

Study on the uptake of learning from EuropeAid's strategic evaluations into development policy and practice

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**Study on the uptake of learning
from EuropeAid's strategic evaluations
into development policy and practice**

**This Study was commissioned by the Evaluation Unit of the
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*The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view
which are not necessarily shared by the European Commission
or by the authorities of the countries involved.*

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AF	Action Fiche
AfD	Agence Française de Développement
AfDB	African Development Bank
AIDCO	EuropeAid Cooperation Office
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (Germany)
BS	Budget Support
C4D	Capacity for DEV
CAR	Central African Republic
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CoA	Court of Auditors
CODE	Committee on Development Effectiveness (WBG)
CPPB	Conflict Prevention and Peace Building
CRIS	Common RELEX Information System
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DEV	Directorate General for Development
DEVCO	Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DG	Directorate General
DGE	Director General Evaluation (WBG)
DGMDP	Directorate General for Globalisation Development and Partnership in the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
DPME	Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (South Africa)
EBP	Evidence Based Practice
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EP	European Parliament
EPPI	Social Research Unit and Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
EVINFO	Evaluation summary following the standard DAC format
EUD	EU Delegation
FPI	Foreign Policy Instruments
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HQ	Headquarters
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group
IF	Identification Fiche

IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFAD-IOE	International Fund for Agricultural Development - Independent Office for Evaluation
IMF-IEO	International Monetary Fund: Independent Evaluation Office
IOB	Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie (NL)
IPA	Innovations for Poverty Action
iQSG	Inter-service Quality Support Group
JEU	Joint Evaluation Unit
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JPAL	Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (MIT)
KfW	Kreditanstalt Für Wiederaufbau (German Development Bank)
KM	Knowledge Management
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
KPP	Knowledge, Politics and Power
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODA	Official development assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute (UK)
ODI-RAPID	Overseas Development Institute: Research and Policy in Development programme
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
oQSG	Office Quality Support Group
QSG	Quality Support Group
RAND	Research and Development Corporation
RBM	Results Based Management
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
RED	Research and Evidence Division (DFID)
REF	Research Excellence framework
RELEX	Directorate General for External Affairs
ROM	Results Oriented Monitoring
SADEV	Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
ToRs	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP-EO	United Nations Development Programme Evaluation Office
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WBG	World Bank Group
WSIPP	Washington State Institute for Public Policy

GLOSSARY

Accountability: the ability to give a true and fair picture of what has been achieved and to report it to those who hold the evaluation function to account. Accountability does not only relate to disbursement of funds or delivery of outputs for the EU's internal purposes, it also relates to the ability to report accurately to the citizens of the developing countries (for whom the interventions being evaluated are intended) and to the citizens of the countries providing the funding for the interventions and the evaluations to take place.

Evidence: information from strategic evaluations that can be used to support a policy/practice decision. Evidence can be stored on paper or electronically. The process of learning turns evidence into knowledge.

Evaluation function: the set of tasks performed by evaluations within an organisation. In order to fulfil this function, the organisation will need to put in place an Evaluation Unit (with a mandate, institutional position and resources); spell out an evaluation policy (defining clear objectives, approaches); develop suitable methodologies for carrying out evaluations; and define processes and procedures allowing for an effective (centralised or decentralised) management and delivery of evaluation products.

Evaluation system: the structures and processes within the organisation that generate and make use of evaluations.

Fiche Contradictoire: the EU management response system for strategic evaluations in which relevant EU services are asked to respond to the evaluation's different components when an evaluation is published and again one year after the publication of the evaluation.

Knowledge: the understanding of what evidence from strategic evaluations means in a particular context and how it can be used to support, or challenge, a policy/practice decision. Knowledge is located in the minds of individuals and is moved around the organisation via individuals or teams through learning processes. Knowledge often relates to how things are done in an organisation – the intangible structures, customs and practices that are not necessarily documented but have built up over time and affect working relationships between teams and individuals.

Knowledge brokering: improving the use of evidence from evaluations by being actively involved in decision-making around an issue; e.g. writing guidance for a thematic area on how to use evaluation evidence, or ensuring that evidence from a range of evaluations is actively debated in programming or policy debates.

Knowledge translation: helping people who are not evaluation specialists make sense of the evidence (from evaluations) and apply it through, for instance, briefing notes

Independent conduct of evaluations: the independence of the evaluators to respond in the most rigorous way to the questions, without interference from those who have set the questions. It is important to distinguish between *relevance*, *impartiality* and *independence*.

- Those commissioning the evaluation must decide what questions they want to ask to ensure that what emerges will be *relevant*.
- The Evaluation Unit ensures *impartiality* by confirming that the evaluation questions meet the DAC and EU criteria, do not avoid sensitive issues, and are evaluable. The Evaluation Unit should be guaranteed this *impartiality* through its budget allocation, recruitment of staff and programme of work.
- *Independence* of the resulting evidence is guaranteed by ensuring that the evaluators are able to conduct the evaluation without interference.

Impartiality contributes to the *credibility* of evaluations by avoiding bias in their findings. *Independence* in turn strengthens *legitimacy* of evaluations and reduces the risk of conflicts of interest.¹

Learning: the process of gaining knowledge through reading, teaching, observing, or doing.

Strategic evaluations: evaluations covering overall EU cooperation. Evaluations can be geographic (country/regional), thematic, related to aid modalities or of a corporate nature. The Evaluation Unit is responsible for managing them.

Uptake: refers to the process of actively considering evaluation evidence and learning opportunities.

Use: refers to the actual application of evidence to policy and practice decisions. The uptake of evidence can only really be seen through a retrospective analysis of its use.

¹ These are the OECD-DAC principles for evaluation of development assistance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Are strategic evaluations effectively used to improve development policy and practice?

Every year, EuropeAid produces 10 to 12 **'strategic evaluations'** dealing with countries, regions, themes or aid modalities. As their name suggests, they adopt a broader perspective than project and programme evaluations, which are of a more operational nature. Strategic evaluations are interested in the **overall relevance and coherence of EU interventions**. They have a dual objective to provide accountability and promote learning. Most importantly, they seek to **generate knowledge to help decision-makers to improve development policy, programming and practice**.

But to what extent is this knowledge effectively used in EU development cooperation? **Are the necessary conditions, systems, processes and incentives in place to ensure the 'uptake' of strategic evaluations?** Or do these labour-intensive and relatively costly reports remain under-utilised?

In order to address these questions, EuropeAid commissioned an **'uptake study'** with two very clear objectives: (i) to collect evidence of the translation of knowledge from strategic evaluations into EU development policy and practice, and on that basis (ii) to make recommendations for strengthening uptake in EuropeAid and the wider EU external action system.

Using knowledge from evaluations is challenging. All donors are subject to a wide range of factors which can support or undermine the uptake process. Most organisations struggle to improve their track record. Not a single organisation examined could be said to have reached the 'golden standard'.

This is not intended to be a technical study for a small and specialised audience. In 2012, the OECD-DAC Peer Review invited the EU to make knowledge a corporate priority and to look into the use of its strategic evaluations. With the changing nature of development cooperation, as reflected in the EU's Agenda for Change, the importance of knowledge is set to increase considerably.

Urgent needs of new EU structures (such as the EEAS) and the growing pressure to show 'value for money' compel the EU to further strengthen evidence-based policy-making across the EU. The very process of carrying out this study drew the attention of many senior stakeholders, from both EuropeAid and the EEAS, who recognised the need to take a closer look at the question of uptake.

The EU uptake system: how does it work and how effective is it?

The study uses a **systemic approach to analyse uptake**, which seeks to understand how the evaluation function operates in a complex political and institutional web, and how it is driven by numerous agendas, a wide variety of actors, and many different needs and interests

EuropeAid's **Evaluation Unit** is a critical actor in the uptake system. It has a clear mandate to focus on strategic evaluations. Over the past decade, it has made strides towards strengthening the rigour of evaluations by developing relatively sophisticated methodologies. It also manages the production of evaluations and the promotion of uptake, mainly through dissemination activities. It is now involved in developing an evaluation policy, sharpening the criteria to select strategic evaluations to be included in the new multi-annual programme and reviewing methods for quality assurance. Despite this augmented workload, staff levels have not increased over time.

From an uptake perspective one can detect a wide range of **formal and informal opportunities** within the management systems and processes of EuropeAid **to encourage learning, through the translation of knowledge from strategic evaluations** into policy and practice. These include

learning opportunities within the programming cycle; the development process of new policies, reference documents and tools; carrying out evaluations, soft dissemination via the knowledge platform Capacity4Dev (capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu) or the follow-up process of strategic evaluations through the '*Fiche Contradictoire*'.

Evidence collected during this study suggests that **several strategic evaluations have, in a variety of ways, influenced EU policies and practices**. There are examples of the direct use of knowledge leading to improved country programming or the development of new tools (e.g. building a new conflict analysis framework). In other cases, strategic evaluations were used to deepen conceptual understanding (e.g. to develop a reference document on sector governance), to improve operational delivery (mainly in country evaluations) or to legitimise changes in policy or programming (e.g. on human rights). The study also observed **missed opportunities** – in terms of uptake – where results were ignored because evaluation findings did not synchronise with management's decision-making process, or users failed to see the direct value of the evidence, or because the context had changed by the time the findings were made available.

Yet, despite the efforts of the Evaluation Unit, **the overall picture looks rather sobering. The 'uptake chain' has too many weak points and missing elements** to allow lessons learnt to be absorbed in a systematic, structured and effective way into policy and practice. Ample evidence was found to support this contention. Strategic evaluations struggle to find clients and consumers. Overall the study observed a major evaluation '**ownership deficit**', as reflected in the fact that many staff (from senior management, geographic units or EUDs) were either unaware of existing evaluations, did not read the reports or felt it is not part of their work. The same holds true for many stakeholders working within political institutions such as Parliaments. While there are many instances of 'uptake' at individual and team level, **institutional learning has been limited**. As a result, much of the evidence generated by strategic evaluations has not been effectively used.

A host of factors contribute to this, including (i) a weak link with the 'demand-side' (or the real needs of the different categories of potential users); (ii) an often limited involvement of key stakeholders throughout the evaluation process; (iii) a tendency to focus more on *what* happened in EU aid interventions rather than on *why* things occurred; (iv) the growing practices of dealing with evaluations in a bureaucratic manner and privileging methodological orthodoxy over building ownership, learning and ensuring uptake; and (v) the often limited operational use of evaluations, is partly due to their ineffectual format and ineffective communication strategies (failing to reach out to a wide range of potential users). As a result, key stakeholders often prefer other sources of information to address their knowledge or evidence needs.

On the whole it is **difficult to detect an effective evaluation system**. The study noted **important disconnects** between evaluations and key internal processes such as policy formulation, programming, monitoring and result oriented management, or the broader Knowledge Management (KM) system. It is also difficult to draw in new clients for strategic evaluations, particularly those interested in shorter, more focused exercises or from the EU External Action Service. Uptake of evidence from strategic evaluations among the latter remains low, with notable exceptions (such as the 2011 evaluation on Conflict Prevention and Peace Building). All this suggests that strategic evaluations are **not sufficiently embedded** in EU development cooperation practice.

Uptake is further hindered by the **lack of an enabling overall institutional environment** for evidence gathering, learning and the effective multi-level use of knowledge in policy-making. This is, inter alia, reflected in the reduction of thematic capacity following successive internal reforms, and the lack of **clear signals from leadership** that evaluations matter and that evaluation should be incorporated throughout the cycle of policies and programmes. The on-going pressure on human resources (doing more with less) further compounds the challenges of being a learning organisation.

The way forward: recommendation areas for further discussion

In many ways, the time has come for greater focus on **the role and place for strategic evaluations in EU development cooperation and the wider EU external action system**. Based on the findings of the study, the **core question** is: can strategic evaluations be more coherently embedded in EU development cooperation and more effectively used to improve policy and practice? Or will evaluation remain a relatively disconnected function which generates knowledge which is less than optimally used?

In the rapidly evolving and expanding policy domain of development cooperation, there are **many internal and external push factors which help revalue the central role of knowledge and learning**. There are demands for relevant forms of knowledge from different parts of EuropeAid and the EEAS. Evaluation is one key tool to respond to these, alongside other sources (such as research). There are promising reforms to improve the Results Framework or strengthen Knowledge Management systems. The Secretariat-General is promoting more evidence-based policymaking across the EU. Like other donors, the EU is under growing pressure to show value for money and report on outcomes. It must also respond to demands related to performance and impact from other EU institutions (European Parliament, Member States, Court of Auditors), external stakeholders (e.g. civil society) and, increasingly, partner countries. However, there are also many factors, which are **disincentives to making knowledge a corporate priority**, including disbursement pressures and reduction in human resources.

Overall the study concludes that the **opportunity should not be missed**, at this critical juncture, to explore how to significantly **strengthen the weak elements of the 'uptake chain'** and make much more productive use of all the knowledge generated by strategic evaluations. This challenge **amounts to a shift of culture in the organisation**.

The proposals below should be read as options which could inspire a multi-actor dialogue within EuropeAid, and with the EEAS, on how to improve the overall uptake system.

Four sets of recommendation areas are suggested:

1. Promote and incentivise a learning and evaluation culture

The **primary responsibility** for promoting a learning culture and upgrading the use of strategic evaluations – as a key tool within this process – lies with the political leadership and senior management. Many of the **systemic shortcomings identified in the study can only be addressed directly by leadership**. In the absence of such a central steering, valuable initiatives taken by other players (such as the Evaluation or the Knowledge Management Units) may not reach the root causes of the limited uptake.

The core task for leadership is to define a **solid and compelling narrative around evaluation**. This needs to clearly indicate that evaluation is not about producing audits, but about learning from the past to improve policy and practice in an increasingly complex and evolving global development context, and about showing how evaluation is an essential element of results based management.

In order to be effective, evaluations need to be fully embedded and mainstreamed in the EU development cooperation system. To ensure this, it is not enough simply to formulate an evaluation policy and a multi-annual programme. Senior managers should establish and drive a comprehensive **corporate evaluation strategy** covering the following components:

- (i) Providing a clear narrative and rationale for conducting different types of strategic evaluations, linked to corporate knowledge needs.

- (ii) Ensuring an inclusive and transparent prioritisation process involving all key stakeholders and combining 'demands' (from the different users) and strategic 'needs' (from the perspective of the institution as a whole).
- (iii) Establishing an appropriate timeline for the production, delivery and follow-up of strategic evaluations with a view to facilitating uptake.
- (iv) Ensuring that internal mechanisms, processes and procedures are in place to allow knowledge to be effectively shared, used, and translated into policy and programming processes. In this context, clarifying the role of the Evaluation Unit in delivering the corporate evaluation strategy and enhancing the learning from strategic evaluations (e.g. through links with on-going processes to improve ROM and Capacity4Dev).
- (v) Ensuring that adequate capacities and budgets are available, including at the level of the Evaluation Unit.

This corporate evaluation strategy should be complemented with an **appropriate mix of incentives** to promote uptake, and by a 'new deal' with the EEAS to determine how strategic evaluations could be optimally integrated as a knowledge tool in EU external action.

2. Review the evaluation process so as to enhance ownership and uptake

The Evaluation Unit could take the lead in pro-actively expanding the outreach of strategic evaluations by strengthening 'ownership' of the exercise while safeguarding the independence/credibility of the resulting reports. In practice this means:

- Exploring ways and means to enhance the participation of users throughout the process;
- Specifying the purpose of the different evaluations;
- Establishing a diversified 'menu' of evaluations and products which respond to differentiated needs, and which are delivered with varying methodologies and time frames;
- Assuming a more pro-active role in knowledge translation, and brokerage, in order to ensure that evidence is readily available and accessible to non-specialists;
- Ensuring that the key dimensions of EU external action are covered, inter alia by including the Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI) and ensuring that specific EEAS interests (e.g. security, stability, and human rights) are systematically incorporated in strategic evaluations.

3. Better exploitation of formal and informal processes for uptake

Several opportunities for improving uptake remain under-exploited. These include:

- **Better aligning evaluations with policy development as well as programming cycles.** A priority in this regard is to upgrade the 'learning' function in quality assurance processes by making more time available for a genuine discussion on key lessons learnt from evaluations.
- Ensuring stronger synergies between the various building blocks of the overall M&E system. Thus a 'virtuous circle' could, over time, be achieved based on (i) a solid information management system (as the core element); (ii) a smart ROM system focusing on outcomes as well as inputs and outputs; (iii) a better uptake of lessons learnt from project and programme evaluations and, building on all this, (iv) a carefully selected set of strategic evaluations which together provide real added value.
- **Building or strengthening 'knowledge alliances'** with units in EuropeAid and the EEAS which share an interest in strengthening the learning culture in the institution.

4. Strengthen the focus on outcomes in both evaluations and the management response system

Improving the uptake of evidence in evaluations not only helps improve policy and programming decisions, it also provides accountability. Strengthening the link between these two functions can be

achieved by changing the current emphasis on an input/output-oriented model to one with a **sharper focus on outcomes**.

As the 'menu' of evaluations is debated it will be worth learning from the methodological development which has occurred for Budget Support (BS). It moves discussions about accountability from an output focus to a debate about intended outcomes. In doing so, it offers valuable opportunities for learning.

Paying more attention to outcomes could also be achieved by promoting the use of knowledge generated by evaluations as a basis for evidence-based decision-making. This entails **reviewing the existing management response system**. The evaluation team suggests altering the *Fiche Contradictoire* to improve ownership by senior management, and to turn it into something closer to an Action Plan. The Tanzania BS evaluation (2013), which has resulted in a joint implementation plan being developed by development partners and the government, could provide inspiration as it indicates wide ownership of the results.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Why 'uptake' matters

1. This study examines the role and influence played by strategic evaluations in the field of EU development cooperation. While project and programme evaluations focus primarily on operational (spending) activities, **strategic evaluations serve a 'higher purpose'**. Their specificity and potential added value is that they:
 - move the analysis beyond projects and programmes;
 - ask questions about the overall relevance and coherence of EU interventions;
 - seek to pass key messages to policy-makers and senior managers with a view towards improving development policy and practice.
2. The EU recognises the critical importance of such evaluations in a results-oriented environment. As mentioned in the EC Communication on reinforcing the use of evaluations: 'Evaluation generates a wealth of relevant information which is essential to **evidence-based decision-making** for planning, designing and implementing EU policies as well as for managing the institution. Evaluation also enhances the **legitimacy** of decisions and the accountability of decision-makers. Moreover, where evaluation results are communicated properly they enhance transparency and strengthen **democratic accountability**².
3. Using **learning from evaluations**, however, is a **challenging** task. Research has identified a number of key dimensions, which influence uptake and the 'knowledge-policy interface'. All donor agencies struggle with improving the value of learning generated by evaluations. There is also a growing awareness that this **challenge will become even more prominent in the future for three reasons**:
 - In order to remain a meaningful player in the rapidly evolving global context, the EU needs **more sophisticated forms of knowledge which go far beyond the domain of traditional development cooperation**. Many developing countries, thanks to impressive growth levels, may soon escape the 'poverty trap'³ and become less dependent on aid. This changing international context led to the agreement of new principles⁴, which recognise, inter alia, the multi-actor and multi-level nature of development processes. It has also widened the results debate from a rather narrow focus on 'aid' effectiveness to 'development' effectiveness⁵. This, in turn, creates a demand for deeper knowledge which can be efficiently shared through user-friendly channels (including social media).
 - The **pressure to show value for money and demonstrate real impact** has grown in tandem with the financial crisis and the growing doubts among political and public stakeholders on the added value of aid expenditure. The recent OECD-DAC Peer Review of the EU development cooperation noted that "a major part of the EU institutions' accountability to taxpayers and Member States should be to ensure development funding has an impact, and to learn lessons to improve performance there and elsewhere"⁶. Donor agencies are investing substantially in

² EC (2007) Communication on reinforcing the use of evaluations.

³ Sachs, Jeffrey (2006) The end of poverty, Penguin Books.

⁴ E.g. Paris Declaration (2005), Accra Agenda for Action (2008), Busan Partnership for effective development cooperation (2011).

⁵ The shift from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness is a change in focus from purely focusing on the delivery of aid to a more comprehensive understanding of the development outcomes of a wider range of external and domestic policies (e.g. trade, investment, security...).

⁶ OECD-DAC (2012) Peer Review of the EU development Cooperation, p. 72.

systems to measure results and ensure public accountability. They increasingly recognise that accountability is not only about justifying the use of funds but also about the relevance of fundamental decision-making processes and policies in a given context (democratic accountability).

- At the highest level, **the European Commission has shown a clear commitment to evidence-based policy making**. To this end, the Secretariat-General has initiated a reform process aimed at improving the use of evaluations across the EU⁷.

1.2. Objectives, expected outcomes and methodology

4. Within the wider perspective of improving the value of learning generated by evaluations, the objective of this study is to provide:
 - **Evidence** of the translation of evidence from strategic evaluations into EU development policy and practice;
 - **Recommendations for strengthening uptake** (as a specific part of EuropeAid's monitoring and evaluation system).
5. According to the Terms of Reference (ToRs) the study should "take into account the changed institutional framework of the European Union, which has resulted from the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty", the implications of which are still unfolding.
6. From a methodological point of view the study team adopted a **systemic approach** to understand and assess processes such as learning from strategic evaluations in a complex institutional setting like the EU. It builds on several analytical tools, including the 'Knowledge, Policy and Power' model (KPP) developed by ODI under the RAPID programme⁸. Figure 1 below illustrates what such a system analysis implies in practice.
7. **Several methods were used to collect evidence:** some 30 interviews with the various targeted key audiences (including senior management) of both EuropeAid and the European External Action Service (EEAS), two focus group discussions, a survey of EU Delegations (EUDs) which received more than 100 responses, a desk review of 26 strategic evaluations (carried out since 2006) and a more detailed 'process tracking' of 4 cases which cover the main categories of strategic evaluations. The study also looked at the role of project/programme evaluations and the Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) system in overall learning processes. All this was complemented by a literature review and a targeted analysis of how other bilateral and multilateral agencies deal with uptake.

⁷ New policy and guidelines should be in place by mid-2014 which will also affect EU development cooperation.

⁸ The KPP model (Jones et al, 2012) sets out four axes for analysis of the interface between knowledge and policy: the political context, the nature of the actors involved, the types of evidence, and the actions of knowledge intermediaries. The framework identified key questions to be answered in the analytical phase of this study (specifically the political and institutional environment). While these questions guided the analysis, the results were presented in a more flexible and operational way to facilitate translation into concrete recommendation areas.

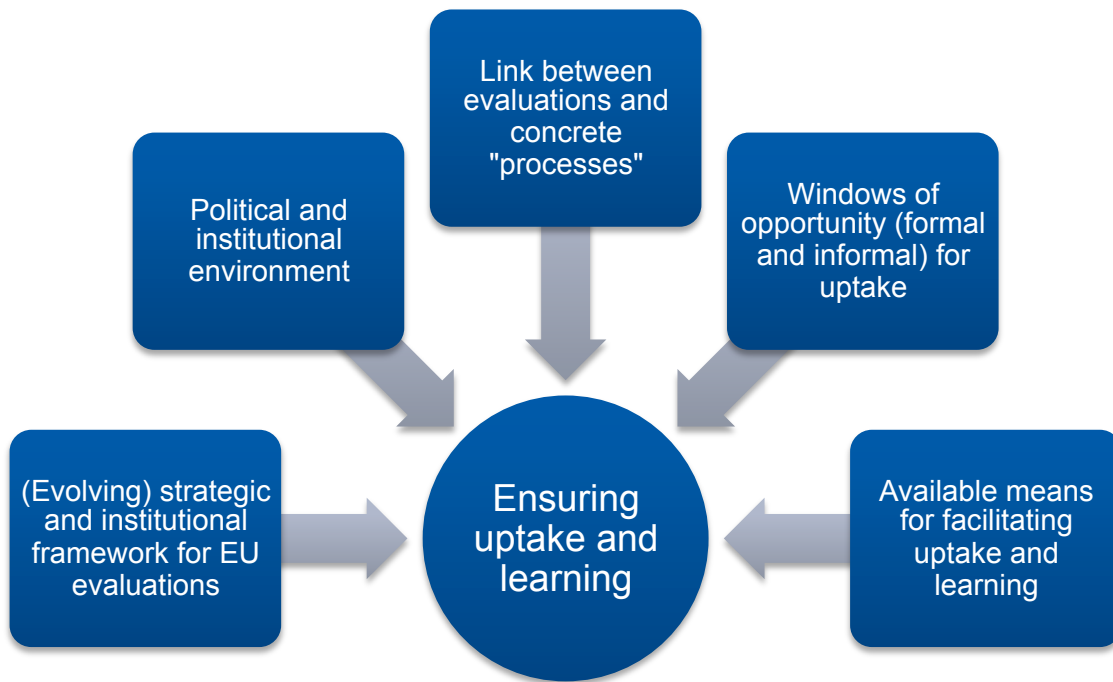


Figure 1: The systemic approach to analysing uptake taken in the report

8. The study faced **important limitations**. Tracking evidence of uptake is not simple, as these processes do not occur in a linear manner. In fact, each evaluation has its own uptake story. There are many informal or ‘hidden’ forms of uptake–learning processes which take place during the exercise itself or afterwards. A time lag may exist between generating valuable knowledge and effective uptake. Adequate data may be lacking to reconstruct the story of uptake – a problem compounded by frequent staff rotation and limited institutional memory.

1.3. Structure of the report

9. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 summarises **key learning points** from both a literature review and a global analysis of the experiences gained by other donors in relation to fostering learning and subsequent uptake. Using these lessons learnt as a reference point, Chapter 3 then proceeds to examine **how the ‘system’ actually works** in EU development cooperation. Chapter 4 interprets these findings by going deeper into some of the specific **challenges which EU policy-makers** will have to face if they want **to structurally improve uptake** processes. On this basis, chapter 5 formulates a set of **recommendation areas** for strengthening uptake.

2. IMPROVING UPTAKE : LEARNING FROM OTHERS

2.1. Learning from the literature

10. All donor agencies struggle to ensure that evidence from evaluations is known and used, especially as development agendas broaden, and budgets and human resources are squeezed. This section draws from the literature to present some **key learning points**, which can provide guidance in understanding how the EU uptake system works. Although the literature⁹ highlights a set of well-known issues, improving the uptake of evaluation evidence in practice remains a **common challenge**.

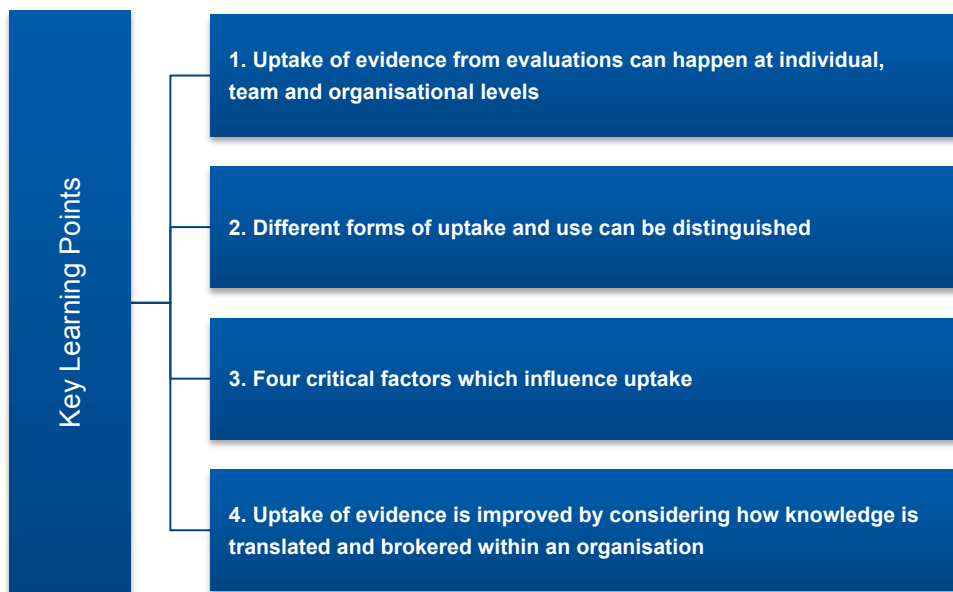


Figure 2: Key learning points from the literature¹⁰

11. Learning point 1: Uptake of evidence from evaluations can happen at individual, team and organisational levels - and is closely linked to ownership

- At the individual level, uptake is closely linked to the ability, willingness and incentives of each person to understand and make use of sometimes very complex evidence.
- At the team level, uptake is affected by a mix of individual abilities, how people within a team are organised and how they relate to each other (e.g. the relationship between generalists and specialists).
- At the organisational level, uptake is affected by how individuals and teams are incentivised to work together and the external pressures brought to bear on policy and practice decisions (e.g. political or historical pressures to consider particular issues).

Individuals and teams who feel a sense of ownership over the results of the evaluations will be more likely to take up and use the evidence they produce. **Ownership comes from having a real interest in what the evaluation determines.** This is more likely if the teams or individuals have been involved in setting the questions which need answering. Developing a sense of ownership therefore begins at the design phase.

⁹ See bibliography in Annex 9.

¹⁰ See footnote 9.

12. Learning point 2: Evaluation evidence is not just used or ignored, but there is a variety of different forms of uptake and use

The different categories of use, as set out below¹¹, are used in chapter 3 to assess the uptake and use of evidence from strategic evaluations in the EU.

Instrumental use

Findings and recommendations from evaluation can be directly implemented to continue, terminate, expand or cut back initiatives or to modify individual components of a programme.

Conceptual use

Evidence from evaluations can provide new ideas and concepts, create dialogue, shift the terms of the debate or provide a catalyst for change.

Learning use

Evaluations can provide learning through doing or learning through use of the evidence: either linked to a specific learning process or through less formal means.

Legitimising use

Evaluation evidence can be used to legitimise a decision or a course of action: it could be used selectively to reinforce a point of view, used to corroborate a decision that has already been taken, or as an independent referee between different viewpoints. This use of evidence can be contentious, as its perceived validity will depend on which side of the argument it supports.

Symbolic use

Evidence from evaluations can be used to make a particular point about where future emphasis needs to lie, for example stressing the importance of value for money.

Non use

Results from evaluations can be ignored because users find little or no value in the evidence or because the context has changed.

Mis-use

Results from evaluations can be suppressed or used to serve the particular objectives of an individual or a team without reference to the organisation's overarching goals.

Distinguishing between the different categories can be a matter of value judgement (for example, one person's 'legitimising use' might be another person's misuse). The different types of uptake will depend on the purpose of each evaluation and the organisational context within which the evidence from the evaluation is received.

¹¹ Adapted from Sandison (2005).

13. Learning point 3: Four critical factors which influence uptake

The literature shows that there are four key factors which influence uptake, as set out below and expanded on in Annex 2.12¹². Each of these four factors comprises a set of elements:

1. Nature of the evaluation process

1. The usability of the results;
2. The quality of evaluations;
3. The credibility/independence of the evaluations;
4. The way they are planned and the degree of stakeholder involvement in this planning process;
5. The different types of evaluation that are offered;
6. The way that evaluation findings are communicated.

2. Organisational characteristics

Organisational characteristics indicate the weight the rest of the organisation gives to the evaluation evidence. This is linked to the existence of the learning culture of the organisation. The location of the Evaluation Unit and its reporting lines to the rest of the organisation partly determines the strength of the messages from the Unit. So do its functions—whether it is mandated to conduct strategic or project-level evaluations, and whether it is focused on accountability or learning.

The organisational leadership sets the tone for how knowledge is used and transferred within the organisation. Finally, organisational links between results based management (RBM) processes and evaluations help define relationships between project and strategic evaluations.

3. Institutional incentives

The nature of evaluation policies sends signals about the types of evaluation activities that are favoured and how they harmonise with other policies and programming priorities. Other incentives include the levels of resources allocated to the evaluation function; the commitment to management responses to evaluations and ongoing follow-up. A low profile response from management to following up the recommendations from evaluations will ripple through the organisation in diverse ways.

4. Contextual factors

These include the wider influences on an organisation which affect its decisions about how to scope, source and apply the evidence from evaluations. This may include wider political aspects, the country context within which an evaluation is being conducted, or broad debates around key issues such as methodology. These influences are likely to come from a variety of different government and non-government sources.

¹² Adapted from Johnson et al. (2009) ODI.

14. Learning point 4: Uptake of evidence is improved by considering how knowledge is translated and brokered within an organisation

Moving knowledge around an organisation needs to be an active, rather than a passive process, even more so within a large organization when resources are tight and evidence is complex. The literature on uptake emphasises the importance of a set of functions generally known as 'knowledge translation' or 'knowledge brokering', as set out in Figure 3 and expanded on in Annex 7. The key points to note are:

- The production of robust information is at the heart of the process. **Information intermediaries** (such as communications specialists) help to ensure that the information is available and accessible to the right people at the right time.
- A greater degree of uptake is achieved when efforts are made to help the intended users of information make sense of it within their context, for example by means of short briefs which communicate evidence from evaluations to non-specialist audiences. This '**knowledge translation**' could be led by evaluation specialists working with communications experts.
- **Knowledge brokers** engage in the substance of policy and programming debates, helping others understand the nuances of the evidence from evaluations, its implications, and possible options. Knowledge brokering can often be done best by those who are directly involved in the debates (in some cases this may be the Thematic Units) bringing in evaluation specialists to ensure that the evaluation is interpreted in a rigorous manner and that the full breadth of the evaluation evidence is considered.
- Senior staff will also need to ensure that the right organisational incentives are in place to allow for effective knowledge translation and brokering to take place. This '**innovation brokering**' may, in turn, stimulate research in a particular area as well as direct change.



Figure 3: The spectrum of knowledge uptake functions (from Shaxson et al, 2012)

2.2. Learning from other donor agencies

15. The ToRs of this study required a review of “processes and the overall performance of uptake of evaluation findings in selected donor agencies which have strengthened their evaluation and results systems”¹³.
16. The review revealed that **no ‘magic bullet’ for improving uptake exists**; all agencies struggle to improve organisational learning and to make good use of evidence from evaluations. The achievement level is mixed and no single organisation could be said to have reached the ‘gold standard’. An overview is provided on how donor agencies have sought to cope with each of the four factors influencing uptake. This is detailed in Annex 2.12.
17. **The nature of the evaluation process**: all donors have rolling evaluation plans varying from one to five years. The planning process often involves consultation with external and internal stakeholders to ensure that current questions are being addressed and that the resulting lessons are widely owned. Some offer ‘menus’ of evaluations and most differentiate between centralised and decentralised approaches. All donors have put systems in place to safeguard their evaluation function from interference. This is often assured through clear and transparent reporting lines and the institutional position of Evaluation Units within the organisation’s hierarchy. The quality of dissemination processes for evaluation evidence varies, though good communication is seen as a prerequisite for learning and a variety of different internal channels are used to address this (e.g. high level meetings, evaluation digests, newsletters, informal presentations, learning cafés).
18. **Organisational characteristics**: different practices exist with regard to the institutional position of Evaluation Units within agencies. If they are not independent Units (e.g. IEG of the WB), they often operate independently from policy divisions and report directly to a more senior or political level of the organisation (Ministers or executive boards). Most Evaluation Units are mandated to evaluate at sector, strategic or thematic level. Operational evaluations are decentralised to varying degrees. Links between these types of evaluations can be weak or ill-defined which does not contribute to wider organisational learning.
19. **Institutional incentives**: most OECD DAC members’ agencies have an evaluation policy document to guide the Evaluation Unit’s work, spelling out how evaluations will be conducted (including with regard to the centralisation/decentralisation issue). Resource allocations are hard to determine as the number of evaluations commissioned varies widely (from 2 to 150 per year). On average, donor agencies spend US\$ 5.1million (EUR 3.73 million) on evaluations per year and US\$ 2.4 million (EUR 1.75 million) to resource the central Evaluation Unit¹⁴. Management response processes are in place across all donor agencies. While they are better developed than follow-up action monitoring or reporting, no agency considers the process to work well.
20. **Contextual factors**: all donor agencies need to respond to similar external pressures regarding resources, evaluation methodologies and changing political priorities. However, the EC differs from other agencies in its complex, multi-layered supranational nature and its dual role as global player and main donor.

¹³ Those covered in detail include DFID, IFAD, GIZ, SIDA, and the World Bank’s IEG. The Department for Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in South Africa was also covered: although part of a national government rather than a donor agency it was felt to contain useful parallels.

¹⁴ OECD (2010) Evaluation in Development Agencies. Better Aid.

3. THE EU UPTAKE SYSTEM IN PRACTICE: REVIEWING THE EVIDENCE

21. Building on the key learning points from the literature and the experience of other donor agencies with uptake (chapter 2), this section focuses on **describing and understanding the formal and informal opportunities** to foster an effective use of the knowledge generated by strategic evaluations within the EU. In line with the systemic approach used in this study, this chapter looks into the following components:

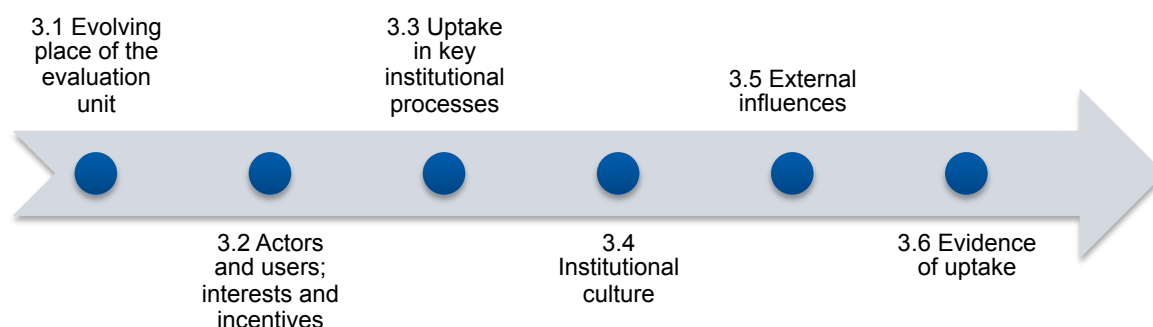


Figure 4: The EU uptake system in practice

3.1. Evolution of the evaluation function over time

22. This section starts with a **brief analysis of how the evaluation function, and related institutional arrangements gradually took shape** within European development cooperation. It helps to set the scene in which uptake processes unfold. It implies looking at when, why and how strategic evaluations became part of the EU development cooperation toolbox as well as the evolving role and position of the Evaluation Unit.

23. The Directorate General (DG) in charge of development cooperation was one of the first Commission services to develop an evaluation function¹⁵. According to a comprehensive evaluation carried out in 1991¹⁶, the quality of evaluation reports had improved substantially over the years. However, the report stressed the need to move away from “the earlier concentration on projects towards syntheses and themes” as well as to put in place “specific arrangements” for feedback mechanisms at the “broad policy level”. This subsequently led to influential evaluations of a more strategic nature, covering issues such as the STABEX instrument¹⁷ (1997) or the so-called ‘global evaluation’ of the instruments and programmes managed by the European Commission¹⁸ (1999). The latter report concluded that “with the creation of the Common Relex Service (CRS), the Evaluation Unit staff, already insufficient to form the basis of a continuing learning process, has been further reduced”.

¹⁵ Williams, K, et al. (2002) The Use of Evaluation in the Commission Services. Technopolis France, p. 4.

¹⁶ Cracknell, B. (1991) EEC Commission and Member States review of effectiveness of feedback mechanisms (for a summary see: EVINFO, 1991, No 001230).

¹⁷ Guillaumont, P. (1997) Evaluation Globale du Stabex.

¹⁸ European Commission (1999) Development and Humanitarian Assistance of the European Union. An Evaluation of the instruments and programmes managed by the Commission. Final Synthesis Report. CEA/DPPC.

24. The comprehensive reform of EU external assistance, initiated in May 2000, sought to strengthen the evaluation function and ensure a better integration into decision-making¹⁹. A '**Joint Evaluation Unit**' (JEU) was set-up and entrusted with the required independence and mandate. The execution of project and programme evaluations was decentralised so the Unit could concentrate solely on strategic evaluations. These would be carried out on the basis of a multi-annual planning process and result in the production of 11-12 evaluations per year. The JEU was to report directly to the 'RELEX family of Commissioners' (DEV, AIDCO, and RELEX).
25. The Evaluation Unit used this window of opportunity to establish its key role. Though the Unit did not develop an explicit evaluation policy, it invested heavily in elaborating detailed methodological guidance for carrying out strategic evaluations (the so-called 'blue bible')²⁰ and in 2010, it took the lead in developing a methodology suitable for evaluating Budget Support (BS) operations (under the auspices of the OECD). Each year, the Unit produced a mix of strategic evaluations, occasionally complemented by own initiatives²¹. In the early years, the Unit often had to engage in advocacy activities to defend the evaluation function, particularly towards senior management. It regularly 'knocked on the table' to demand more attention for evaluation outcomes (e.g. in QSG meetings). Efforts were made to better understand the needs of users (amongst others by a survey in 2007²²), to improve the quality of the dissemination seminars (particularly at country level to ensure involvement of partner countries) and to use new tools for disseminating evaluation findings.
26. The Evaluation Unit performs a valuable service in scoping and managing strategic evaluations, under resource constraints, and within a slow-moving bureaucratic organisation. It has committed staff who strongly believe in the crucial and credible role quality evaluations can play in fostering learning. Throughout the evaluation process, several evaluation managers pro-actively seek to ensure optimal participation of key stakeholders. The **Unit is also aware of the need to constantly innovate** and is now engaged in several reform processes such as defining an up to date evaluation policy, improving the planning process for the period 2014-2020 or refining the quality assurance process.
27. Yet there have been drawbacks. The fact that, after 2001, the Unit was no longer involved in project/programme evaluations led to a gap in lessons learnt. After the creation of AIDCO, the staffing of the Unit remained the same as before. Despite the 'joint' nature of the structure, the other DGs did not provide additional staff. Their effective participation in evaluation processes was often limited.

Current position of the evaluation function and the Unit

28. What is the position and influence of the evaluation function more than 10 years after the 2001 reforms? Though different opinions exist on the matter, the dominant perception is that **the evaluation function has somehow lost momentum** over the past years. Though its mandate has not changed, several stakeholders perceive the Evaluation Unit to have become increasingly 'marginalised' in the overall EU development cooperation system²³. This, in turn, has negative implications for its ability to foster uptake of evidence from evaluations.
29. The following factors are seen to contribute to this:

¹⁹ EuropeAid (2001) Annual Report 2001 on the EC Development Policy and the Implementation of External Assistance, p. 11.

²⁰ European Commission (2006) Methodological Bases for Evaluation external Assistance. Volume 1-4.

²¹ Examples include the evaluation on the Legal Instruments (2011) and a study on how to evaluate capacity development (2012).

²² European Commission. Joint Evaluation Unit (2007) Analysis concerning the use of evaluation results by the EC services.

²³ Included staff from the Evaluation Unit (source: focus group discussion with the Unit).

- **Increased focus on spending and accountability for financial flows** – this pushed the learning objective of evaluations into the background.
 - **Uncertainty about the place of the Evaluation Unit within the EuropeAid hierarchy.** The Unit has moved around three times in the organogram since 2010. While this shifting around is part of the institutional change of EuropeAid, it also suggests there has been confusion on the status and role of strategic evaluations in the overall system²⁴. All this is linked to the broader issues of the overall managerial culture characterised, inter alia, by the limited role learning is playing (for further analysis see section 3.4) and the growing human resource constraints.
 - **Weakening of the thematic hubs.** In the view of a majority of stakeholders consulted, the 2011 merger significantly reduced the capacity of the thematic Units to foster uptake of evaluation evidence. In the former DEV-AIDCO configuration, these Units tended to function as knowledge hubs and ‘brokers’ for the whole system. They were also often the ‘natural allies’ of the Evaluation Unit in ensuring the uptake of strategic evaluations. For example, the 2006 ‘Thematic evaluation of EC support to Good Governance’, was eagerly taken up by AIDCO ‘Governance Unit’ (E4)²⁵. Many of the current thematic Units now also have to manage funds. While these functions were merged to feed thematic expertise more directly into implementation, time-consuming project management responsibilities often reduce the available space for learning.
 - **Tendency to manage strategic evaluations in a bureaucratic manner.** Several interviewees (including consultants involved in evaluations) observed that over the years a rather ‘bureaucratic mode of operation’ has come to prevail in the Evaluation Unit. This is reflected in the tendencies: (i) to deal with the different steps in the evaluation process in a standardised manner; (ii) to display a strict (often overly rigorous) adherence to the methodology; (iii) to fill in the quality grid and the *Fiche Contradictoire* in a primarily administrative manner; or (iv) to only offer a single (quite heavy and sophisticated) methodology for evaluations.²⁶
- “Evaluations need to be less rigid in their methodology. Standard ToRs for evaluations as prepared by the EU do not provide a differing focus nor do they provide the [necessary] weight for policy and programming recommendations – these are often general and lack analysis and depth”. (EU delegation staff member, Survey Q24.4)*
- **The institutional outreach of the Evaluation Unit has become more uncertain with the creation of the EEAS.** The institutional overhaul following the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty changed the EU architecture for external action. The majority of DG RELEX departments and functions were transferred to the newly established EEAS, along with a selected number of directorates of DG DEV²⁷. The remaining DGs (DEV and AIDCO) were merged into the ‘DG Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid’ (DEVCO). In this new landscape, the place of evaluation of external action remains to be clarified (see Box 2).

²⁴ In the initial EuropeAid design, the Unit reported directly to senior management, in 2011, it was brought under the policy directorates and late 2013 it was linked to the Deputy Director General Geographic Coordination.

²⁵ See Case Study 15.

²⁶ The survey for EUDs revealed that Delegation staff struggle with the standardised methodology, and that they prefer evaluations which offer practical recommendations and which offer direct relevance, as opposed to exhaustive documentation. (See annex 6, Q15, Q19 and Q24).

²⁷ Official Journal of the European Union (3/8/2010) Council decision of 26 July 2010 establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service (2010/427/EU). OJEU L201/30.

Box 2: The evaluation function in the new institutional framework of the EU

The creation of the EEAS as an autonomous body of the Union inevitably affects the evaluation function:

- ✓ The EEAS is a young structure and has not yet decided to set up a dedicated Evaluation Unit.
- ✓ While the EEAS is involved in approving the multi-annual evaluation programme, **in formal terms the Evaluation Unit is no longer a joint EEAS-EuropeAid structure**. The lack of ownership of the evaluation function prevents a more systematic use of evaluations in the EEAS.
- ✓ The EEAS and EuropeAid are mandated to work closely together throughout the whole cycle of the EU's external action policies, programmes and instruments. However, effective cooperation between both institutions during these initial years remains uneven and often depends on the specific services and personalities involved.
- ✓ Information sharing between both services is still a major challenge.
- ✓ The working arrangements between the Commission and the EEAS in relation to external action do not specify how strategic evaluations should be organised.
- ✓ Both structures have different needs in terms of knowledge and evaluations; a continuous dialogue on the matter is therefore essential. These interactions are, however, still limited and of an ad hoc nature.
- ✓ The EuropeAid Evaluation Unit is explicitly mandated to “promote the use of evaluation results [...] in EEAS”²⁸, a task which is difficult to fulfil across institutional boundaries.
- ✓ While EuropeAid's evaluation system is linked to the Commission's Smart Regulation policy, the role of the EEAS within this overarching system remains unclear.

30. This study also revealed willingness from both sides to avoid jurisdictional or inter-institutional disputes and directly address the challenges of making evaluations work for both EuropeAid and the EEAS.

3.2. Users of strategic evaluations: key actors, roles, interests and relationships

31. Strategic evaluations are there to serve targeted audiences who have an interest in the findings, either from an accountability perspective or with a view towards learning and adjusting/changing policies and/or practices. It is therefore important to assess:
- Who are the different potential users and what are their main interests when it comes to strategic evaluations?
 - Are these different target audiences being served by what is produced now?
 - Are the target audiences receptive or willing to learn and act on recommendations issued by strategic evaluations?

Different users, interests and concerns

32. From an institutional perspective, it is possible to distinguish different categories of potential users of strategic evaluations. To some extent, their respective core interests as a group of stakeholders can also be identified – though within one category of users individual positions can vary. Table 1 below provides a basic mapping of actors, their core interests as well as their concerns/future

²⁸ See Mission Statement Evaluation Unit.

expectations in relation to knowledge and learning, particularly from strategic evaluations. The table is compiled on the basis of evidence collected from different sources²⁹.

Table 1: Key (institutional) users of strategic evaluations, their interests and specific concerns/expectations for the future

Key users	Core interests in evaluations	Concerns / expectations for the future
Senior Management EuropeAid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main pressure is to commit and disburse funds and account for their use • Evidence to support their response to outside criticism (e.g. Court of Auditors, Member States) • Less emphasis on the learning component to date. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited relevance and practical use of evaluations in general and of the recommendations in particular • Time constraints limit their use of complex knowledge products such as evaluations • Human resource constraints and related negative impact on learning • Recognition that more could be done to ensure uptake, including better strategic planning and a more effective (and enforceable) follow-up system • Need for adequate formats to communicate key evaluation findings.
Thematic Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main interest is in the learning component (rather than accountability) • Recognition of their role in 'knowledge translation' (e.g. thematic support to Delegations and geographic desks, QSGs). • To play this role: need for solid evidence to prepare new policies, induce changes in approaches or provide quality support.³⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall capacity of Thematic Units is weaker after EuropeAid merger • This also reduces opportunities for translating knowledge into guidance or influencing policies and programming • Expectations to focus more on the new policy priorities (Agenda for Change) or approaches (e.g. policy dialogue) • Demand for 'lighter' evaluations with a shorter duration, or even issue-specific evaluations with flexible methodologies.³¹
Geographic Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on short-term urgencies and concrete development issues • Learning on how to improve aid delivery • Ensuring a timely link with programming cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of limited use for first phase of the programming (choice of sectors), though possibly more useful at later stages • Lifespan country evaluations too protracted to be useful • Thematic evaluations are seen as 'something for other departments to act upon' • Improved monitoring systems could be a better way to incorporate lessons

²⁹ These include interviews, the survey done at the level of EUDs as well as the review of 26 strategic evaluations.

³⁰ A concrete example relates to the evaluation of EC support to decentralisation (2012). It is now used by the Unit in charge of decentralisation and local authorities to sensitise EUDs on the need to look deeper into issues of fiscal decentralisation (as a precondition to empowering local authorities). The evaluation is systematically integrated in regional training/exchange seminars organised by the Unit.

³¹ For example: a EuropeAid policy Unit representative expressed an interest to carry out a focused and relatively rapid evaluation of the relevance and impact of 'European Development Reports' as they have been produced over the last 3 years and little is known about the impact of these documents.

Key users	Core interests in evaluations	Concerns / expectations for the future
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation Unit is not pro-active in 'selling' and disseminating evaluations • More active participation in planning and execution of future evaluations.
EUDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main pressure is to commit and deliver funds and account for their use • Delivery of concrete programmes and projects • Timely production of relevant evaluations to guide the multi-annual programming exercise • Focus on aid delivery ('are the projects going well?'), less on deeper policy or political aspects • Ensuring a real added value of country evaluations (compared to similar exercises³² such as Mid-Term Reviews – MTRs, ROMs, project evaluations, studies, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes limited interest to engage (evaluations tend to be perceived as audits and time-consuming exercises) • Tensions between Headquarters (HQ) and EUDs during the conduct of evaluations (e.g. around the often limited EUD involvement in evaluation planning and implementation)³³ • Moderate satisfaction of EUDs with country evaluations (inadequate timing, labour intensive, limited added value) • Thematic and sectoral evaluations are seen as distant exercises – unless the country is selected as case study • EUDs would like to see more recommendations linked to lower level implementation challenges • Limited time and incentives to digest evaluations and use the outcomes.
EEAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No EEAS evaluation function but an emerging interest in strategic evaluations • Relevance of the EU's cooperation strategy as a key component of external action • Political Dimensions of Cooperation (including PCD) • New policy areas in external action generate new evaluation needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception among EEAS staff that strategic evaluations (particularly at country level) are EuropeAid driven and often 'too development-oriented' for being of interest • Demand to be associated more closely in planning, execution and follow-up of strategic evaluations • Expectation to better integrate the political dimension in evaluations • Better use of the EEAS thematic expertise (e.g. on human rights and peace and security).
Member States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather distant interest in EU strategic evaluations • Limited discussion and follow-up in CODEV group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing interest in joint evaluations.
European Parliament (EP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carries out its own evaluations • Rather distant interest in strategic evaluations of the Commission (reflected amongst others in limited participation in dissemination seminars) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative to develop a database on EU evaluations • Possibility of a more structured interest in evaluations and their follow-up after adoption of new EU guidelines on evaluations (2014).

³² The survey showed that Delegation staff do not make a clear distinction between strategic evaluations and other evaluation-related products (ROM, project evaluations).

³³ The survey of EUDs reveals that the involvement of staff in the evaluation process is seen as a key determinant of uptake (see Q19). However, many respondents indicate that their participation is very limited (see Q24).

Key users	Core interests in evaluations	Concerns / expectations for the future
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selective approach (focus on high profile political topics) • Interest in accountability rather than learning • Limited follow-up. 	
Court of Auditors (CoA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In principle there is a complementarity of roles between CoA performance audits and the work of the Evaluation Unit yet in practice lines may get blurred as CoA increasingly moves beyond auditing • Examples of cross-fertilisation between CoA report and EC report on same topic.³⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not available.
Partner countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often reluctance to support country strategic evaluations or case studies in wider evaluations • Fear of audit, interference and consequences • Dissemination seminars can help to build ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New approaches to programming 'Post-Busan' (based on alignment, synchronisation and joint programming) are putting pressure to integrate partner countries more fully into the whole evaluation process.
Civil society actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in seeing their advocacy work reflected/underpinned by independent evaluations • Interest in translation of recommendations in new policies and practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness/capacity to act as external drivers of change.

33. This table is not intended to provide a comprehensive picture, nor does it capture all the fluctuations in interests and concerns as they have manifested themselves over time³⁵. Nonetheless, it provides an indication of the **different perspectives and interests which need to be reconciled** in managing the overall evaluation function within the EU external action. Figure 5 below gives an overview of the different actors and interests in the wider EU evaluation system as well as an indication of a number of crucial intra-institutional links which could be reinforced.

³⁴ This was for instance the case with the topic of civil society. The recommendations of both reports converged on a number of key points. This facilitated uptake, amongst others because external actors could refer to both sources to make a case for change.

³⁵ For instance, the point was repeatedly made that under the former Director General (Koos Richelle) the overall climate was much more conducive for learning and use of evaluations.

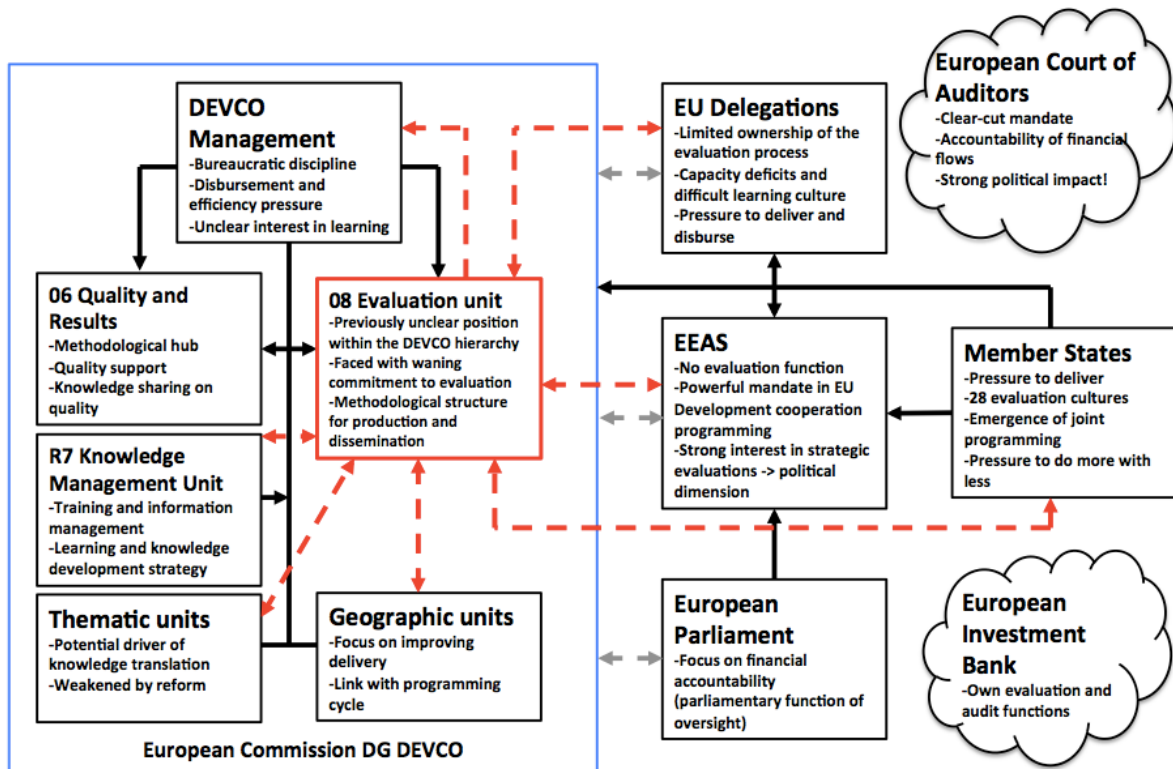


Figure 5: The wider EU evaluation system. (The red dashed lines indicate crucial institutional links/alliances which can be reinforced).

34. The above table also reveals a number of **fundamental drivers** which influence the level and **process of uptake** in EU development cooperation:

- Accountability versus learning.** In principle, strategic evaluations seek to serve both purposes. Both dimensions are interconnected and not contradictory. In practice, however, things tend to be much more untidy. Corporate pressures tend to privilege accountability over learning. Quite some time is expended on evaluation exercises to track financial flows, partly because the databases are not able to do this. There is a recent trend to focus more on impact questions (even in areas where there are major methodological constraints on data collection or measurement). All this may also explain why the section on 'lessons learnt' is often quite short and not very explicit in most of the evaluations considered in this study. This, in turn, tends to affect the generation of new knowledge from strategic evaluations and its effective uptake and use. Figure 6 illustrates tensions which can exist between the various types of accountability and learning.

“The evaluation process should be considered not as a simple exercise which has to be done for instance annually (...) but as a tool to help us improve in the management of our projects (implementation and follow-up)”. (EU delegation staff member, Q24.3)

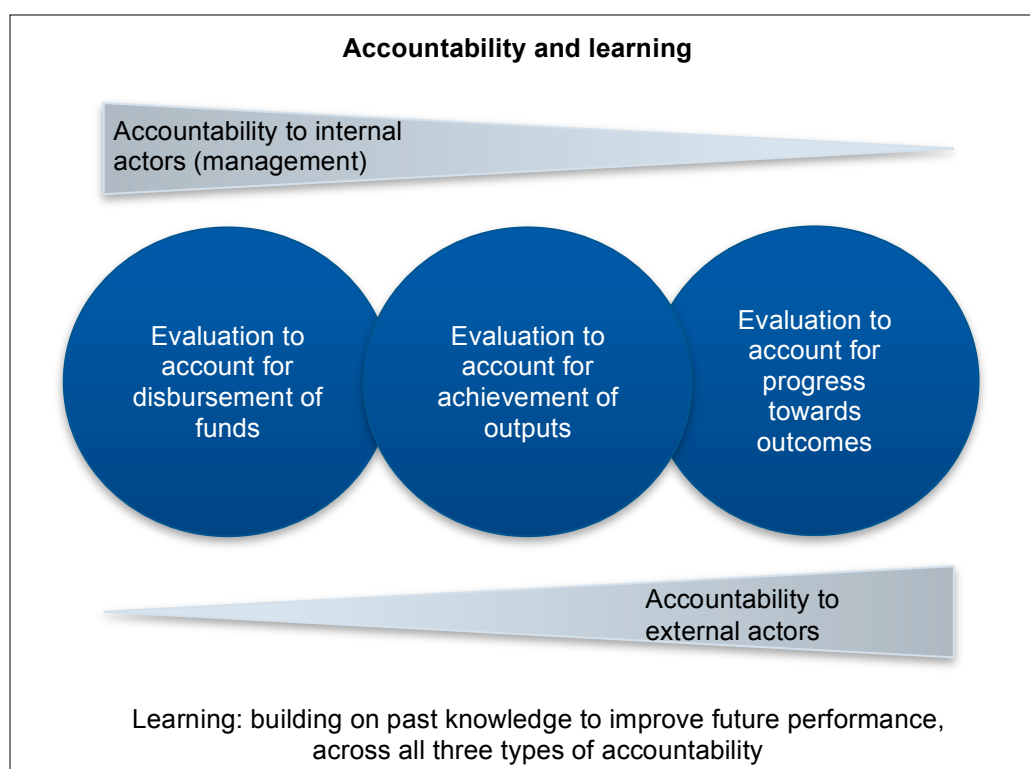


Figure 6: The relationship between accountability and learning

- Demand versus supply.** This tension is most visible in country evaluations. Evidence from interviews and the survey suggests that EUDs would find these exercises interesting if they were done in a more demand-driven and timely manner³⁶ (i.e. linked to an MTR of a new programming cycle) and add real value to ROMs and other studies and evaluations³⁷. Some stakeholders (notably EUDs) would also like these evaluations to focus more on operational questions of aid delivery. Yet this expectation is not in line with the mandate of the Evaluation Unit, namely producing strategic evaluations. As suggested by their name, strategic evaluations should focus on broader policy issues such as the overall relevance of EU interventions in a given country, partnership issues, policy and political dialogue or key choices to be made (beyond the implementation of programmes and projects). This mismatch between demand and supply was visible in the sample of country evaluations reviewed. For instance, evaluations which address (lower level) implementation challenges or give detailed recommendations are generally highly appreciated by EUDs, even though they may miss some of the risks which come from working in a complex political environment³⁸. By contrast, when recommendations touch more strategic or political questions, the feedback is less positive or ignores these wider dynamics, often using the argument that these matters are beyond the mandate of the EUD³⁹.
- The difficult balancing act of the Evaluation Unit.** The above table also illustrates the delicate job of the Evaluation Unit in trying to compose a portfolio of strategic evaluations which responds to these different needs while safeguarding the specific added value of this type of evaluation (i.e. the focus on strategies, policies, key choices and the generation of knowledge which can be used by higher decision-making levels). In the view of the Unit, efforts have been made in recent years to create a diversified portfolio, which reaches out to different constituencies. For instance, topics with a strong political dimension were covered,

³⁶ See Annex 6, Q19, Q22, and Q24.3.

³⁷ See Case Study 2: CAR.

³⁸ See Case Study 4 (Nicaragua) 5 (Nigeria), 8 (Malawi).

³⁹ See Case Study 10 (Central America).

such as human rights (2011), Conflict Prevention and Peace Building (2010 and 2011) or justice and security system reform (2011). The evaluation of BS operations was also sensitive – as the aid modality of BS was challenged by Member States, the Court of Auditors and some parts of the EP. Furthermore, attention was given to relatively new topics including energy (2008) and employment and social inclusion (2011) or to crosscutting issues such as visibility (2011).

35. It is also interesting to compare surveys done in 2007 (at the initiative of the Evaluation Unit) and in 2013 (in the framework of this study), as reflected in Box 3.

Box 3: Comparing the 2007 and 2013 EU Delegation surveys on the value of evaluations

In September 2013 a survey was sent to all EUDs in developing countries⁴⁰. It revealed that evaluations are seen as **one of many sources of information** at the disposal of EUDs. Many respondents do not make a clear distinction between strategic and project/programme-level evaluations.

The survey revealed a **strong continuity** in how EU staff members view the use of strategic evaluations. A large majority find evaluations broadly useful to their work. Clear, concise and practical recommendations continue to be a priority for the users. While 2013 results suggest that evaluations are now more regularly taken into account, several **structural limitations to uptake remain largely the same as in 2007**:

1. The **'hit-and-miss' timing** of strategic evaluations often hinders a smooth translation of evaluations into programming. When a specific need arises, evaluation material is often not available.
2. There is a **gap** between how Delegation staff members identify their own **needs** and how they perceive that evaluations can fulfil them. Strategic evaluations are often perceived as **unnecessarily heavy documents with only limited practical applicability**
3. Strategic evaluations do not always cover the full spectrum of **what Delegation staff would like to see evaluated**.

The survey furthermore reveals that a majority of EUD staff feel that the **effective use of evidence in decision-making is suboptimal** (see question 7). To ensure that the EU acts on the findings of evaluations, several individual responses to the survey call for more political courage and a strong management response.

EUDs see themselves as fairly **detached from the evaluation process** and advocate for a stronger involvement in both the design and production of evaluations in order to increase the direct relevance, but also the applicability of strategic evaluations in their work. While EUDs continue to recognise the value of strategic evaluations, the current system of periodic, 'monolithic' evaluations seems to miss its target (at least partially) in this respect.

Receptivity of staff

36. As for the overall receptivity of staff towards knowledge generated by evaluations, findings suggest that the value of strategic evaluations varies strongly according to the individual background, professional interests and positions of staff. A majority of interviewees, including those at senior level, admitted that evaluations are not part of their direct work sphere. Around **60% of survey respondents indicated that evaluations are "occasionally" or "rarely" discussed and taken into account**.⁴¹ Even though EuropeAid's Geographic Units fully recognise

⁴⁰ See annex 6 for the full survey results and analysis.

⁴¹ See annex 6, Q16 and Q17.

the value of strategic evaluations, they are often not aware that such exercises are being carried out, unless under specific circumstances⁴². As the whole process for ensuring uptake is formalised to a limited extent and not underpinned by the right incentives, learning most often tends to happen at an individual level⁴³ (discrete learning) and by osmosis (through informal channels). In some cases this type of learning may also be 'metabolised' at an institutional level (over time), but the current system is not really conducive for this to take place systematically.

3.3. Formal and informal opportunities for uptake

37. Within the management systems, and processes of the responsible services at HQ and in Delegations, there are both formal and informal opportunities to encourage learning and the translation of knowledge from strategic evaluations into policy and practice. In this section, these channels will be explored and assessed. **Five such channels/internal processes are considered** in detail:

- (i) the development of new policies
- (ii) the programming cycle
- (iii) the process of undertaking a strategic evaluation itself
- (iv) links with the monitoring system and the overall results framework
- (v) links with the wider knowledge system.

3.3.1. Uptake in policy development processes

38. EuropeAid produces many policy statements and Communications on a variety of topics. They also publish Green Papers (discussion documents) and White Papers (official proposals). In some cases, an Issues or Staff Working Paper is drawn up with a view to prepare a policy statement and subsequent Council conclusions. Also to be mentioned are the EuropeAid 'Reference Documents' on a variety of topics which combine policy and operational guidance for EUDs, which are often partly inspired by strategic evaluations⁴⁴.

39. There are many sources of information the EU uses when producing new policies, some of which are mandatory. This is the case with the 'online consultation' and the 'impact assessment' (carried out during the formulation process of a new policy). The quality of the inputs provided through these formal channels can vary substantially. Impact assessments are often seen as complicated, methodologically flawed exercises of limited use, particularly for the elaboration of broad policy statements (such as the Agenda for Change).

40. There are no formal processes or instructions related to the use of strategic evaluations in policy development. Evidence from interviews and the survey⁴⁵ suggests **that the consultation of existing evaluation material** rather depends on the availability of relevant material, and the capacity of the EU services and individuals involved. For policy-makers, other sources of information/knowledge are often seen to be more useful, partly because they respond to pressing needs and/or are presented in more attractive formats. If strategic evaluations appear on the

⁴² A geographic Head of Unit commented that country evaluations do not provide much new learning. Yet the exposure of a staff member in the Reference Group is a "a healthy thing", as it takes away the person from day-to-day management concerns and broadens his/her perspective. That in itself is of great value".

⁴³ The survey revealed that interaction with colleagues and stakeholders is the most important source of professional information for EUD staff (See annex 6, Q8).

⁴⁴ An example is Reference Document no 4 on 'Analyzing and addressing governance in sector operations' (2008), which was a direct product of the 2006 thematic evaluation on EC support to good governance. One of the core recommendations was to promote governance not only as an objective in itself but also in sector programmes. There is evidence of the 'wide uptake' of this document by sector staff (some of whom participated in the elaboration of the Document) and EUDs.

⁴⁵ Survey results suggest that EUD staff finds EU commissioned material such as evaluations comparatively less important than other sources of information for their work (see Q8).

radar, learning is implicit and usually not done in a systematic manner. Whether uptake happens (or not) in policy processes therefore depends on a wider range of factors (see also chapter 2). The distinction between different levels of uptake (see learning point 1, par. 10) also applies to EU development cooperation:

- *At an individual level:* individual agency was seen as the most important driver of uptake. The personal capacity of individuals can activate informal channels for uptake via their own learning and sharing with others. They may see a particular interest in using the recommendations for promoting policy change. Or at a more mundane level, they might be fortunate enough to be involved in a particular programme or by chance become aware of a specific evaluation.
- *At a team and cross-team level:* those writing policy may consult thematic experts, whose job it is to be aware of and take note of evaluation findings. If thematic experts have a substantive role during policy development processes, evaluations can have some influence. However, it is **increasingly difficult to mobilise thematic capacity** in EuropeAid due in part to how the organisation is currently structured. For example, in the case of BS, many of the thematic experts are spread across different Geographic Units. This reduces their collective ability to learn from evaluations conducted in different geographic regions (one interviewee suggested it also hampered the ability to provide the quality assurance needed to effectively implement the complex recommendations emerging from BS evaluations).
- *At an organisational level:* where specific Policy Units are under pressure to act and the timing is appropriate (during a new political cycle), evaluation recommendations might be picked up. A case in point is the thematic evaluation on human rights⁴⁶. When the exercise started, there was limited interest within EU Units, reflecting the relatively marginal position of human rights in EU development cooperation. However, in the midst of the evaluation process, the Arab Spring took place. This led to a strong upsurge of interest at EU level on how to better address human rights. As a result, the evaluation team was invited to participate in the rethinking process of the overall EU approach to human rights – even before the final report had been delivered.

41. In general, policy development is considered as a priority for EuropeAid. The resulting breadth and depth of consultation may be greater than for programming or general cross-organisational learning. **Policy development creates opportunities for uptake**, as shown in the formulation process of two recent Communications dealing respectively with EU engagement strategies with civil society⁴⁷ and local authorities. Both policies were informed by a multi-actor 'structured dialogue'. This, in turn, generated a demand for evidence and facilitated the effective use of thematic evaluations (carried out on the issue of civil society in 2008 and decentralisation in 2011).
42. In the spirit of mobilising different sources of knowledge, some EuropeAid policy processes have sought to involve EUDs or the EEAS. However, doing so has often been difficult for a variety of reasons: lack of incentives, lack of opportunities, time constraints, and/or inter-institutional friction and differences preventing a fruitful interaction between EuropeAid and the EEAS.
43. In some policy processes informal and ad hoc task forces, and working groups, are set up to source information from a variety of networks and individuals. This may help to activate knowledge contained in strategic evaluations and spread learning between individuals, but their informal nature means that this process is not systematised.

⁴⁶ See Case Study 17 (Human Rights).

⁴⁷ See Case Study 18 (Civil Society Channel).

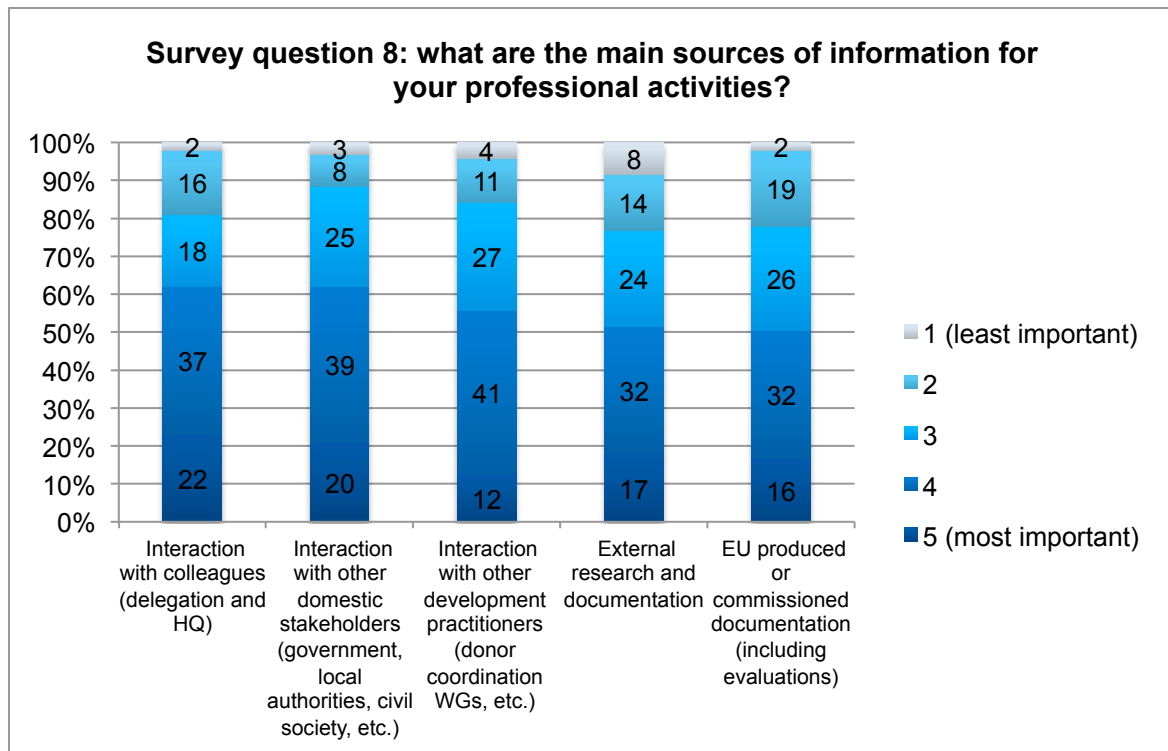


Figure 7: Survey to EUDs – Different sources of information

44. Apart from these features of particular policy processes (which may favour or hinder uptake), it is also important to look at the **quality of the evaluation process itself**. Several interviewees (mainly at country level or in Geographic Units) argued that there is often a dearth of relevant evaluation material to draw on when policy goals are being reviewed and revised at the start of a new Commission. The undertaking and publishing of evaluations are rarely synchronised with key (periodic) policy moments. Moreover, strategic evaluations do not always meet short-term evidence needs; quick studies are often more suitable. Policymakers have little time to read large complicated documents and prefer shorter formats or summaries of what has clearly worked and what clearly has not (a “black and white scenario” in the words of one respondent).
45. Interviewees also made the point that **vested interests and political agendas influence the use of evaluations**. The impetus for a lot of policy work is linked to political and programming cycles. Newly appointed Commissioners for example will want to pursue their own agenda. Sometimes the EU has to respond quickly to events and issue policy statements with strong political messages. In these circumstances, there is often limited space and/or few incentives to effectively use existing knowledge. The same may happen when actors try to achieve a compromise amongst different stakeholder groups.

“When political forces and interests are strong, it becomes much more difficult to advocate the use of evaluation material”. (EEAS staff member)

3.3.2. The programming cycle

46. The 2007 Communication *Responding to Strategic Needs: Reinforcing the Use of Evaluation* explicitly stresses that information generated by strategic evaluations should be used for “evidence-based decision-making for planning, designing and implementing EU policies”. This invites the EU to ensure that evaluations get the necessary attention they deserve during the programming cycle.

47. When reviewing the use of learning from evaluations in programming processes, **two periods need to be distinguished: the 2007-2013 programming cycle and the upcoming 2014-2020 cycle**. The guidelines regulating the respective programming processes differ quite substantially. This, inevitably, will also have an impact on the opportunities for uptake. Most of this section will focus on the uptake during the 2007-2013 programming cycle. The analysis pertaining to the new cycle will be of a more prospective nature as the process is still in an early stage.
48. With regard to the 2007-2013 programming cycle, the guidelines foresaw several **formal arrangements** which could potentially facilitate learning and translation of knowledge from strategic evaluations during the programming process:
- The “common framework for drafting Country Strategy Papers and Joint Multi-Annual Programming” (March 2006)⁴⁸ defined a number of principles for effective programming, including “learning from the past and reviews”. It stressed that “the results of external and internal evaluations should all be taken into consideration and should inform the choices made at the programming stage. Furthermore, CSPs are effective only if their performance is regularly evaluated and strategies adjusted in the light of the findings”.
 - The common framework also stated that “account will be taken of general recommendations specifically made in evaluations of strategies by the partner country, if there are any, evaluations of specific sectors and projects and annual reports.” In the Commission’s guidance document for drafting CSPs⁴⁹, this is taken a step further, and explicit links are made with the body of strategic evaluations managed by the Evaluation Unit.
 - Both the Identification Fiche (IF) and Action Fiche (AF) have sections where EUDs have to refer to lessons learnt, including from evaluations.
 - The former Inter-service Quality Support Group (iQSG) had a mandate to propose improvements to programming methodology and screen draft Strategy Papers and Indicative Programmes. In the process, it was invited to look at a number of focus areas which feature heavily in strategic evaluations (particularly at country level)⁵⁰.
 - The Office Quality Support Group (oQSG) system was set up to assess the quality of specific projects and programmes. One of the questions the oQSG system seeks to assess is the extent to which “lessons learned from ROMs (Monitoring reports and Background Conclusion Sheets), evaluations etc. [are] been taken into account in the identification/formulation of this project?”⁵¹
49. **How did that system work in practice?** To what extent have these formal requirements been conducive to uptake of evidence (including from strategic evaluations) during programming processes? Based on the evidence collected, there is no straightforward answer to this question. There is a huge diversity of experience regarding evidence-based programming, suggesting a mixed track record (with both stronger and weaker cases). However, it is possible to advance the thesis that **the knowledge generated by strategic evaluations remains largely under-utilised during programming**. Several factors contribute to this:
- Various interviewees stressed that filling in the **sections related to evaluations in the IFs and AFs is often a routine exercise**. These sections are often copied from the executive summary of a relevant evaluation and only rarely reflect a process of actual learning. This is partly due to the high workload in Delegations and the lack of quality time to read. But taking up recommendations may also require some expertise as to the expected and unexpected

⁴⁸ Commission of the European Communities COM (2006) 88. Communication From The Commission To The Council And The European Parliament - Increasing The Impact Of EU Aid: A Common Framework For Drafting Country Strategy Papers And Joint Multiannual Programming.

⁴⁹ European Commission (2006) Common Framework For Country Strategy Papers (document based on the Common Framework adopted in April 2006).

⁵⁰ Examples include issues such as the poverty focus, coherence of EU responses, coordination and complementarity.

⁵¹ oQSG checklists for project identification and formulation.

effects of a particular intervention, particularly for something as complex as BS, where considerable skills are needed to identify suitable indicators for tranche disbursement. The predominance of generalist staff who often deal with a wide range of issues in a ‘non-technical’ way, may also lead to a lack of confidence in taking up recommendations.

- Similarly, in oQSG assessments, **discussions of evaluations are not very prominent**. oQSG participants are often not aware of relevant evaluations which have taken place⁵². Much depends on the experience, knowledge and dedication of the geographic and thematic staff who take part in the sessions. EuropeAid HQ staff often sees this as a time-consuming administrative procedure and the quality of the analysis therefore differs greatly on a case-by-case basis.
- As mentioned before, since the organisational restructuring, EuropeAid’s ability to mobilise sector policy and thematic advice has weakened.
- Interviewees suggested that **other sources of evidence often prove of greater value** for making programming choices than “heavy, and lengthy strategic evaluations which provide information at an aggregated level”. These may include project and programme evaluations, reports by various implementation partners, material from other donors, ad hoc studies, etc.
- The **space for EUDs to act on evidence** varies considerably, is often unpredictable and depends on a wide range of factors. Several interviewees stressed the influence of political considerations on programming both from partner countries and HQ⁵³. Examples include pressures from HQ (i) to alter the proposed selection of concentration sectors; (ii) the decision to pull out of the transport sector (construction of roads) based on contested evidence that EU support to this domain had been “a failure”⁵⁴; or (iii) the push to scale up new approaches promoted by the EU (such as blending) even if the circumstances for such changes were deemed, by some Delegations, to be inappropriate and lead to incoherence with national priorities.
- There may also be **internal resistance to the use of evaluations**, particularly when these are critical of a particular sector or propose considerable changes.

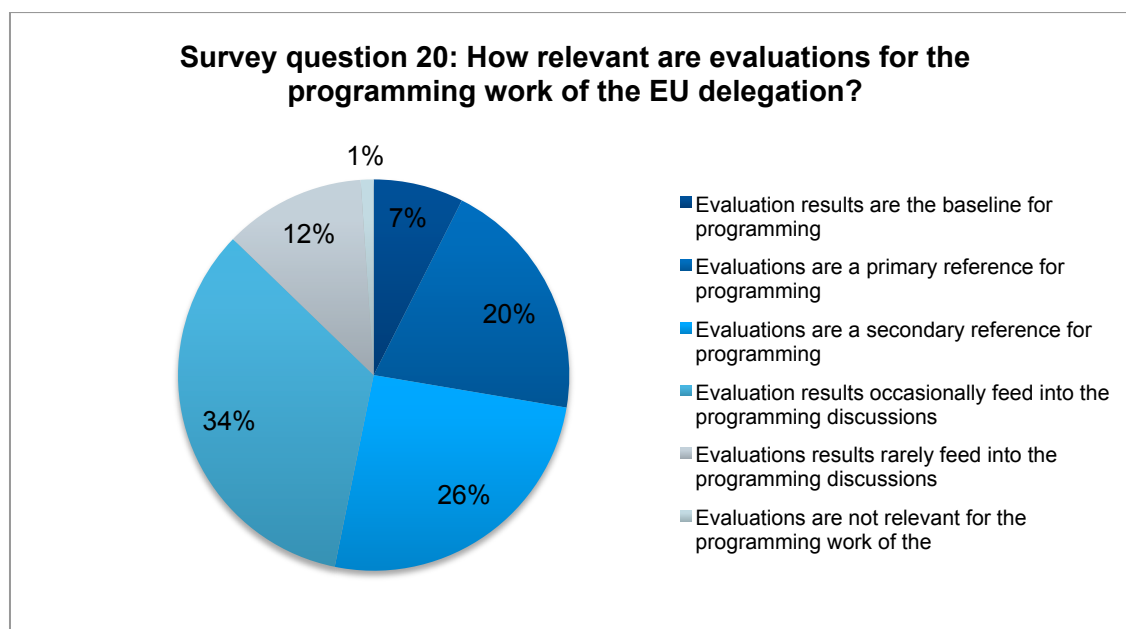


Figure 8: Survey to EUDs: Relevance of strategic evaluations for programming

⁵² Notably (and surprisingly, given the importance of the aid modality) for BS evaluations.

⁵³ This influence coming from HQ has been felt more strongly in recent years.

⁵⁴ Source: interviews with actors involved in protracted debate on relevance of investing in roads.

50. Experience under the 2007-2013 programming cycle also suggests that there are **several informal opportunities for learning and use of existing knowledge**, particularly in the downstream of the identification and formulation phases. These opportunities are linked to discussions which occur during these phases, within EUDs, with partner countries, other donor agencies, or at HQ between different services and with the EEAS.
51. Many factors - specific to the process of each evaluation – tend to determine whether uptake effectively takes place or not. These include **changes in the external environment**. A positive example is the Human Rights evaluation (Case Study 17), which coincided with the Arab Spring. This gave the evaluation a clear rationale and stimulated a real demand for its evidence including for programming purposes. In the case of the Nicaragua country evaluation (Case Study 4), on the other hand, the mandate of the evaluation team was not adapted even if conditions for cooperation had dramatically changed immediately after the start of the evaluation.
52. Specific services, or EUDs, have on occasion contacted the Evaluation Unit. The Unit has been able to provide quick turnaround information verbally, by email or in a short document with answers to strategic questions⁵⁵. However, this happens purely on an ad hoc basis.
53. **Programming of the 2014-2020 EU aid package** is currently underway for the various geographic and thematic instruments. The purpose is to translate the EU's recent impact-oriented development policy (the 2011 'Agenda for Change') into practice at the country and regional levels. It is a critical test of the EU's new institutional framework, established under the Lisbon Treaty, to deliver coherent, political and effective EU external action. The programming guidelines have been adapted to reflect these major changes⁵⁶. The process now requires close cooperation and dialogue between EUDs, EuropeAid and the EEAS throughout the cycle. The key goalposts (derived from the Agenda for Change and the Busan Outcome Document⁵⁷) reinforce existing policy commitments (e.g. related to ownership, alignment, coherence, joint programming) while stressing the need for 'synchronisation' (with partner country/regional planning cycles) and 'differentiation' (aimed at graduating countries out of bilateral aid). The guidelines also sought to simplify the programming process (e.g. by using national/regional plans as the point of departure whenever possible).
54. According to the recent 'EEAS Review'⁵⁸ the current arrangements between the EEAS and EuropeAid related to programming work well, though "the division of responsibilities is potentially unclear and should be clarified". Experiences from the field show that the task division between the two actors tends to vary from one country to another⁵⁹. Positive instances of fruitful collaboration between the Operations and Political sections have been recorded, and led to more politically savvy EU responses. Yet there are other cases where the level of collaboration remains sub-optimal (inter alia due to capacity constraints). It is too early to know whether the new guidelines have created a more conducive environment for uptake of evidence during programming. The reduced human resource base is also reported to have a negative influence on the EUDs capacity to properly analyse country/regional contexts.

3.3.3. How conducive is the evaluation process to ensuring uptake?

55. The Evaluation Unit is a **pivotal actor** in the whole process of planning, setting up and conducting strategic evaluations. It also has a formal role in the uptake process, as reflected in its mission

⁵⁵ Thus, the HoU, drawing on various evaluations, provided a quick support in the form of a set of suggestions on what a re-opened Myanmar EU Office could do to re-establish relations.

⁵⁶ EC/EEAS (2012) Instructions for the programming of the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) and Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), 2014-2020. Brussels, 15 May 2012.

⁵⁷ Busan Partnership For Effective Development Co-Operation (2011).

⁵⁸ European External Action Service (2013) EEAS Review. July 2013.

⁵⁹ ECDPM. (2013). Early experiences in programming EU aid 2014-2020. Briefing Note, No 54 – September 2013, p. 8-9.

statement, which stipulates that the Unit has to “disseminate the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations, and promote and monitor their implementation”. Which is why the ToRs of this study also focus on the way in which the evaluation process itself encourages (or not) uptake, by assessing whether the “scheduling of evaluation exercises and dissemination of evaluation findings [is] timely for the purposes of uptake”.

56. At the same time, the Evaluation Unit **operates in a complex political and institutional environment**, characterised by expanding policy agendas (as set out in the Agenda for Change), growing institutional complexity (e.g. the creation of the EEAS), and a wide range of different (competing) interests and external pressures. All this inevitably has a bearing on its overall functioning (as exemplified in section 3.1 above).
57. A number of institutional **requirements** related to evaluations are particularly interesting for this study:
- It is compulsory for the EC to evaluate all spending activities over 5 million euro.⁶⁰
 - Regulations and Communications mandate the Commission to carry out strategic evaluations to evaluate countries, issues, modalities that are representative of all external aid and present them periodically to the EP, Council, Member States and the CoA.
 - The strategic evaluations are planned for a 5-year period.
 - There is a procedure to follow-up on strategic evaluation, mainly embodied in the *Fiche Contradictoire* which requires a check of what happens with the recommendations up to one year after the findings were published.
 - It is now a standard requirement for senior management to consider thematic evaluations.
 - Within the EEAS, the Development Cooperation Coordination Division coordinates the EEAS' role and input with regard to evaluations, including the involvement of the relevant EEAS geographic and thematic desks.

In order to better understand how the evaluation process facilitates uptake, it is useful to consider **four different dimensions**:

1. Planning of strategic evaluations
2. Conduct of strategic evaluations and supervision of their quality
3. Dissemination of outcomes
4. Monitoring of follow-up.

Planning of strategic evaluations

58. With regard to the **planning of strategic evaluations**, the Evaluation Unit has attempted from the outset to involve different stakeholders in the elaboration of the Multi-Annual Programme, with varying levels of success. Important bottlenecks encountered are: (i) the lack of clear criteria to set priorities; (ii) the rather ad hoc nature of the consultation process and (iii) the limited quantity and quality of inputs received from the different services. Several interviewees at different levels expressed an interest and willingness to engage more structurally with the multi-annual programming process. The Evaluation Unit, from its side, is preparing a new set of criteria and will also seek to refine the overall process of setting priorities and allowing for flexibility to accommodate new pressing demands.

⁶⁰ European Commission. Regulation No (966/2012) on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, Article 30.4; European Commission. Delegated Regulation No (1268/2012) on the rules of application of regulation No (966/2012). Article 18.3.

Conduct of strategic evaluations

59. The **conduct** of strategic evaluations was a hotly debated and often controversial topic during the process of this uptake study. On the one hand, the Evaluation Unit legitimately claims that strategic evaluations should respond to international standards and state of the art requirements in terms of independence, quality and methodology⁶¹. Yet on the other hand, it has clearly emerged from the consultations that a majority of the stakeholders (including many potential users of strategic evaluations and consultants involved in the process) are of the opinion that the **pendulum has swung too far in the direction of an ‘orthodox respect for the methodology’**. They claim it has become “an end in itself”, leading to cumbersome, time-consuming production processes. Too much attention is often given to methodology compared to content matters. This rigorous – if not rigid – application of the methodology tends to alienate many of the stakeholders involved (particularly EUDs and Geographic Units), thus reducing ownership and related chances of uptake.

60. A number of observations can be made with regard to the conduct of evaluations by EuropeAid and **factors which may promote or hamper uptake** during the different phases of the process (initiation, execution, dissemination and follow-up):

“Close cooperation and coordination between HQ, the Delegation involved and evaluators is the top priority for strengthening the uptake and productive use of evaluation material”. (EU delegation staff member, Survey Q24.3)

- The drafting of the ToRs is a critical moment in the life of an evaluation. Key choices are made at this stage regarding scope and expected outcomes, which have a direct bearing on uptake. Closely linked to this, is the issue of ensuring an effective representation and the active involvement of key stakeholders in the Reference Group⁶². Experience suggests that this is not always easy to achieve – despite the efforts of the Evaluation Unit.
- While efforts are made to ensure **stakeholder participation**, several interviewees insisted on the need to “go much further” in the various phases of the evaluation process in order to enhance overall relevance, ensure a **match with the demand side** – i.e. the concrete information needs of stakeholders in order to increase chances of uptake –without jeopardising the independent nature of the analysis. Particularly for country strategy evaluations, the suggestion was made to include a more substantiated dialogue and engagement with the EUDs to foster ownership.
- The crucial importance of **timely planning and delivery** was often mentioned. The sample of evaluations reviewed shows a mix of cases where ‘timing’ was either a key driver of uptake, or a major obstacle⁶³.
- **Perceptions on the quality** of evaluations varied widely among stakeholders at different levels. Several stakeholders felt there is a need to look much deeper into quality issues, including the assessment processes used in the Unit, despite the average score given in quality grids for strategic evaluations tending to be ‘good’. Moreover, the **nature, scope and**

⁶¹ Over the past 5 years a great deal of emphasis has been placed on developing and refining the methodology for Budget Support evaluations, for example.

⁶² An interesting practice was found in the Thematic Evaluation on Governance 92006), whereby several months were taken to prepare the ToRs in close consultation with different services. This went so far that the group even drafted 8 evaluation questions – reflecting their priority needs regarding this evaluation. This approach facilitated subsequent uptake of the evaluation.

⁶³ See for example Case Studies 20 (Investment Facility), 17 (Conflict Prevention and Peace Building), 2 (CAR), 7 (Ukraine), 10 (Central America); see also survey Q19.

depth of recommendations are a contested issue. Many respondents suggested they considered the analysis rather than the recommendations more seriously. It was felt that external consultants did not always grasp the difficulties faced by those delivering programmes and other key stakeholders, which often resulted in unrealistic recommendations. Recommendations were often too broad to be useful or to be considered. Sometimes findings were found to be de inapplicable due to the evaluation's lack of regard to the local political economy. On the other hand, occasionally, EuropeAid were not receptive to recommendations which were explicitly political as they felt they had no formal mandate to deal with them. Some interviewees feel consultants ought to further detail "who should do what" to ensure uptake, while others believed the report should end with a set of conclusions leaving it to the relevant EC staff to sort out how to act upon the evaluation findings. In their view, this would facilitate learning and promote uptake.

- The **limited integration of the political dimensions of cooperation** in evaluations (dealing with countries, regions or sectors) may reduce EEAS interest in such exercises. EEAS staff consider some of the evaluation reports as "too focused on development cooperation and aid delivery issues"⁶⁴ and therefore not useful to determine future engagement strategies.
- The **management of strategic evaluations by the Evaluation Unit** may also differ from evaluation to evaluation. In some cases, a pro-active approach is followed, oriented towards ensuring an optimal participation of key users throughout the process, elaborating specific ToRs, selecting appropriate Evaluation Questions (which also look at political dimensions), allowing some degree of methodological flexibility, facilitating the work of the consultants, etc.⁶⁵ In other cases, a bureaucratic management approach prevails, reflected in a less participatory mode of operation, a choice for standard templates (in terms of ToRs and Evaluation Questions), and an overtly administrative application of the methodology, etc. Thus, the results obtained, in terms of ownership and uptake, were different (as exemplified by several cases in the sample of evaluations reviewed).

Disseminating strategic evaluations

61. With regard to the **dissemination** of the outcomes of evaluations, there are standard processes in place (including a dissemination seminar), which can be complemented by other communication channels (e.g. the synthesis fiche through EVINFO or the use of Capacity4Dev, including videos with interviews taken during the seminars). Yet, the **overriding message** coming out of the study is that the **Evaluation Unit could do more** in terms of stimulating uptake. Or, as one interviewee argued, it could be more pro-active in "**selling the key findings of evaluations to different audiences**"⁶⁶. Others pleaded for making more extensive use of social media.
62. Evidence suggests, for instance, that even in cases where recommendations were perceived as useful, they were often communicated in a way which was not user-friendly. Strategic evaluations tend to result in fairly long reports and annexes (often amounting to several hundreds of pages). Although evaluations have an executive summary, this is often a cut and paste of sections from the body of the report by the consultant. At this stage, no system is in place to ensure that these summaries can be further translated into relevant information and practical guidance for targeted users. It was observed from the perspective of the geographic services that some Policy Units seem to have a much stronger outreach and advocacy approach when they have a new document.

⁶⁴ During a focus group discussion EEAS staff members from a variety of divisions underlined that the EEAS' political role requires evaluations with a broader and more political focus. Country evaluations currently evaluate the implementation of development cooperation against the policies which are in place. The evaluation of the policies themselves is not yet part of the mandate.

⁶⁵ See Case Studies 9 (Central Africa), 16 (Good Governance), 21-25 (BS).

⁶⁶ As an example of this, the Evaluation Unit was keen to ensure that the Director would attend the dissemination seminar for the BS evaluation in Tanzania.

63. Reference can be made in this context to Figure 3, which visualises the **spectrum of functions on knowledge uptake**. In the case of the EU, the responsibility of the Evaluation Unit stops at the level of dissemination (function 1). At this stage, the Unit is not responsible for the three other functions (i.e. knowledge translation, brokering or innovation) and neither has the mandate, staff or expertise to perform these critical tasks.

Follow-up of strategic evaluations

64. Concerning the **follow-up of strategic evaluations**, the DAC Peer Review of the EC evaluation process suggested that they needed to better track the uptake of recommendations. If sustainable change was to happen as a result of an evaluation, a year was rarely enough for recommendations to be tracked. Senior management acknowledged that the procedures for follow-up are rather weak (in terms of clear instructions and allocation of responsibilities) resulting in a situation whereby, in the words of a senior manager: “two years after an evaluation no one can really trace what happened...”. However, it should be noted that no donor agencies are fully satisfied with their management response and follow-up system, reaffirming the team’s belief that no agency has reached the ‘gold standard’ in evaluation uptake.

65. On the other hand, if the current system would be extended over a longer period, the process could easily become a bureaucratic exercise, resembling a ‘tick box’ operation. Moreover, seriously tracking the uptake of recommendations would become quite challenging given that recommendations can focus on anything from changing the system in which the EC functions to something simpler, such as the way in which an issue is communicated. Some interviewees would prefer to build on a number of messages synthesised from a body of evaluations, rather than having to read and interpret each one individually. At this stage, efforts to provide this type of synthesis or systematic reviews are still limited, though there is a certain appetite within the Evaluation Unit to invest in these types of products.

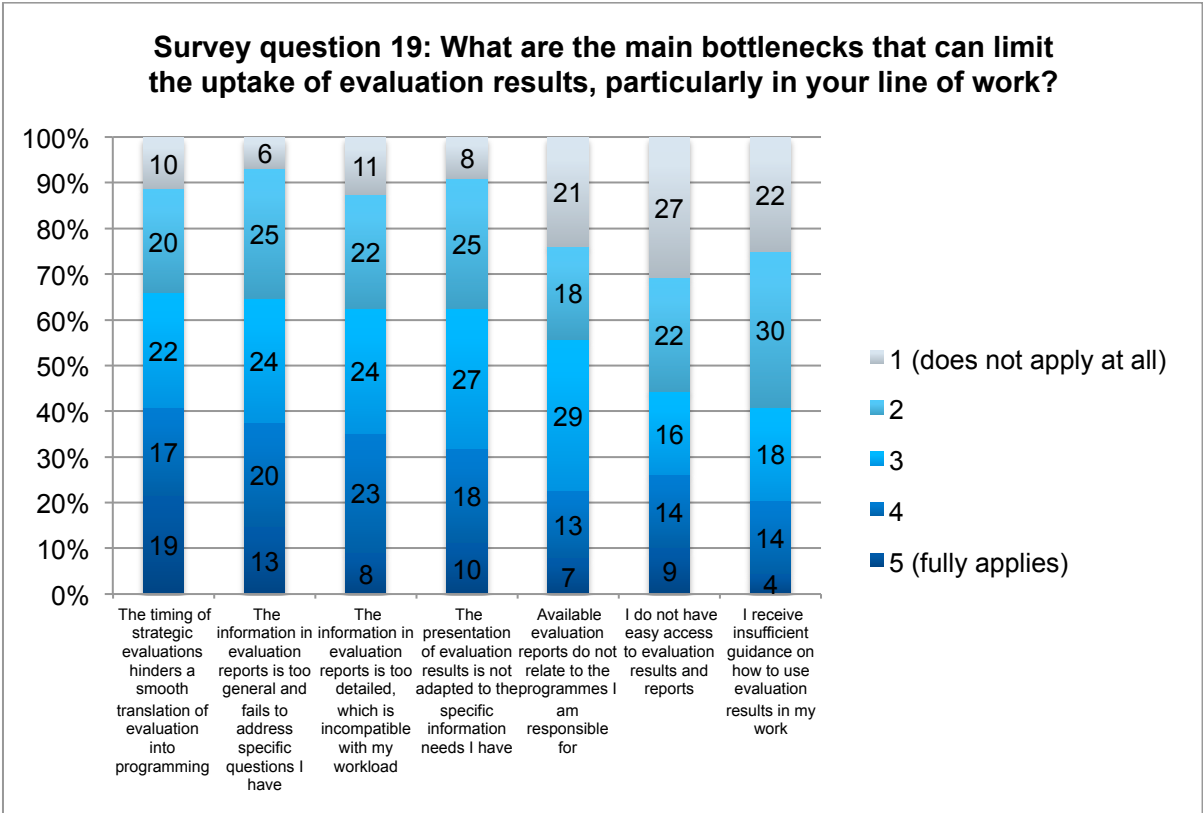


Figure 9: Survey of EUDs – Bottlenecks for uptake of evaluation results

3.3.4. Link with the monitoring and results framework

66. In 2006, the EC published four booklets detailing its methodological approach to evaluations. The first volume includes a synthesis of **comments by the Expert Panel** on the evaluation manual. Among the concerns raised, is the fact that it was not clear how the system of results monitoring would be linked to the evaluation system both conceptually and operationally (e.g. in terms of indicators used). It was also observed by the Panel that “there is no discussion of the linkages which would be necessary to create a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system in a country, for programs of even for projects” and that “... **nothing is made of the similarities and linkages which could come from greater coordination among these approaches**”.
67. Evidence collected shows that this warning was not in vain. **Both the Monitoring and the Evaluation functions largely developed in their own way, driven by distinct agendas and incentives.** Like in other donor agencies, the monitoring system is primarily driven by the pressing political need to show value for money (mainly on a quantitative, output-oriented basis) and to ensure financial accountability. In this context, the EC put in place its ROM system, which aims at helping the EUDs to see whether they are ‘on track’ with delivering results on projects and programs. On a yearly basis more than 1500 ROMs are carried out at considerable expenditure. Yet there is no shortage of critical voices (including within EUDs) stressing the weaknesses of the ROM system (e.g. methodological constraints, superficial analysis, questionable quality of the experts involved, and limited focus on learning). This is compounded by the fact that each ROM ends up being a rather standalone exercise (focused on a specific project). As of yet, no system to ensure that the EU capitalises on the cumulative collection of ROM exercises has been completed. The evaluation function, from its side, also continued to evolve in a rather separate manner, as a relatively self-standing instrument, concerned with delivering ‘state of the art’ evaluation reports.
68. This **disconnect, between the Monitoring and Evaluation functions, tends to weaken both processes.** In the past, EU evaluations have often been constrained by the limited usefulness of monitoring data. The sample review of more than 20 strategic evaluations confirmed that Evaluation Teams continue to be confronted with this problem when they have to make an inventory of financial flows (as CRIS does not provide the data required in a useful format) or seek to build on ROMs to learn more fundamental lessons on the relevance of EU operations. Conversely, the insights gained from strategic evaluations seldom seem to have had an impact on how ROM processes are carried out. Both worlds (Monitoring and Evaluation) largely act independently from each other, thus reducing the possibility for establishing a ‘virtuous circle’ which covers both processes. This, in turn, does not facilitate the uptake of evidence generated by strategic evaluations at the more downstream level of monitoring implementation.
69. **Recent developments suggest this disconnect may be gradually addressed.** The starting point is the EU’s commitment to establish an overall ‘Result framework’. This also provides, in the words of an interviewee, a “major opportunity for the uptake of strategic evaluations”. Building on the experiences of other donor agencies which struggle with similar challenges, the EU seeks to (i) put in place a much more solid ‘Monitoring and Information system’, which also covers non-financial aspects (as the baseline of any attempt to seriously report on results achieved or draw lessons learnt); (ii) enhance the access to information; (iii) review the ROM system to turn it into a more effective quality control and strategic management tool; (iii) shift reporting from a focus on outputs to looking at outcomes and impact; (iv) track all project and programme evaluations so as to ensure they are integrated into the overall M&E system and better linked to possible strategic evaluation processes, and (v) communicate results achieved more faithfully – thus preparing the ground for a more efficient use of findings in subsequent evaluation processes (both related to projects/programs and strategic evaluations). Interviews were unable to ascertain whether these arrangements will work out as expected. Nonetheless, they present potential windows of opportunity to strengthen uptake of evidence from the bottom-up.

3.3.5. Link between evaluations and the wider knowledge system

70. The systemic approach adopted by this study to assess the processes which may facilitate uptake makes it necessary to also examine the wider KM systems within the EU. How solid are these and to what extent do they provide a suitable environment for learning and translation of knowledge into policy and practice?
71. **Formally, EuropeAid has a strong knowledge-related mandate** and it has a wide range of institutional provisions and procedures in place to ensure the use and sharing of knowledge in its operations. All EU interventions in the field of development cooperation integrate components on contextual analysis and lessons learnt. At a more operational level, the QSG process provides a number of checks to ensure that relevant lessons are taken up in the implementation of its cooperation strategies. The Geographic Units act as a hub for relevant information, and analysis, for the Delegations (and the Thematic Directorates) and Units are set up as an internal think-tank, which works on policy development and quality support.
72. **In practice, however, several institutional dynamics limit the productive and strategic use of knowledge** and evidence in EU development cooperation:
- *Increasing focus on spending performance (efficiency)*: there is increasing pressure on EU staff to make cooperation more efficient. As a result, performance is more often measured in terms of spending than in terms of impact and quality. This shifts incentives away from developing a learning culture towards strengthening accountability for spending.
 - *Human resources*: there are constant pressures to reduce staff – while the development agenda becomes increasingly complex and demanding. The current institutional culture does not adequately promote the development of expertise, the retention of talent and the developing institutional memory. Staff turnover is very high, and there are no clear career paths in the EU system. Knowledge transfer between rotating staff is not a priority. While an extensive training architecture exists, it lacks a clear focus on knowledge transfer. Training varies greatly in quality and can be disconnected from the work environment.
 - *Bureaucratisation*: there is a strong tendency towards bureaucratisation, which tends to overload staff and reduce quality time for learning. This also applies to the field of Knowledge Management (KM) and learning.
73. The reorganisation of the EU external action architecture introduced a number of different roles in EU cooperation. Delegations now combine their role as implementing agencies with the role of political representation and negotiation, and the EEAS combines a diplomatic function with a more strategic political role in EU development cooperation (including in the programming process). As a result of these institutional developments, the EU is experiencing **changing patterns of knowledge consumption**. For example, the increasing focus on policy and political dialogue, often in relation to BS operations, requires a continuous stream of timely and in-depth analysis, which is currently unavailable within the EU. Interviewees and survey respondents indicate that the current system does not always meet their requirements. Strategic evaluations could continue to be highly relevant within this changing setup, though as noted above they would need to be re-oriented towards a greater recognition of the political economy of a country or an issue.
74. In this context, the objectives of the KM Unit (R7) are to “define the strategic learning and development framework and (...) develop a comprehensive KM approach (...)”.⁶⁷ These rather ambitious objectives are only partly met today due to capacity and administrative constraints in the Commission. Incomplete access to information continues to be a major challenge, and the

⁶⁷ European Commission (2012) Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid: Main missions of DEVCO Directorates & Units.

current knowledge and learning strategy⁶⁸ of EuropeAid lacks focus and generally fails to integrate and mobilise all the relevant services.

75. The existing KM setup in EuropeAid is fragmented. Knowledge is spread over a myriad of different spaces (ARES, CRIS, shared drives, internet, intranet, Capacity4Dev and a high number of different websites for initiatives and projects), and information management is largely disconnected from learning and staff development. Within this setup, the body of strategic evaluations is a rather static element. Easy access is ensured. Once the documents have been made available, however, little effort is made to translate evaluations into staff learning and institutional knowledge development. Despite the lack of an overall strategic framework, efforts are made in terms of knowledge sharing on quality and thematic expertise. Capacity4Dev, for example, has been in continuous development since 2009 and is gradually maturing.
76. **A new learning and knowledge development strategy for the period 2013-2020 is currently in development**, which aims to remedy many of these structural shortcomings. The draft strategy acknowledges that developing a genuine and durable learning culture requires a comprehensive approach to KM which consistently connects knowledge production and management with the people who use this knowledge. Evaluations are one component in this system.

3.4. Institutional culture and leadership

77. Evidence collected during this study confirms the widely held view that **knowledge and learning are not yet corporate priorities in EU development cooperation, as pleaded for in the OECD-DAC Peer Review of 2012**. However, this is not to say that no knowledge is produced in the institution or that learning is not taking place across the system. Before the merger, the Thematic Units under EuropeAid produced a wealth of practical knowledge, often in close collaboration with EUDs, sectoral and Geographic Units. An example of this dynamic is the stream of 'reference documents' which were published. In recent years, the EC also produced a lot of relevant studies (including political economy analyses at country level) or studies to capitalise on past experiences. To this, one could add the wide range of strategic evaluations carried out on countries, regions, themes, sectors and instruments. In this system, **a lot of learning also takes place among interested individuals**, who pick up ideas and manage to transform them into new practices within their specific area of work. However, according to several interviewees, **the problem is that limited institutional learning takes place**. There are numerous indicators to illustrate this gap, including (i) the limited knowledge of, interest in and absorption of new EU Communications, Reference Documents or indeed strategic evaluations (which are not directly connected to operational priorities); (ii) the limited space, time and opportunities available for learning at both HQ and Delegation level; or (iii) **the lack of institutional memory** across the board (compounded by frequent rotation of personnel).
78. This institutional culture – whereby knowledge and learning are in practice rather secondary preoccupations – is **intimately linked to the prevailing incentive structure** within the services working in the area of EU external action. One respondent aptly captured this, saying that the “fundamental tension in the house is between disbursement and quality”. Throughout the process, the main pressure on staff is to spend money within the imposed timelines and in respect of prevailing procedures. This tends to contribute to a **culture of bureaucratic compliance rather than deeper learning**.
79. Within this system, there is no shortage, however, of staff who remain eager to absorb and use knowledge (including from strategic evaluations), as reflected in the interest for participating in regional exchange seminars organised by EuropeAid (if budgets and work agendas allow). From

⁶⁸ European Commission (2011) Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid: Learning and Development Framework 2011-2012.

an uptake perspective this suggests that there is a real audience of interested staff 'out there' who could be reached by strategic evaluations if a more suitable institutional environment existed.

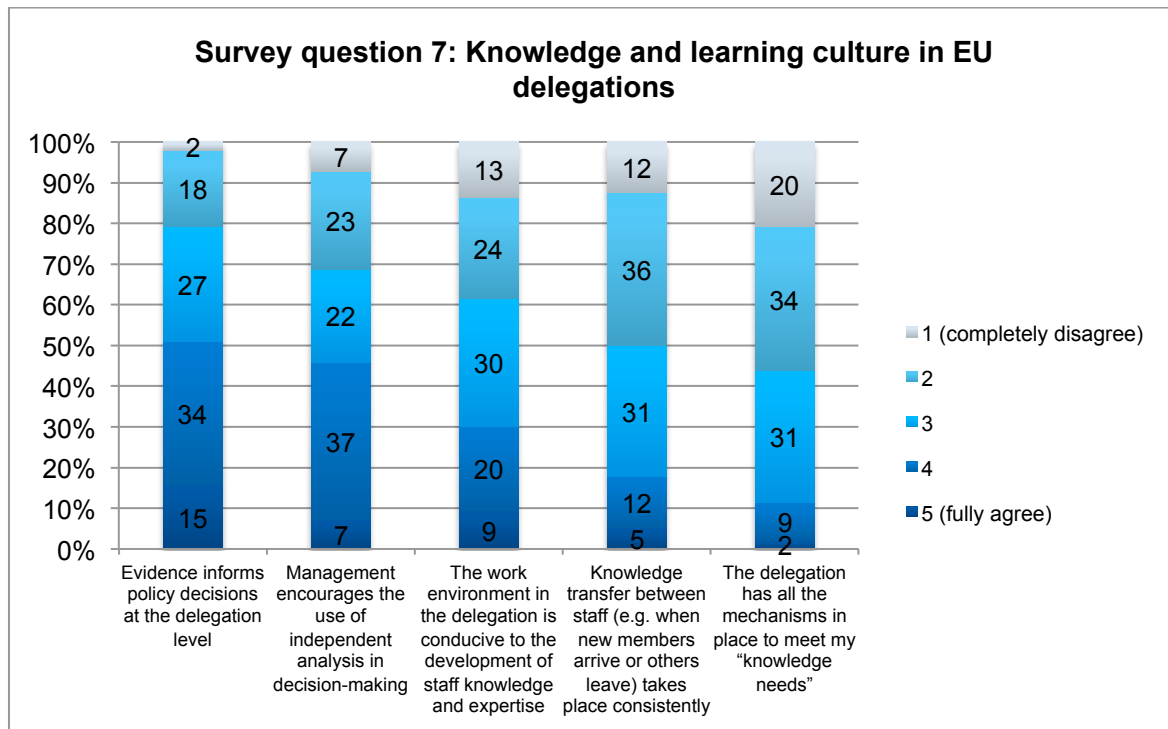


Figure 10: Survey of EUDs – Knowledge culture and learning in EUDs

80. This inevitably raises the question on the **role of political and managerial leadership** in promoting knowledge as a corporate priority and contributing to effective uptake of lessons learnt from strategic evaluations to improve evidence-based decision-making and management. Information from different sources⁶⁹ converges on the need for the leadership of EuropeAid to give a central place to knowledge and learning in the institution.

81. There is currently **no explicit organisational narrative which links results to evidence and evaluation**. This is compounded by the structural reality that EC development cooperation systematically has to 'do more with less' – to a point where institutional capacity is over-stretched. All these factors contribute to under-rating and under-utilising evaluations, especially those of a strategic nature.

“Management must learn to accept criticism and learn from mistakes. It would be so motivating to have dedicated discussions at Delegation level on the results of strategic evaluations [...]”.
(EU Delegation staff member, Survey Q24.2)

82. The new learning and knowledge development strategy, which is currently in development, reflects this desire to change course. It proposes that in order for EuropeAid to become a learning organisation it must not only address structural shortcomings such as staff allocation, Information Management Systems, and the existing quality assurance provisions, but also adopt a **change in mentality and the way knowledge is handled within the organisational hierarchy**.

83. For senior and middle management this means that they should **facilitate and incentivise learning** from evaluation and collaboration. Members of staff must be encouraged to share information and be provided with the necessary quality time to integrate learning in their work or act as knowledge translators and brokers. Learning by doing should be encouraged - including learning from mistakes.

⁶⁹ Including the 2012 OECD-DAC Peer Review.

3.5. External pressures and uptake of strategic evaluations

84. As mentioned above (chapter 2) external environmental pressures can also influence uptake processes of strategic evaluations, both in the positive and negative sense. Thus, several interviewees have argued that the EC, like other donor agencies, is under pressure to show results to increasingly sceptical political and public constituencies. This can be healthy from an uptake perspective as it may encourage institutions to invest in collecting evidence and invest in good analysis. However, it can also have perverse effects when complex questions are reduced to largely linear and quantitative measurements – for example, based on the flawed assumption that development outcomes can be attributed to specific donor interventions. In such conditions – characterised by one interlocutor as the **‘tyranny of the audit’** – there is little scope for considering the more systemic nature of change processes or to learn from strategic evaluations.
85. **Within the EU system, different actors are at work who may have a (direct or indirect) influence on uptake processes:**
- A first important actor is the **Secretariat-General of the European Commission**. As mentioned above (chapter 1) new guidelines are being prepared at this level on how evaluations should be conducted across the EU. They seek to bring more coherence into the overall EU approach towards evaluations and to push for some fundamental common quality standards. The **new guidelines** should ideally be in place by mid-2014 and should be complemented later by a set of measures to ensure effective monitoring of the implementation process. The Secretariat agrees there can be a tension between the two main aims of evaluations (accountability and learning) as the pressure to demonstrate results is omnipresent. Yet there are also new windows of opportunity to enhance knowledge gathering and learning, including the growing interest of the EP and the Council to have not only extensive information on the accounts of the EU but also a broader assessment of results achieved (pursuant to articles 318 and 319 of the Lisbon Treaty). Moreover, all DGs now have to work with ‘management plans’ against which they have to report annually. This process is still strongly oriented towards financial accountability, but pressure to also focus on overall performance is increasing.
 - The **EP** has acquired more powers under the Lisbon Treaty, allowing it to scrutinise in more detail what happens in EU development cooperation. The EP is taking steps to improve its overall database on evaluations related to EU spending. It also carries out targeted studies in different areas. Yet evidence collected suggests **the EP is not yet a ‘driver of change’ pushing for a more knowledge-driven approach** to EU development cooperation, including through a better use of evaluation findings. Also here the dominant concern is with how the money is spent (as reflected in the central importance of the Budget Committee). Occasionally, evidence from strategic evaluations finds its way into parliamentary debates in the Development Committee through different channels⁷⁰. However, as of today no efficient process is in place to ensure a more systematic uptake of evaluation findings by the EP which would, in turn, stimulate wider corporate learning.
 - The **CoA is undoubtedly a powerful player**. Its independent performance and financial audits tend to unleash a lot of political energy in the EU. While senior management can afford to keep strategic evaluations at a certain distance, this is not the case when the CoA intervenes because different interests and obligations are at play. Critical audit reports easily get into the media, are picked up by Parliament, can complicate the discharge and are translated in clear follow-up instructions which are continually checked until addressed. These incentives do not exist in the case of strategic evaluations. While recognising the

⁷⁰ This was the case with the 2011 human rights evaluation which aroused a sudden political interest in many circles (including the EP) following the Arab Spring. This window of opportunity was fully exploited to communicate key findings to the relevant Committee.

power of the CoA, several interviewees **doubted whether the institution was a true agent of change** as its remit is mainly to ensure compliance rather than to encourage learning in a broader programmatic sense⁷¹. The role and influence of **Member States** in creating an enabling environment for uptake processes may merit more attention. On the positive side, the trend towards doing '**joint evaluations**', brings with it opportunities for increased efficiency and collective learning. However, it could also be argued that Member States at the same time **reduce the 'space' for the EU** to become a knowledge-driven institution by systematically insisting on cutting operational budgets and staff levels.

86. The **role of constituencies outside the EU system in uptake processes** should also not be underestimated. In the context of this study, it was not possible to ascertain whether local actors had been influential in positively changing EU cooperation approaches following a country evaluation and related dissemination seminar. Nonetheless, external stakeholders can push forward uptake of evidence from evaluations related to specific themes⁷² or instruments⁷³. In both cases, these external actors used the evaluation to underpin and enhance the profile of their advocacy work related to EU policies and practices. This, in turn, helped to support reform-minded actors within the EU.

3.6. Global overview of evidence of uptake within EuropeAid, and some success stories

87. Examples of positive uptake or missed opportunities have already been introduced in the preceding sections. In the process a wide range of factors which foster or hamper uptake were also pinpointed. At this stage, it is also useful to provide a global overview of the evidence collected of uptake from various types of strategic evaluations, using the analytical grid proposed in chapter 2 – with its seven categories of uptake (see Learning Point 2). This is complemented with three specific cases of uptake, which for different reasons, could be considered as success stories.

Table 2: Overview table of different categories of evaluation use in the case studies

Description	Examples from case studies reviewed
Instrumental use: findings and recommendations from evaluations are directly implemented to continue, terminate, expand or cut back initiatives or to modify individual components.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divided into two streams: direct changes to implementation at country level, and direct uptake into policy and programming documents Evidence primarily found in Fiches Contradictaires Seen to varying degrees across the board – in some cases country evaluations led to changes in country programming The CPPB evaluation contributed to the development of a new conflict analysis guidance framework Problems with instrumental use often associated with poor timing of evaluations (Education, CAR, Ukraine, Central America, geographic evaluations).
Conceptual use: evaluation evidence provides new ideas and concepts, creates dialogue, shifts the terms of debate or provides a catalyst for change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly found in thematic evaluations: Good Governance (2006), Civil Society channel (2008), human rights (2011), CPPB (2011), and evaluations on aid modalities (BS) Not primarily noted in Fiches Contradictoire – Evidence of conceptual uptake mainly gathered from interviews Less conceptual uptake from country evaluations, even although

⁷¹ In the domain of BS, the CoA is perceived to have acted as an agent of change, as its report led EuropeAid to develop more sophisticated response strategies on some thorny implementation challenges (such as the quality of policy dialogue, the issue of showing results in BS operations).

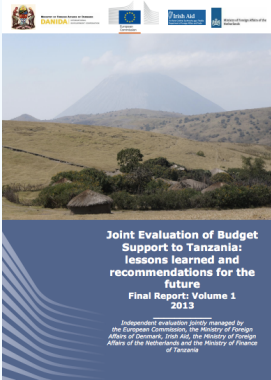
⁷² See Case Study 16 (Conflict Prevention & Peace Building).

⁷³ See Case Study 18 (Civil Society Channel).

Description	Examples from case studies reviewed
	<p>some offer wider conceptual lessons about programming challenges or differentiation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CPPB evaluation introduced and clarified the concept of the integrated approach to CPPB, which is highly relevant for the comprehensive approach to conflict prevention which is currently being developed.
<p>Learning use: evaluations provide learning through doing or learning through use: sometimes linked to a specific learning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of uptake generated through interviews, generally hard to distinguish in Fiches Contradictaires Mainly seen in country evaluations, though surveys indicate that potential is often missed because of the heaviness of the methodology, data constraints and the limited use of recommendations Learning use of thematic evaluations depends heavily on the level of reference group participation (frequency and seniority of RG members). The CPPB evaluation is an example of how the evaluation process was able to feed into on-going policy development.
<p>Legitimising use: Evaluation evidence could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used selectively to reinforce a point of view Used to corroborate a decision already taken Used as an independent referee between different viewpoints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few examples seen across different types of evaluations, again mainly derived from interviews Extraction of partial information to support a particular point seen in the debate between EuropeAid and the EEAS about blending Use of the overall picture without perhaps given due emphasis to a particularly thorny issue (role of PAFs) seen in Tanzanian BS evaluation Corroborating a decision already taken: Malawi country evaluation provided a useful validation of the choice of sectors to focus on, though this was limited by a lack of political economy analysis Evaluation as independent referee: seen in the human rights evaluation where opposing points of view needed to be reconciled Used selectively to reinforce a point of view: CPPB evaluation provided an evidence base to back up the argument that the EU's conflict prevention mandate should be strengthened. Both institutional and external actors (UK, EPLO) used the evaluation this way.
<p>Symbolic use: evaluations signal where future emphasis needs to lie (e.g. via the choice of indicators).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most country evaluations have a highly prescribed methodology (based on the EUs intervention logic), which may not leave enough space to include analysis of the local political economy. This limits the ability of evaluators to make observations about more strategic issues (Nicaragua 2011) More likely to be seen in thematic evaluations (Good Governance, Human Rights).
<p>Non-use: results are ignored because users find little or no value in the evidence or because the context has changed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to classify in detail because the Fiches Contradictaires are not written consistently. Instances were found where the evaluation recommendations were disagreed with or ignored (Malawi), or the political context had changed significantly (Tunisia, Nicaragua, Central America), or institutional incentives were not in place (legal instruments study).
<p>Misuse: suppressing or otherwise misusing the findings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to classify misuse without a full audit trail- can also be politically contentious to report misuse Selection of specific parts of evidence in order to reinforce particular viewpoints is arguably legitimising uptake rather than misuse, though this will depend on the individual viewpoint.

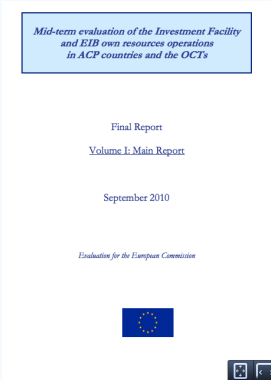
88. In addition to this, a few concrete cases of effective uptake are presented here in more detail.

Case studies 21-25
Budget Support
A promising start



Since 2007, the Evaluation Unit has spearheaded international efforts to develop the methodology for assessing Budget Support (BS). It held its line in the face of opposition to BS as an aid instrument from some Member States and a lack of enthusiasm for changing the methodology from other donors. The evidence emerging from the three pilots contributed to reaffirming the value of BS as an aid modality. The recent evaluation of BS in Tanzania shows that involving stakeholders in discussing the potential outcomes of the evaluation may facilitate uptake of the evidence the evaluation provides. For instance, donors and the Government of Tanzania voluntarily developed an implementation plan based on the results of the evaluation. The Evaluation Unit also put a great deal of effort into bringing key institutional stakeholders around the table, which contributed to the on-going understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by BS. While the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations have had an impact on those working with BS in the respective countries, how much impact they will have on the design of BS programmes in the other countries remains to be seen.

Case study 19
EIB Investment Facility.
Uptake leading to organisational change



This evaluation covered the EIB's Investment Facility and its own resourced operations across a range of countries. It was not linked to a particular policy or programming cycle (it was a MTR under the Cotonou Agreement), but nevertheless was able to bring about significant change in the structure and functions of the organisations. Because of its focus on the EIB's contribution to development outcomes, it was able to get at the heart of the relationship between the EC (especially country programmes), the EIB and the EEAS. The evaluation itself was quite critical in parts, but nonetheless well received. It was able to make recommendations that linked two completely different programming cycles: the Commission's multi-year cycle and the EIB's demand-led approach to programming. The recommendations resulted in very concrete changes which go beyond programming recommendations to sharing office space in order to maximise synergies between the three organisations. This very functional reaction to the evaluation shows that all three organisations took the evaluation recommendations very seriously.

Case study 16
Evaluation of
Conflict Prevention
and Peace Building
High profile evaluation
and institutional
change

Thematic Evaluation of European Commission
Support to Conflict Prevention
and Peace Building

Final Report
Volume 2 (Annexes 1 to 3)

October 2011

Evaluation for the European Commission



Both the quality grid, and the stakeholders interviewed underline the usefulness of the Conflict Prevention and Peace Building evaluation. As one of the ingredients in the debate, it helped the EU define its role in the prevention of conflict in EU external action. The evaluation benefitted from a lengthy preparation and was carried out at a time when the revision of the EU's Conflict Prevention and Peace Building architecture was high on the agenda, and was therefore able to feed into this process extensively. The process of the evaluation itself drew a level of coherence in the views of key EU stakeholders in the Reference Group of the evaluation. As a result, the initial findings and results were taken up into the internal discussions on the new institutional set-up in the EEAS and EuropeAid. The evaluation also had a core influence on the recently released EEAS guidance note on Conflict Analysis. It remains relevant to this day and is taken up in the development of an upcoming communication on the 'comprehensive approach' to conflict prevention. These are just a few examples of how this evaluation was used. The evaluation came at an opportune time and received the necessary institutional backing, which ensured uptake even while the evaluation was still being carried out.

3.7. Conclusions on the EU uptake system

Conclusion 1: The Commission is making strides in strengthening its evaluation function

89. Over the past decade, EU development cooperation has continued to develop its evaluation function. Further efforts were made to refine the methodology (e.g. to conduct BS evaluations). Furthermore, the Evaluation Unit managed to produce 11-12 strategic evaluation reports each year, covering a wide variety of countries, themes, sectors and instruments of cooperation without additional staff. Evidence collected during this study suggests that several of these evaluations have influenced EU policies and practices in a variety of ways.

Conclusion 2: Overall ownership levels and uptake at organisational levels are limited

90. Despite the on-going efforts of the Unit, the 'supply' of knowledge generated by strategic evaluations struggles to find clients and consumers. Overall a major 'ownership deficit' regarding evaluations can be observed, as reflected in the fact that many staff (including senior management) are not aware of existing evaluations, do not read the reports or feel it is not part of their work to do so. While 'uptake' happens at an individual and team level, institutional learning has been limited. As a result, **a lot of evidence generated by strategic evaluations has not been effectively and efficiently used.**

91. A host of factors contribute to this, including (i) a weak link with the 'demand-side'; (ii) an often too limited involvement of key stakeholders throughout the process; (iii) too much focus on *what* happened rather than on *why it happened*; (iv) a tendency to deal in a bureaucratic manner with evaluations or to privilege methodological orthodoxy over building ownership and ensuring uptake; or (v) the often limited operational use of evaluations, partly because the format is not user-friendly and communication strategies are still incipient. As a result, key stakeholders often prefer other sources of information to satisfy their information needs.

Conclusion 3: Evaluations are not systemically embedded in key internal processes

92. While the Commission has an evaluation **function**, it is much more difficult to detect an effective evaluation **system**. The study noted an important disconnect between evaluations and key internal processes such as policy formulation, programming, monitoring and ROM or the broader KM system. It is also proving difficult to effectively integrate new potential clients for strategic evaluations, particularly those interested in shorter, more focused exercises, and the whole EU external action system. Uptake of evidence from strategic evaluations among the latter remains low, with notable exceptions (such as the Conflict Prevention and Peace Building evaluation). As a result, **evaluations are not sufficiently 'embedded' in the overall EU development cooperation system**. They tend to come at the end of the process, without much impact on the overall system.

Conclusion 4: The overall institutional environment is not conducive to learning and to developing an evaluation culture

93. Uptake is further hindered by the lack of an enabling overall environment for evidence gathering, learning and effective use of knowledge in policy-making at different levels. This is, *inter alia*, reflected in the systematic reduction of thematic capacity following successive reforms and in the lack of clear signals and incentives from the leadership that evaluations matter and should be incorporated throughout the lifecycle of policies and programmes.

Conclusion 5: There are growing demands for knowledge, including knowledge from evaluations

94. Despite the constraining environment, there is also a frequently amorphous demand for valuable knowledge in order to respond to 'old' and 'new' information needs. The study team also noted a demand – including from senior level – for an overall review of the evaluation system to find ways and means to improve uptake.

4. SOME REFLECTIONS TO INFORM FUTURE CHOICES REGARDING UPTAKE

95. At this stage of the study a set of broader questions arise. What is the above overview of the current uptake system in EU development cooperation telling us? How should we interpret the key findings? What are the implications for change in the system?
96. Before moving to the formulation of recommendations, it is useful to adopt a **'helicopter' view and look a bit deeper into why the system is like it is and why uptake of evidence**, in particular of strategic evaluations, **is often less than optimal**. The added value of such an analysis is to confront reformist forces within the EU with a number of thorny dilemmas or challenges they will need to address if uptake is to be structurally enhanced. This, in turn, should provide a realistic foundation on which to suggest feasible reform options in Chapter 5.
97. **Five such (interlinked) dilemmas/challenges** are briefly explored here. They emerged from a cross-cutting analysis of the issues outlined in the analytical framework presented in chapter 2 and the evidence collected in chapter 3:
- Accountability and learning
 - Ownership of evaluations
 - Role division in terms of ensuring uptake
 - Political economy of knowledge and the role of leadership
 - Required means to be a knowledge-driven organisation.

4.1. Accountability and learning: a vicious or virtuous circle?

98. In theory, there should be no contradiction between the two main objectives of strategic evaluations, i.e. **accountability and learning**. They are, in principle, **two faces of the same coin**. In order to have effective learning it is important to have solid data on where the money went, what results were achieved and how efficiently things were done (i.e. the accountability part). If this is done in a qualitative manner, there is a solid empirical basis to learn and change policy and/or practice. The evidence collected shows, however, that this virtuous circle often does not occur.
99. In part, this relates to the fact that it is relatively simple to account for inputs (e.g. disbursement). However, it is complicated to demonstrate accountability for outputs because of the question of attribution, and even more difficult to provide accountability for outcomes. This type of deeper learning would require structured reflection processes through individual and team debates about the relationships between inputs, outputs, outcomes and the wider context. Nevertheless, the pressure to show (measurable) results tends to reduce the space for such debates. Having said this, the results from internal monitoring should generate a demand for analysing why and how the intended outcomes are being achieved or not achieved. Therefore a window of opportunity exists for strategic evaluations to provide a useful contribution to these questions, linking evaluations and ROM together and achieving a better ownership of the whole M&E system.
100. Looking at the overall incentive structure within EU development cooperation (see section 3.4 above) significant changes do not seem likely in the near future in terms of rebalancing accountability and learning processes. The 'tyranny of the audit' is likely to remain a dominant force for quite some time in the current climate – also affecting strategic evaluations.

101. However, there are **promising new opportunities for enhancing the profile of learning** from various information sources, including strategic evaluations. These relate to internal drivers, such as the growing demand from various actors for useable knowledge, particularly on new priority areas (e.g. inclusive growth, climate change) or on how to redefine a cooperation strategy in countries where the principle of differentiation applies. The new methodology approach used in BS evaluations may have lessons to offer for wider evaluations, particularly around how to assess input/output/outcome relationships. The overall reform of the M&E system – with its envisaged shift towards a stronger focus on ‘outcomes’ – is another potential opportunity.
102. Furthermore, it would appear that more emphasis is recently being given to knowledge and the promotion of a learning culture. This may be further fuelled by the realisation that the best defence against criticism from outside on EU performance in the area of development cooperation (e.g. emanating from the EP, Member States, the CoA⁷⁴) is to push back with solid evidence (as the EU successfully does in relation to the use of BS). The current attempt of the Secretariat-General to mainstream evidence-based policy-making and management may provide further incentives to upgrade learning.

4.2. How to enhance the ownership of evaluations?

103. Improving the balance between accountability and learning in strategic evaluations is a necessary but not sufficient condition to enhance uptake. A second challenge is to **address the issue of ‘ownership’ in an open and direct manner and see how it can be reconciled with the issue of independence**. The evidence collected in chapter 3 provides a rather sobering picture. For a wide variety of reasons, the overall ownership of strategic evaluations remains low, including among audiences such as political leadership and senior management – who should be among the primary consumers of this type of evaluation.
104. While it is essential to continue ensuring independence and high quality standards, **ways and means should be explored to build a stronger ownership throughout the process**. This may imply searching for creative solutions: (i) to prevent ‘leakages’ in ownership at different stages of the evaluation cycle – starting with the agenda-setting and prioritisation process; (ii) to enhance stakeholder participation during the evaluation process itself; (iii) to provide a more diversified ‘menu’ of strategic evaluations responding to the needs of different users; (iv) to better disseminate key findings through more suitable formats and learning processes.
105. It may amount to **transforming strategic evaluations from a rather static and increasingly bureaucratic process**, to something much more ‘open and dynamic’ which can be organically connected to the shifting demands of the various stakeholders, including from new constituencies such as the EEAS. This may also involve associating and involving internal staff more directly in the execution of strategic evaluations (beyond the often passive participation in a Reference Group) so as to enhance learning opportunities.

⁷⁴ Also the EEAS has been confronted with critical reports of the CoA (e.g. Egypt and Palestine) and is therefore increasingly aware that investing in evaluations – which may provide deeper insights than audits – can be rewarding to properly respond to external pressures and demands for accountability.

4.3. Who should do what in promoting uptake?

106. Another structural factor which hampers uptake is the **unclear division of responsibilities for ensuring effective use and translation of knowledge** derived from strategic evaluations. Three examples, which emanate from the analysis in chapter 3 may illustrate this. First, while there is a formal process for tracking the follow-up given to recommendations, there is no clarity on what should happen after one year and who should be responsible for checking uptake levels or understand why it was decided not to implement the recommendations. Second, while the Evaluation Unit takes care of disseminating the outcomes of a strategic evaluation through various means, this appears to be a fairly passive process. There are no dedicated Units or staff in charge of 'translating' let alone 'brokering' the knowledge generated or for actively 'selling' the evidence⁷⁵. Third, it is not clear who is responsible for checking whether evaluations are seriously considered during programming processes (beyond formal references). As a result, there is a limited connection between knowledge producers and the wide range of potential users of evaluation products (See Figure 11).

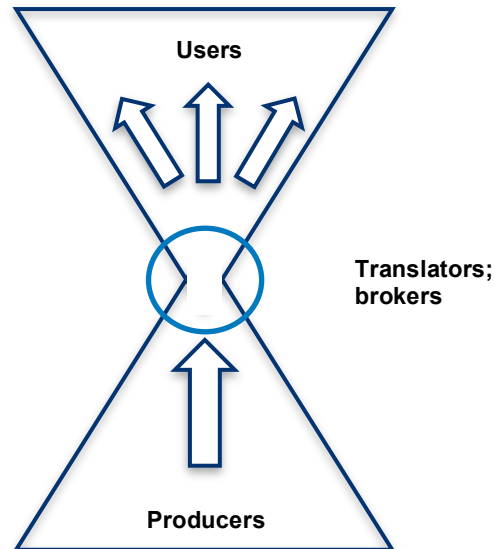


Figure 11: Connecting knowledge production to the users requires overcoming the bottleneck of knowledge translation and brokering

107. There are no simple solutions for addressing these 'missing links' in the uptake chain. For instance, some have suggested **expanding the mandate of the Evaluation Unit** to also encompass 'policing' of the follow-up of recommendations or to ensure 'knowledge translation' into more user-friendly formats. Entrusting these new tasks to the Unit would however imply a widening of its mandate as well as the provision of additional staff and specific expertise. A much more differentiated solution might be required by which different Units assume responsibility for promoting uptake. Furthermore, in order to be effective, reforms in the wider uptake system are also required (e.g. in terms of strengthening KM or the incentive structure for learning).

108. Experience from other donor agencies suggests integration is key to helping the Evaluation Unit avoid becoming 'an island' which produces 'state of the art' evaluations, yet with limited impact on the system. It is also critical to ensure managerial and democratic accountability. The key principle here is the Modernist adage that 'form follows function'. The key functions associated with uptake need to be prioritised first. Only once that has been done is it possible to assess 'who' should do it.

⁷⁵ For example, the team considers the current approach to improving the uptake of evidence from BS evaluations to be too passive. It is not enough to simply invite staff from Geographic Units to attend BS dissemination seminars and complain when they do not attend. The evidence from BS evaluations is now sufficiently robust that *not* using it could be seen as unacceptable. Although resources are a constraint, a more active approach is needed to 'sell' the evidence through a mix of institutional incentives (discussions between Heads of Evaluation and Geographic Units), knowledge brokering (bringing those with experience of BS evaluations in to advise Geographic Units on an individual basis) and knowledge translation (producing short digests of each BS evaluation, and/or being more systematic with Capacity4Development video interviews to reach HQ/EUD staff and practitioners).

4.4. Political economy of knowledge and the role of leadership

109. A key lesson from the analysis in Chapter 3 is the need to carefully look at the prevailing 'political economy' of knowledge in a given organisation. **Enhancing uptake is not a technocratic question, but a 'political' matter.** According to Rossi, two essential features of the context of evaluation must be recognised: "the existence of multiple stakeholders and the related fact that evaluation is usually part of a political process".⁷⁶ Knowledge is power and this inevitably affects the use (or not) of strategic evaluations. Whether structural progress is achieved will largely depend on the existing configuration of interests, power and incentives to change, both at leadership level and among operational staff.

110. The study found ample evidence of the **impact of political economy considerations** on uptake:

- Political considerations will always be a central element driving decision-making processes, whatever the nature and quality of available evidence (e.g. the battery of new policies which were formulated in a relative hurry after the Arab Spring responding to political imperatives). A certain level of discretionary power can naturally be expected at the moment the EU has to decide on whether or not to take up recommendations. Political motives can also underpin selective use of evaluation material⁷⁷.
- Besides their common interests, EuropeAid and the EEAS have different expectations from evaluations, which derive from their respective mandates, organisational cultures and accountability structures. This brings a number of challenges, including the degree to which evaluations should also consider the 'political dimensions' of EU interventions. EEAS constituencies are keen to have strategic evaluations, which systematically take into account political considerations – as this would improve chances of uptake from their side. While there are examples of evaluations which have included a political dimension, other evaluations limit themselves strictly to issues of aid delivery. This tension is partly related to institutional turf wars, partly to the existence of a certain divide between the more traditional development community (privileging a largely technocratic, a-political approach to development cooperation) and those who embrace a primarily political approach (with a focus on interests rather than funding, on realistic strategies which allow the EU to maximise leverage⁷⁸, on policy coherence, etc.).

111. While the influence of these political economy factors should be acknowledged, it is also important to recognise that the **configuration of interests and incentives is not static.** It can evolve as a result of internal and external pressures or because new alliances are built which seek to upgrade learning in policy and practice.

⁷⁶ Rossi, P.H. et al. (2004) *Evaluation. A Systematic Approach* (7th edition), SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA.

⁷⁷ Example of the transport sector, where the long-standing support of the EU was recently largely discontinued – despite demands from partner countries to see this as a priority. Interviews with various stakeholders suggest this decision may have been based on political considerations and a selective use of evidence.

⁷⁸ Several interviewees stressed that cooperation should become more "interest-focused", particularly in countries which are reaching middle-income status. The added value and leverage of EU support no longer resides primarily in funding (as the allocated budgets are far too small compared to domestically available budgets). This evolution is underway in countries which are graduating from aid. In these partner countries "knowledge" rather than 'aid levels' is likely to be the key asset of the EU.

4.5. Doing more with less: what are the implications for uptake?

112. This is another major dilemma that senior management will have to address. One senior interviewee put it bluntly: “the uptake study will be of no use unless something is done about the Commission’s reduced human resource base”.
113. There are no indications that increased budgets will be available in the future to reverse this trend - if anything further reductions in staff are likely. This tension (of ‘doing more with less’) is recognised in a recent report produced by the Dutch Evaluation Unit on the European Development Fund. It notes that “relative to the volume of EU aid” the Evaluation Unit remains “modest, both in terms of staffing and budget”.⁷⁹ However, the report admits that improvements in these areas would not materialise “within a zero growth environment imposed by Member States”.⁸⁰ In this context, it makes little sense to simply copy innovative practices by other donor agencies, such as the decision by DFID to create a well staffed research and evidence division, where an important part of their role is to improve uptake and translation of research and evaluation findings into development policy and practice.
114. Does this slimmed down human resource base mean that the prospects for improving uptake are unlikely in EU development cooperation? Not necessarily, but it does put a **premium on senior management to define realistic implementation strategies** which seek to use internal opportunities to **facilitate learning** optimally. A case in point is to rethink the function of the QSG. Initially, it was conceived as a discussion forum – where evidence from evaluations could also be tabled. Yet, in the perception of most stakeholders interviewed, the QSG process became more often a formalised/bureaucratic process, with “pre-cooked answers”, leaving limited time for content debates. Restoring this critical reflection function in QSG processes could create space for learning and use of evaluations while providing incentives to existing staff to engage.
115. It also calls for **greater efficiency in capitalising on existing knowledge**. For instance, most interviewees agreed that an important reservoir of knowledge, accumulated by the Commission over the years, remains untapped because of weaknesses in knowledge management and limited institutional memory. This ‘hidden’ knowledge resides in a stream of studies, reference documents, project and programme evaluations, strategic evaluations, etc. produced by HQ or EUDs. EU staff are often unaware that this information exists or find it difficult to access it in an efficient manner. Interviewees from Geographic Units claimed that major efficiency gains could be obtained by putting in place systems to exploit lessons learnt on key implementation challenges (such as improving policy dialogue in sector operations) on a transversal basis (i.e. using all available sources of information).
116. Summing up, the two figures below illustrate some of the key dilemmas facing the Commission regarding uptake of strategic evaluations. In the first scenario (figure on the left), EuropeAid may get trapped in a set of contradictory ambitions (considering human resource limitations), which may further reduce the scope for learning. In the second scenario (figure on the right), leadership opts for a reversal of the overall approach by formulating a set of objectives regarding evaluations which are more aligned to learning and uptake.

⁷⁹ IOB. Ministry (2013) The Netherlands and the European Development Fund – Principles and practices. Evaluation of Dutch involvement in EU development cooperation (1998-2012). IOB Evaluation, No 375, p. 22.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

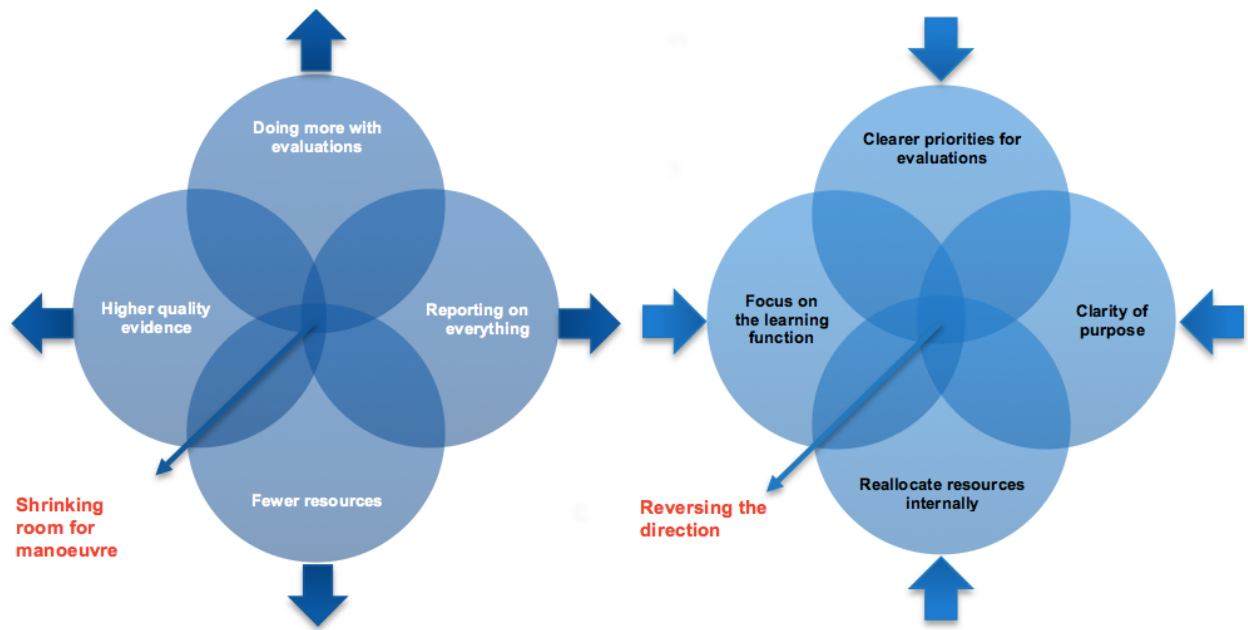


Figure 12: Addressing tensions; increasing room for manoeuvre

5. OPTIONS FOR IMPROVED UPTAKE: FOUR AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION

117. The preceding analysis gives rise to **four key areas within which recommendations can be made in order to encourage and improve uptake of lessons learnt and knowledge** from strategic evaluations into development policy and practice. These are summarised in Figure 13.

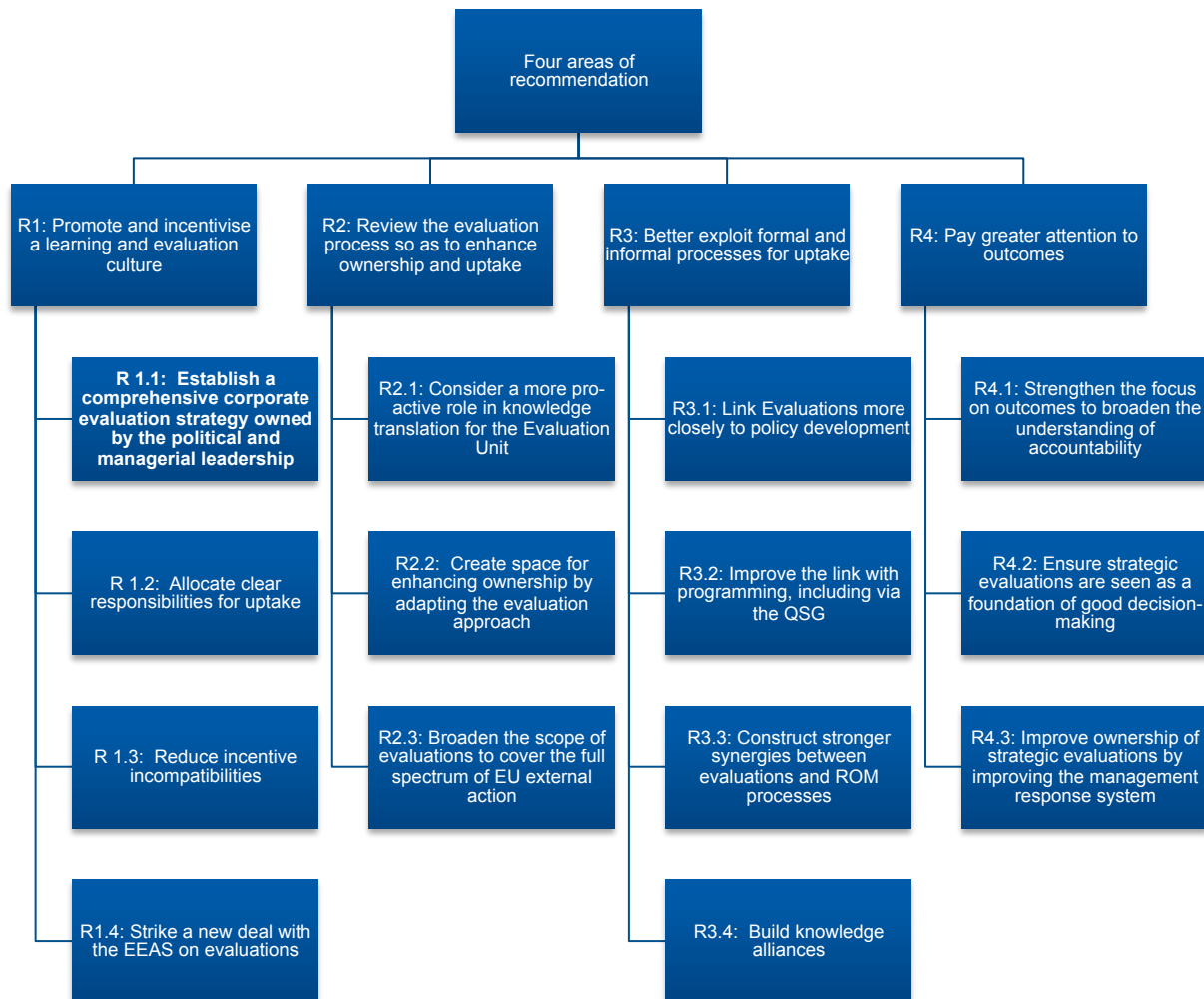


Figure 13: Four recommendation areas

118. We have chosen **not to develop these various options into detailed implementation modalities** in this final report for a specific reason: the process of debating this report should be done in the spirit of **knowledge brokering** rather than presenting the results as if this were an audit. The study has uncovered real tensions regarding the role and place of strategic evaluations, not only within EuropeAid, but also in the broader EU development cooperation system (including in the relationship with the EEAS and the CoA). These cannot be addressed simply by a set of recommendations formulated by external consultants. The consultants producing this report seek to facilitate debate among this study's Reference Group, the Evaluation Unit, senior management – and more widely. It is in this way that the various actors involved will engage in dialogue and gradually develop true ownership of an evaluation system facilitating learning, uptake and use.

119. The recommendation areas below should be **considered as a package**: if any one of the areas is not addressed, it will become a weak link in the uptake chain. Some can be considered in the short term, while others will require a somewhat longer-term process of change. There are recommendations which are largely within the 'control' of the Evaluation Unit, while in other cases the role of the Unit will consist more of exercising 'influence' on the process of change.

Recommendation area 1: Promote and incentivise a learning and evaluation culture

120. This is the **overarching recommendation to improve uptake and the use of evaluations**. The preceding analysis has demonstrated that learning is not yet a corporate priority in EU development cooperation. While demands for relevant knowledge exist across the board, the overall institutional environment and related incentive structure is not conducive to learning. This, in turn, explains why EU development cooperation lacks a proper **evaluation culture** and why limited institutional learning takes place around strategic evaluations.

121. The **primary responsibility** for promoting a learning culture and upgrading the use of strategic evaluations – as a key tool within this process – lies with the political leadership and senior management. Many of the **systemic shortcomings identified in the study can only be addressed directly by senior management**. In the absence of such central steering, valuable initiatives taken by other players (such as the Evaluation or KM Units) may not fundamentally address the root causes of the limited uptake.

122. The core task at hand for the leadership is to define more clearly **what type of evaluation system** the EU needs at this juncture. A priority is to produce a **solid and compelling narrative around evaluation** to clearly indicate that it is not about producing yet another audit but about learning from the past to improve policy and practice in an increasingly complex and evolving global development context.

R 1.1: Establish a comprehensive corporate evaluation strategy owned by the political and managerial leadership

123. In order to be effective, evaluations need to be fully embedded and mainstreamed in the EU development cooperation system. To ensure this, it is not sufficient to formulate an evaluation policy and a Multi-Annual Programme. Senior management need to agree and drive a **comprehensive corporate evaluation strategy**⁸¹ covering the following elements:

- i. Provide a clear narrative and rationale for carrying out different types of strategic evaluations, based on key policy objectives (Agenda for Change) and corporate knowledge needs ('where do strategic evaluations fit in the overall learning system?'). Based on such a clear 'mandate', the Evaluation Unit can further develop a 'menu' of evaluations with adapted methodologies and modes of execution (e.g. centralised or decentralised...).
- ii. Ensure an inclusive and transparent prioritisation process of evaluations to be undertaken together with all key stakeholders.

⁸¹ For a recent example from another agency, see the Independent Evaluation Strategy recently approved by the Board of Directors of the African Development Bank. In order to ensure managerial accountability and effective use of resources, the strategy makes explicit the needed links between long-term policy goals, evaluation activities, skills and budgets. It identifies internal and external drivers of change, sets out the range of evaluative products required to deliver on strategic evaluation objectives and organises the sharing, use and follow-up of evaluation findings.

- iii. Establish the appropriate timeline for the production, delivery and follow-up of the various types of strategic evaluations with a view to improving uptake.
- iv. Ensure that internal mechanisms, processes and procedures are in place to allow knowledge to be effectively shared, used and translated in policy and programming processes.
- v. Ensure that commensurate capacities and budget are available to make all this happen. This holds particularly true for the Evaluation Unit.

R 1.2: Allocate clear responsibilities for uptake

124. In addition to the above, senior management involvement in deciding where responsibilities for uptake lie will help embed the process in the organisation. Uptake should not be the sole responsibility of the Evaluation Unit: other Units are well placed to play their role in ensuring that the evidence is appropriately and effectively translated and brokered to the right audiences. Interviews with senior management indicated interest in entrusting this to Thematic Units. Another option to consider is DFID's 'knowledge broker' model in their Research and Evidence Division, where individuals are tasked with translating complex research into tailor-made products and inserting them into existing spaces for debate and discussion.

R 1.3: Reduce incentive incompatibilities

125. This implies having a careful look at the political, institutional and bureaucratic incentives which now block or hamper knowledge and learning at all levels and to explore feasible (step-by-step) changes in the overall incentive structure. Box 4 below provides a non-exhaustive overview of possible incentives which could help improve the use of learning from evaluations⁸².

Box 4: Possible incentives to foster uptake

Three types of incentives can be distinguished:

- *Corporate/Policy incentives*, including the provision of clear instructions by leadership regarding the need to take strategic evaluations seriously, underpinned by a 'strategic plan' spelling out the purpose of (various forms of) evaluations, the approaches to be used to ensure ownership, adequate timelines as lines of political/administrative accountability to ensure uptake, follow-up and monitoring.
- *Administrative/managerial incentives* such as (i) clear mandates for the Evaluation Unit and other relevant actors with regard to responsibilities for uptake (including knowledge translation and brokering); (ii) inclusive planning and prioritisation processes (involving senior management as ultimate decision-makers); (iii) reinvigoration of quality assurance scrutiny and integration of evaluation findings; (iv) involvement of staff from other Units and EUDs in the overall evaluation cycle; (v) formal obligation for EUDs to carry out a (light and focused) evaluation on overall pertinence of intervention strategy ('are we doing the right thing and in the right way?'), with methodological support of the Evaluation Unit (to ensure credibility of the exercise and outcomes); (vi) joint elaboration of recommendations (to render responsible the key Units/actors involved); (vii) providing a more diversified 'menu' of strategic evaluations which responds to both existing and new constituencies; (viii) making the follow-up process

⁸² Inspiration can also be found in the practices of other donor agencies. DFID senior management have a strong commitment to ensuring policies and programmes are informed by rigorous evidence and have devolved evaluation to operational departments, which has encouraged more genuine dialogue on evaluation design, and more influence of evaluation on programme design.

and monitoring of uptake more compelling (like in the case of CoA reports) without falling into the trap of over-formalisation and bureaucratic 'box-ticking'.

- *Individual incentives* by upgrading the status of evaluation skills in the overall interests/competences required from staff, providing a 'menu' of learning opportunities (e.g. participating in Reference Groups or participating in evaluation teams for countries or themes where that staff member has no direct engagement).

R 1.4: Strike a new deal with EEAS on evaluation

126. A desk review of the EU Communications formulated in the last 3-4 years (with the Agenda of Change featuring centrally) confirm the increasingly political nature of EU's development cooperation and related need to forge constructive links with the EEAS. EuropeAid leadership should seek a much closer alliance with the EEAS in the planning, design, implementation and follow-up of strategic evaluations. Any agreement should be institutionalised and reflected in the highest level working documents and all other relevant joint documents produced by the Commission and the EEAS.

127. An interesting 'joint venture' would be to evaluate the new programmes – those which were jointly developed – at the time of the MTR. It could also provide an opportunity to test out how cooperation with the EEAS works out in practice.

Agenda for Change as the guiding perspective

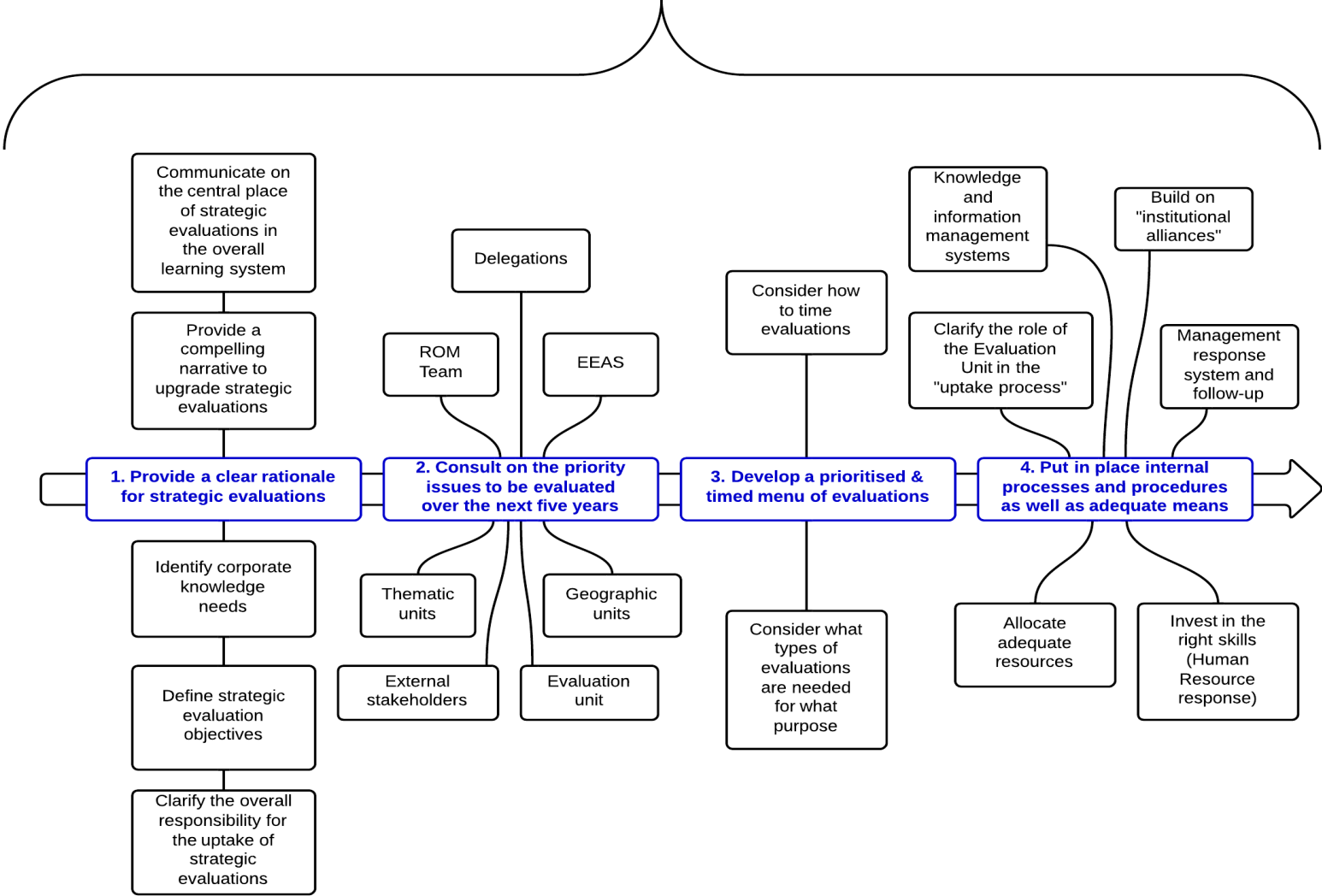


Figure 14: Elements of a corporate plan for evaluation

Recommendation area 2: Review the evaluation process so as to enhance ownership and uptake

128. Evidence collected in this study supports the view that, for many reasons, there is a significant deficit in the ownership of strategic evaluations (see paragraph 90). This leads to a situation where the Evaluation Unit mostly functions in a 'silo' and evaluative findings are insufficiently used horizontally throughout the project and work cycle.

129. Against this background, it is in the **Unit's own interest to exploit all the space available and every opportunity to upgrade the profile and priority of evaluation** in EU development practices. To this end, the following avenues could be explored:

R 2.1: A more proactive role in knowledge translation for the Evaluation Unit

130. Surveys and interviews show a pressing need to spread lessons learnt from evaluations across the organisation in user-friendly formats. In collaboration with EuropeAid's Unit on Quality and Results, the Evaluation Unit has sought to innovate the tools used for communication (e.g. Capacity4Dev video-interviews after dissemination seminars), but other opportunities could be further exploited (in close collaboration with the Capacity4Dev team). The potential to effectively use **social media** and other collaborative opportunities in learning processes should be more fully explored.

131. The Unit could also more clearly define its role in 'knowledge translation', and more actively 'sell' the evidence from evaluations (taking into account its limitations in staff and expertise). This might include systematically summarising evaluations covering the same topic (e.g. lessons learnt with policy dialogue or in terms of engaging with civil society in fragile states). The Evaluation Unit has a key role to play in knowledge translation before it hands over to the Thematic and Geographic Units to play the knowledge brokering function⁸³.

R. 2.2: Create space for enhancing ownership by adapting the evaluation approach

132. Ownership can be improved in several ways:

- First, by making the **evaluation methodology** more compatible with encouraging ownership, while maintaining the required rigour. To this end, the Unit could review each step of the methodology with evaluation specialists and explore how ownership could be enhanced (e.g. when drafting the ToRs, choosing evaluation questions, etc.).
- Second, by improving learning opportunities for staff and simultaneously increasing knowledge transfer. One way of doing this is to explore ways and means to use 'mixed teams' in carrying out specific evaluations – particularly those with a strong focus on learning⁸⁴. These could include evaluation specialists who bring independence and objectivity, plus key stakeholders from other Delegations or Units with an interest in the issue who would bring an understanding of relevance.

⁸³ In DFID and the GIZ information on evaluation content and methods is 'drip fed' to staff in a number of ways including through networks, newsletters, cafes, digests and seminars.

⁸⁴ In the same logic, the suggestion was made that it could be useful to open the Reference Group of country evaluations to staff not directly concerned but facing similar strategic and implementation challenges (e.g. in fragile state situations).

The Evaluation Unit would broker the relationship to ensure that their advice is impartial, through the choice of who is involved⁸⁵. Close involvement of these stakeholders would provide key learning-by-doing opportunities and give those being evaluated valuable exposure to experiences from different Units. Currently the only way to learn from another country is via infrequent seminars or staff rotation; however, the first option does not offer the chance for in-depth knowledge transfer from one country to another and the second is unpredictable.

- Third, by giving careful consideration to the **purpose** of each type of strategic evaluation and adapting the approach and methodology accordingly. While EU regulations oblige the Commission to carry out certain types of evaluation, thematic evaluations and geographic evaluations (for example) serve different purposes. A more appropriate way forward could be to adopt a portfolio approach, providing a 'menu' of strategic evaluations with different methodologies for different purposes for different stakeholders. 'Grand and robust evaluations' with a prescribed methodology which responds to international standards could be combined with other formats, such as synthesis evaluations or more targeted evaluations linked to corporate priorities (e.g. the role of the new institutional set-up with the creation of the EEAS in increasing the effectiveness of EU cooperation)⁸⁶.
- Fourth, by exploring how **recommendations** could be developed through **deliberative processes** involving the various key stakeholders. Currently, there are different views regarding the role of evaluation specialists in this crucial phase. Some stakeholders feel evaluators should stop at the stage of drawing conclusions, leaving the recommendations to the Commission services (as they need to assess the implications and choose feasible options). Others expect the consultants to go much further into providing operational recommendations and spelling out who should do what. With a view to promoting ownership and uptake, an intermediate position seems more appropriate, based on a negotiated process of co-producing recommendations – with the evaluation specialists acting as broker.

R 2.3: Broaden the scope of evaluations to cover the full spectrum of EU external action

133. Since the Lisbon Treaty, the Evaluation Unit is no longer a 'joint structure'. In the view of several stakeholders, this contributes to the marginalisation of strategic evaluations as they tend to be focused on EuropeAid and development cooperation interventions. This reduces the interest of EEAS constituencies in this type of product. To remedy this, the Unit could develop a **pro-active strategy** to engage more strategically with the EEAS while seeking to better integrate, as much as formally possible, the full spectrum of EU external action in its on-going work.

Recommendation area 3: Better exploit formal and informal processes for uptake

134. Evidence clearly indicates that existing formal and informal systems offer opportunities for uptake which are not optimally exploited. The challenge ahead is to embed strategic evaluation more firmly into mainstream policy, programming and monitoring processes.

135. Within the existing budgetary and human resource constraints, we can nevertheless identify **four opportunities**:

⁸⁵ Refer to the glossary for the distinction between relevance, independence and impartiality.

⁸⁶ DFID, the WB IEG, IFAD and SIDA all provide some flexibility in evaluation methodologies.

R 3.1: Link evaluations more closely to policy development

136. If the Evaluation Unit devolved some evaluations (see above), strategic evaluations could focus more on the new policy priorities of the EU in a rapidly evolving context for international cooperation, as spelled out in the recent stream of EU Communications (e.g. related to the Agenda for Change with its focus on inclusive growth, supporting transition societies, engaging strategically with civil society, empowering local authorities, etc.). These are all complex intervention areas, raising major knowledge challenges. Uptake could be enhanced if the Evaluation Unit focused its future strategic evaluations more closely on these key policy issues while involving the responsible Units more closely with the exercise.

R3.2: Improve the link with programming, including via quality assurance processes

137. This is another area where uptake could be significantly improved – in combination with measures taken by the Evaluation Unit (and others) to generate more ‘usable’ knowledge in user-friendly formats. A key priority in this regard is to strengthen ‘learning’ during quality assurance processes by making more quality time available for digesting key lessons learnt from evaluations. In this context, lessons learnt from evaluations could also be included in subsequent Financing Agreements. This relates to issues of substance (setting of objectives and results, areas and sectors to be covered, etc.) as well as to more specific components required to carry out meaningful evaluations in the future (e.g. data, statistics, studies, surveys, structures and areas of substance with regard to policy dialogue, capacity building components, etc.).

R3.3: Construct stronger synergies between evaluations and ROM processes

138. The survey indicated that in general, Delegations find frequent monitoring more beneficial than one-off ‘heavy’ evaluations: there is thus an opportunity to rethink the relationship between ROM and country evaluations. More structurally, the task at hand is to construct stronger synergies between the various building blocks of the overall M&E system, as advocated in 2006 by the Expert Panel (see section 3.3.4) and as now envisaged by the on-going reform of the ROM system. Thus a ‘virtuous circle’ could be created over time, as illustrated in Figure 15 below. If the three first building blocks operated more smoothly and were better integrated, it would be possible to ensure a clearer focus and added value for strategic evaluations⁸⁷.

⁸⁷ The ROM methodology on BS excludes the analysis of Outcome/Impacts and Sustainability as this would go too far for the ROM missions.

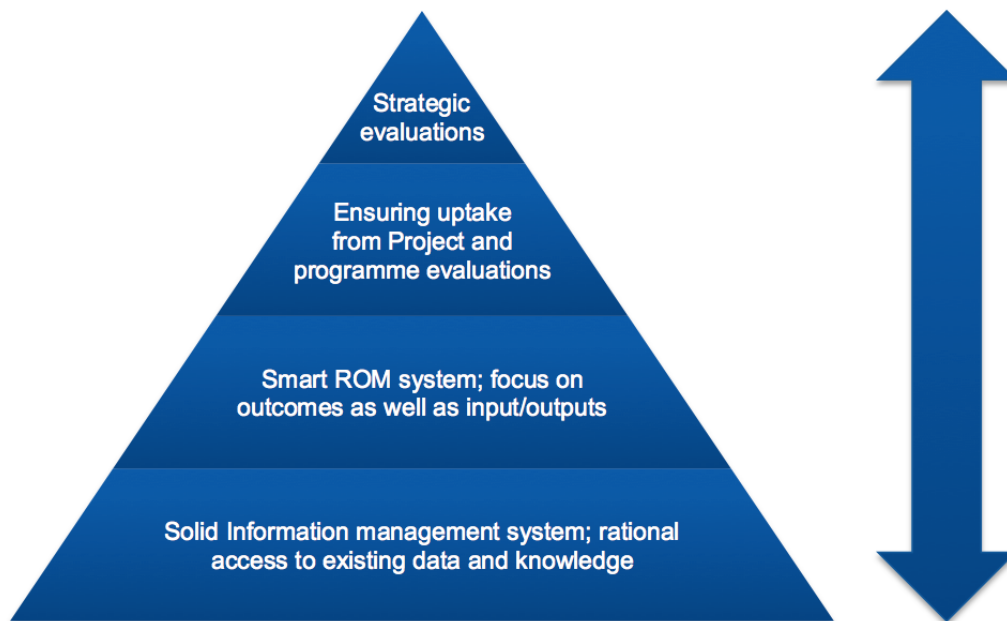


Figure 15: Integrating EuropeAid’s monitoring and evaluation functions

139. An opportunity exists to reconsider the **relationship between ROM and country evaluations as tools**. The EU is trying to turn ROM into more of a strategic management tool, but there are currently no systems in place to synthesise across ROMs or to formally link it to country evaluations. Both serve separate purposes: ROMs provide a snapshot at a particular time while strategic evaluations explore causality. There are three parts to this recommendation: (i) ensure that country evaluations are constructed in such a way that they use the analysis of causality to set out the key questions for what will need to be monitored in future; (ii) put a system in place to synthesise the evidence across ROMs so that management can use ROM to constantly update its understanding of how well the outcomes are likely to be achieved or not; (iii) at the end of each country evaluation, debate internally the implications for ROM and record this in the *Fiche Contradictoire*⁸⁸.

140. This would allow country evaluations to be devolved to the Delegations, strengthening the links between the two systems (the Evaluation Unit would retain a quality assurance role). The Evaluation Unit would remain responsible for evaluations whose evidence is relevant across the organisation (thematic, sectoral, aid modality). The second option would be to improve the strategic pitch of country evaluations and make them more relevant to the joint EEAS-EuropeAid approach to country programming.

R 3.4: Build knowledge alliances

141. EuropeAid’s KM Unit is in the process of developing an integrated learning and knowledge development strategy for the institution which aims to connect more rational information systems and business processes with staff development and training. There is particular demand for this among other Units which are involved in KM and dissemination, notably EuropeAid’s Quality and Results Unit, as well as a number of Thematic Units which have invested considerable time and energy in consolidating their knowledge and expertise in Capacity4Dev. Possibilities for cooperation are already being discussed (and in some cases on-going) with the Evaluation Unit, so this recommendation is hitting a moving target.

⁸⁸ Note that this recommendation could also be applied to the relationship between ROM and project evaluations, but this study’s remit did not extend to project evaluations.

142. Concrete options for further strengthening this 'knowledge alliance' include:

- Involving senior management in joint work: EuropeAid can only become a learning and knowledge-based organisation if this is fully supported by the institution's management.
- Rationalising and streamlining access to evaluation reports, including diversifying evaluation products and joint dissemination efforts.
- Establishing links with EuropeAid's training architecture in order to strengthen the translation of knowledge from new strategic evaluations.
- Strengthening the use of EuropeAid information systems such as Capacity4Dev for evaluation production in order to centralise institutional memory and increase transparency.

Recommendation area 4: Pay greater attention to outcomes and ownership.

143. Uptake of evaluation evidence is important for two reasons: first, to improve policy and programming decisions and second, to provide accountability on outcomes and impact. Both processes could be better linked by considering the following three sub-recommendations:

R 4.1: Strengthen the focus on outcomes to broaden the understanding of accountability

144. The focus on methodological rigour appears to the team to have come at the expense of a focus on demonstrating the achievement of sustainable outcomes. This has happened partly because of the limited way in which political economy considerations have been incorporated into the methodology (see section 4.4) and partly because of the methodological emphasis on tracing the input-output relationships for each evaluation. As the 'menu' of evaluations is debated it will be worth learning from the valuable methodological development which has occurred for BS. The three-step approach⁸⁹ moves discussions about accountability from an *output* focus to a debate about intended *outcomes*. While the full expression of the BS methodology is admittedly very data-heavy, it is worth considering whether a lighter touch three-step approach could be adapted to evaluations with different purposes.

R 4.2: Ensure strategic evaluations are seen as a foundation of good decision-making

145. Senior management could incentivise staff to bring evidence from strategic evaluations to the table by improving knowledge translation activities to ensure that evidence is readily available and accessible to non-specialists (developing short briefs, as described above). The message that *not* considering the evidence from strategic evaluations could be viewed as unacceptable could also be more strongly sent out by senior management.

⁸⁹ The evaluation of BS operations comprises three steps. *Step 1* assesses the inputs provided by BS and their effect on the partner country's budget and policy processes (direct outputs) as well as on the induced changes (induced outputs) in macro-economic policies, public spending at sector level, public policy and reforms, service delivery and institutional settings. *Step 2* covers an assessment of the actual outcomes and impacts as targeted by BS programmes (economic growth, poverty reduction, improved governance, sector outcomes, etc.), identifies the determining factors and examines gov. policy/strategy/expenditure in that context. *Step 3* establishes the linkage between the elements identified at the level of induced output with the determining factors of outcomes and impacts analysed during the second step. The strength of the linkages allows a judgement on the degree to which BS has made a contribution to the achievement of the analysed outcomes and impacts.

R 4.3: Improve ownership of strategic evaluations by improving the management response system

146. The team suggests altering the *Fiche Contradictoire* to improve ownership by senior management, and to turn it into more of an Action Plan (as is the case with several other donors). The Tanzania BS evaluation (2013), which has resulted in a joint implementation plan being developed by development partners and the government, could provide inspiration, as it indicates wide ownership of the results.

147. Building on this experience and the management response system put in place by SIDA, a possible alternative form for the *Fiche Contradictoire* is developed in Annex 8.

The main changes are:

- (i) At the start of the evaluation, a senior manager 'owner' would be assigned. S/he would be asked to endorse the plans for uptake. This could bring a degree of focus to the management response process and indicate a commitment from senior management to understanding how EuropeAid is taking up and using the evidence from each strategic evaluation. The Evaluation Unit would lead in identifying this person.
- (ii) To set out a series of actions which needs to be taken, and assign responsibility for those actions and the timeframe.
- (iii) Ensure that the assigned senior manager endorses the plan, negotiating his or her comments with other interested Units.
- (iv) For country evaluations only, determine the links to the ROM process (see recommendation 2.2). The evaluators will need to understand the ROM process and may be asked to make specific recommendations about what needs to be included in future Financing Agreements of operations (e.g. data development and collection, studies and surveys to be carried out, Policy Dialogue structures and areas of substance to be developed, capacity building components to be included) and monitored on that basis.

148. This process could be brokered by the Evaluation Unit via the Reference Group for each evaluation. Clearly, implementing this change on its own would run the risk of turning it into a bureaucratic tick-box exercise. This approach would only work if significant emphasis was also put on implementing the other recommendations in this report.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

The study team interviewed over 50 individual stakeholders and held several focus group discussions. In order to maintain confidentiality the names and functions of the people in question are not listed, instead an indicative list of the type of actors is given.

DG EuropeAid

DG Senior Management
Senior and mid-level staff
Thematic, geographic and corporate units.

EEAS

Senior and mid-level staff; current and former reference group members
Thematic and geographic divisions.

Other EU and related

Staff working in EU Delegations
Former senior staff from the EC
Evaluation professionals; team leaders and consultants
Technical experts working on EU-funded programmes.

Non-EU agencies

Staff from the following agencies who work in either (1) independent units mandated to evaluate the work of a specific agency and/or (2) units within agencies which focus on evaluation and its uptake (including communication and learning): DFID, USAID, GIZ, IFAD, World Bank, SIDA, DPME (South African Presidency).

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