



JOINT EVALUATIONS: RECENT EXPERIENCES, LESSONS LEARNED AND OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Background and Objectives

1. Since a number of years, the DAC Working-Party on Aid Evaluation (now: DAC Network on Development Evaluation) has been in the lead of promoting joint evaluations as a tool towards increased rationalisation of the process of evaluation, reduced transaction costs for partner countries, improved quality of the work undertaken, and increased weight and legitimacy of the evaluation (cf. Note on Joint Evaluations, prepared by Niels Dabelstein, Denmark, for the meeting of the Working Party on Aid Evaluation on 27-28 March 2003, and Lessons Learned from World Bank Experiences in Joint Evaluation, prepared by Osvaldo Feinstein and Gregory K. Ingram, OED, for the same meeting). Experiences with joint evaluations, involving different bilateral and/or multilateral aid agencies, and a first set of lessons learned were synthesised and presented in “Effective Practices in Conducting a Joint Multi-Donor Evaluation”, published in the Evaluation and Aid Effectiveness Series of the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation in 2000. This significantly added value to the efforts of members of the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation to promote the idea of joint evaluations. As a result, a number of major joint evaluations were initiated and have been concluded recently, or are under way and close to conclusion.

2. As the body of knowledge about joint evaluations grows rapidly, but is still scattered widely across the donor community, the need to review in a more comprehensive fashion and in a systematic way experience with joint evaluations, including emerging issues and new challenges, becomes more acute. Also, the changing environment for international co-operation for development and new paradigms for development co-operation strategies and modalities, such as the PRS-process or new and innovative forms of aid (SWAPs, basket financing, budget support) result in additional challenges for evaluation, imply more, rather than less joint efforts, and therefore increase the urgency to take stock of the current knowledge and of the evidence with joint evaluations. So far, much of the evidence available tends to be anecdotal rather than systematic. Consequently, an in-depth analysis and a rigorous assessment of its findings could contribute to a better understanding of the benefits as well as of the costs of joint evaluations. Moreover, distilling a set of lessons learned could be useful in preparing and implementing joint evaluations in the future; in developing new procedures, processes and formulas for joint evaluations, not least in the area of evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the work of multilateral organisations (cf. Room Document No. 8b on Evaluation of Multilateral Organisations, submitted by Denmark to the 1st meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation in Paris on 15-16 January, 2004); and in identifying new challenges that could help to develop orientations for joint evaluations as the collective effort of the donor community for development grows and requires new and more convincing approaches to demonstrating results and developmental impact (cf. OECD Development Co-operation 2003 Report – Overview by the DAC Chair).

3. Therefore, the DAC Network on Development Evaluation agreed at its meeting in Paris on 15-16 January, 2004, to collectively proceed with a new study on joint evaluations which would build on previous work already in existence, especially on “Effective Practices for Joint Multi-Donor Evaluations”, and which would update and broaden it to incorporate recent experiences and new issues.

Scope of the Study

4. The study on joint evaluations will need to be focused carefully on those issues that are of particular interest for the donor community to be addressed, in order to move the idea of joint evaluations forward. While stock-taking and the drawing of conclusions from the evidence collected would be a key focus of the study, it would be equally important to secure a broad enough emphasis on new and emerging issues, so as to provide early and experience-based guidance on how to deal with new challenges in joint evaluations, and to map out possible ways forward.

5. Key themes of the study would continue to be the benefits of joint evaluations on the one hand, and the costs of them on the other hand. More specifically, subjects that would need to be discussed in the study in some depth, could include the following – and it should be noted that this list is illustrative rather than exhaustive:

- Rationalising the process of evaluation through joint work;
- Strengthening the quality and credibility of evaluations through joint efforts;
- Harmonising donor efforts and procedures in the field of evaluation through joint work (Rome agreement);
- Reacting to changing paradigms of international development co-operation and accounting for new and innovative forms of aid through joint evaluations;
- Reviewing the transaction costs for joint evaluations, for partner countries as well as for donors, including the lead country;
- Reviewing and categorising the different forms that joint evaluations may take (e. g. parallel evaluations on the same subject by different donors) and the mechanisms for their delivery, including management and governance structures, with a view to presenting the full range of choices available;
- Identifying early on opportunities for joint evaluations and potential partners in them;
- Strengthening accountability for results through joint evaluations.

6. There are also a number of new and additional questions, that have surfaced more recently and might be addressed in a study of this kind. These include:

- Standards for, follow-up to, and dissemination of joint evaluations;
- The interest of partner countries in joint evaluations, including their fuller involvement and recipient leadership in them;

- The selection of and the guidance for consultants in joint evaluations, including the use of consortia of consultants, bidding procedures, and contractual and other legal issues;
- The differences as well as the potential linkages between joint evaluations and other joint activities, such as monitoring, data-collection, research, etc.;
- The link between joint evaluations and the results-based management systems in the individual donor agencies;
- The link between joint evaluations and evaluation capacity development, both in donor and in partner countries.

7. Finally, there are a number of emerging issues that members of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation may wish to see addressed in a study of this kind. Again, in an illustrative and not exhaustive sense, the following issues could be given consideration in this context:

- Broadening the range of partners in joint evaluations, including NGOs, political foundations, the private sector, and regional and sub-regional entities active in development co-operation, such as municipalities or regional authorities;
- Using joint evaluations as leverage to work towards harmonising national accountability requirements for aid money;
- Encouraging implementing agencies to do more joint evaluations together with other implementing agencies, at their respective levels of work;
- Creating a level playing field for donors and other partners of unequal weight in joint evaluations.

Approach and Methodology

8. The approach to the study would be characterised by using existing knowledge as a starting point; updating it; adding recent evidence and experience; and by complementing anecdotal evidence with more systematic analysis. The methodology to be applied for taking stock, analysing it and distilling findings and lessons learned/good practices, would be: desk work to absorb and analyse existing written material; interviews with the key actors in joint evaluations, both in Paris and in selected DAC member states' capitals, as well as in international organisations and from among the consultants' community with broad experience in joint evaluations; possibly, but not necessarily a questionnaire to solicit factual information; and focus group discussions with DAC evaluators and other stakeholders in the fringe of other meetings.

Representatives of partner countries are important resource persons for the study, as some of the key issues to be addressed (e. g. the question of transaction costs for partners, the issue of harmonising donor procedures and of reducing administrative burdens on recipient governments) cannot be answered satisfactorily without the involvement of partner country representatives who had some experience with the conduct of joint evaluations, as, for instance, with the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education in Developing Countries or the joint CDF evaluation. Therefore, it is foreseen to hold both individual consultations with partner country representatives as well as a workshop with a group of them to discuss and validate the main findings and conclusions of this work.

Timing

9. The actual work to complete the study would involve approximately 70 days of consultant time (lead consultant) spread over a longer period of time to allow for the necessary flexibility, particularly during the stock-taking exercise. In addition, provision has been made for up to 25 days of supplementary consultant time for specialised tasks in the context of this work. After the DAC Network on Development Evaluation has approved this work at its meeting in mid-January 2004, and as strong commitment to securing the funding of the study has been expressed by eight members of the Evaluation Network, it is envisaged to present a first summary of tentative results and of remaining issues at the autumn 2004 meeting of the Network for discussion and validation, and a draft of the full report at the Network's first meeting in 2005.

Management structure

10. It has been suggested to establish a relatively light management structure for this study. There should be a Steering Committee to provide overall guidance for the work, consisting of the OECD-DAC Secretariat and members that have expressed their willingness to support the study actively (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden). The Steering Committee may wish to establish a small task team to supervise the work and to act as a sounding board for the consultants, as needed. Denmark, Germany and the Secretariat have already expressed their interest to be members of this task team. A few members of the Evaluation Network have indicated their interest in becoming "sleeping partners" in this exercise (Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom). They could be included for information purposes in the electronic consultation process, which should be the primary means of communication among the Steering Committee, the task team and the consultant.

Budget and Finance

11. The main components of the budget for the study consists of: consultant fees; travel, to OECD member capitals and partner countries, including some participation by the Secretariat in these missions; the partner workshop; support costs accruing to the Secretariat; and publication costs (editing and production.). The total budget for work in 2004-05 is 116.000 € and Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria have all made firm commitments to fund the project.