DAC NETWORK ON DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

OECD

AGENDA ITEM VII.
PANEL DEBATE ON JOINT EVALUATION

DISCUSSION NOTE ON JOINT EVALUATION

This note has been prepared by Ole Winckler Andersen from Danida, for discussion during the panel debate on joint evaluation at the 11th Meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation.

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Discussion Note on Joint Evaluation

Purpose

The purpose of this part of the session is to contribute to a better understanding of how joint donor evaluations are being implemented in praxis and to initiate a discussion on how to apply a more strategic approach in the use of these evaluations.

Background

Joint donor evaluations are seen as a way to achieve evaluations that are more relevant and reduce transaction costs for both donors and partners[1]. A quick look at DEREC shows however that probably less than 10 percent of all evaluations are conduced as joint donor evaluations.

A significant share of joint donor evaluations seems to run into management and coordination problems (but there are also many joint donor evaluations which are efficiently managed[2]).

It is often difficult to use the findings and recommendations of joint evaluations as they tend to become quite general and not sufficiently operational.

Assuming that the abovementioned observations (problems and small number) are correct, how can we explain the apparent discrepancy between the perceived benefits and the practical experience?

Analytical perspectives

It is possible to distinguish between two different analytical perspectives on joint evaluations[3].

Joint evaluations can be seen as a solution to a simple coordination problem (coordination game), where the basic assumption is that the evaluation units share the same interests and have a common interests in promoting joint evaluations. The small number of joint evaluations is explained by lack of flexibility in administrative procedures etc. It can be argued that Breier (2005) and SADEV (2008) represent this perspective.

An alternative perspective builds on elements from theories of political economy, where the focus is on incentives, sanctions, information problems, transaction costs etc. The advantage

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[1] OECD-DAC (2006) mentions the following potential benefits: Mutual capacity development; harmonization and reduced transaction costs; objectivity and legitimacy; broader scope; participation, alignment and ownership.
[2] In the discussion we may need to distinguish between different types of joint donor evaluations.
[3] Note that very few analyses have tried to analyse and explain the behaviour of donor evaluation units in joint donor evaluations.

of this perspective is that it is possible to introduce more varied assumptions about actors (e.g. evaluation departments and consultants) and institutional contexts. Examples of this perspective are Martens (2002), Michaelowa and Borrmann (2006) and Pritchett (2008). None of these analyses try, however, to understand the implications of doing joint evaluations, but joint evaluations could be seen as outcomes of a combined principal-agent relation (between the evaluation unit and the donor management as Martens (2002) does) and a repeated game situation (between the evaluation units) with reputation effects and sanctions. This perspective will obviously result in a very different incentive structure for the individual evaluation units (and consultants).

Analytically, the second perspective could explain the problems some of the joint evaluations seem to run into; e.g.:

- High ex ante negotiation costs (evaluation units have to agree on the content of the evaluations and this can be a lengthy processes if interests differ and a number of compromises have to be made)
- Joint donor evaluations often lead to broader scope (broader coverage) with increased complexity (economies of scale does not necessarily exist).This has methodological implications, which - if not adequately dealt with ex ante - can lead to lengthy discussions during the evaluation and have potential negative consequences for the quality of the evaluation
- The consultants will apply a strategic approach to joint evaluations which is different from single donor evaluations. It can, for instance, be difficult for the individual evaluation departments, due to information problems and without high transaction costs, to check the quality of the work of the consultant. Some consultants are fully aware of this.

Some key questions

- Do we have an adequate understanding of the different interests and incentives at play when we do joint evaluations?
- Is it true that the relationship between evaluation units is similar to a repeated game situation where the evaluation units are prepared to enter into compromises (also if that means that the conclusion is the lowest common denominator)
- Is it correct that complexity can increase exponentially in joint evaluations and that ‘economies of scale’ does not necessarily exist?
- Is it above description of how consultants act when they do joint evaluations correct?
- They way forward?