



2023 Annual Report on Evaluation – Selected Highlights

From the Director's desk

Last year did not bring big surprises in Finland. After the elections, the government coalition changes and the new government defines the policy guidelines for its own term. These changes naturally have an impact on our development evaluation. Information is needed on how well the previous policies have functioned, while it is also necessary to consider how the implementation of new policies can be supported by evidence and how they will be evaluated at the end of the cycle.

Globally, we are living in a time of multiple uncertainties, conflicts, competing narratives and climate crisis – all of which pose challenges for evaluation both in terms of data availability and reliability, as well as operating modalities. **However, the role of the evaluation is to produce information for decision-making, organizational learning and accountability in all circumstances.**

Last years, seven important evaluations and reviews were completed at the end of the government term in order to present the results and lessons learned - and to make them available to the drafters of new policies. The evaluation on human rights based approach in Finland's development policy and cooperation was a significant one because Finland's foreign and development policy is based on respect for human rights and their promotion. Similarly, it was important to evaluate Finland's development cooperation in the education sector as the biggest focus area. Finland's international climate finance was evaluated for the first time, even though global climate actions have been financed for at least a decade. Finland's support to domestic resource mobilization in developing countries had also not been evaluated before, although this has been an emerging theme with political and financial importance.

For the past decade, Finland's bilateral cooperation has been reduced and support through multilaterals has been increased. **The findings of the evaluations show that country programmes open up opportunities for different actors to a wide range of contacts and long-term cooperation.** They allow for stronger policy influence, particularly in strategic reform processes of developing countries, both at the country level and at the global dialogue tables. Bilateral support provides opportunities for long-term strengthening of national capacities, and contribute significantly to the effectiveness and sustainability of results. At the same time, the country programmes have guaranteed better evaluability and reporting of the results, thanks to the results-based approach.

Our guest contribution highlights the potential of evaluation as a force for positive change and the new opportunities created by artificial intelligence in evaluation activities. **The ability of artificial intelligence to collect data and analyze it is undeniable** - but at the same time it creates new requirements for evaluators to ensure that the collected data is not misused and that the artificial intelligence remains under human control. The evaluation unit has also started actively experimenting with the use of new technologies in evaluation and continues to develop solutions made possible by artificial intelligence.

I would like to warmly thank the professional staff of our unit, the partners of the framework agreement (Particip-NIRAS), the management of the Ministry and the Departments for their cooperation. Likewise, a warm thank you to the experts and external stakeholders for participating in both evaluations and discussions about their results.

Antero Klemola
Director, Development Evaluation

Introduction

The Development Evaluation Unit of the MFA is responsible for commissioning large-scale evaluations of strategic relevance, which may cover policy priorities, themes or country programmes. Reporting directly to the Under-Secretary of State for Development Policy, Evaluation Unit is independent of the units and departments in charge of implementing development cooperation and making policy decisions.

Evaluations assess development policies and cooperation along with relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability. Evaluations serve learning and decision-making and are essential part of accountability, openness and transparency.

The Unit also actively engages in international cooperation in the field of evaluation, which is an excellent way to learn and influence, benefitting the whole MFA.

In 2023, five policy level evaluations and two reviews were completed. Besides strategic evaluations, we support development of evaluation capacity and culture both in Finland and in partner countries.

The 2023 Annual Report on Evaluation showcases the spectrum of our evaluation activities over the past year. This brief presents some selected highlights from the report which is available in Finnish on the [MFA's website](#).

Guest Remarks

The Future of Evaluation: Harnessing Data, Technology, and Knowledge for Global Impact

Data and knowledge are transformative forces, capable of shaping what we think and how we behave. This has become increasingly evident, and globally recognized. **The last decade alone witnessed a revolutionary shift, granting us unprecedented access to information that was once deemed unimaginable.** In a world where evaluation has the potential to catalyze positive change and development, I am steadfast in my belief in its inherent value and potential.

Reflecting on the not-so-distant past, I can recall a time when the mere idea of seeing someone's face while conversing on the phone was considered far-fetched. Today, virtual meetings seamlessly integrate into our daily lives. Similarly, the notion that technology could "learn" was speculative. **Now, we anticipate our information systems evolving day by day as they assimilate data.**

Ushering in a deluge of information, the advent of new technologies yet presents us with significant challenges in discerning the relevance of all the knowledge to which we are exposed. Amid this inundation, we find ourselves not only navigating through vast pools of data but also contending with content that masquerades as knowledge, and at times, tests our values.

Our evaluation work holds tremendous potential in this dynamic landscape, accompanied by an

undeniable sense of urgency. Excitement for the future is palpable. Yet, as a community, we must prepare ourselves for the profound changes unfolding. How do we leverage this new age? How do we make sure to keep being relevant and align with evolving expectations and demands as brokers of knowledge?

These questions underscore the need for collective contemplation and strategic planning. As we stand at the crossroads of opportunity and challenge, I remain optimistic about the future. **Together, we must chart a course that allows us to harness the full potential of these times while staying attuned to the responsibilities and expectations that come with being stewards of knowledge.**

Building on the foundation of our shared commitment to the transformative power of evaluation, I am thrilled to provide a glimpse into the groundbreaking initiatives undertaken by the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP, initiatives that are shaping the future landscape of evaluation.

First and foremost, I am excited to introduce a cutting-edge development from our office – [AIDA](#) – which stands for Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics. AIDA represents a paradigm shift in how we approach evidence extraction from our UNDP development evaluation database. Harnessing the capabilities

of artificial intelligence and machine learning, AIDA efficiently identifies relevant sections from evaluations, conducts thorough analyses, and generates new summaries and insights. **This revolutionary technology allows us to rapidly decipher the collective messages embedded in our evaluations, transforming evidence into actionable knowledge.**

AIDA is not just a tool; it is a catalyst for learning at an unprecedented speed with enhanced systematic efficiency. We are actively exploring ways to seamlessly integrate AIDA into our evaluation processes, envisioning a future where this technology becomes an integral part of our organizational fabric. By socializing AIDA within and beyond our organization, we aim to create a collaborative platform where everyone can tap into this rich evidence base. Moreover, we aspire to expand AIDA's reach by including evaluations from other organizations and institutions, for the collective wisdom of thousands of evaluations to emerge in a matter of minutes. Nevertheless, there is a need for continued and strengthened vigilance, ensuring that the data and evidence we collect is not distorted or misused and that artificial intelligence remains under human control. **We are in a moment in time where it is possible – and necessary – for the evaluator to leverage technology and artificial intelligence to help speed up the evaluative process, to effectively capture the plethora of data available to us, and to be responsive to our audiences.** The role of the evaluator is expanding, and we will need to ensure that our community of evaluators has the tools and skills required to respond to this exciting direction.

I am equally thrilled to share the success story of the [Global SDG Synthesis Coalition](#), a unique collaboration of which I am proud to be Co-Lead. Born out of the recognition that evaluations and other sources of evidence could really help accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Coalition has become a beacon of collaborative effort. **With representatives from over 60 organizations, both within and outside the UN, actively participating, the Coalition is dedicated to sharing knowledge across all SDG pillars.** The Coalition's syntheses will generate usable and actionable insights for implementers,

policymakers, and other stakeholders. The first tangible outcome of our collective efforts is the Partnership Pillar Synthesis (SDG 17), which we presented at the SDG Summit in New York in September 2023, and which includes valuable lessons on finance, technology, trade, capacity building, and the overall integration of SDGs into national strategies. Looking ahead to 2024, our vision for the Coalition is to solidify it as a lasting force, recognized for its powerful collaboration and its ability to generate novel, meaningful, and impactful insights. Our engagement with experts and governments will continue, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to shaping a future where evaluation not only informs but actively propels, positive change and development on a global scale.

These two initiatives, AIDA and the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition stand as exciting initiatives within a larger sea of projects and activities that our vibrant evaluation community is currently undertaking. **It is truly inspiring to witness the collective efforts of our community, driven by a shared understanding of the transformative power inherent in evaluation and knowledge.**

The unity within our community stems from a common recognition of the significance of evaluation and the imperative to collaborate. As we navigate this dynamic landscape, we are acutely aware of the pivotal role technological advances play in shaping the future of our work. **Leveraging these advancements is not just a choice but a necessity, as we strive to ensure that good evidence becomes the unwavering foundation for decision-making processes.**

Being a part of this community fills me with pride. Together, we are forging a path that embraces innovation, harnesses the power of knowledge, and remains dedicated to the pursuit of excellence. As we navigate these uncharted territories with a heightened sense of responsibility, I am confident that our collective journey will continue to be marked by progress, impact, and a steadfast commitment to shaping a future where evaluation is a force for meaningful transformation.

Isabelle Mercier
Director, Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP



Evaluations concluded in 2024

Evaluation: Human Rights-Based Approach in Finland's Development Policy and Cooperation

This independent evaluation analysed how human rights and the so-called human rights-based approach (HRBA) has been implemented in Finland's development policy and cooperation during 2019-2021. The evaluation assessed how human rights appear in the language used in various documents, how effectively the human rights-based approach has been implemented and its value. Lastly, the evaluation assessed its linkages with risk management.

The evaluation recommends reaffirming HRBA as a core principle guiding Finland's development cooperation. This should be reflected in the human rights outcomes pursued and in the processes that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its partners put into place.

To enhance effectiveness, a broader approach to putting HRBA into practice and monitoring its implementation and results is needed. There is a need for strengthened capacities for human rights assessments, conflict and power analyses and do no harm assessments among partners and the Ministry, linked to systems for closer monitoring.

The Ministry should acknowledge that some partners are likely to remain human rights sensitive, whereas others are steadily improving their capacities to act in human rights progressive and transformative manners. Becoming better within a given level could be an aim. The Ministry should also screen those that may not fulfil the sensitive level more strictly.

The assignment started in the autumn of 2022. It is based on a theory of change developed for the evaluation. The findings are based on a vast document analysis, over 250 interviews, three focus group discussions, and an e-survey among partners. A separate component of the evaluation was the use of data science techniques for document analysis.

Context case studies covered long-term partnerships (Tanzania, Mozambique); HRBA in transition contexts (Zambia, Kenya, Vietnam) and HRBA in conflict contexts (Somalia, Kenya, Palestine). Thematic cases on "Innovations and trends towards transformational development cooperation"; "HRBA in partnering with multilaterals"; "HRBA in severe headwinds" and "From cross-cutting objectives to HRBA, lessons from disability interventions" were completed.

Evaluation: Finland's International Climate Finance 2016-2022

This evaluation assessed the relevance and coherence of Finland's climate finance in relation to international objectives and actors, identified results that have been delivered over the period 2016-2022 and made suggestions on how the Action Plan for Finland's Public International Climate Finance could be enhanced going forward.

Finland's climate financing has not been evaluated before even though earlier assessments has been undertaken by the National Audit Office of Finland (NAOF) and Development Policy Committee (DPC). This evaluation builds upon both of them.

Several different strategies and policies have influenced the shape and direction of Finland's climate finance. Finland has lacked a clear and overarching strategy for its climate financing but has nevertheless achieved a broad range of climate outcomes. **The MFA's interventions are highly consistent with major global commitments under the Paris Agreement and UNFCCC processes, and strongly aligned with policy ambitions and priorities of development countries.** Wider development priorities such as gender and human rights are also well reflected across the portfolio.

Institutional cooperation and participation by civil society have been successful but engaging private sector remains a challenge. The portfolio overall has been efficiently managed. Resourcing within MFA remains a constraint in terms of reporting and synthesizing results, mainstreaming approaches and multilateral influencing.

The evaluation recommends MFA to develop a clearer strategy for its overall climate finance, bringing together the various channels and instruments and ensure that the strategy is properly resourced. MFA should also strengthen its approach to climate mainstreaming and Paris Alignment and build a deeper understanding of Finnish value-added in the climate finance space. A greater integration and alignment between different instruments is also needed.

The evaluation was initiated in the autumn of 2022. The findings were based on a portfolio data review of more than 500 interventions and a more detailed assessment of 49 interventions representing more than 70% of the value of the portfolio. It further included a peer donor review and trend mapping, and interviews with more than 100 stakeholders. The evaluation also produced four case studies on

- ▣ adaptation and cross cutting objectives,
- ▣ development policy investments for the private sector,
- ▣ opportunities and benefits for Finnish stakeholder participation and
- ▣ the role of climate finance at the country level using Tanzania as an example.

Evaluation: Right to Education, Right to Learn - Finland's Development Cooperation in the Education Sector

This independent evaluation examined how Finland has promoted global development in the education sector from 2019 to 2022 and what role it could play in the future. The evaluation analyzed how well multi-actor cooperation has succeeded and what the direction future actions should be.

Finland has demonstrated its commitment to education development cooperation. However, it is crucial that Finland continues and strengthens its commitment, and its reputation may suffer if funding is reduced. **Finland's efforts to respond to the global learning crisis remain highly relevant.** Achievements include improvements in inclusive education, girls' participation, policies, teaching practices, and school environments. Bilateral cooperation is the cornerstone of Finland's success. The multi-actor approach requires fine-tuning, a shared vision, and better utilization of the potential of different actors.

The evaluation recommends that Finland clarifies its shared vision for multi-actor cooperation in educational development cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should allocate its limited resources more strategically and prioritize them better. The focus should be on basic and primary education, particularly in rights-based inclusive education. Additionally, efforts should be made to strengthen education in crisis situations and build resilient education systems. Finland should update the premise of its international role to emphasize the importance of education cutting across the sectors of sustainable development. Improvements in resourcing, coordination and monitoring are needed.

The evaluation was initiated in the autumn of 2022 and is based on a theory of change developed for it, which relies on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' two most recent result frameworks for the education sector as well as country programs. The findings were based on document analysis, 101 interviews, 49 of which were conducted at the country level, and the Delphi method, involving 27 national and international experts in the field. Country-specific case studies were conducted for Finland's long-term partner countries (Ethiopia, Nepal, Palestine). In addition, two thematic case studies were carried out on vocational education in Ukraine and teacher training in Mozambique.

Evaluation: Finland's Initiatives Focused on Enhanced Domestic Resource Mobilization

This evaluation focused on Finland's initiatives on enhanced domestic resource mobilization (DRM). The aim is to help MFA enhance the effectiveness of its support in this area.

Despite the modest level of financing to date, enhancing DRM has been of strategic importance to Finland's development cooperation. The two Action Plans on Tax and Development come with an ambitious portfolio and objectives, in line with the government's commitment to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), strengthen taxation in developing countries, and, as of 2019, uphold corporate tax responsibility principles. The two APs reflect Finland's pledge to increase official development assistance (ODA) under the Addis Tax Initiative.

Despite some challenges in implementing the Action Plans, MFA has built a credible and balanced portfolio by seizing the right opportunities at the right time, and by carefully selecting its main partners at country, regional, and global levels. There are questions, however, on whether these good stories are sufficient to lead to transformative and lasting results.

The evaluation recommends to prepare a new, rolling Action Plan, based on realistic resource provision, building on Finland's achievements to date, and taking into account the need for prioritisation and regular monitoring. It states that Finland is well positioned to further demonstrate its commitment to transparent, fair and equitable global tax systems. The evaluation recommends that MFA should ensure that its support remains conducive to synergies and coalition building at country, regional, and global levels, with a continuous emphasis on promoting South-South cooperation.

The evaluation is based on a Theory of Change which outlines how the two Action Plans on Tax and Development (2016-19 and 2020-23) aimed to achieve their objectives. The evaluation evidence was collected and analysed in three blocks:

- ▣ Policy and institutional analysis,
- ▣ Portfolio analysis and stakeholder mapping,
- ▣ Selected partners' achievements and MFA's contribution.

Evaluation: Development communications amidst global crises and polarized discussion

The evaluation focused on the effectiveness of Ministry for Foreign Affairs' (MFA) development communications in reaching the public and making global development issues visible. It also studied Ministry's processes for developing communication contents and related internal and external collaboration.

Evaluation concluded that information about development issues has reached the public to some extent, but visibility is low among those who do not actively follow development matters. The identified barriers for attracting wider audience include use of professional jargon and scarcity of discussion or debate on the MFA website, Instagram or Facebook accounts and physical meetings. Moreover, Twitter discussion is dominated by people with negative tone.

MFA has high in-house capacity for planning the communications, producing content and acting as spokespersons, but the internal synergies are not fully used. Demand for the development communication unit's services is high and comes from all across the Ministry, making it difficult for the Development Communications Unit to set and follow their own priorities.

Development Academy for journalists was considered a good instrument that helps create and maintain networks and contacts with journalists, while cooperation with CSOs has untapped potential. There are also many lessons that could be learned from development communications in Nordic peer countries.

Review of the MFA's support to international recruitment

The recruitment of Finnish specialists to international positions in the UN and other multilateral organisations plays an important role in Finland's foreign-, security, trade -and development policies. This review was carried out to gain a clearer picture of international recruitment supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) and generate ideas for how it can be developed further.

The review covered all forms of international recruitment supported by the MFA and looked at also how international recruitments are organized in Sweden, the Netherlands and Italy.

International recruitment serves multiple purposes. These are influencing and supporting the multilateral system, gaining access to its organisations, fostering an internationally experienced Finnish workforce, and demonstrating Finland's international presence. The goals are not clear, which leads to activities being managed without an overarching long-term strategy to guide resource allocation and choices.

The review concluded that Finland needs more strategic clarity on international recruitment and that effective management of international recruitment needs efficient coordination. Finland does not take full advantage of its footprint in multilateral organisations nor the networks and experience of former recruits. The report makes eight recommendations to develop international recruitments.

Review of the use and utility of centralised evaluations

The review evaluated the use and usefulness of various evaluations, meta-evaluations and reviews carried out in the years 2015–2022. During the review period, a total of 23 evaluations and three reviews were carried out. The purpose of the review was to strengthen the use of evaluations for evidence-based decision-making, learning and accountability, and to promote the usefulness of evaluations.

During the review period, the Development Evaluation Unit had tried to improve evaluations and the evaluation process by involving more people, developing guidelines and tools and information products. The review considers these actions appropriate for promoting learning and knowledge-based management.

The usefulness of evaluations depends on the departments and units that are supposed to take ownership of the evaluation results and use them in practice. **Centralized evaluations have influenced and contributed to policies, guidelines and processes of development cooperation.** The impact on the political dialogue and by extension the development policy debate has been limited.

Evaluation reports are heavy and their style repels readers. The limits of absorption capacity in the Ministry also become an obstacle to utilizing evaluations, if several evaluations are running at the same time. Previous evaluations and reviews have also highlighted the need to strengthen learning from evaluations in the Ministry. **Learning from evaluations requires adopting an approach where learning processes are facilitated, team-based and forward-looking.** Evaluations are only useful if they are completed on time and respond to information needs.

In addition to the evaluations, EVA-11 has commissioned some reviews, which have been appreciated. In the future, the flexibility of the evaluation plan will be one factor that can be used to respond to rapidly rising needs. The review made six concrete recommendations as measures to strengthen the use of evaluations in data-based decision-making, learning and accountability, and to promote the usefulness of evaluations.

All [evaluation reports](#) can be found on MFA website.

Ongoing and upcoming evaluations

Ongoing evaluations and review:

Meta-analysis of Country Programmes (2021–2024)

The implementation of current cycle of country programmes based on the new format began in 2021. The results of the meta-analysis will be used in the forthcoming planning of bilateral cooperation beyond the current country programmes. The Development Evaluation Unit, in collaboration with regional departments, has designed the process to include both a facilitated self-assessment component and a clearly independent evaluation aspect. The meta-analysis of country programmes commenced in 2023 and will be completed in spring 2024.

Joint Evaluation: Nordic Trust Fund Evaluation

Multilateral cooperation forms a growing part of Nordic development financing, and Nordic countries channel a significant portion of multilateral funding through various multilateral funds, especially through the World Bank Group and the UN system. Finland participates in this Nordic joint evaluation aiming to address existing information gaps, including the practices and impacts of Nordic funds' support and coordination. The evaluation focuses on the World Bank Group, the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), and the African Development Bank. The evaluation will be completed in early 2025.

Upcoming evaluations and reviews to be started in 2024:

Review: Finland's Support to Digitalization in Developing Countries

Digitalization is a key theme in the government program as an accelerator of growth, enhancer of security and resilience, and enabler of inclusivity. Digitalization also plays a crucial role in Finland's development policy and cooperation. The review will assess the integration, implementation, and outcomes of digitalization in development cooperation so far. The results of the review will provide insights and guidance for a possible comprehensive strategy for promoting digitalization in Finland's development policy and cooperation. The review will be initiated in autumn 2024 and will be completed in early 2025.

Evaluation: Peaceful Democratic Societies

Finland promotes comprehensive development towards peaceful, democratic, rule-of-law-based governance. This has been one of Finland's development policy priorities. The evaluation complements and deepens the analysis of the MFA commissioned study on support for democracy, rule of law development, and good governance. The evaluation will launch in autumn 2024 and will be completed in spring 2025.

Evaluation: Finland's support to Environment, Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Biodiversity

Environment, Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Biodiversity has been a long-standing priority in Finland's development policy. As per the government program, Finland seeks to promote sustainable forestry utilizing Finnish expertise, to enhance local living conditions and increasing the global carbon sink. Biodiversity was added as a cross-cutting goal in 2022. This policy priority area and theme has not been evaluated for a long time. This evaluation is partly a continuation of the 2023 evaluation of Finland's International Climate Finance. The evaluation will initiate in autumn 2024 and be concluded in 2025.