Summary Record of the DAC Peer Review Methodology Meeting, held on 4 October 2018

The Revised Draft Summary Record [DCD/DAC/M(2018)9/REV1] was approved at the DAC 5 December 2018 meeting and is now issued as FINAL. The Committee also agreed to declassify this final version.

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Item 1. Welcome and Adoption of the Agenda

1. In opening the session, the DAC Chair welcomed the DAC peer review methodology meetings as important to maintaining the relevance of the peer review instrument, and reaffirmed the centrality of peer reviews to the business of the DAC in terms of both content and process.

2. The DCD Director recalled that in 2017, the DAC agreed to revisions to the peer review analytical framework to reflect the landmark international agreements of 2015. The DAC committed to review those changes in the context of a further methodology meeting in 2018. In the meantime, the DAC reform process called for more accountability, learning and inclusiveness, and the Secretariat commissioned a survey of DAC members and civil society on the use, value and future of DAC peer reviews [DCD/DAC(2018)38].

3. The DAC Chair then invited the Committee to approve the day’s agenda, which they did without modification. The Chair also recalled the postponement of the scheduled Senior Level Meeting, advising that an additional DAC meeting will now take place in December.

Item 2. Proposed Changes to the Peer Review Instrument

4. The Secretariat presented proposed changes to the content and process of DAC peer reviews noting that, following the substantive changes in 2017, the proposals largely seek to remove duplication, unpack some of the more complex indicators, and recall the main findings of the survey. Members in turn recognised the peer review tool as highly relevant and welcomed ongoing efforts by the Secretariat to balance accountability and flexibility in the methodology.

5. The majority of the Secretariat’s proposals were widely welcomed by the Committee. On proposed changes to the content of DAC peer reviews (the Reference Guide), members welcomed a greater focus on innovation, and the clarified language around policy coherence for sustainable development. Members also welcomed the inclusion of the proposed reference to sexual exploitation and abuse, without the need to wait for the OECD DAC Recommendation. Additional comments and proposals by members included the need for a greater focus on global public goods and on civil society organisations (CSOs), and removal of the reference to export credits. The need for stronger language on transparency, and around cross-cutting issues in particular gender, was also requested in order to ensure accountability. A request was also made to await discussion on the forthcoming 2019 Multilateral Development Finance Report by the DAC before incorporating its recommendations.

6. Members emphasised the need to reflect regularly on the 2030 Agenda in peer reviews, without over-burdening and over-extending the analytical framework of peer reviews.

7. With regard to the proposed changes to the chapter on humanitarian assistance, some members welcomed the orientation and focus on fragility and crises, recalling that most humanitarian aid is delivered in countries that are fragile or in crisis and noting that separating these issues in the past has felt artificial. A number of members, however, expressed concern given the distinct, self-standing attributes of humanitarian assistance and the principles applied to it and the structural realities in their own systems, and noting that subsuming humanitarian under the broad heading of crisis and fragility may be unhelpful in their context. Ensuring that new language does not skew the text towards conflict and away from disaster or prevention was also raised as important to some members. A number of members were still awaiting advice from their capitals.

8. The Committee welcomed the proposed updates to the peer review process guidance materials, including more guidance on the levels of preparation and engagement of both reviewed and reviewer members, recognising the need to better reflect revisions made in 2017. Committee members also welcomed the Secretariat reinforcement on the need for senior-level, experienced examiners, recognising the credibility this brings to the process and domestic uptake of review recommendations, while noting the need to balance seniority against availability and technical knowledge. The Committee also welcomed the
proposal for the reviewed member to include in their Memorandum key challenges and issues for the peer review to focus on.

9. The Committee discussed how best to move forward with proposed changes to the report format, in particular, balancing the need for Part 2 to be sufficiently tailorable to each country context, while also making it shorter, sharper and structured for accountability and enhanced topic-based learning. While some members called for more tailoring, others cautioned against potential ambiguity if the space for nuanced analysis and the overview of donors’ systems provided by the current format is lost. Members welcomed the intention to introduce more visuals into the reports.

10. While a couple of members expressed reservations about reducing the peer review meeting from a full- to a half-day, the Committee was open to the proposal in principle, with two members offering to test the format. Some noted that a shorter format may constrain their ability to attract high-level representation, and requested support from the Secretariat in scheduling meetings around the peer review. There was strong support for the related proposal of an annual ‘learning’ meeting, as facilitating learning across peer reviews on key trends and challenges in development co-operation, linked to SLMs and HLMs.

11. Proposals to strengthen the inclusivity, outreach and engagement of the peer review process were widely supported. Given that many important stakeholders are less familiar with DAC processes and language, members noted better communication would ensure greater use of peer review reports. The Committee called for more nuanced and focused communications, which the Secretariat welcomed as encouraging and noted it is working to address.

12. The proposal for a management response was generally supported and the timeline of 6 months considered appropriate, although some members sought clarity around the format and the link with mid-term reviews. The Secretariat emphasised that the processes are intended to remain separate, with the management response providing an official statement of intent on taking recommendations forward.

13. While the proposal for peer review launches to take place in Parliaments was widely recognised as encouraging of whole-of-country ownership and accountability, some members cautioned on the need to remain flexible, particularly in contexts where support for development co-operation is precarious.

Item 3. Proposed 2019-2020 Learning Agenda

14. The DAC Chair invited the Secretariat to introduce the 2019-20 Learning Agenda, which aims at facilitating the synthesis of findings and trends across reviews, and to inform peer learning in line with the DAC reform process. The Agenda includes an annual one-day meeting of the DAC at senior levels on key thematic issues and challenges facing members, the refreshing and updating of the Managing Aid publication, and the continuation of new and on-going peer learning exercises.

15. The Chair opened the floor to discussion. Particular emphasis was placed by members on serving an audience beyond the DAC, the need for an iterative learning approach, and clarification on how specific peer learning topics will be selected.

16. The Committee welcomed and supported the Learning Agenda for 2019-20, which it adopted without modification.

17. In closing the meeting, the Chair invited members to submit written comments to the Secretariat by 12 October. The Secretariat will re-issue an updated track changes version of the Reference Guide in advance of discussion and adoption at the upcoming DAC Meeting on 16 November 2018.