



Evaluation of the Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP)

Final Report

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands

Rotterdam, 4 December 2025

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Executive Summary

Background

The Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP) was launched by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as a successor to the Netherlands Fellowship Programme (NFP) and the Netherlands Initiative for Capacity Building in Higher Education (NICHE). Implementation ran from 2018 to 2024 under the coordination of Nuffic. With a programme envelope of roughly €310 million, funded jointly by the MFA's Social Development Department (DSO, education team) and the Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) division within the Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) department, OKP represented a substantial share of Dutch development spending for education and capacity building on FNS. The programme operated in 55 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

OKP's instrument mix comprised Institutional Collaboration Projects (ICPs), group training (Tailor-Made Training—TMT/TMT+—and refresher courses), individual scholarships, and alumni activities. Instruments were deployed through a differentiated A/B/C country categorisation, guided by Country Focus Documents and Embassy-led consultations, with competitive calls encouraging partnerships between Dutch institutions and counterparts in partner countries (including government, civil society and—where relevant—the private sector). A-countries had access to the full suite; B countries to group training, scholarships and alumni programming (without TMT+); and C countries primarily to scholarships and alumni support.

Cross-cutting priorities were mainstreamed throughout: gender equality and social inclusion; labour-market alignment and employability; institutional governance and quality assurance; environmental sustainability (including climate resilience where sector-relevant); and digitalisation and knowledge exchange.

Evaluation approach and methodology

The [evaluation approach](#) was a theory-based, utilisation-focussed analysis at both portfolio and intervention level (country and sectoral). The review was guided by an evaluation matrix (annex) to cover the ToR's questions on relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender equality. It was agreed during the kick-off meeting that assessing impact would not be included in the evaluation.

[Country case studies](#) were chosen according to six interlinked criteria: 1) regional spread, covering Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Middle East and North Africa. 2) alignment with the OKP's priority themes, where selected countries demonstrated particular engagement in one or more of these priority areas based on confirmed OKP interventions; 3) contextual alignment with OKP design and MFA policy priorities; 4) representation of fragile and complex contexts based on the World Bank Fragility Index 2024; 5) variation in economic development based on World Bank FY25 classifications; 6) learning potential and evaluation value. Country and case selections thus used purposive sampling to maximise variation in context, instrument mix and data richness. This supports depth over breadth but can over-represent better-documented interventions; this was mitigated through triangulation and negative case analysis. The four case-study countries selected for field visits ensured regional balance and maximised evaluative value, combining diverse thematic foci and OKP instruments, a mix of fragile and stable contexts, and practical feasibility for fieldwork.

[For the data collection](#), a set of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to answer the research questions was used. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted at portfolio and country-level. Participant selection was informed by the thematic and institutional scope of each intervention, as identified through

project documentation and application overviews. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to understand thematic coherence, institutional transformation, and perceived outcomes of OKP interventions. Participants included rightsholders and participants in project activities (i.e. lecturers, students, stakeholders) and recipients of scholarships.

Data analysis was done during and after data collection, combining and comparing data from different tools and methods. This was based on sound techniques including triangulation to compare data from primary and secondary resources, as well as combining internal and external sources. For the cases, contribution analysis was applied, testing contribution claims.

A validation meeting validation meeting was organised with a total of five participants taken from the research population, including ministry and programme staff to test preliminary findings and recommendations.

Main Findings

Overall, OKP design and interventions were aligned with objectives of foreign policy of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP) was explicitly **relevant** for the priorities and needs of national partners in each participating country. Finding show that OKP was **relevant** to the Dutch and partner organisations and institutions.

Internal **coherence** was moderate, with synergies materialising in several contexts but often opportunistically rather than through systematic portfolio design. External coherence was strong at design but more uneven in implementation, depending heavily on embassy convening and structured consultation with partner.f

Targets were not clearly formulated, and baseline data were not systematically collected for key components such as scholarships, institutional collaboration projects, and training activities. While numerical achievements were mentioned, they were not consistently tracked or verified. Processes are **effective** only when efforts are coordinated across all levels, from management to the production floor.

Roles were **efficiently** divided and resources well managed among OPK partners and collaboration was generally strong. Yet, operational coordination between different partners active in a country, and with the MFA, was limited.

There is moderate likelihood that the outcomes will be **sustained**. Mechanisms to ensure ongoing **benefits** exist but are unevenly applied (financing, alumni, and exit provisions are weakest).

Performance on **gender** was mixed across countries and interventions. Specific gender-responsive activities/training took place, and efforts were taken to support 50% participation of women.

All respondents **expressed regret over the discontinuation of the OKP program**. For embassies, it served as a valuable instrument to strengthen political dialogue with governments. For higher education (HE) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, it was crucial for building relationships with partner institutions and fostering mutual learning. For individual training participants, it played an important role in promoting reciprocal cultural understanding and appreciation of different ways of life, something increasingly vital in today's polarised world, where misunderstandings are more common. The **OKP** has been a transformative initiative aimed at strengthening capacity in developing countries through education and training.

Recommendations

The **strategic recommendations** primarily align with the DAC criteria of sustainability and coherence, and to a lesser extent with effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance."

1. **Adopt country-led skills partnership frameworks that link Dutch development spending to employer co-financing and sector regulation.** At policy level, embassies should be empowered to broker tripartite agreements between government, industry, and education institutions in priority sectors.
2. **Establish an MFA-wide 'Alumni Diplomacy & Knowledge' policy line.** This should include a unified, alumni database and dedicated activation budgets at mission level.
3. **Make 'Digital Learning as a Public Good' a standing development cooperation policy instrument.** Finance interoperable, open digital infrastructure (e.g., open-source learning platforms, shared course repositories, and mutually recognised credential/micro-credential standards) designed to also function in low-connectivity environments.
4. **Diversify financing models to crowd-in resources.** Projects lasted longer when cash or in-kind co-financing was clearly agreed and tracked. Future calls should make employer or sector co-financing a firm requirement and include it in monitoring from approval through to closure.
5. **Support resource-constrained institutions with targeted capacity and subsidised access:** less-resourced universities and TVETs risk exclusion under strict co-financing rules.
6. **Demand-driven, decentralised design with embassy-led convening and instrument sequencing.** Future portfolios should remain demand-driven and be more decentralised, aligned with partner needs and Dutch policy frameworks.
7. **Clarify roles and strengthen governance (MFA–Nuffic–RNE) with documented handovers.** Regular coordination through steering committees, bi-weekly meetings, and shared repositories make work more efficient and consistent.
8. **Clarify continuation planning at design stage.** Future portfolio design should make continuation pathways visible at approval (institutional embedding, partnership commitments, budget lines, alumni/refreshers), and embassies should be mandated to convene annual sustainability reviews aligned to project or programme milestones.
9. **In fragile and conflict-affected settings,** programme design and implementation should incorporate a resilience lens—not only governance. This means building institutional and community capacity to adapt to shocks and maintain continuity of learning and services.
10. It is recommended to **conduct a mid-term risk and political economy analysis** during implementation, as country contexts can evolve and become fragile over time.
11. It is recommended to optimise the effectiveness and sustainability of capacity development interventions by **strategically balancing long-term academic training** (e.g., Master's programs) **with short-term practical training** (e.g., short courses and Tailor-Made Training)

The **operational recommendations** primarily align with the DAC criteria of effectiveness and sustainability, show moderate alignment with efficiency, and have minimal relevance to the criteria of coherence and relevance.

1. **Reinstate light, outcome-level MEL with separate frameworks—education and thematic:** outcomes were under-measured, but this does not require detailed tracking at the highest sector level. Instead, M&E should focus on effects at the level of institutions and graduates, where OKP has the most direct influence.
2. **Rebalance scholarships toward institutional pathways and return/placement.** approve short courses only when they are explicitly linked to ICP/TMT objectives and include a signed return/placement plan.

3. **Continue to support digitalisation and blended approaches where they add value.** Digital delivery improved resilience and cost-effectiveness when LMS, digital content, and trainer coaching were embedded with QA/budgets, rather than improvised (e.g., during COVID-19).
4. **Operationalise cross-cutting priorities with measurable plans and budgets.** Gender, inclusion, youth, and climate were not integrated consistently. Each theme should have one or two specific indicators, dedicated resources, and stronger use of alumni and TMTs to embed these priorities into HR systems, curricula, and quality assurance.
5. **Localise delivery: retain a central strategic core team; expand in-country Nuffic functions.** portfolios benefitted where local representatives animated alumni, coordination and compliance. Delegate these functions to regional/local offices with clear mandates/budgets, keep strategy and quality assurance in The Hague.
6. Design programmes with **modular components** and **contingency plans** to adapt to changing political or bureaucratic contexts. Agility ensures continuity and relevance, especially in fragile or rapidly evolving environments.
7. **Reduce transaction costs: two-stage calls and targeted compliance guidance.** Introducing a two-stage application process (from concept note to full proposal) together with clear and concise compliance guidance lowers entry barriers for applicants.
8. Promote **joint initiatives between HE and TVET institutions** to blend theory and practice. This creates more holistic and employable graduates and bridges the skills gap. Establish structured, incentivised collaboration frameworks between HE and TVET institutions.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
Akvo RSR	Akvo Really Simple Reporting.
CBE	Competency-Based Education
CBS	Community-Based Sociotherapy
COVID	COronaVirus Disease
CPI	Country Plan of Implementation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DGIS	Directeur-generaal Internationale Samenwerking [<i>Director-General for International Cooperation</i>], the Netherlands
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSO	Social Development Department (Ministry Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands)
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
EKN	Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
EQ	Evaluation Question
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FNS	Food and Nutrition Security
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [<i>German Agency for International Cooperation</i>]
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GT	Group Training
HBO	Hoger Beroepsonderwijs [<i>Higher vocational education</i>]
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resources Development
ICP	Institutional Collaboration Projects
ICT	Information and communication technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGG	Inclusive Green Growth
IQ	Institutional Quality
LMS	Learning Management System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MASP	Multi-Annual Strategic Plan
MBO	Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs [<i>Secondary vocational education</i>]
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MHO	Maatschappelijk Hoger Onderwijs in Ontwikkelingslanden [<i>Higher Education Institutions in Developing Countries</i>]

Abbreviation	Meaning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MSc	Master of Science
NFP	Netherlands Fellowship Programme
NICHE	Netherlands Initiative for Capacity Building in Higher Education
NL	Netherlands
NRW	Non-Revenue Water
NUFFIC	Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education (formerly: <i>Netherlands Universities Foundation For International Cooperation</i>)
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OKP	Orange Knowledge Programme
PLC	Public Limited Company
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PUM	Programma Uitzending (gepensioneerde) Managers [<i>Programme for Sending (Retired) Managers Abroad</i>]
QA	Quality Assurance
RNE	Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
RVO	Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland [<i>Netherlands Enterprise Agency</i>]
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	South East Asia
SPA	Strategic Partnership Agreement
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SRoL	Security and Rule of Law
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
TMT	Tailor-Made Training
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVETA	Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (Kenya)
UAS	University of Applied Sciences
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WO	Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs [Research-Oriented Higher Education]

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned Ecorys to conduct the final evaluation of the Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP), an education and capacity building programme aimed at contributing to global sustainable development. The team conducted the evaluation between January and November 2025, including through field missions in Colombia, Ethiopia, Jordan, and Vietnam.

The evaluation provides an independent assessment of OKP's effects (2018-2024) and the extent to which the programme contributed to the overall objectives of sustainable and inclusive development in partner countries.

It assesses how the OKP instruments have contributed to capacity building and knowledge development in individuals and organisations in partner countries and how the OKP programme contributed to the advancement of the education systems of both TVET and Higher Education, in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) evaluation criteria. Furthermore, it assesses how recommendations from the previous education programmes were implemented; and how OKP promoted gender equality and included marginalised groups.

1.2 Background of OKP

The Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP) was launched by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as a successor to the Netherlands Fellowship Programme (NFP) and the Netherlands Initiative for Capacity Building in Higher Education (NICHE). Following an inception year in 2017, implementation ran from 2018 to 2024 under the coordination of Nuffic. With a programme envelope of roughly €310 million, funded jointly by the MFA's Social Development Department (DSO, education team) and the Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) division within the Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) Department, OKP represented a substantial share of Dutch development spending for education and capacity building on FNS. The programme operated in 55 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

OKP was conceived against a global backdrop of uneven poverty reduction and persistent inequalities in access to quality post-secondary education. It aligned explicitly with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 17 (Partnerships), as well as with Dutch policy priorities in Food and Nutrition Security, Water, Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The programme responded to three systemic challenges in TVET and higher education systems in partner countries:

- Limited accessibility and equity for women and marginalised groups;
- Variable quality and labour-market relevance of provision;
- Constrained institutional capacities to adapt to changing social and economic demands.

To address these challenges, OKP adopted education and skills development as pillars for inclusive growth and poverty reduction, combining short-term skills upgrading with longer-term institutional change through an integrated capacity-development approach at three levels—individual, organisational and institutional—using mutually reinforcing instruments (individual scholarships, group training, institutional projects). This approach

sought to ensure that learning gains and organisational performance improvements translated into stronger sectoral systems and ultimately more inclusive development outcomes.¹

OKP's instrument mix comprised Institutional Collaboration Projects (ICPs), group training (Tailor-Made Training—TMT/TMT+—and refresher courses), individual scholarships, and alumni activities. Instruments were deployed through a differentiated A/B/C country categorisation² guided by Country Focus Documents and Embassy-led consultations, with competitive calls encouraging partnerships between Dutch institutions and counterparts in partner countries (including government, civil society and—where relevant—the private sector). A countries had access to the full suite; B countries to group training, scholarships³

Instruments	Category A	Category B	Category C
ICPs	X		
Group training (TMT, TMT+ ⁴ , refresher courses)	X	X	No TMT+
Individual scholarships	X	X	X
Alumni programme	X	X	X

Cross-cutting priorities were mainstreamed throughout: gender equality and social inclusion; labour-market alignment and employability; institutional governance and quality assurance; environmental sustainability (including climate resilience where sector-relevant); and digitalisation and knowledge exchange. The programme's theory of change linked individual learning gains and organisational performance improvements to stronger sectoral systems in FNS, Water, SRoL and SRHR, ultimately contributing to more inclusive development outcomes. During COVID-19, OKP shifted to blended and online modalities. This was necessary (and an MFA-imposed condition⁵) to allow the programme to continue but also supported the acceleration of digital capability within participating institutions and maintained programme momentum.

Scale and thematic focus. In line with MFA policy, OKP invested across four themes, namely FNS; Water, Energy & Climate; SRHR; and SRoL, while embedding inclusivity and climate action. The programme's own synthesis underscores that the combination of instruments was used to address country and regional needs and to include women and other marginalised groups, with the intention that improved education quality and relevance would feed labour markets with more highly skilled graduates and strengthen organisations central to sectoral development.

Figure 1.1 Overview of OKP



Regional and adaptive programming. Beyond country portfolios, OKP pursued **regional initiatives** in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel⁶, and the MENA region to tackle cross-border drivers of instability, migration and

¹ Nuffic. (2024c). *Seven years of collaboration with the Orange Knowledge Programme, 2017–2024*.

² Ecorys & ResultsInHealth (2020), Mid-term review: Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP).

³ Ecorys & ResultsInHealth (2020), Mid-term review: Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP).

⁴ TMT has a duration of maximum 12 months and budget of max. 75.000 euros, whereas the TMT+ duration is 12-24 months and budget up to €400,000.

⁵ Interview data.

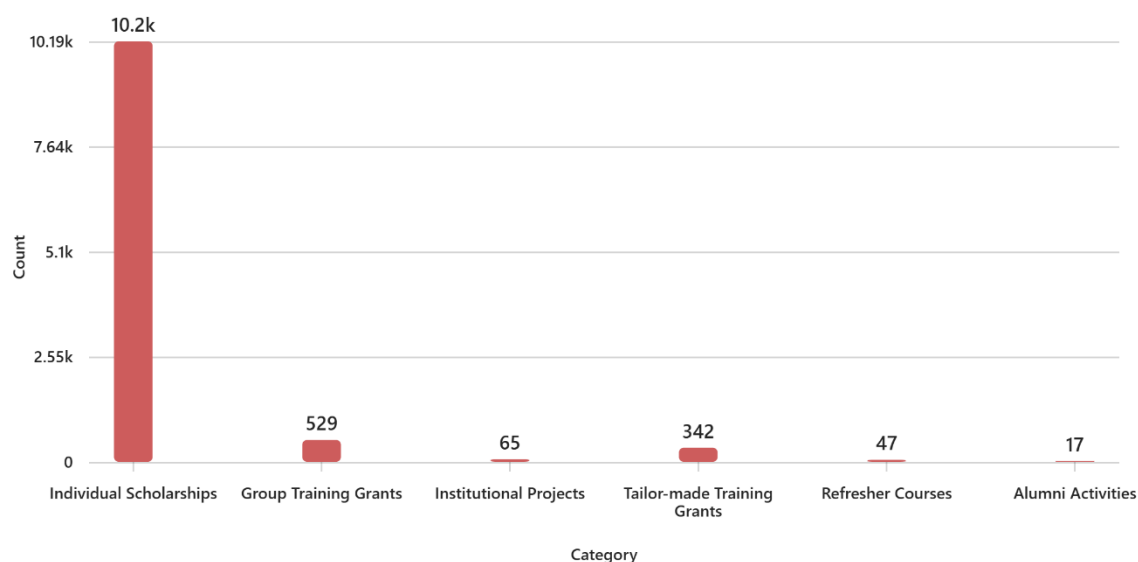
⁶ Nuffic (2024c). *Seven years of collaboration with the Orange Knowledge Programme, 2017–2024*.

hunger by strengthening resilience through education and vocational training and by nurturing regional knowledge hubs and South–South cooperation. Programme management adopted a conflict-sensitive, adaptive stance in response to COVID-19, conflicts (e.g., Ethiopia, Gaza), legal/policy shocks (e.g., Uganda), and operational constraints, often relocating delivery, leveraging e-learning, and prioritizing quality over scale where needed.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning. OKP operated with a programme-level monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework designed to track progress, ensure accountability, and inform programme adaptation where needed. This framework helped Nuffic and partners to monitor activities across instruments and countries, while creating opportunities for learning and adjustment during implementation.

Figure 1.1 presents the total number of OKP activities implemented during the programme period, disaggregated by instrument. The categories differ in nature: *individual scholarships* represent numbers of people, whereas *training grants* and *institutional projects* represent the number of interventions. The figure therefore illustrates the **relative scale of delivery** across instruments; it does not compare impact or participant numbers.

Figure 1.2 Overall counts of scholarships, training grants, and other activities

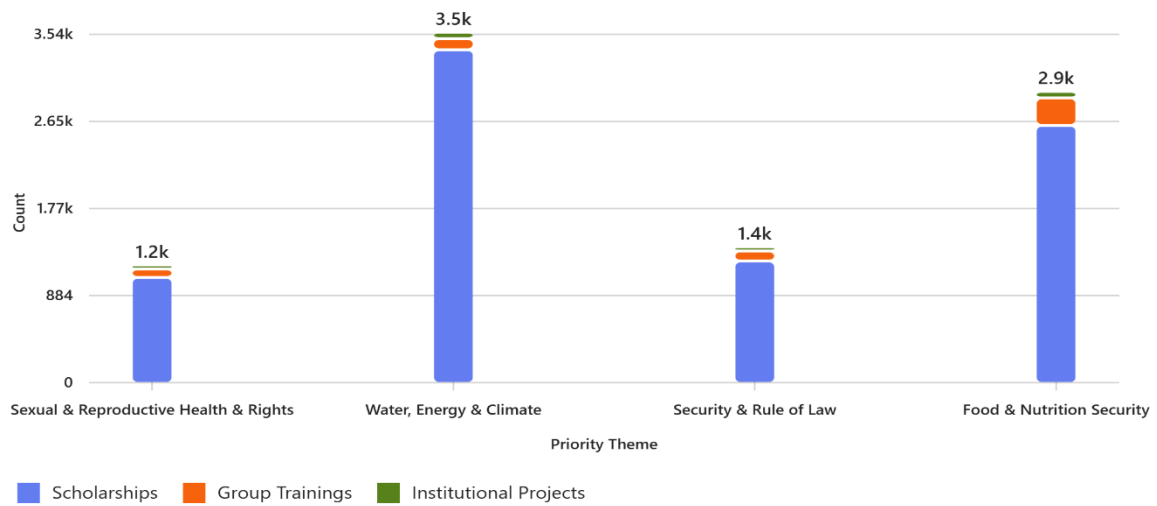


Source: annual report Nuffic 2024

Figure 1.3 below breaks down the activities across four key themes:

- Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR)
- Water, Energy & Climate
- Security & Rule of Law (SRoL)
- Food & Nutrition Security (FNS)

Figure 1.3 Number of Scholarships, Group Trainings, and Institutional Projects by Priority Theme



Source: Annual report 2024, Nuffic

The figure shows that FNS and Water, Energy & Climate received the largest shares of OKP activities, reflecting their prioritisation in funding allocations. In contrast, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Security & Rule of Law (SRoL) accounted for fewer scholarships and projects, consistent with their smaller budget envelopes. This distribution indicates that programme “outputs” broadly mirrored the thematic investment priorities defined in the Country Plans of Implementation and MFA policy frameworks.

2 Methodology

The evaluation approach was a theory-based, utilisation-focussed analysis at both portfolio and intervention level (country and sectoral). The review was guided by an evaluation matrix (see Annex 2) to cover the ToR's questions on relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender equality. It was agreed during the kick-off meeting that assessing impact would not be included in this evaluation. EQs on whether recommendations from previous programmes were taken into account are merged under effectiveness.

1. Portfolio-level: We conducted a strategic analysis that assessed the OKP's overall model and strategies and the alignment with DGIS priorities, as well as relevance and coherence more broadly, and crosscutting issues such as gender equality, youth and digitalisation.
2. Country-level: We conducted country case studies for deepened analysis in twelve countries. These were: [Bangladesh](#), [Colombia](#), [Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#), [Egypt](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Georgia](#), [Indonesia](#), [Jordan \(including Iraq\)](#), [Kenya](#), [Mali](#), [Nigeria](#), and [Vietnam](#). Of these twelve, four countries included country visits, which were: Colombia, Ethiopia, Jordan, and Vietnam.

2.1 Sampling strategy

Country selection

Country case studies were chosen according to six interlinked criteria: 1) Regional spread, covering Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Middle East and North Africa. 2) Alignment with the OKP's Priority Themes, where selected countries demonstrated particular engagement in one or more of these priority areas based on confirmed OKP interventions; 3) Contextual alignment with OKP design and MFA policy priorities; 4) Representation of fragile and complex contexts based on the World Bank Fragility Index 2024; 5) Variation in economic development based on World Bank FY25 classifications; 6) Learning Potential and Evaluation Value.

One Category C country was included even though support ended in 2020, to broaden the evaluative scope and allow for a comparative understanding of implementation in lower-volume contexts. The final sample included twelve countries under the categories A (9) and B (2) and C (1).

Table 2.1 Partner Countries Categorised by Nuffic Classification

Country	Category
Bangladesh	A
Colombia	A
DRC	B
Egypt	A
Ethiopia	A
Georgia	C
Indonesia	A
Jordan (Iraq)	A
Kenya	A
Mali	A
Nigeria	B
Vietnam	A

Country and case selections used purposive sampling to maximise variation in context, instrument mix and data richness. This supports depth over breadth but can over-represent better-documented interventions; we mitigated this through triangulation and negative case analysis. The four case-study countries selected for field visits ensured regional balance and maximised evaluative value, combining diverse thematic foci and OKP instruments, a mix of fragile and stable contexts, and practical feasibility for fieldwork.

Intervention selection

Next, a total of sixty interventions were selected across the twelve countries. These interventions were concrete cases of implementation, such as scholarships, ICPs, group training initiatives, or alumni activities. A selection was made based on volume-adjusted sampling; the volume of interventions implemented per country; the diversity of instrument types; the need for geographical and thematic balance. The table below provides the sample per country.

Table 2.2 Overview of Assessed Orange Knowledge Programme Interventions by Country and Type

Country	Scholarships	IC	GT	Alumni	Total
Nigeria	3	–	1	–	4
Ethiopia	2	2	3	1	8
Egypt	2	1	1	–	4
Kenya	2	2	2	1	7
Bangladesh	2	2	2	–	6
Indonesia	2	3	2	–	7
Georgia	1		2		3
DRC	2		1		3
Jordan (Iraq)	1	2 ⁷	2	1	6
Colombia	2	1 ⁸	2	–	4
Vietnam	1	2	1	–	4
Mali	1	2	1	–	4
Total	21	17	19	3	60

2.2 Data collection and analysis

We used a set of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to answer the research questions.

Document review included various internal and external sources, including:

- **Policy documents**, including inter alia the MFA's Policy on Foreign Aid and Trade, thematic ToCs, and cross-cutting policy frameworks on conflict sensitivity, youth, and gender.
- **OKP programme documentation**, including the MEL strategies and ToC, Individual Scholarship Tracking Report, OKP Annual Reports including Annexes (2018-2024), Tracer Study (2024), web articles on Nuffic, manuals and tools such as the Selection Manual & Information on Algorithm, grant conditions,
- **Country-level documentation**, including Country Plans of Implementation, Akvo Data, narrative and financial reports (where available, see limitations), web articles published by partners; Scholarship overviews (Reuzenquaries OKP Master and Short courses), application overviews, and proposal (where available, see limitations).
- **Statistical and academic literature**, including prior evaluations of NICHE and NFP, and contextual and statistical country data.

Key Informant Interviews

KIIs were conducted at portfolio and country-level. **In total, 189 interviews for this evaluation were carried out.** Embassy perspectives were gathered via KIIs and document review; in relevance judgements we

⁷ One is cross-border in collaboration with Iraq.

⁸ Assessment included interviews and a desk review of another ICP.

weighted RNE input against triangulated stakeholder and document evidence to avoid single-informant bias. As an illustrative example, in Colombia we triangulated embassy interviews (two policy officers and one press officer who also served as the OKP liaison) with documentary sources: the non-public Embassy country strategy, the OKP Colombia strategy, and relevant national strategies. Relevance assessments were not based on interviews alone. The same triangulation approach (embassy KIs, documents, and other stakeholders) was applied across countries (see Annex 1 for document sources). All interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with prior informed consent, in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data were anonymised; participation was voluntary.

A **total of sixteen portfolio-level interviews** were conducted that targeted key informants with a strategic or programme-wide perspective on OKP's design, implementation, and evolution, both internal to Nuffic or the OKP programme, as well as external and independent. The interviews were conducted online and semi-structured, mostly by two evaluators.

Interviews were conducted at country level for each of the interventions selected in the twelve case study countries, through face-to-face (and where needed online) and semi-structured methods. Interviewees included internal and external stakeholders: Dutch Project Coordinators/Directors, Partner Country Coordinators/Directors, staff from implementing partners, high-level staff of partner institutes, scholarship beneficiaries at master level and short courses, trained officials, Embassy staff, national authorities, think tanks, and other donors present in the countries visited. **A total of 173 interviews were conducted across the twelve countries.**⁹

Participant selection was informed by the thematic and institutional scope of each intervention, as identified through project documentation and application overviews. For each intervention, the evaluation team identified individuals directly involved, such as coordinators, as well as those able to offer external or complementary perspectives (e.g., partners, high-level representatives, EU delegation, Ministry staff). Where participant lists were not available from project documentation, contacts were provided by Nuffic as well as through the Dutch MFA and Embassies. The selection aimed to ensure thematic relevance, diversity of roles and gender balance.

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted to understand thematic coherence, institutional transformation, and perceived outcomes of OKP interventions. Participants included rightsholders and participants in project activities (i.e. lecturers, students, stakeholders) and recipients of scholarships in the four case study countries that included field visits, and Egypt additionally. All FGDs followed a structured guide based on the evaluation matrix and adapted to the country context while ensuring consistency across countries. **In total, 22 FGDs were conducted.**¹⁰ In practice, we defined FGDs as small-group discussions with 3–9 participants (ideal 4–7). A small number of sessions reached 10–15 participants due to on-site constraints; these were facilitated as structured group interviews but are included in the overall count.¹¹ Participants were identified with the help of local project coordinators (see section on bias below). FGD composition aimed for balanced group sizes, gender diversity, career-level diversity, and inclusion of different instruments and thematic perspectives. Most FGDs were conducted in English, except for Colombia (Spanish), DRC and Mali (French), and Jordan (Arabic).

Analysis, triangulation, and validation

Data analysis was done during and after data collection, combining and comparing data from different tools and methods. This was based on sound techniques including triangulation to compare data from primary and secondary resources, as well as combining internal and external sources. For the cases, contribution analysis was applied, testing contribution claims. Findings from interviews and FGDs were triangulated with desk-

⁹ Bangladesh 6; Colombia 41; DRC 4; Ethiopia 25; Egypt 8; Georgia 6; Indonesia 9; Jordan 20; Kenya: 7; Mali 23; Nigeria 6; Vietnam 18.

¹⁰ Colombia 4; DRC 1; Ethiopia 1; Egypt 2; Indonesia 2, Jordan 4; Mali 3; Vietnam 5; Indonesia 2.

¹¹ We did not infer within-group dynamics from sessions with 10–15 participants.

based data and portfolio analyses, as well as across different stakeholders from the same or different projects/educational institutes. Draft findings were discussed among team members and systematically analysed across the evaluation matrix.

A [validation meeting](#) was organised with a total of five participants taken from the research population, including ministry and programme staff, to test preliminary findings and recommendations. This was done first in a group where three stakeholders participated, and then bilaterally with two other stakeholders. It included a participatory approach first presenting the findings and then facilitating a discussion on questions, additions and nuances.

2.3 Limitations and bias

2.3.1 *Limitations*

The limitations identified in this evaluation fall under four main categories: (i) data availability and quality, (ii) access, security and logistics, (iii) participation and response patterns, and the (iv) strength of the evidence.

On data [availability and quality](#), a very important limitation was **missing or incomplete core documentation**. In several cases, key files (final/annual reports, logframes, participant feedback) were absent or obtainable only via implementers, which challenged systematic triangulation and outcome tracking. There were sparse project files in several contexts. Some countries reported gaps in proposals, progress reports, or Akvo records, constraining verification and reducing depth of case narratives. Furthermore, regarding platform and file heterogeneity: Akvo entries and project repositories varied in accessibility and metadata quality; for example, inconsistent tagging of linkages/co-financing reduced comparability across instruments and countries. This included financial data inconsistencies, namely differences in presentation of financial data across sources (e.g., “settlement” vs. “eligible costs”), which required reconciliation and introduced interpretive uncertainty across cases. There were also issues with scholarship data coding and alumni traceability: country scholarship tables included “unknown/error/inconsistent” categories and alumni databases were partial, limiting confidence in aggregate patterns and follow-up analyses.

On [access, security and logistics](#), the limitations included restricted site access due to insecurity and remoteness. Access limitations reduced opportunities for field observation in two of the case studies (Ethiopia, Tigray, and Jordan—regarding the cross-border ICP with Iraq). This increased reliance on remote interviews and secondary evidence. Similarly, seasonality and institutional calendars formed a limitation as academic holiday periods and institutional scheduling affected interviewees’ availability and, at times, required modality shifts that reduced participation breadth.

On [participation and response patterns](#), the evaluation encountered occasional stakeholder unavailability and frequent staff turnover. Such turnover (e.g., in embassies and institutions, both in the beneficiary countries and in the Netherlands) weakened institutional memory and reduced the possibility to get insights on developments over time. Concerning language and translation: while most interviews were conducted in English, work in other languages (Spanish, Arabic, French) translation, with the risk of nuance loss and minor comparability issues. In some countries, it proved challenging to get people together for FGDs specifically scholarship alumni.

On [strength of the evidence](#), triangulation constraints from uneven MEL systems was a challenge: inconsistent monitoring quality, including weak output–outcome distinctions and missing outcome data, limited the evaluability of contribution claims and necessitated cautious grading of evidence strength.

2.3.2 *Potential bias*

The findings gathered may have been subject to two forms of bias. Firstly, stakeholders consulted who had benefited from the OKP could have, either consciously or subconsciously, expressed predominantly favourable opinions while offering fewer critical perspectives. This may have been stronger in some cultural contexts such as Asia. In other words, there was a possibility of confirmation bias – where individuals tend to select and communicate information that supports their existing, positive perceptions. To mitigate this bias, we ensured asking questions in diverse ways and challenged statements and assumptions.

Secondly, there may have been an element of selection bias in the sampling process. This is because the team depended on project coordinators to identify participants for the FGDs linked to the projects, as well as because of the challenge of response rate for certain countries. In certain instances, contact details were provided by Nuffic, Dutch embassies, and project coordinators. As a result, and perhaps inadvertently, those chosen may have been selected due to a likelihood to offer more favourable feedback. The participants of the FGDs with scholarship alumni were randomly sampled from the OKP scholarship database (Reuzenquery export). FGD participants were met privately as much as possible, to ensure they felt comfortable sharing their views openly.

3 Evaluation findings

3.1 Relevance

Nr	Question	Answer	Confidence*
EQ1	To what extent are the OKP instruments relevant in relation to the objectives and results as formulated in the corresponding MFA ToCs and results frameworks (food and nutrition security [FNS]; water, energy, and climate [Water]; sexual and reproductive health and rights [SRHR]); and security and rule of law [SRoL] and the countries labour market?	Overall, OKP design and interventions were aligned with objectives of foreign policy of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA),. Between 2016 and 2022, MFA pursued several key objectives in its education policy for development cooperation. ¹² These objectives were designed to align with broader goals of social progress, economic development, and international stability. OKP interventions were developed within the thematic areas established by the MFA as part of the programme's key priorities: water, food security, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and rule of law (RoL), and cross-cutting issues.	High
EQ2	To what extent are the OKP ToC, design and respective underlying assumptions, relevant and valid in the countries and contexts where OKP was implemented?	The OKP ToC and its assumptions were generally relevant and valid, though their realisation varied by context. Strengthening individual and institutional capacity often improved education systems, but links to wider sectoral or developmental outcomes were weaker where institutional embedding, labour-market alignment, or contextual adaptation were limited..	High
EQ9	To what extent and how has OKP addressed (implementation) the needs of demanding organisations and institutions in partner countries? <i>Taken from effectiveness as it aligns more with relevance</i>	Finding show that OKP has well addressed the needs of demanding organisations and institutions. Demanding organisations were actively involved in the design of the projects which was particularly strong when partners had been in long-term relationships. There was a thoughtful approach to programme planning and coordination.	High
EQ3 ¹³	<i>Discussed with related EQs under effectiveness</i>		

*High: three or more independent sources, broad country coverage, and solid documentation; Medium: at least two independent sources with gaps in country coverage and documentation; Low: single-source and/or limited corroborating evidence.

¹² In 2018, the Netherlands selected its Official Development Assistance (ODA) partner countries based on a combination of development needs, Dutch expertise, and thematic priorities. The criteria were more focused on global solidarity and effectiveness than the national-interest-driven approach seen in later years.

¹³ Discussed with related EQs under effectiveness.

3.1.1 To what extent are the OKP instruments relevant in relation to the objectives and results as formulated in the corresponding MFA ToC and results framework (FNS, Water, SRHR, SRoL) and the countries labour market.

Alignment with MFA priorities and needs

Overall, the OKP design and interventions were aligned with the foreign policy objectives of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). OKP firstly fitted within MFA's policy framework and guidance relating to education. Between 2018 and 2024, MFA pursued several key objectives in its education policy for development cooperation, including improving access, quality, and labour-market relevance of (vocational) education—especially for youth and women—in the Sahel/West Africa, Horn of Africa, and MENA regions, as well as supporting education and training for refugees and host communities. These objectives were designed to align with broader goals of social progress, economic development, and international stability, as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (e.g., on quality education and related SDGs on gender equality, decent work, and stability). The Netherlands contributed to these objectives and SDG outcomes through bilateral aid such as the OKP and through global initiatives such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Education Cannot Wait (ECW), UNICEF's PROSPECTS Partnership¹⁴. In 2018, the MFA included education as priority in the policy note *Invest in Perspectives*¹⁵ and investments in youth in 2019 in the policy note *Youth at Heart*.¹⁶ Key elements included strengthening education systems through improving access to and quality of education, especially in fragile and conflict-affected regions; supporting inclusive education systems that leave no one behind, including girls, refugees, and marginalised groups; and increasing opportunities for young people, by equipping youth with relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship; and promoting Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to enhance job readiness. Although education became less of a priority with the new government in 2022, the MFA still invested in education with the explicit objective to prepare youth well for the labour market.¹⁷

Secondly, OKP interventions were developed within the **thematic areas established by the MFA as part of the programme's key priorities:** water, food and nutrition security (FNS), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and security and rule of law (SRoL), and also included cross-cutting issues. The capacity-building topics were wide-ranging, encompassing areas such as water resource management, value chains and market access, port development, milk quality and safety, dairy business management, investment in commercial farming and processing, and transitional justice. Water and agriculture—including FNS—emerged as the most prominent themes across countries. Water was the most common key focus, followed by FNS, underscoring the central importance of these themes in OKP's country-level priorities, their alignment with local development needs, and the greater financial investment by the MFA. While most OKP interventions focused on water and FNS, SRHR and SRoL were also represented.

Importantly, some country priorities extended to themes linked to the four core themes. For example, an institutional collaboration on land governance in one of the reviewed countries facilitated the redesign of land-administration curricula and the introduction of a new course on "Collective Land Governance", both aligned with the peace process and tenure reforms. This closely matched the Netherlands' emphasis on strengthening access to rights and promoting inclusive governance.

The OKP demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity, with particular emphasis on addressing the needs of women and young people, in line with the MFA's prioritisation of gender equality and dedicated youth strategy. The OKP sought to empower women by enhancing their educational and skills development opportunities, recognising their vital contribution to building resilient societies, through mainstreaming gender as a cross-

¹⁴ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2025). *Policy letter on international development*.

¹⁵ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2018). *Policy Note 2018. Investeren in perspectief: Notitie BHOS*.

¹⁶ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019). *Youth at Heart: Strategie voor jongeren, onderwijs en werk*.

¹⁷ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2022). *Policy Note 2022. Doen waar Nederland goed in is: Beleidsnota buitenlandse handel en ontwikkelingssamenwerking*.

cutting issue in the implementation. Nevertheless, the extent and consistency of OKP's responsiveness varied between countries and projects, as explored in greater detail in the chapter on Crosscutting Issues.

Policy relevance in fragile contexts was real but bounded. OKP interventions were implemented in several fragile and conflict-affected states. For example, one ICP in a participating country was addressing the SRoL theme and aimed to increase employment of vulnerable youth in a conflict-affected region during the conflict. Entrepreneurship skills were in higher demand than governance and law courses. The SRoL theme was woven throughout the project as a guiding principle, including the message that good teaching should never be political. Students were encouraged to see academic work as neutral, focused on learning and growth, not influenced by political agendas. The project fits within the SRoL theme not just through these values, but also because of the tough and often unstable context in which it operated. By giving young people access to education during a time of conflict, it offered some structure, hope, and a sense of purpose. In some cases, it may even have helped prevent youth from being drawn into armed groups.

Similarly, a TMT on SRoL in an African country addressed community-based socio-therapy needs tied to local safety/violence reduction agendas. Although the projects did not extend far into systemic change, they meaningfully contributed at local and project-level and were highly relevant to the Dutch policy priority of working in fragile and conflict-affected regions.

Another example is that OKP partnered with a national university in East Africa, a Dutch training and consultancy organisation, and a Dutch university to create a diploma programme *in* teaching in emergencies and inclusive *education for* refugee teachers. The programme was designed to be accessible online, overcoming geographical and infrastructural barriers for refugee teachers in two large refugee camps. It included modules on inclusive education, psychosocial support, and teacher well-being, tailored to the unique challenges faced by refugee educators.

Portfolio-level interviews showed that earlier programmes such as NICHE emphasised demand-driven approaches, where Dutch universities responded to strategic development plans of local universities, ensuring alignment with national policies and sectoral needs. This participatory design process, which allowed Southern institutions to define their own priorities, was critical in ensuring contextual relevance.

3.1.2 *To what extent are the OKP ToC, design and respective underlying assumptions relevant and valid in the countries and contexts where OKP was implemented?*

Alignment to priorities and needs of Partner's governments

The OKP was explicitly designed to align with the priorities and needs of national partners in each participating country. This alignment was achieved through a structured and collaborative approach involving embassies, local stakeholders, and Dutch institutions. Each partner country had a Country Plan of Implementation – of which the format and depth varied depending on the country and strategic relevance to Dutch development cooperation – developed by Nuffic in consultation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (RNE) and local ministries and institutions, and Dutch implementing partners. These plans identified priorities in national development, mapped out sectoral needs and capacity gaps, and defined thematic focus areas for OKP interventions. Selection panels always included Nuffic and Embassies. Many projects required co-funding from local institutions, ensuring commitment and sustainability. Local partners were involved in project design, implementation, and evaluation. Adjustments were made to ensure continued relevance to national priorities. OKP was designed as a successor of NICHE which acted mainly as a technical assistance vehicle where OKP introduced clear “equal benefit” indicators for both Dutch and local HEIs, emphasizing partnership over consultancy.

Overall alignment and relevance strengths

OKP projects were responsive to the strategic priorities of the partner country. Their relevance to partner government policy and frameworks were linked in several ways, including national education and training strategies; sectoral development plans (e.g., agriculture, water, health), broader development goals such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and climate resilience and sustainable growth.

For example, in an East African country, a two-step model to align project to the needs of national partners was followed: the RNE and Nuffic jointly identified and shortlisted local higher education institutions. This pre-selection was based on alignment with the country's national development strategies, sectoral priorities (e.g. agriculture, water, SRHR, education) and institutional capacity and relevance. The focus was on identifying local needs first, ensuring that the initiative was demand-driven. Once institutions were shortlisted, they were invited to form partnerships with Dutch universities, colleges, or private sector actors. Together, these partnerships co-designed project proposals for OKP funding. This approach ensured contextual relevance and stimulated ownership.

In all case study countries, the OKP interventions aligned with national plans and strategies, of which examples are development strategies (in countries across Latin America and Asia), health and rights strategies (in several African and Asian countries), national action plans on food and nutrition security, green growth, and environmental protection (in multiple regions), a peace agreement, the agriculture and rural development strategy (in an Eastern European/Caucasus country), a national livestock transformation plan (in a West African country), and water management and climate-smart agriculture practices (in North Africa). In some countries, the Netherlands had specific thematic agreements such as a Memorandum of Understanding including TVET and Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs) in Climate Change Adaptation and Water management and Sustainable Agriculture and Food security, followed by a SPA Action Plan in the same country.

Overall, the requesting organisations were actively involved in the design of the projects, contributing to their relevance and alignment with institutional goals. Efforts were also made to avoid duplication by ensuring that the proposed activities did not overlap with existing initiatives. This indicates a thoughtful approach to programme planning and coordination, further supporting the view that the identified demands were taken seriously and addressed appropriately. In light of the programme's country-alignment approach, integrating political context analysis into both design and monitoring is especially crucial in fragile settings. Because political and economic conditions can shift rapidly and unpredictably, this consideration applies across all participating countries.

Alignment worked best when national policy/sector reforms came together with labour-market needs.

For instance, one East African country shifted TVET/HE to competence-based education (CBE) in horticulture and water–agriculture nexus; new modules and national TVET authority quality standards were developed with industry links. Similarly, in a **South East Asian country**, projects focused on improving food safety standards and agricultural education and were aligned with national strategy for food security and export competitiveness. Dutch expertise in horticulture and food processing was matched with local labour-market needs. In one case study country, alignment was demonstrated where an initiative mobilised regional actors—including a regional chamber of commerce and a coffee growers' federation to couple entrepreneurship and skills development with local economic priorities in the coffee value chain, reinforcing labour-market fit.

The themes, particularly FNS and Water, and to some extent SRHR, offered added value due to their strong connections with Dutch expertise and reputation. The relevance of a country's focus was greatest when it closely aligned with Dutch expertise as well as the needs of partner countries. Stakeholders generally agreed that the combination of education with thematic areas in which the Netherlands is internationally recognised constituted a significant strength. In several countries, the Netherlands' expertise

in the water and agriculture sectors was regarded as particularly relevant. Dutch expertise was most valuable when it aligned with national needs, such as facing similar water-related challenges. In a North African country, FGD participants of MA scholarships drew parallels between Dutch and local water and agriculture issues, emphasising the value of the Dutch expertise and profile in these sectors, in addition to its expertise in urban development relevant that country. In a South East Asian country, the water-agriculture nexus – which can be regarded as a typical Dutch strength – was highly relevant to national priorities in major river delta regions, despite challenges in implementation because of siloed ministry structures.

OKP interventions also showed direct involvement of the Dutch private sector on country-level, likely contributing to indirect benefits for these actors. For instance, in two partner countries, stakeholders mentioned that OKP interventions were relevant because of mutual benefits through knowledge sharing and networking for educational institutes; as well as for Dutch businesses in Bangladesh; the networking encouraged new business opportunities. In other countries, Dutch companies participated in facilitating labour-market exposure visits.

Similarly, SRHR was considered highly relevant, although not per se seen as a Dutch expertise, and despite sensitives in several countries. A national health ministry in Asia recognised the importance and relevance of the OKP (and more generally the leading and pioneering role of RNE) in the field of SHRH and gender equality.

Themes generally matched national priorities; there was a strong fit when embassies steered the early design, calls and selection. Within the governance model, embassies primarily played a strategic alignment role (fit with the Multi-Annual Strategic Plans (MASP), partner convening) rather than day-to-day administration; strategic leeway varied with capacity and competing priorities. For instance, in one Middle Eastern country, where the embassy steered the early country call around water reuse, this led to a coherent portfolio (e.g., two water-related projects and related ICP/TMT activities). This strengthened practical elements in education which was especially valued in partner countries. In a Southeast Asian country, the Embassy was instrumental in ensuring that OKP projects aligned with national development goals through early involvement in project design and selection. Interviews and the *Country Focus Document for the OKP*¹⁸ confirm that the embassy was actively involved in defining priority areas within the OKP framework, guiding which sectors and topics were eligible for scholarships and training. The Embassy supported strategic partners—government institutions, NGOs and educational organisations—to align with Dutch development cooperation goals. As a result, the effectiveness and sustainability of scholarships and Tailor-Made Trainings (TMTs) were enhanced by linking them to national development priorities and the Embassy's thematic focus.

Challenges and limitations in alignment and governance

However, there were cases where relevance was difficult to secure since it hinged on Embassy engagement, and weaker Embassy capacity limited guidance. Thus, Embassy engagement was critical for maintaining relevance, but in some countries limitations in staffing or budget imposed constraints. Where embassies had limited capacity or competing priorities, this likely affected local ownership. Without strong Embassy guidance, local partners may have had more autonomy, but also less alignment with Dutch policy goals. Also, projects may have been more fragmented or less embedded in broader bilateral cooperation strategies. Lack of Embassy involvement generally reduced follow-up, integration with other Dutch-funded initiatives, or long-term impact. In general, smaller embassies with already limited staff, embassies in fragile or conflict-affected countries, and embassies with broad portfolios and limited development staff had less involvement in OKP.

Embassies often lacked a clear overview of ongoing and planned OKP interventions, and their influence was sometimes constrained by limited visibility and governance clarity. In an Asian context, the Embassy's role in implementation was minimal, and a clearer on-site presence of Nuffic was recommended. This made it difficult to coordinate efforts across sectors or regions, leading to missed opportunities for synergy. Without insight

¹⁸ Country Focus Document for the OKP, Nuffic, HIS, February 2023.

into project pipelines or governance structures, embassies could not strategically align interventions with national priorities or other donor programs. This weakened their role in guiding program coherence and complementarity.

Governance arrangements were often centralised or opaque, limiting embassies' ability to engage with implementing partners or influence project design. This led to disconnected interventions that did not always reinforce each other. Stakeholders observed that OKP projects sometimes operated in silos, with limited cross-learning or thematic integration. The absence of embassy-led coordination contributed to a fragmented perception of the program's internal logic.

While embassies are formally positioned to implement MFA policy themes, it is questionable whether the governance structure provides them with adequate strategic autonomy to effectively mediate between local priorities and central policy directives. Embassies often operate within a framework that emphasises administrative compliance and reporting, potentially limiting their ability to act as strategic actors. This may constrain their responsiveness to local dynamics and reduce their capacity to contribute to adaptive, context-sensitive policy implementation. Nuffic was required to align proposals with embassy policies and follow centrally defined budget ceilings¹⁹, limiting its room for manoeuvre. However, it seems embassies have found informal ways to exercise strategic influence, particularly when strong relationships with local stakeholders and MFA departments exist. This raises the need to revisit the governance structure to ensure it enables embassies to play a more strategic mediating role, aligning local insights with broader policy goals in a more dynamic and responsive manner.

Practical relevance and labour-market fit

OKP was relevant because of the **focus on the labour market and practical skills and knowledge** in both TVET institutions and universities. As mentioned elsewhere in this report (section on effectiveness), HE was supported significantly more than TVET by OKP. For instance, in an East African country, OKP was strategically aligned with the country's major shift to competency-based education (CBE), developing modernised curricula that was tied to TVET reform and employer demand. Similarly, in an Asian partner country, field visits to local and Dutch companies and practical work cases related to practice fields were highly appreciated in education systems that were mostly knowledge oriented, and training greenhouses were developed, among others, in two African countries. However, theoretical knowledge (HE) with practical skills (TVET) to meet industry needs could have been better combined. It can foster joint problem-solving and local innovation through cross-sector projects.

3.1.3 Relevance and validity of underlying assumptions

The assumptions underlying the Theory of Change were generally relevant and valid. The ToC for OKP included several key assumptions that underpinned its pathways to impact. These assumptions reflected beliefs about how change was expected to occur and what conditions should have been in place for the programme to succeed.

The underlying assumption was that strengthening the capacity of individuals—and, by extension, institutions—in TVET and higher education would lead to broader **improvements in education systems**. This premise was closely aligned with OKP's core mission of enhancing education systems through both institutional and individual capacity building. The assumption proved to be relevant. By including a large number of teachers among the projects' target groups, the OKP promoted systemic change. Moreover, many projects adopted a 'train-the-trainer' approach, as seen in countries such as an Eastern European/Caucasus country and an Asian country, further supporting improvements within education systems.

However, while all assumptions were relevant in the countries/regions where OKP was implemented, there were a few exceptions to their validity. Strengthening individual capacity does not necessarily

¹⁹ Budget ceilings were fixed by MFA, establishing Nuffic's steering options.

result in institutional development, specifically when results are not embedded, and institutional development alone does not guarantee sustainable outcomes in specific sectors. The evaluation found that the relationship between these elements is complex and influenced by context, strategy, and institutional readiness and individual and institutional capacity do not automatically link. For example, in one West African country, staff turnover and limited institutional autonomy reduced the lasting effects of individual training, while in another, institutional gains were undermined by political instability.

The belief that capacity development through education automatically leads to sustainable development in thematic areas was a large step and challenging to measure. The inflow of graduates with improved skills and knowledge was expected to strengthen organisations that are key to sectoral development in partner countries. Partner-country organisations and FGDs with scholarships reported benefits from the inflow of skilled graduates, especially in sectors such as agriculture, water management, and health. In one case, alumni from a health-focused programme contributed to new midwifery standards at national level, while in another, agricultural graduates supported local agribusiness extension services. However, graduates may be well-trained, but sectoral impact also depends on labour market conditions, governance, and institutional support. While education contributes to broader development, direct attribution of outcomes such as reduced poverty or malnutrition solely to education is overstated without supporting evidence. These outcomes are influenced by multiple factors, including economic policies, governance, health systems, and social protection mechanisms. For example, in one East African country, despite strong OKP-supported training in agricultural value chains, limited access to finance and weak market linkages hindered graduates' ability to apply new skills effectively and generate broader sectoral change.

Several respondents emphasised that the **evaluation framework of the OKP** should primarily focus on the development of education itself (see also chapter efficiency). This includes elements as teaching quality, institutional capacity, and access to education rather than broader thematic development goals such as reduced malnutrition. While such themes are important, stakeholders mentioned that attributing changes in these areas to OKP risks overstating its scope and impact. By concentrating on education-specific indicators (e.g. teaching quality, curriculum relevance, institutional capacity), evaluators can more accurately assess what OKP directly influenced. Broader outcomes such as reduced malnutrition are often the result of multiple intersecting factors, making it difficult to attribute change solely to educational interventions.

Furthermore, three other assumptions proved to be relevant and valid. The programme assumed that making education more **inclusive** and accessible especially for women and marginalised groups would contribute to inclusive and sustainable development. This assumption was very relevant. Making education more inclusive and accessible, especially for women and marginalised groups, helped unlock the potential of underserved populations such as women in male-dominated technical fields, students from rural or conflict-affected regions, and people with disabilities, as observed in several OKP partner countries in Africa and Asia, leading to more equitable and sustainable development. By ensuring that all groups can participate in education, societies benefit from a more diverse and skilled workforce, which drives innovation and resilience., as seen for instance in agricultural and health projects in East and West Africa where increased female participation strengthened local service delivery and community-level problem-solving.

Sustainable partnerships between Dutch and partner-country institutions were believed to be essential for knowledge exchange, trust-building, and institutional strengthening. The OKP interventions showed that long-term collaboration was central to OKP's design and delivery and was an important contributor to effectiveness of the projects. Long-term partnerships were shown to facilitate trust-building and tacit knowledge exchange, such as soft skills and understanding of institutional procedures, as they allowed for improved communication, mutual understanding, and alignment to partner's needs. In various cases, they contributed to institutional reform as projects were able to build on previous achievements, such as in one Asian case where partnerships already existed for 40 years, building on previous created centres of excellence, faculty improvements or gained technical capacity.

The ToC assumed that **tailoring interventions to local contexts, including adjusting indicators and targets per country, is crucial for relevance and effectiveness**. This assumption was strongly valid, for example shown by the gender situation in the country (see gender below). In cases where the indicators were not adjusted to the local context / institutions, the discussions on gender equality were challenging and not well understood among local partners, such as in a North African context, while gender equality remained a challenge. Another example is that it does not align to contexts related to policies and ministries regulating the educational (university and TVET) systems in a country. For instance, in a south East Asian context, while intentions existed to foster cooperation between TVET and Universities, their implementation became challenging as the two types of institutions are governed by very different regulations and ministries. Also, the general focus on practical skills, beyond just quality education, showed how contextual alignment supports relevance and effectiveness. Furthermore, projects were generally flexibly adjusting to local contexts, contributing to effectiveness. External interviewees not involved in OKP similarly confirm that there was alignment with national systems and needs.

These assumptions were not only theoretical but were embedded in OKP's overall design, which explicitly emphasised responsiveness to local needs, co-creation with partner institutions, and alignment with both national and Dutch development priorities. Local needs played a key role in shaping project setup, which is a core principle of relevance. The programme responded to context-specific priorities, increasing its value and appropriateness in each country. The creation of a foundation for continued collaboration, both within and across countries, reflects a thoughtful and inclusive programme design. The emphasis on ongoing interaction between Dutch and local institutions, and linkages with other national actors, indicates that the design facilitated sustainable partnerships and scalable cooperation beyond individual projects. OKP projects are designed to support the development goals of partner countries, often aligned with their education and labour market needs. OKP emphasises co-creation with local institutions, ensuring that the training and capacity-building efforts are relevant to local contexts.

3.2 Coherence

Nr	QUESTION	ANSWER	CONFIDENCE*
EQ4	What is the level of coherence between the different OKP instruments (supporting each other, synergies and linkages)?	Internal coherence was moderate, with synergies materialising in several contexts but often opportunistically rather than through systematic portfolio design.	Medium
EQ5	What is the level of coherence between the different OKP instruments and country programme with other similar interventions of MFA and other actors active in the OKP implementation countries?	External coherence was strong at design stage but more uneven in implementation, depending heavily on embassies' choice and ability to convene and regularly consult partners	Medium

**High*: three or more independent sources, broad country coverage, and solid documentation; *Medium*: at least two independent sources with gaps in country coverage and documentation; *Low*: single-source and/or limited corroborating evidence.

This chapter assesses the coherence of the OKP, distinguishing **internal coherence** (synergies and linkages amongst OKP instruments) and **external coherence** (alignment and complementarity with MFA policies and other actors).²⁰

²⁰ See the project Inception Report for the evaluation methodology and matrix underpinning this assessment.

3.2.1 Internal Coherence

Stakeholders conceived the OKP as a **layered portfolio** in which ICPs, TMT(+)'s, and scholarships were designed to reinforce one another in strengthening organisations and systems, rather than operating as isolated activities. According to the Theory of Change (ToC), these instruments were expected to interact in mutually reinforcing ways: individual learning would inform group and institutional change; institutional reforms would generate demand and opportunities for further skills upgrading; and alumni mechanisms would help preserve and diffuse results. In this design, coherence was not an incidental by-product but the intended **route to amplify contributions, reduce fragmentation, and increase the plausibility that results would persist beyond the funding cycle**. These expectations were explicitly referenced in OKP's design guidance, evaluation framework, and programme reporting.²¹

Overall, internal coherence was moderate, although it varied considerably across countries. An important consideration was the extent to which OKP reflected lessons from its predecessor programmes, NICHE and NFP. The OKP's portfolio logic envisioned ICPs, TMT/TMT+, and scholarships as a mutually reinforcing package. Evidence confirmed that this ambition materialised in several contexts, although often opportunistically rather than through systematic portfolio design (e.g., where ICPs provided a platform into which scholarships and TMTs could plug).

This evaluation identified four main pathways of complementarity across OKP portfolios:²²

First, *parallel complementarity*: where instruments ran concurrently in a sector (for example, ICPs combined with aligned TMT/TMT+ and scholarship cohorts), allowing for immediate uptake of skills into institutional reforms and reducing duplication.

Second, *sequential*: where later instruments built on earlier ones, including antecedent programmes such as NICHE. For instance, targeted TMTs often followed diagnostic ICP workstreams, or scholarships fed into curriculum renewal, thereby deepening or scaling changes initiated upstream.

Third, *sustainability-supporting use of instruments*: alumni activation, refresher courses, and co-financing mechanisms that help maintain capabilities and embed new practices after project closure, especially when anchored in partner institutions' plans.

Fourth, *scholarship positioning*: scholarships were sometimes linked to partnerships (feeding into ICP/TMT objectives), and sometimes stand-alone to widen reach. Both roles were expected to broaden the portfolio's impact radius, provided they were connected back into organisational processes.

Examples across countries illustrate how these typologies materialised in practice. In a West African country, links were established between OKP instruments and wider Dutch efforts in seed systems, horticulture, and the dairy value chain. However, scholarships were not consistently tied to institutional pathways, and weak return or placement mechanisms reduced traceability of organisational uptake. In a Central African country coherence was expressed less through instrument stacking and more through risk-aware operational design. The SRoL TMT+ project, a community-based sociotherapy initiative, locally coordinated delivery under volatile conditions and was notable for its clean audit, showing coherence adapted to fragility. In an East African country, operational economies of scope were achieved where ICPs were merged or aligned (for example, two related ICPs, or pivots to e-learning in a conflict-affected region. These mergers safeguarded delivery and reduced duplication. In a Middle Eastern country, coherence was facilitated by a predictable rhythm of joint steering. Initiatives such as two water-related projects were steered across ministries and implementers with participation of the water ministry and two national water authorities. TMT+ modules on digital learning were linked into this ICP, and steering meetings were held on a bi-weekly basis, producing evidence of a functioning pipeline. In a West African country, continuity from NICHE to OKP was a defining feature. An ICP secured ministerial approval for curricula and scaled them through training activities while a

²¹ Rodhal Consultancy (2024), Final evaluation of the Orange Knowledge Programme (2017–2024).; Nuffic (n.d.), Orange Knowledge Programme theory of change.

²² See Nuffic, Orange Knowledge Programme theory of change; Orange Knowledge Programme monitoring and evaluation framework; Orange Knowledge Programme annual reports 2019–2024; and Final evaluation (2024).

related initiative used a steering committee and regional exchanges to avoid duplication. Regional TMT+ communities of practice further diffused practices. In a South East Asian country, coherence was advanced through deliberate cross-project learning. The SRHR ICP was anchored in the national family planning directorate with approved curricula, while the Food Safety ICP established master's programmes and laboratories. TMT+ activities extended practice across institutions, showing evidence of reuse and institutional uptake.

The OKP's coherence improved where country portfolios were planned and reviewed as a pipeline (e.g., TMT/TMT+ feeding into ICPs, or continuity from NICHE into OKP). Where embassies and implementers **jointly timed calls and alumni engagement to institutional milestones**, synergies were more convincing. By contrast, coherence was weaker where instruments were implemented in parallel without deliberate linkage. Synergies were also stronger where ICP consortia explicitly assigned instrument-linkage roles, for example, mobilizing alumni or deploying targeted TMTs to remove ICP bottlenecks, and where embassies convened **regular joint planning sessions across** instruments.

Country mechanisms impacting internal coherence varied. Five key patterns emerged during the evaluation, namely (a) sequencing (b) building on earlier partnerships, (c) adaptive responses (d) cross-project learning, and (e) alumni as a coherence lever.

Planned sequencing: in an African case there were signs of planned sequencing across instruments, where internal coherence reflected deliberate layering. Here, two water-related ICPs linked curriculum development with Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority standards and employer MoUs, enabling internships and practice-based learning. In an Asian partner country, intended complementarity was undermined by centralised tendering; institutional projects were not well integrated with scholarships and TMTs, and a more localised tendering approach was judged likely to enhance integration. In the case of a West African country, most of the budget went to scholarships, but there were no structured pathways to ensure graduates were placed in relevant roles after returning, which weakened organisational uptake and left scholarships operating in isolation. Layering was illustrated in practice in one of the MENA countries' water portfolio, where an ICP established an institutional backbone at utility and regulator level, while targeted TMT modules (including on digital learning and NRW management) and scholarships in water governance addressed skill gaps at the ministry and public water agencies.²³ Interviewees described this as “a single story across instruments.” At the same time, sequencing was sometimes shaped by political windows rather than advance planning, evidencing an opportunistic approach to coherence even as the pipeline functioned²⁴.

Building on long-standing partnerships: in a West African country, OKP explicitly built on NICHE legacies. Here, one ICP integrated SRHR and gender into curricula and secured ministerial approval, while another linked TVET centres to labour-market needs despite insecurity. Both selectively drew on TMT/TMT+ to reinforce institutional change. Stakeholders confirmed continuity from earlier NICHE initiatives into the OKP approach. One of the ICPs convened providers via a sector association and a national public institute, aligned curricula and quality assurance across the public and private health training sectors, and obtained approvals; follow-on activities trained trainers and rolled curricula to private schools, demonstrating a pipeline from ICP to TMT/TMT+ and continuity across programming cycles.²⁵

Adaptive responses: In a case in East Africa, the merger of the two ICPs was foremost a managerial decision aimed at streamlining operations. It has not demonstrated clear cost savings or additional outputs overall. The example from a conflict-affected region which had a managerial merger with a regional project did lead to increased tangible outputs from e-courses that were effectively shared across both ICPs; the latter is also a good example of an adaptive response that safeguarded delivery amid shocks. A cluster of agricultural

²³ Source: OKP project logical framework (2019).

²⁴ Source: OKP project logical framework (2019).

²⁵ Source: OKP project documentation (ICP final report and settlement letter) and relevant country plan of implementation (2019); Interview data.

TVET, horticulture, and dairy interventions reflected continuity from NFP/NICHE to OKP. The CPI articulated a three-instrument offer and sought harmonisation with Embassy portfolios (FNS, SRHR, SRoL). At the same time, coherence proved dependent on embassy engagement: design consultations were robust, but day-to-day integration faltered when engagement fluctuated or when security/connectivity constraints intervened.²⁶ In a central African country (SRoL), **sequenced TMT to TMT+ with cross-border delivery** preserved continuity when access was restricted. This ensured the successful delivery of project outputs, including **two cohorts of sociotherapists trained (almost 100 total)**, over 1,000 **community members** completing **CBS cycles**, and a **bilateral diffusion conference (>150 participants)**. This case is a good example of coherence expressed through **risk-aware operational design** as much as through instrument stacking.

Cross-project learning. In one of the South Asian case countries, coherence emerged through deliberate cross-project learning and the reuse of outputs across themes such as SRHR and Food Safety. The SRHR ICP was anchored in the national family planning directorate with approved curricula, while the Food Safety ICP created MSc programmes and laboratories; TMT+ then helped extend these practices across institutions. Nuffic facilitated exchange between two SRHR-related ICPs (one addressing occupational health and safety conditions and one led by a Dutch knowledge institute), both addressing SRHR services, both addressing SRHR services. Shared local management supported reuse and quicker uptake, while cross-learning sessions in the Netherlands helped consolidate lessons across partnerships.

Alumni as a coherence lever: Across the portfolio, alumni represented an important but largely untapped mechanism for coherence. Tracking data²⁷ show that around 32% of sampled alumni reported connections with OKP instruments beyond their own, feeding learning into ICPs and TMTs. Yet structured alumni activation plans were often absent. Scholars tended to identify more strongly with their host institutions than with Dutch higher education as a whole—widely seen as a missed opportunity with possible reputational costs for Dutch cooperation (e.g., weaker visibility of the Netherlands/MFA brand compared to individual Dutch HEIs and reduced opportunities for alumni mobilisation by embassies).²⁸ At the same time, reliance on trusted partners in volatile contexts helped safeguard delivery but sometimes restricted openness to new entrants and responsiveness to market demand. For example, employers in a West African context noted skill mismatches that weakened potential synergies between scholarships/TMTs and ICP employability outcomes, with implications for sustainability.²⁹

Additional evidence showed that coherence was strongest where government co-ownership and/or formal accreditation/approval created a system anchor, and where instruments were sequenced as a pipeline from ICP to training and scholarships. In one of the cases studied in south East Asia, the national family planning directorate approved three SRHR curricula and mainstreamed them in annual training plans, while a Food Safety MSc at **two agricultural universities** provided a platform for continued roll-out. An ICP in an African country convened public and private schools sector associations and a national public institute, securing ministerial approvals.

Regarding the extent to which programme architecture and processes enabled coherence (planning, sequencing, and ToC-fit), this evaluation finds that at a system level, the CPI architecture codified ambitions for integrated portfolios with indicative budgets, but coherence in practice depended heavily on context-responsive convening by embassies/Nuffic and on implementers' ability to shift between modalities as risks evolved.³⁰ Cross-learning occurred in the Netherlands³⁰ and was valuable, with limited evidence of systematic in-country or thematic sessions, contributing to uneven reinforcement at country level (as seen, for example,

²⁶ Source: relevant country plan of implementation.; Nuffic. (2024). *Orange Knowledge Programme Annual report 2024. Annex 1. Country A chapters.*

²⁷ Nuffic (2024b). *Orange Knowledge Programme scholarships: Tracer study.*

²⁸ Nuffic. (2024b). *Orange Knowledge Programme scholarships: Tracer study*; Nuffic. (2024c). *Seven years of collaboration with the Orange Knowledge Programme, 2017–2024*; Ecorys & ResultsInHealth (2020), *Mid-term review: Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP)*.

²⁹ Interview data (portfolio); Nuffic. (2024). *Orange Knowledge Programme Annual report 2024. Annex 1. Country A chapters.*

³⁰ See Nuffic, *Orange Knowledge Programme theory of change*; *Orange Knowledge Programme monitoring and evaluation framework*; and *Ethiopia Country Plan of Implementation*.

in south Asia). The design lesson is clear: portfolios with time-bound coupling (e.g., scholarships feeding into TMTs and subsequent ICP accreditation) achieved stronger and more shock-resilient coherence.

3.2.2 External coherence

Overall, external coherence was strong at design but more uneven in implementation. Country Plans of Implementation (CPIs) and alignment with MASPs ensured a clear fit with Embassy strategies at the outset. Coherence in practice was most convincing where embassies actively convened partners, harmonised portfolios across instruments, and instituted predictable steering rhythms. Conversely, alignment weakened where embassy engagement fluctuated or where scholarships were delivered as stand-alone instruments without structured pathways back into institutions. Across the portfolio, there were recurring patterns in how instruments fitted together, either by working in the same direction (alignment) or by reinforcing each other's distinct contributions (complementarity); namely:

1. Design alignment to MASPs and CPIs was strong in most countries, reflecting structured consultation with embassies and national partners.
2. Operational harmonisation improved where embassies convened regular steering mechanisms. For example, in a MENA country, bi-weekly meetings of ministries and implementers underpinned continuity and synergy in water and food-security initiatives.
3. Donor complementarity frequently arose through networking by implementers and embassies rather than through formal design rules. For example, in a Caucasus country, TMTs built on groundwork laid by a US-funded programme and were followed by EU-funded actions, showing how informal coordination can yield external coherence.
4. Stand-alone scholarships (when not tied to institutional pathways) tended to weaken organisational uptake and thus overall coherence.

Several country cases assessed as part of this evaluation illustrate these dynamics. In one of the **Asian cases**, external coherence was robust: an ICP on climate resilience collaborated with a European bilateral development agency, another donor ministry, and a multilateral development bank, while a university partnership with a UN agency and the Embassy produced circular-economy curricula linked to market demand. Embassy coordination also prevented overlaps with other Dutch-funded programmes such as the *Programme for Sending (Retired) Managers Abroad* (Programma Uitzending (gepensioneerde) Managers [PUM]). In a **South American** case an ICP on land governance aligned closely with peace and tenure reforms, with a new collective land governance course and collaboration with the national training service signalling institutional uptake and fit with the broader reform agenda. In an **East African country**, the 2019 CPI update reflected MFA priorities in SRoL and SRHR, indicating strong design alignment; however, implementation coherence weakened over time due to staff turnover and security constraints, even if thematic fit with Embassy portfolios (FNS, SRHR, SRoL) remained strong.³¹ In another **Asian example**, specific interventions did not always fully align with RNE's original intentions as, due to the nature of call for proposals, it was not possible to pre-define interventions too specifically.³²

Also, this evaluation found that coherence with other Dutch-funded interventions was strongest where embassies led joint planning and coordination across OKP, bilateral, and centrally funded programmes. In a **Southeast Asian country**, an ICP linking SMEs connected directly to other Dutch initiatives on sustainable agriculture, employability, and vocational education, reinforcing TVET reforms and private-sector linkages.³³ Embassy coordination records confirm deliberate convening across these programmes and offer a best-practice example. In **south America**, OKP was complementary to projects involving Dutch government agency responsible for enterprise support (RVO) and the Netherlands' Cadastre,

³¹ Source: relevant country plan of implementation; *Orange Knowledge Programme Annual report 2024. Annex 1 Country A chapters*

³² Interview data.

³³ Source: relevant OKP project settlement letter.

Land Registry and Mapping Agency (Kadaster International). **An ICP between a local public university and a Dutch technical university** was linked to earlier RVO and MFA interventions Cadastral formalisation (2014–2017) and Land in Peace I and II (2017–2022); the capacity created by the OKP project has been key in the implementation of **a Dutch-funded land programme (2022–2025)**. Also, OKP Master scholarships complemented private initiatives in the water sector, including **a Dutch water-utilities initiative and a multilateral development bank-funded programme**. **In a West African country, a local representative of the Dutch implementer** (also covering a neighbouring country) helped revive alumni engagement and align OKP with Embassy priorities.³⁴ Elsewhere, the absence of joint planning mechanisms led to OKP instruments running in parallel to other Dutch interventions with limited cross-referral³⁵, limiting external coherence.³⁶

Regarding the integration of resources with MFA and other actors, this was uneven. With MFA/Dutch-funded programmes (intra-donor integration), integration was strongest in planning and sequencing (embassy-led portfolio clusters, alignment to MASPs/CPIs), but formal pooled co-financing across Dutch budget lines was rare; integration typically took the form of sequencing and complementary use of results rather than shared financing, such in the land-governance example noted above. Some portfolios achieved genuine co-financing, while others relied on ad hoc arrangements.³⁷ For example, **in one of the African partner countries**, specific ICP co-financing amounts of €129,000 and €100,400 were documented, alongside smaller contributions in TMT/TMT+, demonstrating tangible resource pooling and local commitment. **In an Asian example**, the SRHR garment-sector ICP mobilised €50,000 in co-financing, strengthening ownership and sustainability beyond in-kind support. **In both MENA and East Africa there are examples of** employer or association contributions supporting ICP/TMT activities and alumni events, but only episodically. At system level, CPIs (e.g. in both West and East Africa) promoted co-financing in principle, but consistent translation into practice depended on implementer initiative and partner absorptive capacity.³⁸

Additional alignment examples further illustrate operational pathways to coherence. **In a North African country**, a local project office and internship MoUs improved stakeholder coordination, while Women in Agriculture actions widened access and strengthened day-to-day complementarity. **Elsewhere in Africa**, coherence with broader Dutch efforts was visible across seed systems, horticulture; and dairy collaborations, and inter-agency working groups delivered community-level outcomes.³⁹ **In one of the middle eastern partner countries**, the water ICP aligned with the national water strategy and engaged sector actors through the steering committee, though links to farmer-level outreach remained modest. **In one of the West African OKP partner countries**, a TVET/agrifood project engaged regional networks and connected with bilateral and UN development partners, yet the absence of a standing national learning platform constrained system-wide diffusion.

Based on the evidence collected, this evaluation highlights the importance of inclusive consultation during implementation as a critical differentiator for external coherence. Portfolios where embassies institutionalised regular reviews with CSOs, employers, and labour actors were better able to maintain alignment as contexts evolved, demonstrating greater resilience to external shifts⁴⁰. Instead, when consultation was limited to the design stage, portfolios were more likely to drift during delivery.

³⁴ See *Orange Knowledge Programme Annual report 2022 and 2024. Annex 1 Country A chapters*

³⁵ Nuffic (2021). *Orange Knowledge Programme – Annual report 2021; Orange Knowledge Programme Annual report 2024. Annex 1 Country A chapters*

³⁶ Based on interview data from Sahel-linked cases (the evaluation's primary focus was a West African country).

³⁷ See also *Orange Knowledge Programme Annual report 2024. Annex 1 Country A chapters*.

³⁸ See also relevant Country Plans of Implementation for selected OKP partner countries.

³⁹ A local community severely affected by hydrocarbon contamination from state-owned pipelines since the late 1990s benefited from an OKP training that created a platform to engage with local authorities, prompting the national water utility to initiate a project to restore clean water access.

⁴⁰ Ecorys & ResultsInHealth (2020), Mid-term review: Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP); *Orange Knowledge Programme Annual report 2024. Annex 1 Country A chapters*.

3.3 Effectiveness

Nr	Question	Answer	Confidence*
EQ6	To what extent have OKP activities been implemented effectively, and to what extent have the planned outputs been realised? Are there identifiable differences in achieved output progress based on OKP implementation in different countries, and if so, what are these differences, and how can they be explained?	Targets were not clearly formulated, and baseline data were not systematically collected for key components such as scholarships, institutional collaboration projects, and training activities. While numerical achievements were mentioned, they were not consistently tracked or verified. The effectiveness of OKP at output level was mixed, largely depending on the quality of coordination and local ownership.	Medium
EQ8	Did the implementation of OKP activities contribute to the intended outcomes as per the OKP ToC and, if so, to what extent was progress on outcomes achieved? What factors contributed and/or hampered the achieving of outcomes?	OKP contributed to intended outcomes at individual and organisational levels, with evidence of enhanced skills, curriculum reform, and institutional capacity strengthening. Long-term Master's training showed stronger and more sustained effects, while short courses delivered rapid, task-specific results. Sector-wide impacts were limited, with outcomes largely verified at organisational and system-interface levels..	Medium
EQ9	<i>Discussed under relevance</i>		
EQ3, EQ7, EQ12, EQ14 ⁴¹	To what extent were recommendations formulated in earlier conducted evaluations of OKP and its predecessor (NICHE) considered. If so how and how did the follow-up on recommendations affect the above-mentioned topic? If not, why not? <i>Discussed with related EQs</i>	Earlier recommendations were partially taken into account. Progress is visible on reciprocity/co-creation and blended delivery, with limited movement on co-financing. Alumni systems, and private-sector linkage are not consistently demonstrated.	

*High: three or more independent sources, broad country coverage, and solid documentation; Medium: at least two independent sources with gaps in country coverage and documentation; Low: single-source and/or limited corroborating evidence.

3.3.1 *The extent to which OKP activities have been implemented effectively, and the extent to which the planned outputs have been realised*

OKP showed consistent organisational results, in which curricula and routines were delivered in most countries. When one compares reported outputs to the OKP indicators: (i) number of graduates (degree/non-degree), (ii) revised/updated curricula, (iii) scholarship completion and participation by women and under-represented groups, and (iv) institutional quality processes established. Monitoring and final reporting data confirm that delivery was substantial and broadly aligned with activity targets., Tracer data, which relate more to outcomes, indicate very high application of acquired skills (96% of alumni), with 94% reporting full/partial implementation of employer-agreed plans within months of return. Completion rates are 97% among scholarship respondents.⁴² These outputs align with the programme's design emphasis on short-cycle

⁴¹ Discussed with related EQs under effectiveness.

⁴² Nuffic. (2024b). *Orange Knowledge Programme scholarships: Tracer study.*

capacity strengthening and curriculum renewal. In fact, across all instruments, delivery was substantial and broadly aligned with activity targets.

Portfolio documentation shows that during the 2017-2024 period **over 10,000 scholarships** were awarded, over 500 trainings were conducted, and 65 ICPs implemented.⁴³ The sampled country cases assessed for this evaluation confirm the validity of reported numbers.⁴⁴

For example, in a **South Asian country**, an ICP focussed on 73 SRHR trained staff, approved three curricula, and integrated SRHR content in annual training; another ICP focussed on Food Safety, launched a Master's Programme, trained 23 lecturers and nineteen other stakeholders (inspectors), and upgraded laboratories. In a **Southeast Asian country**, a **climate-resilience ICP** focussed on water integrated curriculum, trained lecturers (ToT), developed e-learning during COVID-19, and ran student recruitment campaigns. In an **East African country**, a **medical training college** demonstrated strong scale potential by nearly doubling student intake while simultaneously upgrading its training capacity through a new skills lab, e-learning modules, and the integration of entrepreneurship into the curriculum. It also launched a pioneering "Biomedical Instrumentation Technician" programme to address critical gaps in maintaining medical equipment, supported by public-private partnerships and staff capacity building. In a **Central African country**, a TMT+ trained 84 sociotherapists and embedded community-based sociotherapy (CBS) routines within two local organisations, enabling cascades of practice through over 1,300 community members completing CBS group cycles across participating villages. Learning materials and trained facilitators ensured replication beyond the project, while a 150-participant conference broadened diffusion—credible early outcome signals in a fragile context. Portfolio breadth is further illustrated, *inter alia*, by a Latin American country and a West African country.

In a **South American country**, selected ICPs and trainings produced updated curricula and practice-oriented modules in land administration (e.g., revised BSc/Diploma/ToT at a public university) and strengthened practice in public institutions—for example, trainers at a national training institute were upskilled in port, transport and logistics (via Dutch training providers), and staff at a sector regulator reported clearer technical input on circular-economy policy guideline. In an **African country**, over 1,000 scholarships (73% short courses) were awarded, at least 25 organisations were strengthened, and the portfolio delivered multiple TMT/TMT+ and refresher courses across the FNS, SRoL and SRHR thematic areas. Here, approximately 83% of scholarship beneficiaries were women. These outputs are consistent with country targets and instrument scopes.

OKP was designed to support capacity building in both Higher Education (HE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). **Available evidence indicates that the Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP) provided more support to Higher Education (HE) institutions than to TVET institutions.**⁴⁵ The portfolio tilted towards HE relative to TVET. This imbalance may have limited direct workplace alignment and entry-level skills upgrading. Future design should calibrate the mix to strengthen applied TVET pathways while preserving HE system capacity.

Strengthening linkages between HE and TVET can significantly increase the impact of development programmes such as OKP. A key reason is that it combines theoretical knowledge with practical skills to meet industry need. 38 Dutch institutions participated in OKP, offering over 400 Master's programmes and short courses, primarily through higher education institutions. The majority of the 10,191 scholarship holders were enrolled in higher education institutions, especially for master's degrees and advanced short courses. TVET was part of the OKP scope; however its involvement was often limited to group trainings or tailor-made training (TMT/TMT+) formats, which required co-funding and were more complex to implement.

⁴³ Nuffic. (2024c). *Seven years of collaboration with the Orange Knowledge Programme, 2017–2024*.

⁴⁴ Unless otherwise specified, country information for the cases is drawn from the Country reports presented in the Evaluation's Annex. The country reports present further detailed references to the projects.

⁴⁵ OKP tracer study report 2024, Nuffic; Country implementation plans OKP; <https://includeplatform.net/> (knowledge platform on inclusive development policies)

TVET received less support as higher education institutions often had more established mechanisms for engaging with OKP, including long-standing partnerships, better infrastructure for international collaboration, and more experience with donor-funded projects. Data gathered for this evaluation, including interviews and prior evaluations, highlighted that TVET institutions faced more challenges in accessing and sustaining OKP support. There was a lack of dedicated funding streams, limited incentives for cross-institutional collaboration and difficulty in bridging with higher education institutions without active facilitation. Higher education institutions, by contrast, were often better positioned to adapt during disruptions like COVID-19 due to longer-term partnerships and institutional resilience.

Strengthening linkages between higher education and TVET can generate several important impacts. It broadens access to learning opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds. It also allows the higher level academic and applied expertise of universities and Universities of Applied Sciences to be combined with the practical and technical skills developed in vocational (TVET) institutions, resulting in training that is better aligned with labour-market needs. Such collaboration supports joint problem-solving and local innovation through cross-sector projects. It enables more flexible pathways and smoother transitions from vocational to academic programmes, supporting career progression. Finally, it enhances institutional capacity through shared resources and partnerships and strengthens the resilience and continuity of development programmes by diversifying the range of institutions involved.

3.3.2 *Are there differences in achieved outputs progress based on OKP implementation in different countries and if so, what are these differences and how can they be explained across countries?*

This section synthesises cross-portfolio drivers of effectiveness, based primarily on the case study data. The observed “differences across countries” reflect the presence (or absence) of such enabling conditions, which the following section unpacks in detail. The evidence shows that results varied depending on instrument mix, policy anchoring, partnership maturity, coordination platforms, and the way calls for proposals were designed and managed (not simply because countries differ).

The effectiveness of OKP instruments showed variations, with performance shaped by those same conditions, particularly the quality of coordination, the degree of local ownership, and programme duration. While outputs such as scholarships and training programmes were consistently delivered, most stakeholders indicated that the short-term nature of many interventions limited sustained outcomes. Interviewees sometimes contrasted this with earlier, longer-term programmes such as the Programme for Cooperation with Higher Education Institutions in Developing Countries (MHO) programme, which, though dating back to the early 2000s, was seen as having enabled deeper institutional transformation due to its 12-year horizon.

Thus Effectiveness was uneven within countries, reflecting sector governance and institutional conditions. **An East African country** illustrates this: the midwifery curriculum was approved by the national health ministry rolled out to 47 universities, a strong system-level signal in SRHR. However, attempts to embed FNS results across agricultural TVETs were constrained by fragmented and shifting mandates across ministries.

In general, across the 12 OKP portfolios, results differed primarily for three reasons. **The most important factors were instrument mix, policy anchoring, and the maturity of partnerships.** Countries with larger volumes of scholarships combined with multiple Institutional Collaboration Projects (ICPs), strong thematic alignment with Dutch expertise (e.g., in water and food security), and active coordination platforms tended to show the most visible results. This is consistent with findings of Nuffic’s final evaluation.⁴⁶ For example, a **Southeast Asian country’s** synergy across instruments and a strong local coordination presence amplified uptake and diffusion. In **an East African country**, ICPs and TMT/TMT+ reinforced TVET reforms. In **a Middle Eastern country**, a water-sector ICP linked faculty upskilling with water-sector priorities and governance

⁴⁶ Rodhal Consultancy (2024), Final evaluation of the Orange Knowledge Programme (2017–2024).

strategies, while in South East Asia, a climate-resilience ICP embedded updated curricula and e-learning that sustained delivery during COVID-19.

Context and data systems also shaped pace and depth. For instance, in a **Central African country's** fragile context, sociotherapy cohorts and diffusion events catalysed cascades of practice and offered credible early outcomes despite volatility, but these remained localised due to limited capacity at the national government level. In a **West African country**, the portfolio delivered visible outputs with high scholarship uptake (notably among women), however institutional tracking beyond completion was uneven – illustrating how portfolio structure and data systems conditioned what could be verified.

A third factor was “call-driven” delivery, which influenced design quality. Previous evaluations⁴⁷ found that competitive calls sometimes encouraged applicants to fit proposals to call templates rather than to context-specific, country-owned priorities, which reduced design flexibility. Reviews also noted that consultancy-led consortia were not always well suited to the partnership-based nature of institutional collaboration, with interviewees describing “tender-machine” dynamics and limited scope to adjust designs once calls were issued. These concerns were taken up in subsequent guidance: OKP/NICHE lessons recommended that consultancies participate within consortia rather than lead them, and that calls leave space for problem-driven design with stronger Embassy or authority steering.

3.3.3 *The extent to which recommendations formulated in earlier conducted evaluations of OKP on efficiency of the programme and its predecessor (NICHE) were considered*

Earlier evaluations on NICHE and NFP and the OKP Mid-Term Evaluation offered several key recommendations to improve the programme. While the recommendations from NICHE and NFP focused on the design and relevance of the OKP, the recommendations from the mid-term review were more concerned with its effectiveness and efficiency. Overall, recommendations were partially considered, and related improvements were implemented to a limited extent. MEL tools improved and some alumni initiatives were undertaken, but systematic alumni follow-up and structured co-financing remained uneven. Design intentions on long-term engagement and local ownership were only partially realised in practice.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the OKP was built on lessons learned from previous programmes such as NFP and NICHE. NFP focused on individual scholarships, and NICHE emphasised institutional capacity building. OKP combined both, integrating individual scholarships, group trainings, and institutional collaboration into one cohesive programme. Key shifts from NICHE to OKP included a shift from long-term institutional-only projects to more flexible, impact-driven collaborations; a key shift from NFP to OKP was the move from individual fellowships to integrated capacity building with stronger alignment to Dutch policy priorities. OKP further introduced private sector engagement, thematic focuses (e.g. food security, SRHR), and adaptive programming.

Alumni involvement. in OKP, new focus elements were added to the programme including increased alumni involvement. Nuffic introduced specific grants for alumni activities to foster continued professional development, promote knowledge exchange and collaboration, and support visibility of Dutch education and expertise abroad. The adjustments allowed alumni associations and networks to apply for funding for alumni activities. These were well incorporated under OKP, although a strong portfolio-wide database was missing, thereby limiting effectiveness of alumni events.

Better alignment with MFA needs: previous evaluations suggested to ensure better alignment with the Dutch development cooperation policy as well as the Multi Annual Strategic Plans of the Dutch embassies. **OKP interventions were more explicitly linked to the priority themes of Dutch development cooperation,**

⁴⁷ Ecorys & Results in Health (2020), Mid-term review: Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP); Nuffic (2021), Final results and lessons learnt – NICHE and NFP 2017–2021; Rodhal Consultancy (2024), Final evaluation of the Orange Knowledge Programme (2017–2024).

such as Food and Nutrition Security, Water, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Security and Rule of Law. This ensured that projects contributed coherently to long-term impacts defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme was closely aligned with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'policy "Investing in Global Prospects" (see relevance chapter).

Alignment to local needs: the mid-term evaluation recommended to ensure that projects are better integrated with local development strategies and sectoral needs and tailored to country-specific contexts and challenges⁴⁸. It was also recommended to adapt funding mechanisms to allow for more responsive and flexible management. Generally, there is some evidence that this was done in OKP. Stakeholders reported that projects were well integrated with local development strategies and sectoral needs, and interventions were tailored to country-specific contexts and challenges in the later phases of the programme. Interventions were generally well aligned with local needs.

For example, in an East African country, integration with national priorities was strengthened post-evaluation, especially in Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) and Water. Projects by a local training provider focused on climate-smart agriculture and ICT-enhanced training, aligning with agricultural and digital transformation goals.

In a West African Sahelian country, OKP projects were tailored to SRHR and natural resource management strategies. The programme addressed gaps in health education, especially for mid-level medical staff, aligning with the country's national health policy. Embassy involvement ensured that interventions matched local institutional capacities and sectoral needs. The Theory of Change was adapted to a fragile context, focusing on resilience and sustainability.

In a Southeast Asian country, projects were well-aligned with national priorities in Security & Rule of Law, Water, and Food & Nutrition Security. Embassy-led coordination helped tailor interventions to legal education reform and water management needs. The programme introduced interactive teaching methods, legal clinics, and community outreach, enhancing relevance and impact. Thematic calls were designed to reflect local challenges, such as gender equity and ethics in law.

In another Southeast Asian country, OKP focused on climate-resilient agriculture and nursery sector development in a major delta region. Projects were embedded in the country's climate adaptation and food security strategies. Dutch-local partnerships supported capacity building in education and government sectors. The programme emphasised value chain development and sectoral alignment, especially in horticulture and water management.

Visibility: OKP has become more visible by showing the results and successes of institutes that have been participating in the OKP for a longer period. An example of post-Mid-Term Review improvement in visibility is the Impact Pocket Guide (2017–2024)⁴⁹. Nuffic published a comprehensive Impact Pocket Guide that highlights achievements across seven years. It includes stories of change, project highlights, and institutional successes, making the programme's outcomes more accessible and engaging. OKP used Akvo RSR, a reporting tool, to track and present results from 65 ICPs and over 400 group training initiatives. This platform aimed to improve transparency and real-time visibility of project outcomes, although there were significant challenges in its use (see chapter efficiency).

Feedback to scholarship applicants: the mid-term review highlighted the need to improve monitoring frameworks and feedback to scholarship applicants and implementing organisations, both to enhance transparency and to enable learning from unsuccessful proposals OKP introduced more structured channels such as annual reports, alumni surveys, and the Akvo RSR platform to capture progress and provide some feedback. Organisations also received formal selection or rejection letters. However, respondents noted that feedback to rejected applicants often lacked detail and was not consistently actionable. Indeed, Nuffic's final

⁴⁸ Ecorys & Results in Health (2020), Mid-term review: Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP).

⁴⁹ Nuffic (2024d). *Orange Knowledge Programme 2017–2024: Celebrating 7 years of impact*.

OKP evaluation concluded that feedback remained uneven and did not systematically improve proposal quality across cycles.

Systemic partnerships and reciprocity: earlier evaluations recommended moving beyond single-project logic toward dynamic institutional ecosystems, with an explicit emphasis on equal partnerships and stronger local leadership. OKP's ICPs enabled co-creation (joint curriculum development, research, and capacity-building initiatives etc.). However, the depth of reciprocity varied considerably. In some cases, Dutch institutions often retained a dominant role in design and delivery. While progress was made in building networks and encouraging mutual learning, the ambition of fully equal partnerships was only partly realised.

Project leadership & role clarity: earlier evaluations of NICHE and NFP recommended that project leadership remain with higher education institutions to safeguard ownership and reciprocity (with consultancy firms contributing within consortia rather than taking the lead). Building on these lessons, OKP positioned higher education institutions as the designated leads for ICPs. This approach was also applied: only higher-education institutions could act as lead organisations in ICPs, while consultancies participated as specialised partners. In practice, it may have happened that consortia worked around this new rule by applying internal shadow constructions as was found in one of the country studies.

Outcome measurement: the mid-term evaluation recommended **developing clearer indicators** for measuring long-term impact and increase the use of tracer studies and alumni feedback to assess outcomes. Regular tracer studies were recommended to document outcomes and inform future directions. A tracer study to assess the mid- to long-term effects of OKP scholarships on professionals and their organisations provided evidence of how alumni and institutions have applied knowledge gained through OKP, reinforcing the programme's relevance and impact.

At the project level, recommendations were generally considered during follow-up activities. This often meant incorporating insights from previous interventions, whether across time or between countries where the same Dutch partner was involved. Although formal structures for sharing recommendations among project partners were limited, exchange did happen informally. For example, project coordinators at a Dutch university routinely shared lessons learned from work in different countries. Nuffic also organised learning sessions in The Hague with implementing organisations operating in the same country (on different themes). Additionally, a TMT project in a North African country responded to challenges with English proficiency among stakeholders by establishing a local project office and using translators to boost efficiency. Furthermore, one project in the same country adapted its operations to increase female participation in training programmes (see the section on gender below).

3.3.4 *Did the implementation of OKP activities contribute to the intended outcomes as per the OKP ToC and, if so, to what extent was progress on outcomes achieved?*

Master's training more often led to role changes and advanced skills; short courses showed higher immediate return-to-employer and rapid application. The implication is to combine instruments to balance depth and diffusion. Although most alumni returned, promotions and transfers—and a minority not returning—constrained institutionalisation in some settings. Therefore, retention risks should be factored into design and follow-up.

An outcome in the ToC is enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations (in partner countries and in NL).

There were signs of increased organisational capacity. OKP supported the adoption of new methods, technologies, and policies in partner institutions. Examples include curriculum reform in higher education and TVET institutions in Southeast Asia and the introduction of climate-smart agricultural practices and water management innovations in the same region. The use of digital tools and problem-based learning to improve

teaching and service delivery in that regional portfolio was also noted. OKP alumni in a Southeast Asian portfolio remained within their organisations and took on training roles, sharing knowledge with colleagues. This contributed to internal capacity building and peer learning, especially in institutions involved in institutional collaboration projects.

Nuffic conducted a scholarships tracer study⁵⁰ focusing on mid- to long-term effects of OKP scholarships on (i) career progression, (ii) professional development, (iii) organisational strengthening, and (iv) leadership roles of alumni (2017 and 2022).⁵¹ The survey showed positive results on employment-related impacts, including alumni gaining promotions, sector mobility, and increased employability. These findings were also found during this evaluation's FGDs at country-level. For instance, alumni reported improvements in personal and professional confidence, influence in decision-making, and the ability to train others. These practice changes are reported across sectors and instruments, although depth and pace vary with partner readiness, facilities and leadership support. The tracer study focused on outcomes but there was no consistent evidence that pre- and post-training skill assessments were systematically conducted across all OKP projects, and job placement rates were not consistently tracked or reported across all countries. Some tailor-made trainings may have included evaluations, but there were no requirements to standardise this. KIIs and FDGs however suggest that the results of TMTs and individual courses can be interpreted as plausible contributions consistent with the programme's theory of change.

Effectiveness, or outcome and impact, differs systematically between long-term and short-term training modalities. Long-term Master's programmes (12–24 months) generate stronger lasting effects on knowledge, leadership, and career progression. They are more likely to produce strategic change and innovation within institutions. By contrast, short courses/TMTs deliver immediate skill enhancement for specific tasks or roles and are effective for operational improvements and quick wins.⁵² On sustainability, Master's programmes have higher potential for sustained impact due to deeper learning and networks; short courses risk limited long-term effect unless followed by support or institutional integration.⁵³

Therefore, Master's programmes are best suited to building future leaders, supporting systemic change, and strengthening institutional capacity. Short courses/TMTs are well suited to urgent skills gaps, project-specific needs, and technical competencies. A balanced mix enhances overall programme effectiveness. Follow-up mechanisms (e.g., alumni networks, mentoring, institutional embedding) are necessary to sustain short-course gains. Strategic targeting of Master's scholarships can amplify leadership and policy-level influence.

The second ToC outcome is that TVET/HE organisations (in partner countries and in the Netherlands) perform their tasks better and are firmly embedded in their environment.

Outcomes generally extended beyond organisations toward institutional/system-wide effects, producing institutional spillovers where curricula were formally approved and embedded in routine delivery. For example, from our sample, **in a South Asian country**, SRHR curricula approved for **a national agency** were integrated into the agency's annual training plan, and the Food Safety trajectory launched an MSc while equipping labs and training lecturer teams—thus extending benefits beyond the initial project units; **in an East African context**, a national TVET authority's quality/occupational standards and CBE modules helped normalise practical training across multiple TVET/HE partners; and **in another African country**, government reforms to harmonise quality standards across the public and private health education sector were reportedly the result of the OKP ICP that brought together the national public institute and the association of private schools; a contribution the plausibility of which was confirmed by interviewed stakeholders.

⁵⁰ Nuffic. (2024c). *Seven years of collaboration with the Orange Knowledge Programme, 2017–2024*.

⁵¹ Nuffic. (2024b). *Orange Knowledge Programme scholarships: Tracer study*.

⁵² www.nuffic.nl; <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/>.

⁵³ <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/home>.

Operational changes inside agencies further demonstrate early outcomes. In a Latin American context, practice-oriented modules and short courses with a national training institute catalysed company-level operational changes—for example, a trainee-led adaptation of a forklift from gasoline/gas to cleaner energy in the workplace—indicating uptake into routine practice rather than one-off training effects. Since the 1970s, there has been a longstanding partnership with a leading university in Southeast Asia characterised by deep mutual understanding and collaboration not only on curriculum development but also at the policy level. In terms of sustainability, a double degree program in a provincial capital in that region (Dutch–local collaboration) was discontinued by the partner university, as it was no longer deemed necessary. The local university has since taken on a similar role for provincial institutions, indicating a more balanced and autonomous research collaboration.

Sector-level outcomes were limited, with most results verified at organisational or system-interface level rather than across whole sectors. For example, in a Middle Eastern country, OKP interventions did align with national water, agriculture, SRHR, and education strategies and piloted practice-oriented curricula and hybrid delivery (e.g., wastewater operator training, horticulture living labs, digital learning cascades), but evidence of sector-wide uptake was not quantified and largely framed as recommendations for future embedding (e.g., in certification regimes). In a Latin American context, an ICP on land administration revised land administration curricula, strengthened faculties, and supported regulatory engagement and uptake of community-based data tools by national agencies, but these were reported as institutional or system-interface changes rather than sector-wide indicators.

The institutionalisation of OKP scholarships, ensuring that the knowledge and skills gained by scholarship holders are embedded within their home institutions, faced several constraints, particularly around return and retention.

Scholarship holders were expected to return to their home country and employer after completing their studies. This was essential to achieve the programme's goal of capacity building within local institutions⁵⁴. However, tracking and enforcing return was difficult, especially for Master's graduates who may pursue further opportunities abroad.

Even when scholarship holders returned, retention within their original institutions was not guaranteed. Factors affecting retention included limited career advancement opportunities, inadequate institutional support, mismatch between acquired skills and job roles and political or economic instability.

Employers were required to submit a statement of support during the application process. However, in practice, many institutions lacked mechanisms to reintegrate and utilise returning staff effectively, reducing the long-term impact.

While Nuffic conducted a tracer study to assess outcomes, there was no systematic mechanism to ensure that scholarship holders contributed to institutional change post-return⁵⁵. Country case evidence indicates that, in some settings—particularly within TVET institutions—absorptive-capacity constraints limited the embedding of returning scholars' skills, constraining institutionalisation even when alumni were retained.

Plausibility and contribution: We assess causal plausibility where outputs plausibly led to outcomes: e.g., curriculum revisions (output) preceded adoption of new teaching practices and employer partnerships (outcomes). Where sequencing or counterfactuals are weak, we report contribution only. We assess causal plausibility using theory-based contribution analysis and process-tracing checks of sequence, assumptions, and rival explanations. Across cases, we observe outputs plausibly linked to outcomes. For example, **in South Asia**, three SRHR curricula approved, and 73 trainers prepared led to DGFP adopting youth-friendly

⁵⁴ Nuffic. Grant obligations & conditions for individual scholarships.

⁵⁵ Nuffic (2024b). *Orange Knowledge Programme scholarships: Tracer study*.

services in over 180 facilities and extending SRHR content across vocational courses—an institution-level outcome beyond immediate training delivery. **In a MENA water ICP**, facility upgrades at **two university sites** and **over 100** operator trainings preceded a new water-treatment programme and demonstrated cost-saving applications, though TVET track enrolment lagged—hence a partial chain. **In Southeast Asia**, a law-education initiative's 52 revised courses and 107 trained lecturers translated into reformed teaching reaching 3,406 students, and a **coastal management initiative produced an operational centre at a coastal university**—credible organisational outcomes. **A Southeast Asian portfolio's** contribution analysis finds OKP's didactics/field-based methods accelerated capacity gains despite other donors—supporting plausible contribution amid competing explanations. **A Horn of Africa agricultural ICP** shows outputs (greenhouse, equipment, internships) with weaker employment evidence to date, indicating contribution is plausible but unproven at livelihood level. **An East African portfolio's** smart-classroom and digital-pedagogy training produced a trainer cascade and curricular updates tied to employer platforms—early organisational outcomes consistent with the ToC. Scholarship data (95% alumni returned to employer) further support immediate absorption pathways into organisations, while not by itself proving higher-level effects. Overall, our judgement is 'plausible contribution' to institutional outcomes, with lower inferential strength for sectoral impacts pending longer follow-up and stronger outcome monitoring, in line with IOB guidance on qualitative plausibility.

3.3.5 *Barriers and challenges to achievement of results*

Several factors challenged the achievement of results. **Local institutions sometimes lacked the administrative or technical capacity** to fully implement or sustain projects, particularly in fragile contexts. For example, despite strong demand, TVET institutions and local partners in an **East African country** faced challenges in project management, infrastructure and staff capacity. In a **south East Asian context**, some institutions lacked the capacity to manage complex multi-stakeholder projects with issues including limited financial autonomy, weak coordination mechanisms and underdeveloped research infrastructure.

Challenges related to **digital infrastructures** as well (see the digitalisation cross-cutting issue). In rural **areas in West Africa**, limited internet infrastructure hindered access to digital learning platforms used in OKP projects focused on SRHR and agricultural education. As some institutions had to rely on offline materials or face-to-face training it reduced the reach and flexibility of the interventions. Similarly, **in remote regions of an East African country**, especially in arid and semi-arid regions, unstable internet and power outages made it difficult for TVET students and teachers to participate in online modules. OKP projects adapted by using mobile-based learning, radio broadcasts, or community hubs with solar-powered internet. At the same time, digitalisation also created opportunities: in a **Southeast Asian country**, the Climate Proof project used digital platforms to modernise curricula, sustain delivery during COVID-19, and reach students across provinces, helping to bridge urban–rural gaps.

Furthermore, **embassies' involvement in OKP influenced effectiveness** of OKP. Such involvement varied across countries. **In one Southeast Asian country**, an education attaché enhanced the visibility of Dutch education and strengthened strategic cooperation, allowing the Embassy to advocate for OKP within broader donor platforms. By contrast, in a country in the Horn of Africa, the Embassy had no formal role in the institutional instruments and limited interaction with OKP. A notable coordination gap found across cases was the absence of a comprehensive alumni database, limiting Embassies' ability to engage former scholarship recipients for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and policy engagement.

Security and political stability posed barriers in partner countries, including **those in the Horn of Africa, Central Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa**. Conflict or unrest halted training or prevented scholarship travel; security risks constrained expert missions; and government instability delayed approvals and clearances as governments did not commission nor conducted a political and conflict sensitivity analysis. In a West African country, given the security situation in one northern state (orange alert code given the frequent kidnappings taking place in the region and jihadist attacks) the Dutch trainer was not allowed to travel. The

input was therefore given online despite some challenging connectivity issues⁵⁶. However, as noted at the start of this chapter, projects in fragile regions such as the Horn of Africa and Central Africa achieved small yet meaningful results. OKP interventions can contribute to provide solutions to conflict affected situations/contexts. For instance, in a West African country, a TMT on pasture and fodder technologies focused on fodder production as a way of resolving access to pasture lands for nomadic farmers—providing new perspectives to resolve long-term tensions affecting internal security and food security in the affected regions. It also brought together people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Fortunately, most OKP projects operating in fragile or conflict-affected states did not require or conduct a political/conflict sensitivity analysis.

A further cross-cutting constraint was the absence of systematic baselines and uneven verification across instruments. For scholarships, pre-study baselines existed but were not consistently processed; for ICPs and group trainings, baselines were largely absent. Digital reporting through Akvo/Delta was only partially accessible and not always up to date, while several country files showed missing logframe annexes and gaps in routine M&E (especially for TMT/TMT+). As a result, numerical achievements were often reported but not consistently tracked or independently verified, limiting comparability across portfolios and weakening attribution claims.⁵⁷

Assumptions on alumni reintegration and institutional uptake were supported in water and FNS ICPs, but weaker in SRoL short courses with high staff turnover. We flag such variance to guide risk-tailored design.

3.4 Efficiency

Nr	QUESTION	ANSWER	CONFIDENCE*
EQ 10 + EQ11	How efficiently were roles divided, decisions coordinated, and resources managed among OKP partners (including the MFA) and what factors explain possible differences in efficiency?	Roles were efficiently divided and resources well managed among OKP partners, and collaboration was generally strong. Yet, operational coordination between different partners active in a country, and with the MFA, was limited. The factors explaining differences in efficiency included fragile contexts, COVID-19, language barriers, and a too detailed M&E framework.	High
EQ12	<i>Discussed with related EQs under effectiveness</i>		

*High: three or more independent sources, broad country coverage, and solid documentation; Medium: at least two independent sources with gaps in country coverage and documentation; Low: single-source and/or limited corroborating evidence.

3.4.1 Internal (Nuffic, MFA) and external (partners) collaboration and coordination management

Operational cooperation between **Nuffic and the MFA was generally sufficient**, marked by a consistent willingness to address and resolve operational challenges. However, the Embassy was not always up to date or updated on project implementation and progress. In several countries interaction between the Embassy and project coordinators was limited and largely **ad hoc**. This was true for example in **countries in the Horn of Africa and Southeast Asia**, amongst others. **It is largely due to the governance setup in which Nuffic oversaw implementation and reporting. Embassies were not expected to manage projects. This meant that the Embassy had no formal role** in institutional instruments and sometimes did not even **receive** the OKP country-Annex annual reports from Nuffic. As a result, it was difficult for the Embassy to remain informed about the scope and advancement of interventions.

⁵⁶ Sources: relevant OKP project settlement letter (2024); OKP project documentation (Akvo platform, accessed 2025).

⁵⁷ Edburgh Consultants (2020). *External evaluation: Akvo Data to Decision*; Rodhal Consultancy (2024), Final evaluation of the Orange Knowledge Programme (2017–2024).

Beyond project level, interviews showed that **coordination and management between the different actors active in a country, including Nuffic, MFA, and implementing partners, was limited**, lacking transparency and structure. There was generally no connection between projects from different partners under OKP on country-level. Following the quick turnover at the Embassy, there was criticism by project coordinators on the level of technical expertise present at Embassies. Nevertheless, the Embassy and Nuffic staff were considered supportive, with openness to targeted calls and flexible scheduling to resolve bottlenecks as they arose. This was also the case under challenging circumstances, such as COVID-19 or conflict dynamics in **an East African country**.

On the contrary, **collaboration among project partners within the same project was generally strong**. In various countries, both Dutch and national coordinators described their relationships as solution-oriented, enabling improved cooperation from the outset – particularly when communication required strengthening – trust-based, and characterised by a sense of equality. The level of engagement between Dutch and national stakeholders varied from one project to another, with some having formal steering mechanisms (such as structured bi-weekly meetings) while others depended on more informal, event-based interactions to maintain contact. The majority of institutional engagements was long-term, even up to 40 years, while other project coordinators lost contact after the closure of a project.

Dutch project coordinators had different views on the fairness of the **allocation of budgets**. Budgets were assigned to Dutch (lead) partners and then transferred to national partners in agreed terms. Local partners (Partner B) had their own budgets for local procurement, transport, etc. However, fees for working hours were paid to Dutch partners, while costs by national partners that could be covered were only activities and expenses. On the one hand some stakeholders considered these regulations as obstructing equal partnership and reciprocity with some friction/discussions. On the other hand, it was seen as contributing to cost-effectiveness and avoiding further budget requests. No evidence was found on whether it led or hampered local ownership, and either way it could be argued: by investing own time it can foster local ownership, or feelings of unfairness can hamper local ownership.

3.4.2 *The extent to which resources were allocated and used cost-effectively (staff costs, infrastructure, travel, activities)*

Given limited reporting on outcome level in terms of cost allocation, the evaluation focuses on pragmatic decision-making in avoiding unnecessary costs. Overall, interviews and Akvo reporting of **OKP interventions showed cost-conscious execution**, mostly based on asset use, building on previous expertise, and local presence. Drivers of cost-efficiency included: local facilitation and regular visits including management of local budgets (Partner B budgets) to facilitate local management of costs; presence by Dutch partners in facilitation of activities (Young Expert Programme or already having a local office such as in **one North African country**); building on previous experiences (i.e. ICPs or TMTs) to scale prior work and optimise workflows; adding to practice facilities instead of building new ones; and using existing partner venues for trainings and activities. Furthermore, the country case studies showed that risk mitigation led to increased cost-effectiveness in some countries (**for example, in an East African and a Central African country**), by substituting high-risk travel with sessions in safer (cross-border) country regions which reduced flight and per-diem costs and safeguarded the learning trajectory, while in other countries (such as in **a MENA country**), political and security risks and strict security protocols led to challenges in timely implementation. Furthermore, interviews and available financial reporting showed that funds were generally deployed to deliver the intended work, with sufficient **financial absorption rates**, despite some variation over projects. Stakeholders indicate sufficiency of funds within the scope/objectives of interventions (acknowledging the limited budget and thus scope of TMTs).

Implementers highlighted heavy **administrative loads for the tendering and monitoring/reporting of ICPs**. This was linked to many requirements for the proposal vis-à-vis high competition, and the annual

reporting in rigid frameworks (see for M&E below). A stakeholder proposed introducing a concept note phase to help reduce the significant burdens associated with the acquisition process.

Focus group discussions and reporting involving scholarship alumni revealed that alumni applied for and received **multiple scholarships** – sometimes two or three awards, including Master's and/or Short Courses – without any specific Nuffic regulations addressing this. The absence of a comprehensive cross-country alumni database was pointed out as a limitation. Embassy feedback indicated that, while multiple scholarships for one individual can foster deeper learning, there might be a need to set a limit to ensure that the broader benefits of the scholarship programme reach a wider group of recipients.

COVID-19 formed a significant obstruction to efficient implementation of projects. Although activities were adapted to online means, they did not have the same results as face-to-face meetings, specifically not in remote areas and in applying theory to practice. In some countries, e.g. in one of our sample's Asian countries, even internal travel was impossible. Adaptations came from projects themselves, with little coordination/advice from Nuffic. Projects built on long-term relationships were better able to adapt and remain effective in implementation, while projects with new partners and thus limited or no face-to-face connections had more difficulties. Flexibility in no-cost extensions was provided.

Finally, several project-specific efficiency concerns were noted, yet **language barriers** during training occurred across most countries, specifically as more remote or practical-oriented stakeholders were involved. Despite mitigation by partners, such barriers somewhat hindered effective implementation and slowed progress.

3.4.3 *The division of funding across themes*

FNS likely received around 30–35% of total thematic funding. **Water, Energy & Climate** appears to have received the **largest share**, especially in scholarships (around 25% to 40 %). **SRHR and Security & Rule of Law** received comparatively less notably between 10% and 15%. These figures are **indicative** and may vary slightly depending on the type of instrument (scholarships, TMTs, ICPs) and country-specific allocations.⁵⁸

Across the portfolio, allocations were concentrated in FNS (with related water components), reflecting MFA priorities. This concentration delivered economies of scale in sector expertise and partnerships but heightened the need for cross-theme learning to avoid silo effects. We judge the added FNS investment to be value-for-money where ICPs leveraged co-financing and market linkages.

The value added by additional FNS Funding was that Agricultural Systems were strengthened as projects focused on sustainable horticulture, climate-resilient farming, and water-efficient agriculture. These interventions contributed to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). FNS projects often intersected with water management, climate resilience, and health, enhancing the coherence and impact of OKP interventions.

For example, **in an East African country**, FNS ICPs established greenhouses and integrated climate-smart agronomy modules in TVET curricula to strengthen practice-based training; **in a North African country**, FNS activities combined water-saving irrigation practices with post-harvest handling training to reinforce horticultural value chains.

In a South East Asian country, the Country Plan of Implementation (CPI) priority themes Water and Food & Nutrition Security are both listed as key focus areas. The CPI outlines a Theory of Change that integrates water resource management with food security goals, especially in rural and agricultural contexts. Institutional

⁵⁸ Nuffic (2024a). *Orange Knowledge Programme – 2024*.

Collaboration Projects on Food & Nutrition Security were strengthening agricultural education at vocational schools (SMKs), with explicit links to water management and climate-smart agriculture.⁵⁹

A Water & Food Security Nexus Project **in another South East Asian country** focused on strengthening capacity in education and government sectors to support climate-resilient agriculture and water-efficient nursery practices in **a southern delta region**.⁶⁰ In **a West African country**, TMT/TMT+ on pasture and fodder technologies targeted feed scarcity constraints, supporting smallholder resilience within the FNS portfolio. The focus of the Smallholder Agriculture Resilience Project (UNDP, Green Climate Fund) in an Asian country was on empowering smallholders to manage climate-induced water insecurity and adopt resilient agricultural practices in **a central highlands and coastal region**.⁶¹

3.4.4 *The adequacy and efficiency of M&E and reporting mechanisms*

The adequacy and efficiency of the M&E system was mixed. Interviews revealed **criticism on the Akvo system**, specifically in OKP's initial stages. It was perceived burdensome with trouble in accessing and recording information, hampering equality between Dutch and local counterparts and local ownership. Additionally, the system was considered rigid with questions for reporting not facilitating internal learning and adaptive management.

OKP's M&E framework was furthermore **considered as too detailed on sectoral level** resulting in indicators that were not helpful in contributing to learning, accountability and adaptive management. Indicators were phrased in very specific details such as 'Number of Family Farms with increased productivity', and 'number of undernourished people with improved food intake'.⁶² These indicators did not facilitate effective learning and accountability as projects focussed on educational capacity building, e.g. development of curricula. The framework resulted in submission of lengthy and complex M&E logframes and annual reporting, and heavy M&E burdens that did not contribute to partner country's leadership and equality of partnerships, nor they helped understanding what educational institutes achieved. Meaningful measurements on sectoral outcome-level remained limited and meta-evaluations or impact-level studies did not take place.

The MEL framework included multiple instruments (scholarships, TMTs, institutional collaboration), each with distinct indicators and reporting formats. This fragmentation made it hard to aggregate data and draw coherent conclusions across interventions.

Stakeholders expressed **nuanced views on reporting on the different OKP instruments**. Reporting for TMTs was generally regarded as effective and conducive to learning, aligning well with the instrument's scope. In contrast, reporting for ICPs was considered burdensome, constrained by rigid frameworks and reporting questions that offered little learning value to implementers, and the fact that reports were required annually even though most significant progress occurred later in the implementation phase. Additionally, the interviews with Dutch and national project coordinators of ICPs and TMTs showed that while lessons learned in ICPs were often shared with national partners, and national partners provided inputs in reporting on ICPs, the involvement of national partners in TMT reporting was notably limited. The MEL system lacked structured learning mechanisms to feed insights back into programme design. This reduced the ability to adapt interventions based on what was working or not. Much of the monitoring focused on outputs (e.g., number of trainings, scholarships awarded) rather than outcomes (e.g., institutional change, policy influence). As a result, it was difficult to demonstrate impact or link activities to broader development goals.

⁵⁹ <https://eng.ui.ac.id/en/okp-call-food-nutrition-security/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.aeres.eu/expertise-all-projects/okp-nuffic/all-okp-nuffic-projects> .

⁶¹ <https://www.undp.org/vietnam/projects/strengthening-resilience-smallholder-agriculture-climate-change-induced-water-insecurity-central-highlands-and-south-central-coast>: . <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/projects/strengthening-resilience-smallholder-agriculture-climate-change-induced-water-insecurity>

⁶² Nuffic (n.d.). Orange Knowledge Programme monitoring and evaluation framework.

Reporting on scholarship outcomes remained minimal, with little meaningful follow-up despite the requirement for back-to-office reports that were not widely shared for instance with embassies, and no observed systematic efforts to track scholarship outcomes. The Tracer Study Report was considered a positive initiative, as it provided valuable insights into the medium- and long-term impacts of the scholarship programme on professionals, their organisations, and their countries, showing positive results. However, an Embassy stakeholder noted that the potential of the large OKP alumni network remained unused. Throughout OKP implementation, there were no discussions between Nuffic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and programme coordinators on how to strategically leverage the extensive pool of OKP alumni for Dutch diplomacy or interests. The lack of a comprehensive alumni database, though mitigated in some instances by individual embassies, further hindered this effort.⁶³

Across instruments (scholarships, TMT and ICPs), our inference from outputs to outcomes rests on five conditions: (1) individual capabilities translate into role changes and routine practice; (2) organisations have incentives, posts and resources (incl. O&M for equipment, digital access) to absorb and institutionalise new practices; (3) institutional products (curricula, labs/equipment, QA/protocols, partnerships) are formally adopted and used at scale; (4) employer/regulator engagement creates demand pathways (placements, co-designed curricula, accreditation); and (5) participation, safeguarding and inclusion provisions sustain uptake. Where one or more conditions are weak—e.g., equipment without maintenance budgets, staff turnover, limited private-sector linkages—our judgement is ‘plausible contribution’ only. The link from outcome to impact (e.g., service quality, productivity, employability) is credible but remains tentative within this evaluation window; we triangulate early signals (organisational KPIs, employer uptake, policy or budget adoption) and refrain from sector-wide impact claims absent ex-post data.

Without clear outcome data and synthesis, it was challenging to translate MEL findings into policy-relevant messages. Embassies and policymakers struggled to see the strategic value of OKP interventions beyond individual success stories. The analysis shows that output-only monitoring would be insufficient to capture meaningful change; concentrating on a small set of outcome indicators with scheduled ex-post checks, maintained policy relevance while containing reporting burden.

3.4.5 *The role and functioning of the OKP advisory and sounding boards*

As stated in OKP annual reports, the advisory and soundings boards aimed to give strategic advice and direction to the OKP programme to ensure progress towards its overall objective.⁶⁴ The *Advisory Board* consisted of seven members taking diversity into account, and knowledgeable of vocational and academic institutions, private sector, knowledge institutes and development cooperation. It met twice yearly, and topics covered included: theory of change, expected results, youth employment; regional approach, and inclusion of vocational training.

The *Sounding Board* was an expert group consisting of nine/ten representatives of all parties involved in OKP implementation, including MBO, HBO, WO, project coordinators from ICPs and alumni, both in the Netherlands and partner countries.⁶⁵ The Sounding Board’s aim was to provide practical recommendations and test new elements, meeting three to four times a year, for instance in relation to localisation, impact communication, TVET participation, and co-funding.

Interviews suggested that having functions as the sounding and advisory boards was valuable for enhancing programme delivery. Discussions focused on Nuffic, OKP, and areas for potential improvement, such as dealing with priority countries and themes and defining the relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, awareness of the advisory board and sounding board was generally low outside its members, and

⁶³ Nuffic. (2024b). *Orange Knowledge Programme scholarships: Tracer study*.

⁶⁴ OKP Annual Reports 2018, 2019, 2022.

⁶⁵ OKP Annual Reports 2018, 2019, 2022.

few people were familiar with its outcomes or results. There was also minimal outreach following these discussions. Only three OKP Annual Reports provide information on the topics discussed during the meetings.

3.5 Sustainability and Orientation towards Impact

Nr	QUESTION	ANSWER	CONFIDENCE*
EQ 13	To what extent is it likely that the outcomes achieved by OKP implementation will prove to be sustainable over time with regard to the creation of preconditions for sustainability? Are there mechanisms in place to ensure ongoing benefits?	Moderate likelihood that the outcomes will be sustained. Mechanisms to ensure ongoing benefits exist but are unevenly applied (financing, alumni, and exit provisions are weakest).	Medium

**High*: three or more independent sources, broad country coverage, and solid documentation; *Medium*: at least two independent sources with gaps in country coverage and documentation; *Low*: single-source and/or limited corroborating evidence.

This section shows that the likelihood that OKP results will be maintained is moderate, with variation by instrument and country. Likely sustainability is stronger where instruments were sequenced as a pipeline and partnerships were formalised; it is weaker where recurrent financing arrangements for continuation are not in place—for example, there are no documented institutional budget commitments for O&M/staffing, limited or untested revenue models, and rules that prevent institutions from keeping and using their own earned income to cover continuation costs—and where alumni mobilisation is limited. The section also examines how different elements—namely institutional sustainability, continuity of partnerships, financial pathways, exit and risk management, and alumni/refresher ecosystems—shape sustainability, and the extent to which they plausibly support broader development effect.

3.5.1 Sustainability: likelihood of sustained outcomes and preconditions

Across the portfolio, sustained outcomes are most visible where curriculum and organisational changes were formalised within institutional procedures, where partnerships were anchored in sector governance, and where pragmatic financing arrangements were identified. This subsection assesses how far results are likely to endure beyond funding. We do so by looking at six dimensions: institutional sustainability, continuity of partnerships, financial pathways, exit and risk management, alumni/refresher ecosystems, and the extent to which these elements plausibly support broader development effects.⁶⁶

A first test is whether changes were institutionally embedded, i.e., incorporated into curricula, procedures and governance, so they persist as “business as usual.” In a **Southeast Asian country**, the **legal education partnership** revised over 50 courses and produced 20 teaching guides reaching >3,400 students (over half women); revisions were approved through faculty procedures and supported by a local-language handbook curated at a major national university. This indicates embedding within partner universities because those processes bind future teaching regardless of project funding. Meanwhile, a coastal management centre at another national university operates under a 2021–2030 business plan with staffing and service lines (training, consultancy, GIS platform) and roles in provincial task forces, signalling organisational anchoring and a route to recurrent demand. By contrast, in contexts where activities were shorter or organised mainly as modular training (e.g., a TMT+ in Central Africa), participants did take on new supervision and teaching roles—an “institutional multiplier”—but formal policies and curriculum rules beyond the immediate unit were less evident in the files reviewed. In other words, based on the cases sampled, this evaluation finds that breadth beyond the partner unit was stronger where projects had time and governance leverage to pass through curriculum committees and sector bodies; where delivery was short-cycle, positive practice change occurred but

⁶⁶ Data is drawn from the Country reports presented in the Evaluation’s Annex. The country reports present further detailed references to the projects.

codification at institutional or sector level was thinner.⁶⁷ In **a south American country**, similar signals of institutionalisation are visible: instructor training delivered under OKP aligned with priorities reflected in a national vocational training agency's Annual Training Plan and contributed to strengthening its national instructor-training function; while a major public university incorporated a new Collective Land Governance course, extending institutional effects in land administration. Both moves secure roll-out under public funding. These steps were accompanied by operational adjustments and follow-on collaboration with European programmes, reinforcing continuity through networked partnerships rather than stand-alone activities. The cases assessed in an East African country reinforce this pattern. Competence-based and climate-smart agriculture curricula were embedded and, in several cases, accredited by the national TVET authority, with MoU-backed internships used to sustain employer pull, even though alumni arrangements remained uneven across stakeholders. In health, a medical training college consolidated a skills lab, e-learning and entrepreneurship modules and is positioning itself as a centre of excellence within a local public-private network, although a premature funding end constrained full handover arrangements. In **a MENA country**, a water-sector partnership aligns with the National Water Strategy and is steered by a ministry-chaired committee; operator training is underway, while O&M budgeting and certification still require formalisation to secure continuity. Country data for a **West African country** indicate continued collaboration and delivery in a challenging context; yet deeper institutional embedding appears to depend on follow-on cycles and policy-level engagement, which were variably evidenced within the review window. And in a **South Asian country**, earlier-discussed SRHR outputs (curricula, trainers, graduates) translated into system-level uptake, as the national Directorate for family planning integrated SRHR in its annual training plan.

The data shows that sustained outcomes also depend on partnerships that continue to operate after grants close. Durability was most visible where platforms and roles were formalised and assigned custodians. In **a South East Asian country**, a national law lecturers' network with a leading national university as hub for hosting and dissemination, a multi-stakeholder platform in an eastern province with 15 partners (internships and climate-smart agriculture training), and follow-on cooperation around a watershed area (including a Dutch-funded initiative and an internship facility linking a Dutch university of applied sciences with local actors) provided concrete vehicles for continued knowledge exchange. In **a Middle Eastern country** water and horticulture portfolios, multi-annual roadmaps agreed with the Embassy underpinned more resilient cooperation. Where cycles were short and competitively tendered, interviewees noted a tendency towards "consultancy-style delivery", which limited deeper joint supervision and shared responsibility (features that normally sustain collaboration).

Financial pathways remain the most fragile element. Some projects mobilised co-funding or in-kind contributions (e.g., a €50,000 contribution in **a south East Asian** SRHR garment-sector initiative), and a minority pursued service revenues (consultancy, short courses). However, explicit host-budget lines and credible revenue models were inconsistently documented. Several country interviews (e.g., **in different African countries**) flagged weak alignment with ministerial budgets. Survey evidence from the final programme evaluation indicates that 58–61% of surveyed institutions anticipated difficulty continuing activities without external funds and in mobilising follow-on finance, pointing to recurrent risks around O&M and rules that limit retention of earned income. Where internal allocations and employer/municipal co-funding were formalised during design, continuity improved.

The alumni/refresher ecosystem is a positive but under-exploited lever. The 2024 tracer study⁶⁸ points to strong employment outcomes, leadership roles and high levels of skill application—precursors to sustained organisational change—and reports approximately 65% participation in professional networks, though engagement varies by country and the exact figure requires confirmation from the tracer tables. Interviews consistently pointed to missed opportunities for structured mobilisation (embassy convening, light refresher budgets, or Nuffic-facilitated communities of practice). Alumni identify primarily with their host institutions

⁶⁷ Country Reports; Interview data (portfolio).

⁶⁸ Nuffic. (2024b). *Orange Knowledge Programme scholarships: Tracer study*.

rather than with OKP as a programme and are not always linked to national sector platforms, suggesting low-cost scope to improve diffusion and maintenance of practices. Illustrative material from a **West African country** describes alumni-led initiatives on gender-based violence and blogger training with visible local effects.

Finally, the contribution towards broader development effects is plausible but not proven at scale.

Application of acquired knowledge, organisational method improvements and efficiency gains are widely reported by many alumni, including those interviewed as part of the data collection. Based on the available evidence, this evaluation finds a plausible contribution to organisational capacity (confidence: medium), but cannot make a general claim of sustained, system-level effects. The discontinuation of ex-post studies in December 2022 further limits verification of sector-level effects, reducing the evidence base for assessing sustainability from an efficiency perspective. Therefore, all forward-looking judgements here are expressed with graded confidence and should be read alongside the effectiveness analysis (see Section 3.3.4).

Taken together, these cases show that where institutional rules, sector platforms and financing options intersect, portfolio results are more likely to persist; where one of these elements is weak, such as O&M funding or defined handover responsibilities, the orientation towards longer-term effects is present but less assured.

3.5.2 *Mechanisms in place to ensure ongoing benefits*

This section reviews which of the five sustainability mechanisms described at the start of this chapter were actually in place across the portfolios, and where gaps remained. The findings clearly impact the outlook for sustained outcomes just discussed. The picture is mixed. Most portfolios displayed some combination of institutional rules, partnerships and financing arrangements that point beyond the grant period; however, the completeness of those combinations varies by context and instrument.

Institutional embedding was the most consistently observed mechanism (see 3.5.1 for illustrations). Less frequently observed were cross-institution quality cycles or sector-wide accreditation updates that would propagate changes beyond the initial partner set.

Partnership continuity tended to hold where roles were formalised, and responsibilities assigned (see 3.5.1 for illustrations). Where MoUs were not concluded or platforms remained ad hoc, and collaboration attenuated after closure.

Financial pathways were present but uneven. Some portfolios documented co-funding or in-kind contributions, and a minority pursued service revenues (consultancy, fee-based short courses). At the same time, Nuffic's final programme evaluation⁶⁹ indicates 58–61% of institutions anticipated difficulty sustaining activities without external funds and in mobilising follow-on finance. Positive exceptions tended to combine internal budget lines with employer or municipal co-funding; where these were absent, benefits risked gradual attrition.

Alumni and refresher ecosystems existed in part but were not systematised. However, country materials rarely show privacy-compliant alumni registers linked to sector platforms or light-touch refresher budgets that would keep practices current; consequently, diffusion often depended on individual initiative rather than programme design.

Planned exit and risk management was the least common pathway. Typically, closure documents did not specify maintenance/QA cycles, O&M funding sources or handover MoUs. This reduced resilience to staff

⁶⁹ Rodhal Consultancy (2024), Final evaluation of the Orange Knowledge Programme (2017–2024).

turnover and budget shocks. In portfolios dominated by short-cycle activities and compliance delays, the absence of these provisions made continuity particularly vulnerable once external funds ceased.

3.5.3 *The actions and conditions to achieve longer-term impact*

Building on the portfolio patterns described above, the evidence indicates that sustained outcomes were most likely when design and implementation choices deliberately reinforced the OKP's theory of change rather than leaving continuation to chance. In practical terms, based on the materials studied and the in-depth "8+4" case studies, **five conditions recur across country materials and interviews as the backbone of longer-term effects:**

1. **Instrument sequencing matters.** Country portfolios that intentionally used scholarships, TMT/TMT+ and ICPs as a pipeline (aligned with embassy convening calendars and CPI priorities) were better able to translate discrete outputs into embedded practice and organisational routines over multiple cycles.
2. **Continuation provisions at approval make a difference.** Sustainability improved when proposals explicitly documented (i) where and how institutional embedding would occur (e.g., curriculum committee routes, QA calendars), (ii) which partnership commitments would continue (MoUs, steering arrangements), (iii) what financial contributions would underwrite O&M and roll-out, and (iv) how alumni/refresher arrangements would be maintained and governed. Where such provisions were absent or informal, promising practices tended to remain bounded to project actors and fade after closure.
3. **Early financial anchoring is important.** Embedding budget lines in institutional HRD strategies, ministerial or municipal allocations, and employer cost-sharing arrangements underwrites routine costs and reduces dependence on external grants. Survey evidence highlights the risk baseline—many institutions anticipated difficulty mobilising follow-on finance. Hence, this evaluation contends that design-stage financial lines are not optional extras but prerequisites for continuity.
4. **Standards, certification and QA cycles help lock in quality and create demand for continued delivery.** Recognised standards, certification and QA cycles convert skills into formal credentials, embed routine re-assessment, and generate employer and regulator demand. Evidence in the portfolio shows higher continuity where these are anchored in sector bodies and national QA systems (see 3.5.1 for illustrations).
5. **Structured alumni mobilisation strengthens diffusion and maintenance of practices.** Tracer evidence shows strong professional effects and leadership roles; to translate these into sustained organisational change, alumni need to be organised as communities of practice linked to sector platforms, supported by privacy-compliant rosters and modest refresher budgets.

Taken together, these conditions argue for greater rigour at design and approval in any future programming to sustain outcomes at scale (e.g., build continuation into the pipeline, document the institutional and partnership pathways up front, anchor the money early, link to standards and QA, and mobilise alumni as part of sector platforms). The implications for future programming are operational rather than conceptual and are reflected in the recommendations.

3.6 Gender equality and inclusion

Nr	Question	Answer	Confidence*
EQ15	How has OKP integrated a gender transformative and inclusive approach in its implementation, across its various instruments and how did it contribute to	Performance on gender was mixed across countries and interventions. Specific gender-responsive activities/training took place, and efforts were taken to support 50% participation	Medium

Nr	Question	Answer	Confidence*
	increased gender equality in TVET and Higher education?	of women. Across the portfolio, 50% of scholarships were awarded to women and 50% to men. However, gender equality was not meaningfully applied to country contexts, and no strong conclusion can be drawn on the extent to which gender and inclusion outcomes have been achieved.	

3.6.1 *The mainstreaming of gender and inclusion into OKP implementation*

As stated in the introduction, the OKP design demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity, with gender equality and inclusion of marginalised populations as cross-cutting themes throughout activities. Mainstreaming was designed through the requirement for all interventions to have at least 50% women in project/training participants and awards of individual scholarships. Furthermore, SRHR was among the key thematic areas specific for some countries enabling a more direct focus on gender equality.

Results show that **performance on gender was mixed across countries and interventions**. In some countries, where women were less represented in certain positions or where projects targeted male-dominated fields (e.g. engineering, water resource management), introducing quotas among participants was suitable and useful. For instance, in a TMT+ in **a North African country**, a partnership between a Dutch consultant and **a local university** helped improving gender representation in the second TMT+ after having faced challenges during the first. It did so by ensuring neutral language in advertisements and by including female speakers, as stated in its annual reporting. In a **South Asian Country**, equal gender representation remained a challenge as male participants outnumbered female participants in both Masters and Short Courses scholarships. In an **East African Country**, the projects took efforts to promote women participation, yet this was challenging, particularly for FNS-related interventions, since female students in the FNS sector were generally fewer in number to start with.

Furthermore, there have been reported cases of **specific gender-responsive activities/training** mostly in SRHR and SRoL thematic areas but also FNS and Water. This included the establishment and strengthening of gender officers in TVET colleges and curriculum development and trainings provision on gender equality in **Africa and Asia**. There were also examples of spin-off initiatives, such as the development of an empowerment group “Women in Agriculture” in a **MENA country**.

However, **the level of equal representation of men and women differed much per country, and promoting or reporting on equal participation became a tick-the-box exercise in some countries** limited to counting how many women were represented in trainings or activities. Gender was in many cases not intentionally emphasised (e.g. **in south America**), without systematic gender targets for partners (e.g. a middle Eastern country). In many other countries the involved local educational institutes already had strong representation of women in mid-level and high positions and equal distribution of students. Complexity of gender equality can differ among countries, and representation in universities was affected for instance by the flexibility that educational institutes provide for women to combine work and family. Yet, the reporting did not foster deeper context analyses and subsequent project adjustments. Gender equality was searched for in the number of women participating, rather than in changing attitudes, behaviour or perceptions. This at times resulted in constrained conversations between Dutch and local partners. In only very few cases, such as an ICP in **a south American country**, gender studies were conducted to understand gender issues and other contextual realities.

Gender parity has not been achieved for the individual scholarships in all countries. Across the portfolio, 50% of scholarships were awarded to women and 50% to men, but in some countries **in Africa and**

Asia only about one third went to women. Still, this was considered a good result considering the challenging contexts in these countries.

Finally, in challenging contexts regarding gender equality, inclusion of gender in programs was most beneficial when it was accompanied by an embassy that played a role in discussion with local policy makers.

Next to gender, OKP targeted marginalised populations including those in remote or conflict-affected areas, lower income groups, and people with disabilities. As stated in Chapter 1, OKP's design allowed for flexibility to include these target groups. Again, the **results across projects and countries regarding inclusiveness of marginalised groups were mixed**: generally, inclusion of marginalised groups was not intentionally part of the design but depended on the presence of such groups in the region in which the project was active. No specific disability-focused initiatives were reported, and no special education services and accommodations for students with disabilities such as hearing devices or braille equipment were found.

Specifically in fragile or conflict-affected states projects were more concerned with vulnerable people. For instance, one project under review in an East African country addressed social inclusiveness by supporting economically poor students with exercise books, sanitary materials, pens and white papers, and included Internally Displaced Persons due **to the conflict in the north**. Similarly, in Latin America, one project worked in a territory with a large indigenous population, and it effectively contributed to connecting this population to the local economic development processes.

3.6.2 *The extent to which there is increased inclusion of all*

Following the outputs discussion in the previous section, **no strong conclusion can be drawn on the extent to which inclusion outcomes have been achieved**, i.e. that there has been increased inclusion for all following the OKP programme. The OKP interventions in documentation, interviews and FGDs showed limited systematic, measurable gender and inclusion outcomes.

Nevertheless, findings suggested incidental results of increased inclusion of marginalised groups in the areas of **gender equality** (in some countries), **IDPs, and youth**. The representation of women among scholarships awardees and their participation in activities is not always equal to 50% but can be considered acceptable in challenging contexts. Given the personal impact scholarships had on individuals – as confirmed in FGDs – the OKP interventions made some contributions to inclusion of all.

Furthermore, being focussed on education, OKP projects explicitly targeted youth skills and employability. FGDs with students, scholarship alumni, and project participants show that OKP projects contributed to individuals' employability on an incidental level, for instance through the OKP network, internship opportunities, or increased expertise following receipt of a scholarship for the Netherlands. However, job placement or actual employment outcomes were not demonstrated in the reporting. Finally, there have been positive results on inclusion of Internally Displaced Persons through entrepreneurship training and access to finance.

3.6.3 *The engagement of communities, leaders and stakeholders*

The OKP interventions showed strong engagement of different types of stakeholders in the projects. Among the capacity-building activities were often **multi-stakeholder events or trainings**, combining academic staff with staff from ministries, companies or sector associations. Furthermore, interventions showed **strong labour market linkages** contributing to effectiveness, understanding needs and building relationships that were sustained even after the OKP projects ended. This included field visits, business internships and apprenticeships, and the creation of multi-stakeholder support structures or platforms.

The projects also targeted educational institutes in (remote) communities, such as a delta region in a Southeast Asia, areas in the northern and eastern regions of an East African country, or territories with large indigenous populations in a South America, such as a specific southern province. Furthermore, project coordinators in interviews confirmed having good contact with relevant Ministry staff, at times facilitated by the alumni networks of the specific universities (being part of the ministry as well), or by the project coordinators designing the project.

4 Conclusion and recommendations

The following section provides recommendations based on key evaluation findings. They are informed by the recommendations identified in case studies as well as the portfolio review and framed in the context of the broader discussions about the future of Dutch cooperation in vocational and higher education. The recommendations were triangulated against evidence reported in the findings and prioritised for materiality, feasibility, and system-level relevance at programme/portfolio level (MFA/Nuffic/partners). The recommendations are based on the key lessons learnt listed below. Although each country context is unique—and it is, therefore, hard to make overall statements, this evaluation does contend that the following lessons have general significance.

4.1 Lessons learnt and key success factors

4.1.1 *Lessons learnt*

Relevance

OKP laid a foundation for continued collaboration in the countries where it operates, especially where local needs played a key role in shaping project set-up and the overall programme design reflected those needs. Such collaboration took place both between Dutch and local partners, as well as among partners within the beneficiary countries themselves, and at times also across borders or within regional contexts. This foundation was most visible where partnerships fostered ongoing interaction between Dutch and local institutions, and where linkages with other national actors created space for continued cooperation beyond individual projects.

Coherence

Portfolio coherence depended on how well the different instruments (ICPs, centrally managed TMTs, and scholarships, often implemented by different partners) were integrated. Weak connections, short trainings, and pressures at the project level (e.g., the need to disburse budgets within short timeframes and to comply with rigid performance indicator frameworks) reduced the portfolio's ability to achieve long-term impact.

Effectiveness

Implementation resilience required sustained support structures. COVID-19 challenged partner engagement mechanisms, but longer-term partners were better able to adapt. Educational support functions faded without dedicated funding, and bridging universities and TVETs proved difficult without explicit incentives and active facilitation. Strengthening linkages between Higher Education (HE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) can significantly increase the impact of development programs like OKP. Key impact reasons are that theoretical knowledge (HE) with practical skills (TVET) to meet industry needs are combined. It can foster private sector engagement in a future programme. One key lesson learned is that both HE and TVET institutions value the inclusion of more practical components in their curricula, which the OKP has supported. However, fostering closer collaboration between HE institutions, typically more theory-oriented and TVET institutions, focused on practical skills, could lead to more effective and efficient solutions.

Efficiency

Financing rules and incentives affected fairness and integration. ICP budgets excluded local staff time, while funding of working hours was available for Dutch partners. The establishment of separate project bureaus in universities to manage OKP as an additional funding stream, created silos and raised equity concerns. Lower-resourced institutions were left at a disadvantage.

Sustainability and early signs of impact

Diplomatic value existed but needed clearer roles and greater acknowledgement. Embassies were a crucial link, connecting the Netherlands with partner countries in terms of diplomacy, trade, and political relations, and OKP gave them a way to sustain programming; TMTs offered soft-power benefits. Alignment with Dutch foreign policy and embassy strategies strengthened design-stage coherence and diplomatic engagement; however, in some contexts this close alignment constrained local ownership during implementation. The governance setup limited how much Nuffic could steer implementation consistently across instruments and countries. The alumni network remained underutilised.

Overall

All respondents expressed regret over the discontinuation of the OKP program. For embassies, it served as a valuable instrument to strengthen political dialogue with governments. For higher education (HE) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, it was crucial for building relationships with partner institutions and fostering mutual learning. For individual training participants, it played an important role in promoting reciprocal cultural understanding and appreciation of different ways of life, something increasingly vital in today's polarised world, where misunderstandings are more common. The **OKP** has been a transformative initiative aimed at strengthening capacity in developing countries through education and training.

4.1.2 Key Success Factors of OKP

1. Collaboration between Dutch institutions and local partners ensured relevance and sustainability of projects. Long-term relationships, like in a South-East Asian country, were crucial for trust and impact. OKP emphasised inclusive partnerships between Dutch institutions and local stakeholders, universities, ministries, NGOs, and private sector actors. In the same country, the Climate Proof programme focussed on coastal engineering, water management, and climate resilience. It strengthened partnerships between Dutch and national universities, improved access to international journals, and supported young researchers.
2. OKP focused on tailor-made training, short courses, and scholarships that directly addressed local needs in sectors like agriculture, water management, health, and education. In the courses, The programme emphasised inclusion, gender equality, and access for marginalised groups, including refugee teachers in an East African country. The Teaching in Emergency for refugee teachers focussed on inclusive education and professional development for teachers in refugee camps. Online diploma courses, psychosocial support modules were developed and improved access to education for untrained refugee teachers was realised.
3. OKP demonstrated flexibility in adapting to local administrative systems and political environments. Projects were tailored to country-specific needs, allowing for **responsive adjustments** in implementation. For example, in fragile contexts in the Middle East and refugee settings in Africa, OKP adapted delivery models to overcome logistical and bureaucratic hurdle.
4. Especially during the pandemic, OKP adapted by offering online learning platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom, making education accessible in remote areas.
5. All projects were aligned with the strategic priorities of partner countries, such as food security, water management, and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and Rule of Law and Security.

4.2 Recommendations to strengthen education and capacity building for sustainable development

Recommendations are presented in two groups: strategic (policy and design related) and operational (implementation related).

4.2.1 Strategic/policy recommendations

The strategic recommendations primarily align with the DAC criteria of sustainability and coherence, and to a lesser extent with effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance. Illustrative cases exemplify Key Success Factors 1–3, and directly inform Recommendations 2, 4 and 6 by showing how co-design, alumni networks and labour-market alignment translated into durable results. These recommendations also draw on OKP findings and lessons from prior Dutch programmes (NICHE/NFP), as indicated where relevant.

1. **Adopt country-led skills partnership frameworks that link Dutch development spending to employer co-financing and sector regulation.** At policy level, embassies should be empowered to broker tripartite agreements between government, industry, and education institutions in priority sectors. The partnerships should bring together three elements, i.e., (i) employers contribute financially to training programmes, ensuring co-ownership and reducing reliance on donor funding; (ii) governments provide enabling regulations and incentives to encourage investment in training (e.g., exemptions, tax allowances, or pooled sector funds); (iii) equity measures are built in, so smaller or less-resourced institutions (including SMEs on the business side) can participate through flexible co-financing rules. (Coherence, sustainability).

Consistent with NICHE/NFP lessons on integrated, policy-aligned capacity development.

2. **Establish an MFA-wide ‘Alumni Diplomacy & Knowledge’ policy line.** This should include a unified, alumni database and dedicated activation budgets at mission level. The aim is to systematically mobilise Netherlands-funded alumni for policy dialogue, knowledge exchange, crisis response, and economic cooperation. (Coherence, sustainability).

Addressing OKP’s portfolio-wide alumni tracking and activation gaps noted in evaluations

3. **Make ‘Digital Learning as a Public Good’ a standing development cooperation policy instrument.** Finance interoperable, open digital infrastructure (e.g., open-source learning platforms, shared course repositories, and mutually recognised credential/micro-credential standards) designed to also function in low-connectivity environments. This reflects OKP’s experience that digital and blended delivery improved reach and efficiency, but was hampered by weak infrastructure, particularly in rural and fragile contexts and for women and marginalised youth. This means ensuring that content and tools can be downloaded, stored, and accessed without continuous internet access, so learners in fragile or remote contexts are not excluded. This would institutionalise the resilience and reach observed with blended delivery, while addressing the connectivity barriers faced in fragile and remote contexts. In the long term, positioning the Netherlands as a global leader in open digital learning creates economic benefits through strengthened partnerships, demand for Dutch expertise and edtech, and closer alignment of partner-country skills with international labour markets. (Coherence, sustainability, relevance).

Consistent with NICHE/NFP and OKP lessons on blended delivery.

4. **Diversify financing models to crowd-in resources.** Projects lasted longer when cash or in-kind co-financing was clearly agreed and tracked. Future calls should make employer or sector co-financing a firm requirement and include it in monitoring from approval through to closure. To reduce donor dependence and increase impact, financing options should be tailored to the context. These could include cost-sharing with companies (through PPPs or CSR), challenge funds for innovation, blended or impact finance (e.g., concessional loans with private investment, first-loss guarantees), or results-based payments tied to skills and employability. In some cases, system-level reforms could be supported through SWAPs or budget support, and pilot Social or Development Impact Bonds could be tested for measurable outcomes. Coordination with partner governments is important for creating employer training incentives (such as levy-grant schemes or tax allowances), while ensuring equity through special funding windows for resource-constrained institutions. Set explicit expectations for private-sector engagement (co-design, internships/placements, co-funding thresholds), with country-specific targets and joint monitoring to ensure labour-market pull. (Coherence, sustainability, efficiency).

5. **Support resource-constrained institutions with targeted capacity and subsidised access:** less-resourced universities and TVETs risk exclusion under strict co-financing rules. Create an equity window that (i) applies a sliding-scale match (for example, 0–30%) based on a simple capacity/fragility index; (ii) accepts in-kind contributions up to an agreed percentage to be set at policy level; (iii) offers temporary subsidies via an Access Fund; and (iv) grants paired with stronger institutions for structured mentoring and access to innovation support structures/testbeds (as, e.g., in the EU's EIT HEI model). (Sustainability, relevance, effectiveness).
Aligned with NICHE/NFP lessons on inclusion of weaker institutions.
6. **Adopt a demand-driven design with embassy-led convening and instrument sequencing at the country level.** Coherence was strongest where ICP–TMT/scholarships were sequenced and embassies convened regular steering and operational meetings; SEA experience showed misalignment when ICPs are country-designed, but TMT/scholarships were centrally managed. Practically: make a calendarised cadence (e.g., annual portfolio brief, mid-year learning clinic, cross-programme clusters), a design standard, with alumni engagement anchored to ICP milestones. (Coherence, sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency)
7. **Balance thematic concentration with system linkages across education levels.** For future programmes, moderate concentration within one priority theme can be advisable where labour-market demand and co-financing are strong; however, maintain a minimum diversified pipeline to protect system-level linkages (HE–TVET) and resilience. (Coherence, sustainability).
In line with NICHE/NFP advice to balance thematic focus with system connectivity.
8. **Clarify roles and strengthen governance (MFA–Nuffic–RNE) with documented handovers.** Regular coordination through steering committees, bi-weekly meetings, and shared repositories make work more efficient and consistent, while handovers help reduce risks from staff turnover. However, unclear roles and rigid use of the theory of change limit flexibility. (Coherence, sustainability, efficiency).
9. **Clarify continuation planning at design stage.** Future portfolio design should make continuation pathways visible at approval (institutional embedding, partnership commitments, budget lines, alumni/refreshers), and embassies should be mandated to convene annual sustainability reviews aligned to project or programme milestones. Stakeholder engagement should be embedded from the outset through co-creation workshops, advisory boards, and feedback loops to build trust, ensure relevance, and foster shared responsibility for outcomes. (Sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency).
10. **In fragile and conflict-affected settings, programme design and implementation should incorporate a resilience lens—not only governance.** This means building institutional and community capacity to adapt to shocks, maintain continuity of learning and services, and recover from disruptions. Resilience-focused approaches should include flexible delivery mechanisms, contingency planning, and support for local actors who can sustain progress amid instability. Political economy and risk analyses should be embedded throughout the programme cycle to ensure responsiveness to evolving conditions. (Coherence, relevance, effectiveness).
11. **Balance long-term academic training with short-term practical training to enhance effectiveness and sustainability.** Optimise the effectiveness and sustainability of capacity development interventions by strategically balancing long-term academic programmes (e.g., Master's degrees) with short-term practical opportunities (e.g., short courses and Tailor-Made Training – TMT). (Effectiveness, effectiveness, sustainability).

4.2.2 Operational programme recommendations

The operational recommendations primarily align with the DAC criteria of effectiveness and sustainability, show moderate alignment with efficiency, and have minimal relevance to the criteria of coherence and relevance.

- 1. Reinstate light, outcome-level MEL with separate frameworks—education and thematic.** Outcomes were under-measured, but this does not require detailed tracking at the highest sector level. Instead, M&E should focus on effects at the level of institutions and graduates, where OKP has the most direct influence. Separate M&E for education/training and thematic priorities is needed; actionable feedback loops and tracer studies should be included. Implement robust MEL systems with stakeholder input to track impact and adapt strategies. Continuous learning improves effectiveness and accountability. (Effectiveness).
- 2. Rebalance scholarships toward institutional pathways and return/placement.** Approve short courses only when they are explicitly linked to ICP/TMT objectives and include a signed return/placement plan; in future cooperation, prioritise circular skills pathways (e.g., dual certification) that meet partner-country needs and Dutch labour-market shortages, and avoid standalone tracks. (Effectiveness, sustainability, relevance).
- 3. Continue to support digitalisation and blended approaches where they add value.** Digital delivery improved resilience and cost-effectiveness when LMS, digital content, and trainer coaching were embedded with QA/budgets, rather than improvised (e.g., during COVID-19). Future portfolios should encourage digital and hybrid methods as complementary to face-to-face learning, with minimum standards and budget lines available for institutions that choose to integrate them. (Effectiveness, sustainability, efficiency).
- 4. Operationalise cross-cutting priorities with measurable plans and budgets.** Gender, inclusion, youth, and climate were not integrated consistently. Each theme should have one or two specific indicators, dedicated resources, and stronger use of alumni and TMTs to embed these priorities into HR systems, curricula, and quality assurance. This should go beyond simple compliance: follow-up is needed to trace how these priorities influence professional development over time, and other forms of inclusion—such as disability—should also be considered. (Effectiveness, sustainability, relevance.)
- 5. Localise delivery.** Retain a central strategic core team; expand in-country Nuffic functions. Portfolios benefitted where local representatives animated alumni, coordination and compliance. Delegate these functions to regional/local offices with clear mandates/budgets; keep strategy and quality assurance in The Hague. Consider developing a (new) cadre of local Nuffic representatives in the partner countries and in the regions. (Sustainability, efficiency, coherence).
- 6. Design programmes with modular components and contingency plans to adapt to changing political or bureaucratic contexts.** Agility ensures continuity and relevance, especially in fragile or rapidly evolving environments. Support long-term capacity development, not just short-term training. Sustainable change requires empowered institutions and professionals. In conflict-affected or volatile contexts, conduct a mid-term risk and political economy analysis during implementation, since country conditions can shift and become fragile over time. This approach ensures that the programme remains responsive and adaptive to emerging challenges. (Effectiveness, sustainability).
- 7. Reduce transaction costs: two-stage calls and targeted compliance guidance.** Introducing a two-stage application process (from concept note to full proposal) together with clear and concise compliance guidance lowers entry barriers for applicants. This approach improves the overall fit of

proposals within the portfolio and reduces unrecoverable costs. It also reflects established international donor practice that balances accessibility with quality assurance. (Effectiveness, efficiency).

8. **Promote joint initiatives between HE and TVET institutions to blend theory and practice.** This creates more holistic and employable graduates and bridges the skills gap. Establish structured, incentivised collaboration frameworks between HE and TVET institutions for example by: (a) co-developing curricula aligned with labour market needs; (b) creating joint innovation hubs and applied research projects; (c) facilitating staff and student exchanges to build mutual understanding; (d) providing targeted funding and policy incentives to encourage partnerships; (e) engaging industry stakeholders to ensure relevance and impact; and (f) strengthening institutional capacity in TVET to manage partnerships effectively.

Annexes

Annex 1 - List of consulted documents

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Annex 2 - Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification	
RELEVANCE: Are the intervention's goals aligned with the needs of the target population? Does it address the most pressing issues?					
EQ1	<p>To what extent are the OKP instruments relevant in relation to the objectives and results as formulated in the corresponding MFA ToCs and results frameworks (food and nutrition security [FNS]; water, energy, and climate [Water]; sexual and reproductive health and rights [SRHR]); and security and rule of law [SRoL]) and the countries labour market?</p>	<p>JC1.1 Strategic Alignment: The OKP instruments align to and support MFA's strategic goals and objectives.</p> <p>JC1.2 OKP programme objectives and instruments are consistent with global priorities including other donors' ones</p> <p>JC 1.3.OKP programme objectives and instruments are aligned with national partners' priorities and are relevant to the government policies' frameworks and action plans</p> <p>JC 1.4 OKP is consistent with and has addressed beneficiaries' (including final beneficiaries, partner organisations and institutions) requirements and needs.</p> <p>JC 1.5. The OKP (ToC and instruments) design, strategies, activities have taken into account women's equality, inclusion and rights of vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities.</p> <p>JC 1.6 TVET/HE organisations better able to perform their core tasks, within a strong enabling environment lead to an education system that is of good quality, relevant and accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree of alignment of OKP instruments with objectives of MFA policy on education in particular (2016-2022) OKP has articulated a clear HE and TVET education sector development strategy by each of the priority themes. (FNS, Water, SHRHR, SRoL) Degree of appropriateness and quality of the ToC, in particular indicators and targets of the OKP (disaggregated by gender) OKP objectives match with global policies in the areas of TVET/HE, FNS, Water, SRHR, SRoL OKP instruments match with national education (HE/TVET), FNS, Water, SRHR, SRoL and Labour policies in selected countries Evidence that education and training programmes take into account current and future labour market needs Evidence that training programmes' offer is relevant to the development of the country and key sectoral organisations Evidence that chambers of commerce, cooperatives, NGOs were involved and consulted in 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>Sector analysis</p>	<p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy documents: BHOS note, Country Strategies, policy notes and letters to parliament, and thematic ToCs, as well as broader MFA policies including Conflict Sensitivity, Youth Strategy, gender policies Portfolio information: OKP Inception report, gender strategies, methodologies and plans, thematic and regional strategies, the MTR, and Nuffic documentation. evaluations from the NICHE-NFP programmes. Intervention-specific documentation and media/publicly available sources. Reports (annual, research, technical, project) Working Papers Government Documents White Papers Evaluations Conference Proceedings Theses and Dissertations Minutes of meetings Conferences, OKP advisory Board, Sounding Board etc 70 Data from World bank, ILO, UNESCO, OECD (Education at a glance 2024.) National statistics Research studies

⁷⁰ In case these documents are available

Evaluation Question (EQ)		Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
			designing OKP (ToC and instruments)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open data tools Organigramme of demanding institution <p>Stakeholder sources: (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal stakeholders of the OKP: Nuffic staff, implementing partners, MFA, (HQ and embassies), end beneficiaries/rightsholders (trainees, teachers, staff from institutions/ministries) having participated in one or more of the OKP's instruments. Stakeholders/partners such as government officials and other TVET/HE institutions. External experts in partner (case study) countries, including representatives from (local) governmental bodies and policymakers, (international) NGOs working on education or the various thematic priority areas, semi-government bodies (national education boards, knowledge institutes and academia) both in the Netherlands and in the partner countries, and other development partners. This includes thematic sector experts in the case study countries for the sectoral analysis.
EQ2	To what extent are the OKP ToC, design and respective underlying assumptions, relevant and valid in the countries and contexts where OKP was implemented?	<p>Assumptions as per M&E framework Nuffic⁷¹:</p> <p>JC2.1 Individual interventions lead to enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations in partner countries and in the Netherlands.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of innovation and flexibility in service delivery methods ToC adaptations to changes in Dutch policy, COVID-19 and the growing importance of climate justice. Availability of needs assessments of TVET/HE institutions 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Literature and documents review</p> <p>Stakeholder sources: (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>See sources EQ1.</p>

⁷¹ All assumptions in this document are taken from the Nuffic M&E framework

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
	<p>JC 2.2 Group interventions lead to enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations in partner countries and in the Netherlands</p> <p>JC2.3 Enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations in partner countries and in the Netherlands lead to strengthening of organisations key to (sectoral) development of partner countries</p> <p>JC2.4 Strengthening of organisations key to (sectoral) development of partner countries leads to inclusive sustainable development</p> <p>JC2.5 TVET/HE organisations are better able to perform their core tasks, within a strong enabling environment because they have qualified teaching, research and supportive staff able to analyse current and future societal challenges (inclusivity, climate change, etc.), to translate them into research questions or integrate them in their strategic vision, to integrate these questions and results in curricula and teaching;</p> <p>JC 2.6. Contextual Fit: the OKP fits within the local context, including cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors, realities on the ground. Corresponding assumptions, have been adjusted when necessary (e.g. in light of changing contexts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OKP objectives match with needs of beneficiaries (4 OKP themes) • Evidence of adaptability to changing conditions • Level of integration with local systems • Evidence of country thematic and national policies and strategies taken into account • Evidence that OKP ToC and instruments are demand-driven • Evidence that OKP ToC and instruments embed local ownership • Evidence that strategic and operational plans of the demanding institutions fit with OKP instruments • Satisfaction levels of stakeholders, including beneficiaries, partners, and funders • Evidence of final beneficiaries' involvement in the design (farmers, NGOs, young people, (male/female, mothers, fathers etc) • Evidence of SMART strategy design towards increased participation of women and vulnerable and minority groups • Evidence of involvement and consultation during the design of OKP instruments (CSO, vulnerable population, farmers, NGOs, young people, (male/female, mothers, fathers etc). 		

Evaluation Question (EQ)		Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
		including, the importance of climate justice, the reintroduction of education in the Dutch development cooperation, youth, digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic)?			
EQ3	To what extent were recommendations formulated on relevance in earlier conducted evaluations on the OKP programme and its predecessor NICHE taken into account? a. If so, how and how did the follow-up on recommendations affect the above-mentioned topics? b. If not, why not?	<p>JC 3.1 New focus elements are added to the programme including increased alumni involvement, more attention to cooperation between knowledge organisations, and better communication about presentation of results</p> <p>JC 3.2 The design of the programme focuses on climate, gender, inclusion, demand driven projects.</p> <p>JC 3.3 Alignment with MASP of the Dutch embassies</p>	<p>Evidence of indicators addressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation • Flexibility • Complementarity • Gender and inclusion • Visibility Climate 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Literature and documents review</p> <p>Stakeholder sources: (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>See sources EQ1.</p>
COHERENCE How does the intervention complement or conflict with other initiatives? Are there synergies or duplications?					
EQ4	What is the level of coherence between the different OKP instruments (supporting each other, synergies and linkages)?	<p>(Internal coherence) JC 4.1 The OKP project reflected the experience gained from NICHE and NFP programmes</p> <p>JC4.2 OKP improved the alignment with the four thematic themes and cross cutting issues of Dutch development cooperation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of synergies and linkages between the OPK instruments. • Evidence of focus of instruments on themes and crosscutting issues 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>Sector analysis</p>	<p>Stakeholder sources: (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review including, subject to availability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy documents: BHOS note, Country Strategies, policy notes and letters to parliament, and thematic ToCs, as well as broader MFA policies including Conflict Sensitivity, Youth Strategy, gender policies, Embassy strategic plans/interventions, EU indicative policies and plans
EQ5	What is the level of coherence between the different OKP instruments and country programme with other similar interventions of MFA and other actors active in the OKP implementation countries?	<p>(external coherence) JC5.1 The design of the support reflected close consultation with external development partners.</p> <p>JC5.2 Embassies take an active role in harmonizing Dutch projects (such as</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that OKP is directly aligned with the MASP of the Dutch Embassies • Evidence of a level of coordination and collaboration with other stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and community groups. 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Stakeholder sources: (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review including, subject to availability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy documents: BHOS note, Country Strategies, policy notes and letters to parliament, and thematic ToCs, as well as broader MFA policies including Conflict Sensitivity, Youth Strategy, gender policies, Embassy strategic plans/interventions, EU indicative policies and plans

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification	
	<p>the OKP) with other relevant bilateral or local projects (at country level).</p> <p>JC 5.3The OKP integrates resources (financial, human, material) from different sources to achieve its objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence that the OKP complements other ongoing or planned interventions, (other development partners) avoiding duplication and ensuring synergy 			
EFFECTIVENESS outputs: Are the intended outcomes being realised? What factors are influencing the achievement of these outcomes?					
EQ6	<p>To what extent have OKP activities been implemented effectively, and to what extent have the planned outputs been realised? Are there identifiable differences in achieved output progress based on OKP implementation in different countries, and if so, what are these differences, and how can they be explained?</p>	<p>JC6.1 The outputs have been delivered according to plans</p> <p>JC6.2 There is Increased access to and completion of TVET/HE programmes</p> <p>JC 6. An increased participation of women and underrepresented groups in education.</p> <p>JC 6.5 Differences across countries in progress on OKP instruments output results on educational levels (TVET vs. HE):</p> <p>Assumption⁷²</p> <p>JC 6.6 Individual interventions lead to enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations (in partner countries and the Netherlands)</p>	<p>Compulsory (output) Indicators as per M&E framework Nuffic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the # of graduates (male/female/minorities degree/non-degree) Increase in the # of revised/newly developed curricula in NL and/or Southern partner organisation that integrate research results Increase in the # of knowledge institutions with an increased participation of students from minorities Increase # of joint (research) proposals and publication submitted, financed and implemented Increase in the # of beneficiaries in the society reached with knowledge, skills and techniques Increase in the # of jobs supported/created % of alumni population who state that they have applied in their workplace the knowledge and skills gained from the interventions 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Contribution analysis</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Stakeholder sources: (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review including, subject to availability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance monitoring systems, M&E documents Interviews, focus groups Consultations, and context analysis. Feedback from beneficiaries to gauge their satisfaction with the project's outcomes. Country plans of implementation WB and UNESCO reports Country EMIS and Household surveys Country reports Audio-visual materials Stories/testimonials from Southern partners/alumni Showcase new projects and partners Intervention-specific documentation and media/publicly available sources.

⁷² Assumption as per Nuffic ToC evaluation framework

Evaluation Question (EQ)		Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of alumni promoted to more strategic positions within their own organisation or other organisation • # of accreditation and quality assurance processes established • # of curricula for degree, non-degree and short courses revised/newly developed • # of students enrolled in revised/newly developed study programmes (male/female) - student satisfaction (male/female) • # of students performing an internship or practical work (male/female) • # of scholarship holders that have successfully completed course/training (level/male/female/minorities) • 73Individual # of scholarship holders that have successfully completed course/training (level, male/female/minorities) • Increased # of skilled workers in the labour market • Student population size per country, economic and political factors per country measuring per theme of Enrolment rates, completion rates. variety of places where OPK visibility is demonstrated. 		
EQ 7	To what extent were recommendations formulated in earlier conducted evaluations on OKP, on effectiveness regarding output	JC 7.1 OKP has become more visible by showing the results and successes of institutes that have been participating in the OKP for a longer period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in graduate satisfaction (employed/non employed/self-employed) (male/female) 	Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation	Stakeholder sources: (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs Literature and documents review

⁷³ In the M&E framework outcome indicators

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
<p>and outcome (including on fostering organizational and institutional changes) and its predecessor (NICHE) considered</p>	<p>JC7.2 Feedback from Nuffic, regarding scholarship allocation and grant allocation/rejection to requesting organisations is provided in a systematic way.</p> <p>JC7.3 The ToC is adjusted to better fit realities on the ground and connects with the activities conducted within OKP.</p> <p>JC 7.4 Involvement of beneficiaries and country partners make ToC and OKP more demand driven</p> <p>JC 7.5 Alignment with Dutch and local needs is clear.</p> <p>JC 7.6 Systematic change through institutional ecosystems: focussing on creating interdependent and dynamic networks of institutions and stakeholders so that impact extends beyond individual projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in employers' satisfaction over the graduates' skills and knowledge • Increase # of relevant innovations • Increase in the # of services to community - -number of businesses co-investing in activities • # of SMEs supported increased 	<p>Case studies</p>	<p>See sources EQ6.</p>
<p>EFFECTIVENESS outcome: as per Nuffic ToC or immediate results</p>				
<p>EQ 8 Did the implementation of OKP activities contribute to the intended outcomes as per the OKP ToC and, if so, to what extent was progress on outcomes achieved?</p> <p>What factors contributed and/or hampered the achieving of outcomes?</p>	<p>Outcomes ToC project level:</p> <p>JC8.1 TVET/HE: organisations (in the selected partner countries and in NL) perform better their core tasks, firmly embedded in their environment, in line with country/regional specific labour market needs & aiming at inclusiveness.</p> <p>JC 8.2 Outcomes ToC at scholarship level: Enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations (in partner</p>	<p>Compulsory Outcome indicator as per Nuffic M&E framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TVET/HE Education • # of (knowledge) institutions supported directly • # of staff have gained qualitative and relevant knowledge and skills to develop and offer the revised/developed study programmes (teacher/administrative, 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Contribution analysis</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives from alumni on policy and procedural changes, inclusive development, and innovations as a result of intervention - testimonials from employers on organisational changes (implemented procedure/techniques, work ethic etc. due to trained staff (critical mass) <p>M&E systems of HE and TVET institutions</p>

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
	<p>countries and in the NL) in line with country/regional specific labour market needs & aiming at inclusiveness.</p> <p>JC 8.3 The unintended (both positive and/or negative) effects of the OKP implementation. How did they take shape and affect the achieving of outcomes.</p>	<p>male/female, PhD/MSc/short training)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of research results/contributions translated into policy advice at national, regional or local level • Organisational • diversity in management and teaching staff (i.e. balance junior/senior staff, women/men, minorities) (also gender criterion) • Evidence of unintended effects on the context of OKP projects • number of organisations strengthened by individual and/or group training (private/public) (level/male/female/minorities) • Scholarships • number of organisations strengthened by individual training (private/public) 		
	<p>Based on assumptions OKP ToC:</p> <p>JC8.4 Better performing HE/TVET institutions and enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals; organisations are better equipped to deal with adaptation and transfer of technology in response to domestic and global challenges key to their sector; organisations are better positioned within the fields key to the sector and the country.</p> <p>JC 8.5 Organisations are better equipped to interlink their activities with other organisations key to sectoral development, which leads to a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of alumni who state that they have applied or not in their workplace the knowledge and skills gained from the interventions • % of alumni promoted or not to more strategic positions within their own organisation or other organisation • # of joint (research) proposals and publications submitted and financed • # of staff of Dutch training education organisations that have gained new insights and ways of working • Supportive quality management system available; • Qualified teaching, research and supportive staff available: 		<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&E systems Nuffic, • Countries statistics, • Embassies reports • Tracer studies • Student satisfaction

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
	<p>multiplying effect of the interventions at sector level.</p> <p>JC 8.6 Organisations create an environment in which individuals share and learn experiences with the aim to improve themselves and the organisation.</p>			
<p>EQ9 To what extent and how has OKP addressed (implementation) the needs of demanding organisations and institutions in partner countries?</p> <p><i>Are there identifiable differences in achieved outcomes based on OKP implementation in different countries, and if so, what are these differences, and how can they be explained??</i></p>	<p>JC9.1 The policy and strategy documents of the demanding institutions and partner institutions reflect the need. taking into account the number of universities, public and private and TVET institutions</p> <p>JC 9.2 The extent OKP contributed to systemic improvements (including improving institutional capacity and/or influencing policy in target sectors) in TVET/HE organisations and institutions.</p> <p>JC 9.3 Organisations (in the selected partner countries and in NL) perform better their core tasks, firmly embedded in their environment, in line with country/regional specific labour market needs & aiming at inclusiveness</p> <p>JC9.4 Differences with regards to contributions of OKP instruments between different types of organisations and institutions and how do possible differences take shape (e.g. Universities apply for ICPs while TVET institutions more for TMTs.)⁷⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> employers that state that their department/organisation has become more effective because of OKP research is produced for policy making and implementation, to the benefit of society as a whole. # employer satisfaction on suitability of the training for the organisation number of improvements in (inter)national policies/laws # of OKP instruments (TMT and short courses, scholarships, research, alumni) for Government, TVET, HE institutions, country/regions, theme, instrument, gender, income levels, sizes etc describing the trend in differences. 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Contribution analysis</p> <p>Sector analysis</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy documents Country case studies

⁷⁴ Methodologically difficult questions to answer. Qualitative we may be able to find some differences but hard to say if these will be statistically significant.

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
	<p>JC 9.5 Differences across countries, thematic areas (e.g., FNS, Water, SRHR, Rule of Law), or educational levels (TVET vs. HE): The focus thematic areas per country and the income level indicator of the country has a correlation with the number and capacity of HE and TVET institutions focussing on thematic areas.⁷⁵</p>			
EFFICIENCY: Are resources being used optimally? Could the same results be achieved with fewer resources				
<p>EQ10 How efficiently are roles divided and resources managed among OKP partners (including the MFA) and what factors explain possible differences in efficiency?</p>	<p>JC 10.1 Cost-effectiveness, balance of spending: staff costs, travel, infrastructure, activities</p> <p>JC 10.2 Internal management: Nuffic's role and functioning as the OKP programme manager, given existing expertise, role, position</p> <p>JC 10.3 The efficiency of programme implementation, including Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) and collaboration/coordination arrangements between partners (implementing stakeholders, TVET and HE institutions, Nuffic and the MFA.</p> <p>JC 10.4 Collaboration and harmonisation with Dutch embassies and other Dutch ministries and Dutch funded projects.</p> <p>JC 10.5 Building on relationships of Ministries and Nuffic in countries where OKP is active</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disbursement % at close of project aggregated by instrument/activity • Disbursement % at close of project of staff costs at local and Dutch level and % in relation to activities costs activities/instrument costs. • Disbursement percentage of infrastructure in relation to staff and instruments costs • # of meetings, consultations, communication activities for information sharing. • Quality and consistency of the OKP MEL system • # of meetings OPK advisory and sounding board • Transparency of budget allocations procedures • Calculation of the total costs per instrument per country • Complexity of budget allocation • Timeliness of funds transfer 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review resource allocation, disbursement processes and the relationship between inputs and outputs • Annual plans Nuffic

⁷⁵ Methodologically difficult questions to answer. Qualitative we may be able to find some differences but hard to say if these will be statistically significant.

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
	<p>JC 10.6 Roles and functioning of the OKP advisory and sounding board</p> <p>JC 10.8 Flexibility on the theme, budgeting, use of instrument and activity within countries to realise the principle of being demand driven.</p>			
<p>EQ 11</p> <p>How efficiently are roles divided, decisions coordinated, and resources managed among OKP partners (including the MFA) and what factors explain possible differences in efficiency? (the sub questions have been moved to the Justification criteria in the evaluation matrix)</p>	<p>JC 11.1 Contextual factors that might affect the cost-effectiveness of the instruments in different countries: differences in infrastructure, regulatory environments, and socio-economic conditions</p>			<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability.</p>
<p>EQ 12</p> <p>To what extent were recommendations formulated in earlier conducted evaluations of OKP on efficiency of the programme and its predecessor (NICHE) considered. If so how and how did the follow-up on recommendations affect the above-mentioned topic? If not, why not?</p>	<p>JC 12.1 Promotion of blended learning methods and involvement of local experts to reduce travel budget and enhance strengthening the local sector</p> <p>JC 12.2 Increased strategic use of the OKP advisory board and sounding board.</p> <p>JC 12.3 Revisited M&E system, including the mandatory indicators. Develop a track and trace system to measure impact of group training and institutional collaboration.</p> <p>JC 12.4 Review current procedures for efficiency based on feedback from different stakeholders. In general,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings/consultations OPK-Nuffic-EKN-local partners • Evidence of adaption and renewed procedures of allocation procedures based on stakeholder's feedback (translation, transparency, user friendliness) • Evidence of streamlined processes (e.g. documents in English and in French, feedback protocol)) and transparent — especially with regard to the assessment process and feedback for rejection/grants (for all instruments). • Level of delegation Nuffic's responsibilities to the OKP implementers. 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes of meetings, records, stakeholder reflection

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification	
	<p>processes need to be more streamlined especially with regard to the assessment process and feedback for rejections/grants. The procedure for scholarship allocation can be made simpler.</p> <p>JC 12.5 Remove the employer commitment since this can increase employees' chances on the labour market.</p> <p>JC 12.6 Nuffic has taken a more prominent role as programme manager. Nuffic has delegated some of its responsibilities to the OKP implementers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of reviewed M&E system and framework 			
SUSTAINABILITY; Will the benefits of the intervention last?					
EQ13	<p>To what extent is it likely that the outcomes achieved by OKP implementation will prove to be sustainable over time with regards to the creation of preconditions for sustainability?</p> <p>Are there mechanisms in place to ensure ongoing benefits?</p>	<p>13.1 Institutional sustainability: The quality improvements in educational provision at HE and TVET levels are being embedded in systems, processes and oversight/management of the sector, including raised expectations from parents/students.</p> <p>JC13.2 Sustainable partnerships are developed between educational institutions and other stakeholders and collaboration projects and initiatives resulting from these partnerships. Assumption⁷⁶: an education system that is of good quality, relevant and accessible leads to inclusive sustainable development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MoU s or other types of formal partnership (individual and organisational) collaboration agreements exist after end of project; Dutch training education organisations that have sustainable improved their training methods Staff of Dutch training education organisations that have gained new insights and ways of working Organisations key to (sectoral) inclusive development of partner countries are strengthened by inflow of enhanced workforce Evidence of local presence and involvement in focus 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Contribution analysis</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional capacity, institutions organigramme exit strategies, budget. Sustainability assessments, risk matrices, and capacity assessments

⁷⁶ Nuffic ToC evaluation framework.

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
	<p>JC 13.3 Financial sustainability: the financial inputs required from the are likely to be affordable within the medium-term financing framework of the Government. Involvement project partners in project design to ensure realistic budget planning.</p> <p>An alumni engagement policy and network is developed to capitalise on scholarships, grants and Dutch alumni networks.</p> <p>JC 13.4 A sound exit strategy in the design of OKP was developed and in place.</p> <p>JC 13.4 Integrated capacity development programmes lead to sustainable partnerships between persons and organisations in the Netherlands and selected partner countries⁷⁷</p> <p>JC 13.5 Enhanced knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations (in the partner country and in the Netherlands) lead to sustainable partnerships between persons and organisations in the Netherlands and partner countries.⁷⁸</p> <p>JC 13.6 Sustainable partnerships between persons and organisations in the partner countries and the Netherlands lead to sustainable development.⁷⁹</p>	<p>country/countries to ensure locality and relevance within national priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of engagement policy and (alumni) network to capitalise on scholarships, grants. • Evidence from the budget allocations and expenditure reports • Financial and non-financial contributions from CSOs and the private sector are likely to be sustained 		

⁷⁷ Assumption as per Nuffic ToC evaluation framework

⁷⁸ Assumption as per Nuffic ToC evaluation framework

⁷⁹ Assumption as per Nuffic ToC evaluation framework

Evaluation Question (EQ)		Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
EQ 14	Were recommendations formulated in earlier conducted evaluations on sustainability of the OKP programme, and its predecessor (NICHE) taken into account:	<p>JC 14.1 Shifting policy towards business development in knowledge exchange/co-creation, with an emphasis on promoting the Netherlands as a knowledge country and with more focus on maintaining what has been built (and building upon it). This will be important as the development cooperation budget continues to decrease.</p> <p>JC 14.2 Increased involvement and engagement of the Dutch HE. How has OKP integrated a gender-transformative and inclusive approach in its implementation, across the various instruments, and how and TVET institutions and relevant consulting firms in designing and planning capacity development programmes.</p> <p>JC 14.3 Consideration of the development of a European OKP and use this as a tool for fostering collaboration and donor harmonisation in Europe</p> <p>JC 14.4 Extent to which recommendations from previous evaluations related to sustainability have been followed up during OKP implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic staff of partner country still cooperates with academic staff of other education organisation(s) Scholarship holders that became members of the alumni association of their host university (male/female) (NL/other) 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>(Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Literature and documents review, subject to availability.</p>
GENDER EQUALITY and INCLUSION					

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
<p>EQ15 How has OKP integrated a gender transformative and inclusive approach in its implementation, across its various instruments and how did it contribute to increased gender equality in TVET and Higher education?</p>	<p>JC 15.1 Both women and men have equitable opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.</p> <p>JC 15.2 How does the representation of women in leadership and influential roles within the programme take shape.</p> <p>JC 15.3 Increased inclusion of all regardless of background, social position, sex, socioeconomic status</p> <p>JC 15.4 The programme in its design and in practice is adapted to the cultural and social contexts of the target communities, respecting local gender norms while promoting equality.</p> <p>JC 15.5 The community, leaders and stakeholders are engaged to foster support for all-inclusive practices.</p> <p>JC 15.6 Resources (financial, educational, technological) are equitably distributed to support both women and men.</p> <p>JC 15.7 The training and capacity-building efforts ensure they address the specific needs of women and men.</p> <p>JC 15.8 The programme is in compliance with gender policies: The programme aligns with national and international gender equality policies and frameworks and OKP promotes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of scholarships awarded to women • # of stimulating measures/extra facilities aimed at preparation, supervision and aftercare of female candidates • changes in personal, academic and professional attitudes regarding women • improved gender equality and gender awareness in the workplace • # of organisations developed and implemented a gender strategy • % of scholarships awarded to minorities • increased participation of students from minorities • # of stimulating measures/extra facilities aimed at preparation, supervision and aftercare of minorities. • # of organisations developed and implemented a gender strategy increased • # of organisations with improved policies or procedures to encourage access to education of women and minorities • More diversity in management and teaching staff (i.e. balance junior/senior staff, women/men, minorities) • # of organisations with policies and procedures to ensure an environment which is gender sensitive increase. 	<p>Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation</p> <p>Contribution analysis</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Literature and document review (Key Informant) Interviews and FGDs</p>

Evaluation Question (EQ)		Indicative area to cover/Judgement criteria (JC)	Indicators	Evaluation Methodology	Data collection Tools/ Means of verification
		<p>and protects the legal rights of women and men.</p> <p>JC 15.9 Governance and funding mechanisms of OKP been gender sensitive and inclusive (for example, who were representing the different boards and who took decisions and does this reflect gender diversity and inclusivity?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of women in management of faculty/department increased • # of organisations with policies and procedures to ensure an environment which is gender sensitive increased 		
RECOMMENDATIONS					
EQ16	Which recommendations can be formulated for the implementation of future (similar-) education centred programmes by the MFA overall?		What are lessons learned and what are good practices	Triangulation of evidence from documents and stakeholders' consultation, synthesis from other research questions.	Will be answered in a separate recommendations chapter of the final report, based on findings on all of the above research questions.



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