



## **ROOM DOCUMENT 14**

**DAC Network on Development Evaluation**

### **PEER REVIEWS OF EVALUATION IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

**A joint initiative of the DAC Evaluation Network and the UN Evaluation Group**

This note has been prepared by the Denmark for consideration at the 5th meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 16 – 17 November 2006.

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# **Peer reviews of evaluation in international organizations**

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### **Background**

Managing for results, or results based management, has in different forms been introduced throughout the multilateral system and in international cooperation. It uses many instruments, such as monitoring, results agreements, and performance assessments to take management decisions and report on what is happening. On results and learning from past experiences evaluation has a crucial role to play. In order to credibly report on results, evaluation must be independent from management, so as to prevent a bias in assessing and reporting.

The independence of evaluation and evaluators has led to two important questions:

- 1) If evaluators are not part of the regular management structure of the organization, who is evaluating the evaluators?
- 2) Do professional standards exist against which the evaluators can be evaluated?

The answer to the first question is that if management cannot evaluate the performance of evaluators, evaluators have to do it themselves through mechanisms of "peer review". This is the accepted standard in many independent professional communities, such as financial audit. Secondly, professional standards exist in the international community against which such a peer review can take place.

### **A joint initiative**

The DAC Evaluation Network and the UN Evaluation Group have joined forces to establish an internationally recognised form of peer review of the evaluation function. The joint task force will focus on developing a framework for peer reviews, based on previous experiences and internationally recognized standards. It will promote peer reviews, starting with interested UN organizations. The joint task force sees its work as catalytic in ensuring that peer reviews will incorporate perspectives from a broad range of professional expertise in (inter)national organizations, including perspectives of recipient countries, and non-governmental and private sector expertise.

### **Purpose and aims of a peer review in an international organization**

The peer review would focus on the evaluation function within the organization, take its central evaluation unit as a starting point and work towards understanding the way evaluation operates at the various levels, in order to review the quality of the function in light of the objectives of the organization and the appropriate international standards. Specific aims would be:

- 1) To assess structural aspects of how the evaluation function operates in the organization. Depending on the organization reviewed, this would look at the evaluation function in the perspective of how the organization can better report on and increase its effectiveness in reaching its goal.
- 2) The peer review would look at policy issues, starting with the evaluation policy of the organization and other related policies, as well as issues of planning, budgeting and coverage.
- 3) It would address various relevant levels in the organization, such as the governance level (board, council), central management functions and the central evaluation unit, decentralized evaluations both in headquarters and in field offices, and outsourced evaluations in interventions.
- 4) It would look at existing capacity and need for capacity strengthening, use of relevant and appropriate evaluation methodologies, and the quality of the evaluations undertaken, in preparation, implementation and reporting.

### **Potential benefits**

The potential benefits for (international) organizations of this peer review are:

- 1) A better integration of evaluation into the results based management system of the organization in the longer run, leading to better learning from past experiences in the organization and more authoritative reporting on results achieved and effectiveness of the organization
- 2) An improved evaluation policy, up to internationally recognized standards, fully cognizant of the requirements of independence and professional quality of evaluations, as well as planning and budgeting of evaluations which would lead to a better coverage.
- 3) Better integration of evaluations into the various levels within the organization, with adequate attention at the governance level, headquarters, in field offices and in interventions;
- 4) A better understanding of the quality of the on-going work and what is needed to upgrade or to maintain quality at the required level.

### **Development of the peer review framework**

Principles, norms and standards and best practice benchmarks have been developed in various professional evaluation communities over the past decades. The DAC principles for evaluating development assistance and the UN Evaluation Group “norms and standards” are two important elements, as well as the best practice benchmarks that the Evaluation Cooperation Group of the International Financial Institutions has worked on. Furthermore, several international professional associations of evaluators have worked on establishing common ground on ethical guidelines, evaluation methodologies, ways of working together, principles for various forms of evaluation, and so on. Increasingly, perspectives of evaluators working in non-governmental organizations, the private sector, governments of recipient countries, are heard in international conferences and meetings. The professional community of international evaluators is vibrant and alive, and increasingly includes subject matter beyond the traditional development issues, such as humanitarian assistance, human rights, environmental, and normative issues.

Several initiatives towards professional peer reviews were taken in recent years. Some international and bilateral organizations organized their own peer reviews by inviting in respected colleagues to look at the evaluation function and recommend on improvements. The DAC evaluation network took the initiative in 2004 to start up an assessment of the evaluation function in multilateral organizations. The UN Evaluation Group took the initiative in 2005 to work towards establishing a “quality stamp” on the evaluation function in member organizations. This initiative builds on these experiences and aims to establish a formal, internationally recognized system for peer reviews.

### **The current approach to peer reviews**

Until a formal system for peer reviews is in place, organizations would volunteer for a peer review. Ideally, the Board or Council of that organization would support the peer review and would show interest in its results. For each peer review, a panel of internationally recognized evaluation experts will be established, representing the various evaluation communities and with adequate understanding of the organization to be peer reviewed. Ideally a peer review would start on the basis of a self-assessment of the organization, and would entail a desk review of the evaluation system, reports and documents. The peer review itself would consist of interviews by the panel of key informants in the organization, with the central evaluation unit as the starting point, and could include a field visit, if deemed appropriate. The approach would necessarily be adapted to the evaluation environment in the organization. The peer review report would ideally be presented to the governing body of the organization and would lead to a plan of action for improvements or strengthening of the evaluation function if needed.