

Evaluation Systems and Use: a Working Tool for Peer Reviews and Assessments

The members of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation are committed to the continuous improvement of evaluation tools, processes and products. The attached assessment framework has been developed by the Network to strengthen the evaluation function and to promote transparency and accountability within development agencies. It is intended for use as a “living” working tool in future assessments of evaluation systems as part of the DAC Peer Reviews - the only internationally agreed mechanism to assess the overall performance of OECD members’ development cooperation programmes.

Moreover, the tool has been conceived as a management device for DAC evaluation managers and more broadly for all those in partner countries and aid agencies engaged in designing, managing, and improving evaluation practice. Based on the normative framework provided by the DAC Principles on Evaluation of Development Co-operation (1991,1998), the assessment tool embraces lessons learned from the wide range of activities conducted by the Network.

Covering eight dimensions, the assessment tool is intended to be used as a flexible tool which will constantly be updated on the basis of lessons and experience obtained from Network Members and from its use in future Peer Reviews. The assessment framework incorporates suggestions and comments received by Network members, and was presented to the DAC Evaluation Network on 30-31 March 2006. Comments and suggestions for further improvements or developments of the assessment tool from development partners and agencies are also welcomed.



The Network on Development Evaluation is a subsidiary body of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) at the OECD. Its purpose is to increase the effectiveness of international development programmes by supporting robust, informed and independent evaluation. The Network is a unique body, bringing together 30 bilateral donors and multilateral development agencies: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, UNDP, and the IMF.

For further information on the work of the DAC Evaluation Network, please visit the website www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork or email dacevaluation.contact@oecd.org

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A WORKING TOOL ON EVALUATION SYSTEMS AND USE

1. Evaluation Policy: role, responsibility and objectives of the evaluation unit

- Does the ministry/aid agency have an evaluation policy?
- Does the policy describe the role, governance structure and position of the evaluation unit within the institutional aid structure?
- Does the evaluation function provide a useful coverage of the whole development cooperation programme?
- According to the policy, how does evaluation contribute to institutional learning and accountability?
- How is the relationship between evaluation and audit conceptualised within the agency?
- In countries with two or more aid agencies, how are the roles of the respective evaluation units defined and coordinated?

→ Is the evaluation policy adequately known and implemented within the aid agency?

2. Impartiality, transparency and independence

- To what extent are the evaluation unit and the evaluation process independent from line management?
- What are the formal and actual drivers ensuring / constraining the evaluation unit's independence?
- What is the evaluation unit's experience in exposing success *and* failures of aid programmes and their implementation?
- Is the evaluation process transparent enough to ensure its credibility and legitimacy? Are evaluation findings consistently made public?
- How is the balance between independence and the need for interaction with line management dealt with by the system?

→ Are the evaluation process and reports perceived as impartial by non-evaluation actors within and outside the agency?

3. Resources and Staff

- Is evaluation supported by appropriate financial and staff resources?

- Does the evaluation unit have a dedicated budget? Is it annual or multiyear? Does the budget cover activities aimed at promoting feedback and use of evaluation and management of evaluation knowledge?
- Does staff have specific expertise in evaluation, and if not, are training programmes available?
- Is there a policy on recruiting consultants, in terms of qualification, impartiality and deontology?

4. Evaluation partnerships and capacity building

- To what extent are beneficiaries involved in the evaluation process?
- To what extent does the agency rely on local evaluators or, when not possible, on third party evaluators from partner countries?
- Does the agency engage in partner-led evaluations?
- Does the unit support training and capacity building programmes in partner countries?

→ How do partners/beneficiaries/local NGOs perceive the evaluation processes and products promoted by the agency/country examined (in terms of quality, independence, objectivity, usefulness and partnership orientation?)

5. Quality

- How does the evaluation unit ensure the quality of evaluation (including reports and process)?
- Does the agency have guidelines for the conduct of evaluation, and are these used by relevant stakeholders?
- Has the agency developed/adopted standards/benchmarks to assess and improve the quality of its evaluation reports?

→ How is the quality of evaluation products / processes perceived throughout the agency?

6. Planning, coordination and harmonisation

- Does the agency have a multi-year evaluation plan, describing future evaluations according to a defined timetable?
- How is the evaluation plan developed? Who, within the aid agency, identifies the priorities and how?
- In DAC Members where ODA responsibility is shared among two or more agencies, how is the evaluation function organised?
- Does the evaluation unit coordinate its evaluation activities with other donors?
- How are field level evaluation activities coordinated? Is authority for evaluation centralised or decentralised?
- Does the evaluation unit engage in joint/multi donor evaluations?
- Does the evaluation unit/aid agency make use of evaluative information coming from other donor organisations?

- In what way does the agency assess the effectiveness of its contributions to multilateral organisations? To what extent does it rely on the evaluation systems of multilateral agencies?

7. **Dissemination, feedback, knowledge management and learning**

- How are evaluation findings disseminated? In addition to reports, are other communication tools used? (press releases, press conferences, abstracts, annual reports providing a synthesis of findings)?
- What are the mechanisms in place to ensure feedback of evaluation results to policy makers, operational staff and the general public?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure that knowledge from evaluation is accessible to staff and relevant stakeholders?

→ Is evaluation considered a 'learning tool' by agency staff?

8. **Evaluation Use**

- Who are the main users of evaluations within and outside the aid agency?
- Does evaluation respond to the information needs expressed by parliament, audit office, government, the public?
- Are there systems in place to ensure the follow up and implementation of evaluation findings and recommendations?
- How does the aid agency/ministry promote follow up on findings from relevant stakeholders (through e.g. steering groups, advisory panels, sounding boards)?
- Are links with decision making processes ensured to promote the use of evaluation in policy formulation?
- Are there recent examples of major operation and policy changes sparked by evaluation findings and recommendations?
- Are there examples of how evaluation serves as an accountability mechanism?

→ What are the perceptions of non evaluation actors (operation and policy departments, field offices, etc) regarding the usefulness and influence of evaluation?

References:

- DAC Principles on Evaluation of Development Assistance [OCDE/GD(91)208]
- Review of the DAC Principles on Evaluation of Development Assistance OECD(1998)
- Strengthening Evaluation Systems in Member Agencies [DCD/DAC/EV(2004)1]
- Evaluation systems in DAC Member Agencies; a study based on DAC Peer Reviews, presented at the Second Meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation , Paris 9-10 2004