Security and Rule of Law review contributes to better research funding

The recently finalised research programme on Security and Rule of Law aimed to enhance the knowledge-base of security and rule of law policies and intervention programmes in fragile and conflict-affected settings, in order to improve their effectiveness. The programme has been reviewed to improve future research programming. In this document, NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development reflects on the Ecorys findings and mentions learning points.

>> EVALUATION REPORT

Ecorys reviewed the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) research programme on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency to contribute to future research programming. The four areas that were beheld of great importance were: collaboration and roles, research for impact and research fairness, guidance and communication to projects, and selection procedures.

The performance of the programme was assessed from multiple angles: the performance of WOTRO Science for Global Development and the granted projects in itself, but also the collaboration between NWO-WOTRO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL). NWO-WOTRO facilitates the research component within the Knowledge Platforms of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Research for impact and research fairness

NWO-WOTRO has developed multiple methods to enhance impact and to foster equal partnerships. For instance organising kick-off workshops (on project or programme level), consortium composition (transdisciplinary teams), a programme knowledge brokering trajectory, and site-visit evaluation and guidance. Unfortunately, these were hardly implemented in the SRoL programme due to the need for quick results. Some projects were so short, around six months, that they put pressure on co-creation and equal partnerships. Funding fewer projects with a longer time-span allows focusing on strengthening coherence between projects, and ensuring the harvesting of intermediate results to be able to respond to demands from both policy and practice stakeholders.

>> Longer-term projects with intermediate results respond better to short-term knowledge needs

In this programme, there should have been more clarity about who’s needs should be addressed and more extensive co-creation activities on different levels when the programme was set-up. When talking about impact, it must also be clear to whom the research should be relevant and who’s questions should be answered.

>> Defining the knowledge needs should be in a process of co-creation
Guidance and communication to projects
In the programme, there has been little time and resources to offer guidance to the research projects. Co-creation, knowledge sharing, and equal partnership can improve with activities on programme level and more focused communication and support on project level. This should be made clear from the start (in the calls for proposals) so that consortia applying for the research funds are fully aware of the responsibilities and expectations they will be taking on.

>> Guidance is needed to amplify the process of co-creation and knowledge sharing, and equal partnerships

Selection procedures
The selection procedure designed and implemented by NWO-WOTRO was found to be transparent and fair. However, the length and complexity of the process conflicted with the needs of the donor organisation for fast, applicable research. For future programmes NWO-WOTRO assess whether newly developed selection methods fit with the objectives of a programme.

>> selection procedures should fit the needs of donor organisations

Collaboration and roles
Over the years, there has been a notable improvement in the collaboration between NWO-WOTRO, KPSRL and the MFA. The evaluation is critical about the start, since they started off with a lack of formal contractual arrangements, absence of a clear division of roles and responsibilities and a lack of a dedicated pool of funds for knowledge uptake and dissemination.

>> start with clear arrangements on the collaboration

Just like in research consortia, time and effort should have been invested in building the tripartite partnership. Solid agreements on communication and processes are crucial for the execution of a thematic programme with multiple parties involved. But the collaboration improved over time. For instance, a joint “plan for impact” was developed for the last call for proposals, which resulted in more and stronger mutual activities on knowledge sharing, which was also appreciated by the projects.

>> invest in building a relationship from the start

A way forward
NWO-WOTRO has a history in evaluating programmes, with the aim to improve its research programming. All programmes following from the priority policy areas of Dutch development cooperation and executed in partnership with a knowledge platform, will be evaluated for extensive critical reflection. Some insights were already implemented in the final call for proposals of SRoL.
The Security & Rule of Law (SRoL) research programme

The SRoL research programme started in 2013, and is managed by NWO-WOTRO. The programme is part of the Knowledge for Development Policy of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL) formulated the research agenda for the SRoL research programme. The research programme used a combined approach of knowledge development and application thereof by funding both strategic and applied research.

Based on the needs identified by the KPSRL in the research agenda, NWO-WOTRO developed two funding modalities within the SRoL programme:

- The Applied Research Fund (ARF). This fund aims to bridge the gap between policies for Security & Rule of Law and the implementation thereof in LMICs;
- The Strategic Research Fund (SRF). This fund aims to enhance the academic basis and underlying assumptions of policy theories and intervention logic of development actors in the area of Security & Rule of Law.

Within these two funds, eight calls for proposals have been developed (six calls for applied research, two calls for strategic research) each focusing on a research theme as identified by the KPSRL.

After the first calls within ARF and SRF were launched, changes were made with regard to both funds. The changes to the Applied Research Fund were quite extensive: On request of the MFA and the KPSRL, NWO-WOTRO agreed to fund more, shorter and smaller research projects. As result of the shorter timeframe it was decided to ease some criteria and change some characteristics. This new set up came with challenges and lessons learned, which can also be read from conclusions and the recommendations in the review.

More information: [www.nwo.nl/srol](http://www.nwo.nl/srol)