

Evaluation of Enabel's 2030 Organisational Strategy

and its implementation since 2020

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Ambitions 2030



This evaluation report was drawn up by independent external experts. The opinions expressed herein represent the views of the authors and are not necessarily shared by Enabel, its Belgian partners, or partner country representatives.

Internal Evaluation Office - Enabel

Strategic evaluation Enabel strategy 2030

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Paeradigms

The evaluation was carried out by Paeradigms, an NGO and social enterprise focused on transformational outcomes that lead to social change and economic impact. Paeradigms' work focuses on four thematic areas: (1) Education, (2) Renewable energy & climate change, (3) Gender, diversity & inclusion, (4) Communication & advocacy.

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We as evaluation team have been impressed by the commitment and deep engagement of all involved, especially the thoughtful and in-depth conversations that took place. We believe that Enabel and all its partners in Team Belgium are well prepared for the successful implementation of our recommendations, and for adapting to the dynamic contexts in which we live and work today.



Executive summary



Part



Executive summary

Background

Enabel's Strategy 2030, finalised in 2020, bears testimony to Enabel's forward-thinking and resilient approach to development cooperation in the face of complex challenges posed by ongoing global dynamics and geopolitical upheavals, particularly in key partnership regions like West Africa. African nations are asserting more agency, driven by Pan-Africanism and increased intra-African trade, with influences from China and India challenging traditional Western dominance. Rising public debt and governance models are under scrutiny, with alternatives from China and Russia gaining traction. European actors, including Enabel, are shifting towards a Team Europe approach, focusing on sustainable infrastructure and climate change. Enabel has decided to reassess its Strategy 2030 to stay relevant amid evolving African dynamics and global development trends.

Strategy evaluation

Paeradigms was commissioned to evaluate the Enabel 2030 strategy, gauging how relevant and aligned Enabel's 2020 and 2030 strategic orientations are with the evolving geopolitical context, partner needs, and international guidelines, and what adjustments are needed to maintain their value and future relevance.

Methodology

The methodology focused on three core elements:

- (1) A **formative approach** within Enabel and its Belgian partners assesses the 2030 strategy amid changing contexts, recognising COVID-19 delays and focusing on collected insights to inform future adjustments.
- (2) A **participatory approach** collaborating closely with the Enabel evaluation unit, user groups, and Board of Directors to tailor the evaluation process, ensure relevance, and maintain quality through interviews, workshops, and formal presentations.
- (3) A **six-step evaluation process** involving global and operational context analysis, strategy design and implementation analysis, juxtaposing the changing context with Enabel's strategy, and developing future scenarios, with methods refined based on Enabel's feedback.

Findings

The formulation of the Enabel 2030 strategy itself is testimony to remarkable foresight and has proven to be highly relevant in today's rapidly changing geopolitical and international cooperation context. The findings illustrate how the six ambitions guide Enabel institutionally in repositioning itself within international cooperation, evolving its partnerships, and shaping its programme design and implementation. Especially in partner countries, there is strong recognition from government officials, development actors, and Belgian partners that Enabel is proactive in anticipating and responding to new

operational requirements and shifts in the development cooperation landscape.

Q1: To what extent are the strategic orientations taken by Enabel in 2020 still relevant and in line with the evolving geopolitical context and international cooperation?

The ambitions of Enabel are highly relevant and aligned to the evolving geopolitical environment and international cooperation developments such as the European and Belgian Comprehensive Approaches, even though political coherence on international cooperation is not yet fully established in Team Belgium.

The geopolitical and other global shocks of the last two decades have disrupted progress towards democracy and peaceful regional and pan African integration, causing increased insecurity and political instability in Africa. The last decade has seen the rise of a multipolar world, where many new actors pursue pragmatic and transactional relationships with African nations to gain access to resources, influencing new partnership options aligned with national interests. African countries seek economic growth to empower their youth and enhance autonomy in shaping and financing society and public services, shifting away from the traditional aid model, which is now believed to perpetuate dependency and is considered inadequate. Instead, African countries seek partners who cooperate mutually and support with expertise, funding, and innovative approaches to boost African government capacity to realise their own domestic economic and social development ambitions.

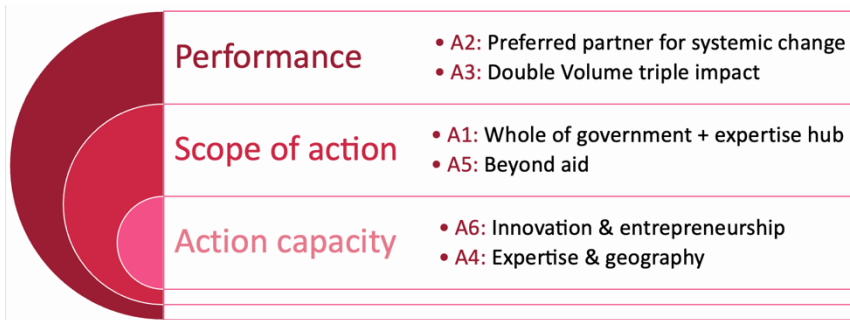
Enabel's 2030 strategy anticipated the shift towards more collaborative, respectful, and politically aware approaches that support African countries in achieving their development goals independently. Nevertheless, Enabel's development cooperation model will require new levels of flexibility in the face of democratic backsliding, insecurity, ODA decline, pluralisation of development actors, and the new self-esteem and alternative governance choices of partner countries. The rollout of its 2030 strategy gave Enabel a clear head start compared to other agencies and offered an opportunity for Enabel to assess its current positioning, which, as this evaluation shows, is rather positive.

The need for Europe to protect, rebuild, and maintain its geopolitical sphere of influence in Africa has resulted in an attitude shift that translates into Team Europe and the Global Gateway initiatives to increase strategic synergy across EU development actors in response to the growing influence of other actors delivering major infrastructure projects. Enabel has proven to be a key partner to both Team Europe and Global Gateway initiatives.

With the 2030 strategy, Enabel has developed a framework of six ambitions, providing it with a strategic steering instrument to:

- **Enhance its performance** as a preferred partner and grow both the volume and impact of its actions.
- **Expand the scope of its actions** with the comprehensive and beyond aid approaches.
- **Build its capacity to act** on the back of its expertise and deep geographic knowledge and by fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.

The six ambitions also provide a management framework for clear accountability between Enabel, the Minister of Development Cooperation, and Belgian partners.



The layered approach illustrated here is based on a recommendation from the evaluation team. The evaluation proceeded with this approach to assess to what extent interconnections and mutual strengthening between the ambitions ensure a unified and robust approach to Enabel's long-term goals in an overarching rationale.

Q2: To what extent do Enabel's 2030 strategic orientations meet the needs and expectations of Enabel's partners in the countries¹ where projects and programmes are implemented?

Enabel's strategic orientations meet the needs and expectations of partner countries. However, it can strengthen this success by further finetuning the implementation of its ambitions in line with the variability among its partner countries to:

- **Meet high expectations** in partner countries with above-average government effectiveness that want to deliver on a social contract with their citizens.
- **Build more capacity** for formulating strategies, reaching out, and delivering more effectively in partner countries with moderate government effectiveness levels.
- **Provide adequate responses** to meet the need for resilience in contexts with below-average government effectiveness and high insecurity.

Indeed, the context analysis showed high variability among Enabel partner countries in degrees of democratic governance, levels of government effectiveness, and security threats. In accounting for these variations, the analysis revealed the remarkable finding that democratic

backsliding has been going hand in hand with a dominant increase in government effectiveness. Government effectiveness, in turn, has a positive impact on the degree to which countries can control the security situation and vice versa.

In contexts of high government effectiveness, interviews confirm that countries prefer partners who closely align with their development vision, work collaboratively on systemic change, attract additional funding, and engage flexibly with various actors beyond traditional aid paradigms. Partners are expected to understand the context, align with geographic and sectoral divisions of labour between donors and partners as per government preferences, excel in their areas of expertise, and introduce innovative approaches and models. This 'new self-esteem' reflects countries' increased agency and bargaining power, positioning themselves as 'co-creators' of

international relations.

In contexts with low government effectiveness and capacity, countries prioritise funding volumes over selectivity due to pressing challenges. Weak governments, lacking robust and coherent development plans, struggle to balance funder agendas with their own priorities. This 'survival mode' leads to partnerships that gravitate towards building resilience in traditional sectors, narrowing the space for innovation. Despite this challenging environment, Enabel shows that systemic change models can be developed and piloted, providing proof of concept that can attract sizable funding for replication and scale-up.

Between these two extremes of government effectiveness, options vary based on political stability, security, clarity of vision, economic opportunities, governance model inclusiveness, and the risk appetite of the government and its partners.

Enabel's 2030 strategic ambitions tick all the boxes in high government effectiveness contexts. Case studies show Enabel's relevance depends on its ability to act as a preferred partner for systemic change, align with government vision and domestic policies, and mobilise additional funding to amplify impact. Expanding beyond the traditional aid model is welcomed, as it allows for a holistic approach with strong economic components and innovative ecosystems that strengthen the partner government's effectiveness. Enabel's internal expertise, peer-to-peer exchanges, and entrepreneurial 'can do' attitude further increase its relevance as a preferred partner. However, higher government effectiveness drives higher expectations and less tolerance of external agendas and political conditionalities, as in Rwanda and, to lesser extent, Benin.

¹ Enabel partner countries include 14 Belgian bilateral cooperation countries and four additional partners without Belgian government involvement.

It can also limit political participation, freedom of speech, and inclusion, posing a challenge for Enabel to achieve results while building trust to gradually create space for political dialogue and a governance model that allows more freedom and inclusion. With such approaches based on mutual respect, Enabel provides strategic depth for positive engagement, which is valuable for the political dialogue between Belgium and its partner countries.

In low government effectiveness contexts, where the need for building resilience and reducing insecurity are essential for progress, the peace humanitarian nexus comprehensive approach also offers opportunities for mutual reinforcement of the development cooperation function and political dialogues.

Such opportunities for the mutual strengthening of development cooperation and bilateral political dialogues highlight the need for an effective, comprehensive approach, relying on transparent communication and coherent political and strategic cooperation across Team Belgium, with mutual respect and a clear understanding of each entity's roles and strengths.

Q3: What additional accents or focuses should Enabel operate to perfect its strategic positioning, to remain relevant, to continue to have added value for partners in Africa and to be future proof?

Strategy design & management recommendations

- **Establish a theory of change for each ambition** and track the path towards achieving objectives with progress indicators.
- **Adopt an overarching rationale across ambitions** to strengthen coherence and avoid silo approaches.
- **Use the overall rationale to ensure linkages** and synergies are optimised across all ambitions.
- **Incorporate scenario planning** and other foresight instruments in anticipation of potential context evolutions.

Ambition 1 – Expertise hub and key partner of the BE government²

Enabel's role as a key partner of the Belgian government is highly relevant for all partner countries, providing trust and legitimacy.

Several partner country representatives lamented the disappearance of Belgian Higher education scholarships, which they credit for enabling their own career paths to the highest levels of their governments and for which they remain ever grateful to Belgium.

The relevance of Enabel as a Belgian Expertise Hub broadens and deepens as government effectiveness increases in partner countries. Partner countries are keen

users of the expertise hub to the extent of their absorption capacity. Enabel is an agile partnership builder and offers a wide range of expertise options, although Belgian partners may face delivery constraints.

Ambition 1 Recommendations

- **Prioritise higher education scholarships** to invest in kinship and trust-building between Belgium and future leaders of its partner countries.
- **Turn operational success at expert levels into strategic purpose** at institutional and political levels in Belgium to increase relevance as an Expertise Hub.

Ambition 2 – Preferred partner for systemic change

Enabel stands out as a preferred partner for systemic change, with partner countries that spontaneously raise the key elements of its DNA as major strengths. Backsliding democracy and the adoption of alternative governance models in the pursuit of government effectiveness produces a context in which partner countries increasingly dismiss or bargain away external policy agendas and political conditionalities. Enabel draws legitimacy from its systemic approach, its alignment with national strategies and policy frameworks, and its deep understanding of the context. However, instances of unpredictability in the Belgian decision-making process can put its credibility at risk.

Ambition 2 Recommendations

- **Use more explicitly the Enabel 'DNA'** as a neutral entry point to position itself as a preferred partner for systemic change, relevant in all contexts.
- **Adopt government effectiveness as a pragmatic context indicator** to align its relevance and coherence with partner country expectations, needs and opportunities. As government effectiveness increases, so do expectations for autonomy from external agendas and political conditions.
- **Adopt principled pragmatism** to adapt the tone and timing of its value dialogue with partners, illustrating with proofs of concept how participation and inclusion can improve policy quality and government effectiveness. This approach reinforces Enabel's legitimacy as a preferred partner aligned with national strategies and policy frameworks.
- **Support the Belgian government in staying engaged in contexts where democracy is backsliding** to capitalise on the mutual reinforcement of the development cooperation function and the political dialogue.
- **Streamline Belgian decision-making processes**, requiring transparent and agile coordination to avoid Belgian political priority impositions on domestic partner country policies.

² The focus is on the expertise hub part here as key government partner is treated under Q4.

Ambition 3 - Double volume and Triple impact

'Double volume' is relevant in all contexts, while 'triple impact' varies with government effectiveness levels in partner countries. Enabel has not fully consolidated and communicated the institutional rationale for double volume. A rationale can be found in the global partnership (GP) strategy, which overlaps only in part with several other institutional rationales we gathered from Enabel interviewees. While several pathways from double funding to triple impact were gathered from Enabel interviewees, these are not established as formally documented or monitored strategies.

Ambition 3 Recommendations

- **Create a single strategy document** that consolidates the institutional rationales of Enabel and the GP strategy for third-party funding and communicate it widely in Team Belgium.
- **Evaluate the relevance of the 50/50 limit.**
- **Establish strategic pathway models** towards impact multiplier effects as formal strategies.
- **Align TEI and GGI designs** with partner country contexts and priorities, using its anchorage in partner countries and EU proximity.

Ambition 4 – Specific Expertise and Geographic Targeting

While specific expertise is highly relevant in all contexts, stakeholders have mixed views on global solutions. Enabel has expanded geotargeting criteria under the 2017 Enabel law, addressing contradictions with the 2013 law and adding strategic depth across its country portfolio. Enabel boosts its status as a preferred partner by geotargeting regions within partner countries based on needs, presence of other actors, and potential synergies. By linking bilateral partnerships with regional approaches, Enabel supports partner countries to improve regional relationships, seize opportunities, and mitigate security risks.

Ambition 4 Recommendations

- **Reassess and rebalance the global solutions** in line with their relevance in a changing context. Enabel should clarify how sectoral expertise, systemic change, innovation expertise and the expertise related to global solutions are interconnected.
- **Package expertise in a modular fashion** to be broadly applicable yet adaptable to specific contexts.
- **Pursue demand-driven geotargeting strategy** to diversify government effectiveness levels in the country portfolio, leverage bilateral partnerships with a regional approach, and align with government priority areas inside partner countries.

Ambition 5 – Beyond Aid

Enabel has a rather reductive interpretation of Beyond Aid for the international community. Focusing only on

attracting new partners and deploying innovative financial instruments may create risks which require adequate regulation in partner countries and needs solid knowledge management across multiple actors.

African leaders, on the other hand, subscribe to the Beyond Aid agenda as a pathway to self-determination. They define Beyond Aid as a new social contract with their citizens and government effectiveness as the key to making domestic resources the main source of development finance.

Ambition 5 Recommendations

Enabel should develop and implement a more robust concept of Beyond Aid by adopting two perspectives:

- **Embrace the four dimensions of the international Beyond Aid agenda**, which requires supporting new actors and new financial instruments with adequate regulation in partner countries and ensuring effective knowledge management across a growing number of fleeting actors.
- **Embrace the vision of African leaders towards Beyond Aid** by strengthening their government effectiveness to build citizen trust and supporting their capacity to raise domestic revenue as a proportion of national income and invest it in expanding public services and infrastructures.

Ambition 6 – Model Business, entrepreneurship, and innovation

There is overwhelming agreement on the relevance of Ambition 6, and Enabel enjoys high recognition for its integrity and strong credibility for its entrepreneurial and innovative approach. Enabel is renewing its People and Talent Management with professional and personal development trajectories. It also pursues organisational change processes in 'circles' promoting a non-hierarchical engagement model that includes staff at HQ and in the field. It is piloting the OECD methodology for innovation pathways in six contexts with associated capacity building. Concerns arose regarding the potential overload for field staff hampering their participation in the circles. Field staff also expressed their desire for a faster rollout of new professional development trajectories. Concerns were voiced on the need for structural talent retention and a desire for closer collaboration between Expertise and People & Talent was raised to better integrate soft and hard skills.

Ambition 6 Recommendations

- **Investigate whether more agile ways of rolling out professional and personal development activities are required.**
- **Rationalise the number of circles** or change projects and link them more explicitly to ambition objectives in strategic management reporting.

- **Institutionalise and expand its innovation strategy across operations**, establishing a dedicated study and innovation fund for rapid deployment and agile R&D.
- **Mainstream innovation, entrepreneurialism, and leadership soft skills** in the Operations, Expertise, and People & Talent departments.
- **Consider strategies to secure structural funding** for building and retaining in-house expertise beyond project funding constraints.

Q4: To what extent is the 2030 strategy articulated and in line with the existing broad political guidelines and the relevant standards of the Belgian and European partners?

Enabel is a major European EU policy implementation agency and strong supporter of the EU who enables Belgium to punch above its weight on the international stage.

Belgium supports close cooperation with the EU in its MFA policy declaration,³ deploying a bilateral portfolio through Enabel and BIO, allocating multilateral funding, and supporting Belgian NGOs. Through Enabel's implementation capacity, Belgium stands out in the EU, allowing Enabel to attract funding alongside larger member states like Germany and France. By broadening its scope through the comprehensive approach and the 'beyond aid' agenda, and aligning with EU and Belgian policies, Enabel enhances Belgian visibility and EU partnerships in development cooperation. As a key player in the Team Europe and Global Gateway Initiatives, Enabel links Belgian bilateral cooperation with regional policies, advancing equal partnerships and contributing to the SDGs.

Other EU countries are adopting similar geopolitical stances with the Comprehensive Approach and Beyond Aid agenda. Enabel's role as a preferred partner for systemic change strengthens Belgian and European presence in Africa, using principled pragmatism to advance the values dialogue.

The panoply of institutional and legal complexities in the Belgian governance system hampers a coherent political and policy environment for Enabel to 'be coherent with'.

The Comprehensive Approach requires a coordinated 'whole of government' effort to align Belgian foreign affairs across all ministries and create a coherent political and international cooperation policy environment to which Enabel can align. One key action is establishing the interministerial platform.

The differing visions of the 2013 Development Cooperation Law and the much broader mandate of the 2017 Enabel Law contribute to the development cooperation function being 'embedded in' rather than 'integrated within' the MFA. The broadening MFA foreign action and growing demands on Enabel's mandate are increasingly at odds with the development cooperation function. The hybrid setup with two Ministers and separate policy processes complicates roles and relationships, leading to a lack of clarity and unity. Swings of the political pendulum between successive Development Cooperation Ministers and unpredictability in decision-making disrupt continuity and affect Enabel's credibility. Misalignment of political mandates, strategic horizons, and administrative cycles further exacerbates coherence problems.

Q4 Recommendations

The findings underscore the importance of MFA directorates immediately initiating strategic discussions involving the different directorates (DG D, DG B, DG M), Enabel, and BIO Invest. These discussions should ensure alignment with the Comprehensive Approach and aim to develop safeguards against the risk of instrumentalisation in development cooperation.

- In the next legislature, the Belgian government should endeavour to:
 - **Establish a coherent policy environment** by implementing the 'whole of government' inter-ministerial coordination platform.
 - **Fully integrate the development cooperation function within the MFA** for better coherence.
 - **Revise the 2013 development cooperation law** to align with the Comprehensive Approach and Enabel's mandate.
 - **Implement integrated MFA oversight** in line with Enabel's mandate as an international cooperation agency for all ministries.
 - **Align political, strategic and administrative cycles** to align with political mandates to ensure consistency and coordination.
- **Better integrate development cooperation** within the Comprehensive Approach and develop measures that ensure against instrumentalisation risks.
- **Share investment and development expertise** between BIO and Enabel, as a routine practice.
- **Ensure a joint business/development case** between BIO and Enabel and align geographic targeting early.

³ Doc 55 2934/004 Belgian Parliament, 28 October 2022, General Policy Note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European affairs, and foreign trade.



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