



OSCEval News is the evaluation newsletter of the Office of Internal Oversight.

Its aim is to provide insights into the OSCE's work in evaluation, by sharing key evaluation findings and conclusions, as well as new developments regarding the OSCE's overall evaluation culture.

Evaluation is a management tool that contributes to decision-making, strategic planning, and organizational learning.



Meta-Evaluation of Recurrent Findings in OIO Evaluations, 2010-2017

This meta-evaluation was conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight in 2017.

Introduction

OIO is committed to enhancing communication of the results of its evaluations so that they can inform key organizational processes. It is in this spirit that this meta-evaluation was undertaken. Its purpose was to identify cross-organisational issues (challenges and shortcomings) pinpointed in the reports on 46 OIO evaluations conducted over the period 2010-2017. The underlying premise was that if certain issues keep surfacing in evaluation exercises, it means that they are systemic and have not fully been addressed at the level of the organization. This meta-evaluation is thus intended to point to those areas where, in OIO's view, organizational learning has yet to happen and management action is required.

The following five main categories of recurring issues emerged from the review of evaluation reports: co-ordination and collaboration within the OSCE; monitoring and evaluation; knowledge management, gender mainstreaming, and sustainability.

Internal co-ordination and collaboration

Many OIO evaluations identified the need to improve internal co-ordination and collaboration. A recurrent finding is that the co-ordination between the Secretariat and field operations during the programme / project planning and implementation phase is often ad-hoc rather than systematic. Shortcomings in co-ordination with field operations are also cited as limiting the potential to bridge the gap between high-level political work and on-the-ground implementation and change. OIO evaluations also point to a lack of strategic guidance provided by the Secretariat to field operations in some areas.

Regarding the collaboration within executive structures, several evaluations identified challenges to work across the three OSCE Dimensions, and this even applies to smaller field operations, where colleagues meet on a daily basis. Overall, findings suggest that the OSCE is not leveraging its significant in-house expertise and knowledge across all its executive structures. Other implications are missed opportunities to share technical knowledge, information and best practices, which would ultimately promote efficiency and strengthen programme / project implementation.

Monitoring and evaluation

A majority of OIO evaluations identified a lack of monitoring and evaluation systems to generate data on the implementation, progress and results of programmes and projects. This is one of the main impediments to successful results-based management, and a major obstacle in the way of organizational learning and development. It furthermore severely limits the ability of the OSCE to measure and demonstrate the outcomes and impact of its work.



The evaluations furthermore consistently pointed to the need for SMARTer and more gender-sensitive indicators, especially at the outcome level, as well as for consistent data collection practices to measure progress against these indicators. This lack of indicators, in addition to the absence of data, undermines efforts to identify what works and what does not, and to draw conclusions of value for policy and planning.

OIO evaluations acknowledge that the OSCE context is not necessarily always conducive for the establishment of a results-based management culture, including the introduction of more systematic and harmonized monitoring and evaluation practices. Complicating factors are the OSCE's annual Unified Budget cycle, political considerations in some areas, high staff turnover, as well as the nature of the organization's overall accountability framework. Hence more efforts are needed to introduce an organization-wide monitoring and evaluation system that collects results-based information across programmes, projects and activities, which in turn is synthesized, analyzed, shared and used to inform policy making and planning, and to demonstrate that the work and investment of resources has made a difference.

Knowledge management

Many OIO evaluations established that there is a challenge with knowledge management in the OSCE. To some extent, this is the consequence of its weak monitoring and evaluation culture. On the other hand, many staff members have a limited understanding of knowledge management, of what it entails, and of its benefits. It was also observed that existing initiatives to transfer information and to share good practices are frequently ad-hoc, limited in scale and depth, and not fully institutionalized.

Positive initiatives to advance the creation, analysis, sharing and use of knowledge within the organization also exist. These include a number of information sharing platforms, focal point networks, newsletters, capacity building activities, publications. Many of these should be better promoted and regularly updated, though.

Gender mainstreaming

OIO evaluations show that over the years there has been some progress with regards to gender mainstreaming in the work of the organization. It was also established that many

good gender-specific interventions exist. Progress was observed with regards to strengthening the institutional structures and mechanisms to support gender mainstreaming in the organization. The network of gender focal points spans the entire organization, a majority of field operations have established internal networks/working groups of gender liaison points from various units/departments, and a large number of them have developed gender action plans and roadmaps. A number of executive structures now have dedicated gender advisors/experts, who work exclusively on supporting gender mainstreaming.

However, progress across the organization remains uneven. For instance, gender concerns tend to “evaporate” during the project cycle, with little monitoring, reporting, and analysis in self-evaluations, resulting in limited information about achievements.

Misunderstandings also exist with regards to the purpose, potential nature, and focus of the work for ‘gender equality’. ‘Gender mainstreaming’ is seen by many to be mostly about enhancing ‘women’s participation’, which is often considered as the end goal, rather than as one way to remove barriers to equality or to address discrimination in order to have more effective interventions. Furthermore, overall within the organization there is still a limited understanding of how gender inequalities constitute a security risk, and vice versa, of how gender mainstreaming contributes to achieving the mandate of the OSCE.

Sustainability

OIO evaluations presented mixed findings regarding this issue. On the positive side, the OSCE has contributed substantively to participating States’ efforts to strengthen policies, strategies and legislation in the areas related to the OSCE’s mandate. Ensuring sustainability in terms of the consistent implementation of these policies is more challenging, especially since implementation is ultimately the responsibility of participating States and therefore beyond the control of the OSCE.

There are nevertheless a number of measures that can be taken by the OSCE to increase the likelihood that the benefits of its work will be sustained. These include the conduct of proper needs assessments (involving different types of stakeholders), gender analyses, regular monitoring including at the outcome level, continued engagement of counterparts beyond individual capacity building events, including by supporting the development of training programmes in participating States, and transition strategies. OIO evaluations observed, however, that staff members often have little capacity to plan for sustainability. Overall, for the OSCE, ensuring the sustainability of its work remains one of the organization’s major challenges.

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