



EVALUATION CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Tips for
"capacity friendly"
evaluation in
development
agencies

Introduction

While not all Network member evaluation units are mandated to work directly on evaluation capacity in partner countries, all have committed to the principles of harmonisation, alignment and the use of country systems (see Note 1). At a minimum, this means donors should consider how their own evaluation work can strengthen rather than undermine evaluation capacity in partner countries.

This tip sheet draws on Network experience in the fields of capacity development and joint evaluation to explore how managers and evaluators based in donor development agencies can best support partner evaluation capacity development. It outlines the key elements of a “capacity friendly” approach to development evaluation based on the three key principles of harmonisation, alignment and use of partner country evaluation systems.

Capacity development is a long-term, endogenous change process. While this process can be supported by external partners, capacity development should be owned and driven by partner countries themselves. Likewise, the primary goal of strengthening evaluation systems *in partner countries* is to inform policy making and increase accountability in partner countries. The benefits to donors, such as greater partner capacity to participate in joint work and assurance that aid is contributing to development results, are secondary.

Note 1. In the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) developing countries committed to strengthen their evaluation systems and donors committed to use those systems to the maximum extent possible. At the High Level Forum in Accra in 2008 donors further agreed:

- to use country systems as a first option for aid programmes managed by the public sector;
- to be transparent when they decide not to use country systems;
- to support country-led reform programmes; and
- to develop corporate plans for using country systems.

Tips

1. Give evaluation units a mandate to involve partners

Evaluation departments should have a clear mandate to participate in joint evaluations and to support country-led evaluations. Agency incentives should encourage donor staff to involve partners and use local systems. Country systems in evaluation include government evaluation departments, independent audit units, university centres, or local think tanks. Internal guidance on applying the commitment to using partner country systems should include references specifically on using evaluation systems.

2. Select topics of mutual interest

The selection of policies, themes or programmes to be evaluated and the evaluation questions to be answered should respond to partners' learning and accountability needs, not just those of the donor. Partner country government officials, local CSOs, and other relevant stakeholders can, as appropriate, be involved in setting the evaluation work programmes of donor evaluation departments. Especially where direct partner involvement is not feasible, donor evaluation departments should seize opportunities to produce evaluations that are timely, relevant and useful for partner countries, in addition to responding to the needs of their own agency.

As an initial step towards setting a joint evaluation agenda, donors should provide partner country stakeholders with multi-year timeframes for evaluations planned in their country. This will enable partners to highlight areas of possible collaboration or overlap and identify implications on evaluation capacity in-country.

Note 2.

[Example of staff incentives in donor evaluation departments to be added]

3. Involve partners actively throughout joint evaluation processes

When doing joint evaluations involve relevant partner stakeholders actively and early in the evaluation processes. Relevant stakeholders should have a say in the set-up and design of the evaluation, and not be viewed simply as informants. Partners should also be engaged in responding to and following up on evaluation recommendations. Having direct responsibility for evaluation processes and outputs strengthens ownership – a key element in determining whether or not evaluations are actually used. ←

4. Involve local partners in donor evaluations

Field experiences confirm that one of the most effective ways of building capacity is through hands-on “learning by doing”. In addition to participating in joint work (or in contexts where joint work is not yet feasible) local partners can be included as observers or reference group members in donor evaluations. This will help build familiarity with evaluation approaches, stimulate interest and improve individual skills.

5. Hire local experts

As part of using country evaluation systems, local experts can be hired to conduct an evaluation or serve as members of a reference group or steering committee. The use of locally-based institutions as opposed to ad-hoc evaluation consultant teams, can be particularly effective in ensuring long-term sustainability and moving beyond individual skill building to advance a “culture of accountability”.

6. Use local procurement systems

As a first option, donors should consider using local procurement systems in the hiring of local evaluation experts. Donor rules for the conduct of evaluation should create a legal mandate and incentives to do so.

Note 3. Example from experience
In 2008 a short survey was carried out of partner country participants in the joint evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Many stated that having partner countries in charge of country studies and actively involved in designing the evaluation TORs facilitated learning while also building ownership.

Note 4.
[to be added]

7. Don't assume there is zero evaluation capacity, even if none is immediately apparent

When judging whether or not suitable partners are available to conduct country-led evaluations or undertake a joint evaluation, donors should base their decision on current facts. Existing capacity is often underutilised or hidden due to a lack of support systems, low demand for evaluation from management or weak accountability systems. National and regional evaluation associations can be a good entry point for identifying and mobilising local capacities.

8. Focus on the use of evaluation in partner countries

If evaluation findings are not used there will be little incentive to increase or maintain the capacity to produce them. Evaluators can strengthen capacity by supporting both process use and final use of evaluation findings in partner countries, for instance by holding local workshops at several points in the evaluation process. Incentives must be created in development agencies to encourage systematic use of evaluation findings by relevant country actors.

9. Share examples

Sharing examples of the usefulness of high quality evidence to inform development policies will help stimulate partner stakeholder interest and bolster demand for capacity development. Donor evaluation departments can share positive examples from their own experiences, or facilitate opportunities for "south-south" learning so that partner countries can hear examples of useful evaluations from other developing countries.



Meeting of the Africa
Community of Practice in
Managing for Development
Results - 2008



A newly trained evaluator in Vietnam hones her skills while collecting field data.

10. Be clear about the benefits and beware of the risks of evaluation

The benefits of evaluation must be clear to convince staff and decision-makers in partner countries of its usefulness and raise the positive incentives for individuals to participate in evaluation. Support for evaluation at the political level is critical – it sets the tone and helps ensure sustainability. As with all processes of change there may be institutional barriers or individual resistance to capacity development initiatives that require particular attention.

11. Co-ordinate with other donors

Donors have committed to harmonise development evaluation to avoid creating undue demands on partner systems that overwhelm local capacities and pull evaluation expertise away from partner country systems. Donors should use available platforms to coordinate with one another and work towards more collaborative processes.

12. Use harmonised standards

Whenever possible donor evaluation departments should use internationally agreed definitions and standards for evaluation to avoid confusion and support harmonisation, which in turn will lead to more consistent – and therefore effective – capacity development.

TOWARD OVERALL GOAL



RELYING ON PARTNER COUNTRY SYSTEMS

development cooperation should increasingly become evaluated by partner countries, via their own national systems.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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The World Bank, "Evaluation Capacity Development: OED Self-Evaluation." (Washington, D.C., June 2004)

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