The system at Sida, in addition to these broad objectives, aims to strengthen learning and to generate knowledge in a more general way. The objective of improved learning is less explicit in the case of the two other organisations. All three organisations consider accountability and transparency to be important objectives for a successful response system. Sida acknowledges transparency, but places more emphasis on clarifying Sida's position in relation to the evaluation findings and on clarifying responsibilities. IFAD's system pays considerable attention to increased commitment by management and consensus by all concerned stakeholders. EuropeAid and IFAD consider enhanced awareness necessary for achieving the subsequent objectives.

The objectives of all three systems are relevant and logical. In theory, the organisations should be able to achieve most of them. It is perhaps optimistic to assume that a follow-up system itself could contribute to substantial learning, as this depends upon the entire evaluation system – for example, issues related to staffing, other tools for organisational learning and the organisational context. Overall, adopting realistic expectations about what kinds of learning the systems should contribute to, it is reasonable to conclude that the objectives could be achieved.

In practice, a number of implementation failures and organisational deficiencies prevent the attainment of some objectives.

4.2 What explains the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?

Sida

The two sub systems that constitute Sida's management response system differ in relation to how well they achieve the objectives. Evaluations carried out by the evaluation unit achieve most objectives. Sida's positions in relation to the evaluation findings are usually clarified, as are the allocations of responsibilities for response.

Accountability is strengthened, through the bi-annual follow-up of implementation status by the Office of the Director General. However, there are limitations in the accountability function. The follow-up is poorly documented and there are no punitive measures for non-compliance. There are no procedures for ensuring that the follow-up is transparent, through public accessibility. Nonetheless, the system has been implemented relatively effectively, which is attributable to dedicated staff and a requirement for a systematic follow-up that prevents evaluations from being shelved and forgotten.

It appears that the Sida system does not entirely, at any level, manage to achieve its main objectives: to strengthen learning and to ensure that adequate actions are taken in response to the evaluation. Evaluations carried out by the evaluation unit contribute to learning to some extent. The evaluations are of an acceptable quality and time is devoted to discussing the findings. However, the response system has not been well integrated into existing decision-making forums. Since the evaluations conducted by the evaluation unit have a broader scope, or are of more strategic relevance, their integration within ongoing or future decision-making processes is indirect.

Sida's decentralised management response system meets very few of its objectives, due to implementation failures and unrealistic goals; in particular that of strengthened learning. A more realistic primary objective of the system needs to be developed and the whole system revised.

Neither sub-system includes partner representatives in the process and hence do not contribute to Sida's overall objective of enhancing partnerships.

EuropeAid

The management response system at EuropeAid has been effectively implemented, but achieves only some of its objectives. It creates awareness of the evaluation recommendations among the concerned departments through the summary of the evaluation recommendations, which serves as a basis for discussions about the evaluation and how to implement the recommendations. The involvement of the reference group in discussions, and dissemination activities such as seminars, further contribute to awareness among relevant departments and delegations. Other objectives are only partially met.

Delegation of responsibilities for the response activities, including a timetable for implementation, is rarely stated, and the agreed actions are often vague. Increased accountability and transparency is achieved to some extent; the evaluation unit ensures that the follow-up is documented in the response document and is published along with the evaluation report on the external website. However there are no sanctions if tasks are not accomplished. With no clearly defined lines of responsibility, and a lack of consequences for non-commitment, the incentives for implementing a recommendation are not compelling.

It is less clear whether the main objective – to support the uptake of the evaluation lessons in new operations – is met. There are a number of complementary channels, such as the Inter-Service Quality Support Group, the thematic networks and the reference groups, which could provide a link to future strategies and programmes. However, neither the response system, nor the evaluation process, is adjusted to match the policy and programming cycles, in particular with regard to the timing of the evaluation and response. The Inter-Service Quality Support Group is not used extensively in evaluation matters, and the high turnover of reference group members limits the extent to which evaluation findings are communicated to the departments and delegations.

IFAD

IFAD's management response system achieves most of its objectives, although the lofty ambition to include partners has hindered the achievement of two objectives in particular: to reach consensus over what actions to take in response to an evaluation, and to engender commitment in both IFAD and the partner government to carry out the actions. There is often not sufficient time allocated to finding agreement about what actions to take, which hinders the achievement of real agreement about how to proceed, in particular since stakeholders invariably have different backgrounds and interests. There are fewer incentives for the partner government to carry out the actions, and so is invariably less committed than IFAD programme management department. For both IFAD and the partner government, commitment also depends upon the extent to which they are able to affect the actions to take. There have been cases in which the evaluation unit has left insufficient latitude for the IFAD management and the partner government to formulate their response, which has reduced the relevance of the actions and hence the commitment of the partners. Commitment also depends upon the extent to which stakeholders participate in the evaluation. Involvement of members of the Core Learning Partnership is usually restricted to comments on the draft report and Issues Paper, and attendance at the final workshop. Higher stakeholder participation usually engenders greater commitment.

IFAD's management response system ensures that all stakeholders are aware of the main evaluation findings and recommendations, through the Issues Paper and the subsequent discussions at a final workshop. The involvement of key stakeholders throughout the evaluation process is crucial for creating awareness as is open information sharing and timely communication.

IFAD has a robust follow-up tool, in the annual report on the implementation of the agreed actions – the PRISMA – which greatly contributes to accountability. The transparency of the entire process is achieved through the publishing of the follow-up as an attachment to the evaluation and through the PRISMA report. The system has enabled learning from evaluations – its primary objective – to some extent, by bringing evaluation closer to the decision making process. This is achieved through the requirement of a formal response prior to the making of any decisions based on an evaluation, such as project extensions or the formulation of a new strategy or policy. Without doubt, this has raised the attention given to evaluation within the organisation. The participatory process and the focus on joint agreement are other ways of creating a learning-conducive environment.

4.3 Conclusions

Based on the different characteristics of the systems in the organisations in this study, and on the study's analysis of causative factors surrounding the degree to which objectives have been achieved a number of more general conclusions can be drawn.

In designing an effective and relevant management response system it is important to consider what objectives the system should achieve. The objectives should be realistic and attainable, and should take into consideration the entire evaluation system and overall objectives of the organisation.

The system should be built upon various components that reflect, and are adapted to, the particular objectives of that system. This evaluation has demonstrated several components that are important in these considerations:

The involvement of stakeholders/ partners

Key stakeholders must be included in the response process. This participation is essential in three important respects: in order that final recommendations are capable of being implemented; in order to engender real consent among the stakeholders about what actions to take in response to the evaluation; and to engender sufficient commitment to carry these out. These elements are promoted further where stakeholders are involved systematically in both the evaluation and response processes.

In line with the focus in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness on mutual accountability, the role of partners in the follow-up systems must be considered and made explicit.

Joint discussions and time for reflection

It is important that the evaluation is discussed and clarified among relevant stakeholders, in order to engender consent, awareness and commitment over response actions. Sufficient time needs to be given to reflecting upon and discussing evaluation findings, in order to formulate comprehensive and considered responses.

Each organisation must decide the most appropriate format for these discussions, in consideration of their needs, financial resources, personnel and other resources. Large and costly exercises, such as IFAD's workshops, may not be appropriate for all organisations.

The follow-up tool

An appropriate follow-up tool, that checks the implementation status of the follow-up actions, is essential, in order for a response system to deliver its outcomes, especially those related to accountability and transparency. This has been demonstrated by IFAD's introduction of the PRISMA, which substantially increased the extent to which recommendations have been translated into actions. The increased level of transparency that the PRISMA contributed has proven beneficial for evaluation use and in incentivising subsequent action by managers.

Receiver of information

It is essential that the information that is being generated about implementation status of follow-up is forwarded to a designated *receiver*, such as an executive board, and that this receiver has the authority and capacity to act upon implementation failures and to verify that management has taken all agreed actions. This verification may be seen as ultimately hypothetical, as it will always be problematic to verify what is happening at the field level. Nonetheless, it increases accountability and has proven to be an effective tool to ensure implementation. At IFAD, for example the executive board can cross-check the extent to which the recommendations have been taken into account in country strategies. If a country programme manager does not acknowledge the actions agreed to be taken in response to the evaluation in a draft strategy presented to the board, the board is likely to reject the strategy.

Documentation and Publication

It is important that the response is documented and made public, in order to strengthen accountability and make the process more transparent. For internal purposes, it may be sufficient to make the document available for staff members, for example by ensuring adequate filing procedures.

Responsible unit for supervising implementation

It is necessary to nominate a central organisational body responsible for organising the response, in order to secure an effective implementation. In particular, this body will be responsible for documenting and publishing evaluation reports and response documents. At EuropeAid, for example, the evaluation unit ensures that all evaluations receive a response, and that the response document is published. In the case of Sida, the lack of responsibility for this function was a clear weakness for effective implementation.

Overall policy-making structures

It is important that organisations review explicit channels for decision-making, and consider how the response system can be integrated into these. This cannot be considered in isolation, and is, rather, an integral part of the entire evaluation system. For example, one means of achieving this is to require a response before decisions made in response to evaluation findings (such as a strategy response). Another is to indicate, in the evaluation policy, what levels of decision-making evaluation recommendations should feed into, and what type of response the different evaluations require.

Quality control mechanism

An effective response system requires some form of systemic quality control mechanism. It may not be necessary to respond to all evaluations (for example if they are not of sufficient

quality), but it is nonetheless important that a system is in place to ensure that evaluations of sufficient quality are acted upon.

Decentralised systems

A decentralised response system will need to be considered in organisations that have a decentralised evaluation system. Although it is important to ensure that decentralised evaluations are acted upon, a management response system may be less relevant. The evaluations often are often linked to future activities in a more direct way such as mid-term evaluations. Nonetheless some kind of systematic follow-up is needed, for example through a management response system.

It may be feasible that the centralised and the decentralised systems have different objectives. The degree of sophistication of systems necessary will differ, including the time and resources spent on the decentralised response system.

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