



## Presentation IOB evaluation Dutch humanitarian aid policy

13 March 2023, The Hague

*Summary report*

'[Trust, Risk and Learn](#)' is the overarching final report of the evaluation of Dutch humanitarian aid policy between 2015 and 2021 conducted by the IOB. In March 2023, IOB's main researchers presented their main findings and stakeholders gave an initial reaction.

### Speakers:

- **Johanneke de Hoogh**, coordinating policy researcher at IOB.
- **Klaartje Docters van Leeuwen**, unit Lead on Strategy, Humanitarian Diplomacy and Evidence for the International Assistance Department at Netherlands Red Cross (NL-RC).
- **Arjen Jooisse**, chair Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), Worldvision.
- **Judith Sargentini**, director MSF Netherlands.
- **Thea Hilhorst**, professor Humanitarian Studies, Erasmus University

### Johanneke de Hoogh of the IOB

The main research question of the evaluation was: *To what extent does Dutch humanitarian policy contribute to achieving humanitarian goals, and how does it do so?* As Johanneke de Hoogh, one of the main researchers of the IOB evaluations explained, the two main ways in which the Ministry tries to achieve its humanitarian goals, diplomacy and funding, were examined through literature studies, interviews, surveys and fieldwork in South Sudan, Yemen and Syria. A total of about €3 million in funding was spent between 2015 and 2021. The IOB evaluation concluded that Dutch humanitarian aid policy was generally effective in enabling timely, needs-based and principles-based humanitarian assistance and reaching those most in need. However, lack of access and challenging contexts in the field were identified to limit the effectiveness of the policy. Additionally, it was found that Dutch humanitarian diplomacy was effective whenever there was narrative, capacity and teamwork with embassies and missions.

Three important focus points of the IOB evaluation were innovation, localisation and the nexus. All three a challenge and Red Cross & NGOs seem to be better allies. Regarding innovation, the effectiveness of this was hard to measure considering there is not one shared definition of what innovation entails. What was concluded is that the policy objectives relating to this have not been thought through adequately and there was insufficient capacity for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). This also applies to localisation and the nexus. As for localisation, IOB emphasised the need for more commitment to strengthen the capacity of local actors and to invest more in equal partnership. This requires a change in the way in which risks are shared; risk should be shared more equally between local actors and donors, considering that local partners currently have hardly any say in this. Lastly, IOB concluded that the Ministry should do more to facilitate proactive coordination with broader development aid by integrating this in the strategy used and by blended funding.

Therefore, IOB recommends to continue multi-year flexible funding, to ensure that the trust in partners is accompanied with MEL and to promote equal partnerships with local partners by including them in the decision-making. Furthermore, IOB recommends to enhance capacity-strengthening with local partners and to address the shortcomings in risk management. The MFA should assess whether

it is possible to focus accountability less on mitigating the risk of money or materials not being used exactly as required by the donor. Lastly, IOB recommends to coordinate with the broader development aid by exploring blended funding and using the network and advice of the embassies.

### **Klaartje Docters van Leeuwen of the Netherlands Red Cross (NL-RC)**

Klaartje Docters van Leeuwen expressed her appreciation for the conclusions of the IOB report, while also acknowledging that she recognised the discussions and challenges described therein. In response, Klaartje Docters van Leeuwen highlighted four points:

- Localisation: The Red Cross recognises the need to strengthen the system, however, Klaartje stressed that this should not be postponed until a crisis or disaster occurs. E.g. flexible funding should also imply funding to strengthen the capacity of humanitarian actors long before or after a disaster or crisis occurs (for instance to invest in preparedness). This can be linked to priorities like innovation and the nexus (hum-dev nexus). Furthermore, she highlighted that local and national actors are often first to respond in emergencies, thus intermediaries (including UN) should reflect critically on how to add value and not extract it. In addition, they should 'use' them only when needed, but invest in longer term strengthening, adequate coverage of core cost, risk sharing etc.
- The nexus: the Red Cross emphasised the need for long-term disaster risk reduction and resilience, again proactively and not waiting for a crisis or disaster to occur.
- Innovation focuses on *system* innovation and transformation (rather than a new 'gadget') or, for example, a new partnership, and is closely linked to localisation and the nexus.
- Humanitarian diplomacy: the Red Cross underlined the need for more clarity on what change is needed and how to achieve this in a more coordinated way. Instead of talking to the already converted (which happens too often), legitimacy, credibility and trust is needed to persuade decision-makers to act in the interest of people in the most vulnerable situations.

In the end, KDvL concluded that the Red Cross welcomes the IOB's many good observations, but that it is now up to the sector to learn how to share risks, resources and influence and make concrete how to put this into practice.

### **Arjen Joesse of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA)**

Arjen Joesse expressed in his response to the IOB evaluation that he considered it to be a great report, however, that he missed a study of how the performance of the humanitarian aid policy relates to funding allocation. In addition, Arjen mentioned three key points.

- The purpose of an evaluation of a humanitarian aid policy should be to assess whether people at the field level and people in need feel they are helped effectively. While Arjen recognizes the complexity of obtaining this research, the DRA finds that this component is missing from the IOB evaluation and therefore they consider it a partial conclusion.
- A pseudo dichotomy between scale and specialisation. Arjen strongly emphasised that while the DRA might receive less funding than the UN, this does not necessarily mean that it would not be able to reach considerable scale. In other words, principled humanitarian action with tailor-made solutions can exist at substantial scale.
- Lastly, the DRA suggests to let budget allocations follow the relative strengths identified by the IOB in order to maximise the report's impact. In the end, the DRA is concurred with the IOB evaluation, but would like to stress the need for an approach based on the priorities of the affected communities, supporting local actors where needed to deliver the response. In other words, the DRA advocates for a bottom-up approach that allows for tailor-made solutions at scale and in which people in need are pivotal.

### **Judith Sargentini of MSF**

MSF has not received institutional funding since 2015 and was not considered in this evaluation of IOB. In response to the evaluation, Judith Sargentini raised a fundamental issue of policy coherence: policies of the MFA that could conflict with humanitarian principles. She identifies a pattern in which

geopolitical issues undermine humanitarian principles that should be central to governmental policy. This pattern is also apparent in how the MFA approaches humanitarian aid within the EU, at the borders of the EU and outside the EU. Judith contends that despite IOB's focus is on humanitarian aid policy outside the EU, it is crucial to take this into account as it is a problematic development.

### **Thea Hilhorst**

Thea Hilhorst concluded the panellists' introductory presentation with two key points. First, she explained that the choice of field studies used for the evaluation is semi-biased, as South Sudan, Yemen and Syria are three similar contexts in terms of extreme conflicts. Situations of "no war no peace" are not included in the evaluation. Second, the evaluation pays little attention to the topic of gender, while this topic is of great importance within Dutch humanitarian policy and humanitarian action. In the end, more discussion and reflection is needed. Humanitarian needs are outgrowing humanitarian funding, making it crucial not to forget to look at the future and the challenges to come.