SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 884TH MEETING

PEER REVIEW METHODOLOGY

held on 2 October 2008 at 10h00 and continued on 16 October at 10h30 at the Château de la Muette, Paris

This Summary Record has been APPROVED at the DAC meeting on 13 November 2008. It covers action points as agreed under the corresponding agenda items: DCD/DAC/A(2008)10 and DCD/DAC/A(2008)10-ADD1.

Contacts: Karen Jorgensen [karen.jorgensen@oecd.org] and Chantal Verger - Tel: 01 45 24 15 11 [chantal.verger@oecd.org].
Peer Review Methodology

DAC Meeting, 2 and 16 October 2008

Summary record

1. The agenda for the 2 October meeting was not covered during that session and a resumed session took place on 16 October. This summary record covers the combined outcomes of these two sessions.


2. The agendas were adopted, with the agreement to include under item 2 of the agenda of the 2 October session a request from the United Kingdom for a discussion on how the commitments of the Accra Agenda for Action (paragraph 24) will be further taken into account in peer reviews. It was agreed on 16 October to discuss this issue further at the next methodology meeting in early 2009.

2. **Adoption of the revised version of the Content Guide**

3. On 2 October, the Secretariat informed the Committee that the revised Content Guide should be used for the 2009-10 biennium and gave a short overview of the main changes to the structure of the Content Guide, with two main points:
   
   - Most of the text has not changed from the original Content Guide. The text was, however, edited and some questions were regrouped for greater clarity, like those related to NGOs in chapter 3 and 4. Questions on Fragile States, originally in chapter six as a special issue, have been integrated into relevant chapters throughout the document. The list of reference in the boxes at the beginning of each chapter have been updated.

   - Three changes to the Content Guide include: (i) integration of the AAA in every chapter and more room in the field level questions for feedback from partner countries; (ii) new questions on regional and decentralised co-operation in relevant chapters; and (iii) new questions on policy coherence for development taken from the Synthesis Report on Policy Coherence for Development (chapter 2).

4. The DAC’s comments covered: (i) general observations on the revised Content Guide; and (ii) specific comments on the new questions in chapters one to six. The Secretariat subsequently prepared a new version, which was approved at the 16 October session. Comment were also made at the 2 October meeting on how the peer review process could contribute further to the implementation of the AAA.

**General observations on the revised Content Guide**

5. The Content Guide is a living document giving the ongoing nature of peer reviews. This new version was seen as a good improvement on the original. The changes (introduction of questions on regional dimension and decentralised co-operation, mainstreaming of fragile states, regrouping NGOs under Chapter 3) were welcomed by the Committee. The Committee however recommended on 2 October that the Paris Declaration and the AAA should be better integrated by including them as reference documents for all relevant chapters and using specific text from AAA commitments.
Specific comments on new questions in chapters one to six

6. The Secretariat noted on 2 October specific suggestions from the Committee, including in which sections the AAA language can be used.

7. On Chapter 2, the Secretariat asked the Committee whether it could agree to the peer review addressing one policy issue to illustrate the effectiveness of the institutional structures and their impact on policy outcomes, and if so, which policy issue it would be. Committee members welcomed the idea of illustrating how the system works with a specific policy area but thought that it would be too difficult to select one policy issue for all reviews and proposed having a menu of options. The Committee would also like to give flexibility to the reviewed country to choose a different topic should the issues on the menu be inappropriate for that country. It was suggested that the policy issues should be trade, environment/climate change, and migration. It was agreed that the Secretariat would communicate to the DAC how it will proceed with Chapter 2 so that it can include new wording on the special policy coherence for development topic in the revised Content Guide.1

8. On Chapter 6 and the special topics for the Biennium 2009-10, it was agreed that capacity development will continue to be a special topic mandatory for all peer reviews. The Committee agreed to adopt the special topics i) agriculture and food security and ii) the environment and climate change - following a short presentation by the Secretariat explaining why the new topics were being proposed. The Committee asked for more specific questions to guide the discussion on these topics.

Approval of the revised version at the 16 October meeting

9. A revised version taking into account these suggestions was subsequently circulated on OLIS on 8 October for further consideration at the resumed session on 16 October. Three main changes were made:

• The Accra Agenda for Action has been mainstreamed further. Questions referring to these commitments were all in bold type in the document to facilitate the review.

• In Chapter 2, an additional question on the choice of topics has been included in line with the discussion at the 2 October meeting and the survey involving the 11 DAC members reviewed in 2009-10.

• In Chapter 6, questions have been included on the two selected special topics, in close cooperation with DCD/POL and DCD/PRG divisions.

10. Other minor changes which were requested by members complemented existing questions (e.g. decentralised co-operation, regional organisations, priority areas for policy coherence for development). Finally, for clarity purposes, the word "agency" was replaced in the text by "reviewed country" or "donor", since some donors do not have an agency, or may have several institutions in charge of development aid.

11. The DAC welcomed the changes made. Several DAC members suggested minor changes (especially with respect to AAA), which will be shared in a written form. In taking them into account, the Secretariat should not overload the Content guide to ensure that it provides useful guidance to the examiners. This calls for strategic focus and balance in the content guide with open, streamlined

1. Between the two sessions, the Secretariat surveyed the 11 members under review in 2009-10, seeking their agreement that the menu of three topics be applied to their review.
questions. Further to a request from Germany to cover 6 policy coherence areas in chapter 2, the DAC decided to maintain the current focus on one topic to be selected out of the three topics mentioned in the Content Guide.

12. The DAC adopted the Content guide, subject to minor changes to be incorporated following a written procedure. Germany and the United Kingdom will confirm their agreement after consulting their headquarters on the selected topics for policy coherence. The Content guide will be the reference for the 2009-2010 peer reviews. However, as Irish peer review is in process, it will be done on the basis of the previous version with regards to the special topics.

The peer review process and the implementation of the AAA commitments

13. Several members suggested that a deeper reflection be undertaken to see how peer reviews could contribute to the AAA commitment on mutual accountability mechanisms (par 24c). The Netherlands proposed a new mechanism complementary to peer reviews, consisting of partner country-based assessment reviews, involving partner country authorities, DAC members active in the country and representatives from DCD. The Netherlands would be willing to finance this work. The United Kingdom emphasised the need to address how the peer review process can contribute to international mutual accountability mechanisms. The discussion showed that, while partner countries’ views need to be better reflected in peer reviews, this should not alter the characteristic of DAC peer reviews - two donor “peers” assess a third donor - which ensures its success. There should therefore be a clear distinction between the role of partner countries in the peer review process and mutual review mechanisms. This calls for further reflection on how DAC peer reviews might feed into a wider system of international mutual accountability. Members also suggested that the Committee needs time to discuss on these issues, which also involve the DAC Reflection Group, the DAC retreat and the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness.

14. In the short term, the Secretariat plans to use field visits better to become more attuned to partner country perspectives on the reviewed country and other donor partners’ performance. These perspectives will be better captured in the field visit report. In parallel, the Chair asked the Secretariat to reflect on ways in which peer reviews can take account of partner countries and complement mechanisms for mutual accountability, and to revert to the DAC with a background paper on where we are today and what could be the options for the future.

3. Press advisory for DAC peer reviews

15. Agreeing on the content and process of DAC peer review press releases has been an issue for a long time. The Secretariat proposed to the DAC a new, simpler, process, which allows meeting the three objectives of: i) a content reflecting the findings and main recommendations of the review; ii) a journalistic style; and iii) a streamlined, transparent process. The proposal is to treat the press release as an integral part of the main findings and recommendations, as was done for the peer review of Luxembourg. The process includes the following steps:

- When drafting the Part 1 report, the Secretariat prepares a summary and places it at the beginning of the report.
- This summary is reviewed and agreed by the examiners, as they review Part 1.
- The content of the summary is also agreed by the communication officer in OECD/PAC, as the press release is sent by PAC.

2 The Netherlands will share the proposal in writing with DAC Members and the Secretariat.
• Being included in Part 1, the summary is seen by all DAC members as part 1 is released on OLIS and discussed during the PR meeting. It may be adjusted at the end of the meeting to reflect the discussions.

• Once approved, the press release is issued, with an added standard paragraph mentioning key references for the media.

16. This standard, professional process, allowing the DAC to ensure consistency and fair treatment across peer reviews, was welcomed and adopted by the DAC.

4. **Follow-up Guidance to DAC peer reviews (DCD/DAC(2008)18)**

17. The Secretariat introduced this item by reminding the Committee of the objectives and previous steps for setting up a follow up process to peer reviews. So far, there is no interim action systematically undertaken between peer reviews, the only requirement for the DAC members being to provide an annual memorandum on the status of their development co-operation system, which is not effective. The Secretariat had submitted a proposal to the DAC at the January 2008 peer review methodology meeting to set up a follow-up process as a way to track changes, results and impact. The proposal was to replace the previous annual memorandum by a reporting system comprising two elements: i) a matrix listing the key recommendations of the PR, to be completed on a regular basis between two peer reviews; ii) a mid-term review, taking the form of a DAC chair’s visit to the HQ and an updated matrix on the previous PR’s recommendations accompanied by a brief narrative. The DAC approved the principle of dropping the need for an annual memorandum and of setting up a new follow up reporting process. The DAC insisted that this be kept as simple as possible. At that time, the Chair asked the Secretariat to move forward in detailing an approach consistent with the DAC views. The Secretariat circulated a revised proposal for endorsement by the DAC3.

18. The discussion confirmed the agreement of setting up a follow-up process involving the two proposed elements. However, the DAC is still divided between some members wanting a mandatory process as a signal to demonstrate the commitment of the DAC to the peer review process and to maintain pressure for greater impact, and others favoring a voluntary approach to follow-up. DAC members also suggested there needs to be flexibility in the timing of mid-term reviews. Most of them said that, for efficiency and substance reasons, completing the matrix one year after the peer review should not be mandatory. All members who have had a mid-term review on a voluntary basis stated that the exercise was valuable and light. This was confirmed by the Chair. One DAC member suggested reflecting further at some point on the way the results of mid-term reviews are communicated.

19. The DAC agreed on the following:

i. The proposed process for following up peer reviews is adopted with the caveat that the matrix should be completed two years after the PR, as part of the preparation for the mid-term review, but only on a voluntary basis after one year.

ii. The process will start in 2009 on a voluntary basis. The five countries reviewed in 2007 (Denmark, European Community, Canada, Spain and Finland) will receive a letter proposing to set up a mid-term review process in the course of the year.

iii. At the methodology meeting in early 2010, the DAC will assess the results and benefits of these mid-term reviews. On this basis, it will decide on how to pursue the follow up process.

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3. In the meantime, Belgium, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have asked for a mid-term review on a voluntary basis.
5. DAC peer review learning action plan (DCD/DAC(2008)47)

20. With a view to making greater use of PRs to encourage mutual learning, a first learning action plan covering the biennium 2007-08 had been submitted and endorsed by the DAC in January 2007. The Secretariat presented a summary of the work done to implement the learning action plan and proposed a new plan for the biennium 2009-10.

21. The DAC appreciates efforts made to extract good lessons from peer reviews, making more strategic use of them. Managing aid, the 12 lessons from peer reviews, the synthesis reports on aid effectiveness and on humanitarian assistance were quoted as good examples of useful documents.

22. The DAC expresses the need to be strategic on the choice of topics, with selecting themes responding to a demand and avoiding overlaps with comparative work being conducted in other DCD divisions. The secretariat should ensure that the timing for releasing the reports is appropriate for greater impact. Further consideration should also be given to the audience. The DAC would like to broaden it to include, on the one hand, public outside the development community in DAC countries 4, including to the MCM and, on the other, emerging donors and partner countries.

23. The DAC appreciates and supports the proposed topics for 2009-10, but several members expressed concerns over the possibility to learn on the basis of a too limited number of peer reviews, as is the case for the bi-annual reports on elected special topics. Some members suggested other topics: policy coherence for development, administrative costs and fragile states. On the issue of administrative costs, it appears that nothing can be learned from peer reviews since the lack of consistent statistics does not allow covering this topic. A way to approach this could be to prepare a survey in collaboration with the Working Party on statistics. On fragile states, it was reminded that monitoring of fragile states should now (post Accra) be an integral part of the monitoring of the Paris Declaration. The peer review division will submit a report in early 2009 on this topic, which may be updated at the end of 2010 if there are significant new findings.

24. The Chair concluded that prioritisation will be needed since any additional proposal should be subject to additional resources provided by DAC members. The plan should be reviewed in light of the discussion (especially the strategy to reach communities beyond the DAC). An updated proposal specifying further the audience and timing of the reports will be circulated to the DAC with a view to adoption by a written procedure.

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4. For instance, climate change is a topic of interest beyond the development community.
Participants list for/Liste des participants

2/10/2008

Président(e)/Chairperson

Eckhard DEUTSCHER
DAC Chair

Australia/Australie

Ms. Caitlin WILSON
Counsellor (Development Cooperation)
Permanent Delegation

Belgium/Belgique

Mr. Martinus DESMET
Conseiller de la Coopération Internationale
Délégué au CAD
Permanent Delegation

Denmark/Danemark

Mr. Frode NEERGAARD
Minister Counsellor
Permanent Delegation

Mrs. Sisse RUNGE
Trainee
Permanent Delegation of Denmark to OECD

Finland/Finlande

Ms. Sari LEHTIRANTA
Counsellor
Permanent Delegation
France/France
Mme Marie-Odile BLANC  Chargée de mission

Germany/Allemagne
Mrs. Renate VON BODDIEN  German Representative to the DAC
                  Permanent Delegation

Hungary/Hongrie
Ms. Ágnes JÁNSZKY  Counsellor
                  Permanent Delegation

Ireland/Irlande
Dr. Orla SHEEHY  Development Officer
                  Irish Delegation to the OECD
                  Permanent Delegation

Italy/Italie
Mr. Fabio CASSESE  First Counsellor
                  Permanent Delegation

Japan/Japon
Mr. Yoshitaka HOSHINO  Counsellor
                  Permanent Delegation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ms. Masumi OWA              | Advisor  
Development  
Permanent Delegation |
| Mr. Jin-Kyu JEONG           | Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation |
| Mr. Gerardo BRACHO          | First Secretary / Mexican Delegate to the DAC  
Permanent Delegation |
| Miss Alejandra CARACAS URIBE | Intern                                |
| Mr. Bert VAN GEEL           | Deputy Permanent Representative  
Permanent Delegation |
| Mr. Roger CORNFORTH         | Counsellor (Development)  
New Zealand Agency for International Development  
Permanent Delegation |
Norway/Norvège
Ms. Kristin H. LANGSHOLT  
Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation

Poland/Pologne
Mr. Piotr DERWICH  
First Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation

Portugal/Portugal
Ms. Alda MEDEIROS FERNANDES  
Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation

Spain/Espagne
Mrs. Alicia MORAL REVILLA  
Conseiller  
Permanent Delegation

Sweden/Suède
Mr. Patrick RABE  
Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation

Switzerland/Suisse
Mr. Anton STADLER  
Conseiller  
Permanent Delegation
Turkey/Turquie

Ms. Lale AGUSMAN
First Secretary
Permanent Delegation

United Kingdom/Royaume-Uni

Mr. Roland FOX
First Secretary (Development)
Permanent Delegation

United States/États-Unis

Mr. George CARNER
US Representative to the OECD/DAC
Permanent Delegation

OECD/OCDE

Mr. Richard CAREY
Director
DCD
OECD

Mr. Stephen GROFF
Deputy Director
DCD
OECD

Ms. Karen JORGENSEN
Head of Division
DCD/PEER
OECD

Mme Chantal VERGER
Administrator
DCD/PEER
OECD
Mme Elisabeth THIOLERON  Administrator
DCD/PEER
OECD

Ms. Genny BONOMI  Economist/Policy Analyst
DCD/PEER
OECD

Ms. Anna HELLSTROM  Administrator
DCD/PEER
OECD

Mrs. Ida MCDONNELL  Administrator
DCD/PEER
OECD

Ms. Alexandra TRZECIAK-DUVAL  Head of Division
DCD/POL
OECD
Participants list/Liste des participants

16/10/2008

Président(e)/Chairperson

Eckhard DEUTSCHER  
*DAC Chair*

Australia/Australie

Ms. Caitlin WILSON  
*Counsellor (Development Cooperation)*  
*Permanent Delegation*

Belgium/Belgique

Mr. Martinus DESMET  
*Conseiller de la Coopération Internationale - Délégué au CAD*  
*Permanent Delegation*

Canada/Canada

Ms. Nicole GESNOT  
*Counsellor*  
*Permanent Delegation*

Czech Republic/République Tchèque

Mr. Roman HOLÝ  
*Third Secretary*  
*Permanent Delegation*
Denmark/Danemark

Mr. Frode NEERGAARD  
Minister Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation

Miss Sisse Christina RUNGE  
Trainee  
Permanent Delegation of Denmark to OECD

Finland/Finlande

Ms. Nora HEINONEN  
First Secretary (as from 15.10.2008)  
Permanent Delegation

France/France

M. Nicolas BAUDOUIN  
Coopération Internationale et du Développement  
Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres

Mme Marie-Odile BLANC  
Chargée de mission

Mme Laurence DUBOIS DESTRIZAIS  
Ministre-Conseillère pour les Affaires économiques  
Représentation Permanente de la France auprès de l'OCDE

Germany/Allemagne

Mrs. Renate VON BODDIEN  
German Representative to the DAC/Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation
Greece/Grèce

Mrs. Vasiliki MANAVI  
First Secretary  
Permanent Delegation

Ms. Nike-Ekaterini KOUTRAKOU  
Director  
Emergency, Humanitarian and Food Aid  
Directorate Hellenic Aid  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ireland/Irlande

Dr. Orla SHEEHY  
Development Officer  
Irish Delegation to the OECD  
Permanent Delegation

Italy/Italie

Mr. Giacomo PINAFFO  
Stagiaire  
Permanent Delegation of Italy to the OECD

Japan/Japon

Mr. Yoshitaka HOSHINO  
Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation

Mexico/Mexique

M. Daniel TOVAR RETANA  
Analyste  
Delegation Permanente du Mexique auprès de l’OCDE
Miss Alejandra CARACAS URIBE  
lntern  

Netherlands/Pays-Bas  

Mr. Bert VAN GEEL  
Deputy Permanent Representative  
Permanent Delegation  

New Zealand/Nouvelle-Zélande  

Mr. Roger CORNFORTH  
Counsellor (Development)  
New Zealand Agency for International Development  
Permanent Delegation  

Norway/Norvège  

Ms. Kristin H. LANGSHOLT  
Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation  

Poland/Pologne  

Mr. Piotr DERWICH  
First Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation  

Portugal/Portugal  

Ms. Alda MEDEIROS FERNANDES  
Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation
Ms. Madalena VASCONCELOS
   Trainee
   Permanent Delegation

Sweden/Suède

Mr. Patrick RABE
   Counsellor
   Permanent Delegation

Switzerland/Suisse

Mr. Anton STADLER
   Conseiller
   Permanent Delegation

United Kingdom/Royaume-Uni

Mr. Roland FOX
   First Secretary (Development)
   Permanent Delegation

United States/États-Unis

Mr. George CARNER
   US Representative to the OECD/DAC
   Permanent Delegation

World Bank/Banque mondiale

Ms. Barbara GENEVAZ
   Senior Counselor
   External Affairs, Europe
   Permanent Delegation