



The Quality of Reviews and Decentralised Evaluations in Norwegian Development Cooperation

Presentation of Findings

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Overview

- Purpose and objectives
- Methodology
- Five messages from the evaluation
- Lessons from other agencies

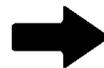
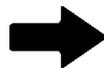
Purpose and objectives

Purpose: contribute to good quality reviews in Norwegian development cooperation.

Objectives:

1. Assess the quality of reviews
2. Examine the use of the review findings
3. Identify factors contributing to quality and use

Methodology



1. Study to map all completed reviews between 2012-2015. Provided foundations for sample

2. An email survey of grant managers to access info on review budgets / teams etc.

3. A quality assessment of 60 reviews and associated TORs conducted in 2014

4. Case studies from five reviews out of the 60 to understand drivers / barrier to quality and use

5. An online survey of staff from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Norad and Norwegian embassies.

Methodology



Reviews were assessed across 6 areas of quality drawn from the OECD-DAC standards:

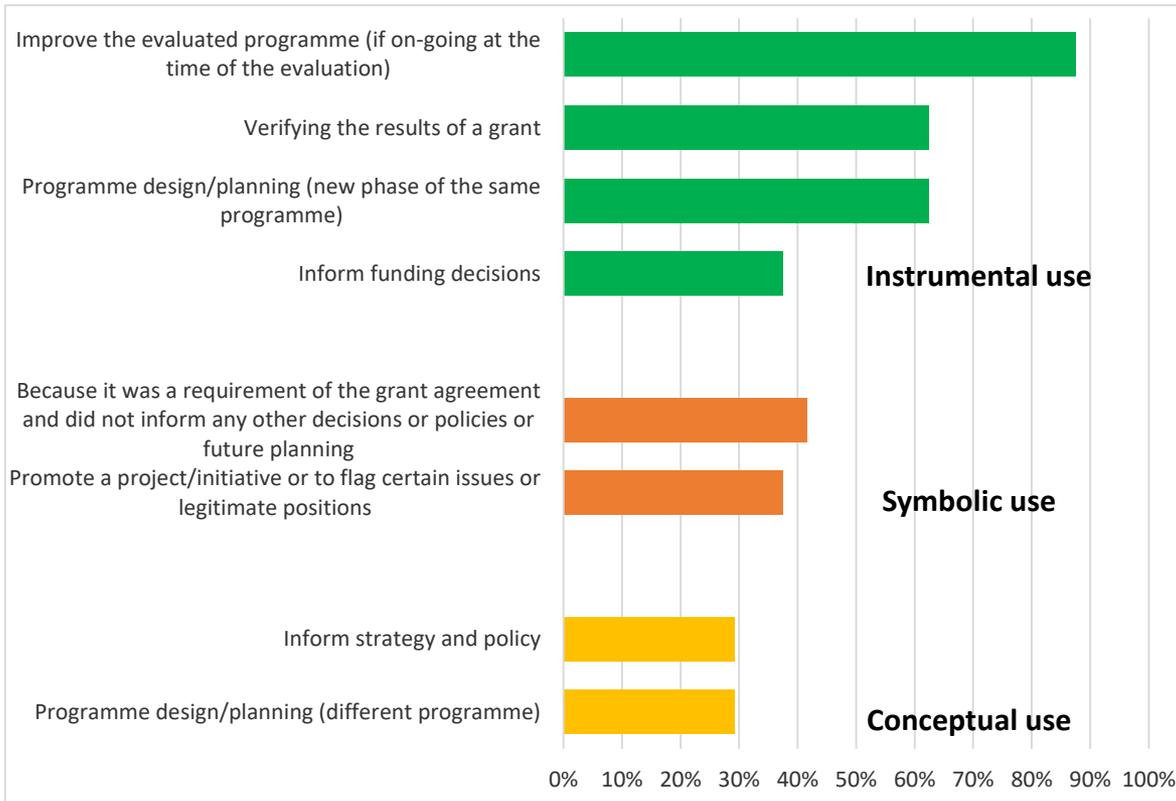
- Report summary and structure
- Review purpose, scope and questions
- Methodology
- Application of the OECD-DAC criteria
- Quality of analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations
- Integrations of cross cutting themes: gender, climate, anti-corruption

Five messages from the evaluation

1. Reviews provide managers with **useful** and **timely management information** on how grants are being implemented.
2. The findings presented in reviews however are **not always sufficiently robust**, so management decisions are being taken based on questionable data.
3. Reviews also tend to focus on documenting activities and outputs, not outcomes, therefore are **not effective instruments for reliably assessing the results** of Norwegian aid.
4. The **ToRs, budget and team composition** are key determinants of review quality and use.
5. Internal systems and **support for designing, managing and sharing learning** from reviews are underdeveloped and are hindering quality and use

1. Reviews are useful and timely

Figure 1: Indication of how survey respondents have used reviews

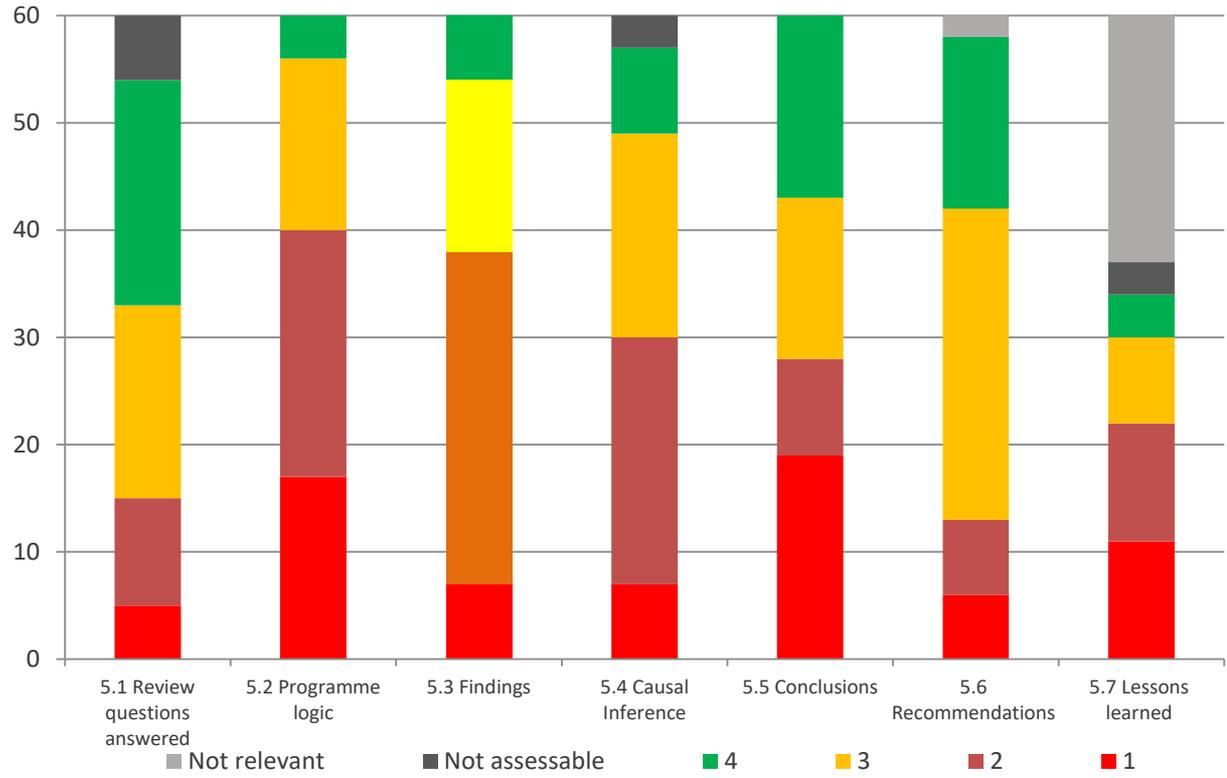


Surveys and 3 case studies indicated that:

- Reviews are **used** among the units that commissioned them
- Reviews are predominantly used in an **instrumental** way, less symbolically and conceptually.
- Reviews generally come at the **right time**, and offer **relevant and realistic** recommendations

2. Review findings are not sufficiently robust

Figure 2: Quality area 5 - quality of analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations

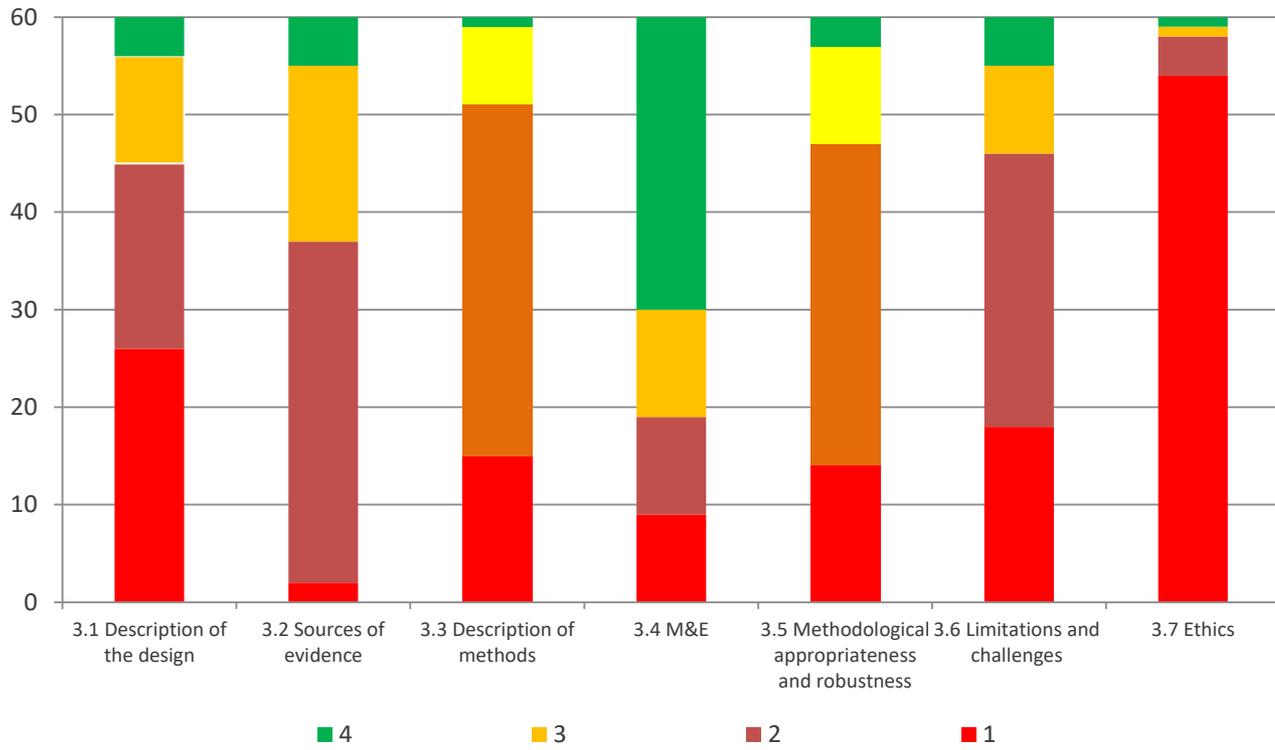


The **quality of the findings** presented in the reviews **was poor**, with 37 reviews rated as a 1 or 2

Weaknesses included: lack of a clear line of evidence, inadequate triangulation and lack of transparency about gaps/limitations in data

2. Review findings are not sufficiently robust

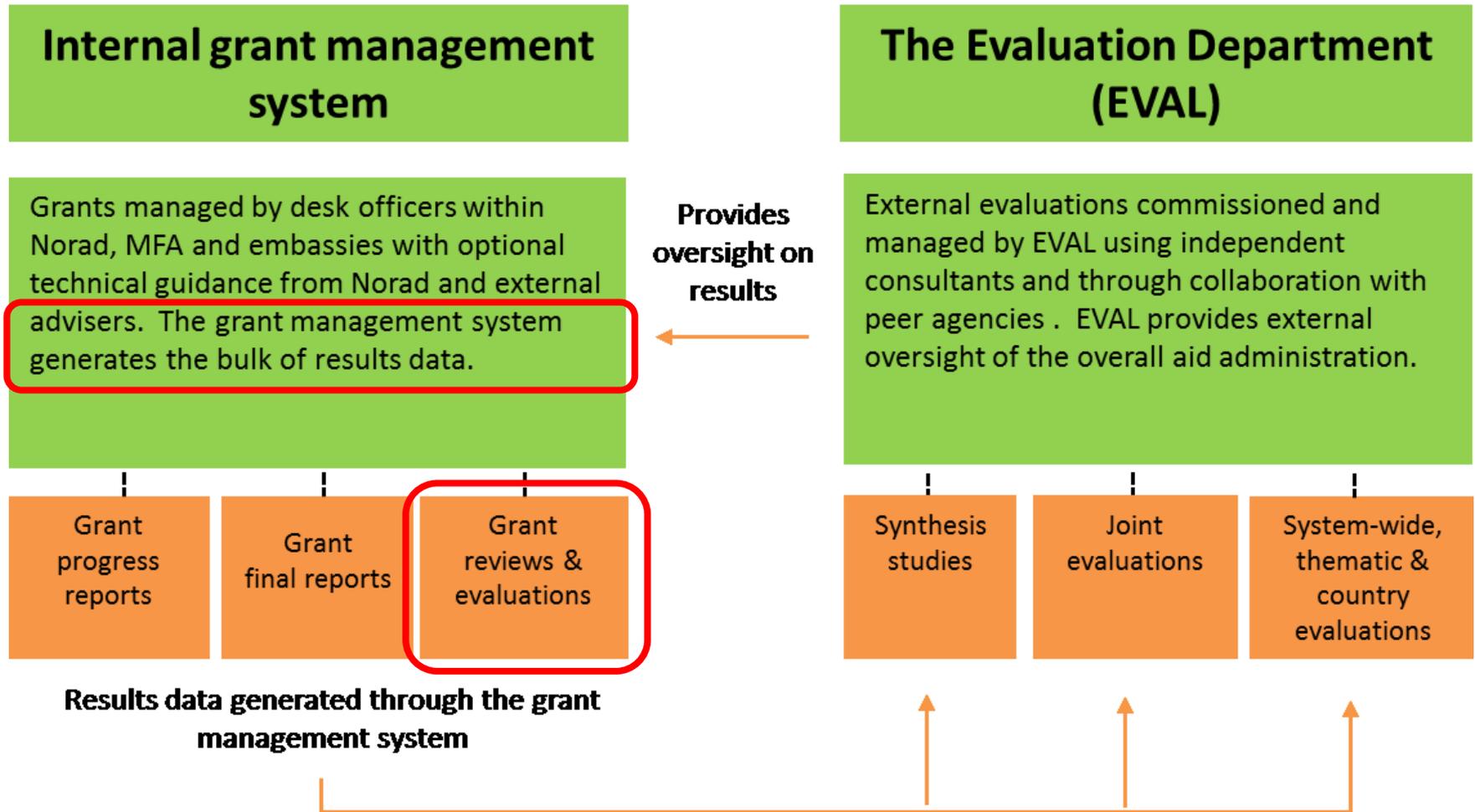
Figure 2: Quality area 3 – methodology



The **quality of the methodology** used in reviews **was poor** with 47 reviews rated a 1 or 2 for the appropriateness and robustness of the methods used.

Also, limited evidence to suggest that staff believe that robust methodology is important to quality.

3. Reviews don't generally demonstrate the results of Norwegian aid



4. ToRs, team and level of resources are key determinants of quality and use



High quality terms of reference were associated with high quality reviews and use



A high caliber team was associated with high quality reviews. Key attributes include: evaluation, context and subject expertise.



Reviews that had more **days allocated (proxy for budget)** were rated higher for quality

5. Inadequate systems to support reviews

- Grant managers do not have access to the necessary tools to conduct high quality reviews
- The Grant Management Manual is the only official source of guidance
- The systems for enabling staff to access review documents have limitations and hinder the wider use of reviews and corporate learning

Learning from other agencies

Reviews and decentralised evaluations tend to have less status than corporate evaluations, yet overall they:

- Amount to a **considerable investment** in resources
- Are often the **basis for significant operational decisions**
- Are often the **foundation for more in-depth evaluations**

Learning from other agencies: how to maximise the value of reviews?

- Developing appropriate systems for quality assurance
- Incentivising a commitment to quality and use
- Embedding use in decision making processes
- Doing fewer reviews, but doing them better
- Integrating reviews into a wider knowledge management system
- Synthesising the lessons across reviews and packaging them for different audiences

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Thank you...

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