



ROOM DOCUMENT

Agenda Item V, ii

Update on Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of Multilateral Organisations

This update has been prepared by the co-chairs of the DAC/UNEG Task Team on Peer Reviews, for information at the 9th meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 15-16 June 2009.

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Update on Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of Multilateral Organisations

Prepared by the co-chairs of the
DAC/UNEG Task Team on Peer Reviews

Background

The DAC Network on Development Evaluation and the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) have joined forces and established an internationally recognised form of professional peer review of the evaluation function of UN organisations. These peer reviews are conducted using a *Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of Evaluation Functions in Multilateral Organisations*.¹

A joint DAC/UNEG Task Team promotes and facilitates peer reviews of interested UN organizations. It sees its work as catalytic in ensuring that the peer reviews will incorporate perspectives from a broad range of professional expertise in (inter)national organizations, including perspectives of member countries, and non-governmental and private sector expertise.

The purpose of a professional peer review is to provide DAC and UNEG members as well as decision-makers in the leadership of the UN organisation at issue, its Executive Board and its evaluation office with an independent assessment of the organisation's evaluation function and the quality of its evaluation work.

A professional peer review of the evaluation function in an organization is not in itself an assessment of the effectiveness of that organization. However, it contributes to the basis for assessing the effectiveness of the organization, by testing the capacity and quality of the organization's own evaluations of effectiveness, and thus the confidence that can be placed in them. Further, while a peer review of the evaluation function is focused on one important part of an organization's performance management systems, it is also likely to shed light on other parts, such as the framework for managing for results, etc.

The *Framework* indicates three core criteria that need to be satisfied for evaluation functions and products to be considered of high quality: (i) independence of evaluations and the evaluation system(s), (ii) credibility of evaluations, and (iii) utility of evaluations.

Because the professional peer reviews are intended to assess the evaluation function against accepted international standards in a wide range of organizations, the framework has a blend of standard and flexible elements. It contains guidelines on a broad normative framework using applicable norms and standards, and provides step-by-step options and practical suggestions for carrying out the review. At the same time, it allows for necessary flexibility for example, to adapt for de-centralised and centralized evaluation systems or to feature special issues or emphases for particular organizations. It recognizes that the model may be adapted in some cases – for example, to very small or highly specialized organizations, and/or those with limited existing evaluation capacities².

¹ This framework was established in 2007 and is based on the experience of two pilot reviews (UNDP, 2005 and UNICEF, 2006).

² The DAC/UNEG Task Team developed a framework for 'lighter' peer reviews, those to be conducted in small(er) organisations. This framework is also based on the same core criteria.

Each peer review should contain the following structural elements:

- A basis for proceeding: including the necessary agreement for cooperation, and a clear question for assessment;
- A normative framework consisting of an agreed set of principles, standards and criteria against which the evaluation function is to be reviewed;
- Designated actors and roles in the Panel that carries out the peer review; and
- A set of procedures for planning, assembling and testing the base of evidence and findings, leading to the final result of the peer review – an exchange around the conclusions drawn primarily from the diverse professional experience and judgments of the peer panellists themselves, deliberating as a group.

It should be noted that the peer reviews:

- Are not themselves full-fledged evaluations – they are less comprehensive and in-depth assessments but they should adhere to a rigorous methodology – applying the key principles of evaluation while taking full advantage of the particular benefits of a peer mechanism. The final conclusions will be a judgment by the Panel concerned.
- Must themselves reflect the accepted standards of good practice in development cooperation by seriously engaging developing country partners in the process of the review, in the learning acquired, and in the use of the results.
- Are designed to be targeted and lean – without sacrificing the rigour required for their basic validity and credibility – to avoid making unreasonable demands of time, expense and additional workload on both Panel members and the organization being reviewed.

Progress and the future of peer reviews

The peer review of the evaluation function of the WFP, conducted in 2007, was the first review that followed the *Framework for Professional Peer Reviews in Multilateral Organisations*. In 2008-2009 peer reviews were undertaken of the evaluation function of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations (OIOS), supported by Switzerland and Norway and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), supported by Belgium and Finland. The review of OIOS was published in the first quarter of 2009; that of the GEF will be finalised in the second quarter.³

The DAC/UNEG Task Team aims to revise the *Framework* taking into account the experiences of the reviews undertaken in the period 2007 - 2009. Although it is not expected that there will be fundamental changes, it has emerged that the three main pillars of the review mentioned in the *Framework* namely independence, credibility and utility do not easily match the normative framework that can be derived from the *UN Norms and Standards for Evaluation*. There is a certain degree of overlap between the Norms and Standards and the three main elements of the peer review.

At its meeting in February 2009, the Task Team discussed the further development of the Framework as well as other issues, such as the future of the reviews namely the 'ownership' and the formalisation of the reviews by providing them a structural place.⁴

The latter issues were also discussed by UNEG at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in March 2009. In the AGM appreciation was expressed of the support received thus far from bilateral evaluation offices, both in terms of providing panellists and through funding the reviews. The experiences in

³ The peer review panel for the OIOS review included evaluators of FAO, UNIFEM, Norad and SDC. That for the review of the GEF was composed of evaluators from Belgium, Finland, WFP, Kazakhstan and Mauritania.

⁴ At present, the peer review process is a voluntary undertaking both for those who conduct the review as well as organisations being reviewed. This obviously influences the range of organisations being covered and efforts should be made to formalise the peer review process.

OIOS and the GEF have reinforced the perception that peer reviews are helpful in providing an independent and professional perspective on evaluation issues in the organization being reviewed. Compared to alternative assessments it was concluded that the peer reviews are currently the best instrument to help and support UNEG members in adopting the UNEG Norms and Standards and improve their evaluation policies and practices. In view of the importance adhered to the peer reviews and to foster ownership for these reviews among the UNEG members, the AGM decided to designate the work on peer reviews within UNEG to a new UNEG Task Force on "Evaluation of the Evaluation Function". This Task Force is co-chaired by OIOS and the GEF. It will collaborate with the DAC Network on Development Evaluation regarding peer reviews, implying that its members will participate in the Joint DAC/UNEG Task Team on professional peer reviews.

It is suggested that the collaborative efforts of the Joint DAC/UNEG Task Team will focus on two issues:

- Continued support for on-going and new peer reviews, as well as incorporating lessons learned into the *Framework*;
- Preparing an assessment of the influence of peer reviews on DAC Members' appreciation of the evaluation function in multilateral organizations and whether this appreciation has led to a reduction in multi-donor evaluations or other assessment and review processes.

Ongoing and future peer reviews

UNIDO is currently undergoing a peer review supported by Denmark and Austria. The Peer Panel is chaired by the Head of Evaluation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and is further composed of evaluators from Austria, Denmark and the GEF.

Possibilities to conduct peer reviews are being explored with four UN organisations.