



Irish Aid

Evaluation Policy

December 2007

Evaluation Policy for Irish Aid

1. Introduction

The purpose of this Evaluation Policy is to set out Irish Aid’s approach to evaluation and how evaluation helps Irish Aid improve the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of its development assistance. Evaluation is a core element of Irish Aid’s management process and it serves to generate accurate, objective and evidence-based information used for decision and policy making.

For Irish Aid, evaluation is defined as the systematic and objective assessment of the design, implementation and results of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy by assessing the effectiveness of the intervention against its stated objectives.

Within Irish Aid, evaluation is managed by the Evaluation and Audit Unit. Its Mission is:

“To maintain an efficient, effective, relevant and independent evaluation and audit function within Irish Aid through the execution of evaluation and audit exercises, facilitating acceptance of their findings and contributing to policy development within the overall programme.”

The Unit’s mandate covers evaluation of Official Development Assistance funds administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and does not cover expenditure administered by other Departments. It reports to the Director General and to an independent Audit Committee. In order to enhance the independence of the evaluation arrangements for the Irish Aid programme, the Advisory Board for Irish Aid (ABIA) has the right to see, and to comment on, the reports produced by the Evaluation and Audit Unit.

2. Objectives

The two objectives of evaluation in Irish Aid are:

- Learning
- Accountability

Learning

Evaluations seek to explain to the key stakeholders the extent to which development interventions and their modalities have succeeded or failed and the reasons why. In Irish Aid, the knowledge generated from evaluations is used to inform its decision making and policy processes for the purposes of increasing the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of its development assistance. The audience is primarily Irish Aid’s management and the partners, staff and stakeholders in the partner country who are directly concerned with the

activities under review. Other audiences include the general public, other development organisations, and researchers concerned with development issues.

Accountability

Evaluation is an instrument used for documenting the usage and results of Irish Aid's development assistance in order: (a) to account for its own performance and that of the agencies and partners it supports; (b) to help establish the extent to which value for money is being achieved. In this regard, proper and rigorous evaluation of development interventions serves the public interest in Ireland and in its partner countries. More specifically, it also helps fulfil the accountability requirements of the Oireachtas and the Audit Committee of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

While both objectives must be satisfied in evaluation activities, individual evaluations need not always fulfill these objectives to the same degree. From the outset, it is necessary to consider the main priority of the evaluation planned.

3. Rationale for Evaluation

The task of the Evaluation and Audit Unit is to carry out evaluations of primary strategic importance to Irish Aid. In addition, Irish Aid's Operational Sections and Embassies also undertake evaluations that are of direct relevance to their areas of competence. In all cases, the decision to evaluate should be informed by the following:

- Policy Relevance – what is the relevance of the development intervention in the context of Irish Aid's strategies, policies and goals?
- Usefulness – what use will the outputs of the evaluation be to the interests, plans and priorities of Irish Aid, its partners and other stakeholders?
- Accountability – was the intervention carried out in an efficient and cost effective way?
- Innovative value and replicability – does the development activity proposed for evaluation represent a new and innovative way of dealing with development challenges? Is it likely that it can be replicated and adopted on a wider scale?
- Financial importance – what is the importance of the development activities proposed for evaluation in terms of the scale of funding?
- Risk – would a failure of the development intervention pose a particular threat to the organisation's capacity to achieve its goals? (Amongst the risk factors that should be taken into account are those of a political, economic, financial or organisational nature).
- Evaluation feasibility – is it possible to carry out the evaluation as intended? Are there reliable data, competencies and financial resources etc available?
- Cost-benefit – is the evaluation likely to produce results that can justify its costs?

4. Guiding Principles

Evaluation in Irish Aid is guided by the OECD-DAC Principles for Evaluation:

- Partnership
- Impartiality
- Transparency
- Credibility
- Independence

These principles are integral to Irish Aid's conduct of evaluation exercises. Irish Aid's approach to partnership, impartiality and transparency in evaluation includes the use of Steering Committees on all major evaluations. In conformity with the Department of Finance's guidelines, competitive tendering procedures are used when selecting consultants. The use of suitably qualified external consultants helps achieve independence and credibility.

5. Evaluation Criteria

Irish Aid uses the OECD-DAC's 'Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance':

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Impact
- Sustainability

In addition, Irish Aid evaluations assess the processes used in a development intervention and examine whether the relevant parties and authorities were appropriately involved in preparation and implementation.

If one of the above criteria is not regarded as relevant or appropriate for a particular evaluation, this will be explicitly stated in the Terms of Reference or in the evaluation report. It is recognised that different emphases on the criteria may be applied when evaluating emergency interventions¹.

Irish Aid has adopted gender, HIV/AIDS, environment and governance as cross-cutting issues. Evaluations conducted by Irish Aid are ordinarily designed and reported in a manner that produces information documenting the extent to which these issues are addressed.

¹ Guidelines and approaches to the evaluation of Emergency and Humanitarian Assistance will be developed as a supplement to this policy.

6. Evaluation Planning and Management

The Evaluation and Audit Unit operates on the principle of (a) a three-year rolling work plan, and (b) an annual operational work plan which is approved by the Senior Management Group of Irish Aid, as well as the Audit Committee. A consultative process, incorporating dialogue across the Sections in Irish Aid and the field missions, forms the basis of both components of this planning process. The plan will cover strategic evaluations across the entire development programme.

In line with the Nordic Plus initiative and in the interests of increased coordination of approaches to evaluation, Irish Aid has adopted the Swedish International Development Agency Evaluation Manual ‘Looking back, moving forward’ as its core reference document for the management of evaluation assignments.²

The Paris Declaration concerning aid effectiveness, harmonisation and alignment, and the increasing use of new aid modalities, has important implications for evaluation. As a consequence, Irish Aid will actively seek to undertake joint evaluations when and where appropriate. This too will include work on emergency interventions. Joint evaluation, in this case, is deemed to include joint donor and partner country work.

7. Reporting

Reporting Lines

All evaluations produced by the Evaluation and Audit Unit are submitted directly to the appropriate members of the Senior Management Group and to the Department’s Audit Committee.

Reporting Arrangements

Evaluation reports are presented in clear and accessible formats for dissemination to all stakeholders. While the report will reflect the final opinion of the independent evaluator(s), the Evaluation and Audit Unit will retain copy editorial rights. Evaluations are publicly available documents and will be placed on the Irish Aid official website, and formally published where appropriate. A systematic approach and plan for dissemination of the report, its findings, conclusions and main lessons, should be established as part of the ordinary planning process of an evaluation. Dissemination processes can include formats such as formal workshops and briefings, through to the targeted distribution of reports and abbreviated summaries. Press Releases are prepared for Value-for-Money reviews and for other major evaluations.

² ‘Looking back, moving forward, Swedish International Development Agency Evaluation Manual, 2004 http://sida.se/shared/jsp/download.jsp?f=SIDA3753en_mini.pdf&a=3148,

Report Structure

In the report format, recommendations will be clearly identified and addressed to the appropriate stakeholder. Reports will also contain generally applicable conclusions in the form of lessons learnt. Responsibility for the content of evaluation reports and its independence rests with the authors, whilst responsibility for minor editorial rights and copyright ultimately rests with the Evaluation and Audit Unit.

8. Management Response

To ensure that the findings and recommendations of evaluations are properly taken into account by the operational departments concerned, a Management Response will be formally documented as an action plan. This will identify the actions necessary to improve the quality of the intervention, or to rectify problems. The preparation of a Management Response applies to all evaluations. It will also be made available to the Audit Committee. When recommendations are rejected by the operational department / unit concerned, the reasons for rejection should be clearly stated.

9. Responsibilities of the Evaluation and Audit Unit

The Evaluation and Audit Unit will:

- Identify critical work exercises and compile annual and multi-annual Unit work plans;
- Coordinate and manage activities contained in the work plan, including the Value for Money exercises initiated under the Department of Finance's Value for Money Initiative;
- Ensure that best practice approaches to the quality assurance of evaluations are applied;
- Actively disseminate key findings and publish reports;
- Ensure that key findings feed into the appropriate policy, strategy, planning and appraisal cycles;
- Provide advice, training and support to monitoring and evaluation work of the operational departments and, where requested, Irish non-government organisations working in development;
- Manage a database of reports and recommendations;
- Provide support services to the Audit Committee.

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