EVALUATING DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION **FUNDAMENTALS**

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WHAT IS EVALUATION?

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of a planned, ongoing or completed intervention, its design, implementation and results.

Evaluations focus on **results** – both **expected and unexpected** – looking beyond inputs and activities. Evaluations also help us to **understand causality**, or the drivers of observed changes.

Evaluations should provide information that is **credible and useful**, enabling the incorporation of lessons and insights into decision-making processes to support learning and accountability, and ultimately improve impacts.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Evaluation provides credible **evidence and insights** that are used for **accountability** and **learning**.

Evaluation is part of **good governance** and a key tool for decision-makers. In development co-operation, evaluation plays an important role due to the unique governance and accountability context.

Evaluation contributes to **better development results** for all.

| Strong evaluations provide evidence on what works, for whom, why, and under what circumstances. | Stakeholders use this evidence to make decisions, learn and improve, and to strengthen accountability. | This leads to improved interventions with better impacts through adjusted policies and scaling up of successful programmes. | Evaluation strengthens progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. |
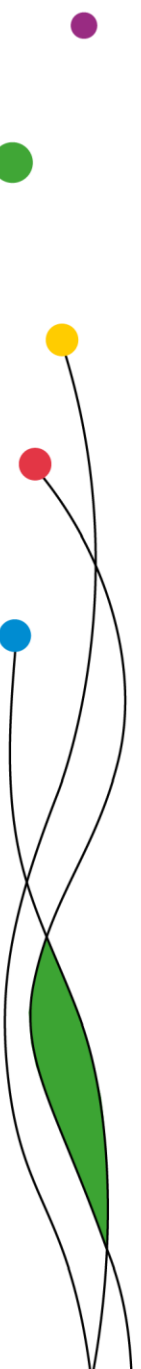
EVALUATION CRITERIA

Evaluation aims to determine relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

The DAC Evaluation Criteria outline the desired attributes of an intervention and the measures against which it should be evaluated.

These criteria set a quality standard: **all sustainable development interventions should be relevant and coherent, and use resources well to achieve objectives and positive impacts that last.**

This guidance by the OECD (2021) defines the six evaluation criteria and two principles for their use. Additional resources can be found here.

BASIC STANDARDS

The [OECD DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance](#) and the [Quality Standards for Development Evaluation](#) provide norms to guide evaluations. The Principles address the overall role of evaluation within institutions and the way it should operate whereas the Quality Standards guide individual evaluation processes and products.

Key standards include:

Independence: Evaluations are **credible, relevant, ethical** and mitigate bias. Approaches and methodologies are selected to suit the evaluation questions and the intervention being evaluated to produce credible evidence.

Usefulness: Evaluation **findings, conclusions and recommendations are useful and used –** they are fed back to relevant decision makers and people affected by the intervention.

Sufficient **capacity and resources** are allocated to evaluations, ensuring **effective and efficient** delivery.

Evaluations are **participatory:** they involve and address the learning and accountability needs of stakeholders – in particular, people impacted by the intervention – in a **collaborative manner**.

Section D.4 of [OECD DAC Peer Review Analytical Framework](#) sets out the expectations of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on evaluation.

GOOD PRACTICES

Evaluations are underpinned by clear guidelines

Institutions **clearly define the role of evaluation** and its contribution to achieving development goals.

Evaluation policies clarify roles and responsibilities, set standards, and inform the timing and programming of evaluations (including what is evaluated and when, and coverage standards such as requirements for an evaluation, set by geography, size or theme).

- Evaluation policies in Switzerland, Australia and Austria distinguish between different types of evaluation. They set out the mandate for the central evaluation unit and describe the role of evaluation in the development agency.

- Sida's evaluation handbook presents Sweden's approach to evaluation, including principles and criteria, roles and relationships. It also contains a step-by-step guide for the planning, preparation and commissioning of evaluations.

- New Zealand's evaluation policy stresses utility, partnership and participation as core principles underpinning evaluation quality.

GOOD PRACTICES

Evaluations are independent, credible and relevant

Agencies protect the independence of evaluation functions through a variety of policies, processes and practices, including defining clear reporting lines, using external consultants, and separating evaluation budgets and staff from the rest of the organisation.

Agencies increasingly engage programme staff and managers to identify learning needs and ensure that evaluations meet the needs of the intended audience, to be relevant and useful.

- DEval in Germany and EBA in Sweden are independent entities, providing independent evaluations and scientifically sound evidence to decision makers.

- In Belgium, the Special Evaluator reports directly to the parliament via the Minister for Development Co-operation and of Major Cities.

- In Denmark, all evaluations are undertaken by companies. Evaluation reference groups, including internal and external stakeholders, provide feedback and comments during the evaluation process.

GOOD PRACTICES

Evaluations are used for learning and accountability

Evaluation findings should **influence the decisions and actions** of policy makers, managers and staff. Many agencies have **management response systems** requiring decision makers to respond to evaluation findings and recommendations and many track follow-up actions.

- The Netherlands' evaluation unit IOB and the United Kingdom's ICAI make all reports public and report to parliament. Management is required to react and explain how evaluation results will be used.

- Canada's Evaluation Services and Learning Division has a specific unit on Knowledge Translation that supports the analysis of evaluation evidence to translate it for decision makers.

Evaluation results need to be communicated effectively and tailored to each stakeholder's interests.

- In Denmark, evaluation results are communicated to the Minister for Development Co-operation, a summary is forwarded to parliament and a press release posted on the public MFA website.

- Ireland's Evaluation Handbook supports accountability for development results by communicating evaluation findings to a variety of users; findings are presented through illustrations, charts, interactive web tools, and videos to meet each users' needs.

GOOD PRACTICES

## Evaluations are delivered efficiently and effectively

To produce **quality, credible** evaluation evidence, **administrations need adequate human and financial resources.** The approach and methodology for an individual evaluation is selected base on what will work best to answer the questions at hand.

Efficient and **effective** evaluations rely on **related systems in the project cycle** such as programme design, monitoring and statistics.

- The United Kingdom's evaluation strategy prioritises investment in individual skills and training.

- Iceland and Denmark, which have limited staff resources in the evaluation unit, work strategically with external consultants.

- The Netherlands and Canada conduct their own evaluations, using external support only for specific skills or tasks.

- The Inter-American Development Bank's Independent Evaluation Department carries out *ex ante* assessments to determine the evaluability of new projects and the strength of related systems.

GOOD PRACTICES
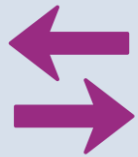
Evaluations are participatory and address stakeholder needs

Consultation with the end users of evaluations ensures a purpose-driven evaluative focus that addresses priority learning questions and needs**.**

- Portugal's triennial evaluation work plan is prepared in consultation with operational units and policy makers to fill knowledge gaps in decision making.

- AFD's evaluation policy sets out criteria for conducting programme evaluations, emphasising that they should fill the knowledge gap, match AFD's strategy priorities and add value.

Collaborative processes strengthen the quality and relevance of an evaluation**.** Partner countries and other stakeholders, including the communities affected by the intervention, should be meaningfully involved in the evaluation process.

- Under the auspices of the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, Colombia, Finland, Uganda and UNHCR co-managed an evaluation of efforts to protect refugee rights during the pandemic.

- Japan includes partner countries in tracking or implementing follow up actions and management responses and in setting the organisation's evaluation work programme.

MEASURING SUCCESS

How do we know if DAC members are moving in the right direction?

► **Institutions encourage a culture of results and learning,** where staff and partners seek out, learn from and act on findings. Decision makers **question assumptions** and **critically think** about an intervention's design, implementation and actual results.

► **Knowledge gaps** are identified and resources are allocated to fill them through evaluations and other suitable research methods.

► Evaluations generate **credible evidence** about what worked, what didn't and why. This allows institutions to **act on evaluation evidence** and make changes to their policies, funding and ways of working.

► Evaluation findings **meet the needs of targeted stakeholders**:

- Management, staff and implementing partners have the information they need to improve and adapt interventions when needed.
- Intended beneficiaries experience improved outcomes and fewer negative effects.
- Government expectations are met concerning oversight, accountability and evidence-based policy making.
- Media and the public benefit through transparency and accountability on spending.

► Institutions invest sufficient **human and financial institutional resources** for evaluation, representing sufficient resources in proportion to the portfolio of development co-operation being evaluated. Conducting evaluations has costs as well as benefits and is considered an **investment in improved effectiveness**.

RESOURCES

This [Glossary](#) defines key concepts in evaluation and results monitoring. This [guidance](#) covers the criteria and their use; application of a [gender equality and human rights lens](#) to the criteria is explored [here](#).

[This report](#) lays out 12 lessons on development evaluation drawn from OECD DAC members' peer reviews and the experiences of the members of the [OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation](#) (EvalNet).

Specific guidance on evaluating [conflict prevention and peacebuilding](#), [impact evaluations](#) and [managing joint evaluations](#) are useful references for evaluators and development practitioners.

[This report](#) (*update forthcoming*) provides information about the resources, policies and practices of EvalNet participants.

OECD DAC [Guiding principles on managing for sustainable development results](#) help development organisations navigate complex development co-operation and humanitarian challenges to reach their expected results.

[DAC Evaluation Resource Centre](#) (DEReC) is an online database of over 4000 thematic and data-based evaluations.

[Better Evaluation](#) is a comprehensive source of evaluation guidance and information.

Relevant topics in this series

[Managing for sustainable development results](#): the relationship between results and evaluation functions and findings is crucial for enabling the use of results information for learning.

[Risk management](#): evaluations provide valuable insights that support early risk identification and facilitate informed decision making to mitigate them.

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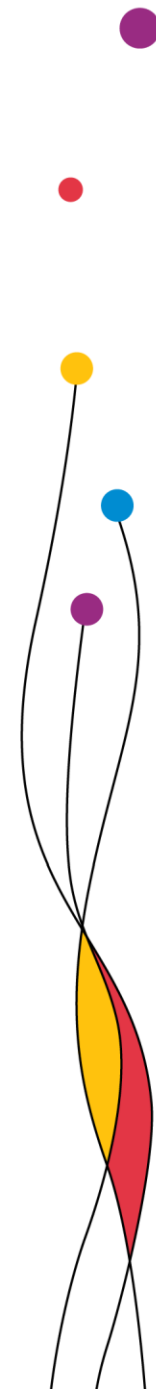
DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION
FUNDAMENTALS

This series unpacks development co-operation standards and illustrates how DAC members are applying them. Applying standards can help all actors to fulfil their ambitions and commitments.

Each *Fundamentals* document introduces a key aspect of effective development co-operation, sets out **basic standards**, offers **good practice** examples, and identifies **relevant resources.**

Other topics in this series, which will be expanded and updated over time, can be found on the **Development Co-operation TIPs • Tools Insights Practices** peer learning platform. For comments, contact **DCD.TIPs@oecd.org**.

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