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The Expert group's working methods

This document describes *how* the expert group works. How studies are initiated, how priorities between different studies are set, the parameters for how work on studies should be carried out and quality-assured, and how follow-up of the activities should be conducted. The expert group has also decided upon an operational strategy that describes the expert group's remit and the issues with which it works. This document uses 'studies' as an umbrella term for projects that are to result in a report of some kind to the expert group.

1. Initiation of studies

Suggestions for studies can come from many different sources. Members of the expert group and its secretariat may submit proposals, but the expert group encourages proposals also from other sources. This includes everyone, from potential authors and independent experts to the Government Offices or other actors in the area of aid.

2. Setting priorities

Proposed issues that should be highlighted by studies are placed on a list that is regularly discussed at the expert group meetings. The expert group determines which issues are to be the primary focus of the secretariat and also provides suggestions for specific studies that could contribute to highlighting the issue. The list of proposals forms the basis of the regular work between meetings of the expert group. However, the order in which studies are carried out, and whether they are actually carried out, will in practice not only be guided by the order of priority and resources available, but also depend on the availability of researchers/experts to carry out studies. Experience from similar working groups is that the availability of skilled writers is often the determining factor when it comes to which studies can actually be carried out. Public announcements can be one way to try to find suitable authors for specific studies. However, this requires that the expert group has detailed knowledge of what the study will involve. It is also a work-intensive method and can therefore only be used for a small number of studies.

3. Synopsis proposals

In order for the expert group to decide whether or not a particular study should be carried out, a synopsis is prepared. This can be done by a potential author or by the secretariat, possibly in cooperation with a member of the expert group. The draft synopsis is to include information concerning which issues the study is intended to highlight and its relevance to the expert group's overall remit. The study is to be classified according to the criteria given in the expert group's operational strategy. It is also to contain information about the state of knowledge, the method that will be used and the type of conclusions the study may lead to. It should also be clear who will carry out the study and whether it should be advertised. The expert group has decided on the *Guidelines for project synopses*, which is intended for external authors and which describes what should be contained in a synopsis.

4. Decisions on studies

When it has been decided that a study is to be advertised, procured or commissioned from a specific researcher/expert or team of researchers/experts and if so, who the author(s) will be, a final synopsis is developed and, using the synopsis as background data, the expert group takes a decision as to whether the study will be carried out. When a decision on a study is taken, the expert group specifies how it expects the study to influence policy: is it expected to be directly relevant to policy, is the impact more long term, will the impact occur through discussions in the media? Policy impact is followed up once the study has been carried out.

5. Implementation of studies

The expert group will mainly engage external writers who have done research or otherwise acquired knowledge on a specific issue. As far as possible, the reports produced are expected to include policy recommendations. Normally, the expert group does not take a position on these. The expert group determines the subject of the report, subjects it to quality control and decides whether it will be published in the expert group's series, but does not take a position on the content and conclusions of the report. This arrangement means that published reports are normally characterised by the same *dual independence* that has long applied for the Expert Group on Public Finance; the expert group selects which studies are to be published and the authors themselves then determine the content of the reports. However, exceptions to this general rule may occur. If the expert group considers that it may be useful to make a state-

ment, it can assess and take a position on the material in order to make recommendations. In addition, the expert group's secretariat may, to a lesser extent, carry out its own studies, possibly in cooperation with a member of the expert group. In such cases, the expert group is solely responsible for the analysis and conclusions.

The draft report is discussed by the expert group on several occasions. In addition, a reference group is usually set up consisting of people with the skills relevant to the study that is to be carried out. The aim of the reference group is to provide support to the authors and thereby increase the quality of the reports. The reference group is chaired by a member of the expert group. This member is responsible for monitoring the work on the report and to give recommendations as to whether the report should be published. Decisions concerning the reference group and its chair are taken by the expert group. The expert group can instruct the chair, together with the secretariat and the author, to appoint the reference group.

6. Communications

The expert group is to be as transparent as possible. For this reason, minutes are to be kept of the expert group's meetings and are to be published on the expert group's website.

It is also important that the expert group's work has an impact on policy and the debate. Experiences from similar expert groups show that the effect on policy often occurs via public debate and usually after quite some time. The expert group should therefore actively work to disseminate the results of the studies carried out and otherwise contribute to the debate on aid issues; see the separate communication strategy (*to be produced*).

Members of the expert group and the secretariat also provide targeted presentations to relevant decision-makers.

Under its terms of reference, the expert group is also to present an overall account of its work to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs twice a year.

7. Follow-up of projects

Following a completed, published and communicated study, the secretariat follows up the results of the activity in light of the criteria that served as the basis for carrying out the study, and against the backdrop of the objectives established for the study when it was commissioned regarding its impact on policy, influence on the public debate and the build-up of knowledge. The follow-up is presented to the expert group and constitutes important data for the presentation of the activity's results.