Department for Evaluation

Report 8, 2024

# Recommendations for improvement in systems and practices for Nansen Programme results management

Real - Time Evaluation of Norway's Nansen Support Programme for Ukraine

## About this report

This note on recommendations marks the third and last written deliverable of the first module of the Real-Time Evaluation of Norway's Nansen Support Programme for Ukraine. It focuses on options for improving systems and practices for results tracking, analysis and follow-up. It draws on insights from comparative systems in other aid agencies working in Ukraine, an assessment of how the current Nansen results management system is working, and ideas generated through sense-making processes with the Nansen Department.

**The report is commissioned by** the Department for Evaluation in Norad. The Department for Evaluation is responsible for conducting independent evaluations of activities funded over the ODA budget. The department is governed under a separate mandate and associated strategy issued by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Climate and Environment. The department reports directly to the Secretary Generals of these two ministries.

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# Preface

The primary purpose of this real-time evaluation is to foster learning and support informed adjustments to Norway's civilian assistance to Ukraine (the Nansen Support Programme for Ukraine). The focus of this first module is strengthening the systems and practices for results tracking, analysis, and follow-up.

Real-time evaluations, conducted while programmes are still underway, provide critical and timely feedback to stakeholders. They facilitate collaborative interpretation of findings and the formulation of actionable recommendations. To ensure adaptability and responsiveness, and in light of the ongoing transfer of responsibility for independent evaluations of Norwegian development cooperation from Norad to Norec in 2025, this evaluation has been designed with a modular approach. This structure enables close dialogue and engagement with stakeholders across the Norwegian aid administration, resulting in a series of focused, substantive deliverables.

Three deliverables have been produced in this module:

- Rapid comparative review of results management principles and 'best fit' approaches for Ukraine programming;
- Assessment of Norad's current system and practices for tracking, analysing and following up on results from the Nansen Programme;
- Recommendations for improvement in systems and practices for the Nansen Programme results management.

This note constitutes the final substantive deliverable, a set of recommendations, aimed at enhancing the systems and practices for results tracking, analysis, and follow-up within the Nansen Programme.

Oslo, 10 December 2024

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| EQ | Evaluation Question |
| FCDO | Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office |
| GMA | Grant Management Assistant |
| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| MFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Norway) |
| Norad | The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation |
| OPM | Office of the Prime Minister |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| TPM | Third Party Monitoring |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| USAID | US Agency for International Development |

# Shorthand terms

| | |
|---|---|
| Evaluation Department | Norad's Department for Evaluation |
| Nansen Programme | The Nansen Support Programme for Ukraine |
| Nansen Department | Norad's Department for the Nansen Support Programme for Ukraine |
| Nansen Partners | Operational partner organisations in Nansen Support Programme |

# Summary

Across and within the internal stakeholders of Nansen Programme there is not yet consensus on what results are expected of the whole programme other than the five aspirational goals set by Parliament.[1] This lack of consensus has limited the ability of Nansen Department to establish a consistent, effective and efficient results management system at the level of both agreements and sectors, and 'whole of programme'. Our view is that unless this consensus is reached quickly, all other attempts at results management improvements will be stymied, including those coming through from other parts of Norad.

Views about Nansen results divide roughly into four definitions. While there is some overlap between them, they represent fundamentally different perspectives. Reaching consensus will require much deeper and more collective exploration than has happened to date.

- Results are primarily about meeting urgent political goals as viewed by MFA/OPM and Ukraine authorities. These may overlap with the intended results described in Nansen partner agreements, but not all the time. The political (not developmental) imperative comes first when deciding whether or not to act and invest.

- Results are primarily concerned with the delivery of planned results at output level, as described in agreements: goods, services, products or processes that either happen or do not happen, and can be aggregated to form a 'sum of the parts' for Nansen.

- Results are primarily concerned with medium and longer term effects (or outcomes) of different outputs delivered: these effects may be positive or negative, or unclear. Here the focus is on the extent to which Nansen is 'greater or less than the sum of its parts'.

- Results need to be defined and assessed differently for Nansen because of the unusually close MFA/OPM governance and decision-making, and the circumscribed advisory role for Norad. Results need to focus on the effect of Norad's role on MFA decision-making on Nansen

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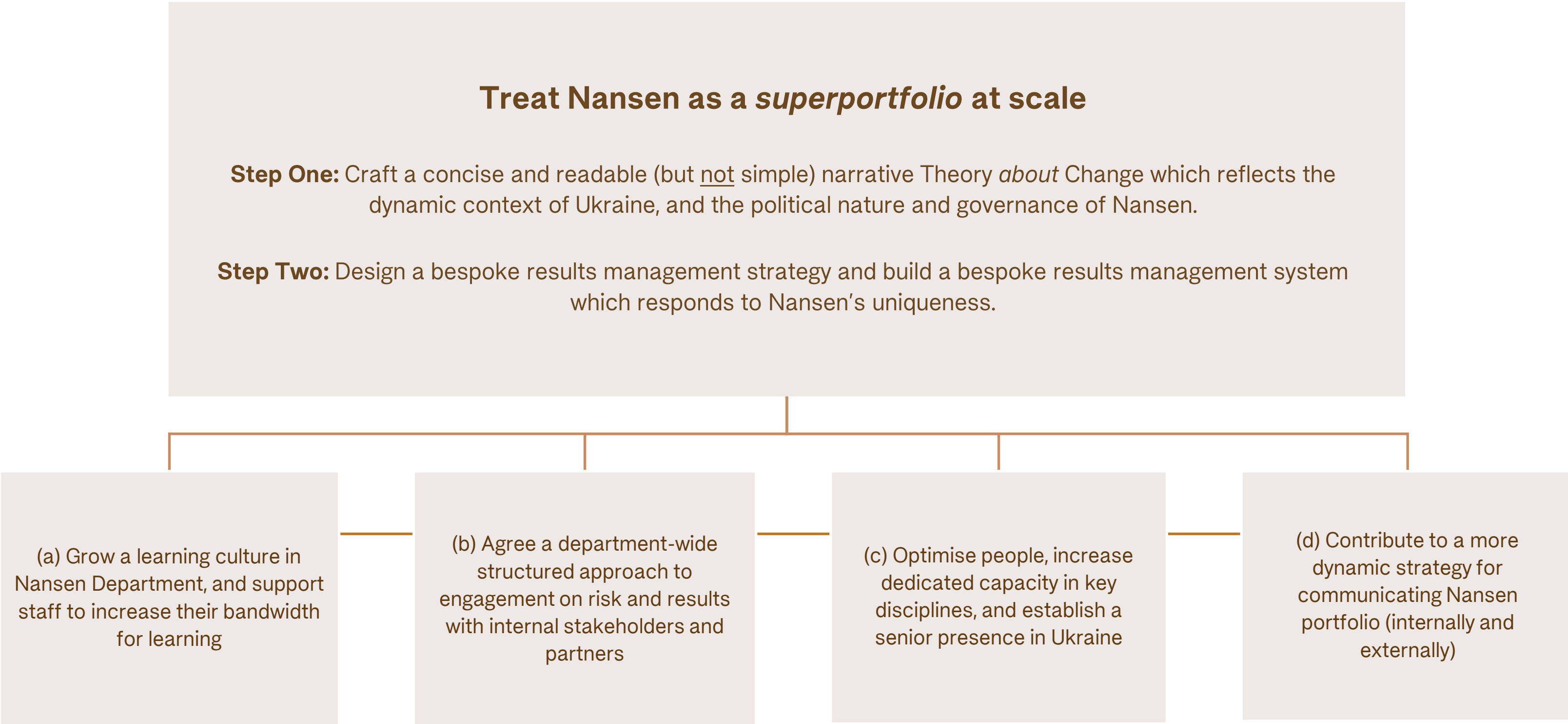
[1] Meld. St. 8 (2023-2024) Nansen-programmet for Ukraina

investments and engagements, and what difference this effect then contributes to the quality of results for people, processes, goods and services on the ground.

We propose a package of interdependent recommendations to emphasise the importance of moving beyond a gap-fixing approach to build more purposefully one coherent and mutually agreed strategy and system for results management – appropriate for Nansen and its unique profile. The package (figure 1) comprises one headline recommendation, with four supporting recommendations.

Figure 1: A package of interdependent recommendations



**Headline recommendation: Treat Nansen as a *superportfolio* at scale**

**For the purposes of results management, Nansen should be treated as a *superportfolio* at scale, rather than a large programme or a thematic portfolio as currently defined by Norad**.

Nansen is unique for Norway: the political and security nature of its existence and ambitions, and its detailed governance by MFA and OPM; the extraordinary scale of investments across multiple sectors and actors, managed by Norad; the context of a fast-moving theatre of a direct and proxy war between opposing geo-political systems and alliances, responding to daily shifts in frontlines; and its connection with the Norwegian public.

Under this headline recommendation, we propose two steps:

**Step One: Craft a concise and readable narrative Theory *about* Change which reflects the dynamic context of Ukraine, and the political nature and governance of Nansen**.

This narrative should establish a common understanding about 'the results that matter' for Nansen. The process should help to identify a *feasible* set of results that sit between the five aspirational and political goals set by Parliament, and the specific results negotiated with operational partners. These portfolio level results could be called 'intermediary results'. We strongly recommend that these intermediary results reflect more closely what is *within the control and influence* of MFA and Norad, rather than articulating high level aspirations which are well beyond the reach of any government agency or department, or indeed any of Nansen's operational partners.

In view of Norad's specific role in relation to Nansen, we also recommend a clear focus on Norad's *primary role* in relation to Nansen: the provision of timely professional advice and knowledge of aid to MFA and OPM. This role is central to whether or not Norway's investments in such a dynamic and dangerous context are undertaken with the best insight.

**Step Two: Design a bespoke results management strategy and build a bespoke results management system which responds to Nansen's uniqueness.**

Existing MFA/Norad systems for results management are not well suited to Nansen and are unlikely to become so in the coming year. Attempting to integrate Nansen into existing and emerging systems will take even more time and effort than is currently the case, with very limited return. In the event of a conclusion to the war in 2025, this view could be revisited. But for the foreseeable future, the dynamism and danger of programming in Ukraine looks set to continue, and with it the close political decision-making of MFA/OPM. This is why we recommend development of a coherent strategy for moving from the dominance of the results management through individual agreements and sectors to one that better reflects the full scope of results management priorities around a political portfolio cycle, focussed on intermediary results identified under Step One.

The four supporting recommendations are:

(a) **Grow a learning culture in Nansen Department, and support staff to increase their bandwidth for learning**

(b) **Agree a department-wide structured approach to engagement on risk and results with internal stakeholders and partners**

(c) **Optimise people, increase dedicated capacity in key disciplines, and establish a senior presence in Ukraine**

(d) **Contribute to a more dynamic strategy for communicating Nansen portfolio (internally and externally).**

# The task, method and limitations

**This report is the last substantive written deliverable of the first module of the Real Time Evaluation of Nansen Programme which runs from September to early December 2024.**

Our task was to identify recommendations for improving the current results management system for Norwegian civilian support to Ukraine. Our work has focussed on two main evaluation questions and related sub-questions (figure 2).

**Methods followed in the RTE.** We focussed on making sense of information and knowledge which had been gathered during earlier stages, including: a comparative review of other aid agency results management approaches and capability in Ukraine; an assessment of Nansen Department's current system and practices through seven agreement-based case studies; and additional interviews and document review. A hybrid workshop was held on November 12th 2024 during which the Nansen Department and MFA participants were asked to reflect on what they had learned from the process and products from the evaluation so far, where they thought they could do more, or less or differently on results management in future, and what questions they wished to prioritise in future. Responsibility for the interpretation of responses through the various workshops and interviews rests with the Real Time Evaluation team alone.

The RTE met several times to draw out and debate potential recommendations from these insights. In so doing, we drew on our own experience of designing and running results management systems for complex, multi-sectoral portfolios, including in situations of active conflict. The deliberations came together as one package of recommendations for discussion in an earlier draft of this report, and were presented in a follow-up virtual meeting on November 25th. Feedback on the draft report has been addressed in this final report.

**Limitations.** Securing adequate time with Nansen Department and MFA/Embassies to reflect deeply on these questions was an abiding challenge but this reality also strengthened some of the reasons which underpin our recommendations.

Figure 2: Evaluation questions and related sub-questions

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **EQ1** | **To what extent has the Nansen department established appropriate and efficient systems and practices to track and analyse results of the Norwegian civilian support?**<br><br>a) How are systematic assessments conducted on partner's systems and plans for results and results management?<br>b) How are results from partners receiving support tracked and analysed?<br>c) How are systematic results tracking and analysis conducted by the Nansen Support Programme at the aggregate and portfolio levels?<br>d) How well do the current systems for result tracking capture unintended results, both positive and negative?<br>e) How well do these current systems and practices for results tracking respond to key requirements and conditions, such as Norwegian policies, Norad's frameworks, partner's own systems and practices for results tracking and the rapidly changing security landscape and challenges of the war in Ukraine? | What improvements can be made to these systems and practices, including the potential use of automation and innovation approaches? |
| **EQ2** | **To what extent is the Nansen department following-up on reported progress and results, to ensure main challenges are addressed effectively?**<br><br>a) How are the results from assessments followed up and used to influence further decision?<br>b) In what areas have there been significant deviations to expected results or high risks for lack of results, and how is the department working to address these?<br>c) What routines have the department established to collaborate efficiently with partners to ensure effective follow-up of results?<br>d) How effectively does the department collaborate with MFA and Embassies to follow-up on partners results and strategies? | What improvements can be made to follow-up systems and practices, including the potential use of automation and innovative approaches? |

# Overview of Nansen results management system & practices

### *Nansen Department achievements over the last 12 months*

Norway is fortunate to have in the Nansen Department a cohort of highly professional and experienced staff members. In the space of only one year they have been able to get on top of an aid programme of considerable political and technical complexity as well as extraordinary monetary value, the like of which has never been seen before in Norway.

They have combined this professionalism with commitment to go beyond the scope of MFA/Norad's formal grants-based management system. This is shown in their regular practice of digging deeper into what is happening with and through the growing caseload of 50+ individual agreements. They have achieved this through alternative informal channels, compensating for the limitations of the formal mechanisms of results management prevalent in multilateral organisations. These informal mechanisms have worked owing to the strong culture of constructive relationship management by Nansen staff, modelled from the top, and reflected across the department.

Nansen Department's size and co-location of most staff has helped establish a strong working culture capable of assuming a huge responsibility very quickly. This culture, which combines assiduousness with constructive relationships and tenacious curiosity, is one that has been helped in part by Nansen Department being a relatively small and co-located team of people, and by the personal motivation (shared across staff) to contribute to the resilience and recovery of Ukraine. This has worked well for the process of shifting responsibility for Nansen Programme from MFA to Norad – allowing time for staff to build up their knowledge of aid, of the operational partners and the different sectors in which very large investments are being made.

We also noted a number of initiatives taken by Nansen Department to address some of the gaps they have observed in the results management system; these are important building blocks for some of our recommendations. At the level of agreements, we saw initiatives which sought to increase the focus of partners on real-time output reporting, learning and outcome level change (positive and negative). We also note the work to curate accessible insight on risks around the actors, sectors and value chains related to current and potential agreements. At the level of 'whole of programme' we note efforts made by some teams to aggregate results across a sector and to develop a more integrated approach to looking across agreements in one geographical cluster. We also note efforts to bring in additional support to expedite data entry into the Norad Portfolio Dashboard (P-Dash).

These examples are indications that Nansen Department has the awareness and motivation to recalibrate the results management approach to Nansen Programme, but these efforts need to form part of a more systematic approach, combined with the requisite capacity support. Our observations about how the current results management system is working (or not) are not criticisms of what was or was not prioritised in the hiatus of Norad assuming responsibility for Nansen Programme; rather, they are an attempt to make explicit some of the trade-offs involved in that process and the opportunities available for thinking through a current set of choices.

### *Current situation for Nansen results management system*

These achievements have come at a price, however. In our view the current situation of results management for Nansen Department is not sustainable. No human system can operate endlessly without some slack. Either that slack is planned for through careful design and sequenced implementation, or it happens by default through burn-out, loss of motivation and high staff turnover. This in turn results in loss of institutional memory and higher transaction costs for remaining staff who have to fill more gaps and juggle even more competing priorities. This finding resonates with a similar finding in the recent Internal Audit.[2]

This is one of the major reasons for our proposal of a package of interdependent recommendations where we emphasise the importance of moving beyond a gap-fixing approach to building more purposefully one coherent and mutually agreed strategy and system for results management – appropriate for Nansen and its unique profile.

The package comprises one headline recommendation, with four supporting recommendations. Each recommendation sets out concrete options for consideration. Each option is designed to contribute to, as well as benefit from, other parts of the package. Taking forward these substantive recommendations in isolation and without commensurate capacity (in the form of dedicated staff or external support) may pose a risk to the current system.

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[2] R2024-03 Forvaltning av Nansen-programmet: Organisering, risikostyring og informasjonssikkerhet. Internrevisjonsrapport. Utgitt: 24 oktober 2024

### *The rationale for the headline recommendation*

Our main conclusion which provides the rationale for our headline recommendation is that across and within the key internal stakeholders of Nansen Programme there is not yet consensus on what results are expected of the whole programme other than the five aspirational and political goals set by Parliament. This conclusion applies to the level of individual agreements/sectors as well as 'whole of programme'.

We understand this absence of consensus to be a consequence of the pressure to get the Nansen Programme started in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the process over the past year of transferring responsibility for managing a quantity of very high value agreements from MFA to Norad in a context of on-going war. Nevertheless, the lack of consensus and the lack of time and capacity to address it, has severely limited the ability of Nansen Department to establish a consistent, effective and efficient results management system at the level of both agreements/sectors and 'whole of programme'. Our view is that unless this consensus is reached quickly, all other attempts at results management improvements will be stymied, including those coming through from other parts of Norad.

Understanding the range of divergent views on Nansen results is a necessary point of departure. Over the course of the evaluation, these views divided roughly into four definitions. While there is some overlap between them, they represent fundamentally different perspectives which, in order to reach consensus, need much deeper and collective exploration than has happened to date.

- Results are primarily about meeting urgent political goals as viewed by MFA/OPM and Ukraine authorities. These may overlap with the intended results described in Nansen partner agreements, but not all the time. The political (not developmental) imperative comes first when deciding whether or not to act and invest.

- Results are primarily concerned with the delivery of planned results at output level, as described in agreements: goods, services, products or processes that either happen or do not happen, and can be aggregated to form a 'sum of the parts' for Nansen.

- Results are primarily concerned with the medium and longer term effects (or outcomes) of different outputs delivered: these effects may be positive or negative, or as yet unclear. Here the focus is on the extent to which Nansen is 'greater or less than the sum of its parts'.

- Results need to be defined and assessed differently for Nansen because of the unusually close MFA/OPM governance and decision-making, and the circumscribed advisory role for Norad. Results need to focus on the effect of Norad's role on MFA decision-making on Nansen investments and engagements, and what difference this effect then contributes to the quality of results for people, processes, goods and services on the ground.

The effect of a lack of clarity on how results are defined and by whom is further reflected at the different levels of results management:

**'Whole of programme' level.** Although called a 'programme' and sharing some commonalities with other Norad portfolios (such as the requirement for strategic goals to which individual agreements are expected to contribute), the Nansen Programme is unlike other Norad programmes or thematic portfolios focussed on a specific issue. This ambiguous identity, combined with the lack of consensus on the results that matter, affects the way in which results management of the Nansen Programme is being interpreted by different internal stakeholders, how people are being deployed and where, what practices and routines are prioritised and documented, and what gaps have emerged in the overall system. While there a few good examples of efforts being made to aggregate across agreements in a specific sector (such as humanitarian) this is not widespread. Aggregation is in any case only one dimension of 'whole of programme' results management.

**Agreements and sectors level:** Building on efforts already made by Nansen Department, there is a need for continued improvement in achieving more timely reporting by partners on output delivery, through structured mechanisms that are less reliant on Nansen Department having to invest in a parallel informal system which, despite the considerable effort involved, has limited visibility in the documentation.

Substantial improvement is needed in the tracking of outcome level change (positive and negative) through individual agreements and across sectors. This is a critical aspect of risk management requiring up-to-date knowledge and insight of how the investment of large sums of money is affecting power relationships between different actors in specific sectors and around particular interventions (such as energy, civil society and political parties). The extent that Norad can achieve this through its current reliance on the results management systems of multilateral partners is doubtful, not least because some of those organisations are now embedded in the Ukraine system.

The rationale for each of the supporting recommendations precedes the recommendation itself.

# A package of interdependent recommendations

**The visual overview at Figure 1 is a summarised version of the full package of recommendations which are now explained in detail.**

**Headline recommendation: Treat Nansen as a *superportfolio* at scale**

**For the purposes of results management, Nansen should be treated as a *superportfolio* at scale, rather than a large programme or a thematic portfolio as currently defined by Norad**.

From almost any angle, Nansen is unique for Norway: the political and security nature of its existence and ambitions, and its detailed governance by MFA and OPM; the extraordinary scale of investments across multiple sectors and actors, managed by Norad; the context of a fast-moving theatre of a direct and proxy war between opposing geo-political systems and alliances, responding to daily shifts in actual and virtual frontlines; and its connection with the Norwegian public.

Under this headline recommendation, we propose two steps, in sequence. Delivery of the second requires completion of the first.

Step One

**Craft a concise and readable (but not simple) narrative Theory *about* Change[3] which reflects the dynamic context of Ukraine, and the political nature and governance of Nansen**.

This narrative, developed with participation of key internal stakeholders, will help to establish a common understanding about 'the results that matter' for Nansen, and how best to track and analyse these. The process should help to identify a *feasible* set of results that sit between the five aspirational and political goals set by Parliament, and the specific results which are continuously being

[3] We use the term 'theory about change' rather than 'theory of change' (ToC) to break the association between what we propose here, and the more conventional and decontextualised logical pathways which many ToCs have come to represent, and which frequently simply set out a diagramatic version of a conventional logical framework of unlikely cause-effect relationships and hoped-for results.

negotiated with operational partners through individual agreements and sectors. These portfolio level results could be called 'intermediary results'.

We strongly recommend that these intermediary results reflect more closely what is *within the control and influence* of MFA and Norad, rather than articulating high level aspirations which are well beyond the reach of any government agency or department, or indeed any of Nansen's operational partners.

In view of Norad's specific role in relation to Nansen (which is more circumscribed than for other programmes or thematic portfolios) we also recommend a clear focus on Norad's *primary role* in relation to Nansen – which is the provision of timely professional advice and knowledge of aid to MFA and OPM. This is not merely a matter of Norad's 'added value'; this role is central to whether or not Norway's investments in such a dynamic and dangerous context are undertaken with the best insight.

The purpose of such a concise Theory about Change document is to provide an accessible snapshot which helps to explain the choices being made through Nansen, and which can easily be revisited and updated – as the context continually changes, and Norway's political responses change too.
These periodic points of update (say, quarterly) provide important opportunities for internal stakeholders to review whether or not course correction is required, or whether emerging issues require a different strategy altogether. They are also the staging points when the availability of knowledge – through externally commissioned research and/or internal curation of open source knowledge or partner reporting – can be converted into actionable learning: that is, a set of decisions informed by collective processing of information and knowledge. This is a task which cannot be outsourced.

A clear diagrammatic representation of a theory about change may complement a concise narrative and be useful for communication purposes; however, it cannot substitute for a narrative because it cannot sufficiently capture the contextual and time-sensitive nuances in a way that will allow for regular and useful updating, and informed course correction.[4]

[4] The downside of many diagrammatic representations of theories of change is that they appear to offer confident pathways of change which are de-linked from any analysis of context. They are either leaps of faith (not well-grounded theories about how and whether particular changes can be brought about) or they are so complicated as to be unintelligible for all but those who were involved in the process of designing them.

Step Two

**Design a bespoke results management strategy and build a bespoke results management system which responds to Nansen's uniqueness.**

Existing MFA/Norad systems for results management are not well suited to Nansen and are unlikely to become so in the coming year. We understand the wish to integrate Nansen into existing and emerging systems, but we think this will take even more time and effort than is currently the case, with very limited return. In the event of a conclusion to the war in 2025, this view could be revisited. But for the foreseeable future, the dynamism and danger of programming in Ukraine looks set to continue, and with it the close political decision-making of MFA/OPM.

This is why we recommend development of a coherent strategy for moving from the dominance of the results management through individual agreements and sectors to one that better reflects the full scope of results management priorities around a superportfolio cycle. Fundamentally, this will require a shift of staff focus and effort from individual grant cycle management to broader investigations about how, where and why change is happening (or not) – and what it means for strategic decision-making. This will require much more focus on, and investigation into, the intermediary results identified under Step One.

Liubomyrivka, Ukraina, november 2023
Photo: Espen Røst | Panorama

We recommend the following components of a bespoke strategy:

i. **Use an alternative form of portfolio results framework to track and analyse results**. Conventional logical frameworks are ill-suited to dynamic contexts such as Ukraine because they attempt to predict what is impossible to predict. This creates confusion about whether or not results have failed when the context changes. Working from the intermediary results identified under Step One, an alternative results framework could incorporate key monitoring questions on the context as well as tracking examples of when and where actionable learning has taken place. While it can draw on aggregated results from across different agreements, it goes much further at looking across the different interventions that comprise a portfolio: money, diplomatic activity, evidence and learning, and political navigation.

ii. **Link the portfolio results framework to tools (like an outcome Map[5]) designed for tracking and analysing results in uncertain contexts.** An Outcome Map describes the vision for a programme and then focuses on describing potential changes in behaviours of the relevant people, groups and organisations influenced by a programme or portfolio. These changes are described at different levels from 'love to see', 'like to see', 'expect to see' and also 'don't want to see'. It is a collective planning tool designed to deal with complexity and is not based on linear models of change. Development of a Nansen Outcome Map could help portfolio stakeholders (internal – and when appropriate, external also) to identify different scenarios for how different actors may behave in response to Nansen investments and interventions. Through a periodic review process, it is then possible to see where and in what ways Nansen interventions were more or less effective, and where adjustments might be needed. An Outcome Map can also be used to anticipate how a situation might deteriorate (including where risks may lurk) and what flexibility may be required to accommodate or mitigate this. It can be a much easier way of developing an accessible 'big picture' of a complex programme for different stakeholders, but without over-simplifying reality.

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[5] https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Series-Outcome-Mapping-14.pdf

iii. **Establish a quarterly learning and review cycle against the portfolio results framework (including Outcome Map).** The purpose of this is to encourage regular knowledge sharing and reflection against key questions from the Results Framework, and findings emerging from the Outcome Map reviews. The last quarterly review could take the form of a more structured performance self-assessment against the Results Framework, with lessons learned feeding into the priorities for the year ahead.

iv. **Free up people's time by agreeing where current tasks can be reduced and current processes shortened, while still complying with mandatory rules.** This could be achieved, for example, through further development of smarter application of MFA/Norad GMA processes, an initiative already underway within Nansen Department. Nansen Department can also choose to be more selective about which parts of guidance and more conventional MEL tools are useful for partners/agreements/sectors, and which can be set aside or the threshold for 'good enough' lowered in the agreement approval process. We saw evidence of this already with the energy investments.

v. **Appoint a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning senior advisor to lead delivery of the superportfolio results management strategy, and maintaining momentum across the department.** This work will need to be done step by step, and cognisant of the dynamic seasonal and political and military context of Ukraine. At the same time, momentum must be maintained to help each step reach completion and for the benefits of a more joined up strategy to be experienced by the staff. This requires dedicated capacity to ensure that the tasks and processes are fit for purpose, feasibly participatory, and completed in a timely manner. [Link to supporting recommendation c].

vi. **Establish an external learning partner of some kind to accompany the process and provide additional capacity and expertise when needed.** We suggest consideration of a developmental evaluation (DE) facility[6] to accompany and support the process. This is a kind of learning partnership which can include direct support for crafting of a theory about change, the strategy for superportfolio results

[6] A developmental evaluation has some similarities with a real-time evaluation but is a broader approach which is based on a long-term partnership between the evaluation team, and the programme or portfolio implementation team. A developmental evaluation can, for example, use elements of real-time evaluation, but it may also use a number of other different evaluative approaches in consultation with the programme management team. Developmental evaluation is based on the idea of a learning partnership and often works closely with dedicated staff members within the programme management team. (For further information the INTRAC M&E Universe provides a succinct summary and sources: https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Developmental-evaluation.pdf

management and the components of this strategy, such as alternative results framework and selected MEL adaptive tools. A DE also provides for a 'critical friend' to support some of the facilitation tasks over the longterm, thus building up a longer term perspective on the programme. Certain conditions are required to maximise the benefit of this approach. These include: flexibility in relation to planning and budgeting so that the DE can respond to learning and evaluation needs as they emerge from the portfolio; dedicated MEL capacity within the programme team to collaborate closely with DE processes and outputs; and commitment from the programme to engage with the different stages of the DE, based on agreed plans and learning spaces.

## Supporting recommendation (a)

**Grow a learning culture in Nansen Department, and support staff to increase their bandwidth for learning**

**Rationale for this supporting recommendation.** Most aid agencies regard learning as important for better decision-making; many make the mistake of assuming that the existence of robust evidence-based knowledge will automatically lead to that learning. Through the evaluation process we observed similar assumptions in Norad and Nansen Department's documentation, in the lack of obvious utility of the Knowledge, Evidence and Learning Plan (now apparently set aside) and in the lack of bandwidth of staff to create time for more reflective learning.

Despite this, the evaluation has shown that there is a strong culture of curiosity in the Nansen Department and this is an important foundation for growing a learning culture. Across the programme as well as among other donors and local Ukrainian actors, there is also a considerable quantity of knowledge – actual and emergent, including an initiative by one donor to establish an external political economy analysis facility. Converting this knowledge into deep learning which can then be applied within an aid agency civil service, requires a number of proactive steps and a strong discipline. This first supporting recommendation offers suggestions for creating the conditions whereby a group of curious civil servants have sufficient bandwidth to absorb knowledge, make sense of it and then work out how and in what form to apply it. This is crucial for Norad's effectiveness as a provider of influential professional advice to MFA and OPM.

### Step a1

**Adopt a light and short Learning Agenda, developed in collaboration with MFA and OPM and used as a guide for supporting regular consequential conversations between MFA, OPM and Norad about Nansen portfolio level results**.

A learning agenda works by prioritising a handful of collectively agreed and memorable questions which are mapped against a set of commonly shared priorities for further knowledge and insight. These are likely to relate to the intermediary results identified under the theory about change process featured under the main recommendation. We recommend that these priorities relate both to internal ways of working (such as how MFA uses Nansen Department advice) as well as external realities (the Ukraine context and specific sectors or issues, such as de-mining or localisation). The USAID Tips for a Learning Agenda provides useful criteria for establishing which may be the most promising questions.[7] This learning agenda can then be linked to the proposed alternative results framework; in so doing, people who participate in the learning processes see a reward for their efforts when the results framework is reviewed.

### Step a2

**Establish a regular routine of learning spaces designed in ways which encourage staff to set aside current work priorities and demands so that they can focus their minds on different kinds of questions, using critical thinking methods.** Ensure these spaces are well facilitated and do not burden anyone with heavy write-ups. Their value lies in the frequency of informed conversations and how these feed into people's day to day working and deliberation. Examples of how staff have converted learning into action can be harvested periodically by the MEL senior adviser and recorded in a simple format for later review purposes.

### Step a3

**Plan for more substantial events from time to time, with key knowledge inputs (written, verbal, visual) from which a more thorough and longer debate can be held.** Design well, target some people to come better prepared, and make sure it is well chaired and that it is clearly valued by MFA, OPM and Norad leaders. These events could be linked to a periodic review of part of the portfolio results framework.

### Step a4

**Consider using regular peer Action Learning sets to encourage people to help each other solve real-time results management problems they encounter through their work.** Action Learning is best suited to peers who are working on different areas so that discussion is not affected by line management relationships. Using a technique of peer open questions, it is design to help build people's confidence to analyse work-related problems, and develop better strategies for tackling them. The intention is to release creative strategising (through a form of crowd-sourcing) as well as encourage people to be accountable for their own actions, rather than allowing a problem to stagnate.[8]

[7] https://usaidlearninglab.org/system/files/resource/files/learning_agenda_tip_sheet_final.pdf

[8] Action Learning, established by the educator Reg Revans, works on the principle that those best able to help you with your work problems are those facing similar challenges – what he calls 'comrades in adversity'. More information can be found at ActionLearning Associates, among other websites: https://www.actionlearningassociates.co.uk/action-learning/reg-revans/

## Supporting recommendation (b)

### Agree a department-wide structured approach to engagement on risk and results with internal stakeholders and partners

**Rationale for this supporting recommendation.** The regular but rapid interaction between MFA and Nansen Department tends to focus on immediate information needs of MFA, and this can limit the ability for Nansen Department to be part of a two-way dialogue on issues which may be important for MFA decision-making, including unintended results and risk. There appears to be scope for a more structured approach to this engagement.

Partly in response to these immediate MFA information needs, Nansen Department currently operates a dual system of results management with partners. This combines diligent use of the formal results management systems of the partners and MFA/Norad's GMA system, with an informal system of respectful relationships to try to obtain the real-time information needed but not available through the formal system. Informal mechanisms are often important for helping to compensate for the limitation of formal systems, and to different degrees different Nansen Department teams are making this dual system work for them. But it is neither efficient, nor entirely effective. We observed considerable variation in how the informal system works, and a lack of consistent record of these transactions. We also observed a high level of effort to make the formal system work, but with limited influence on how multilateral partners ultimately go about results management.

In our view there is scope for Nansen Department to bring this dual approach into one explicit and structured strategy for engagement, customised for different internal and external stakeholders.

#### Step b1

**Develop a shared understanding of each stakeholder (internal and external) and design a customised strategy for each**. The approach to each stakeholder would be shaped by what Nansen Department needs from the engagement, what Nansen Department can offer, as well as what Nansen Department understands of the interests and needs of the stakeholder. The strategy should reflect the optimal way of going about a productive working relationship.

This includes:

a) patterns and types of meeting, how to prepare for these and to record them using simple templates (potentially linked to mobile phones);

b) variation in expectations and thresholds for 'results management'. For example, for some smaller partners ToCs and Results Frameworks could be replaced with learning workshops for sharing results and learning. For the bigger multilaterals, it may be an additional and smaller working meeting to invite reflections on learning which do not appear in formal reporting (building on an initiative already being tried by Nansen Department for some partners).

c) For internal stakeholders, a more purposeful approach (for example, a Nansen-MFA engagement on a light learning agenda and portfolio risk assessment) could open up space for different kinds of discussion from time to time.

### Step b2

**Use the strategy to on-board new staff and to handle the evolution from a Nansen Department staff which is currently co-located in Norway to one which becomes more dispersed (including a possible presence in Ukraine).** An explicit strategy can help guide individual work priorities, as well as helping Nansen Department as a whole remain joined up and communicating from the same song sheet. This can also help in managing the interface between the Embassy and Norad, building on the practice which has been established between Nansen Department, MFA and the embassy in Moldova.

### Step b3

**Review the strategy periodically to help establish whether any changes in circumstance (such as a change of personnel or a policy or agreement cycle) requires an adjustment to the engagement strategy.** This review can be included as part of the learning agenda and is clearly linked to both of the portfolio intermediary result areas proposed under the headline recommendation.

## Supporting recommendation (c)

### Optimise people, increase dedicated capacity in key disciplines, and establish a senior presence in Ukraine

**Rationale for this supporting recommendation.** Much of what has been recommended above cannot be achieved unless the Nansen Department has an allocation of staff which comes closer to what would normally be required of a portfolio of this magnitude. The benefits of relatively small size and co-location which assisted Nansen Department during its first year are fast diminishing as the number of agreements continues to rise, and the Government proposes a major scaling up and extension of Nansen. With the effect of the new US presidency heralding a number of potential policy and military shifts, events are likely to be even more fast-moving in Ukraine. Nansen Department's inability to join discussions on the ground will continue to limit its scope for providing the best insight required to help MFA's decision-making and support real-time risk mitigation. Notwithstanding the government limitations on staffing of aid management, we think there are value for money arguments to be made in relation to five areas of additional capacity, presented in order of priority.

### Step c1

**Recruit an administrative tier of staff dedicated to Nansen Department to free up senior staff time from routine tasks which can be delegated, such as field visits**

**and strategic discussions.** Such tasks include data entry, travel preparation, process coordination and other tasks which do not require senior staff expertise. Data-entry for P-Dash across the Nansen portfolio could also be included. However, our suggestion here is that until P-Dash's replacement is in place, it would be more efficient to agree a set of priority result types and then commission one or two administrative staff to review relevant documentation periodically in order to complete and update a spreadsheet with the data. Priority results would be shaped by what is expected in agreements and may include (for example) numbers of people reached with restored energy supplies, geographical areas with restored infrastructure or demined land, numbers of children able to resume schooling in restored buildings, or numbers of displaced people receiving equipment kits.This report could then be tested for its utility in drawing out portfolio level results required by other parts of Norad and MFA.

### Step c2

**Recruit at least one dedicated and senior MEL adviser to lead the portfolio results management strategy and system.** This role would lead on development of the bespoke results management strategy and oversee its implementation. It would also provide the docking point for externally commissioned pieces of research and would manage the developmental evaluation facility or whatever learning partnership support is secured by Nansen Department. **A useful complement to this lead role could be a MEL specialist in the use of automation**, especially in the context of Ukraine. (This links to the suggestion of Third Party Monitoring [TPM] below.)

### Step c3

**Establish a Nansen Department senior presence in Ukraine as a priority.** The task of keeping on top of local and geo-political events, and on programme adaptation to these events necessitates some kind of presence in Ukraine. Delays in establishing this will impede Norad's effectiveness in advising MFA and OPM from a position of up-to-date and nuanced insight.

Damaged residential buildings in Irpin
Photo: Nora Savosnick | Panorama

### Step c4

**Complement Nansen Department presence in Ukraine with local (and where warranted international) capability for Third Party Monitoring.** Used carefully and aligned to risk assessments, this is an important means of helping to grow the local market for accountability for public goods, and complementing the limitations of multilaterals to report in real-time on the results of Norway's investments. TPM is also one way of tapping into Ukraine's rapid advances in digitalisation, with potential for testing different methods for results tracking, especially in high risk areas where people should not be monitoring in person. However, TPM should not substitute for the representative function of senior Norad personnel, and the importance of building internal institutional learning of context.

### Step c5

**A dedicated senior Communications adviser could help the Nansen Department communicate much more effectively the complex picture of Nansen results, both to internal stakeholders and the Norwegian public.** Communications roles do not always sit easily in complex political programmes; but with the right skills and sufficient orientation in the different interests and contextual nuances, such a role could assist Nansen Department to establish a more reliable and compelling outflow of information through MFA and OPM which increases accountability to the Norwegian public as well as increasing understanding of how the Norwegian government as a whole is managing Nansen.

**Supporting recommendation (d)**

### Contribute to a more dynamic strategy for communicating Nansen portfolio, internally and externally

**Rationale for this supporting recommendation.** We think there are two dimensions of communicating results which are worth considering. The first is public communication, and the second is between internal stakeholders.

Given the scale of public funding and public interest in Nansen portfolio, we were struck by the lack of a current 'big picture' of Nansen portfolio on the government website. While periodically some results stories appear (including in November), communication is not very up-to-date even though a number of Nansen's many partners have dynamic Ukraine website pages. With the scaling up and extension of Nansen, it is timely for Norway to scale up its communication of Nansen results in a more consistent and up-to-date manner, learning from some approaches being used by other donors. These include: easy-to-update fact sheets and maps (USAID, FCDO); a City-to-Country link (Danida); an investment overview (Sida); links to partner websites (Sida); stories of change (USAID and Norad), Country Strategy and Results Framework (USAID). We understand that a cross-departmental strategy for communications already exists and is under the responsibility of OPM. There appears to be scope for this to be refreshed and consideration given to the kind of capacity required to communicate more frequently and knowledgeably about Norway's contribution.

We also observed the challenge of trying to communicate about Nansen across the different cultures of Norad and MFA – in particular how content is communicated, and what formats and length work best. Crafting information and insights about risk and results from technical documentation for a political audience is difficult and may require some dedicated effort on the part of MFA and Norad to work out what is wanted. The new Norad Chat Gpt facility can be trained to help in this area and we understand that all Norad staff are being offered training in this.

### Step d1

**Refresh the cross-departmental Communications strategy for external communications, drawing on learning from other aid agencies with big Ukraine programmes.** The strategy could cover the purpose for public communications (in terms of results reporting and accountability), and consider: the frequency, content (including more continuous narratives alongside 'hot facts'), channels for different audience segments, format and media (word, image, video).

### Step d2

**Develop optimal formats, style and channels for sharing professional advice and knowledge of aid with MFA.** Since part of the challenge for Nansen Department is the time involved in extracting from large data sources the handful of sentences required to provide a timely response to an MFA request, the newly launched Norad ChatGpt AI tool can help to speed this up. It would nevertheless be helpful to establish more clearly with MFA and OPM the style of political communication which is most likely to help insights from Nansen Department to be most useful for MFA. The AI tool can then be trained to craft text in this manner. Improving this communication interface may support Nansen Department to grow its reputation for providing timely 'quick reads' for MFA on issues that Nansen Department believes should matter to MFA.

# Annex

Terms of Reference

# Terms of Reference

## Background

### Norway's support to Ukraine

In response to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Norway established the Nansen Support Programme for Ukraine for the period 2023-2027. There is a political agreement on this multi-year support programme for Ukraine, at NOK 75 billion. The programme encompasses both military and civilian support, with a commitment to clearly separate the two.

The Nansen Support Programme is flexible and long term and based on Ukraine's needs. It encompasses several sectors and areas, including energy supply, nuclear safety, rehabilitation, private sector development, transport, agriculture, democracy and accountability institutions, civil society and humanitarian needs.

Due to the need for coordination and to minimize risks, Norwegian funding is channelled to a large degree to multilateral and international partners with a proven track record. The World Bank's multi-donor trust fund (Ukraine Relief, Recovery, Reconstruction and Reform Trust Fund) has received more than NOK 6 billion to maintain government services through budget support and initiating reconstruction efforts. Other key support measures provided by Norway include: NOK 1.5 billion to secure energy supply and security in Ukraine through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; NOK 50 million to Ukraine to the OECD Country Programme.

Humanitarian assistance is also part of the Nansen Support Programme: In 2023, NOK 2.8 billion were disbursed to Ukraine and neighbouring countries. Norway has a goal to be among the leading humanitarian donors in Ukraine and to the refugee response in neighboring countries, where Moldova is given priority.[9] Moldova also benefits from long-term development assistance in the Nansen Support Programme.

### Real-time evaluation of Norway's civilian support to Ukraine

The Department for Evaluation has a mandate to perform independent evaluations of Norway's development cooperation. Following various consultations, the Department for Evaluation has decided to conduct a real-time evaluation of the ongoing Norwegian civilian support to Ukraine.

[9] Meld. St. 8. 2023-24

Real-time evaluations are dynamic assessment processes that provide timely feedback for ongoing projects and programmes. It is not unusual for a real-time evaluation to include different types of learning loops, including a single-loop learning focusing on aligning commitments with reality, emphasizing corrective actions at the programme implementation level. Moreover, real-time evaluations are characterized by their adaptability in providing timely and contextually relevant information, ensuring that evaluations are immediately applicable and facilitate continuous improvement.[10]

To facilitate adaptability and learning, this real-time evaluation is structured into modules of shorter duration with built-in flexibility. The first of these modules is described in detail in this document.
The real-time evaluation builds on and will benefit from other ongoing studies and evaluations. The Department for Evaluation has recently conducted a rapid literature study of key corruption risks in providing aid to Ukraine and how donors like Norway can mitigate them. Similarly, the Department for Evaluation is engaged in an ongoing joint Nordic evaluation of contributions to trust funds where the Ukraine Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction multi-donor trust fund is one of the case study analyses. Moreover, the internal audit and investigations unit in Norad is conducting an audit of Norad's management of Norway's civilian support to Ukraine. Lessons and findings from all these processes will be considered for this real-time evaluation.

## Overall purpose

The primary purpose of this real-time evaluation is to foster learning and enable Norway to make informed adjustments to its civilian support to Ukraine. The evaluation aims to ensure that efforts funded from the Nansen Support Programme align effectively with the programme's overarching mandate and aid development management principles.

The primary intended user of this evaluation is Norad and in particular the Department for the Nansen Support Programme for Ukraine (herein Nansen department) considering its responsibility for managing the Nansen Support Programme. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs could also potentially use this real-time evaluation due to its role in the policy and strategic development of the Nansen Support Programme. Other potential users include the Norwegian Parliament, Norwegian civil society organisations, Ukrainian and Moldovan government institutions and organisations and other development partners engaged in Ukraine and Moldova, and the general public in Norway.

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[10] For further details, see Rogers, P. (2020). Real-Time Evaluation. Monitoring and Evaluation for Adaptive Management Working Paper Series, Number 4, December. Available at: https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2021/working-paper-real-time-evaluation/

## Evaluation Objective and Questions

The objective of the evaluation is to assess the systems and practices to ensure results of the ongoing Nansen Support Programme, enabling continuous improvement and enhanced results.

The evaluation will address the following questions:

1. **To what extent has the Nansen department established appropriate and efficient systems and practices to track and analyse results of the Norwegian civilian support? What improvements can be made to these systems and practices, including the potential use of automation and innovative approaches?**

   a) How well do these current systems and practices for results tracking respond to key requirements and conditions, such as Norwegian policies, Norad's frameworks, partners' own systems and practices for results tracking and the rapidly changing security landscape and challenges of the war in Ukraine?

   b) To what extent, and how, are results from partners receiving support tracked and analysed?

   c) To what extent, and how, are systematic results tracking and analysis conducted by the Nansen Support Programme at the aggregate and portfolio[11] levels?

   d) To what extent, and how, are systematic assessments conducted on partners' systems and plans for results and results management?

   e) How well do the current systems for result tracking capture unintended results, both positive and negative?

2. **To what extent is the Nansen department following-up on reported progress and results, to ensure main challenges are addressed effectively? What improvements can be made to follow-up systems and practices, including the potential use of automation and innovative approaches?**

[11] A portfolio, in this context, refers to a collection of grants, interventions and initiatives that together contribute to a common set of objectives and have a common underlying logic. See Department for Evaluation (2020). Evaluation of the Norwegian Aid Administration's Approach to Portfolio Management. Report 2 / 2020.

f) How are the results from assessments followed up and used to influence further decisions?

g) In what areas have there been significant deviations to expected results or high risks for lack of results, and how is the department working to address these?

h) What routines have the department established to collaborate efficiently with partners to ensure effective follow-up of results?

The evaluation will provide tailored recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Nansen department's result management systems and practices. The recommendations will also consider the need to manage the burden of reporting on partners, including governmental ministries and agencies. It will offer specific improvements to address identified gaps and leverage best practices, and ensure recommendations are practical and feasible within the programme's operational context.

The evaluation will attempt to facilitate conditions for learning and use by the primary intended user. This will be achieved, for example, by synchronizing the evaluation timeline with existing processes and plans from the Nansen department to the extent possible.

## Scope

While the focus is real-time, the evaluation will look backwards into 2023, when the Nansen separtment in Norad was established and responsibilities for the management of agreements transferred to Norad. In addressing the evaluation objective and questions, the evaluation will consider various factors, including the timeline and context surrounding the transfer of the civilian part of the Nansen Support Programme to Norad. The evaluation is geographically focused on Ukraine. Support to interventions from the Nansen Support Programme in neighboring countries, especially Moldova, will also be considered as appropriate.

The evaluation focuses exclusively on official development assistance funded through the budget of the Norwegian Foreign Affairs (*budsjettområdet 03 Internasjonal bistand*).

## Approach and methodology

The evaluation will begin with identifying relevant standards and good practices on **results-based management and knowledge systems within the development aid sector**. This includes a review of how Norad and other development agencies are managing portfolios or similar types of support, including the use of digital interfaces, and identifying good practices from those. Previous evaluations by the Department for Evaluation, evaluations nearing completion, evaluations by other development actors, and relevant academic research will be considered to identify relevant standards and good practices. Moreover, there will be a focused analysis on how systematic assessments of partners' systems are designed and applied at Norad and other development agencies, ensuring all findings are based on proven methodologies that consider the diverse nature and type of partners.

Furthermore, the desk review may also include a sub-component to map out results-based management systems for development aid used in Ukraine, as well as international collaborative efforts on result management.

A thorough **desk review of project and programme documents** will be the cornerstone of this evaluation. This involves systematically gathering and analyzing existing documentation and reports related to Norway's civilian support to Ukraine, including minutes and reports from bilateral and multi-lateral meetings and discussions with other donors. The desk review will map the current systems, practices, and tools (as P-Dash[12]) used by the Nansen department, providing the backbone for the analysis. In addition, analyses of quantitative data sources will also be carried out as appropriate.

**Interviews with Nansen department staff** will be particularly important in the early stages of the real-time evaluation to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the systems and practices employed. These interviews will be limited in number and take place following the desk review to clarify and expand on initial findings. **Interviews with other informants**, including other Norad staff working with Norad's portfolio approach, MFA officials, partners and subject matter experts, will be used to guide the analysis.

The evaluation will incorporate a **case study approach** to provide in-depth analysis and insights into results management of specific aspects of Norway's civilian support to Ukraine. This may involve selecting specific funding pools, themes, and partners for detailed examination.

**Automated processes**, including AI-driven pipelines, might be employed for the document review and analysis of other data gathered to enhance efficiency and generate new insights. Each use will undergo a thorough assessment to ensure its rigor, validity, effectiveness and safety.

The real-time nature of the evaluation will be reflected in **periodic updates** to the methodology, examining new documents as they come in and re-evaluating the data considering new developments within Norad, the Nansen Support Programme and its partners, or in the country.

[12] «P-dash» is a Power-BI based dashboard including grant agreements and results. The system is in development by Norad.

The evaluation will adhere to the evaluation quality standards and criteria, along with recognized academic and ethical principles. It will be utilization-focused, with processes designed to engage the primary intended users to ensure that the findings are practical and applicable. Regular feedback loops with the Nansen department will be established to facilitate continuous learning and timely adjustments.

## Organisation of the evaluation

The Department for Evaluation in Norad is responsible for the overall management of the evaluation. The evaluation team will report to the Department for Evaluation through the team leader. Given the nature of the evaluation and the necessity for nuanced understanding of Norad's operations and coordination with the Nansen department, the Department for Evaluation in the persons of its project leader and sparring partner is expected to actively contribute to the process and its deliverables. Stakeholders will be invited to contribute throughout the process, including by sending comments on draft deliverables and participating in stakeholder workshops. In addition, experts or other relevant parties may be invited to comment on reports or specific issues during the process.

## Deliverables

The schedule for deliverables may be modified, contingent upon the resource availability in the Department for Evaluation and the operational capacity of the Nansen department. Stakeholder workshops will be organised for selected deliverables. These pre-determined deliverables may be complemented with alternative, more agile forms of knowledge production. This may include infographic, dynamics graphs, dashboards or chatbots.

1. A brief inception report describing, among other things, the approach and suggestions on additions to the predetermined deliverables. The inception report needs to be approved by the Department for Evaluation before proceeding further.

2. A brief note (max. 3,000 words, approx. 6 pages) on key principles and standards in results tracking and results analysis and in assessing partners' systems for results management,

3. An assessment report covering evaluation question 1 not exceeding 5,000 words (approx. 10 pages) excluding summary and annexes.

4. An assessment report covering evaluation question 2 not exceeding 5,000 words (approx. 10 pages) excluding summary and annexes.

5. A summary report covering evaluation questions 1-2 not exceeding 3,000 words (approx. 6 pages).

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