1. ABSTRACT

Evaluation, considered as a practice aimed at enhancing the quality of management of policies or programmes, can help decision-making and implementing at all levels of responsibility. Its objectives are to improve the quality of strategic decisions, to optimise the allocation and mobilisation of resources, and to give authorities, implementing bodies and citizens an account of the results of a policy or a programme. The creation of a learning process in an evaluation context will help to reach those objectives.

Over the past three years, the Walloon public authorities have greatly increased its use not only of evaluations in general but also of the recommendations included in evaluation reports. Where in the late nineties evaluation, notably linked to structural funds, was seen as an obligation, recent experiences show that the public authorities have actually taken the opportunity to use evaluation results to improve their capacity of action.

The paper illustrates three cases of evaluation experiences in a context of two decentralised Bodies of a federal State (Belgium), the Walloon Region and the French Community, with particular emphasis on the learning processes generated by the different evaluations. Moreover, it is interesting to note that each such modification tends to generate new evaluation questions and consequently to enhance the evaluation capacity of both evaluation teams and public authorities.

After a short description of these experiences, the paper identifies the major and optimal conditions that have facilitated the learning process of the stakeholders, and the kind of learning process is most likely to occur when certain conditions are fully or partially met.
2. CASE STUDIES

Following case studies occur in the context of the Walloon region and the French Community, which are autonomous decentralised entities of the Federal State of Belgium and have a legislative autonomy since 1980. According to Jean-Marie Agarkow and Luc Vandendorpe¹, evaluation practices in the Walloon Region have progressed from a regulation practice with the evaluation of structural funds in the beginning of nineties to a practice aiming to improve decision-making, in supporting design and implementation of policies. With the utilisation of evaluation in the so-called “Contrat d’Avenir pour la Wallonie”, the practice tends to evolve to a policy practice as being used in the public debate.

The idea of the paper is based on experience of ongoing and completed evaluations in the Walloon Region and the French Community of Belgium in which authors have participated. If the three selected case studies do not represent the whole spectre of Walloon evaluation practices, those are anyway quite representative of different types of external evaluations of long-cycle programme or policies carried out in the Region: 1°) the evaluation of structural funds, 2°) the evaluation of a sector policy and 3°) the evaluation of the regional development programme of the current Walloon government. The three cases are the following:

- The evaluation of European Social Fund measures of the objective 1 in the province Hainaut (1994-1999);
- Evaluation of the agricultural quality policy (1999-2000);

The following comparative table illustrates different features of the three cases:

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Examining the context and process of those evaluations were necessary to identify conditions helping to create a learning process. Following questions have been addressed for each case:

1. What is the purpose of the evaluation? What is the scope of the evaluation?
2. How can we characterise the intentions of the commissioner?
3. How can we characterise the subject to be evaluated? (Length and cycle of the programme, scope of the programme, structure of the programme, formulation of objectives)
4. How can we characterise the process of the evaluation? (Interaction with the commissioner, involvement of the stakeholders, focus of the evaluation, quality, budget, dissemination of the results)
5. How can we characterise the findings?
6. What kind of learning factor occurred?

2.1. The evaluation of European Social Fund measures of the Objective 1 in the Province Hainaut (1994-1999)

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

Following the adoption of the regulation of structural funds of 1993, Community structural operations had to be the subject of prior appraisal, monitoring and ex post evaluation designed to appraise their impact.\footnote{Council Regulation (EEC) No 2081/93 of 20 July 1993}

The Province of Hainaut was eligible for the programme Objective 1 of the structural funds (1994-1999) promoting the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind. Our role was to realise the second intermediary evaluation of the impact of the European Social Funds measures of the programme. Those measures were aiming to facilitating access to the labour market, promoting equal opportunities in the labour market, developing skills, abilities and professional qualifications and encouraging job creation.

At this time, the diffusion of an evaluation culture was quite limited between the French Community and the Walloon Region. The willingness of the European Commission was to encourage auto-evaluation. This was followed by an impulsive declaration but without any support, any obligation and any feedback.

Intentions of the commissioners

The evaluation was commissioned by the Belgian European Social Fund Agency, which is the administration assuring the monitoring and co-ordination of the implementation of the programme. As a regulatory obligation, the expectations for the results of the evaluation were not specific. The concerns of the European Commission, the politics and the European Social Fund Agency could be expressed during the Advisory Committee organised at the beginning of each stage. The European Commission considered the potential effect of the evaluation at the level of impact, the politics, at the level of supporting to decision-making and the European Social Fund Agency at the level of management. They did not focus the evaluation on a specific point.
**Features of the subject to be evaluated**

The programme Objective 1 (1994-1999) was quite complex regarding the large scope it has to cover, the multiplicity of promoters it let intervene and the vague formulation of objectives and strict criteria. We could notice large differences in the understanding of objectives by the stakeholders. Moreover, promoters were depending on different organisational authorities having themselves their own vision and objectives. It was a long-cycle programme for which projects were approved on a one-year basis, resulting in a lack of long-term vision. The programme objective 1 designed for the Province Hainaut contains identical measures of objective 3 and 4, covering the Walloon Region without Province Hainaut. This creates redundancies between our evaluation and evaluations of those programmes.

**Process of the evaluation**

Interactions with the commissioner occur essentially through the Advisory Committees as we described above. The Committee did not express a specific willingness for change on which the evaluation could focus on. Expectations were evolving over time. The key questions were formulated in accordance with the standard questions of a mid-term evaluation of structural funds, particularly the question of effectiveness, and had to cover the whole programme. It could not really focus on specific themes and had to cover a very large scope. It took a time to acquire a global and synthetic view of the programme.

The evaluation culture was too limited at the time to develop evaluation of the programme in relation with auto-evaluations. We have used face-to-face interviews with the promoters and privileged observers and quantitative surveys with the final beneficiaries (longitudinal analysis of the path to employment).

Due to internal and external organisation of the project, the first report contained errors and the results were quite limited. This was quite critical for the credibility of the results at the first stage. The technical quality improved over time with the limitation of the budget capacity (to cover a sufficient percentage of the set of promoters for example). This was recognised and the results could be accepted.

The timing of the evaluation was not appropriated with the decision-making process. Decisions had to be made regarding the design of the future programme (2000-2006); this was coming in 1999 at the beginning of our evaluation process. As we were involved in the ex-ante evaluation of the programme objective 3, which was in line with the decision-making process of approving the new programme, we could then increase the value of the results of our intermediary evaluation with the cooperation with evaluators involved in other intermediary evaluations.

Dissemination of the results of the evaluation was rather limited. Feedbacks occur only through Advisory Committee and dissemination of an executive summary to a limited number of actors. Promoters are not inclined to participate actively in providing data and information if they know that they will not receive feedback of how it is used.

**Characteristics of the findings**

It was a quite long process to obtain final findings. The evaluation resulted in a set of conclusions and recommendations relating to the effectiveness of measures by theme (vocational education, human potential in technological research and development training for workers, socio-professional insertion, local development) and relating to the design and management of the programme (formulating the programme, selection procedure, interactions with pro-
motors, monitoring system, etc.). Those findings covered the whole programme and were detailed for some themes and very general for some other themes. Given the scope of the evaluation, the conclusions and recommendations were not very specific.

The way to address the conclusions and recommendations, separately, clearly and point by point, was well recognised by the European Commission and the politics in the final report. The final report was not in line with a particular decision period but it opens new questions and ideas that both the politics at short time and the administration at long time can pinch.

What kind of learning process occurred?

This was an evaluation covering a broad set of evaluation questions with methodological requirement of the European Commission to undertake evaluation of structural funds and particularly the European Social Funds. Such intermediary evaluation of structural funds programme occurs on long period and is not focused on specific political or institutional context.

The results of such evaluation are to open new questions and to suggest innovative ideas about several themes and at several levels (decision-making, information, management, etc.), but there is no particular intention at the beginning of the process, only intellectual curiosity. Such evaluation has to proceed with a lack of strategic issues, which are expected to be reached. Learning process occur occasionally. For this reason, the European Social Agency has decided within the new programme Objective 3 (2000-2006) to budget thematic evaluations aiming to deepen important questions.

This evaluation took part of a learning process in combination with other evaluations. For example, it helped the Agency in structuring the Monitoring systems and particularly the database of the new programme. It gave also ideas on the way to interact with the promoters. Thanks to the added value of the ex-ante evaluation of the programme objective 3, it feeds indirectly the strategy and the working-out of the new programme (2000-2006).

Finally, this kind of evaluation creates a learning process, which has to be considered as a long-term process. It is part of the memory of the administration and can be used at any time.

2.2. Evaluation of the agricultural quality policy (1999-2000)

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The objective of the newly-arrived Minister of Agriculture was to have a clearer view of the overall performance of the ten year regional level policy designed to enhance the quality of agricultural products (food quality labels, promotion of regional and country products) and to initiate a deep reform of the system of quality development and promotion in the different Walloon agricultural networks.

The context related to the willingness to change and improve was extremely favourable (food quality crisis, new government, change of political majority, change of minister). Needs for change were shared at civil society and at governmental level, following major food safety crisis (the so-called dioxin crisis). More generally, the health of the farming sector in Wallonia was, and still is, very weak, the current speculations bringing too little added value. At strategic level, the will of the Minister was, in priority, to increase this added value and hence the revenue of the farmers by emphasising the quality of the agricultural products. At operational level, on the contrary, changes were seen as suspect, the sector being most conservative and reluctant to changes.
**Intentions of the commissioners**

The Ministry of Agriculture, being responsible for the implementation of the policy, commissioned the evaluation. He was certain that the policy should be changed, if not radically transformed, but did not translate this will in evaluation terms. Evaluation questions turned out to concern four major criteria: internal and external coherence, pertinence, and effectiveness. It involved measuring performances at the level of each of the stakeholders (administration, operating agencies, farmers, consumers).

This evaluation had also not been welcomed by the administration of agriculture usually empowered to conduct evaluation of European interventions related to structural funds. The role of the administration was moreover under stake in the policy.

**Features of the subject to be evaluated**

The Walloon policy to enhance the quality of agricultural products was a 10-year old policy aiming at a better visibility and commercial support of the food products by stressing on a specific “label” their intrinsic qualities and/or the region of origin. The intention of the lawmakers was to respond to a growing demand of the population regarding these types of products. The implementation of the policy turned out to be chaotic, involving a series of operators whose role was to accompany the farmers in entering the new system. Concrete market results were, ten years later, relatively poor and concerned a limited number of producers and, therefore, consumers. Weaknesses in the promotion of these products were also identified, leading the Minister to order an audit the regional promotion agency. A major problem of external coherence regarding a European directive overruling the regional law had also put the policy under fire.

**Process of the evaluation**

The original policy launched in the late eighties had been translated in legal texts, which were closely analysed and criticised to identify the original objectives and underlying strategy. Each of the implementation measures mentioned in the regional law was systematically scrutinised and checked in terms of implementation process and performance indicators.

The “theoretical” findings were then tested through a qualitative survey, which completed the analysis and strengthened the initial findings by acknowledging the strengths and (numerous) weaknesses of the implementation of the policy during its first decade of existence. A difficulty in the process was that performance indicators were scarce, which reflected the weaknesses of the policy implementation and the absence of labelled products on the marketplace.

The interrelations between the stakeholders were conflicting, sometimes openly. The reluctance of some actors regarding the evaluation process could be overcome by the fact that they were given the opportunity to express themselves on the policy. In such context the evaluation team considered of his duty to meet and listen the point of view of each type of stakeholder through the survey. It played the role of interface between the needs of the stakeholders and the demands of the commissioner, with a constant concern to validate the relevance of the evaluation questions in a first time; and to gather qualitative and quantitative information regarding the performance of the policy in a second time.

The evaluation has therefore played a favourable role in the latent conflict, not by diminishing the tensions, but by revealing the need to publicise and express these tensions and to ensure better communication between the commissioner and the other stakeholders of the pol-
icy. Some critics were shared in terms of relevance, effectiveness and management of the policy.

The planning of the evaluation was in line with the political agenda of the reform. The evaluation was ordered shortly after the launch of the new policy and help to stabilise and precise the objectives of it. Results of the evaluation were expected in a delay that would leave time to implement the reform in the period of the legislature. As a demonstration, the results of the evaluation were presented to the Walloon Parliament and helped its members understand the need for and importance of the reform. The evaluation consequently helped the decision-making process by bringing supporting qualitative and quantitative arguments to the revised policy.

A success condition of this interface role was to frequently interact with the commissioner. The dissemination of the results remained however weak due to the lack of mutual confidence between stakeholders. The subsequent reform can be seen as an imposed one. The evaluation team had sometime to negotiate with the commissioner to initiate multilateral discussions and partnerships.

Characteristics of the findings

In terms of findings, the evaluation confirmed that little results were achieved through the policy because of major implementation problems.

Conclusions were consequently formulated in severe but realistic terms and presented to the Minister and his staff the same way. This presentation gave the commissioner the opportunity to discuss the evaluation and to challenge the evaluation team regarding uncertainties or disagreements in the report. The subsequent decision was to initiate the reform rapidly and to integrate in the design of its action plan, elements that would allow for a follow up and a possible intermediary evaluation: performance indicators, clear definition of objectives, …

The whole picture of the policy was however not completely negative. The evaluation also stressed out positive elements in the policy making process which had been successful and on which the new policy should rely. A considerable degree of experience and technical knowledge had been capitalised by some operators and one of the recommendations asked explicitly to take this capital aboard within the new system. This finding clearly helped the Minister to learn from the evaluation process.

Recommendations were made to launch and implement a deeply revised quality policy, which is in now progress for more than one year.

What kind of learning process occurred?

The learning process that this case study illustrates clearly occurred at the decision-making level. It has helped the Minister and his team to clarify their will and objectives, to structure and to organise their new policy in a programming perspective. They were also encouraged to think according to the (unsatisfied) needs of beneficiaries, be them farmers or consumers.

In some way, one can also say that the evaluation helped the decision-maker to listen more carefully to the needs of the different stakeholders of the policy. In a difficult context where many of these stakeholders were reluctant to change and sometimes unaware of how their interests can be better served in a revised policy, the decision-making authority showed a tendency to impose its point of view and hence its decisions to the actors who are in charge of implementing the policy. The evaluation demonstrated that this tendency was one of the
causes of the failure of the previous policy and emphasised on the need to communicate better with the stakeholders. This process is currently in progress and proves to be a key to the successful implementation of the policy.

2.3. The evaluation of the “Contract for the Future of Wallonia”

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The so-called “Contract for the future of Wallonia” is the regional development programme of the Walloon government, which has been set in place since June 1999. It contains objectives fixed for 10 years and declined in governance principles, priority measures and action-sheets, which cover all the competencies of the Region. It corresponds to a political willingness to create a breaking with the strategies of the past in order to start a “collective taking on responsibility” by means of “ambitious guidelines” and “defined objectives” (terms coming from the preamble of the Contract for the future of Wallonia).

One of the ten governance principles is the evaluation culture, which has to help the work method used by the Government during the legislature. In accordance to this principle, the Walloon Government has commissioned an external evaluation in itinere of the Contract, which was launched in January 2001 and produced first results at the end of December of the same year.

The Government considered conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation in order to adopt its updated version of the “Contract for the future” in which he establishes strategic priorities for the next two years. Evaluation was not only considered as critical reflection exercise on the Government’s Action but especially as way of helping the updating of the development programme. Conclusions and recommendations could be used in that purpose.

The evaluator was in charge of the elaboration of the Monitoring System of the Contract in co-operation with the administration, related to the actions of the Contract and declined by competence area of the Walloon Region. He was asked to produce on the 31st December of each year (2001 and 2002) an evaluation of the policies of the Contract. We have used the tree diagrams in order to represent the objectives and to identify indicators.

Features of the subject to be evaluated

Evaluation was perceived differently but always with interest among the stakeholders: administration, Government and functional promoters. Some representative of the Government were quite reluctant to cope with an external evaluation. Thanks to a close co-operation and a permanent dialogue between the evaluator and its commissioner (the Minister-President of the Government), the appreciation of the first evaluation report was globally positive. The development of an operational monitoring and evaluation system was then considered as a real added value for the political cycle.

The representatives of the administration glanced at evaluation with scepticism for some and interest for others. Aware of their role in the implementation of the programme, they could express some difficulties linked to the operational application of the actions listed in the document. They were involved in the setting up of the system of indicators.

Finally, the survey gave the opportunity to some promoters (social partners, civil society, local authorities) and observers (universities, media) to give their opinion on the government
plan and on the perceived effects on behavioural and cultural changes. Some messages could be addressed to the government on the way to improve the document and to reinforce the process.

The evaluator used participative methods, combining a bottom and a top down approach. With regards to the stakes of the “Contract” and the evaluation culture, it was essential to associate the evaluation to participation and dissemination dynamic.

Process of the evaluation

The “Contract for the future” initiates an innovative process, as a contract including a collective commitment of the stakeholders: regional public authorities, local authorities, social partners, promoters, enterprises, citizens and so on. The approach tends to open a permanent dialogue and a collective learning action process and to reinforce responsibilities of the stakeholders.

The evaluator developed methods and evaluation questions in line with the innovative process of the “Contract for the future” and particularly in paying attention to its mobilisation effects on the promoters. We used participative methods in organising workshops aiming at understanding and formulating the objectives specifically, and we focused a survey on the issue of involvement and commitment of the stakeholders. This resulted in specific recommendations relating to the conditions and ways of commitment of the stakeholders to the contract.

The planning of the evaluation was perfectly in time with the political cycle. As being one of the governance principles, the external evaluation was planned within the adoption of the contract in January 2000. The evaluation process started in January 2001 and the first evaluation report was produced in January 2002 accompanying the decisions coming at mid-term of the legislature and relating to the updating of the Contract fixing objectives for the two following years (2002-2004) covering the second mid-term of the legislature. The next evaluation report will be produced in January 2003.

We focused our report on key questions, especially in the implementation process of the Contract and the involvement dynamics. The monitoring system we designed is still under construction at the level of the whole region, which includes a collection of indicators intended to measure the achievement of specific objectives of the Contract. Due both to the fact that it was too early to measure the impact of the Contract and the fact that the monitoring system was in embryonic state, we could not appreciate the results systematically. This situation did not influence much the credibility of the results when it was presented but at longer term, it will be necessary to provide results in relation with the objectives of the Contract for the acceptability of the evaluation exercise. This is why we will pay much attention this year in the elaboration of a reliable monitoring system.
**Characteristics of the findings**

Conclusions and recommendations of the first evaluation report concerned three dimensions of the Contract:

- The “Contrat d’Avenir” as an orientation and mobilisation instrument;
- The “Contrat d’Avenir” as a long-term project focusing on the progress of the actions and the first results;
- The implementation of the Contract, focusing on the process, the management and the monitoring.

The updated version of the Contract contains 20 priority measures for 2002-2004 and three complementary strategies:

- Quantifying the objectives;
- Developing a transversal piloting of the Contract;
- Developing partnerships and reinforce information.

The updated version and declaration of the Minister-President mentioned explicitly that those strategies rely immediately and concretely on the recommendations formulated by the evaluator.

**What kind of learning factors occurred?**

The real innovation is the Contract itself and its change of “governance style” which has resulted in a decision to evaluate the Contract and to set up a permanent monitoring system. One should note that it is the first experience of an evaluation by a Government to undertake an evaluation of its regional development programme.

The evaluation could take the opportunity to develop participative methodology in line with the philosophy of the Contract and to focus on key questions related to the implementation of a change process. The government could then rely on the evaluation to updating the Contract and adopting its priority measures for 2000-2004.

The results of the evaluation were broadly disseminated among the actors of the Contract. The results were presented in several stakeholders groups. The evaluation report could then be used as dialogue basis between the government and stakeholders groups, helping in building partnership and contractual relations between them.

Learning process occur also through the establishment of a permanent monitoring system of the government’s actions which, as reference point, could then be coherent with monitoring systems managed by the stakeholders. More generally, learning occurs through the dissemination of an evaluation culture at different levels in Wallonia.
3. CONDITIONS FOR CREATING A LEARNING PROCESS THROUGH EVALUATION

Analysis of those case studies let appear that the context (cultural environment, institutional history, socio-economic context, political context) is of importance to create a favourable learning process. During the evaluation process, evaluator and commissioner have to take advantage of facilitating factors in this context. They can turn to account five key conditions that will support a constructive learning process through evaluation of policies and programmes:

- The creation of a constructive interaction between the evaluator and the stakeholders,
- The willingness to change and improve among stakeholders,
- The adequacy of the evaluation timing in relation to the strategic planning of the policy or the programme,
- The reliability of the results and
- The way of the conclusions and recommendations are addressed to the different stakeholders.

Those conditions are interconnected and each of these conditions has to be taken into consideration for each stakeholder concerned.

We can list examples of learning factors that can occur through an evaluation process:

- Learning through the contribution of the evaluation to new ideas or expertise in formulating the whole programme or policy, and specifically formulating the objectives;
- Learning about the experience of the programme or the policy leading to reorientation in the strategy, objectives and criteria;
- Learning about the effectiveness and efficiency of management and organisation of the programme leading to improvements in execution (selection procedures, procedures for the follow up of each action, monitoring system, financial system, internal communication, information flows and animation of the programme, and so on). The evaluation would be able to provide specific recommendations for a monitoring system since it is necessary for collecting the data in the evaluation process.
- Learning about evaluation methods and introducing an evaluation culture through participative methods.

3.1. Willingness to change and improve

Some evaluations have as a prior objective providing an account of the results or enhancing transparency rather than aiming at improving the quality of the programme and its implementation. In this context, there is little chance that the results of the evaluation will be used for learning purposes. But even in these cases an evaluation can also act as part of a change or improvement process.

The context in which the evaluation is undertaken will considerably influence the use of the results in a learning process. The context is defined by the scope of the policy or the programme and has to take account of the different stakeholders and their specific roles and re-
responsibilities, the timing of the policies and the programme, the geographic area, the working culture of the institutions in which the stakeholders operate, the specific organisation and mechanisms of the programme or the policy. In this specific context, we will then look at resistance and change factors. Is there sufficient consensus for improvements or change? Is the institutional or political context favourable to improvement and change? What progress has been made recently? What is the recent experience of change in the context of the programme or the policy? How did the stakeholders feel about the effect of those changes? What are the current and future prospects, opportunities, and threats?

The evaluator will identify at which level a change process can be undertaken among the several stakeholders, starting from the level of consciousness of each stakeholder about the strategic findings the evaluator has made. In the case of an evaluation aiming at a real change or improvement objective, it should then help to identify:

1°) the specific needs for change at a strategic or operational level,
2°) the knowledge and the skills of the organisation, the allocation of responsibilities,
3°) the freedom of action,
4°) the organisation’s culture and behaviour,
5°) the communication flows,
6°) the experience of change
7°) the available resources.

The evaluation can help in defining how change and improvements can be implemented: timing, planning, priorities, communication, processes and structures supporting those changes and improvements.

3.2. Creation of a constructive interaction between the evaluator and the stakeholders

In the context of a given policy or a programme, we can identify different types of stakeholders. Typically, we have the financing authority, the decision-maker(s), and the daily responsible for the implementation of the policy or a programme and the final beneficiaries. In several cases, one can add promoters to this list.

Each of those stakeholders will see specific benefits in the results of the evaluation:

- The financing authorities will take most interest in looking at the relative results of the policy in relation with the allocation of the budget.
- The decision-maker will be particularly interested in the effect of the policy. What are the results and impacts? Which actions can be taken to improve the effectiveness of the policy or programme? How can the results be communicated? How can the decision-maker show evidence of success? How can the decision-maker show that he takes into account the less positive point of the evaluation?
- Of importance to those responsible for the implementation of project are results that provide to give some justifications to the decision-maker and results in relation with the way of functioning the organisation, particularly the working of the policy or the programme, in order to undertake eventual corrective actions (among them some has to be approved by the decision maker).
- It is unlikely that promoters will be directly concerned by the evaluation of a whole policy or programme but they will, however, have an interest in the results in so far as they
relate to their specific actions or fields of work. They might undertake their own evaluation in order to show the success of their actions and their willingness to improve weaker points. Some promoters are represented by federations, which will defend their interests to the public authorities.

- Final beneficiaries will take into consideration those results that have a practical influence on their life. For example, unemployed people will probably try to measure how a specific course of training will enhance their chance of finding a job. Groups of beneficiaries might be represented by associations or federations, which defend their interests in front of the public authorities, e.g. associations for disabled people, employer’s federations, and trade unions.

Firstly, evaluation has to reinforce the decision maker position, whereas he is interested in learning from the study and the evaluation process to improve his action (some evaluations are only implemented to satisfy a legal condition). If there is few or no chance that evaluation findings and recommendations should be taken into account, it is worthless to ask the stakeholders to participate to the process (see condition 1).

In order to create a favourable environment rendering to dialogue, the evaluator will consider how he interacts with the commissioner and his representatives and with other stakeholders. A relationship between a competent evaluator and well informed commissioner built on trust and consultation and participation by enthusiastic stakeholders can be considered key factor influencing the credibility of the results.

Support to the commissioning entity

Support for decision-makers on the part of the evaluator, and dialogue between the evaluator and the decision makers are essential for the credibility of the evaluations conclusions. It is at the start of the evaluation that the learning process can be developed. When the evaluator undertakes the evaluation, he naturally acts as support to the commissioning entity. A constructive interaction will be developed when the learning process is integrated by all the stakeholders, including the evaluator and the commissioner.

The interaction will be based on key features of the organisation supporting the programme or the policy: its needs for improvement relating to strategic and operational aspects, recent progress and future prospects. The analysis and results of the evaluation will have to be put in perspective with these inputs. This can only be achieved through constructive dialogue between the evaluator and decision-makers.

In that context, the formulation of evaluation questions and definition of priorities can then be seen as essential. Even if the evaluation questions are clearly mentioned in the terms of references, it will be important to develop them in a constructive dialogue with the commissioning entity in order to facilitate mutual comprehension of the mechanisms that led to those questions and to insure that the organisation is ready to facilitate improvements and solutions to those questions.

Interaction with stakeholders

A programme or a policy involves several stakeholders. We have described in the previous section those different stakeholders, their role and their possible interests in the evaluation. The learning process can occur for each of those stakeholders and particularly in the relation between the commissioners of the evaluation and the other stakeholders of the programme. This process has to be carefully leaded. Evaluator has to choose the right moment and order
to communicate with each stakeholder, according to the readiness of everyone to exchange information and open a dialog on the evaluation findings

The formulation of evaluation questions will be differentiated according to the stakeholders they may concern and whilst bearing in mind, in particular, the learning process that can occur in the relation between the stakeholders. The evaluation should integrate interests and concerns of the different parties in the methodologies. In the course of the evaluation, the creation of a participative dialogue is the best way among stakeholders to feel involved in a learning process. The way to communicate with them will depend upon the communication method and style of the organisation, the management of a policy or a programme.

3.3. Adequacy with the needs of the strategic planning of the decision-makers (at several levels)

Evaluation should be seen as part of a larger process of performance management. The creation of a learning process, involving the use of the evaluation results, will depend on how the planning of the evaluation interacts with the planning of the policy or the programme. Ideally, the results of the evaluation should arrive before important decisions. The type of results should correspond with the level of those decisions. The choice of timing for undertaking the evaluation is important.

The timing of the presentation of the results should be in line with the decision-making process. It is then essential for the evaluator to understand the decision-making process. This can be done through analysis of documents relating to decision procedures, minutes of important meetings, attending some important meetings and interviewing decision makers.

As illustrated in the figures in the two following pages, the evaluation cycle should be coherent with the programme cycle. The policy can follow a similar scheme.

At each stage of the programme cycle, the evaluation can bring useful results for decisions:

1. **Identifying the needs**: ex-ante evaluation focused on the question of relevance (adequacy of objectives with needs and specific situation);

2. **Strategy and objectives**: ex-ante evaluation focused on the question of relevance and external coherence (complementarities and synergy with policy framework and other programmes or initiatives);

3. **Choice of the processes and actions**: ex-ante evaluation focused on the question of internal coherence (complementarities and synergy between actions of the programme and between actions and objectives);

4. **Defining management and organisation**: ex-ante focused on the adequacy of the management and organisation to the programme or in-itinere evaluation focused on the same question and on the effectiveness of management and organisation;

5. **Implementation**: an evaluation carried out during implementation of the programme is an in-itinere evaluation. An in-itinere evaluation has often several stages. To be useful, the results will have to be focused on the type of decisions that has to be taken at each stage: e.g.: management and organisation, effectiveness (measuring the achievement of the objectives) and efficiency (measuring the weighting of the effects in comparison with the costs). At the
mid-term of the programme, decisions can be made relating to reorientation of some objectives, criteria to select actions, management and organisation. At the end, decisions can be made on future orientations for drafting a new programme. The results of the evaluation should arrive before those decisions are taken.

6. Evaluation: ex-post centred on impacts, utility (correlation of impacts with needs and problems), sustainability (long-term effects). The objectives of this evaluation would be to have long-term information on the programme. It can feed into the future development of policies and programmes.

The evaluation cycle has to be taken into account: the necessary time to commission the evaluation, to carry out the evaluation (defining evaluation questions, collecting the data and analysing the data), and to report the results. The planning of the evaluation should be organised in order to produce results and communicate them to the concerned stakeholders before the decisions. Of course, the decision cycle can sometimes be unpredictable and it can happen that some decisions have to be taken before the results of the evaluation are known and com-
municated. One should note that the learning process will not only occur at the moment of the presentation of the results of the evaluation but can also occur during the evaluation process through workshops and other participative methods.

### 3.4. Reliability of the results

Technical quality is an important factor determining the acceptability of the results by the different stakeholders. Stakeholders, for whose the results are difficult to accept or agree with, will have a tendency to look at any weaknesses in the technical quality of the report in order to affirm that the results are not founded on reliable data or methods. So it is important that the evaluator can demonstrate and prove that the results are based on reliable data and methodology.

However, compiling report focusing on this condition risks limiting considerably the scope of the evaluation and not addressing important questions. The risk is to produce a report based on reliable data but which is too theoretical or too descriptive. It is preferable to have incomplete and imprecise answers to important questions than having precise answers to questions in which nobody is interested. So it is important to present the margin of error or imprecision linked to those results. The evaluation should conclude with statements backed up with results, given a reasonable margin of error.

### 3.5. Addressing conclusions and recommendations

This condition refers to how evaluation results are presented and communicated. There is a pedagogical dimension here. The content of the conclusions and recommendations should be addressed to targeted groups of stakeholders taking into account their position in the programme, their institutional position, their freedom of action and the degree of recent progress.

The commissioner will organise in co-ordination with the evaluation the communication of the results: it should identify the best way to communicate by choosing adapted methods and language which take account of their working and cultural style and habits.

It should then follow the following stages:

1°) Identifying the different stakeholders to be addressed.
2°) Identifying the messages likely to be of interest to them.
3°) Understanding the mechanisms of the interaction between the commissioner and the stakeholders (systemic analysis).
3°) Conceiving suitable methods (report, workshops, newsletters, etc.) to communicate those messages to each of the concerned stakeholders.
4. CONCLUSIONS: INTEGRATING EVALUATION IN THE LIFECYCLE OF THE POLICY / PROGRAMME

An evaluation has few value in itself if it does not contribute to the success of the concerned policy / programme.

The learning process it generates is therefore depending on the place and role the evaluation will take in the whole process of policy and programme making and implementing. The context of the evaluation starts from the first beginning of the cycle (what is the situation the policy / programs aims to change, and why is it important for the commissioner and the stakeholders?). Choosing the right moment and scope for the evaluation will determine its capacity to bring added value.

It is of crucial importance that commissioner and evaluator take this historical, institutional and cultural context before launching the evaluation process.

The creation of a real learning process is also the result of interaction and dialogue between the evaluator and the stakeholders during the evaluation. This is depending on their position in the programme, their capacity to influence strategic and organisational decisions and their working culture.
Bibliography


