

Summary note of impact evaluation workshop Paris, November 15 2006-11-17

The workshop was the first meeting of the Network of Networks (NoN), with representatives of the three official agency evaluation networks: DAC Evaluation Network, ECG and UNEG. The objectives of the workshop were to share experiences in conducting rigorous impact evaluation to explore its role in the overall evaluation efforts of the agencies and the possibilities and limitations of such studies, and identify steps toward implementing an expanded program of such studies.

The initial presentation by IEG overviewed approaches to impact evaluation, emphasizing the importance of addressing the issue of possible selection bias which arises if program participation is correlated with determinants of outcomes. The review undertaken by IEG showed that several agencies are producing studies which address this concern, some of which were presented during the course of the day.

Conducting impact evaluation

1. There was broad support for an expanded program of impact evaluation as a means of improving understanding of development effectiveness. There was also support for working through the evaluation networks to help provide a coordinating framework for such a program.
2. It was generally felt important to maintain a flexible approach, exploiting possibilities for mixing methods whilst retaining technical rigor. Impact evaluations need to be well-contextualized and policy relevant.
3. Whilst approaches to impact evaluation at the project level are well understood, there is no consensus on impact evaluation of new aid instruments or development impact at the country level. The future work of the NoN should address these unresolved issues.
4. The future work of the NoN should continue to be inclusive. Means of incorporating partner countries in the initiative should be identified, including using the initiative as a vehicle for evaluation capacity development. NGO participation may also be sought.

Next steps

In order to support the common impact evaluation efforts of members of the networks, and so improve our understanding of development effectiveness, it was agreed to take the following next steps:

1. A Task Force should be created to assist members of the NoN in taking forward their program of impact evaluation. This Task Force should be small, but include representatives from each of the three networks, from partner countries and possibly the NGO community. The chair of each network will be consulted as to possible members of the Task Force from their network. The work of the Task Force should be conducted in a participatory manner. The World Bank (IEG) was asked to facilitate the formation of the Task Force. A work program will be proposed for the task force which will cover the elements outlined in the following points.

2. One activity of the Task Force would be the preparation of Guidance on Impact Evaluation. Whilst endorsing a rigorous approach toward impact evaluation, the Guidance should be pragmatic as to what is possible. This Guidance should draw on what is already available in agency manuals etc. The Guidance should not take a narrowly technical approach and recognise that there are other issues in impact evaluation beside selection bias, such as the need to use a well-contextualized, policy-relevant approach. In addition, attention need be paid to institutional aspects, including capacity development of partner countries. A preliminary draft of the Guidance would be prepared by the Task Force and then subject to wider consultation within the NoN. The World Bank was asked to initiate the process with an outline/draft for the Task Force to work with.
3. The Task Force is charged with considering the issue of how impact evaluation approaches may be applied to new aid instruments such as budget support and SWAPs.
4. The Task Force should also identify an impact evaluation platform for fostering information sharing and collaboration by members of the NoN. A website of resources was proposed, which would include the database of existing impact studies.
5. Coordination between agencies so as to allow the possibility of meta-analysis was felt desirable to each agency going off and doing their own different impact studies.
6. It was agreed that discussions should be held with the Centre for Global Development (CGD) regarding the Leading Edge initiative and possible complementarities between that initiative and the work of the NoN. The heads of the three networks will write jointly to CGD to try to agree a division of labour between the initiatives.
7. It was felt that a further meeting of the NoN would be helpful. This meeting should be expanded to include NGOs, developing country participants and the Foundations. But in general emphasis was on working in a flexible and low key manner rather than creating large formal structures.

Immediate action points:

1. IEG to liaise with heads of networks and developing country evaluation associations to identify possible TF members.
2. IEG to distribute the initial draft Guidance prepared for the workshop to Task Force members. IEG will also collect and distribute to Task Force members existing agency guidelines on impact evaluation.
3. Heads of networks to consult with members and then prepare response to CGD.