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37 Evaluation Report

Mid-term Assessment
Spanish Cooperation
4th Master Plan
2013-2016

Executive summary



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Executive summary

The mid-term assessment of the Spanish Cooperation 4th Master Plan presented here reviews the progress made in 2013 and 2014, the first two years in which the Plan has been in force. As stated in the 4th Master Plan, the objectives of the mid-term assessment are to i) review the progress made in meeting the commitments assumed under the 4th Master Plan by evaluating what was achieved and the alterations made to what was planned, and ii) identify the ongoing challenges to the smooth performance of the 4th Master Plan.

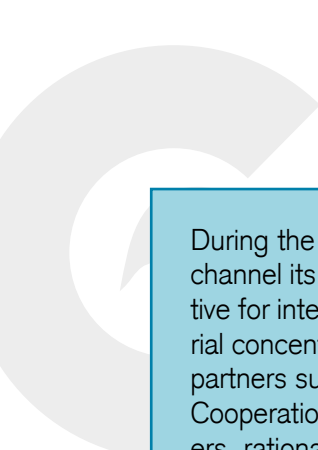
It is necessary to note that a mid-term assessment differs from an evaluation by being an exercise with a lighter methodological process and depth of analysis, closer to monitoring than to an evaluation *per se* and with more emphasis on operational issues. The dimensions of this study were guided by the 10 management results in the 4th Master Plan. The mid-term assessment was carried out between January and March 2015 and consisted of reviewing and analysing more than 100 documents produced by different Spanish Cooperation and international stakeholders, conducting individual or group interviews with 55 Spanish Cooperation stakeholders, a group dynamics session with 12 members of the Efficiency and Quality Working Group of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation and the General Secretariat for International Development Cooperation (Spanish initials, AECID-SGCID) and an online survey of the 17 Autonomous Communities and 2 Autonomous Cities with a response rate of 58%.

The major findings that emerged from this process were:

- Despite the drop in the relative weight of its official development aid (ODA) in recent years (down approximately 44% from 2011), **Spanish Cooperation has been able to maintain its presence and high profile in important international debates** (the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Development Funding Agenda, EU Development Agenda and Aid Effectiveness Agenda, among others) in a rapidly changing international context poised between the final years of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the definition of a new post-2015 international agenda.
- **Spanish Cooperation has made progress in these two years toward geographical concentration but it needs to improve the visibility of all the countries with which it is working by defining levels for its strategic partnerships and coherently channelling the flow of ODA to the countries chosen.** The mid-term assessment shows that Spanish Cooperation has gone from working in 50 countries to concentrating its aid on 23 partner countries. However, among the countries no longer prioritised, work is being done in 12 so-called “non-partner” countries through New Generation Agreements in Latin America and the Caribbean and redesigned country programmes in Africa. Therefore, Spanish Cooperation is currently working bilaterally, although with differing intensity, in 35 countries, either through Country Partnership Frameworks (CPF), New Generation Agreements or redesigned regional or thematic programmes. At the regional level, there is a lack of clarity as to what it is involved in working with differentiated approaches.
- However, **it has not been possible to gather evidence that phasing out and redesign of country programmes has always followed a structured process discussed with and approved by the partners, at the level of all the stakeholders involved.** Some processes are better documented than others and there are phasing out countries in which country offices -Technical Cooperation Offices (TCO)- have remained open while the programmes under implementation are completed. However, evidence has not been found to demonstrate that Spanish Cooperation has put forward common procedures for a gradual, sustainable withdrawal process, which would include the steps in a process to be discussed with and approved by the partner countries and other stakeholders. In the case of AECID, the proposed decision on closure or redesign basically fell to the geographical Directorates. In Latin America and the Caribbean it seems that the tendency has been to redesign programmes so as to continue the presence of Spanish Cooperation, while in Africa and Asia the gradual closure of country programmes has predominated.

- **In these two years, there has been a focus on planning, mainly at country level. A management system on the overall development results to which Spanish Cooperation wishes to contribute is still lacking and needs to be defined and set up.** Therefore, although the 4th Master Plan is more responsive and realistic than preceding plans and sets some general strategic guidelines and action lines so as to focus the efforts, it does not make clear the overall development results to which Spanish Cooperation aims to contribute. The definition of development results has been left for a second stage, after results have been formulated at the country level in the Country Partnership Frameworks (CPF) in dialogue with the partner countries. After having signed CPFs with most of its partner countries, Spanish Cooperation is currently working on an integrated development results monitoring system in bilateral cooperation, but, like other donors, it is still facing the challenge of providing itself with an overall system that allows a broader identification of its results.
- Having said this, in the first two years of the Master Plan, **progress has been made in strategic planning with the implementation of Country Partnership Frameworks in 78% of the partner countries.** CPF processes have fostered the participation of the Spanish Cooperation stakeholders and led to a better knowledge of who does what in each country. The focus on strategic guidelines is seen as a progress in terms of intersectorality, but it presents challenges when adapting the traditional sector-oriented cooperation model that has ruled Spanish Cooperation to date. In addition, the application of the planning and monitoring mechanisms proposed in the CPFs (which are development results-oriented) is limited by the continuing existence in Spanish Cooperation of certain unfit administrative aid procedures and instruments.
- In regard to the commitment to concentrate on multilateral aid, **modest progress has been made in the effectiveness and selectivity of Spanish multilateral cooperation.** The multilateral aid organizations prioritisation process and the signing of Strategic Partnership Frameworks (SPF) with UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA began during this period but have not ended yet. ODA data for 2013 does not show any clear trend towards reducing the number of multilateral aid organizations Spanish Cooperation works with.
- In a context of economic restrictions, **Spanish Cooperation has been able to balance its shrinking bilateral aid budget by diversifying its portfolio of cooperation methods, with an obvious boost to reimbursable financial cooperation through FONPRODE and greater efforts in delegated and triangular cooperation.** However, there is a lack of reflection on and systematisation of the way in which the different modalities and instruments available serve the development goals set, at least at the CPF level.
- During these years, **steps have been taken to improve knowledge management and uptake the lessons learned in the actions of Spanish Cooperation.** The next two years will be vital for consolidating these achievements. Many evaluations have been produced, thereby meeting most of the commitments made and promoting a culture of evaluation in Spanish Cooperation. In general, the integration of the info@od tool has been positively valued, since it means progress in communicating and making information available to Spanish Cooperation stakeholders and in helping to make the criteria for classification more homogeneous and thereby improving their quality. Some positive progress is being made in creating spaces for dialogue and promoting the exchange of experiences, although these are in a too embryonic stage to evaluate their contribution to generating a knowledge- and learning-based working culture, which will in any case require more time to be built and consolidated.
- In these two years, **significant efforts have been made to increase transparency in terms of dissemination of information.** However, it is necessary to promote transparency in terms of information about processes and more accountability about the results achieved.
- In addition, **messages from Spanish Cooperation to the general public have improved. However, the construction of a global citizenship committed to human development requires more resources and better coordination among the different stakeholders.** In regard to improving quality, the comprehensibility and accessibility of Spanish Cooperation's messages to the general public highlight the efforts made to improve its institutional communication as an entity with its own identity.

- **Steps are also being taken to improve Education for Development actions in AECID and SGCID, and an effort is being made to have better coordination between the different stakeholders.** Nevertheless, there has been a substantial decrease in the subsidies to NGOs (non-governmental developmental organisations) and the announcements of these subsidies are limiting the field of action to objectives dealing with “Education for Cooperation” rather than Education for Development, if we understand the latter as an educational process of social transformation towards a global citizenship.
- **The significant reduction in the humanitarian action budget does not match with its importance in the Master Plan.** The period 2013-2014 was characterised by drastic cuts in funding for humanitarian actions, with an 84% drop in the funds disbursed through the Humanitarian Action Office (Spanish initials. OAH) between 2011 and 2013. Royal Decree 342/2012 of 10 February makes no reference to humanitarian action when it defines the powers of the State Secretariat for International Cooperation and for Ibero-America (Spanish initials, SECIP) and SGCID, so that in practice, in the absence of leadership by SGCID on humanitarian policy issues, it is AECID-OAH that assumes the strategic orientation and dialogue on Spanish Cooperation's humanitarian policy.
- **Progress has been made on bringing Spanish Cooperation stakeholders together, but an overall vision linked to the comparative advantages of each of them in order to better reach the goals of the 4th Master Plan is still lacking.** Although Spanish Cooperation claims to encompass all the stakeholders, it is not a single stakeholder itself, nor do all the stakeholders have the same involvement. At the operational level, there is considerable reliance on two bodies: SGCID and AECID, both at headquarters and country level. With regard to other stakeholders, some progress has been made on improving coordination and complementarity (Action Framework Agreements with the Autonomous Communities and relation with the business sector) but these are very much restricted to exchanging information and experiences. No clear definition of the value added and comparative advantages each of them offers in order to fulfil the goals set in the Master Plan. On the other hand, although processes have been implemented to move towards greater policy coherence for development, it is necessary to promote greater clarity in what this means and more involvement by all the Spanish Cooperation stakeholders and all the Public Administrations that do not provide ODA is needed.
- **The adaptation of the institutional capacities of Spanish Cooperation is being hindered by the lack of a needs assessment, the inertia of the system itself and budgetary difficulties.** In 2013 – 2014 the net ODA disbursed was approximately 23% less than the figure given in the 4th Master Plan (€2.3 billion per annum). In the case of AECID, the drop in budget resources (-70% between 2011 and 2013), staff reductions and strong pressure for cost control in recent years have led to a very difficult situation in which there is a limited capacity to respond to the need for institutional adaptation. The mismatch between the demands of complying with administrative procedures and the objectives of bringing effectiveness and quality to the different modalities by which aid is channelled continues. Faced with the increasing diversification and complexity of development cooperation, inefficiencies between administrative instruments and aid modalities may tend to grow. There continues to be an organisational structure and culture that hinder the exchange of experiences, critical reflection and the uptake at the institutional level of lessons learned. Instead, a working dynamic of compartmentalisation, institutional memory loss and repeated processes is in place, with, in the end, high transaction costs.
- During these years, **AECID has bolstered training but it lacks a human resources policy that fits the objectives of results-oriented management.** An effort has been made to improve technical training offered by AECID in-class and online, both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, there is still not enough staff in some departments, there is a lack of correlation between professional skills and technical needs, and methods for hiring and structuring the existing staff are not fit for purpose.



During the first two years of the 4th Master Plan (2013-2016), Spanish Cooperation has been able to channel its efforts into **redesigning** its profile in an economic context that has been particularly restrictive for international cooperation and for Spain. Considerable progress made in geographical and sectorial concentration, as well as the use of new types of aid to maintain a relevant relation with its strategic partners support this argument. The crisis has also offered an opportunity to tackle aspects of Spanish Cooperation that traditionally have been left pending, such as more coordination between stakeholders, rationalising its spending, planning, fostering a culture of evaluation and greater transparency and the necessary improvement of **accountability**. All these aspects have evolved positively, within the **realism** imposed by the economic situation. Similarly, during these two years, Spain has continued to be present in fora and debates on the International Development Agenda as a significant stakeholder.

But there are topics still to be tackled. In spite of the progress, Spanish Cooperation should make sure that it has a solid, longer term vision that more clearly sets out the development **results** to which it wishes to contribute overall, linked to its capabilities and its value added. In these two years, Spanish Cooperation has focused its attention on planning at the country level (through CPFs), following the ownership principle. However, to be able to move forward to a greater policy coherence from a shared vision, to focus decision-making more strategically on the different modalities and ways of channelling aid, and to adjust its capacities, Spanish Cooperation needs to define more specifically the development results to which Spanish cooperation policy wishes to contribute and to make the necessary differentiation demanded by the different contexts of action. These years have also shown that there is a growing mismatch between the institutional and technical instruments, methods and capabilities of the Spanish Cooperation system and the challenges posed by development today. This weakness is known and some measures are being adopted, but to face up to this situation structural changes are necessary that not only involve the traditional stakeholders in Spanish Cooperation but can only be tackled with a strong political will. In any case, they will require more time before they can be built and consolidated.



Full report and other related documents in:

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