

Evaluation of Norway's Plan of Action to Support EU Accession Countries

FINAL REPORT



Project: Evaluation of Norway's Plan of Action to Support EU
Accession Countries

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1 Executive Summary

Summary of Findings

The Plan of Action (PA) provided almost NOK 300 million to some 500 activities to the 12 then-EU accession countries during the period 2001-2003. This short-term programme had two overarching objectives: to support the EU accession process, and strengthen the collaboration between Norway and the 12 countries, including building networks.

The PA was thus a highly fragmented portfolio, which in principle should have made it difficult to manage and produce monitorable results. It has, however, produced surprisingly positive results, largely at project level, though also programme-level results that are relevant to the objectives. The key to this success has been the interest and capacities of the local partners and the direct involvement of Norwegian counterparts. This self-selection of actors who have mutual interest in the collaboration was for many as important as the PA financing.

The fact that the local actors had a technical and organizational capacity that enabled them to be full partners and not simply recipients in the collaboration was important. The respect for this partnership shown by the Norwegian actors was also essential, and appreciated.

Norway's *Plan of Action to Support EU Accession Countries* (hereinafter "PA") was implemented during the period 2001–2004 and included the 12 candidate countries which were then negotiating accession to EU. Scanteam was contracted to carry out an evaluation of the PA. This was done (i) based on a survey of the Norwegian partners involved and embassy staff in the accession countries, (ii) interviews with MFA staff who had worked in Oslo or in the relevant embassies, (iii) project visits to environment projects in Poland, health projects in Lithuania and democracy projects in Latvia, and (iv) interviews with the Norwegian partners on the projects visited.

1.1 Project Results and Success Factors

In the survey of Norwegian partners, the three most important results noted were that (i) the formal objectives of the projects were attained, (ii) the local partner was satisfied with the project, and (iii) contacts were established and networks built. Other results were that the Norwegians felt they had acquired new skills and knowledge, including country knowledge they thought would be useful for the future. A number also felt that their own organizations had benefited from staff working abroad, bringing back experiences and seeing their own work and situation in a new light.

The local partners pointed more to the strengthening of skills, development or improvements to their networks, and thus the enhanced ability to discuss and share experiences. A key result for a number of them was their exposure to different "corporate cultures", and in particular a more inclusive way of working that involved other stakeholders directly.

The key factors of success as seen by the Norwegians were (i) their own sector skills, (ii) the PA funding, (iii) project design – clarity, realism and focus. In

addition came the partners' skills and knowledge of the country situation, their own financial resources, and theirs and their partners' willingness and ability to contribute beyond what had been expected.

For the local actors, the Norwegians' partnering approach was much appreciated: listening, trying to adjust their support to the partners' needs, being solution oriented, and being inclusive and inviting in other partners on the Norwegian side.

When it comes to sustainability, 62% of the Norwegian partners say they continue working with their original partners, which is a surprisingly high figure. This number was not broken down by region, but may very well be even higher in the Baltic states, for several reasons (see below). While continuity by itself is not a good proxy for sustainability, the high degree of interest that the continuity reveals, is positive.

During the field visits to Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, it could be noted that virtually all the project results produced were sustainable: they were continuing the activities, developing further skills and approaches, and were applying new skills, equipment and networks. The least sustainable result was usually horizontal networks – to other partners in the Baltic or Central European region – because these depended on continued external funding.

The Baltic partners seemed in particular to appreciate the PA projects. One reason given was that they, as smaller nations, felt they got more direct and useful interaction with Norway, as another small nation. A second reason was the historical and regional ties, where the Baltic-Nordic links were seen as important. The support and enthusiasm for the PA as a program may therefore be somewhat greater here than in the other countries, though this is a hypothesis that the Evaluation was not able to verify.

1.2 The Main Actors

69% of the Norwegian recipients considered their projects as very successful and the remaining 31% that they had developed as expected. Research institutions in fact rated 90% of their projects as "very successful". There was hence no project that was seen as a disappointment or failure.

Collaboration with other Norwegian institutions in the project varied considerably across type of Norwegian partner, but in general there were a number of extensions/networks that were established as part of the projects.

Information and guidance from the MFA was seen as positive by 76%, and support during implementation as helpful by 70%. MFA requirements on reporting was for some conducive to learning, though overall there was little feed-back and joint learning with the MFA.

Collaboration with the local partners had been very successful for 73%, as expected for 23%, and in only one case was it seen as negative. Two-thirds of the projects had cooperated with others in the region in addition to the main partner,

and national authorities and technical bodies contributed to a majority of the projects.

The performance by Norwegian partners according to category showed some variation, where two key issues were if the category had a tradition of cooperation in the region from before (research institutes tended to), and if they had own administrative resources to allocate to the project (public institutions were more likely to).

Embassy staff were positive both about the Norwegian and local partners, seeing both parties to be realistic, committed, and contributing to embassy knowledge, networks to Norway, and profiling of Norway locally.

The role of the embassies and embassy staff was seen as positive, but the PA took more work time than embassies had originally foreseen. Much of the time was spent managing relations to the national authorities and less on being involved in the individual projects. Where this happened, the projects saw this as positive.

1.3 Contribution to PA Objectives

Regarding the first objective of the PA, namely contributing to the EU accession process, there were in fact a number of identifiable results. In a few cases they related directly to the EU accession process itself (some of the legal work in Bulgaria and Romania was evidently of this nature), where projects contributed to putting in place standards or procedures that were according to EU regulations or demands. In general, however, project contributions were more indirect, in the form of modernizing and upgrading systems and thinking that the parties recognized as being more EU compatible.

Concerning the second objective of the PA, namely strengthened cooperation and building networks, almost all projects had results that were relevant. Networking was seen as among the three most important results by nearly 60% of the Norwegians. Network sustainability has also proven amazingly sustainable when it comes to the main Norwegian-local partners, while wider networks have often withered due to lack of external funding. Overall, however, networking appears extremely successful and durable.

1.4 Lessons Learned

The three key lessons were (i) need for longer time frames for projects, (ii) greater financial resources for each project, (iii) better links to similar projects.

Other issues raised included a stronger role for the MFA and embassies in project identification while having more flexible eligibility criteria, more resources for learning, better definition of objectives and the Norwegian concerns, stronger demands on local partners for contributing resources, and more concentration of resources on fewer sectors and countries for better results.

Concerning the lessons for the EEA mechanism, the concerns raised were that the EEA grants by and large were too difficult to access for the kinds of projects the PA had funded, and that it therefore would be difficult to pursue successful activities. This had to do with the minimum size of projects, the more demanding procedures, priority-setting by national authorities to the disadvantage of non-public sector actors, and the EEA being simply a financing mechanism while a critical strength of the PA had been the partnering that provided contents and collaboration.

2 Introduction

2.1 Objectives, priorities and target areas of the Plan of Action

Norway's *Plan of Action to Support EU Accession Countries* (hereinafter "PA") was implemented during the period 2001–2003 and included the 12 candidate countries which were then negotiating accession to EU. The funding period for Bulgaria and Romania was later extended through 2004. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) publication "Norway and the EU Candidate Countries – a plan of action for increasing contact and cooperation between Norway and the countries that are candidates for EU membership" (MFA 28 March 2001) presents the programme and its objectives.

Objectives

The Government's aims were to create a platform for broad and strengthened cooperation with the candidate countries over the next few years, by encouraging closer contact, network-building and cooperation in a broad range of areas between the authorities and NGOs in the various countries and in the business sector, the working community, civil society and the academic and cultural spheres.

The objectives were:

- *To promote security, stability and sustainable growth and development in Europe, by supporting the integration of the Baltic and Central and Eastern European countries into the economic and political cooperation in Europe through membership of the EU.*
- *To create a platform for broad and strengthened Norwegian cooperation with all the candidate countries, especially the Baltic and Central and Eastern European countries, by encouraging closer contact, network-building and cooperation in selected areas.*

Priorities

The Government wanted Norway's efforts to mainly be directed towards the countries in the Baltic Sea region – the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, plus Poland. In assessments of projects and other support to the candidate countries, the Government put particular emphasis on the following factors:

- The priorities of the candidate countries themselves,
- Norwegian interests in relation to the individual country,
- The EU's assessment of each country and the support and measures it provides.

Target areas

The focus of Norwegian efforts were to be the following areas:

- *Democracy, fundamental rights, gender equality and an active civil society*
- *The environment and sustainable development, research, education and culture*
- *Public administration, administrative systems and market orientation*
- *The justice and home affairs*

The "Guidelines for Project Grants Under The Government's Plan Of Action For Candidate Countries To The EU" specified criteria for granting support, of which some of the important ones were:

- Applicants may be Norwegian or foreign persons and organizations, and they may be private, government or multilateral organizations.
- Norwegian applicants must be able to show proof that they have established working contact with a collaborating partner in Central Europe.
- Applications from foreign actors are to be submitted through a Norwegian embassy or delegation
- In their appraisal of an application MFA will solicit views from the relevant embassy or delegation as well as from relevant Norwegian ministries

2.2 Terms of Reference for the evaluation

In its letter of 24 May 2006 inviting tenders for the evaluation of the PA, the MFA included Terms of Reference (TOR) with background, objectives and scope for the evaluation (see Annex A). The TOR refers to the two objectives referred to above, and then provides the five objectives of the evaluation as being:

- Identify good projects and good actors, analyse why they achieved the positive results, and identify the critical factors of success;
- Assess advantages and disadvantages of working with public institutions, private firms, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) under different circumstances;
- Identify which kinds of activities have been continued and have proven to be sustainable, and what is required to ensure sustainability;
- Assess to what extent projects have contributed to building networks and increased collaboration between Norwegian and foreign actors;
- Assess the role of the Embassies and how they can best contribute to i.e. network building.

The TOR also asks the Evaluation to identify "lessons learned" and suggestions for the future, in particular regarding:

- How public authorities, private firms or NGOs have worked with the projects;

- Provide information about how successful the PA has been, and how appropriate the working methods have been.

The TOR finally requests the Evaluation to consider the "lessons learned" in light of the new funding arrangements provided under the EEA Grants programme for the period 2004-2009.

2.3 Methodology and Information Base

The TOR narrows the scope of the evaluation in terms of target areas and countries. In agreement with the MFA, the following steps were taken.

Web-based survey of Norwegian recipients

A questionnaire was sent to the recipients of project support, covering 132 projects within the selected areas of health, democracy, and environment in all the countries covered by the PA. The questionnaire was sent to 99 persons, since several persons were involved in more than one project. 71 persons replied, providing a response rate of 71.7%.

Web-based survey of embassy staff in charge of the PA

A survey was submitted to 36 persons who had worked at the Norwegian embassies in the 12 countries and who had been involved in the administration of the PA. 17 of these answered the survey.

The results of the two surveys were presented to the MFA in Inception Report 2 in November 2006. These results are enclosed as Annex B¹.

Analysis of projects in selected target areas and countries

In accordance with the TOR and subsequent conversations with MFA, it was agreed that the more in-depth analysis would be of projects in a combination of selected sectors in particular countries, as follows (see Annex C):

- Latvia: Democracy projects
- Lithuania: Health projects
- Poland: Environment projects.

For this analysis the following steps were undertaken:

- **Review** of available documents in MFA archives, which in most cases included application, appropriation document and project reports
- **Interviews** with Norwegian recipient

¹ Because these surveys were of Norwegian respondents only, the questions and hence the compilation of answers were all in Norwegian. Progress Report 2 was hence written in Norwegian, as is therefore also Annex B.

- **Interviews** with cooperating institutions on the selected projects in the three selected countries

Interviews with MFA personnel

A selection of MFA personnel who had been involved in the administration of the PA in the Ministry were interviewed (see Annex D).

2.4 Overview of the Projects

A total of 505 projects with total expenditures of NOK 276.6 million were funded over the PA. Table 2.1 shows the distribution of projects by geographic area, while table 2.2 provides the breakdown by main sectors.

Table 2.1: Projects by geographic areas

	<i>Projects</i>		<i>Expenditures</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>NOK</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Bulgaria	45	8.9	17 721 345	6.4
Estonia	66	13.1	15 581 614	5.6
Lithuania	59	11.7	21 599 798	7.8
Latvia	58	11.5	17 613 691	6.4
Poland	37	7.3	19 918 829	7.2
Rumania	67	13.3	14 908 798	5.4
Baltic region	42	8.3	33 791 471	12.2
Eastern Europe	60	11.9	112 356 419	40.6
Sub total	434	85.9	253 491 965	91.6
OTHERS	71	14.1	23 126 588	8.4
TOTAL	505	100.0	276 618 553	100.0

Expenditures in each of the six key recipient countries were amazingly similar, varying from NOK 15 to 22 million, despite major differences in population size. The other six countries received a total of NOK 23 million together. The single largest allocation was the more general regional allocation to Eastern Europe of NOK 112 million – over 40% of the total – though it is not clear how this amount in fact ended up in terms of expenditures across the twelve countries.

The Baltic region, covering projects that included more than one of the Baltic states, also received an additional NOK 34 million. This means that the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, with a total population of under 7.5 million compared with more than 100 million in all the 12 countries as a whole, received in total about NOK 90 million - almost one third of the resources. But this distribution was in line with the intention of favouring the Baltic region

Table 2.2 shows number of projects and expenditures in the six main sectors (the other sectors have been aggregated into the category "other" in the table²). These six sectors account for nearly 64% of the projects (322), and 90% of the expenditures (NOK 248 million). "Democracy" has by far the most projects (110) while "Education and Research" has received most money. This is in large part due to a single large project, "Higher education and research", which received a total of NOK 35 million.

There is a wide variation in the size of projects, ranging from only NOK 1,577 to above NOK 35 million. Table 2.2 shows average project expenditure in each sector. The "Education and Research" sector has the highest average exactly because of this one large project. If this is removed, the average size would be NOK 869,115, which would still be highest. "Transportation Support for Humanitarian Aid" (TRS) is a special case, where average expenditure was only is NOK 18,555.

Table 2.2: Projects by target sectors

<i>Target Area</i>	<i>Projects</i>		<i>Expenditures</i>		<i>Average</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>NOK</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>NOK</i>
Business Cooperation (NSM)	30	5.9	19 563 661	7.1	652 122
Public Administration (FVL)	35	6.9	21 827 843	7.9	623 653
Health and Social Sector (HEL)	45	8.9	35 956 210	13.0	799 027
Environment (MIL)	60	11.9	40 322 089	14.6	672 035
Democracy (DEM)	110	21.8	59 712 872	21.6	542 844
Education and Research (UTD)	42	8.3	70 633 728	25.5	1 681 755
SUB TOTAL	322	63.8	248 016 403	89.7	770 237
Other	183	36.2	26 602 150	10.3	145 367
TOTAL	505	100.0	276 618 553	100.0	547 760

There were 335 different recipients for the 505 projects, because several recipients received support for more than one project (most of this is in fact a registration issue, because different phases of the same project were sometimes given different project numbers). 221 recipients were Norwegian and 108 non-Norwegian, where Norwegian recipients received 76.1% of the funds.

² These includes Energy, Peace, Fisheries, Humanitarian aid, Industry, Agriculture, Macroeconomic Structure, Media, Human Rights, Organizations and political parties, Secondment, Transport support for humanitarian aid, Weapons control and Various.

Table 2.3 gives the breakdown of Norwegian recipients using the categories given in the TOR. The two big categories are, as expected, public sector entities, and NGOs. There were, however, a significant number of private companies involved. The PA did not fund directly commercial interventions but rather skills transfer and networking initiatives. There were also some individuals who had initiated projects, largely based on private contacts and own skills and concerns.

Table 2.3: Number of projects and expenditures by Norwegian recipients

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Expenditures (NOK)</i>
Public actors (ministries, directorates, counties, municipalities, research institutes)	97	163,683,948
Private business companies	25	26,699,924
NGOs	78	15,401,224
Private persons	18	3,187,600
Other, not known	3	1,655,858
TOTAL	221	210,628,554

2.5 Acknowledgements and Disclaimer

The Evaluation team would like to thank Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its staff in Oslo, the Norwegian partners who replied to the survey, the Norwegian partners who spent time with us on the interviews, but first and foremost to the local partners who received us so well and shared generously of their time during our field visits to Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The Evaluation team was, without exception, met by a very forthcoming attitude by all contacted, and would like to express its sincere gratitude to the openness and interest shown in this task.

This report and its findings are the responsibility of the consultants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or any of the other informants listed.

3 Project Success Factors

The Evaluation is asked to identify good projects and verify which ones have proven to be sustainable.

3.1 Results identified by Norwegian recipients

The web-based survey of Norwegian recipients had, as mentioned earlier, a response rate of over 70%, which is a very high. This was due to quite persistent follow-up, and many of those who did not respond was due to the fact that the Evaluation team in the end was not able to find a number of the persons who had been involved. While there is always a certain amount of self-selection in such surveys (those who want to, respond – those who for example did not achieve anything they are proud of simply do not answer), the Evaluation team believes that in this case this bias is probably fairly low, since almost all those who were identified ended up providing a response.

What is striking in the survey is that *none* of the respondents consider their projects a failure. 49 of the 71 (69%) rated their projects as “very successful” and 22 (31%) “as expected”. Respondents with projects in the target area “Democracy” had a slightly lower percentage of projects rated as “very successful” (62.5%) than for the two other target areas (health, and environment) both with 72% (see Annex B, table 2.5)

The respondents were asked to identify the three most important results from a possible eight alternatives (see Annex B, table 2.6), and three of these eight stood out as given most often:

- (i) "Formal objectives were attained" was mentioned as most important by 38 respondents (53.5%),
- (ii) "Partner was very satisfied with the project" was mentioned as most important by 16 respondents (22.5%), and
- (iii) "We established contacts and built networks" was given as most important by 9 respondents (12.7%).

In the following the results from the survey and the observations in the interviews are commented upon.

a) Achievement of project objectives: 53% of the recipients gave this as the most important result of the project and 25% as one of the three most important results. In interviews with recipients and their partners, several made the observation that at times the formal objectives were more like deliverables and did not fully reflect the broader goal of the project. Others mentioned that the formal objectives were not always well specified to begin with but evolved as the partners developed their activities, but that there had always been a common understanding of what were the important issues to address and that they had been good at maintaining that focus. In cases when the project was clearly a pilot

and a follow-up phase was foreseen, but did not materialize for different reasons, interviewees expressed that the project had not really been that successful.

b) Norwegian recipients acquired competence and knowledge. Although this result is not rated among the most important ones, most recipients recognized that they acquired new competence and knowledge through the project. This was the case in innovative pilot efforts, such as in the environment target area, but was also noted in several of the health projects and projects based on applied research. In both the latter fields, the participation in activities and working with colleagues in the Baltic states was seen as useful also to the Norwegian partners. One reason was that the local counterparts were often highly qualified professionals whose working traditions and environments limited their ability to apply their technical skills to the fullest. But there were also insights into both how the socio-cultural setting constrained choices, and how local partners searched for innovative ways of using very scarce resources. At the same time, the Norwegians and the local partners were also able to confirm the appropriateness of approaches used by the Norwegians, not least of all the more inclusive and participatory ways of involving families and other relevant stakeholders in larger supportive processes and building of networks locally.

c) Norwegian recipients acquired country knowledge and understanding which will be useful in the future. This is rated as second or third most important result by many. It may be one of the explanations why as many as 62% report that they continue working with the same partner. Furthermore, several report that they have both strengthened their own work in the field and also extended this to cooperation with others.

d) Norwegian recipients established contacts and network. This result received a high rating, a finding reiterated in interviews. However, it was somewhat qualified. Solid contacts for future cooperation was often limited to the main partner and restricted to this in technical cooperation projects. Although broader contacts and networks were also established they tended to wither away after the project period. This was particularly true of "horizontal" networks – contacts between the Baltic countries, for example. The critical factor here was the lack of funding for the continued interaction through seminars and other forms of face-to-face contact. While E-mail and other forms of distance communication has improved dramatically, there seemed to be agreement that the direct interaction, the ability to share experiences and discuss them in small groups, was important for maintaining the longer-term collaboration.

e) Own institution has benefited (employees have become more engaged, open, creative). Few recipients gave this as an important result. This reflects the fact that in most projects the participation in the project on the Norwegian side was limited to one or two persons. However, in projects where there was broader engagement from the Norwegian side, this was acknowledged as being very useful. Several issues were mentioned: i) staff became better at teaching and working with others; ii) they became more attentive to larger framework conditions because it was clear that this was important for designing activities in

the partner country; iii) they reflected more on their own work situation and were more aware of what was specific and useful in the way they organized their work in Norway iv) and more enthusiasm in their own work as they could see how their inputs made a difference to their partners.

f) Partners were very satisfied with the project. 23% of the recipients gave this as the most important result and 30% as second most important. This relatively high score indicates that the recipients perceive that partnerships were successful. Another indicator of the same is that as many as 62% report that project activities and cooperation is continued with the same partner. In interviews with partners (see below) they were almost unanimous in their praise of the projects and their satisfaction with the results obtained.

g) Norwegian recipient have become more interested in this type of engagements abroad. 15% of those who answered gave this as third most important result. This is in line with the rather high indication of this type of activities as further discussed in other sections.

3.2 Results identified by main partners

In the interviews with the main partners, they were also asked to identify the most important project results using the same alternatives as for the Norwegian recipients. The local partners were less concerned about the formal project objectives – in part reflecting the fact that much of the project preparation work was done by the Norwegian partner. In most cases they just confirmed that these had been achieved.

Local partners focused more on the strengthening of the different types of skills acquired and how the project contributed to the objectives of the institution and benefited their own partners or stakeholders. Many also emphasized that they had strengthened their own networks as a result of the project. It was also mentioned in certain cases that the project had positively influenced and motivated their own institutions' personnel.

One of the key messages, however, was that many had acquired a new "corporate culture" from the collaboration with their Norwegian partners. This was particularly strong in the health sector, where virtually all the Lithuanian partners pointed to the wider perspective the Norwegians had on their task. There was more attention to involving all the staff in the institution and less emphasis on status and hierarchy, so that the different groups of staff worked more closely together. But the most important was the involvement of families and other stakeholders in the approach to supporting the client, whether children who needed rehabilitation, drug abusers, commercial sex workers, or patients with communicable diseases. This feed-back came from officials in the Ministry of Health, directors of formal treatment institutions, and staff in semi-public service providers. The attention paid to listening to the patients and their needs rather than relying just on own professional training, and the fact that the Norwegian partners in general were seen as listening a lot to the Lithuanians and asking questions rather than providing up-front answers was noted as important.

3.3 Project success factors given by Norwegian partners

In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether certain multiple choice alternative factors contributed to the project's positive results (Annex B, table 2.7). It is important to note that this question did not make any rating of the most important factors, just whether it was of importance. Three answers stood out as being mentioned most often:

- (i) Recipient's own sector competence (mentioned in 94% of the answers),
- (ii) Financial resources of the PA (93% of the answers) and
- (iii) Project design (clarity, realism, focus) (92% of the answers).

a) Own sector competence. The fact that this is the factor given by most as the one contributing to project results (94%) does not apply that this is the most important one. But what it does indicate is that virtually all recipients meant that their own sector competence was important and therefore also relevant. In the interviews with local partners, the importance of this point was confirmed. Local partners further mentioned that the Norwegian partners were sensitive to the views expressed on the type of competence required.

b) Own country knowledge. As many as 70% answered that their own country experience contributed to project results. This coincides with the information that a large group of the recipients had already worked in the country and quite often with the same partner. Few said that they had come up against cultural differences which seriously hampered project implementation – though this is an issue that external actors seldom themselves are aware of. This did not, however, come up as an issue in the interviews with local partners either.

c) Partner's sector competence. 82% mentions partner's competence. Although this is lower than for own sector competence, it is a clear recognition of the partner's skills and the fairly equitable relations that were found in the projects. It also meant that the Norwegians felt that their skills and knowledge were taken full advantage of. They were working with organizations and individuals who had a solid foundation for their own work, were proud of their achievements, and were interested in extending and improving what they were doing and thus had an open and collaborative approach to working with the Norwegians.

d) Partner's country competence. 82% also mentions partner's country competence. This was of course particularly important when it came to issues like involving local or central authorities in the projects, among other things to ensure future financial and political support for the improvements and thus ensure sustainability.

e) Other Norwegian actors' competence. 38% mention the competence of other Norwegian actors. The recipients' cooperation with other Norwegian institutions is discussed in more detail in other sections. It should be noted that more than one third of the respondents benefited from the support of other Norwegian institutions.

f) PA's financial resources. The funding provided by the PA was an important factor, as recognized by 93% of the recipients. Without these resources, these projects would not have been possible.

g) Own financial resources. 62% say that their own financial resources contributed, which means that these projects did not rely exclusively on PA financing. In the case of many public institutions, research institutes and NGOs, for example, the wage costs of staff involved in the projects were significant, yet the organizations agreed to this time use. The hosting of local partner staff in own institutions, sometimes for weeks, also was largely paid for by own resources and funds that were mobilized locally. The project budgets in many cases do not capture these considerable contributions.

h) PA's guidelines. 62% said that the PA guidelines contributed to project result. This means that the guidelines were clear and constructive.

i) Project design (clarity, realism, focus). 92% informed that project design contributed to project results. The explanation given is that the recipient and the partner had arrived at a mutual understanding of project intentions and activities and in that way avoided problems during implementation.

j) Own efforts beyond expected. 76% reported that project implementation had required more efforts than what was originally envisaged.

k) Partner's efforts beyond expected. The respondents informed that in 66% of the projects, the partners contributed more than expected.

l) Own ability to adjust and be flexible. 79% of the respondents reported that their own ability to adjust and be flexible had contributed to project results.

3.4 Project success factors given by local partners

The success factors given by the local partners varied somewhat by country. This was in part due to the fact that it was a different sector in each country, but also caused by the differences between a large Poland and the smaller Baltic states.

Some of the comments were common across sectors and countries, however. The Norwegian recipients were in general praised for being good partners:

- They listened and tried to understand partner needs, concerns and priorities, and would discuss before making proposals;
- They tried to tailor inputs and activities in response to partners' needs;
- They generally were good at combining theory and practice to ensure relevance of solutions, and were practical and solution oriented;
- They were generally good at involving the right people from the Norwegian side in project activities, and would invite in others from outside their own institution where relevant;
- They were flexible and pragmatic in design and implementation – they were process oriented and did not bring blueprints they wanted to impose.

- They were committed, dedicated, helpful and at the same time very professional in their fields.

Almost without exception, the local partners praised the projects as having been useful and relevant to their own needs. There were criticisms of particular events or missed opportunities, but these were seen to be second-order compared with the overall assessment of the projects and the results.

In Latvia, there was a lot of emphasis on the need for the recipient to be in the driver's seat, so that the project did not become "supply driven" by the external partner. By and large they experienced the Norwegians as respecting this. Since the sector that was supported was democracy development, it is logical that there was particular sensitivity to this dimension, and all the more positive that the Norwegian partners generally were seen to play their role appropriately.

The Latvians also emphasized the need for time, for inclusive approaches in order to ensure broad-based engagement of different stakeholders – again concerns that the Norwegians seem to have complied with.

In Lithuania, the professionalism and the inclusive approach were emphasized. The former contributed to strengthening the activities carried out, the interest among the Lithuanians to learn and interact, while the second aspect contributed to introducing new treatment approaches that involved families and other stakeholders in ways the Lithuanians saw were useful for improved results.

The technical professionalism and the linking up with other actors, in particular the national authorities, were dimensions also pointed out by the environment projects in Poland.

The comments received were consistent across projects, which makes the Evaluators confident that they provide a reasonable picture of how the partners in these three countries view the projects. The observations are furthermore in line with what are considered to be "good practice" approaches in development cooperation. This strengthens the likelihood that the projects will be able to achieve their longer-term goals, and can attain at least a reasonable degree of sustainability (see next section).

3.5 Continuity and sustainability

A key concern in the Evaluation is to assess the sustainability of the activities funded under the PA. In the survey, the recipients were asked about the continuation of the cooperation, where 62% said this cooperation continued with the original partner (see Annex B, table 2.15). This is in fact a remarkably high rate of continuity. It is also interesting to note that 17% report that they have established cooperation with other partners based on the project, and that 38% informed that they have established the same type of cooperation in other countries. For several recipients the project has also had direct impact on their own institution in as much that 31% has increased their own activities similar to those of the project, 37% have developed further products or activities which

were started in the project, and 13% has established relevant cooperation with other institutions in Norway.

When it comes to actual sustainability of projects and their achievements, the picture is rather complex. A first observation is that when the projects have been a first phase or a pilot envisaging continued financing of a larger second phase, none of the projects that have been looked into have been successful in obtaining such financing by other financing mechanisms or stakeholders with continued Norwegian involvement. However, a surprisingly high share of the projects visited in fact revealed considerable sustainability of the results produced by the PA projects – a notable achievement.

Latvian Projects

In Latvia, the achievements of the project "Union building among fire fighters" are followed up by both the union and the employers. The system for negotiations and tariff agreements now are in place, supported by people who participated in small, well focused training activities under the project. The Diakonia Centre, another project, has become a foundation where the Norwegian partner is a member of its council. It is operational, providing both services to the community and training. People trained by the project are now training others, who in turn are working actively in their communities. The activities are now sustained by financing by local authorities, who buy the services of the Centre.

Many of the people who were involved with the project on democratization through political parties continue to work within different political parties, although the NGO the project worked through is no longer operational. The project on consumer protection was an important start to develop consumer protection and marketing legislation, which is now pursued on the basis of EU regulations. Consumer inspectors were trained on market surveillance and advertising and the business environment improved. As a follow up to the project on "Local and Regional cooperation", both local and national authorities follow up project initiatives and activities through different structures and institutions. The school in Rezekene that benefited from the democratization project, was introduced to methods to ensure democratic participation and education of students that are now applied in the school.

The project "Electronic case handling system for Latvian citizenship" was a pilot that did not get financing for implementation. Nevertheless, the Naturalization Board stresses that much of the intentions in the pilot project have been followed up, first by considerable government financing and continued work with different government institutions to implement technical solutions suggested in the pilot. One consequence is that the naturalization process has become less cumbersome. On the other hand, the Latvian and Norwegian partners agree that "Supporting integration of minorities" has not been sustainable because the topic of the project was not a core task for the Latvian partner. The project was promoted by the Norwegian Red Cross with the support of the Embassy, for

several reasons, but since it was not anchored in the Latvian partner's programme, achievements have not been followed up centrally or locally.

Lithuanian Projects

The two projects for children with disabilities in Kaunas worked with health institutions in Vestfold. The collaboration began in the early 1990ies, so there were relations of trust and professional exchanges in place. The PA permitted a scaling up of the work, in particular more intensive and broad-based exchange of staff both ways, as well as financing of equipment. The intensive staff interaction is seen as the critical factor, because it permitted a large group of Lithuanian professionals to experience a different approach which they then introduced and implemented in their institutions, including stronger involvement of the families. Norwegians were used as lecturers at the University of Medicine and thus reached a much wider group of professionals. Both projects believe this attitudinal change has provided the largest single improvement to their institutions, since the academic training of the staff is good. One institution is applying for FMO funds. The other was not aware of this option, but is now working with the faculty of psychiatry at the University, and they are considering a joint proposal, preferably with a Norwegian partner.

The Baltic Sea Region Task Force on Communicable Disease Control supported a range of projects in Lithuania, coordinated by Ministry of Health. The Task Force networks are for the most part still active, the projects results are continuing as part of their health programs, and Lithuania has decided that it will use a substantial share of its FMO resources for the health sector. The Task Force and PA experience is seen as critical to the development of the required institutional capacity for this. One comment was that the Task Force, and the direct access to high-level officials in Norway, was much appreciated, as Lithuania easily "drowned" in the larger EU gatherings. Similar comments were made regarding the support to the national bioethics committee, which has been working with its Norwegian counterpart for a number of years.

Support to prevention and treatment of drugs abuse focused on building family support groups, while the project with the national Aids centre on trafficking in women financed a regional workshop for centres in the Nordic and Baltic states plus Russia. In both cases, the Lithuanian and Norwegian partners pointed to the mutual benefits from these projects: the issues are trans-border, in part with links to criminal activities, so close regional collaboration is necessary.

The support to social statistics development was the third time the Norwegians were involved. Their role has changed dramatically, with the Lithuanians clearly in the driver's seat, the Norwegians acting as advisers and working more on the data analysis. The exercise was thus of professional interest to the Norwegians, while generating data for policy discussions and development in Lithuania.

The last project simply provided updated equipment to the national air rescue coordination centre. While the equipment was much appreciated, there had been no real training and technical assistance provided, but the links to Bodø Rescue

centre were good and continuous, so the equipment was provided within a solid institutional framework, and thus being applied as foreseen.

Polish Projects

In Poland some of the achievements of environmental projects are being well maintained and further developed. In the Sustainable forest management project, methods for stakeholder participation and conflict solving developed in the project are now being applied by the National Forest Certification Initiative. The project results are being followed up through this organization where the project director is now the leader in charge of implementing this process.

The most important achievements of the "Conservation of the river valley ecosystem" project were the description of sites for "Natura 2000" and the management guidelines for these. They were endorsed by the Ministry of Environment and have been distributed to all local authorities. The list and description of "Natura 2000" sites are now the basis for negotiations with government of the final list. The proposals that came out of the project on restoration of rivers to allow for migratory fishes are being followed up by WWF together with a wide range of stakeholders.

"Energy production from waste" was a feasibility study for an investment project in a huge agro-business company. This study has not been implemented because the technology suggested was not realistic and the company does not have the funds to build the plant. Nevertheless, the local partners and company are cooperating in order to find other technical solutions to the same challenge.

The project "Implementing system for environmental surveillance" introduced *Total Environmental Accounting and Management System* both through the teaching of engineers at the Silesian Technical University in Katowice, and as techniques for engineers working for private companies who apply these methods.

3.6 Findings and conclusions

- In a survey of Norwegian partners, the three most important results noted were that (i) the formal objectives of the projects were attained, (ii) the local partner was satisfied with the project, and (iii) contacts were established and networks built. Other results were that the Norwegians felt they had acquired new skills and knowledge, including country knowledge they thought would be useful for the future. A number also felt that their own organizations had benefited from staff working abroad, bringing back experiences and seeing their own work and situation in a new light.
- The local partners pointed more to the strengthening of skills, development or improvements to their networks, and thus the enhanced ability to discuss and share experiences. A key result for a number of them was their exposure to different "corporate cultures", and in particular a more inclusive way of working that involved other stakeholders directly.

- The key factors of success as seen by the Norwegians were (i) their own sector skills, (ii) the PA funding, (iii) project design – clarity, realism and focus. In addition came the partners' skills and knowledge of the country situation, their own financial resources, and theirs and their partners' willingness and ability to contribute beyond what had been expected.
- For the local actors, the Norwegians' partnering approach was much appreciated: listening, trying to adjust their support to the partners' needs, being solution oriented, and being inclusive and inviting in other partners on the Norwegian side.
- When it comes to sustainability, 62% of the Norwegian partners say they continue working with their original partners, which is a surprisingly high figure. This number was not broken down by region, but may very well be even higher in the Baltic states, for several reasons (see below). While continuity by itself is not a good proxy for sustainability³, the high degree of interest that the continuity reveals, is positive.
- During the field visits to Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, it could be noted that virtually all the project results produced were sustainable: they were continuing the activities, developing further skills and approaches, and were applying new skills, equipment and networks. The least sustainable result was usually horizontal networks – to other partners in the Baltic or Central European region – because these depended on continued external funding.
- The Baltic partners seemed in particular to appreciate the PA projects. One reason given was that they, as smaller nations, felt they got more direct and useful interaction with Norway, as another small nation. A second reason was the historical and regional ties, where the Baltic-Nordic links were seen as important. The support and enthusiasm for the PA as a program may therefore be somewhat greater here than in the other countries, though this is a hypothesis that the Evaluation was not able to verify.

³ The continuity can be *both* a response to lack of sustainability – hence the need for continued relations – or as a *result* of sustainability: the parties are so satisfied with what has been achieved that the collaboration is moving on to new issues. This Evaluation was not able to pursue this issue further, so the exact link between continuity and sustainability is not clear.

4 The Main Actors

One of the purposes of the evaluation is to identify the actors who were successful, analyse why they achieved such good results, and identify critical success factors.

A wide range of actors have been involved in the PA. First are the applicants who may receive funding of projects, in this report referred to as the recipients. The Guidelines for the PA says that applicants could be Norwegian or foreign persons and organisations, and they could be private, government or multilateral organizations. As noted above, there were 221 Norwegian and 108 non-Norwegian recipients.

Most of the Norwegian recipients had one main partner in the partner country, and the focus of this Evaluation is on the Norwegian recipient and their partner.

4.1 Norwegian recipients

The survey, as noted, showed that 69% of the recipients believed their project was successful, and the remaining 31% that it had developed as expected. Regarding the distribution across different categories of Norwegian recipients, Annex B table 2.4 shows 90% of the research institutes rated their projects as “very successful” while all other categories rated 67% of the projects as “very successful”.

A key reason for the research institutions being so satisfied with their projects, judging from some of the follow-up interviews, is that many of them had long-standing collaborations and networks in the region, so that their projects were able to build on and further develop activities that already were well defined and has clear purpose and expected results.

Through the survey and interviews, the extent and nature of cooperation between the recipients and other actors was addressed. This included other Norwegian institutions, including the MFA and embassies, with the main partner, and with others in the recipient country.

4.1.1 Cooperation with other Norwegian institutions

Table 2.8 in Annex B shows that in 68% of the projects, the Norwegian recipient cooperated with one or more Norwegian institutions. The Survey also showed the differences between the different categories. The category "Interest organisations/associations" ("*Interesseorganisasjon eller forening*") is the one that has collaborated the most with other Norwegian institutions, while research institutions have had the least such contacts in the context of the PA.

Annex B table 2.9 shows the rate of collaboration across the three sectors that this Evaluation is looking at. There is less in the environment sector – 14 out of 26 organizations (54%) had such external collaboration. In the other two fields of health and democracy development the percentages 77% and 71%, respectively.

There is no particular reason found for this difference, so why this is so is not clear, nor does it seem to explain any difference in success across the sectors.

There are some important differences in the types of cooperation. In many cases the recipient cooperates with others in order to ensure the incorporation of technical skills and involve these resources in order to strengthen the technical content of the collaboration with the partner. In the health field, for example, the Lithuanian partners did not only visit the Vestfold institutions, but were also taken to Rikshospitalet and other health institutions in Norway, they were taken to schools to see how children with disabilities are supported there, etc.

There were many examples of cooperation to widen the "catchment area" and to mobilize additional financial and human resources. The project supporting "Hamsundagene" in Latvia had a wide cooperation with both local authorities, cultural institutions, and higher education and research institutions in Northern Norway. This contributed to both financing and participation. In the "Union building amongst fire-fighters" in Latvia, the Norwegian recipient brought in people both from the employer side and institutions in charge of public safety, which ensured the relevance for the different Latvian partners. The same approach was followed by most other projects. The project "Local and regional development" was particularly successful in bringing in people from both local authorities at municipal and county levels, as well as people from research institutes and universities. In the "Democratization of schools" in Latvia, the Norwegian recipient was able to obtain financial support from both local authorities and NGOs.

In Lithuania, the Norwegian recipients involved both other Norwegian but also other regional partners. It has already been noted that the Task Force was in its structure a Baltic Sea regional endeavour, and thus helped strengthen networks and take advantages of skills in all the Baltic and Nordic countries plus the other participating states of Russia, Poland and Germany. The regional seminar on HIV/Aids and commercial sex workers was also part of a larger collaborative network and process of exchange of experiences and finding ways of working better together.

For the two World Wildlife Fund projects in Poland, "Sustainable forest management" and "Conservation of river valley ecosystems", WWF Norway consulted national authorities on similar issues in Norway and actual cases were used for sharing of relevant experience.

In two questions in the survey the recipients were asked about whether other Norwegian institutions (not including MFA) contributed to project results. 27 recipients (38%) indicated that the competence of other Norwegian institutions contributed to the achievement of project results. For 30% of the projects the recipients indicated that the technical competence in other Norwegian institutions contributed positively to the planning and implementation of the projects, while 59% indicated that this did not contribute (Annex B, tables 2.7 and 2.10).

4.1.2 Support and cooperation with MFA

In the Survey, recipients were asked to assess the support they received from the MFA and the embassy and how this contributed to planning and implementation of the project. Annex B table 2.10 shows that 76% said MFA information and guidance contributed positively, and 70% that this was important for the preparation and follow up of the application. In interviews, this picture was modified with the comment that many of the project proponents did not need very much support from MFA as they already had previous similar experiences, but that it had been useful and therefore was appreciated.

Only 24% stated that information from MFA on the partner country was important. This type of information most recipients already had from previous work or got from their partners.

42% indicated that support from MFA during the implementation of the project contributed, while 23% indicated that there were discussions on learning and results with MFA. In the interviews, many of the informants praised the MFA for not being bureaucratic but instead were flexible and quite helpful. Several also express that actual assistance was not much required. Some indicated that MFA requirements on reporting were conducive to learning, although it did not bring about much feed back from MFA.

4.1.3 Recipients' cooperation with main partners

In the survey, 73% of the recipients indicated that their cooperation with their main partner had been very successful, 23% that it had been as expected, and only in one case that the cooperation had been negative. The actual nature and reasons for the good cooperation is provided in other parts of this report.

4.1.4 Cooperation with others in recipient countries

The recipients were asked to indicate all cooperating partners in the recipient country. For 45 projects it was reported that the project involved more than the main partner, and in many cases quite a number of cooperating partners. For 26 projects it was reported that the cooperation was limited to only the main cooperating partner.

The recipients were also asked to assess the support and cooperation of the recipient countries' authorities (Annex B, table 2.12). The partner country embassies in Oslo were not much involved: for only nine projects, the recipients reported that the embassies contributed information, eight that embassies provided support during the implementation and only in four cases that the embassies were involved in discussions on the learning and results of the projects.

Regarding institutions inside the country, however, the cooperation was quite wide. It was reported that for 44% of the projects, central authorities contributed to the implementation of the projects and local authorities in 55% of the projects. In addition, it was reported that for 73% of the projects national technical

institutions contributed. This broad cooperation between the project and various national institutions at both central and local levels was confirmed in interviews with virtually all partners.

4.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the partners

4.2.1 *Norwegian recipients*

The Norwegian recipients having responded to the survey report were grouped into nine categories (Annex B, table 2.4). The following comments are based on both the survey of recipients and our interviews.

The research institutes (10 respondents) is the category that reports the highest rate of successful projects but the category with the lowest cooperation with other Norwegian institutions (only 40% of the projects). The views by informants is that the strength of this category lies in having well-prepared strategies as the basis for the projects, and that the role of partners are well defined. This is based on longer-term relations and networks that research institutions have had, and thus the strong ownership to the relation and the individual projects that have been agreed to. The projects are often longer term commitments (or at least part of longer-term relations), and also among the larger ones. The institutions have administrative capacity and experience from other research cooperation projects, and thus have own resources that can absorb much of the administrative costs of running the projects. Finally, the relations build on the long-term mutual professional benefits for all those involved.

Higher education and research (6 respondents) rate 67% of the projects as very successful, and the same percentage cooperated with other Norwegian institutions. The views are similar to the ones for the research institutions. One added element, however, is that education activities have clear impacts on those benefiting from the program. They are also the ones where it is easiest to involve national authorities and ensure coherence with national policies, and therefore ensure continuation after project funding has ceased.

Interest organisations and associations (12 respondents) also rate 67% of the projects as very successful. This is the category with the highest level of cooperation with other Norwegian institutions, 92% of the projects. The comments by the informants is that these organizations are often able to find a space for shared interests and mobilize engagement, but that this often withers away when external support ceases.

Municipalities and counties (9 respondents) also rate two-thirds of the projects as very successful, and 78% cooperated with other Norwegian institutions. The views were that this is the category with the highest potential to involve people on both sides at all levels, from national authorities to grass root, that extends out to large groups and will often have a longer term perspective, particularly because it often involves twinning or friendship arrangements. Municipalities and counties will often have access to own resources to maintain activities and network and often will be able to capture this from other organizations.

Political parties. There is only one political party amongst the respondents of the survey. The view is that this is probably the most demanding category because of different traditions linked to the roles of parties in Norway and partner countries. In several of the participating countries, political parties are more volatile. Networks are hence less stable, and project sustainability is thus vulnerable.

Private companies (9 respondents) also rate 67% of the projects as very successful. Their cooperation with other Norwegian institutions is slightly below average (56% of the projects). The category "private companies" was quite heterogeneous. The PA did not support initiatives that were clearly commercially oriented, but assisted when they involved problem solving for given institutions or included transfer of technologies, capacity building or education. This group of actors was often very motivated as they saw the PA as a means to enter a market. However, their staying capacity varies. Often it has turned out that this is where maintaining networks and ensuring sustainability is most uncertain. A problem has at times been that Norwegian companies have not always had the required knowledge or understanding of local procedures and bureaucratic cultures in the recipient country.

Government institutions (11 institutions) rate 64% of the projects as very successful. Their cooperation with other Norwegian institutions is slightly above average (73% of the projects). The views are that Government institutions have become more and more motivated for this type of cooperation, usually having similar institutions as cooperating partners. The challenge has often been different bureaucratic traditions and cultures, but when these are understood, Government institutions may have many advantages as far as maintaining networks and ensuring sustainability since they have own resources and the required administrative capacities.

NGOs (12 respondents) rate 67% of the projects as very successful, and their cooperation with other Norwegian institutions was also average at 67% of the projects. A common view was that NGOs are crucial actors in this type of programs, particularly at the initial stage. They are best suited to involve the emerging civil society organizations in the recipient country, and to develop networks. The challenge is to avoid support that entails aid dependency and threatens sustainability. NGOs is also the category where the Norwegian recipient and the main partner have not always had the same priorities or motivation. In some cases it was noted that NGOs may be overly enthusiastic and lack some of the necessary critical attitude when assessing the capacity and appropriateness of the potential cooperating partner.

Private person. There is only one private person amongst the respondents of the survey. Informants in general felt that support to private persons in principle should be avoided, especially if it is one person firms with commercial interests. On the other hand, some of the success stories have been projects initiated by an idealistic individual with extraordinary motivation, commitment and stamina. But the dependence on one person makes this category very vulnerable.

The embassies, when assessing the Norwegian partners, were quite positive (see Annex B, table 3.6). The Norwegian partners were seen to have developed good projects, had strong technical skills, basically good at selecting their local partners, and quite good at tackling unexpected situation. They were seen to be quite realistic regarding the level of support the embassies could provide, though a number of the embassy staff felt they had to spend more time on these projects than they had expected. Most important, however, the embassies felt the projects and the Norwegian recipients had contributed to the embassies' own knowledge and skills, and had made an important contribution to the image of Norway in the partner countries.

4.2.2 Local partners

In the survey, 73% of the recipients indicated that their cooperation with their main partner had been very successful, 23% that it had been expected and only in one case that the cooperation had been negative.

Annex B table 2.6 shows that 23% gave as the most important result of the project that partners were very satisfied with the project, 30% gave this as the second most important result and 17% gave this as the third most important result. The credit that the recipients give to their partners for the positive results is also evident from the fact that for 82% of the projects the recipients report that their partners' skills contributed positively to the project results (Annex B, table 2.7)

Embassy staff were also quite positive about the local partners (Annex B, table 3.7). They felt the local partners by and large had been good at assessing Norwegian partners, and that they were generally well prepared for the collaboration. They were less satisfied that the local partners handled unexpected situations well, but were impressed with their commitment and that they contributed what could be expected to project implementation. The most positive reactions, however, were to the two statements that "the collaboration with the local partners has been a positive experience for the embassy", where 67% said this was "very true" and a further 27% said "largely true", only one respondent saying "partially true", and none said this was wrong. Similarly on the statement "the local partners contributed to strengthening the collaboration with Norway", 60% said this was "very true", 33% said this was "largely true", one person again felt this was "partially true", and nobody disagreed.

4.3 The Embassies

There were no specific guidelines or procedures for the roles and responsibilities of the embassies in regard to PA. However, MFA staff who were involved in the management of the PA emphasize that the embassies did play an important role, and more so with time. The embassies initially did not have much capacity to contribute to the management of the PA. Most were small, and the number of projects and total PA funding varied considerably across countries, as noted above, with the embassies in the Baltic countries, Poland, and later Bulgaria and Romania, that had most projects.

In Annex B, the answers from the 17 embassy staff who had responded to the survey show the tasks they were involved in (tables 3.2 and 3.3). In relation to MFA, the tasks mentioned by most were advice on selection of projects to support and participate in discussions on progress of target areas, followed by contacts on general program implementation and reporting on results and the least often mentioned are contacts with MFA on general program planning. Regarding Norwegian recipients, the task mentioned by most was informing about local conditions, provide assistance on problems or conflicts during implementation and the least often mentioned, which was building networks among Norwegian recipients with projects in the country. In the responses many mention different tasks in relation to national authorities, such as contacts during both planning and implementation of projects as well as meetings to discuss progress and solve conflicts. Finally, the general task to hold information meetings for local interested stakeholders is among the tasks most often mentioned.

The Norwegian recipients were asked about their contacts with the Norwegian embassies. For 32% of the projects the Norwegian recipient indicated that the embassy had contributed by providing information about the country, 27% by providing information and support in connection with the application, 39% by providing information about the recipient country. As much as 44% reported that the embassy had provided support and follow-up in connection with the implementation of the project. However, only 21% reported that the embassy had been involved in discussions on learning and results of the project (see Annex B, table 2.10).

One of the key reasons for the very positive comments from embassy staff was that in a number of the EU accession countries, Norway had either not be present or had had very limited activities. The PA provided a series of initiatives that made Norway as an actor much more visible, and hence provided access and positive comment that it otherwise would not have been able to generate.

During the interviews, Norwegian recipients explained that when they had substantive and regular contacts with the embassy it was often because the embassies had an interest in the issues of the projects, such as "Supporting the integration of minorities", "Hamsundagene" and "Democratization of political parties" in Latvia, the child rehabilitation projects in Lithuania, etc . When there was no involvement of the embassy, it was often because the recipient did not need any support, usually because they had a long cooperation with their partner. Interestingly, several recognize that they themselves should have been more active in contacting and informing the embassy.

When this question was discussed with the main partners in the projects, those who informed about contacts with the embassies were largely the same ones where the Norwegian recipients had been in contact with the embassies. As a follow up to the projects, WWF Poland had many contacts with the Norwegian embassy regarding the Polish EEA financial mechanism. These contacts contributed to the establishment of the special NGO fund.

4.4 Findings and Conclusions

- 69% of the Norwegian recipients considered their projects as very successful and the remaining 31% that they had developed as expected. Research institutions in fact rated 90% of their projects as "very successful". There was hence no project that was seen as a disappointment or failure.
- Collaboration with other Norwegian institutions in the project varied considerably across type of Norwegian partner, but in general there were a number of extensions/networks that were established as part of the projects.
- Information and guidance from the MFA was seen as positive by 76%, and support during implementation as helpful by 70%. MFA requirements on reporting was for some conducive to learning, though overall there was little feed-back and joint learning with the MFA.
- Collaboration with the local partners had been very successful for 73%, as expected for 23%, and in only one case was it seen as negative. Two-thirds of the projects had cooperated with others in the region in addition to the main partner, and national authorities and technical bodies contributed to a majority of the projects.
- The performance by Norwegian partners according to category showed some variation, where two key issues were if the category had a tradition of cooperation in the region from before (research institutes tended to), and if they had own administrative resources to allocate to the project (public institutions were more likely to).
- Embassy staff were positive both about the Norwegian and local partners, seeing both parties to be realistic, committed, and contributing to embassy knowledge, networks to Norway, and profiling of Norway locally.
- The role of the embassies and embassy staff was seen as positive, but the PA took more work time than embassies had originally foreseen. Much of the time was spent managing relations to the national authorities and less on being involved in the individual projects. Where this happened, the projects saw this as positive.

5 Contributions to Objectives

The two objectives of the PA, quoted in section 2.1, are quite different in their degree of operationalization. Whereas the first one focuses on larger process and accession issues – concerns that go way beyond anything the limited funding Norway provided really could influence – the second one was more linked to the relations to Norway. The TOR acknowledges that it would be difficult to evaluate the achievements of the first one, but nonetheless there are some findings also in this area that are of relevance.

5.1 Supporting the Accession Process

During the country visits, quite a number of partners explained the positive relationship between the projects and the work of national authorities to prepare for EU accession. In Latvia, "Democratization of political parties" focused seminars on issues of relevance for the EU accession discussions, and with participation of a broad range of civil society actors beyond political parties. The "Consumer Protection" project in the same country was directly relevant as efficient market surveillance and advertising control were among the requirements for membership in EU. During the negotiations the Government could refer to the improvements taking place as a follow-up to the project. The project which most clearly linked to the EU accession, however, was "Electronic case handling system for Latvian citizenship". The Naturalization Board reported regularly to the EU negotiators and embassies on the progress in speeding up the naturalization process in line with the recommendations in the project.

In Lithuania, the broad-based Task Force experience was seen as useful for preparing the different parts of the health system for participation in the larger EU processes. Many of the processes and skills introduced through the other health projects, such as the bioethics committee, the child rehabilitation projects, and the strengthening of the air rescue coordination centre, were relevant and useful for the modernization and thus alignment with EU standards and practices, and in this sense was helpful and in line with the EU accession process. Since the health sector within the EU system is largely considered a national issue and thus not a priority sector for EU support, for example, the health projects did not have the same direct centrality in the internal EU accession process as the democracy projects in Latvia.

In Poland the two WWF projects, on sustainable forest management and conservation of river valley ecosystem, contributed directly to Poland's EU accession dialogue and discussions of sites to be included in the "Natura 2000".

In the survey of embassy staff, 11 of the respondents agreed to the statement that "the projects contributed in a concrete manner to the achievement of this objective" and that "some of the projects were useful with a view to the objective". By the same token, 13 of the respondents disagreed with the statement that "it is difficult to see that the projects contributed in any way to this

objective” and 9 disagreed with the statement that “this is not possible to assess” (Annex B, table 3.4).

The more specific comments that were made in this regard are provided in table 3.9 in Annex B. These included observations such as the Estonian authorities paying more attention to sectors that were important for the EU accession process. In Latvia, the PA was seen as having assisted in particular the justice sector prepare for EU accession, and similarly in Rumania where difficult sectors like justice, situation of children, corruption were being supported. Similar comments were made about the projects in Bulgaria. One comment was that the projects perhaps prepared the country more for the period after EU membership than with the accession process as such, by introducing standards and processes that EU membership would demand.

5.2 Strengthened cooperation and building networks

Regarding the second objective, the PA contributed to networking first and foremost between Norwegian recipients and their partners in the recipient countries, and between Norwegian embassies and different actors in the country.

In the survey of Norwegian recipients, 13% rated “Networking” as the most important result, 18% as second most important result and 27% as the third most important. All together, this came out as the third most important result of the projects (Annex B, table 2.6).

These networks are maintained to a varying degree, but one indication that most of these networks are still operational is the fact that for 62% of the projects, the recipients report that they still continue the cooperation with the original partner. It is also safe to assume that the networks have been important in the cases where the cooperation is both maintained with the original partner and extended to new partners.

In the interviews with recipients, many informed that they already had important and solid contacts with their partners through previous cooperation. Nevertheless, in many cases the networks were extended at both national and local levels thanks to the projects. In some cases, like “Hamsundagene”, networks were extended beyond the recipient and main partners to groups in both countries with shared interests. These contacts are maintained directly between the groups also after the project. This also applies, as noted previously, to the networks established under the Baltic Sea Region Task Force, the HIV/Aids and commercial sex workers groups, and others.

However, quite a number stated that they would have liked to have more contacts with other similar projects for sharing experiences for mutual benefits. Many criticized both the MFA and the embassies for not having used the PA more as an arena for further networking.

In interviews with the cooperating partners, many indicated that they had also extended their network to national and local institutions in the country as a consequence of the project. In many cases previous informal contacts have been

formalized to ensure continued cooperation, like for instance with "Local and Regional Cooperation" in Latvia, where this has even come to include cross border contacts with neighbouring countries. These are networks which Norwegian institutions also may benefit from. The same had happened with both the Task Force and the child treatment projects in Lithuania, where the projects had provided the impetus for establishing or strengthening national networks, and thus contributed to more systemic spill-over effects.

In the survey of embassy staff and the interviews of MFA staff, they all make it clear that they see the PA as a way of establishing a wide range of contacts and networks which they would have hardly been able to achieve otherwise.

In the survey of embassy staff, nine of the 17 embassy respondents agreed to the statement "the majority of the projects contributed to better cooperation with the candidate countries" (Annex B, table 3.5). There were also additional comments with a view to the relevance of PA as a platform for Norwegian cooperation with candidate countries. The more specific comments (see Annex B, table 3.10) noted how the PA had made Norway more visible during the EU accession process, how the projects had opened doors for Norway to national offices, helped strengthen relations both in the fields where Norway supported activities but also more generally to national authorities, "in ways that probably would not have been possible without the PA". Some embassy staff saw this result as the most important outcome of the PA.

In addition to the assessment made by the embassy staff, it follows from the way that Norwegian participants in the PA have assessed the networks created that the PA has been very successful in creating a platform for broad and strengthened Norwegian cooperation with these countries. This seems also to be reflected in the way that Norway works with these countries on the EEA financial mechanisms.

5.3 Findings and Conclusions

- Regarding the first objective of the PA, namely contributing to the EU accession process, there were in fact a number of identifiable results. In a few cases they related directly to the EU accession process itself (some of the legal work in Bulgaria and Romania was evidently of this nature), where projects contributed to putting in place standards or procedures that were according to EU regulations or demands. In general, however, project contributions were more indirect, in the form of modernizing and upgrading systems and thinking that the parties recognized as being more EU compatible.
- Concerning the second objective of the PA, namely strengthened cooperation and building networks, almost all projects had results that were relevant. Networking was seen as among the three most important results by nearly 60% of the Norwegians. Network sustainability has also proven amazingly sustainable when it comes to the main Norwegian-local partners, while wider networks have often withered due to lack of external funding. Overall, however, networking appears extremely successful and durable.

6 Lessons Learned

Both in the two surveys as well as in the interviews, questions were asked regarding lessons learned.

In the survey of the Norwegian recipients, they received two sets of questions, one addressing the program level and another regarding the projects. Both sets of questions were phrased as recommendations if Norway were to finance a similar PA in the future (see tables 2.13 and 2.14 in Annex B).

It turns out that the answers to the two sets of questions were largely similar. The responses are therefore grouped together as general observations/"lessons learned" in the section below, ranked by order of importance: the options that got the most votes are presented first. The comments that follow are ones that were either provided as written comments in the survey questionnaire, or during the interviews.

6.1 Key lessons and recommendations

- A) **Longer time frame for projects** was the recommendation with the highest total score. In interviews it was emphasized that "things take time", so one year projects were much too short. Most of the recipients in fact could refer to several years of cooperation prior to the financial support of the PA, which they felt was a major reason for the success of the given project. Some also referred to external factors which may delay project implementation.
- B) **More financial resources available for each project.** Obviously, most would have liked to have more resources. Some commented that it was a constraint that administrative costs could not be included. Some also emphasized the need to undertake a realistic assessment up front of the required financing to complete the full project and to avoid unrealistic expectations with a pilot project.
- C) **Better links to similar projects.** Quite a few wanted to have more contacts with other similar projects and recipients, for sharing of experiences for mutual benefits.
- D) **More support from MFA and embassies to assist in identifying projects and support their implementation.** In interviews it was explained that some of the problems faced during implementation had to do with addressing formal requirements of the local administration or rules and regulations that the projects themselves were often not well equipped to handle. The equipment provided for the air rescue coordination centre in Vilnius, for example, more than a year after it had been installed suddenly became the source of controversy when a relevant ministry picked up on this. In this case, the embassy in fact did help resolve the matter through transmitting a formal letter to the authorities – but it created some tension while the process was taking place.

- E) **More flexibility regarding eligible target areas.** In interviews it was noted that if target areas are too rigidly applied, they may become a constraint to engagement and creativity. Partners may be overly motivated to propose activities in response to donors' interests expressed through target areas to the detriment of their own priorities. Many also said that the new EEA financial mechanisms are restrained to other target areas than the projects they had worked with under the PA.
- F) **More time and resources allocated to learning.** Some acknowledged that MFA's reporting requirements contributed to learning, but would have liked to see more response from MFA and exchange of ideas as follow-up.
- G) **Clearer understanding of how Norwegian financed projects respond to local priorities and plans.** In interviews it was explained that in some cases like the "Integration of minorities" in Latvia, the Norwegian definition of the target area did not reflect a good understanding of the local situation.
- H) **More concrete and measurable objectives.** Some informants felt that the PA objectives were not sufficiently operational, and this created uncertainty regarding the criteria for project prioritization and selection. However, others were opposed to this, as they feared that this might exclude projects with less measurable objectives up against stated programme goals. Comparable comments were made at project level, where some would have liked better defined projects (from the local partner's side), so that results monitoring could be better, and it was clearer exactly what was to be produced. In the Task Force projects, however, it had been a prerequisite that all projects provide a Logical Framework matrix, and while this had been difficult for some of the country teams to begin with, it was recognized that this had permitted better project development as well as better oversight over a large and complex programme.
- I) **Stronger demands on resources from local partners.** Some felt that stronger and clearer requirements for partner contribution might strengthen the local ownership. On the other hand it was also said that this might exclude cooperation with certain partners that did not have own resources.
- J) **More concentration of resources to fewer sectors (target areas).** Some stated that a programme should try to find areas where other programmes do not work.
- K) **More concentration of resources to fewer countries.** A few informants believed that by targeting resources on fewer countries, Norway could achieve better and more sustainable results.

6.2 Observations in relation to EEA financial mechanisms

In interviews with both Norwegian recipients and their cooperating partners, many said that their understanding had been that EEA financial mechanisms would be available for continued or follow-up financing of projects initiated under the PA. Many were disappointed with the unexpected long time period that elapsed before the new mechanisms became operational.

Some mentioned that the target areas for the EEA mechanisms or the priorities of national authorities did not necessarily coincide with the nature of the PA projects. For individual EEA projects, the minimum project limit was also seen as too high for many of the local organizations, including the demand that they had to have own funding as a contribution. The application information demanded was more complex, the procedures much more cumbersome and time-consuming, the application process much less transparent, and the timeline largely unknown but appeared as very extended. These rules would block the ability of many to apply unless there were bloc grants for small-scale activities in place. On the other hand, under the EEA system the local partners would in fact be managing the funds, and thus having a greater say in actual planning and implementation of activities, which was generally seen as positive (a couple of projects did not want the accounting and reporting responsibilities).

Some local partners were concerned that national authorities would prioritize activities in the public sector over the kinds of small-scale direct collaborative activities that the PA had funded, and where the local commitment on both sides had been critical to project success. The EEA was seen as an "empty" funding mechanism in the sense that there were no contents contributions linked with the funding. The most important aspect of the PA projects to many had exactly been the interaction with partners and peers in developing skills and discussing issues.

Norwegian recipients noted that it would be difficult to get funding for collaborative projects because decisions were now with the national authorities. Several noted that it would be very helpful if the EEA mechanism had a small-scale projects facility that could finance the kinds of collaborative activities that the PA had funded. It was seen as particularly useful for follow-up to successful projects, and where this ought in fact to be a funding criterion from the Norwegian side. Some local partners also expressed surprise at what was seen as a very anonymous Norwegian profile in the EEA, when there were clear success stories that ought to be developed further.

6.3 Findings and conclusions

- The three key lessons were (i) need for longer time frames for projects, (ii) greater financial resources for each project, (iii) better links to similar projects.
- Other issues raised included a stronger role for the MFA and embassies in project identification while having more flexible eligibility criteria, more resources for learning, better definition of objectives and the Norwegian

concerns, stronger demands on local partners for contributing resources, and more concentration of resources on fewer sectors and countries for better results.

- Concerning the lessons for the EEA mechanism, the concerns raised were that the EEA grants by and large were too difficult to access for the kinds of projects the PA had funded, and that it therefore would be difficult to pursue successful activities. This had to do with the minimum size of projects, the more demanding procedures, priority-setting by national authorities to the disadvantage of non-public sector actors, and the EEA being simply a financing mechanism while a critical strength of the PA had been the partnering that provided contents and collaboration.