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From output to outcome? 25 years of IOB evaluations

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From output to outcome?

25 YEARS OF IOB EVALUATIONS



Jos van Beurden
Jan-Bart Gewalt

aksant

FROM OUTPUT TO OUTCOME?

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Jos van Beurden and Jan-Bart Gewald

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Contents

Preface: Look back, so you can do good 7

Acknowledgements 9

Introduction 10

1 The establishment of the Operations Review Unit 13

International setting 13

The beginning of Dutch foreign aid 14

Aid criticised 18

— Jan Pronk

Minister for Development Cooperation, 1973–1977 and 1989–1998 20

Admitting failure 21

Establishing the Operations Review Unit 24

Scope and procedures 27

2 First period, 1978–1987: Inspection of projects 29

The outside insider 29

— Joop Kramer

First director, 1977–1985 31

First mission with impact 33

A mission without a report 35

Confidentiality 37

State of affairs 39

Appointment of the Inspector General 42

— Prince Claus von Amsberg

Inspector General Development Cooperation, 1984–2002 43

A global evaluation 44

Realignment of bilateral aid policy 46

Preparing for a new era 47

3	Second period, 1988–1995: Policy reviews	50
	A new approach	50
	— <i>Hedy von Metzsch</i>	
	<i>Second director, 1985–1999</i>	52
	Impact on the coalition government	54
	Modest impact on operational departments	58
	Decentralised evaluations	59
	Impact in the political arena	61
	First country reviews	63
	Realignment of Dutch foreign policy	67
4	Third period, 1996–2003: Made-to-measure evaluations	70
	A changing world	70
	Independence threatened	72
	First steps in new policy areas	77
	Adjusting the methodology	78
	— <i>Rob van den Berg,</i>	
	<i>Director, 1999–2004</i>	78
	Utilising local capacity	82
	A report with a damaging impact	82
	The benefits of international collaboration	86
5	Output and outcome	91
	One among many	91
	Independence	93
	Quality	97
	Outcome	98

Appendix 1: List of Evaluations 1978–2003 104

Appendix 2: List of Joint Evaluations 1988–2003 115

Acronyms 119

Look back, so you can do good

‘Do good and don’t look back’ was the motto that inspired the authors of the history of Dutch development aid, when they chose the title for the introduction to their book.¹ This phrase, made famous by the Dutch 17th century admiral and privateer Piet Heyn means as much as ‘do the right thing but do not expect to be praised or thanked for it’. In this sense these pious and proud words fit both the attitude of the domineering Dutch of the seventeenth century and Dutch twentieth century attitudes towards development aid.

In reality, not all Dutch development aid was spent right, or at least in the most efficient way. And we know so, because the Dutch did not fail to look back. The first foreign aid was spent in 1949. In the 1970s the amounts involved and the expectations stirred by development aid rose in tandem. Critics, both in the global South and in the global North, and from left to right in the political spectrum questioned the ways in which aid money was spent. In 1977 the then minister for development aid established a review unit, to gather reliable information on the efficiency and effectiveness of aid. In the first 25 years of the existence of this review unit, total Dutch development aid amounted to more than 50.000 million euro. A substantial part of this expenditure was reviewed. The review unit’s reports served both as important input for policy documents and as arguments in the public debate.

From our present day point of view it may strike us as strange that it took from 1949 until 1977 to put a review unit in place. But this is somewhat of an anachronism. Since the 1970s evaluating government expenditure has come to the fore, both in the political arena and among scholarly commentators. If policy evalua-

1. P.A.M. Malcontent and J.A. Nekkers, ‘Introduction. Do something and don’t look back’, in: P.A.M. Malcontent and J.A. Nekkers (eds.), *Fifty years of development cooperation 1949-1999*, SDU Publishers, The Hague, 2000, p. 11-55. This theme was echoed in an essay which showed that Dutch development cooperation did look back in R.D. van den Berg, ‘Leert de hulp van lessen uit het verleden? Doe wel en zie niet om’ in *Internationale Spectator* 55 (May 2001) pp. 253-260.

tion, accountability and inspection are obvious requirements today, that was far less the case even in the recent past. This recent interest in evaluating procedures and departments has led to a number of institutional histories.² However, a history of the review unit for development aid was lacking so far. And none of the existing studies tackled the thorny question how effective the evaluation effort has been.

It was therefore challenging to write a history of the first 25 years of IOV/IOB, the review unit for Dutch development aid, and since 1996 for Dutch foreign policy as well. But it was not without its complications. Some of these were the usual ones of contemporary history: a mass of evidence on paper, multiple archives still to be found in the drawers of the policy makers concerned. Interviews with a large number of the actors are in order. But some were more special. The people who made the history of IOV/IOB are professional evaluators. They are therefore conscious of the special problems any evaluation entails. But the history of a review unit is itself also an evaluation, and historians are evaluation professionals too. It took some re-calibration of evaluation tools and measures before the present text could be composed. It goes without saying that those responsible for the evaluation presented here are the professionals whom the International Institute of Social History commissioned to do the historical research and write the book. Doing so, however, would have been impossible without the input of IOB staff members, who dug up the documents, pointed directions to and in the review unit's archive, were available for interviews, commented on drafts and engaged in debate. In doing so, they put to work the philosophy that also governs their daily work: only if we are prepared to look back, we can gauge whether we are performing well.

Lex Heerma van Voss

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2. H.B. Hoekstra e.a., *Goed besteed en niet zo zuinig ook. Inspectie der Rijksfinanciën 1921–1996* (Den Haag: Ministerie van Financiën, 1996); P.J. Margry, E.C. van Heukelom, A.J.R.M. Linders, *Van Camere vander rekeninghen tot Algemene Rekenkamer : zes eeuwen Rekenkamer: gedenkboek bij het 175-jarig bestaan van de Algemene Rekenkamer* (Den Haag: SDU, 1989).

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In June 2002 Jan-Bart Gewald began the research, assisted by Martine Prins, and presented a draft report in February 2003. On the basis of that report and further research, Jos van Beurden wrote the final version of the text.

On behalf of IISG, Willem van Schendel and Lex Heerma van Voss supervised the research and writing. Within IOB, Hans Slot was responsible for coordinating the work. He, Rob van den Berg, Ted Kliet, Dick van der Hoek and Han van Bommel provided valuable, critical comments on the texts. The final responsibility lies with Jos van Beurden and Jan-Bart Gewald.

Introduction

The Dutch government first provided foreign aid to developing countries in 1949. Although the first overall review of Dutch bilateral aid was carried out in 1969, it was only in 1977 that the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation established its own review department. In the intervening years the Dutch foreign aid budget had increased considerably. In the subsequent decades, after some ups and downs, it would stabilise at 0.8% of the gross national product, making the Netherlands a major donor country.

Development cooperation has long been the subject of parliamentary and public debate. Then as now, there were forces that wished to reduce government spending on development assistance, claiming that Dutch taxpayers' hard-earned money was being ill-spent or frittered away on ineffective activities. In the mid-1990s, however, public attention began to shift to other issues. This shift was even more apparent in the reaction throughout the Western world to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001.

In 1977 Minister for Development Cooperation Jan Pronk had good reason to set up a review unit that could provide him with timely, reliable information on the quality of Dutch development assistance projects. He needed inspectors, working independently of the other departments, who reported directly to him. Thus the *Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking te Velde* (IOV, or Operations Review Unit) was established, later to become the *Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie* (IOB, or Policy and Operations Evaluation Department). The Netherlands was not the first bilateral donor to set up a separate evaluation unit. Canada and Germany established theirs in 1970, Belgium and Sweden in 1971, and the World Bank set up its Operations Evaluation Department in 1973.¹

In compiling this history of the Dutch evaluation department, the authors first considered concentrating on its activities in a few 'representative' countries in the three continents that receive Dutch foreign aid, and to include the views of

1. OECD, *Aid Evaluation: The experience of members of the Development Assistance Committee and of International Organisations*. Paris, 1975, pp. 21, 36, 16, 56, 86.

the local counterparts on the work of evaluation department. Such countries could include Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Mali, Uganda, Tanzania and Bolivia, all of which have received considerable Dutch aid over the years, and where several evaluations have been carried out. Another such country is Egypt, where the department carried out its first three inspections. It would then have been possible to compare the brief reports on these evaluations (written in Dutch) with the extensive country reviews of 1998, which covered two decades of Dutch aid. It soon became apparent, however, that this approach had its limitations, in that it would not present a sufficiently full picture of the history of the evaluation unit, and that, for logistical reasons, it would be difficult to include the views of Southern counterparts.

As the interviews and the research in the archives in The Hague progressed, it became clear that the history of the evaluation unit could also be traced by following its course under its consecutive directors. The three directors who have led the unit thus far have had a substantial influence. This influence has ranged from simple matters such as the style of reports, through to more serious issues such as the unit's relationship with the various ministers, its policies, its unity and the degree of openness. Although the influence of any director is obviously limited, as he is a staff member serving a minister, all three are given due attention in this book.

While weighing the pros and cons of different approaches, the authors could hardly overlook the abundant materials produced by the unit. By knowing more about the history of the use of this output and the effect of the evaluations, it would be possible to assess whether the evaluation department had helped to improve the quality of Dutch development assistance. But using these materials as a starting point raised several questions. What is an effect, an impact and an outcome? How can they be measured? When should they be measured? In most cases, the effect, outcome or impact of an evaluation may not be apparent immediately, but only after many years, by which time the evaluation report may have been only one among many contributory factors.

There is also the question of who is affected by an evaluation. Here we consider the effects of the evaluations on the politicians who have been responsible for development cooperation since 1977 – Jan Pronk, Jan de Koning, Cees van Dijk, Eegje Schoo, Piet Bukman, Jan Pronk, Eveline Herfkens and Agnes van Ardenne – and their colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Hans van Mierlo, Jozias van Aartsen, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Dick Benschop and Atzo Nicolai. The IOB's reports have also had an effect on the heads of the policy and operational departments within the ministry. Obviously their relationship with a review unit is ambiguous – they do not like their work to be criticised by outsiders, while they need criticism in order to improve it. We also had to consider

the effects of the evaluation reports on parliament, the media and pressure groups, which are often swayed by the issues of the day, and last, but by no means least, on the stakeholders in the recipient countries.

We have divided the history of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department into three periods, using the output, the short- and medium-term outcomes and the long-term impact of its work as guiding factors. The first period began in 1978, when the inspectorate became operational and the inspections were mostly about learning. It lasted until 1987, when Minister Piet Bukman announced the shift from inspections of individual projects to evaluations of sectors, themes and country programmes. The second period started in 1988, when it was decided that all evaluation reports would be made public, and thus public accountability was added as a new aim of the department's work. This period lasted until 1996, when a major realignment of Dutch foreign policy was announced. The start of the third period was marked by the expansion of the inspectorate's mandate to include all aspects of Dutch foreign policy. In this book this period ends on 19 February 2003, when IOB celebrated its 25th anniversary.

In the process of gathering information for this book, the authors examined the evaluation reports, IOB's archives in The Hague and other documentation such as parliamentary reports, books and newspaper articles. Many individuals were interviewed, including officials inside the evaluation unit (serving and retired) and outside experts. Since most of the interviews with civil servants were 'off the record', the interviewees are rarely named. As the department initially functioned as an inspectorate, this term is mostly used in chapter 2 describing the first period. In its second period the term evaluation department is more relevant, and is used in chapter 3. As the unit has been known internationally as IOB since 1996, this acronym is most frequently used in chapter 4 describing the third period.

This account does not offer the final word on IOB's history. That would require more research and more distance in time. The authors are aware that the book offers only a partial picture, but hope that it is sufficient to illustrate the history of the evaluation department. With regard to the title, *From Output to Outcome?*, during its first quarter century the IOB has produced many reports, working documents and other kinds of output. The authors hope that this volume goes some way towards answering the crucial question of what effect, outcome or impact this output has had.

The establishment of the Operations Review Unit

This chapter briefly examines the international context between the end of World War II and the mid-1970s, and the rise and institutionalisation of Dutch development co-operation. It describes the first criticisms of the effectiveness of aid and the initiatives undertaken to forestall the failures and criticisms in the future, which led to the establishment of the Operations Review Unit in 1977.

International setting

The Allied Powers gathered in July 1944 in Bretton Woods to discuss ways to enable the war-ravaged European economies to get on their feet again. They created financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, whose task was to provide capital to these countries in the form of large-scale loans. Initially, these loans were distributed through the newly established United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.¹

It soon became apparent that the loans were not bringing about the expected results. In 1947 the US Secretary of State General George C. Marshall therefore initiated a substantial plan to end the poverty, chaos and political turmoil in Western Europe. As the countries of Western Europe had been important markets for the US before the war, their recovery was seen as essential for the US economy. Moreover, to counter the threat of Soviet domination in Europe and maintain peace, technical assistance and financial support were considered essential.

After the Second World War the process of decolonisation, first in Asia and later in Africa, introduced an ever-growing stream of newly independent countries onto the world stage. At the same time, the beginning of the Cold War strengthened the position of already independent countries in Latin America, the Middle East and Asia. Soon, these countries also began to call for assistance.

1. www.thirdworldtraveler.com/New_Global_Economy/Bretton_Woods_NI.html

They argued that as the US had been prepared to assist the war-torn nations of Europe with the Marshall Plan, it should also be prepared to initiate a similar programme for poorer countries.² In his inaugural address on 20 January 1949, US President Harry S. Truman proposed to establish a 'Point Four Program' to assist the underdeveloped regions of the world and to promote their economic growth using similar means, i.e. providing technical assistance and encouraging the flow of private investment capital.

The United Nations, which officially came into existence in October 1945, offered these newly independent countries a forum within which they could make their aspirations known. As the Cold War intensified, these countries were increasingly drawn into the politics of the Western world. Amid growing concerns regarding underdevelopment and the need for support, in December 1948 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 198, which emphasised the international responsibility for the economic development of underdeveloped countries. In practice, however, there was resistance to this resolution. The Netherlands and other European countries had very limited financial reserves and the United States was mainly focused on the post-war economic reconstruction of Europe. Resolution 200, adopted at the same time, focused on technical assistance for economic development, but it too encountered resistance. Nevertheless, these resolutions appeared to be indisputable moves in the right direction and fed into Truman's Point Four Program.³

The beginning of Dutch foreign aid

Immediately after the Second World War the Netherlands was preoccupied with reconstruction, the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the struggle for independence in the Dutch East Indies. There was little public interest in broader development issues. Only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was professionally involved in certain aspects of development cooperation. The Netherlands displayed some missionary fervour with regard to the Dutch East Indies, convinced that Dutch technical experience and expertise were essential for the development of the colony.⁴ Colonial civil servants were even

2. P. Malcontent and J. Nekkers, 'Do something and don't look back', in: J.A. Nekkers and P.A.M. Malcontent, *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation 1949–1999*. SDU Publishers, The Hague, 2000, p. 11.

3. J. de Jong, 'Flying the ethical flag', in: J.A. Nekkers and P.A.M. Malcontent (2000), *op cit.*, p. 59.

obliged to remain in the country after independence in 1947, in order to transfer their knowledge and experience. Within the Netherlands, development thinking was mostly limited to the higher echelons of the civil service, particularly among officials with colonial backgrounds. An exception was the economist Jan Tinbergen, who in 1945 had pleaded for a worldwide effort to reduce the poverty gap.⁵

The history of Dutch development assistance began in 1949, in response to Truman's Point Four Program and UN Resolutions 198 and 200. Following the establishment of the UN Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) and UN forums such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Netherlands government set up an inter-ministerial commission, whose task was to discuss Dutch responses to these UN initiatives. The commission members generally agreed that, as well as providing bilateral aid for Indonesia and the two colonies Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles, the Netherlands should support the United Nations. This decision resulted in the establishment of the *Werkcommissie inzake technische hulp aan laag ontwikkelde landen* (WITHALL, or Working committee on technical assistance to less developed countries), which included representatives of various ministries. On the basis of WITHALL's preparatory work, the Council of Ministers decided in October 1949 to provide EPTA with a contribution of 1.5 million guilders. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to offer assistance. In 1950, two commissions for international technical assistance were established and both were placed under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their main tasks were to prepare technical assistance projects in developing countries, including the selection of experts to implement them, and to maintain relations with international organisations. After Indonesia's independence many Dutch experts, employed there, had to look for other outlets for their skills.

Dutch foreign policy is often said to combine the interests of a salesman and the ideals of a Christian minister. In this mix, the two sets of objectives alternate, depending on the spirit of the time and the interests involved. At first, the underlying motives for Dutch involvement in development cooperation were technocratic in nature. Development policies focused mainly on economic development, the exchange of experts and the provision of bursaries for the Netherlands. The involvement was considered beneficial to both academics and business interests.

4. J. de Jong, *op cit.*, p. 60.

5. J. de Jong, *op cit.*, pp. 58-59. Tinbergen received the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1969.

It is interesting to note that the discussion in the Netherlands initially focused on whether to adopt a multilateral approach rather than provide bilateral assistance to its former colonies – a debate that has never been resolved. In the early 1950s the idea was that bilateral assistance would always be limited to a few projects in a few countries, while by participating in multilateral programmes with stronger partners, the Netherlands could exert more influence, thereby creating a distinct profile for itself. In such programmes all the participating countries were jointly responsible, so that individually they did not bear too much risk. Also, within a multilateral structure the Netherlands could not easily be accused of neo-colonialism, since acceptable opportunities to support former colonies were still available.⁶ But although the expenditures on multilateral technical assistance increased from 1.5 to 2.5 million guilders between 1951 and 1955, they never exceeded 5 to 10% of the total amount spent on those colonies that had remained within the influence of the Netherlands.⁷

It has been argued that this was due to the indifferent public climate in which the concept of multilateral technical assistance was being developed. After dealing with Indonesia, the Dutch had had enough of ‘tropical concerns’.⁸ Very few believed that the so-called developed countries had a responsibility to improve the welfare of poorer nations. An exception, next to Jan Tinbergen, was the ecumenist Father Simon Jelsma. In the summer of 1954 Jelsma and a group of like-minded people protested against the announced reduction in taxes, which was not accompanied by an increase of foreign aid. They deplored the fact that nothing was being done to diminish the global gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, in 1956 they set up Novib, the *Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Bijstand* (Netherlands Organisation for International Assistance), to support projects in developing countries. The then Queen Juliana of the Netherlands also openly called for increased support.⁹ Only from the late 1950s onwards was foreign aid considered part of Dutch foreign policy.¹⁰

6. Flip van Helden, *Ontwikkelingssamenwerking: hulpverlening en betoog. Een analyse van de Nederlandse ontwikkelingssamenwerking onder Pronk 1973–1990* (Development Cooperation: Assistance and argument. An analysis of the Dutch Development Cooperation under Pronk 1973–1990), Thesis, Wageningen University 1990, pp. 14–15.

7. In 2003 the proportion of multilateral aid in the total aid budget was some 30%. Source: www.minbuza.nl.

8. J. de Jong, *op cit.*, p. 77.

9. J. van Beurden, *Avonturen van een linkse geldschieder*, Amsterdam, 1988, pp. 5–6.

10. J. de Jong, *op cit.*, pp. 76–77.

Following the 1963 general election, the victorious political parties lobbied for the establishment of a separate government unit that would be responsible for development affairs. This led to the appointment of I.N.Th. Diepenhorst as Secretary of State for Development Cooperation. However, he soon clashed with the finance minister about the budget for foreign aid. He noted in his diary that he believed the ministers of finance and of foreign affairs were opposed to development assistance, that in their view it was 'wasted money', and the only guideline for it should be 'Dutch self-interest'.¹¹ During the formation of a new cabinet in 1965, it was decided that the position of secretary of state would be upgraded to minister, but without portfolio.¹² Although this decision was based largely on the necessary distribution of ministerial positions in the coalition government, and was opposed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Luns, it illustrated the increasing significance of the issue of development assistance in the Netherlands. The new minister remained without a department and without a budget, he lacked the authority to appoint civil servants and was wholly dependent upon the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within this ministry, however, a Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) was established to serve the new Minister for Development Cooperation.

DGIS soon began to expand. Its focus shifted slowly from multilateral to bilateral aid, and increasing attention was paid to the connections between aid and trade. International aid was considered to be a moral obligation, but Dutch self-interest could be served by means of bilateral structures. Thus more funding became available, development planning became more long-range, and criteria were established for the selection of countries that were to receive development aid. In 1965 the development budget of the Netherlands was more than 200 million guilders, but had grown to almost 740 million guilders by 1970. Under aid champion, Minister Jan Pronk, the budget jumped to almost 1.4 billion guilders in 1974, 3 billion guilders in 1977, and 4.6 million guilders (almost €2.1 billion) in 1985.¹³ Since then the aid budget slowly declined to 0.8% of the gross national product, at which level it was fixed in 1996. At present this amounts to around €3.75 billion per annum.¹⁴

11. Cited in *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 October 2003.

12. Flip van Helden, *op cit.*, p. 15.

13. Paul Hoebink, *Geven is Nemen: De Nederlandse Ontwikkelingshulp aan Tanzania en Sri Lanka (To give is to take: The Netherlands Development Assistance to Tanzania and Sri Lanka)*, Nijmegen, Stichting Derde Wereld Publikaties, 1988, pp. 51, 56, 61, 64, 72.

14. See IOB Evaluatie 291, *Nederlands Schuldverlichtingsbeleid 1990–1999*, para. 2.2.1, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs annual reports on development assistance.

Aid criticised

In response to the establishment of a volunteers' organisation by Novib and other NGOs,¹⁵ in 1963 Foreign Affairs Minister Luns, following the example of the American Peace Corps, established the Dutch youth volunteer programme *Jongeren Vrijwilligers Programma*, later renamed *SNV Nederlandse Ontwikkelings Organisatie* (SNV Netherlands Development Organisation). SNV's start was characterised by haste. Its existence had to be justified as quickly as possible, and one way to do this was to post 50 volunteers abroad. Not surprisingly, there was far too little time for the identification of projects where volunteers could work, practical preparations and the recruitment of volunteers. In November 1963 a first batch of 21 volunteers left for Africa. Their task was to strengthen the agricultural education in Cameroon. Ten years later some 1,400 others had followed them for assignments elsewhere.¹⁶

SNV's weak points would become ammunition for the opposition within Dutch society to foreign aid, spearheaded by the newspaper *De Telegraaf*. In 1973, Crown Princess Beatrix and her husband Prince Claus, Chairman of the *Nationale Commissie Ontwikkelingsstrategie* (National Commission on Development Strategy),¹⁷ visited Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Tunisia, where they met with a number of SNV volunteers. The visit prompted *De Telegraaf* to publish five full-page articles within a week in which the SNV was dragged through the mire. According to these articles, the volunteers were not motivated by a desire to assist the development of the countries in which they were working, but to benefit themselves. They lacked any form of idealism, they had been fooled by SNV propaganda, and were costing Dutch taxpayers 20 million guilders a year. SNV dismissed the criticism. In early 1974, under the headline 'A sad return', *De Telegraaf* reported on the return of the 1000th SNV volunteer as yet another case of disillusion and frustration.¹⁸

Following the November 1972 election a new centre-left government took office in May 1973. Jan Pronk was appointed Minister for Development Cooperation, and he pressed for the reorientation of Dutch development cooperation. The explicit objectives of the government, according to Pronk, were: '... that

15. F. Bieckmann, *De wereld volgens prins Claus*. Amsterdam, 2004, p. 131.

16. D. Verhoeven, *Hulp blijft nodig, maar anders. SNV: van vrijwilligers naar adviseurs*. SNV, The Hague, 2002, p. 8.

17. The commission (now known as the NCDO) supports initiatives inside the Netherlands that promote the debate on sustainable development.

18. Cited in, Ton Nijzink, *Dag Vrijwilliger! Twintig jaar SNV*. SNV, The Hague, 1984, p. 45.

besides economic growth a modification in production structures needs to take place and a change in the distribution of incomes is to be brought about. ... that besides nation-building ... a more equal division of power has to be pursued ... that besides a change in consciousness a modification in the structure and the patterns of prevailing standards and values has to take place and social mobility and emancipation has to be reached.¹⁹ Pronk further argued that 'If such changes seem to be impossible the issue of development assistance ... means nothing more than a stopgap for the consequences of an international economic process that in itself does not change'.²⁰

While the SNV emphasised that its policies fitted well within the framework of Minister Pronk's idea of development cooperation, a report written by two former SNV employees was leaked to *De Telegraaf* before Pronk could deal with it. In it the two listed their disappointments and provided an overview of what they believed were the SNV's failures. 'Aid organisation blew money for years', was the banner headline of *De Telegraaf* on 3 May 1974. The article, based on the report, concluded that, '... for SNV, the growth of the organisation was of greater importance than development work'.²¹ In the course of the following two weeks, another seven articles appeared, all of which attacked Jan Pronk as the minister responsible. He was accused of manoeuvring a member of the royal family into an awkward position. Prince Claus, at Pronk's request, had been appointed chair of the SNV in February 1974 but, according to *De Telegraaf*, Pronk had deliberately neglected to inform him about the SNV's dismal functioning. The paper even went so far as to insinuate that Pronk constituted a national threat, and demanded his resignation.²²

Pronk's position in the cabinet was safe, and he was not overly concerned with the attacks in the press. Indeed, they eventually blew over. In April 1975 *De Telegraaf* claimed that their criticism had actually led to positive changes within the SNV, with Pronk as the moving spirit.²³ For the newspaper, a solution to the problem of SNV and what it saw as politicised Dutch development cooperation,

19. Cited in Ton Nijzink, *ibidem*, p. 45.

20. Cited in Hans Beerends, *30 Jaar Nederlandse Ontwikkelingshulp 1950 – 1980: Zin / onzin / effecten / perspectieven*, Nijmegen: Landelijke Vereniging van Wereldwinkels, 1981, p. 51.

21. Henk de Mari, 'Hulpstichting smijt al jaren met miljoenen', *De Telegraaf*, 3 May 1974.

22. Henk de Mari, 'Pronk werpt blaam op zijn voorgangers', *De Telegraaf*, 14 May 1974. See also J. van Tijn, 'Vrijwilligers. Tweede aanval op Claus mislukt. De gemakkelijke geschiedenis van een Telegraaf-rel', *Vrij Nederland*, 35, 18 May 1974.

23. Henk de Mari, 'Vrijwilligershulp steeds meer ten goede aan armsten', 9 April 1975.

was non-politicised direct aid, and it was in this direction that SNV appeared to be moving.

As the number of SNV volunteers increased, so did the volume of aid and DGIS' say in how it was spent, at the expense of the Ministry of Economic Affairs,²⁴ the chances of failure grew as well. The fear of failure also existed within DGIS. Some failures had been well documented, such as the case of the Dutch cows that were transported to Sri Lanka and then literally pushed out of the plane because no one had thought about how to unload them, while others had died because they could not stand the climate.²⁵ There were also numerous unsubstantiated stories, some of which explained more about the authors' political agenda, while others contained serious elements of truth. For example, development workers had helped farmers to build brick houses that were later used as goat sheds because the locally built houses were cooler. Cold storage centres had been built in tropical Africa, but were never used. Tractors had been transported to countries that were too poor to buy fuel for them. Expensive medical equipment remained unused in rural clinics in South Asia because there were no doctors who knew how to use it. Fiascos such as these have always been rewarding subjects for both right-wing and left-wing opponents of aid,²⁶ and especially for the media. To prevent such public relations disasters occurring in the future Pronk believed he needed to better informed of failures before his critics got to hear of them.

Jan Pronk

Minister for Development Cooperation, 1973–1977 and 1989–1998

People who have worked with Jan Pronk have all emphasised, first, that he is highly intelligent and has a great knowledge of the problems he is dealing with, and second, that he is headstrong. Time and again, people temper their praise for him by emphasising his tenacious and stubborn approach to certain aspects of policy or procedure. As minister, Pronk liked to challenge and score off his staff and held a strong grip on them.

24. Paul Hoebink, *Onze Wereld*, November 1999, p. 38.

25. See e.g. Paul Hoebink, *op cit.*

26. A left-wing opponent was the *Tijdschrift voor Anti-Imperialistische Scholing* (*Journal for Anti-imperialistic Education*).

Jan Pronk was born in The Hague in 1940, the son of a social-democratic teacher. He studied at the School of Economics in Rotterdam, where Jan Tinbergen was one of his teachers, and graduated in 1964. During the student rebellions of the late 1960s, Pronk taught economics in Rotterdam. Already an active member of the *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labour Party), he entered parliament in 1971. In 1973, he became the youngest member of the cabinet, when he took up the position of Minister for Development Cooperation within the government of Prime Minister Joop den Uyl.

After the fall of the government in 1977, Pronk returned to parliament. From 1980 to 1986 he served as Deputy Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). When the Labour Party returned to power in a coalition government in 1989, Pronk once again became Minister for Development Cooperation, a post he held until 1998, when he became Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment. He resigned in 2002 following a report by a parliamentary commission about the Dutch involvement in the genocide committed by Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica in 1995. In 2002, Pronk was instrumental in drafting the protocols and declarations that were adopted at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he was Special Envoy to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

For a long time Pronk has remained both the moral conscience and mascot of the left wing of the Labour Party in the Netherlands. He received substantial personal support in successive elections. Aware of the support that he enjoys within the party, Pronk has been able to sustain and push through his views on a number of issues, particularly in the fields of development cooperation and the environment. Regarding Indonesia, Pronk never refrained from drawing attention to both Indonesian and previous Dutch human rights abuses. On one occasion, the then Prime Minister Wim Kok, put down Pronk with: 'Jan, you have neither the past, nor [national] conscience within your mandate'.²⁷

Admitting failure

The idea that institutions working either outside or independently of the policy making and implementing agencies should review government policies, originated in the USA, with the review of several 'New Deal' programmes in the

27. Floris van Straaten, 'Jan Pronk: Tegendraads', *NRC Handelsblad*, 16 April 2002.

1930s.²⁸ After the Second World War the number of reviews of government policies increased quickly, not only in the USA, but also in the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom. In the Netherlands, when the Operations Review Unit was established in 1977, public expenditures were rarely reviewed.²⁹ The health, education and labour sectors had their own government inspectorates, but they focused on ensuring that subsidised institutions observed the official rules and regulations, rather than on reviewing their own policies.

Dutch development assistance was probably the first government sector to be evaluated as a whole. In 1965, the then Minister for Development Cooperation, Theo Bot, had commissioned an independent evaluation of Dutch development assistance, focusing on the benefits to the recipient developing countries and the aid capacity.³⁰ For three years, a team of 18 researchers from six institutes worked on the assessment. One member of the team was Jan Pronk, at that time attached to the Netherlands Economic Institute in Rotterdam. He played a prominent role. The report offered some serious criticisms, especially with regard to the aid policy towards the former Dutch colony Indonesia, the youth volunteer programme, and the way most aid was tied to the Netherlands, but it failed to come up with strong proposals for improvement. In partial response to the findings, the liberal newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* (NRC) wrote in 1969 that to spend so much money 'on something rather dubious is dangerous folly', and concluded that, 'One has to understand that someone else's poverty is not our responsibility. Development assistance is in conflict with the independence that was recently acquired by many former colonies. ... A country that wants to be independent has to pay the price of economic development, and as long as free aid is offered the naked truth that the price is high remains veiled. Development assistance is just a makeshift measure that aggravates the malady since the search for a real cure is being postponed'.³¹

28. P.G. Grasso, S.S. Wasty and R.V. Weaving, *World Bank Operations Evaluation Department: The first 30 Years*, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 6. See also B. Gerlag, T. Kliest and R. van den Berg, *De Reikwijdte van IOB Studies: Een Analyse van Evaluatierapporten 1978–1999*, IOB Werkdocument, December 2000, p. 1.

29. Frans Leeuw, at IOB's 25th anniversary celebrations, 19 February 2003.

30. Werkgroep Evaluatie Ontwikkelingshulp, *Evaluatie van de Nederlandse ontwikkelingshulp: onderzoek verricht in opdracht van de Nederlandse regering* (Working Committee Evaluation Development Assistance, *Evaluation of Netherlands Development Aid: Research commissioned by the Netherlands Government*), Tilburg, 1969.

31. J. Brugman, 'Ontwikkelingshulp is een lapmiddel', *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 11 January 1969.

The findings of this first major evaluation and reactions such as that of the NRC must have challenged Jan Pronk. The world needed to be changed for the better, and for the experts to conclude after three years of intensive and expensive research that they did not know how to do it must have been dissatisfying. It is clear that this experience was a formative one for Pronk, and ensured that the evaluation of development cooperation became of central importance to him. Looking back, one wonders why that evaluation did not lead to an institutionalised review unit at an earlier stage. Were there simply too many contradictory interests and interest groups involved in the Dutch foreign assistance? Would the administrative machinery, which any ministry is, not allow more speed? Or was it a result of the *condition humaine*, or, as former World Bank President Robert McNamara put it, of the fact that it is 'very, very difficult for any of us who take pride in our activities to admit failure'?³²

In 1977 Jan Pronk had another reason to set up an Operations Review Unit under the umbrella of DGIS. It was particularly galling to him that his own staff continued to present too positive reports regarding the progress of Dutch foreign aid. They rarely reported failures in the projects for which they were responsible. In other words, to remain one step ahead of his critical opponents and to check on his own staff, he needed better – i.e. clear, detailed and independent – information about the conditions on the ground of Dutch aid projects. According to one staff member who worked for the minister at that time, 'Pronk wished to have his own reporters, people who reported directly and only to him'. One civil servant who fell the same way as Pronk was Joop Kramer, then director of the *Directie Technische Hulp* (DTH, Directorate Technical Assistance). Within DTH, Kramer had run up against a number of issues, and it was in seeking to overcome them that he had begun writing a policy document entitled *DTH Anders* (DTH Different).³³ While writing it Kramer came into contact with Pronk, who found in him a kindred spirit – hard working, independent, intelligent and equally strong willed.

32. Robert McNamara in a message on the occasion of the OED's 30th anniversary, in: P.G. Grasso, S.S. Wasty and R.V. Weaving, *World Bank Operations Evaluation Department: The first 30 Years*, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. ix.

33. Thus far we have not been able to discover a copy of this document, though it is referred to in numerous pieces.

Establishing the Operations Review Unit

At that time at least six donor countries – Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Sweden and the USA – had already established their own separate review units,³⁴ and the World Bank's Operation Evaluation Department was set up in 1973. After the Dutch Operations Review Unit was established in July 1977 other countries followed suit, including Denmark in 1982.³⁵

The first official references to the Dutch unit to be found in the archives date from September 1976. In a memorandum to the Director-General for Development Cooperation, Minister Pronk wrote that 'It appears desirable to me to begin preparations for the establishment of an inspectorate development cooperation'.³⁶ As justification he noted the substantial sums of money devoted to development cooperation and the emphasis that needed to be placed on the quality of Dutch aid. Within the Ministry, a development economist working in a policy planning and advisory secretariat was approached to draw up ideas regarding the establishment of a unit, whose task it would be to inspect Dutch aid projects. In his report he discussed how other donors were dealing with evaluation and inspection. The Minister then asked him to contact various people and institutions within the ministry and to compile their ideas *vis-à-vis* an inspectorate.

Pronk's ideas and intentions were straightforward. He wanted a unit with inspectors who would investigate whether or not Dutch bilateral development assistance was being spent in accordance with the intended aims of the Minister. The new unit was to be concerned solely with the inspection of individual projects. It was not to carry out evaluations, which would require more intensive research on the basis of far broader sets of questions. Nor was it to be just an exercise in financial control, since that would mean that its scope would too restricted. In Pronk's view, the unit was to be independent of the departments engaged in policy development or implementation. At the same time it was to be part and parcel of the apparatus of the state, and to bear official authority. In the memorandum Pronk explicitly stated that he wished the unit to be developed in line with the experiences of inspectorates in other government departments, which also focused on inspections and not on evaluations.

34. OECD, *Aid Evaluation: The Experience of Members of the Development Assistance Committee and of International Organisations*. Paris, 1975, pp. 12, 16, 21, 36, 56, 76.

35. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Evaluation Guidelines*, Copenhagen, February 1999, p. 5.

36. Memo 336/76, 20/09/1976 from J.P. Pronk to DGIS via S, cc. andere diensten. Instelling 10v.

In the run-up to the establishment of the inspectorate, a number of hurdles within DGIS first had to be tackled. In November 1976 a document, *Enige gedachten over de functie en positie van een inspectie ontwikkelingssamenwerking* (Some thoughts about the function and position of an inspectorate development cooperation), was distributed to the various departments and directorates with a request for comments and suggestions. From the responses, which varied from the banal, through to detailed suggestions, it was clear that the directors of the various directorates had no wish to have their fiefdoms inspected by outsiders. In general, their concern was to limit the damage such a new unit might do to their reputations. They considered themselves sufficiently capable to inspect projects themselves and, if need be, contract external help of their own choosing.³⁷

One staff member of a department that had apparently recently been investigated by a private management consultancy firm, submitted suggestions that were essentially no more than a regurgitation of the suggestions for his own department. One of the Deputy Directors inside the Ministry responded with an extremely detailed and dense 11-page memorandum to DGIS.³⁸ Central was the issue of control. Referring to the document *DTH Anders*, he acknowledged that in the effective execution of development cooperation policy civil servants faced ‘a near impossible task’. This had been acknowledged in *DTH Anders* and the directorate was currently actively implementing the document’s recommendations. The Deputy Director insisted that the inspectorate should not deal with issues that belonged within the domain and the jurisdiction of DTH. He concluded ‘DTH sees no reason for the establishment of a separate inspection unit within the Directorate General to inspect the implementing directorates’.

Following further discussions, in early 1977 Pronk ordered the management of DGIS to put in place the organisational and provisional necessities that would allow for the establishment of the inspectorate.³⁹ Although sections within the ministry continued to express their opposition to Pronk’s ideas, Kramer was given the go-ahead to start working on a ministerial order and explanatory statement (*Ministeriële beschikking en toelichting*). By May 1977 Kramer had completed

37. See (1) Symposium 13 en 14 January 1983 over het functioneren van het IOV. Deel II, p. 2; and (2) DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluations, *Survey of Users of Evaluations*, IOB, May 1997, p. 6.

38. Memo 847/725, 2/12/1976, van Souchef DTH aan DGIS.

39. Memo 266/77, 28/2/1977, van SA (Roos) aan R via SA, DGIS en S. See also scribbled comments by Pronk dated 27/3/1976.

drafts of these texts and sent them, together with a memorandum, to a number of interested parties within the ministry. These documents, and the responses to them, were discussed at a management lunch on 13 May 1977. The main conclusion was that not all the parties involved accepted the right to existence of the envisaged inspectorate. Nevertheless, the meeting appears to have been a formality, and, in the words of the minutes, 'DGIS ordered head of DTH to bring about a few changes and specifics in the text'.⁴⁰ Finally, on 17 May 1977, the Director-General informed Minister Pronk that the draft documents 'reflected well your intention regarding an inspectorate'.⁴¹ Interestingly, Pronk wanted both the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the Minister for Development Cooperation to sign the order regarding the establishment of the inspectorate (*Beschikking inzake de instelling van de inspectie*). This would ensure that any changes to the inspectorate that later Ministers for Development Cooperation might wish to make would also require the support of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁴²

Following the election in May 1977, after four years in office, the centre-left coalition government came to an end. It took 208 days before the new government, this time a centre-right coalition, came to power in December 1977. It was during this interregnum that the outgoing Minister for Development Cooperation, Jan Pronk, and the man who was to become its first director, Joop Kramer, pushed through the establishment of the inspectorate.

On 1 July 1977 the ministerial order was signed and the *Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking te Velde* (IOV) formally came into being. Although the name translates into English as Inspectorate Development Cooperation in the Field, the IOV came to be known as the Operations Review Unit or simply 'the inspectorate'. Kramer was relieved of his duties as Director of DTH and allowed to establish and assemble inspectors for the new unit. Kramer was to be responsible not only for the job descriptions, but also for their ranking. Initially he was to have a budget for three tenured positions, but it was envisaged that this was to be expanded to ten positions in the future.

During the second half of 1977, as the politicians continued their negotiations to form a coalition government, Joop Kramer certainly did not envisage that his task would be changed or obstructed by the incoming government. He drew up a 'short passage' detailing the review unit, to be included in the texts dealing with

40. Note after a meeting on 13 May 1977 on a draft ministerial order regarding a review unit.

41. Memo 58/77, 17/5/1977, Mr. L.H.J.B. van Gorkom aan R via S.

42. Memorandum, 8/6/1977, van Chef AOR aan S, Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking te Velde, paraaf 4.

development cooperation that were submitted to the politicians. Even before the inspectorate had appointed its first inspectors, let alone become operational, Kramer informed the negotiating parties that, 'the first missions of inspection will leave at around the end of the year'.⁴³

Scope and procedures

The formal instructions for the newly established Operations Review Unit were completed in mid-August 1977. It was to have three tasks: to investigate bilateral projects and activities being carried out within the scope of Dutch development cooperation, to report on them, and to advise. The reports were to go directly to the Minister and, to enable him to keep one step ahead of his critics and to check on his own civil servants, they were to be strictly confidential. Outside of the inspectorate's area of operation were those forms of aid in which the Dutch contribution was subsumed under the authority of multilateral bodies such as the European Development Fund, the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the World Bank and other organisations. As the Director-General stated, 'The inspectorate is meant for the activities that have been funded by Dutch government money'.⁴⁴ Not to be included were activities funded by the developing countries themselves, or the activities of non-governmental organisations that were entirely self-financed without government assistance. The inspectorate was to be an independent unit within DGIS, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With regard to the selection of the staff of the new unit, the outgoing Minister for Development Cooperation had stated that the first criterion that should count was 'field-experience with the implementation of development projects'.⁴⁵ This apparently did not apply to Kramer, since he had never been to a developing country. In view of his organisational talent and ministerial contacts, however, Kramer appeared to be the best candidate for the position of director of the Operations Review Unit.

43. Memorie van Toelichting, Passage over inspectie, DTH, 6 July 1977.

44. Memo 131, 15/08/1977 van Secretaris-Generaal aan PVS, ADVA, AMAD, DGIS, enzovoorts, Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking te Velde (IOV).

45. Memo 336/76, 20/09/1976 van J.P. Pronk aan DGIS via S, cc. andere diensten. Instelling IOV.

The creation of an independent Operations Review Unit did not come out of the blue, nor was the Netherlands the first donor country to establish one. In the mid-1970s Dutch development aid grew substantially, as did the proportion of untied aid, but DGIS was not ready to handle these larger amounts. The government, and particularly Minister Jan Pronk, opted for an independent review unit with inspectors who would report directly to the Minister. The new unit was to concentrate on the inspection of bilateral, as opposed to multilateral, development cooperation projects. It was not to make policy evaluations and was to refrain from financial auditing. Pronk needed the unit in order to strengthen his position in the debate with both right- and left-wing opponents within and outside parliament, and to check on his own civil servants. The establishment of the unit aroused much resistance among the policy and operational departments of the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation.

First period, 1978–1987: Inspection of projects

This chapter explains how, in its first period, the Operations Review Unit had to justify its existence and find its place within the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It describes the unit's first reports, and who they were intended to benefit. The appointment of Prince Claus as Inspector General helped to ensure that the unit's recommendations were implemented. As the volume of untied aid increased, it was decided to go beyond inspections of individual projects to evaluations of entire sectors, themes and country programmes.

The outside insider

Prior to the formal establishment of the Operations Review Unit, Minister for Development Cooperation Jan Pronk was well aware that there were not that many people who would meet the criteria for inspector. He wrote to the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation: 'I can imagine that such an inspectorate will come about only gradually. One reason is the limited availability of new permanent positions. Moreover, experiences have to be acquired with a new inspection unit, which should result in an adjustment of the initial set up'.¹

Pronk wished to ensure that the inspectorate carried the clout necessary to guarantee access to and respect within the bureaucratic world. Joop Kramer, whose position within the ministry was equivalent to a director, immediately selected Han van Bommel as his assistant.² Kramer then had to address the question of what made a good inspector. Then and now, becoming an inspector is a process of learning on the job. 'The ideal inspector did not and still does not exist', says present director Rob van den Berg. 'Those who join have either vast

1. Memo 336/76, 20/09/1976 van J.P. Pronk aan DGIS via S re: establishment inspectorate.

2. Van Bommel has been responsible for a variety of tasks, and is still there, the living embodiment of the inspectorate's institutional archives.

field experience in developing countries, or a strong background in research. After joining, they are trained as inspectors'.³ In other donor countries the situation is not much different. The Swiss Service de la Coopération Technique, for example, states that inspectors have to be impartial and able to withstand inside and outside pressures, stressing that they need 'a stable personality'.⁴

Shortly before departing in late March 1978 on the first inspection mission, Kramer prepared an advertisement for the new inspector positions,⁵ without consulting the Director-General in charge of government personnel, who was based in the Ministry of Home Affairs. The latter quickly wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressing his regret at this haste: 'The inspectorate mentioned was established in July 1977, but no contact was made with my Ministry'.⁶ An estimated 200 applications were received, showing the high level of interest in the positions. Only two of the applicants were actually appointed, however, and one of them had been directly approached by Kramer to apply for the position.

In the summer of 1978 Rein Derksen was appointed as the unit's first inspector. He had worked in Tanzania (then Tanganyika) until 1966 as a teacher at the Morogoro Teachers' College. Between 1968 and 1972 he studied political science in the USA. Then he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, where he was employed within the Directorate Africa, and later became head of the Latin America desk. When he heard that an inspectorate was to be established, he approached Kramer, who urged him to apply.

The second inspector, Jan Paulus, came from outside the Ministry. Born in Indonesia, he studied sociology at the University of Utrecht, worked in Tanzania where he wrote a report on educational development, and continued studying at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. Paulus worked for SNV Netherlands Development Organisation in the Philippines, then in Brazil (where he became its youngest country director), and later in Tanzania. When Paulus received a letter informing him of the new review unit he immediately submitted an application, and was invited to The Hague for an interview. On arrival, he discovered to his dismay that the letter had been sent not only to him, but also to many other SNV country directors and staff. His application was turned down on the ground that he was too young (he was then 37), but he appealed against Kramer's decision, and was eventually appointed in September 1978.

3. Interview with Rob van den Berg, IOB, The Hague, 14 February 2002.

4. OECD, *Aid Evaluation: The Experience of Members of the DAC and of International Organizations*. Paris, 1975, p. 62.

5. IOV/1975 – 1984/1, Algemeen, Vacature, Melding nr. 8.61/48.

Within a month of joining the review unit, and with little preparation, Derksen and Paulus were sent off on inspection missions to India and Indonesia, respectively.⁷ As for the other applicants, Kramer used them as a reserve from which he could draw *ad hoc* experts and *de facto* inspectors for future missions.

In the initial stages the running of the inspectorate was easy because of the personal commitment of its staff to the director. Kramer continually reminded them of their unique position within the ministry and groomed a special corporate identity that can best be described as part student union, part exclusive club and part old boys' network. In those first years, decisions were never taken unilaterally – everything was discussed in staff meetings – although there was a strict hierarchy. Reading through the archival material, one cannot escape the impression that there was a playful atmosphere within the unit that was transferred into the manner in which work was conducted. For example, inspection missions were arranged to a number of countries for no other reason than their names began with the same letter. Thus, a combined mission to Lesotho, Liberia and Libya was followed by another in the following year to Malawi, Malaysia, Malta and Morocco.⁸

Joop Kramer
First director, 1977–1985

As the man with strong progressive sentiments who established the inspectorate, Joop Kramer was both feared and admired. His written comments, consistently characterised by a keen sense of the correct and subtle word choice, could make or break people. He was clearly the boss of the inspectorate and like a father to some of the young inspectors, but he was hardly a team player.

Born in 1920 into a large Catholic family, Joop Kramer studied political and social sciences at the University of Amsterdam. He became the foreign affairs editor of the newspaper De Tijd (1938–1940 and 1945–1948). When the Netherlands became involved in the Second World War he became a teacher. In 1944 he joined the Nederlandse Stichting voor Psychotechniek (Netherlands Foundation

6. 10v/1975 – 1984/I, Algemeen, Minister van Binnenlandse Zaken, 28 March 1978, aan Minister van Buitenlandse Zaken.

7. Interview with R. Derksen, Aalden, 20 September 2002, and with Jan Paulus, Utrecht, 26 September 2002.

8. 10v/1975 – 1984/0080 and 10v/1975 – 1984/0081.

for Psychodiagnostics), which made personality analyses independent of class, family or religious affiliation. In his work as director of the inspectorate Kramer emphasised the importance of providing objective analyses. Between 1948 and 1950 he had worked as editor for the weekly *Groene Amsterdammer*, and his writing skills stood him in good stead when he joined the protocol department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a section dealing with the formulation of treaties. Kramer progressed rapidly through the ranks to become the director of the Directorate Technical Assistance, even though prior to 1977 he had never been to a developing country.

Kramer had substantial contact with Jan Pronk. Both clearly believed in the malleability of society, and were responsible for the establishment of the inspectorate. Kramer understood the game within the government machinery sufficiently to survive under later Christian-Democrat and Liberal-Conservative ministers, who were more centre or centre-right.

Even before the appointment of the first inspectors, in October 1977 Kramer wrote to the Dutch embassies in the recipient countries, emphasising the need for their cooperation and asking for information regarding activities that could be inspected.⁹ These activities could be anything from projects that had been completed, from which lessons could be learned, to activities that needed to be followed up and would benefit from inspection. He then put together the inspectorate's first annual programme on the basis of the responses submitted by the embassies. Having been director of the Directorate Technical Assistance, he was able to draw on his detailed knowledge of the projects that had been commissioned under his directorship. Embassies that sought to fob off the review unit could be guaranteed his further intense interest. By early 1978 a truly daunting schedule for inspections of 57 projects in 19 countries had been drawn up for that year.¹⁰ These included a dairy project in Egypt, barrage projects in Burkina Faso, a slum improvement project in Pakistan, and a technical education programme in Bolivia.¹¹

9. 10v/1975 – 1984/6, Brief aan alle ambassades in Ontwikkelingslanden, 2/11/77 & 10v/1975 – 1984/1, Minuut, 10v 269625, aan Alle ambassades in ontwikkelingslanden, 24 October 1977.

10. 10v/1975 – 1984/6, Memo 22, 24/11/1977 van 10v aan DFO, Jaarprogramma 10v 1978 & Jaarprogramma 10v 1978.

Within three weeks of writing to the embassies, Kramer sent a telex to those who had not responded insisting that they do so as soon as possible.¹² The hurdles that had been encountered during the inspectorate's establishment were still in place. The embassy in Cairo wrote that there was no point in carrying out an inspection of the dairy project at such an early stage, and new staff had been appointed, which complicated the matter. The response of the ambassador to Thailand and Laos was similar. Noting the 'modest nature and importance' of Dutch bilateral aid to Thailand, he argued that the couple of projects that had been established with Dutch aid had only just started and it would be too early to review them. The situation was no different in Laos, although due to the scale of Dutch aid and the danger of the illegitimate use of funds an inspection there might be desirable in the long run. The ambassador continued that in view of difficult negotiations between Laos and the Netherlands, even 1978 would probably still be too soon.¹³

First mission with impact

These replies did not dissuade Kramer from undertaking the missions, however. In early February 1978 the ambassador in Cairo received a letter, signed by the Minister for Development Cooperation, stating that an inspection team would arrive in early March, and that the team was counting on the logistical support and 'local knowledge' of the embassy staff. Although the ambassador was unable to prevent the mission, he did manage to remove a number of health care projects from the inspectorate's list, which, according to him, had not yet reached a stage that justified inspection.¹⁴

Kramer, at that time still the only one allowed to conduct inspections, travelled to Egypt, accompanied by an external irrigation and drainage expert. The embassy added its third secretary, who was to be responsible for agricultural matters. In two weeks the team reviewed an education project in Cairo, poultry projects in Helwan and north Tahrir, and the Damietta livestock/dairy project. The desk study that had been carried out in The Hague was complemented with

11. 10v/1975 – 1984/6, Jaarprogramma 10v 1978.

12. 10v/1975 – 1984/37, Verzonden telexbericht, 25/11/1977.

13. 10v/1975 – 1984/119, Letter from F. van Dongen, Ambassador to Thailand and Laos, to the Minister for Development Cooperation, 29/11/1977.

14. 10v/1975 – 1984/37, Note by Kramer, 8 February 1978, 'Eerste Inspectiemissie 7 t/m 21 maart 1978'.

information from the Cairo embassy files and the team's own observations. Finally, the inspection team discussed the findings with the embassy staff and the Egyptian Under-Secretary for Economic Development.¹⁵ They also conducted a so-called *tour d'horizon*, an overview of all activities that had been agreed upon since the commencement of Dutch–Egyptian bilateral development cooperation.

In general, the three projects under review were positively evaluated. Only the livestock/dairy project had met with problems. The Egyptians were interested mainly in improving and increasing milk production, whereas the Dutch focused on improving the circumstances of the farmers, including the squatters that had occupied small pieces of land in the area. Although it had been agreed in 1976 that the squatters were to be incorporated into the project as small-scale farmers, the project director had always opposed this. He had not hesitated to call in the military to remove squatters who, according to the Egyptian authorities, were hampering the efficient exploitation of the polder.¹⁶ In its report the inspectors stated that this was partly true, but also noted that 'although these squatters were illiterate, they did have rudimentarily organised and primitive knowledge of *their* kind of agriculture and livestock, and it is to be expected that with training they could increase production on their fields'.¹⁷ The Dutch engineering firm responsible for the project, ILACO, accepted the findings and recommendations.

In May 1978, the inspection reports were submitted to the new Minister Jan de Koning, Pronk's successor. They were more or less typical of the reports produced in those early years – their scope was limited to projects, the recommendations were practical and the reports were thin. The report on the Cairo education project was just four pages long, the poultry projects report five pages, and the livestock/dairy project report 13 pages. In the margin of the letter accompanying the reports the Minister wrote: 'I believe the inspectorate has made a good start'.¹⁸ In early June the inspectorate reported that the Minister had approved the reports. The Directorate Technical Assistance and the Directorate Financial Development Cooperation were asked to submit to the inspectorate, by the end of the year, a summary of the extent to which the recommendations had been implemented.¹⁹

In May 1979, a second mission was sent to Egypt, and again the Damietta livestock/dairy project was reviewed. The problems encountered by the first inspec-

15. 10v/1975 – 1984/37, Inspectiebezoek Egypte 07-22/03/1978, algemeen.

16. 10v/1975 – 1984/37, Verzonden codebericht, 28/04/1978.

17. 10v report 3, Damietta Dairy Project.

18. 10v/1975 – 1984/37, Memo 76 van Chef 10v aan R via DGIS en S, 22/05/1978.

19. 10v/1975 – 1984/37, Memo 92 van Chef 10v aan Chef DTH en Chef DFO, 08/06/1978.

tion had been partly resolved. The squatters were now being allowed to remain on their land and could even become proprietors. Certain activities were developed for them. The Directorate Financial Development Cooperation²⁰ and the Dutch embassy in Cairo²¹ commented on the draft of the second report, while the Directorate Technical Assistance immediately agreed with the contents. The Damietta livestock/dairy project report was submitted to the Minister at the end of October 1979, with the remark that on the basis of previous recommendations more satisfying results could be expected.²²

The first report on the Cairo education project also had an impact. In response to one of its suggestions, DGIS decided to assign an aid coordinator to the embassy in Cairo with sole responsibility for development cooperation. The ambassador responded negatively to the suggestion, arguing that the balanced division of tasks and the harmonious cooperation among embassy personnel should not be disturbed. It would be a misapprehension that within the embassy development cooperation was subservient to Dutch economic interests.²³ The inspectorate's first mission, which had cost less than €11,500, can be described as a success.

A mission without a report

The arguments of the Dutch ambassador in Bangkok did not dissuade Kramer from planning a mission to Thailand. In January 1979 he requested the embassy to make personnel available in September and October, to provide the inspectorate with a list of relevant projects and development activities and a travel schedule, and to suggest authorities and organisations that could be visited.²⁴ In May the ambassador replied that the planned mission would coincide with an 'overburdened assembly season' for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP),²⁵ so that embassy personnel would not be able to offer much supervision. Kramer scribbled in the margin of the letter that his inspectorate did not need much supervision anyway. With regard to one of the projects that Kramer wanted to visit, the ambassador noted that a few of the

20. Memo AR-102/79 van DFO/AR aan IOV via DFO/BS, 30/07/1979.

21. Brief van Eerste Secretaris OS, Caïro, aan Minister voor OS, 10/10/1979.

22. Memo 200 van Chef IOV aan R via DGIS en S, 29/10/1979.

23. IOV/1975 – 1984/37, Ontvangen codebericht, 25/07/1978.

24. IOV/1975 – 1984/119, Letter from Kramer to Ambassador Thailand, 17/01/1979.

25. IOV/1975 – 1984/119, Letter from Ambassador, Bangkok, to the Minister for Development Cooperation, 30/05/1979.

Dutch experts affiliated with it would be abroad in October, but for Kramer 'a few' surely did not mean 'all'. Nor was the fact that an appraisal mission had just visited another project a drawback for Kramer. He dismissed the ambassador's conclusion that it would be better to postpone the mission to Thailand, with the word 'balderdash'.

In July 1979, on behalf of the Minister, Kramer wrote to the ambassador in Bangkok that he still planned to proceed with the mission.²⁶ During the inspection, which was estimated to cost around 40,000 guilders (€18,000),²⁷ he would be accompanied by van Bommel and an expert on artificial insemination. Besides inspecting a number of agricultural, fertiliser and artificial insemination projects, Kramer also wanted to review two small embassy projects (*kleine ambassade projecten*). One month later the ambassador had put together a tentative programme.²⁸ The schedule for the first week looked promising, and the mission left for Bangkok.²⁹ Half way through the mission Kramer wrote an optimistic letter to the inspectors at home, with the salutation 'IOVivat' (long live the inspectorate), in which he referred to 'the thick crust of bureaucracy and politics that is difficult to penetrate' in Thailand.³⁰

While Kramer and van Bommel were still in Thailand, Derksen, the inspectorate's acting director, sent a letter to the ambassador in Bangkok regarding a second mission to be carried out in the second half of 1980.³¹ The tone of the letter was the same as the one sent a year earlier, but this time the ambassador was able to discuss the matter with Kramer personally.³² The archival material does not reveal whether this second trip ever took place. Even the first trip to Thailand did not result in an official report. Just before Christmas 1979 Kramer wrote a note in which he said that he expected to finalise the draft reports and recommendations within one or two weeks.³³ Parts of the drafts were sent to the Minister, but as these never became official reports, the mission to Thailand thus never

26. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Letter from Kramer (in The Hague) to Ambassador, Bangkok, 12/07/1979.

27. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Memo 141 van Chef IOV aan ACO/TI, 31/07/1979.

28. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Letter from Ambassador, Bangkok, to the Minister for Development Cooperation, 14/08/1979.

29. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Bezoek Chef IOV, drs. J.H. Kramer en J.K. van Bommel.

30. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Kramer in Bangkok, 27 September 1979, to IOV.

31. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Letter from Derksen to ambassador, Bangkok, 30/09/1979.

32. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Letter from Embassy counsellor to the Minister for Development Cooperation, 19/10/1979.

33. IOV/1975 – 1984/II9, Memo van Kramer, 18/12/1979.

had any output, and thus no outcome. The reason was that Kramer had taken on so much work that he had no time to finish the reports.

Confidentiality

The inspectorate regarded its reports as documents of great importance, in which all signs of the frivolity that characterised the inner workings of the review unit were to be avoided. Since all the reports were classified, Minister Jan Pronk had a weapon that his critics within and outside the ministry did not have. It was hoped that confidential reporting would help to ensure the quality of the inspection work, guarantee the inspectorate's independence and encourage openness and self-criticism on the part of those responsible for the projects under review, in particular the local authorities in the recipient countries. For a number of years Pronk's successors adopted a similar position.

The classified nature of the reports had another effect. It increased their attractiveness, irrespective of their content. Hidden from public view, submitted to a select few, the reports were much sought after by civil servants who feared the criticism they might contain. They zealously copied every report they could lay their hands on. Top-level managers often followed the review unit very critically. In May 1979 the director of the Directorate Financial Development Cooperation apparently got hold of a report, and wrote to Kramer, 'Your draft summary ... I can not endorse it'. What he actually objected to was the fact that he had had no say in drawing the conclusions.³⁴

That Kramer did not even allow heads of department to comment on the draft reports surprised even Minister Jan de Koning. 'It appears that I do not always receive the notes made by heads of departments and others in relation to draft reports of the inspectorate'.³⁵ Kramer, however, believed that the confidentiality of the reports would ensure the independence of his unit. Without it, inspectors would be constrained in what they could write and say. A commentator on Dutch development cooperation, Paul Hoebink, has noted of the reports written under the directorship of Kramer that 'they are very critical with regard to the results achieved [and] of the ministry machinery, in particular with regard to the approval, extension and so forth of projects'.³⁶

34. 10V/1975 – 1984/2, Algemeen, Chef DFO, 30/5/79, Memo to Chef inspectorate.

35. 10V/1975 – 1984/2, Algemeen, J. de Koning, 4/1/79, Memorandum aan Chef 10V via S en DGIS.

36. Interview with Paul Hoebink, Den Haag, 1 November 2002.

Various ministers for development cooperation were challenged over the confidentiality of the inspection reports. On several occasions, members of parliament confronted Minister Jan de Koning (1977–1981) on the issue. In May 1978, for example, during a budget debate in the Upper House, a member of a small party stated that he wished to be informed about the results of the inspections. De Koning said he understood this wish, but also made a restriction. ‘Organisations with which we have made these evaluations, whether in the Netherlands, or in the developing country, also have to approve such a publication’.³⁷ When asked a similar question by a fellow Christian Democrat, he replied: ‘I am prepared to do anything, but do I serve this House well by throwing this load of paper around? Is it not better that I try to make a selection of the reports...?’ In addition, the House should of course have the right to ask for any report’.³⁸ At that time the Standing Committee on Development Cooperation had already received summaries of some reports. In 1982 the Christian Democrat Minister Cees van Dijk (1981–1982) declared, ‘The inspection reports are meant for me personally’.

During a symposium on the inspectorate’s work in January 1983, inspector Rein Derksen stated that the classification of the reports as confidential had ‘raised questions and possibly also irritation from the beginning. Both inside the ministry and outside, the question arose whether it *ipso facto* did not spoil somewhat the feedback possibilities’. While this was not true for operational staff within the ministry, ‘it seriously restricts external persons and groups, who have to make the best of less confidential, more generalised versions of the reviews’.³⁹

All this made it inevitable that over the years the reports would be made public. Minister Eegje Schoo (1982–1986) assured parliament that she wanted to inform the members and other interested parties as fully as possible. She was therefore willing to publish ‘the summaries at the end of all inspection reports’ dealing with individual projects.⁴⁰ Somewhat later she announced that more general reports would be made available in full to parliament, the first one being a review of a global fund with small grants for drinking water provision.⁴¹ This would not apply to the reports on country programme evaluations, however, which she preferred to keep for internal use.

37. Eerste Kamer beleidsdebat begroting 1978, Handelingen EK 9 May 1978, p. 246.

38. Lower House debate on budget 1979, Handelingen TK, 29 November 1978, p. 1854.

39. 10V Symposium, 13 en 14 January 1983, deel 11, p. 7.

40. Lower House budget debate 1983, Handelingen TK, 16 February 1983, pp. 2380, 2542.

41. Handelingen TK, 1983–1984, 18 100 V, nr. 27, p. 28.

The opposition parties continued to press for all inspection reports to be made public. At the end of 1984, following a clash between Labour party spokesperson Eveline Herfkens (later also Minister) and Minister Schoo, Herfkens tabled a motion calling for full openness, but it was rejected.⁴² Finally, Minister Piet Bukman (1986–1989) announced that all original inspection materials were to be made available to parliament.⁴³ When Jan Pronk, the Minister who had initially opted for full confidentiality, succeeded Bukman in 1989, he confirmed this commitment to do the same.⁴⁴

State of affairs

In 1980 Kramer drew up a document, entitled *Stand van Zaken* (State of affairs). The document offered an overview of the inspectorate's activities so far. Kramer wrote: 'For over one and a half years the inspectorate has been functioning as more than a one-man business. ... It has investigated about 140 projects – large and small – and has reported on about 90. ... This may appear to some to be an impressive amount, although the number, which runs into the thousands, of Dutch bilateral activities that have been completed and are still running, dwarfs this'.⁴⁵ The main reason why the review unit was unable to cover more activities lay in the fact that it was understaffed. Of the nine full-time inspectors that the unit was supposed to have in 1980, only four were actually employed. The inspectorate had not yet passed through its start-up period.⁴⁶ Kramer also openly discussed the 'feelings of discomfort' that had existed among ministers at the time of the inspectorate's establishment.

Kramer listed the four key tasks of the review unit: information, control, operational support and education. The provision of information that clearly and closely described the reality on the ground was undoubtedly its prime function. Within the ministry civil servants were dependent on reports from experts or project staff in the field, but these were often biased. The need existed 'even if it is not consciously felt, for the "live" observations of objective inspectors, acquired in the course of intensive and, where necessary, relatively long visits to "the field".'

42. Handelingen TK, 1984–1985, 7 November 1984, p. 1256; 8 November 1984, pp. 1371–1383; 22 January 1985, pp. 2692, 2693; 12 March 1985, pp. 3946, 3948.

43. Handelingen TK, 1986–1987, 19 475, nr. 4, p. 3, 5.

44. Handelingen TK, 1990–1991, 21 813, nr. 6, pp. 21, 45.

45. *Stand van Zaken*, p. 13.

46. *Stand van Zaken*, 27/5/1980 – 01/09/1980, p. 1.

Kramer argued that as the Minister and his top civil servants most strongly felt the need for this objective information, the reports were consciously written with them in mind.

The document claimed that the title ‘inspectorate’ had led to misunderstandings with regard to the nature and function of the unit. ‘With many, the term only awakened associations with “control” and the rooting out of “faults”, thus the unit had a negative and even a partially threatening tone.’ This is at odds with the statements of his closest associates in the unit, all of whom commented that Kramer was well aware of the implications of the word ‘inspectorate’, and of their designation as inspectors. Kramer consciously chose these terms, as well as the salary scales and the status that came to be associated with the unit, so as to ensure compliance with the inspectors’ recommendations. Kramer admitted that in numerous reports the inspectors had recommended radical changes in, and even halting projects that were already running, while it had also reported on projects that were functioning well. He claimed that, on the basis of experience, preparatory research and fieldwork, the inspectors were generally able to determine, rather precisely, improvements that were both necessary and feasible. The objectivity of the inspectors allowed them to provide detailed operational support in the form of advice to projects. Such advice was necessary, as ‘The supervision of field activities is often shoddy and the number of internal evaluation exercises must of necessity be limited’.⁴⁷

The confidential document *Stand van Zaken* contained no shocking revelations, but the draft was leaked to the press before the Minister had seen it. The newspaper *De Telegraaf* (how it got hold of the document remains unknown) then published in a series of articles and editorials detailing how ‘aid money appears to be thrown away’.⁴⁸ The newspaper changed the inspectorate’s document from an instrument to counter aid opponents into one that was against development cooperation as such. The articles insinuated that the Minister was seeking to cover up the document and its findings, describing it as ‘the investigation which development cooperation does not wish to make public’, and claiming that it was a heavy burden on the Minister. Other newspapers followed with similar salvos.⁴⁹ DGIS therefore decided to make the document public, and once it did so little more was heard of it. Once stripped of its allure, the document apparently lacked the punch necessary for a good news story.

47. *Stand van Zaken*, pp. 3, 4.

48. Kees Lunshof, ‘Ontwikkelingsgeld lijkt weggegooid’, *De Telegraaf*, 5 September 1980.

In an effort to counter the negative publicity, Kramer met with Henk de Mari of *De Telegraaf*, the journalist who in the mid-1970s had led an attack on the activities of Prince Claus, Minister Jan Pronk and Dutch development cooperation as a whole. The interview was a fiasco. ‘Only 150 of 6000 development projects investigated’, read the headline in the edition on 13 December 1980. The article again referred to ‘millions’ that ‘disappeared’ in Jamaica. After which Kramer was allowed to state: ‘To do our work in a manner approaching thoroughness, we would need at least nine inspectors. At present we have four ... The largest part of Dutch government spending on development cooperation takes place beyond our view’.⁵⁰ Kramer was then quoted as saying that of the projects investigated by the inspectorate, 18% were complete failures and a further 17% were not successful.

On the following Monday Minister De Koning telephoned the Ministry’s Deputy Director of Publicity.⁵¹ He was told that although one of his staff had been present during the interview, and although the text did not contain factual errors, his department could not be held responsible for tendentious reporting. It was regrettable that Kramer had quoted percentages.⁵² Blamed for granting the interview, Kramer did not hesitate in seeking to put matters right: ‘I did not willingly make the appointment with de Mari... I received the suggestion to accept his approach from the Publicity Department itself. Only then was the appointment set’. The ‘percentages’ were to a certain extent de Mari’s constructions – Kramer admitted to having estimated that 60–65% of the activities investigated had been good or not disappointing, and that half of the rest, about 18%, were bad.⁵³

49. Johan Olde Kalter, ‘Rapport verspilling ontwikkelingsgelden voorlopig nog niet in de openbaarheid’, *De Telegraaf*, 6 September 1980; Commentaar, ‘Ontwikkelings-samenwerking’, *De Typhoon*, 13 September 1980; and Parlementsredactie, ‘Opzet projecten derde wereld soms slordig’, *Trouw*, 12 September 1980.

50. Henk de Mari, ‘Slechts 150 van 6000 ontwikkelingsprojecten onderzocht’, *De Telegraaf*, 13 December 1980.

51. Memo vdo-512/80, 15/12/1980 van Souchef vdo aan R via plv. DGIS en S. Interview met Chef IOV.

52. Memo vdo-512/80, 15/12/1980 van Souchef vdo aan R via plv. DGIS en S. Interview met Chef IOV.

53. Memo 198, 16/12/1980 van Chef IOV aan R via plv. DGIS en S. Interview *Telegraaf*.

Appointment of the Inspector General

Although the inspectorate's first reports (on Egypt) had had some effect, the outcomes of many other reports on development cooperation policy formulation and implementation remained limited. The review unit was handicapped by the fact that it had no institutional authority to enforce the implementation of its recommendations. It was not part of the direct staff of the Minister and did not attend his weekly meetings. The inspectorate had to prove itself all the time, both within and outside the ministry. In 1984 an opportunity arose to do something about this. Prince Claus von Amsberg, husband of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, made it known to Joop Kramer that he was interested in a new function at the Ministry. The Prince had shown a consistent interest in development cooperation, particularly in Africa. At the time he was special adviser to the Minister, but his advice was requested on practical policy matters. Moreover, his communication with Minister Schoo was not very intense. The Prince was interested in a position that would demand more reflection. Kramer suggested that the Prince become Inspector-General Development Cooperation. The Prince, by virtue of his standing and authority, and his direct access to the Minister, could help to ensure that the reports' recommendations were indeed carried out both in the field and in the Netherlands itself.

Without revealing his contact with Kramer, the Prince approached the Director-General about the job, and the latter gained the approval of Minister Schoo. By the middle of 1984 Kramer had prepared a job description. The first point was that 'the function should be a "do" function', which guaranteed that it would not alter the manner in which the inspectorate operated. The Inspector General should be able to 'ensure that attention was paid to the inspection reports and advice'.⁵⁴ In addition, he could try and help to ensure the evaluation of multilateral organisations, such as the World Bank or UNDP.⁵⁵ The position of the Inspector-General was described as follows: 'He reports directly to the Minister for Development Cooperation while providing copies to the Secretary-General and the Director-General for Development Cooperation'.⁵⁶

54. 10V/1975 – 1985/5, Memo 239, 2 July 1984, Chef 10V aan R (op verzoek van DGIS: rechtstreeks).

55. The Dutch contributions to multilateral organisations had increased over the years, from 36 million guilders in 1977 to 183 million guilders in 1984. See e.g. Report 280, *Co-financing between the Netherlands and the World Bank*, Vol. 11, p. 35.

56. 10V/1975 – 1985/5, Memo No. 184/84, 27 August 1984, DGIS aan R via S. Taakvervulling inspecteur generaal.

Prince Claus attended the weekly staff meetings of the inspectorate, commented on draft inspection reports, and supported the follow-up of the recommendations. In his first two years, upon the completion of reports, he arranged meetings with the directorates involved to seek clarification regarding policy advice contained in the reports. He repeated the visits to discuss what had been done with the recommendations. This approach was soon abandoned however, when the directorates complained that they felt they were being criticised by a headmaster. The Prince also used his new position to protect the inspectorate's independence, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Prince Claus von Amsberg
Inspector General Development Cooperation, 1984–2002

Prince Claus was an unconventional gentleman thinker, who loved discussions about international politics and culture.⁵⁷ His saying, 'People are not to be developed, they develop themselves' characterised his critical view of traditional development cooperation. He demonstrated commitment, yet he was thoughtful and never loose in conversation. Former Minister Jan Pronk characterised his working style as 'modest and authoritative. He was able to be present without creating a sphere in which others felt intimidated'.⁵⁸

Claus was born in Germany in 1926, but in 1928 the family left for Tanganyika, where his father had been appointed manager of a sisal plantation. Claus had a happy childhood. As with many settler children, he grew up learning the language of the servants, Kiswahili.⁵⁹ He attended boarding school in Lushoto, but in 1938 returned to Germany to attend secondary school. When he arrived the country was in the grip of the Nazi party. Claus later remarked that his way of escaping this reality had been to close his eyes and dream of Africa. His love for the continent never left him.

In the late 1950s Claus entered the West German diplomatic service and served in the Dominican Republic and Ivory Coast. In 1963 he was transferred to

57. For a political biography of Prins Claus, see F. Biekman, *De wereld volgens prins Claus*. Amsterdam, 2004.

58. Jan Hoedeman, 'Claus was kritisch over Golfoorlog', *de Volkskrant*, 7 October 2002. Interview with Jan Pronk.

59. Guido van de Kreke, 'Ik ben een oude Afrikaan', *De Telegraaf*, 7 October 2002.

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bonn, where he worked in the department responsible for economic relations with sub-Saharan Africa.

In 1966 Claus gave up his career as a diplomat when he married Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands. He was appointed chair of the National Committee Development Strategy, chair and later honorary chair of the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, and special adviser to the Minister for Development Cooperation. In 1980, when Beatrix became Queen, Prince Claus began to suffer from depression and was not seen in public for some time. In 1984 he became Inspector General for Development Cooperation.

Prince Claus was a hard worker. He visited countries targeted by Dutch policy, such as India, Sri Lanka, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia. 'Without those countries my world had remained small. They helped me to discover that the country where I came from was not the centre of the world'.⁶⁰ During his last years Prince Claus suffered physically, although mentally he remained strong. When he died in 2002, many Dutch people deeply mourned.

A global evaluation

The rather progressive aid policy that Jan Pronk had launched in the 1970s was often challenged, particularly in periods with centre-right governments. Pronk wanted to increase the volume of aid, especially for socialist countries such as Tanzania, Vietnam and Cuba, and for Suriname, which had gained independence in 1975. He also favoured the integration of the goals of the second development decade of the United Nations into Dutch policy and increased support for the UN Conference on Trade and Development.⁶¹

Minister Eegje Schoo (1982–1986) has been seen as the politician who tried to make a clean break with Pronk's heritage. So far, Schoo has been the only minister of the Liberal-Conservative (VVD) party to be entrusted with development cooperation. She believed that the attempts to improve the position of the poorest people had been unsuccessful, aid was too fragmented, and the number of recipient countries too large. Dutch trade and industry should have a bigger say. In

60. *Internationale Samenwerking*, the magazine of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 1999, pp. 13–14.

61. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking van de Derde Wereld: Beeldvorming en beleid in Nederland 1950–1990*. SDU, The Hague, 1994, p. 148.

preparation for a redefinition of development cooperation policy she requested the inspectorate to provide her with an overview of the results of all the evaluations carried out so far, a summary of failures and successes, and how much money had been spent. The inspectorate had a very short time to do this, but Kramer accepted the challenge, even though some of his inspectors argued that such a review would be too global and much too fragmented. Later the minister would quote the review as the complete truth.

Joop Kramer wrote the general evaluation of Dutch bilateral development cooperation (*Globale evaluatie van de Nederlandse bilaterale ontwikkelingssamenwerking*) almost single-handed.⁶² The report focused on bilateral aid and, in particular, on ‘country allocations’, the budget item for aid to developing countries. Of the activities reviewed by the inspectorate, 15% were ‘very satisfactory’; 35% ‘fairly satisfactory’; 19% ‘satisfactory to a limited extent’; 20% ‘fairly unsatisfactory’; and 8% ‘very unsatisfactory’.⁶³

The report claimed that the basis on which countries had been selected for aid was not systematic, and pointed to the need for policies tailored to each country. It spoke of a wide gap between policy aims and implementation in developing countries, and the illusion of policy compatibility between the Netherlands and the recipient countries. Most governments had policies for poverty alleviation, but they ‘think more in national than in poor-group proportions, and more in financial-economic than in socio-economic terms’. The report also warned of the tendency of developing countries not to adhere to their commitments. Staff within the Ministry was not sufficiently knowledgeable about the recipient countries, while activities on the ground were often unsuccessful because local culture and customs were disregarded. The report contained harsh words about the low level of expertise within diplomatic missions abroad. An important general conclusion was that Dutch aid had focused heavily on increasing the economic autonomy of countries as a whole, rather than on reducing poverty of certain sections of their populations. Poverty alleviation and economic self-reliance were to be the two main aims of Dutch development policy.

62. 10v, *Globale evaluatie van de Nederlandse bilaterale ontwikkelingssamenwerking* (A general evaluation of Dutch bilateral development cooperation), The Hague, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 168/A–I, January/April 1984.

63. No opinion was given about the remaining 3%.

Realignment of bilateral aid policy

In two policy documents, *Herijking bilateraal beleid* (Realignment of bilateral policy) and *Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en werkgelegenheid* (Development cooperation and employment) Minister Schoo described how development cooperation could become more effective. Poverty alleviation had to remain a major goal, but in conjunction with economic growth and self-reliance. Development activities should generate money to make countries economically self-reliant in the long run, without the need for aid and heavy financial commitments to keep activities running. The private sector had to become more involved in development activities.⁶⁴ Schoo planned to pursue two main programmes: 'rural development', which was to focus on the sustainable improvement of national food supplies and rural living conditions; and 'industrial development', which would concentrate on increasing employment opportunities and industrial production capacities, and on strengthening the economic power of communities. She planned to reduce the number of countries receiving Dutch aid from 110 to 35, including the ten so-called programme countries that were to be the focus countries for bilateral assistance.⁶⁵

Schoo's plans drew a lot of criticism. 'Farewell, poorest', one newspaper stated, lamenting the absence of an honest interest in the poorest people.⁶⁶ The Minister was criticised because she tied foreign assistance to Dutch economic interests. Her expertise was doubted.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in a scathing commentary on her plans, the National Advisory Council for Development Cooperation pointed out, among other things, that her proposals did not take the findings of the inspectorate sufficiently into account.⁶⁸ Schoo replied to her critics that most people had too high expectations of the *Herijkingsnota*.

She also received sympathy for the plans. One newspaper welcomed the new approach and used the inspectorate's comments in its general evaluation of

64. See *Herijking Bilateraal Beleid* and *Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en werkgelegenheid*, both 1984.

65. 'Nota 'herijking' naar parlement. Vernieuwd bilateraal beleid mikt op duurzame verbetering', *Internationaal Samenwerking*, 9, 6 June 1984.

66. A.E. van Niekerk, 'Nota herijking: basis voor meer zakelijke benadering van o.s.', *Financieel Dagblad*, 14 May 1984.

67. Alice Oppenheim, 'Bedrijfsleven moet risico's durven nemen in de Derde Wereld', *Elseviers Magazine*, 23 June 1984.

68. NAR Advies nr 81, *Commentaar op de regeringsnota Herijking Bilateraal Beleid*, June 1984.

Dutch bilateral development cooperation to underscore its point.⁶⁹ Schoo's critics, wrote another, had no interest in the structural social problems that lay at the root of the failures, and how they could be incorporated into new development cooperation policies.⁷⁰ 'It would be incorrect to state that Schoo was only concerned with the interests of Dutch business', wrote historian Maarten Kuitenbrouwer.⁷¹ He noted that several programme countries had disappeared from her list, but were still receiving substantial amounts of aid via other programmes. Schoo also dramatically increased the Dutch contribution to the UN Population Program. According to the historian, there is quite some continuity, and as far as there had been a break with the past, it had already begun under her predecessors.

Preparing for a new era

In a 1984 interview about the realignment of the development cooperation policy, Minister Schoo said that she considered the inspectorate as an indispensable instrument to acquire independent and objective judgements about the efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy of aid expenditures.⁷² In that same period, inspired by its experiences in past years, the Operations Review Unit was reflecting on its own role and position. It began to see that, in view of its massive workload, parliament did not need brief inspection reports on many single projects but clear answers on the validity of Dutch development cooperation as a whole. Anxious to provide parliament with an overview of the success or failure of Dutch development cooperation, the review unit tried to turn to sector and thematic reports. In mid-1980, in a report to parliament, the inspectorate noted: 'For 1981 an increase in summary reports can be expected, which aim to relate the field experience in different regions to the phase of policy making which precedes the concrete implementation of projects'. The review unit considered it too early to provide an overall picture of the quality of the bilateral aid, but

69. A.E. van Niekerk, *op. cit.*, 14 May 1984.

70. Marco Bommeljé en Leo van Grunsven, 'Behoudzucht kenmerkt kritiek op nota-Schoo', *de Volkskrant*, 16 May 1984; 'CDA wekt woede met waarschuwing Schoo', *Trouw*, 4 September 1984; 'Felle woordenstrijd tijdens debat over ontwikkelingshulp', *De Telegraaf*, 4 September 1984.

71. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *op cit.*, p. 157.

72. 'Nota "herijking" naar parlement. Vernieuwd bilateraal beleid mikt op duurzame verbetering', *Internationale Samenwerking*, 9, 6 June 1984.

offered some impressions, one of them being that in implementation of many projects 'few traces can be found of the fundamental aims of Dutch development policy'.⁷³

The first sector and thematic reports were little more than compilations of individual project reports. Examples were: the impact of Dutch-funded agricultural activities on women, covering experiences from 1972 to 1982; cattle projects in nine countries in the period 1978–1984; and drinking water improvement projects in eight countries between 1975 and 1980.⁷⁴ These reports simply could not cover more, since Dutch development cooperation at that time mostly consisted of individual projects. Moreover, Kramer accepted such a workload that sometimes it was feared that the Operations Review Unit would become ineffective. One old hand commented that 'Kramer wanted everything, and sometimes he simply bit off more than he could chew'. In an attempt to deal with the inspectors' workload, numerous young academics were employed on a temporary basis. They did the preparatory work in the Netherlands before missions started and in some cases travelled with the missions to assist the inspectors.

During a seminar in 1983, which was attended by civil servants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and outside experts, the inspectorate was praised for these compilations, which enabled it sometimes to come up with generalisations. But most participants still recognised the 'danger that one gets caught up in case studies and that the existing general policy questions are not dealt with. The inspectors should work more in a deductive manner, review certain themes and deal with them on the basis of the broadest possible documentary research, here and there substantiated by field research. The simultaneous use of both methods of research is, in the opinion of a large number of participants, necessary'.⁷⁵ The value of the compilations of reports and the gradual move towards sector and thematic reports was recognised by the parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Cooperation, where members asked detailed questions and showed a keen interest in the successes and failures of Dutch aid efforts.⁷⁶

73. 10v/1975–1984/2, Algemeen, Memorie van Toelichting Begroting 1980.

74. 10v, *Bevindingen en aanbevelingen 1984–1994*. Den Haag, 1995, pp. 131–138.

75. Report of the 10v Symposium, 13 and 14 January 1983. The Hague, 1983, p. 5.

76. See, for example, TK Handelingen 1985–1985, 19, 475, Lijst van vragen en antwoorden en van nadere vragen en nadere antwoorden van de Vaste Kamercommissie van 20 maart 1986.

With the arrival of a new coalition government late in 1977, the founder of the Operations Review Unit, Minister Jan Pronk, left his post before the unit had become operational. The inspectorate soon justified its existence by quickly issuing a number of reports that showed how the unit was supposed to function: quick, thorough and in co-operation with the departments responsible for policy design. The effects of the reports varied considerably. The three reports on projects in Egypt had a clear impact on Dutch aid to that country. In the case of the mission to Thailand, the inspection never resulted in an official report, and had no outcome at all.

In its first period, 1978–1987, the Operations Review Unit carried out many inspections and produced 238 reports. The unit investigated expenditures totalling 1.8 billion guilders – an average of 7.7 million guilders per project – representing about one-fifth of all Dutch bilateral aid. In the early years, the research took an average of three months and always referred to bilateral aid projects.⁷⁷

The inspectorate was an integral part of the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation, but from the beginning its relations with policy and operational departments were complicated. This was partly a result of the nature of the inspectorate's work, which involved inspecting bilateral projects, and partly due to the confrontations between the first director and other departments and embassies, and the usual squabbling among civil servants. The inspectors were seen as critics and sometimes unwelcome inquisitors, and their work was often obstructed. The inspectorate's relations with the various ministers were somewhat better.

Managers, aid coordinators and their assistants within the ministry, members of parliament and the media ensured that the reports eventually became public – even though their efforts were uncoordinated. This followed a common trend among donors. According to a 1995 report only in France were most evaluations still classified for internal use only.⁷⁸

The impact of the appointment of an Inspector General was felt mostly within the Ministry itself. The initial intention that the inspectorate's reports should be seen by the Minister only was quickly eroded. At the end of this first period, the switch from reviews of individual projects to evaluations of sectors, themes and country programmes would change the Operations Review Unit from a feared inspectorate to a policy-oriented research institution.

77. IOB, *De reikwijdte van IOB Studies: Een analyse van evaluatierapporten 1978–1999*, December 2000, pp. 16–17. See also Rob van den Berg, 'Leert de hulp van lessen uit het verleden?', *Internationale Spectator*, May 2001, pp. 253–267.

78. P. Hoebink, *The Comparative Effectiveness and the Evaluation Efforts of EU Donors*. National Advisory Council for Development Cooperation, The Hague, 1995, p. 7.

Second period, 1988–1995: Policy reviews

This chapter discusses two changes in the work of the Operations Review Unit. The first was the expansion of the work from inspections of individual projects to broader, in-depth policy evaluations. The second had to do with the publication of the evaluation reports, which allowed learning from experience and added the purpose of public accountability to the unit's work. The chapter examines the effects of these changes, both in the political arena and the media, and within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The chapter ends on the eve of a realignment of Dutch foreign policy in 1996, which was to have significant consequences for the Operations Review Unit.

A new approach

In 1987 the new Minister for Development Cooperation Piet Bukman, accompanied by Prince Claus, explained to the parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Cooperation that the inspectorate was to shift to working on sectors and themes within development cooperation where efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions were in doubt. Once a theme or a sector had been chosen, the unit would look for projects that could be evaluated. This approach had been proposed at the 1983 symposium for external experts and ministry staff, and had in fact been practised for some time already. With this approach, the Operations Review Unit changed into a thematic, sector and policy evaluation department.

The new approach had important consequences. Evaluation research and writing began to take longer and more external evaluators were involved. In some instances as many as 25 – mostly outside – experts worked on one review. As we shall see, reports became longer, although individual project evaluations and compilations were sometimes published. Examples include the reports on fishing boats for Peru (report 241) and public housing projects in Curaçao and Aruba (reports 249 and 250). Whereas the inspectorate had prepared an average of 24 reports per year between 1978 and 1987, the number was now reduced to three to four per year. Between 1987 and 1995, the end of the second period, only 26 reports were published. An increasing number of reports were published in Eng-

lish, and sometimes French, for the benefit of stakeholders in the partner countries. Some reports, such as those on women entrepreneurs (report 242) and on community health care (report 243), were published in both Dutch and English. Last, but not least, the evaluation of more than single projects, combined with full publication, ensured that the reports would have an impact beyond the Minister and his staff. In the years thereafter, Hedy von Metzsch, who became the unit's second director in 1985, would oversee the transition from an inspectorate to an evaluation department. As a model she would use the World Bank's independent Operations Evaluation Department, and draw on her experience in the OECD/DAC Working Group on Aid Evaluation.

In the work of the evaluation department certain themes became more prominent, in particular gender and the environment. This was in line with the general thinking about priorities in development cooperation and provided further justification for the unit's existence. Report 200, for example, provided an overview of the impacts of 15 agricultural projects on the position of women in developing countries. It concluded that the projects had rarely improved, and sometimes had even had a negative impact on the position of women, since most had been designed for male farmers. These tough conclusions did have a beneficial impact, in that Minister Schoo decided to launch a special programme on 'women and development', which was continued under her successors.¹

In 1986, at the request of parliament, the Commission on Ecology and Development presented a report on the integration of environmental factors into development cooperation policy. The Commission advised that the evaluation department should carry out a thematic evaluation, which Minister Bukman accepted. The department was to determine the effects of the Dutch aid policy on the local ecology, and whether the policy had contributed to sound environmental management. In addition to a desk study, the evaluation teams visited Burkina Faso, Indonesia and Kenya, and investigated 29 small projects. They found that although ecological considerations had been taken into account in very few projects, there were few negative ecological effects. For the governments of the three countries ecology had a low priority, and the Netherlands did not have a clear policy either. The evaluation teams recommended that ecological goals be integrated into Dutch environmental policy, and that sector specialists be added to embassy staff in the recipient countries. The ministry began to implement these recommendations even before report 254 was published in 1992, six years after parliament had asked for it.

1. E. Postel-Coster, 'From participation to mainstreaming: Dutch policy on women and development', in: J.A. Nekkers and P.A.M. Malcontent (2000), *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation 1949–1999*, SDU, The Hague, 2000, pp. 307ff.

When in 1985 Joop Kramer announced his retirement Minister Schoo had to look for a successor who could develop this new evaluation approach further. She knew Hedy von Metzsch both as a civil servant at DG IS and through her membership of the national Emancipation Council, which Schoo had chaired. With experience in developing countries and a relevant academic background, von Metzsch was felt to be the right person for the job. She would be able to change the inspectorate further into a policy evaluation unit, create more openness and develop the learning function of evaluations by involving those being evaluated. She would serve under four Ministers for Development Cooperation – Eegje Schoo, Piet Bukman, Jan Pronk and Eveline Herfkens.

Hedy von Metzsch
Second director, 1985–1999

Hedy von Metzsch sought nuance. Staff members comment that she spoke softly, forcing people to listen to her. She had a great interest in methodology, i.e. how one arrives at verifiable and valid findings regarding the reality of development cooperation, and in the detailed and descriptive nature of the evaluation work. She provided meticulous comments on every evaluation before it was published.

Von Metzsch was born in 1938 in Indonesia. At the beginning of the Second World War her family was evacuated to Australia. After the war von Metzsch settled in the Netherlands and completed a Masters degree in non-western sociology at the University of Leiden, and studied social policy at the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague. She served as a junior professional in a rural development programme in Argentina, and in 1969 joined the Directorate Technical Assistance, with responsibility for Latin America. In the policy development bureau of that directorate, von Metzsch was involved in formulating evaluation procedures for development cooperation. She was particularly interested in developing built-in evaluation mechanisms in aid projects and programmes.

Von Metzsch did not necessarily have the ambition to become director. Moreover, within the review unit there was considerable opposition to her appointment. Kramer and a number of inspectors had wanted a candidate from inside. They even appealed to the Minister, accompanied by Prince Claus, but their effort was fruitless. Von Metzsch was appointed, and was to become the longest-serving director in the unit's 25-year history. Like her predecessor, she had clear ideas as to what she wanted to achieve and have done with the evaluation department. She got along well with Inspector-General Prince Claus with whom she

agreed on the limited role of development cooperation, and shared a love for art and culture.

Another example of an evaluation that went far beyond a single project was the first study of an aspect of the management of foreign aid. The 1988 report *Contracting out: Bane or Blessing?* (report 245) was 300 pages long, and dealt with the use of consultants in bilateral projects. The use of consultants had increased considerably since the mid-1970s, and had become policy in 1984 with Minister Schoo's realignment of development cooperation policy. It was assumed that contracting out would improve the quality of the implementation of aid projects, and that engaging the private sector would increase public support for development cooperation. It was also intended to reduce the workloads of civil servants. Thus, whereas consultants implemented 45% of projects and programmes in 1979, the proportion had risen to 60% by 1986.

After investigating 18 projects in five countries the evaluation unit concluded that the effects of contracting out varied substantially. Some consultancy firms were too mono-disciplinary and lacked the knowledge to operate in some countries or deal with certain types of project. They were expensive and did not diminish the workloads of civil servants. The ministry was criticised for using too many external experts, while employing too few in-house staff with expertise in particular fields, leading to an erosion of in-house knowledge and the capacity to assist and monitor the work of consultants during the implementation of aid projects and programmes. Further, consultancy firms rarely cooperated with experts in the recipient countries, even though in some countries, especially in Asia and Latin America, the necessary expertise was available. In cases where there had been such cooperation the results were generally better.

The findings of the evaluation fitted in a more general discussion about the use of technical assistance and caused much unrest and anger among both small and large consultancy firms, who over the years had become more dependent upon advisory work in developing countries. They accused the ministry of making them responsible for its own administrative weaknesses, and pleaded even that more work would be entrusted to them. The conclusions of the report were 'devastating', not only for the ministry but also for the consultants. The Netherlands was the only donor with a policy of contracting out on principle; most other donor countries preferred to implement difficult projects themselves.²

2. P. Hoebink and L. Schulpen, *Adviesbureaus en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking: Verslag van een enquête*. Occasional Paper 20, Derde Wereld Centrum, Nijmegen, 1990, pp. 34–35.

In those years there were strong voices in developing countries that criticised donors for failing to involve local consultants and make use of local expertise. In their view this continued to deepen the gap between the North and the South.³ Similar research by the Scandinavian countries had shown that local consultants of a comparable level could have replaced half of the outside experts working on projects in Africa!⁴ Thus the report *Contracting out: Bane or Blessing?* recommended that more local experts be contracted. It also recommended that more experts were needed within the ministry, but not employed at headquarters in The Hague. Rather, they should be posted to work in the embassies in the recipient countries, and they should be able to contract more local consultants. This recommendation would be repeated in later country programme reviews and became one of the reasons for the delegation of powers to embassy staff in the 1990s.

Impact on the coalition government

In 1986 parliament asked the Minister to have the inspectorate perform an evaluation of the mixed credit programme. The programme, set up in 1979 by the Minister for Development Cooperation and those of Finance and Economic Affairs, was intended to promote 'developmentally relevant' export transactions with partially soft conditions. The programme had two goals, in that it was intended to stimulate progress in the developing world, and at the same time to promote Dutch exports. In 1982 Minister Schoo had subsumed the mixed credit programme in the sector programme Industrial Development. In most developing countries, she argued, economic growth went hand in hand with increasing industrial production. Due to the lack of internal resources, foreign investment was needed to stimulate the development of technology, the training of labour, the development of entrepreneurship and access to foreign markets.⁵ One in four internationally active Dutch companies saw investment in developing countries as a serious option, and most of them criticised the ministry for its lack of understanding of business.⁶

3. See, for example, 'Gouden tijden voor consultants zijn voorbij', *Internationale Samenwerking*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July/August 1999.

4. *Internationale Samenwerking*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 1989, pp. 8–9.

5. 10v/1985 – 1989/Inv.Nr: 45, Terms of reference, Evaluatie Investeringsbevorderende Projecten, n.d.

6. F.A.J. Baneke and C.J. Jepma, 'Dutch interest and development interests', in: J.A. Nekkers and P.A.M. Malcontent (2000), *op cit.*, p. 261.

In 1988, work started on the evaluation of the mixed credit programme in Costa Rica, Egypt, Honduras, Indonesia and Thailand. Many institutions and experts were involved, and the bulk of the fieldwork was contracted out, with one of the inspectors responsible for coordination. For example, the Free University of Amsterdam and Salakita University carried out the fieldwork in Indonesia, in Egypt an independent consultant was responsible for it, while in Costa Rica and Honduras the Netherlands Economic Institute took the lead. The research was supervised by a reference group consisting of representatives of the evaluation unit, the ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Economic Affairs, the team leaders of the field missions and three independent specialists.⁷

Report 248, *Hulp of handel?* (Aid or trade?), was published in February 1990, four years after parliament had asked for it. Between 1979 and 1989 loans amounting to 1.5 billion guilders (€680 million) committed, had been taken up. The export transactions that had been financed with these loans amounted to 3 billion guilders (€1.36 billion).⁸ From the perspective of export promotion, therefore, the programme had been a success – 90% of the transactions would not have come about without ‘soft’ financing. From the perspective of the further development of poor countries, however, it had not been a success. The tugs, dredgers, planes, trucks, telecommunication equipment and other capital goods that had been provided had not been sufficiently utilised due to the lack of local resources and expertise in the recipient countries. All in all, in three-fifths of the cases investigated the capacity utilisation had been insufficient. The export transactions had almost no effect on employment opportunities in the recipient countries. The least developed countries’ share in the benefits had actually fallen, from 21% in the initial years to just 4% at the end of the programme.

The report analysed several examples. One was dredging equipment for Honduras. While the Honduran government had requested that certain specific dredging tasks be completed, they had been given a dredging ship. Its delivery flew directly in the face of earlier feasibility studies carried out by Dutch consultants, which had indicated that it would be most cost effective to outsource the dredging. ‘The mission did not gain the impression that the project had in any way been tested with regard to the development priorities of the recipient country’. Another example was the establishment of a wind tunnel in Indonesia. After

7. 10V/1985–1989/Inv. Nr: 45, Memo 10V – 19, 9 February 1990 van Chef 10V aan R via DGIS en S, cc. IGOS, plv. DGIS, Chef DST. 10V evaluatierapport programma Ontwikkelingsrelevante Exporttransacties, *Hulp of handel?*

8. 10V, *Hulp of handel? Een evaluatie-onderzoek van het programma Ontwikkelingsrelevante Exporttransacties*, The Hague, 1990, p. 9.

noting that the project could not be explained in terms of Dutch policy with regard to development cooperation in Indonesia, nor was it covered by the concentration sectors as formulated in the Indonesian policy documents, the inspectors noted that the project 'does not contribute in a direct way to the self-determination of the economy, let alone to an improvement in the living standards of a large sector of the population'.⁹

The 354-page report caused a significant stir in the political arena and even led to tensions within the coalition government.¹⁰ The two major Dutch employers' organisations (vno and ncw) were critical of the research methodology used rather than the validity of the findings. They argued that the Operations Review Unit should have compared the way Dutch business had utilised the programme with the practices of other donor countries, and the effectiveness of these credit schemes with other forms of aid.¹¹ If it had done so, they argued, the mixed credit programme would have proven to be a success.

Labour Party Minister Jan Pronk, who had just resumed his position as minister after an 11-year absence and had had no part at all in the research or writing of the evaluation report, disagreed. In a letter to parliament he wrote that he did 'consider the report ... of great importance. It is thorough research. The conclusions ... will have to be very seriously considered in the determination of future policy'.¹² Three days later, at a meeting with the Standing Committee for Development Cooperation, the more centre(-right) oriented Christian Democrat, Christian, and Liberal Conservative parties sought to discredit the report. They thought the title *Hulp of handel?* was tendentious. Labour and Green party representatives used the report to blame the previous coalition governments and the business community. According to one of them, the implementation of the programme 'points out ... the inability and naiveté on the part of the government. The business community was allowed to identify and implement its own projects. ... The country desks of the government were insufficiently involved, while the embassies only carried out global reviews. It was therefore no wonder that things went wrong'.¹³

9. 10v, *Hulp of handel?* *Ibid.*, pp. 306, 259.

10. OECD/DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluations, *Survey of Users of Evaluations*, working document, May 1997, p. 14.

11. For the record, the 10v report detailed other export financing programmes of other donor countries, but did not compare them with those of the Netherlands.

12. 'Ontwikkelingsrelevante Exporttransacties', Brief van de Minister voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking aan de voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 's-Gravenhage, 26 March 1990.

Most Dutch newspapers picked up the report and their reactions were remarkably similar.¹⁴ The regional *Haagsche Courant* laid the blame for the programme's failure with the Christian Democrat and the Liberal Conservative parties and noted that one reason for the failure had been that the Dutch business community had been allowed to choose its own projects. Another regional newspaper, *De Gelderlander*, quoting from the report, said that the tying of aid had led to serious price explosions. For some consignments Dutch companies had charged twice as much as their European competitors, secure in the knowledge that the developing country concerned could not turn to another supplier. Some Dutch companies had even used the government's subsidies to out-compete local companies in the recipient countries.

The report continued to have an effect on policy long after the newspapers had dropped the topic.¹⁵ Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Piet Bukman, the previous Minister for Development Cooperation, wrote lengthy comments, in which he broadly followed the reaction of the employers' organisations. 'An essential failing of the report is the absence of a comparative basis ... the reader is not in a position to be able to develop a true opinion'.¹⁶

13. 10v/ 1985 – 1989/ Inv. Nr. 45, 21 300 V, Nr. 114, Verslag van een mondeling overleg, 9 May 1990. ICL programma, ORET, Rapport AR inzake ICL's.

14. 'Hulpbeleid derde wereld geen succes', *NRC Handelsblad*, 9 February 1990; 'Bedrijven hebben het meeste baat bij ontwikkelingshulp', *Haagsche Courant*, 9 February 1990; 'Hulp bedrijven soms schadelijk', *de Gelderlander*, 9 February 1990; 'Rapport kraakt Nederlands hulpprogram derde wereld', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 10 February 1990; 'Groot onderzoek naar hulp in derde wereld', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 9 February 1990; 'Derde wereld loopt hulp mis', *de Gelderlander*, 9 February 1990; 'Ontwikkelingshulp schiet doel voorbij', *Telegraaf*, 10 February 1990; 'Ontwikkelingshulp via exportkredieten mist doel', *Financieel Dagblad*, 12 February 1990; 'Pronk wil strikter voorwaarden voor hulp derde wereld', *de Gelderlander*, 10 February 1990; 'Het failliet van een hulpprogramma', *de Gelderlander*, 10 February 1990; 'Regeling subsidie op uitvoer naar arme landen schiet doel voorbij', *de Volkskrant*, 10 February 1990; 'Tonnen aan exportsteun bedrijven verspild', *de Volkskrant*, 10 February 1990; 'Nederlandse bedrijven verdienen fors aan ontwikkelingshulp', *de Waarheid*, 10 February 1990.

15. 10v/ 1985 – 1989/ Inv. Nr. 45, 10v-rapport *Hulp of Handel*, kanttekeningen, DST/ 1D, 19 March 1990. Commentaar op evaluatierapport 1990, *Hulp of Handel?*, M.M. Meeng. (Algemene opmerkingen, Het bedrijfsleven, Toetsing aan de Indonesische projecten).

16. 10v/1985 – 1989/ Inv. Nr. 45, Brief van drs. P. Bukman, Staatssecretaris van Economische Zaken, aan de Minister voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 21/03/1990. 10v-rapport programma Ontwikkelingsrelevante exporttransacties. Commentaar op het 10v-rapport *Hulp of Handel*.

When Minister Pronk presented his policy document *Een wereld van verschil: Nieuwe kaders voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking* (A world of difference: New parameters for development cooperation) to parliament in September 1990, the report *Hulp of handel?* was referred to only in the bibliography. The announced policy changes relied more on the public reaction to the evaluation report than on the evaluation itself. Pronk adjusted the export transaction programme. When the evaluation unit reviewed the programme again in 1999, the findings were more positive. This time the employers' organisations and the Christian Democrats did not denounce the absence of a comparison with similar programmes of other donor countries.

Modest impact on operational departments

After the much talked about report *Hulp of handel?* the Operations Review Unit carried out an evaluation of the sector programme on rural development. This programme owed its existence to the Christian Democrats in the coalition government in which Eegje Schoo had been Minister for Development Cooperation. Since the mid-1970s rural development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America had been a key element of Dutch development policy, on which the government had spent 1.2 billion guilders (excluding food aid) between 1985 and 1991.

In report 253, *Sectorprogramma Plattelandsontwikkeling* (Sector programme on rural development), the evaluation department concentrated on two questions – whether the programme had resulted in a more effective policy for rural development, and whether it had led to sustained improvements in the productivity and living conditions of rural populations. In addition to interviews and desk research, the field research covered 40 projects in Indonesia, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Sudan and Tanzania. In their conclusions the evaluators noted that the rural development programme had been too ambitious, especially in Africa. Often there had been no local implementation capacity, little attention had been paid to local participation, and very few projects included measures to improve the position of women. Although three-quarters of the projects examined had had good immediate results, less than one-quarter would be sustainable once donor support was withdrawn. Income-generating projects stood a much greater chance of achieving sustainability than those aimed at improving public amenities.

In early June 1991 Pronk submitted the report to parliament. In his reaction, which came only six months later, he repeated what he had written in *Een wereld van verschil*, that although the development of rural areas would remain a central objective of development policy, the sector programme on rural development had

been terminated.¹⁷ And ‘although the conclusions and recommendations of the inspectorate’s report were thus no longer directly applicable’, its findings were still of importance. In effect, the report heavily criticised the work of Pronk’s predecessors and justified once again his own approach to development cooperation, in which the poorest of the poor were central, and where the focus was ‘on improving the incomes of the rural poor, employment opportunities, purchasing power and food production at rural level’. Moreover, Pronk wanted to support programmes in countries where the government had a policy to support the small-scale rural sector. Although the report caused a stir among the Christian Democrats in parliament, it quickly disappeared from the political agenda. Some staff members of the operational departments continued to make use of it, and years later they still thought it ‘alive and very useful’.¹⁸ Thus the impact of the evaluation of the sector programme on rural development was felt only in the long run, and in an unspectacular way.

Decentralised evaluations

At a meeting in Brussels in September 1989, Hedy von Metzsch and the heads of evaluation departments of other EU Member States agreed to carry out a joint review of the results of evaluations in the design and implementation of future development projects. Two months later a mission arrived in The Hague to study feedback mechanisms and methodological issues in Dutch reviews. To begin with, the mission characterised Dutch development aid as having ‘a strong orientation towards women in development, urban poverty, research and the environment’. They noted that the volume of aid grew faster than the number of staff, with only ten technical experts employed within the ministry in The Hague and 35 sector specialists in the embassies, and that the ministry was highly dependent on outside consultants and institutions. Only a limited number of countries received Dutch aid, and assistance via co-financing agencies and balance of payments assistance were important.¹⁹

17. Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Vergaderjaar 1991–1992, 22 300 V, Nr. 75, Brief van de Minister voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking aan de voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, ’s-Gravenhage, 17 January 1992, reactie op evaluatierapport *Sectorprogramma Plattelandsontwikkeling*. J. Pronk, *Een wereld van verschil*, The Hague, 1990, pp. 218–230.

18. OECD/DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluations, *Survey of Users of Evaluations*, working document, May 1997, p. 14.

At that time the staff of the evaluation unit consisted of the director, eight inspectors and three support staff, and had an annual budget of around 3 million guilders (€1.36 million). The 1990 EU report commented that the Operations Review Unit produced ‘very comprehensive and exhaustive studies, usually covering whole sectors or themes, and each one generally involves several person-years of work’. The way the unit operated was considered as ‘a highly effective system of feedback at the policy level’, while its consultations ‘leads to both formal and informal feedback long before the report is eventually completed’.²⁰

The team from Brussels also studied the ministry’s internal or decentralised reviews. Most were built-in mid-term evaluations and contained recommendations for the next phase of a project, for which a department or embassy was responsible. Their number was thought to be between 140 and 170 per annum. However, ‘their potential value in terms of broader policy implications above the project level has not yet been exploited. ... In the absence of summaries there is no means whereby the gist of the mid-term evaluations can be conveyed to other staff or the public’. Since most fieldwork for the evaluations was carried out by consultants, ‘reports are not always as operationally relevant as they could be’.²¹

The attention to decentralised evaluations was not new. For a number of years a debate had been going on within the ministry about the impact of decentralised evaluation and monitoring on policy formulation and implementation. The debate was hampered by a lack of real information, however, so that the Operations Review Unit began a study of evaluation and monitoring practices in 16 projects in Burkina Faso, Egypt and Pakistan. Report 258, *Evaluation and Monitoring*, published in 1993, was focused, business-like and critical, and touched upon the functioning of the ministry itself. The findings were rather negative. Most decentralised evaluations did not satisfy methodological requirements, nor did they clarify whether projects were in line with Dutch development cooperation policy. Assessments of the effectiveness and efficiency of projects varied, and were usually limited. A thorough analysis of the consequences of a project for the target group – the poor – was the exception rather than the rule. Whether project results were sustainable was unknown. Monitoring was rare, superficial and of limited use. In short, most of the staff lacked the discipline and the ability to carry out decentralised evaluations and to monitor projects. Judging from

19. B. Cracknell, *EEC Commission and Member States Review of Effectiveness of Feedback Mechanisms: Eight Country Report: The Netherlands*, Brussels, EEC, 7 December 1990, p. 3.

20. B. Cracknell, *op cit.*, p. 5.

21. B. Cracknell, *op cit.*, p. 4.

studies made by other donors, the report added, things were little better elsewhere.

The report *Evaluation and Monitoring* could have created the same political stir as had happened after the publication of *Contracting Out: Bane or Blessing?* It was the second unfavourable evaluation of the management within the ministry and confronted Pronk with the weakness of his organisation. The Minister sent the report to parliament at the end of the quiet summer months. In the Upper House only the Christian Democrat fraction criticised him later for this subterfuge. In the Lower House a number of written questions were submitted, which the Minister answered during the annual budget debate later in the year. Not much more happened. It is possible that the report received minimal public attention due to the rather complex nature of the subject of evaluation and monitoring. Some organs of the press carried critical references to the report. The regional *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, under the headline ‘Inspection trashes control on expenditure of aid money’, noted that ‘Control on the spending of Dutch aid money to projects in developing countries is still a leaky basket. Although aid projects are regularly visited and evaluated by experts, these experts concentrate on emotionally inspired statements, while cost-benefit analyses are seldom carried out’.²² Within the ministry the report resulted in a readjustment of the procedures and guidelines for evaluation and monitoring.

Impact in the political arena

In October 1992, Frits Bolkestein, opposition spokesperson for the Liberal Conservatives, published an article in the respected liberal newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* denouncing Dutch development cooperation. He described himself as someone who ‘had worked for ten years in developing countries’, without mentioning that he had been a Royal Shell employee, and not a development worker. Bolkestein was impressed by Graham Hancock, who in his book *The Lords of Poverty* had argued that aid had created and entrenched ‘a powerful new class of rich and privileged people ... of parasites and hangers-on made up of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the bilateral agencies’.²³ In the developing countries aid had ‘perpetuated the rule of incompetent and venal men’ and condoned ‘the most consist-

22. ‘Inspectie kraakt controle op besteding hulp gelden’, *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 6 November 1993.

23. Graham Hancock, *The Lords of Poverty: the Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business*, Atlantic Press, New York, 1989.

ent and grievous abuses of human rights that have occurred anywhere in the world since the dark ages'. In his article Bolkestein noted that the economy, and not development assistance, was the critical factor in the development of poor countries. Foreign aid had not helped to solve their governance problems, but had instead helped to keep them in place. Would it not be 'a good idea to thoroughly evaluate what the old has led to?'²⁴

In the same period the evaluation unit had completed two reports, one dealing with Netherlands aid to the Tanzanian sugar industry (report 255), and the other with aid to the rice cultivation sector in Mali (report 256), both of which were relatively positive. Bolkestein had not openly included the findings of these reports, although it was clear that he was aware of at least the one on Tanzania. Possibly he did so as the conclusions did not strengthen his anti-aid argument.

Report 255 dealt with sector aid and structural adjustment in relation to the production of sugar in Tanzania. It noted: 'During the first half of the 1980s, the sugar companies were operating at about 60% of their full capacity ... revenues lagged behind production costs, but the Netherlands' decision to continue providing aid eventually yielded positive results. In 1986 changes in the Tanzanian government policy allowed the sugar companies to use foreign exchange earned by exports to pay for their imports. Between 1986 and 1990 consumer prices increased sixfold. These changes ... led to an increase in refinery production and to a recovery in company profits'.²⁵ The report noted that working conditions for the 7000 seasonal workers in the industry were extremely bad, and that no steps had been taken within the aid effort to improve them. Aid for sugar production in Tanzania was justified in economic terms; indeed, 'it prevented the collapse of the Tanzanian sugar industry and laid the foundations for a spectacular rise in production during the 1990s under full Tanzanian management'.

Report 256 dealt with smallholder rice cultivation in the *Office du Niger, Mali 1979–1991*, and concluded that Dutch aid had 'contributed significantly to the rise in the number of hectares under cultivation. Intensive production doubled and, in some cases, even trebled average yields per hectare. Rice produced at the *Office du Niger* is able to compete with imports, in the domestic market, in both quality and price. ... A financial and economic analysis of the aid showed a moderately positive result for the return on the investment in rehabilitating the irrigation

24. Frits Bolkestein, 'Kwijtschelding ontwikkelingsgeld beloont falen', *NRC Handelsblad*, 1 October 1992.

25. Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, *Netherlands Aid Reviewed: An analysis of Operations Review Unit reports, 1983–1994*, The Hague, 1996, p. 101.

works, and a good to high return on other investments'.²⁶ Both reports 255 and 256 drew attention to the need for poverty alleviation in Tanzania and Mali but noted that this was not necessarily being met through the focus on market liberalisation that had been pursued in both projects.²⁷

Minister Pronk replied to Bolkestein (and Hancock) in a speech in November 1992, and during a debate in May 1993 at the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague. Bolkestein strongly attacked Pronk's policies. He presented an account that was pretty much in line with the full review of the Dutch country programme in Tanzania, which the evaluation department was working on but had not yet finalised. Due to the profits generated by aid, he said, the currencies of developing countries could become stronger, with detrimental results for their exports. This, argued Bolkestein, had occurred in Tanzania and had led to a vicious circle in which ever more aid was needed so that the country would never be able to stand on its own two feet. According to a report in the *NRC Handelsblad* the next day, Bolkestein had announced the end of the era of the malleability of the world. Pronk had just returned from war-torn Somalia, and was on the defensive. He admitted that he was 'much less ambitious' in his efforts to make the rich countries mean something useful for the poor nations, and pleaded for efforts 'to halt the increasing deterioration and to save lives'.²⁸ Bolkestein challenged Pronk with a proposal for a 'time out' in development cooperation, which Pronk rejected. The two ended debating the amount of aid – Bolkestein called for a reduction and Pronk for the opposite. After the debate, Pronk heavily reproached the evaluation department, and its director Hedy von Metzsch in particular, for supposedly having leaked to Bolkestein a draft version of report 263, *Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Tanzania, 1970–1992*.

First country reviews

To design and implement a programme evaluation providing an overview of all bilateral aid projects and programmes in a particular country was a new and tough job.²⁹ The inspectors made their new task even more challenging by working on three country reviews at the same time. Apart from Tanzania, the other

26. Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, *Netherlands Aid Reviewed: An analysis of Operations Review Unit reports, 1983–1994*, The Hague, 1996, p. 97.

27. In complete contrast to what was being argued by Bolkestein at the time.

28. 'Bolkestein daagt Pronk uit tot 'time-out' in ontwikkelingsbeleid', *NRC Handelsblad*, 18 May 1993.

two countries selected were India and Mali. The three evaluation teams applied the same concepts and research methods and had to answer the same questions – to what extent had the country programme fitted in with the priorities of both the donor and the recipient country? How had the aid been organised and managed? To what extent had the programme contributed to economic self-reliance, and to poverty alleviation? How sustainable were the results? The reviews were a Dutch affair. The recipient countries carried no responsibility, although India had asked to participate in the evaluation effort but had later declined. For each country an extensive research of dossiers took place in 1991, and in 1992 numerous field studies were carried out in which local consultants were also involved. Each team analysed the data collected and wrote a report in 1993 and early 1994.

India, Mali and Tanzania have had long aid relationships with the Netherlands. In the selection of India as a target country, Dutch business interests (particularly the fertiliser and shipbuilding industries) had played an important role. Between 1980 and 1992 India had received a total of 3.5 billion guilders (€1.59 billion) from the Netherlands, making it India's sixth largest donor. About 80% of all aid was channelled via the regular country programme. Until 1985 programme aid was dominant, intended to finance imports of fertiliser and as budget support, after which project support became more important.

Between 1975 and 1992 Mali had received 600 million (€272 million) in Dutch bilateral aid, making the Netherlands Mali's second most important donor after France. The cooperation with Mali had begun during the droughts of the early 1970s, and over the years project support was replaced by programme support. About 90% of the aid was intended for rural development. While in the Niger delta Dutch aid had helped to increase rice production, in southern Mali it was used to boost cotton production (hence the fertiliser) and to improve the conditions of poor cotton farmers.

Attracted by Julius Nyerere and his African socialism, the Netherlands had become Tanzania's third largest donor. Even when the Tanzanian approach did not yield results in terms of either poverty alleviation or economic self-reliance, Dutch aid, like that of the Nordic countries, had been continued. Between 1970 and 1992 Tanzania had accepted 2.5 billion guilders (€1.13 billion), two-thirds of which had come through the country programme. Over the years the share of aid to the industrial sector doubled from 30 to 60%, while that to the agricultural sec-

29. Minister Pronk and his staff had made one such overview in 1977, when parliament asked for an evaluation memorandum on Indonesia in order to discuss the consequences of the large-scale human rights violations. See P. Malcontent, *Op kruistocht in de derde wereld*, Verloren, Hilversum, 1998, pp. 102ff.

tor decreased from 20 to 10%. As a result, no more than one-third of the Dutch aid was being used for the development of rural areas, where the majority of the population lived.

About a year after the debate between Pronk and Bolkestein, the three evaluation reports (261, 262 and 263) were published, together with a synthesis report, totalling about 1400 pages. In no report was the selection of the country to receive Dutch aid questioned or criticised. They did comment, however, on the decisions about the volume of aid, which were not based on the results of the aid, but were made in The Hague, where the country programmes were drawn up with few inputs from the recipient countries. There were far too many projects, and in the case of India, the aid had been spread over too many sectors and too many states. Despite the high levels of poverty in all three countries, most of the aid was spent on increasing economic self-reliance. The Dutch private sector had had an important say in the allocation of funds. Although during the last years of the period investigated donors had approved the economic policies of the three countries, the proportion of programme aid had actually decreased. The effectiveness of the programmes differed – the Mali programme was identified as being the best, the one in India not too bad, and the one in Tanzania disappointing.

The Dutch evaluation unit was not the only one that came to negative conclusions about the effectiveness of aid for Tanzania. Norway had issued a very critical report in 1988. A few weeks after the publication of the Dutch review, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs published an equally negative review of the 4 billion guilders (€1.82 billion) it had spent since the mid-1960s on the donors' darling, and Finland and Denmark were conducting their own evaluations.³⁰ While preparing the Dutch evaluation, the inspector responsible for the Tanzania country review had visited some Scandinavian donor agencies in order to learn of their experiences and conclusions.

When it was published, the review of Tanzania attracted considerable public attention, and became one of the inspectorate's most influential reports. It concluded that Tanzania had become dependent on aid. Equipment for cleaning drinking water and sanitation had disappeared or was out of order. The uneconomic state enterprises were using the cold stores, grain warehouses, modern cattle sheds and hangars in a very inefficient way. Only the support to income-generating activities such as dairy cattle husbandry had proven successful. The report featured on the front pages and in editorials of most newspapers. 'Billions of aid gone to waste' and 'The black hole of Minister Pronk' trumpeted the *De Telegraaf*. The financial daily, *Het Financieele Dagblad*, was equally critical: 'Ministry

30. *Internationale Samenwerking*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 1994, p. 8.

of Pronk wastes billions of aid'. Mainstream and centre-left newspapers were direct, although more thoughtful: 'Aid too complicated: Third world country not more independent in spite of support'; 'Aid to sugar-baby Tanzania spent with little effect'; 'Aid programmes too complex for recipient countries'; and 'Amount of aid not in keeping with the results'.³¹ In its editorial, *De Telegraaf* wrote about 'a shocking report' and 'the marginal effectiveness of development assistance' for the three countries. 'The giving of aid has become too much of a goal in itself. ... Instead of learning from mistakes, these multiplied. ... In fact the report teaches us that with less money the same can be achieved if it is spent well ... there is not a single reason left as to why annually the aid budget should be allowed to grow automatically'.³²

An editorial in the *Financieele Dagblad* noted that 6.6 billion guilders (€3 billion) had been transferred to scattered, arbitrary and depressing programmes in India, Mali and Tanzania, a fact that should 'now also open the eyes of those who in principle are not averse to development assistance'.³³ It commented that the ministry employed 'generalists' who were transferred every three years, ensuring that Dutch development cooperation had no 'institutional memory', and so had become dependent on external advisors. The editorial concluded that the evaluations provided justification for politicians to 'look beyond the sensitivity of this subject and for once to begin reflect on the intentions and magnitude of Dutch aid'.

Virtually all of the media criticism focused on the case of Tanzania, while generally ignoring the more successful programmes in Mali and India. But the case of Tanzania was far more complicated than what the newspapers made of it. Only

31. 'Onthutsend rapport over waterprojecten in Tanzania en India. Miljarden aan hulp de mist in', *Telegraaf*, 19 July 1994 (Jos Hagers); 'Omvang hulp stond los van resultaten', *Volkskrant*, 19 July 1994; 'Hulp te ingewikkeld. Derdewereldland ondanks steun niet zelfstandiger', *Trouw*, 19 July 1994; 'Miljarden aan hulp de mist in. Onthutsend rapport over waterprojecten in Tanzania en India', *Telegraaf*, 19 July 1994; 'Hulp aan troetelkind Tanzania weinig effectief besteed', *Trouw*, 19 July 1994; 'Ontwikkelingshulp is te versnipperd', *Algemeen Dagblad*, 19 July 1994; 'Kritiek inspectie op controle hulp aan arme landen', *NRC*, 18 July 1994; 'Hulp mislukt in Tanzania', *Het Parool*, 18 July 1994; 'Hulp industrie in Tanzania niet effectief', *Haagsche Courant*, 18 July 1994; 'Hulp en ontwikkeling', *NRC*, 18 July 1994; 'Hulpprogramma's te complex voor ontvangende landen', *Staatscourant*, 19 July 1994; 'Pronk belooft beterschap na kritiek', *NRC*, 19 July 1994 (Willebrord Nieuwenhuis); 'Afrikanen', *Volkskrant*, 20 July 1994; 'Ministerie van Pronk verspilt miljardenhulp', *Financieel Dagblad*, 19 July 1994; 'Het zwarte gat van minister Pronk', *Telegraaf*, 20 July 1994.

32. 'Schrikbarend', *Telegraaf*, 19 July 1994.

33. F.V.E. van der Boon, 'Hoogste tijd voor bezinning op ontwikkelingshulp', *Financieel Dagblad*, 20 July 1994.

a few newspapers, among them the daily *Trouw*,³⁴ refrained from using negative headlines. But all in all, the India, Mali and Tanzania country evaluations substantiated all the long-held prejudices of many people with regard to development cooperation. Many readers' letters called for a radical overhaul of Dutch development policy.³⁵

The three country reports did indeed influence the further development of Dutch aid policy. During the run-up to the 1994 election Bolkestein used the country reviews as proof that development assistance did not function well. While negotiating for a new coalition he used the reports to strengthen his case for a reduction in foreign aid as a percentage of GNP. Further, he advocated a complete overhaul of development cooperation policy in the light of the (in his view) negative findings of the evaluation department. The Labour Party, of which Jan Pronk was a member, fought for at least the same percentage of GNP. When a realignment of Dutch foreign aid became unavoidable, the Labour Party, in a clever manoeuvre, opened up the debate to include the realignment of all foreign policy. In their view, development cooperation could not be regarded separately from other aspects of foreign policy, such as security and peace, foreign trade and bilateral relations. This view was accepted in the 1994 coalition agreement.³⁶

With some degree of pride, Hedy von Metzsch noted that the reports were mentioned in the coalition agreement of 1994. Foreign aid had to become more effective. The current situation, in which different parts of the aid policy were implemented separately, could not be continued. 'As far as development cooperation was concerned, the reconsideration of foreign policy was also take place as a result of the recent report of the inspectorate',³⁷ she said.

Realignment of Dutch foreign policy

As soon as the new centre-left government came into office in 1994, Pronk, the Minister who had set up the inspectorate to serve him, now had to deal with reports that served mostly his opponents. He issued a policy response and dis-

34. 'Hulp te ingewikkeld: Derde-wereldland ondanks steun niet zelfstandiger', *Trouw*, 19 July 1994.

35. See in particular the reader's letter to the *Telegraaf*, 'The black hole of Minister Pronk', 20 July 1994.

36. R. van den Berg, 'Leert de hulp van lessen uit het verleden?', *International Spectator*, May 2001, p. 256.

37. Communication with Hedy von Metzsch, Den Haag, 18 September 2002.

cussed the reports with the parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Cooperation, advised by Inspector-General Prince Claus. Pronk endorsed most of the conclusions and promised to do as much as possible to implement the recommendations. Development aid was too centrally administered, he admitted. He was not inclined to reduce the number of aid projects in countries that, in his opinion, pursued inadequate policies, since projects were a more flexible means of cooperation in those countries. In addition to posting 60 new development cooperation specialists, Pronk also appointed a financial controller at the embassies in the recipient countries.

When a few years later the evaluation department started a second series of country reviews, this time Bangladesh, Bolivia and Egypt, the Minister did not object. On the contrary, he encouraged the inspectors to cover the entire history and all aspects of Dutch aid to those countries. The evaluation department itself wanted a more restricted approach and not country programme reviews, which would take more than three years, as had been the case with the 1994 country reviews. It was rumoured that one of Pronk's motives for long country reviews was to keep the evaluation department busy so that it could cause him no harm. When the reports (269, 275 and 277) were eventually published they would not have the same public impact within the Netherlands itself, but at embassy level and in the three recipient countries.

The overhaul and the overall realignment of Dutch foreign policy that took place from 1996 onwards was to bring more coherence between overall foreign policy, development cooperation policy and foreign economic policy. Minister Pronk perhaps expected that this integration would enable him to get a grip on the whole of Dutch foreign policy, but the coalition agreement stated explicitly that the Minister of Foreign Affairs would be the coordinator. This weakened the position of Minister for Development Cooperation; it was even rumoured that with this arrangement the Foreign Minister could keep an eye on Pronk.³⁸

The realignment led to a reorganisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an integration of the political and the development regional directorates. This was to have serious consequences for the Operations Review Unit.

The activities evaluated in the 26 reports published by the Operations Review Unit between 1988 and 1996 represented expenditures of 19.5 billion guilders (€8.85 billion). The random checks on activities covered slightly less than half of the amount

38. P. Malcontent, 'De schaduwminister van Buitenlandse Zaken', in: J.A. Neckers and P.A.M. Malcontent (2000), *op cit.*, p. 236.

spent on a theme or in a sector, and were considered representative. The evaluation department itself took the initiative in selecting many of the activities for review, although in some cases they were requested by the Minister or by parliament.

Most of the evaluations covered activities in Africa. More than one-third focused on activities in rural areas, and none purely on urban activities. The average period covered by a review was 12 years, and the average cost of an evaluation was 1.35 million guilders (€0.61 million), less than 1% of the total amount spent on the activities under review. Report 264, 'Humanitarian Aid to Somalia' was proportionally the most expensive, amounting to 1% of the 88 million guilders spent in Somalia between 1991 and 1993. This was because it was the first evaluation of humanitarian assistance and also because of the difficult working circumstances in the country.

On average, it took 26 months to complete an evaluation. There was a remarkable increase in the number of foreign experts involved in the carrying out of evaluations. More than two-thirds of the evaluations were conducted by mixed teams of experts from the Netherlands and from the country or countries of study. In most cases the evaluation department used reference groups consisting of independent experts and ministry staff.

In the first period the evaluations had been intended for management and learning purposes, i.e. for internal control. In the second period, the shift to in-depth evaluations of sectors, themes and policies in the recipient countries had far-reaching consequences. First, since they were published in full, the reports served the purpose of ensuring public accountability. More and more the Minister discussed the reports with the parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Cooperation.³⁹

A second consequence was that reports provided a basis for discussions about Dutch development cooperation. In some instances these discussions became part of the *ars politica*; in other cases they focused on the quality of Dutch aid.

A third consequence had to do with the method of work of the evaluation department. Whereas the reports from the first period were often a mix of investigative journalism and research, in the second period many evaluations had an academic quality. Public accountability meant that the reports had to be precise, and the findings had to be well founded. The management of evaluations became much more demanding. In neither the first or second periods did the Operations Review Unit attempt to act as 'a focal point for evaluation methodology', even though over the years it had accumulated much know-how about it.⁴⁰

39. OECD/DAC Working Group on Aid Evaluations, Survey of Users of Evaluations, 1997, p. 4.

40. B. Cracknell, *op cit.*, p. 6.

Third period, 1996–2003: Made-to-measure evaluations

This chapter discusses the consequences of the global changes of the early 1990s, and the subsequent 1996 realignment of Dutch foreign policy, for the work of the inspectorate, now renamed the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB). In this third period the IOB looked for ways in which it could again play a key role, while maintaining its independence within the ministry. As donors moved away from implementing individual projects to supporting sector-wide or national programmes in developing countries, IOB was increasingly involved in joint evaluations.

A changing world

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990 and the disappearance of the bipolar world system, the hopes that were raised by the emergence of a new international order were soon dashed. In many parts of the world, especially in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe, chaos and instability increased. Religious and ethnic frictions frequently erupted into violent conflicts that the international community was unable to prevent, many of which had the potential to become a threat to all of us.

Jan Pronk had attempted to address these changes and their consequences for the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGIS) in his 1993 policy document *Een wereld in geschil* (A world in conflict). He believed that the management of conflicts and the preservation of peace should become more prominent in Dutch development cooperation policy. A larger part of the aid budget would have to be spent on emergency, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, and on conflict resolution and peace building. Dutch aid should go to countries that were on their way to democracy and pursued sound economic policies. East and Central European countries should also benefit from Dutch foreign aid. In the development jargon concepts such as ‘good governance’ and ‘ownership’ came to the fore.¹ Since DGIS would have to do more to assist conflict-affected regions, Pronk called for the integration of Dutch development policy and traditional foreign affairs policy.²

A second consequence of these global changes was decreasing support in the Netherlands for development cooperation – in parliament, the media and among the public. The new conflict ‘hotspots’ diverted much of the attention away from the traditional developing countries and continents. Many were disillusioned that there had been so few changes for the better in these countries and that so little progress had been made in alleviating poverty. People had lost their faith in the effects of foreign aid. They understood that development assistance was only a minor factor in the development of a country. They also argued that poverty in the Netherlands itself and in the East European countries, some of which would soon join the European Union, deserved more attention.

The public debate about development issues, in which some evaluation reports had played a role, became less prominent. Development cooperation had become an accepted part of Dutch government policy. Even when public services such as health and education had to accept budget cuts, the percentage of the gross national product designated for foreign assistance remained, despite some ups and downs, at 0.8%. Occasionally, and especially at election times, the discussion about the use of the development aid budget for posts that perhaps should be covered by other ministries, was reopened. Examples included the financing of Dutch participation in UN peacekeeping operations, aid for Eastern Europe, and assistance for asylum seekers. However, comparing the volume of Dutch aid with those of other donor countries, it seems that this discussion never led to fundamental changes.

The realignment of the Dutch foreign policy was formulated in 1995 and became operational a year later.³ Its main aim was to enable the Netherlands to respond to the global changes described above, and to readjust priorities and instruments. Dutch foreign policy had to become more flexible and there was to be more coherence among the various elements: development cooperation, international trade and financing, investment policy, transfer of technology, political cooperation and military assistance. Until then policies had too often been formulated for each element in isolation, resulting in contradictions and inconsistencies.

1. These concepts also aroused a lot of criticism. See, for example, the interview with Zegeye Asfaw, former Minister of Land Reform in Ethiopia: ‘Most countries in the South have been fighting for good governance since their independence’, in: *The Courier ACP-EU*, March–April 2003, p. 67. In the Netherlands the concept was criticised by Jan Breman, ‘Ontwikkeling en de kwaliteit van bestuur’, *Socialisme en Democratie*, 6, 2001, p. 276.

2. See J.A. Nekkers and P.A.M. Malcontent, *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation, 1949–1999*, SDU, The Hague, 2000, Introduction, pp. 56 and 57.

3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Herijking*, 1995.

This realignment changed the work of the inspectorate, which in 1996 was renamed the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB). From now on it was not to restrict itself to the evaluation of development cooperation, but to broaden its field of work to include all elements of the Dutch foreign policy. The IOB was one of the very few evaluation departments of donor countries covering such a broad field.⁴ In addition to this major change in foreign policy, there was a small realignment to make development cooperation more effective, prompted largely by the evaluations of the country programmes in India, Mali and Tanzania. The key objectives were now fewer projects, more ownership, better monitoring and simpler procedures.

Independence threatened

In the years following the policy realignment IOB published few evaluation reports. To be precise, in each of the years 1995, 1996 and 1997 only three reports were issued, a number that had been equalled only in 1989.⁵ This had partly to do with the timing of the start of evaluations. A number had been set up at roughly the same time and were long-term research projects. To some extent, the department became somewhat withdrawn in the aftermath of the clash with Minister Pronk about the leaking of the Tanzania country review – to which probably Pronk did not object.

It is also possible that the evaluation unit submitted itself to self-censorship in order to evade the Minister's wrath. Paul Hoebink believed that some self-censorship was unavoidable. As their reports were now open and accessible, 'their tone became different, more careful. Outspoken statements, which could be found in reports of the first period, were omitted. That made the reports from the point of view of the functioning of the ministry less challenging'.⁶ Rob van den Berg described it slightly differently: 'In all its periods IOB has had a tradition of speaking its mind. The only thing one can say is that the public nature of our output has made IOB rather reserved in making judgements about people. But that has more to do with privacy regulations. Findings have been rarely muffled away. There are instances of conclusions that were kept in final reports in spite of outside pressure to mitigate them'.⁷ For Hoebink, *Contracting out: Bane or Blessing?*

4. The Norwegian evaluation department covered the same broad field.

5. IOB, *De Reikwijdte van IOB studies*, p. 12.

6. Interview with Paul Hoebink, 1 November 2002. Follow-up communication, 19 December 2003.

(1988) was an example of a report in which the inspectorate was frank and outspoken, and dared to question the functioning of the ministry itself. It was this willingness to criticise the functioning of ministerial bureaucracy dealing with Dutch development cooperation that, in his opinion, was sadly lacking in many later reports.

In the IOB's Annual Plan for 1998 Director Hedy von Metzsch announced that the department's work would be speeded up, in response to critical questions posed in parliament about the inspectorate's output. A series of evaluations already in progress were to be completed with 'a shorter time frame, sharper delimitation, and such like'.⁸ The duration of an evaluation should not exceed one year. Reviews would no longer delve into the history of a theme or sector. The areas to be covered would be more restricted. The reports should be shorter and more accessible. Examples of evaluations that were completed within one year included the *Review of the Netherlands development programme for the Palestinian territories, 1994–1999* (report 282) and the *ORET/MILIEV Review 1994–1999: Assisting developing countries to buy investment goods and services in the Netherlands* (report 283).

Several IOB inspectors had serious doubts about the speeding up of the work. They feared that the resulting reports would be superficial, offering mostly positive conclusions as there would not be enough time to address fundamental issues – no inspector could afford to draw critical conclusions based on sketchy or deficient research. The heads of departments responsible for a programme that had been evaluated quickly would no doubt be all too happy with such positive outcomes. IOB Evaluation 282 was remarkably sweet and positive indeed. 'Despite this complex and difficult environment, the evaluation shows that most aid activities contributed towards a basis for the socio-economic development of the Palestinian people and a functioning civil society in the Palestinian territories. ... The policy relevance and effectiveness of the aid programme was generally good'.⁹ Before the year 2000 this approach of quick evaluations was abandoned.

7. Communication with R. van den Berg, 17 December 2003.

8. IOB/2009/Inv.Nr: 23/ Bedrijfsvoering, IOB Jaarplan/ 1998. (It is interesting to note that Agnes van Ardenne, Minister for Development Cooperation since 2002, used almost the same words in her speech at IOB's 25th anniversary celebrations in February 2003.)

9. IOB Evaluation no. 282 *Palestinian territories*, November 1999, p. xii. In contrast with these positive findings, in 2002 it was decided not to have a structural development relation with the Palestinian Authority due to its lack of good governance. See: Beantwoording schriftelijke vragen over Begroting van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken en de HGIS nota 2003, 25 October 2002.

IOB published 11 evaluation reports in 1998 and five in 1999, most of them the products of long-term research projects. Evaluations of the country programmes in Bangladesh, Bolivia and Egypt, reviews of the programmes of SNV Netherlands Development Cooperation in Nepal and Benin, and several evaluations about women and development were completed and published in 1998. Although the three new country studies were discussed with the parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Cooperation, as indicated before, the reports had little impact within the Netherlands. The extensive review of a quarter century of Dutch aid to Bangladesh – three volumes with a total of 662 pages – offered interesting reading and new elements. As well as a review of the balance of payments support and assistance to several public sectors, the report provided an extensive assessment of the work of Dutch co-financing agencies and NGOs in Bangladesh. The report was also remarkable in that the minutes of the discussion on the results of the evaluation with the government of Bangladesh were included. Although the quality of these country programme evaluations had not diminished, it seemed that IOB was a less prominent participant in the public debate on foreign aid in the Netherlands.¹⁰

In the first two decades the inspectorate reported directly to the Director-General for Development Cooperation and, after the 1996 realignment, to the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Through them, IOB reported to the highest level, and so was fully independent of other departments within the ministry. This position was not exceptional. The review units of the donor agencies in Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland had similar positions. In eight other countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, the US and the UK) the unit was in a more subordinate position within a policy, audit or management division.¹¹

Yet, in view of what was said above about self-censorship, the degree of IOB's independence should not be overestimated. In order not to lose its hold within the ministry and to ensure that both the Minister and the operational departments accepted the conclusions of its evaluations, IOB had to consider their opinions, wishes and priorities. The experiences of evaluation units in other countries were similar. In Denmark, about 70% of the research agenda of the Evaluation Secretariat was based on requests from departments and embassies. Apparently the unit was 'making an effort to involve relevant departments and embassies in *all* steps of the evaluation procedure'.¹² For IOB the proportion of research based on requests

10. Interview with Paul Hoebink, Den Haag, 1 November 2002.

11. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Review of Evaluation in Danida*, Copenhagen, 2003, p. 9.

from the Minister for Development Cooperation, the Minister for affairs related to the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, and from parliament, was about 40%.¹³

Thinking back to the hurdles that had to be surmounted in the 1970s to get IOB established, and realising that there was still opposition to the review unit within the ministry, it is hardly surprising that IOB had to guard its independence continuously. Over the years there were at least two serious attacks, both during the 1990s. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had another central review unit, the Inspection and Evaluation Unit, which investigated the functioning of Dutch embassies and consulates. With the 1996 realignment of foreign policy and the subsequent reorganisation of the administrative machinery, it was proposed that these two central review functions be combined into one new department. The argument was that the work of the two units required similar research competencies, and that their fields of research were closely linked.¹⁴ The director of the Financial and Economic Affairs Department within the Ministry, who had made the proposal, was willing to coordinate the new unit.

When Hedy von Metzsch and her staff learned about this proposal they were not amused. In a memo they explained the necessity of the evaluation department functioning on its own.¹⁵ This time it was easy, and the proposal for the merger was dropped. The evaluation department even gained, since its field of work was expanded to include all aspects of Dutch foreign policy. It subsequently no longer fell under the Director-General for Development Cooperation, but under the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and its name was changed from *Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking te Velde* (IOV) to *Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsvaluatie* (IOB), or the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department.

The second attack would demand more parry and thrust. As part of the coalition agreement of 1998 there would be budget cuts for all ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Among the many possible solutions, the ministry's top officials preferred to combine IOB with the Strategic Policy Planning Unit. Such a merger would mean that there would be one less director burdening the budget. Planning and evaluation had some crucial elements in common. They look further than the short term and purely operational matters. The work of both is based on different information than the facts, figures and other information,

12. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 and 13.

13. IOB, *Annual Reports* 2000, 2001 and 2002.

14. Memo Directeur Financieel Economische Zaken, 2 January 1996.

15. IOB Memo, 22 January 1996, Ontwikkeling instrumenten integraal management.

which are used by operational departments. Both planning and evaluation have a complicated relationship with the operational departments. Both need a somewhat tolerant minister in order to be effective. They are also each other's opposites, as IOB is to look back, and the planning unit forward.

Although the Strategic Policy Planning Unit soon heard of this proposal, IOB was initially unaware of it. An inspector heard about it by chance in January 1999 during a New Year reception. Hedy von Metzsch immediately wrote several memoranda objecting to the proposal to the Deputy Secretary-General.¹⁶ In her opinion the policy investigation and advisory tasks of the planning unit were incompatible with the policy evaluation work of IOB. The combination of the two would mean that the new directorate would have to evaluate 'independently' the advice that it had given to the Minister at an earlier stage, making it judge of its own cause. Two weeks later the Deputy Secretary-General met with the staff of the evaluation department, including Inspector-General Prince Claus, to address their concerns, but in vain. Prince Claus and Hedy von Metzsch came to understand that the basic decision had already been taken. Foreign Minister Jozias van Aartsen and Minister for Development Cooperation Eveline Herfkens had signed a memorandum, drawn up by the Secretary-General, and the name of the director of the new department was already known. The ministry's top officials admitted that the preparation of the decision had not been 'optimal', but IOB's objections were insufficient to revoke it. In a final effort, von Metzsch contacted Minister Herfkens directly. The Minister, she was aware, knew of the importance of the independence of an evaluation unit from her time at the World Bank, where the independence of the Operations Evaluations Department was undisputed. Prince Claus was present at their meeting and strongly supported von Metzsch.¹⁷ Their visit proved to be effective. The Minister finally decided that 'There was a well-founded reason to maintain the organisational independence of the inspectorate',¹⁸ and the proposed merger of the planning and evaluation units was cancelled.

16. Memo from IOB to Deputy Secretary General, 1999, IOB-181/99, and memo from IOB to the Secretary General, 1999, IOB-092/99.

17. Memo from IOB to the Minister for Development Cooperation, 5 February 1999, IOB-137/99.

18. Draft memo S-3945/99, 9 March 1999.

First steps in new policy areas

In 1999, three years after the inspectorate's field of work had been broadened, 108 published the first evaluation report covering a subject that did not belong to the traditional field of development cooperation. This was report 279, *Diamonds and Coals: Evaluation of the Matra programme of assistance to Central and Eastern Europe, 1994–1997*. The Matra programme, which had been launched in 1994 in 14 Central and East European countries, was a demand-oriented subsidy programme in which local authorities in those countries, strongly influenced by Dutch consultancy firms and civil society organisations, had formulated the demand. The assessment of the programme's contribution to social transformation was based on the evaluation of 50 projects in Russia and Hungary. In three out of four projects the performance was considered satisfactory or good, although few systematic efforts had been made to disseminate the projects' results.

The diamonds of the report's title were the good projects that had not helped to improve the relations between government and other local actors, while the coals were the projects where the ownership by local partners had remained weak. The programme had a number of inherent weaknesses, including the lack of evaluation and monitoring and clear procedures. To facilitate the discussions with the Russian reference group, part of the report was translated into Russian. The report of the Matra programme evaluation was as long as most other reviews of that period, and the methodology did not differ substantially from that applied in evaluations of development cooperation.

Since then more (though not many more) evaluations were being set up to review sectors outside traditional development cooperation. In order to have sufficient expertise, in each case one inspector was in charge, assisted by a number of external research associates and consultants. Out of the almost 30 reviews published since 1996, two are of this kind. The subjects they dealt with were extremely varied. Report 287, for example, was entitled *The Art of International Culture Policy: Evaluation 1997–2000*. It found that although culture had become a full and autonomous sector of Dutch foreign policy, cultural policy could be more pro-active. It also found that coherence between this and other sectors of Dutch foreign policy was almost non-existent.

Ongoing reviews include evaluations of the Dutch negotiating strategy during the 1999 European Council of Berlin, and of the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries.

Adjusting the methodology

As Hedy von Metzsch wanted to retire in 1999, Minister Eveline Herfkens and senior management within the ministry began to look for a successor. IOB staff prepared a profile, and Rob van den Berg was selected. He had worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a long time and was at that time on secondment to the European Commission in Brussels. Upon assuming his new position, van den Berg accepted the assessment of the outgoing director and her inspectors that something had to be done to improve the impact of IOB's work. How could the inspectorate regain a role beyond the small circle of minister, civil servants and a number of experts? How could it be made into an up-to-date evaluation department? In the search for solutions, accessibility, demand orientation and ownership became key words.

Rob van den Berg
Director, 1999–2004

According to his colleagues, Rob van den Berg looks for debates, is productive and knows what he wants. He became director of IOB in August 1999, after working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, the European Commission in Brussels and the World Bank in Washington. Although he may have been unfamiliar with the details of small projects in far away places, he has an excellent overview of outlines and major bottlenecks in the policy and implementation of Dutch development cooperation.

Born in 1953, son of a manager at Shell, van den Berg studied contemporary history in Groningen. After graduating in 1979 he worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, served as executive secretary of the National Advisory Council for Development Cooperation, became head of the research programme of the ministry and played a crucial role in setting up autonomous development-related research programmes in the South. In these programmes, local researchers could decide on their own research agenda in cooperation with local policy makers and end users. Van den Berg spent some years in Suriname as head of development cooperation at the Dutch embassy and was seconded to the European Commission in Brussels. Since he became director he has continued to emphasise the importance of the independence of the IOB, to promote the dissemination and use of evaluation findings and to favour joint evaluations. Van den Berg is co-editor of three books, and has written articles on development cooperation, history and research. He has also actively promoted equal relations within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 2000 van den Berg and his staff compiled a document, *Ongoing Programme for 2000–2001*, which announced three major changes that would take place within IOB.¹⁹ The first involved the adoption of a more client-driven approach, with more diverse working methods and evaluation products. The evaluation department took up an old suggestion and introduced simpler working documents that could serve as background papers for later evaluations, or contained the texts of reports that would appeal to a broader readership. Working documents could be published under the author's responsibility. Examples included *An evaluation of Netherlands co-financing of World Bank activities in Ghana 1983–1996*, and *Report on the evaluation of co-financing between the government of the Netherlands and the World Bank: special study Uganda 1981–1996*, both of which were intended as inputs for a later evaluation of Dutch co-financing activities with the World Bank. Others were *Institutional development: Netherlands support to the water sector 1988–1998: Case studies*, and *Building evaluation capacity for poverty reduction strategies*, a 32-page report on a workshop on methodological issues organised by the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Unit and IOB. IOB also began to play a more active role in disseminating information about its work, producing annual reports for a wider audience, compiling 'key sheets' (short briefings on evaluation reports), a brochure and flyers, and issuing press releases announcing the publication of its evaluation reports. As a rule, the terms of reference were to be included in each evaluation report. Van den Berg himself informed the staff of the potential of new technologies. A website was launched (www.euforic.org/iob) to make IOB materials more accessible, with links to the evaluation units of other donors.

The second change involved improving IOB's relationships within the ministry, with embassies and with staff in the field in order to ensure that the findings of the evaluation efforts were used. It was felt that the use of new media could help to rectify the lack of attention to the findings of evaluations by senior ministry officials. Thus, in 2002 a help desk was set up to assist the staff of other departments to improve the decentralised evaluations. Departments always had asked IOB for advice, and IOB had been open to assist them, especially after IOB's 1993 *Evaluation and Monitoring* evaluation, which highlighted the need for improved procedures and directives for decentralised evaluations. IOB had an interest in improving the decentralised evaluations, as the good ones among them could provide useful information for later IOB evaluations, although as one IOB staff member noted, 'the quality of most is too poor' to use for setting up and implementing evaluations.

19. IOB, *Ongoing Programme for 2000–2001*, August 2000, pp. 2–3.

The third change announced in the *Ongoing Programme for 2000–2001*, involved updating of the evaluation methodology. Although IOB had been doing this since its inception, since 1991 the OECD/DAC Working Group on Aid Evaluation had been asking development agencies to ‘have an evaluation policy with clearly established guidelines and methods and with a clear definition of its role and responsibilities and its place in the institutional aid structure’. IOB had additional reasons to update the information on its guidelines and methods. One was that a new law (*Regeling Prestatiegegevens en Evaluatieonderzoek Rijksoverheid*) was implemented from 2002 onwards, requiring each policy sector of the government to be systematically evaluated every five years. Another was the increase in joint donor evaluations. Donors had started to cooperate more both in policy formulation and planning. Since this often led to the set up of common programmes and budget support, many development efforts were no longer Dutch-only affairs. To separate the Dutch contribution from such common efforts and evaluate it in isolation would be unrealistic. Finally, IOB’s work had become much more complicated with the 1996 realignment, after which it had to cover all sectors of Dutch foreign policy.

Because of this expansion, IOB evaluators could be ‘confronted with new issues of a methodological or political nature’, as described in the 2002 working document *Richtlijnen voor evaluaties* (Directives for evaluation),²⁰ which provided an overview of directives related to the implementation of evaluations. Through this IOB wanted to become more transparent to the organisations and institutions being evaluated, to the users of the evaluations, and other interested parties. The document stated that whereas evaluations in the development cooperation sector usually explained whether money had been well spent, those in the political sector focused on non-financial and political goals that were more difficult to measure. In such cases, since a ‘clear and traceable path of targets, which have been made explicit beforehand’ often did not exist, measuring effectiveness was quite different from measuring the effectiveness of a country programme. One example was *Agenda 2000: How the Netherlands negotiates with Europe*,²¹ a report on about the effectiveness of Dutch negotiating strategies within the European Community. With these new complexities it had become clear that, even more so than in the past, each evaluation had become a made-to-measure job.

The 2002 working document on directives described many long-standing practices, and added new elements. As a starting point it stated the OECD/DAC

20. IOB, *Richtlijnen voor IOB evaluaties: Werkwijze en procedures voor het uitvoeren van evaluaties*. May 2002.

21. IOB, *Agenda 2000: How the Netherlands negotiates with Europe*. June 2003.

definition of evaluation (which IOB had been using for many years): ‘An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making processes of both recipients and donors’. Because of its new, broader mandate, however, IOB had to omit the words *developmental*, *recipients* and *donors* from evaluation reports covering non-aid issues.

Evaluations had a legitimising function and enabled learning, according to the working document on directives. Yet since 1999 IOB had not given recommendations, for several reasons. By making recommendations IOB would, in a new evaluation, become judge of its own cause, as was to happen in the second review of the Dutch development assistance to Mali of 1998 (see below). Recommendations usually had an impact in areas that the evaluator had not covered, the most obvious being finance. By making recommendations the evaluator inevitably adopted the role of policy maker. However, IOB reports include a section called ‘issues for the future’ or ‘areas for special attention’, after the main findings. From several IOB reports, it is apparent that these ‘issues for the future’ can be rather easily be reformulated as recommendations. Possibly the omission of recommendations had become necessary because of the shift in the evaluation department’s second period to broad evaluations. The new-style reports often had the nature of high-level policy papers.

In spite of these adjustments there were no changes in the three basic criteria applied to assess an activity. These still are: the *relevance* of the activity in relation to the main aims of the policy sector concerned; its *effectiveness* in the sense that the output of the activity has helped realise the goals of the project, programme or policy; and *efficiency*, which points to the costs of the means selected to realise the goals. These criteria were also used to measure the impact of the Great Society Programs in the USA in the 1930s.²² For evaluations of development cooperation, sustainability was added as a criterion, but this was closely linked to the other three criteria.

22. P.G. Grasso, S.S. Wasty and R.V. Weaving (eds.) *World Bank Operations Evaluation Department: The First 30 years*, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 6.

Utilising local capacity

In line with the principle of promoting local ownership, the 2002 working document on directives outlined the need to involve consultants from recipient countries in an evaluation, and elaborated on the difference between them and consultants from donor countries. IOB had been practising the ownership principle in several ways, such as by involving reference groups in the recipient countries and by discussing the findings of an evaluation with local stakeholders. IOB also wanted to intensify the involvement of authorities, experts, organisations and representatives of target groups in the South in evaluations of Dutch development cooperation. In one of his first memoranda to IOB staff, Rob van den Berg discussed evaluation capacity in the South,²³ a theme that Hedy von Metzsch had raised earlier as chair of the OECD/DAC Working Group on Evaluations. In March 2000 the issue was discussed at a special staff meeting, at which one of the points raised concerned the quality assurance of the work of experts from the recipient countries. The staff accepted that as a starting point there was no difference between consultants from donor and recipient countries.²⁴

The 2002 document provided guidelines on this issue. First, whether local consultants should be contracted was to depend upon the subject of the evaluation. For some subjects, knowledge of local cultures and languages was more important than for others, but even then IOB should keep in mind that a researcher from the recipient country 'offers no guarantee of a better understanding of the cultural dimension' of the evaluated activity. For example, most recipient countries are not culturally homogeneous. Sometimes highly educated local consultants are unable to get along with the target group of many activities, i.e. people living in poverty. Finally, only in some recipient countries does 'the same research and evaluation tradition exist as in the West'. Good evaluators were and are equally rare, in both Western and developing countries.

A report with a damaging impact

We now return to the practice of the evaluation work, in particular to the Mali country programme review. In the years following the publication of the first evaluation report in 1994, the Netherlands Embassy in Bamako had tried to im-

23. Memorandum, Directeur IOB van den Berg, aan Inspecteurs IOB, cc. IGOS, 6 August 1999.

24. Besluitpunten stafvergadering, 31 March 2000.

plement its recommendations. In March 1998 the second inspection team arrived in Bamako to investigate the activities of the embassy. The inspector noted that ‘the recommendations of the 1994 country review and the 1996 visit of the Minister for Development Cooperation to the country pointed the direction for the implementation of the aid policy’,²⁵ and that implementation was being carried out ‘within clear parameters’, laid down in ‘excellent year plans’.

The embassy in Bamako had also requested that IOB return to Mali, a request that IOB included in its annual work plan for 1999.²⁶ In a memorandum to both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Development Cooperation, von Metzsch wrote that ‘in countries where the inspectorate has done extensive research and where a number of recommendations have been made for the development programme, it can be useful to check in a short new study how the aid to such a country has been going since’.²⁷ The research in Mali was to be relatively short, consisting of ‘an analysis of the present Netherlands aid portfolio and conversations about changes in the portfolio and the aid approach with stakeholders (government, NGOs, aid implementers, etc.)’.²⁸

For this ‘Mali revisited’ mission, the lead inspector had long working experience in Mali and been involved in compiling the 1992 report on small-scale rice cultivation in the *Office du Niger*. The inspector and a research assistant prepared the programme for the review. They consulted embassy personnel, Malian partner organisations, consultants, donors, and technical assistance personnel employed in Dutch projects and programmes. They also identified Malian researchers and others who would become members of the Malian reference group.

A reading of their first report indicates that from the very beginning there were complications between the IOB mission and the embassy. Upon arrival in Mali, the mission discovered that ‘the Embassy primarily suggested Malian ministries as discussion partners, whereas IOB primarily identified consultants and resource persons’, since this would be closer to the idea of ownership. Pointing to a ‘donor circus’, the inspector further noted ‘in a context where people are getting

25. Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, ISB, Organisatiedoorlichting Hare Majesteits Ambassade te Bamako, 9–20 March 1998.

26. IOB/2009/Inv.Nr: 37/ IOB Bedrijfsvoering Memorie van Toelichting, 1998, Memo IOB–1019/98, 19/10/1998 van Directeur IOB aan SG/DG-beraad.

27. IOB/2009/Inv.Nr: 23/ Bedrijfsvoering, IOB Jaarplan, 1998, Memo IOB–1075.98, 03/11/1998 van Dir. IOB aan M en R via S.

28. IOB/2009/Inv.Nr: 23/ Bedrijfsvoering, IOB Jaarplan, 1998, Memo IOB–1109/98, 12/11/1998 van Directeur IOB aan FEZ/BZ via plv S, cc. BLS, FEZ/BZ, Medewerkers IOB, Jaarplan IOB 1999.

sick of missions and evaluations, it is extremely difficult to raise new and relevant information that is also interesting for Malians'.²⁹

Unfortunately most local partners consulted had not received the preparatory document, which the inspector had sent beforehand, and those who had received it had either lost it or not read it. In discussing this, the mission's report unwittingly exposed a major weakness of the 1994 Mali country report as a whole, as it related the failure to read the preparatory document to 'existing cultural differences: the oral culture remains far more important than the exchange of written pieces'. Although many Malian partners remembered the earlier country evaluation, which had caused such uproar in the Netherlands, it had had no impact among Malians themselves: 'The old report was nowhere brought to the fore in the context of our visit'.³⁰

The findings of report 285, *Review of the cooperation between Mali and the Netherlands 1994–1998*, differed substantially from the positive views of both the ambassador and the Ministry's own Inspection and Evaluation Unit, and from the earlier 1994 Mali country programme review. In the 1994 programme reviews of India, Mali and Tanzania, Dutch development assistance to Mali was seen as the most successful. In 1998, however, the second evaluation team concluded that there was a major gap between policies and implementation. The dialogue between the Netherlands and Mali was fragmented and insufficient. The different types and levels of cooperation were obstacles to ownership and the improvement of partner relations. The expansion of the embassy and the improved monitoring system had not resulted in a greater understanding of the impacts of Dutch aid policy in Mali.³¹

IOB submitted the evaluation report to the Minister in August 2000 and urged her to submit it to parliament after the summer recess.³² Herfkens instructed her staff to draw up a policy response, and to involve the ambassador who had been in charge in Bamako at the time of the 'Mali revisited' evaluation, but by then had left for another post. She stressed that '*lots of emphasis [must] be paid to what has happened since 1998*'.³³

29. IOB/Bureauvergadering/ Memo, 13/08/1999 van A.S. aan Dir. IOB, IGOS en IOB-ers. Verslag oriëntatiereis Mali-review, 24/05/06.

30. IOB/Bureauvergadering/ Memo, 13/08/1999 van A.S. aan Dir. IOB, IGOS en IOB-ers. Verslag oriëntatiereis Mali-review, 24/05/06.

31. IOB, *Onderzoek naar de samenwerking tussen Mali en Nederland: 1994–1998*, The Hague 2000.

32. Memorandum, IOB-513/00, Directeur IOB – Rob D. van den Berg, aan R via S, 14 August 2000.

In a four-page confidential and personal memorandum to the Minister, the former ambassador to Mali wrote that this second evaluation could not be characterised as ‘independent research’ or a ‘recipient led evaluation’. ‘The Malian counterparts considered that it dealt with the confirmation of the prejudices of the two leaders of the evaluation, rather than with evaluation’.³⁴ He further listed a number of ‘defects’ in the report and claimed that ‘the chief consultant on the Malian side was not independent. He is a former minister of finance, and frustrated that the president did not reappoint him. ... On account of his mediocre performance, [he] is no longer contracted by the European Union’.³⁵

Worried by the memorandum, Minister Herfkens sent it to her staff, after scrawling on it ‘Help! Your attention please. How do we save ourselves from this? Very soon the evaluation will go to parliament. Tone down without dropping IOB all too obviously. After all I am supposed to take them seriously’.³⁶ Apparently she had chosen to downplay the IOB findings. In late October 2000 the Minister submitted her official policy response to parliament. By and large she accepted the report’s findings, but members of parliament had to understand that much had improved in Mali. According to her, the relevant parties had taken note of the findings of the ‘Mali revisited’ report, drawn their conclusions, and initiated action to ensure the success of Dutch development cooperation in the country.

In November 2000 IOB took delivery of the dossier and discovered within it the memorandum from the former ambassador in Bamako to the Minister. The inspector responsible for the report immediately contacted the chief Malian consultant, and passed on the ambassador’s critical comments about him. In a two-page email, the Malian consultant systematically dismissed each of the criticisms.³⁷ Subsequently van den Berg dispatched a confidential memorandum to the deputy Director-General for Development Cooperation and to the (new) ambassador in Bamako,³⁸ in which he declared ‘the truth is that the person involved has never been minister of finance, has been approached on numerous

33. Memorandum, 3431/MI, RS aan IOB via Plv DGIS, 17 August 2000.

34. Memorandum, Stoelinga aan R, cc. DAF, Bamako, 6 September 2000, IOB-evaluatie Mali.

35. Memorandum, Stoelinga aan R, cc. DAF, Bamako, 6 September 2000, IOB-evaluatie Mali.

36. Scribbled comments on Memorandum, Stoelinga aan R, cc. DAF, Bamako, 6 September 2000, IOB-evaluatie Mali, en Memorandum, 3653/MI, RS aan Plv DGIS, cc DAF, HMA Bamako, 8 September 2000, IOB-evaluatie Mali.

37. E-mail, K.S. to the inspector concerned, Thursday 2 November 2000, 7:49 pm.

occasions by the current president to fulfil important functions, which he has continually turned down, and that the person involved has reviewed many projects for many parties in Mali (including the World Bank), which he has accomplished and completed to their full satisfaction'. Van den Berg concluded: 'We would also find it deplorable, should the Netherlands embassy underscore in Mali in this manner that truly independent experts can count upon a *Berufsverbot* from the Dutch'. Having stated the problem, van den Berg then asked the parties concerned to take action to ensure that the consultant's name was cleared.

The embassy's answer disappointed van den Berg. 'The memorandum by the previous ambassador was written in his personal capacity nearly two months after his departure from Bamako'.³⁹ The events referred to in van den Berg's memorandum had taken place in the past and things had changed substantially since then. No one in the ministry who had received a copy of van den Berg's confidential memorandum went against this verdict. The inspector responsible for the report wrote to van den Berg that in the future more time was needed for this type of reviews.⁴⁰ One painful lesson from the 'Mali revisited' evaluation was that the research period had been too short. Readers could ignore the critical conclusions of the report by claiming that the underlying reality, if it had been more thoroughly researched, would not have provided sufficient ground for them. A more pleasant conclusion was that IOB was an institution that was able to criticise its own earlier evaluations.

The benefits of international collaboration

The changing foreign aid approaches during the 1990s increased the importance and utility of multi-donor and joint evaluations. The sector-wide programmes and national development programmes being set up in many developing countries were quite different from 'traditional' aid projects. With an emphasis on collaborative assistance, donors and development agencies, together with stake-

38. Memorandum, Directeur IOB – Rob D. van den Berg, aan Plv. DGIS en CdP Bamako (via Plv. DGIS), CC DGIS, DAF, RS, Plv. IOB, IOB-S., 20 November 2000, IOB-808/00, Opvolging Mali-rapport IOB.

39. Memorandum, CdP Bamako, aan IOB via Plv. DGIS, CC DAF, RS, DGIS, Plv. IOB, 24 November 2000, BAM/00/380, opvolging IOB rapport Mali.

40. IOB/Bureauvergadering/ Memo, 13/08/1999 van inspector aan Dir. IOB, IGOS en IOB-ers. Verslag oriëntatiereis Mali-review, 24/05-05/06.

holders in the recipient countries, share common objectives and engage in co-financing schemes rather than implementing separate projects.

Effective evaluations therefore called for greater cooperation among donors and between donors and recipients. Although this type of evaluation became more prominent in the evaluation department's third period, since the early 1980s IOB had been an active participant in the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation, later renamed the Working Group and still later the Network on Development Evaluation. Hedy von Metzsch had been both vice-chair and chair of this international forum, and Rob van den Berg was to chair it from 2002 to 2004. This participation provided IOB with an international platform to discuss and harmonise evaluation methodologies, to foster evaluation capacity in the South and to conduct thematic synthesis studies based on its members' evaluation reports. The Network on Development Evaluation provided fertile ground for multi-donor evaluation initiatives.

A second international forum for evaluation units includes the heads of the evaluation units of the EU Member States and the European Commission. Since the late 1980s the evaluation units of some like-minded Member States had cooperated and assisted the European Commission in establishing its own, much needed evaluation service. In this process IOB played an active role. IOB is also a participant in the so-called Utstein group, which brings together the ministers for development cooperation of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK.⁴¹ Through this group the evaluation departments of these four countries has been able to take the initiative for joint evaluations that often also involve the evaluation units of other donor countries. IOB has also joined a group consisting of the evaluation departments of the donor agencies of Austria, Germany and Switzerland, which meets once a year to discuss methodologies and share experiences.

As noted in the 2002 working document on directives, international evaluations were initially multi-donor efforts focusing on the performance of multi-lateral institutions such as the UN and the European Commission. Over the last decade IOB participated in many of them either by taking the lead or as a member of the evaluation steering committee or management group.⁴² The report of the first multi-donor evaluation in which IOB was involved was published in 1988, entitled *Development of Rural Small Industrial Enterprise: Lessons from Experience*. Another report was *Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda*, published in 1996. Besides Denmark, which led the evaluation, 18 donor countries and 17

41. Sweden joined the Utstein group in 2003.

42. See IOB *Annual Report 2001*, p. 8.

multilateral organisations, international agencies and international NGOs were involved. In 1998 IOB took the initiative in the multi-donor *Evaluation of the United Nations Capital Development Fund*, and chaired its steering committee.

Donors and the government of Ghana jointly evaluated *The Ghana Road Sub-sector Programme 1996–2000*. Although the Dutch financial involvement in the Ghanaian road sector was limited, IOB participated in this evaluation, which was jointly led by Danida and the Ghanaian authorities. The joint evaluation progressed ‘rather flexibly’, as IOB noted in its 2000 annual report. In the period 1995–1999 IOB collaborated with the evaluation departments of other EU Member States and the European Commission in a series of evaluations of EU support (managed by the European Commission) to the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, to Asia and Latin America, and to developing countries in the Mediterranean region. In addition, IOB was also involved in an evaluation of humanitarian assistance in Rwanda provided by the European Commission.

Joint evaluations offer several advantages for both recipients and donors. They reduce the burden of multiple, separate donor evaluations, they often are more balanced and carry greater authority. The transaction costs for the individual participating agencies are lower, except for the lead agency. Joint evaluations may also have their disadvantages. The involvement of a large number of partners makes them rather time-consuming. This starts with the process of reaching agreement on the terms of reference, cost-sharing and contracting arrangements. The partners can easily avoid taking responsibility for the evaluated programme, as the specific contribution of each of them is often not dealt with. Thus, even though France did not consent to the above-mentioned evaluation of EU aid to Rwanda, IOB and other evaluation units decided to go on with it.

Some joint efforts have resulted in new activities. A workshop on building evaluation capacity for poverty reduction strategies in recipient countries, organised by IOB and the World Bank’s Operations Evaluation Department in 2001, resulted in a capacity building programme run by the World Bank and supported by IOB. The programme set out to diagnose the existing evaluation capacity in selected developing countries, to foster the development of centres of excellence in the South in order to promote the South–South cooperation on evaluation, and to provide training.⁴³

In parallel with the steady increase in joint donor evaluations, IOB is encouraging so-called partner or country-led evaluations. At a meeting hosted by IOB at the OECD in Paris in early 2000, the evaluation office of UNDP, the Operations

43. P.G. Grasso, S.S. Wasty and R.V. Weaving, (Eds.) *World Bank Operations Evaluation Department: The first 30 years*. World Bank, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 119.

Evaluation Department of the World Bank, and the evaluation units of several other donor agencies expressed their willingness to support recipient countries to enable them to take the initiative in evaluating external aid. Although Mozambique was mentioned as a possibility, and its foreign minister indicated his government's willingness, for various reasons nothing came of it. 'Efforts to identify another country foundered on often political problems – in many developing countries an evaluation culture does not exist. They object in particular to the independent status of the type of evaluation that evaluation units are willing to support'.⁴⁴

Between 1996 and 2000 IOB's work covered some 30% of the funds allocated for development cooperation. The coverage in the years after 2000 is not yet known.⁴⁵ Apart from a director and deputy-director, IOB employed an average of nine inspectors, plus 3.5 secretaries.⁴⁶ On 19 February 2003, there were 12 inspectors, most of them permanent staff, and a few on temporary secondments. One inspector was working mostly on joint evaluations, while several others were doing so as part of their duties.

In its third period, IOB published some 30 evaluation reports, a few of which dealt with subjects unrelated to the field of development cooperation. In some instances the reviews were prompted by ongoing international debates. The most obvious examples of this were the debt relief evaluations (report 291 on Dutch Debt Relief Policy and report 292 on Results of International Debt Relief).⁴⁷ Most evaluations covered African countries and themes, but an increasing number dealt with global issues. Examples include report 283, ORET/MILIEV Review 1994–1999, which dealt with assistance to developing countries to buy investment goods and services in the Netherlands, Report 284 on Institutional development: Netherlands support to the water sector, and report 293 on Netherlands–FAO Trust Fund Cooperation. The maximum period covered by a review was 20 years (report 289 on Culture and development: Evaluation of a policy 1981–2001). A number of reports covered much shorter periods, including the review of programmes for health, nutrition and population in Burkina Faso, Yemen and Mozambique (report 288) and a review of the Netherlands Development Programme for the Palestinian territories (report 282). Some of the reports were considerably less voluminous than those published in the second period.

44. IOB, *Annual report 2000*, pp. 11–12.

45. IOB, *Annual report 2001*, p. 25.

46. IOB, *Annual reports 2000, 2001, 2002*.

47. IOB Evaluatie 292, *Resultaten van Internationale Schuldverlichting*. See p. iii for this factor and p. 165 for the formal considerations.

The average cost of an evaluation decreased in this third period. The number of foreign experts involved in carrying out the evaluations continued to increase. In a comparison of evaluation departments carried out by Danida, in 2002 the staff costs of the Dutch Policy and Operations Evaluation Department were €1.4 million, while €1.8 million was spent on consultants. This is a relatively small difference compared with Canada, Denmark, Norway and the UK, which have a small staff of their own and where the costs of consultants vary between twice and seven times as much. In 2002 the costs of IOB amounted to 0.08% of the total aid budget, compared with 0.05% in the UK and 0.13 – 0.65% in seven other European donor agencies.⁴⁸

48. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, A Review of Evaluation in Danida, Copenhagen, 2003, Table 3.

Output and outcome

This final chapter elaborates on some of the conclusions reached in previous chapters, and attempts to assess the effects of IOB's many outputs and the independence of its work from the users of the reports. In particular, it considers whether the work of the evaluation department has had immediate or long-term effects on the stakeholders in Dutch development cooperation, in particular on the various ministers for development cooperation and staff of the ministry. First, we offer some remarks about IOB's position in the global village.

One among many

The last quarter century has witnessed a certain degree of progress in the developing world. Life expectancy has increased, adult illiteracy has been reduced, and some diseases are now largely under control.¹ The number of people living below the poverty line of one dollar per day has finally started to decrease.² On the other hand, the UN Development Programme and others argue that the gap between the rich and the poor has increased. During the past 30 years the number of least developed countries has almost doubled. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is undermining efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Poverty in some former East Bloc countries is taking alarming forms. There is 'unprecedented opulence' in the world, writes Indian Nobel Prize winner in economics, Amartya Sen, that sometimes assumes forms that we could never have imagined one or two centuries ago. Alongside these excesses are widespread 'deprivation, destitution and oppression'.³

1. For example, Dutch foreign assistance played a role in the eradication of river blindness in West Africa.

2. World Bank Group, *Annual Report 2002*, chapter 3.

3. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. xi.

The World Bank has calculated that developing countries themselves have contributed most to the improvements, followed by private investment, the remittances of migrant workers and, finally, foreign assistance. In 2000, foreign aid to developing countries totalled \$54 billion, one-third of which was in the form of private foreign direct investment, which in turn amounted to only one-tenth of those countries' total investment of nearly \$1.5 trillion. In the education sector, for example, developing countries spent more than \$250 billion per annum, while World Bank loans for the sector amounted to about \$1 billion per year, or 0.4% of what developing countries spent themselves.⁴ The Dutch government announced in late 2003 that it would spend €2.5 billion on education in the next five years, which on an annual basis is equivalent to 0.2% of the total amount that will be spent by developing countries.⁵ In other words, the contributions of all donors, including the Netherlands – in terms of finance, analysis and advice – to poverty alleviation and economic self-reliance in the developing world represent only a tiny fraction of the expenditures of the countries themselves and other actors. Evaluation departments such as IOB obviously cover only part of these aid expenditures.⁶

The relative unimportance of Dutch development cooperation is no reason not to investigate critically its quality and impact, and to ask *Helpt Hollands Hulp?* (Does Dutch aid deliver?). This question has been asked right from the beginning. In the 1960s it was the starting point for the first major evaluation of Dutch development aid.⁷ Over the years it has occupied a number of research institutions and advisory bodies in the Netherlands that play a role in the assessment and improvement of the quality of aid. To mention just a few of these, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid*) published a memorandum in which it pleaded that as much priority be given to promoting good governance as to poverty alleviation. Another body, the Advisory Council for International Questions, has recommended to increase the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Most institutes of higher education in the Netherlands offer courses on development issues and related advisory services. Many Dutch non-governmental aid organisations and their counterparts in developing countries add to our knowledge of development issues.

4. World Bank Group, *Annual Report 2002*, chapter 3.

5. Press release, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 September 2003.

6. Until 2000 IOB covered 30% of the Foreign Affairs budget. From 2000 onwards the target coverage was 45%. See: IOB, *Programmering 2003–2007*. The Hague, September 2003, p. 6. With the increase in joint evaluations the coverage could increase further.

7. See, for example, XminY Beweging, *Helpt Hollands Hulp?*, The Hague, 1969.

The respected Netherlands Court of Audit (*Algemene Rekenkamer*), which investigates whether Dutch money has been spent on what it was meant for, also contributes to our knowledge about the quality of Dutch aid. In 1984, for example, the Court of Audit investigated Dutch budget support to Jamaica.

This summing up possibly portrays the Dutch Policy and Operations Evaluation Department as just one small player amongst many bigger ones. Yet it does have a special task and a special nature. In assessing whether it has fulfilled its task and whether it has adhered to its principles, this chapter considers three factors: its independence and impartiality; the quality of its output; and the outcome – the impact and utility of the IOB's output for the various stakeholders.⁸

Independence

Almost without exception, experts and politicians have stressed that independence and impartiality are preconditions for a well functioning evaluation unit. Here we quote just a few examples. A member of parliament concluded in 1990 'The role of the Inspectorate should not be underestimated. It does need an independent position ... and that deserves our support'.⁹ 'IOB should depend neither upon politics nor upon official priorities', said former Minister for Foreign Affairs Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at IOB's 25th anniversary celebration. 'Its power is to be found in its independent judgement. It should never give that up'. Minister for Development Cooperation Agnes van Ardenne fully agreed, noting that she would not exclude the possibility of an evaluation unit functioning outside the ministry. Pieter Stek, former executive director of the World Bank, only underlined what both ministers said: 'Independence is the most fundamental condition for a useful judgement'.¹⁰

Independence has several dimensions.¹¹ One has to do with operational procedures. IOB has always been independent in that it is able to set its evaluation agenda, phrase the questions for an evaluation, and bring in outside expertise. Usually, one inspector is in charge of an evaluation. In practice he decides on the

8. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Review of Evaluation in Danida*. Copenhagen, 2003, p. 5.

9. EK Handelingen, begrotingsdebat, 15 May 1990, p. 805.

10. All quotes from: IOB, *25 Jaar IOB: 19 februari 2003*. Werkdocument, May 2003, pp. 12, 15, 45.

11. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Review of Evaluation in Danida*. Copenhagen, 2003, ch. 3.

research, although his colleagues and, when applicable, reference groups can challenge him throughout the process, from the writing of the evaluation proposal through to the formulation of the findings. Nowadays the inspector in charge can bring in outside experts, either from the recipient country or elsewhere. IOB's independence is also apparent during the writing of the report, and when the draft reports are discussed in a dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that the conclusions are accepted by all.

A possible limitation of IOB's independence could be that the Minister has to approve its budget. Eberhard Köpp, director of the World Bank Operations Evaluation Department from 1990–1995, considered budget approval 'the weakest aspect' of the independence of his department. 'The work program and its content and direction were subject to strong influence by Bank management through the back door of budgeting'.¹² It seems that such strong influence has been absent in the Netherlands. IOB receives an operating budget and this has never been used as a tool to curtail its independence.

Another important aspect of IOB's independence is its relation with the Minister. The *Inspectie Ontwikkelingsamenwerking te Velde* (IOV) was originally established in 1978 as an 'extension' of Minister Jan Pronk, as his eyes in the field. Thereafter, director Joop Kramer was successful in maintaining the inspectorate's independence *vis à vis* the ministers who succeeded him. Ministers had no say about the contents of an evaluation. That was why, when evaluations became public, they would add a policy response. We have not been able to find a serious instance in which one of the eight ministers for development cooperation has tried to influence or change the contents of an evaluation report. Most ministers made positive comments about IOB at the beginning of their term, since the evaluations concerned the work of their predecessor and could be used to justify changes they wished to make. As noted previously, Minister Pronk used both the 1990 evaluation *Aid or Trade* and the 1991 evaluation of the sector programme for rural development to cut back on the initiatives of his predecessors. When the ministers had been in office for a number of years, however, and their own work became the subject of the evaluation reports, the relationship could change. But they would not influence an evaluation, preferring instead to ignore or to delay the publication. In the case of the 1994 country programme reviews, the minister delayed their publication briefly before the election by requesting IOB to provide a synthesis of the three evaluation reports.¹³ Another minister tried to downplay

12. E. Köpp, *Promoting Professional and Personal Trust in OD*, in: P.G. Grasso, S.S. Wasty and R.T. Weaving (eds.), *World Bank Operations Evaluation Department: The First 30 Years*, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 57.

the importance of unwelcome findings, as happened with report 285, *Review of the cooperation between Mali and the Netherlands 1994–1998*.

Independence also is an issue in IOB's relation with the operational departments. Joop Kramer stressed that the inspectorate should remain independent from the other departments. Minister Pronk and Kramer agreed that the inspectorate should be respected and maybe even feared by the operational departments. There were often frictions between IOB and other staff of the ministry or the embassies. IOB still does not report to these departments and embassies, but to the Minister, at first through the Director-General for Development Cooperation and, since the 1996 realignment of foreign policy, through the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In its second and third periods, IOB consulted the relevant operational departments and the Minister when setting up an evaluation and in formulating the findings and issues for the future. IOB also began to strengthen its relationship with other departments in order to get something done with its recommendations and issues for the future. Inspector-General Prince Claus played a role in this by discussing them with the departments concerned. Sometimes the pressing questions asked by him or the inspector responsible for an evaluation made these discussions 'painful',¹⁴ so that this practice was stopped after two years. In its second and third periods IOB also increased its consultations with partners in the recipient countries.

The relationship between IOB and the operational departments has also been influenced by the findings of decentralised evaluations. For example, some operational departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to improve their evaluation and monitoring practices following the publication of the inspectorate's report *Evaluation and Monitoring* in 1993. However, the 2001 OECD/DAC Peer Review of the Netherlands concluded that only little progress had been made, and echoed earlier recommendations. 'The DAC recommends that the Netherlands initiate the range of actions necessary to the creation of a coherent, overall monitoring and evaluation system, which is structured around learning'.¹⁵ IOB is in the process of studying whether substantial improvements have been made, but it is feared that the quality of the decentralised evaluations is not much better than it was in 1993.

13. Secretariaat IOB, *Evaluatie van de collegiale en secretariele hulp aan Drs A.C.A. van der Wiel (inspecteur IOV) 1988–1994*. (Document prepared in honour of Van der Wiel's departure from IOB), The Hague, 1994, ch. 3.

14. F. Bieckmann, *De wereld volgens prins Claus*, Amsterdam, 2004, p. 235.

15. The DAC reviewed Dutch development cooperation policies and programmes on 5 June 2001.

In a comparative study of evaluation practices in EU Member States, published in 1995, Paul Hoebink stated that the relationship between IOB and the operational departments had become too close, and that IOB had not achieved an effective balance between autonomy and loyalty to the Minister and other departments. 'Project officers are part of the reference group which advises on methodology and approach ... therefore major points of critique are omitted or final reports are undone of sharp comments'.¹⁶ Hoebink did not provide concrete evidence to substantiate his statement, however. In the Evaluation Secretariat of Danida, the Danish agency for development cooperation, there had been cases where pressure had been applied, in particular 'during the phases of fieldwork and report writing'. The hampering of the work 'typically originated from institutions or personnel with a stake in the project being evaluated'.¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that all evaluation work in Denmark is contracted out, and that putting pressure on an external consultant is not the same as putting pressure on an evaluation department or its staff. Pieter Stek of the World Bank strongly favours a close relation between the evaluation and other departments. 'The interaction between evaluation and operations inside the World Bank is very productive. It prevents mistakes in judgements'.¹⁸

The degree of independence also has to do with the inspectors themselves. This is a sensitive area in which it is easier to ask questions than to find answers. Within IOB there has always been a tension between the intention of the inspectorate to attract inspectors from outside the ministry, and the limitations on doing so imposed by the human resources department of either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Home Affairs. All IOB directors and most inspectors come from within the ministry or from institutions such as SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, which are close to it, and only occasionally from a different sector such as trade and industry. At present most inspectors come from within the ministry, and have internalised the game of being loyal in a hierarchical bureaucracy. In their previous positions they may have been sector or thematic specialists. Thus it is not possible to generalise as to what background or history produces the best inspector.

Some insiders are convinced that upon joining IOB these inspectors have the necessary impartiality to perform a good evaluation. Others doubt this, argu-

16. Paul Hoebink, *The Comparative Effectiveness and the Evaluation Efforts of EU Donors*. National Advisory Council for Development Cooperation, The Hague, 1995, p. 6.

17. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Review of Evaluation in Danida*. Copenhagen, 2003, p. 11.

18. IOB, 25 *Jaar IOB: 19 februari 2003*. Werkdocument, May 2003, p. 15.

ing that they are too well integrated into the games and skirmishes that characterise a government bureaucracy. It is a soft organisation, unused to self-criticism, they argue, so that staff members who have been part of it for a long time easily unlearn to be straight. They may be good, but their evaluation reports can be vague and their language guarded. But no two inspectors are the same – their interpretation of IOB's independence can differ, some of them have stronger backbones than others, and some are prepared to be stricter than others. Some are less inclined to look back and think about their career when their time with IOB is over.

Quality

For high-quality evaluation reports, skilled inspectors are essential. Since the inspectorate was established, the requirements for a good inspector have been simple: not too young, lots of field experience, relevant academic qualifications and excellent writing skills. Because of the skills required, and to give them more authority, inspectors have always been on a rather high scale.¹⁹ Over the years the profile of an inspector has changed. Since 2003 inspectors have also been required to have management experience and good communication skills. They have to be able to lead a large number of Dutch, foreign and local experts working on an evaluation, and to involve reference groups, both in the partner country and in the Netherlands. They also need an international network in order to function well in joint evaluations, and to be able to write the final report of an evaluation.²⁰

Apart from some brief periods, the quantity of IOB's output has never been a problem (see appendices). In its 25 years, IOB has published more than 300 inspection and evaluation reports. IOB has been responsible for dozens of working documents, and is involved in an increasing number of multi-donor or joint reviews. In its first period, the inspection reports were remarkably brief.²¹ They were quick, direct and impartial assessments, and looked almost like field notes.

19. Scale 14 on average. The IOB director used to be at scale 16, and since the 1996 realignment of foreign policy at scale 17.

20. *Profile inspector*, Intranet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003.

21. For example, the report on a poultry project in Egypt (report 2, 1978) was just five pages long, the report on the Damietta dairy project (report 3, 1978) 13 pages, and the report on four small projects in Tanzania (report 95, 1982) only six pages. In the 1982 synthesis report 95, *Rural Health Care Project Kunri: Synthesis of evaluation studies of DAC member rural health projects*, the authors presented their research and findings in just 30 pages.

They were about learning from experience. Stakeholders in the recipient countries had no say in the drafting of the reports.

In its second and third periods, IOB distinguished itself with evaluations that were generally more in-depth and systematic. The inspectors used scientific research methods and avoided any doubtful interpretations of the research findings, let alone fabrications. In case of doubt, their colleagues or reference groups would challenge and criticise them. These evaluations were about learning from experience and about how to be accountable and transparent. IOB has tried to involve stakeholders in the recipient countries in the evaluation work, and this has been encouraged by the increase in the number of joint evaluations.

Members of parliament often expressed their appreciation for the quality and independence of IOB's evaluation reports. One described the 1984 *Global Evaluation of Bilateral Development Cooperation* (report 168) as 'extremely worthwhile reading', a 'clever and fascinating piece of work that offers many interesting and frank points of departure for an in-depth discussion'.²² In 1992 a colleague described the evaluations 'as a clear instrument for the promotion of public support in the Netherlands'.²³ Another referred to the main findings of the 1993 report *Evaluation and Monitoring* 'staggering'.²⁴ Academic researcher Paul Hoebink was more critical of the quality of the evaluations, however. 'Field research is rather short and sometimes superficial. In general, the evaluations are directed more at improving aid management and aid delivery than at measuring aid impact'.²⁵

Outcome

The effects of IOB's reports in the first period were undoubtedly different from those in the second and third periods. The confidential inspection reports on individual projects or clusters of projects often (but not always) had an immediate learning effect at a very practical level. Both Dutch and local officials involved in project implementation were named and, where necessary, advised to change things.²⁶ In that sense they can be compared with the reports of the other evaluation department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Inspection and Evaluation Unit, which investigates the functioning of Dutch embassies and consul-

22. TK Verslag Uitgebreide Commissie Vergadering over de Nota Herijking bilateraal beleid, 3 September 1984, p. 5.

23. EK Handelingen, begrotingsdebat, 7 April 1992, p. 916.

24. EK Handelingen, begrotingsdebat, 20 April 1994, p. 1591.

25. Hoebink, 1995, *op. cit.*

ates. Those reports also have a practical impact – their circulation is limited, and they are well read, as no embassy wants to receive an unsatisfactory assessment.

At the operational level, the practical effects of IOB's reports began to fade as soon as the evaluations went beyond projects and began to cover themes, sectors, policies and whole country programmes, and when they became public. The new type of evaluations led to changes at the policy level, but IOB's role in such changes is difficult to define. In 2003 it was decided that the Minister's policy response should be followed by an action plan to deal with the main findings and issues for the future. It is too early to say whether these action plans are helping to broaden the impacts of IOB's reports.

The crucial question is whether IOB's outputs have had an outcome in terms of improving Dutch development cooperation policy. Have the evaluations actually influenced the Minister, the ministry's policy and operational departments, the stakeholders in the partner countries, parliament, the media and/or the public? Has Dutch support for poverty alleviation and economic self-reliance been improved as a result of the inspections and evaluations? In its publication *Algemene bevindingen uit IOB-rapporten 1984–1994* (General findings from IOB reports 1984–1994) IOB itself is not pessimistic. 'A number of general recommendations, which the Inspectorate made on the basis of its findings in the period 1984–1994, have been implemented by now. ... Most recommendations have been dealt with in some form or other in policy documents'.²⁷

A number of examples of such improvements have been described in previous chapters. The monitoring of ongoing projects, programmes and policies by operational departments and embassies has been improved somewhat. The project cycle has been simplified, while checks have been put in place to ensure that poverty, gender and environmental considerations are integrated into projects. Thanks to the recommendations of the evaluation department, there is now a greater recognition of the importance of ownership and donor coordination, of the potential of programme support for countries with good socio-economic policies, and of the need to reduce the number of projects.

Minister Jan Pronk supported IOB's conclusion about the impact of its work in his 1996 policy paper *Hulp in uitvoering* (Aid in progress), in which he discussed the use of Dutch aid and the role of IOB since the realignment of foreign

26. Examples include the reports on the Damietta dairy project in Egypt (report 3, March 1978), and on a project for the mentally handicapped in a village in Tanzania (report 86, May 1981).

27. IOB, *Algemene bevindingen uit IOB-rapporten 1984–1994*, p. 5. Updated in 1998, p. 5.

policy.²⁸ The findings of IOB's research had been used in 'decisions to continue an activity' or to adjust it. The evaluations were 'moments of learning' in aid policy in general. IOB had helped Pronk to understand 'that the accumulation of policy options and activities can be a problem for recipient governments in developing countries'. IOB's reports had inspired measures 'to promote the coherence and consistency of the policy'. During the ten previous years IOB's reports had led to the formulation of policies in some 20 sectors. Pronk mentioned in particular the 1991 evaluation of the sector programme for rural development, which inspired the ministry to view rural development as a process rather than as a separate programme.

While reading *Hulp in uitvoering* one cannot avoid the impression that Pronk, apart from giving an optimistic summary of IOB's work so far, was trying to convince parliament that he was doing a good job and that attacks on development aid were unjustified. According to a student of the University of Amsterdam who investigated the relation between Pronk and the IOB, the Minister 'claims to take the evaluations very seriously and to give serious consideration to their recommendations. In subsequent policy documents, however, there are few references to evaluations, so any direct influence is difficult to ascertain'.²⁹ Pronk's angry reaction to the leaking of a draft of the Tanzania country programme review in 1993 was another indication that ministers are politicians, and politicians use reports such as the IOB evaluations selectively when they fit their own political agendas.

Pronk was not the only minister who made selective use of the IOB reports. In 1984, in a response to the policy document on the realignment of Dutch bilateral aid, the National Advisory Council for Development Cooperation criticised Minister Schoo for the 'limited and selective' use of the *Global Evaluation* and other evaluations. One painful experience IOB had with a minister's treatment of its findings concerned the *Review of the Cooperation between Mali and the Netherlands 1994–1998* (report 285). Minister Eveline Herfkens could not use the findings politically, and so avoided them by repeating that much had changed for the better in Mali.

In *Algemene bevindingen uit IOB-rapporten 1984–1994*, IOB admitted that 'in practice it has turned out difficult to make these recommendations operational'. The lack of impact at the operational level within the ministry itself, which characterised IOB's output in the second period and in the third, and the strong

28. *Hulp in uitvoering: ontwikkelingssamenwerking en de herijking van het buitenlands beleid*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, 1996, pp. 46–56.

29. Natasja van den Berg, quoted by Rob van den Berg, 'Leert de hulp van lessen uit het verleden?', in: *Internationale Spectator*, May 2001, p. 259.

impression that IOB's work was often considered superfluous has always worried the evaluation department. It has been the subject of many consultations between IOB and senior ministry officials. The latter promised in 2000 that this situation would be improved, but according to director van den Berg little has changed.³⁰ Staff of the ministry did not read the thick reports.³¹ They tended to think that the evaluations related to Dutch development practices in the past, while they developed and implemented development practices for the present and in the future. The aid managers and coordinators often did not wish to take into account evaluations that could actually suggest cuts in their budgets, since budget cuts have always been seen as a reflection of poor performance.

In the second period parliament sometimes showed considerable interest in IOB's reports, some of which fuelled the public debate about development co-operation. In the third period such public debate has been less prominent. The present Minister for Development Cooperation, Agnes van Ardenne, candidly admitted that when she still was a member of parliament the evaluations received little attention.³² In the book *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation*, which was sponsored by the ministry, the evaluations are referred to occasionally. But one of the contributors was so unfamiliar with IOB's work that he wrote 'Evaluations related only to individual projects, and there was very little analysis of the impact of policy as a whole. Where such analyses were performed, they played a very minor role in determining the course of policy'.³³ Apparently the author was unaware of the events of the ten years before 1999, and had not read the 1984 *Global Evaluation* of the effectiveness of Dutch bilateral aid.

Report 288, *Health, Nutrition and Population: Burkina Faso, Mozambique and Yemen, 1995–1999*, was about the impact of aid. One interesting observation was that it had been assumed that medicines for the poor did not reach poor people in faraway, remote areas. Another was the fact that everyone had to pay for medical care, so that the poorest of the poor could not make use of health care facilities unless they were subsidised. In the three countries under review, based on research in remote areas, this was not the case. To reach this conclusion, local

30. 25 Jaar IOB, 19 February 2003, werkdocument, p. 40.

31. For this reason IOB began to compile 'key sheets', a series of briefing papers presenting the main findings and issues for the future.

32. Agnes van Ardenne, *Verzelfstandiging IOB serieus bekijken*, speech at IOB's 25th anniversary, 19 February 2003.

33. D. Hellema, 'A special role in the world', in: J.A. Nekkers and P.A.M. Malcontent, *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation 1949–1999*. SDU Publishers, The Hague, 2000, pp. 326–7.

people had been asked what they thought of the health clinic, whether there were medicines, and if so, how much they had to pay for them. IOB published the report, issued a key sheet and a press release, but there was almost no media reaction. IOB did the same for evaluations of debt relief efforts in which the Netherlands were involved (reports 291 and 292). Some of the findings of the field research in Mozambique, Nicaragua and Tanzania and desk studies on Bolivia, Jamaica, Peru, Uganda and Zambia were potentially quite damaging for the government. They showed that Dutch aid had been used to pacify international financial institutions, and that the impact on the recipient countries was rather dubious. These evaluations received more media coverage. In parliament the reports led to a motion regarding the use of the foreign aid budget for the cancellation of export credits. Civil society groups have also used the findings to strengthen their campaigns for debt relief.

The wide calls for more transparent results-based management and for joint evaluations will undoubtedly lead to new dilemmas. In joint evaluations the performance of individual donors will be less visible. Recipient-led evaluations will raise new questions. IOB will not easily cease to exist. But in the end, all an evaluation department can do is to write good evaluations, while it is up to the public, politicians and the Ministry's staff to act upon them as they wish. Thus, whatever the effect, outcome or impact of IOB's output was, many evaluations had an unintended result in the sense that the question whether they had consequences was outside IOB's control.

Foreign aid, as has been repeatedly remarked, is probably the most evaluated sector of government, both in the Netherlands and in some other donor countries. There are no voices in favour of discontinuing IOB. Former World Bank supervisor Pieter Stek insists that IOB should keep on 'playing a key role. The 0.8% of the gross national product for development assistance is a Dutch trump card, which means that we are taken seriously. This card has to be played well'.

IOB's independence and the quality of its work are not the major bottlenecks. The main bottleneck is recognition. IOB will have to play cleverly with the tension between its independence and its ability to have its findings implanted in the rest of the ministry. According to former Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, IOB should take care 'that its activities reflect to a certain extent the voices and visions in Dutch society'. His colleague, Minister for Development Cooperation Agnes van Ardenne said the same, when she challenged IOB to become more relevant and not to look back too long, as had been done in the report on debt relief, which covered the period 1991–1999. Her advice 'be shorter, faster and topical, and do not abstract so long until it has no more taste', is reminiscent of the approach of IOB's first director, Joop Kramer.

With regard to its role in the future, IOB could continue to focus on the evaluation of all sectors of Dutch foreign policy. It could also consider other choices. It could go back to the tasks it carried out in its first period, and compile brief, confidential reports about projects and programmes. It could restrict its work to evaluating the management of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (as it did in the reports Monitoring and Evaluation and Contracted out: Bane or Blessing?). It could become a high-level policy department. To ensure greater impact, it may be decided to integrate IOB into the Netherlands Court of Audit (Algemene Rekenkamer). In any case, IOB could become a centre of excellence, focusing much more on identifying opportunities for the export of this aspect of Dutch know-how.

But that is about the future, and not the history of 25 years of IOB. Whatever its future, IOB can always heed the advice of its former Inspector-General Prince Claus: 'Civil servants should have more courage to be critical, and to be open about their criticisms'.³⁴

34. Interview with Prince Claus, 8 September 1999.

Appendix 1

List of Evaluations 1978–2003

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>No.</i>
2003	Behartiging van de Buitenlandse belangen van de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba.	295
2003	Co-ordination and Sector Support. An evaluation of the Netherlands' support to local governance in Uganda 1991–2001	294
2003	Netherlands FAO Trust Fund Co-operation 1985–2000	293
2003	Resultaten van Internationale Schuldverlichting 1990–1999	292
2002	Nederlands Schuldverlichtingsbeleid 1990–1999	291
2003	Agenda 2000: hoe Nederland onderhandelt met Europa	290
2002	Culture and Development, Evaluation of a Policy (1981–2001) (Dutch and English version)	289
2002	Health, Nutrition and Population: Burkina Faso, Yemen, Mozambique. Evaluation 1995–1999	288
2001	De Kunst van het Internationaal Cultuurbeleid. Evaluatie 1997–2000	287
2001	Smallholder Dairy Support Programme (SDSP) Tanzania. Inspectie van de identificatie, formulering en aanbesteding	286
2000	Onderzoek naar de Samenwerking tussen Mali en Nederland 1994–1998	285
2000	Institutional Development. Netherlands Support to the water sector 1988–1998	284
1999	ORET/MILIEV Review 1994–1999. Assisting Developing Countries to buy investment goods and services in the Netherlands	283
1999	Palestinian Territories. Review of the Netherlands Development Programme for the Palestinian Territories, 1993–1998	282
1999	Hulp door Handel. Evaluatie van het Centrum tot bevordering van de Import uit Ontwikkelingslanden (CBI), 1990–1996	281
1999	Co-financing between the Netherlands and the World Bank 1975–1996 (Volume 2 – Main Report)	280

1999	Diamonds and Coals. Evaluation of the Matra-programme of assistance to Central and Eastern Europe, 1994–1997	279
1998	The Netherlands Aid programme with Bolivia (Volume 3 – Sub Report)	278
1998	Bolivia. Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Bolivia. Main findings and summary (Volume 1 – Summary Report)	277
1998	Bolivia. Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Bolivia (Volume 2 – Main Report)	277
1998	Egypt. Evaluation of the Netherlands Support to the Water Management and Drainage, 1975–1996 (Volume 3 – Summary Report)	276
1998	Egypt. Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Egypt, 1975–1996 (Volume 1 – Summary Report)	275
1998	Egypt. Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Egypt, 1975–1996 (Volume 2 – Main Report)	275
1998	Evaluation of SNV in Benin, Nepal and Bolivia (Summary Evaluation Report)	274
1998	SNV – Nepal, 1985–1995 (Hoofdbevindingen en samenvatting)	273
1998	SNV – Nepal (Engelstalig evaluatierapport)	273
1998	SNV – Benin, 1985–1995 (Hoofdbevindingen en Samenvatting)	272
1998	SNV – Bénin, 1985–1995	272
1998	Vrouwen en Ontwikkeling. Beleid en uitvoering in de Nederlandse Ontwikkelingssamenwerking 1985–1996	271
1998	Bangladesh. Evaluation of the Netherlands-funded NGO's, 1972–1996 (Volume 3 – Sub-report)	270
1998	Bangladesh. Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Bangladesh, 1972–1996 (Volume 1 – Summary Report)	269
1998	Bangladesh. Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Bangladesh, 1972–1996 (Volume 2 – Main Report)	269
1998	Women in Kenya and the Netherlands Development Co-operation 1985–1995 (Dutch and English version)	268
1997	Les femmes du Burkina Faso et la Coopération Néerlandaise 1985–1995 (Dutch and French version)	267
1996	Netherlands Aid Reviewed. An analysis of Operations Review Unit Reports, 1983–1994	266

1995	Fertiliser Aid. Evaluation of the Netherlands fertiliser aid 1975–1993 with special reference to Bangladesh, Mali and Zambia	265
1994	Humanitarian Aid to Somalia	264
1994	Tanzania. Evaluation of the Netherlands development programme with Tanzania, 1970–1992	263
1994	Mali. Evaluatie van de Nederlandse hulp aan Mali, 1975–1992	262
1994	India. Evaluation of the Netherlands development programme with India, 1980–1992	261
1994	Evaluatie van de Nederlandse Hulp aan India, Mali en Tanzania. Samenvattend rapport	260
1993	Samenwerkingsverbanden in het Hoger Onderwijs. Een evaluatie van samenwerkingsverbanden in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland en Tanzania	259
1993	Evaluatie en Monitoring. De Rol van Projectevaluatie en monitoring in de Bilaterale hulp	258
1993	The Flood Action Plan, Bangladesh. Een onderzoek naar aanleiding van het debat over waterbeheersing in Bangladesh	257
1992	La Riziculture Paysanne à l'Office du Niger, Mali, 1979–1991. Évaluation de l'appui néerlandais	256
1992	Sector Aid and Structural Adjustment; the Case of Sugar in Tanzania	255
1992	Milieu en ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Een evaluatie van de effecten van het milieubeleid, met nadruk op veldonderzoek in Burkina Faso, Indonesië en Kenia	254
1991	Sectorprogramma Plattelandsontwikkeling. Een programma evaluatie met projectonderzoek in Indonesië, Soedan, Rwanda, Tanzania en Nicaragua	253
1990	Voedselhulp en Ontwikkeling. Een evaluatie van de Nederlandse voedselhulp met nadruk op Sub-Sahara Afrika in de periode 1980–1989	252
1990	Centra voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Een onderzoek naar kwaliteit en bereik van de voorlichting -en bewustwordings-activiteiten na de Centra voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (COSSen)	251
1990	Volkshuisvesting Curaçao. Een evaluatie van het huisvestings-programma van de Fundashon Kas Popular (FKP), 1979–1989	250
1990	Volkshuisvesting Aruba. Een evaluatie van het huisvestings-programma van de Fundashon Cas pa Comunidad Arubano (FCCA), 1979–1989	249

1990	Hulp of Handel? Een evaluatie-onderzoek van het programma Ontwikkelingsrelevante Exporttransacties (GKP/LCL's)	248
1990	Small Enterprises, New Approaches workshop proceedings	247
1989	Importsteun. Evaluatie van Nederlandse importsteun aan Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique en Pakistan (1984–1988)	246
1988	Uitbested, goed besteed? Een onderzoek naar uitbestedingsbeleid voor bilaterale ontwikkelingsactiviteiten met nadruk op rurale en regionale ontwikkeling (tweede druk, 1989)	245
1988	Zambia Western Province 1997–1987. Joint evaluation of the development programme in the Western Province (W.P.) of Zambia	244
1988	Gezondheidszorg aan de basis. Ervaringen met de extramurale gezondheidszorg in de Nederlandse ontwikkelingssamenwerking vanaf 1975 (tweede druk, 1992)	243
1988	Women Entrepreneurs (Dutch and English version)	242
1987	Leverantie Vissersschepen aan Peru	241
1987	Samenvatting en Beschouwing Regionale Ontwikkeling Aceh, Indonesië	240
1987	Hospital Based Health Care. Evaluative summary of Dutch-supported activities in the Field of Hospital-based Health Care, 1975–1984 (Dutch and English version)	239
1987	CEDE Antiyas / CEDE Aruba. Programma voor Kleine Medefinancierings Projekten (KMP)	238
1987	Programmation de l'Execution du Developpement Integre – PEDI, Burkina Faso	237
1987	Unité de Planification (AVV-UP-3), Manga, Burkina Faso	236
1987	Rurale Electrification, Egypte	235
1987	GCP 186 Vrachtwagens General Union of Cooperation of Transportation Societies, Egypte	234
1986	GCP Havensleepboot Tanzania Harbours Authority, DSM, Tanzania	233
1986	GCP Sleepboot en twee Werkpontons Canal Harbour Works, Egypte	232
1986	Havensleepboot voor Corinto, Nicaragua	231
1986	GCP 36 Rijdende Melkontvangers Dairy Marketing Board, Zimbabwe	230
1986	GCP Havensleepboot en twee Vrachtschepen THD, Georgetown, Guyana	229
1986	GCP Gecombineerd Vracht-opleidingsschip, Mexico	228
1985	Advisory Panel on Drainage, Egypte	227
1985	East Bahr Saft Drainage Project, Egypte	226

1985	CGP 16 werkplaatsen United Bus Company of Zambia	225
1985	KAP 061 Constructie drie waterputten in de Gwembe Vallei, Zambia	224
1985	KAP 006 Werkplaats Chilenje Trade School Lusaka, Zambia	223
1985	Damietta Dairy Project: Vrouwenaspecten, Egypte	222
1985	Animal Husbandry Training Centre, Damietta Dairy Project, Egypte.	221
1987	Assisting Livestock development, 1978–1984 (Dutch and English version)	220
1985	Cattle Development Area Programme: Vrouwenaspecten, Zambia.	219
1985	Cattle Development Area Programme, Zambia.	218
1985	Palabana Dairy Training Institute (PDTI), Zambia.	217
1985	Palabana Dairy Settlement Scheme: Vrouwenaspecten, Zambia.	216
1985	Dairy Settlement Schemes, Zambia	215
1985	Zambia Agricultural Development Company, Melkveehouderij	214
1985	Productie van Vaccins tegen Dierziekten, Zambia	213
1985	National Artificial Insemination Service (NAIS), Zambia	212
1985	Ruraal Ontwikkelingsproject PRODERM, Cusco: Vrouwenaspecten, Peru	211
1985	Social Work and Research Centre, Orissa – Hivos, India	210
1985	Campus/Dorpscentra project, SWRC, Rajasthan – Hivos, India	209
1985	Rehabilitatie provinciale en districtsziekenhuizen, Indonesia	208
1985	Landbouwvestigingen in Kasempa: vrouwenaspecten, Zambia	207
1985	Landbouwvestigingen in Kasempa District, Zambia	206
1985	Kimalewa Cooperative Development Society – Novib, Kenya	205
1985	Local Building Materials Project – Novib, Sudan	204
1985	Amadi Rural Development Training Institute – Novib, Sudan	203
1985	Harambee Institutes of Technology, Kenya	202
1985	Equipment Politechnics Nairobi en Mombasa, Kenya	201
1985	The Effects of Bilateral Cooperation in Agriculture on the Position of Women.	200
1985	Het Nederlandse Dairy Development Project, Sri Lanka	199
1985	IRDP Nuwara Eliya: Vrouwenaspecten, Sri Lanka	198
1985	Twee KAP's in het district Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka	197
1985	Integrated Rural Development Project Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka	196
1985	Small Enterprise Development Project, Indonesia	195

1985	Vier Kleine Ambassade Projecten, Egypte	194
1985	Samenwerking t.b.v. vrouwen, Egypte	193
1985	Rehabilitatie van Gehandicapten, Egypte	192
1985	Zes Kleine Ambassadeprojecten, Zambia	191
1985	Inzet van Fysiotherapeuten door SNV, Zambia	190
1985	Steunverlening aan het Ministry of Education and Culture, Zambia	189
1985	PAID/ESA Literatuurprogramma, Zambia	188
1985	PAID/ESA Pan African Institute for Development – SIR, Zambia	187
1985	Suppletiedeskundigen aan de University of Zambia	186
1985	PUO Samenwerkingsverband Universiteit van Zambia	185
1985	GCP Dieselgeneratoren Electriciteitscentrale Bali, Indonesia	184
1985	RIRD P Rada'a integrated Rural Development Project, Yemen	183
1985	Urologische kliniek aan de universiteit van Mansoura, Egypte	182
1985	Vaccinbereiding door het Agouza Instituut, Egypte	181
1985	TB bestrijdingsprogramma, Egypte	180
1985	Vuilverwijderingsproject Taiz, Yemen	179
1985	Sichili Rural Hospital and Outreach Programme, WP – Cebemo, Zambia	178
1984	CPB Christelijke Plattelandsvrouwen Bond	177
1984	LaVe de Landelijke Vereniging van Wereldwinkels	176
1984	LIW Landelijke India Werkgroep	175
1984	Schieffelin Leprosy Res. & Training Centre Karigiri – Icco, India	174
1984	Rural Unit for Health and Social Affairs (RUHSA) Icco, India	172
1984	Ellen Thoburn Cowen Hospital Kolar – Icco, India	172
1984	Samenvattende Beschouwing Vier ICCO Medische Projecten, India	171
1984	Sites and Services / Low Cost Housing Project Solo, Indonesia	170
1984	Kampong Improvement Project Cibotabek, Indonesia	169
1984	Globale Evaluatie van de Nederlandse Bilaterale Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 1975–1984	168
1984	Tameco Messenfabriek – Hivos / SNV, Tanzania	167
1984	Pluimveeproject Rawdah, Yemen	166
1984	KAP 015 Electrisch Kookstel Jambereiding, Zambia	165
1984	Food Processing Unit Chikuni, Zambia	164
1984	Medefinanciering via ICCO van medische activiteiten EPF, Rwanda	163
1984	Medefinancieringsteun aan BUFMAR via ICCO, Rwanda	162

1983	Toezicht op aanleg weg Dhamar – Rada’a – Al Baida, Yemen	161
1983	Uitbreiding drijvende Havenpier Ras Al Kathib, Hodeiha, Yemen	160
1983	Mbeya Mobile Hospital Engeneering Association – SNV / Icco, Tanzania	159
1983	Acht Kleine Ambassadeprojecten, Tanzania	158
1983	Pootaardappelproject, Yemen	157
1983	Rural Water Supply in het Dhamar Rada gebied, Yemen	156
1983	Hospital Administration & Nursing Service Project, Yemen	155
1983	Domestic Water Activities, 1975–1980 (Dutch and English version)	154
1983	Twee Culturele Ontwikkelingsprojecten, Yemen	153
1983	Kunstmestleveranties, Sri Lanka	152
1983	Soakpit Project Baldia, Karachi, Pakistan	151
1983	Karachi Slum Improvement Project, Pakistan	150
1983	Universitaire Samenwerking Burkina Faso	149
1983	Cellule de Construction en Milieu Rural. Burkina Faso	148
1983	Education Nationale Burkina Faso	147
1982	Werkgroep Campa (Stichting Samenwerking Hoogland Indianen)	146
1982	Stichting Nedsat Ned. Educ. Sociaal Aangepaste Technologie	145
1982	Werkgroep Kairos	144
1982	SWML Stichting Wereldsolidariteit Midden-Limburg.	143
1982	SOBE Stichting Onderzoek Bedrijfstad Electrotechniek.	142
1982	Flood Forecasting; nader rapport, Pakistan.	141
1982	Industrieterrein Kossodo Burkina Faso.	140
1982	Leverantie Pootaardappelen, Sri Lanka.	139
1982	Betalingsbalanshulp: Leverantie Tarwebloem, Sri Lanka.	138
1982	Verbetering Medische Voorzieningen, Sri Lanka.	137
1982	Periyakulama Coöperatieve Vrouwenboerderij, Sri Lanka.	136
1982	RIDE Regional Industrial Development Course, Colombo, Sri Lanka.	135
1982	Verbetering Woonomstandigheden Slums and Shanties, Colombo, Sri Lanka.	134
1982	Environmental Pollution Control Project, Bangladesh.	133
1982	MATS Medical Assistants Training Programme, Bangladesh.	132
1982	SNV Inzet Streekontwikkeling Departement du Sahel Burkina Faso.	131
1982	Dorpsputtenproject Volta Noire, Burkina Faso.	130
1982	Dorpsbossenproject Volta Noire en Centre Nord, Burkina Faso.	129

1982	Training en Onderzoek – Veeteelt, Tanzania	128
1982	Samenwerking met TSA – Veeteelt, Tanzania	127
1982	Samenwerking met LIDA – Veeteelt, Tanzania	126
1982	Veeteeltactiviteiten in Tanzania – Samenvattende herleiding	125
1982	Drinkwater- en Rioleringsvoorzieningen Uraba, Colombia	124
1982	Grondwateronderzoek TNO-Insfopal: Cesar, Atlantico, Llanos, Colombia	123
1982	Watervoorzieningsproject Choco, Colombia	122
1982	Fifteen Cities Watersupply, West-Java, Indonesia	121
1981	Chodak II Project – NOVIB, Senegal	120
1981	Dairy Development Project (NLDB), Sri Lanka	119
1981	Centre de Reserche pour l' Habitat, Senegal	118
1981	Six Cities Watersupply, Indonesia	117
1981	Voedselhulp 1977–1980, Senegal	116
1981	Financiële Hulp Telecommunicatiematerialen, Pakistan	115
1981	Hawkers Kiosks, Kenya	114
1981	Indramayu Project, Indonesia	113
1981	Tanga Cementfabriek, Tanzania	112
1981	Het Programma voor Kleine Ambassadeprojecten	111
1981	Improvement River Forecasting & Flood Warning System, Pakistan	110
1981	Drie Kleine Ambassadeprojecten 018, 040, 042, Peru	109
1981	Leveranties National Milk Board (NMB), Sri Lanka	108
1981	Mannar Water Supply Scheme, Sri Lanka	107
1981	Leverantie Materialen Regionale Waterleidingsystemen, Sri Lanka	106
1981	Central Transport Board (CTB) Busonderdelen, Sri Lanka	105
1981	Kleine Ambassade Projecten in Pakistan	104
1981	Elf Kleine Ambassade Projecten in Senegal	103
1981	Kenya Building Centre en Kenya Housing Project	102
1981	Dairy Cattle Research Project (DCRP), Naivasha, Kenya	101
1981	PUC: Civiele Ingenieursopleiding; Lab. Bouwconstructies, Peru	100
1981	PUC: Werktuigbouwkundige Ingenieursopleiding, Peru	99
1981	PUC: Universitaire Samenwerkingsprojecten, Peru	98
1981	PUC: Sociale Faculteit en Onderzoekscentrum – Cebemo, Peru	97
1981	Samenwerking met de Pontificia Universidad Catolica (PUC), Peru	96
1981	Rural Health Care Project, Kunri (RHCP), Pakistan	95

1981	Drainage and Reclamation Institute of Pakistan	94
1981	Twee Kleine Ambassadeprojecten 029 en 035, Colombia	93
1981	Leveranties Medische apparatuur 1976–1977, Sudan	92
1981	KAP-schenkeningen voor Hella Mayo, Sudan	91
1981	Morogoro Wells Construction Project, Tanzania	90
1981	Shinyanga Shallow Wells Project, Tanzania	89
1981	Uttar Pradesh Rural Water Supply Project, India	88
1981	Andhra Pradesh Rural Water Supply Project, India	87
1981	Vier Kleine Ambassade Projecten 016, 012, 038 en 066, Tanzania	86
1981	Veterinary Investigation Laboratory/Clinical Centres, Kenya	85
1981	Farm Implements Factory, Mbeya, Tanzania	84
1981	Aluminium Africa, Steel Billets, Tanzania	83
1981	National Sugar Training Institute (NSI), Tanzania	82
1981	Cultuurtechnische assistentie t.b.v. rijstproductie, Guinee-Bissau	81
1981	Sappen- en Jamfabriek Titina te Bolama, Guinee-Bissau	80
1981	Equipment Mona Rehabilitation Centre KAP 003, Jamaica	79
1981	Revalidatiecentrum Bor te Bissau, Guinee-Bissau	78
1981	Special Education Project, Kenya	77
1981	Self-Help Woningbouw inwoners ex-kaburini – Icco, Kenya	76
1981	Eldoret Site and Services, Kenya	75
1981	Twee Kleine Ambassadeprojecten 002 en 003, India	74
1981	Aarden Dammen Burkina Faso	73
1981	Uitbreiding en Modernisering St. Stephen's Hospital – Icco, India	72
1981	Cardinal Gracias High School, Bombay, Cebemo, India	71
1981	Twee Irrigatieprojecten Ullapata en Huayllacancha – Icco, Peru	70
1981	Squatter Settlement Project, Jamaica	69
1980	Small Enterprises Development Company Ltd. (SEDCO), Jamaica	68
1980	Twee kleine Ambassade projecten, Moçambique	67
1980	Samenwerking in het vlak van de Gezondheidszorg, Moçambique	66
1980	Samenwerking Eduardo Mondlane Universiteit, Moçambique	65
1980	De Internationale Dispensary Association (IDA) te Amsterdam	64
1980	Prefab woningen in Guarda, Portugal	63
1980	Uitbreiding Gezondheidscentrum Pematang Siantar – Cebemo, Indonesia	62
1980	Internaten Verplegend Personeel Yogyakarta – Novib, Indonesia	61

1980	Rehabilitatie Kraamkliniek Mardi Santosa – ICCO, Indonesia	60
1980	Landbouwontwikkelingsproject Leziria Grande, Portugal.	59
1980	Institut Geographique de Haute Volta, Burkina Faso	58
1980	De voedselhulp aan Boven Volta, Burkina Faso	57
1980	KAP 25 en KAP 40, Burkina Faso	56
1980	Kleine Ambassadeprojecten, Portugal	55
1980	Visserijproject Fayoum, Egypte	54
1980	Farme Ecole Ndoungue, Cameroun	53
1980	Hospital Protestant de Ndoungue, Cameroun	52
1980	Landbouwwestigingen Kasempa-District, Zambia	51
1980	Canal Development Programme, Zambia	50
1980	Rural Electrification Project Mongu-Kalabo, Zambia	49
1980	Vaccinleveranties, Philippines	48
1980	Vrijwilligersinzet bij Zai de l'Est, Cameroun	47
1980	Vrijwilligersinzet Moeder- en Kindzorg Oost Provincie, Cameroun	46
1980	Integrated Rural Development Project Rada'a, Yemen	45
1980	Steun aan UNDP-Projecten, Yemen	44
1980	KAP 001 Don Bosco Youth Centre, Philippines	43
1980	Schools of Arts and Trades, Philippines	42
1980	Institute of Small Scale Industries, Philippines	41
1980	Agro Based Industrial Development Course Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	40
1980	Agrarisch Sociaal-Educatief Centrum Instituto Christao, Brasilia	39
1980	Bosbouwprojecten, Brasilia	38
1980	Drie KAP-projecten 001, 003 en 004, Brasilia	37
1979	Damietta Dairy Project II, Egypte	36
1979	Medische Programmahulp: Leverantie Medische benodigdheden, Yemen	35
1979	Central Health Laboratory & Bloodbank, Yemen	34
1979	Leverantie Koelinstallaties, Egypte	33
1979	Kunstmatige Inseminatie, Egypte	32
1979	Aardappelen in Bangladesh	31
1979	Leverantie wegenbouwmateriaal Yemen Highway Authority	30
1979	Early Implementation Projects, Bangladesh	29
1979	Project Rundveeleveranties, Tunesia	28

1979	Praktijkschool Tuinbouw- en Voedselgewassen Saida, Tunesia	27
1979	Project Diepzee Visserij, Kenya	26
1979	Leveranties Karachi Port Trust, Pakistan	25
1979	Installatie 132 KV-Schakelstations Lasbela-District, Pakistan	24
1979	Leverantie Gasturbinegeneratorinstallaties, Kotri, Pakistan	23
1979	Self Help Rural Water Supply, Kenya	22
1979	Districtsziekenhuis Kapenguria, Kenya	21
1979	Hola District Ziekenhuis, Kenya	20
1979	Medische Programmahulp: Leverantie Medische Apparatuur, Kenya	19
1979	Nederlandse Ontwikkelingsactiviteiten in Arequipa, Peru	18
1979	Leverantie textiel-rotatiedrukpers, Pakistan	17
1979	Dorpscoöperaties Centraal Java, QTA-R-I ex 1974, Indonesia	16
1979	School voor Fotogrammetrie te Bandung LTA 7a, Indonesia	15
1979	PUO-Project Tropisch Ecologisch Woudonderzoeken LHW-8, Indonesia	14
1979	Slachthuizen in Jakarta ATA-29 / ATA-78, Indonesia	13
1979	ATA-114: Forest Inventory Training, Indonesia	12
1979	Nederlandse Overheidshulp aan het Technisch onderwijs, Tanzania	11
1979	Project Woonwijkenanering Cartagena, Colombia	10
1978	Tanzania Export Coöperatie Programma	9
1978	Uitbreiding Nylongarenfabriek Century Enka, Poona, India	8
1978	Veeverhuizingsproject Calcutta, India	7
1978	Calcutta Urban Development II, India	6
1978	Calcutta en de CMDA, India	5
1978	Cornwall Youth & Communication Development Project, Jamaica	4
1978	Damietta Dairy project, Egypte	3
1978	Poultry Project Helwan / North Thahrir, Egypte	2
1978	Cairo revalidatie en scholingsproject, Egypte	1

Appendix 2

List of Joint Evaluations 1988–2003

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>ISBN</i>
2003	Local Solutions to Global Challenges: Towards Effective Partnership in Basic Education – Final Report – Bolivia – Burkina Faso – Uganda – Zambia – Document Review	
2003	Addressing the Reproductive Health Needs and Rights of Young People since ICPD: The contribution of UNFPA and IPPF – Bangladesh Country Evaluation Report – Burkina Faso Country Evaluation Report – Egypt Country Evaluation Report – Nicaragua Country Evaluation Report – Tanzania Country Evaluation Report – Vietnam Country Evaluation Report	
2003	Toward Country-led Development. A Multi-partner Evaluation of the Comprehensive Development Framework. Synthesis Report. The World Bank	0-8213-5643-7
2003	Toward Country-led Development. A Multi-partner Evaluation of the Comprehensive Development Framework. Findings from six country case studies: Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Romania, Uganda, Vietnam. The World Bank	0-8213-5669-0
2000	Ghana. Joint Evaluation of the Road Sub-sector programme 1996–2000	
1999	Evaluation of European Union Aid (Managed by the Commission) ACP, MED, ALA Countries and Humanitarian Aid – Synthesis Report (ICEA/DPPC)	

- 1999 Evaluation of the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). Synthesis Report
- 1999 Donor Support for Institutional Capacity Development in Environment: Lessons Learned
- 1998 Evaluation of European Union Aid (managed by the Commission) to ACP Countries Synthesis Report
- 1998 Evaluation of Aspects of EU Development Aid to the MED Region. Final Synthesis Report
- 1996 The Multilateral Development Banks – The North South Institute
 - Volume 1 – The African Development Bank
 - Volume 2 – The Asian Development Bank
 - Volume 3 – The Caribbean Development Bank
 - Volume 4 – The Inter-American Development Bank
 - Volume 5 – Titans or Behemoths?
- 1996 Joint Evaluation of European Union Programme Food Aid – Synthesis Report
 - Evaluation conjointe de l'aide alimentaire programme de l'Union européenne – Rapport de synthèse
 - Joint Evaluation of European Union Programme Food Aid – Summary of Synthesis Report
 - Evaluation conjointe de l'aide alimentaire programme de l'Union européenne – Résumé du rapport de synthèse
 - Bangladesh: An Extended Study (March 1996) / Bangladesh: Etude Approfondie (mars 1996)
 - Cape Verde: An Extended Study (April 1996) / Cape Verde: Etude Approfondie (avril 1996)
 - China: A Rapid Evaluation (April 1996) / La Republique Populaire de la Chine: Evaluation Rapide (mars 1996)
 - Egypt: The Extended Study (February 1996) / Egypte: Etude Approfondie (mars 1996)
 - Ethiopia: A Rapid Evaluation (February 1996) / Ethiopie: Evaluation Rapide (avril 1996)
 - Kenya: A Rapid Evaluation (February 1996) / Kenya: Evaluation Rapide (février 1996)
 - Mali: A Rapid Evaluation (March 1996) / République du Mali: Evaluation rapide (mars 1996)
 - Mauritania: A Rapid Evaluation (June 1996) / République Islamique de Mauritanie: Evaluation rapide (octobre 1996)

- Mozambique: An Extended Study (June 1996) / Mozambique: Etude Approfondie (juin 1996)
- Nicaragua: A Rapid Evaluation (February 1996) / Nicaragua: Evaluation Rapide (février 1996)
- Peru: An Extended Rapid Evaluation (April 1996) / Perou: Evaluation Rapide Prolongée (avril 1996)
- Zambia: A Rapid Evaluation (February 1996) / Zambia: Evaluation Rapide (février 1996)
- 1996 The Role of Rating Systems in Aid Management. Experiences of DAC Member Organisations
- 1996 The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience. Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda
 - Study 1 Historical Perspective: Some Explanatory Factors
 - Study 2 Early Warning and Conflict Management
 - Study 3 Humanitarian Aid and Effects
 - Study 4 Rebuilding Post-War Rwanda
 - Synthesis Report
- 1994 Assessment of DAC Members' WID Policies and Programmes. Overall Report
- 1994 Assessment of Policies and Organizational Measures in Women in Development Adopted by DAC Member Countries. Theme 2 of the Assessment of WID Policies and Programs of DAC Members
- 1994 Evaluation of the World Food Programme. Main Report
- 1994 Evaluation of the World Food Programme. Abridged Version
 - Country Case Study: Bangladesh. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Bolivia. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Ethiopia. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Ghana. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Guatemala. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Malawi. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Morocco. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Pakistan. Working Paper
 - Country Case Study: Vietnam. Working Paper
- 1993 Review of the integration of gender concerns in the work of the DAC. Theme 1 of the Assessment of WID policies and programs of DAC members

- 1991 Evaluation of International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- 1989 An Evaluation of WHO's Action Programme on Essential Drugs. Submitted to the Management Advisory Committee, The Action Programme on Essential Drugs
- 1989 Sustainability and Evaluation. A synthesis of evaluation findings concerning the Netherlands Programme for International Education
- 1988 Primary Health Care: A synthesis of 76 recent project evaluation, health sector and policy documents of DAC member countries
- 1988 Development of Rural Small Industrial Enterprise. Lessons from experience. Joint study by UNDP, ILO, UNIDO and the Government of the Netherlands (Vienna, 1988)

Other reports

- 1989 Small Enterprises, New Approaches. Proceedings of the Workshop "Small Scale Enterprise Development, in Search of New Dutch Approaches". The Hague, 6th and 7th March, 1989
- 1990 'Jusqu'à épuisement des stocks'. Aide alimentaire au Mali
- 1995 Bevindingen en Aanbevelingen 1984-1994 – Focus op Ontwikkeling 3 (DVL/OS)
- 1996 Between driver's seat and waiting room. Results of the external evaluation of the European Centre for Development Policy Management. Volume 1: Main Report ; Volume 2: Annexes
- 1996 Donor Experiences in Support of Human Rights. Some Lessons – Report on behalf of the Operations Review Unit, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Acronyms

DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DGIS	Directoraat-Generaal Internationale Samenwerking (Directorate-General for Development Cooperation)
DTH	Directie Technische Hulp (Directorate Technical Assistance)
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
ESCAP	UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EPTA	UN Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance
IOB	Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department)
IOV	Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking te Velde (Operations Review Unit)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCDO	Nationale Commissie voor Internationale Samenwerking en Duurzame Ontwikkeling (National Commission for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development)
Novib	Nederlandse organisatie voor internationale bijstand (Netherlands organisation for international assistance)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SNV	Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (Foundation of Netherlands Volunteers); now known as SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
WITHALL	Werkcommissie inzake technische hulp aan laag ontwikkelde landen (Working committee on technical assistance to less developed countries)

en, J.-B. Gewald

I to outcome

25 YEARS OF IOB EVALUATION

From output to outcome?

From Output to Outcome? traces the fascinating history of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and, since 1996, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1977 the Minister for Development Cooperation Jan Pronk set up an independent review unit that would provide him with timely, reliable information on the quality of Dutch development assistance projects. He needed such information to counter both the often overly positive reports from his own staff, and the attacks on Dutch development assistance policy in parliament and in the media. A quarter century later it is difficult to imagine foreign assistance without an evaluation department. Yet, as investigative journalist Jos van Beurden and historian Jan-Bart Gewald demonstrate, the IOB's course has been far from smooth. The authors describe the challenges to its independence and skirmishes with other sections of the Ministry, and tackle the question of the effects of the department's many reports. They offer an overview of the changes in IOB's art of evaluating.

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