Reaping the Fruits of Evaluation?

An evaluation of management response systems within aid organisations

Sara Bandstein
Erik Hedblom

Preface

The Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation (SADEV) is a government-funded institute that conducts and disseminates evaluations of international development cooperation activities. SADEV's overriding objective is to contribute to the achievement of the goals of Swedish development cooperation.

Evaluation activities at SADEV are conducted along two main branches. Firstly, SADEV evaluates the organisation of Swedish international development cooperation, focusing on issues such as the management and monitoring of executive organisation, the choice of modalities, donor coordination and the internal efficiency of donor organisations. Secondly, SADEV evaluates the short- and long-term impact of Swedish development cooperation. SADEV's evaluations are available electronically from SADEV's website, and in hard copy.

Performance based management and evaluation use are two related concepts that have been much emphasised by policy makers and development practitioners in recent years. In order to put themselves in a position of being able to capitalise on the information provided through evaluations, many aid organisations have established formal systems that are intended to facilitate the process of acting upon evaluations. These are referred to as management response systems.

This report presents the findings of three case studies of management response systems, at Sida, EuropeAid, and IFAD. The report provides an analysis of the design and constituent components of the respective systems and seeks to reveal the extent to which: a) the systems achieve their intended objectives, and b) how relevant they are to the organisations and staff that they serve.

Based on the findings of these three management response systems, this report makes recommendation that should be addressed when an organisation is developing or redesigning a management response system. Since little research has been produced about this crucial aspect of the evaluation process, this report makes a much-needed contribution to this area.

Lennart Wohlgemuth,
Director General

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Executive Summary

Background

This report synthesises the findings of three case studies carried out during the period 2005-2007. The evaluation of Sida's management response system was commissioned by Sida's Secretariat for Evaluation, and carried out by Umeå University, in 2005. In 2006 the Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation (SADEV) and Umeå University decided to assess two additional organisations – IFAD and EuropeAid – in order to gain further knowledge about the effects of management response systems. Both assessments were carried out during the latter part of 2007.

A management response system can be understood as a way of "linking evaluation findings to future activities" (OECD/DAC 1992:133). It governs the procedures dealing with a completed evaluation and is intended to facilitate the process of making evaluations an integral part of an organisation's learning and decision-making processes.

There is a dearth of information available about how to develop management response systems, what effects they have, and the features that make them relevant. Considering that evaluation and evaluation use is receiving increasing attention, it is timely to assess the merits of management response systems and the value that they add to organisations.

Evaluation objectives

The main objectives of this evaluation are to gain a deeper understanding of: (i) how management response systems are designed, (ii) how well they achieve their intended objectives (their effectiveness), and (iii) how relevant they are to the organisations and staff that they serve. Information gathered through the three case studies is used to draw general conclusions about how, and the extent to which, a management response system can be made effective and relevant. A number of recommendations are then made.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation is designed as a programme theory evaluation. The underlying programme theories of the three management response systems are reconstructed, and the constituent components are assessed, both logically and empirically. The assessment is made against two criteria: effectiveness and relevance. The *effectiveness* of management response systems is measured against the achievement of the stated objectives of the response systems in terms of output and outcomes, as specified in the relevant programme theory. The *relevance* of the management response systems is

measured in relation to the objectives and the priorities of the organisation; that is, their value and usefulness to the respective organisations.

The evaluation processes and the methods used in the case studies were very similar, aside from some differences that were mainly consequential upon organisational differences. Information about the systems was mainly obtained through document analysis and interviews with staff from the management/operational department of the respective aid organisations, staff at the evaluation units and representatives from partner governments, implementing agencies and evaluation consultants.[1]

Main conclusions

The analyses of the three management response systems reveal that, although they operate differently, their objectives largely correspond. Their primary common objectives are to increase the use of evaluation findings and to ensure that evaluations are considered in ongoing or future decision-making processes. All three organisations consider accountability for following up evaluations and transparency key objectives for a successful response system. In addition to these common objectives, Sida emphasises that the management response system should enhance learning within the organisation. The main conclusions below are summarised in three categories: design, effectiveness and relevance of management response systems.

The design of management response systems

In order to achieve their stated objectives, the response systems are built upon a number of components. This evaluation identified the following components, or activities, that all three organisations have taken into account in designing their respective management response systems:

- A summary of main evaluation findings to be considered prior to being responded to.

- A review/assessment of evaluation recommendations, containing the position taken by management.

- An action plan/document recording the organisation's response to recommendations considered feasible (indicating responsibilities and timeframes for implementation).

- A follow-up of agreed actions (either formal or informal).

In addition to these common features, other components can characterise the structure of a management response system:

- A stakeholder workshop, with the main objective of clarifying evaluation recommendations and increasing ownership by stakeholders.

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[1] Methods for data collection included focus group interviews with staff from the evaluation units and management/operational departments, and individual interviews with key staff involved in developing the management response systems and who had experience with response processes. The document analysis was based on key documents such as evaluation reports, response documents and guiding policies and strategies.

- An annual follow-up tool which synthesises all follow-up activities taken as a result of evaluation recommendation over the course of one year.

- Partner involvement in the response process.

The effectiveness of the management response systems

The management response system at Sida is divided into two subsystems as a result of the dual nature of the evaluation system (a centralised and decentralised component). The implementation of the centralised system has been reasonably successful, with over 90 per cent of the evaluations responded to, most of which included an action plan. The system achieves most of its objectives, although a number of weaknesses have been identified that reduce the effectiveness of the system: 1) there are no explicit channels for using evaluations in decision-making; 2) the limited availability of response documents; 3) there are no sanctions for non-compliance; and 4) there is a lack of clarity concerning the overall objective of enhanced learning.

Sida's decentralised management response system suffers from a number of weaknesses that limit its full effectiveness. Factors that reduce the effectiveness of the decentralised system include: 1) a lack of knowledge of the system among staff and a perceived lack of clarity of guidelines; 2) a lack of relevant information in response documents; 3) ad hoc follow-up of action plans; 4) poor documentation of response documents and limited availability of the responses to Sida staff and partners; 5) poor overall evaluation quality; 6) limited time for staff to reflect upon evaluation findings; and 7) a lack of clarity concerning the overall objective of enhanced learning.

The management response system of EuropeAid has been successfully implemented, to the extent that most evaluations receive a response from management. The system was found to be reasonably effective, since it allows for greater awareness of evaluation recommendations in the concerned departments and enhances accountability and the transparency of the overall evaluation process. However, the system does not achieve all of its objectives. Factors that reduce the effectiveness of the system include: 1) unclear delegation of response activities; 2) the frequent absence of timeframes for implementation and vague agreed actions; 3) the absence of sanctions for non-compliance; and 4) that the system is not properly adapted to match the policy and programming cycles.

The IFAD management response system has been implemented effectively in terms of its outputs. The system incorporates a mutual agreement between IFAD management and partner governments, which reflects that the parties have joint ownership in ensuring that recommendations are responded to. The assessment indicates that the management response system achieves most of its objectives at the outcome level, if it is only applied to IFAD. The system is vital in contributing to accountability, and the response process is transparent and guidelines and directives are clear. The system is well aligned with decision-making processes, and evaluation recommendations must be considered in the design and adoption of new policies and programmes. Factors that reduce the effectiveness of the system include: 1) problems are evident in the ability to garner commitment from partners to claim ownership; 2) an inability to create real consensus among stakeholders about agreed actions; and 3) a limited ability to monitor the follow-up undertaken by partners.

The relevance of the management response systems

This evaluation finds that most objectives in each of the three systems are valid and logical, in that they are capable of being achieved in theory, in accordance with the respective programme theories. However, it is overly optimistic to assume that a follow-up system can, of itself, contribute to substantial learning more generally. This is a particularly important factor in Sida's management response system, which may presently contain unrealistic objectives.

The activities and outputs of the IFAD and EuropeAid management response systems are reasonably consistent with the overarching objectives of the respective systems. The activities and outputs of Sida's centralised subsystem are not consistent with the overarching objective of enhancing learning. The relevance of the decentralised subsystem is limited due to implementation failures and the unrealistic objective of enhanced learning. To increase the relevance of the objectives of Sida's system, it is important that learning is defined and that the management response system in general is acknowledged to a greater extent as a tool that promotes the effectiveness of evaluations.

Of the three organisations, only IFAD engages partner countries and cooperating organisations in its response activities. This makes the response system more relevant to the mandate of the organisation and its working methods than the other two systems do to their respective organisations.

Recommendations

This evaluation's nine key recommendations, articulated below, are mutually reinforcing. In order to ensure an effective and relevant management response system, the priorities of an organisation should be taken into account in assessing the relevance and usefulness of each recommendation.

Adapt the management response system to the organisational context

The extent to which a management response system is effective and relevant is context-sensitive. Consequently, the entire organisational structure is important. In particular, the evaluation system used, and the types of evaluations carried out, by the organisation must be considered in developing or redesigning a management response system. The objectives of the response system must be designed to be consistent with the role of evaluation within the organisation.

Consider overall policymaking structures

The management response system cannot be designed in isolation, but rather it must take other decision-making forums of the organisation into consideration. One example is to indicate (for example, in the evaluation policy) what levels of decision-making evaluation recommendations should feed into, and what type of response the evaluations require.

Ensure clear guidelines and regulations regarding administrative procedures

Given that it may take some time for a management response system to become fully institutionalised within an organisation and to deliver effectively on its main objectives, it is important that the system is launched with clear guidelines and responsibilities for all actors both involved in the process and affected by the system.

Document the response process

Implementation of follow-up actions and use of evaluation results can be improved if the entire process is well-documented and, in appropriate circumstances, made public. A high degree of transparency of the process further strengthens accountability.

Appoint a responsible unit for supervising the response process

It may be necessary to delegate the responsibility for supervising the response to a central organisational body in order to assure effective implementation. In particular, this body should be responsible for documenting and publishing response documents. Sometimes it may be optimal to have different units responsible for different parts of the response process, but in this case, responsibilities must be clear.

Design an effective follow-up tool that checks the implementation status of agreed actions

An appropriate follow-up tool, that checks the implementation status of the follow-up actions, is essential, in order for a response system to deliver its intended outcomes, particularly those related to accountability and transparency. It may be sufficient that a staff member be responsible for this follow-up, although this evaluation has shown that a centralised management tool appears to be more effective.

Designate a receiver of information

For most types of evaluation it is essential that the information that is being generated about the implementation status of follow-up is forwarded to a designated *receiver*, and that this receiver has both the authority and capacity to act upon implementation failures, and to verify that management, or, where relevant, the partner government, has carried out all agreed actions.

Increase involvement of evaluation stakeholders and partners

The response process must reflect the fact that evaluations often directly deal with issues at the country level, and that recommendations can be directed to development partners. To improve the relevance of the response and the impact of the evaluation, it is important that partners participate during the response formulation stage. If follow-up actions are to be implemented successfully all relevant stakeholders must have the opportunity to express their views and to comment upon the usefulness of the evaluation findings.

Ensure sufficient time for joint discussions and reflection

It is important that evaluations are discussed and understood by relevant stakeholders, in order to engender consent, awareness and commitment to response actions. Sufficient time needs to be given for reflecting upon and discussing evalua-

tion findings – preferably jointly – in order to formulate comprehensive and clear responses.

List of acronyms

ACP	Agreement at Completion Point (IFAD)
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CLP	Core Learning Partnership (IFAD)
EuropeAid	Directorate-General of the European Commission responsible for implementing external aid programmes and projects
FC	Fiche Contradictoire
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OE	Office of Evaluation (IFAD)
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development / Development Assistance Committee
PMD	Programme Management Department (IFAD)
PRISMA	President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (IFAD)
RELEX	The Directorate-Generals for Development, External Relations and EuropeAid
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UTV	Secretariat for Evaluation (Sida)
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

Contents

1   Introduction

Evaluation within aid organisations is generally undertaken with a dual purpose: i) to learn how to improve and gain a deeper understanding of reviewed activities; and ii) to promote organisational accountability. Evaluation often seeks to determine what does and does not work, and the reasons why. If these issues are determined, evaluation can allow an organisation to improve in order to achieve its objectives and promote accountability. The extent to which an evaluation is successful in contributing to these objectives depends upon a number of factors, including how effectively the organisation uses evaluation results, and the extent to which it is able to learn from evaluation findings.

In order to facilitate the process of making evaluation an integral part of an organisation's learning and decision-making processes, most organisations have introduced a formal system that governs the procedures dealing with a completed evaluation. These processes are usually called "management response systems", and can be understood as a way of "linking evaluation findings to future activities" (OECD/DAC 1992:133) and of increasing the extent to which evaluation findings are integrated into policies and programmes. At a very broad level, management response systems are intended to facilitate the follow-up of evaluation results and to increase both the use of each evaluation report and the value that it adds.

The introduction of management response systems within aid organisations in the last decade should be seen in light of the attention that has been given to development results and aid effectiveness – the cornerstones of the Paris Declaration – and the fact that international aid flows have increased. As aid volumes have increased rapidly over the past several years, aid organisations in general have been under greater pressure to demonstrate results and to be accountable to the executive boards or national governments that provide their funding.

This report provides a synthesis of three separate case studies, in assessing the management response systems of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and EuropeAid (the Directorate-General of the European Commission responsible for implementing external aid programmes and projects). The three case studies have been carried out in collaboration with Umeå University.[2]

There is a dearth of information available about how to develop management response systems, what effects they have, and the features that make them relevant. Considering that management response systems are gaining increasing attention, it is timely to assess their merits and the value that they add to organisations.

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[2] Anders Hanberger and Kjell Gisselberg at the Umeå Centre for Evaluation Research.

1.1 Evaluation objectives

The main objectives of this evaluation are to gain a deeper understanding of: (i) how management response systems are designed, (ii) how well they achieve their intended objectives (their effectiveness), and (iii) how relevant they are to the organisations and staff that they serve. Information gathered through the three case studies is used to draw general conclusions about how, and the extent to which, a management response system can be made effective and relevant. A number of recommendations are then made.

1.2 Evaluation use and the role of management response systems

Evaluation research has acknowledged that evaluations can be used in many different ways (see Patton 1997; and Vedung 1997). For instance, the results of an evaluation may be used as an input to decision-making concerning the evaluated activity (commonly referred to as instrumental use) or to obtain a deeper understanding of the evaluated activity and contribute to organisational learning (which is known as conceptual use)[3]. Often these two types of use correspond to the accountability and learning purposes of evaluation.

It is also acknowledged that it is not only the results of evaluations that are used. The evaluation process itself may provide important insights into the activity and create a shared understanding among the stakeholders. Evaluations may also be used to legitimatise a particular interest or policy or to gain time and evade responsibilities – although the overall (or formal) objective of the evaluation is normally something else (Vedung 1997).

Why, when and how an evaluation is used depends on several factors such as the objectives of the evaluation and the kind of information gathered, but also on the purpose and design of the organisation's management response system. Usually a management response system aims to assure that evaluation results are properly considered and, if required acted upon and that the follow-up actions are implemented appropriately. Another role of the system is to provide a direct link from relevant evaluation findings and recommendations to decisions about how to improve the reviewed intervention. By stipulating the necessary steps to be taken by management in response to an evaluation, findings and recommendations are assumed to feed directly into the management process. The system hence aims to ensure that the lessons from an evaluation are taken into account when formulating new decisions. Both these functions of a management response system clearly contribute to an instrumental use of evaluations.

To date, there is limited knowledge about how a response system should be developed in terms of reflecting and reinforcing conceptual evaluation use. A response process that aims to enhance the conceptual use of evaluations must, as a minimum, ensure that time is allocated to enable all relevant stakeholders to reflect upon the evaluation and to discuss the findings. It is also important that the system allows

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[3] "Conceptual use is contrasted to instrumental use in that no decision or action is expected. In this regard evaluations are used to influence thinking about issues in a general way. Evaluation findings contribute by increasing knowledge." (Patton, M. 1997).

stakeholders to formulate response activities and that it assures that stakeholders have full ownership of this process.

1.3 Evaluation design and criteria

The present evaluation is designed as a programme theory evaluation. A programme theory (sometimes referred to as a logical framework) aims to clarify the goals of a programme (in this case the management response system) and assumptions about how the goals are reached (that is, the necessary inputs and actions). Programme theory analysis uses logical reasoning to determine how problems are tackled (Leeuw 2003; Rossi et al 2004).

In this evaluation, the underlying programme theories of the three management response systems are reconstructed. The constituent parts of the systems are then assessed both logically and empirically. The assessments are made against two evaluation criteria: *effectiveness* and *relevance*. The *effectiveness* of the management response systems refers to the extent to which their objectives have been achieved. These objectives exist at two levels: the implementation of the system (the outputs), and their intermediate effects (the outcomes).

By identifying the outputs of the systems, an assessment can be made of the extent to which they follow stipulated guidelines and policies. The objectives at the level of outcomes are seldom stated explicitly, but rather must be derived from official documents, such as policies or strategies, or from interviews with key staff.

Relevance refers to the extent to which the management response systems are adapted to suit their objectives and the priorities of the organisation; that is, their value and usefulness to the organisations. Two questions are considered in assessing relevance (DAC evaluation criteria):

• To what extent are the objectives of the management response systems valid, given the priorities of the organisations?

• Are the activities and the outputs of the systems consistent with the attainment of their expected effects?

1.4 Evaluation process and methodology

This report synthesises the findings from three case studies carried out during the period 2005-2007. The evaluation of Sida's management response system was commissioned by Sida's Secretariat for Evaluation, and carried out by Umeå University in 2005. In 2006, the Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation (SADEV) and Umeå University decided to assess two additional organisations, IFAD and EuropeAid, to gain further knowledge about the effects of management response systems. Both assessments were carried out during the latter part of 2007.

The selection of the additional organisations was based on three considerations:

i.   To allow for an assessment about how effectively the systems had been implemented and their possible effects it was important that the organisations each had formal response systems that had been in place for several years.

ii.   In order to provide diverse perspectives, the organisations had to operate in different spheres within the international aid architecture, and needed to have different organisational structures. The selection would preferably comprise both multilateral and bilateral organisations.

iii. It was important that the evaluation systems of the respective organisations differed.

There are significant differences between IFAD, EuropeAid, and Sida in terms of organisational structure and how evaluation fits within the respective business models of the organisations. Sida is governed by the Swedish Government, and operates bilaterally. IFAD is a specialist agency of the United Nations, and is therefore governed by UN regulations. EuropeAid is responsible for implementing external aid projects and programmes of the European Commission. Both Sida and EuropeAid have a large number of country offices managing substantial parts of their aid activities. IFAD is a centralised organisation, which closely resembles a development bank. The organisation does not execute programmes itself and does not maintain permanent field presence.

Evaluations at Sida and EuropeAid are carried out both by a central evaluation unit and by the various operational departments and country offices, whereas IFAD has a central evaluation unit based at headquarters. Consequently IFAD has only one management response system. At Sida, the management response system is divided into two parts: one system for evaluations carried out by the central evaluation unit, and one for evaluations carried out by departments and country offices. The management response system of EuropeAid only applies to centralised evaluations.

In order to avoid potentially misleading comparisons, this analysis endeavours to take these differences into account in analysing the respective systems and in drawing conclusions about their effectiveness and relevance.[4]

The evaluation processes and methods used in the case studies were similar, other than some differences that were consequential upon organisational variation. Each case study included a number of data collection methods to allow for triangulation of the results. These included:

•   Focus group interviews with staff from the evaluation offices and management/operational departments. Each group comprised staff from the same department and professional level within the organisations.

•   Individual interviews with key staff involved in developing the management response systems.

•   Individual interviews with relevant stakeholders involved in specific evaluation and response processes, both from within the aid organisations and from partner governments and implementing organisations (where this was possible).

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[4] This evaluation focuses on how aid organisations respond to their own evaluations. Joint evaluations and their corresponding response actions are not assessed. Most evaluations are generally carried out individually (not jointly), and therefore response systems are intended to support the uptake of these evaluations. In omitting responses to joint evaluations, differences between the systems become clearer. However, given the increased importance of harmonisation and alignment according to international agreements such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, this is an area that requires further research.

- Analysis of key documents, such as evaluation reports, response documents and policies.

This synthesis report builds entirely upon the information elicited through the three case studies, and the findings and conclusions of each case study have been verified by each respective organisation. More information about the methods used to collect and analyse data, and about the effects of the respective systems, can be found in the individual case study reports.[5] A reference group has provided comments on the draft reports of both the case studies and the final synthesis report throughout the evaluation process.[6]

2   The management response systems

2.1   Sida

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

The evaluation system at Sida consists of two parts: a decentralised system for evaluations carried out by Sida's operational departments and Swedish embassies; and a centralised system for evaluations commissioned or executed by Sida's Secretariat for Evaluation (UTV). UTV is an independent organisational unit that reports directly to Sida's board of directors[7], which also approves the annual Evaluation Plan and Evaluation Report (Sida 1999:1). UTV evaluations are normally of a thematic or strategic nature, and are frequently undertaken jointly with other donor agencies. Evaluations of the departments and embassies focus on activities within their respective responsibilities (Sida 2008: 3). It is important to keep in mind that the various types of evaluation have different objectives and, that Sida is expected to use these evaluations in different ways, according to the type and focus of the evaluation. Evaluations carried out by UTV usually serve multiple purposes, which will normally include: to facilitate and deepen the discussion about important issues, to improve a new policy (and hence feed directly into decisions) and to hold management accountable. The roles of both project and programme evaluations are primarily to inform decision-making within the operational departments and embassies.

From 2003 to 2006, Sida published 166 evaluations[8]: UTV conducted 25 of these. In addition, UTV also carried out nine evaluations jointly with one or several donors or partner organisations. All completed evaluation reports at Sida are managed by UTV and published in one of Sida's evaluation series.

Figure 1 Type of evaluations and managing unit

Managing unit	Type of evaluation	Number of evaluations completed 2003-2006
UTV	Thematic, strategic and policy	25[9]
Departments and embassies	Project and programme	141
Total		166

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[7] Until January 2008, UTV had an independent status within Sida, reporting directly to the board of directors. UTV was nonetheless subordinate to the Director-General who chaired the board of directors. UTV was also required to follow the same procedures as other departments when applying for annual budget allocation, which to some extent limited its independence. From 1 January 2008, Sida's board of directors was replaced by an advisory board. The main difference is that the advisory board has no decision-making authority, but is rather intended only to provide advice to the director-general. It is too early to assess the full consequences of this change for the evaluation function, but it is clear that it will be impossible for UTV to maintain its independence, as all decisions regarding evaluation are transferred to the director-general.

[8] Reports presented in one of the two series of Sida Evaluations and Sida Studies in Evaluation. Other publications such as Evaluation Newsletters and Working Papers have not been included. Sida Studies in Evaluation consists of both evaluation reports and studies concerned with conceptual and methodological issues.

[9] An additional 13 case studies were published along with the main reports

An important aspect of most evaluations commissioned by UTV is the reference group. A reference group normally consists of Sida staff having a significant interest in the evaluation results, and independent experts. Its role can involve discussing and commenting on the terms of reference for the evaluation team, validating the evaluation questions and discussing and commenting on notes and reports produced. After the completion of an evaluation, the reference group may also contribute to the feedback process, and ensure that the evaluations is discussed, and its findings taken into consideration, within the respective departments.

2.1.1   Sida's management response system

Sida launched its management response system in 1999 as a consequence of the establishment of UTV in 1995.[10] As this report builds on the findings of the evaluation of Sida's management response system that was made in 2005 (Hanberger and Gisselberg 2006), changes made to system after the end of 2005 have not been taken into account. The programme theory for Sida's response system has been reinterpreted for this evaluation to allow for a comparative analysis with IFAD and EuropeAid. This interpretation has been validated by Sida staff. Further, a number of Sida policies have been revisited, and information has been collected from persons well-informed about Sida's management response system.[11]

Sida's management response system is divided into centralised and decentralised subsystems. Irrespective of the level of evaluation, the response process should start with an overall assessment of the relevance, accuracy and usefulness of the evaluation and its findings. Sida should indicate whether it accepts or rejects the recommendations, and provide explanations for the response. Possible implications of the evaluation lessons and how they can be effectively utilised should also be considered (Sida 1998).

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

All evaluations completed by UTV should be submitted directly to the director-general, who delegates responsibility for the follow-up to the chief controller.[12] The chief controller then issues instructions to the relevant departments or embassies, and compiles the responses. UTV has no responsibility for the response process, but is invited to comment on the draft response and action plan before it is presented to Sida's management committee.[13] Sida's director-general then approves the response and action plan, and the board is informed (Sida 1999:6).[14] Implementation of the actions should be verified bi-annually by the director-general (or delegate), and the respective department or embassy should be notified if sufficient actions have not been taken. The chief controller summarises the implementation status of the agreed

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[10] In 1995 Sida was reorganised, resulting in a need for a separate and independent evaluation secretariat. Before 1995 SIDA had a specific evaluation unit, which was part of the planning secretariat.
[11] Useful comments and clarifications were made by Anders Berlin, Bengt Ekman, Ingmar Gustafsson, Joakim Molander and Stefan Molund.
[12] The position of chief controller was replaced by a planning director in 2005.
[13] The management committee consists of all heads of department, and meets once a month.
[14] The board of directors has no decision-making authority regarding the content of the management response; the decision is directly taken by the director-general.

actions and informs the management committee.[15] UTV should regularly review the extent to which the agreed actions are implemented and should be informed about the results of the monitoring process (Sida 1999).

For evaluations undertaken by the operational departments and embassies, the desk officer managing the evaluation is generally responsible for coordinating the response process, and is often also responsible for drafting the response. Heads of department or embassy counsellors are responsible for ensuring that the results of evaluations are taken into consideration in policymaking, and in decisions about ongoing or new activities. The controller of the relevant department or embassy should follow up the implementation of the action plan bi-annually. The administrative procedures for the management response process are summarised in figure 2.[16]

Figure 2 Sida's management response process

Summary of recommendations	Agreed actions	Responsible actor	Period (timetable for implementation)	Follow-up (bi-annually)
Recommendation # 1				
Recommendation # 2				
Recommendation # 3				

Additional activities to incorporate evaluation results into operations and to enhance the use of evaluation results, such as seminars and workshops, may also be arranged by Sida.

2.1.2   Purpose of Sida's management response system

The main purposes of Sida's management response system[17] are to enhance learning and knowledge generation, and to ensure that findings and recommendations of evaluations are appropriately acted upon (Sida 1999: 6; Fallenius 1997: 6; GD 158/98). The policy documents do not elaborate the meaning of "learning", or the critical components it entails. The assessment made in this evaluation takes this unclear definition of "learning" into account.[18] The system is further intended to meet the following intermediate goals (GD 158/98):

1   Sida's position in relation to the evaluation is clarified. The response process forces Sida to assess the evaluation and to clarify whether or not it agrees with the findings and recommendations. For evaluations undertaken by UTV, the response could be important for clarifying Sida's positions on strategic issues.

2   Clear lines of responsibility are created for responding to the evaluation and implementing the agreed actions. By establishing an action plan a point-by-point response to each accepted recommendation is given, specifying responsibilities and deadlines.

3   Accountability is increased. The follow-up of the implementation is intended to hold management accountable for implementing the agreed actions.

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[15] Information provided by Bengt Ekman, 29 April 2008.
[16] The first four columns represent the action plan.
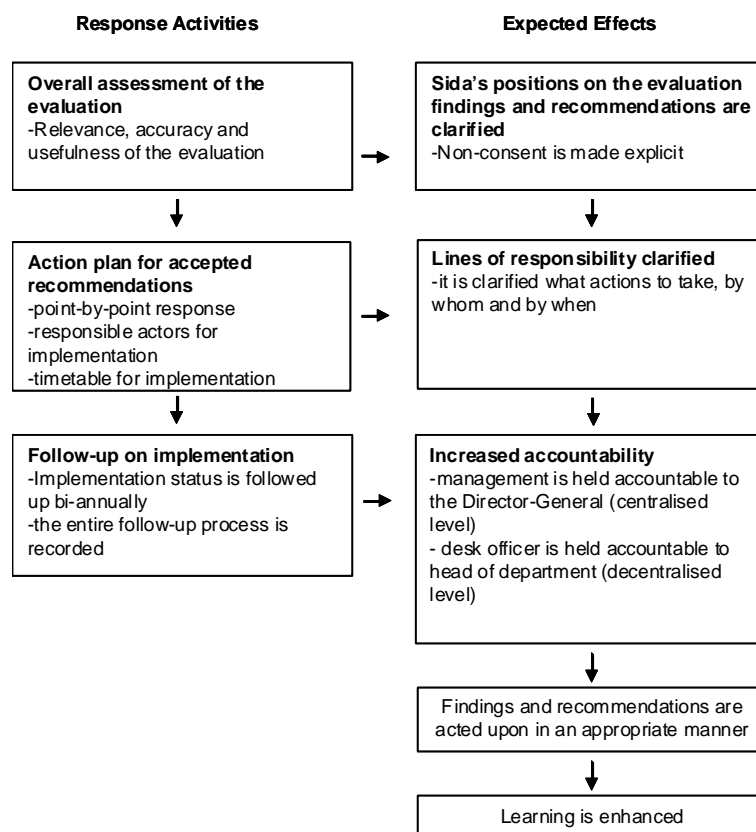[17] The objectives are the same in each of the two systems.
[18] The Sida Evaluation Policy (1999) attributes learning as being one of the main objectives for evaluation activities in Sida, in addition to accountability. The policy does not define "learning", nor assigns what indicators should be used in order to assess whether Sida evaluations contribute to learning.

4   The system should ensure that findings and recommendations are acted upon appropriately.

5   Learning about Sida's activities is enhanced.

The response activities, and the corresponding expected effects, of the system are shown in the programme theory in figure 3 below.[19]

Figure 3 The programme theory of Sida's management response system – activities and expected effects

Response Activities   **Expected Effects**

| **Overall assessment of the evaluation**
-Relevance, accuracy and usefulness of the evaluation | → | **Sida's positions on the evaluation findings and recommendations are clarified**
-Non-consent is made explicit |

Action plan for accepted recommendations
-point-by-point response
-responsible actors for implementation
-timetable for implementation

→ **Lines of responsibility clarified**
-it is clarified what actions to take, by whom and by when

Follow-up on implementation
-Implementation status is followed up bi-annually
-the entire follow-up process is recorded

→ **Increased accountability**
-management is held accountable to the Director-General (centralised level)
- desk officer is held accountable to head of department (decentralised level)

Findings and recommendations are acted upon in an appropriate manner

Learning is enhanced

2.2   EuropeAid

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

The Directorate-Generals for Development, External Relations and EuropeAid (the RELEX family) have established a common Evaluation Unit to evaluate their activities. The Evaluation Unit manages sectoral and thematic evaluations, as well as country and regional level evaluations, while evaluations of Commission activities in partner countries are carried out by the respective country offices. The role of the Evaluation Unit in relation to country level evaluations is limited to providing methodological guidelines. During the period 2003-2006, the Evaluation Unit published 54

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

evaluations; an average of 14 evaluation reports per year. Five of these were carried out jointly with other donor organisations. Figure 4 below outlines the various evaluation types and their corresponding objectives (EuropeAid 23 April 2007).

Figure 4 The types of evaluation and evaluation objectives

Type of evaluation	Evaluation objective	Number of evaluations completed 2003-2006
Country/regional	To modify current programming or improve future programming	31
Thematic/sectoral[20]	To better understand the complexity of the fields concerned and improve EuropeAid operations	23
Total		54

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

2.2.1 The management response system – the Fiche Contradictoire

The management response system of EuropeAid was formally approved in November 2001 by the RELEX Commissioners, and is here referred to as the Fiche Contradictoire (FC) system. The system was designed internally within EuropeAid, and applies only to evaluations carried out by the Evaluation Unit.

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

The evaluation manager at EuropeAid is responsible for the entire evaluation process, for disseminating evaluation findings and recommendations to relevant stakeholders and for ensuring that the recommendations are followed up. At the completion of an

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[20] Thematic or sectoral evaluations could relate to: a theme (e.g.: environment, good governance), a policy area (e.g.: fishing policy) a sector (e.g.: transportation, health) or an aid instrument (e.g.: cooperation agreement) or of a disbursement channel for the assistance (e.g.: support to NGOs) (EuropeAid Co-operation Office 2006).

evaluation, the evaluation manager makes a quality assessment based on a set of pre-defined quality standards.[21]

Figure 5 The Fiche Contradictoire process

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

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

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

2.2.2   Purpose of the Fiche Contradictoire system

The overall purpose of EuropeAid's management response system is "to support the uptake of evaluation lessons and recommendations in new operations and in the decision-making processes" (EuropeAid Co-operation Office 2001:4). To achieve this goal, the various components of the system are intended to achieve the following results:

1   Enhance *awareness* of evaluations within the affected and concerned departments and delegations. It is assumed that this will be achieved when the summary of key information in the first column of the FC matrix is communicated to relevant stakeholders. The reference group is to be informed about the key issues, which will trigger a deliberation process.

2   Create personal and organisational *responsibility*. The second column of the FC template is intended to clarify what actions are to be taken, by whom and by when. This should clarify the lines of responsibility so that the response process is effective.

3   Increase *accountability* for response actions and enhance *transparency*. The third column provides a checklist of agreed actions. It is inherently an accountability

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

component, but it also adds a dimension of transparency to the overall system. The publication of the FC matrix on the website also increases transparency.

These expected effects and corresponding activities are shown in the programme theory, in figure 6, below.

Figure 6 The programme theory of Fiche Contradictoire system – activities and expected effects
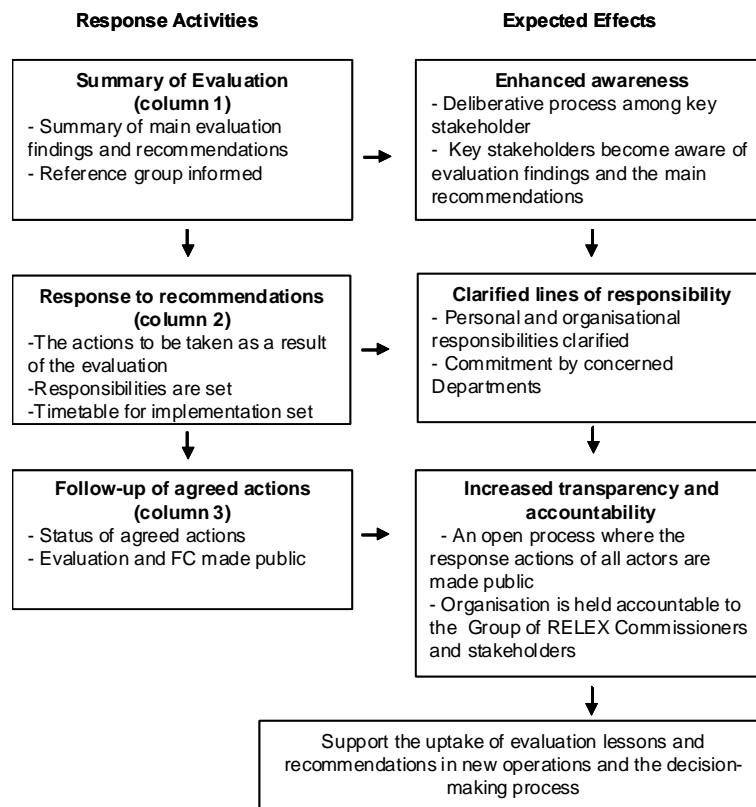
2.3   IFAD

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is a specialist agency of the United Nations that works with governments to develop and finance programmes and projects through low interest loans and grants. In monetary terms, IFAD is a relatively small development actor. In 2006 IFAD provided USD 2.9 billion[22] to 186 programmes and projects.

The Office of Evaluation (OE) is an independent body that reports directly to the executive board of IFAD. Evaluation in IFAD is separated from line management, and the evaluation budget is separate from other budget lines. The OE formulates its work plan without interference from either IFAD management or the president's office. During the period 2003-2006, the OE produced a total of 59 evaluation reports. Of these, 39 were project evaluations, 10 were country programme evaluations, four were corporate level evaluations and six were thematic evaluations. The various types of evaluation and their corresponding objectives are shown in figure 7.

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[22] IFAD Annual Report 2006.

Figure 7 Types of evaluation and evaluation objectives

Type of Evaluation	Evaluation Objective	Number of evaluations 2003-2006
Corporate level evaluation	Assess the effectiveness of IFAD operational policies, processes, and practices, and provide the building blocks for revisiting existing policies or for formulating new ones.	4
Thematic evaluation	Examine specific aspects, themes and processes of IFAD's operations and policies. They are designed to assess the effectiveness of IFAD's processes and approaches and to contribute to increasing the Fund's knowledge about selected issues and subjects.	6
Country programme evaluation	Provide direct and concrete building blocks for revisiting existing or formulating new country strategies.	10
Project evaluations:		39
1 Completion evaluation	To assess project achievements and identify lessons learned. A project completion evaluation is conducted after the finalisation of the project.	
2 Interim evaluation	Justify a second phase and improve the design and implementation of subsequent interventions. Mandatory before the second phase of the project.	
Total		59

2.3.1 The management response system – the ACP

The management response system at IFAD is referred to as the Agreement at Completion Point (ACP). The system, as it is manifested today, was formally introduced in 1999.[23] But it was not until 2003, when the OE was made fully independent, that the ACP system came into full effect. Since then, all evaluations at all levels are processed in the ACP system.[24]

At the completion of an evaluation, the main findings and recommendations are summarised by the OE in an Issues Paper. The Issues Paper is communicated to the stakeholders of the evaluation and then discussed at a workshop. As a result of the workshop, the OE drafts a response – the ACP document. IFAD management and the partner government have the final responsibility for the content of the ACP, and make necessary alterations before approving it. The ACP should:

• document the recommendations that are found acceptable and feasible, and those that are not, and make the former more operational;

• specify the response by the stakeholders (both IFAD and the partner government), detailing how they intend to act upon the recommendations within the framework of an action plan that assigns responsibilities and deadlines; and

• highlight evaluation insights and learning hypotheses to further future discussions and debate.[25]

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[23] New Evaluation Processes, 26/01/2000 Doc. 71502.
[24] IFAD's evaluation system is highly centralised. The Office of Evaluation initiates and commissions all evaluations of IFAD operations.
[25] IFAD Evaluation Policy 2003.

All recommendations agreed in the ACP should be followed up annually by the operational department, and then presented to the executive board in the "President's Report on Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Action" (PRISMA). IFAD management is responsible for producing the PRISMA report. The OE provides comments on the analysis and the content of the report.

The administrative procedures of the ACP process are summarised in matrix format, in figure 8.

Figure 8 The ACP process

Issues Paper (Summary of evaluation findings and recommendations)	Workshop	ACP document (agreed actions)	PRISMA (PMD follow-up of implementation status)
Recommendation # 1			
Recommendation # 2			
Recommendation # 3			

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

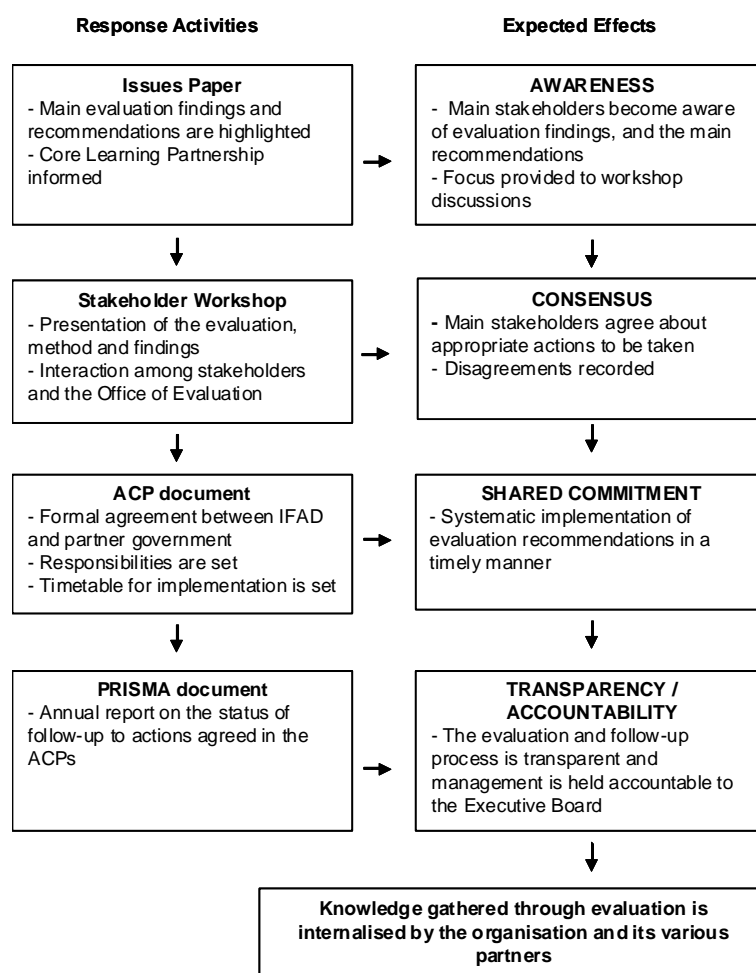### 2.3.2 Purpose of the ACP system

The main purpose of IFAD's management response system is to ensure a process in which knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by the organisation and its various partners. To achieve this, the system is built upon a number of components that are intended to achieve the following:

1 Create *awareness* of the main evaluation recommendations. The Issues Paper – containing the main findings and recommendations – is an instrument intended to create awareness among the key evaluation stakeholders.

2 Lead stakeholders towards reaching a *consensus* about what actions to take. Based on the Issues Paper, the discussions of the final workshop are intended to enable stakeholders to understand both the evaluation findings and recommendations, and the methods used to reach the conclusions, and to provide the opportunity to contribute to the discussions that will determine appropriate actions. Through this process the main stakeholders are assumed to have reached a consensus about appropriate actions.

3 Engage management to commit to and take action. As the ACP document articulates the response to the evaluation and stipulates what actions to take, by whom, and by when, it should trigger a *commitment* by IFAD management and the partner government. Both IFAD management and the government are signatories to the ACP document, and bear full and equal ownership of the agreed actions.

4 Enhance *transparency* of IFAD-funded activities and hold management *accountable* for implementing the agreed response actions. The PRISMA report is the final

step of the ACP system, and provides additional transparency to it. IFAD management is conscious that the PRISMA report will check whether recommendations are being implemented; it therefore knows that its actions will be scrutinised and that it will be held accountable. The follow-up of the agreed actions thus increases accountability, and the publishing of the report imbues the process with additional transparency.

The activities and expected effects of the ACP system are shown in the programme theory in figure 9 below.

Figure 9 The programme theory of the ACP system – activities and expected effects

Response Activities

Expected Effects

Issues Paper
- Main evaluation findings and recommendations are highlighted
- Core Learning Partnership informed

→

AWARENESS
- Main stakeholders become aware of evaluation findings, and the main recommendations
- Focus provided to workshop discussions

↓ ↓

Stakeholder Workshop
- Presentation of the evaluation, method and findings
- Interaction among stakeholders and the Office of Evaluation

→

CONSENSUS
- Main stakeholders agree about appropriate actions to be taken
- Disagreements recorded

↓ ↓

ACP document
- Formal agreement between IFAD and partner government
- Responsibilities are set
- Timetable for implementation is set

→

SHARED COMMITMENT
- Systematic implementation of evaluation recommendations in a timely manner

↓ ↓

PRISMA document
- Annual report on the status of follow-up to actions agreed in the ACPs

→

TRANSPARENCY / ACCOUNTABILITY
- The evaluation and follow-up process is transparent and management is held accountable to the Executive Board

↓

Knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by the organisation and its various partners

2.4   Summary of important features of the management response systems

The three management response systems have some common features, but they also differ in a number of important respects. The table below outlines the features that have been identified as most important in the response systems. A distinction is made between Sida's centralised and decentralised response systems.

Figure 10 Summary of key features of the response systems

	Sida (centralised)	Sida (decentralised)	EuropeAid	IFAD
Average number of evaluations/year	6	36	14	15
Overall purposes of the response system	Ensure that appropriate actions are taken as a response to findings and recommendations. Strengthening of learning	Ensure that appropriate actions are taken as a response to findings and recommendations. Strengthening of learning	Support the uptake of evaluation lessons and recommendations in new operations and the decision-making process	Internalise knowledge gathered through evaluation within the organisation and its various partners
Involvement of stakeholders in discussion of evaluation findings	To some extent; in particular through reference group discussions. Partner representatives are rarely involved in the response process. Dissemination seminars are often organised	To some extent throughout the evaluation process Partner representatives are rarely involved in the response process. 	To some extent; in particular through reference group discussions. Partner representatives are rarely involved in the response process. Dissemination seminars are often organised	Always. All relevant stakeholders, including government partners are invited to discuss the evaluation and response actions at a final workshop
Ability of stakeholders to affect responses taken as a result of the evaluation	In general only a limited number of stakeholders within Sida can affect the response activities	In general only a limited number of stakeholders within Sida can affect the response activities	In general only a limited number of stakeholders within EuropeAid can affect the response activities	All stakeholders that participate in the final workshop are able to express their views on what actions to take in response to an evaluation
Respondent to the evaluation findings	Relevant department or embassy at Sida (coordinated by the Chief Controller). Partners are not requested to respond to recommendations directed to them	Relevant department or embassy at Sida. In general the same department that initiates the evaluation. Partners are not requested to respond to recommendations directed to them	Relevant department (coordinated by the evaluation unit) Partners are not requested to respond to recommendations directed towards them	IFAD management department and the partner government of the borrowing country responds to recommendations directed to the respective party.
Content of action plan (or the equivalent of an action plan)	The action plan states agreed response actions, responsibilities and timeframe for implementation	The action plan states agreed response actions, responsibilities and timeframe for implementation	The second column of the fiche contradictoire states agreed actions, responsibilities and timeframe for implementation	Parts of the ACP-document states agreed actions, responsibilities and timeframe for implementation (for both IFAD and the partner government)
Follow-up tool	Yes. Director General is responsible for bi-annual follow-up.	Yes. Head of department or embassy councillor is responsible for bi-annual follow-up	Yes. Head of unit is responsible for annual follow-up	Yes. The management department is responsible for annual follow-up

	Sida (centralised)	Sida (decentralised)	EuropeAid	IFAD
Documentation of the follow-up	Not mandatory	Not mandatory	The third column of the fiche contradictoire	The PRISMA report (more substantive than a mere follow-up, for details see 3.3.1)
Receiver of information on follow-up	The management committee and UTV are informed about implementation status (not able to act on implementation failures)	No receiver	The evaluation unit is informed about implementation status (not able to act on implementation failures)	The Executive Board is informed about the results and able to act on implementation failures
Publication of response document	Not mandatory	Not mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory (attached to the evaluation report)
Responsibility for supervising the response process	Office of the Director General/ Chief Controller	Head of department/embassy councillor/ departmental controllers	Evaluation Unit	Office of evaluation + Management Department (for different parts of the response process)
Participatory elements in the response process	Internal within Sida, at headquarter level	Not on a formalised basis	Internal within EuropeAid, at headquarter level	Both IFAD and the partner government are involved in the response process

3   Effectiveness and relevance of the systems

Below is an assessment of the three management response systems, judged against the evaluation criteria of effectiveness and relevance, as defined in chapter 1.3 of this report. The overall assessment of effectiveness takes actual implementation into consideration as well as the extent to which the intermediate and overarching objectives have been achieved. The relevance criterion assesses the extent to which the management response system is adapted to suit the objectives and priorities of the organisation. The relevance of the three systems is also discussed in relation to both evaluation use and the various roles that a management response system could play as discussed in chapter 1.2.

The empirical evidence from which this assessment is made is documented in the three separate case studies of the organisations. The assessment below is a synthesis of the findings from these reports and all references are documented in each respective case study.

3.1   Sida

3.1.1   Implementation of the system – effectiveness at the output level

For evaluations commissioned by UTV from 1999 to 2005, the response process followed the administrative procedures well. Over 90 per cent of the evaluations had a corresponding response, and most included an action plan. However the response documents were not published or filed to the same extent as evaluation reports were. UTV-initiated evaluations were of a relatively high quality, and time was allocated to discussing the findings.[26]

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

The response documents prepared by operational departments and embassies provide limited information about how Sida assesses the relevance, accuracy and usefulness of evaluations. In contrast, almost all responses contain a detailed action plan about how

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[26] Further information about the conduct and results of the evaluation quality assessment is available in the case study of the Sida Management Response System; (Hanberger and Gisselberg 2006).

the accepted recommendations are to be implemented, although they do not always indicate who is responsible for the follow-up.

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

There appear to be several reasons for the slow and partial implementation of the decentralised system. The most important is the lack of commitment from management. Compared to other administrative procedures at Sida, the management response system receives little attention, and managers endeavour to minimise the added workload it creates. A second explanation is that the guidelines and regulations regarding the administrative procedures in the system are perceived as being indistinct and lacking in clarity. The formal status of the system was formally clarified by the director-general (Sida 1998; GD 158:98) but the administrative procedures have not been disseminated to Sida staff to a sufficient extent. This perceived lack of clarity is likely to have reduced the number of responses. High staff turnover and high numbers of inexperienced staff could also have impacted upon implementation. Moreover, no specific unit has the responsibility of publishing and documenting management response documents – a different situation than exists with evaluation. These procedures are handled individually by each department, which possibly limits the extent to which responses are documented and filed.

3.1.2   Achievement of objectives – effectiveness at the outcome level

The objectives of Sida's management response systems (as elaborated in the programme theory) are achieved to a varying extent:

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

Clear lines of responsibility for how to respond: The responses to evaluations carried out by UTV usually include detailed action plans that identify specifically what actions are to be taken, by whom, and by when. The Office of the Director General is responsible for following up implementation, which is usually done.

For the decentralised response system, insufficient guidelines about the administrative procedures creates confusion among staff about who is responsible for writing the response and indeed whether or not the system is compulsory. Controllers at the departments are unaware of the requirements of their roles in respect of management response, and at what stage of the process their participation is relevant. The majority of action plans identify deadlines for implementation and clarify responsibilities. For the relatively large number of evaluations where no response is given, no responsi-

bilities are clarified. Hence, responsibilities for the decentralised system are not sufficiently clarified – neither those relating to the system itself, nor those for individual action plans.

Enhanced accountability: Basic mechanisms exist for increasing accountability in relation to evaluation response actions, through the follow-up mechanism: in particular the cross-checking of the extent to which the action plans are implemented. This is done in most cases for evaluations carried out by UTV. Since the Office of the Director-General is responsible for the follow-up, the concerned departments usually pay attention to the implementation of the actions. Accountability is also enhanced since the chief controller reports implementation statuses to the management committee. Although the management committee is not able to act on implementation failures and cannot impose sanctions if decided actions are not implemented, the relevant head of department is held accountable to a greater extent through this procedure.

For evaluations carried out by the departments and embassies, action plans are not routinely followed up and used. Management does not request response documents, and response documents are not recorded and filed properly, which reduces both the extent to which they can be followed up and the accountability of the organisation for acting on evaluation results.

Findings and recommendations are acted upon in an appropriate manner: The centralised management response system ensures that evaluation results are at least considered, since most evaluations are followed up as stipulated. However, the system has only to some extent been integrated with existing decision-making forums. The evaluations and the draft responses to these are presented to the management committee. The management response is only approved by the director-general after it is discussed by the committee. Although this process should affect the actions to be taken, Sida managers usually devote little time to reading and discussing the response. Often, no major changes are made to draft responses. Other than the management committee, there are no explicit channels for using evaluation findings in decision-making. Responses are only rarely used in forums where important decisions are made, and there are no requirements that new policies or strategies be based on relevant evaluations.

Due to implementation failures of the decentralised system, the system cannot guarantee that all findings and recommendations are acted upon. Nonetheless, decentralised evaluations usually feed into decision-making in a more direct way. Mid-term evaluations, for example, provide information to be used in determining the continuation of a project or programme. Other evaluations may be undertaken before prolonging a project or designing a new one. However, this direct use of evaluations is rather an effect of the type of evaluation carried out than as a result of the management response system. Even in the absence of a formal follow-up process, these types of evaluations are likely to be used. The formal link from evaluations to decision-making that the management response system provides could still be useful in ensuring that all findings are considered, rather than just those that suit management purposes and agendas.

Enhanced learning and a deepened understanding: It is highly problematic to accurately assess the extent to which the management response system "contributes to learning", given that this notion is vague and has not been adequately defined by Sida. The

assessment of Sida's management response system only briefly notes that the system has had a limited impact on learning in a more general sense. Evaluations carried out by UTV are of relatively high quality, and some time (although often not sufficient time) is allocated to discussing the findings. These evaluations are sometimes subject to a broad discussion about issues of strategic relevance, and some evaluations receive attention from a large number of stakeholders. Most evaluation processes have a reference group attached, which could facilitate discussions and learning. However, the contribution of the management response to learning is marginal.

Sida's decentralised response system does not incorporate the most fundamental conditions necessary to enhance learning in a conceptual sense.[27] Firstly, the evaluations do not fulfil minimum quality requirements.[28] The case study indicates that approximately half of the sample of evaluations from Sida's departments and embassies were of poor or inadequate quality.[29] The weakest section of the evaluations is invariably the analysis and methodology; the conclusions and recommendations are generally of higher quality. Secondly, staff are rarely given sufficient time to reflect upon the evaluation findings and recommendations. Often the time devoted by staff members is limited, and only a relatively few people are involved in the process. The response documents may also contain distorted or incomplete information; the limited information contained in the responses renders them inadequate for sharing knowledge from the evaluation to Sida staff.

3.1.3 Relevance of the system

Most objectives of Sida's centralised system are valid and consistent with organisational priorities. It is difficult to assess the relevance of Sida's system in relation to the overarching objective of enhancing learning, as the concept of "learning" has not been properly defined. In the context of the management response system, learning is problematic, and the extent to which management response systems can contribute to this objective is probably marginal. Evaluations carried out by UTV may in some cases be used to gain a deeper understanding of Sida's activities, but this is generally not an effect of the management response system itself. Engendering conceptual learning depends upon the evaluation systems and the types of evaluations carried out. Consequently, if learning is defined in this general and conceptual sense, the overall objective seems to be unrealistic, given Sida's resources and the set of response activities that the organisation uses. A well-designed management response system that is effectively implemented is likely to improve the activities of the organisation. Nonetheless, there remain are other factors outside the response system that will affect learning from evaluation.

As shown in previous sections, the activities and outputs of the system are consistent with the immediate objectives of clarifying Sida's position on the evaluation, to clarify responsibilities and to enhance accountability for following up evaluation findings. The accountability function could be made more relevant if the responses were ade-

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[27] There is limited research available about how a management response system should be designed in order to facilitate learning or promote a conceptual use of evaluation. The factors listed in this section can be considered as a minimum, although they are not considered sufficient.

[28] The review of ten evaluations in Hanberger and Gisselberg (2006) indicated considerable flaws in evaluation quality, as assessed against the evaluation quality instrument established for the review (Hanberger and Gisselberg 2006: Annex 6, table a).

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

quately documented and made public, or filed to a greater extent. Accountability could also be enhanced if the system could guarantee that the relevant head of department act upon implementation failures. Furthermore, it could be argued that implementation failures should be discussed transparently, in a wider context, with involved stakeholders.

The management response system is not fully integrated within decision-making about future policies and activities, which limits the relevance of the system in assuring that evaluation results are used in the policymaking process. Evaluation findings were discussed and communicated to the management committee, but no decisions were taken at these meetings. Furthermore, new policies or strategies do not have to explicitly refer to evaluations. This is mainly explained by the structure of the entire evaluation system, and by the types of evaluations that are undertaken. Since the evaluations conducted by UTV have a broader scope, or are of more strategic relevance, their integration with ongoing or future decision-making processes is often indirect.

The objectives of Sida's decentralised management response system are valid, although the primary objective of "enhanced learning" seems unrealistic at this level (in the absence of an adequate definition). As an effect of unrealistic goals and implementation failures, the activities of the decentralised system are not consistent with the attainment of its objectives and expected effects. The system has not become sufficiently institutionalised, and its effective implementation depends more upon the use of experienced staff and interested management than on the operation of the system itself. With the limited number of responses given, and inadequate follow-up by the respective controllers, the system cannot ensure that evaluations are acted upon at all times.

Since Sida aims to incorporate partners in all of its activities it is surprising that neither the centralised nor the decentralised systems engage partner countries or cooperating organisations to a greater extent. The response system is designed for evaluations initiated and monitored by UTV, or by Sida's operational departments or embassies. Many evaluations, in particular those commissioned by operational departments and embassies, assess the effects of Sida's support that is implemented by cooperating organisations, and recommendations are directed towards these. Still, partners are rarely involved in the follow-up discussions, and the responses are often drafted by Sida staff, even where the recommendations are directed towards a partner organisation. Hence, the relevance of Sida's response systems to promote mutual accountability and responsibility is limited.

3.2 EuropeAid

3.2.1 Implementation of the system – effectiveness at the output level

The response system at EuropeAid has been effectively implemented, in the sense that most evaluations completed in the period 2002-2004 have corresponding FCs.[30] This means that all columns in the matrix have been completed and the agreed

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[30] Further information is available in the case study of the EuropeAid Management Response System; (Hanberger and Bandstein 2008).

actions in response to the evaluations have been followed up and approved. The follow-up items for the agreed actions in the third column have not yet been taken for all evaluations in 2005, and almost none have been taken for 2006. Since the follow-up of the agreed actions usually takes longer than the suggested time of one year it appears that the designated time frame is unrealistic. Aside from the delays in follow-up, the utilisation of the system follows the stipulated procedures.

3.2.2   Achievement of objectives – effectiveness at the outcome level

A number of conclusions can be drawn about how well the objectives of the management response system (as elaborated in the programme theory) are achieved:

Awareness: The management response system incorporates the necessary components to enhance the awareness of evaluations. A summary of the main findings and recommendations is provided for almost all evaluations, which is used as a basis for the discussions that determine the response. The reference groups are often active in the response process, although high turnover among members of the reference groups reduces the dissemination of evaluation findings to the various departments and delegations. Most evaluations are also discussed at a dissemination seminar, which further increases awareness among the departments and delegations.

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

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

Enhanced transparency / accountability: As all evaluations and FC documents are published externally, the system incorporates clear elements of transparency, which contributes to the legitimacy and accountability of response activities. Notwithstanding that the system compels management to respond to evaluations, the accountability feature is deficient to some extent. The identification of those responsible for following up the implemented actions is rarely explicit. Further, there are no sanctions if decided actions are not implemented. With no clear lines of responsibility, and a system that will not sanction non-commitment, the system lacks effective incentives to implement a recommendation.

Support the uptake of evaluation lessons and recommendations in new operations and the decision-making process: It is uncertain whether the overarching goal of the system is met. A number of weaknesses associated with the FC system render this goal difficult to achieve. The system is not calibrated such that the policy and programming cycles correspond. One example of this poor calibration is the inordinate passage of time between the completion of the evaluation and the response. This manifests in a lack of interest in the evaluation when follow-up actions are formulated.

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

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

3.2.3 Relevance of the system

The objectives of the FC system are valid and largely consistent with EuropeAid's overall priorities. Most activities and outputs of the system are consistent with the attainment of its objectives. EuropeAid's management response system strongly emphasises the accountability purpose, and it does provide a structure to the latter part of the evaluation process. The FC system adds legitimacy to the evaluation process and ensures that evaluations are read and are given some kind of formal response. The system needs to be developed in terms of designating roles and responsibilities more clearly in order to further enhance the relevance of the accountability function.

The extent to which the FC system supports the uptake of evaluation lessons is less clear. The system is not calibrated such that the policy and programming cycles correspond, which could limit the use of evaluation results (at least in an instrumental way). To make the FC system more relevant in this respect, the entire evaluation system should be assessed and potentially revised.

No explicit elements of the FC system are aimed at facilitating a deeper understanding of the evaluation results; on the whole the system is very instrumental. Since a reference group is attached to each evaluation process, it is possible that the evaluation results are discussed and the response process may contribute to a deliberation process. High staff turnover and, as this evaluation has shown, often limited interest in the follow-up process by reference group members, reduces the relevance of the system in engendering a deeper understanding among concerned staff members. Since the FC system does not engage all concerned departments, delegations or partner countries, its relevance to the organisation is further reduced.

3.3 IFAD

3.3.1 Implementation of the system – effectiveness at the output level

The response system at IFAD has been effectively implemented, in that a CLP is created for all evaluations, and each evaluation process concludes with a final stakeholder workshop, in which the main evaluation findings and recommendations are discussed.[31] All completed evaluations in the period 2003-2006 have an ACP document attached, and have been published on the IFAD public website in

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[31] Further information is available in the case study of the IFAD Management Response System; (Bandstein and Hedblom 2008).

accordance with IFAD's disclosure policy. The implementation statuses of agreed actions of the ACPs from 2002 onwards have been followed up in PRISMA reports.[32]

The content of the PRISMA reports has been substantially developed since this reporting was introduced. The first PRISMA provided only a short overview of completed evaluations and a limited analysis of how well the recommendations had been implemented. Subsequent reports have extended the analysis, and include a detailed follow-up of the ACP actions. ACP actions are now synthesised and classified according to: i) level, ii) nature, and iii) theme.[33] The thematic review in particular has become more detailed in recent PRISMA reports. In 2006, implementation status categories were introduced to further improve the follow-up. When assessed against these, 74 per cent of all agreed actions had been fully implemented, and 21 per cent were awaiting a response. The information provided in the PRISMA 2007 was even more detailed. A total of 166 actions, or about 60 per cent, are reported to have been fully incorporated into new operations, strategies and policies. This ratio is higher in the case of actions applicable to the IFAD corporate level and slightly lower in the case of recommendations to IFAD at the country level.[34] The ACPs resulting from this group of evaluations did not include recommendations that were not accepted by stakeholders. The analysis in the earlier PRISMA reports is less rigorous and cannot provide the above information regarding implementation rates (PRISMA 2004-2007).

In recent years, the PRISMA has paid less attention to actions of an operational nature, since such actions provide little insight of broader application in an organisational context. The present purpose of the PRISMA is not only to monitor and report on actions taken in response to ACP actions, but also to identify areas in which systemic IFAD-wide responses are still needed (PRISMA 2004-2007).

3.3.2   Achievement of objectives – effectiveness at the outcome level

An essential prerequisite for meeting the objectives of IFAD's management response system is that stakeholders participate actively and contribute to the evaluation and response processes. Whether or not this happens depends mainly upon the individual's interest and stake in the evaluated project and programme, but also upon the extent to which the OE allows for stakeholders to contribute. The empirical evidence indicates that those directly responsible for a project or programme are generally more active CLP members. Higher level evaluations, such as corporate or country level evaluations, attract more attention than project level evaluations. In practice, the involvement of IFAD staff is often restricted to comments on the evaluation methodology and draft evaluation reports, and participation in the final workshop. Depending on the substance of the comments provided, and on the workshop discussions, this level of involvement could be sufficient for achieving system objectives. Involvement of partner government representatives is however more limited, and usually only involves participation in the final workshop. Furthermore, CLP members have little involvement in the process of formulating the actual actions to be taken in response to the evaluation – the ACP document. The main explanation

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[32] The first PRISMA report was submitted to the executive board in August 2004. PRISMA 2004: 1
[33] i) Level (i.e. whether it is a project- or country-level action, or whether the recommendation is directed to government or IFAD); ii) nature (i.e. whether it is an operational or strategic recommendation); iii) theme (for example, a recommendation that concerns gender, rural finance, decentralisation, and so on).
[34] PRISMA 2007.

for this inactive CLP is its members' limited interests and stakes in the evaluated project or programme. It can also be explained by a lack of willingness on behalf of the OE to transfer responsibilities to the CLP to steer the evaluation and response processes. It is evidently difficult to assemble a CLP that actively participates in the entire evaluation and response processes, rather than just in selected parts, such as the final workshop; this undermines the extent to which system objectives can be achieved.

Based on the empirical findings, a number of conclusions can be made about how well the objectives of the management response system, as elaborated in the programme theory, are achieved.

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

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

This evaluation has shown that, due to the fact that stakeholders – in particular government representatives – do not participate actively during the evaluation process, consensus in rendered more difficult to achieve. CLPs comprising only IFAD representatives, such as the corporate level evaluation of direct supervision, are usually more active and effective in creating consensus.

Shared commitment: Commitment to making evaluation recommendations actionable and to implementing them is formally achieved when IFAD management and the partner government sign the ACP document. Although this is an important step, the formal agreement does not guarantee commitment by all parties. As mentioned above, stakeholders may not always participate and contribute to the evaluation process as stipulated; partner representatives show a particular tendency to minimal participation.

In order to create commitment, it is also important that senior level staff with decision-making authority, from both IFAD and the partner government, participate in the workshop and in the formulation of ACP actions. The OE usually ensures that relevant staff members and partner government representatives take part in workshop discussions, but the ACP system has not entirely succeeded in engaging them in the formulation process. The OE drafts the ACP document but both IFAD management and the partner government are free to suggest alterations and to disagree with the

actions. In practice, however, the draft ACPs receive few comments and rarely include any clear statements of disagreement.

Notwithstanding that the ACP documents are signed, and that the parties have formally agreed to carry out the actions, there is evidence that some ACP actions may be beyond the control of either IFAD or the partner governments. These cases demonstrate that the parties have not taken responsibility for ensuring that the actions can be implemented. It is also an indication that the OE sometimes has too much control over the formulation of what actions to take. The level of commitment could increases if the OE ceded responsibility for formulating the ACP to the two main stakeholders.

Enhanced transparency/accountability. The objective of enhancing transparency and holding IFAD management accountable for acting on evaluation results is largely fulfilled. There is a high degree of transparency since the ACP document is published together with the evaluation report, and the agreed actions are made public. The objectives of the system are clear, as are its deliverables and the responsibilities of the actors that are involved, which further contributes to a transparent response system.

An effective accountability mechanism – the PRISMA – is in place to ensure the accountability of IFAD management, in that the executive board can easily cross-check the extent to which evaluation recommendations are acted upon. The introduction of the PRISMA has resulted in more attention given to evaluation recommendations by IFAD's operational department, and in the increased involvement of that department in the development of ACPs. The accountability of IFAD management to the executive board has been strengthened with the introduction of the PRISMA. The PRISMA requires managers to explain how the ACP actions were implemented, or to explain, and be accountable for, why they were not. Country programme managers must take the actions into account in designing new projects. If they do not, they must answer to the board and explain why the design deviated from the recommendations.

The performance of the partner government is not explicitly followed up through the PRISMA[35], and partner governments are not held accountable to the same extent as IFAD management. Informally, country programme managers are responsible for supervising the implementation of actions directed to partner governments. The ACP system is not as effective in enhancing accountability for implementing ACP actions of the partner government as of IFAD management.

Knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by IFAD and its various partners. The overall objective of the ACP system – to ensure that evaluation results are acted upon and taken into consideration in the decision-making process – is achieved to a certain extent, as evaluation has been brought closer to the decision-making bodies within IFAD. Evaluation recommendations directed towards IFAD need to be considered by management when developing strategic documents such as corporate policies or country strategies. Considering the high percentage of ACP actions that are implemented, as shown by the PRISMA, there is considerable evidence that evaluation results usually feed into new decisions.

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[35] Implementation is followed-up through non-project activities.

However, with regard to the partner government, the ACP system cannot ensure that evaluation knowledge is taken into consideration. Partner counterparts show less interest in the evaluation, and their participation in the evaluation and response processes is limited. Consequently, there is often a low commitment to implementing the agreed actions. This is exacerbated by the fact that the PRISMA does not explicitly follow up the implementation of actions directed towards the partner government. With limited commitment and no tool for ensuring effective implementation, the extent to which the ACP system can ensure that knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by the partner is limited.

There are elements of the ACP system that could potentially contribute to learning in a more general way, such as stakeholder involvement and the joint discussions about evaluation results. A majority of the stakeholders value the platforms for discussions that the workshops do offer. They also agree that evaluations rarely contribute to new knowledge, but rather tend to confirm what is already known. Nonetheless, individual country programme managers perceive that evaluations – and the ACP system itself – give them confidence when formulating new country strategies.

3.3.3   Relevance of the system

The objectives and structure of the ACP system are relevant to IFAD and its priorities. The various intermediate goals of the system are logical and coherent, and should contribute to the overarching goal of internalising evaluation findings in future programming. However, the ACP system is only relevant in cases where management and the partner government fully commit to and participate in the response process. If there are inadequate discussions when actions are being formulated, the ACP loses legitimacy and becomes less relevant to the actors in the process.

The ACP system plays a strong role as a mechanism to enhance accountability for the response activities, and in assuring that evaluations are given a formal response. The PRISMA greatly contributes to accountability of IFAD management. It is less effective in holding partner governments accountable. Given the emphasis of IFAD's system on engaging partners and making them committed to implementing the agreed actions, the relevance of the accountability function could be further improved if the follow-up tool assessed agreed response actions directed to partners to a greater extent.

The ACP system also provides a direct link from the evaluation findings and recommendations to decisions about how to improve the reviewed intervention. It facilitates the internalisation within IFAD of knowledge gathered through evaluations, by bringing evaluation closer to the decision-making process. This is achieved through the requirement of a formal response prior to the making of any decisions based on an evaluation, such as project extensions or the formulation of a new strategy or policy. The system is clearly calibrated so that the policy and programming cycles of IFAD correspond, and ensures that evaluations are used when formulating new projects, programmes or policies.

Although the ambition of including partners in the response process limits the extent to which objectives can be reached, it is a necessary step to making the system relevant to the overall objectives of IFAD.

3.4   Summary – effectiveness

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

The system at Sida, in addition to these broad objectives, aims to enhance learning (although the organisation does not define what type of learning is to be enhanced) and to improve knowledge of the reviewed activities. The objective of improved learning is less explicit with the two other organisations. All three organisations consider accountability for following up evaluations and transparency important objectives for a successful response system. Sida acknowledges transparency as an important goal, but places more emphasis on clarifying Sida's position in relation to the evaluation findings. IFAD's system pays considerable attention to increasing the commitment by management and in achieving the consensus of all concerned stakeholders. EuropeAid and IFAD consider enhanced awareness necessary for achieving the subsequent objectives.

The two subsystems that constitute Sida's management response system achieve their objectives to different extents. The centralised management response system is reasonably effective, although its primary purpose has been difficult to assess (at both levels) due to the lack of a clear definition of the contents of learning.

Sida's positions in relation to evaluation findings are usually clarified, as are the allocation of responsibilities for response. Accountability for implementing the response actions is strengthened through the bi-annual follow-up of implementation status by the Office of the Director General. However, there are limitations in the accountability function. The follow-up is poorly documented and filed, and there are no corrective measures for non-compliance. There are no procedures for ensuring that the follow-up is transparent, through public accessibility. In addition, the system has not been well integrated in decision-making processes, since the evaluations conducted have a broader scope, or are of more strategic relevance. Nonetheless, the system has been implemented relatively effectively, which is attributable to dedicated staff and a requirement for a systematic follow-up that prevents evaluations from being shelved and forgotten.

Sida's decentralised management response system meets very few of its objectives, due to implementation failures and goals that appear unrealistic – in particular the goal of enhanced learning.

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

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

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

The ACP process has been implemented effectively in terms of its outputs and, if only applied to IFAD, it achieves most of its objectives at the outcome level. The ambition to include partners has hindered the achievement of consensus over what actions to take in response to an evaluation, and of engendering the commitment of both IFAD and partner governments to carrying out the actions. There is often not sufficient time allocated to finding agreement about what actions to take, which hinders the achievement of real agreement about how to proceed, in particular since stakeholders invariably have different backgrounds and interests. There are fewer incentives for the partner government to carry out the actions, and consequently the partner government is invariably less committed than IFAD's programme management department. For both IFAD and the partner government, commitment also depends upon the extent to which they are able to affect the actions to take. There have been cases in which the evaluation unit has left insufficient latitude for IFAD management and the partner government to formulate their responses, which has reduced the relevance of the actions and hence the commitment of the partners. Commitment also depends upon the extent to which stakeholders participate in the evaluation. Involvement of members of the CLP is usually restricted to commenting on the draft report and Issues Paper, and attendance at the final workshop. Higher stakeholder participation usually engenders greater commitment.

IFAD's management response system ensures that all stakeholders are aware of the main evaluation findings and recommendations, through the Issues Paper and the subsequent discussions at a final workshop.

IFAD has a robust follow-up tool, in the annual report on the implementation of the agreed actions – the PRISMA – of actions directed towards IFAD management. The PRISMA greatly contributes to accountability of IFAD management, but is less effective in holding the partner government accountable. The transparency of the entire process is achieved through the publishing of the follow-up as an attachment

to the evaluation and through the PRISMA report. The system has ensured that evaluation results are acted upon and given due consideration, by bringing evaluation closer to the decision-making process. This is achieved through the requirement of a formal response prior to the making of any decisions based on an evaluation, such as project extensions or the formulation of new strategies or policies. Undoubtedly, this has raised the attention given to evaluation within the organisation. The participatory process and the focus on joint agreement are other ways of creating a learning-conducive environment. However, the ACP system only marginally contributes to increasing the use of evaluation results by partner governments.

3.5   Summary – relevance

This evaluation shows that most objectives of the three management response systems are valid and logical. However, it is overly optimistic to assume that a follow-up system of itself could contribute to substantial learning in a conceptual sense, as learning depends upon the entire evaluation system and the organisational context, such as issues related to staffing and other tools for organisational learning. Although it may be desirable for all responses to contribute to learning and a conceptual understanding, this may not be feasible given the evaluation system and types of evaluations carried out presently.

The objectives of IFAD's system explicitly emphasise the importance of including partner countries or cooperating organisations in the response process. Clearly, this increases the relevance of the objectives in relation to the overall priorities of the organisation.

The three management response systems are designed and primarily used in an instrumental way; that is, they aim to improve the uptake of evaluation lessons and to assure that evaluations are acted upon. In particular IFAD's management response system is constructed to ensure that the response and policymaking processes correspond. Each type of evaluation is expected to clearly contribute to the formulation of a project, a strategy or a policy.

The activities and outputs of the IFAD and EuropeAid management response systems are reasonably consistent with the overarching objectives of the respective systems. It is less apparent whether the activities of Sida's system, at both levels, are relevant, given that its management response system aims to enhance learning. In order to make the response system more consistent with this objective it is crucial that learning is defined and that it becomes more acknowledged as a learning tool within the organisation.

Of the three organisations, only IFAD engages partner countries and cooperation organisations in its response activities. This makes the management response system more relevant to the organisation and its working methods than is the case for the other two organisations' systems.

4   Conclusions

This evaluation's primary conclusion is that both the relevance and the effectiveness of a management response system greatly dependent upon how well the system is adapted to the organisational context. In particular, it is important to consider the evaluation system and the types of evaluation undertaken by an organisation when formulating the objectives or designing the activities of the management response system.

Aid organisations engage in a broad range of evaluation activities and carry out a large number of different types of evaluation. The objectives and the use of the different types of evaluation vary greatly, and it is neither appropriate nor feasible that all evaluations are responded to in the same manner. According to the objectives and foci of evaluations, they are expected to be used at different levels and in different ways within an organisation – and should ideally also be used by partners. Many of the evaluations conducted by Sida's operational departments, and the project evaluations carried out by IFAD, are used directly when designing subsequent activities. Hence, the primary role of a management response system in this context is to ensure that the evaluation findings and recommendations are properly considered and incorporated into the design of new activities. Country programme evaluations undertaken by both IFAD and EuropeAid are used in a direct way, but at a higher policy level, and they aim to improve future country strategies and programming. Evaluations of a thematic, strategic or policy nature aim to improve understanding of complex issues, and to generate insights about the particular area.

Another important aspect is how well the organisations have managed to coordinate the response systems with the overall policymaking structures of the respective organisation. At EuropeAid the existing forums were not extensively used when following up evaluation findings, which clearly reduced the extent to which evaluation results were used in decision-making by the organisation. The IFAD evaluation policy clearly explains how each evaluation should be used; the policy has consequently facilitated the process of institutionalising the management response system. Each evaluation type is intended to feed into decisions about either a project, a strategy or a policy. The evaluations carried out by Sida's departments and embassies are often used in decision-making due to the types of evaluations carried out at this level, such as mid-term assessments. In the case of Sida's centralised evaluations, there is a lack of clarity about how evaluations are intended to be used and what processes they should feed into.

This evaluation has shown that the manner in which a management response system is launched, and the extent to which responsibilities are clarified, are decisive in determining its effectiveness. At Sida limited knowledge about the administrative routines and procedures, and a lack of accountability, resulted in poor implementation and limited effectiveness. It is crucial that management clearly indicates its intentions with the system and demonstrates that it is committed to seeing the system

implemented. It is important that adequate guidelines and regulations exist, which specify all steps to be taken in the response process, and that the organisation ensures that they are adhered to by staff members.

The implementation of the system activities was shown to be more effective when the responsibility for supervising the response process was delegated to a central organisational body. In particular, the extent to which the responses were documented and made public increased when one unit was responsible for the process. At EuropeAid, for example, the evaluation unit ensures that all evaluations receive a response (but not the type of response), and that the response document is published.

One of the most important components of a management response system is unarguably the follow-up tool. How the follow-up tool is designed and used by the organisation affects the achievement of system objectives. The introduction of the PRISMA at IFAD has substantially increased the extent to which recommendations have been translated into actions. The increased level of transparency that the PRISMA has contributed has proven beneficial for evaluation use and in introducing an incentive aspect, encouraging subsequent action by managers. At EuropeAid the documentation of the implementation of response activities in the third column of the fiche contradictoire matrix increased accountability and prevented evaluation results from being shelved.

This evaluation has found that it is essential not only to gather information through a follow-up tool, but that the information that is generated about the implementation status of follow-up is forwarded to a designated receiver. Furthermore it is important that this receiver has the both the authority and capacity to act upon implementation failures and to verify that management, or in some cases the partner government, has taken all agreed actions. This verification may be seen as ultimately hypothetical, as it will always be problematic to verify what is happening at the country level. Nonetheless, it increases accountability and has proven to be an effective tool to ensure implementation. At IFAD, for example, the executive board receives information about the follow-up and can cross-check the extent to which the recommendations have been taken into account in country strategies. If a country programme manager does not acknowledge the actions agreed to be taken in response to the evaluation in a draft strategy presented to the board, the board is likely to reject the strategy. EuropeAid reports information about the follow-up to the commissioners, which may act on implementation failures. At Sida information about implementation status of the follow-up to centralised evaluations is reported to the management committee, but this committee can only indirectly act upon implementation failures. Aside from the head of department or embassy councillor there is no receiver of information about the follow-up to decentralised responses.

To improve on relevance and effectiveness it is important that all concerned actors are entitled to respond to the evaluation results. Evaluation recommendations are directed not only towards the aid organisations but also frequently towards partners, for them to implement. However, the normal procedure is that the aid organisations themselves draft the response to these recommendations (which was found to be the situation for Sida and EuropeAid). Both effectiveness and relevance are compromised if partner country stakeholders are not involved in the response processes. However,

real consent among stakeholders about actions to take in response to an evaluation can only be engendered if the stakeholders assume an active role and have adequate knowledge about the evaluation. Engendering commitment to carry out agreed actions is not likely to be successful without a participatory process between all stakeholders. These elements are promoted further in cases where stakeholders are involved systematically in both the evaluation and response processes.

Finally, this evaluation concludes that the formulation of relevant follow-up actions that are capable of practical implementation requires that sufficient time be allocated for the stakeholders to discuss and reflect upon the evaluation findings. The workshop that IFAD organises at the completion of each evaluation process is one explicit attempt to institutionalise discussions and facilitate a joint response process. At EuropeAid the evaluation results are discussed by the reference group, but without the involvement of partners. Formal discussion forums are absent from Sida's management response system, although evaluations may be discussed on an ad hoc basis.

5   Recommendations

Based on the analysis and conclusions of the effectiveness and relevance of management response systems, nine broad recommendations have been formulated. Although the recommendations have been extracted from the three organisations assessed in this evaluation, they could, with minor modifications, be applicable to most aid organisations for use in the process of developing or redesigning management response systems.

i.   Adapt the management response system to the organisational context

The extent to which a management response system can be effective and relevant is context-sensitive. The management response system cannot be considered in isolation – the entire organisational structure is important. In particular, the evaluation system and the types of evaluations carried out by the organisation must be considered when developing or redesigning a management response system. The objectives of the system must be designed consistently with the role given to evaluation in the organisation's policies and strategies.

Aid organisations engage in a broad range of evaluation activities and carry out a large number of different types of evaluations. The objectives and the use of the different types of evaluation vary greatly, and it is neither appropriate nor feasible that all evaluations are responded to in the same manner.

In many aid organisations (such as EuropeAid and Sida) evaluations are carried out by both operational departments at the country level and a central evaluation unit. The existence of a dual evaluation system, and the differences between the two, must be taken into consideration when designing a management response system. It is important to ensure that all evaluations are acted upon, but a management response system must be developed to suit the purposes of both the evaluation system and the types of evaluation at the different levels.

ii.   Consider overall policymaking structures

A management response system cannot be designed in isolation but must also take into consideration other decision-making forums of the organisation. This is particularly important if the role of the management response system is to provide a link between evaluation and decision-making. One example is to indicate in the evaluation policy the levels of decision-making that evaluation recommendations should feed into, and the nature of responses the different types of evaluation require.

iii. Ensure clear guidelines and regulations regarding administrative procedures

Given that it may take some time for a management response system to become fully institutionalised within an organisation and to deliver effectively on its main objectives, it is important that the system is launched with clear guidelines and responsibilities for all actors that are involved in the process and that are affected by the system.

Guidelines and regulations need to be communicated in thoroughly, so that all stakeholders understand the intentions behind the system, how objectives should be achieved and how the different stakeholders should interact. Given that most organisations suffer from an over-abundance of policies, this recommendation of still more regulation may pose difficulties that will need to be addressed within an organisation.

iv. Document the response process

Implementation of follow-up actions and the use of evaluation results can be improved if the entire process is well-documented and made public. A high degree of transparency of the process further strengthens accountability. For internal purposes, it may be sufficient to make the document available to staff members, for example by ensuring adequate filing procedures.

v. Appoint a responsible unit to supervise the response process

It may be necessary to delegate the responsibility for supervising the response to a central organisational body in order to assure effective implementation. In particular, this body would be responsible for documenting and publishing response documents. Sometimes it may be optimal to have different units responsible for different parts of the response process, but regardless, responsibilities must be clear.

vi. Design an effective follow-up tool that checks the implementation status of agreed actions

An appropriate follow-up tool, that checks the implementation status of the follow-up actions, is essential, in order for a response system to deliver its outcomes, especially those related to accountability and transparency. It may be sufficient that a staff member is responsible for this follow-up, although this evaluation has found that a centralised management tool appears to be more effective. It is most important that the roles are clear and are performed according to the regulations and guidelines.

vii. Designate a receiver of information

For most types of evaluation it is essential that the information that is being generated about the implementation status of follow-up is forwarded to a designated receiver, and that this receiver has both the authority and capacity to act upon implementation failures, and to verify that management, or, in some cases, the partner government, has taken all agreed actions.

viii. Increase involvement of stakeholders and partners

The response process must reflect the fact that evaluations often directly deal with issues at the country level, and must enable recommendations to be directed to development partners. To improve both the relevance of the response and the impact of the evaluation, it is important that partners participate when responses are being formulated. Any actors towards whom the evaluation results and recommendations are directed should also provide a response. If follow-up actions are to be implemented successfully, all relevant stakeholders must be able to express their views and comment upon the usefulness of the evaluation findings.

All aid organisations emphasised the role that partner countries play in increasing aid effectiveness, and all followed the ethos that participation of partner countries is decisive in ensuring that evaluation findings and recommendations are acted upon. Partners should therefore be involved in all activities of the organisation that are relevant to their development, including evaluation activities.

ix. Ensure sufficient time allocated for joint discussions and reflection

It is important that evaluations are discussed and understood by relevant stakeholders, in order to engender consent, awareness and commitment to response actions. Sufficient time needs to be allocated to enable reflection upon and discussion of evaluation findings – preferably jointly – in order to formulate clear and comprehensive responses.

The joint discussions and time for reflection facilitate the deliberation process and provide a basis for being able to utilise the findings from evaluations. In addition, given that evaluations cannot always propose the concise operational recommendations that managers often request, it is necessary for a broad range of stakeholder involvement in all response processes in order to produce recommendations that are as concrete and useful as possible.

Each organisation must determine the most appropriate format for these discussions, taking into consideration their objectives, financial resources, availability of staff and other resources. A standard format outlining how evaluations are discussed as part of the response process, and prior to being publicised, should be a first step in ensuring that discussion of this type occurs.

6 Reaping the fruits of evaluation?

The title of this evaluation implicitly asks whether management response systems are an important method for maximising the returns from the evaluation process; are management response systems important in reaping the fruits of evaluation? The answer to this question depends largely (although not solely) upon two main factors: the type of evaluation undertaken and the purpose of the evaluation.

Most aid organisations attribute the main purposes of undertaking evaluations as: i) enhancing organisational accountability, and ii) learning how to improve their activities. To effectively enhance accountability, there is a need to formalise the procedures that follow a completed evaluation to ensure that findings are considered. In order to improve reviewed activities it is important that there is a link between evaluation findings and decisions taken by management. Management response systems, if appropriately designed, are excellent tools for achieving both of these objectives. Management response systems can ensure that evaluation results are properly considered, and that follow-up actions are implemented as agreed (although a follow-up system cannot assure practical implementation). Management response systems can facilitate the processes of communicating performance assessments to management, and of incorporating evaluation findings into the wider scheme of activities in an organisation, in order to improve performance. As this evaluation has shown, implementation failures, or a lack of commitment by management, can also hinder a management response system in contributing to such an increased instrumental use of evaluations.

The purpose of evaluation may be not only to enhance accountability, or to improve decision-making, directly, but also to increase the conceptual understanding of reviewed activities, thus contributing to learning more generally. This report has highlighted some of the difficulties associated with the concept of learning. For example, the report argues that a management response system that aims to improve learning in this general sense must provide sufficient time for all relevant stakeholders to reflect upon the evaluation, and must allow stakeholders to have full ownership of this process. Nonetheless, it remains unclear the extent to which management response systems can contribute to a conceptual use of evaluation and what this entails. Further research is needed in order to draw firmer conclusions about the effectiveness and relevance of management response systems in this respect.

Although aid organisations differ in how they view accountability and learning, these concepts should not be opposed, but rather should be mutually reinforcing – irrespective of how learning is defined. However, in order to maximise utility, it is important that management is aware of the role evaluation should play in an organisation and considers what forums are appropriate for different types of evaluation to be presented in.

Many aid organisations are presently grappling with issues related to how to undertake joint evaluations. While joint evaluations pose obvious difficulties, such as issues related to costs and coordination, the new international development architecture, with its focus on harmonisation, alignment, and aid effectiveness, favours the joint evaluation model. There is little systematic knowledge about follow-up for joint evaluations, and no common agreement on what should be regarded suitable and appropriate management responses (OECD/DAC 2005). How management response systems are to be applied to joint evaluations is an area requiring further research. In particular, it is important to continue discussing how the response should be formulated, and by whom. Should there be a joint response to the evaluation? Who should respond to the evaluation? Should it just be the donors that commissioned the evaluation that respond, or should donors and partners respond jointly?

Management response systems do have a unique value in increasing both the effectiveness and relevance of evaluation reports, and can improve the degree to which evaluation is utilised, in particular with regard to the more instrumental use of evaluation. Adopting a standardised format for post-evaluation analysis, which a response system represents, is a useful element in ensuring that evaluations are appropriately considered by aid organisations. Indeed, a management response system may help organisations reap the fruits of evaluation.

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Figures

Figure 1: Type of evaluations and managing unit (Sida)

Figure 2: Sida's management response process

Figure 3: The programme theory of Sida's management response system – activities and expected effects

Figure 4: The types of evaluation and evaluation objectives (EuropeAid)

Figure 5: The Fiche Contradictoire process

Figure 6: The programme theory of Fiche Contradictoire system – activities and expected effects

Figure 7: Types of evaluation and evaluation objectives (IFAD)

Figure 8: The ACP process

Figure 9: The programme theory of the ACP system – activities and expected effects

Figure 10: Summary of key features of the response systems