

This report has been prepared by



Consortium of
ADE and COWI
Consortium leader: ADE s.a
Contact Person: Edwin Clerckx
Edwin.Clerckx@ade.eu

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*The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' point of view
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or by the authorities of the concerned countries.*

ADE SA
Rue de Clairvaux 40, Bte 101
1348 Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium)
+32 10 45 45 10
ade@ade.eu
www.ade.eu

Evaluation team members having contributed to this report:

*Mr. Arne Disch (Team Leader)
Mrs. Karolyn Thunnissen
Mrs. Juana de Catheu
Mrs. Karine Ruyssen
Mrs. Ritha Sukadi Mata
Mr. Edwin Clerckx (Quality Controller)*

The evaluation team has been supported by Mr. Vincent Coppens

*The evaluation is being managed by the DG
DEVCO Evaluation Unit.*

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European Union. The report does not necessarily
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Executive Summary

Objectives

This evaluation was commissioned by the Evaluation Unit of the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development. It evaluates the European Union's (EU) **Joint Programming process** during the period **2011-2015**. It covers all regions and countries of EU development cooperation. It aims at providing the EU and the wider public with an overall independent assessment of the Joint Programming process, and, on this basis, to provide recommendations to improve current and inform the future Joint Programming process.

Context

Joint Programming of development cooperation is a longstanding commitment by the EU and its Member States in support of the international aid and development effectiveness agenda. The EU presented a renewed commitment to Joint Programming in its **European Union Common Position**, which was a policy statement to the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011. It provides the Joint Programming framework including its context, scope and principles. Its core elements are (i) *Joint analysis of and joint response to a partner country's national development strategy identifying priority sectors of intervention* - together they form what is called a *joint strategy*; (ii) *In-country division of labour: who is working in which sectors*; and (iii) *Indicative financial allocation per sector and donor*. The joint analysis and joint response are primarily developed at partner country level by EU delegation and Member States representatives in the country. As of end of 2015, 55 countries had agreed to carry out Joint Programming, and of these 26 were seen to be far enough along that they could be included in the evaluation.

Methodological Approach

This evaluation followed the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development's methodological guidelines for complex evaluations. It applied an Intervention Logic (or Theory of Change) analysis to define a set of eight Evaluation Questions with Judgment Criteria and Indicators against which data were collected. Conclusions are based on the responses to the Evaluation Questions, and Recommendations in turn on these conclusions.

The team combined five tools to collect and analyse data: (i) **documentary review** of general documentation and on **14 country case studies**; (ii) **interviews** with EU and Member States headquarters, and country-level staff and stakeholders; (iii) **process tracing** in 2 country case studies; (iv) a **web-based survey** to EU and Member States headquarters

and country-level staff; and (v) **visits** to seven Member States headquarters and to eleven Joint Programming implementing partner countries.

The main **challenge** of the evaluation has been the short history of the Joint Programming process. This means that there is limited evidence yet on results of the Joint Programming process. The evaluation has therefore focused on countries where Joint Programming processes were reaching a certain stage and were expected to begin producing some results.

Overall Assessment

In the vast majority of countries examined, the Joint Programming process has proven to be very valuable for the EU and Member States. It owed in particular to the closer interaction and better understanding of each donor's cooperation, and of investment in a common vision. Indeed, the production of the Joint Programming roadmap and the Joint Analysis have contributed to a clearer view amongst the EU, its Member States and some associated donors (such as Norway and Switzerland) about each other's cooperation portfolios, the drivers for cooperation and the particular cooperation strengths and limitations of each donor. This work has enabled the EU, Member States and associated donors to work closely together, to reach a consensus on the Partner Country's challenges and how to respond to them as a joined effort, even if not yet joined implementation. It has also helped to make EU and Member States aid more harmonised, working towards commonly agreed objectives and adopting commonly agreed strategic approaches. Even though this might not yet have led to improved aid effectiveness indicators (number of sectors/donor, number of donors/sector), it has led to an improved division of labour within sectors and laid the foundation for more effective aid and more effective development. The Joint Programming process has also made the participating donors more visible, both as a group (the EU and Member States' voice) and in their own right, vis-à-vis the Government, other stakeholders (where they have been consulted) and other development partners.

Beyond these achievements of the Joint Programming process, the evaluation makes several observations that should trigger further reflections on how to better use Joint Programming and how to make it deliver on its expected outcomes. Firstly, the exercise has remained very much an EU and Member States exercise, not sufficiently involving the Partner Country, whether the Government or the civil society organisations, or involving them very late in the process at a time when priorities had already been agreed. It has been argued by EU delegations and Member States staff in the field that they needed to agree amongst themselves first, before involving the Partner Country in their deliberations. Only rarely has an equilibrium been found between internal and external deliberations. This has limited the potential ownership of the Joint Programming process by the Partner Country. Secondly the Joint Programming process has rarely been able to cover all sectors of cooperation: most often the exercise was limited to those sectors where several EU and Member States were active and had common interests. Whilst this makes sense, programming jointly on a limited number of sectors constrains the impact Joint Programming can have on improving the effectiveness of collective EU and Member States' aid. As a result, Joint Programming should not be

expected to contribute directly to aid effectiveness, but indirectly, through its expected results on a better EU-MS coordination. Thirdly, it is not clear to what extent the increased visibility has been used by the EU to gain more political clout. In a couple of cases Joint Programming has led to the use of the EU and Member States' voice with a political/policy purpose, without however any discernible results as yet in terms of changes of policies.

The Joint Programming process has in most cases not yet reduced transaction costs for partner country governments or the EU and Member States. In most cases, EU and MS staff surveyed indicated that they did not know (at the time) whether transaction costs were reduced, or on the contrary that transactions costs were heavy and were not reduced, notably for EU Delegations. This is confirmed by interviews in 14 countries. **Several elements suggest that those transaction costs were nevertheless often “worth it” in light of expected benefits**, as reported by EU and Member States. This is particularly the case in crowded sectors and where existing aid coordination is weak, i.e. where most potential gains lie. This should be verified in the future, notably in countries where the Joint programming process will have been fully implemented.

On the whole, the review of the country case studies thus shows that the Joint Programming exercise was worthwhile: it is starting to deliver positive results although these are so far still mostly limited to the EU family rather than benefiting the partner countries. The ambitions of Joint Programming in terms of aid effectiveness (reduced aid fragmentation, increased transparency and predictability, reduced transaction costs) have thus not as yet been realised. However, it is argued on the basis of findings in the field, that other results (better coordinated and more strategic EU aid with joint understanding, shared objectives and joint positioning) are being obtained, which are valuable contributors to better development effectiveness of European Union aid.

Conclusions

In line with the above, the evaluation draws the following main conclusions:

C1: The Joint Programming process delivers well on outputs fully managed at **field level** (Joint Programming roadmap, EU and Member States aid mapping, and joint analysis) but faces challenges on those that require **headquarters** consent or approval (joint response, financial frames).

C2: The Joint Programming process has been instrumental in increasing **coordination** between EU, Member States and other associated donors' aid, in some cases enhancing EU and Member States' **voice**. But Joint Programming has so far had little effect on **synchronising** programming with national programming cycles.

C3: Joint Programming has delivered uneven contributions to improved aid effectiveness: positive results regarding **predictability**, but limited ones concerning measures of **aid fragmentation, transparency, and transaction costs**. However, Joint Programming has boosted **EU aid complementarities and synergies** thus contributing to development effectiveness.

C4: The Joint Programming process has, in most countries, not yet led to **ownership of the process and of its results by the partner country**.

C5: Joint Programming has generally increased EU and MS **visibility** but this has not necessarily been used for increased leverage.

C6: Joint Programming as a process developed at country level works well though **roles** of EU delegations, other EU institutions, field offices and Member States' headquarters staff could be clearer and approaches to decision making could be more consistent across these actors.

C7: JP has contributed to bringing the EU and MS on the ground closer together, with signs of increased convergence and **coherence**.

C8: Joint Programming process results primarily from the **interest and commitment** by the EU and the Member States on the ground and is helped by a favourable country context.

C9: Joint Programming support has been positive for achievements, in terms of **guidance, technical assistance, and peer-learning events**.

Recommendations

A set of main recommendations emerge from this evaluation, which can be structured in three clusters:

Improve and update the intervention logic

R1 – Improve the intervention logic for better defining the strategic purpose of Joint Programming. Clarify that the two main benefits to be expected from Joint Programming are (i) more coherent and strategic EU and Member States' aid, and (ii) joint EU-Member States positions and messages. Joint Programming may also contribute to wider objectives such as reduced aid fragmentation, increased transparency and predictability, and reduced transaction costs, but these are rather to be seen as results over time of overall better coordination.

R2 - Rethink the scope of Joint Programming, both globally and at country level. EU and Member States headquarters should update policies and guidance on Joint Programming to reflect the shift from aid to development effectiveness, and to add a political dimension (as per the Council Conclusions of 12 May 2016 on Stepping Up Joint Programming). It should also be examined to what extent there is a willingness to include, for instance, globally and regionally-programmed aid, blending, and humanitarian aid (which is not programmable by definition). At a country level, it would be useful that the EU and Member States define a common intervention logic and areas to focus on, i.e. what they most want to achieve through Joint Programming and how.

Keep Joint Programming strategic, flexible, and pragmatic

R3 - See Joint Programming as a process as well as products. *Products* can be light or comprehensive, but the *process* of exchanging information, investing in joint analysis,

building trust, and arriving at a comprehensive and coherent strategic EU –Member States approach is key. Make the products and process more flexible and easily adjustable over time. Ensure frequent exchanges, at a strategic level, on how the context is evolving, on common positions and responses, and on EU common values and specific value-added.

R4 - Strengthen collaboration on the ground between the EU and Member States. Use the Joint Programming process and its common vision and response to build a more unified European community both internally and in its dealings with the partner country and external actors in general. In each country, identify the key capacities and interests of EU and Members States for Joint Programming, for seeing how they can contribute to the process. Build on strong bilateral relationships, be it from the EU or Member States.

R5 - Consolidate Joint Programming supporting services. Don't change the rules and don't make them more prescriptive: the Joint Programming Guidance Pack is good; it just needs some clarifications and/or to be further disseminated. Continue the regional and global experience-sharing – emphasizing good practices and lessons learned. Continue providing a pool of technical assistance.

Clarify and reinforce the role of all stakeholders

R6 - Ensure both political and cooperation actors are engaged throughout the process. Engage with the European External Action Service, Member States headquarters, Ambassadors, and political sections from the start. Define respective roles.

R7 - Deepen the dialogue with national stakeholders. Joint Programming has shown to provide many opportunities for strategic dialogue with national authorities and stakeholders at each milestone of the process. When there is already a well-established forum for strategic dialogue (both among development partners and with the partner country), consider how Joint Programming can bring value to it. In parallel, continue emphasising good practices in aid transparency and aid predictability.

R8 - Improve the incentives for investing in Joint Programming. Member States' embassies and field offices should discuss the benefits of Joint Programming (and its scope) with senior management at headquarters and with Ambassadors upstream. Member States should also clarify roles, including who is the go-to person or unit at headquarters for Joint Programming support. Delegation staff's (considerable) investment in Joint Programming should also be recognised in their workload and performance assessments.