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DCD/DAC/EV(2003)2



Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

07-Mar-2003

English - Or. English

**DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE**

**DCD/DAC/EV(2003)2
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Working Party on Aid Evaluation

Follow up to the Client Survey of Peer Reviews

The attached document is submitted for consideration at the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation meeting on 27-28 March 2003

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JT00140514

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FOLLOW UP TO THE CLIENT SURVEY OF PEER REVIEWS

Purpose

1. The purpose of this note is to invite Members of the WP-EV to consider the recommendations of the Client Survey, particularly those with a bearing on the work of the WP-EV, and also, to consider, in the light of the discussions in the DAC and the SLM, the role to be played by WP-EV in the future in respect of the DAC Peer Reviews.

Introduction

2. Following the request by the DAC for closer collaboration between the WP-EV and peer reviews, an informal sub-group on peer reviews was set up by the WP-EV¹. The sub-group commissioned a Client Survey of the OECD DAC Peer Reviews. The Sub-group had several meetings and held electronic consultations to discuss different aspects of the survey, including the Terms of Reference for the survey, the selection of the consultant², the proposed methodology, and to review the draft findings of the survey. At appropriate times the sub-group reported on progress to the full WP-EV and the DAC. The client survey has now been completed and this meeting brings an end to the existence of the informal sub-group.

3. The findings and recommendations of the Client Survey were reported to the DAC [DCD/DAC(2002)28 and DCD/DAC(2002)28/ANN1] on 5 November 2002. The Secretariat has set out its response to the recommendations [DCD/DAC(2002)29/REV1], which was discussed, together with the client survey report recommendations, at the Senior Level Meeting on 12 December 2002.

Client Survey Findings

4. The client survey confirmed that peer reviews are clearly of substantive value to Members. No other international organisation is mandated to do this kind of review. According to the survey, Members see a clear value-added and need for the peer reviews. Many members reported that the peer reviews have had high or some impact on their aid policies and programmes. However, despite their overall positive assessment of the importance and impact of peer reviews, DAC Members are seeking improvements in notably three main areas:

- Experience-sharing and collective learning
- Methodology of peer reviews
- Thematic coverage of peer reviews.

1. The informal sub-group consisted of a core group of volunteer members: Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, U.K. and the OECD/DAC Secretariat with Mr Jan Dybfest, Norway as Chair. WP-EV Members from Canada, Italy, Japan and US participated in some of the meetings.

2. Following a restricted tender in which four experienced evaluation consultants were invited by the sub-group to bid, Dr Guido Ashoff, German Development Institute, was selected unanimously. He carried out the survey during the summer of 2002.

5. A number of other areas are also suggested for improvements, including strengthening the peer character and giving field visits a common approach etc. The note to the SLM identifies action to be taken by different actors and suggests a role for the Working Party on Aid Evaluation: “Quite a number of Members would welcome more support and guidance from the WP-EV in methodology, particularly regarding outcome-oriented standards, ways to assess the contribution of individual donors to achieving the MDGs in a more systematic way, and more measurable indicators and benchmarks”³. These were regarded by several interviewees as necessary to make the peer reviews more analytical.

6. The Secretariat accepted the general thrust of the Client Survey findings and recommendations, recognising that the survey generally endorsed the use of present, commonly agreed standards, but was looking for enhancements in the areas noted above. The Secretariat proposed one general improvement and some specific actions. The general improvement to the peer review process is to have regular DAC Methodology Meetings, in January and June, and together with DAC delegates discuss a broad range of issues including peer review methods. The DAC and SLM endorsed these suggestions.

7. As part of the specific actions, and in line with DAC SLM discussions, the Secretariat would welcome further involvement by the Working Party on Aid Evaluation, notably related to methodology issues. An institutional mechanism, such as a technical support group of volunteer WP-EV Members, could play an important function in providing advice from an expert and technical perspective on a range of assessment issues, complementing DAC’s overall strategic and political guidance role.

Present Institutional Context of Peer Reviews

8. In late 2002, the Evaluation section and the Peer Review division merged to become the Review and Effectiveness Division (DCD/PEER). This has allowed both sections to explore the synergies between their work and to build on the interactions that have been taking place on the Client Survey and the DAC Development Partnership Forum. This latter considered “state of the art” practice regarding results oriented management, drawing on the work of peer reviews and evaluation. .

9. Following the endorsement of the Secretariat response to the Client Survey, DAC Methodology discussions began in January 2003 with a brief proposal for running such meetings [DCD/DAC(2003)2]. Possible topics for inclusion in these meetings include: Approaches to analytical frameworks, standards and criteria; analytical framework for joint assessments; and the balance between critical and constructive elements in peer reviews. Regarding the thematic coverage of peer reviews, the Secretariat suggested greater focus, and the need to find a way to meet two requirements – to compare results across donors by selecting some common themes, and to share lessons from individual donor experiences that contribute to best practice in the DAC. Two thematic areas proposed for further analysis draw from the interaction of peer reviews and evaluation, and concern the tracking of results and the contribution of donors to the MDGs.

10. There are ten individual Peer Reviews scheduled for 2003 and 2004. (See Annex). The Review and Effectiveness Division intends to undertake some comparative studies, drawing from these peer reviews⁴. One on policy coherence for development is already under way. Another will take forward the work initiated on results oriented management by the DAC Development Partnership Forum. In addition, there will be two joint country assessments⁵ of donors, in Tanzania (March 2003) and in Sout-East Asia

3. DAC/DAC (2002)28, paragraph 9, fifth tiret.

4. Two initial comparative studies were reported to the DAC in 2001: partnerships for poverty reduction and evaluation systems [DCD/DAC(2001)32]. This latter comparison had been reported to the WP-EV in 2001.

5. The first joint assessment was in Mozambique in 2001.

(2004). The method of joint assessment allows the peer reviews to look more systematically at the contribution of individual donors to the collective efforts that are increasingly led by partner governments and where multilateral donors have a strong voice.

Methodological issues for WP-EV consideration

11. In taking forward the proposals for continual improvements of the peer reviews, the Secretariat notes two particular methodological challenges:

- Assessment frameworks and criteria related to the focus of various chapters and issues under consideration. While principles and guidelines have been agreed in a number of areas, there are challenges in translating them into assessment frameworks that can be used operationally in the peer reviews. Other areas, such as the results orientation of aid agencies also poses challenges. While several donors in the client survey suggested that assessing donors against results and outcomes rather than inputs and activities would be desirable, the framework and criteria by which to do this are not always apparent.
- Country level assessment challenge. While it would be politically desirable to attribute country level development results to the actions of individual donors it has become increasingly clear that it will only be possible to measure donors' contributions to collective efforts towards development results. This involves the consideration of country ownership and the way multilateral organisations also shape the development agenda in a country. Work has recently advanced on more analytical frameworks in connection with country level visits and joint assessments but further work is needed and the evaluation expertise in the WP-EV might provide useful input into this work.

Possible role and mechanisms for WP-EV

12. In line with the client survey recommendations and the discussions at the DAC SLM, the Secretariat suggests the WP-EV provide a sounding board and advice on methodological issues, in the context of increased attention to peer review issues by the DAC. In order to undertake such a role, a small technical support group of WP-EV could be useful for discussion and advice. This technical support group might interact via e-mail and through meetings. WP-EV meetings and workshops might also provide occasions for piggy-backing with informal discussions on Peer Review issues.

Issues for discussion

13. Given the above discussion of the Client Survey, and the proposals of the Secretariat for follow up, it is suggested that WP-EV considers the following issues:

- Is there support for a continuing involvement of WP-EV in Peer Reviews through the provision of methodological and technical evaluation advice?
- Is there agreement with the substantive focus on assessment frameworks for specific issue, including country level assessments?
- How would the sounding board role be operationalised most effectively? Would a small technical support group be the appropriate mechanism for a sounding board? Are there volunteers for participation in the technical support group?

ANNEX: PEER REVIEW AND JOINT ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE 2003-4**2003**

27 January	DAC Methodology Meeting
18 March	Luxembourg Review
22 May	Denmark Review
17 June	Finland Review
25 June	DAC Methodology Meeting
27 June	Joint Country Assessment (Tanzania) of Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Japan
28 October	Ireland Review
15 December	Japan Review

2004

January	DAC Methodology Meeting
	Australia Review
	France Review
	Austria Review
	Norway Review
	Italy Review
	Joint Assessment (in Asia)
June/ July	DAC Methodology Meeting