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**Results-Oriented Monitoring of EC  
External Assistance**

**Uses and Scope of ROM: suitability of  
ROM information to draw overall  
qualitative conclusions on the EC  
Development Aid Portfolio**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In May 1999 the Council of the European Union invited the European Commission (EC) to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and transparency. One of the actions implementing these recommendations was the creation of the *Results-Oriented Monitoring* system (ROM).

Since its inception phase, the EC has endeavoured to define a system, a methodology and a set of guidelines that would enable the collection of quality results-oriented data, analysis and management recommendations. The gradual refinements and improvements of the methodology have mainly focused on the role of ROM as a flexible and quick tool to inform and improve the management of projects/programmes at individual level.

Even though originally designed to provide support to individual projects/programmes, the fact that ROM includes a certain degree of uniformity in its approach and format across the board allows a degree of comparability among different interventions at a scale that is currently not possible through any other evaluation tool within the EC. The comparability of ROM, together with its exceptionally comprehensive coverage<sup>1</sup> calls for an analysis to investigate whether the ROM information could be used not only for individual project management, but also to draw overall conclusions or lessons learnt on the EC Development Co-operation portfolio at large and how.

The present paper is associated to the main research study “Causes underlying Effectiveness and Impact of EC Development Projects. Qualitative study based on ongoing and ex post ROM reports (2005-2007)”.

## 2. MAIN AIMS OF THE DOCUMENT

The exceptional abundance of information provided by ROM and its degree of comparability apparently creates a golden opportunity to acquire a better comprehension of the EC Development Co-operation portfolio; however, in the absence of a robust methodology and a careful treatment of the information, the very same desire that inspires the quest for a better comprehension, entails a high risk of producing conclusions with the appearance of constituting robust knowledge based on a scientific approach, when they are just intuitive belief. The present paper aims to understand and separate the different degrees of knowledge that the ROM system may provide at aggregate level on the EC Development Aid portfolio.

In general, the present document wishes to contribute to a better understanding of the opportunities and limitations offered by the ROM information vis-à-vis drawing overall conclusions or lessons learnt on the EC Development Co-operation portfolio at large.

## 3. BASIC METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND SAMPLE

The main methodological aspects concerning the present document are as follows:

- a) The researchers analysed 301 Monitoring Reports, representing 171 projects. All of them were read in their full content to find and analyse the information that would enable answering the research question.
- b) A specific column on *the suitability of ROM information to draw overall qualitative conclusions on the EC Development Aid portfolio* was created. This made possible entering

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<sup>1</sup> In the past few years, ROM has covered every region and almost every country falling under the Commission's external co-operation activities, annually providing approximately 1,600 reports on 1,400 projects and programmes with a total value of almost 10 billion Euro.

qualitative information and comments on this specific aspect while the monitoring reports were being read and then enabled the retrieval of this information for an aggregate analysis.

c) The conclusions and lessons gathered in the present document are based on the comments and observations contained in each of the 310 reports analysed and on qualitative observations made on these reports both individually and as a group.

#### **4. USES AND SCOPE OF ROM: SUITABILITY OF ROM INFORMATION TO DRAW OVERALL QUALITATIVE CONCLUSIONS ON THE EC DEVELOPMENT AID PORTFOLIO**

##### **4.1. IS ROM INFORMATION SUITABLE TO DRAW OVERALL QUALITATIVE CONCLUSIONS ON THE EC PORTFOLIO?**

We did not want to take for granted that a tool that was basically designed and developed to analyse and support projects at individual level could necessarily be used at aggregate level to extract overall conclusions. In consequence, we asked ourselves: beyond the original use of ROM information for individual project management, would it be possible to also use ROM information to draw overall conclusions or lessons learnt on the EC Development Co-operation portfolio at large? This main question was related to a number of uncertainties that could not be solved before undertaking a research, such as: will ROM information show causality relations? If so, how to aggregate them? What would be the level of causality? Will we find information on all the variables that are interesting so as to extract overall conclusions? How to separate anecdotal aspects affecting only a few projects from patterns that explain most interventions? etc.

The different trials and tests undertaken in the drafting of the core study give an answer to these questions and prove that **the ROM system may be applied as a tool to analyse aggregate information and to draw overall qualitative conclusions** on the EC development portfolio given **two pre-requisites**:

Firstly, the analysis should go beyond the numerical focus based on scores and incorporate a qualitative analysis of the information contained in monitoring reports (for details see *Methodological basis for the study and guidelines for future qualitative studies*).

Secondly, the analysis should only include finished interventions<sup>2</sup> as opposed to interventions that are still unfinished. This emphasises the key added value of the Ex-post ROM in enabling overall analyses of the EC portfolio.

In fact, the study shows the advantages of the versatility offered by ROM thanks to the various approaches and perspectives it incorporates. Ex-post monitoring has a distinct added value in aggregate portfolio analysis whereas the added value of on-going monitoring lies in its use as a management tool at individual project level. Re-monitoring exercises capture

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<sup>2</sup> See the document “*Methodological basis for the study and guidelines for future qualitative studies*”: 1. A prerequisite for understanding causality is to be able to assign causes to effects, which is only possible with finished projects. 2. The focus of the study is not on identifying a list of causes, but rather on separating circumstantial causes from determining causes. This can only be judged in finished interventions. Ongoing reports assess a moment in time, not the overall performance of a project. 3. Adaptation is a crucial variable that would be lost without an end-project focus. 4. Unfinished projects include *prospects for impact*, a concept that is not comparable with *real impact* at the project’s end. 5. The “rotten apple” effect of mixing circumstantial effects with final effects would render the whole set of data invalid, thereby hampering the extraction of overall conclusions.

dynamic information that may be used at both individual intervention and aggregate portfolio levels.

#### **4.2. IS IT NECESSARY TO DEVISE A SPECIFIC METHODOLOGY FOR AN AGGREGATE ANALYSIS OF ROM INFORMATION?**

The ROM information can be aggregated following many different ways. However, a non-rigorous treatment of the information may mislead the reader into interpreting as well-proven facts based on a robust and scientific approach conclusions that are just intuitive impressions.

Consequently, a strict methodology to approach the aggregate analysis is paramount. If the aggregate analysis aims at focusing on qualitative findings and causal relations, two principles are indispensable:

1. An emphasis on the quantitative significance of the qualitative findings, to ensure that overall conclusions on the portfolio can be drawn. For example, and in order to ensure the maximum representativeness of the findings, the present research used only variables that appeared in a very abundant number of projects<sup>3</sup>. Other aspects of interest for which information was not sufficiently abundant were also analysed to acquire a full understanding of performance; however, these were not included in the study's main body of analysis and conclusions so as to avoid anecdotal distortions.
2. The mitigation of the researchers' bias by way of specific methodological tools. A comprehensive and detailed description of the methodological process that supports the findings and conclusions of the study is included in the stand-alone document "Methodological basis for the study and guidelines for future qualitative studies". The creation of this methodological basis is documented in a way that facilitates its future use as the basis for answering other possible EC research questions at global scale based on ROM information.

#### **4.3. SCOPE OF ROM TO ANALYSE CAUSALITY: THE COMPLEMENTARITIES BETWEEN EVALUATIONS AND ROM**

The focus of monitoring visits is on primary level cause-effect relations. ROM missions and reports are meant to be fast, short and focused on providing a quick information source and support for the project management. ROM can capture immediate causes, but would not aim at variables that belong to deeper causality relations that are the exclusive object of evaluations or aggregate studies. In other words: we observe that monitoring reports tend to capture primary causal relations of the type "Poor or Good Performance is caused by X", but it is rare to find deeper causal relations<sup>4</sup> of the type "Poor or Good Performance is caused by X, which ultimately stems from Y & Z". Therefore ROM cannot substitute the function of evaluations identifying in-depth causality relationships.

Conversely, ROM's broad coverage and comparability cannot be matched by the limited quantitative coverage or comparability of evaluations. Indeed, the higher cost of an evaluation makes these exercises less abundant than ROM missions; additionally, the results of an

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<sup>3</sup> The thresholds and benchmarks used for this purpose are explained in detailed in the Methodology.

<sup>4</sup> The present research study used exclusively Monitoring Reports and not Background Conclusion Sheets (BCS), as they were not available for all geographical lots. A study based on BCS would probably offer a higher detail in causality (but less clarity on what causes are crucial, and which ones anecdotal). Even using BCS the depth of causality cannot be compared to that of an evaluation.

evaluation are much more difficult to compare or aggregate than ROM results given the lesser uniformity of the former.

It can therefore be concluded that ROM and evaluations are highly complementary rather than substitutive tools. The opportunities for combination of the two tools are multiple. For example, the research study points at an obvious opportunity: ROM aggregate analysis allows identifying crucial issues for the portfolio, but the scope to analyse their in-depth causality through ROM information is limited. These identified issues could be examined in depth by an ad hoc evaluation. The combination between qualitative studies encompassing a large quantity of ROM reports, with well directed evaluations ensuing from the conclusions of a qualitative study are a field yet to be explored and exploited.

#### **4.4. ROM: THE ROLE AND CONSEQUENCES OF SUBJECTIVITY**

Subjectivity is unavoidable in any form of monitoring or evaluation. In this regard, the goal of any methodology or set of guidelines would not be to achieve full objectivity, but to ensure as much as possible that subjectivity is minimized so as to achieve what we can call “an acceptable degree of subjectivity”, i.e. a degree of subjectivity that does not spoil the usefulness of the information for management, accountability or learning purposes.

The research has identified four recurrent sources of “excessive subjectivity” that could be prevented through a reasonable effort by the different actors involved (see below “suggestions for improvement”). These are the following:

##### **4.4.1. The widespread absence of Results-Oriented Monitoring Systems (P-ROMS) and its decisive effect on subjectivity**

The quality, accuracy and objectivity of the information retrieved through ROM and through evaluations is adversely affected by the widespread absence of appropriate Results-Oriented Monitoring Systems (P-ROMS) at intervention level. The study shows how the absence of P-ROMS is a characteristic of EC projects in general. This is accompanied by a general inexistence of baselines, which makes it impossible to measure real impact.

The repercussions of this absence in aspects such as project performance, accountability, visibility and learning capacity are treated in the study; here we only focus on the negative consequences of said absence on the accurateness and robustness of the findings provided by ROM. Indeed, the lack of P-ROMS at project level frustrates the attempts made by monitors to assess on objective grounds the project effects and its consequences. In simple terms, the more inadequate P-ROMS are, the more subjective the assessments carried out by ROM monitors are, as the monitors depend on the presence of a minimum basis of information in the project. This not only affects the project at individual level, but it also reduces the quality and reliability of the raw information needed to undertake overall research or aggregate analyses of the EC Development Aid portfolio.

For example, a close qualitative analysis of the good performers reveals that in 69% of the good performers analysed, the “a” rating in *effectiveness* is not justified against targets or Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs). The lack of justification for “a” ratings in the *impact* criterion reaches 75% (a much higher unjustified proportion than “d” ratings”). This element explains to a certain extent why the proportion of good performers is much higher than the proportion of poor performers in the sample analysed, and creates distortions. It must be noted that, while affecting the ratings, this particular error does not affect a qualitative analysis based on the full reading of the reports. Conversely, a report that in the absence of clear references (P-ROMS/ OVIs) mistakenly concludes that a project is yielding high impact when its actual effect on the beneficiaries is negligible, constitutes a much more serious risk (regardless of the rating).

Finally, it is worth adding that the lack of P-ROMS not only affects ROM, but it equally increases subjectivity and hinders the accuracy and depth of evaluations<sup>5</sup>.

#### **4.4.2. The absence of a common ratings yardstick and its effects on comparability**

The research also provides many examples of ratings that, even though well justified, are nonetheless “differently” justified, which makes comparability difficult. A typical justification difference stems from the difference in project contexts. When projects are located under extreme external conditions (war, natural calamities, etc) monitors tend to “internalise” those external conditions into the assessment and rating. This can be illustrated by formulas similar to the following “...impact is excellent (“a” rating) given the extremely difficult situation and the fact there are external elements outside the control of project that difficult the attainment of the Overall Objective...”. As a result of this “internalisation” of the context, a project with objectively limited impact may be positively assessed and rated, and another project with a similar degree of objective impact, but without the same external difficulties, may be rated negatively. The same effect is typically found in projects that, in spite of an overall poor performance, are rated positively thanks to an excellent performance in the last period of implementation (even though overall performance is still limited). These discrepancies have no particular significance for individual projects, as the project is mainly interested in itself and its improvement. However, the consequence for aggregate analyses is the difficulty of comparability in the absence of a common yardstick.

#### **4.4.3. The weight of speculation on comparability**

The qualitative analysis shows a significant number of projects in which the monitor does not assess reality *as it is*, but *as it would be provided certain factors take place*. The presence of speculative assessments constitutes an important obstacle for comparability and aggregate analysis. Speculative assessment may originate in some occasions in the lack of rigour of a given monitor as what should be the reference of analysis. However, it is worth noting that speculative assessment is officially endorsed by the ROM methodology in Ongoing monitoring (not in Ex-post monitoring) for the criteria *Impact* and *Sustainability*, which are specifically assessed as *Impact prospects* and *Potential sustainability* respectively. A primary conclusion is that whereas this methodological endorsement may have its advantages in the framework of ROM taken as a tool to support individual project management, it automatically rules out the possibility of comparability in ratings for these two criteria, as it is impossible to measure the degree of speculation (probably much higher at the start of a project) or the rationale of such speculation in different monitors with different backgrounds.

This *speculation factor* does not affect Ex-post projects, at least not from the point of view of the official ROM methodology, as the monitors are mandated to assess *Impact to date* and *Sustainability to date*. The final conclusion is that Ex-post reports allow comparability for these two criteria, whereas Ongoing information on the same two criteria should be treated as heterogeneous and, more importantly, as a complete different material and non-comparable for aggregation purposes.

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<sup>5</sup> The lack of P-ROMS hinders the possibility of placing high demands on evaluations given that most of the necessary data that should have been previously collected by the P-ROMS will not be available. As a result, evaluators spend a large part of their valuable and costly time doing routine data collection work, which not is only inefficient at evaluation time, but also detracts time and analysis scope from the evaluation. The presence of P-ROMS would enable the establishment of much more demanding Terms of Reference for evaluations, bringing them to a complete different level of depth, and allowing more precise and accurate answers on the key questions that need to be understood.



#### 4.4.4. Causality and reports that do not allow extrapolation

The research undertaken had a focus on causality. Understanding the “why” and the “how” behind *impact* and *sustainability* at a global level so as to draw global conclusions and lessons learnt. Among all the reports examined there were three kinds of reports that could not be used to understand causality at an aggregate level.

- Descriptive reports that, for example, state high impact or sustainability, but don't explain what caused<sup>6</sup> this success or how it happened.
- Highly technical reports that do not explain success against planned objectives, but instead provide a technical description of the effects produced by the project. Whereas those in the know understand the transcendence of those technical effects, it is not possible for somebody not familiar with the project to know which effects are important and which not and why.
- Finally, there are reports with a causality path so intimately linked to a specific local situation that they cannot be generalised or extrapolated. The information coming from these reports cannot be used for lessons learnt or to extract general conclusions and cannot be aggregated to the information coming from other reports.

#### 4.5. TREATMENT OF THE ABSENCE OF INFORMATION

In the ROM methodology, even though monitors are expected to consider a certain amount of pre-determined analysis issues, they still keep a high degree of discretion to decide what aspects of the analysis deserve to be included in the Monitoring report and which ones are less relevant (may be altogether omitted or included as background information in the BCS). This means that, within certain limits imposed by the methodology, monitors do not comment on every possible aspect in the reduced space offered by a Monitoring Report, but only on those elements that are deemed to deserve the highest priority in view of the needs of the project. This degree of flexibility can be very useful at individual project level. For example, it liberates the Task Managers from reading irrelevant information that could have been useful for other kind of projects but it is not for the specific project they are managing. Not only the Task Managers are benefitted with better targeted reports for their needs, but the monitors also know that they can use their (limited) time in the field to explore more profoundly those aspects that are considered more relevant for the specific situation of the project, instead of having to comply with a fix checklist that would force them to consume the limited time uniformly among elements that may be of secondary importance for the specific project.

However, this same flexibility has an undesired effect when we try to use ROM information at aggregate level. There are aspects that would be highly interesting to understand the portfolio as a whole, but if they were not considered sufficiently interesting for that individual project at the time of reporting, there is no information about them in the reports, neither negative, nor positive. The absence of information in a report is in general terms very difficult to interpret when aggregating information. Many interpretations are possible: we may speculate that the monitor did not write about a given aspect because even if it was noticed it was not considered a priority, or because it was sensitive and it was preferred to deal with it orally, or maybe the monitor did not notice that that aspect was present, etc. In our research we have been meticulous assigning value only to explicit comments of the monitors. In fact, the value of the absent information is different depending on the nature of the variable, which makes difficult if not impossible to assign a general estimated value (it would be necessary to

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<sup>6</sup> A descriptive report may be found in any of the geographical regions; however, TACIS reports tend to be methodologically more descriptive than the rest due to the different role of the reports in the project management in this region.

go variable by variable examining its nature and context). Consequently, when a monitor does not comment on a given aspect, we have followed a restrictive interpretation approach and we have considered that we just don't know what happened without entering in further speculation.

Having said this, there are a few variables for which the absence of information is particularly excessive, surprising or undesirable (as it affects aspects of critical importance for the EC). These variables are: *EC visibility*, *EC procedures* and *EC communication with the project*. The absence of information in these particular variables deserves a separate analysis and we undertake it in order to seek a starting point for improvements in the ROM methodology (see suggestions for improvement below) to reduce the amount of absent information and increase the understanding that enables remedial action when needed.

### ***EC visibility***

The decision to include Visibility as one of the variables on which to collect information and analyse it for the *good performers* was based on the hypothesis that it would produce highly valuable information. The assumption was that, given that we are analysing specially successful projects with high impact, there might be a substantial amount of information and good practices showing how EC Delegations and the EC as a whole capitalised on those successful projects to increase leverage on higher policy and strategic objectives such as political or trade dialogues with Partner Governments, best practices and successful models feeding into donor dialogues, etc. As shown by the data, this assumption did not hold true, as *Visibility* was in fact one of the three variables (among 41 for *good performers*) for which there was less available information. Only 21% of monitors commented on the variable; of this 21%, only 22% said that the EC was capitalising upon its good results with visibility, whereas 78% confirmed that in spite of the good results, the EC was not having any visibility or added benefit in the form of replication, etc.

Why was there so little information on *Visibility* available in the reports? Actually this is rather surprising if we take into account firstly, that we are speaking of especially good projects with many good features to be said about them and secondly, the fact that visibility is a priority area for the EC.

An intuitive explanation for the lack of information in monitoring reports could be that monitors simply decided to omit this aspect in favour of a reflection on other issues. Yet, this is an implausible argument for various reasons. Firstly, monitors are indeed aware of the importance the EC attaches to the extent to which projects contribute to overarching strategic objectives of the EC development policy as these elements are reflected in the BCS. Secondly, monitors do point it out when the EC is not capitalising on impact. It is thus reasonable to infer they would also point it out when the EC does capitalise on impact, even more so when positive assertions generate less resistance than negative judgements. In this regard, the most likely explanation for the absent information pattern observed in the data is that it may correspond, in reality, to projects where impact was not capitalised upon but monitors simply do not mention it. This is further supported by the fact that when monitors comment on *Visibility*, they do so to stress the fact that despite high impact, the EC did not capitalise upon it.

The analysis of aggregate data strongly suggests that the lack of capitalisation upon high impact, even in the case of outstandingly well-performing interventions, is a recurring pattern in the EC portfolio. A detailed reading of the reports also reveals that the lack of systematisation of good practice and successful experiences and the absence of P-ROMS are two recurrent factors impeding capitalisation on high impact.

## ***EC procedures***

EC procedures and their application constitute a horizontal element affecting by definition every EC funded intervention. Seeking potential causalities between EC procedures and project performance, we have examined this variable from different perspectives.

The quantity and depth of the information available in monitor reports for poor performers is limited. There would be in theory two possible reasons for this. One is that monitors did not mention problems with EC procedures simply because there were none. The other is that there were issues but monitors did not point them out. When reading the reports in detail, several indications suggest the latter as a more plausible explanation. Among other observations, it has been noted that when monitors mention problems with EC procedures, they focus on analysing their consequences rather than on their ultimate causes and the ensuing responsibilities. This may be associated with the implicit conflict of interest existing between monitors and the EC. This conflict of interest is two-fold: on the one hand, the prospects of Contractors and Experts to obtain further contracts discourages direct criticism; and on the other hand, the nature of the ROM as a tool for management support gives precedence to a constructive attitude towards remedial action that advises against direct criticism. This contrasts with the ideal situation for the purpose of gaining an aggregate understanding of causality, where a clearly defined criticism would be much more useful to identify overall patterns and remedies.

Additionally, it should be noted that monitors tend not to include comments on EC procedures in Ex-post reports, whereas in ongoing monitoring reports, references to EC procedures are far more common. Indeed, most of the absent information is found in the former, where monitors have less incentive to investigate factors related to past delays in implementation and that are less relevant than direct information on project impact or sustainability.

The main negative effect of the absence of detailed causal information on EC procedures in ROM is the lack of differentiation between problems caused by certain EC procedures, their application by EC Task Managers or their understanding by Implementing Partners. This amalgamation of possible causes hampers a correct understanding of the measures to be taken. (see below suggestions for improvement).

## ***EC communication with the project***

Finally, among the different perspectives of communication, we sought to determine whether the specific communication of the EC with the project and partners showed some causal relation with performance. The research shows that the monitors tend not to comment on the EC attitude specifically and, if they do so, they do not attribute a specific causal relation with *poor performance*. This could be interpreted as a reflection of a reality where poor performance is never related to weak communication on the part of the EC with the projects. However, the repetition of the absence of information pattern in a variable specifically attributing responsibility for poor performance suggests that the reason for the absence of causal information is the reluctance of monitors to point at specific stakeholders as culprits of poor performance and, least of all, at the EC with which an implicit conflict of interest, as explained above, exists. Therefore, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that we do not know if there is a causal relation between the EC levels of communication with its partners and poor performance. The available information for this variable is weak on both quantitative and qualitative levels, impeding a solid aggregate understanding of this variable.

## 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### 5.1. IMPROVEMENT OF THE ROM SYSTEM TO OFFER BETTER INFORMATION FOR AN AGGREGATE OVERVIEW ON THE PORTFOLIO: THE IMPORTANCE OF EX-POST ROM

A good solution to increase the amount of available information for aggregate purposes, without damaging the flexibility needed at individual project level<sup>7</sup> would be to increase the role of Ex-post reports as a tool to gain aggregate overview of the portfolio, leaving the ongoing reports focusing on their roles of support to individual project management. Thus, aspects that are considered interesting for a better understanding of the portfolio and whose causality is at present weakly covered by ROM (such as *EC visibility*, *EC procedures* and *EC communication with the project* or any other that the EC considers particularly relevant) could be incorporated in BCS sub-questions for Ex-post missions to ensure that the monitors cover them. Attribution of responsibilities when necessary (the EC, the partner, the system?) would also help a better understanding of remedies. This would not damage the individual projects, as projects subject to Ex-post monitoring are by definition only finished ones.

In this regard, it is worth remembering how even small changes in the methodology may produce remarkable gains. An example of this is the simple change of name in the Ex-post templates of the so-called “recommendations box”. Since this section of the reports changed its name from “key observations and recommendations” to “key observations and lessons learnt” the amount of qualitative information on causality found in the reports is significantly higher and clearer.

An alternative or additional option would be leaving the Ex-post ROM methodology as it is and launching an ad hoc study to understand the specific trends indicated but not explained by the aggregate research study so as to nuance and define pre-identified causality factors.

Finally, and in view of the high added value of Ex-post monitoring, not only in extracting lessons learnt but also in drawing overall aggregate conclusions on the EC portfolio, it would be highly advisable to formalise Ex-post monitoring as an integral part of the ROM system.

### 5.2. P-ROMS ENFORCEMENT AND ALTERNATIVE PROXIES

As explained above, the lack of P-ROMS has, among other consequences, a tremendous negative impact on the quality of the information gathered by the ROM system. The role of enforcement to be played by EC Headquarters and EC Delegations is considered the key element for improvement of this aspect on which the whole PCM and ROM methodology is based upon.

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<sup>7</sup> NB: It is important to take into account that any change in the ROM methodology for ongoing projects automatically implies a constant trade-off between what is ideal for project management at individual level and what is preferable for an aggregate overview on the portfolio. Therefore the temptation to add more sub-questions to BCS so as to force monitors to comment on aspects of interest (thus avoiding the absence of information) may constitute an improvement vis-à-vis a better global understanding of the portfolio, but they come in detriment of the needs of the individual project, as every extra sub-question reduces the chances of the monitor to spend the limited mission time on those elements that deserve the highest priority in view of the specific needs of the project and even to attend the requests of the managers. Additionally, and as explained before, the nature of the ROM as a tool for management support gives precedence to a constructive attitude towards remedial action that advises against direct criticism, again in contrast with the ideal situation for an aggregate overview of causality, where a clearly defined criticism would be much more useful to identify overall patterns and remedies.

From the monitors' side there are ways to reduce (although not to avoid) the negative effect of the absence of P-ROMS. The research shows that, even if not ideal, an assessment based on ad-hoc proxies that substantiate and back up the conclusion of the monitor are useful for aggregate qualitative analysis (it is up to the reader to decide whether the proxies are adequate to justify the achievement of the objectives). However, a subjective assessment, without providing facts or ad-hoc proxies (statements such as "the results contributed to the achievement of the PP") cannot be used to extract any kind of qualitative learning. In consequence, whenever OVIs are not available, monitors should be required to use other ad-hoc proxies allowing an objective assessment of the project's performance. Qualitative comments are useful in reports even if they contain some degree of discretion, but extreme scores supported merely by subjective judgements should be avoided, as they are misleading.

### **5.3. CONSENSUS AMONG THE DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHICAL LOTS: QUALITY CONTROL AND HANDBOOK FOR MONITORS**

The homogeneity of the ROM methodology and guidelines has been gradually improved over the years. Some aspects that offer room for further improvement and harmonisation have been mentioned in this document. Others are as follows:

- Increase the homogeneity of the quality assurance mechanisms regarding aspects that are subject to deviations: i.e. the justification required from monitors in the event of extreme scoring ("a" and "d"), the requirements regarding description vs. analysis, minimum sample, etc.
- The Handbook for Monitors does not include methodological aspects related to the field visits (minimum sample, quality of sample, etc). Even though a detailed guideline is not feasible, the minimum requirements of a field visit to justify a monitoring report should be regulated to ensure a minimum quality that ensures the value of aggregate analyses.

### **5.4. ASSESSMENT OF THE ROM TOOL**

After 10 years of ROM, an ad hoc assessment of the tool looking at its different uses and benefits, gaps and opportunities could offer valuable information for its improvement and better understanding.

### **5.5. RELEVANCE CRITERION AND PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE**

The research showed a methodology gap such as the lack of separation between real relevance and strategic relevance. This has been solved in the last improvement of the methodology. A further betterment would be the distinction between passive acceptance and real priority for the beneficiary. Indeed, given the range of needs of the beneficiaries, the data show that a truly relevant project addresses those that are most urgent and important for the beneficiaries, those that constitute a *high priority* for them. The fact that target beneficiaries do not explicitly reject or oppose an intervention does not necessarily mean that the intervention is relevant. A project that does not represent an immediate priority may not be openly rejected, but simply accepted passively (*passive acceptance*). ROM monitors could help prevent these situations through an analysis distinguishing these aspects presently hidden behind the general notion of *relevance*.