



ROOM DOCUMENT NO. 5

DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation

*DAC EVALUATION INVENTORY
AS A POTENTIAL
KNOWLEDGE BUILDING TOOL*

**Submitted by
Canada**



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DAC Evaluation Inventory and Knowledge Building: A Discussion Paper

Introduction

This activity report on the inventory has two objectives. One is to give members a brief overview of the activities associated with maintaining and managing the Inventory. The other is to highlight some of the key challenges we face as a group in making the Inventory a knowledge building tool.

The DAC Evaluation Reports Inventory was established as a bibliographic reference tool to provide a summary of evaluation abstracts and plans that its members wished to share among donor agencies and individuals/groups interested in international development.

The Inventory is managed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). There are three main applications associated with the Inventory: a *master database* located within CIDA's Corporate Memory system (containing a complete list of evaluations and abstracts submitted since the Inventory's inception in 1988); a *CD-ROM* version which is created annually and is provided to all members of the Development Assistance Committee (containing abstracts, plans, development country contacts, and the full text of 7 evaluation reports for the past six years) ; and an *Inventory Website* which contains only a list of abstracts that donors have agreed to make public.

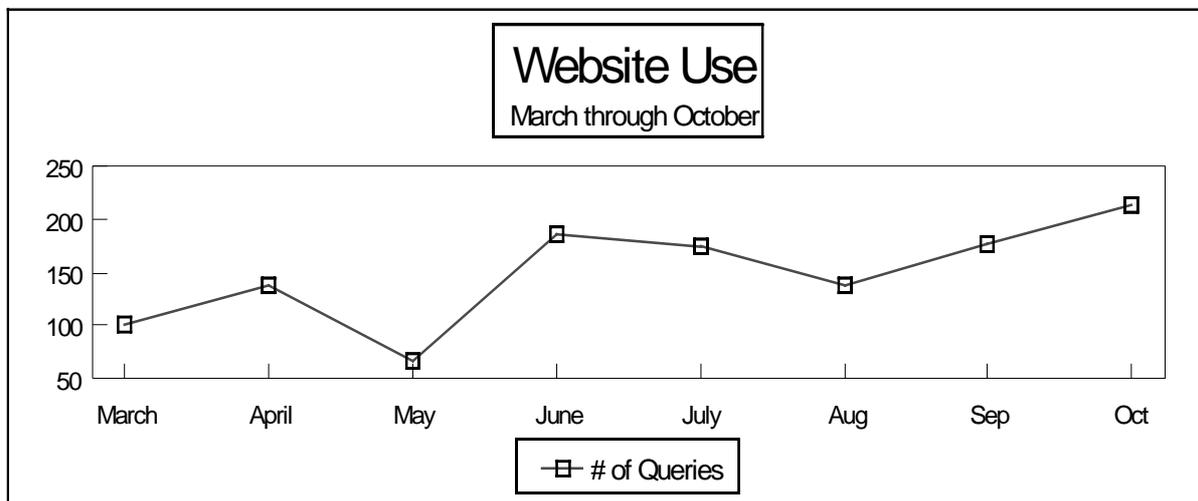
The complete inventory contains 7,888 abstracts contributed by 32 members / observers. The *CD-ROM* version, with its limited distribution to members only, contains 6264 abstracts plus seven full evaluation reports (*on Good Governance and Women in Development*). The Website contains only 3346 abstracts (or 53% of those available on the *CD-ROM* version) that have been approved for public viewing by donors. All abstracts are based on evaluations undertaken over the last ten years.

Internet Access

In February 1998 Internet access to selected items was established with the introduction DAC Evaluation Inventory Website: <http://minweb.idrc.ca/daclog.htm>. A draft brochure [Annex A] designed to promote and animate use of the inventory by members and the public is being circulated for consideration among members. The brochure provides general information on the inventory: its purpose, how it is organized [evaluation abstracts, planned evaluations and DAC evaluation contacts], and a reference guide on how to access the Website.

The Website has recently been updated. Besides the addition of more abstracts, the site is more user-friendly than before. A frame has been introduced that allows users to move from one function within the site to another without having to go back to the main menu. The search template has been upgraded so that more than one donor, sector and country can be selected within any one search. A contributor's homepage with direct access to each homepage has also been installed as another feature of the site.

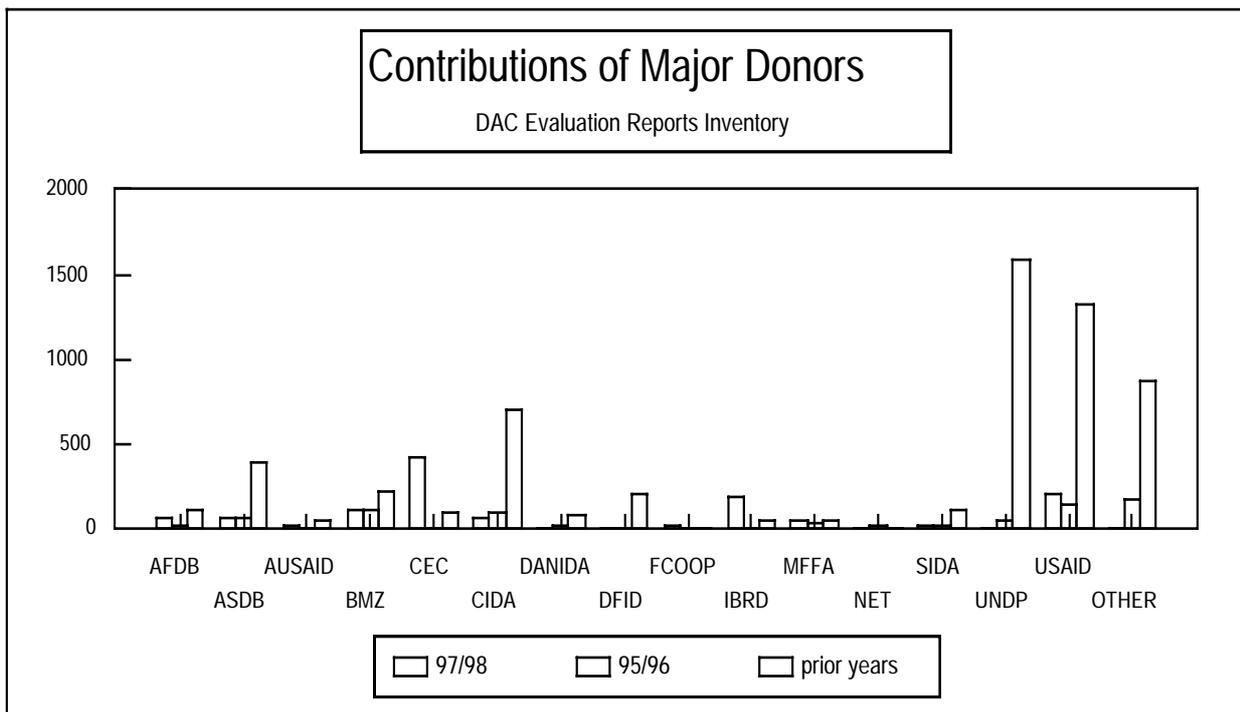
The Website contains a summary of abstracts from 16 members who have agreed to make this information available to the general public. In addition, direct links to the homepages of 7 members along with the OECD have been created. Some of these homepages contain the full text of the donor's evaluation reports.



Since the inception of the Website in March 1998, there has been a steady growth in the number of visitors (over 1,000) to the site. The chart above provides a summary of the number of visitors recorded. The current software package being used cannot provide a breakdown of the hits either in terms of the actual searches conducted or where they originated. However CIDA is in the process of identifying and installing monitoring utilities that will provide this information in the future. More work is planned to improve accessibility to the Website. Considerations are being given to improve the template to allow any number of donors, sectors, countries and evaluation types to be selected within one search rather than the current limit of two.

Input Activity Report

Though the frequency of contributions is a function of the size of individual aid programmes and correspondingly evaluation activities, it appears that contributions have not been consistent over the period. While the volume of evaluations undertaken by each member is not known in absolute terms, the data suggests that USAID has been the largest contributor of the system providing 1,664 abstracts followed closely by the UNDP which has provided 1,642 abstracts. At the other end of the spectrum, 3 - 8 submissions were made by some members. CIDA falls in the middle having submitted 862 abstracts. Most contributors, however, have submitted between 100 and 500 abstracts.



No member has submitted evaluation plans in the past year nor has any member submitted the full text of their evaluations.

As the chart demonstrates over one half of the abstracts submitted (4,041) relate to projects/programs that were carried out prior to 1990. Two thousand seven hundred and fifty abstracts relate to projects/programs carried out between 1990 and 1994 and 1,097 relate to projects/programs carried out after 1994.

The majority of abstracts (over 70%) relate to project evaluations although in recent years there have been considerably more sector and program evaluations. This is probably a reflection of recent trends related to the shift in focus in donor evaluations within the donor community. About nine hundred abstracts refer to impact evaluations.

Although there have been 32 different contributors to the Inventory, typically there are only about 15 contributors each year. CIDA has been the only contributor that has provided submissions each year. United States, Sweden, Finland, Germany and Denmark along with the IBRD however, have contributed most years and represent the core contributors of the Inventory along with CIDA.

The number of abstracts submitted annually to the Inventory by individual donors has decreased over time. This may be the result of a reduction in the number of evaluations that are taking place within the donor community¹; a reflection in the cost of providing submissions; or, it

¹ If CIDA is any indication of a general trend in the number of evaluation being carried out, then it could be that fewer evaluations are being conducted throughout the donor community. CIDA's contributions have more than halved from pre 1996

could be a reflection of some dissatisfaction with the usefulness of the Inventory. On the other hand there are indications that the introduction of the Inventory website, may have produced renewed interest in the Inventory. AsDB, Austria, France and Finland for example, have actively resumed contributing again.

It is not possible to determine how useful the Inventory is within member organizations without conducting a review. There is some indication that there has not been widespread installation of the Inventory *CD-ROM* within many of the contributing organizations. This is based on our own experience at CIDA and the nature of inquiries received from members regarding the technical aspects of installing the *CD-ROM*. If this is the case, it is unlikely that there is widespread use of the Inventory within individual donor organizations except by those units and individuals who received the CD-ROM.

The Inventory as a Knowledge Building Tool

It is evident from the above that while there may be a critical mass of existing information for knowledge sharing and building, the limitations on the quality of the data base, accessing it and the delivery channels chosen for its dissemination are not optimal.

Marketing and Animation

While the introduction of the DAC Evaluation Inventory brochure on internet access is a positive step towards enhancing awareness of the Inventory, more direct contact with contributors is required to ensure contributions are received and donors concerns and needs addressed in a timely basis. The need for a more pro-active approach towards enriching the data base and securing links to homepages and the full text of evaluation reports is required. A first step in this direction is to get all members to submit their abstracts for publication on the site in a more disciplined manner. The use of call letters, based on formal annual requests to members to submit abstracts and reports, should not limit inputs to once a year. Members should in fact use it as a reminder that they can submit contributions throughout the year.

Standardization of Formats and Technological Barriers

The need to adhere to or develop more user friendly formats for submission of reports and abstracts is also evident. There are, for example, a variety of formats submitted: some contributors follow the abstract guidelines and provide the information as text files with DAC sector coding as suggested; others provide their own executive summary and code them along the lines suggested; while still others provide only a bibliographic reference to the evaluation conducted. One reason often cited for these discrepancies are related to the conversion of individual member sector codes to DAC codes.

Organization and Access to the Inventory

The Inventory is currently stored and delivered to two separate audiences for different purposes. One is the DAC members to enhance learning and co-operation among its members. The second is to other individuals/groups interested in international development. This has

required the creation and management of the three separate data bases mentioned earlier: *a master database; one for the CD-ROM version and one for the Inventory Website. Changes in technology and our experience with maintaining and managing the inventory suggests changes in this regard will be required if we are to maintain cost effective and efficient approach towards developing a critical mass of information and easy access to it.*

By virtue of the current evolution of the Internet, the use of CD-ROM as an application for this purpose is outdated. First, it is in fact a duplication of effort and resources in terms of maintaining and managing the information gathered for each data base. Second it requires additional resources to develop separate utilities to access the same information on two different formats: CD-ROM and the Website. This includes configuring and managing separate data bases as well as developing different search utilities for each individual format. Members should therefore give serious consideration to eliminating the CD-ROM version of the inventory rather than maintaining both.

In view of these maintenance and management issues, members should also consider rethinking the role and function of the Website. We suggest that the Inventory should remain a repository for abstracts but not of evaluation reports. That its primary function should be a research tool for conducting various kinds and levels of searches: "cross cutting" issues or on the basis of thematic, sector, country, or donor conducted or planned evaluations. Functioning primarily as a repository and research tool, the inventory should therefore only maintain evaluation abstracts and provide hyper-linked access to the relevant reports which will be made available on member websites.

This new approach will not only contribute to more efficient management of the inventory but would also allow for additional effort to be placed on more innovative Website development issues. One of these could be for example, the resurrection and use of evaluation plans since their presence on the Website would be a more timely tool than the CD-ROM. Such changes will widen usage of the Inventory and will be helpful to evaluation divisions as well as researchers, students and others interested in international development.

Summary and Recommendations

In order to transform the DAC inventory into a knowledge building tool the Working Party must address two key issues:

1) The need to establish an effective and timely mechanism to enrich the data base and create a critical mass of evaluation information. This will require:

- that members make a pro-active effort to process and deliver their contributions in a disciplined and consistent manner.
- a more user friendly format for submissions of reports and abstracts must be devised. One important step in this direction will be to harmonize the conversion of individual members sector codes to DAC sector. This will also go a long way to facilitate other co-operative efforts.

2) In order to enhance learning and co-operation among members while simultaneously addressing the public needs of individuals / groups interested in international development the Working Party must decide on the most optimal means of delivering and accessing the inventory to these distinct groups of users. The following suggestions are made for members' consideration:

- streamline our delivery channels by eliminating the CD-ROM version of the inventory to allow a more efficient use of resources and the emerging Internet technology;
- make the website a repository for abstracts only and providing the full reports on members homepages thorough a hyper-link for the Inventory website; and
- an alternative is to maintain the website as a repository for both abstracts and reports except to allow members only access to the full reports through pass words. In effect creating a private site for members within the current website architecture.

Resolving these issues will make our efforts more effective by providing opportunities to use this evaluation tool to enhance learning and co-operation among members and all who are interested in the challenges associated with international development and performance measurement.



The DAC Evaluation Reports Inventory

Sharing Findings and Lessons Learned

What is the Inventory? The inventory is a computerized database of evaluation information obtained from studies conducted by the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation. The inventory is a primary research tool which allows for conducting various kinds and levels of searches on "cross cutting" issues or on the basis of thematic, sector, country, or donor conducted or planned evaluations. As such it is only a repository of evaluation abstracts that provide hyperlinked access to the actual reports that are made available on member websites.

Why was the Inventory established? The Inventory was established by the Working Party to foster the dissemination and feedback of evaluation findings among donor agencies and individuals/groups interested in international development.

How is the Inventory organized and maintained? The inventory contains 7,000 evaluation abstracts. This information base is being expanded to carry the full text of reports. Information provided in the inventory is organized in three categories:

Evaluation Abstracts of individual reports containing a brief description of the activity evaluated, the methodology used, and the main finding and lessons learned;

Planned Evaluations by contributing agencies; and

DAC Evaluation Contacts within contributing agencies and developing countries.

The Canadian International Development Agency manages the Inventory for the Working Party on Aid Evaluation. It is maintained through yearly contributions made by individual DAC members.

Access to the Inventory

The DAC Evaluation Inventory can be accessed on the internet at <http://minweb.idrc.ca/daclog.htm>. The website is hosted by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada. The Website provides users with three selections: evaluation abstracts; DAC member contributor addresses; and available development organization websites.

A Quick Reference Guide

THE WEBSITE

The website is a windows-based application that allows users to select from "pick lists" such as "Evaluation Abstracts" or "Contact Lists" to generate searches.

How to search for "Evaluation Abstracts"? Once on the website, double click on the "Evaluation Abstract" icon. This will give access to a "pick list" which allows user to specify the search parameters by country, sector, evaluation type, date and or/text.

How to search for Contacts Once on the website, double click on the "Contact Lists" icon. This will give access to DAC evaluation contacts within the contributing agencies and developing countries.

Search links have been created between sectors countries, evaluation types and dates to allow users to jump between individual records, contacts and websites without beginning another search. Users can copy directly from the application and insert (by using copy/paste command) findings into their reports, print search results, or save them as electronic files.

As new contributions are received from members and new websites are made available by contributors, these will be added to the Site.
