



ROOM DOCUMENT 5

DAC Network on Development Evaluation

DAC QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

Workshop Report

Item III: ii

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**3rd meeting
2 - 3 June 2005**

DAC QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

This note provides a summary of the two meetings on Quality Standards for Evaluation organised by the Network on 14-15 April in New Delhi in the context of the IDEAS conference on Evaluating Development – Beyond Aid. The first part presents the content and conclusions of the workshop held on 14 April. The second part describes the main substantive and procedural decisions taken during the 15 April meeting to take this work stream forward. The note also aims to elicit Network members' feedback and input into the process. Members will recall that both documents have been sent to them on 13 May 2005 by Australia and Denmark - co-chairs of the Task Force on Quality Standards.¹

PART I: QUALITY STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION, NEW DELHI 14TH APRIL 2005 WORKSHOP REPORT

1. Background

The purpose of the workshop was to further the work on the development of DAC standards for evaluation by considering the experiences of different agencies in the development and use of standards for assessing the quality of development evaluation. Workshop findings were planned to feed into the DAC production of evaluation standards, itself part of overarching processes of harmonization within the donor community. The workshop was held as part of the International Development Evaluation Association 1st Biennial Conference, which ensured that discussion of standards included participation from members of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EVALNET), a range of evaluation specialists, including from developing country governments, and civil society.

2. Presentations

The workshop began with eight presentations on quality standards as follows:

The Value of Evaluation Standards, Eva Lithman, SIDA and Chair DAC EVALNET outlined DAC work to date on standards, and reviewed other ongoing metaevaluations. She defined standards as 'mandatory norms', principles as 'aspirational goals', and guidelines as 'recommendations'. Lessons from the accounting field in terms of developing standards included: the need for broad ownership; the need for clear rules; and the need for an independent and competent standard setting body. She posed a number of questions for the workshop – whether standards are needed, whether common standards are possible, who should formulate the standards, how should adherence be reviewed, and to which standards developing countries should adhere?

Quality Norms and Standards in UN Organisations, Saraswathi Menon, UNDP and Chair UN Evaluation Group (UNEG), referred to the 2004 General Assembly Resolution which called for a stronger evaluation function within the UN, promotion of collaborative approaches under UNDAF, and the need for harmonization and simplification of evaluation functions. She referred to the UNEG Standards currently

1. See Niels Dabelstein's email of Fri 13-May-2005 on "DAC Network on Development Evaluation - Quality of Evaluations".

under development, which attempt the complex process of developing and operationalizing standards for the very varied organizations which make up the UN system, as well as meeting the needs of developing country partners.

Good Practice Standards in IFI's, Patrick Grasso, World Bank, discussed the work of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) currently made up of five international financial institutions. The ECG set up two working groups, for the public and private sectors, on evaluation criteria and ratings. Both working groups developed standards on governance, evaluation criteria, process and documentation, and the private sector group has carried out benchmarking exercises in 2002 and 2004. Issues have included that harmonization has not been given priority by IFIs or their evaluation units; and how to develop standards for evaluating joint programming such as in SWAps.

Quality Assessment in IOB, Netherlands, Rita Tesselaar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands, presented the findings of a Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) metaevaluation, which is planned to take place annually. Twenty five evaluations completed in 2002 were assessed against the criteria of validity, reliability and utility, on a four point scale. This was complemented by field studies in Mozambique and Kenya, and interviews in the Netherlands, the aim of which was to verify the findings of the assessment and analyse factors which affected the quality of evaluations. Findings of the metaevaluation were that: evaluations were of variable quality; and that there needs to be greater attention to policy level issues.

Quality Assessment in SDC, Switzerland, Anne Bischel, SDC reported on a metaevaluation of 12 SDC reports against the criteria of utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy. The SDC metaevaluation guide drew on the 2000 Swiss Evaluation Society Evaluation Standards. Strengths of SDC evaluations included: timely reporting; cost effectiveness of the evaluation; and focus on management issues. Weaknesses included: selection of the evaluation team; and description of evaluation procedures and methods. Recommendations included: the need to improve terms of reference; to ensure a more competitive and open selection procedure for evaluators; and the need for a greater focus on utilisation.

Discussant for the morning's presentations was Ba-Tall Oumoul Khayri, Secretary General of the Association Mauritanienne de Suivi-Evaluation. Among her key points were whether standards should be developed only for evaluation of development assistance, or also for evaluation of development, and what would differentiate these two types of standards; what kind of partnership is feasible in the development of standards, and who the clients of metaevaluation are, e.g. does this include civil society; and who was taking the main initiative in the development of standards.

ALNAP Quality Standards and Assessment was presented by Tony Beck, independent. ALNAP is a network of evaluation offices and evaluators of humanitarian action which has been carrying out a metaevaluation of evaluations of humanitarian action since 2000, covering 197 evaluations. The ALNAP metaevaluation uses a mixed method approach including rating on a four-point scale against a detailed set of criteria, and dialogue with evaluation offices concerning evaluation quality. Strengths of evaluations included: attention to human resources; attention to coordination; and use of the DAC criteria. Weaknesses included: lack of description of methods employed; poor attention to gender; and failure to identify evaluation use and uses.

The DAC Draft Quality Standards were presented by Irene Davies, AusAID, including the background to the decision to develop standards, and the process involved to date. The process has involved developing and testing a draft set of 20 standards drawing on the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance, and other standards including the SEVAL standards. The DAC Network on Development Evaluation now needs to decide where to take this work, and questions related to this raised in the presentation were: Is a standards based approach the way to proceed? Should assessment of

evaluations be applied only to the evaluation report, or also to the evaluation process? And is it feasible to achieve consensus on standards for reports and/or the whole evaluation process?

2.1 Summary of common points from presentations and discussions

- Standards are needed against which the quality of evaluations can be assessed, and currently there are multiple attempts to develop standards, not all of which are coordinated.
- There is considerable overlap in the make-up of standards being used or developed – up to 80 per cent of standards were similar or common, usually drawing on the Joint Programme Standards of the American Evaluation Association, and 20 per cent were specific to the organization developing them.
- Methodologies for metaevaluation are similar – assessment of a sample of evaluations using a rating system, use of two metaevaluators, and in some cases dialogue between metaevaluators, and evaluation offices and evaluators, concerning evaluation process and quality.
- Some findings from metaevaluations were similar, for example failure to clearly identify evaluation procedures and methods, and failure to clearly identify users.
- Standards need to be developed in a consensual and participatory manner, and to suit the needs of multiple stakeholders. Once agreement has been reached among stakeholders on the need for development of standards, an effective process is to set up a dedicated working group.

3. Break-out group discussion

Following the presentations there were three break-out groups made up of 10 people each, which discussed the following questions:

- Will harmonisation of standards lead to greater diversity or straitjacketing?
- What are the arguments for and against standards?
- Should the focus of operationalising standards be on the evaluation report and/or the evaluation process?

3.1 Summary of break-out groups

Arguments in favour of standards

- Standards, if used in association with metaevaluation, are likely to lead to an improvement in evaluation quality. Overall there was general support for the DAC EVALNET to develop a set of standards.
- In this era of harmonization, developing a set of standards for DAC members will play an important role in establishing common norms and measures for evaluation quality.
- Common standards are likely to be useful for developing country partners as this will facilitate joint evaluations and likely lead to simplified reporting formats.

- Standards will facilitate the work of evaluators and evaluation managers, who will both be able to refer to a minimum quality which evaluations will need to achieve.
- Standards will facilitate benchmarking among DAC members.
- Standards will facilitate higher quality of syntheses of findings from evaluation reports, by allowing evaluators to remove from metaanalysis/synthesis samples evaluations which do not meet minimum quality requirements.

Arguments against the development of common standards

- It is unclear if southern governments, civil society and southern evaluation associations will agree to a common set of standards.
- Northern evaluation companies with greater resources may dominate evaluation as they will have greater capacity to meet the standards.
- Depending on the way standards are developed, this may hinder some evaluation approaches, eg more participatory approaches.

Methodological issues

- DAC members need to decide if they are a) only going to develop standards; b) develop standards and carry out a metaevaluation; and c) carry out a metaevaluation involving both assessment of evaluation reports against the standards, and interaction between metaevaluators and evaluation offices.
- When developing standards, DAC members need to draw on the guidance available from the wider evaluation community on metaevaluation.
- Increasing moves to joint programming, general budget support and SWAps has implications for assessment of evaluation quality and the development of standards. For example this may mean that criteria currently used for evaluation – such as the DAC criteria – will need to be complemented by policy-level criteria.

PART II: DAC QUALITY STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION, NEW DELHI 15TH APRIL 2005 SUMMARY OF KEY DECISION POINTS

1. Background

Following the Workshop on Quality Standards for Evaluation, DAC Evaluation Network representatives² met to:

- a) Take stock of the workshop's findings;
- b) Define the scope of the future Network's activities in this area;
- c) Agree on the process for the way forward.

2. Outcome

Review of the workshop findings: Network members agreed that the workshop had provided a useful opportunity to compare experiences on developing and using standards to raise the quality of development evaluation, which could usefully feed into the development of DAC Standards.

Scope and nature of future work: Members felt that the quality of evaluation reports was both linked to, and a function of, the quality of the evaluation process. It was agreed that further work will need to take this into account. Immediate steps towards developing quality standards for evaluation reports should be taken in conjunction with work on the evaluation process as a whole.

It was also clear that the standards should be considered as a state-of-the-art tool for members to aspire to rather than a straightjacket blueprint. The standards will provide the DAC evaluation community members with an internationally agreed basis on which to develop individually owned assessment frameworks to improve the quality of evaluation, and therefore a mechanism to strengthen harmonisation of evaluation practice. Members indicated that by clarifying the 'rules of the game of evaluation quality', the standards could potentially provide a tool for dialogue between DAC members' evaluation departments and other external stakeholders, such as consultants.

3. Process

To take forward the Network's work on Quality Standards, members decided to create a task force to refine the draft minimum standards developed by Australia³ in light of the workshop's findings, and taking into consideration others' experiences (ECG, UNEG, etc). Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands Switzerland, the UK and the Secretariat offered to be included in the task force. To benefit from a partner perspective, members agreed to ask IDEAS to contribute to the work of the task force. Australia and Denmark agreed to take the lead. In the run up to the June meeting, the Task Force agreed to work as much as possible by virtual means and to meet on 1 June in Paris, with the aim to present an action plan at the DAC Evaluation Network meeting on 2-3 June.

To achieve concrete results a high degree of ownership from the entire Network is needed. Network members are invited to contribute to the work of the Task Force on substantive and procedural issues.

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2. Members represented included: Australia, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Asian Development Bank and the DAC Secretariat.
 3. Review of the Quality of DAC Evaluation Reports Room Document no.9, 2nd meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation 9 -10 November 2004.