

Study on Collaborative Partner-Donor Evaluation

Executive Summary
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THE DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE: ENABLING EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

THE DAC NETWORK
ON DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION



1 This Study

This Study pertains to Collaborative Partner-Donor Evaluation (CPDE), i.e. evaluation of a development assistance intervention done by the concerned donor(s) together with concerned institution(s) in the beneficiary country (hereafter ‘partner country’). The Study takes a step beyond the Paris Declaration Evaluation (PDE), which was the first large scale collaboration between evaluation functions of donors and partner countries. The mandate of the CPDE Study was (1) to pave the way for a platform connecting members of the OECD–DAC (EvalNet) and partner countries as to promote evaluation collaborations, and (2) to understand the capacity development potential of collaborative evaluations.

In order to carry out this Study, twelve members of the Evaluation Network of the OECD–DAC (EvalNet) provided resources and ten bilateral partner donor collaborations were established. Fourteen country studies were launched, managed, and carried out by institutions and service providers of the partner countries, an achievement which confirms the capabilities already evidenced by the PDE process. The material of the fourteen country studies was discussed at a partner-donor workshop held in Manila in December 2014. It was also synthesized in four thematic papers. In June 2015 the Study coordinators released a first version of the Study including a section on the way forwards with potential actions proposed to volunteering donors and partners. In October 2015, a questionnaire survey submitted the envisaged actions to all EvalNet members plus partner country coordinators involved with the Study (72 institutions overall). The response rate was 50% for donor institutions and 60% for partner countries. The final version of the Study includes a summary of the surveyed institutions responses.

The main intent of a collaborative evaluation is joint learning and/or mutual accountability, but the Study concentrated on a side effect of collaborations: strengthening partner country evaluation systems. Up to now, activities targeted at Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) have been of a ‘supply-push’ nature, e.g. training country-based evaluation professionals or supporting country-based evaluation networks. The principle of strengthening evaluation systems combines demand and supply as it aims to open opportunities for putting evaluation capacities at work in the partner country, and then to promote learning by doing at the levels of individuals, public and private organizations, networks, and coordination arrangements. Far from being an end in itself, a good country evaluation system is expected to generate extensive and frequent utilization of sound evaluation results, to raise interest in using evaluation evidence in public policy making, to contribute to better and faster learning from experience, and then to improve the effectiveness of country policies.

The Study process has been slower than expected but quite successful in mobilizing targeted institutions. It appears that the CPDE Study (as its predecessor the PDE) has been among the rare global arenas connecting in a concerted manner evaluation functions of donors and partner countries. In addition the Study process has shown a significant interest from a broad range of stakeholders, starting with Parliamentarians and Voluntary Organizations of Professional Evaluators (VOPEs) all the way to academia, civil society and evaluation users in partner countries.

2 Lessons from the Paris Declaration Evaluation

The Paris Declaration established a framework for partner-donor collaboration by holding both parties mutually accountable for the delivery of development results. When the time came to evaluating the Declaration, the works were undertaken through a partner-donor collaboration. Has this large scale collaborative evaluation contributed to strengthen evaluation systems in the involved partner countries?

The Study shows that most partner country institutions involved with the PDE had the opportunity to include their own development priorities in the design of the collaborative evaluation project but only some of them were able to do that in practice. In general, the evaluation process was an opportunity to share information with various stakeholders of the Paris Declaration and to raise awareness of and attention to the aid management reform.

The PDE process was however a fully collaborative one as it involved country actors and organizations, together with local evaluation service providers. The constitution of the National Reference Groups (NRGs) – comprised of members from selected development partners, civil society and academia – is mentioned positively in most of the country studies. These groups were convened to manage and provide overall guidance to the surveys and the country level evaluations, and provided the opportunity to work directly with several stakeholders.

In the PDE context collaborative evaluations have often been assessed as complex and time-consuming, involving high transaction costs and complicated management structures. The processes for coordinating a large number of participants may make it difficult to reach consensus, and the realization of the evaluation should match both the needs of the partner country and the time constraints of the donors.

3 Learning from reviewed collaborations

Each country study included one or several narratives of CPDEs that may have helped strengthen country evaluation systems. Altogether, these narratives offered a wide range of collaborative experiences, with different capacity-building features ranging from a donor-led evaluation with light involvement of country capacities to a strong involvement of country organizations and government leadership.

In case of strong involvement of country institutions the collaboration arrangements tend to include formal commitments through a signed memorandum of understanding and specified responsibilities as regards decision-making, coordination and evaluation management. The involvement of relevant national organizations – including civil society and private sector – indicates the degree of country ownership and engagement. In such cases, CPDEs were useful and have increased the legitimacy of country evaluation systems.

Timeliness is another driver to the success of collaborations, particularly when the CPDE is linked to country planning and budget allocation cycles or to the renewal of a bilateral or multilateral programme.

Most of reviewed CPDEs were funded by donors through grants and technical assistance funds, with limited contribution from countries to logistical and administrative costs. However, there were few exceptions – in Uganda, for example, where the government used its financial and technical resources, and allocated a dedicated budget line for conducting evaluations, including CPDEs.

When it was adopted, the learning by doing approach in implementing CPDEs paved the way for the formulation of action plans for national evaluation capacity development.

CPDEs were seen by many partner country institutions as an opportunity to strengthen the evaluation culture and the capacity of national structures and organizations, as well as individuals.

The main lessons range from rooting CPDEs to the country/national context, political will and national ownership, harmonising the timing of CPDE initiatives with partner country planning cycles and budgetary resource allocations, and making explicit country evaluation system development objectives and linking them to institutionalisation efforts through CPDEs, to streamlining results-orientation in a coherent evaluation system across government bodies and national structures to ensure progress towards development results.

4 Strengthening country systems through collaborations

Capacity oriented collaborations are meant to use and to strengthen the partner country evaluation system. A country evaluation system is a web of virtuous loops involving individual professionals, organizations and institutions in the public and private sectors, academia, media, and the civil society, plus one or more specialized networks such as a national evaluation association and evaluation communities of practice. Feedback loops apply to the demand and supply of evaluation services, to the demand and utilization of evaluation results, and to the checks and balances ensuring confidence in evaluation results. Country evaluation systems tend to emerge in the hands of evaluation champions, often within the Ministry of Finance or Planning, and then to extend more widely in the public sector and the society as a whole. However, a mature evaluation system becomes sustainable only if it does not depend on a specific champion anymore.

The Study addressed the question of the extent to which collaborative evaluations use the partner country systems. Overall such use is restricted to some steps of the evaluation process, i.e. discussing the time, scope, and objectives of the evaluation, discussing questions, criteria, and method, collecting data, writing parts of the evaluation report, and presenting results to country stakeholders. The country system tends to be used at the level of individual professionals. The lead institution in the partner country signs the memorandum of understanding, co-ordinates field work, and convenes presentation events. Conversely, collaborative evaluations tend to make no or limited use of country systems as regards initial evaluation demand, chairing the evaluation management group, procuring evaluation services, financing evaluation tasks, designing the method, formulating conclusions and recommendations, assessing quality, and dealing with follow-up action plans. Moreover, country systems tend to be poorly used at the level of organizations such as public institutions, other than the lead institution, private consultancy firms, research centers, and civil society organizations (CSOs). Evaluation networks of the partner country are almost never used as well as its checks-and-balances mechanisms.

Even if a majority of collaborations make limited use of the partner country evaluation system, the Study has identified a number of successful exceptions which offer a good prospect for designing CPDEs that would really use and strengthen partner country systems. For instance evaluation systems have progressed quite fast in Philippines and Vietnam, with a key contribution of bilateral collaborations with Japan and Australia. In each case, collaborative evaluations were part of a multi-year capacity

development strategy and aimed at learning-by-doing. The Study has identified a few other examples of learning-by-doing at the level of country institutions and networks.

From the whole set of reviewed collaborations in a wide range of countries, the Study concludes that “one size does not fit all” and that collaborations should be adapted to the degree of maturity of the partner country system.

- In the case of a nascent evaluation system, partner-donor collaborations could take the form of pilots involving country based professionals and institutions, for instance by inviting country institutions in a reference group, by involving country based professionals with the methodological design, formulation of draft conclusions, and quality assessment. Collaborations could also involve emerging evaluation networks and help designing country-specific evaluation mechanisms.
- Where the evaluation system is maturing, collaborations could become more frequent and more balanced. Country professionals and institutions could play a co-piloting role in reference groups, evaluation teams, quality assessments, and dissemination plans. Country networks and evaluation mechanisms could be used as far as possible.
- In a mature system, evaluations tend to focus on national policies, rather than on donor interventions. However, some collaborative evaluations could be initiated and shaped on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, donors could increasingly rely on the partner country system for their own evaluations.

The Study also shows that collaborative evaluations may complement previous or parallel capacity development efforts – such as training, advice, assistance, or policy dialogue – but they cannot replace such efforts. Referring to the Study findings, it could be said that capacity development should be understood in a wide manner, as system development, rather than in the narrow sense of professional capacity development.

5 Collaborations and multiple partnerships

Which collaboration arrangements are effective and efficient for carrying out CPDEs? On the side of partner countries, collaborations may include the development assistance coordination office, the institution in charge of the evaluation policy, and/or other concerned ministries or agencies. Key factors are the existence and strength of an evaluation champion as well as the existence of a national evaluation policy. On the donor side, collaborations may include one or several aid agencies and sometimes foundations. Key factors are the degree of autonomy/responsibility of the donor country office and the headquarter commitment to developing evaluation capacity. On both partner and donor sides, other influencing factors are the connection between aid co-ordination framework and country evaluation policy, the personal contacts between donor country offices and the evaluation champion, and even the trust or mistrust in one to another’s integrity.

The cost of a given collaboration includes expenditures and time needed for running a joint management process, for matching the administrative constraints of various partners, and for satisfying multiple information needs. There are also some risks of diluting priorities, disagreeing on some evaluation conclusions, or disrupting the evaluation process in case of staff or organizational changes.

Collaboration arrangements are valuable if their cost is compensated by sufficient benefits in terms of e.g. more relevant results, better ownership and use of results, and/or learning by doing. The Study shows that the benefit-cost ratio is likely to increase if collaboration arrangements are congruent with the configuration of partnerships in the concerned country.

Several trends are likely to multiply and diversify partnerships related to development assistance. In turn this would create opportunities for collaborative evaluations, reduce their cost, and increase their benefits. First donors should be keen to engage in various partnerships because of the general commitment to use partner country systems, either on a bilateral or multilateral basis, and this trend might be an opportunity for collaborative evaluations. Also the call for mutual accountability should lead to establish new partnerships and distract donor agencies from their current practice of vertical accountability (accounting to their own constituencies exclusively), thus making collaborative evaluations easier. Moreover the current practice of budget support, which involves specific partnerships, might be a driver to collaborative evaluation.

Building upon the experiences reviewed the Study suggests that collaboration arrangements should be adapted to the configuration of partnerships prevailing in the concerned country, something which is always feasible, even in case of limited evaluation capacity and/or lack of collaboration opportunities.

6 Setting up a CPDE initiative

The Study confirms the rationale for promoting CPDEs in the following terms:

- Problem to be addressed - In some partner countries where the national evaluation system is weak, evaluators lack professional experience, service providers lack evaluation references, public organizations are not familiar enough with evaluation, evaluation champions are fragile, and checks and balances are not sufficient for securing the credibility of evaluation works. In such instances, donor agencies tend to carry out their evaluation aside of the country system, thus depriving the partner country from learning-by-doing opportunities, something which in turn slows down the progress of evaluation. The problem to be addressed is to break such vicious circles where they are identified.
- Time frame – In a given partner country, the above quoted problem may just be a temporary one since evaluation systems may reach a reasonably mature stage in a decade or even less if the learning curve is steep.
- Specific contribution – Because current ECD efforts are primarily targeting the supply side of evaluations activities, they may not suffice to break the vicious circle, something which keeps country evaluation systems underutilized and weak. Capacity oriented collaborations can make a difference as far as they provide learning-by-doing opportunities on both demand and supply sides at all levels of evaluation systems.
- Part of a renewed ECD strategy – Collaborative evaluations deserve to become one of the components of a renewed ECD strategy targeted at systemic development and not just professional capacity development. In such a systemic perspective country led evaluations and South-South evaluation partnerships would also provide valuable opportunities for learning by doing.

The Study also confirms the rationale for a global CPDE initiative in the following terms:

- Problem to be addressed – Collaborative evaluations are valuable if, and only if, there are opportunities for matching donors and national actors at the level of partner countries and if collaboration arrangements reflect the degree of maturity of the evaluation system and to the configuration of partnerships. These preconditions are constraining and will not be met spontaneously.
- Time frame – As long as there remain weak country evaluation systems, i.e. long term
- Specific contribution – Setting up a permanent arena of development assistance evaluation functions from partner and donor countries in order to facilitate and promote capacity oriented collaborations, make good collaboration practices visible and enable mutual learning from collaboration experiences.
- Part of a renewed ECD strategy – No other arena of that kind is available at present. Hence it might be useful beyond its primary purpose of promoting CPDEs, for instance serving as a collaborative platform for discussing ECD strategies.

In line with that logic, the Study coordinators developed a list of potential actions for promoting CPDEs within the next years. In October 2015 these ideas for a CPDE initiative were submitted to donor and partner institutions through a questionnaire survey. The survey had a good rate of answer and confirms the interest and feasibility of a CPDE initiative.

Among donors, most responding institutions would be ready to engage in collaborative evaluations using country systems, preferably through pilot collaborations. A majority of volunteering respondents would consider collaborations even if the partner country evaluation system is weak, with adequate risk mitigation arrangements. Most responding donors are ready or may be ready to prioritize a few partner countries where collaborations would complement other ECD efforts, to use partner country systems instead of (or in addition to) the agency's own system, to include a few CPDEs in the agency's work plan with a learning-by-doing intent, to include collaborative evaluations in their ECD strategy, and to monitor collaborative evaluations efforts and their benefits.

In partner country, most responding institutions are ready or may be ready to identify potential collaborations with one or more donor agencies, to include collaborative works in the country evaluation policy where such a policy exists, to engage in a few collaborations designed for maximizing learning-by-doing benefits for as many stakeholders as relevant, and to monitor the progress of their evaluation system with a focus on actual practice and use of evaluation rather than mere capacity.

Altogether, most respondents from donor institutions and partner countries are ready to participate in a CPDE initiative through a working group gathering development assistance evaluation functions from donor agencies and partner countries. A wide share of respondents would agree to establish that working group in a formal manner within an existing international institution. In the longer term, most respondents consider that the working group should or might become a permanent arena where all evaluation functions from donors and partner countries can exchange views and collaborate. More than half respondents say their institution would be or might be ready to provide the working group with some

institutional, human and/or financial resources. Finally, there would be a sufficient number of candidate institutions for joining a management group in charge of steering a CPDE initiative and keeping the momentum of that initiative once this Study comes to an end.

7 Next steps

A new Management Group would be gathered. It would take over the electronic platform of this Study. The Management Group would invite all institutions involved in the CPDE Study, plus any interested new coming institution to take part in an informal exchange of news and lessons about capacity oriented collaborations, to promote such collaborations throughout their respective networks, and to match their collaborations efforts at the level of partner countries. The Management Group would also contribute to organizing regional sharing events (e.g. Francophone and Anglophone Africa, Asia, Latin America), building on the opportunity of evaluation events, possibly with the support of Regional Development Banks and CLEAR regional centers.

In parallel, the Management Group would seek an umbrella under which a more formal CPDE Working Group could be established. OECD-EvalNet might be the logical host of such a group if participants from partner countries could be given an observer status. UNEG might be also considered, again if participants from not UN agencies could be given an observer status. The EvalPartners initiative could be used as an umbrella for a formal CPDE Working Group. Another option could be to create a topical interest group within the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) but this needs also a special arrangement as IDEAS is mainly the global platform for individual evaluators.

International bodies committed to evaluation capacity development could provide in-kind support and seek to improve the impact of their current ECD efforts (e.g. CLEAR, IPDET) by bridging the supply of evaluation competencies and the use of these competencies through CPDEs.