

Mission-Oriented Innovation Policy workshop series: Observations from workshop 4¹ – *Monitoring, evaluation & reflexivity of missions*¹

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Focus first three workshops

Our first workshop focused on *'scoping and agenda setting of missions'*. We discussed how to define mission objectives that direct collective action – see the workshop report [here](#). Participants voted our second workshop to focus on the *'coordination in missions'*. So, after having set the mission objective, how do we create the coordination structures (formal and informal arrangements and incentives, etc.) that make people and organizations collectively move towards that objective? The second workshop's summary can be found [here](#). The third workshop focused on identifying good practices with regards to the *'implementation of missions'*, see the workshop summary [here](#).

Focus fourth workshop: monitoring, evaluation & reflexivity

This fourth workshop will focus on the *'monitoring, evaluation & reflexivity of missions'*. Although MIP has not seen broad implementation yet, and experiences with evaluation are therefore few, it is still important to think about how to set up the structures, frameworks and methods for monitoring and evaluation. Particularly formative evaluation is key to draw lessons on how to work with mission policy at an early stage.

We had several experts present their views on policy evaluation. *Matthijs Janssen* (MIPO/UU) provided an introduction to the topic, highlighting the importance of different categories of monitoring and evaluations and maps them out on an axis that ranges from formative to summative evaluation. He stresses that the combination of frequent formative evaluations with occasional summative evaluations can enable fast and frequent learning and policy adaptation. Such complementary use of formative and summative evaluation, which are currently sometimes seen as a battle between learning and accounting, is needed to maintain the validity of mission-oriented innovation policy as an emerging policy instrument and rationale.

Joeri Wesseling (MIPO/UU) then introduced the Mission-oriented Innovation Systems (MIS) framework that has been developed at MIPO to provide formative mission policy evaluation. Via a systematic approach aimed at intermediary outcomes, the MIS approach identifies the barriers that inhibit the development and adoption of technological and social/behavioural innovative mission solutions. By comparing these barriers with the mission policy instruments undertaken, formative policy recommendations can be provided (see the paper [here](#)).

Prof. *Laurens Hessels* and *Amber Geurts* (Rathenau Institute) then gave a presentation on their two recent mission evaluation reports on 'EU missions for societal challenges' ([here](#) – in Dutch, but translated to English if sufficient interest) and on 'Research programs with a mission' evaluating programs from VINNOVA, DARPA and CGIAR ([here](#) – idem.). Their work highlights the importance of tailored evaluation approaches; of suitable mission indicators (i.e. indicators to measure the progress towards reaching the mission goals and which should be measurable over time and benchmarked to enable attributing impacts to mission policy) and mission-process indicators (qualitative indicators to measure whether the mission goals are reached in the way proposed, via measuring process aspects such as the involvement of citizens, creation of ecosystems, behavioural change, or co-benefits); of

¹ Due to the Chatham House Rule, unless explicitly approved, the workshop summary is anonymized of participant and country. For figures that illustrate the summary – see also the expert presentations

the roles of the citizen in monitoring and evaluation (as an evaluator; scientist, collector & sender; recipient; and/or supporter & benefiter); and of monitoring and evaluation for learning about and being reflexive on the formulated mission goal and mission process, which requires tentative or adaptive governance structures to benefit from.

Christoph Brodnik (Austrian Institute of Technology) and *Cristian Matti* (Climate-KIC) then discussed the insights on innovation portfolios and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) practices. They define innovation portfolio as a particular tool to explore, analyse and convert strategic priorities and objectives into innovation activities which are project-based. This tool is useful because it can provide a framework to transform rough preliminary ideas and prototypes into real investment opportunities by revealing potential synergies with strategic action lines and the current strength of the targeted system. Their formative MEL approach shows how systems innovation, which is needed for achieving more radically transformative missions, can be managed to build transformative capacities and learn and adapt during project implementation. The approach shows that it is important to monitor, evaluate and learn at the level of inputs (supply, enables, demand), activities (incl. ecosystem building, deep demonstrations, educational programmes, etc.), outputs (act at the policy level, citizen engagement, business models, etc.), outcomes (transformative impacts inside and outside of project scope) and impacts (achieving the mission goals). They identify three modules ranging from Theory of Change (1), to connecting that to transformative outcomes via a strategy or roadmap that serves as a communication and reflection device (2) and finally developing a MEL plan (3).

In the breakout groups, we discussed various questions; most prominently *'To what extent do existing frameworks and methods of data collection work for monitoring and evaluation of MIP, and to what extent do we need new ones?'* The workshop participants raised that missions are unique and their dynamics as well as the systems in which they intervene are very complex. Not only new but also customized approaches to evaluation are therefore required. On the higher level of aggregation, it is not possible to rely on econometric models and attribution becomes a challenge. At the project-specific level, it is possible to identify outcomes, using qualitative approaches such as *Output Harvesting*, the MEL approach developed by Christoph Brodnik and Christian Matti, or the approach developed by Bergek & Haddad (see *'Evaluating transformative innovation policy outcomes as unfolding processes of change in sociotechnical configurations'*). Outcome Harvesting is an approach used by various NGOs in which one asks other stakeholders what outputs they have seen and then mapping outcomes against the theory of change. It is however, like the MEL approach, quite labour-intensive and findings may be difficult to generalize, leaving a gap in understanding between project-specific impacts and how they contribute to systems transformation and/or meeting the overall mission goal. Nevertheless, we can learn from decades of evaluation practices and methods in foreign aid. The MIS approach does not assess project-specific impacts, but studies the system level in a formative way. Similar approaches use transformative outcomes and leverage points to provide formative policy recommendations aiming to increase the impact of transformative MIP (see e.g. [here](#)).

Other questions related to *concerns regarding availability of data* and to *new types of indicators based on data that are more readily available and can overcome the gap between project-specific and mission-generic monitoring*. Conventional indicators/science data like patents and publications are easily available per project. However, it is not clear how this contributes to the mission end goal (e.g. decreasing CO2 emissions). Again, the gap between what we can measure from individual projects and the monitoring of end-goal progress towards the mission remains a problem. Alternative data sources like text mining of project descriptions, including of projects outside mission policy that may nevertheless (positively or negatively) affect its goal (i.e. policy coherence evaluation) can provide important data – but often the gap remains. Data-driven evaluation runs the risk of promising too much and losing credibility with policymakers and others. Narrative evaluation can be done to reduce

the project-mission gap, and involving external stakeholders (such as local governments, industry, citizens – although privacy can be an issue) increases honest reporting. To further reduce the gap, things like attitude or behavioral change needs to be monitored, but can be hard to measure. Approaches like the MEL and MIS approach build on transformative outcomes, leverage points, systemic problems etc. as new indicators and methodologies. The premise is that a causal chain of policy impacts is not possible to fully trace from project-based to systemic impact, because the system is too complex. Transformative outcomes and system functions are based on the premise to create intermediate outcomes/steps that guide towards an alternative pathway. They direct your attention to leverage points and systemic problems, that can lead to a transformed system that enables meeting the mission (as opposed to achieving incremental steps that in the long-term will not be able to meet transformative missions, like a zero-emission mobility system).

How to develop reflexive structures that enable learning and possibly readjusting the mission policy (without it leading to stability concerns)? Participants pointed out that missions have long-term goals and intermediate goals and that it is important to distinguish between (at least) output-outcome-impact. If interim targets are not met, the mission governance should be flexible enough to adjust particular instruments along the way. Ideally, an (annual) monitoring report is submitted to an independent evaluation committee as this increases transparency, accountability and communication. Participants also highlighted it is important to keep track of outside/societal developments, to rethink initial mission articulation and priorities within it, and to track spillover effects of a mission to its environment.