

Donor Experience with Country Program Evaluations

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September 2002

OECD Development Assistance Committee Expert Group on Aid Evaluation

OECD DAC is a lead group in collecting and disseminating the lessons of donor agencies' experience with Country Program Evaluation, their approaches and methods, and the constraints they have faced.

In March 1999, the OECD DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation convened a workshop in Vienna to promote learning on the subject in light of the ongoing shift toward country programming in the donor community. Twenty-one donor countries or multilateral aid organizations, as well as seven partner countries, were represented at the workshop, including three participants from CIDA.

This section summarizes some of the information contained in the workshop and other DAC materials, including *Evaluating Country Programmes Vienna Workshop* (1999) and *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management* (2002).

DAC Definitions of Program Evaluations

The DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation offers the following definitions for program evaluations:

- *Country Program Evaluation*. This is an evaluation of one or more donors' portfolio of development interventions, and the assistance strategy behind them, in a partner country.
- *Sector Program Evaluation*. This is an evaluation of a cluster of development interventions in a sector within one country or across countries, all of which contribute to the achievement of a specific development goal.
- *Program Evaluation*. This is an evaluation of a set of interventions, marshaled to attain specific global, regional, country or sectoral development objectives.

The term Country Program Evaluation (CPE) refers to a range of evaluation exercises. The desk study prepared by DAC consultants for the 1999 workshop identified 108 CPEs that were conducted by donor agencies between 1990 and 1999. The following 'borderline cases' were included in the sample:

- Evaluations of all donor activities in a given country, even when these activities take the form of numerous, largely uncoordinated projects rather than an integrated country program; and
- Evaluations of the major part of a donor's country program as a case study evaluation of agency-wide donor goals.

Coverage of Country Program Evaluations

Donors undertook 'lighter' or 'heavier' CPE exercises in response to a range of conditions and factors. Some CPEs were large, expensive evaluation projects lasting two to three years. Others were much smaller in scope and program coverage, and designed to make an immediate contribution to the donor's programming cycle.

Generally, the exercise was ‘lighter’ or ‘heavier’ depending on the structure of the country program, the evaluation issues being addressed, the amount of programming covered, the time-period under review, and the forms of the donor-partner relationship being examined.

While ‘heavier’ CPEs produce more conclusive findings, and allow more comparative review of country program performance, ‘lighter’ CPEs can produce policy-relevant recommendations rapidly, which is particularly useful when the aid program is set within changing circumstances. These could be country-specific (such as reform or transition processes) or donor-specific (such as program planning).

Table 1 ‘Lighter’ versus ‘Heavier’ Country Program Evaluations

	‘Lighter’ CPE	‘Heavier’ CPE
Donor’s Aid Investment	Donor’s aid program is small relative to the national economy, other donors, or its global operations.	Donor’s aid program is large and central to the country, and aid plays a major role in its development performance. The CP is a significant part of donor’s global activities
Donor Country Program	Donor’s aid to country is numerous largely uncoordinated initiatives. It is neither typical nor experimental in nature, limiting the value of the lessons that might be learned	Donor’s aid to the country is formulated as an integrated country program. It is typical of the donor’s CPs, increasing the value of lessons learned to the donor.
Scope of Evaluation	Examines CP performance.	Examines CP performance as well as non-aid issues (e.g. donor-partner relations).
Program Coverage	Covers selected program components, and large or easy-to-assess projects	Examines most CP components, most large projects, and overall CP performance
Evaluation Issues	Relevance, efficiency, coherence and effectiveness of the country program.	Relevance, efficiency, coherence, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.
Program Period	Looks at recent, current and near-future activities	Looks at long period of programming, and donor-partner relations
Data Availability	Weak program information base (from monitoring and evaluation) makes it hard to gather data and assess performance.	Strong information base (providing baseline and current data) makes analysis and benchmarking performance possible.
Nature of Findings	Indicative findings	Conclusive findings
Use of Evaluation	Immediate use in program cycle for program planning or adjustment.	Downstream use in long-term program review and reporting.

Evaluation Criteria for Country Program Evaluations

Most of the CPEs in the DAC sample addressed some or all of the following evaluation criteria:

- *Relevance* – The extent to which objectives of the country program were consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners’ and donors’ policies
- *Efficiency* – A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) were converted to results.
- *Effectiveness* – The extent to which the country program’s objectives and/or intended results were achieved
- *Impact* – The positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by the country program, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended

- *Sustainability* – The continuation of benefits from the country program after major development assistance has been completed, which includes the probability of continued long-term benefits
- *Value-for-money* – The relationship between resources expended to achieve results and the results achieved.
- *Consistency* – The degree of complementarity between the various elements of the donor’s country program.
- *Coherence* – The degree of complementarity between elements of the country program, as well as between the country program and the ‘non-aid’ aspects of the donor-partner relationship, including diplomatic and trade relationships.

Identifying the Country Programming Interventions to Evaluate

Most of the CPEs in the DAC sample examined only a portion of the elements of a donor’s country program. By and large, the donors employed one of two basic methodologies for selecting the elements or interventions to examine:

- Donors examined the largest projects only, ensuring they were drawn from across the range of modalities and sectors, so that they comprised a set percentage of all disbursements in the period.
- Donors examined a sample of interventions that had either been evaluated before or would be relatively easy to evaluate.

Methodological Considerations

The evaluations in the DAC sample took these methodological issues into consideration in the design and implementation of the CPE:

- CPEs need an evaluation framework to assess actual performance against intentions. Most often, donors relied on country program frameworks, which in some cases articulated logical hierarchies of expected results. In cases where the program framework was missing, or insufficiently robust for the analysis, donors relied on corporate frameworks for assessing CP performance.
- CPEs need indicators for use in measuring performance. In the sample of CPEs, some donors’ country programs had performance indicators that were identified in the program design and planning stage. Others relied on performance indicators from the corporate frameworks. In some cases, the donors developed performance indicators for the evaluation itself, and sought to ensure wide acceptance of the chosen indicators among key evaluation stakeholders.
- CPEs need a conceptual model for connecting the projects, initiatives or interventions supported in the country program to the country program or corporate framework. Donors articulated the elements or components of the country program, and would cluster projects within these components. These components often comprised the donor’s programming in a sector, sub-sector, thematic or priority area. This clustering of projects would facilitate the identification of evaluation work packages for planning, data collection, analysis and reporting.
- Donors analyzed program performance in light of the country context. Most donors approached the evaluation from the ‘inside out’ – that is, they evaluated program performance, and then asked how key factors in the country context contributed to or

constrained the achievement of results. In a few cases, however, the donors approached the evaluation from the ‘outside in’ – they assessed the changes taking place in a country over a historical period, and then asked how the country program contributed to these changes.

- Many donors found it necessary (though difficult) to establish benchmarks for CP performance. The most common plan was to compare their CP performance with another donor’s CP performance in the same country, or to compare their CP performance in one country with their CP performance in another country. Where this was not possible, donors established benchmarks by comparing some elements of their CP performance with other elements of their CP performance (e.g. comparing programming in basic health care with basic education); or by comparing some elements of their CP performance with the same elements in other donors’ programs in the country (using findings from thematic, sector or project evaluation reports).
- Many donors emphasized the importance of ‘stakeholder’ dimensions of CPEs, and developed processes and methodologies for ensuring stakeholder participation and ownership in the exercise. They involved stakeholders in the evaluation in order to ensure better use of the findings and recommendations in the program management cycle.

Use and Dissemination of Findings from Country Program Evaluations

Donors in the DAC sample used the findings from CPEs for assessing past performance or planning future programming. When donors approached the CPE as a *summative evaluation*, they typically sought to describe and understand past successes and failures, and used the CPE as an input to an agency-wide review of its goals, methods and achievements. When donors approached the CPE as a *formative evaluation*, they typically observed performance as the basis for generating detailed recommendations regarding the next programming cycle.

The planned use of the CPE will shape the dissemination of findings. With some donors, the CPE is an internal document that is circulated only within very restricted circles and not discussed in any depth with the partner country. Donors in the DAC sample that reported sharing the CPE with the partner government, also found that the partner typically made little if any use of it. Some donors disseminated CPE reports to their own Parliament for discussion, or published the findings for public consultation.

Lessons Learned for CIDA

In designing its CPE for the Philippines, CIDA may wish to take the following lessons from other donors’ experience into consideration:

1. A desire to use the CPE for understanding past performance as well as shaping future country programming will increase the size of the evaluation exercise and effort required.
2. A desire to address a full range of evaluation issues (including relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, value-for-money, consistency and coherence) will increase the size of the evaluation exercise and effort.
3. A desire to examine program performance as well as management issues, donor-partner relations, and donor collaboration will increase the size of the evaluation exercise and effort.
4. A desire to ensure stakeholder participation and ownership in the CPE will increase the size of the evaluation exercise and effort.