



DAC Guidelines and Reference Series

# Quality Standards for Development Evaluation





*DAC Guidelines and Reference Series*

# **QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION**



DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE

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## THE NETWORK ON DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

The Network on Development Evaluation is a subsidiary body of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) at the OECD. Its purpose is to increase the effectiveness of international development programmes by supporting robust, informed and independent evaluation. The Network is a unique body, bringing together 32 bilateral donors and multilateral development agencies: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, and the International Monetary Fund.

For further information on the work of the DAC Evaluation Network, please visit the website [www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork](http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork) or email [dacevaluation.contact@oecd.org](mailto:dacevaluation.contact@oecd.org)

Also available in French under the title:

**Normes de qualité pour l'évaluation du développement**



# FOREWORD

## EVALUATION IN AN EVOLVING DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

**A** quality evaluation should provide credible and useful evidence to strengthen accountability for development results or contribute to learning processes, or both. These Standards aim to improve quality and ultimately to reinforce the contribution of evaluation to improving development outcomes.

New aid modalities, consensus on shared development goals and the commitments made in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) are changing the way development partners address global challenges. In this evolving development context, evaluation has an important role in informing policy decisions and helping to hold all development partners mutually accountable for development results. The way development evaluation is carried out must also reflect this new context, becoming more harmonised, better aligned and increasingly country-led, to meet the evaluation needs of all partners.

The DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation reflect this evolving framework and provide a guide to good practice in development evaluation. Built through international consensus, the Standards are intended to serve as an incentive and inspiration to improve evaluation practice.

The draft Standards were approved for a three-year test phase in 2006 and have been revised based on experience. A range of development partners have contributed to this process, including donors and partner countries. Initial input was provided during a workshop in New Delhi in 2005. A 2008 survey of the use of the Standards, a 2009 workshop held in Auckland and comments submitted by the members of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, helped to improve and finalise the text, with support from the Secretariat of the OECD. The Standards were approved by the DAC Network on Development Evaluation on 8 January 2010 and endorsed by the DAC on 1 February 2010.



**Nick York**

*Chair of the OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation*

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### **Terms used in this document**

The term ‘development intervention’ is used in the Standards as a general term for any activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, theme, sector, instrument, modality, institutional performance, etc, aimed to promote development.

The term ‘evaluation report’ is used to cover all evaluation products, which may take different forms, including written or oral reports, visual presentations, community workshops, etc.

# INTRODUCTION

The DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation identify the key pillars needed for a quality development evaluation process and product. They are intended for use by evaluation managers and practitioners. The Standards are not mandatory, but provide a guide to good practice. They were developed primarily for use by DAC members, but broader use by all other development partners is welcome.

The Standards aim to improve quality and ultimately to strengthen the contribution of evaluation to improving development outcomes. Specifically, the Standards are intended to:

- improve the quality of development evaluation processes and products,
- facilitate the comparison of evaluations across countries,
- support partnerships and collaboration on joint evaluations, and
- increase development partners' use of each others' evaluation findings.

The Standards support evaluations that adhere to the *DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance* (1991), including impartiality, independence, credibility and usefulness, and should be read in conjunction with those principles. The Principles focus on the management and institutional set up of evaluation systems and remain the benchmark against which OECD DAC members are assessed in DAC Peer Reviews. By contrast, the Standards inform evaluation processes and products. The Standards can be used during the different stages of the evaluation process and in a variety of ways, including to assess the quality of evaluations, inform practice, strengthen and harmonise evaluation training, or as an input to create evaluation guidelines or policy documents.

The Standards should be applied sensibly and adapted to local and national contexts and the objectives of each evaluation. They are not intended to be used as an evaluation manual and do not supplant specific guidance on particular types of evaluation, methodologies or approaches. Further, these Standards do not exclude the use of other evaluation quality standards and related texts, such as those developed by individual agencies, professional evaluation societies and networks.

This document is structured in line with a typical evaluation process: defining purpose, planning, designing, implementing, reporting, and learning from and using evaluation results. The Standards begin with some overall considerations to keep in mind throughout the evaluation process. An annex provides references to related OECD DAC development evaluation publications.

# 1 OVERARCHING CONSIDERATIONS

## 1.1 DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

Development evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed development intervention, its design, implementation and results. In the development context, evaluation refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of a development intervention.

When carrying out a development evaluation the following overarching considerations are taken into account throughout the process.

## 1.2 FREE AND OPEN EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process is transparent and independent from programme management and policy-making, to enhance credibility.

## 1.3 EVALUATION ETHICS

Evaluation abides by relevant professional and ethical guidelines and codes of conduct for individual evaluators. Evaluation is undertaken with integrity and honesty. Commissioners, evaluation managers and evaluators respect human rights and differences in culture, customs, religious beliefs and practices of all stakeholders.

Evaluators are mindful of gender roles, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, language and other differences when designing and carrying out the evaluation.



## 1.4 PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

In order to increase ownership of development and build mutual accountability for results, a partnership approach to development evaluation is systematically considered early in the process. The concept of partnership connotes an inclusive process, involving different stakeholders such as government, parliament, civil society, intended beneficiaries and international partners.

## 1.5 CO-ORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT

To help improve co-ordination of development evaluation and strengthen country systems, the evaluation process takes into account national and local evaluation plans, activities and policies.

## 1.6 CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Positive effects of the evaluation process on the evaluation capacity of development partners are maximised. An evaluation may, for instance, support capacity development by improving evaluation knowledge and skills, strengthening evaluation management, stimulating demand for and use of evaluation findings, and supporting an environment of accountability and learning.

## 1.7 QUALITY CONTROL

Quality control is exercised throughout the evaluation process. Depending on the evaluation's scope and complexity, quality control is carried out through an internal and/or external mechanism, for example peer review, advisory panel, or reference group.



## 2 PURPOSE, PLANNING AND DESIGN

### 2.1 RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The rationale, purpose and intended use of the evaluation are stated clearly, addressing: why the evaluation is being undertaken at this particular point in time, why and for whom it is undertaken, and how the evaluation is to be used for learning and/or accountability functions.

For example the evaluation's overall purpose may be to:

- contribute to improving a development policy, procedure or technique,
- consider the continuation or discontinuation of a project or programme,
- account for public expenditures and development results to stakeholders and tax-payers.

### 2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The specific objectives of the evaluation clarify what the evaluation aims to find out. For example to:

- ascertain results (output, outcome, impact) and assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability of a specific development intervention,
- provide findings, conclusions and recommendations with respect to a specific development intervention in order to draw lessons for future design and implementation.

### 2.3 EVALUATION OBJECT AND SCOPE

The development intervention being evaluated (the evaluation object) is clearly defined, including a description of the intervention logic or theory. The evaluation scope defines the time period, funds spent, geographical area, target groups, organisational set-up, implementation arrangements, policy and institutional context and other dimensions to be covered by the evaluation. Discrepancies between the planned and actual implementation of the development intervention are identified.

## **2.4 EVALUABILITY**

The feasibility of an evaluation is assessed. Specifically, it should be determined whether or not the development intervention is adequately defined and its results verifiable, and if evaluation is the best way to answer questions posed by policy makers or stakeholders.

## **2.5 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

Relevant stakeholders are involved early on in the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute to evaluation design, including by identifying issues to be addressed and evaluation questions to be answered.

## **2.6 SYSTEMATIC CONSIDERATION OF JOINT EVALUATION**

To contribute to harmonisation, alignment and an efficient division of labour, donor agencies and partner countries systematically consider the option of a joint evaluation, conducted collaboratively by more than one agency and/or partner country.

Joint evaluations address both questions of common interest to all partners and specific questions of interest to individual partners.

## **2.7 EVALUATION QUESTIONS**

The evaluation objectives are translated into relevant and specific evaluation questions. Evaluation questions are decided early on in the process and inform the development of the methodology. The evaluation questions also address cross-cutting issues, such as gender, environment and human rights.

## **2.8 SELECTION AND APPLICATION OF EVALUATION CRITERIA**

The evaluation applies the agreed DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The application of these and any additional criteria depends on the evaluation questions and the objectives of the evaluation. If a particular criterion is not applied and/or any additional criteria added, this is explained in the evaluation report. All criteria applied are defined in unambiguous terms.

## **2.9 SELECTION OF APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose, scope and evaluation questions determine the most appropriate approach and methodology for each evaluation. An inception report can be used to inform the selection of an evaluation approach.

The methodology is developed in line with the evaluation approach chosen. The methodology includes specification and justification of the design of the evaluation and the techniques for data collection and analysis. The selected methodology answers the evaluation questions using credible evidence. A clear distinction is made between the different result levels (intervention logic containing an objective-means hierarchy stating input, output, outcome, impact).

Indicators for measuring achievement of the objectives are validated according to generally accepted criteria, such as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely). Disaggregated data should be presented to clarify any differences between sexes and between different groups of poor people, including excluded groups.

## **2.10 RESOURCES**

The resources provided for the evaluation are adequate, in terms of funds, staff and skills, to ensure that the objectives of the evaluation can be fulfilled effectively.

## **2.11 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES**

The governance and management structures are designed to fit the evaluation's context, purpose, scope and objectives.

The evaluation governance structure safeguards credibility, inclusiveness, and transparency. Management organises the evaluation process and is responsible for day-to-day administration. Depending on the size and complexity of the evaluation, these functions may be combined or separate.

## **2.12 DOCUMENT DEFINING PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS**

The planning and design phase culminates in the drafting of a clear and complete written document, usually called "Terms of Reference" (TOR), presenting the purpose, scope, and objectives of the evaluation; the methodology to be used; the resources and time allocated; reporting requirements; and any other expectations regarding the evaluation process and products. The document is agreed to by the evaluation manager(s) and those carrying out the evaluation. This document can alternatively be called "scope of work" or "evaluation mandate".



## 3 IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORTING

### 3.1 EVALUATION TEAM

A transparent and open procurement procedure is used for selecting the evaluation team.

The members of the evaluation team possess a mix of evaluative skills and thematic knowledge. Gender balance is considered and the team includes professionals from partner countries or regions concerned.

### 3.2 INDEPENDENCE OF EVALUATORS VIS-À-VIS STAKEHOLDERS

Evaluators are independent from the development intervention, including its policy, operations and management functions, as well as intended beneficiaries. Possible conflicts of interest are addressed openly and honestly. The evaluation team is able to work freely and without interference. It is assured of co-operation and access to all relevant information.

### 3.3 CONSULTATION AND PROTECTION OF STAKEHOLDERS

The full range of stakeholders, including both partners and donors, are consulted during the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute. The criteria for identifying and selecting stakeholders are specified.

The rights and welfare of participants in the evaluation are protected. Anonymity and confidentiality of individual informants is protected when requested or as needed.

### 3.4 IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION WITHIN ALLOTTED TIME AND BUDGET

The evaluation is conducted and results are made available to commissioners in a timely manner to achieve the objectives of the evaluation. The evaluation is carried out efficiently and within budget. Changes in conditions and circumstances are reported and un-envisaged changes to timeframe and budget are explained, discussed and agreed between the relevant parties.

### 3.5 EVALUATION REPORT

The evaluation report can readily be understood by the intended audience(s) and the form of the report is appropriate given the purpose(s) of the evaluation.

The report covers the following elements and issues:

### 3.6 CLARITY AND REPRESENTATIVENESS OF SUMMARY

A written evaluation report contains an executive summary. The summary provides an overview of the report, highlighting the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and any overall lessons.

### 3.7 CONTEXT OF THE DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION

The evaluation report describes the context of the development intervention, including:

- policy context, development agency and partner policies, objectives and strategies;
- development context, including socio-economic, political and cultural factors;
- institutional context and stakeholder involvement.

The evaluation identifies and assesses the influence of the context on the performance of the development intervention.

### 3.8 INTERVENTION LOGIC

The evaluation report describes and assesses the intervention logic or theory, including underlying assumptions and factors affecting the success of the intervention.



### **3.9 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF INFORMATION SOURCES**

The evaluation report describes the sources of information used (documents, respondents, administrative data, literature, etc.) in sufficient detail so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed. The evaluation report explains the selection of case studies or any samples. Limitations regarding the representativeness of the samples are identified.

The evaluation cross-validates the information sources and critically assesses the validity and reliability of the data.

Complete lists of interviewees and other information sources consulted are included in the report, to the extent that this does not conflict with the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

### **3.10 EXPLANATION OF THE METHODOLOGY USED**

The evaluation report describes and explains the evaluation methodology and its application. In assessing outcomes and impacts, attribution and/or contribution to results are explained. The report acknowledges any constraints encountered and how these have affected the evaluation, including the independence and impartiality of the evaluation. It details the techniques used for data collection and analysis. The choices are justified and limitations and shortcomings are explained.

### **3.11 CLARITY OF ANALYSIS**

The evaluation report presents findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons separately and with a clear logical distinction between them.

Findings flow logically from the analysis of the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions are substantiated by findings and analysis. Recommendations and any lessons follow logically from the conclusions. Any assumptions underlying the analysis are made explicit.



### **3.12 EVALUATION QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

The evaluation report answers all the questions detailed in the TOR for the evaluation. Where this is not possible, explanations are provided. The original questions, as well as any revisions to these questions, are documented in the report for readers to be able to assess whether the evaluation team has sufficiently addressed the questions, including those related to cross-cutting issues, and met the evaluation objectives.

### **3.13 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CHANGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION**

The evaluation report explains any limitations in process, methodology or data, and discusses validity and reliability. It indicates any obstruction of a free and open evaluation process which may have influenced the findings. Any discrepancies between the planned and actual implementation and products of the evaluation are explained.

### **3.14 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF DISAGREEMENTS WITHIN THE EVALUATION TEAM**

Evaluation team members have the opportunity to dissociate themselves from particular judgements and recommendations on which they disagree. Any unresolved differences of opinion within the team are acknowledged in the report.

### **3.15 INCORPORATION OF STAKEHOLDERS' COMMENTS**

Relevant stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on the draft report. The final evaluation report reflects these comments and acknowledges any substantive disagreements. In disputes about facts that can be verified, the evaluators investigate and change the draft where necessary. In the case of opinion or interpretation, stakeholders' comments are reproduced verbatim, in an annex or footnote, to the extent that this does not conflict with the rights and welfare of participants.

## 4 FOLLOW-UP, USE AND LEARNING

### 4.1 TIMELINESS, RELEVANCE AND USE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation is designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users. Conclusions, recommendations and lessons are clear, relevant, targeted and actionable so that the evaluation can be used to achieve its intended learning and accountability objectives. The evaluation is delivered in time to ensure optimal use of the results.

Systematic dissemination, storage and management of the evaluation report is ensured to provide easy access to all development partners, to reach target audiences, and to maximise the learning benefits of the evaluation.

### 4.2 SYSTEMATIC RESPONSE TO AND FOLLOW-UP ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are systematically responded to and action taken by the person(s)/ body targeted in each recommendation. This includes a formal management response and follow-up. All agreed follow-up actions are tracked to ensure accountability for their implementation.

### 4.3 DISSEMINATION

The evaluation results are presented in an accessible format and are systematically distributed internally and externally for learning and follow-up actions and to ensure transparency. In light of lessons emerging from the evaluation, additional interested parties in the wider development community are identified and targeted to maximise the use of relevant findings.

## ANNEX 1. RELATED DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION PUBLICATIONS

*OECD DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance*  
(OECD DAC, 1991)

*OECD DAC Principles for Effective Aid*  
(OECD DAC, 1992)

*OECD DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management*  
(English/ French/ Spanish and other languages,OECD DAC, 2002-2008)

*Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability*  
(OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2001)

*OECD DAC Guidance for Managing Joint Evaluations*  
(OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2006)

*Evaluation Systems and Use, a Working Tool for Peer Reviews and Assessments*  
(OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2006)



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# Quality Standards for Development Evaluation

The DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation provide a guide to good practice in development evaluation. They are intended to improve the quality of evaluation processes and products and to facilitate collaboration. Built through international consensus, the Standards outline the key quality dimensions for each phase of a typical evaluation process: defining purpose, planning, designing, implementing, reporting, and learning from and using evaluation results. The Standards begin with some overall considerations to keep in mind throughout the evaluation process. An annex provides references to related OECD DAC development evaluation publications. For more information on this publication and the work of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation, visit [www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork](http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork).

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