

Breaking with the Past?

**Belgian Development Co-operation
at the Turn of the Century**

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Executive Summary

This paper gives a broad overview of the evolution of Belgian aid policies throughout the 1990s. It documents changes in stated motives and objectives, aid volumes, poverty orientation of aid, the structure and main components of the aid programme, the use of new types of aid instruments, the geographic concentration of aid and the institutional set-up. Official rhetoric on aid motives and objectives as it is captured in subsequent official policy notes is confronted with effective aid practice. It is argued that aid practice was strongly influenced by factors which are external to deliberate aid policy making.

Crisis in the countries in Central Africa, which were traditionally major beneficiaries of Belgian aid, for instance, did heavily impinge upon the structure and main components of the aid programme, the aid volume and the geographic concentration of aid whereas internal political discussions in Belgium, in particular linguistic tensions, largely dominated the various institutional reforms of the aid department.

Résumé

Cet article retrace l'évolution de la politique de coopération belge pendant les années 90. Plusieurs aspects sont passés en revue : les motifs et les objectifs changeants du discours officiel, le volume de l'aide, l'accent mis sur la réduction de la pauvreté, la structure et les composantes majeures du programme de l'aide belge, l'usage fait de nouveaux instruments de l'aide, la concentration géographique et les structures organisationnelles. La rhétorique officielle telle qu'elle émane des différentes notes de stratégie est confrontée avec la pratique. Est analysée la façon dont des facteurs externes à la politique de coopération ont influencé les résultats.

La crise dans les pays de l'Afrique centrale, qui étaient les bénéficiaires traditionnels privilégiés de l'aide belge a eu, par exemple, des incidences sur la structure et les composantes du programme de l'aide, le volume et la concentration géographique, alors que les réformes ou propositions de réformes des structures organisationnelles de l'aide ont été largement dominées par des discussions internes belges, notamment le contentieux linguistique entre les communautés et régions du pays.

Introduction: Overview and Major Issues

The 1990s were a challenging decade for development co-operation in Belgium. In Africa the former colony (DR Congo¹) and the territories formerly administered by Belgium (Burundi and Rwanda) witnessed coups d'Etats, civil war, regional conflicts, genocide and immense suffering by the population. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives in all three countries. Aid to this region constituted the core of Belgian African policies, both in terms of volume of aid and geopolitical attention up to the late 1980s. The crisis affecting the three countries wiped out decades of development aid and constituted a major challenge for Belgian policy makers. For some observers, it was evidence of the failure of Belgian aid policies.

At a political level, the reaction to the crisis of the 1990s by successive Belgian governments varied. Belgium suspended aid to DR Congo in 1991, following the reported killing of students by Mobutu's paratroopers on the Lubumbashi university campus, and from then onwards took a tough stand against the regime. This constituted a major change of heart. In the ensuing period of regime change, instability and war, Belgium was active on the diplomatic front and supported regional efforts to find a peaceful solution. It also provided humanitarian and emergency aid to DR Congo, making it the first bilateral donor to DR Congo in 1999-2000 [DAC, 2002a]. In Burundi, Belgium supported the transition to a democratic system in the early 1990s and used aid to this effect. But in October 1993 the first democratically elected president Ndadaye was murdered by the Tutsi military after only a few weeks in office, and the country plunged into political and military instability from which it had yet to recover at the end of the decade. In Rwanda the early 1990s witnessed the onset of a major internal military conflict between the regime in place in Kigali and the invading forces of RPF troops from Uganda made up of former Tutsi refugees. Belgium was involved in the search of a peaceful solution here too, using both aid and diplomatic means, and putting pressure on Rwandan president Habyarimana to enter into negotiations with the rebels and sign the 1992 Arusha peace agreement. Belgian troops, present in the country as part of the deal to supervise the implementation of the Arusha declaration, were caught up in the fighting that started on the 6th of April 1994 when the plane carrying president Habyarimana and his colleague from Burundi was shot down. Ten Belgian paratroopers were killed by the army, and the Belgian government pulled out its troops and contributed to the non-intervention of Western governments in the dreadful weeks that followed². The Belgian government contributed humanitarian aid after the genocide, and then gradually resumed its structural aid to Rwanda.

In the course of 1995 the Belgian political world was shaken by a series of highly critical articles published in the Flemish daily 'De Morgen'³. They painted a picture of failed Belgian aid projects in all three continents. A major charge was that commercial interests had the upper hand in decision making, resulting in wasteful 'white elephants' which did more harm than good. The

¹ We will use the new name of DR Congo even when referring to the period when the country was still named Zaïre.

² An all-party parliamentary commission was later set up to investigate the role of Belgium in the 1994 events in Rwanda [Senat de Belgique, 1997]

³ The journalist who wrote the articles later produced a book on the same topic. See de Coninck [1996].

projects that were singled out for attack had received most of their funding through the ministry of finance rather than the aid department, yet the former was never seriously questioned, and the latter got all the blame. That a series of articles could have such an influence may seem at first sight remarkable. But official aid policies had acquired over the years a poor reputation with political commentators and many rank and file members of parliament. The criticism thus struck a chord with those disenchanted observers, and was amplified in the media and parliament. A special parliamentary commission was set up that formulated a set of recommendations to improve the working of the aid department [Chambre des Représentants de Belgique, 1997]. Several senior officials were removed, and the government embarked on a major overhaul of the administration. The Belgian Administration for Development Co-operation (BADC), a semi-autonomous unit within the ministry of foreign affairs, was restructured and integrated, although not fully merged, into the ministry of foreign affairs and renamed Directorate General of International Co-operation (DGIC). At the same time, an independent operational branch, the Belgian Technical Co-operation (BTC), was created, modelled on the German GTZ⁴. This reform has been criticised for being overhasty and badly conceived, but it certainly answered to an urgent political need.

⁴ By Law of 21 December 1998, published in *Moniteur Belge* [30/12/1998].

Efforts were also undertaken during the 1990s to increase the geographical concentration of bilateral aid flows. Not much did come from this. Equally unsuccessful were initiatives to increase overall political coherence between ministerial departments⁵, and between direct bilateral aid and aid channelled through NGOs and other non-state actors.

⁵ In 1994 an Interdepartmental Working Party on Development Co-operation chaired by the State secretary for Development Co-operation was created. While some efforts were taken to improve co-ordination among ministries on the issue of food security, in general the Working Party was not very active and did not succeed in improving overall policy coherence [Schellens, 2000] [Jennes and Schellens, 1997][DAC, 1997].

During the 1990s the Belgian aid strategy shifted away from its traditional technocratic and socio-economic focus. Partly as a consequence of the events in Central Africa and of the atmosphere of scandal surrounding development co-operation, the secretaries of state⁶ responsible for development co-operation during the 1990s put more emphasis than their predecessors on political and civil rights, and on 'soft' issues such as the environment and culture. In an important break with the past, it was decided that aid provided by DGIC would no longer be tied to procurement in Belgium. Development aid became, so to speak, purer. But it also became leaner. Aid flows diminished as a share of GNP, following a trend in other countries, although the fall was less dramatic than for DAC countries as a whole. In terms of instruments of aid, the 1990s not surprisingly saw an upsurge in the use of humanitarian aid. Direct bilateral aid gave increasingly way to aid channelled through the NGOs and other non-public actors. The influence of NGOs on official policies grew considerably. The staff of personal advisors ('cabinet') of the secretaries of state who held office during the 1990s saw the importance of collaborators with an NGO background grew considerably at the expense of officials from the aid administration or experts from universities, consultancy firms, or private business. Underlying this trend was the fact that in the eyes of public opinion and the political class, NGOs were the only major actor untainted by the scandal surrounding aid

⁶ A secretary of state is a junior minister without a seat in the cabinet. For decisions requiring cabinet approval he reports to a designated senior minister.

policies, notwithstanding the more critical assessment of the role of NGOs that began to appear in the press⁷. The ascendancy of NGOs was helped by several reforms in co-financing modalities that strengthened their financial and analytical muscle. The academic world also considerably increased its clout. This was mainly translated in a substantial increase in funding and a high degree of autonomy in implementation, rather than in any significant involvement in the debate on aid policy.

⁷ See Achterhuis, Barrez, Tandon et al. [1993].

During the 1990s, the three secretaries of state were all coming from Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of the country. This continued a trend over the last two decades, in which development co-operation attracted more attention in the Flemish than in the francophone part of the country. For instance, the scandals pertaining to the aid department were brought out by a Flemish daily paper, widely discussed by Flemish politicians and NGOs, but were less noticed in the French-speaking part of the country. What was not foreseen was that the linguistic issue would all of a sudden become a major factor in the debate. During discussions among the coalition parties in the course of 2000 concerning a wide range of policy reforms providing more federal subsidies to the cash-stricken Walloon region and francophone community and more autonomy to Flanders, the possibility of handing the responsibility of major parts of development co-operation over to the regions became a hot issue. It was thrust onto the political scene in 2000 by a small Flemish political party ('Volksunie' or Flemish Union), whose support was needed to get the two-third majority needed for the reform package. There was also increasing support for such transfers of resources and political power on the francophone side, notably from the socialist party. The principle of handing over development co-operation to the decentralised level of authority was negotiated during a nightly marathon session, to the dismay of many development experts in the main political parties, the NGO movement, and the academic world.

1. Motives and Overall Objectives

In Belgium, the official rhetoric on aid has evolved during the 1990s. The end of the Cold War and the political and military instability that followed not only in Eastern Europe but also in Africa, brought new issues into focus. More than in the past, aid began to be seen as an instrument to bring peace and stability to developing regions and to protect European borders from floods of immigrants. AIDS had also alerted public opinion that there was no effective way to cut the Western world off from the developing countries and their woes. Such changes in the justification for international aid mark the brochures and policy documents produced by successive secretaries of state in this period [DGIC, 1992, 1998 and 2001]. The new rhetoric may well be just that: a way of phrasing policy intentions in fashionable jargon for sale to the general public, without necessarily resulting in any effect on actual decision making. But this would be an unfair assessment of the considerable efforts by successive Belgian governments to renovate development co-operation policies.

Table 1: Governments in power

Government Coalition	State secretary/Minister Development Co-operation (Political Party)	Minister of Foreign Affairs (Political Party)
May 88 - September 91 Christian Democrats and Socialists and Flemish Nationalists	Minister A. Geens (Flemish Nationalists)	M. Eyskens (Flemish Christian Democratic Party)
September 91- June 95 Christian Democrats and Socialists	State secretary E. Derycke (Flemish Socialist)	W. Claes (Flemish Socialist Party) From October 1994 onwards: F. Vandenbroucke (Flemish Socialist Party)
June 1995 - September 99 Christian Democrats and Socialists	State secretary R. Moreels (Flemish Christian Democrat)	E. Derycke (Flemish Socialist) exceptionally, Moreels reported to the Prime Minister, J.-L. Dehaene, (Flemish Christian Democrat)
September 99 - ... Liberals and Socialists and Greens	State secretary E. Boutmans (Flemish Green Party)	L. Michel (Francophone Liberal Party)

Table 1 gives an overview of the politicians in charge of development co-operation in the decade of the 1990s. Minister Geens ended his term in office in September 1991. In some ways he was imbued with the motives and objectives of a previous period, emphasizing poverty reduction through the funding of economic and social projects, less concerned with larger themes such as popular participation, sustainable development, gender, or local ownership. He was succeeded by State secretary Derycke who was in charge of development co-operation between September 1991 and June 1995. A lawyer who came into development co-operation unexpectedly after a cabinet reshuffle, he then took on development co-operation as his main task under the next government, Derycke had to handle the major debacles in Burundi and Rwanda. A member of the Flemish socialist party, he tried to steer a cautious progressive course, linking aid policies to the wider political and institutional dimensions. He espoused the new themes of human rights, good governance and debt relief, and approached poverty as a multidimensional concept. In the following government he became Minister of Foreign Affairs, while newcomer Flemish Christian Democrat Moreels took on the position of State secretary for Development Co-operation (June 1995 till September 1999). A medical doctor who prided himself of his experience as a ‘war surgeon’ and who had presided over the Belgian section of the international NGO Médecins Sans Frontières before entering politics, Moreels brought some experience with him in the field of humanitarian aid, and a passionate belief in linking aid to good governance and human rights. He also shared the humanitarian aid agencies’ instinctive preference for top-down, donor-driven approaches managed by expatriate staff. He pursued many of the same topics as Derycke, but with more emphasis on humanitarian operations and on human rights. He also continued Derycke’s efforts to untie bilateral aid from procurement in Belgium. He openly denounced the principle of aid

tying and announced the unilateral suspension of the tying of bilateral aid disbursed under his responsibility. Boutmans, a member of Parliament for the Flemish ecological ('green') party, took over as State secretary in July 1999. A lawyer, and a cautious man by nature, Boutmans added the traditional themes of the greens, and his own - empowerment, culture, sustainable development - to those of his predecessors. But he felt more reluctant to preach recipient countries on good governance and sound economic policies as in his view donor countries, Belgium in particular, do not always provide the good example at home.

In many ways, these three politicians pursued similar overall objectives and gave Belgian aid policies a new sense of direction. The adoption of the first law on International Co-operation by Parliament on 25 May 1999 [Moniteur Belge, 01/07/1999] constituted a consolidation of these changes. The law lays out a new framework for the Belgian international development co-operation policy. The global objective of Belgian development co-operation is to accomplish sustainable human development by combating poverty. Poverty reduction is presented as the prime objective of the aid programme. The concept of poverty is conceived as multidimensional, including economic, social and political aspects, opening room for the concept of human rights. In line with recommendations contained in the DAC strategy paper [DAC, 1996], the law also strengthened the importance of sector policy papers and country strategy papers [DAC, 1997]. These documents, first introduced in 1996, were meant to translate the broad aid policy objectives into more specific objectives and concrete activities for a particular sector and country and provide an objective basis for subsequent monitoring and evaluation.

Another law, dating from February 1994 [Moniteur Belge, 13/09/1994], illustrates the new spirit that pervaded the decade. It requires the government to report on the human rights situation in countries with which it wished to sign a general development co-operation agreement, and also to present an annual report on the human rights situation in programme countries. The law has not been well observed, except in its first years. Co-ordination problems between the departments of development co-operation and foreign affairs have undoubtedly contributed to this situation, as has manpower shortage at DGIC.

Turning to Belgium's 6-month EU presidencies, in the second half of 1993, Belgium pushed, not very successfully, the issue of debt relief. In the second half of 2001, Belgium tried to convince the EU members to become more active towards solving the crisis in DR Congo, again without much success.

2. Strategies, Major Principles and Guidelines, Major Instruments: Rhetoric and Implementation

2.1. Relations with Bilateral and Multilateral Donors and Recipients

The discussion of new aid instruments may at first sight seem unrelated to the present heading. Yet it is in this context that the relations with recipients and other donors were most seriously challenged. During the 1990s donors started to adapt their aid instruments, in particular project aid, to the criticisms being voiced. The weaknesses of projects in aid-dependent countries were increasingly acknowledged and documented. Belgium in 1989 started an experiment of 'co-gestion' or joint management in its project funding to some recipient countries. Under 'co-gestion' the responsibility of donor and recipient were spelled out for the whole project cycle. The recipient was responsible for project identification, formulation and implementation. Belgium would have the final say in accepting the identification and formulation reports, and together with the recipient would take charge of evaluation. The system was meant to ensure that, while still very recognizably 'Belgian', projects would to a larger extent than before be integrated in the spending procedures of the recipient country. An important advantage was also that projects would be at least partially be untied, tendering for goods and services coming under the supervision of the recipient and being based on the principle of free competition. Some weaknesses of project aid remained however, such as the use of Belgian rather than recipient government monitoring and control procedures, and de facto imposition of Belgian technical assistance during project formulation and implementation. Unfortunately the countries selected for the implementation of the new management system, Rwanda and Burundi, were caught in a spiral of institutional instability and violence, and the experiment ran only very partially. The system was applied tentatively to some other beneficiary countries, such as Bolivia, Tanzania and Vietnam, but limited to certain non-project transactions, such as debt relief operations [DAC, 1995]. Most of the features of 'co-gestion' have been adopted in the new management system elaborated for BTC. However, the system is now more complicated and unwieldy, with two partners of the Belgian side: DGIC for planning and BTC for supervision of implementation. It is too early at the time of writing to tell whether it can function flexibly and efficiently.

Belgium has been reluctant to provide general budget support to developing countries. Budget support not only alters the relations with the recipient, but also with other donors, with whom a strong co-ordination becomes desirable. The ambiguous Belgian attitude is illustrated by its handling of debt relief. In the early 1990s the Belgian official export credit agency, the Office National du Ducroire (OND), was in dire financial straits. Many of the export credit and insurance contracts it had accepted in earlier years had fallen through and the agency had accumulated a huge amount of

unrecoverable claims on developing countries, while on the other hand it had to pay out large sums of money to the Belgian firms that were parties to the contract. In 1991 it was decided that the Treasury would buy some of the OND's outstanding claims on developing countries for half their face value, far above their market value, and thus provide needed liquidity to the organisation. As part of the deal, development co-operation was asked⁸ to contribute annually almost 14 million euro over a period of 12 years in exchange for which it would receive from the Treasury some of the debt claims which it could then in turn extinguish. Whether this is indeed genuine aid is a debatable point, but the DAC accepted it as ODA under its generous accounting rules. To the extent that a developing country would have normally repaid its outstanding debt service, debt cancellation can be considered a form of virtual budget support⁹. The recipient government is free to use resources it would have otherwise set aside for debt service payments. In this sense debt cancellation may be considered a form of virtual budget support. It is a striking feature of Belgian debt relief operations during the 1990s that aid officials usually insisted that the recipient government put aside an agreed sum of money in a special counterpart fund jointly managed with Belgium. In this way budget support was averted and replaced by the more familiar instrument of project aid. Aid officials remained largely oblivious to the criticisms voiced in this respect by academics and other experts.

Although Belgium was sceptical about granting budget support during most of the 1990s, there are some counter-indications towards the end of the decade, notably in the case of Niger and Mozambique¹⁰. DGIC seemed to have been divided on the issue, with some senior staff in favour of budget support whereas the majority of the staff remain opposed. A factor complicating the use of this instrument was the opposition coming from the 'inspecteur des finances', the official from the budget department stationed at DGIC who has to approve all spending prior to execution, and who opposed budget support on legal grounds.

Following discussions in the framework of Special Partnership with Africa (SPA) in the second half of the 1990s, there has been some discussion about the integration of project aid in sector-wide approaches (SWAPs), where donors join sector policy dialogue with the recipient, and rely progressively on recipient procedures for spending and accounting of funds. While acknowledging the arguments in favour, not much happened in practice. In fact there was often limited sector coherence even at the Belgian level. In Rwanda for instance, Belgium was funding some 12 interventions in the health sector at the turn of the century, including some institutional technical assistance at the level of the Health Ministry. But no explicit overall sector strategy seemed to underpin the different interventions, which were managed as isolated interventions.

⁸ It is more correct to say that the deal was imposed on a reluctant Minister Geens by his colleague from the Treasury, Philippe Maystadt, and the rest of the government.

⁹ To the extent the recipient would not have paid back its debt service, there is no immediate effect on the budget.

¹⁰ Both deals became operational in the period after 2000 and are not further discussed here.

2.2. Poverty orientation of aid

Belgium had a reasonably good track record on poverty orientation during the 1970s and 1980s. This has to do with the geographical concentration on Central Africa. Table 2 shows that the situation in the 1990s is much less impressive. The data should be interpreted carefully because of the large part that remains geographically unallocated in the first half of the decade¹¹. The percentage of ODA to the least developed countries remains high compared to the DAC. However if we consider the whole group of low-income countries, there is not much difference between Belgium and the DAC average. The increasing share going to lower middle-income countries is striking. This evolution is not the consequence of some determined effort at reallocating aid resources, but rather of the crisis in the three Central African countries which eased the constraint on budget allocations to the other aid recipients. Low middle-income countries among the traditional aid recipients of Belgium, such as Bolivia, had a greater absorption capacity than the low-income countries, and they were accordingly rewarded with more aid. Interestingly, direct bilateral aid scored better than indirect aid in terms of orientation on poor countries. In the beginning of 1995 one of the authors wrote a comment in a Flemish NGO monthly publication¹² comparing the geographical orientation of Belgian official aid and that through Belgian NGOs. Using the Human Development Indicator of the UNDP as a yardstick, he calculated that bilateral official aid in the period 1991-1992 was more poverty oriented than the aid disbursed by NGOs with official co-financing.

¹¹ [DGIC 2002d] provides a detailed statistical survey of Belgian development co-operation for the period 1997-2001. There is no comparable reliable set of data for the whole decade, except what is published by the DAC.

¹² 'De Wereld Morgen', January 1995.

Some insight into poverty orientation can also be glanced from sector allocations. Table 3 provides a breakdown for the second half of the decade. Comparable data are not available for the earlier period because at the time DGIC used its own, idiosyncratic classification, which it finally abandoned in 1998, and which is not strictly comparable to the international nomenclature used in Table 3. Few clear trends appear in Table 3, although health spending seems on the rise, as does support for government and civil society, banks and financial services, emergency aid and sensitisation actions, whereas support for agriculture, forestry and fishing went down. Sector breakdowns based on DGIC's own classification (not shown here) indicate that the share of spending in the social sectors (education and health) almost doubled in the period 1990-1997, whereas spending in support of industry went down from some 6 per cent to 1.5 per cent during the same period.

**Table 2: Distribution of ODA by Income Group
(net disbursements as per cent of total ODA)**

	1989-1990	1990-1991	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000
Belgium											
low income countries	84.6	54.8	50.9	38.4	43.0	49.5	68.0	67.2	73.9	72.4	66.9
least developed countries	62.7	34.9	32.9	28.4	33.2	34.0	40.6	43.7	47.6	44.7	40.8
other low income countries	21.9	19.9	17.1	10.0	9.8	15.6	27.4	23.5	26.3	27.7	26.1
lower middle income countries	11.2	5.8	13.1	16.7	20.3	23.5	26.4	26.0	20.5	22.3	27.4
upper middle income countries	4.2	1.7	2.4	2.3	3.1	3.4	5.3	6.8	5.6	5.1	5.4
high income countries	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2
unallocated	0.0	37.7	33.6	42.5	33.4	23.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

	1989-1990	1990-1991	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000
DAC average											
low income countries	68.4	60.4	55.0	49.0	38.9	52.1	62.3	63.1	64.5	62.9	64.5
least developed countries	37.3	24.4	24.0	23.9	24.2	25.7	30.1	31.5	32.2	29.3	30.1
other low income countries	31.1	36.0	31.0	25.1	14.7	26.4	32.2	31.6	32.3	33.6	34.4
lower middle income countries	25.4	7.6	13.4	20.3	20.8	23.2	27.6	29.7	28.5	29.9	30.5
upper middle income countries	6.2	1.3	2.8	2.6	3.8	4.2	4.6	5.1	4.9	5.1	4.9
high income countries	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	2.9	2.4	5.5	2.1	2.2	2.1	0.1
unallocated	0.0	30.7	28.8	24.1	33.6	18.1	0.0	0.0	-0.1	0.0	0.0

Source: calculated on the basis of annual DAC Reports 1990-2001

The sector data have to be interpreted carefully however. In the case of education especially, most spending benefited tertiary education rather than primary or secondary education. An unpublished internal DGIC policy paper on education and training [DGIC, 2001a] points out that in the period 1994-1999 only about 3 to 5 per cent of all spending in the sector went to primary education. As far as health expenditures are concerned, the situation is different. An unpublished internal DGIC policy paper on basic health care [DGIC, 2002b] indicates that over the period 1995-1999 on average about 38 per cent of all direct bilateral Belgian aid in the health sector was spent on basic health care services.

Table 3: Sector breakdown of DGIC expenditure (% of DGIC total)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
BADC/DGIC administrative expenditure	6.01	6.89	6.11	6.70	6.01	4.60
Non-BADC/DGIC administrative expenditure	3.22	2.72	1.88	0.95	2.29	1.70
Education	11.02	9.45	7.79	10.27	10.29	9.99
Health	5.40	7.11	8.03	8.18	9.07	8.54
Population, health, fertility policy	0.99	1.39	1.05	0.96	0.91	2.60
Water and purification	1.52	1.75	2.32	1.73	1.60	1.38
Government and civil society	6.80	6.91	6.46	6.26	7.65	8.92
Social services	5.27	4.45	4.43	4.55	5.37	5.38
Transport and storage	1.16	0.99	0.84	0.55	0.75	0.63
Communications	0.69	0.70	0.67	1.26	0.19	0.14
Energy	0.65	0.72	0.40	0.19	0.28	0.14
Banks and financial services	1.76	0.79	11.56	9.04	9.03	9.21
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	13.25	13.66	9.06	9.12	7.71	8.65
Manufacturing, mining and construction	3.05	2.44	2.27	2.94	2.49	1.57
Trade and tourism	0.10	0.05	0.12	0.75	0.13	0.65
Protection of the environment	2.77	3.04	2.91	1.98	0.16	2.14
Women and development	0.46	0.39	0.71	0.39	0.53	0.51
Multisectoral uses	3.56	4.30	5.56	4.34	4.14	5.02
Non-food aid programmes	1.95	4.46	0.91	1.21	0.21	1.03
Security and food aid programmes	3.07	3.77	3.02	3.58	0.09	1.89
Debt related actions	2.92	3.56	2.34	2.65	2.49	2.96
Emergency aid (including emergency food aid)	3.17	4.54	6.11	3.94	6.84	5.30
Sensitisation actions in Belgium	0.00	0.01	0.07	1.41	2.21	2.16
Other non-allocated, non-specified	21.19	15.76	15.38	17.38	19.57	14.90

Source: DGIC [2001a]

Belgium also contributed to multilateral efforts that can be subsumed under the label of poverty reduction. In 1999 for instance it contributed some US\$ 4 million to the HIPC trust fund of the World Bank and in 2000 some US\$ 9 million to a fiduciary fund, equally administered by the World Bank, to enable the African Development Bank to extend debt relief to its members. Finally, a major instrument of poverty reduction was the Belgian Survival Fund (BSF), which was mostly used to finance projects of multilateral agencies. We devote some attention to this instrument in section IV.

2.3. Balance between old and new objectives

The Law on International Development of 1999 stipulated that five sectors - public health, education and training, agriculture and food security, basic infrastructure, and conflict control and reconstruction - and three cross-cutting issues - environment, gender and 'social economy' - would constitute the core of official Belgian aid efforts. Although all the state secretaries who were in charge of development co-operation during the 1990s

emphasised similar sectors and themes, there are also specific accents marking out the three politicians. Derycke emphasised political objectives such as human rights, good governance and democracy. For the first time, a policy note on development co-operation paid more than scant attention to the cross-cutting issues of gender and the environment. Some efforts were also made to integrate these aspects effectively into Belgian development assistance but understaffing at the Belgian aid administration made these efforts not entirely successful. The Women in Development Unit set up in 1987 and consisting of only two full-time staff and a newly set up Environment Unit (1.5 staff members) were brought together in 1992 within the Department for Strategies and Development. Partly accommodating the needs of this limited staff capacity, an advisory board on gender issues was installed in the mid 1990s consisting of independent experts and representatives from among others NGOs, universities, the aid administration and the cabinet of the State secretary. In general, the progress made by Belgian aid throughout the 1990s in terms of incorporating gender equality issues was far more noteworthy than the process made regarding environmental issues. Sectoral and country policy papers were assessed on their degree of gender responsiveness and adjusted where necessary, whereas an assessment on environmental sensitiveness was completely lacking [DAC, 1997].

During the tenure of Derycke, the importance attached to human rights and democracy was particularly visible. At that time, Belgium was fine-tuning its policy of political conditionality. In 1993, direct bilateral development co-operation aid to Rwanda was, for instance, made conditional on democratisation and improvements in the human rights situation, and negotiations with Indonesia on a new general agreement broke down because the Indonesian authorities refused to include a human rights clause. Government officials repeatedly stressed that official development assistance relations with DR Congo could only be re-established when human rights and other aspects of governance improved. The policy of political conditionality and Belgium's policy towards Africa came under fire after the genocide in Rwanda. In February 1995, an important policy paper was published by the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Vandenbroucke, and Development Co-operation, Derycke, which put new accents in Belgium's Africa policy. While the paper stressed the willingness of Belgium to provide continued aid to Central Africa it added that this would no longer be based on honouring any 'privileged relationship'. The paper also proposed a re-orientation from a paternalistic approach towards a 'genuine partnership' building on notions of 'shared responsibility', 'local capacity building', 'sustainable development' and the untying of aid.

While it was not an explicit objective of Belgium aid at that time, political circumstances were such (see Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, Somalia) that an increasing portion of Belgian development aid was used for humanitarian assistance and emergency aid. Over the period 1990-1995, emergency aid expenditures more than doubled from less than US\$ 5 million in 1990 to US\$ 12 million in 1995.

In his policy paper, Moreels (1995-1999, Christian Democrat) drew special attention to humanitarian concerns. In practice, food aid, emergency aid, preventive aid and short-term rehabilitation aid became more important aid categories in Belgium. In 1999, for instance, spending on emergency aid (including emergency food aid) increased to 39.42 million US\$ (see also Table 3 for percentage changes). Conflict prevention came to the forefront and internationally Belgium led the lobby for antipersonnel mine clearing and against the small arms trade¹³. This evolution was part of a worldwide phenomenon. It was increasingly perceived at the end of the 1990s that working in war situations or in regions that are affected by conflicts is an integral part of the development challenge. Promoted by an emotionally highly committed State secretary, Belgium went particularly far. Within DGIC a special unit responsible for conflict prevention activities was installed and in 1997 two new financing instruments were created to react rapidly and flexibly in cases of need. Two new basic allocations were specified in the budget (together amounting to about 9.02 million US\$ in 1997), i.e. conflict prevention, restoring peace and human rights through bilateral co-operation and through financing international institutions. By 2000 the budget had risen to 10.14 million US\$.

Moreels also emphasised the so-called 'social economy', comprising small-scale informal sector activities and alternative systems of social security and credit provision. Probably prompted by a desire to counter the negative association of development co-operation and unscrupulous big business, Moreels promoted co-operation between Belgian and partner countries' small and medium-sized enterprises through a special facility. He thereby started from the unproven premise that small and medium-sized enterprises have a higher degree of development relevance, efficiency and impact.

Boutmans (since 1999) had no problems endorsing the priority sectors and themes of the Law on International Development voted in 1999 under his predecessor. As a politician from a 'Green' party he put extra emphasis on environmental issues, both in rural but also increasingly in urban areas, the medical, social and economic problems caused by AIDS, and on culture. As a lawyer he was also keen to continue the emphasis put by Derycke and Moreels on human rights, conflict prevention and peace building. But he also felt that Belgium was not in a moral position to lecture recipient governments on how to run their own countries. In November 2001 he created BIO, a public company under private law, translating Moreels' proposal about aid to small and medium-sized enterprises into reality [Moniteur belge, Brussels, 17/11/2001]. His decision to create a separate entity, rather than to entrust this task to BTC, was not a very inspired one, and led to a further dispersion of the management of development co-operation. Through early consultations with DGIC and BTC, BIO has shown its willingness to co-ordinate with the other actors of Belgian development co-operation. BIO has been well endowed with financial resources¹⁴ but by mid-2002 no project has effectively been financed, so it is too early to judge its functioning.

¹³ In 1995, Belgium was very active at the international Conference on Disarmament. Belgium further tried to play a leading role in international efforts to limit the production, sale and use of anti-personnel landmines. It continues to play a leadership role in promoting universalization and effective implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty and served as co-rapporteur of the Standing Committees of Experts on the General Status of the Convention.

¹⁴ The public sector pledged a financial participation of about 5 million euro to the capital of the company. Aside from this capital, the Belgium state provides additional resources through 'development certificates' for a maximum amount of about 97 million euro, spread over a period of four years (until July 2005).

3. Volume targets

The 0.7 per cent of GNP target was treated less reverentially during the 1990s than during previous decades. Derycke used the somewhat dubious slogan ‘quality before quantity’ as a title for his policy paper, as if both could or should not be pursued together. Moreels re-emphasised the quantitative target of 0.7 per cent, but only for the longer term. He proposed as an intermediate objective 0.5 per cent of GNP by the end of the legislature. Belgium did not come nearer to the 0.7 per cent of GNP target during the 1990s, on the contrary (see Table 4). The downward trend that started in the early 1980s continued. In constant prices, ODA declined during the 1990s, whereas during the 1980s no clear trend either upward or downward is discernable, as the following graphs testify. The data are from the DAC.

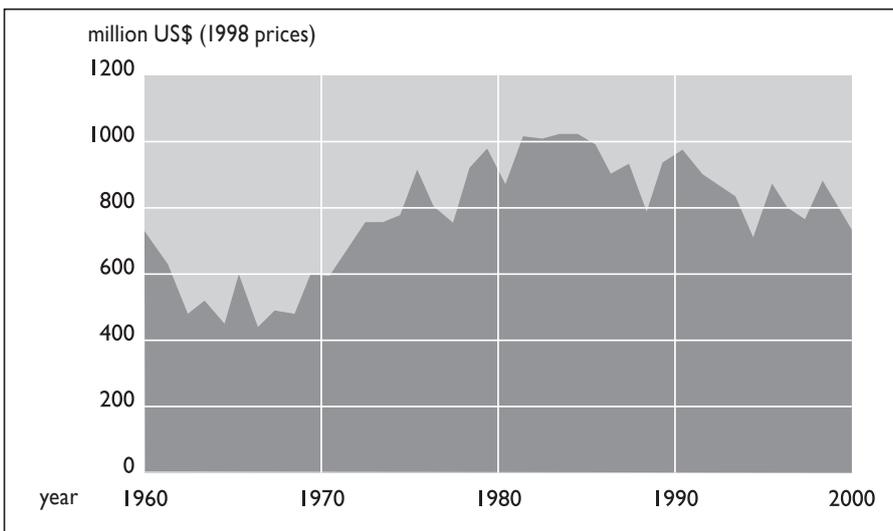
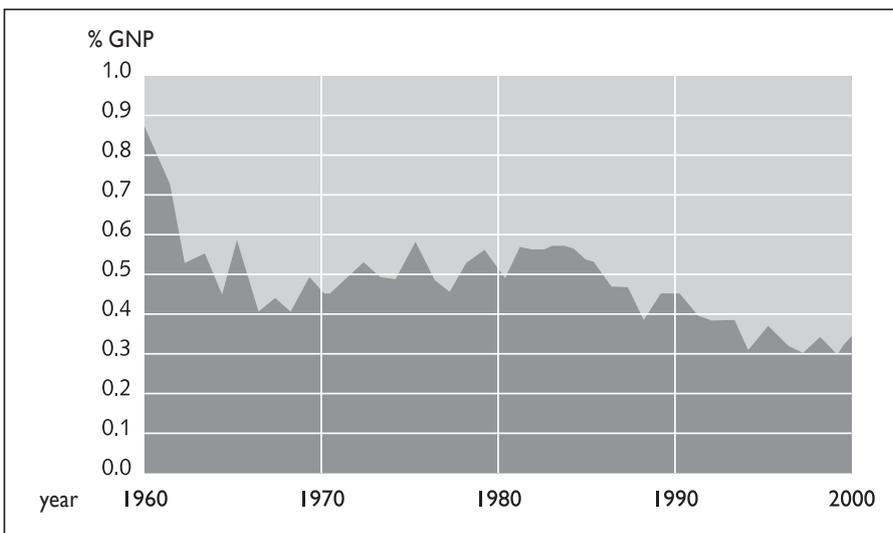


Table 4: Breakdown of total Belgian ODA and the general expenditures of the DGIC/BADC by type of action (in million US\$, current prices)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1. DGIC Administration costs	33.14	22.53	29.53	32.81	33.47	36.44	40.07	34.83	39.68	35.51	27.10
2. Bilateral (total)	383.84	327.99	409.76	322.76	276.10	328.72	309.47	295.27	307.83	313.12	281.35
• Direct	246.08	213.95	248.85	164.77	157.89	139.64	153.76	119.93	120.70	129.23	120.28
• Indirect	137.76	114.05	160.90	157.89	118.20	189.07	155.70	175.34	187.12	183.89	161.06
- NGO co-financed	64.15	62.47	88.26	90.79	66.26	108.08	90.61	100.13	107.63	98.31	88.15
- University co-operation	31.01	24.52	32.86	28.02	16.12	50.44	32.15	33.92	40.02	42.60	37.24
3. Bi-Multi DGIC (incl. Belgian Survival Fund, Emergency aid)	69.65	49.41	41.73	56.27	43.77	73.43	98.58	58.29	65.87	50.35	78.92
4. Multilateral	126.58	103.05	113.66	204.25 ⁴	115.10	135.126	100.19	154.76	152.51	162.46	165.51
• UN Group						31.69	34.23	26.62	19.41	21.58	33.45
• EU Group						84.08	47.66	53.96	73.40	93.29	67.27
• IDA/World Bank Group						0.75	0.325	57.794	47.79	47.05	52.26
TOTAL DGIC/BADC	613.23	502.98	594.66	615.28	468.40	573.13	548.31	543.15	565.89	561.45	552.86
Ministry of Finance	232.15	290.42	229.88	153.45	180.62	367.85	251.08	134.45	162.00	120.31	152.84
• Bilateral ²	33.03	77.79	33.93	27.9	24.02	6.56	10.97	-17.00 ³	-4.81	-12.78	3.63
• Multilateral	199.12	212.64	195.95	125.54	156.60	360.45	240.10	151.44	166.81	133.10	149.21
Office National du Ducroire (OND)	0	0	52.7	21.25	37.98	38.31	69.11	36.10	102.83	19.87	31.49
Foreign Affairs (except for DGIC)	10.36	14.42	18.38	21.01	13.53	33.55	33.02	27.54	27.08	24.60	37.37
Other Federal Ministries	21.09	10.05	6.45	6.22	8.86	5.71	8.54	6.33	6.82	6.98	6.82
Other Regional Ministries, Provinces and Communes	17.22	16.21	18.63	17.97	20.67	26.06	30.99	24.34	25.12	29.98	36.90
TOTAL (ODA)	894.06	834.07	920.68	836.00	747.56	1044.5	941.23	772.04	889.75	766.71	818.28
ODA/GNP	0.46%	0.42%	0.42%	0.40%	0.32%	0.37%	0.35%	0.31%	0.35%	0.30%	0.36%

Sources : Figures 1990-1994: DGIS [2001b], Figures 1995-2000: DGIS [2002d]

Notes:

¹ using DAC exchange rates

² including among others loans from state-to-state

³ negative figure due to a decline of the amount of loans from state-to-state, in combination with an increased repayment of the latter

⁴ the exceptional large amount is due to the fact that in 1993 DGIC instead of the Ministry of Finance paid Belgium's contribution to IDA. From 1997 till 2000 this was again the case. It explains the steep increase in the multilateral contribution from DGIC to the World Bank Group from 1997 onwards.

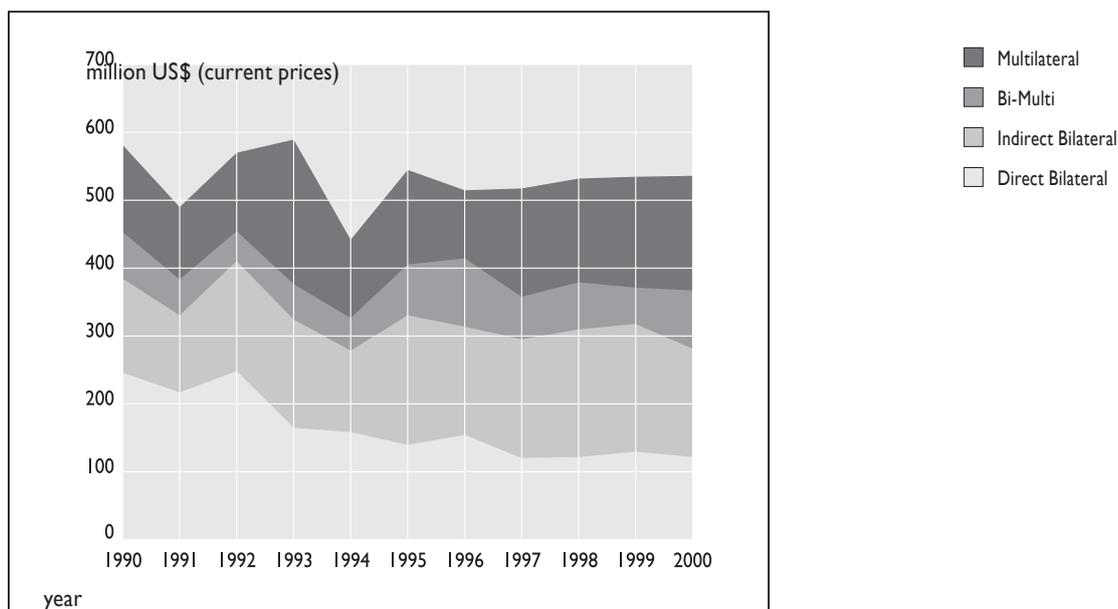
This was the period that the European economic and monetary union was being prepared and the Maastricht criteria had been set to assess eligibility of the EU member countries. Given that Belgium's public debt ratio was more than double the target rate of 60 per cent of GNP, it was felt by the government of the time that reaching the 3 per cent fiscal deficit target was imperative, as was some progress towards reducing the public debt ratio, and keeping inflation under the target rate. Another contributing factor undoubtedly was the crises in the three traditional aid recipient countries in Central Africa. A third element explaining the downward trend in the percentage of ODA as a share of GNP was the modification of the Development Co-operation Fund in 1993. This budget facility made it possible to carry over unspent budget appropriations to the following year. As the budget of development co-operation has traditionally been characterised by a relatively low spending ratio (disbursements as a percentage of budget appropriations), the fear was

that the disappearance of this facility would lead to a decline in ODA spending. The decline has been lower than expected due to a considerable rise of the spending ratio of DGIC, in particular at the end of the 1990s (from about 75 per cent and 76 per cent in 1994 and 1995 to about 93 per cent in 1999 and to more than 99 per cent in 2000) facilitated by an increase of multilateral and indirect bilateral aid, categories for which the administrative work burden is considerably lower.

4. Structure and main components of the aid programme

The aid under the responsibility of DGIC can be decomposed in four categories: direct bilateral aid, negotiated by DGIC on behalf of the Belgian government, and whose execution is since 1999 entrusted to BTC, indirect bilateral aid, i.e. funds entrusted to NGOs and other Belgian non-public actors who have the right of initiative in allocating these funds, multi-bi, and finally multilateral aid. The aid administered by other ministries and official bodies is discussed below. Table 4 provides a breakdown for the period under review. One of the remarkable features of the decade of the 1990s is the considerable fall in the importance of direct bilateral aid. From around 40 per cent of all DGIC aid at the beginning of the decade it fell to around 20 per cent in the closing years of the same decade. This not only represents a fall in relative terms, but also in current prices. The slack has been taken up by indirect bilateral aid, especially through the NGOs and the universities, and by multilateral aid, as shown in the following figure.

***Breakdown of DGIC Aid by Main Categories
(excluding administrative expenditures)***



The reduction in the direct bilateral aid, for which DGIC has effective responsibility, was not explicitly planned by any of the three secretaries of state. It can probably be best explained as a consequence of the continued failure of DGIC (and its predecessor BADC) to deliver aid timely and effectively, together with the dynamism of the indirect actors and the introduction of programme financing for the same actors, which greatly reduced transaction costs for the public sector and allowed vastly increased spending. To the extent that this shift was the result of a natural competition between direct and indirect actors, this was not by itself an undesirable outcome. What is regrettable, however, is the absence of a serious effort to develop a consistent global policy in which the different instruments are weighted against each other and complementarities between them exploited. The programme funding provisions for NGOs, universities, and some other minor indirect actors, all of them developed during the decade of the 1990s, were a considerable improvement upon the previous project-by-project approval, but DGIC did not take advantage of the possibilities offered by the institutionalised dialogue with NGOs and universities to cement fruitful collaborations. We will return to this issue below when we discuss indirect bilateral aid.

Technical assistance no longer commands the important place in direct bilateral aid it held during previous decades. The number of long-term expatriate (Belgian) experts declined from several thousands in the 1970s to some 1200 at the end of the 1980s. By the mid-1990s the number had fallen below 500, and at the end of the decade to less than 300. The breakdown or at least interruption of aid relations with the three main recipients of Belgian technical assistance during the 1990s, DR Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, is a major cause of this striking trend. Belgian aid officials were probably also not insensitive to the many criticisms voiced against long-term expatriate experts [DAC, 1995, 1997]. A similar re-orientation also took place for scholarships and training courses. More emphasis was put on local or mixed scholarships and study grants in Belgium were restricted to post-graduate studies and to short-term specialised training courses. This evolution also matched changes in the indirect bilateral co-operation with Belgian universities that put more emphasis on long-term institutional North-South co-operation.

Project aid remained the key instrument of Belgian direct bilateral aid, but its importance in total aid declined. The 1990s were characterised by sturdy growth in the share of indirect bilateral aid, as indicated above. This has been made possible by the introduction of programme funding, which shifted autonomy and responsibility to the indirect partners. The Belgian administration distinguishes between three partners of indirect co-operation: recognised non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Belgian universities and specialised privately incorporated organisations such as the Association for the Promotion of Education and Training Abroad (APEFE), and its Flemish counterpart, the Association for Development Co-operation and Technical Aid (VVOB), and scientific institutions such as the Institute of

Tropical Medicine in Antwerp. We will focus on the first two, which are the most important ones in budgetary terms.

In volume terms, NGO co-financing remained the major item of indirect bilateral aid. At the beginning of the 1990s, subsidies to NGOs amounted to 7 per cent of Belgian ODA. This share increased to 10 per cent in 2000. NGOs spent most co-financing funds on projects (65 per cent in 2000). Long-term expatriate NGO experts (previously called ‘volunteers’) are second in importance (20 per cent), followed by development education in Belgium (12 per cent) and training and scholarships (3 per cent).

During the 1990s, the relationship between the government and NGOs was characterised by a gradual move from project-by-project funding to programme funding. In 1991 programme funding was introduced for the larger and more experienced NGOs, while the traditional project co-financing scheme was kept in place for the bulk of NGOs. The modality of programme aid was extended to all NGOs from 1997 onwards. Since these reforms, NGOs submit five-yearly programmes and annual action plans. The main objective of these reforms was to reduce transaction costs for both NGOs and the administration through a simplification of administrative procedures. Incentives were created to increase professionalism and far-reaching clustering among NGOs. The work of the aid administration shifted from laborious bureaucratic ex-ante control of individual projects submitted to monitoring and ex-post evaluation. Whereas DGIC officials had difficulty adjusting to the new type of aid management and while they still tended to assess the yearly action plans as packages of projects, they nevertheless increasingly switched to the new programme logic, as seen by the increase in field inspections. In addition, external experts have been appointed to assist the administration in its policy dialogue with the NGOs and the evaluation of programmes. Co-ordination among NGOs was favoured through the formal recognition and financing of two federations, one for the Flemish NGOs and one for the francophone (and German-speaking) NGOs who represented NGOs in their relations with the government. Consultation between the NGOs and the government was institutionalised through three committees, each one in charge of a particular field of activity. Consultation among the NGOs and the administration was further strengthened from 1998 onwards through the institutionalisation of policy dialogues between the administration and individual NGOs on the occasion of the submission of the programme and the yearly action plans. An NGO consultative committee was installed to provide advice at the request of the state secretary, the federations, an individual NGO or on its own initiative. It met approximately about ten times a year.

Although generally recognised as a major breakthrough, NGO programme funding suffers from some weaknesses. First and foremost, the government failed to weed out the large number of small NGOs who previously had access to project financing. Many such NGOs are run by a few well-intentioned individuals, but without professional staff to speak of,

and are hardly equipped to perform their assigned tasks adequately. As a consequence programme funding is now extended to up to 100 NGOs, many of them too small and institutionally too unstable to warrant the considerable trust imparted to them under programme funding. A much smaller number of, say, ten to 15, would have been preferable from a public sector management perspective, with the rest either receiving project funding directly or through consortia of larger NGOs. A financial incentive for NGOs to merge or form alliances did not give the expected results, as subsequent secretaries of state estimated that small emerging NGOs ought to be given a chance to get direct access to government co-financing, and in this way contributed to the dispersion rather than the concentration of funding. Second, the opportunity offered by the new consultation mechanisms to enter into a policy dialogue with the NGO community in view of a co-ordination of activities among themselves and with the public sector was not taken up, due in part to the resistance of the NGOs, but also because the DGIC did not bring a coherent policy strategy to the negotiating table. Third, evaluation of the functioning of the NGOs and their field achievements, crucial for a system of programme funding to work fairly and efficiently, was not undertaken systematically. The administration thus lacked the authority to credibly assess individual NGOs and reward good performance.

Table 5: 10 major recipients of Belgian NGO support and Belgian direct bilateral aid (annual averages for the period 1995-2000) (in million US\$)

Indirect Bilateral (NGOs only)		Direct Bilateral	
DR Congo	6.1	Rwanda	9.3
India	3.2	Bolivia	7.3
Brazil	3.1	Ivory Coast	5.6
Philippines	2.3	Morocco	5.6
Peru	2.2	Niger	5.4
Bolivia	2.0	DR Congo	5.2
Ecuador	2.0	Tunisia	5.1
Nicaragua	1.5	Tanzania	4.3
Rwanda	1.4	Algeria	3.6
Guatemala	1.3	Burkina Faso	3.5

Source: calculated on the basis of Annual DGIC Reports (period 1990-2000)

A glance at the geographical distribution of NGO spending and of direct bilateral spending in Table 5 reveals that there is not much co-ordination or spontaneous overlap. Countries such as Brazil, India, Nicaragua or Guatemala are important destinations of NGO funding, but do not receive any direct bilateral aid. Of the countries in Table 5 only three are common to the two lists: DR Congo, Rwanda and Bolivia.

The reform of the indirect university co-operation was governed by agreements between the Belgian state and the Inter-university Councils of the two major Belgian communities, i.e. the Flemish Inter-university Council (VLIR, representing the Flemish universities) and the Inter-university Council of the French Community (CIUF, representing the French-language universities). The main focus of the reform was to give the universities greater responsibility while allowing the administration to concentrate on the important functions of policy dialogue, monitoring, and evaluation. The agreements set the framework regarding different tools of university co-operation, i.e. training in Belgian universities of students from developing countries, so-called North actions (involving all development co-operation activities carried out by Belgian universities in the North), own initiatives of Belgian universities to reinforce the teaching and research capacities in the South and institutional university co-operation. The latter form of university co-operation, which has risen sharply over the years aims at strengthening the teaching, research and administrative capacities of a limited number of partner institutions. Although the programme framework has undoubtedly allowed the Belgian universities to gain experience as development actors and to exert considerable peer control, the DGIC has failed to exploit the advantages offered by the policy dialogue to co-ordinate university co-operation with its own bilateral programme. On the positive side, evaluations are being performed on a regular basis.

Multilateral aid constitutes a considerable part of Belgian aid (see Table 4). There is an almost complete separation in the management of multilateral and bilateral aid. Complementarities and synergies are not pursued. The major item is the contribution to the European Development Fund (EDF) of the EU, which rose to 41 per cent of the multilateral budget in 2000. Subsequent Belgian governments were enthusiastic supporters of the EU, and contributions to the EDF, negotiated at the EU, were consequently hardly being questioned, although the quality of EU development aid was not in general highly regarded within DGIC. Another part of the multilateral budget was taken up by compulsory contributions or internationally negotiated contributions, such as the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank, and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). What remained is a large number of highly dispersed and often relatively small voluntary contributions to dozens of organisations, often earmarked for particular interventions. The law on International Co-operation of 25 May 1999 envisaged the concentration of multilateral aid to about 20 multilateral organisations. Another, subsequent reform in 2002 foresaw pluri-annual commitments within a programme framework to some of those organisations, an innovative feature not only for Belgium. As a consequence Belgian non-EU multilateral co-operation contributes financially to 27 international organisations, five of which receive an internationally set contribution¹⁵ while the 22 remaining were singled out for voluntary contributions. Criteria used by DGIC include the consistency between the mandate and the activities of the organisations on the one hand and the priorities of Belgian development co-operation, consistency between

¹⁵ These include IDA, GEF, MP (Montreal Protocol), CCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification) and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development).

the Belgian contribution to the organisation and the contribution of other actors to the same organisation, and a management approach on behalf of the organisation which permits an ex ante appraisal and evaluation of its functioning. In order to work out a detailed assessment sheet per organisation that could also be used to follow-up the performance over time, the criteria have been fine-tuned and made operational through the definition of 36 indicators [DGIC, 2002b]. The assessment sheets were used for the first time in 2000 to select 14 multilateral organisations¹⁶ that would henceforth benefit from either core-funding or programme funding and eight organisations¹⁷ that would receive funding of earmarked components of their activities.

The Belgian Survival Fund (BSF) is an important vehicle for multi-bi co-operation. It was set up in 1983 as a result of a Parliamentary initiative, with the aim to provide additional aid funds, collected from the state-run lottery, to improve the food security of households in 18 selected countries of SSA (not necessarily concentration countries of Belgium development co-operation), affected by chronic food shortages, poor access to basic services and a high infant mortality rate. An innovating feature of the programme was the adoption of an integrated approach towards food security and the co-operation among a number of international development organisations (IFAD, FAO, UNCDF, UNICEF). Some 15 larger Belgian NGOs also received funds from BSF. In a later phase some of the BSF funds were also used for direct bilateral projects. The major criticism against the BSF has been its slow pace of implementation. During the first phase of the BSF, covering a period of ten years, there was an authorisation from Parliament to commit about US\$ 300 million, but by the beginning of the 1990s only half had effectively been spent. This is maybe not so unusual, given that projects take a long time to formulate and are implemented over a number of years. Nevertheless this was a source of consistent criticism. After an evaluation in 1993, the second phase of the BSF started in 1994. Since then the rate of disbursements has increased, partly due to the system of annual programming. More emphasis has also been put on the projects' degree of innovation, sustainability and multiplier effects on poverty reduction and food security [DAC, 1997]. After a series of further evaluations carried out in collaboration with the operating partners at the end of the 1990s, the modalities of the use of BSF funds were fine-tuned [DGIC, 2002c].

¹⁶ See Moniteur Belge [14 June 2000]. These 14 organisations include two intergovernmental agencies which do not belong to the UN system, i.e. ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) and IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) and 12 UN agencies: UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), UNCDF (United Nations Capital Development Fund), OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid), UNAIDS (United Nations Programme against aids), and HABITAT (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements).

¹⁷ See Moniteur Belge [14 June 2000]. The eight organisations include five UN specialised agencies: ILO (International Labour Organization), FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization), WHO (World Health Organisation) and the World Bank; the GCIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), an organisation associated with the World Bank; the IOM (International Organisation for Migration), an inter-governmental agency, and the West African Development Bank (WADB).

5. Country Programming

Statistics on geographical allocation indicate that Belgian aid is highly dispersed. During the 1990s less than 60 per cent of total bilateral aid was received by the ten largest recipients. One reason for this is that several Ministries and other public agencies are managing part of the aid programme, and that there is very little co-ordination between them. But this is certainly not the major cause. The situation is in fact only slightly better if we turn to the part of the aid budget managed by DGIC (direct plus indirect).

Table 6: 20 major recipients of DGIC (1990-2000) (in million US\$)

	TDGIC Average 1990-1994	Total DGIC Average 1995-2000	Direct Bilateral Average 1990-1994	Direct Bilateral Average 1995-2000
Rwanda	36.3	20.9	24.4	9.3
DRC	24.5	22.2	11.4	5.2
Burundi	32.7	6.6	25	1.5
Bolivia	9.3	12.1	5.4	7.3
Tanzania	11.8	9.6	5.9	4.3
Morocco	9.2	7.3	6.5	5.6
Vietnam	5.8	9.5	4.7	3.5
Senegal	6.6	7.5	2.9	3.4
Kenya	7.7	6.6	2.7	2.4
Tunisia	6.7	6.7	5.5	5.1
Ecuador	5.7	7.4	3.1	2.6
Burkina Faso	3.5	7.9	1.4	3.5
Niger	4.2	7.1	3.3	5.4
Ivory Coast	4.1	6.9	2.8	5.6
Algeria	6.4	4.3	1.4	3.6
Philippines	4.2	6	1.6	1.6
Indonesia	8.3	1.9	2.9	1.3
Thailand	6.1	3.7	3.5	2.2
Brazil	4.1	5	0	0
Cameroon	5.2	4.1	2.2	2.5
Average	10.1	8.2	5.8	3.8

Source: calculated on the basis of Annual DGIC Reports (1990-2000)

Table 6 provides data on how much the 20 major recipients of aid through DGIC received in the first half and the second half of the 1990s. As can be seen the average is around 10 to 8 million US\$ per year, with many countries receiving less than 8 million US\$. The picture is even starker if we concentrate on direct bilateral aid managed directly by DGIC. The data appear in the second part of Table 6, and as can be seen the average is around 4 to 6 million US\$, depending on the period under consideration. Fixed costs are high in terms of geographical desks in Brussels and field offices in the recipient country. Even with just a few staff manning the desks, it adds up to an important sum compared to the small amount of aid that is being allocated.

One consequence of the geographical dispersion of aid can be seen from Table 7.

Table 7: Relative importance of Belgium in its 10 major ODA recipients (period 1999-2000)

	Rank ¹	Importance ²
Vietnam	9	2%
Congo	2	96%
Rwanda	8	8%
Tanzania	>10	na ³
Bolivia	>10	na
Cameroon	10	2%
Niger	6	6%
Ivory Coast	>10	na
Burkina Faso	>10	na
Tunisia	6	2%

¹Rank: Belgium's rank among multilateral and bilateral donors.

²Importance: Belgium's contribution as a percentage of those donors preceding it in the ranking list.

³na: not available in DAC tables.

Source: on the basis of DAC [2002a, 2002b],

These ten countries are 'major' recipients from a Belgian perspective and, with the exception of Cameroon and Tunisia, had the status of programme countries in Brussels, but from a recipient perspective Belgium is hardly an important donor, except in the case of the DR Congo. If one considers that Belgium only contributes between one and 1.5 per cent of DAC bilateral aid, this result is not surprising. But it puts the notion of programme country into perspective. Until the 1980s, the geographical distribution of Belgian aid was highly skewed towards DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. In the five years preceding our period of study (1985-1989) the three main recipients obtained more than half of bilateral ODA. In these countries Belgium was a major donor. The rest of bilateral aid was widely dispersed over a large number of countries, many of them receiving funding for one or two projects. During the 1960s and 1970s the concentration was even more pronounced.

As a consequence, Belgium is now a small donor with little clout in most countries in which it is active. In the past, the issues brought up by the marginal status of Belgian aid compared to dozens of larger multilateral and bilateral donors were mainly addressed by putting the emphasis on project aid as a major instrument of aid and by shirking away from policy dialogue at sector or macro levels. But if it is believed, as is at present fashionable to do, that project aid as a form of conditionality is an illusion [World Bank, 1998], and if it is further argued that in aid-dependent countries project aid, with all its donor-imposed bureaucracy, undermines the institutional capacity of the recipient government to plan, budget and implement their own development, the question must be faced what the best strategy is for small donors. The

reflection of what, if any, the contribution might be of small bilateral donors in a post-project area, except as providers of funds, has not been squarely faced by Belgian aid officials. For Central Africa, there is the feeling that there is some role for an overall foreign policy in which aid has an important place, and which involves putting pressure at the highest level. For the other countries, it is not clear that the notion of programme country makes much sense.

Although the above results would suggest otherwise, successive governments congratulated themselves on the efforts at concentrating bilateral aid. Table 8 shows the 'programme countries' selected by the successive governments.

Table 8: programme countries

	Geens 1988-1991	Derycke 1994¹	Moreels 1995-1999	Boutmans 1999-
Sub-Sahara Africa				
1 Angola			x	
2 Benin		x	x	x
3 Burkina Faso		x	x	x
4 Burundi	x	x	x	x
5 Cameroon	x	x		
6 DR Congo	x		x	x
7 Ethiopia			x	x
8 Gabon	x			
9 Ivory Coast		x	x	x
10 Kenya	x	x	x	
11 Mali		x	x	x
12 Mozambique				x
13 Niger	x	x	x	x
14 Rwanda	x		x	x
15 SADC	x	x	x	x
16 Senegal		x		x
17 South Africa			x	x
18 Tanzania	x	x	x	x
19 Uganda		x	x	x
North Africa and Middle-				
20 Algeria	x	x		x
21 Morocco	x	x	x	x
22 Palestine			x	x
23 Tunisia	x	x	x	
Asia				
24 Bangladesh	x	x		x
25 Cambodia		x	x	x
26 Indonesia	x			
27 Laos		x	x	x
28 Philippines		x	x	
29 Thailand	x			
30 Vietnam		x	x	x
31 Asean region	x			
Central and Latin America				
32 Bolivia	x	x	x	x
33 Ecuador		x	x	x
34 Peru		x	x	x
35 Surinam	x			

¹ As proposed in a mid-1994 paper on the geographical concentration policy.

This list was not officially endorsed by the government.

The lists are far too long to have any effect on the concentration of aid. A maximum of ten countries instead of up to 25 would be more reasonable from this perspective. Second, the list changes from one government to the next. There seemed to have been no agreement across political parties to keep the list the same for a period of time bridging several legislations. As a consequence 35 countries were at one moment or another a programme country during the 1990s. Out of those only 6 were on the list for the whole decade, as can be seen from Table 8. Furthermore, non-programme countries also continued to receive aid, sometimes more than the programme countries.

6. Institutional Set-up, Changes and Problems

During the 1980s and early 1990s several attempts were made to reform the administration. Both Minister Geens and secretary of state Derycke tried their hand at it. Their reforms had in common that they were based on the idea that the same administrative division should be responsible for as large a part of a cycle of planning and implementation as possible. This came to be called the principle of A to Z responsibility. A corollary was that head of departments could also be held accountable for the final outcome. During the second half of the decade another, much more drastic, overhaul of the administration was prepared under secretary of state Moreels and further put in practice by his successor, secretary of state Boutmans. That Moreels could go much further in his reform than his predecessors was due to a number of factors. There were the scandals that had rocked the administration at the beginning of his mandate, and had led to the setting up of an ad hoc parliamentary commission that presented its recommendations in 1997. Moreels had also the advantage of reporting directly to a forceful prime minister Dehaene, who supported his fellow Flemish Christian-democrat. The Moreels reform was enacted in 1998-2000 and consisted of three parts. First, and foremost, a new unit, the Belgian Technical Co-operation (BTC), was set up as a public company. This had the advantage of allowing a flexible personnel policy, and also addressing the problem of a cruel shortage of high-level personnel that had plagued the administration for a long period of time. BTC was governed by a board made up of experts, appointed by the government. Moreels, with his background as president of an efficiently run major humanitarian NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières, felt that the major weakness was the slowness and ineffectiveness of implementation of operations in the field, and BTC was the new tool that would allow this constraint to be overcome. The remaining administrative and management tasks, mainly strategy and policy preparation, would be left to the BADC. BADC was part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but had enjoyed substantial autonomy. Moreels integrated this department more fully in Foreign Affairs, without however merging it. What this meant was that BADC was renamed into the Directorate General of International Co-operation (DGIC), but with a separate budget and personnel that did not rotate within the Ministry, and

a State secretary responsible at the level of the government. A third part of the reform was the creation of a separate evaluation unit, with an independent head of evaluation, to be recruited from outside the administration.

The reform was set in motion under Moreels, and further implemented under his successor, state secretary Boutmans. Boutmans felt however that continuity was of the utmost importance, and that the new government could therefore not backtrack on the reforms that had been left unfinished by the previous government. Boutmans faithfully implemented what was handed down to him, notwithstanding his personal misgivings. The creation of BIO was his own device. The idea came again from his predecessor, but Boutmans decided that this task should not be entrusted to BTC. By creating yet another independent public company, this time in charge of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries, Boutmans made the administrative landscape even more complex than it already was.

It may be too early to judge this major reform by its outcome, but several critical comments are in order. First, the reform goes against the grain of the efforts of the predecessors of Moreels, Geens and Derycke. Instead of A to Z responsibility, the functions of policy preparation and implementation were again radically split, with all the risks of poor co-ordination and administrative infighting that had been experienced during the 1980s. At the very least, this testifies to a lack of institutional memory in the modernization of the administration. This is linked to the fact that in Belgium such reforms are very much imposed by the government on the administration, with minimal participation from the latter. Every new minister or state secretary, with his inner circle of handpicked personal ‘cabinet’ advisors, starts the process of analyzing the weaknesses of the administration afresh, driven by a political will to make a difference, to plant the flag of the new man in charge, even if it means swinging back the pendulum of reform in the opposite direction from the predecessor. Second, the Moreels reform was not in line with the new thinking that was emerging at the time in international circles. BTC, like the German GTZ on which it was loosely inspired, was set up to leave the donor in charge of implementation, and seems to have been conceived with old style donor-driven projects and technical assistance in mind. Moreels, with his background in humanitarian aid, was either unaware of or oblivious to the increasing calls for more recipient country ownership during implementation. To put it sharply, if the move is towards budget support under recipient-formulated and owned strategies for development and attacking poverty, as is now tempted with the PRSP approach, then BTC seemed an odd choice for preparing the administration for these new tasks. Third, Moreels did not acknowledge the important weaknesses in terms of strategy preparation and policy analysis. The part of BADC that was left over after the implementation tasks were taken away, was structurally weak and unprepared for its important residual tasks. The name change into DGIC and the partial integration into Foreign Affairs did not solve any of this. In one way, the integration did not go far enough to be able to profit from a pooling

of human resources with foreign affairs. But it could not go much further than it actually did without risking the wholesale taking over of the administration by the much larger and conservative foreign affairs ministry, with its limited interest in development. Fourth, the new evaluation structure emphasised the accountability dimension of evaluation to the detriment of the learning function of evaluation, although this feature was not proposed by Moreels. In effect, the removal of the evaluation function from DGIC suppressed the critical reflection on current practices as a tool of internal quality control within the organisation¹⁸. Fifth, the new setup was administratively very complex and bound to run into co-ordination problems. For instance both BTC and DGIC set up field offices in the 25 or so programme countries, each of which has to relay with the geographical desk in the respective headquarters in Brussels.

¹⁸ This analysis is endorsed by the 2001 DAC Peer Review of Belgian aid [DAC, 2001].

Another institutional aspect that we wish to discuss here is the relationship between the aid administration and other ministries that are also involved in aid policies. In the previous paragraph we already discussed how DGIC was partially integrated without a full merger into the ministry of foreign affairs. Notwithstanding this closer administrative and physical proximity, the co-ordination between DGIC and the rest of the ministry of foreign affairs did not work very well the first years. This was most striking in the field of human rights, humanitarian aid and conflict prevention, all of which taken up by development co-operation as new themes during the 1990s, while at the same time remaining areas of interest at the ministry of foreign affairs. There has been surprisingly little exchange and collaboration between the departments, leading to a loss of efficiency and effectiveness of Belgian actions. It seemed at times that the new relationship between DGIC and foreign affairs was too close for comfort, not only for the administration, but also for politicians. There have been frequent clashes between state secretary of development co-operation Boutmans and minister of foreign affairs Michel. Both politicians belong to different political parties and language groups, and have very different styles of operating.

The relations between development co-operation and the ministry of finance are more distant but equally difficult. As already indicated before, the civil servants at finance are very jealous of their role of representing Belgium at the International Financial Institutions¹⁹. Development co-operation has not been allowed to post any staff to the delegation to the World Bank in Washington for instance, in contrast with the practice of important bilateral donors such as the US, France, Germany, UK, and also the Scandinavian donors and the Netherlands. By contrast, the Belgian ministry of finance did not relent, even after DGIC suggested that it would bear all the related costs, and even after it had started paying the contributions to IDA from its budget. This has led to a lack of communication between development co-operation and the IFIs. One of the consequences is that the Belgian aid administration largely missed out on the lively debate that was going on in Washington on such diverse matters as debt relief, the need to integrate poverty reduction in

¹⁹ The following incident is illustrative. In 2001 a Belgian Treasury official, stationed at the Belgian delegation to the World Bank Washington, was sent back to Brussels, apparently as a sanction for having consulted with a colleague from DGIC over the preparation of the Monterrey Conference on Financing Development.

macroeconomic strategies, or on new aid instruments such as budget support. During much of the 1990s the Belgian minister of finance, Philippe Maystadt, was chairman of the influential Interim Committee of the Board of Governors at the IMF. In this capacity he was involved in some important discussions on debt relief. Yet it is remarkable that almost nothing of this was communicated internally between the two departments. Aid officials would find out indirectly what Maystadt was saying on behalf of the Belgian government, and also indirectly on their behalf. There were no important debriefings, and little feedback, let alone dialogue.

Another difficult relationship was that between the federal government in Brussels and the many complex layers of local authorities that had been given more and more responsibility after each round of constitutional reform in Belgium. This has some bearing on our topic, as the constitution of 1993 confers considerable rights to the Regions (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels) and the Communities (French, Flemish and German speaking) in the domain of foreign policy. There is probably no other country in the world where decentralised political authorities have such far-reaching powers. This has for instance led to intense consultation between the federal and decentralised governments during the Belgian EU presidency in the second half of 2001, including EU ministerial meetings being chaired by ministers from decentralised government on behalf of the different Belgian governments. The same overlap of authority exists in the area of development co-operation. The Flemish government for instance has signed international co-operation treaties with South Africa and Chile and extended aid to them.

The above may help explain why an independent development policy at the federal level, without any involvement of decentralised levels of government, is politically becoming increasingly difficult. Not only did the decentralised governments, using their own resources, start to deploy their own development policies, but they became more and more outspoken claimants for a bigger part of the federal cake of the aid budget. During the decade of the 1990s all the main parties in the Flemish Parliament for instance approved a declaration that large parts of development co-operation should be handed over to the Flemish government.

All this came to a head in 2000, during the so-called Lambermont negotiations, in preparation of a series of complex reforms that would yet again reshuffle some of the responsibilities between different layers of government. It was decided that parts of development co-operation would be handed over to the decentralised governments. Following the principle ‘in foro interno, in for externo’, every layer of government represents Belgium outside the country in areas in which it has responsibility within Belgium. This is for instance the case with education, agriculture, infrastructure, and the environment. On this basis the Flemish and francophone governments had requested that development co-operation be split along sector lines, and the government had accepted this in principle. In the most ambitious version

of this plan, the Flemish and francophone governments would select their own partner countries, set up their own aid agencies, fund their own projects in areas under their responsibility. The federal government would still be in charge of for instance multilateral aid, and the tasks traditionally entrusted to the Ministry of Finance. The final Lambermont agreement, accepted by the parties of the coalition and some of the opposition, accepted the principle that part of development co-operation would be handed over to decentralised levels of government by 2004, but did not give any details.

The agreement was met with dismay by the majority of NGOs and development experts. State secretary Boutmans publicly expressed his opposition, but did not resign over it. The DAC was openly critical in its 2001 peer review of Belgium. A Senate commission studied the issue in 2001 and invited experts and representatives of NGOs and the academic world to give their views. Significantly, at the end the commission could not find a majority in favour of the so-called regionalisation of development co-operation. In the meantime the issue has been sent to a technical working group that has to work out the details. Staff at DGIC and BTC were shaken. The Moreels reform has not been completely worked out in all its details, and already another, even more massive reform of development co-operation is hanging in the air.

7. Main Actors and the Public Support of the Aid Programme

All major political parties in Belgium remained committed to development co-operation. If anything, a stronger consensus on the importance of aid prevailed at the end of the decade than at the beginning. Excellencies of the liberal, christian-democratic, socialist, and green parties pursued active policies in the areas of aid and foreign policy, especially towards Central Africa. The liberals, traditionally the most skeptical and the most likely to emphasise Belgian commercial and economic interests over development issues, became major defenders of a foreign policy 'of the heart'. Of the government in office at the end of the decade, both Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt (Flemish liberal) and foreign affairs minister Louis Michel (francophone liberal) were very interested in development policies and active on the diplomatic front. There were no signs of disagreements within that coalition between the progressive greens and the conservative liberals. When tensions arose, they were more related to conflicts of personalities or territorial fights than to ideological differences. The only political party that took an outspoken anti-aid stand is the 'Vlaams Blok', a right-wing Flemish nationalist party that came to the fore during the 1990s but remained excluded from power by an agreement between the other parties.

The press has also remained largely positive towards development aid. In the 1990s, it provided a more critical analysis than during previous decades, but largely in a constructive atmosphere, with the exception of the

almost vitriolic attacks that appeared over several months in the Flemish daily 'De Morgen' and on which we reported earlier. NGOs continued to be very forceful actors, influencing both Parliament and the press. During the mid-1990s a series of scandals and highly critical press reports led to a worrying loss of credibility of official aid policies. Secretary of state Moreels, who was highly regarded at the time by public opinion and whose moral integrity was not in doubt, started to redress this situation. He also attached extra attention to informing and educating the general public on development issues, and he increased the budget considerably (see Table 3) [DAC, 1997]. Boutmans has continued this policy.

Opinion polls did not always show a clear picture. A major opinion poll in Flanders in 1999 indicated that one of three people felt that poverty in the third world was among the three most important societal problems, contrasting with some earlier results, and suggesting that there might be considerable support for official aid in the country. At the end of the decade the government decided to gradually increase aid spending over the coming years. This decision has not met with any major criticism in the media.

Conclusions

Aid policies in the 1990s were being pursued in a climate of major upheavals. Some of these were externally caused, such as the dramatic events in Central Africa. These events in particular marked the end to the post-colonial period in which Belgium had been providing the major part of its bilateral aid to DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. In the past Belgium emphasised its 'special ties' with Central Africa, leading to fuzzy and unarticulated aid policies. All that has changed. The three countries went through dramatic crises, and the whole region remained highly unstable during most of the period. Belgian aid dwindled, and diplomacy became as important, if not more important, than aid. The aid that no longer went to the three traditional beneficiaries was spread out very widely, without any clear sense of direction or a convincing effort at imposing some geographical concentration. At the level of motives and overall objectives, aid became more complex, with all the major political parties involved in government putting emphasis on human rights and governance issues. In another break with the past, aid tying was if not abandoned, then at least greatly attenuated, except for the bilateral aid administered by the ministry of finance. Indirect actors, especially NGOs and the universities, became major channels for official aid, to the detriment of direct bilateral aid.

The Achilles heel of aid policies remained administrative management despite, or maybe because, several efforts at restructuring. A major reform at the end of the decade, splitting the administration in two entities, DGIC for planning and BTC for implementation, has not been in operation long enough for us to make a balanced judgment, but there are some reasons to be skeptical about the good it may bring. The major cloud hanging over development policies is however the proposal to hand over important parts to the regional governments. This would in practice result in three governments in Belgium being in charge of development co-operation, one federal and two regional, and would call for yet another major rethinking of management structures. Notwithstanding the overwhelming negative comments from national and international experts, and appeals from major NGOs and concerned academics not to go ahead with this reform, by mid-2002 there were no signs that the government was willing to recant this decision.

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List of abbreviations

BADC : Belgian Administration for Development Co-operation
BSF : Belgian Survival Fund
BTC : Belgian Technical Co-operation
CCD : United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
GCIAR : Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIUF : Francophone Inter-University Council
DAC: Development Assistance Committee
DGIC: Directorate General for Development Co-operation
EDF : European Development Fund
FAO :Food and Agricultural Organisation
GEF: Global Environmental Facility
GTZ : Deutsche Gezelschaft für Zusammenarbeit
HABITAT : United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
IDA : International Development Agency
IDEA : International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IFAD : International Fund for Agricultural Development
ICRC : International Committee of the Red Cross
IFI : International Financial Institution
ILO : International Labour Organization
IOM : International Organisation for Migration
MP : Montreal Protocol
OCHA : Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid
ODA : Official Development Assistance
OHCHR : Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OND : Office National du Dueroire
RPF : Rwandan Patriotic Front
SPA : Special Partnership with Africa
SWAPs : sector wide approaches
UNAIDS : United Nations Programme against aids
UNCDF : United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCTAD : United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP : United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO :United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNEP : United Nations Environment Programme
UNHCR : United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF : United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM : United Nations Development Fund for Women
VLIR: Flemish Inter-University Council
WADB : West African Development Bank
WHO : World Health Organisation



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