

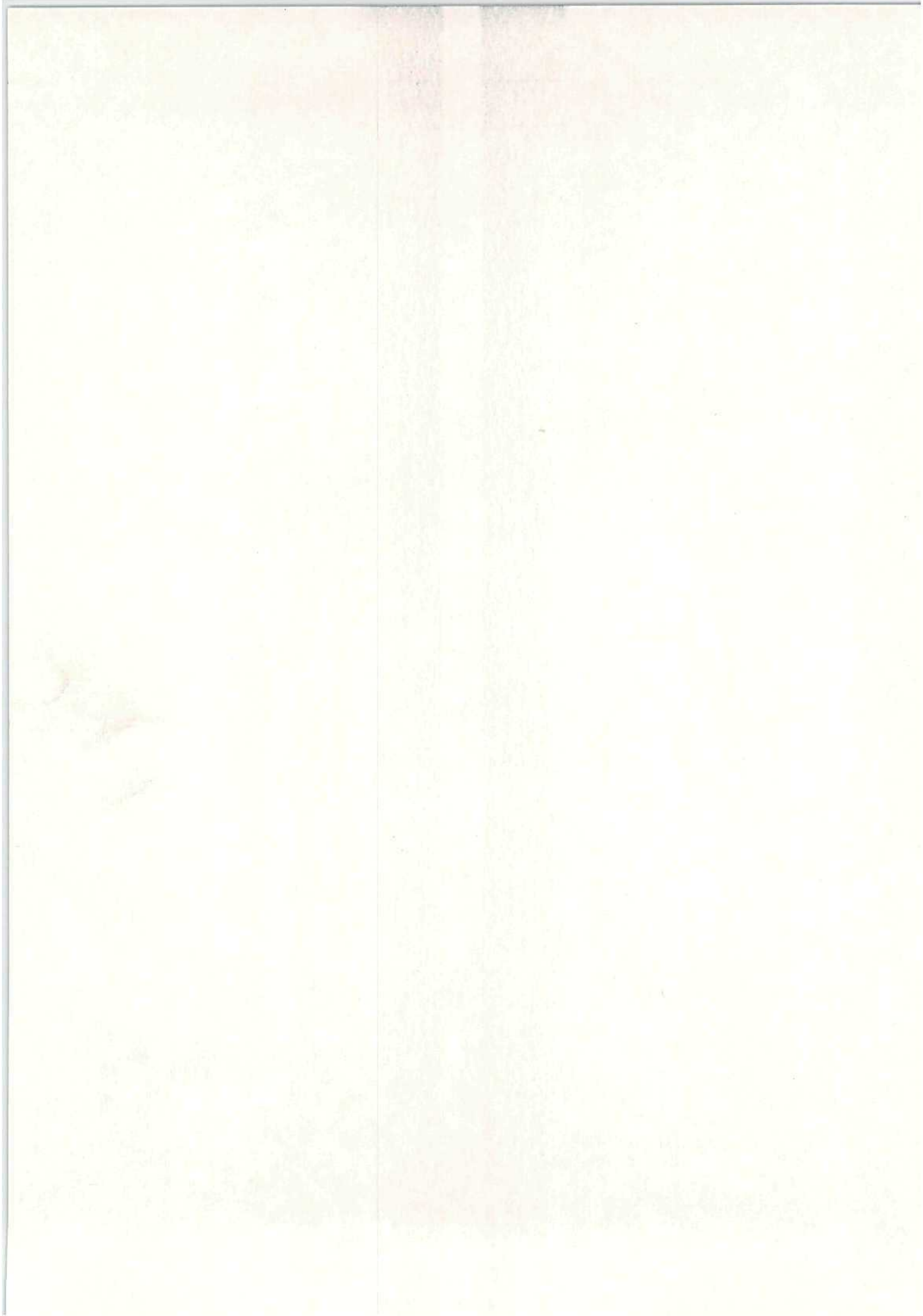
ROYAL MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
Norway

# Evaluation Report 1.93



**INTERNAL  
LEARNING FROM  
EVALUATIONS AND  
REVIEWS**

by  
Scanteam International as



Januar, 1993

# Learning from experience

A Study of the Feedback from  
Evaluations and Reviews in  
Norwegian Bilateral Aid

by

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Scanteam international as

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The views expressed in this report are those of  
the authors and should not be attributed to  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Learning from experience is important to improve the success of development aid. This study was set up to investigate how the Norwegian aid administration learns from its evaluation system. It limits the focus to bilateral aid administered by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and concentrates on the production and use of evaluation reports and project reviews.

The study is based on a large empirical material; 7 case studies of evaluation processes; a questionnaire to all professional staff in the administration; a contents analysis of reports; interviews with selected groups and senior management; and special purpose reviews of the instruments of corporate memory. The study was undertaken between October 1991 and September 1992.

The importance of systematic evaluation is fully recognized in the aid administration. It has been encouraged by political authorities at the highest level. The Norwegian aid administration has two evaluation systems.

The first is centred around the production of **evaluation reports**. Most of the more recent reports are studies of a **policy** nature and often concern the **impact** of aid. The activities are led by the evaluation unit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reports are of a high quality, expensive and are undertaken by external, independent expertise. Less than ten reports are completed per year.

The second system is centred around the production of **project reviews**. These are commissioned by the aid agency (NORAD), by its sectoral, regional or field offices. They are mostly concerned with **delivery** of aid (and to some extent **impact** of aid). Some 40 to 50 reviews are undertaken every year. The quality varies, perhaps because there are no standardized formats or methods. The reports are often undertaken to satisfy a particular need for information.

At present there is a gap in the evaluation

system between the broad, policy oriented studies and the more narrow, in-house reviews of projects and programmes. There is a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities between the Ministry and the Agency in this area, to ensure that high quality **impact** evaluations of individual aid activities are carried out.

Evaluations and project reviews serve the purpose of learning - but are also management tools and instruments to exert control/ensure accountability.

Project/programme evaluations which are traditionally seen as instruments to analyze impact and policy related questions are surprisingly strong on more detailed questions related to aid delivery, and relatively weak on questions related to policy. Thus, many of the evaluations had more the character of a combined project review and evaluation and therefore became more expensive and time consuming than necessary. Such evaluation reports therefore seem to serve the combined purpose of control and management decisions better than lesson-learning. This is rather contrary to what would be expected since one would assume that the main concern at the ministry level should be to draw lessons which can be used as a basis for policy decisions.

Information needs forming the basis for evaluations are often unclear, contradictory and vaguely articulated. This gives the evaluations a weak basis in the aid administration, and make them less useful as management tools.

In terms of making use of evaluation results, channelling of information is not the critical part, but rather the content itself and the timing in relation to management cycles, since the average evaluation would take about 2 years from the first initiative to the report is published.

There is no doubt that evaluations generate much information which is spread, read and used. The average person in the aid administration takes part of 3 to 6 evalua-

tions and project reviews per year. That would often represent 1 to 2 evaluations and probably all reviews that come close to the person's own tasks. The evaluation system reaches its targets with information.

But does it generate learning? Yes, people in the organization think so. They rank learning from project reviews highly, but learning from evaluations does not appear to be so significant. Some evaluations reach very few but others reach a lot of people. A typical evaluation is read by a handful who are concerned with the particular aid activity itself; that type of activities; or the country in question. But there are also evaluations that reach large numbers - if not all - of the staff members.

Some evaluations contain much inputs to learning. The quality varies. Other evaluations contain little that is new; they may summarize existing knowledge, codify the "state of the art" of something, or simply fail to add new insights within the field. If nobody learns, it is not necessarily the administration which is at fault.

When these two dimensions (scope and extent of learning) are combined they show four patterns of learning, that; (1) many learn a lot; (2) many learn a little; (3) few learn a lot; and (4) few learn a little. The predominant mode is that few learn rather little. One possible hypothesis is that the approach to evaluations in the aid administration suffers from the ambition that large numbers of people should maximize their learning. By all evidence this is overly optimistic and it does not take into account how learning really occurs. The system risks becoming dysfunctional when it tries to make the many learn a lot, and instead ends up with few learning a little. Why?

Knowledge structures - organizational and individual - put a limit on the absorptive capacity of the aid administration. The absorptive capacity is much higher in respect of specific inputs of knowledge, for example in a technical field. Consequently learning can be very high when the exploration and solution of a problem takes place close to the ordinary tasks of an individual.

When he or she is given the opportunity to investigate a problem, develop knowledge, learn and apply the learning on the daily work tasks, then the learning effect can be high.

On the other hand the organization is weaker on abstract knowledge that is political, social and cultural in character. It is not very likely that even information of high quality, with a high potential for learning, will achieve much. As the absorptive capacity is low, the amount of learning will remain low.

Can the aid administration be classified as a system which is open to knowledge - does it have a learning culture? The question must be reformulated to take into account varying purposes and processes of learning. It appears as if the best learning culture is found at the level of professional subgroups, be they sector specialists or regional specialists. At this level there are "dominating knowledge structures" and little diversity. On the contrary, it is at the more general levels of overriding values and interdisciplinary competence, that knowledge structures are weak and fragmented.

The capacity to learn is higher further down in the organization, and the more specific the subject is. The organization is relatively more open to learning about, for example, methods of forestry, power generation or land use. In particular, the more directly useful and applicable the information is, the more likely is it that someone will learn.

On the other hand, if the information coming to the organization is interdisciplinary and if it touches on broader issues of why and how development takes place; indeed if the information is political, then, as the case studies show, it is not so likely that anyone will learn. Of course people profess an interest in such issues, and they are relatively quick to recognize their faults, but they fail to change - to learn. Even if the single individual would want to learn, and perceives himself or herself to be open minded, they are not embedded in an organizational structure that is conducive to such learning.

Besides, as the questionnaire suggests, the respondents are hypocritical. They think themselves open but in practice they do not subscribe to values and attitudes that would accompany an open attitude towards knowledge. New thoughts and holistic perspectives are among the least valued qualities of evaluation reports. Critical and controversial evaluation reports are not likely to be rejected but the information might be neglected. The reason is not unwillingness to learn, but a lacking capacity.

How can then openness at the level of individuals (with the above reservations) turn to something else at the level of the organization? There are several explanations.

- (i) an open organization benefits from a diversity of knowledge structures, and there is diversity in the aid administration.
- (ii) the diversity must not be total. On the contrary, there should also be a dominating knowledge structure. There should be a common frame of reference and some coherence to the values and ideas espoused by the organization. Qualities such as these are relative, but the indications imply that the aid administration lacks dominating knowledge structures.
- (iii) whether a dominating knowledge structure facilitates learning or not depends on how well developed it is. Well developed structures have a capacity to absorb radically new information and to learn. In plain terms, the more you know the more likely is it that you will learn something new.

Consequently, the aid administration needs to make a strategic distinction between two modes of learning; via communication or via involvement. Learning via **involvement** means that the staff of the aid administration pursue knowledge themselves. They take part on evaluation teams, actively commission evaluations and follow the work closely. They learn by doing and by investigating the phenomena they are curious about themselves. Learning via **communication**, which is the second process of learning from

evaluations, means to learn by consuming the results of evaluation reports, by reading, attending seminars and so on.

The aid administration must pursue learning in both ways, but the two roads to learning require different methods and approaches.

**Learning via involvement** means that the staff of the aid administration must pursue knowledge themselves, they cannot wait for others to serve them with evaluation reports. If they are to pursue knowledge effectively, the organization needs to change in five ways:

1. Personnel policies must allow staff members to spend time to work closely with evaluation teams
2. The scope for initiatives must not a priori be limited to any particular type of evaluation (policy, impact or delivery)
3. Top management must actively encourage and support staff to engage in evaluation and learning activities, and help create resources so that this is possible
4. Evaluations that constitute effective learning arenas are often established together with other donor organizations, particularly the multilateral organizations. It is important that staff take part in their missions/studies.

**Learning via communication** means to develop knowledge with the help of evaluation reports; by reading and taking part of evaluation results in other ways. The evaluation system contains much information which is not fully used, and it may generate even more. In order to fully utilize intelligence from evaluations the organization needs to change in four ways:

5. The evaluation unit at Ministry level should emphasize policy oriented studies that provide inputs for learning on issues of a political nature, and that cut across organizational and disciplinary boundaries.
6. The evaluation functions (at Ministry and Agency level) need to follow-up more actively and imaginatively on

evaluations that have significant potential for learning. Continued seminars, working groups to elaborate on findings and implementation, public debates, reviews in professional journals, as well as standardized mechanisms for storing, etc. are all examples of means that should be used fully.

7. The mandates of the evaluation unit(s) should extend to follow-up activities. A major part of the work on any particular evaluation should take place after it is finished, and be concerned with introducing and developing its knowledge in the organization.
8. The organizational culture values new thinking and ideas little, compared to other qualities of information. These attitudes must change. Curiosity, experimentation and novelty of ideas must be leading elements in the organizational culture.

The School of Development Cooperation is an important forum for both types of learning and it is recommended that the task of operationalizing ways and means of learning via communication and involvement is done in close collaboration with the school. It is recommended that a Board is appointed to ensure that the curriculum of the school is integrated with the need for knowledge.

Evaluations are expected to contribute to learning, and to be useful as inputs to the decision-making process. At the operational level, both these objectives will be better reached if the following measures are undertaken:

9. Different types of evaluations should be more clearly defined and firmly based in the appropriate part of the organization. The main principle would be to make those evaluations which are intended for policy decisions more policy oriented; those intended for management decisions more focused on impact evaluation; and to transfer the more detailed question of aid delivery to improved monitoring systems and reporting procedures both at the donor

and the recipient side.

10. To improve the flow of information, it is necessary to establish effective systems for monitoring, evaluation and reporting, with well defined requirements on the division of responsibilities, what type of information should pass through the system, and what formats should be used for reporting.
11. The Log-frame and Integrated approach should be used extensively to draw conclusions and summarize the lessons learned. (as suggested in the Evaluation Handbook)
12. Evaluation findings which are potentially useful for a wider audience, should be extracted and presented in a more condensed and digestible form than the full reports distributed today.
13. The time of completing evaluation reports should be reduced from the present average of 2 years to an average of no more than 6 months. This is possible by systematically improving management, refining the mandates and limiting the focus to the most relevant aspects of the question at hand.
14. Archive and IDOK should be developed further. The systems should be linked up and made accessible from the terminals in the staff members' offices. The documents should be registered with annotations in the database.
15. Files and databases are necessary, but not sufficient, as tools in the corporate memory. But they must be supplemented by other inputs; for example, debriefing people with field experience, network participation, and task force assignments within the administration.

The strategy chosen to guide Norwegian development assistance in the 90's suggests a shift of responsibilities from the donor to the recipient and a shift in types of aid from identifiable development activities (project/programmes) towards non-identifiable activities (financial instruments). This is a move towards less administrative demanding types of aid, which will change the role of the donor, the donors' organisational

needs, and correspondingly the evaluation system. Four different scenarios for development aid are described in this study, which corresponds to four different major types of aid activities. At present, Norwegian bilateral aid is heavily focused on the most administratively demanding scenario with minor components of the three other types of aid in addition. Consequently, the maximum solution is needed, both in terms of organisational resources and evaluation systems.

At present, evaluation is highly centralised. Both policy evaluations, impact evaluations and to some extent evaluation of aid delivery have been initiated at the ministry level. The evaluation system at agency and field office level is un-coordinated, ad-hoc and without any quality control support.

16. In light of the present division of responsibilities between the Ministry, agency and field offices; current international experience; and the new strategy for Norwegian aid, a major initiative to decentralise the evaluation system should be made. This would imply that the Ministry should by and large confine its role to policy oriented evaluations; the agency should concentrate on policy-oriented evaluations of direct relevance to its aid activities plus impact evaluations; and the field office and the recipient should increasingly take over the role to evaluate impact of aid and monitor aid delivery.
17. Decentralisation along these lines would require a strengthening of the capacity and capability of the agency and its field offices in supporting evaluation activities, monitor the quality of evaluation material, support recipient institutions in developing evaluation procedures, processing evaluation material, organising learning arenas, training personnel and develop methodology.
18. In order to achieve this, an evaluation function should be established at agency level to provide support to staff

initiatives. This may take the form of a unit or be part of the existing structure, but the point is that it should **not** undertake evaluations, but provide professional support to the evaluations undertaken/commissioned by departments. The unit should help to ensure that the agency gets feedback of high quality.

19. At all levels in the aid administration there is a need to increase professionalism of managers and staff in order to develop and operate a reliable and cost-effective evaluation system and safeguard the quality of information generated.





## **SECTION A**

### **The framework; evaluation, organisation and learning in development cooperation**

#### **Introduction.**

This section sets the stage for the following discussion of evaluation and learning.

**Chapter 1** introduces the subject of this evaluation, its scope as well as its limitations. The focus is on evaluation and learning in the aid administration and presents the methods of inquiry. These build on a combination of case studies, content analysis, a questionnaire, interviews and studies of specific topics.

**Chapter 2** presents the stage for evaluation and learning; that is, the system of Norwegian bilateral development assistance. The chapter reviews briefly the organization at present, the use of evaluations at different levels and the role of the evaluation unit. The reader who is familiar with the Norwegian aid administration could go straight to the next chapter.

**Chapter 3** is a brief summary of the state of the art concerning evaluation and learning. The chapter portrays the diversity in aid organizations and discusses five major design variables of how an evaluation function may fit into the overall organizational structure. There is no comprehensive review of the different systems, and certainly no comparison of all their effectiveness.

## 1. PURPOSE AND METHOD

### 1.1 Background and objectives of the evaluation

Between 1986-88, the National Audit Board reviewed learning in one of the Swedish aid agencies (SIDA). The report (RRV, 1988) concluded that there are major external obstacles to learning in an aid administration including:

- The complexity and rapid changes in the organisation's tasks
- Unclear and contradictory objectives
- The limited role of aid administrations in development since recipient governments also strongly influence activities.

It was found that SIDA's ability to learn is far from optimal, and that most initiatives to improve the situation would only be marginal unless major changes were introduced in the organisation, such as to refine the overall objectives, introduce a strategy for the totality of aid activities, reduce the administrative burden on professional staff, change their roles from administrators to "brokers", etc.

The Swedish study was read with interest in Norway, and it was felt that the findings to a large extent also reflected the Norwegian situation.

During the last years, the Norwegian administration has initiated several main changes which resemble those suggested in the Swedish report, such as:

1. A new overall strategy has been introduced
2. A gradual shift to less administrative demanding forms of aid is initiated
3. A major reorganisation of the administration has been done
4. Efforts to simplify procedures and improve management tools is under way

5. A comprehensive and systematic training programme (School of Development Cooperation) has been institutionalized

This is expected to result in a more efficient aid administration with improved learning ability.

The point of departure for the present study, as specified in the mandate (Annex 3), is to assess whether the Norwegian aid administration is able to learn from its own evaluation system, as expressed in the **project reviews and evaluation reports** produced each year. The mandate therefore is very limited in relation to all factors that determine effective learning in an organisation. The changes above (1-5) also limit the relevance of some findings in this study, since it is yet too early to predict their effects.

The present evaluation was initiated in response to these changes. The mandate specifies that organisational changes and changes in division of responsibility within the aid administration call for further clarification on the roles and division of responsibilities with respect to ensuring feed-back of experiences from development activities. Also the initiatives of international organisations, to review the effectiveness of feed-back mechanisms from aid evaluations, have motivated this evaluation (OECD/DAC 1989 and EEC 1991)

The mandate specifies the objective of the present evaluation to be:

To assess whether different parts of the aid administration receive the information needed on the basis of project/programme reviews and evaluations, in relation to their roles and responsibilities; and how the information is utilised.

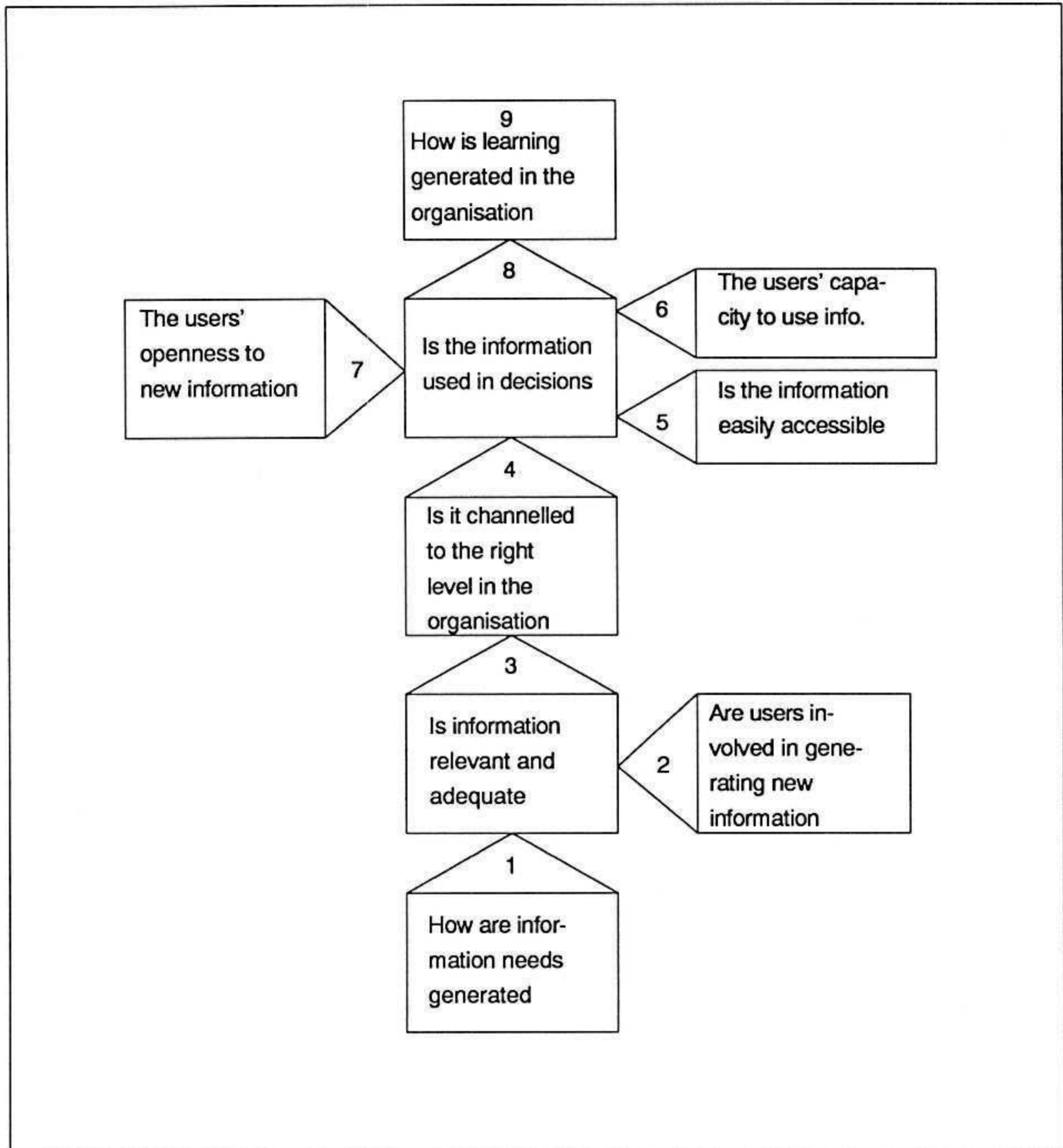


Figure A.1.1 The nine main questions specified in the mandate

The mandate further identifies nine main questions to be addressed, i.e.:

1. How are information needs generated
2. Are users involved in generating new information
3. Is information relevant and adequate
4. Is information channelled to appropriate parts of the organisation
5. Is the information easily accessible
6. Do the users have capacity to utilize new information
7. Are the users open to new information
8. Is the information used in decisions and management
9. How is learning generated in the organisation

The questions are organised in a logical sequence which follows the evaluation process from the first initiative to evaluate is conceived until evaluation results have been internalized through individual and organisational learning. The sequence of questions is illustrated in figure A.1.1.

The present report presents the findings. It is divided in 3 parts. Part A describes the present evaluation system of the aid administration in Norway and some other countries. Part B addresses the above questions and presents the empirical findings. One chapter is devoted to each question. Part C discusses the future organisation of evaluation in the Norwegian aid administration, and methods to improve the quality of information and learning processes generated by the evaluation system. Each section and each chapter has an introductory text and each chapter a conclusion. The reader who wants to get a quick grasp of the total text could skim through these sections to get an overview and only go into the full text where he or she finds it interesting.

## 1.2 Methodological questions

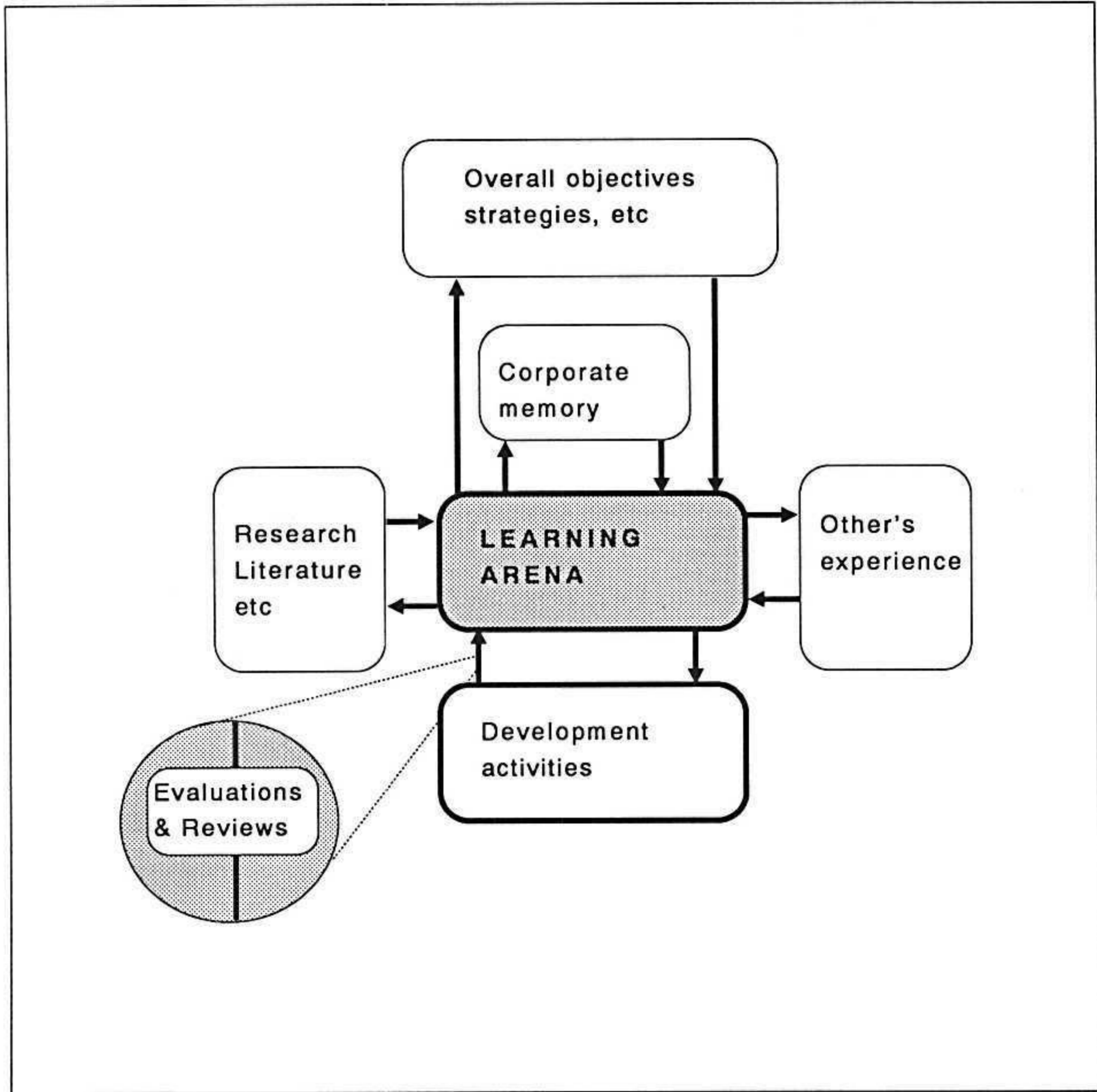
Studies of institutional learning is methodologically complicated since it involves the

study of a number of individuals with different roles and learning needs; and various processes at different levels inside and outside the organisation. With limited resources it is very difficult to satisfy the scientific standard of validity and reliability of information in such studies. Consider the aspect of time. Learning is a slow process and since the evaluation is done in one specific period, it is difficult to measure learning directly. Indirect methods will have to be used.

In the present study, the methodological solution is to concentrate in depth on a limited number of cases, instead of relating to a broad sample of aid activities. This makes it possible to study longitudinal processes of decision-making and learning indirectly, and related to different levels in the organisation. With such an intensive technique, the sample is not representative and the possibility to draw general conclusions correspondingly low. This is compensated to some extent by using additional, more extensive techniques such as interviews and survey. The approach makes it possible to focus on a representative number of variables or factors affecting learning, and thereby maintain an acceptable level of validity and reliability in the results.

The present evaluation is based on 11 background studies made over a period of one year:

1. A detailed contents analysis of 13 project reviews and 4 evaluation reports, in order to study the quantity and quality of information, the methods used, perspectives, whether information was decision-oriented, degree of standardisation, composition of study teams, etc.
2. Case studies of 3 project evaluations, 2 country studies and 2 thematic evaluations. These were the core activities of the evaluation and took more than 50% of the resources. They were longitudinal studies of how evaluations were conceived, initiated, carried out and utilized by the aid administration.



**Figure A.1.2** Institutional learning. This study focuses on the effect of evaluations/reviews which are only two of many factors affecting learning.

3. A survey including all professional staff in the aid administration. The survey included 10 main questions with a large number of pre-coded answers and one open-ended question. It was administered to 197 individuals and the response was about 60%.
4. Special studies of the documentation, archive and training sections of the organisation, based on the study of documents, interviews and observation.
5. A series of 6 individual interviews and 4 group interviews with 4 managers each, where respondents were confronted with preliminary findings and encouraged to contribute more insight and suggest future solutions.
6. A review of other donor organisation's evaluation systems. This included a review of literature and a one-day briefing by a British consultant, Dr. Basil E. Cracknell.

In connection with the case studies, field work was carried out in Tanzania and Sri Lanka in November 1991 and April 1992, one week each.

The studies were undertaken in two phases. After each phase, a reference group consisting of managers from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NORAD discussed the results and provided guidance for the next phase of the study. The findings are presented in 11 background papers (in Norwegian), listed in Annex 1. These represent a substantial empirical material where the validity and reliability is founded on the large number of angles chosen, variables studied, and methods applied. All papers are available from the evaluation unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### 1.3 Limitations of the study

The focus of this evaluation is learning. The learning arena is the Norwegian aid administration. The purpose of learning is to improve the quality of Norwegian financed aid activities.

Organisational learning is determined by many different factors, such as how effective learning is organized, the motivation of

staff, time available for learning, etc., as seen in figure A.1.2. There are different inputs to learning arenas. Development activities in the field is the primary one. Secondary inputs are constituted for instance by the experience of other individuals or organisations, the corporate memory, research, literature, etc. Information can be extracted from these sources, generate learning and also feed back and influence them.

At a more elevated level, the formation of overall objectives for development aid, strategies etc. is another learning arena which will influence and be influenced by the learning process.

To study organisational learning is therefore a complex undertaking. Yet the present study is by definition limited to the effects of evaluations and project reviews, i.e. only a small part of the complex, as illustrated in figure A.1.2. With this limitation, many important aspects of learning can only be touched very briefly in the present study. For instance, the role of the recipient is not covered by this study.

Taking a closer look at evaluations and project reviews, most people agree that such documents serve three combined purposes at least: as a basis for (1) decision-making; as an input to (2) learning; and as a (3) control instrument. The focus of this evaluation is on the learning aspect. However, since the three purposes are strongly inter-related, it is difficult to make a meaningful analysis of only one aspect in isolation. Other aspects are therefore also included in the discussion. This does not contradict the mandate, since one of the questions is whether information is used in decisions.

Most evaluations done by the Norwegian aid administration and all project reviews are related to bilateral aid. The sample of evaluations which constitute the basis for this study, were drawn in agreement with the reference group. All evaluations relate to bilateral aid (except for one: Parallel Financing and Mixed Credit which relates indirectly also to multilateral aid). Hence the multilateral side of the aid administration is touched only briefly in this study.

## **1.4 Evaluation team**

The study was undertaken by the following team:

- Mr. Knut F. Samset, Scanteam international, Norway, (team leader)
- Mr. Kim Forss, Andante Consulting, Sweden
- Mr. Otto Hauglin, Asplan Analyse, Norway

## **1.5 Acknowledgement**

The evaluation team would like to express its appreciation for the helpful cooperation and good will it received from all individuals met with, and for the efforts of individual departments to provide the team with necessary information. We should also like to thank all those whose ideas and suggestions have contributed to this report.

## 2. ORGANISATION AND EVALUATION

### 2.1. The aid administration

The aid administration has seen major organisational changes over the last decade. Originally, multilateral aid was channelled directly through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while bilateral aid was administered by a semi-autonomous agency (NORAD) under the Ministry. Then a separate Ministry for Development Cooperation was established, which handled both multi- and bilateral aid, with NORAD as an internal department. The Ministry was subsequently merged with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; NORAD regained its semi-autonomous position; and the previous division of responsibilities between the Ministry and the agency was retained.

For convenience, we are making the distinction in this study between the **Ministry** level (Foreign Affairs), the **agency** level (NORAD Headquarters) and **field office** level (which is of course part of the agency).

Over the last 10 years, the total budget for development aid increased from 2.4 to 7.4 billion NOK, which represents an increase in real terms of 38% (table A.2.1). In the same period permanent staff in the aid administration increased by 50%, as indicated in table A.2.2. The largest expansion is at the Ministry level, while also the system of field offices have been developed considerably.

At the **ministry** level, there are three departments under a minister for development cooperation: the programme department, the bilateral department and the multilateral department. Recent years about 40-45% of Norwegian aid has been multilateral aid, mainly provided as general contributions to multinational organisations. Humanitarian aid is provided both bilaterally and multilaterally and amount to about 10% of total aid. Also a share of 6-8% of the bilateral budget is administered by international aid agencies for specific purposes (multi-bi). This means that about half of the total aid is administered directly by the

	1980	1991
Multilateral aid	1.0	3.5
Bilateral aid	1.4	3.9
Total	2.4	7.4
Present value (1991)	5.4	7.4
Budget increase in real terms	-	38 %

**Table A.2.1**

The Norwegian aid programme (Billion NOK)

	1980	1991
Ministry level	10	65 <sup>1)</sup>
Agency level	174	212 <sup>2)</sup>
Field office level	35	78
Techn. assistance personnel	205	97
Volunteers	95	124

1) Includes 21 staff members in the multilateral department  
2) 1992 figures

**Table A.2.2**

Number of employees in the Norwegian aid administration



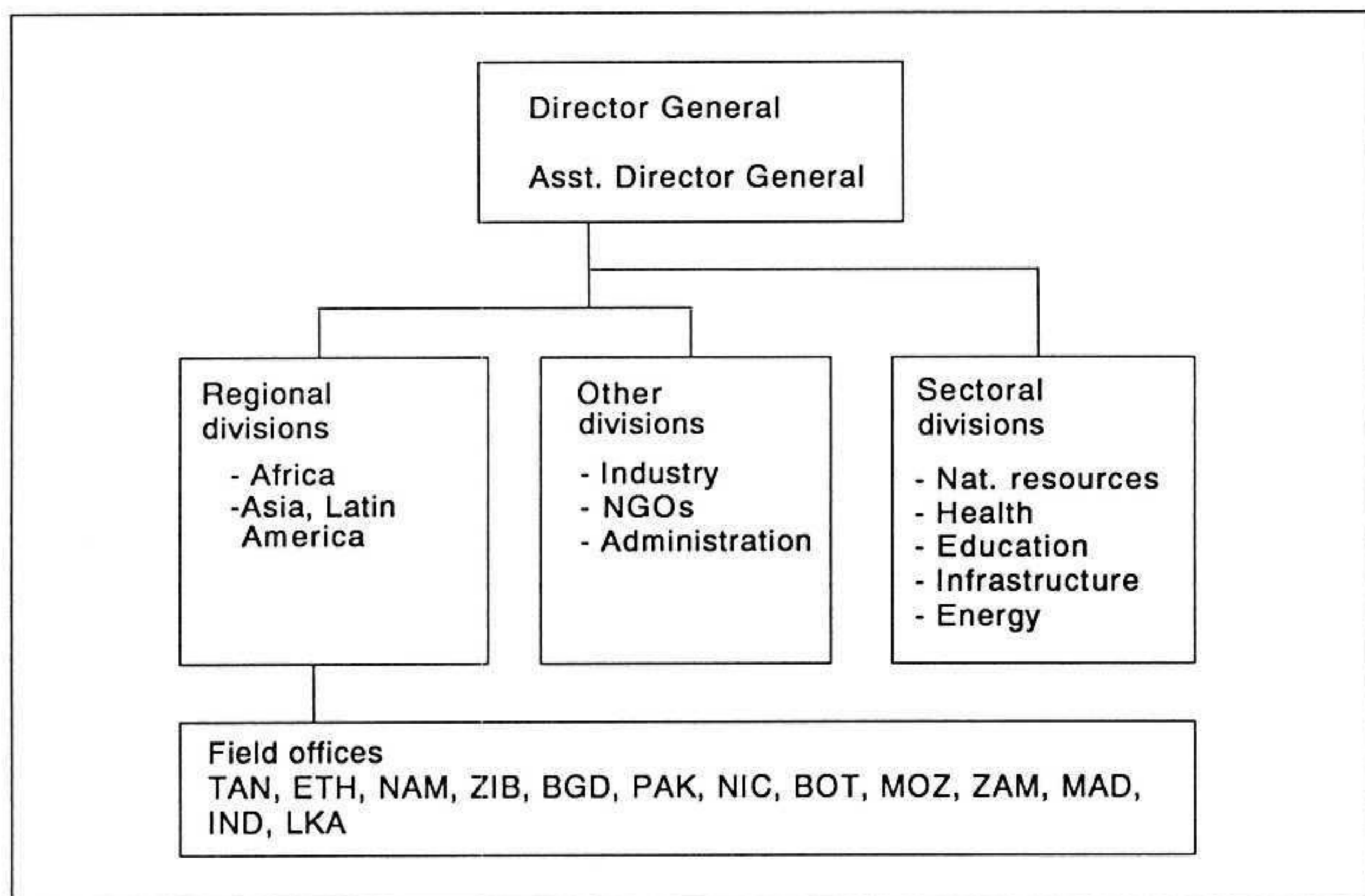
Ministry - generally as financial contributions through international aid agencies.

At the **agency** level, Norwegian aid is presently organized with separate regional and sectoral divisions, and three additional divisions for industry/commerce, NGOs and volunteer services, and administration (figure A.2.1). About half of Norwegian aid is provided at a bilateral basis, meaning that it rests on an agreement between Norway and the recipient country's government. Formally speaking, the real development activities take place in the recipient country and fall under the jurisdiction of that country's legal and administrative systems. Nevertheless, the division of work is such that the Norwegian aid administration has a large influence over planning, implementation and follow-up. Multilateral aid, on the other hand, rarely involves the Norwegian administration in much more than the transfer of funds.

During the last few years a new strategy for bilateral aid has emerged. Two of the most important aspects are (1) an increasing shift of responsibility for aid activities from the donor to the recipient; and (2) a gradual shift from project and programme level assistance towards sectoral and financial assistance. The last trend is reflected in a marked reduction by more than 50% in technical assistance personnel as indicated in table A.2.2. At the same time the administration is being decentralised; the number of field offices has increased from 8 to 13 and their staff resources have doubled.

## 2.2. The evaluation system

In the present evaluation system there is a major distinction between **evaluations** and **project reviews** as the two main instruments used by the aid administration. **Evaluations** are defined as independent



**Figure A.2.1** Organisational structure of NORAD

assessments of the effectiveness and impact of aid activities where the overall objectives for Norwegian development assistance are taken as the main references. **Project reviews** are defined as internal routine assessments of aid delivery, initiated and undertaken by NORAD alone or together with the recipient. Project reviews have traditionally been seen as a management tool which to a lesser extent focus on the overall questions of the impact of aid.

In this study, the term evaluation is used for both types of instruments, unless we also explicitly comment on project reviews. However, since the distinction between the two is unclear, we shall make a distinction between **policy** level evaluations, **impact** evaluations and evaluations of **aid delivery**.

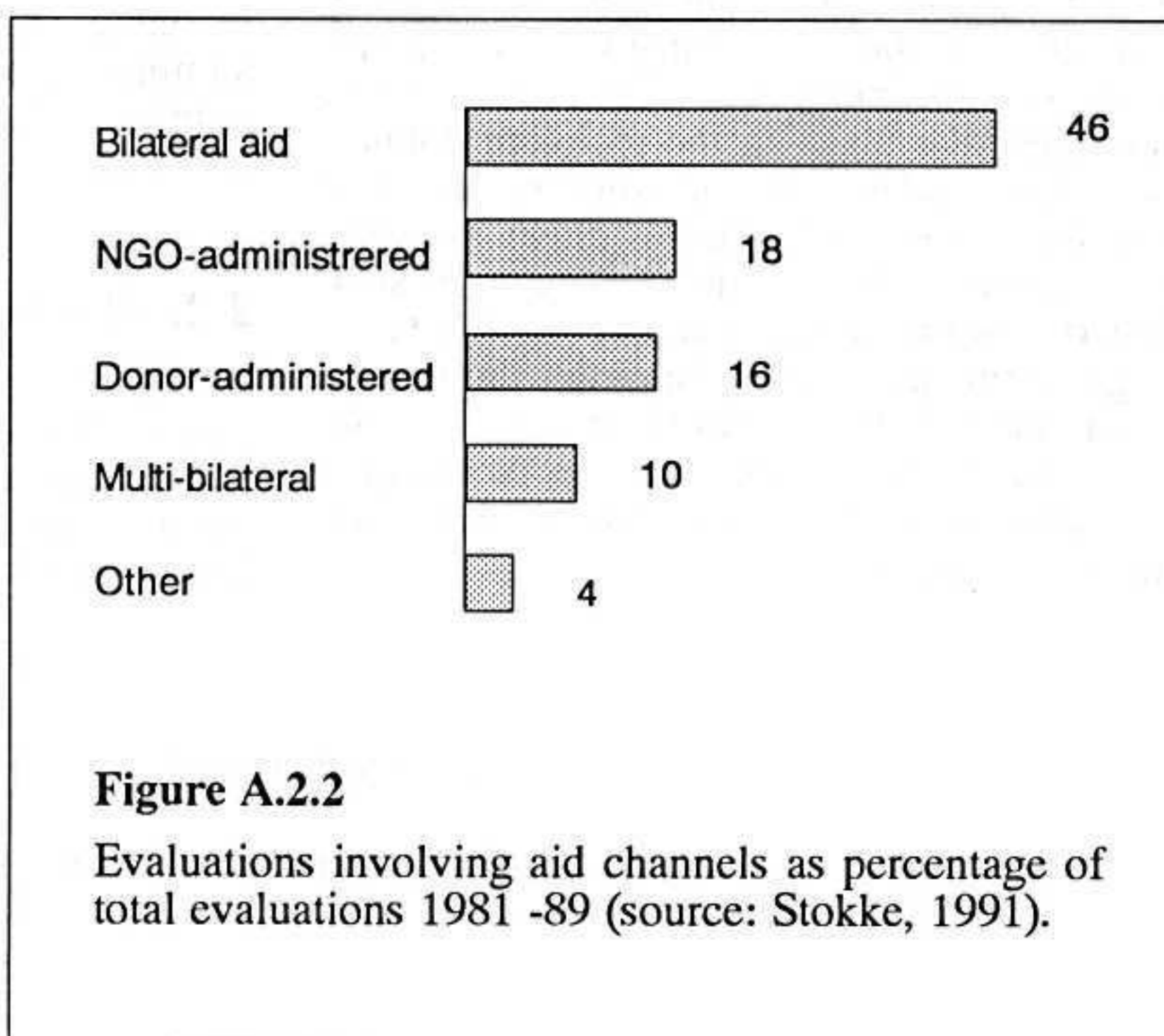
- **Policy** level evaluations are undertaken to generate knowledge for decision making at higher levels (e.g. thematic evaluations of aid delivery instruments, aid policy, etc.)
- **Impact** evaluations focus on projects, programmes, sectoral activities, etc., in order to determine effectiveness, the wider impacts, relevance and sustainability of aid.
- **Aid delivery** evaluations are limited assessments of whether aid activities have been implemented as foreseen (i.e. in quantity, quality and on time)

The concepts are described in more detail in chapter C.1, below.

### Ministry level

The core element in the present evaluation system is the evaluation unit located at Ministry level under the Programme Department, with a professional staff of 3. The overall objective of the unit is to:

*“undertake evaluations and provide feedback of experiences to the Norwegian aid administration, the public, Norwegian authorities and recipient countries. Contribute to international exchange of experience, development of evaluation methods, and development of evaluation expertise in Norway and the developing countries.”*



Most evaluation activities are directed towards bilateral aid (figure 2.2). Over the period 1981-89 only 4% of the evaluations were related to multilateral aid channels, and 10% dealt with multi-bilateral aid initiated from the Norwegian side. Evaluation of multi-bilateral aid is usually initiated by the international agency, occasionally with participants nominated by the multilateral department in the Ministry. The bulk of assistance channelled through the multilateral system, however, is not subject to evaluation from the Norwegian side.

During the last 10 years evaluation activities have been intensified and the focus has changed. The number of reports has doubled over the last 5 years, as compared with

	1981 - 85	1986 - 90
Project evaluations	16	7
Country studies	1	9
Thematic evaluations	3	12
Sectoral evaluations	5	17
Total	25	45
Annual budget (mill NOK)		10

**Figure A.2.3**

Different types of evaluations undertaken during 1981 - 90

the first 5 years (figure A.2.3). 6-9 reports have been issued each year. There has been a gradual shift from project evaluations towards sector, thematic and country level evaluations as indicated in figure A.2.4. These changes follow the objectives of the unit, and help the system draw lessons which are more generally applicable, than what can be learned from individual projects.

Country studies have now been replaced by country strategy papers and the responsibility transferred to the bilateral department of the Ministry. The evaluation unit, therefore, is at present mostly preoccupied with programme, sector, and thematic evaluations.

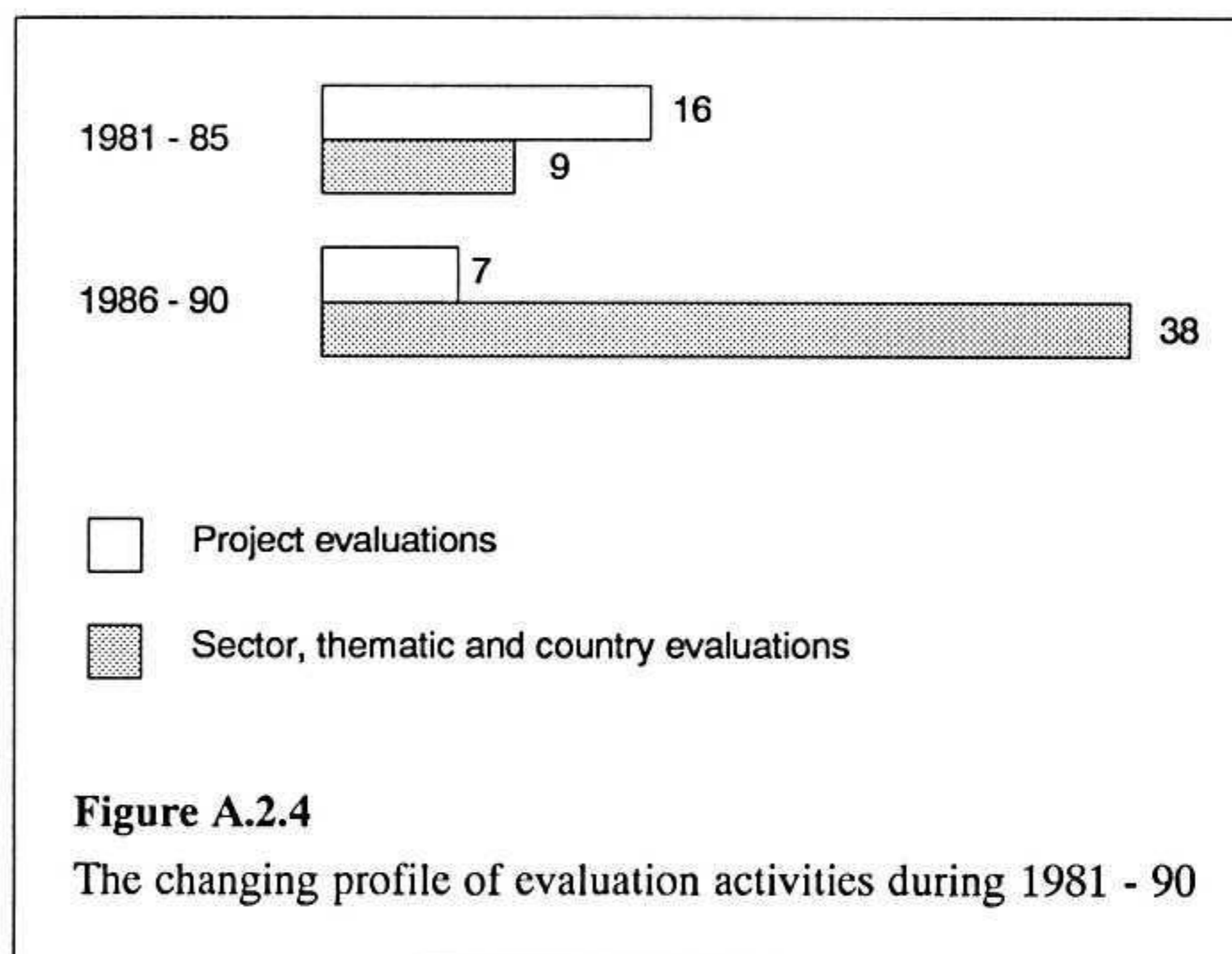
Different parts of the aid administration are

annually requested to provide inputs and comments to the evaluation programme established by the evaluation unit. Reports are distributed for comments from the relevant parts of the organisation before they are finalized, and a cover note containing the Ministry's conclusions and recommendations is issued by the evaluation unit for further action at ministry and agency level.

#### Agency level

The main instrument at agency level is the project review. Over the last years, 40-50 such reports have been issued annually. Their quality varies substantially from brief travel reports written by internal staff to very comprehensive reports made by independent external teams which focus on both aid delivery, impact and policy issues. The tendency has been towards more comprehensive reviews, often with both internal and external team members and participants from the recipient country.

Clearly, with a tendency of the Ministry to

**Figure A.2.4**

The changing profile of evaluation activities during 1981 - 90

focus more on sector and thematic evaluations, there is a thrust to strengthen evaluation activities at agency level. However, a separate evaluation system has not yet been institutionalized.

In accordance with the decentralisation policy, the field offices have been assigned a major role in undertaking reviews of aid activities and can request assistance for this from different departments in the agency.

At the agency level the current situation is that the regional division has a special authority to request other parts of the organisation to undertake reviews of aid activities. The sectoral division and the division for industry and commerce are instructed to undertake reviews on request from other departments. The division for NGOs and volunteer services is instructed to establish the requirements for documentation and reporting. The administrative division is instructed to develop and implement a system for economic reporting.

In total, the division of responsibilities in the field of evaluation seems to be unclear both between the agency and field office level and between the different divisions and departments. Apparently, the main principle is that different departments and divisions should initiate reviews within their field of activities, and support review activities initiated by other parts of the organisation on request. There is an underlying assumption that internal staff should be preferred for external staff in review teams, and the recipient should increasingly be involved. In fact reviews should eventually be initiated and undertaken by the recipient.

Whereas evaluation reports are published and open to the public, project reviews are internal documents with limited distribution, and available only through the internal documentation system of the organisation. They have traditionally been used mainly at agency level as management instruments, but also to some extent by the evaluation unit as background information to identify the annual evaluation programme and as background material for evaluation teams.

Thus, the present situation is that there exist two separate evaluation systems that are almost entirely compartmentalised. The distinction between project/programme level evaluation and the more ambitious types of project reviews seem to be more a reflection of the institutional split than of substantial differences. It is in the use of the documents within the aid administration that the difference becomes salient, as will be discussed in part B of this study.

### **3. THE INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITY'S EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING AND EVALUATION**

#### **3.1 Introduction.**

The Cassen report of 1986 is the most extensive review of the impact of aid (from all donors to all recipient countries) that has been done. The report is provocatively called "Does Aid Work?". The authors answer that question with "Yes, but ..". Aid does not work as well as it might have done, and one of the major reasons is that aid organizations fail to learn from experience - their own and others. A subsequent study Riddell (1987) found that no more than 10% of all aid is ever subjected to some form of evaluation.

The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is the major forum for exchange of experience between donor countries. DAC's annual report has repeatedly called for increasing efforts in evaluation among members, and more recently it has turned to the broader subject of feedback and learning. DAC has also had an important role in standardizing the vocabulary used among aid organizations and many of the nations that are new as donors have benefitted from this work (OECD, 1986; *Methods and Procedures in Aid Evaluation*).

However, the concern for evaluation is much older. The first comprehensive textbook was written by Suchman in 1967. Since then many have followed that focus on evaluation methods (Patton; 1980 and 1982; Rossi, Freeman and Wright, 1979; United Nations, 1972 and 1978), the use of evaluation in decision-making (Birgegård, 1975; Imboden, 1978), the wider ramifications of evaluation (Scriven, 1977), and evaluating evaluation systems (Wholey, 1979; Elzinga, 1981 and Forss, 1985). These works are a very small sample of books and articles on the subject. But the selection is typical in that it reflects how little of the substantial development of the subject emanates from development assistance, or has been brought to bear on the processes of evaluation in aid.

The first aid agencies to devote more systematic attention to the evaluation of aid were the UNDP, UNESCO and USAID. They published handbooks and manuals as early as the 1960s. At present all agencies have some form of evaluation system. The World Bank is outstanding in its coverage (all projects are evaluated when they end), but apart from that no agency is at the forefront of the "state of the art". All that can be said is that systems differ, and some have advantages that others lack, but the latter may well have different advantages. This chapter summarizes some of the major differences, based on the reviews by Cracknell, 1990; Stokke, 1992 and DsUD 1 990:63.

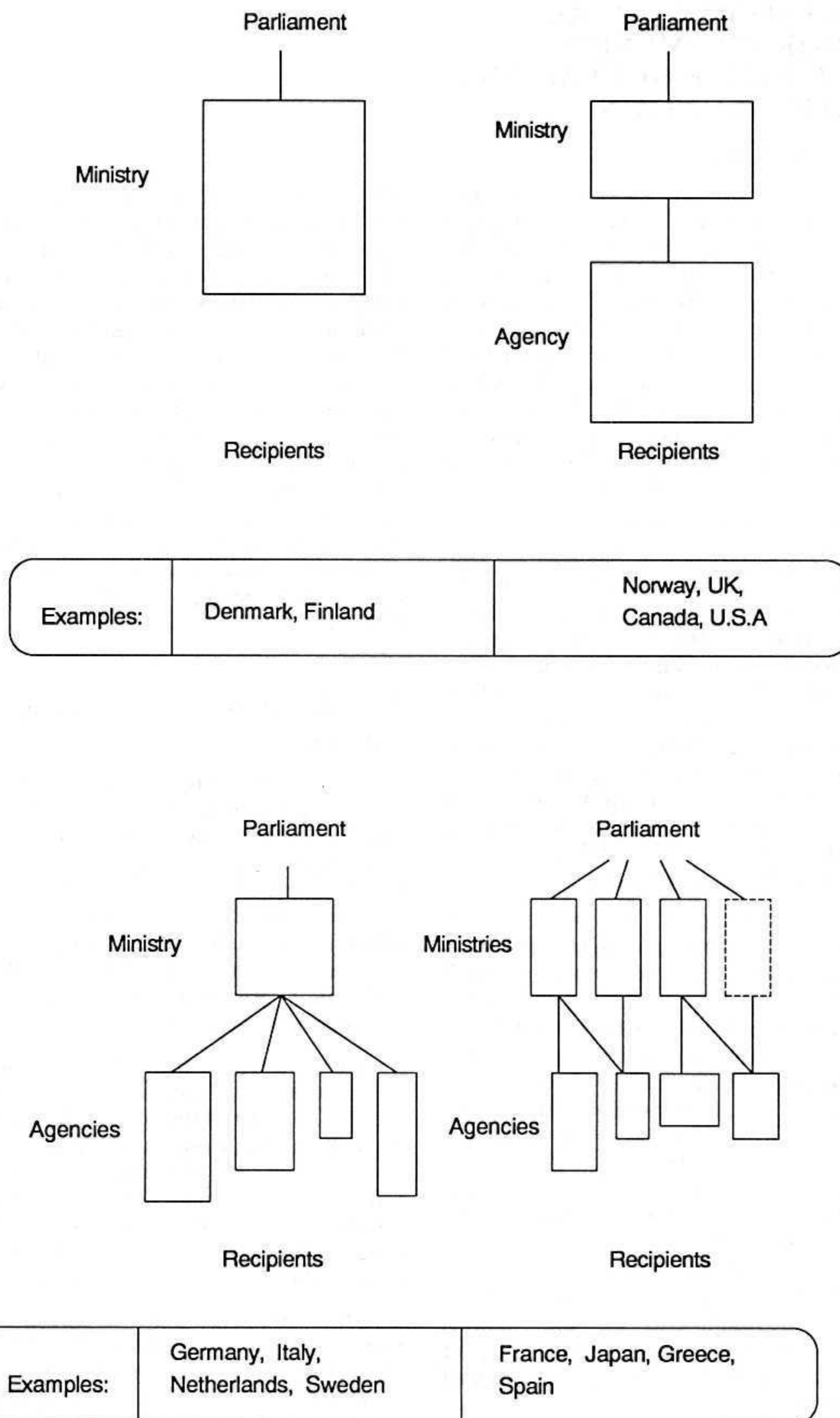
#### **3.2 The structure of aid administrations.**

Evaluation units are now an integral part of the aid administration in most donor countries. However, the administrative systems responsible for the implementation of aid differ. The political responsibility for aid is usually vested in a ministry (either a separate Ministry for Development Cooperation or as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), although in some cases it is split between several ministries.

In some countries the whole system of aid administration is contained within a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which means that there is in effect one large organization that contains all of aid decisions, from the ministerial level and down. But it is more common that implementation of the aid programme is delegated to administrative organizations outside the Ministry.

In some countries there is one aid agency responsible for implementation, and in other countries there are several. In addition, implementation may also be delegated to

**Figure A.3.1** An overview of the administrative structures in development assistance



semi-public organization, NGOs or even to the private sector - either directly from the Ministry or via an aid agency.

These few design variables in themselves lead to several different configurations of the aid system. Figure A3.1 shows four common patterns of the division of responsibilities between one or several ministries and one or several aid agencies. Reality is not as simple as that; some ministries also have an implementing function, and some agencies may report to several ministries. For example, multilateral aid usually goes directly from a Ministry to the UN system, the World Bank and others.

It is also possible that there are small, special purpose agencies that are not reflected in the grand overview presented here. The point is however that when the evaluation function becomes institutionalized, its location and task will depend on the surrounding system.

### **3.3 The place and design of the evaluation function.**

Which are the most important structural features of the evaluation function? It is possible to discern at least five aspects of the design of an evaluation unit that distinguish between different practices in the donor community. These are; (1) independence, (2) differentiation, (3) centrality, (4) openness and, (5) the formalization of the systems.

#### **1. Independence.**

In evaluation theory it is often maintained that evaluators should be independent of the subject they evaluate. Similarly, an evaluation unit should be independent of the system it evaluates. Among the major donors it is only Sweden and the World Bank who have independent evaluation units, placed outside the agency(ies) and with its own governance. Both report directly to the main stakeholders; that is, parliament (Sweden) and the Board (World Bank). The Netherlands Joint Inspection Unit also has considerable independence from the system, but it reports to the

Minister concerned with development cooperation, not to the public. In all other countries evaluation unit is a part of the administration.

#### **2. Differentiation.**

In principle evaluations may cover a broad range of issues concerning the more limited **aid delivery**, **impact assessment** at project, programme and sector levels, or policy issues and other fundamental issues concerning sustainability, relevance of different objectives, etc. Some of the administrative systems limit the scope of the evaluation unit to one or a few aspects, as for example the ODA which is primarily engaged in impact assessment. Other donors assign responsibility for different types of evaluations at separate levels, as for example Norway and Germany. Yet others give different levels freedom to pursue the questions they find relevant over the whole field of possible evaluation tasks. The Netherlands, U.S.A., Sweden and Denmark may be examples of this.

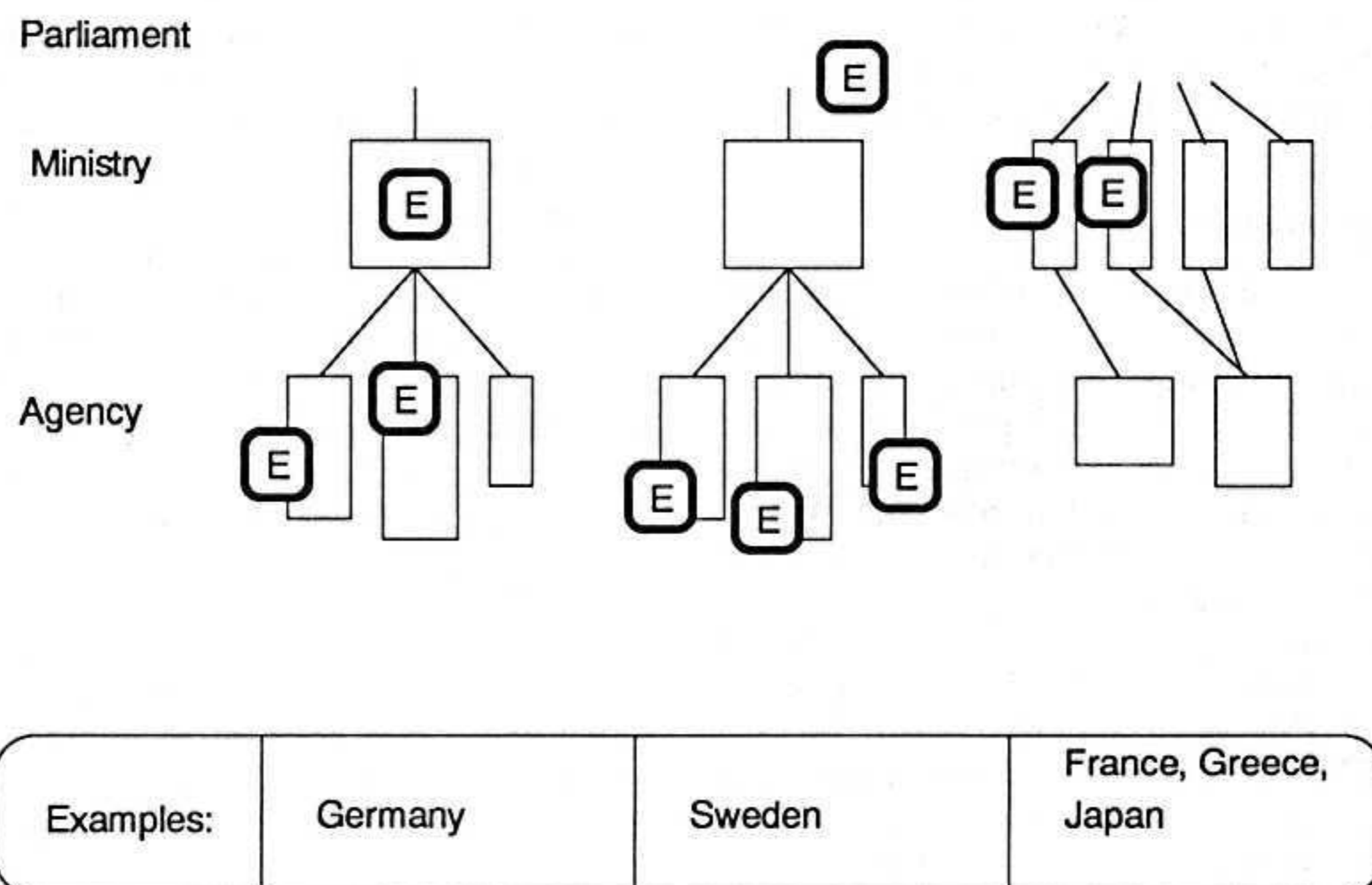
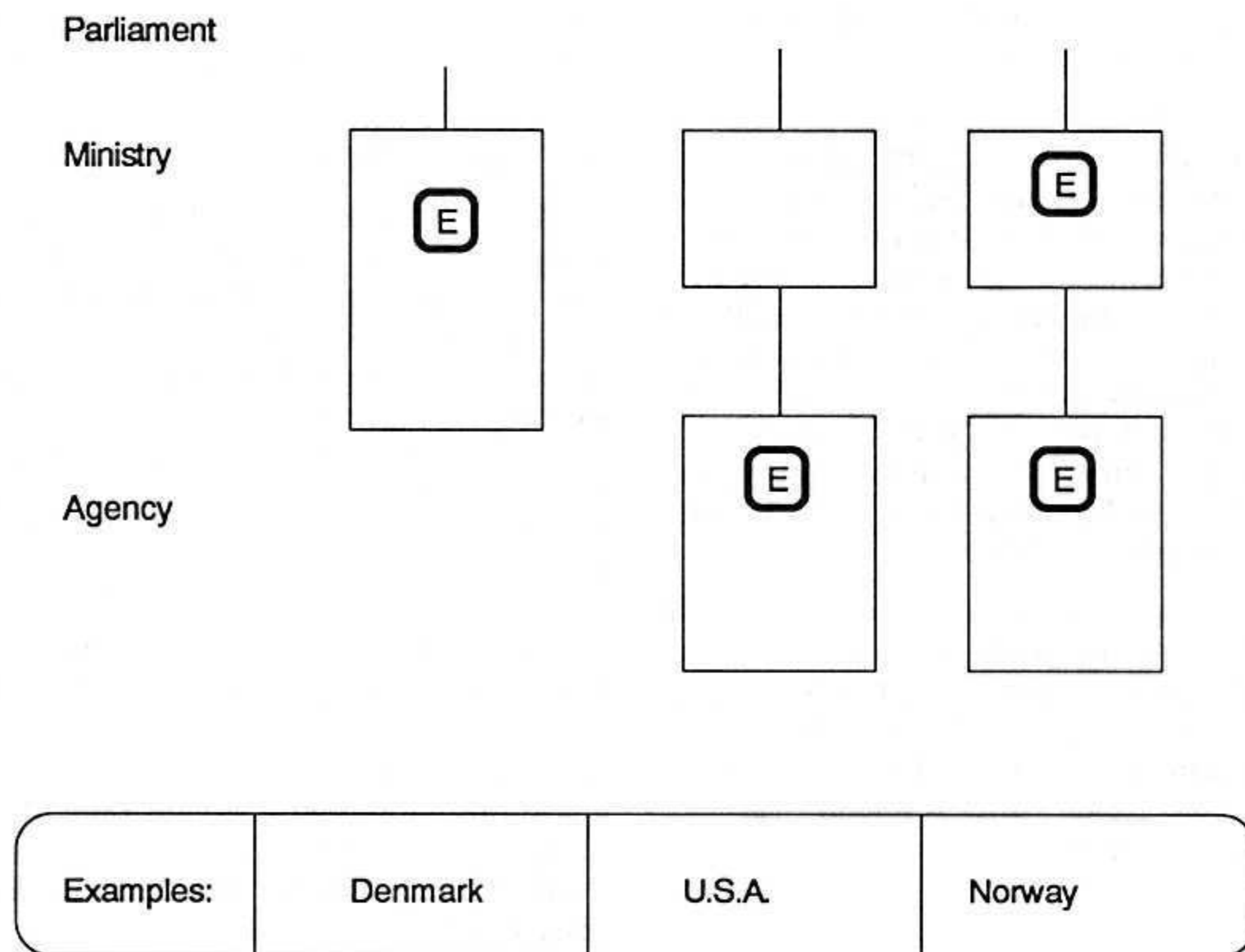
#### **3. Centrality.**

An evaluation unit which is centrally placed may be more likely to reach top-level decision-makers. But in some systems the top-level decision-makers are notable through their absence as power is decentralized. In that case a central evaluation unit faces the risk of being marginalized. But that is a risk even if decisions are taken centrally, because a central evaluation unit may lack a grasp of real issues, that are relevant at the moment. In some administrations the evaluation unit is centrally placed, as in the UNDP and the U.K. Yet other systems have evaluation units that are not close to the centers of power (Denmark and Finland) and others have evaluation units at central as well as other levels (Germany, Netherlands, Sweden).

#### **4. Openness.**

The practice of making documentation from the civil service open to the general public varies from one country to another, and the practice of making evaluations of aid public follow these general patterns. In several

Figure A.3.2 The place of the evaluation function





countries such studies are confidential (Germany, France, Belgium, the UN-system) whereas they are actively made public in others (Norway, Sweden). However, there is a trend towards greater openness among all donors.

### 5. Formality.

The evaluation system could be more or less formalized in the process of working; that is, the content of the evaluations and the objects determined according to rules. The evaluation system could also be more or less standardized as to what follows after a report. In some systems there are procedures for writing, circulating and using summaries (Germany, UK) and in other systems there are virtually no rules for anything (France, Sweden), the reports are made and spread ad hoc. It is more common to have standardized the content and process of initiating evaluations than to have standardized the follow-up, but there is a trend towards formalization and standardization in most donor countries, not least initiated by the European Community and the DAC.

Figure A3.2 shows how evaluation units can be set up within an aid administration, summarizing and highlighting some of the differences among the donors today. Needless to say, the picture is more complex than so. The most important distinction seems to be between external versus internal units and between widespread evaluation functions or a centralized unit. If anything, the trend has been towards a more fragmented use of evaluations. As aid amounts increase and more actors become involved the need for feed-back grows. Each actor needs some control of its operations, and some need an overview. The trend is downwards and to the right in the figure; that is, systems go towards more fragmented structures with several aid organizations, and consequently with evaluation functions spread throughout the administration.

In a way this resembles an experimental situation. Many actors try to do the same thing in the same environment, and they follow different ways to accomplish their objectives. True, the size of their aid

contribution varies and some have a longer history of cooperation than others. They give different emphasis within the same set of objectives. But they all have evaluation systems intended for management and learning. So, which system works best, which makes the most important contribution to an aid program of high quality?

The question cannot be answered. There is no research and no studies that attempt to make such a comparison. Only one system has been assessed in terms of learning, and that is Sweden (Norway follows with this study). Neither was comparative. The few comparative studies that exist (DAC, 1989; Cracknell, 1991, Stokke, 1992, Bovaird, Gregory and Stevens (draft)) do not go so far as to assess performance or contribution. They are descriptive and analytical, and possibly there is not yet any sufficient methodological framework for a comparative, comprehensive review of the effectiveness of aid evaluation systems (perhaps not an audience either). There is a danger in that descriptive studies tend to put a virtue on the formal aspects of the system, and underrate the effectiveness of informal channels of feedback. They may also miss the subtle connections between learning and decision-making that only a close and intense scrutiny of a system can start to yield.

### 3.4 The expenditures on evaluation.

Another question is how productive the different systems are. How much do they evaluate? Again, there is no data. The comparisons that exist usually only capture parts of the systems. In Norway the evaluations of the Ministry are included in the review in DsUD 1990: 67, but not those of NORAD (as this study shows the "project reviews" can be quite as extensive as evaluations). There is no overview of the Swedish system either, SIDA's evaluation unit has some 10 to 15 evaluations on their annual program. But the other aid agencies each undertake between 5 and 20 evaluations per year; the Ministry commissions some and the newly established external

evaluation unit will start another 5 to 10. The British aid agency, the Danish and Finnish ministries, Netherlands Joint Inspection Unit and the German Ministry have easily accessible and reliable figures ranging between less than 10 and more than 20 evaluations per year. But in Germany the GTZ and KfW commission their own evaluations, and the total figure is not known. The French and Japanese systems have no total picture of the evaluation efforts either.

Consequently it is not possible to estimate the total costs of evaluation either. Comparing the budgets of evaluation units would give a distorted picture. The cost of individual evaluations vary. The "Rolls Royce" model of thematic or sector studies, taking several manmonths to complete, may cost around 2 million NOK, but a typical project evaluation may end up around a few hundred thousand NOK. Though available statistics show that the international system (particularly the banks) spend more on evaluation, this picture is not true. It simply reflects that the evaluation function often is so fragmented that the donors do not know themselves how much they spend on evaluations.

### 3.5 Concluding remarks.

The review above shows that the Norwegian system of organization and evaluation, like all others, is unique. The central features at present is that it has one centralized system of evaluation at Ministry level, which puts a heavy emphasis on externally conducted studies, makes reports public and tries to disseminate results. Parallel to this there is a system of reviews at the agency level which leads its own life; close to the real problems of decision-makers - but with little concern for standards, formats, procedures and rules. The latter has no 'quality control' and makes no effort to spread the reports.

In conclusion, this review of the international experience of evaluation portrays some of the diversity. The reader who wants to penetrate further into the field is advised to turn to the works referenced. The main point of these few notes are to put the study

of learning in the Norwegian aid administration in perspective. The notes point at the diversity of institutional reforms that can be undertaken. Finally, it is important to note how little evidence there is of the effectiveness of design. Any recommendations that come from this study and from others rests on the logic of an argument and piecemeal evidence, never on a comprehensive evaluation of alternatives. That is of course not a reason not to act. "Clear thinking and bold action, based as always on inadequate evidence, are all we have to see us through to whatever the future holds" (McNeill, 1982).

## **SECTION B**

### **Learning and evaluation: Empirical evidence**

#### **Introduction**

This section presents the findings from the case studies, the questionnaire, the content analysis, the interviews and the specific reviews that were undertaken as the basis for this evaluation. The section is organized in nine chapters that each focus on a separate research question. All information from the different studies is presented when these questions are discussed.

**Chapter 1** addresses the logical starting point: why does anyone need information? how is the demand formulated and by whom? What type of requests are expressed and which are the fora for expressing demand for evaluation and/or learning? Once the demand for knowledge is formulated the process of evaluation starts. **Chapter 2** describes how different users are involved in, for example, formulating terms of reference and taking part in reference groups. The chapter discusses categories of users and also comments on the role of recipient countries.

**Chapter 3** examines the quality of evaluation reports and reviews. Do they serve as useful inputs to decisions, learning and other uses? What are the standards; is the information valid and reliable? **Chapter 4** raises the question whether the information is channeled to decision-makers. Different levels of the aid administration may have different needs for information. Is that reflected in the distribution and use of reports? What are the major obstacles to a smooth and efficient flow of intelligence in the system? **Chapter 5** treats the corporate memory. What constitutes the corporate memory? How are these systems used, why are they not used more and how could they be developed?

**Chapter 6** deals with the capacity to use evaluations by investigating obstacles. These are discussed in terms of structure, process and human factors. **Chapter 7** shows how evaluation results are received at the levels of individuals and at the systems level. Are reports accepted, rejected or neglected? How common are the different forms of response and what patterns are there when they occur? **Chapter 8** goes into detail on the extent of using evaluation, for purposes of decision as well as for other purposes. **Chapter 9** concludes with an exposition of different modes of learning and suggests how these modes relate to different learning tasks.

## 1. STARTING POINT - THE NEED FOR INFORMATION

The evaluation system in Norwegian aid administration is primarily aimed to meet particular requirements of the aid administration:

- Control/accountability
- Decision-making
- Learning

This means that the evaluation system must meet specific information requirements both for decision-makers and other users. The focus for this type of evaluation is therefore quite different from the more general, policy-oriented evaluations. Such evaluations will emerge from more theoretical, research related requirements and discuss evaluation results on the basis of their contribution to the general development of knowledge and theory in that particular field.

Where decision- and user-orientation is involved, the responsibility for defining the information needs and the strategy lies to a much greater extent with the client. It is quite crucial during implementation and after for the client to prepare, specify and adopt a proprietorial attitude to the questions. This chapter will describe and analyse how information needs arise, are processed and formulated as mandates.

### 1.1 What types of information needs exist?

In general, highly variable levels of information needs form the basis for evaluations and project reviews. It is very difficult to distinguish clearly between the requirements from the various administrative levels.

Likewise, there is nothing which indicates an obvious connection between the individual person's need for information and his position in the aid administration.

There are, however, some distinct trends:

- There is general consensus about the importance of systematic information

gathering on the various aid activities. This is especially evident in connection with planning of project reviews where data on activity, efficiency and impacts are vital as basis for control and decision-making.

- There is also a general and extensive need to obtain knowledge of basic policy issues, such as national economy, socio-cultural conditions, environmental problems and specific country knowledge. In the survey a large part of the managers and professional staff underlined this particular need. There is however reason to ask whether such needs for information can be met through the evaluation system - in the way this is designed and works today.
- Information needs forming the basis for evaluations are often obscure and vaguely articulated. People in central positions rarely express explicit needs for information, and the needs are often of a general character. This gives the evaluations in particular a weak base in the aid administration. The project reviews have a much stronger position in the administration's requirements.
- In many cases very different and to some degree contradictory information needs arise. For instance, there may be a request for both a broad and comprehensive evaluation and at the same time a question of phasing out the assistance which is raised. In the evaluation of the HIRDEP-programme such needs were expressed in different ways, which caused uncertainty and cast doubts on the real purpose of the evaluation. This was also the case with the country study of Sri Lanka. At the bottom was the Ministry's desire for a broad country analysis that would form the basis for further development cooperation. But at the top was the immediate need to analyse the conditions in the country during a difficult political period in order to

clarify whether to withdraw the assistance. It is not always easy to combine such diverse information needs in an individual evaluation programme.

In order to comprehend the actual information needs, the existing level and structure of knowledge, is an important factor. A hallmark is that many people have worked for a long time in Norwegian aid administration. For example, around 75% of the permanent employees at agency level have more than 5 years' seniority at the agency. In addition, some of the people with lower seniority are also likely to have experience from other parts of aid administration. This means that the individual employee has acquired considerable experience and insight. To what extent this influences the true information needs is difficult to estimate. It may either have the effect of reducing the need for information, as the individual to a large extent is able to draw on his own store of knowledge, and perhaps feels that he is in command of his own professional field; or it may have the effect of making him feel that he is permanently in need of up-dating, expanding and altering his knowledge, precisely because of the insight and knowledge that he possesses.

Another significant factor is the question of corporate culture. Is the Norwegian aid administration open and responsive to change, with an internal organization which encourages to challenge old wisdom and the search for new information? We do not have data which directly describe to what extent the aid administration is an organisation responsive to change, but through survey and interviews many people have expressed great motivation and the will to learn.

## **1.2 How are the information needs expressed?**

A large proportion of the project reviews are manifestations of regular and contractual information needs tied to progress reports, immediate results, efficiency, etc of specific aid activities. In such cases the connection between the project reviews and the relevant information needs are uncomplicated and

mere routine. It is fairly obvious, from the objectives, outlines and plans of the project what information is needed. The connection between the knowledge required for control, decision-making and the project reviews is therefore relatively simple and direct. The reviews have, moreover, as already mentioned, a much stronger position at the agency level than the evaluations.

When information needs are linked with overall policy issues and the impact of aid, the relationship with the evaluation tool is much more diffuse and complex. This becomes evident in connection with the formulation of the Annual evaluation programmes. Every year the evaluation unit in the Ministry circulates a preliminary proposal and invites for reactions and ideas. The proposal is circulated to all departments, both within the Ministry and the agency.

Ideally, this should be a golden opportunity to air information needs and more general learning requirements connected with policy. It would be reasonable to assume that thorough discussions within various departments and a large number of suggestions would ensue from this process.

This is not the case. From the interviews it became evident that there were few initiatives and suggestions in connection with the processing of proposals for the annual evaluation programme. The issues and the proposals aroused interest and debate only to a small extent and few ideas were presented. According to informations from the evaluation unit in the Ministry, about ten suggestions came out of this process last year.

There may be various explanations for this. In the first place, it is possible that information needs are linked with problems at the operational level. There is little experience and tradition associated with formulating general, overall policy strategy on the basis of actual project experience. To some extent, the uncertainty related to the difference between project reviews and evaluations also have played a role.

These are, however, conditions that may be

altered through systematic training and development of skills in the individual unit.

In the second place, it is possible that many people find little sense in expressing needs and problems when it will take two years, may be more, before a report appears. Several of the employees emphasised this strongly. The outcome of this is, however, that information needs associated with overall policy issues are only passed on or channelled to the evaluation system to a limited extent.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that the Ministry, in formulating the evaluation programme, should not only consider information needs communicated from the aid administration. For instance, it is possible that the programme systematically should cover the central principles of Norwegian aid, independent of any proposals.

In that case it will not be the actual information needs, but principles laid down by a higher political authority which direct the formulation of the evaluation programme. One such example is the evaluation of socio-cultural relations where emphasis and precedence are the consequences of the Parliament's specific treatment of a White Paper on Norwegian aid. Likewise it was assumed that the pilot arrangement with parallel financing and mixed credits to Tanzania should be evaluated.

### **1.3 How should the information needs be processed?**

In the previous section we indicated how the relationship between actual information needs at the operational level and project reviews appears to function well. Similarly we have described how the formulation of the evaluation programme induces activities and channels demands for knowledge on policy questions, only to a small extent.

When the decision has been reached on carrying out either an evaluation or a review, considerable work is laid down in formulating the mandate. As described in chapter 3, this preparatory time takes around

50% of total evaluation time from initiation to completion. For the reviews considerably less time is used.

At this preparatory stage, towards a completely formulated mandate, the following features are prominent:

- Formulation of problems are not based sufficiently on existing knowledge, and are not sufficiently tied to issues which will be focused on in the follow-up. As an example, the necessity of the country study for Tanzania was questioned, as it was pointed out that there was sufficient information material already.
- Mandates vary considerably, both in size, details and standardizing. On the whole, it seems to be a weakness that standard formats that ensure the inclusion of important aid principles, are not used. The mandates - especially related to the evaluations - tend to become very extensive, too detailed and difficult to execute in a realistic manner.

All this indicates that there is a need for greater emphasis and professionalism on processing different information needs. This applies both to quality and progress of the work.

The time from the first initiative to the start of the evaluation work should be reduced considerably. Making the work more professional by emphasis on increased expertise in formulating the problems must be carried out on a broad basis. Many managers and professional staff members at agency level and field offices must obtain such expertise as all units in the aid administration in future must be assumed to take on responsibility to initiate evaluations or reviews. Weaknesses in mandate will be reflected in how the evaluation is carried out, formulation of the report and not least; in its use and follow-up afterwards.

Such an increase in professionalism will also influence the cooperation with the team. It may relate to a client with well-considered and thoroughly prepared questions and with a clear idea about information needs, and actual use of the evaluation/review.

## 1.4 Conclusion

Although considerable time and resources are used in preparing information needs and formulating mandates, it is precisely in this phase of the evaluation work that some obvious improvements may be made.

Firstly, in that the processing of information needs seeks to clarify how and to what extent these needs may be met by various evaluations.

Secondly, in that both the actual information needs existing in the different parts of the aid administration and the main objectives of the aid form the basis in formulating mandates. This may imply a stronger standardization of mandates to ensure that major and permanent problems are addressed, especially for evaluations and reviews on the project, sector - and programme level.

Thirdly, in that the weak standing of both evaluations and the evaluation programme in the different departments of the aid administration is taken seriously. This may entail that routines for formulating evaluation programmes and participation in the formulation of mandates must be altered.

Fourthly, in that necessary measures are implemented to strengthen the organisation so the responsibility for initiating and formulating mandates may be handled in a professional and effective manner.

## 2. PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATION - THE USER'S ROLE

The user's participation in evaluation raises many questions with respect to relevance, independence, credibility and influence.

In policy-oriented evaluations the basic value is independence for the team and no influence by the users. In decision - and user-oriented evaluations, the need for user participation at the various stages will be much greater. It will therefore be necessary with various forms of participation in the process. In practical terms this may mean user participation in the formulation of mandate and evaluation design, participation in evaluation teams and report formulation. Precisely because the evaluations are to meet specific requirements for decision-making and learning, relatively strong user participation will be relevant.

Reducing the degree of independence in the evaluations and strengthening user participation accordingly, may, however, imply that

- **the relevance of the evaluations is strengthened.** The issues treated are in compliance with user's needs. Actual situations may be analyzed on the basis of experience and insight. This may be of great importance for the reception of the report and follow-up internally in the aid administration.
- **the credibility of the evaluations is weakened.** In that the client and any users influence the issues, procedures and presentation, the critical distance will be reduced. This may mean a direct or indirect steering towards specific results. The consequence of the aid administration having an evaluation system largely governed and influenced by people and units with implementation responsibility, may generally reduce confidence in the aid.

This dilemma have to be solved in practice. In each particular case a position must be taken and concrete measures for user participation organized which serve that particular information requirement.

### 2.1 How does user participation work?

In this connection we will limit the user concept to units at different levels of the aid administration. A wider understanding of the concept would also comprise all other target groups for an evaluation: researchers, the media, other aid agencies etc. In very few cases would it be relevant to include such groups in the evaluation process. We will therefore concentrate on the user groups which are either initiators of the evaluation or have responsibility for follow-up in different ways. The participation by the recipients, which is of great interest in principle, will be dealt with in the next section.

Previously we have considered user participation in the formulation of the evaluation programme and concluded that it is weak and not very active. For the reviews the position is different. The need for the various project reviews is closely tied to relevant issues at the operational level. User participation is therefore much stronger and active.

In the case-studies it became evident that much time and effort is invested in formulating mandates. It is however difficult to find a fixed pattern for user participation. Usually the evaluation unit formulates a preliminary proposal which is then circulated for comments to relevant units in the Ministry and the agency, including field offices. The amount of comments vary greatly, both in quantity and quality. This is probably an indication of how important the evaluation is considered. In some cases the proposed composition of the evaluation team is also circulated for comments. Here the reactions will also vary. In a small development aid milieu, as in the Norwegian one, questions on team members' independence, previous association with aid projects etc. will often arise.



We also came across cases where the evaluation unit did not circulate mandate for comments, but selected a team leader and left him to draw up proposals and assemble a team. This was the case with the HIR-DEP-evaluation.

At this stage of the evaluation work where a relatively high degree of user participation from different parts of the aid administration is logical, we believe that the routines should be standardised and made more efficient. The purpose is both to reduce time spent in preparatory work and ensure stable and reliable user participation. With the weak proprietary relations to the evaluations this is also a measure that would better anchor evaluations in the relevant user groups.

With completely independent teams it will in principle be appropriate to have very little user participation in the implementation phase of the evaluation. For joint teams with both internal and external participants the situation is somewhat different. Through our case-studies we have found that formally two different models are chosen for organizing user participation in the implementation phase:

- The team works in close contact with a person responsible in the evaluation unit who has the overall management responsibility on behalf of the client. This is not user participation in its real sense, but represents a monitoring of progress and ensures that the team carries out the task in accordance with the mandate. In principle, this management should not represent any interference or attempts to influence results
- A reference group is appointed which plays a more active role in relation to the contents of the evaluation.

In practice these arrangements appear to function very differently. Some team members report that the evaluation unit plays a major part with emphasis on participation and steering. This applied for instance to the country study of Tanzania. The role of the evaluation unit was described as very reti-

cent and passive by others. This was the case for the HIRDEP-evaluation.

Some team members report, however, relatively strong informal pressure from various quarters inside the aid administration and from special interest groups outside in attempts to influence the evaluation. This was the case for the country study for Tanzania. In such cases it may be an advantage to have a reference group representing different users' interests where viewpoints and steering is communicated through formal channels.

For evaluations and country studies, in all the case-studies, and so far as we know, there have always been routines for user participation towards the end of the evaluation processes. These have included:

- A wide round of comments to the team's Draft Report. Sometimes the report is circulated to a large number of units within the administration, who are invited to comment by a certain time-limit. How many who actually comment and the quality of these comments, vary a lot.
- When the comments have been collected, a seminar is arranged where the team and the different user groups meet to go through and assess the Draft Report. Such seminars are not a regular routine, but relatively common practice.

In practice this works very differently. The amount of comments varies greatly, from a few to many. In most cases the comments deal with actual mistakes and weaknesses in the data. It is, however, a fact that in several of our case-studies we have found a considerable number of comments disputing the conclusions, assessments and recommendations.

The attendance at seminars vary. This is also the case for the amount of activity in connection with the seminars. On the whole, the seminars are felt to be useful elements in the evaluation work, both by user representatives and team members. However, the same situation as for the comments applies also here. The debate does not

always concentrate on actual conditions, but also touches on recommendations and assessments. In connection with carrying out the commentary round and seminar related to the country study of Tanzania, the team remarked that they were completely dependent on their own professional integrity and strength in order to ensure the study's independent character. A weaker team would have succumbed to pressure on several points.

In one case, in the HIRDEP evaluation, the team deliberately planned a strategy with considerable user and recipient side participation throughout by arranging several seminars and workshops with broad attendance. The interesting principle here is that user participation was arranged by the team and not by the client. We believe that such an approach would be worth trying out more extensively.

When the comments and the results of the seminar discussions are processed, the Final Report is drawn up without further user participation.

## 2.2 How does the recipient side participate?

As far as we have registered no guidelines exist for participation from the recipient side in evaluations and reviews. In practice, however, the following features have been prominent:

- The country studies have been regarded as a unilateral Norwegian concern. Participation by recipient countries has not been organized at any stage of the evaluation process
- In some cases the mandate and Draft Report have been sent to the recipient side for comments. Likewise, the recipient has on the whole been invited to the seminar that discusses the Draft Report
- In putting together teams, consultants and researchers from the recipient side have in many cases been included in the team.

All the case-studies indicate that the recipient side plays a small part in the evaluation work. This applies both in deciding which evaluations should be carried out, formulation of mandate and the ability to influence the process on the way. The recipient is, however, expected to be at the disposal of the team with information and viewpoints.

According to our assessment it is quite obvious that a frame of reference to enable real participation by recipient representatives in the evaluation work is lacking. In this field there is a need for improvements. This is also the opinion of the majority of those who answered the survey. On the question of what characterizes a good evaluation report, recipient participation in the evaluation work was given high precedence.

## 2.3 Conclusion

There is clearly a need to contemplate and systematize the various forms of user participation to a greater extent than has been the case so far. In particular, it is necessary to develop unambiguous attitudes both in principle and in practice to the role the recipient representatives are to play in the evaluation work - both in evaluations and reviews.

There is also a need to discuss improvements connected with standardization of mandate and use of reference groups.

Both user and recipient participation must be considered from the values of the evaluations tied to relevance, independence, credibility and influence. Reviews and evaluations with a strong emphasis on user- and decision-orientation can never be completely unbiased. The goal is to decide the degree and the form of influence so evaluation work retains its integrity and does not just become a part of the normal administrative work, but has a semblance of distance and independence.

### 3. THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION

The assessment of information quality is based upon an analysis of the contents of 13 project reviews and 4 evaluation reports; and the more in-depth study of 7 evaluation reports (case studies). The question of quality was also discussed in the survey and final interviews with professional staff and managers in the aid administration.

What is quality of an evaluation report? It is said that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and so is quality. People appreciate different things in evaluation reports. Some put a high value on instrumental usefulness, others look for novelty and excitement. Quality of a report might be coverage, treatment of objectives, etc. In one way, quality relates first and foremost to the objective of the study and the scope of the terms of reference. A study made in two weeks according to a limited set of questions may be of extremely high quality, but one made over three years with fifteen times as many resources might be of low quality. But the latter may still have formal aspects that make it appear of higher quality. With these reservations in mind, this chapter uses the following four criteria as operational guides to quality:

1. Contains reliable/valid information
2. Is problem- and decision-oriented
3. Is produced at a reasonable cost
4. Is delivered on time

#### 3.1 Reliability and validity of information

##### Evaluations

Of several alternatives listed in the survey questionnaire, reliability and validity of information was ranked as the most important quality of evaluation reports. The contents analysis and case studies confirm that the evaluations mostly are valid and reliable. Sometimes the data is less reliable, for example in the evaluations of Import Support and Mixed Credits where some

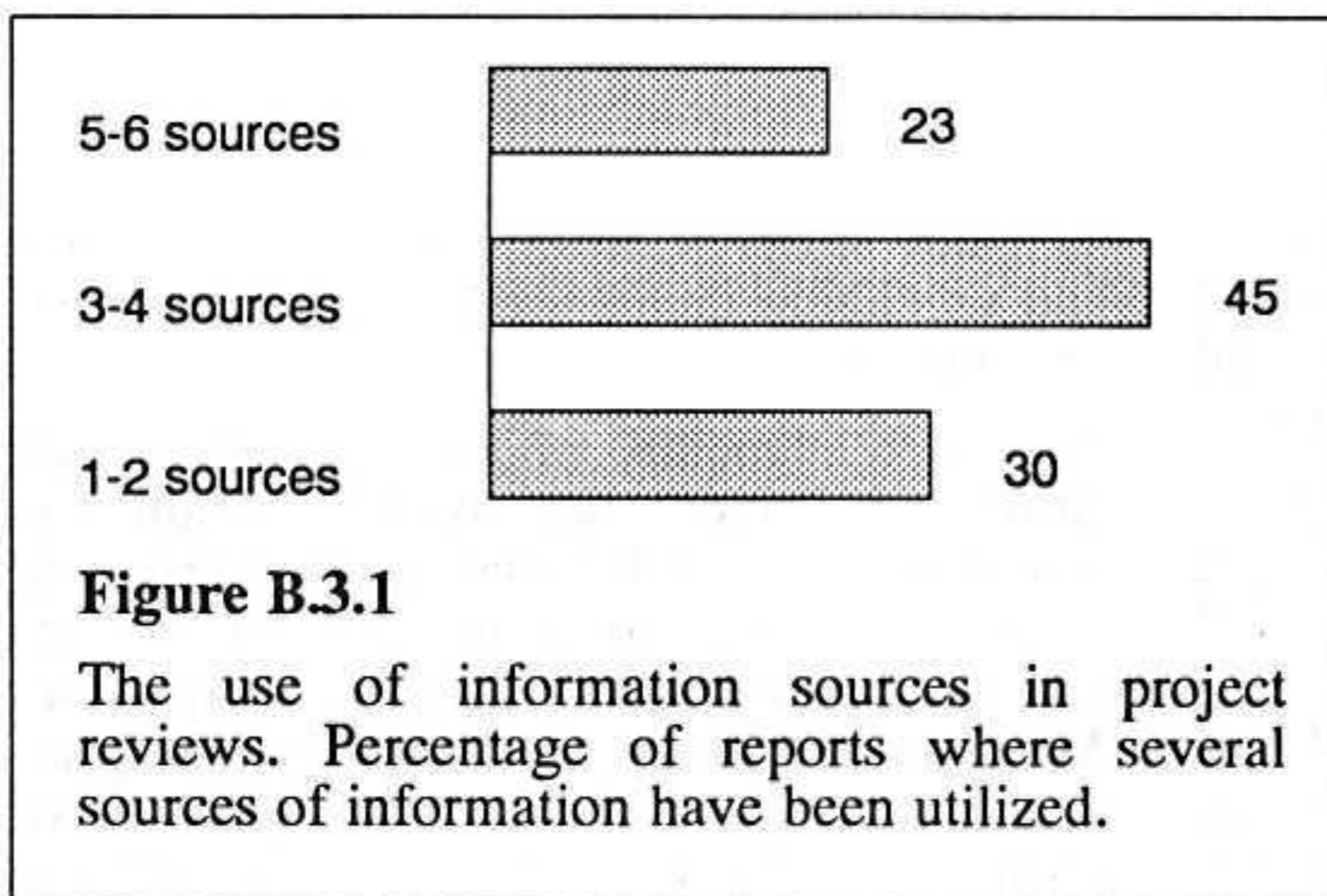
statistics suffered from low response rates and unreliable inputs (and even of questionable validity).

The high standard of information is not surprising, since the typical evaluation report is based on 1-2 man-year of research/analysis, usually divided between 3-8 individual members of an evaluation team. Most evaluations teams are interdisciplinary, which would diminish the problem of professional biases. There is an increasing tendency to involve social scientists and economists, and in most cases evaluation specialists are included in the teams, which is thought to improve the overall quality of the reports. All case studies were done by independent and well qualified evaluation teams of personnel outside the aid administration, which would reduce the problem of institutional biases. In all cases, a number of different methods have been used in data collection and analysis of data, which would contribute to improved validity and reliability of information.

The use of interdisciplinary teams instead of teams with the same professional background is thought to broaden the perspective of the analysis, reduce professional biases, and provide insight which is valuable in a long-term perspective. The evaluation of IDM illustrates the point. All team members had a strong background in management/school administration. The report was strongly geared towards a detailed analysis of the immediate management problems of the institution, while more overall questions such as the institute's role in a national context and a long term perspective got less attention. Because of its controversial nature, the report was neglected by local decision makers at the recipient side. Because of the detailed approach it was less relevant for the donor's decisions.

##### Project reviews

The quality of the typical project review is less outstanding, since the resources used on the average project review is substan-



tially less than on evaluations. The review team consists of fewer people, the budget is considerably less, field work is shorter and the report is less comprehensive. Some of the project reviews, however, have a professional standard comparable with that of evaluation reports.

A good indicator of validity and reliability of information is the extent to which several sources of information or methods of data collection have been used. Figure B.3.1 indicates that 75% of the reports are based on the use of only 1-4 sources of information. These are usually discussions with project staff, NORAD staff, direct observation, and interviews with target groups. More formal and quantitative methods like surveys and systematic observation are used very scarcely, and only 25% of the study teams have used a broader array of information sources. In 2/3 of the cases target groups were addressed adequately, which would tend to improve validity of information. In those cases, however, where interviews with key informants is the main source of information, the reliability is difficult to assert.

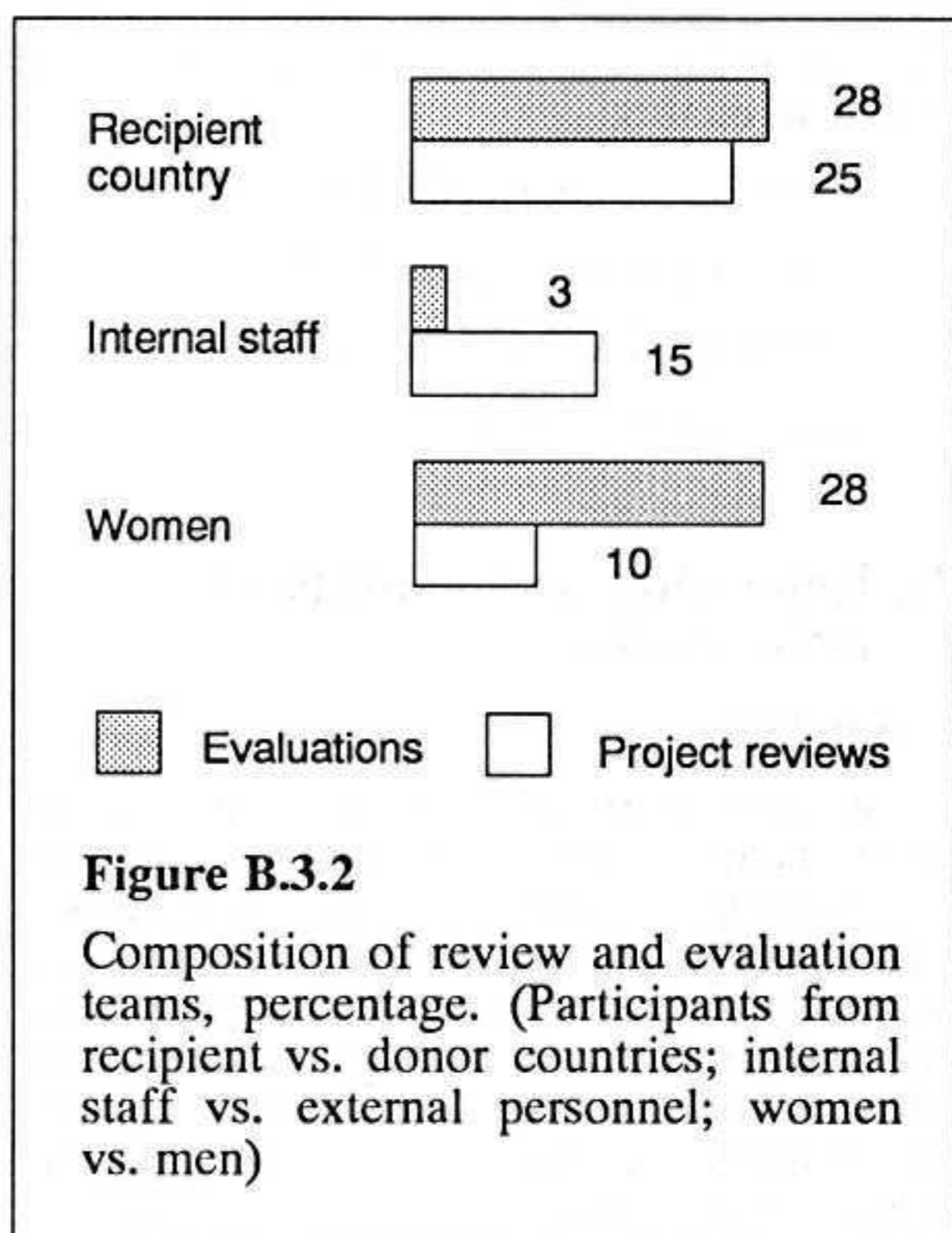
A second important indicator is the qualifications and composition of the review team. In the cases included in this study, 25% of the participants were from the recipient countries. This is not more or less than could be expected but of high significance for the question of validity and reliability of information. 85% of the team members were external staff, which is surprisingly high,

comparable with evaluations (97%). It is contrary to present policy (to prefer internal staff for external consultants in project reviews) if only 15% of the participants are internal NORAD staff. Only 10% of the participants were women which is surprisingly low; less than half of what is typical in an evaluation team. (Figure B.3.2).

The most significant difference between the typical review team and the typical evaluation team is that the evaluation team in addition to sectoral experts also often include one or several evaluation experts with a generalist background and development-oriented perspective. This will probably reduce bias (as discussed above), and give better quality information.

### 3.2 Is the information decision/problem-oriented

This aspect of quality was addressed by analyzing to what extent a sample of



reviews and evaluation reports were able to focus on concepts deemed important for decision-making. These concepts were of three groups, firstly the Log Frame **design** elements used to describe a development activity, i.e. the:

1. Inputs
2. Outputs
3. Goal
4. Purpose

The idea is that if a report focuses mainly on the two firsts concepts, then it is basically concerned with the question of aid delivery. If it focuses on the two latter concepts, then it is more concerned with impact and policy issues.

The second set of concepts is the Log-Frame **decision** elements, i.e.:

1. Efficiency
2. Effectiveness
3. Impact
4. Relevance
5. Sustainability

Again, the two first concepts relate mainly to the question of aid delivery, while the three latter concepts deal with impact and policy questions.

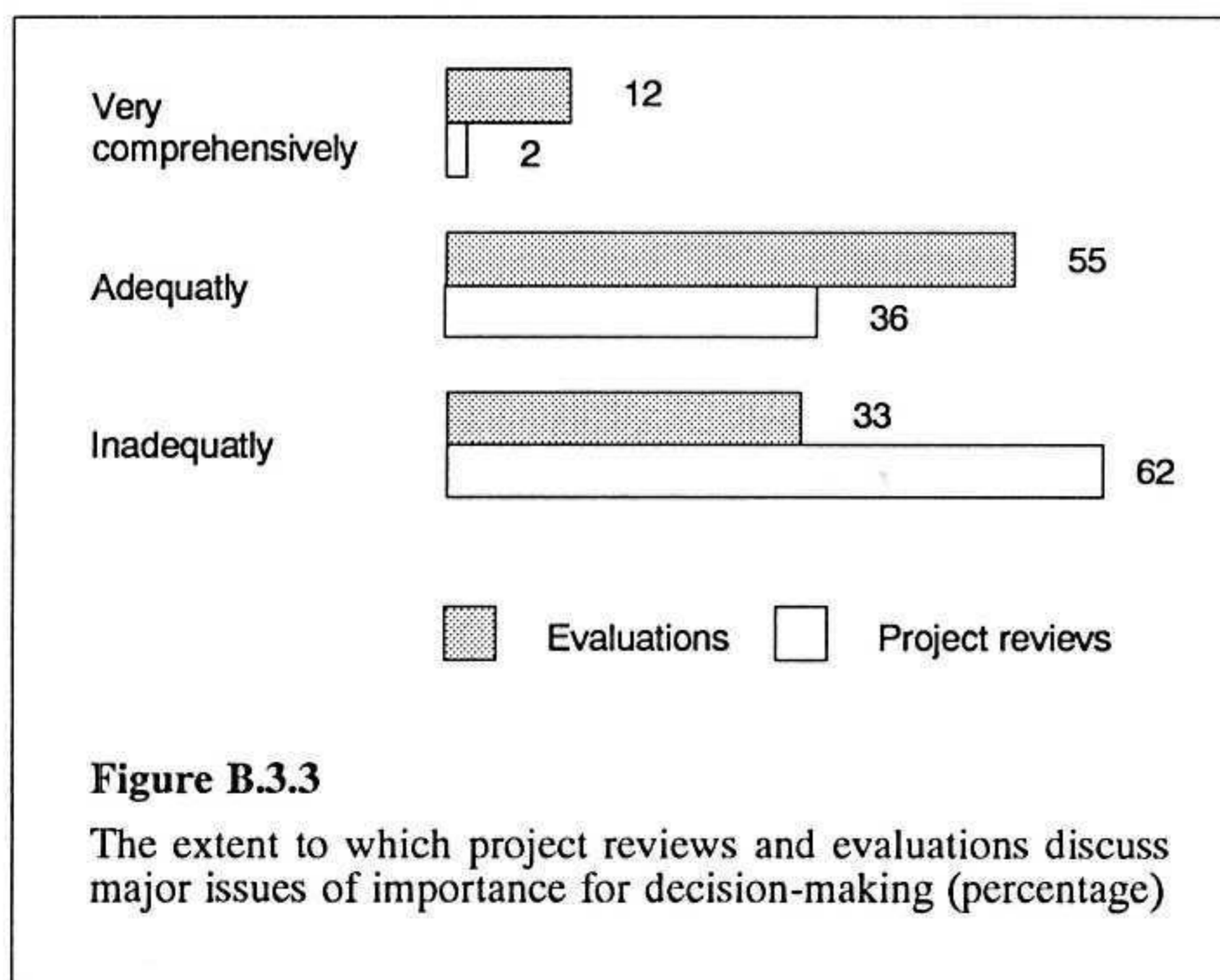
Also a third set of criteria were included, the cross-cutting issues which are given priority by many donor agencies today in the so-called "Integrated Approach". Thus, an assessment was also made of to what extent the reports focused on:

1. Environmental questions
2. Socio-cultural issues
3. Gender issues
4. Institutional development
5. Technology assessment
6. Financial and economic issues.

The findings are presented in figure B.3.3. The overall picture of whether these issues have been focused indicate that 38% of the project reviews provide an adequate coverage of these questions, which is surprisingly high taken into account that the mandates for these studies are very differentiated and only occasionally specify several

of the elements mentioned above. The situation is considerably improved with evaluation reports, and 2/3 of the reports adequately discuss these major issues. Still it should be noticed that one third of the evaluation reports and two third of the reviews address these major issues inadequately.

When taking a closer look at what type of information is contained in the reports, it is again useful to distinguish between **aid delivery, impact**



	Project reviews	Evaluations
Aid delivery	++	++
Impact of aid	+	++
Policy issues		+

**Figure B.3.4**

The focus of project reviews and evaluation reports

of aid and **policy** issues. Figure B.3.4 gives an impression of the situation. Project reviews, which have traditionally been seen as instruments to measure aid delivery are surprisingly strong in their assessment of impact of aid, while discussions related to policy implication is limited. Project/programme evaluations which are traditionally seen as instruments for analyzing impact and policy related questions are surprisingly strong on more detailed questions related to aid delivery, and relatively weak on questions related to policy. Sectoral and thematic evaluations, which are more policy oriented, are not part of this picture.

The situation is reflected in many of the mandates for evaluations. There has been a tendency to request an analysis at a very detailed level at the expense of the broader, more policy-oriented issues. Thus, many of the evaluations had more the character of a combined project review and evaluation and therefore became more expensive and time consuming than necessary.

This problem, which has been seen in many aid agencies, is addressed by the evaluation unit in a new evaluation hand-book based on the combined Log Frame Approach and the Integrated Approach. The book

recommends a standardized mandate for project/programme evaluation which focuses on the decision-elements and the cross-cutting issues mentioned above.

Both evaluations and project reviews are meant to serve the needs for control, decision-making and learning in the aid administration. As suggested in figure B.3.5, the contents analysis indicates that project reviews would best serve the purpose of control, but be less useful as a basis for management decisions since their focus is primarily on aid delivery. Many of the reports contained wide reaching recommendations for partner institutions in recipient countries, and relatively limited recommendations for the donor. One would have expected the opposite result since donor agencies would mainly be concerned with management decisions, while the control function should be handled by others, for instance the field office and institutions in the partner country.

Evaluation reports seem to serve the combined purpose of control and management decisions better than lesson-learning. This is also rather contrary to what would be expected since one would expect that the

	Project reviews	Evaluations
Control/ accountability	+	+
Management decisions	*)	+
Lesson-learning		

\*) Relatively comprehensive recommendations for partner institutions in recipient countries, but not for NORAD

**Figure B.3.5**

The overall aims which are best served by project reviews and evaluations

mainconcern at the ministry level should be to draw lessons which can be used as a basis for policy decisions.

### 3.3 The cost of information

The cost of individual evaluation reports differ largely with the size of the team, the length of field work, type of evaluation, scope of the mandate, etc. In the 7 case studies, the price ranged from 0.25 - 2.5 million NOK. During the last 5 years, 41 evaluations have been undertaken at an average cost of 1 million NOK. There is no way to establish whether the information has been produced at a reasonable cost. But on the basis of what has been said above, we have reason to believe that the output could be improved in the future with mandates which are less preoccupied with the detailed (operational) level and more with overall impact of aid activities and policy issues.

We have no means to establish the total cost of the annual production of project reviews in the aid administration, since this is handled independently by different departments under separate budgets. Assuming an average cost 1/3 that of evaluations and an annual production of 40-50 reviews, the total cost would be around 15 millions NOK. This corresponds to an annual expenditure on combined evaluation activities of 25 million NOK, or 0.6% of the total disbursement of bilateral aid in the Norwegian aid administration. Thus the present cost level is reasonable compared with many other aid agencies. Countries like Sweden and Holland is closer to the 1% mark, which in the case of Norway would represent an annual budget of some 40 million NOK.

The cost of an evaluation report is no reliable indicator for its usefulness as a vehicle for learning. The socio-cultural evaluation is a case in question. The evaluation was done in two distinct phases resulting in two different evaluation reports. The first phase was quick and in-expensive. The report offered an overview of main concepts and issues as well as a few firm recommendations on how the aid administration should

go about to sensitize socio-cultural issues. It was received favourably by the majority of staff. The second phase, which extended over 4-5 years at a cost ten times that of phase 1, offered a more detailed discussion of the same issues, which was largely ignored by the staff. Subsequent analysis suggest that the average staff member did not have basic knowledge of socio-cultural issues to digest the more elaborate report and that other initiatives should have followed after the first report was produced, instead of an in-depth evaluation.

### 3.4 Is information produced on time

One of the main priorities of staff members as revealed in our survey, is that information should be decision-oriented, which means that it should be relevant to decisions and available when needed.

In this respect there is a large difference between evaluations and project reviews. Evaluations are undertaken at different stages in the life of aid activities. They can be initiated:

1. As a pre-programmed activity specified in the initial agreement, for instance to be undertaken every third year
2. Because there is a particular need to evaluate (for instance implementation problems, a particularly successful approach, a particularly expensive programme, etc.)
3. As ex-post evaluations (after aid activities have been terminated in order to determine long term effects).

Most evaluations undertaken in the Norwegian aid administration is of the second category, since very few are pre-programmed or ex-post. They are initiated either to serve the Ministry's need to exercise control or draw lessons; or to serve the agency's need for management decisions. Some evaluations are therefore initiated as the result of consultations with agency departments after the Ministry's evaluation programme has been presented. In these cases, the need to synchronize

evaluations with forthcoming decisions is larger than is the case with sector evaluations and thematic evaluations designed by the Ministry to extract broader lessons.

The evaluation process has proved to be very time consuming. The 7 case studies included in this evaluation suggests that the average evaluation would take about 2 years from the first initiative to the report is published. One case (socio-cultural issues) extended over a period of 6 years. Figure B.3.6 shows a more detailed record of how time is spent.

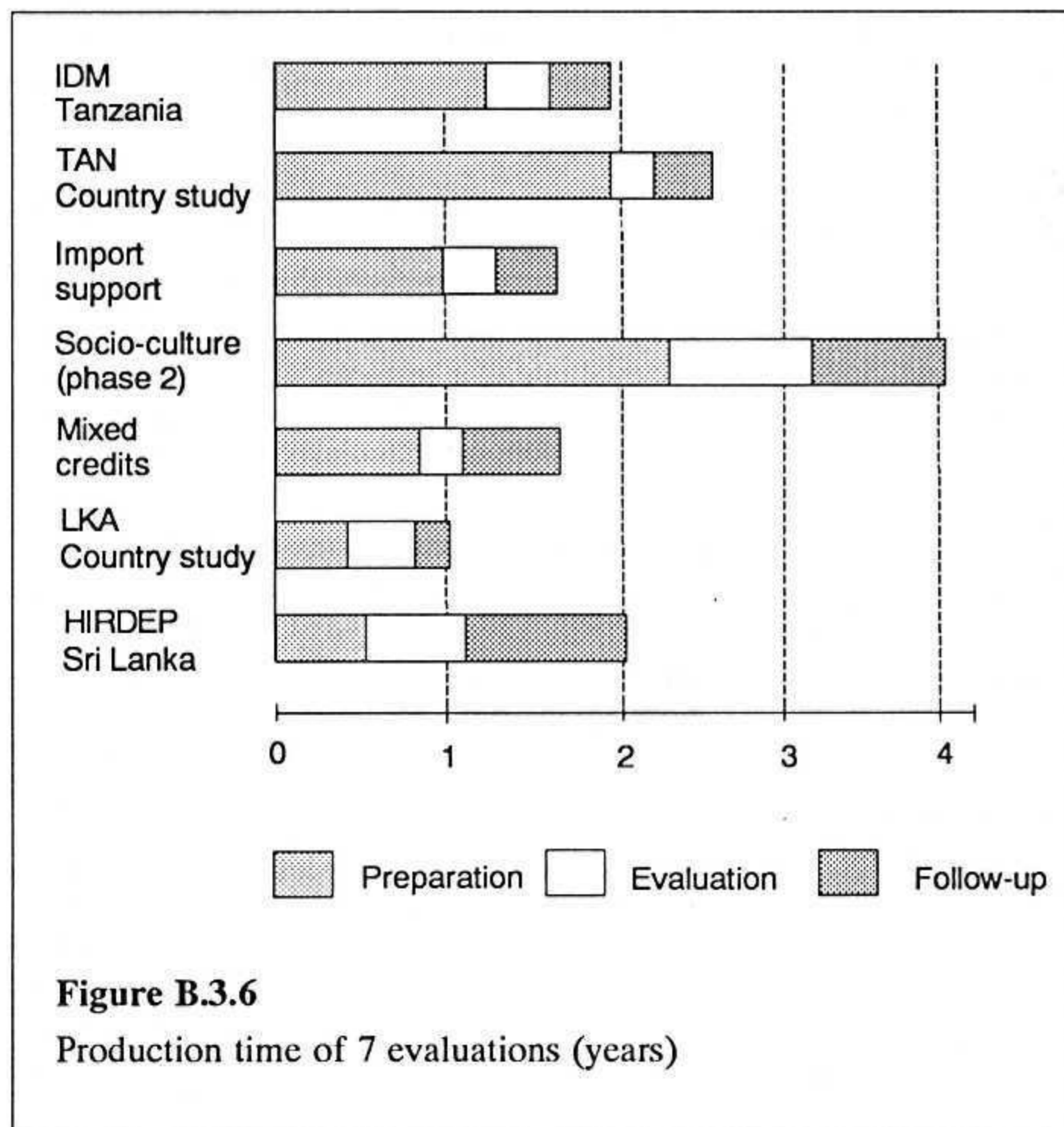
The evaluation-work itself, from the contract has been signed until the draft report is presented, takes about 25% of the time, or 6 months on average, with a variation from 3 months to 11 months. This includes pre-studies, field work and report production. The same amount of time is used on average to follow-up the draft report until it

is published. This includes to distribute the report, collect comments, draw official conclusions and recommendations, edit the final version and print the report.

The most time consuming part by far proves to be the preparatory phase which on average takes more than 50% of the total time. This includes producing the first draft mandate, negotiating the mandate with affected parties in the aid administration and the recipient government, identifying evaluation team and negotiating the contract. The time spent preparing for evaluations ranged from 5 months to more than 2 years, averaging 14 months.

The extensive production time for evaluations is much more than would be tolerated for evaluations that feed into management cycles. The problem would be less serious with policy-oriented evaluations. Some of the reasons for the extensive time schedules

clearly are out of reach of those involved. For instance, in the socio-cultural evaluation, phase 2, the contract had to be re-negotiated because of illness. But in general one would assume that both the preparation phase and the follow-up phase could be reduced considerably, for instance by improving and standardizing management procedures. Much time is spent negotiating the mandate with all parties involved. Considerable improvements could be made by using standardized mandates for project and programme level evaluations, which could serve the dual purpose of focusing the



**Figure B.3.6**

Production time of 7 evaluations (years)



evaluation on issues relevant for decision- and policy-making and away from the more detailed questions relating to aid delivery. Presumably, project and programme level evaluations could be produced within 6 months in most cases.

Project reviews, which are generally less comprehensive than evaluations, are more closely phased in with management decisions and have a much shorter production period. Our data suggest a time-span of 1-4 months per project review, and an average of 2,5 months. The mandate can usually be established within the agency between the regional and sectoral divisions and the field office. The mandate is usually tailor-made to respond to specific management needs. The report will feed back to the users of the information directly, and the reports are internal, they will not be published.

### 3.5 Conclusions

In summing up, the evaluations by and large contain high quality information which provides a solid basis for the needs of the aid administration to exert control and ensure accountability. The extensive use of independent expertise, both in evaluations and reviews underscores this situation, and also the use of differentiated methods and information sources used by evaluation teams.

In project reviews the situation is less favourable. In some cases the limited use of systematic methods and information sources would represent a major threat to the reliability of reports and there is substantial scope for improvement.

But is the information useful? Much of the information, both in evaluations and project reviews, is related to aid delivery. The more comprehensive project reviews also discuss issues related to the impact of aid activities, while evaluations are preoccupied to a large extent with impact and to some extent also policy issues. Some project reviews would therefore serve the purpose of evaluations for all intents and purposes, while several of the evaluation reports divert their attention from policy issues towards questions of aid delivery.

In terms of cost of information the total evaluation system is considerably less expensive than in many other donor agencies, and an increase of 60-70% on the total costs would be within reasonable limits. On the basis of what has been said above, much could be done to improve cost effectiveness of the evaluation system simply by making those evaluations which are intended for policy decisions more policy oriented; those intended for management decisions more focused on impact evaluation; and both types of report less focused on questions related to aid delivery by strengthening monitoring systems and reporting procedures both at the donor and the recipient side.

Both evaluations and project reviews are almost exclusively carried out by external staff. With the high turn-over in the aid administration, much of the professional competence in various areas is maintained in external institutions. Much could be gained in terms of improved learning if internal staff were more directly involved in carrying out evaluation activities in cooperation with external consultants, researchers and other specialists.

The phasing of information production with the needs for information of different parts of the aid administration is another major question. The production of evaluation reports is unnecessarily time consuming. This is a problem primarily in those cases where evaluations should feed into existing management cycles. In general there seem to be considerable scope for improvement by refining internal procedures for planning and follow-up in connection with evaluations. A second major concern would be to clarify the linkage between the evaluation systems in the Ministry and at the agency level in order to avoid overlapping and improve the phasing with existing management cycles.

#### 4. CHANNELLING INFORMATION TO DECISION-MAKERS

Evaluations are used for different types of decisions at different levels in the aid administration. Project/programme level evaluations may be used to decide whether or not to continue a project/programme, to decide its share of a country programme, or as a background for more management oriented decisions regarding the direction of the activities, choice of technology, etc. Country level evaluations have been used as a background for country programming and when new projects have been designed. Thematic evaluations may feed into decisions at all levels from the Parliament to the field office in establishing policy and guidelines for development aid and aid activities. These are just a few examples.

The amount of information generated in connection with Norwegian financed development activities is substantial. Both evaluation reports and project reviews are instruments designed to extract or aggregate information for the use of decision- and policy-makers. Project reviews generate intelligence from a number of more detailed progress reports, minutes from meetings, special studies, etc. The use of independent review teams and field missions adds an element of verification and analysis. The result is a condensed form of information directed towards the decision-makers. Evaluation reports serve the same function, but are aimed at a higher level in the administration and usually encompass a broader period of time or a wider range of development activities than the reviews.

Each year, some 6-9 evaluation reports are produced and 40-50 project reviews. These are bulky reports and represent a large amount of information which is not easily digestible. In order to become useful, the different reports are distributed to relevant departments and individuals in the organisation. Information must be further condensed for the higher layers of the organisation. The ideal situation would be a building block system where information were extracted and condensed step by step in correspondence with information needs at each level

on its way upwards in the organisation. The compromise must be cost-effective, ensure a substantial reduction of information in each step but retain the most substantial parts important for decision-making. The present study is limited to the effects of evaluations and project reviews which is only one part of the complex as illustrated in figure A.1.2. They are feedback mechanisms from development activities to the aid organisation. In the present study, there is therefore many important aspects of learning that has only been touched very briefly. The team has been specifically instructed not to go into the organisational aspects of learning.

##### 4.1 Evaluations

An evaluation report will usually interest only part of the administration. As we have seen in chapter B.1, different departments or "stake holders" are consulted both when the annual evaluation programme is decided and the evaluation mandate established. Eventually, the draft report is distributed to the same stake holders for comments, then finalised by the team. Before it is published, the evaluation unit prepares a cover-note with a summary specifying the Ministry's conclusions and suggested actions; which will then be discussed and sanctioned at a high level in the Ministry. The agency is then informed about the conclusions and may receive instructions for action. The results of evaluation activities are also presented to the Parliament in a very brief summary each year.

It is common to speak of "channels" for information. It is an image that suggests some efficiency in handling information. But where are the channels? The person looking for channels will not find any tabular objects of steel winding their way round the buildings, with evaluation reports speeding between departments. On the contrary, channels are insubstantial, but could be defined as the procedures for distributing evaluation and review reports - such as those outlined above.

The work "channels" suggests a mechanistic way of thinking about the use and spread of intelligence, which corresponds little to reality. The rules and procedures that are outlined above and detailed in chapter B.2 are followed, and by all evidence they do channel information to the appropriate levels - but often too late (but that is not because the channels are deficient). There is nothing in our case studies to suggest that the channels themselves are not as good as could be expected. We have not found any piece of information passively waiting to be channelled to the right level in time for a decision.

On the other hand, not all information is used and not all reports contain useful information, but that is another problem. But, given the rules and procedures, it may be possible to disseminate information in various ways. The rules and procedures are followed rather uniformly, with little variation. The principal faults of the system are: (1) that it spreads information to more people than are really concerned with the problem at hand, and (2) it does not follow-up enough to make sure that more general information is absorbed. The problem needs to be addressed in terms of public relations and of tailor-making the intelligence.

Which problem is most serious? There are costs associated with sending out reports, and above all costs when people take part of information they do not need. But who can tell with precision what is needed beforehand? Some degree of overlapping may be necessary in an information processing system. In fact, systems that are dependent on intelligence make sure that they have several overlapping sources of information. The cost of having too much information is small compared to the risk of missing an essential signal. Information is important to the aid administration, and the cost of overlapping or redundant signals is low compared to the risk of not being informed at all.

In the case of project and programme level evaluations many of the recommendations are at a surprisingly detailed level. The few such evaluation reports produced annually

are directly relevant to a very limited audience. They are available in full, with a condensed summary included and the Ministry's cover-note intended for top managers. In terms of making use of evaluation results, channelling of information is not the critical part, but rather the content itself and the timing in relation to management cycles.

The broader thematic and sectoral evaluations are usually of less direct relevance to its much broader and more undefined audience. The conclusions and recommendations offered will be more general and less relevant for specific decisions, and the chance that these reports are digested and assimilated is less likely.

The channels for these evaluations are less obvious; transfer of information requires an initiative from the recipient.

The survey of practices in the aid administration indicates that these reports are not easily read by most people. The majority of staff took part of only two reports last year, which are likely to be reports of the first category, directly relevant to their field of work. The survey shows no difference between the field office level, the sectoral and the regional parts of the agency, and the Ministry. These reports are usually available only in their full, bulky version, which may be one explanation for the limited response. It could very well be that this type of evaluations should rather be presented in a condensed, popularised mini-version in order to reach a broad audience. Again, the question of how relevant the evaluations are should be highlighted.

## 4.2 Project reviews

Project reviews also have a limited, well defined and well motivated audience at the agency and field office level, and there is no difficulty in channelling information to the right place in the organisation. The number of project reviews directly relevant to each of the five departments in the sectoral division is limited. The number is considerably larger in the two regional divisions, but is reduced when the reports are divided by

country or area. At the higher level of management there is a definite need to extract information of relevance for decision-making. This is done through a system of cover-notes. Review reports are also occasionally discussed in the Advisory Forum, meeting once a week and consisting of the two regional directors and their deputies, the chief of division for the country concerned and the officer responsible for the project at head quarters (sectoral division), and the sectoral division involved, and the resident representative in the recipient country concerned. Decisions and follow-up are by and large confined to the regional department concerned.

At the agency level the problem is not the channelling of information. The survey confirms that most individuals read only two review reports or less each year, which we assume again would be those directly relevant for their field of work. The system probably serves the needs of staff in their roles as managers and decision makers, but offers no opportunities for systematic exchange of information across the borders in their roles as learners. As is the case with evaluations, project reviews would probably have to be presented in an aggregate form, maybe as summary of findings from several project reviews in order to be useful as learning material to a wider audience.

At the ministry level, project reviews are of little direct significance. Reporting is concentrated on tertiary reports and budgeting information. The main area of intersection between the agency and the Ministry is the annual country programme negotiations which are initiated by an input from the field offices. In these input reports, relevant information from project reviews is used and references to project reviews may be included. This is explained to sufficiently satisfy the Ministry's need for information.

Also the project reviews will feed in as background information for evaluation teams, which is then aggregated and presented upwards in the Ministry and downwards to the agency as described above.

### **4.3 Improving the channelling of information**

Thus there are two almost entirely separate spheres of evaluation activities in the aid administration with fairly limited interaction. The third sphere is the multilateral system. Few documents produced in the bilateral part of the aid administration are seen as directly relevant for the multilateral department, except for those evaluations produced by the evaluation unit which directly relates to the multilateral system. Only 7 such reports were produced in the period 1981-89.

At the multilateral side, a number of evaluation reports are received from multilateral organisations, particularly in connection with multi-bilateral assistance. Some of these may involve team members appointed by the Ministry. The reports are made available to the relevant departments in the bilateral part of the administration in the case of multi-bilateral aid activities.

The potential for improvements of the present system is probably more related to the way information is aggregated; and the timing of information; than to the channelling of information. The last few years, the agency has started to introduce tools for objectives-oriented management (the Log-frame approach) which could be used as the basis in a modular monitoring and evaluation system, where information can be extracted and aggregated more easily in accordance with information needs at appropriate decision levels in the organisation. Work has been initiated to design and introduce a system for quality management in the organisation, and a large proportion of staff have been trained in using the Log-frame approach. The foundations for a modular reporting system is therefore established.

A main concern, however, should be to simplify the amount of information channelled through the system. At present, there is no unified format for reporting, or well defined categories of what types of information to be extracted, and the task to draw lessons and isolate substance of relevance

for decision making on the basis of the very differentiated reports generated today is insurmountable. It should be noted the Evaluation Unit is currently finalizing an evaluation handbook which presents a solution to this problem, based on the combined Log-frame approach and the so-called Integrated approach discussed in chapter B.3, above. Also, the forthcoming quality management system will probably address the problem.

Timing of information is a second problem which primarily concern evaluations. As was seen in chapter B.3, the production of evaluation reports takes time, often as much as two years or more from the first initiative until the report is published. Since evaluation reports often address operational questions, timing is vital for their use in decisions. The survey indicated that evaluation reports are of little relevance to operational decisions; which is to some extent attributed to the problem of timing. This was also confirmed in the interviews with managers. It was reported that in many cases management has to make major decisions long before an evaluation report is presented. This may redefine the situation in total and consequently the evaluation report may be less relevant and useful when it eventually is made available.

The production period for project reviews is substantially less than for evaluations, typically 1-4 months. Since they are initiated by the users, they are usually synchronized with major decisions. Phasing is therefore less of a problem than with evaluations.

#### **4.4 Conclusions**

In conclusion, the question of whether the right type of information is channelled to the right level in the organisation is more a question of what type of information is generated in the first place, and whether this information can easily be aggregated and condensed for decision-makers. The problem is less a question of improving the channels and more a question of establishing a simple and effective system for monitoring, evaluation and reporting with well defined require-

ments on what type of information should be passed through the system, and what formats should be used for reporting. We would assume that in order to make evaluations a useful tool for management and decision making at the agency level, the response time will have to be reduced from 2 years to 6 months in the typical case. In order to make information useful for learning purposes, lessons from evaluation reports and project reviews would have to be presented in a more condensed and digestible form than the full reports distributed today.

## 5. SYSTEMS OF CORPORATE MEMORY

In an organisation with considerable turnover in its staff, especially in the internal organisation, the value of efficient methods for storing, accumulating and making accessible evaluation material becomes increasingly important. Even though the individual to a large extent accumulates and takes away his private store of knowledge and "professional memory", arrangements have to be made which ensures continuity in the establishment of learning from experience.

Through a separate background study we have analyzed more closely three separate systems for ensuring an efficient corporate memory in Norwegian aid administration:

- Archives, both at the Ministry, the agency and the field offices
- IDOK, NORAD's information and documentation centre
- Training activity, in particular the School of Development Cooperation.

We have also considered the connection between them and to some extent assessed and tested accessibility.

### 5.1 How are the systems structured?

The archives have a duty to store all documents produced which are part of the processing work. This duty also includes all documents that enter as part of the processing procedure or as documentation. By documents are meant notes, letters, reports, contracts, agreements etc., as well as telexes, telefaxes and internal notes.

The archives contain both documents which are accessible to the public and material exempt from public view, including classified material. Only the employees have physical access to the files. Others, eg researchers and consultants have to sign a special declaration of confidentiality.

The Ministry's archives and the agency's archives are separate systems and do not keep material for each other beyond what

leaves or enters as part of the processing procedure. This means that all material concerning reviews is found in the agency, while material on the evaluations is found in the Ministry. The agency and its field offices have the same filing system, but it is uncertain if the material in the field offices concerning reviews is available in full in Oslo.

The individual administrative worker is responsible for all documents from the processing procedure being sent to the archives.

The archives at the agency level are organized according to a classification system which presupposes that you know which report or project you are searching for. The file key and the organisation of the files allow little opportunity to search for material based on theme or sector. In the agency's files alone, some 30.000 new documents are registered every year.

IDOK is a separate section at the Information Unit in NORAD. IDOK lends books, distributes pamphlets, brochures and reports and organizes exhibitions. IDOK may gather information from different sources and provide surveys over relevant information material by way of databases and connections with other libraries, research institutions, aid agencies etc.

IDOK's collection of reports contains publicly accessible documents such as:

- Strategy documents, ie sector- and country strategies, country programmes, plans of action and Agreed Minutes from country programme negotiations
- Evaluation documents, ie appraisals, large project reviews and evaluations.

In June 1992 the report collection contained 601 titles of which 366 were evaluation reports and reviews.

The responsibility to hand over report material rests with the regional divisions and the technical divisions. IDOK's assess-

ment is that the report collection was more or less complete from 1991 onwards.

The reports are registered in IDOK's bibliographical database. This database also contains evaluation reports from other aid agencies, articles from periodicals and books. Reports from the World Bank are not publicly accessible and are not registered.

The reports are registered on theme words and also on NORAD's country/sector/project code where this is appropriate. This means that one may search under "water supply" and find all relevant material without knowing the different project numbers.

Search in the database must take place in IDOK. So far it is not possible to enter the database from terminals in different offices.

The School of Development Cooperation was established in 1991 and started its own activity in 1992. It aims at providing skills for employees in the Ministry, the agency and the field offices as well as for contract personnel such as experts and volunteers.

The school is meant to provide an understanding of:

- The setting of priorities and objectives of Norwegian aid administration
- Information on the partner countries
- Cross-cultural communication
- Tools and methods for analysis and appraisal
- Management procedures

Some of the teaching modules are obligatory for all co-workers in the aid administration, while others are intended for special target groups.

It is stressed that the school also should provide the participants with insight in new expertise, practice at problem-solving and learning of the experience of others. In the plan for the course, reviews and evaluations are to some extent used as documentation of actual experiences and as themes for discussions. In addition, the team members are often engaged as lecturers.

## 5.2 How do the systems work?

In as much as the archives contain all relevant material of a case or a project and the individual staff member has learnt how to use them, this may provide historical information and describe the continuity in a project. Knowledge is, however, not accumulated and there are, for example, few possibilities for making comparisons or study sector experiences. The archives are therefore principally a tool in the on-going processing work and therefore a tool also for control and decision-making. As a basis for learning it has more limited application. It is therefore a necessary, but not sufficient aid in securing an adequate Corporate Memory.

In our survey among employees in the aid administration, 42% answered that the archives are an important source of new knowledge. 19% thought they were of average importance and 39% thought that they were not important at all. On a ranking list over important sources of new knowledge, the archives are ranked number 6 among 19 alternatives.

IDOK's collection of reports and database are in principle meant to represent access to a broad and relevant material on experience. Since the report collection was not complete before 1991, there will be considerable gaps. In connection with the HIRDEP-evaluation, we identified altogether 44 central reviews/evaluations carried out during the period of 1979-91. In searching through the report collection and the database we found that only ten of these were registered. This may be so, because some of the reviews were slightly dated, but also because evaluation material produced or initiated by the field office or recipient was less likely to have been transferred and registered in the report collection. This is also likely to be a weak point with the system in the future.

Another problem which limits the use is that the reports are registered in the database only by subject words and title without annotation. Therefore, a user will be unsure of the value of retrieving the report.

A considerable problem is that report material is sent partly to the archive and partly to IDOK and that the exchange between them does not function satisfactorily. Seen from the point of view of the individual staff member, it is an obvious disadvantage that the archive and IDOK are not joined in one simple, jointly searchable system. This and other circumstances makes the threshold for active use of both the files and IDOK relatively high. The danger is therefore that the systems will function mainly as passive storage medium.

The use of the report collection and the database varies greatly. Within the aid administration it appears that the units most efficient at delivering report material for registering are also the units that most frequently use the service. On the whole it appears that external users make up the main part of those who make use of the services. This means that students, researchers, job-seekers, consultants, journalists etc. are the most frequent users.

Through the survey 31% of employees in the aid administration answered that IDOK was an important source of new knowledge. 31% thought IDOK was of average importance, while 32% did not consider IDOK important at all. On a ranking list of important sources of new information, IDOK was ranked number 13 of 19 alternatives. Databases were ranked at the bottom. The results confirm the impression that IDOK so far is not a central source of new information and learning in the aid administration and that confidence in the usefulness of databases is extremely low.

As the School of Development Cooperation has just started its activity it is too early to assess how it will function. There is, however, reason to anticipate that the school will become a central arena of learning both for transfer of experience and development of new knowledge and new perspectives.

### 5.3 Conclusion

As systems, both the archives and IDOK can clearly be developed further. This applies to link-up and completeness as well as to simplification of accessibility. For staff members it will be of great value to have easy access to the "active" part of the corporate memory of the aid administration from terminals at their own places of work. We would, however, like to warn against creating a completeness, which also gives access to old, irrelevant material automatically. This will create an over-complex and impractical situation which will drastically reduce the relevant use. After a time, even good physical accessibility will not be of any help if all there is a vast amount of material with small relevance and application.

Finally we would recommend a certain realism concerning the effect both of archives and databases. All experience indicates that such remedies must be supported and supplemented by other sources and methods for up-dating and learning. Field work, participation in project reviews, debriefing by people with field experience, contacts with colleagues, network participation, seminars, reading of specialist literature and the establishment of arenas of learning within the various divisions of the aid administration will still play a larger role than even the very best storage- and retrieving media. May be it would be a good idea to give, IDOK for instance, the role as an mediator of information, by bringing people with particular experience and knowledge together in more or less stable networks?



## 6. THE CAPACITY TO USE EVALUATION RESULTS

### 6.1 Introduction.

Whether the aid administration has the capacity to use evaluation results or not depends partly on structural characteristics of the system, partly on process characteristics and partly on human factors. This chapter analyzes the evidence; that is, does the organization possess the capacity to use evaluation results. Next the issue of capacity is analyzed in its components; structural-, procedural-, and human factors. The final section discusses the significance of bottlenecks to an increased use of evaluations.

### 6.2 Are reports read?

What does the evidence then say regarding the use of evaluations? Evaluations and project reviews are written material and the first indication of their use is whether they are read or not. It is possible that evaluation results are communicated by word of mouth, but for all practical purposes reading will be the first and major step in using the input from evaluations and reviews.

More than 60% of the professional staff read a **project review** every year, and almost 90% read **evaluations** every year. In fact, the majority read more; 2 to 6 full reports (that is, both project reviews and evaluations), parts of another 1 or 2 reports, and some also read summaries of another few reports. People tend to read the full reports more often than they read only parts of them or a summary.

How many of the **project reviews** are actually read? The commissioning of reviews is a decentralized activity, hence the number produced per year is difficult to establish. In the government white paper of 1985 the amount was estimated at around 40 to 50. Accordingly, most employees read more than 15% of the total output. It is thus highly likely that they do read all reviews within their sector and most of the reviews that concern the countries they are engaged in.

People read more **evaluations** than project reviews, but not in the same way; they read mostly full reports, at times only parts of the reports and sometimes only summaries. The most common answer was to read 1 to 2 full reports per year, parts of another 1 to 2, and summaries of equally many. That means most of the staff in one way or another took part of 3 to 6 evaluation reports per year. In total 45 evaluations were produced during the period 1986 to 1990 - almost 10 per year. As that corresponds almost to the amounts read, most of the reports seem to reach most persons.

There is no complete overlap between the different segments of how people read and how much they read, thus there may well be some who read only summaries and no full reports and vice versa. In addition, we should remember that those who answered the questionnaire probably have a positive bias towards the evaluation system as a whole. Others probably read less.

The size of **project reviews** varies between 30 and 150 pages, and **evaluations** on the average have 150 pages. Roughly adding the figures, the average employee reads some 300 pages of project reviews and 450 pages of evaluation reports per year. With a normal reading speed, this represents 3 - 5 working days on getting information from the evaluation system - or about 1% of the total time at work. In terms of time, it is not much; but in terms of coverage it seems to be as much as can be expected.

So there is a "capacity" to read reports and reports are read. Do people learn by reading them? Table B6.1 indicates that both evaluations and project reviews are considered important sources of learning, but project reviews more so than evaluations. Similarly, both types of reports are important for understanding the project environment. However, people differ on their relative importance.

	Yes	No answer	No
Project reviews are an important source of learning	82	15	3
Project reviews are important in understanding the project setting	75	16	9
Evaluations are an important source of learning	67	28	6
Evaluations are important in understanding the project setting	60	28	12

**Note:**The respondents were asked to state whether they agreed or not to the statement. Thus, for example, 52% of the respondents agree that project reviews are an important source of learning.

**Table B6.1** The value of learning from project reviews and evaluations - questionnaire responses (n = 70, percentages)

not even recognized. The fact that 63% think that their role is an impediment to learning must include such factors. Whether they are right or not is another question, but it signifies that the roles of the aid agencies in development cooperation need to be developed and clarified.

The table shows that 75% think that routine work is given priority. As many as 94% think they have not time enough to engage in learning activities, and 67% answer that they have too little time to reflect on their experiences. We saw

Ranked among 19 other sources of learning, project reviews are deemed the third most important source of learning; but evaluations rank as number 14.

above that the average person might spend somewhat more than 3 days reading evaluation reports and progress reports. In reality people read on weekends, in the evenings and while travelling.

### 6.3 Structural aspects of the capacity to learn.

Table B6.2 presents different structural obstacles to learning. First of all they relate to the role of the employee. The concept of a "role" refers to what people actually do at work, it is an aggregate of the small (and large) tasks that make up the day at work. The data in table B6.2 show that learning is not perceived to be required, and it may not be rewarded and perhaps

One rather obvious structural impediment to learning from evaluations is the fact that evaluations are undertaken by the Ministry, whereas the majority of those who are expected to learn are at NORAD. There is

	Very important	Of some importance	Not so important
Time to learn	94	10	6
Priority of routine work	75	16	9
Time to reflect on experiences	67	18	15
The design of professional roles	65	16	19

**Note:**The respondents were asked to rank different obstacles to learning on how important they are. Thus, the table shows that 94% of the respondents think that lacking time to learn is a very important obstacle.

**Table B6.2** The relative importance of structural impediments to learning. (n=77, percentages)

no organization without conflicts between "headquarters" and "subsidiaries", and the aid administration is no exception. There is no reason to think that the conflicts are worse than in most other organizations, but nevertheless it is unfortunate for learning that the system is split this way. This was clearly brought up during the group- and in-depth interviews. The division of responsibilities between Ministry and Agency regarding evaluations/reviews is a source of conflict and thus an obstacle to learning from studies across the organization.

The organizational divide also relates to a terminological split between project reviews and evaluations. Evaluations are supposed to be more comprehensive, independent, and more directed towards policy issues and the public debate. Project reviews, on the other hand, are management instruments. In practice the distinction is unclear, both in terms of quality and scope of the reports. Some project reviews are as comprehensive as some evaluations.

Tautological definitions are not clarifying, and this one is no exception. The survey uncovered a lot of confusion regarding why reports are initiated, how they are used, and their value. Clearly, the concepts of reviews and evaluations are not understood in the aid administration.

#### 6.4 Procedural aspects of the capacity to learn.

Learning does not occur automatically and neither do people start reading reports and reviews just out of the blue. It takes some encouragement; some form of promotion. It is necessary to form a learning arena - an occasion for people to get acquainted with the outputs from the evaluation work and to raise their appetite. This is what happens after the evaluations are completed, and it thus belongs to the processes of encouraging learning.

**The hearing**, when the report is sent out in draft form to the inner circle of interested sections, is the first learning arena. The evaluation reports are sent to hearing soon

after being received by the evaluation unit. Therecipients are asked to respond with comments within a few weeks.

The case studies indicate that the hearing does not always have the qualities one would associate with a learning arena. There was little evidence of substantial exchanges of ideas. It was rare indeed that respondents elaborated on the evaluation findings, attacked them or supported them with new facts. If the evaluations were attacked it was generally from a narrow point of view defending a sections status. At times the respondents pointed at factual errors in the findings. In total, there is no evidence of learning from the hearings.

When a major evaluation has been presented, the evaluation unit may also call a **seminar** to discuss findings. This was done in three instances out of eight. The meetings were well-attended, and people comment favourably on them in two cases. In those cases they seem to have been important as arenas for learning.

The Ministry arranges **press-conferences**, if there are to be any. There were six press conferences arranged in the 7 cases. The reports did get coverage in the press, but the level of discussion varied. At times it lead to a focused and critical debate, with good opportunities for learning. At other times the press caught on details that appeared to make good news but were far from the main thrust of the studies and related little to the effectiveness and efficiency of aid. As a means of informing the public the experience from the cases is contradictory. However, that may be too rational a point of view. The very fact that press-conferences are undertaken has symbolic value. The media is informed, and the Ministry performs the task of communicating results to the general public.

The fourth process characteristic that could stimulate learning is the **publication of reports**. Evaluation reports are easily accessible and printed in large numbers; between 300 and 3 500 copies. This means that reports are available for staff members, institutions, university libraries, and those

Case	Were the following learning arenas set up?			
	Hearing	Seminar	Press Conference	Publication
Institute of Development Management, Tanzania	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Country Study, Tanzania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Import Support, Tanzania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country Study, Sri Lanka	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
HIRDEP, Sri Lanka	Yes	Yes	Not yet	Not yet
Socio-cultural Conditions in Development Assistance Part 1	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Part 2	Yes	No	No	Not yet
Parallel Financing and Mixed Credits	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

**Table B6.3** Communicating evaluation results on 7 case studies.

among the general public who are interested. In only one case (Import Support, Tanzania) have we heard complaints that the reports were hard to come by.

Table B6.3 shows the process of communicating the results, internally and externally, from the case studies. The table shows four types of "learning arenas", but the degree of use varies and so does the quality of what is going on. According to the case studies, seminars are the most effective way of disseminating knowledge, and wide availability of evaluation reports is of course a prerequisite. The quality of the debate in mass media varies widely, in some cases it is very low, at other times well informed and perceptive. Hearings do not contribute much to learning.

But the learning arena is not only what happens after the reports are concluded, it is

also what happens when the inquiries are taking place. The fact that a team of evaluators descend on a project (even as part of a thematic study or a country study) is in itself a challenge to learn, and it often visibly leads to debate and new insights. In those rare cases when NORAD personnel are closely associated with the team, the learning becomes particularly intense.

The case of Import Support to Tanzania exemplifies such a process. NORAD staff took active part on a number of project reviews, and together with the evaluation itself this led to a high learning effect. Without the integration, learning would probably have been much lower.

NORAD personnel seldom take part on evaluations because of the policy of using independent teams. Here there is a conflict between the wish for learning and the quest

for objectivity and credibility. By all evidence, the organization pays a heavy price in terms of learning when it excludes its personnel from active part on evaluation teams. But is there not a risk that project personnel will try to present positive findings? No - equally clear is the evidence that the findings are not presented in a "rosy light" when agency staff are parts of the teams (Browning, 1984; Forss, 1985; Imboden, 1978). It may be formally wrong, but in substance makes no difference. Not including NORAD personnel from evaluation and review teams lead to substantial foregone opportunities for learning.

However, the quest for objectivity is one thing, independence another. Independence is an instrument to reach objectivity, but it is not a guarantee that objectivity is reached. In real life, it is common and convenient to use independence as an approximation for objectivity. It is a cheap way to create legitimacy, and perhaps legitimacy is the most important value of all.

### 6.5 Human characteristics of learning.

Whether people learn from a given input depends on how much they knew before. If they have well-developed frames of reference, the new knowledge fits easily into place and becomes part of an even better developed "structure of knowledge". If the new information falls into a blank space, it slips and falls off, like water from a goose. Thus, the more one knows beforehand, the more likely is it that a given input of knowledge will be of use - that it will affect ones learning.

The case studies indicate that inputs from project reviews and evaluations may combine over time to produce better and better structures of knowledge. Minor inputs may have major effects, because they were well adjusted to poorly developed knowledge structures on the subject matter. More sophisticated inputs on the same subject may fail to have an impact.

The two parts of the evaluation of socio-

cultural conditions illustrate the point. The first part was rather plain, but had a major impact. The second part was much more complex but had little impact. The question is therefore; are the knowledge structures in the aid administration well developed - or are these structures weak?

It is not our task to assess individuals. On the contrary we take for granted that people in the aid administration are as people are in other parts of society; some brilliant, some mediocre, most in between. More interesting is how they interact to form organizational knowledge structures.

Like individual people have structures of knowledge - so can organizations be said to possess structures of knowledge, made up of the knowledge of people within the organization. The level of understanding of a phenomena, the perceptiveness of people's views, the analytical detail shown in discussions of a topic, the comprehensiveness of understanding and the ability to see the phenomena in relation to other things - are all good indicators to the status of knowledge structures.

The organizational knowledge structures concerning rural roads maintenance, international negotiations, administration of import support, or any of the other subjects that the aid administration has to have an expertise on, is outside our judgement. But within the field of learning the knowledge structures are weak, and the same applies to the subject of evaluation. The basic theories on the subjects are not known, the "state of the art" is not followed, and the major issues or problem areas that are discussed among professionals are not echoed in the aid administration. There are, for example, no common starting points as to why evaluations and project reviews are undertaken, why they should be undertaken, and how they should be used.

Table B6.4 illustrates the point from the survey. The distribution of answers shows that there is no organizational structure of knowledge on these topics - there is no common experience. We would hypothesize that if the organization is to maximize its

	Often	At times	Seldom
For planning purposes	43	18	39
Bilateral agreements	44	15	41
Improve quality	34	23	43
Audit	36	18	46

**Table B6.4**

The lack of homogeneous knowledge structures in the field of evaluation. Distribution of response rates on the question "why evaluations are started?" (percentages, n=77)

opportunities for learning, it needs to develop a culture of learning, and to get adjusted to speaking about learning (and evaluation) in terms that express actions and results within that field.

## 6.6 Concluding remarks.

To learn more, the organization needs at first to develop its knowledge structures concerning the phenomena of learning; and if it is to make good use of the evaluation system, it needs to develop its knowledge structures concerning evaluation. In both these aspects much remains to be done. The school for development cooperation will have an important task to do in this respect. It is virtually the only arena where such competence can be gradually developed. The subjects of learning and evaluation need to be introduced, developed and, if possible, applied in various forms under the framework of the school.

## 7. THE ART OF RECEIVING EVALUATION RESULTS.

### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed that evaluation and project reviews are read. People take part of all reports that come within their field of work. There are a number of arenas where the meeting between people and information takes place, and there are structural weaknesses in the organization that to some extent block the full utilization of those meetings. In the final end it takes an individual to make something of information, and chapter B.6 ended by noting that it is important to develop knowledge structures if the reports are to have any effect.

This chapter pursues the question of what happens to the input of information. Now that people do receive information the question is what they do next. Do they reject it, if it is controversial? Does the system reject odd information? Can the system accept new ideas? Indeed, does it like to get new ideas? Is it an "open" system, and does it need to develop characteristics of open systems. Needless to say, the picture is complex. Not all new ideas are accepted, nor should they be. Uncritical acceptance of information is not conducive to learning. The "receiving end" must be able to select, adapt and give priority to the information that comes. There is no shortage of infor-

mation, and not all evaluations and project reviews have reliable findings or well designed recommendations.

### 7.2 Are results accepted, rejected or neglected?

What does the evidence from the case studies say: are evaluation results accepted, rejected or neglected? Table B7.1 summarizes how the reports were received, based on the correspondence between the evaluation unit and the team of evaluators, and the comments during the hearing and the seminars. No evaluations were rejected because of their findings. In some instances the draft evaluations were modified, but never because the findings were controversial or critical.

Draft reports were sometimes changed because of factual errors in the descriptions, which the teams themselves were eager to remove (as on the Country Study of Tanzania, the evaluation of Import Support and the evaluation of Parallel Financing). It took a long time before the second study of socio-cultural conditions was finalized, but again it was not because the findings were

too critical. The evaluation unit wanted practical/operational recommendations - it did not disagree either with the analysis or the content of the recommendations that were made.

Of course the picture is not that simple. Each evaluation contains several "bits of information", and not all are accepted. Also information that is accepted by the Ministry may be rejected by NORAD, and vice versa. The field

	Accepted	Neglected	Rejected
Tanzania Country Study	X		
Commodity Import Support	X		
Sri Lanka Country Study	X		
HIRDEP	X (1)		
Socio-cultural conditions 1	X		
Parallel Financing	X		
Socio-cultural conditions 2		X	
IDM		X	

(1) The process is not yet finalized

**Table B7.1** How evaluation reports are received.

	Index of "difficulty"	Accepted	Neglected	Rejected
Commodity import support	medium	1	-	-
Sri Lanka Country Study	low	1	2	-
HIRDEP	low	1	2	-
Parallel financing	high	1	2	3
Socio-cultural conditions 1	high	1	3	2
Tanzania Country Study	high	1	1	2
IDM	low	2	1	-
Socio-cultural conditions 2	high	2	1	3

**Note:** The "Index of difficulty" indicates to what extent the report is considered controversial or critical. The figures indicate the type of response given; 1 is the most common response, 2 is the next and 3 is the least common response.

**Table B7.2** How evaluation reports are received.

offices may reject findings that the sectoral divisions accept and that are neglected by the regional divisions, and so on. In addition, not all reports are equally digestible, some are more controversial than others.

Table B7.2 shows the more complex picture, where the evaluations are ranked as high, low or medium depending on how "rough" they are in their criticism. An evaluation assigned a high would a priori conflict with several interests in the aid administration and would require a high degree of openness to be accepted. An evaluation assigned low would not be particularly offensive, and would confirm what people already know.

The figures show the primary, secondary and tertiary reaction to the findings and content of the reports. The aid administration does not tend to reject critical reports, nor are controversial issues systematically neglected. The critical reports generate more differentiated reactions, but that is in itself an indication of learning. The "worst" in terms of learning, would be if there is a pattern of neglecting and rejecting controversial information.

The case of the evaluation of Parallel

Financing and Mixed Credits illustrates the point. The evaluation found the two instruments to be useful, both to promote development according to Norway's assistance policies, and to generate export for industry. These findings were accepted by all. But the evaluators recommended changes in the administration, and these were rejected by the unit which "lost"; that is, which saw the control of money being shifted to another unit.

The unit in case was alone though, and all other parts of the administration supported the change. But the evaluation contained theoretical discussions concerning principles of assessing cost-effectiveness which have far-reaching implications. By and large, these findings were neglected. There is no trace of discussion or debate of them. Thus the primary reaction is acceptance, the secondary rejection and the third neglect.

### 7.3 Obstacles to openness.

It is more likely that a non-critical evaluation report will be neglected than a controversial one. Also, neglect is a more common pattern of response than rejection. Why are



Question	Very important	Of medium importance	Of little importance
The organization's lack of openness to critical reflection	47	24	19
The colleagues lack of openness to new ideas and visions	28	28	24
Lack of interest to discuss fundamental issues	22	29	49
Lack of personal motivation	14	26	50

**Note:** The respondents were asked to rank a list of potential obstacles to learning. The answers above indicate for example that 14% thought "personal motivation" was a very important obstacle to learning, whereas 50% thought that it was of little importance.

**Table B7.3**

An open organization? Responses to the question of which the significant obstacles to learning are. (n = 77, percentages)

	Important	Medium	Not important
1. The conclusions are valid and reliable	93	7	0
2. It contains a summary	92	4	4
3. It can be used in decision-making	89	4	7
4. It presents the achievements accurately	86	10	4
5. The recipients are actively involved	85	7	8
6. The methods of investigation are clearly presented	84	11	5
7. It puts the findings in a wider perspective	75	18	7
8. It follows the terms of reference	74	18	8
9. It has practical recommendations	70	17	13
10. It is well written	66	26	8
11. It contains new thoughts	64	30	6
12. The final report is short	49	36	15
13. It follows a standardized format	22	27	51

**Table B7.4**

Desired qualities in evaluation reports. (n = 74, percentages and rank order of qualities)

findings neglected? Is it because the organization is not open enough? Could be, but that depends on what is meant by open. It could also be that people do not have time enough to read and digest information.

An oversupply of information may in itself cause bottlenecks on the receiving side, meaning that the capacity to absorb information could be low, even if the will is high. Table B7.3 shows an image of how open the organization is. Respondents blame the organization more than its personnel. The table shows that people's motivation, interest and openness are perceived to be of minor importance as obstacles to learning.

Almost half of the respondents say the organization is not open to critical reflection, and only 19% think that the organization's openness (or lack of openness) is a problem of little importance. This leads on to another two questions; (1) are people as open as the respondents like to think, and if so (2) how can the organizational aggregate be something else than individual openness?

"Openness" can of course be assessed in a number of different ways. The image of openness relates logically to curiosity, appreciation of new ideas, and willingness to experiment. Table B7.4 presents what people like about evaluations - that is, the most important qualities of evaluation reports. Even though a majority think that "new thoughts" and "wider perspectives" are important, other qualities win out.

In fact, the qualities that relate to "openness" rank among the lowest. When time and resources are scarce (as they always are) qualities that promote an open climate will be first sacrificed. People value reliability, validity and usefulness of evaluation studies. These qualities, though important, do not automatically promote learning.

Table B7.4 is about evaluation reports, but the desired qualities of project reviews follow the same pattern. Around 50% of the respondents answer that "wider perspectives" and "new thoughts" were important, but they ranked as no 7 and 11 out of 13 qualities. Again, the results point to a low level of curiosity and little interest in "free

thinking". The results also indicate a low acceptance of experimentation and little tolerance for mistakes in evaluations and project reviews. In conclusion, even if people like to see themselves as open, they do not behave so in their interaction with the evaluation system.

How can then openness at the level of individuals (with the above reservations) turn to something else at the level of the organization? There are several explanations. **First**, an open organization benefits from a diversity of knowledge structures, and there is diversity in the aid administration. **Second**, the diversity must not be total. On the contrary, there should also be a dominating knowledge structure. There should be a common frame of reference and some coherence to the values and ideas espoused by the organization. Qualities such as these are relative, but the indications imply that the aid administration lacks a dominating knowledge structure. (Which is demonstrated by the difficulty to formulate and communicate a strategy.)

**Third**, whether a dominating knowledge structure facilitates learning or not depends on how well developed it is. Examine the case of "Socio-cultural conditions in development cooperation". The findings in the report were supported by all, indeed there was a widespread recognition of the faults in the system. There was a common and dominating knowledge structure. But it was a weak structure, and it did not entail a capacity to absorb more information. Instead, consider another example; the knowledge structure on management of import support. This could also be called a common and dominating structure (among those few that were concerned), but it was a well developed structure. It carried within it the capacity to absorb radically new information and to learn.

#### 7.4 Concluding remarks.

In sum, the organization as a whole is not as open as it might be. It contains too much diversity in knowledge structures, with unclear knowledge structures in central

areas. It appears as if the best developed knowledge structures are found at the level of professional subgroups, be they sector specialists or regional specialists. At this level there are also dominating knowledge structures and little diversity. On the contrary, it is at the more general levels of overriding values, insight into development processes, and interdisciplinary competence, that knowledge structures are weak and, at times, too diversified.

The capacity to learn would thus be higher further down in the organization, and the more specific the subject is. The organization is relatively more open to learning about, for example, methods of forestry, power generation or land use. In particular, the more directly useful and applicable the information is, the more likely is it that someone will learn. If the information has such qualities the receiver will learn - he or she will want to learn and he or she is embedded in structures and values that will support learning. Evaluation reports at this level will be accepted or rejected, but seldom neglected. It is not likely that good quality evaluations will be rejected - people will learn if there is anything to learn.

On the other hand, if the information coming to the organization is interdisciplinary and if it touches on broader issues of why and how development takes place; indeed if the information is political, then it is not so likely that anyone will learn. Of course people profess an interest in such issues, and they are relatively quick to recognize their faults, but they fail to change - to learn.

Even if the single individual would want to learn, and perceives himself or herself to be open minded, they are not embedded in an organizational structure that is conducive to such learning. Besides people are hypocritical, they think themselves open but in practice they do not subscribe to values and attitudes that would accompany an open attitude towards knowledge. New thoughts and holistic perspectives are among the least valued qualities of evaluation reports (cf table 7.4). Critical and controversial evaluation reports are not likely to be rejected but

the information will be neglected. The reason is not unwillingness to learn, but a lacking capacity.

## 8. DECISIONS AND EVALUATIONS: THE USE OF STRUCTURED KNOWLEDGE.

### 8.1 Introduction.

Chapter B6 showed that evaluations and reviews are read, and chapter B7 indicates that they generate learning. The extent of learning varies and it is more likely that people learn about concrete issues. Interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral and political information is less likely to lead to learning. The organization is more open to specific inputs of information than to more general inputs. This is so because organizational knowledge structures are weak and fragmented and lack a dominating structure on policy oriented issues - but they are not at the level of specific, often technical, competence.

Even if evaluations and reviews are read and contribute to learning, it is not quite certain they are used. But what does it mean to use evaluations? **First** of all it means to use them in decision-making. The evidence on whether they are used or not is presented in section 1 below. **Second**, there are ways of using evaluations that do not relate directly to decision-making, but which may still be important. These different uses of evaluations and reviews are examined in section 2. In the last section the use of information from evaluations is related to other inputs to decision-making in particular and administration in general.

### 8.2 Are reviews and evaluations used for decisions?

It would not be fair to assess evaluations and reviews on the basis of their contribution to decisions if they are not intended to contribute. However, as table B8.1 shows they are often initiated precisely to provide inputs for decisions. That is the most common reason to start evaluations and reviews (even though they are often started "in response to bilateral agreements). The pattern is the same for both reviews and evaluations, even though the degrees vary. Purposes of management dominate over other

reasons to evaluate, but the control aspects and the formal reasons are also present. Evaluations are less often started for auditing and control purposes than reviews. According to the survey, the reports were seldom started to initiate learning (cf chapter 6) or to promote a more general understanding of the process of cooperation.

Now, if reviews and evaluations are started because there is a need for inputs to the decision-making process, the next question is if the outputs of the studies are used. It would seem so, 50% of the respondents

Statement	Reviews	Evaluations
To provide inputs for major decision	67	51
To audit/verify activities	54	36
To enhance learning/competence building	28	33

**Note:** The figures in the columns indicate one of three possible answers to each question. Thus for example 67% agreed that reviews are started to provide inputs for major decisions (and 33% disagreed or did not answer). Note that neither the sums of rows nor of columns should be 100%

**Table B8.1**

Reasons to start reviews and evaluations. (Percentages that answered "yes" to the questions in case, n- 78)

claim that they often refer to project reviews and 29% often refer to evaluations. It would seem as project reviews are used more, as only 16% say that they do not refer to the reports, whereas 34% do not refer to evaluations.

But there are more respondents who agree with the statement that evaluation and reviews are useful for decisions than who disagree with that statement (table B8.2 below). Both reviews and evaluations are considered to be useful for policy decisions, and very many reviews consider useful for operational decisions, but not evaluations. As most of the respondents would presumably be more engaged in operational decisions than in policy decisions, it is not

limit on the usefulness of evaluations. It does not recognize the full use of intelligence from the system of project reviews. These are not as limited in scope as the vocabulary implies. Neither are evaluations in fact. It is rather surprising that as many as 35% think evaluations are useful inputs to operational decisions.

There is a contradiction between these figures and the views that surfaced during the in-depth/group interviews. Many voiced a criticism of evaluations, indicating that they were out of phase with the need for inputs to decisions and that it was not clear who would use them anyway. Reviews were seen as much more useful. Still, it is not uncommon that open questions in an inter-

Statement	Agree	Disagree	No answer
I often refer to reviews	50	16	34
I often refer to evaluations	29	34	37
Reviews are useful for policy decisions	72	13	15
Evaluations are useful for policy decisions	73	8	19
Reviews are useful inputs to operational decisions	86	4	10
Evaluations are useful inputs to operational decisions	35	27	38

**Table B8.2** The use of evaluations in the aid administration (n=70, percentages)

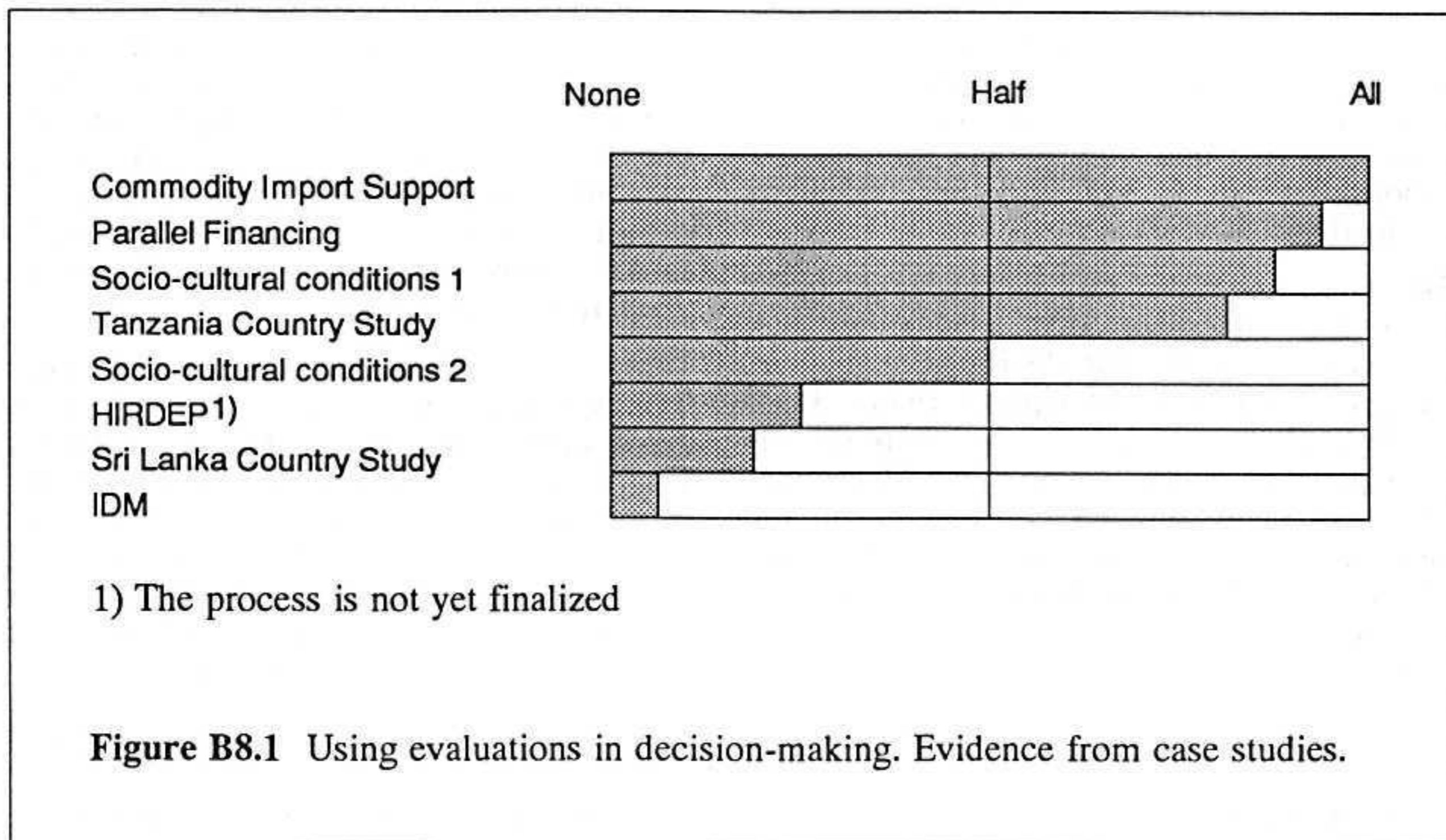
surprising that more of them often refer to the project reviews than to evaluations.

It is interesting to note that project reviews appear to provide as useful inputs to policy decisions as evaluations. It would seem as if it is easier to infer general conclusions from specific reports than to deduct specific conclusions from general reports. Knowledge travels from the bottom up and not from the top and down! At least not if we are to believe the responses.

The cases, for example the evaluation of Import Support, would also confirm this view. The logical distinction between reviews and evaluations only apply as a

view situation generates more critical comments than a focused question in a survey. The latter type of question also provokes a real and relative consideration of the problem, whereas an interview seldom puts a problem in perspective.

However there is a need to pursue the question of how evaluations are used further. Figure B8.1 below summarizes the results from the case studies. All evaluations held a large number of recommendations. Sometimes the recommendations could be counted and related to decisions; for example on whether to permanent the system of parallel financing and mixed credits. At other times the recommendations



are diffused and they might be followed up by a number of “small” decisions that cannot be traced or mapped (for example on increased learning about socio-cultural conditions in the project setting). Some reports have more than 20 pages of recommendations, others had 7 recommendations summarized on half a page.

There is naturally a difference in the novelty of recommendations. Many of the inputs from the Country Study of Tanzania were used in the subsequent country analysis, and were recognized in the Agreed Minutes of the negotiations between Norway and Tanzania on development cooperation. As the case study shows, several of those ideas and principles were commonplace and would have been “used” even without the Country Study. In the other Country Study (Sri Lanka) the inputs were more creative, but they were overtaken by events and had little impact on the form and content of the cooperation.

The rather mechanistic connection between recommendations and decisions in figure B8.1 is thus partly misleading. The relationship between inputs from reviews and evaluations on the one hand, and decisions on the other hand, are much more subtle and

complex.

The evaluation of Commodity Import Support to Tanzania may highlight the complexity of the connection. The evaluation contained a general discussion of the virtues of a market oriented system of foreign currency allocation, but thought the situation in Tanzania would not turn in that direction in the short run. The evaluation thus recommended NORAD to strengthen the administrative allocation of import support funds via systematic screening of the applicants and a follow-up of performance.

NORAD reacted quickly by setting up such a system. But reality overtook Tanzania’s propensity for reform and soon an Open General License for foreign exchange was introduced. NORAD made a full turnaround and added its funds to the so called OGL system. It would thus seem as the evaluation led in the wrong direction, or that it had no consequence as NORAD did something different two years later.

A decision process is however more dynamic than such a simple conjecture could capture. The evaluation, together with the project reviews that preceded it, and the cooperation with other donors that followed;

set an arena for learning and developing the methods of financial assistance that was very important. It is not likely that NORAD would have acted as swiftly to support the OGL had not the evaluation been, even though it led in another direction at first. The actual recommendations were important and were used, but the mass of knowledge generated in the process of evaluation mattered more and influenced the future decisions heavily. The connection is easy to forget by the actors themselves and it is not discerned by looking at recommendations only.

Figure B8.1 indicates that the evaluation of Parallel Financing and Mixed Credits was about as "successful" as the one of Import Support, judging by how influential it was in decisions. The most important consequence was that the trial run of the systems of parallel financing and mixed credits was made permanent. The evaluation showed that the development effect of the projects financed under these schemes was high, at least as high as by any alternative arrangement. Parliament took the decision to consolidate the systems within half a year. Later on these schemes have had increased allocations of funds, something which is not likely to have happened if the evaluation had been very negative.

Still, the evaluation was set in such a way that it is not likely the conclusions would have been negative. Most of the time and effort spent by the evaluators went into answering **how** these systems were to be managed in the future - not **whether** they were to be managed at all. True, they were expected to answer that question too, but it takes much more effort to come up with a negative answer to the latter question - particularly considering the terms of reference - than they had at their disposal. At first sight the impact of the study thus appears much higher and more substantial than it actually was.

The evaluations of the Institute of Development Management in Tanzania exemplify another situation. Even though three major studies have been undertaken, none of them have had any consequences for the design of

the project. On the contrary, it appears as if the evaluations have repeated concerns and opinions that were voiced at the time, and they put on paper changes that were already happening. The content of decisions made and implemented were an input to the evaluation rather than the other way round!

In conclusion evaluations are useful inputs to the decision-making process, but their usefulness varies a lot. It is obviously important that evaluations arrive in time, particularly if they are expected to contribute to a certain decision on a project. On the other hand, good evaluations may always be useful, and much knowledge will be put to use sooner or later, as the evaluations of Import Support and Socio-cultural conditions demonstrate (and other case studies as well). It is also quite clear that evaluations need to be followed up and promoted in non-conventional ways. It is not possible to foresee when and how the intelligence will be put to use. The statements in response to the survey seem to reflect the aggregated experience of the case studies rather well.

### 8.3 Other uses of evaluations.

There are several ways to skin a cat. Evaluations may be used in a number of different ways some of which relate strongly to decision-making and others more weakly. The concepts are interrelated. An evaluation may be used in decision-making by virtue of having generated learning; but the evaluation may yield learning without any visible effect in decisions (in the short run). In the following some uses of rational analysis are discussed that relate a little to both learning and decision-making.

The theory of decision-making has two branches; one deals with the question of how decisions ought to be made and the other deals with how decisions are made. Both are concerned with rational analysis as an input to decision. The former branch has devised a number of methods whereby decisions can be made better (by using methods such as cost-benefit analysis,

environmental scanning, delphi techniques, critical path analysis, etc.) The other branch has repeatedly shown that decisions seldom are rational however sophisticated the inputs to the decisions are. Instead they show how the "clinical" methods of analysis are transformed into something more messy, but more fitting to the human condition. During interviews, some referred to aid administration as an "art" rather than as a bureaucratic process. It is common to distinguish between manifest and latent functions. In the aid administration, the manifest functions of evaluation are control, decision-making and learning. But there are also latent functions. Below follows a list of some latent functions, and figure B82 indicates to what extent latent functions were present in the case studies. Inputs such as evaluations and reviews could be used in a number of different ways, for example:

1. To **motivate and legitimate decisions** that are already taken. Of course it is obvious that evaluations are never undertaken for this purpose, but in actual fact it may be a function, if not by design then by default. If evaluators are not critical enough, or perceptive enough, they may fail to bring any new thoughts to the administration, and their remaining function is to show that things are good as they are.
2. To **motivate others and create consensus** about a course of action. Evaluations and reviews are read by many and they often deal with critical issues in development. They could well be important as a means of communication, to prepare the ground for action.
3. Evaluations may also be used in the **rivalry for money and power**. One unit in the system may point to evaluation results to strengthen its case in the competition for scarce funds. The face validity of an argument would presumably be much higher if it rests on the recommendations of an evaluation.
4. Evaluations may be used for purposes of **disinformation or camouflage**, to turn attention from more important

issues. Neither the general public nor the administration can discuss too many issues at a time. Presenting evaluation results in an area may turn the discussion away from something much less comfortable.

5. Evaluation has by some researchers been presented as a **ritual** - a modern form of rain dance. It is a symbolic activity which is used to convey an image of rationality and efficiency. It would thus be a way of convincing oneself and others that the system works well - without actually knowing if it does.
6. Evaluations may also have a **therapeutical function**. When the decision-makers do not know what to do they commission an evaluation. However, the possible courses of action may be quite clear, as well as the consequences. But if there are only uncomfortable alternatives an evaluation may be a way to postpone the decision and let things improve by themselves.

To what extent do the case studies fill any of these other functions? Figure B8.2 presents a rough indication of the functions that evaluations might have had in the process of cooperation - whether intended or not. The figure shows that all functions except what was

called "camouflage" are discernible on the case studies. The most common functions are to legitimate activities, to use rational analysis as a ritual, and to motivate people and establish consensus. But very often the different functions merge, and an evaluation within a dynamic process often fulfils several functions - different for the different people and organizations that are involved.

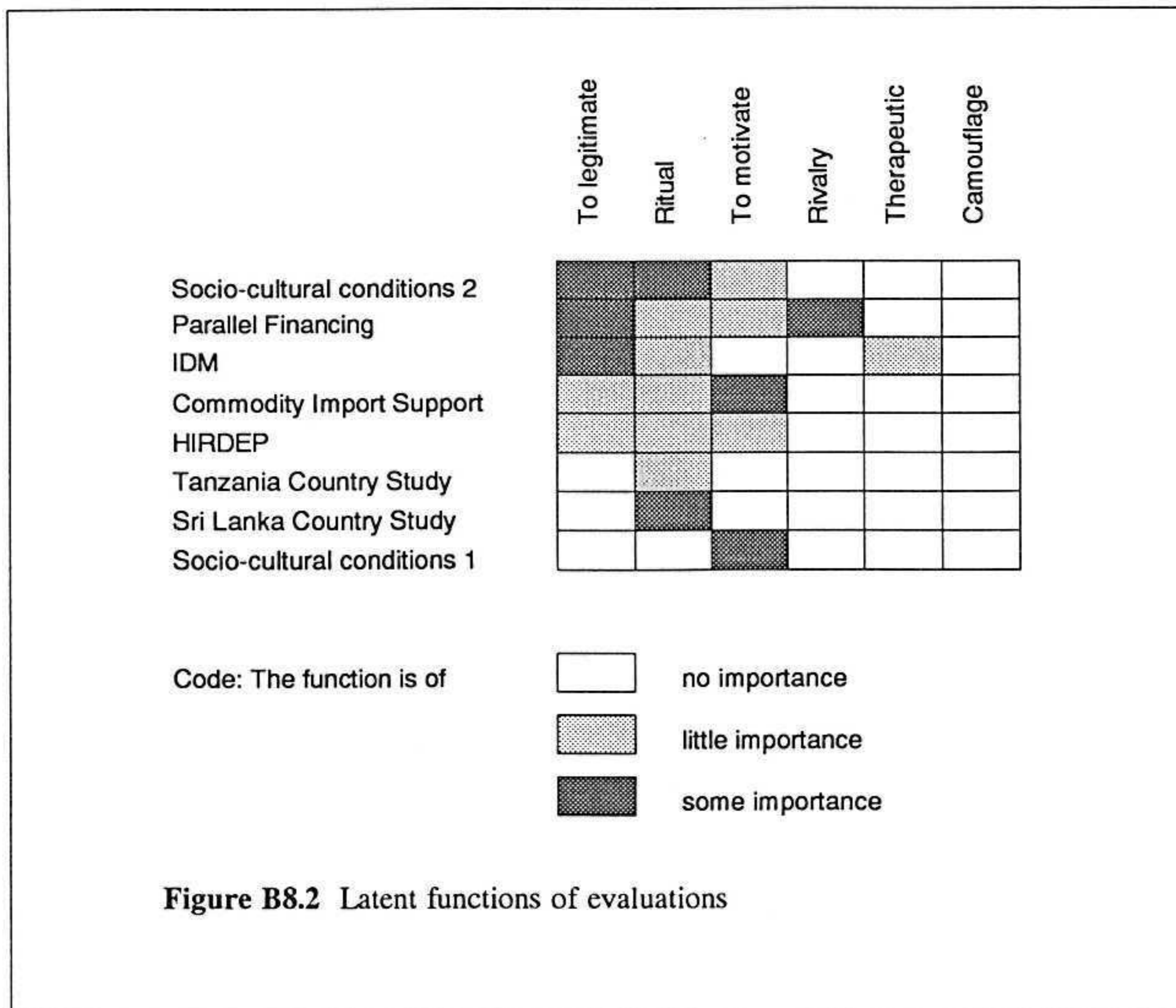
A comparison between the figure above and tables B7.1 and B7.2 show that the evaluations that were most difficult, and that had several responses (that were both accepted, neglected and rejected, though in differing degrees) were also those that had most functions in the organization. These evaluations provided a richer range of responses.



### 8.4 Concluding remarks.

Even though the purpose of the evaluation system is to make development assistance effective, and to keep the public informed, it would be a mistake to concentrate only on the immediate use of evaluations and their effects. The other functions exist, such as those above and maybe others. At first sight they may seem contradictory to the rational

function of the system, but they may also be necessary as outlets for the less than rational processes that take place in all organizations. The point is confirmed as the case studies show that the “best” evaluations in terms of knowledge, learning and use (rational) also are those that have most side effects in terms of non-rational functions.



## 9. INFORMATION AND LEARNING IN AN OPEN SYSTEM.

### 9.1 Introduction.

This chapter describes how the aid administration learns. First the role of evaluations and reviews within the total learning of the system will be explored. Then section 9.2 introduces a typology of learning processes and shows how they can be combined in a learning system. The next section, 9.3, explores the content of learning and asks whether it is possible to find suitable arenas for separate learning tasks.

In previous parts of this study the evaluations were found to be of relatively high quality, although not without limitations. The evaluations and reviews are read extensively and used for decision-making. The reports are an input to learning, but the extent of learning varies and generally speaking their real impact is lower than their potential. This is evident in table B9.1 which presents how evaluations and reviews rank as sources of learning.

It is quite clear that field visits are the single most important sources of learning. They are ranked far above what comes as the second most important source of learning, namely the experience of other donor organizations. The data in chapter 6 indicated that people read more evaluations than reviews, but chapter 8 demonstrated that reviews are used more in decision-making.

The data in table B9.1 add that reviews have a much higher contribution to learning. It is remarkable that evaluations rank as low as number 5

from the bottom of the list. Evaluations are considered less important than other written information, such as books and journals. Other written information also rank low, as for example inputs from data banks, IDOK and the media (TV, newspapers). On the other hand material from ARKIV rank as somewhat more important, though the differences between those items found towards the middle of the scale are not significant.

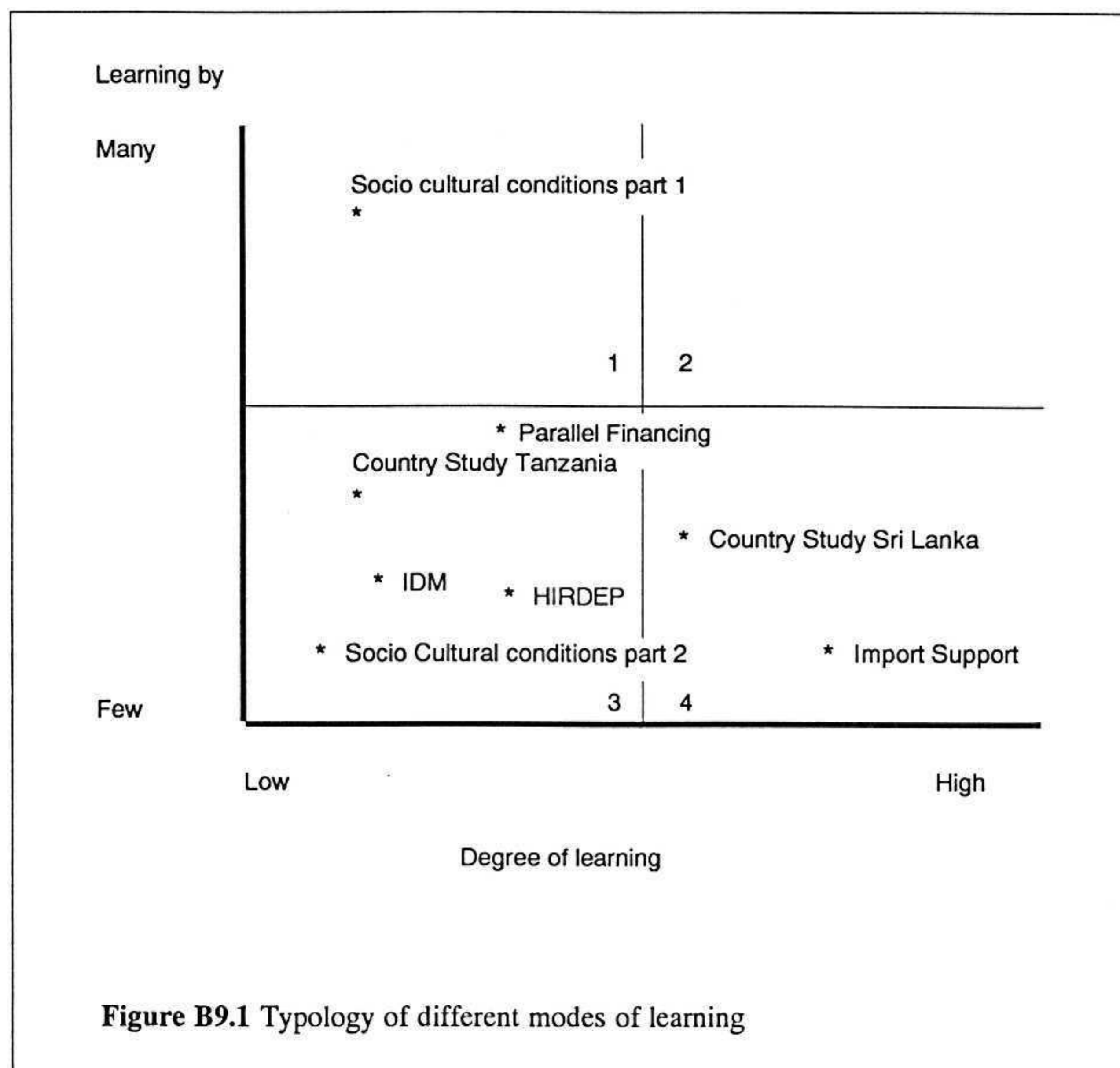
### 9.2 A typology of modes of learning.

It is rather trivial to note that some evaluations reach very few but others reach a lot of people. The typical project evaluation is read by a handful who are concerned with the project itself; that type of projects;

	Importance		
	High	Medium	Low
Field visits	78	9	13
Other donor's experience	55	32	13
<u>Project reviews</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>22</u>
Informal information from colleagues	49	50	31
Meetings and conferences	49	24	27
ARKIV	42	19	39
Advice from external expertise	41	38	21
Advice from international expertise	38	33	29
Advice from researchers	35	30	35
Professional journals	34	36	30
Internal seminars	33	35	32
External seminars	33	32	35
IDOK	31	37	32
Books of professional interest	31	29	30
<u>Evaluations</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>30</u>
Training courses	27	32	41
Mass media	22	18	60
Repatriated NORAD experts	17	16	67
Data banks	10	14	76

**Table B9.1**

The importance of different sources of learning. (n=78, rank order, percentages)



or the country in question. The case study of Import Support to Tanzania found that learning was probably limited to five or six people at NORAD and some in the Ministry. There were not many who read and learnt from the evaluations of the Institute of Development Management and HIRDEP either. On the contrary evaluations such as Socio-cultural conditions and the Country Studies are read by many and they do bring new information to those who read. Some of these studies are read by the majority in the organization and it is not likely that anyone is unfamiliar with their content.

It is equally trivial to note that some

evaluations lead to more learning than others. The quality varies and some evaluations contain more information than others, and some are to a higher degree accepted than others. Evaluations such as the Country Study of Sri Lanka were very solid and contained much relevant information. The study of Import Support is internationally well-known and other donors frequently refer to its findings. Other evaluations contain little that is new; they may summarize existing knowledge, codify the “state of the art” of something, or simply fail to add new insights within the field.

Figure B9.1 combines the two dimensions

and plots the impact of case studies. It is possible to discern four patterns, or modes, of learning. There are those instances where few people learn, and they either learn little (3) or they learn a lot (4). There are also instances where many learn, but only a little (1). In theory it would be possible that many learn a lot (2), though there are no indications of that happening.

The figure shows that the predominant mode is that few learn rather little. One possible hypothesis is that the approach to evaluations in the aid administration suffers from the implicit ambition that large numbers of people should maximize their learning. By all evidence this is overly optimistic and it does not take into account how learning really occurs. Rather than strengthening the processes whereby a few learn a lot, or whereby the many learn a little, the system risks becoming dysfunctional when it tries to make the many learn a lot, and instead ends up with few learning a little. Why?

Chapter 7 proposed that the knowledge structures - organizational and individual - put a limit on the absorptive capacity of the aid administration. The absorptive capacity is much higher in respect of specific inputs of knowledge, for example in a technical field. Consequently learning can be very high when the exploration and solution of a problem takes place close to the ordinary tasks of an individual. When he or she is given the opportunity to investigate a problem, develop knowledge, learn and apply the learning within the context of the daily work tasks the cumulative learning effect can be high. The evaluation of Import Support is a good illustration of the point. The system of project reviews was integrated with the evaluation and the program officers took active part in both exercises. The organizational knowledge structures were extended and developed significantly.

On the other hand the organizational knowledge structures tend to become weaker on abstract knowledge and on knowledge that is more political, social and cultural in character. It is not very likely that even information of high quality, with a high

potential for learning, actually will achieve very much in this field. As the absorptive capacity is low, the amount of learning will remain low - and even a small step forward would be an achievement. But the positive face of the coin is that it does not take much to achieve a result in organizational learning.

In the case of Socio-cultural conditions (part 1) costs were low and the amount of new knowledge was small. But the report had other qualities; it was well written, presented the subject lucidly and in terms that were relevant to the organization. It was read by many and most of the readers learnt something. A small step in developing the organizational knowledge structures was taken. Learning was achieved through a process of communication, and the quality of that process was more important than the sophistication of the input.

The case studies distinguish two different processes of successful learning. The first process might be called "**learning by involvement**" and it is characterized by the program officer taking part in evaluations and project reviews and developing knowledge together with external expertise - in the recipient country or from the donor community. The advantages of this mode of learning is that it can be easily coordinated with decision-making and it is likely to be used in practice rapidly. Other advantages is that it may tie in easily with other sources of learning, such as field visits and exchanging experiences with other donor organizations. It may lead to a rapid development of knowledge structures at the level of individuals and sections of the organization. The negative aspect is that only few people will be concerned and it will be a relatively expensive mode of learning in terms of NORAD and Ministry staff resources.

The second process might be called "**learning by communication**". It is a more passive mode of learning where new knowledge is served from "the top". Here people learn by reading or listening, not by doing and active problem-solving. The advantage is that the same input can reach

many persons at a low cost. To achieve a learning effect it is more important to have a process of high quality than to supply sophisticated inputs. Given the absorptive capacity of the recipients, the communication must be creative, interesting, fun and provocative - in various combinations. The negative aspect is that the amount of knowledge will be small. It is by all evidence not possible to transform the system rapidly on issues such as for example the role of women in development, environmental concerns and ecological balance, democracy in the process of cooperation - to name a few examples.

The important point is that both processes lead to learning and they have a place in the system. But the ways of promoting them differ. The organization needs strategies and processes of promoting each, not least does it need to recognize their preconditions. Each mode of learning relates to the evaluation system in its own way; **learning by involvement** builds on participation in the process. It suggests that the activities are initiated and controlled close to the program officers.

**Learning by communication**, on the other hand, may be removed from the operational level. The unit in charge needs a wide mandate to undertake follow-up activities and it should not be limited to conduct evaluations only. Table B9.2 summarizes the characteristics of the modes of learning.

Is it too pessimistic to abandon the ambition that large numbers of personnel can learn substantially from evaluations? Perhaps, but for the moment there is nothing to indicate that the evaluation system is coming close to achieving that type of effects. It is more realistic to (1) recognize the value of the learning processes that do exist, and (2) to remove the obstacles to using them fully. It

<u>Learning by involvement</u>	<u>Learning by communication</u>
Reaches a few	Reaches many
Presupposes high absorptive capacity	Presupposes low absorptive capacity
Provides difficult inputs	Provides easy inputs
Emphasis on reliable and valid results	Emphasis on new thoughts and holistic perspectives
Action-oriented	The input may not be directly applicable
Program officers take active part	The stimuli to learn is served by others
Often expensive	Can be cheap
Controlled close to the users	May be controlled centrally or outside the system

**Table B9.2**

Characteristics of two typologies of learning.

seems to be a more cost-effective way of promoting organizational learning, even though it is not the theoretical optimum of learning.

Several of the evaluations are found in the lower left hand corner of figure B9.1. If the processes were designed to contribute as much as possible to learning, it would probably be relatively easy to "push" them either to the right so that some people learn more, or upward, so that many actually do learn something - even though not much.

Which is best, and which mode of learning should have priority: learning by involvement or learning by communication? Is it worth more to have some people learn a lot than to have many learn a little? It is impossible to tell, but it seems likely that an organization needs both. The trade-off will depend on the status of personnel and the knowledge structures at hand. The ideal is to move organizational learning to a situation where several people may be involved

in substantial learning (square 2, figure B9.1) but the road there goes via learning by communication and by involvement.

### 9.3 The content of learning.

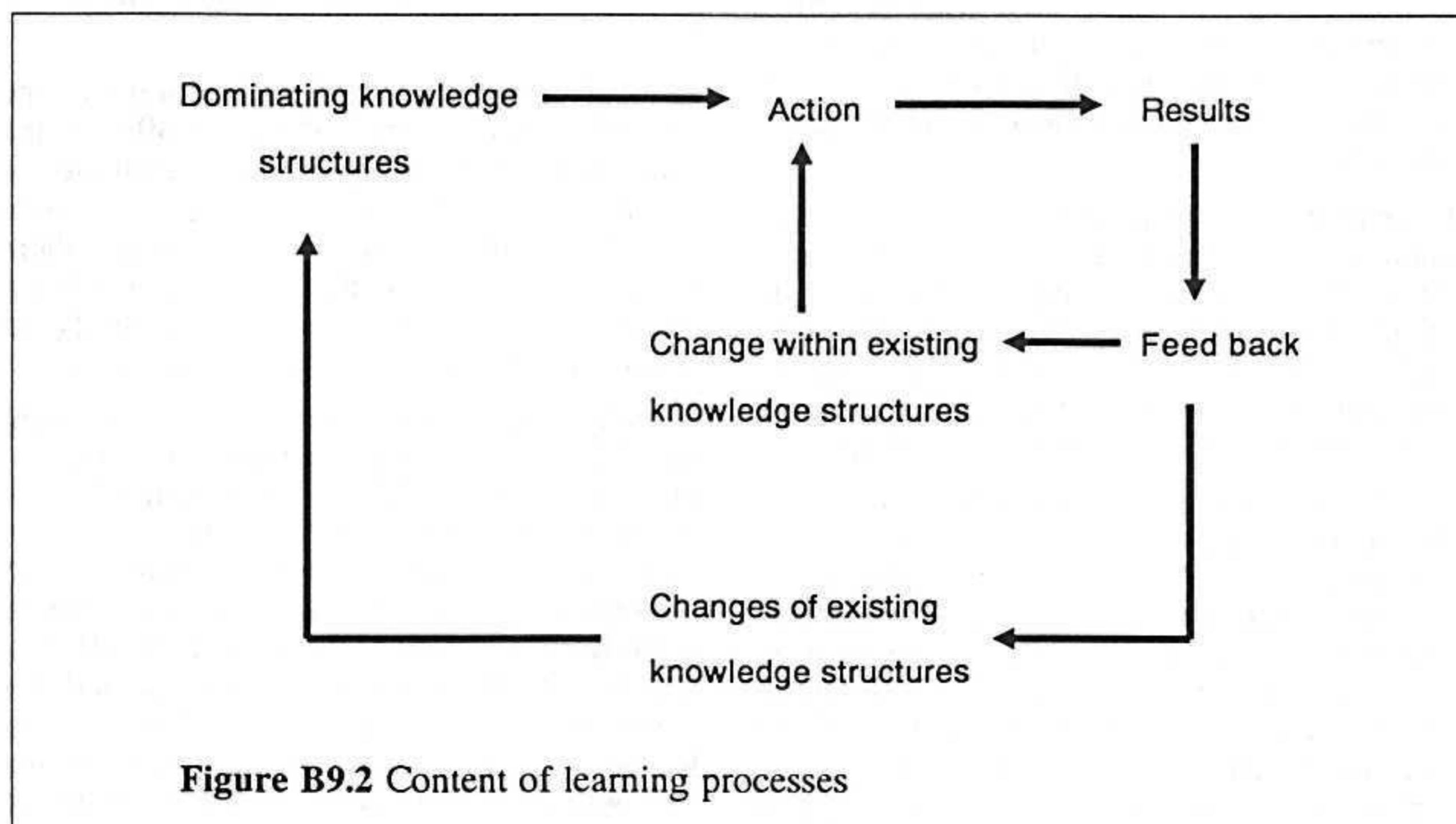
What exactly is it that happens when people learn? The key word is change; learning implies a change in what we know and, by consequence, in how we act. Organizational learning similarly means changes in what the organization knows and how it acts. When speaking of what the organization knows, it is convenient to assume that this means the content of the dominating knowledge structures (be they weak or strong, as discussed in chapter 7). The evaluation system may provide inputs that change knowledge structures, but the extent of change varies.

An organization, like an individual, may receive information inputs that demand a total overhaul of knowledge structures. Assume that an atheist suddenly finds evidence that God exists, or a fundamentalist who is confronted with evidence of the Big Bang. Both will have to revise their view of the world. Their old knowledge structures break under the impact and new

ones take their place.

But the input of information may be quite substantial but perhaps it still fits with existing knowledge structures. A student of physics may be engaged in a research programme to explore the content of black holes in space. In the course of investigation large amounts of information may be encountered, but perhaps nothing that alters his or her basic view of the world. Learning takes place, but the new information is incorporated in the old knowledge structures and leads to their further development and refinement.

In the theory of learning it is common to distinguish between **single-loop** and **double-loop** learning. The difference between the two is that single-loop learning is supposed to take place within existing knowledge structures, developing and refining them. Double-loop learning implies that the old knowledge structures have become redundant and that they no longer help us perceive and act in the world (to put it drastically). The two types of learning are illustrated in figure B9.2. The conclusions of this study indicates that the aid administration is rather good at single-loop learning. The system of evaluations and reviews



provides information that fits into the existing knowledge structures, and as long it does the results are used in decisions.

Needless to say, there are also ways of improving this type of learning. No system is perfect. But the major deficiency of the present system is that double-loop learning is rare. Still, conditions in the environment calls for changes in the dominating knowledge structures of the organization.

The evaluation of Parallel Financing illustrates the point. The discussion of where to handle the system of parallel financing did not require any new thinking. The whole controversy took place within an established knowledge structure concerning how and why things are to be done. The evaluation put the already existing views on paper but did not really advance any new arguments. Nobody needed to change world-view in order to accept the evaluation results. But the same evaluation also contained viewpoints on results.

The theoretical arguments open up an abyss concerning the belief in accountability of aid projects, and if accepted would imply a drastic rethinking of evaluation. These results were largely neglected. There is no indication that they were discussed further in the organization. To do so would require a change of knowledge structures rather than a refinement, and perhaps that explains why these sections of the evaluation have been neglected.

As the dominating knowledge structures are partly non-existent, weak and fragmented the task of double-loop learning is difficult. At present the evaluation system makes a limited contribution, but it has a potential to do more. There is a strategic choice to make; the first option is to increase staff participation in evaluation (**evaluation by involvement**) and make sure that the review system is thoroughly synchronized with evaluations.

This implies that control of the evaluation function would move closer to the agency. Personnel policies would have to be changed so that involvement is facilitated. It would be a management task to encourage involve-

ment and reward the visible results. At present evaluation seems to be given low priority at operational levels - obviously this would need to be radically changed - which is again a management task. If successful, **learning via involvement** would be strengthened.

However, the major avenue for double-loop learning lies in **learning via communication**. When people learn by actively working on a task themselves, they make progress - but they often do not see problem solutions that require changes of their structures of knowledge. As we have seen, the **learning by involvement** in the system is "single-loop". **Learning via communication** is more likely to bring inputs for double-loop learning, but will it result in such learning? Will the information be absorbed? The evidence indicates that it would be a slow process; the shifts in knowledge structure are not likely to appear rapidly. The shifts would probably take place via one short step at a time.

Nevertheless, in the short run this suggest that **learning via communication** is a more urgent task than **learning by involvement**. The former should receive priority, but the latter must not be neglected. Perhaps it is also possible to encourage double-loop learning via involvement, for example by making sure that managers are engaged in inquiries of a policy character.

The school for development cooperation is an arena where both types of learning may be tried and encouraged. The curriculum is set to introduce and disseminate evaluation results and this will automatically increase **learning via communication**. But the school could also be an arena for practical participation on evaluation teams, for example by having some course modules actually carrying out evaluations of policy character, impact or delivery. This could take the form of project work that at the same time solves practical problems, and generate learning.

The environment of development cooperation is extremely complex and turbulent. A successful organization has to master both single- and double loop learning, and

in the final end be transformed into a system in which many learn and there is a high quality of all learning. Learning within existing knowledge structures and learning to change knowledge structures may not in itself be enough. The aid administration also has to learn how to learn; that is, it needs to develop, introduce and follow-up its system of learning and continuously check its performance. This is called "meta-learning" and that is, in a sense, what this study has been about.



## **SECTION C**

### **Concluding discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The study of learning and evaluation as presented in section B raises several questions and point at possible ways of improving the administration. Both learning and evaluation are functions that cut across organizational boundaries, depend on inputs and provide results extensively. It is necessary to get a strategic grasp on the organization and its development in order to have a relevant discussion of learning and evaluation. Section C brings together the conclusions from section B and elaborates on the framework of learning and evaluation presented in section A.

Aid activities have different purposes. They also presuppose that the aid administration plays certain roles, but roles vary with the type of aid. **Chapter 1** describes these different types of aid; the role of separate levels of the administration; and the consequences in terms of evaluation and learning. The chapter distinguishes four separate categories of aid based on who controls the funds when they are used, and whether the activities are identifiable or not.

Each type of aid leads to a logical division of responsibilities between donor and recipient and between levels of the administration. But what happens when all types are combined in one administration? The system itself will be complex. Governance, control and coordination become more costly and require higher competence. The same applies to learning and evaluation. **Chapter 2** outlines the characteristics of a system where all types of aid are combined, although there is a strategic shift to more recipient controlled and non-identifiable activities.

## 1. EVALUATION IN A CHANGING ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The Norwegian aid administration's new strategy for development assistance implies that responsibility should increasingly be shifted over from donor to recipient. As a rule aid should be integrated with the recipient country's own development activities. NORAD would be responsible for government-to-government development cooperation. The new strategy calls for a move from project/programme level assistance to sectoral assistance and financial instruments. To put the recipient in focus implies a gradual reduction in the administrative burden of the aid administration; considerable changes in the division of responsibilities both internally and externally; and eventually in the organisational structure itself. The evaluation would also be affected.

### 1.1 Four scenarios for development assistance

A variety of instruments or mechanisms for aid delivery are used by the international community. These could be differentiated as illustrated in figure C.1.1. Donor controlled activities on the one hand, e.g. construction

of infrastructure by foreign contractors; the recipient controlled activities on the other, e.g. donor assisted research programmes carried out entirely by the recipient country.

The other distinction is between development efforts which consist of identifiable activities, such as traditional projects, and non-identifiable activities, such as financial inputs into larger sectoral budgets where funds are not ear-marked for specific activities.

Examples of the four types of aid activities are listed in table C.1.1. The first type of activities are very demanding for the donor in terms of management, but the accountability is high. The latter demands little in terms of management but since there is no way to identify what funds are used for, the accountability is correspondingly low. The Norwegian strategy in its intentions would imply a move in the direction from category 1 towards category 4.

The four types of aid activities represent four different scenarios of how aid administrations could be organised; particularly regarding the demand for management

	Donor controlled	Recipient controlled
Identifiable aid activities	<b>1</b> (scenario 1)	<b>2</b> (scenario 2)
Non-identifiable aid activities	<b>3</b> (scenario 3)	<b>4</b> (scenario 4)

Figure C.1.1 Different types of aid activities/scenarios

- 1. Identifiable, largely donor controlled**
  - Project and programme assistance
  - Sectoral activities
  - Country programme support
  - Regional programmes
  - Equity investment programmes
  - Volunteer services
  - Etc.
  
- 2. Identifiable, recipient controlled**
  - Project and programme assistance
  - Sectoral activities
  - Concessionary credits
  - Mixed credits
  - Export promotion activities
  - Etc.
  
- 3. Non-identifiable, donor controlled**
  - NGO-implemented activities
  - Support through industry/trade organisations
  - Support through research establishments
  - Etc.
  
- 4. Non-identifiable, recipient controlled**
  - Balance of payment support
  - Import support
  - Commodity support
  - Servicing of national debt

**Table C.1.1** Different types of development aid activities

resources and the design of evaluation systems. The four scenarios are discussed below.

#### **Scenario 1:**

##### **Identifiable, donor controlled aid activities**

The first scenario involves the traditional project/programme assistance which is largely controlled by the donor country. The donor identifies development efforts, and is engaged in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The formal responsibility lies with the recipient, but for various reasons, the donor is involved throughout the project cycle at a very detailed level. Typical reasons would be that the recipient country's institutional capability is low, the donor's confidence in the recipient country's policy is low, that development activities have a low priority in the recipient government (e.g. poverty oriented assistance), etc. In many cases there is a strong component of technical assistance personnel involved, which further increases accountability. The aid activities in this scenario are identifiable in the sense that it can be established exactly for what purpose funds have been used (e.g. hospitals, roads, experts, scholarships, etc.).

Aid activities under this scenario can be applied in all recipient countries regardless of local management capabilities or policy, since the donor is strongly involved at all stages. For the same reason, this type of development aid is very demanding in terms of management for the donor; and usually requires considerable institutional capacity both at ministry and agency level and in field offices in the recipient countries, as indicated in figure C.1.2. Donors such as Germany and USA channel large shares of aid this way and have designed organisations with large headquarters and strong extension offices in the field.

#### **Scenario 2:**

##### **Identifiable, recipient controlled aid activities**

The second scenario involves much the same type of activities as the first scenario,

but with the important distinction that the recipient country identifies, plans, implements, and evaluates activities. It is normally applied in more developed countries or those with considerable institutional capability. The donor can establish exactly for what purpose funds have been used. Examples would be project and programme assistance, credit schemes for investments, export promotion activities, etc., and may involve technical assistance personnel from the donor country.

This type of aid is less demanding in terms of management capacity at the donors side, as illustrated in figure C.1.2. It would still require an extension system with field officers in the recipient countries but would be considerably less demanding than scenario 1 since most of the planning, implementation and evaluation activities are carried out by the recipient. Many donor countries provide this type of development assistance in a number of the more developed countries, and some countries have established separate agencies which are specialised in this type of assistance, for instance Sweden (BITS) and France.

#### **Scenario 3:**

##### **Non-identifiable, donor controlled aid**

The third scenario typically involves an intermediary agency between the donor and the recipient, such as NGOs, industries, trade organisations, research establishments, etc. The aid is non-identifiable for the donor in the sense that it involves certain contributions to the intermediary's total budget, investment programme, etc; while identification, planning, implementation and evaluation is taken care of by the intermediary organisation alone or in cooperation with institutions in the recipient organisation.

This type of aid can be applied in all countries, under the assumption that the intermediary agency is able to provide the necessary institutional capability. The donor needs no permanent extension in recipient countries as indicated in figure C.1.2, since the aid programme can be negotiated directly between the headquarters of the donor agency and the intermediary. Techni-

Types of aid activities	Ministry	Agency	Field office	Recipient country
1. Identifiable, donor controlled	●	●	●	applicable in all types of countries
2. Identifiable, recipient controlled	●	◐ *)	◐ *)	presupposes donor's confidence in recipient's capability
3. Non-identifiable donor controlled	●	● **)		applicable in all types of countries
4. Non-identifiable, recipient controlled	●			presupposes donor's confidence in recipient's policy
5. All types of aid activities combined	●	●	●	

\*) Less demand for an extensive aid agency

\*\*\*) Implemented through intermediary organisations

**Figure C.1.2**

The need for administrative extensions at the donor side in order to manage different types of aid (scenarios 1-3)

cal assistance personnel is provided by the intermediary organisation.

**Scenario 4:**

**Non-identifiable, recipient controlled aid**

The fourth scenario involves direct transfer of funds between governments in the donor and recipient country. Examples would be balance of payment support, import support, commodity support and contributions to servicing national debt. This is the least demanding in terms of management capabi-

lity on the donors side. The aid agency may not even be necessary, nor any field offices as indicated in figure C.1.2. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassies of the donor country have the necessary capability.

The aid is non-identifiable in the sense that it consists of contributions to larger budgets in the recipient country which are not ear-marked for specific purposes. Hence accountability may be low. It presupposes that the donor has a high degree of confidence in the recipient government's

Types of aid activities	Ministry	Agency	Field office	Recipient
1. Identifiable, donor controlled	P	P I	I A	( I A )
2. Identifiable, recipient controlled	P	P	( I )	I A
3. Non-identifiable donor controlled	P	P * )		
4. Non-identifiable, recipient controlled	P			
5. All types of aid activities combined	P	P I	I A	I A

\* ) Evaluations (P, I,A) undertaken by intermediary organisations

P = Policy evaluations      I = Impact evaluations      A = Aid delivery assessments

**Figure C.1.3** Evaluation needs in different parts of the aid administration (scenario 1-5)

policy. Technical assistance personnel from the donor country would be involved only occasionally.

discuss evaluation requirement, a distinction between three types of evaluations can be made:

### 1.2 Evaluation requirement in the four scenarios

As mentioned, the four scenarios represent a trend from administratively “heavy” aid to administratively “light” aid. The requirements of evaluation systems would be different in the four cases. In order to

- **Policy level evaluations (P)** which are undertaken in order to generate knowledge for decision-making at the highest level in the administration. Examples would be broad thematic evaluations of different types of aid delivery instruments (e.g. concessionary credit programmes), or a type of aid policy (e.g. poverty-oriented aid, support to private sector), etc.

Type of aid activities	Ministry	Agency	Field office	Recipient
1. Identifiable, donor controlled	Policy evaluations	Sector evaluations Proj./Progr. evaluations	Evaluations/ reviews	Evaluations are initiated by the donor
2. Identifiable, recipient controlled	Policy evaluations	Aggregation of evaluation results	Proj./Progr. evaluations	Proj./Progr. evaluations/ reviews
3. Non-identifiable donor controlled	Policy evaluations	Aggregation <sup>*)</sup> of evaluation results		<sup>*)</sup>
4. Non-identifiable, recipient controlled	Policy evaluations <sup>**)</sup>			<sup>**)</sup>
5. All types of aid activities combined	Policy evaluations	Proj./Progr./ sector evaluations Aggregation of ev. results	Evaluation of recipient controlled activities. Reviews	

<sup>\*)</sup> Evaluations are undertaken by the intermediary organisation

<sup>\*\*)</sup> No evaluation required by the donor

**Figure C.1.4** Types of evaluation activities needed at different levels (scenarios 1-5)

- **Impact** evaluations (I) where the focus is on projects, programmes, sectoral activities, etc. in order to determine the effectiveness, the wider impacts, relevance and sustainability of aid activities. Examples would be studies of health impact from water supply programmes, studies of employment and social consequences of private sector investment, etc.
- **Aid delivery** evaluations (A) which are the limited assessments of whether aid activities have been implemented as foreseen (i.e. in quantity, quality and on time). This usually involves rather limited reviews of delivery based on information from the implementing organisation (e.g. project reviews)

Within the four scenarios evaluations would ideally be done at separate levels in the aid administration, as follows:

#### **Scenario 1:**

##### **Identifiable, donor controlled aid**

In the first scenario, where the control of aid delivery is administered largely by the aid agency and its field offices, the ministry would ideally limit its evaluation activities to **policy** related issues, e.g. to the review of certain types of aid policy on the basis of experiences from the field, as described in figure C.1.3 and C.1.4.

At the agency level, **impact** evaluations would be a main concern in order to satisfy the organisation's own need for learning, decisionmaking and accountability, and such evaluations would usually be initiated by the donor. But the agency would also need to concentrate more on policy oriented evaluations in order to draw lessons from aid activities which can feed into the overall discussion of aid policy.

At the field office level, **aid delivery** evaluations would be the main focus, in terms of for instance regular project reviews. Also, they may to some extent contribute to impact evaluations or prepare the ground for them.

In those cases where the recipient has

sufficient institutional capability and the donor has sufficient confidence in the implementing institutions, evaluation of aid delivery and impact could also be done by the recipient.

#### **Scenario 2:**

##### **Identifiable, recipient controlled aid**

At the Ministry level the situation would be much the same as in the previous scenario where the focus would be on **policy** evaluations.

Bearing in mind that the recipient organisations would be responsible for both identification, planning, implementation and evaluation of aid activities, the donor agency would need to concentrate on **policy** level evaluation activities, for instance sectoral studies and aggregation of evaluation results from studies undertaken by the recipient.

The field office would have a limited role in evaluation, for instance in terms of participating in joint evaluation teams or reviewing the effectiveness of the evaluation system at recipients end, as indicated in figure C.1.3 and C.1.4.

#### **Scenario 3:**

##### **Non-identifiable, donor controlled aid**

In the third scenario, all types of evaluation of aid activities would be undertaken by the intermediary organisation, and the aid administration's role would be very limited, as indicated in figure C.1.3 and C.1.4. Again the ministry would concentrate on **policy** level evaluation activities, while at the agency level the focus would be to relate to evaluation reports from the intermediary organisation, to aggregate evaluation results on the basis of these, and review the effectiveness of the evaluation systems of the intermediary organisation.

#### **Scenario 4:**

##### **Non-identifiable, recipient controlled aid**

In the fourth scenario, development assistance takes the form of injections of funds into larger budgets in the recipient country, and is therefore not identifiable in the sense that donor funds can be traced back to



specific purposes. Consequently there is nothing that can be evaluated by the donor except the broader **policy** issues (e.g. pertaining to the socio-economic policy, the human rights situation in the country, or its democracy). Since there is no development agency on the donors side, the donor would have to rely on its own policy research as well as intelligence from other sources such as the World Bank, Amnesty, World Watch, etc.

### 1.3 The combined situation

Although some countries have organised their aid administration in separate agencies handling different types of aid (for instance Sweden), most countries channel several types of aid through the same organisation (such as Denmark, the Netherlands, U.S.A. and Norway).

The combined situation would of course require an extensive aid administration with institutional capacity both at ministry, agency and field level, as indicated in figure C.1.2. In terms of evaluation needs, the combined situation would also require the most extensive evaluation system, dictated by the needs of all four scenarios, as

illustrated in figure C.1.3 and C.1.4.

The composition of the different types of aid varies in different countries. At present there is a tendency in many countries to move away from traditional donor controlled project assistance towards support for larger programmes and increasing calls to make recipient governments responsible. In other words a move towards less administratively demanding types of aid

A shift in the composition of development aid from scenario one towards scenario four, however, would imply a corresponding shift in evaluation system, where impact evaluation and aid delivery evaluation is moved from the ministry and agency (HQ) level towards the field office and the recipient, as illustrated in figure C.1.5.

In contrast, the present evaluation system in the Norwegian administration is essentially based at the ministry level (policy and impact evaluations), while the evaluation of aid delivery has mostly been initiated at the agency level. In recent years there has been a reduction in impact evaluations of individual projects and programmes undertaken by the ministry, and a corresponding increase in policy-oriented evaluations, which

	Ministry	Agency	Field office	Recipient
Scenario 5	P	P I	I A	I A
Present situation	P I	A		

**Figure C.1.5**  
Evaluation activities. The present Norwegian system compared with scenario 5

reflects the new strategy being introduced. However, a further decentralisation of the evaluation system would be necessary to meet the challenges of the emerging situation. These challenges are discussed in more detail in chapter C2, below.

## 1.4 Conclusions

The strategy chosen to guide Norwegian development assistance in the 90's suggests a move towards less administrative demanding types of aid, which will change the role of the donor, the donors' organisational needs, and correspondingly the evaluation system.

At present, evaluation is highly centralised. Both policy evaluations, impact evaluations and to some extent evaluation of aid delivery are initiated at the ministry level. The evaluation system at agency and field office level is un-coordinated, ad-hoc and without any quality control support.

In light of the present division of responsibilities between the Ministry, agency and field offices; current international experience; and the new strategy for Norwegian aid, a major initiative to decentralise the evaluation system should be made. This would imply that the Ministry should by and large confine its role to policy oriented evaluations; the agency should concentrate on policy-oriented evaluations of direct relevance to its aid activities plus impact evaluations; and the field office and the recipient should increasingly take over the role to evaluate impact of aid and monitor aid delivery.

## 2. EVALUATION IN A LEARNING ORGANISATION

### 2.1 A differentiated and flexible evaluation system

The changes towards increased responsibility for the recipient, and decentralisation of Norwegian aid indicated in the new strategy will not be carried out immediately and across the whole field of development aid at the same time. On the contrary, it will be necessary with a gradual shift in modes of development aid and a differentiated implementation of the various parts of the development assistance. For instance, the degree to which the recipient will be able to manage aid activities will vary from country to country and from sector to sector.

This means that elements from the various scenarios described in the previous chapter will exist side by side simultaneously - both today and for a long time in the future. The evaluation systems can correspondingly not be redirected quickly and permanently towards a situation where aid is completely recipient-managed, with only non-identifiable activities (scenario 4).

The main conclusions are therefore:

- The evaluation system must be **differentiated and flexible**, adapted to the various forms and plans of development assistance. At the same time it must be able to detect and pass on results from all these various kinds of assistance.
- The evaluation system must however be **clear and unambiguous** in relation to which bodies are responsible for the various evaluation measures, the objectives of different evaluations and the follow-up of results.
- The evaluation system must be structured so as to promote **accumulation and channelling** of knowledge geared to active use within various learning arenas, both on the side of the donor and the recipient.

We emphasise that our definition of the evaluation system does not include the

current administrative reporting systems associated with finance (The Plan II-system) and activities (four month-reports, annual reports etc.). It encompasses evaluations related to aid deliveries, impact of aid and policy issues as described in chapter C.1.2.

### 2.2 A learning organisation

The main focus of this evaluation is how the Norwegian aid administration learns from its own experiences, as expressed in project reviews and evaluations.

If learning is the overall purpose, we strongly emphasise that improving the evaluation system, the tools, the methods and the procedures is necessary, but not at all sufficient. More efficient administration of and carrying out the different types of evaluation will not create learning in itself, if not the aid administration is developed as a learning organisation.

With reference to Figure A.1.2 which describes different factors affecting organisational learning, it is also obvious that effective learning depends on different inputs and a successful combination of them. Experience from development activities in the field, experience of other individuals and aid administrations, information extracted from research, literature and corporate memory are some of these other sources which generate learning together with project reviews and evaluations.

Further it is necessary to focus the structure and the corporate culture within the aid administration. Different inputs is of little help if there is a lack of learning arenas for discussing, processing and integrating the inputs.

It is therefore a need to both improve the evaluation system and develop the corporate culture towards a learning organisation.

Concerning the task of creating a learning

organisation, we will advice concentration on the following main requirements:

- **Learning arenas** characterized by an open, inquiring, supporting and tolerant culture of learning. The arenas must give room for discussions on experiences from aid activities as well as overall policies, objectives and strategies.

Most of the learning arenas must be localized as integrated parts of the different divisions of the aid administration, but also connected with special branches as IDOK and the School of Development Cooperation.

- **A leadership** on all levels who gives high priority to learning, and takes active part in the discussion on learning arenas. It is essential that activities on learning arenas are given the necessary priority. One should avoid a situation where learning activities depend on the individual staff member's initiatives or where learning is permanently suppressed by day-to-day tasks.
- **A corporate memory** developed with great emphasis on simplification of accessibility, easy linkage between the different parts and a selection of material within the "active" part of the memory consisting of information with high relevance and application. The corporate memory must be supported and supplemented by other sources and methods for learning.

### 2.3 Some implications for evaluation activities

On the basis of the main requirements described in the previous sections, we will indicate a few specific consequences associated both with the general organising of evaluation activities, communication and learning, and point to some possible consequences relating to organisation.

#### 1. Ministerial level

At Ministerial level the evaluation activities need to concentrate on questions of an

overall, principal nature closely associated with policy and the top management's need for information. This would imply a certain amount of restructuring in relation to today's situation; in the first place by placing the responsibility for evaluation of concrete aid activities outside the Ministry, namely with the agency, field offices and the recipient.

This does not say that the results of such evaluations should not be communicated to and dealt with by the Ministry as basis for decision-making, control and learning. On the contrary, it will be particularly important to ensure that evaluation results are extracted, compiled and communicated internally in the Ministry from a wide basis. The Ministry should also approve the standards and requirements of the evaluation system, and monitor it's performance to ensure that the system is efficient and functions as intended.

Altogether we believe the Ministry's tasks should be mainly:

- Undertake **policy-oriented thematic evaluations**. Examples would be evaluation of main objectives and strategies, such as the different instruments or mechanisms for aid delivery, and policy studies that provide inputs for learning on issues of a political nature, and that cut across organisational and disciplinary boundaries.
- Evaluate other forms of aid than bilateral aid
- Approve standards and requirements of the **total system for evaluation**, define structures, assign parts and main precepts and monitor the quality of the system, ie carry out meta-evaluation.
- Discuss questions relating to evaluation systems and evaluation precepts together with the agency in **international organisations**, such as OECD, IMF, IBRD, UN etc. and communicate outcome and experiences into Norwegian aid administration.

## 2. Agency level

At the agency level evaluation activities need to be strengthened. Also at this level policy-related evaluations may be initiated, but directly associated with assessment of programmes, sectors and country. There will still be a need for evaluations of actual aid projects where this cannot be referred to the field offices or the recipient. We propose that the diffuse and unnecessary distinction between project evaluations and project reviews is abandoned, and that one term only is employed: **Project level evaluation**.

The agency ought to develop a decentralized evaluation system, and support the recipient with advice, development of methodology and implementation of evaluations. Likewise, there is a need to institutionalize the quality control of evaluations, both internal, as well as those produced by field offices and recipients.

On this basis the following tasks would be the responsibility of the agency:

- Produce **relevant information on country level** as inputs to the Ministry's country-strategy documents and the regular country-programme documents.
- Initiate and undertake **evaluation of sectors, programmes and projects**. A prerequisite would be that an evaluation programme exists which is closely tied to decision- and knowledge needs. Some evaluations are programmed in bilateral agreements, with the emphasis on assessing efficiency and making proposals for change. Other evaluations will focus on questions related to the results of development aid, such as impacts and sustainability. In some cases it will also be pertinent to carry out evaluations in cooperation with other development aid agencies.
- Initiate evaluations that have a **significant potential for learning**.
- Develop the **procedures and methods** for impact evaluation, including the development of impact indicators. This includes to provide field offices and possibly also the recipient, with

professional assistance in connection with the implementation of evaluations. Some of this assistance will be associated with developing standards for agreements, reporting etc. and also with supervising evaluation work with quality control and feedback.

## 3. Field office level

The field offices' role in the evaluation system will also have to be strengthened. More responsibility need to be delegated to the field offices in order to carry out project level evaluations, possibly in cooperation with the recipient.

Their role would mainly be to:

- Participate in the production of **information on country level**, undertaken by the agency, as an input to country- programme documents and country-strategy analyses
- Participate in and possibly undertake **evaluations of sectors, programmes and projects**. Such evaluations may be carried out partly with the help of independent teams, mixed teams or entirely as internal teams. To an increasing extent it should be relevant to carry out the evaluations in cooperation with the recipient.
- **Monitor and review the quality** of project evaluations administered by the recipient.

## 4. Recipient level

The recipient's involvement in evaluation also need to be strengthened. In country-programme agreements and agreements at project/programme level it must be clearly defined what responsibility rests with the recipient, in terms of evaluating aid delivery and impact, or contribute to such evaluations.

The role of the recipient would mainly be:

- Administer or carry out **project level evaluations**
- Participate in project-, programme- and sector level evaluations carried out under the auspices of the donor.

A major question which ought to be answered at all levels is related to the **relevance and independence** of evaluations. We do not think it possible to make clear distinctions, but propose that the necessary degree of independence for each particular case is assessed and on this basis a team selected and mandate formulated. In some cases completely independent teams would be required, in other cases stronger participation by the aid administration or the recipient. The important aspect is a high degree of responsibility both in the planning and mandate formulation phase of evaluations.

## 2.4 Some implications for communication and learning activities

### 1. Ministerial level

At Ministerial level, as mentioned above, evaluation of bilateral aid might be reduced. Processing evaluation material, passing on and working out the follow-up documents may, however, be strengthened. Feedback to the other parts of aid administration about the quality of the evaluation system would be added. Also, there is a continued need to establish and organize seminars, and prepare material as input for these and other learning arenas.

The Ministry's main function would be to use evaluations to promote learning via communication. This means to:

- Process results from thematic evaluations and work out proposals for **follow-up and decision-making documents**.
- **Extract lessons from evaluation material** prepared by the aid administration, the recipient and other aid agencies and communicate this internally.
- **Communicate evaluation experience** to the Ministry head, Parliament, media, international organisations and other aid agencies, including participating in international fora on questions relating to evaluation.

- **Give feedback** to other parts of the aid administration on the quality of the total evaluation system.
- **Establish learning arenas** such as internal professional seminars and systematic communication and discussions of experiences and other learning material in regular meetings.

### 2. Agency Level

At the agency level the main tasks would be to process and synthesize evaluation results, collect and store information in the "Corporate memory", communicate internally for training purposes and report to the Ministry and international fora. Also, arrangements for upgrading skills in the evaluation field and development of methodology should be established.

The agency's role in a decentralized evaluation system would include the following functions, to:

- Initiate and undertake project-, programme- and sector level evaluations and prepare **proposals for follow-up and decision-making documents**
- **Synthesize results** from evaluations and evaluations carried out by field offices and recipients and communicate such results internally and to the Ministry.
- Continue to **strengthen and develop IDOK** and the internal archive as central media for collecting, sorting, storing and communicating information. It is important that IDOK is expanded in order to become a central source of knowledge that is accessible to the public and can serve all parties involved in Norwegian aid directly or indirectly. An interconnection of the different storage medias and their accessibility must be worked out to better ensure active use.
- Ensure that report **material processed by field offices becomes accessible in IDOK**. In the same way it is vital to ensure that material from international organisations and other aid agencies is accessible.

- **Carry out training and exchange experience** in connection with evaluations within the agency and the field offices. Provide feedback on the quality of project evaluations carried out by field offices or the recipient.
- **Participate and follow up the work in international organisations** e.g. communicate evaluation material and experiences of evaluation methods and general procedures.
- **Establish and develop internal learning arenas** mostly as separate internal fora, partly as elements in ordinary meetings, but also through processing and use of evaluation results at School of Development cooperation.

### 3. Field office level

For the field offices it will be important to make use of material from evaluations carried out under their own management, or in cooperation with the recipient or under the recipient's management, in their own internal training.

Their main tasks would be:

- **Process and communicate** results from their own evaluation activities and evaluations carried out by the recipient, to the agency.
- **Communicate results** of evaluations to the recipient and make use of evaluation material in a dialogue with the recipient.
- **Establish internal learning arenas** tied to the field office.

### 4. Recipient level

The recipient side need to be more directly involved in evaluation activities at all stages, and eventually be able to monitor and evaluate aid activities and report the findings to the donor.

### 5. General

At all levels of the aid administration evaluations will only be one of several sources of learning. Individual field experience, the experience of colleagues, research, literature, conferences etc. will often be equally or more important sources.

It is however important that evaluations and all other sources of information also are made accessible in learning arenas which are not part of the ordinary management procedure and which are characterized by an open and inquiring learning environment.

Dialogue, exchange of opinions and exchange of experience are central functions to promote learning. Such functions will often have low precedence in relation to actual procedures and day by day tasks. At all levels it is therefore important for management to ensure that development of competence is given the strategic position necessary in a learning organisation. An up-dated, continuously learning organisation where the knowledge is shared rather than remaining part of the individual's information base, will also be well prepared for more immediate, current tasks - even in situations with a high turnover of personnel.

In addition, evaluations may be integrated and used in planning- and decision-making documents in a more standardized form. This would include guidelines for report standards, standard front covers which may be stored in data bases, and planning-, decision-making and report documents with a standard form where appraisal of evaluation results become obligatory.

## 2.5 Some organisational implications

At last we will indicate a few consequences related to organisation, structure and procedures.

### 1. Ministerial level

At Ministerial level it is necessary to maintain an evaluation unit. When concentrating evaluation activities to thematic evaluations and evaluation of other than bilateral aid, the capacity can be used to a larger extent to ensure quality in the total evaluation system; synthesize and communicate evaluation results, and communicate with international evaluation fora. Also, the existence of an evaluation unit above the agency level adds credit to the total evaluation system.

## 2. Agency level

For the agency it seems to be a need to establish a separate evaluation unit, or designate some part of the organisation to be responsible for development of methodology, training, professional support and safeguarding of quality. Such a unit is presumed to have such functions both in relation to divisions of the agency, field offices, and the recipient. It will be especially important to give support to field offices. A high rate of turnover of personnel, increased responsibility for evaluations and limited capacity require the evaluation unit at the agency to be able to give considerable support in particular cases.

We would assume that the administration and execution of sector-, programme- and project level evaluation would be vested in the individual divisions of the agency and the field offices. This means that regional divisions as well as technical divisions and field offices may incept and administer evaluations within the agency's total evaluation programme.

## 3. Field office level

For the field offices the scope of tasks related to evaluations would increase. This also applies vis a vis recipients where both implementation of joint evaluations and supervision and appraisal of evaluations undertaken by the recipient may be relevant. A need for increased capacity and competence at the field offices is likely even though professional assistance from the agency would be a considerable resource.

## 4. Recipient level

For the recipient, increased responsibility for evaluations may in many cases require professional support from the aid administration, primarily from the field offices; in order to strengthen the recipient's capacity and competence in this field.

## 5. General

At all levels the new strategy seems to imply a need to improve evaluation and reporting systems. A central element will be to **increase professionalism** of leaders and

professional staff in processing information needs, formulate mandates, initiate and administer evaluations, process evaluation results for implementation and learning. The overall purpose is to ensure that evaluations are **integrated and synchronized** with the aid administration as an essential instrument for better development aid.



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## LIST OF BACKGROUND STUDIES

The following studies were undertaken as part of the present evaluation. The papers are available in Norwegian, only.

1. Contents analysis of a number of evaluations and project reviews, by Knut Samset, Scanteam International, 36p, December 1991
2. Case-study of Institute of Development Management (IDM) Tanzania, by Knut Samset, Scanteam International, 20p, December 1991
3. Case-study of “Country Study and Norwegian Aid Review, Tanzania”, by Otto Hauglin, Asplan Analyse, 26p, December, 1991
4. Case-study of the evaluation of “Import Support, Tanzania”, by Kim Forss, Andante Consulting, 19p, December 1991
5. An analysis of NORAD’s information and documentation center, archive and training sections, by Otto Hauglin, Asplan Analyse, 21p, June, 1992
6. Case-study of “Socio-cultural conditions in development assistance”, by Kim Forss, Andante Consulting, 18p, June, 1992
7. Case-study of the evaluation of “Parallel Financing and Mixed Credits”, by Kim Forss, Andante Consulting, 18p, June, 1992
8. Case-study of “Country Study and Norwegian Aid Review, Sri Lanka”, by Knut Samset, Scanteam International, 15p, June, 1992
9. Case-study of “Evaluation of Hambantota Integrated Rural Development Programme (HIRDEP)”, by Otto Hauglin, Asplan Analyse, 22p, June, 1992
10. Survey of the opinion professionals staff and managers on learning and the use of evaluations and project reviews, by Kim Forss, Andante Consulting, 56p, June, 1992
11. Summary of interviews with managers and desk officers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NORAD, by Otto Hauglin, Asplan Analyse, 15p, June, 1992



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The first part of the paper is devoted to a study of the
 properties of the function  $f(x)$  defined by the
 equation  $f(x) = \int_0^x f(t) dt$ . It is shown that
  $f(x)$  is a constant function, and that the only
 solution of the equation is  $f(x) = 0$ .

In the second part, we consider the problem of
 finding the maximum value of the function  $f(x)$ 
 subject to the constraint  $f(x) = \int_0^x f(t) dt$ .
 It is shown that the maximum value is attained at
  $x = 0$ , and that the maximum value is  $0$ .

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