DAC Network on Development Evaluation

Summary Record of the Twelfth Meeting of the DAC Evaluation Network

23-24 June 2011

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWELFTH MEETING OF THE DAC NETWORK ON DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

I. OPENING SESSION

1. The Chair, Nick York, opened the meeting and welcomed new members to the network. The draft agenda [DCD/DAC/EV/A(2011)1] was adopted. The summary record of the eleventh meeting [DCD/DAC/EV/M(2010)2] was approved.

2. Following the announcement of elections to two vice-chair positions to the Bureau (communicated by the Secretariat to members on 18 April 2011), the floor was opened for elections. Canada, seconded by Switzerland, nominated Henri Jorritsma. William Carlos was nominated by the Netherlands and seconded by the United States. The nominated candidates were elected.

3. The DAC Facilitator, Frode Neergard, briefed members (this item was taken up in the afternoon session) on the key outcomes of the recent OECD Ministerial Council meeting at which development had been a key theme, and on the “opening up” statement of the DAC agreed at the Senior Level Meeting held in April. He informed members on the ongoing discussions on the reform of subsidiary bodies and DAC architecture more broadly. Moreover, he provided specific messages to the Evaluation Network in which he noted that demonstrating and communicating results had moved to the top of the agenda and with it the importance of evaluation. He stressed the need for the Network to be flexible and forward looking and in-tune with the priorities of the new DAC. He welcomed the internal reflection that had taken place in the network and the network’s awareness of and efforts to link to DAC priorities and noted the positive reception by DAC delegates to the presentation by the Bureau at the informal lunch meeting held on 28 March 2011.

II. COMMUNICATING EVALUATION FINDINGS

4. This session was held in collaboration with the Informal Network of DAC Development Communicators (DevCom), and a number of DevCom members participated. The focus on communications at this meeting builds on past work in the network on evaluation use and disseminating findings. The chair opened the session highlighting the need for active and effective communication strategies at a time when pressure to demonstrate results and interest in evaluation are high.

a) Connecting with policy makers

5. Henri Jorritsma (the Netherlands) kicked off the discussion by providing a report on the recent Managing Aid Seminar held at the DAC Senior Level Meeting and shared some reflections on current trends around results reporting and evaluation in the Netherlands. The Managing Aid Seminar demonstrated clearly that evaluation is gaining in importance and is now a high priority. The strong interest in evaluation from senior policy makers is a great encouragement to the network.
6. In the Netherlands, as well, there is an overall positive trend toward greater interest in evaluation. This is seen, for instance, in discussions of evaluation reports with decision makers; these discussions are becoming more in-depth. The speaker highlighted that communication is not an end in itself, but should help evaluation contribute to knowledge and improve the impacts of development programmes. A recent research project in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs looked into use of evaluation by operational staff and senior management, and at the political level. Evaluation is used extensively at the operational level, but senior management often view evaluation as a potential risk and approach findings from a damage control perspective. The study also showed that there is not necessarily a direct causal link between evaluation and policy change, but that evaluation (together with other sources of knowledge) contributes evidences which builds up over time and eventually results in change. It is important, therefore, to take a long-term perspective on communication and use. Evaluation also supports transparency, which is important in the public arena, and can help strengthen support for development aid. But it can also undermine public support when the results of evaluation are negative.

7. During the rich discussion that followed, members discussed the wide range of audiences for development evaluation and agreed that a differentiated approach for targeted engagement is needed. Communication must include country partners and governments, as with, for instance, Phase II of the Paris Declaration Evaluation. Capacity is closely linked to use and intended audiences need to know how to deal with evaluation findings and how to get what they need from a report. Awareness-raising and capacity development must therefore accompany efforts to increase take up of evaluation results. One of the biggest challenges is producing something that ordinary people can relate to (describing how public money has impacted the lives of poor people) while basing conclusions on reliable evidence.

8. Members agreed that interest in evaluation is rising and the role of evaluation in policy making is gaining in importance in the current development climate. Still, evaluation is just one source of information and it is important to link with and feed into other research and knowledge generation processes. Members described how engaging early in the programme cycle is particularly important for ensuring that evaluation feeds into critical decision windows. There was agreement that working in dialogue with decision makers can help ensure evaluations meet their needs and answer their questions – while maintaining credibility and independence of judgement. It was agreed that high-level political support can help reinforce use. Discussants also pointed out that evaluation can work through intermediaries – for example advocacy NGOs or policy advisors – who will in turn influence policy makers.

9. There is also a need to recognise that no matter how well evaluations are packaged or presented, political interests will largely determine whether or not leaders follow and accept evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. Members expressed interest in working to better understand these decision-making processes and the role of evidence, in order to more strategically target evaluation. This includes understanding incentives and disincentives for use and the importance of a wider culture of accountability and learning.

10. Members discussed the challenging communication dynamics of joint evaluation processes where the needs and political dynamics of multiple partners come into play. It was suggested that it would be useful to share experiences in dealing with joint/multiple management responses.

11. The chair summarised the discussion, noting the need to build a culture of evaluation to prepare the ground for communicating results. Planning and understanding systems and building relationships with users must be taken seriously. Evaluations must be useful and digestible to users and they should be timed to influence critical decision points. There is an element of psychology in how people respond to different stories about the risks and results (positive or negative) of development co-operation. Different types of products, including meta-analyses and short reports that start with what people want to know about, are needed to target different users.
b) Innovative approaches to sharing evaluation results

12. The Secretariat for the Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration, Niels Dabelstein, described the communication work underway for phase two of the evaluation and shared some short video clips (see website). Two to three video spots for each of the involved 22 countries will give a glimpse of that country and how the Paris Declaration has been implemented. Several thematic videos of 3-5 minutes each were also created. Because they realise that very few people will read the whole report, a slimmer version of the executive summary is also being produced. Interest in this work is very high, and the evaluation is one of the few sources of solid evidence about what is happening in development cooperation today. Mr. Dabelstein also pointed out that evaluation work is seldom mentioned in partner countries and that more work is needed to reach this potential audience.

13. Njoman George Bestari of the Asian Development Bank, presented communication work aimed at increasing accountability and lesson learning to improve development effectiveness (see PowerPoint). To expand the audience of the reports and get more people reading the findings, the Bank produces a range of evaluation products, including two, four and 10 pagers. There is a strong emphasis on web communication. They have found that navigating the web is not easy and that simply putting a report up online does not work because there is no storyline to help readers understand the evaluation findings. More effort is needed to present different pieces of the report and make them interesting to relevant audiences.

14. The Chair highlighted the striking level of investment and impressive amount of work, which can serve as inspiration to others.

c) Panel: A communication perspective for evaluation

15. A panel of communication experts from the Informal Network of DAC Development Communicators (DevCom) addressed the network and shared perspectives from their work on messaging on development co-operation and strategies for communicating about results.

16. Shareefa Choudhury (DFID) put the morning’s discussion into a broader perspective describing how DFID’s comprehensive review has resulted in an increased push for transparency and a new focus on reporting results back to the U.K. public (see PowerPoint). There is strong pressure on DFID as a department to show what results are being delivered, in a media context where many believe aid doesn’t work or is wasted. (Polls show that 69% of the U.K. public believe that aid is wasted.)

17. The DFID communications team has done extensive polling and research to understand public attitudes towards and support for development co-operation. DFID’s primary audience is interested in human interest stories of people’s lives changing thanks to UKAID. In these stories, empowerment and agency have proven to be more effective themes than charity – general audiences are moved more by tales of “teaching a person to fish” rather than “giving someone a fish”. The communications team also works to place an individual story of change within a broader context of transformation at the country or global level. They back-up their own messaging with “supportive voices” from other sources (such as NGOs, celebrities or international organisations), which helps overcome scepticism of the government’s own reporting. Ms. Choudhury emphasised the importance of thinking about the objectives of communication and being clear about what we want people to do with the information we are sharing. She suggested holding focus group discussions and using polling to determine what communication channels (radio stations, TV channels, websites, etc.) are used by key target audiences.

18. Hans Peter Melby (NORAD) shared some of the extensive work on communication and learning done in NORAD and described how they are working to engage with different audiences when presenting evaluations. The Evaluation Department does a lot of its own communication and outreach. In terms of
specific audiences, they work with politicians (both incumbents and oppositions parties), journalists, aid officials and operations staff. The major point of weakness is engaging recipient country audiences, who are rarely engaged. Mr. Melby emphasized the need to be realistic about how much interest there will be in individual evaluations, but also shared the example of a major evaluation on climate change, which generated high-level interest and media attention. Such successes require a lot of work and planning.

19. Norway’s approach aims to use evaluation to encourage critical thinking and debate about development co-operation. They highlight findings that people are interested in to stimulate public dialogue around aid and development, as a long-term means to influence and improve aid. They use language that will be interesting and spark discussion, while treating positive and negative results evenly. The department also garners interest in its work by publishing plans ahead of time.

20. Marie-Christine Boeve (Belgium) shared experiences with making evaluation and communication work together better (see PowerPoint). Ms. Boeve described how evaluation and communication previously worked like separate planets. While each was producing complimentary results information, there was nothing linking the two together. Many efforts have been made to improve synergies and get evaluation and communication working together. They have created a range of different communication outputs and draw on evaluation findings as an input to other communication work. For instance, a newsletter has been developed for parliament members with videos and short briefing notes, including information from evaluations. Case studies for the annual report have been added, also drawing on evaluation facts and stories. More work is needed to reach partner country stakeholders.

21. In closing, the chair highlighted that the panel presentations demonstrated the power of stories and video and the need to link stories and robust evidence (not just selectively using evidence to tell interesting stories). Beneficiaries are good sources for evidence and stories and audiences are more interested in lessons that come from them. There are many opportunities to improve how evaluation departments operate in the field of communications, including by segmenting and better understanding audiences and their interests and needs.

III. PARIS DECLARATION EVALUATION PHASE II

22. The key results of the evaluation were presented by Niels Dabelstein (see executive summary and PowerPoint). The relative greater progress among partner countries as compared to a more uneven implementation among donors was noted. A main reason for the lack of progress among some donors was related to political commitment. The importance of feeding back evidence to the preparatory processes for the forthcoming High Level Forum in Busan was stressed. Communication and dissemination was also a task for members taking part in the evaluation, as well as for the management group.

23. It was suggested that a stocktaking of experience should be undertaken which would be useful for future large scale evaluations and for better understanding of the capacity development dimension of the evaluation. The possibility of holding a workshop back to back with the next Network meeting was to be explored further.

Action: Active dissemination and communication of the report and its main findings. Feed into the preparatory processes for HLF4 and the Forum itself. Explore the possibility of holding a workshop back to back with next Network meeting.

IV. BUDGET SUPPORT

24. The current chair of the network task team, Martyn Pennington of the European Commission, described the progress of developing a shared approach to assessing the results of budget support and
updated the network on the status of the three pilot tests in Mali, Tunisia and Zambia. Members welcomed the progress made and support was expressed for the proposal to carry-out a synthesis of the three evaluations, and for the other next steps proposed by the steering group (see room document). The basic suggested guiding principles (to use and continue to improve the methodology and to contribute to mutual learning and collaboration on these evaluations) also met wide agreement. The high political interest in this work and the challenge of presenting clear information on results from a limited number of pilot tests were noted. Members were invited to lead or join further evaluations and a number of specific proposals were made.

**Action:** The steering group will meet to determine specific next steps. Synthesis of policy lessons and dissemination of key messages to inform current policy discussions. Methodology revised based on experience and used for further joint work. Members to inform steering group of plans to lead or support other evaluations.

V. GOVERNANCE EVALUATIONS

25. Members welcomed a proposal (see room document) to analyse synergies and strengthen learning between evaluations in the areas of public governance and aid effectiveness. Support was expressed for the suggestion to draw on the robust evidence in this area and feed into ongoing policy discussions, taking advantage of the current high interest in improving support for good governance. The challenges of timing were discussed and it was suggested that the core group work to link this work with Busan High Level Forum preparations where possible, even if this means using strong evidence from evaluations that have not yet been fully finalised, but also work to feed evidence to broader debates and other fora such as the DAC Governance Network (GOVNET).

26. The Secretariat of the DAC GOVNET described current work underway in to take stock of results measurement and evaluation in the governance fields. GOVNET members have expressed interest in working with EVALNET to draw evidence from recent and ongoing evaluation work and to work together on improving approaches to evaluation.

**Action:** Cross-analysis of current evaluations in this field will be carried out and evaluation briefs produced on key policy topics. Danida, Sida, DFID and the DAC Secretariat will take forward this work, in collaboration with the EC and the Netherlands. Members interested in supporting this work will contact the U.K. to get involved.

REPORT BACK FROM SMALL GROUP PARALLEL SESSIONS

Towards good practice in communication

27. Nermine Wally (IOCE) reported back on the outcomes of the follow-up session on communicating evaluation findings. The group shared experiences and discussed common challenges. Members welcomed the morning presentations and discussions. Several shared that they were inspired by the innovative approaches used by other members and stated that hearing about other possibilities was very useful. It was agreed the use and uptake of evaluation findings is not just about what evaluators and communicators do, but also about the political economy of decision making in development co-operation. Members expressed interest in the suggestion to explore these processes in more detail in order to better understand how evaluation can/cannot influence decision makers in aid agencies and partner countries. The tensions between using individual stories, which effectively reach the public, and the need to use rigorous evidence and credible methodologies, were discussed. Some suggested that evaluators need to be more
brave and bold in stating findings based on strong evidence, and not to shy away from drawing clear conclusions where possible.

28. It was generally agreed that a lot of progress on communication has been made in recent years and that there are a number of initiatives underway in various agencies to improve communication of evaluation findings and to work with communicators. Nonetheless, weaknesses remain, particularly in and communicating results to beneficiary country governments. It may be helpful to begin by looking at what has already been accomplished and sharing information on current strategies.

**Action:** Compile and share current communication strategies of member evaluation departments and explore areas for possible further work towards compiling good practice tools.

**Gender equity**

29. Belen Sanz (UNEG) reported back as chair of the session. The group started off discussing the lack of focus on results in gender mainstreaming. While a number of agencies have in the past 10 years strengthened focus on systematic gender integration into projects, accountability towards gender integration did not follow, and there has been too little focus on results. Odile Keller from the African Development Bank presented an evaluation synthesis on mainstreaming gender equality, which examined experiences across multilateral and bilateral donor organizations.

30. The report found a consistent story across organisations: the absence of a monitoring and evaluation system, the lack of consistent support from leadership, inexisten incentive and accountability systems and the challenge of integrating gender into new aid modalities have contributed to close to no progress in this area. Members, such as the World Bank and Sweden, indicated similar conclusions in their own agencies regarding gender mainstreaming work. There was an overall recognition on the need to share experiences on evaluations that analyse gender equality and on the role of EVALNET to serve as a platform to advance this issue.

**Action:** Share findings of the African Development Bank report with the OECD DAC Gender Network and other interested networks. Produce an Evaluation Insights brief. Retain the issue on the EVALNET agenda and promote exchange of information on evaluation plans and evaluation reports on gender equality.

**Haiti evaluation work**

31. Patrick McManus (Ireland) reported back as chair of the session. The small group session discussed the streams of work related to the Haiti evaluation task force that was established in response to the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The meeting took stock of completed products such as the shared context analysis/evaluation framework and the web portal, and the just released Evaluation Insights produced by DFID, which was a useful synthesis of emerging lessons. The session discussed the proposal for an evaluation learning and support office in Haiti prepared by the URD group, and it was agreed that the proposal, following some clarifications on governance, should be shared with the wider network for indications of possible funding support and/or comments. The meeting touched on the suggestions for a joint impact evaluation where several members had indicated interest but no lead had emerged yet. It was suggested that an in-depth synthesis could be undertaken at an appropriate later stage, as a potential alternative.

**Action:** Share the proposal for an evaluation and support office in Haiti with the full group. Continue to explore interest/lead potentials for a joint impact evaluation or synthesis.
VI. MULTILATERAL EFFECTIVENESS

32. Key highlights of the 2011 Multilateral Report were presented by the Secretariat. While core funding to multilateral organisations was proportionally lower as a trend, overall funding support including ear-marked contributions from bilateral budgets was the highest ever reported, some 40 per cent of total ODA, or US$50 billion. The DAC is to further discuss the report and emerging conclusions before its publication.

33. Cida, as lead for the task team on multilateral effectiveness, reported back on the findings of the pilot review and presented options for discussion on taking work further. In the ensuing discussion, a number of members noted that the pilot reviews had been found a workable option and provided complementary information to the MOPAN reviews. It was underlined that further work should be done in close co-operation with MOPAN. Some of the representatives of the multilateral banks and institutions underlined the role of the boards in the institutions and the importance of using results information provided by their independent evaluation departments. In summing up the discussion, the Chair noted the interest in the topic and lively discussion, and the strong support among many members to pursue work in the area. The task team would need to think through the role of the boards and how to work in ways that would support and not undermine evaluation systems. He noted the complementarity in approaches to strengthening the results information basis: first, and whenever possible, to rely on multilateral organisations’ systems when adequate, second, strengthening evaluation functions through peer reviews, and finally the use of reviews, where needed and feasible, to complement the work of MOPAN.

34. The co-chair of the UNEG/DAC task team (the Netherlands) presented the current status of the peer reviews of evaluation functions of UN organisations. Drawing on the useful experience in the six reviews so far conducted, three future reviews were in the planning stage: FAO, UN Habitat and UNEP. The discussion highlighted the usefulness of these peer reviews and a member suggested that a discussion be held on doing similar peer reviews of evaluation functions in bilateral agencies. Several members reported on external or internal reviews they had recently gone through, and Norway indicated its willingness to be peer reviewed during 2012.

35. Attention was drawn to the information note on “Drawing lessons from comprehensive evaluations of international institutions” developed by the GEF (Global Environment Facility). SADEV informed members that further progress had been made and invited interested members to contact SADEV for more information after the meeting. The Chair asked members to review and feed back any comments, while also drawing attention to the preceding discussion where a sense of concern about a proliferation of initiatives in the area had been expressed.

**Action:** The task team is encouraged to continue further reviews, in consultation with MOPAN, as a way of strengthening the results information base on multilateral partners. New peer reviews of evaluation functions of UN organisations are encouraged.

**DAC Chair addressed the network**

36. Brian Atwood, the DAC Chair, addressed the network highlighting the relevance of EVALNET’s current work programme and sharing his views on development today and DAC reform. He emphasized that people look to the DAC for assessment, guidance and open discussion about approaches to development. The DAC is looking to the Evaluation Network, in particular, because of a renewed strong emphasis on results and the need to become learning organisations and improve evaluative analysis in development. The Chair described the High Level Forum in Busan, Korea as the most important opportunity for the development community in the past decade.
37. The DAC is looking for broader and deeper partnerships and has supported a new engagement strategy. New actors and new types of development co-operation, including south-south co-operation, will need to be evaluated and should be informed by evidence. Mr. Atwood challenged the network to look into risk management and evaluating capacity development, security and job creation. He also supported the focus on partner capacities and encouraged further work to measure and assess development results beyond aid.

VII. CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING

38. Beate Bull (Norway) reported on progress made by the joint task team in the development of guidance for evaluating donor support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, an ongoing collaborative project with the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF). A workshop was held in February 2011 in Oslo to take stock of the application phase and decide on next steps (see room document). A host of actors have used the draft guidance over the past two years and interest in this work has been very high. Particularly valuable elements include: the overview of key steps in evaluation, the description of evaluation questions, the introduction of conflict analysis and theories of change as tools for evaluative analysis and the clarification provided on concepts such as conflict sensitivity. A number of issues were identified to strengthen the guidance and revisions were done by a consultant, under the guidance of a joint management group made up of EVALNET and INCAF members and the Secretariats. The consultant briefly described the intensive revisions underway.

Action: Revised guidance will be shared with EVALNET and INCAF for comment. Members are encouraged to share concrete examples from work in situations of conflict and fragility for inclusion in the document.

VIII. UPDATES ON ONGOING WORK

a) Developing evaluation briefs

39. The first in the new series of Evaluation Insights, “Haiti earthquake response – emerging evaluation lessons” produced by Jonathan Patrick (DFID) was welcomed. Potential topics for future issues were suggested, including gender mainstreaming, food security, budget support, governance and South Sudan.

Action: Members interested in developing an “Evaluation Insights” brief are encouraged to contact the Secretariat for collaboration.

b) Impact evaluation

40. A report on the NONIE conference was provided by Jocelyne Delarue (AFD) which was held in March 2011 in Paris. She said that a big step forward has been taken over the past years in terms of comprehension of the issues involved in impact evaluation and also, in the quality of papers produced. She noted the many remaining challenges including the involvement of stakeholders and partners, capacity constraints in agencies and beyond, and methodological challenges. The UNEG representative indicated that the next NONIE conference will be organised by UNEG and held in the spring of 2012 in Rome.
c) Discussion of entry points for engaging other countries and partners

41. The Secretariat introduced the document “Opportunities and entry points for engaging other countries and partners”. In the discussion, members provided ideas and suggestions for entry points and noted the need for a long term approach to engage with multiple stakeholders including new and emerging donors, partner countries, foundations and civil society, and the broader development evaluation community. Karen Jorgensen (OECD DAC Secretariat) highlighted ongoing discussions on development co-operation with major emerging economies, including China, India and Brazil, and pointed out that evaluation and capacity development are priority areas of interest for these countries. She suggested members think about how to bring these partners into different activities of the network, including in the longer term.

42. It was noted that it would be important to be clear on what the network could offer to others, such as strong experience with managing evaluations and expertise on evaluation systems, and to seek a mutually beneficial dialogue. It was suggested that a workshop could be organised to clarify mutual expectations and potential collaboration. The interest of key stakeholders should be further explored (including among partners in the OECD enhanced engagement process) building on contacts and suggestions from members.

**Action:** The Network welcomes dialogue and collaboration with other partners, including other providers of development co-operation, and the Secretariat and Bureau will continue to explore options for concrete engagement with interested parties on topics of mutual interest.

IX. CURRENT EVALUATION ISSUES AND OTHER BUSINESS

Efficiency study

43. Key findings of the study “Tools and methods for evaluating the efficiency of development interventions” were shared by Michaela Zintl (BMZ) and Markus Palenberg (consultant). The study was motivated by the fact that efficiency analysis in evaluations was often lacking or inadequate. Starting with the theoretical foundations, it describes and assesses 15 distinct methods and explains how they can be used (see Power Point presentation and study). Joint work on testing selected methods and developing an experienced based implementation manual for evaluators and guidance for evaluation units commissioning evaluations was proposed. A number of members noted the current strong focus on concepts such as value for money and efficiency, and several members indicated interest in collaborating on exploring how to take work further (Canada, UK, Belgium).

**Action:** Members interested in collaborative work are invited to contact Michaela Zintl.

International Organisation for Co-operation in Evaluation (IOCE)

44. The representatives of IOCE described the organisation which groups national and regional evaluation associations and networks, and drew attention to the potential for collaboration, sharing experiences, and reach- out to a wide evaluation community (see meeting documentation).

45. The Secretariat drew attention to the preparations for the 6th Afrea Conference (see room document), planned for January 2012 in Ghana, and the opportunity to support capacity development in the region.
Any other business

46. The representative of the Council of Europe highlighted interest in collaborative evaluation work in the area of human rights and on topics of judicial reform and crime.

47. The Chair thanked outgoing members Saraswathi Menon (UNDP) and Joakim Molander (Sida) for their many important contributions to the Network and wished them well for the future.

INFORMAL AFTERNOON SESSION

X. JOINT EVALUATION MARKET PLACE

48. Members welcomed an overview of ongoing and future evaluation work provided by the Secretariat (see PowerPoint), based on the member evaluation plans inventory. Members encouraged continued sharing of ideas and suggestions for joint evaluations early on. It was suggested that the plans inventory could also be used over time to look at where a significant amount of evaluation work has been carried out and identify possible topics for policy briefs or where there are gaps requiring further work.

Action: Members will continue updating and sharing plans with the Secretariat on a regular basis. The Secretariat will explore focusing the analysis and discussion on one or two key sectors or themes for the next network meeting.

TASK TEAM MEETINGS

49. The steering group on evaluating budget support met and took decisions on next steps to revise the methodology and synthesise findings from the pilot evaluations (see separate note on that meeting, produced by the European Commission).
Participants List for DAC Network on Development Evaluation
Liste des Participants pour Réseau du CAD sur l’évaluation du développement

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