



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

TRANSPARENCY ON SPENDING AND RESULTS: THE DUTCH ONLINE PORTAL FOR DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES

Key messages

Ensuring transparency and accountability for Official Development Assistance (ODA) and communicating on results requires a user-friendly and accessible online platform. The Netherlands has developed a [portal](#) that offers a comprehensive overview on Dutch development spending, its activities and the results.

Keywords

[Innovation](#) | [Learning and knowledge management](#) | [Management systems](#) | [Managing for Sustainable Development Results](#) | [Official development assistance allocations](#)

Key partner

[Netherlands](#)

Challenge

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) embraced a [Results-Based Management](#) (RBM) approach for its Official Development Assistance (ODA) activities in 2016. This new approach forms the basis for an annual [online report](#) to Parliament about ODA results. In parallel, the Dutch MFA worked on three other objectives related to the publication of its results and building public trust in development co-operation: a greater accountability and transparency, the extended use of the [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI) reporting standard, and an online landing page to communicate about its ODA policy and results. All this culminated in the launching of a [new development co-operation portal](#) in 2021 with comprehensive data about the MFA's development co-operation activity, spending and results.

Approach

Developing the portal required putting in place key elements in terms of:

- **Capacity:** a dedicated capacity for the setup and processing of data as part of the broader RBM approach. This also involved organising training courses and hands-on support with a helpdesk to bring the requested results data and information on the required level.
- **Internal procedures** for: a) monitoring, evaluation and learning to increase data quality and data completeness; and b) knowledge management to build a solid data warehouse with sufficient guarantees in terms of data security, protection of sensitive data, and options for quality control and data analysis.
- **IT system:** adopting a new IT application to register results internally while building an interface with the IATI platform to allow an efficient flow of data that implementing partners have published on IATI to the portal (principle of single entry, multiple use). An existing monitoring and evaluation application was bought and tailor-made to meet the Ministry's requirements and an external IT firm was hired for developing the portal.
- **Roadmap with gradual improvements and expansion of the portal.** This included an internal guidance for policy officers with manuals, guidelines, and requirements about which results to report and when, and how to calculate those results.

Results

The portal presents a systematic and up-to-date overview of spending and results for all the Netherlands' development co-operation activities. It includes a multi-layered webpage providing three types of data for the various activities, the budget for each activity, and the annual results report. The portal:

- **Increases accountability** to Parliament with the annual ODA results report supporting more informed discussion in Parliament.
- **Improves outreach and public exposure** by providing the full picture of the MFA's development co-operation activities and results. With 25 000 unique visitors per year, according to the latest available figures, the portal has proved to be the MFA's most powerful channel of communication, conveying the MFA's development policies and results to a large audience.
- **Boosts the results-based management approach and use of IATI** among colleagues and partners. It has also built enthusiasm for presenting the results of the activities under their responsibility to a wider audience.
- Increases visibility to senior management and stimulates healthy internal competition among different ministry departments to improve outreach by getting their activities and results published on the website.

Lessons learnt

Multiple dilemmas arise when designing an online portal that maximises accountability and transparency while avoiding data overload and data leaks. In particular it was noted that:

- Keeping the system manageable requires careful balancing of the never-ending requests from external parties to provide more detailed information and push the boundaries of what should be publicly available.
- Dealing with the protection of sensitive data, complying with national regulations, and adhering to the European General Data Protection Regulation is complex.
- Accountability requests and transparency issues are difficult to assess for policy officers who lack experience and do not always foresee the consequences of providing certain data and may misinterpret or exaggerate the sensitivity of data. As a result, the trajectory to get internal protocols in place for data reporting, classifying types of results to report, quality control procedures, and approval mechanisms is long and cumbersome.
- Governmental requirements for online publications resulted in technical hiccups.
- Permanent and relentless commitment and leadership by senior management is primordial.

Further information

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Development Aid Portal*, <https://www.nlontwikkelingssamenwerking.nl/en/#>.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *What is DutchDevelopmentAid.nl?*, <https://www.nlontwikkelingssamenwerking.nl/en/#/about>.

OECD resources

OECD (2016), "Transparency and accountability for effective development", in *Making Development Co-operation More Effective: 2016 Progress Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264266261-8-en>.

OECD (2014), *Accountability and Democratic Governance: Orientations and Principles for Development*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264183636-en>.

OECD (2011), *Strengthening ownership and accountability*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49655107.pdf>.

OECD, "Managing for sustainable development results", *Development Co-operation Fundamentals*, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1112_1112683-sr6wf7xp34&title=Managing-for-sustainable-development-results.

To learn more about the Netherlands' development co-operation see:

OECD, "Netherlands", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/2faea623-en>.

OECD (2017), *OECD Development Assistance Peer Reviews: Netherlands 2017*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278363-en>.

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