



ROOM DOCUMENT 3/C

Draft NONIE statement on impact evaluation

This report has been prepared by the Chair of NONIE for information at the 7th meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 20 – 21 February 2008.

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Driven by the results agenda and the focus on achieving the development outcomes contained in the Millennium Development Goals, there is increased international attention by policy makers, practitioners, and evaluators to **impact evaluation**.

Managing for development results implies a number of changes in the way interventions are designed, implemented, monitored, and managed. The role of evaluation in this context is to assess results in a credible and independent fashion, contribute to learning and accountability, and for effective policy decisions and programme improvement.

The Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE) has been formed to enhance development effectiveness by promoting useful, relevant and high quality impact evaluation.

Members of NONIE are the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG), the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Evaluation Network, and the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG). Based on demand, the membership is now expanded to include developing country representatives identified through the global and regional networks, led by IOCE. NONIE is headed by a Chair and Steering Committee and its work is supported by a light Secretariat.

What do we mean by quality impact evaluation?

NONIE will be looking at this issue in more depth as it develops its work programme and guidance. The starting point is the **DAC definition** of “impact”, which is:

“positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended”.

This definition broadens impact evaluation beyond direct effects to include the full range of impacts at all levels of the results chain.

Quality impact evaluations are those which ask the relevant questions, use appropriate methods, apply methods rigorously, and deliver policy- and programme-relevant conclusions. The network will build from the quality standards for evaluation already developed elsewhere – particularly in the member networks – while focusing on the implications and requirements for impact evaluation.

NONIE supports an issues and priority-driven approach to define the evaluation agenda. Criteria for selecting interventions for impact evaluation should include the relative importance of the intervention for beneficiaries in developing countries and the potential for improving development effectiveness. NONIE advocates an open approach to finding the most appropriate methods for impact evaluations – drawing on a wide range of techniques available from different disciplines.

Within this broad approach, NONIE will also consider some important issues often debated by evaluators such as: when impact evaluators can and should develop an explicit *counterfactual* as part of the evaluation design; what mix of quantitative (including experimental and quasi-experimental) and qualitative methods to use in which circumstances.

Guidance

NONIE is therefore developing guidance on methods which will cover a range of techniques and options. Among other things, the guidance will:

- Emphasize the importance of considering the purpose of the evaluation, the evaluation questions, and the nature of the intervention when determining the type of impact evaluation, its approaches, methods and data. In particular, quality impact evaluations are those which use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, methods and data, with a balance determined by the questions being addressed, the purpose of the evaluation, and the nature of intervention.
- Emphasize the importance of conducting rigorous impact evaluations by: including all valued impacts, gathering credible evidence of impacts, addressing internal and external validity, applying causal analysis (either through attribution analysis or contribution analysis), and carrying out effective and sound management. Also, emphasize the importance of ethical standards and how these should be built into approaches to impact evaluation.
- Emphasize that a well-designed impact evaluation considers both process and impact evaluation questions, unintended impacts, and explore how context influences impact. Policy relevance and programme design and implementation is thus enhanced as the study can address questions of why- or why not- an intervention had the intended impact, not just whether it did. An important approach to doing this is theory-based evaluation, consistent with the principles of realistic evaluation.

Approach

Given the aims of ensuring that quality impact evaluations are influential and are used by policy makers and development practitioners, NONIE is also committed to the following guiding principles:

- Capacity building: Promoting impact evaluation capacity amongst its members and partner countries.
- Advocacy: Advocating impact evaluation in the broader development community and amongst evaluation specialists, and building the demand for and access to the results of impact evaluations so that they improve development effectiveness.

- Coordination and collaboration: Working with other networks to coordinate activities and share information on impact evaluation. NONIE is developing a program for coordination and collaboration on impact evaluation and creating a resource platform for information sharing in impact evaluation.

These principles are being supported through a number of activities:

- NONIE members are producing the Impact Evaluation Guidance that will be available for broader consultation later in 2008.
- NONIE members will seek opportunities for greater collaboration ranging from information sharing through a database of impact evaluations to meta-evaluations and joint impact evaluation studies.
- NONIE recognises the need to build demand for and use of impact evaluations and will be looking at how best to support this among its members and partner countries.