



# **DAC Tokyo workshop on Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability**

**DAC WORKING PARTY ON AID EVALUATION**

## **Feedback for Better Decision-Making**

**Submitted by**

**'Ministry of Foreign Affairs'  
Norway**

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**Hosted by the Government of Japan  
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Paper prepared for the DAC Tokyo Workshop on "Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability", 26-28 September 2000

## **FEEDBACK FOR BETTER DECISION-MAKING**

### **Summary**

The paper describes how decisions are made and evaluations followed up in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The overall purpose of evaluations is described in relation to development policy and development cooperation. The paper focuses on measures for incorporating the results of evaluations into policy-making on development issues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and into the work of NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. The paper describes how these measures contribute to decision-making and follow-up, and methods and results are discussed on the basis of our experience.

### **Introduction**

I would like to thank Japan for hosting this workshop. Its topic is particularly relevant because we in Norway have recently been working on strengthening feedback mechanisms in our evaluation process, especially internal mechanisms that will allow us to make better use of evaluations for learning and management purposes. However, all aspects of the way evaluation is used should be regularly reviewed, and I have been looking forward to taking part in what I believe will be interesting discussions during the workshop. I also appreciate very much having the opportunity to address the issue of feedback for better decision-making, and particularly so before such a distinguished gathering of experienced colleagues.

I shall be describing the Ministry's evaluation system and the procedures we have for serving senior management and politicians. While preparing the paper I have consulted colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, to hear their opinions of current procedures and practice. Norway had a change of Government early this year, and I was also able to hear the views of former political leaders on these issues.

I shall be focusing on the stages in the evaluation process that are of special relevance to decision-making, but I also hope to show how the various steps of the process are interlinked and dependent on each other.

## The Norwegian Context

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for evaluating development policies and development cooperation. The Evaluation Unit is currently part of the Policy Planning and Evaluation Department, which reports directly to the Secretary General of the Ministry.

The Unit's mandate is, however, to cover all the Ministry's fields of activity, that is to say activities relevant to both foreign policy and development cooperation policy. Most of our evaluation work is still in the development field, because it is only two years since the mandate was widened to include foreign policy.

We are also mandated to evaluate the activities of NORAD as well as the activities of national and international non-governmental organisations that are supported financially by the Ministry and NORAD. The overall budget for official development assistance this year is 1.3 billion dollars. This includes both bilateral and multilateral development cooperation and support to humanitarian and other development organisations.

In her statement to the Storting (the parliament) on development cooperation policy in May 2000, the Minister of International Development, Ms Anne Kristin Sydnes, emphasised that development cooperation policy is an integral part of foreign policy and international efforts to promote peace and security.

With respect to the fight against poverty, she stressed the importance of employing the instruments that yield the best results. If new approaches work better than old ones, they are the ones we must choose. If alliances with other actors give better results, there is no reason not to join forces. For many of the poorest developing countries the debt servicing burden is so great that it undermines any real opportunity for development, and the Minister pointed out that the developing countries will only benefit from the opportunities presented by globalisation if there is a strong, open, rule-based trade system.

These extracts from the statement are a good illustration of how complex the agenda for development policy and development cooperation has become. They also show the relevance of feedback from evaluations for decision-making and implementation of the development cooperation. In her statement, the Minister stated that quality must be ensured, that evaluation will be given high priority and that the development cooperation administration will be made even more effective.

The Ministry's evaluation capacity is limited, and a selective approach is therefore needed. We invite all departments in the Ministry and NORAD, as well as the embassies where NORAD representatives are integrated, to propose evaluation projects. The main criteria used to select projects are whether they will provide new insight and enhance understanding of broad and comprehensive issues, such as macro issues at country or sector level, and whether they deal with cross-sectoral issues or new types of activity. Priority is also given to the timeliness and relevance of projects as determined by the management of the Ministry. On this basis a yearly programme of evaluation projects is approved by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development. The budget for this year's programme is 2 million dollars, and with a staff of 5 people we plan to publish 10 evaluation reports in 2000.

All evaluation reports are made public. The aim is to inform the Storting and the general public, and as I mentioned earlier, the reports are used as an instrument for management and policy-making internally. It should be noted that NORAD also carries out internal reviews for quality assurance of projects and other activities.

### **Recommendations for Decisions**

The Evaluation Unit of the Ministry prepares terms of reference for an evaluation in consultation with the parties involved, and thereafter an evaluation team of independent experts, researchers and consultants is selected, normally after a bidding procedure, to carry out the evaluation. The Evaluation Unit checks that the draft report corresponds to the terms of reference, and makes sure, in consultation with the parties involved, that the factual information in the report is correct.

When an evaluation report has been completed by the evaluation team and accepted by the Ministry, it is circulated for comment to the relevant departments within the Ministry and to NORAD and any other parties involved. On the basis of the final report and any comments submitted, the Evaluation Unit prepares a memorandum to the political staff containing proposals for decisions.

The memorandum summarises the experience gained during the evaluation process, the content of the report and its recommendations. It also includes comments on the report's content, conclusions and recommendations for follow-up. Reasons for any disagreement with regard to conclusions and recommendations are included in the memorandum. It concludes with the recommendations of the Evaluation Unit.

The memorandum is regarded as an important step for following-up the evaluation. Because some time elapses between the decision to carry out an evaluation and the production of the memorandum, it is a challenge to produce relevant and timely information.

Our experience is that evaluations at country or sector level make a useful contribution to raising awareness of dilemmas and systemic difficulties in development cooperation. This kind of information often serves as a useful background for future action by the Ministry and NORAD, and also in connection with the contact and negotiations with partner countries.

Although the recommendations in a memorandum depend on the nature of the evaluation, they should generally be concrete and possible to implement in the near future. The recommendations in the memorandum are based on those in the report itself, and it is important to make this clear to the evaluation team before it starts its work.

Sometimes, however, there is disagreement on the content and conclusions of the evaluation reports. In such cases, it is very important that the positions of the parties are clearly spelled out. When taken seriously, disagreement on the results of an evaluation report does not seem to have a negative impact on the feedback and follow-up of the evaluation report. On the contrary, disagreement may result in greater focus on the evaluation report itself, and in more debate on its content and conclusions. Our experience is that disagreements and discussions with the evaluation team and between the various internal units during the evaluation process are normal and that sufficient time should be allowed to sort them out.

We should bear in mind that the evaluation process is also an opportunity for expressing legitimate interests, and that the parties must therefore be given an opportunity to make their opinions known. Any recommendation for changes in future policies and activities should be based on this. It is important for the follow-up process to ensure that people have confidence in the evaluation from the start. This means that the process must be open and transparent, and the parties must be informed and involved throughout. In order to create such an open atmosphere and reciprocal respect, we require the evaluation team to brief people who are interviewed and to organise seminars for the parties involved during the process to provide feedback and for exchanges of views on the evaluation topic.

However, it is crucial that disagreements on content and conclusions are sorted out between the parties, so that the recommendations in the memorandum are based on as much agreement as possible.

### **Political Decisions**

A meeting between the political staff, the Evaluation Unit, the department responsible and NORAD is held in order to discuss the proposed decisions and their follow-up. After this, on the basis of the memorandum and the meeting, the political staff determines which recommendations are to be followed up and by whom, and what the time limits should be.

These meetings with the political staff are a recent development, and our experience so far is positive. As many evaluation reports address broad issues, the meetings have gathered people from several departments and different levels in the organisations. The political staff have set aside sufficient time for the meetings and have invited comments and an exchange of views. The meetings have drawn attention both to the evaluation reports and to the specific policy issues in question. So far, our experience is that the meetings are an efficient use of time and stimulating for the parties involved.

When the recommendations are well thought out and based on agreement, the proposed decisions are likely to be accepted. In some cases, the political staff have adjusted and corrected some of the recommended actions. They have particularly emphasised the international context of actions, for example the importance of better cooperation with the authorities in a recipient country, or of multi-donor work to improve understanding of structural problems or constraints on the economic development of a particular country.

According to former Minister of International Development Hilde F. Johnson, the successful use of evaluations for policy-making requires both a good understanding of the political issues and satisfactory methodology. She has stressed that the evaluation process must be a collective effort by the parties involved, and must result in well prepared memoranda that take into account different views and contain realistic and unified recommendations.

### **Follow-up**

The Evaluation Unit incorporates the decisions of the political staff on follow-up in a separate memorandum. A letter with instructions on the follow-up is sent from the Secretary General to the department responsible and other parties involved. NORAD is informed and instructed by the department responsible.

The follow-up memorandum repeats the main points to be followed-up and reflects the political emphasis of the recommendations. It also contains the main points of the discussion at the meeting with the political staff.

From the follow-up memoranda made during the last year it is clear that there are many different ways of following-up an evaluation. Here, I would like to mention the evaluation of development cooperation with Tanzania carried out in 1999. It was made at the time of the CDF (Comprehensive Development Framework) initiative, and it was decided that in the future, Norwegian cooperation with Tanzania was to be seen in the light of a development strategy drawn up by Tanzania itself. This initiative signalled that in the future, country assistance strategies will be drawn up with the recipient country in charge, and that the recipient country will also play a more active role in donor coordination.

The departments responsible and NORAD are supposed to report back via the Assistant Secretary General to the Secretary General within six months at the latest and given information on the measures that have been introduced or planned in order to follow up the decision of the political staff. If, after six months, the response is considered to be unsatisfactory, the Secretary General may decide that a study is to be made to clarify the reason why the decisions have not been followed up.

The responsibility of the Evaluation Unit ends when the follow-up memorandum is written. After this, the responsibility lies with the operational departments.

By and large we feel that the operational departments do follow-up the decisions. We recognise, however, that there are problems in keeping to the time limits for implementation of the decisions that are made. Many of these reports are not made within the time limit of six months. The problem has been discussed and we now foresee a stronger involvement at this stage of the follow-up by the Assistant Secretary General with assistance from the Evaluation Unit.

### **Concluding remarks**

There are procedures for integrating the results of the evaluations into policy-making in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and into the work of NORAD. By and large, the system is considered to be satisfactory. Our aim is that each single evaluation should become a process by which new knowledge is incorporated into the ongoing work of the Ministry and NORAD.

In order to ensure the quality of the evaluation process, two things are important. The recommendations should be realistic and based as far as possible on consensus, and the political staff must show a keen interest in using the information generated by the process.







# **DAC Tokyo workshop on Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability**

**DAC WORKING PARTY ON AID EVALUATION**

**Assessing and Learning in Managing for  
Results in USAID: Lessons Learned**

**Submitted by**

**'U.S. Agency for International Development'  
United States of America**

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**Hosted by the Government of Japan  
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**ASSESSING AND LEARNING IN MANAGING FOR RESULTS IN  
USAID: LESSONS LEARNED**

**Jean DuRette  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
August 2000**

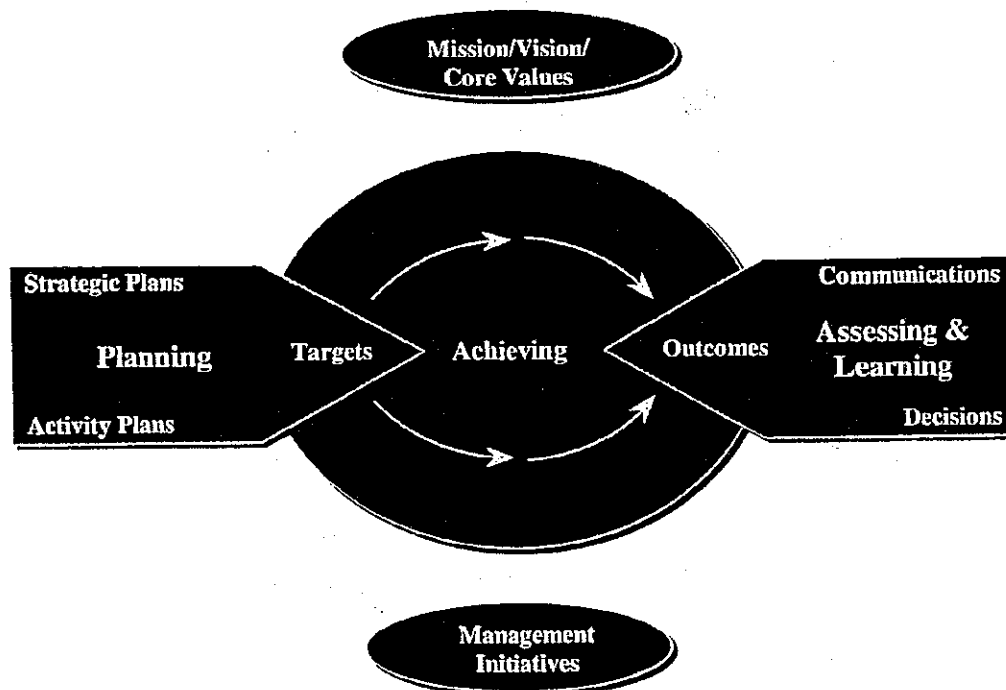
This paper will focus on USAID's internal assessing and learning process and the use of "feedback" or information generated through performance monitoring and evaluation and transmitted to those for whom it is useful and relevant. The discussion is placed in the context of USAID's results-based management system.

Beginning in 1994 USAID initiated results-based management as part of the broader U.S. Government mandate that agencies focus programs on the achievement of intended results. The sections below outline key features of the USAID results-based management system, use of information in managing for results, the responsibilities of the USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation, and the principal lessons learned over the past years.

### USAID's Results-Based Programming System

The objectives underpinning USAID's results management system are to limit USAID/Washington's approval to higher-level objectives (results), as opposed to activity-level inputs and outputs; link budget allocations to objectives as opposed to activities; delegate activity design, approval and budgeting decisions to Operating Units; and establish teams to bridge organizational boundaries within and outside of USAID to manage development programs. A dynamic cycle of three management functions characterizes the system. It includes: (a) planning, (b) achieving and (c) assessing and learning. These functions operate within the context of management leadership, both the organizational mission/vision/core values and management initiatives. Figure 1 illustrates the model:

**Figure 1: USAID's Managing for Results Programming System**



Three important linkages characterize this model:

- USAID's *mission, vision and core values* provide a framework to guide *strategic and activity planning*. *Learning* from past experience shapes the framework. The Agency Strategic Plan sets out the *mission* and the *vision* of the results to be accomplished through Agency goals. The *core values* – managing for results, customer focus, teamwork and participation, empowerment and accountability, and valuing diversity – guide USAID action to improve performance and achieve the *vision*.
- Performance measures link the *planning* and the *assessing and learning* functions. Establishing performance measures and *targets* before *achieving* takes place enables USAID to judge progress. Measures are used to assess *outcomes* and help maintain the results focus.
- *Assessing and learning* is not the end but involves *decision-making* that can in turn lead to *management initiatives* and back to *planning*. *Planning* here includes new activity development, refining objectives (results) or rethinking tactics in a goal area of the Agency Strategic Plan.

*Planning* includes both strategic and activity planning. Strategic planning occurs at various levels of USAID – e.g., Agency, Operating Unit and objective team -- and is a collaborative process with country partners and other donors. It aims to define specific results to be achieved (also called *Strategic Objectives, Intermediate Results* or *Special Objectives*). Activity planning defines the means (inputs and outputs) needed to achieve the results. Planning also involves determining how to assess progress.

*Achieving* involves the implementation of planned activities in collaboration with partner institutions (governments, international organizations, contractors, grantees and other donors).

*Assessing and learning* represents a continuous effort to anticipate and measure the impact on the objectives (results) defined, make decisions to improve the chances of success, and ensure that learning takes place within the objective team at the Operating Unit level and throughout the organization as experiences are communicated. *Assessing and learning* takes place with partners as work proceeds to transform inputs into outputs and assess whether the outputs are adequate to achieve the objectives sought. Good performance data and supporting analysis and evaluation are critical to the assessment and learning stage. Some key aspects include:

- Reporting performance honestly and openly, even when results are less than hoped.
- Involving customers and partners in assessing the quality, timeliness and effectiveness of outputs.
- Tracking and reporting progress in achieving outputs and results.

- Assessing the reliability and quality of performance measures and correcting weaknesses.
- Questioning the underlying causal link between activities and results and conducting evaluations and research to strengthen the link.
- Providing performance information at all levels of USAID, at a level of detail that matches the needs of information users.
- Recognizing the importance of learning from mistakes rather than minimizing them to avoid possible embarrassment.

### Use of Information in Managing for Results

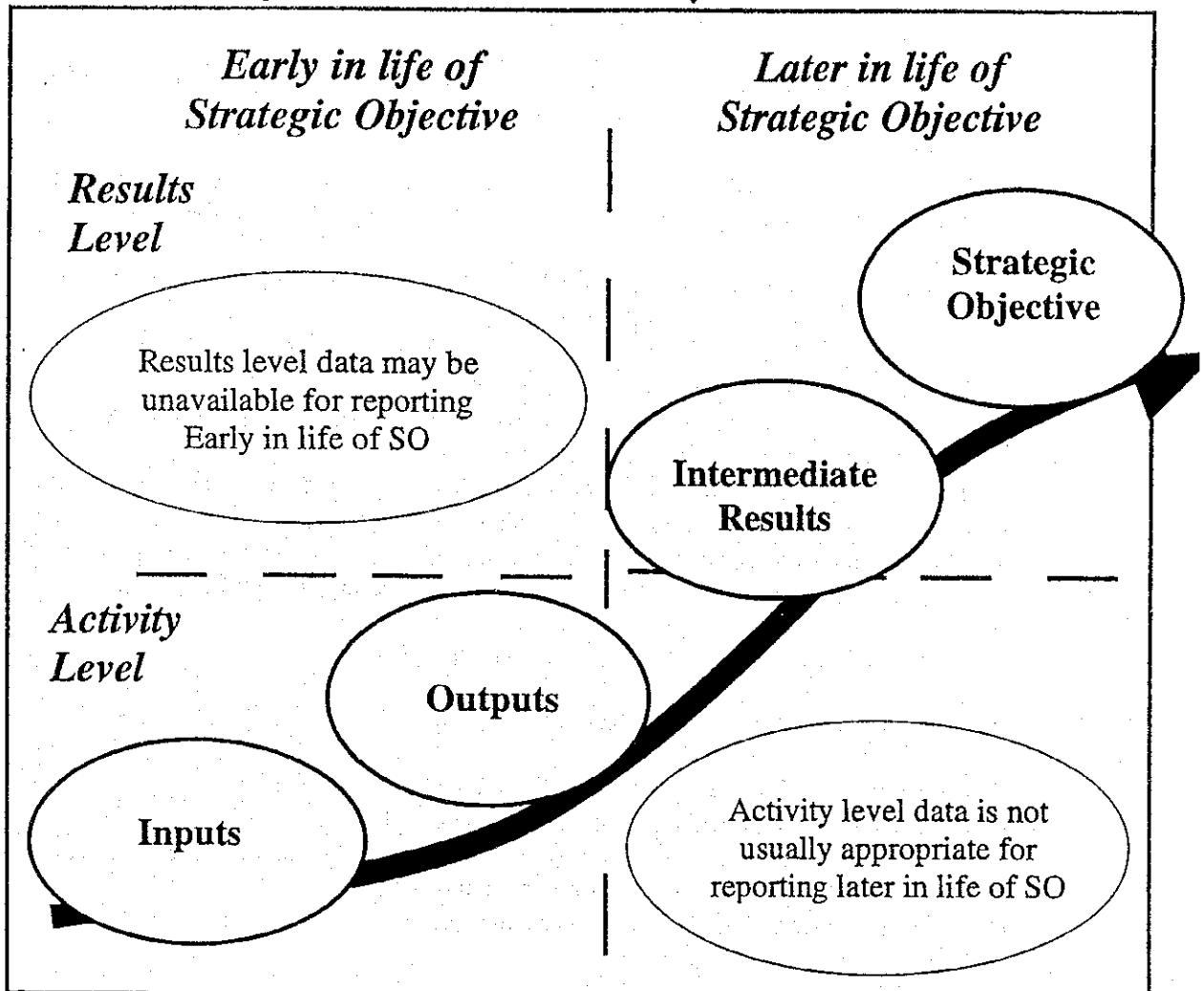
The previous section described the USAID results management system. This section turns to performance management and the use of performance information in managing for results. The emphasis will be on the Operating Unit (i.e., the country or Washington office managing a program), reflecting USAID's decentralized management system. Once the concerned Washington bureau approves the Strategic Objectives proposed by an Operating Unit, Strategic Objective teams are empowered to implement and monitor program achievement. As teams manage performance and generate information, they learn what is and is not successful, taking corrective action as necessary.

Performance management actually begins during the strategic planning stage when the team develops the development hypothesis that identifies causal linkages between USAID actions and the intended Strategic Objective (highest level result). The team also defines indicators, annual targets to be achieved, and baselines. The team likewise undertakes activity planning, defining the specific outputs to be achieved to reach agreed-upon results and the inputs needed. The planning stage sets up the *causal pathway for results* that helps the team define the information needed to assess progress and manage for results during implementation or the achievement stage.

During the achievement stage, performance management involves the collection of systematic feedback on the robustness of the development hypothesis causality chain and strengthening it by making decisions and taking action reflecting that feedback. Assessing and learning for performance management is a highly proactive, forward looking process in the environments where USAID typically works. The type of performance information that teams and Operating Unit manager's use varies over the life of the Strategic Objective as activities are initiated, outputs produced and results achieved.

Figure 2 below diagrams the causal pathway (bold arrow), linking activities (with their inputs and outputs) to results (Intermediate Results and Strategic Objectives) at the early and later periods of achievement:

Figure 2 Achieving Results: Data and Causal Pathway



At the early stage, when activities are being established, output information may be more available and useful for management and reporting purposes. For example, during early implementation of a basic education objective to improve basic education quality, managers may use information on the number of specialists trained in curriculum revision and testing and the number of teachers trained in the new curriculum and testing measures, among others, to determine if implementation is on track. At later stages, as outputs are achieved, results-level data may be more important for monitoring progress. Using the same basic education example, this may involve teachers' performance in introducing the new curriculum or, at a higher level, examination results for children being taught with the new curriculum. That is, at a later stage results should be measurable and attributable to USAID efforts, provided the causal chain is adequate.

*How do we plan for performance management?*

The cornerstone of performance management is the *performance monitoring plan (PMP)*, developed by the team with its partners. The PMP:

- Defines specific performance indicators, baselines and targets for each result to be achieved (strategic objective, intermediate result, or specific objective) and for activities.
- Plans for data collection (source, method, schedule and responsible unit/person for data collection), reporting, review and use.
- Identifies data limitations, significance and actions to address weaknesses.
- Identifies data quality assessment procedures.
- Plans for evaluation (both external and participatory) and special studies work to supplement regularly collected performance data.
- Plans for monitoring the development hypothesis, critical assumptions and context.
- Estimates costs for collecting data and plans for financing.
- Communicates performance expectations to partner institutions that will produce specific outputs intended to contribute to measurable changes in indicators.

*What are some of the specific uses of performance information?*

Team leaders and managers use information to:

- Determine gaps between desired results and actual achievements.
- Improve the activity performance, effectiveness and design.
- Inform management decisions on resource use (including technical assistance and USAID staff time for planning, monitoring and support).
- Adjust expected results, targets and assumptions.
- Improve performance indicators.
- Determine whether the development hypothesis is valid.
- Inform decisions on continuing, modifying or abandoning objectives or activities.
- Develop new strategic plans.
- Document findings on the impact of development assistance for sharing with USAID staff, external partners and other stakeholders.

Each Operating Unit (either country- or Washington-based) prepares an annual Results Review and Resource Request (called an "R4") to provide information needed at several USAID levels:

- At the Operating Unit to determine if programs and resources (funding and staffing) need adjustment to maximize impact;
- At the Washington geographic bureaus to make decisions on the allocation of resources across countries to meet development and foreign policy goals; and
- At the Washington management and policy bureaus for Agency-wide internal and external use, including performance reporting, future program planning, budget



preparation, and communication of development experience to other development and practitioners and stakeholders.

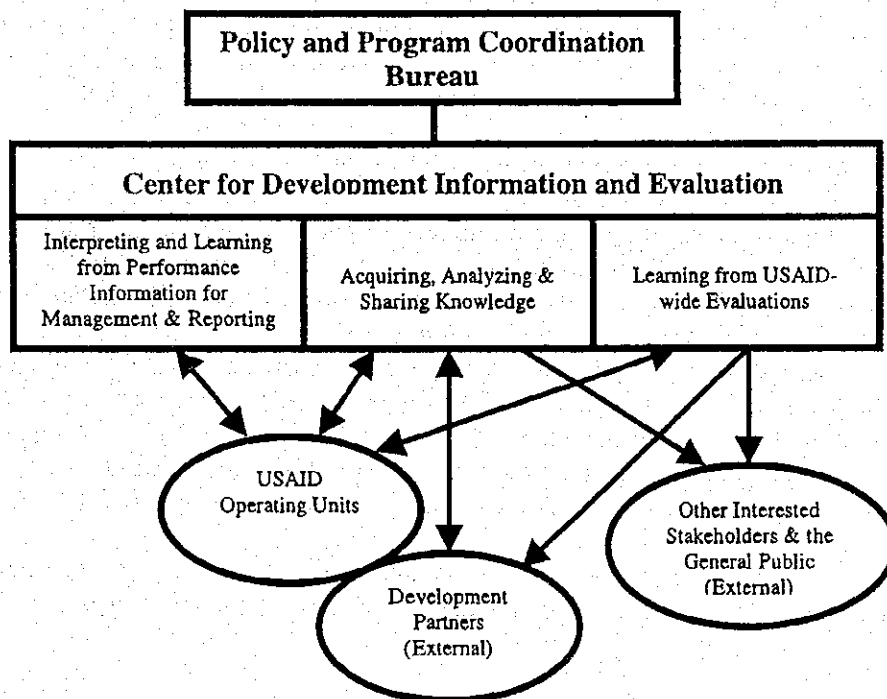
The R4 provides an explicit performance statement for each Strategic Objective (indicating whether it is on track, exceeding expectations or not meeting expectations), an overview of factors affecting performance, and a narrative review of performance relative to expectations (including partners' contributions) and data tables for three or four indicators. The multiple R4 reports serve as a basis for internal reporting and external accountability reports to Congress.

#### Responsibilities of USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation

CDIE serves as USAID's central evaluation office and is located within the Policy and Program Coordination Bureau in Washington. It was first established in 1983 as a direct result of a U.S. Government external audit that found USAID's application of the lessons of previous development experience to new projects and programs as deficient. A salient feature of the center has been the combining of evaluation and development experience functions in one office to enhance the Agency's learning and sharing of what works and what does not to improve development programs.

The office has three functions that together contribute to the Agency's acquisition, sharing and use of knowledge. CDIE is also responsible for reporting on its performance in managing for results to external stakeholders and partners. The three functions are diagrammed and discussed below:

Figure 3: Responsibilities of CDIE



- *Interpreting and learning from performance information for management and reporting.* CDIE reviews, interprets and shares Agency-wide performance and evaluation information relative to the Agency Strategic Plan. It prepares USAID's annual Agency Performance Report for external stakeholders in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and the Congress. It also provides leadership and prepares guidance for staff on strategic planning and performance management.
- *Acquiring, analyzing and sharing knowledge.* CDIE preserves, promotes and maintains USAID's institutional memory of development experience and socioeconomic indicators. It collects, summarizes, synthesizes and disseminates development experience for USAID staff, enhancing internal learning. It also extends development information through briefings, workshops, seminars, and the USAID Intranet to inform USAID decision-making at all levels. It promotes the sharing and use of development experience knowledge externally with development partners, other interested stakeholders and the general public through the Internet and other report dissemination. In 1999 annual country-program level performance reports (R4s) were made available for the first time on the Internet.
- *Learning from USAID-wide evaluations.* CDIE is also responsible for conducting evaluations to distill lessons learned from development programs across the Agency and for sharing lessons learned through reports, workshops, and conferences. Evaluations identify implications for the Agency Strategic Plan and for senior managers and Operating Unit managers in their planning and design of new development programs. CDIE also shares lessons learned with external partners and other stakeholders.

#### Lessons Learned

USAID has made considerable progress in implementing its results-based management system and met many challenges in generating and using information for learning and improving performance. Major lessons learned are briefly discussed below:

1. *Collaboration on performance management with development partners is essential.* The development of strategic plans and performance monitoring plans with developing country, donor and technical assistance partners is important to develop consensus on objectives and how performance will be monitored. Collaboration increases the likelihood of identifying and obtaining useful information, and of strengthening the assessing and learning process. It also provides an opportunity to increase partner country understanding of performance assessment. In many cases the partner country is the source of information needed to assess progress. Without a fuller understanding of the plan and the place of information in assessing progress, it is less likely that USAID (and its partners) will obtain the kind and quality of information needed to track progress and manage activities effectively.
2. *Use of a variety of sources for performance information is important to assess performance fully.* Information generated from performance indicators is but one of

a number of sources USAID uses in assessing performance. This information can let managers know what results are being achieved. But evaluations are an important source of information needed to address specific questions on how and why results are or not achieved. They provide greater insight on issues of sustainability and the validity of the development hypothesis. The number of routine evaluations conducted dropped as USAID implemented its results-based management system; however, managers increasingly recognize the need for in-depth analysis that monitoring cannot provide. USAID is now giving more attention to the need for evaluation information gleaned through various types of formal and informal assessments. Other information sources can also be useful in judging performance – e.g., special studies such as demographic and health surveys undertaken by USAID or analyses and evaluations of other donors, partner agencies and academicians.

3. *Planning for performance monitoring is necessary.* A well-designed performance monitoring plan developed during the initial strategy and activity planning period at the Operating Unit level is essential for providing managers with data on a timely and consistent basis for decision-making.
4. *Establishing standards and criteria for performance indicators and data is important for obtaining credible and useful information.* Performance indicators for monitoring and reporting performance must be useful for management decision-making, reflect progress of results sought, measure change that is clearly and reasonably attributable at least in part to USAID's efforts, and meet quality standards of *objectivity, directness, validity and reliability*. USAID has placed increasing emphasis on assessing the quality of performance data experience and noting where limitations exist as part of improving its results management efforts.
5. *Annual performance assessment and reporting must be balanced with the need to obtain long-term, sustainable results.* Putting in place information systems for annual performance assessment and reporting takes time and effort. USAID experience suggests that while generating annual information is important for monitoring progress, managers need to give as much attention to longer term sustainability and impact questions and the analysis needed to make decisions on the longer term program direction. The Agency has also reduced requirements for and the time devoted to annual performance reporting and Washington reviews, encouraging Operating Units to spend more time on information and analytical work that is important for managing for and achieving results over the longer term.
6. *Progress on results achievement is but one factor in determining future program budget allocations.* USAID's annual progress reporting at the Operating Unit and Agency level is combined with its annual budget preparation processes. Experience shows that progress on results achievement is one factor in *informing budget allocation decisions*. Other factors include development needs, foreign policy considerations, and contributions of other donors.

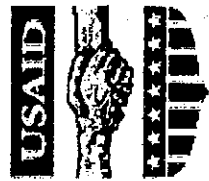
7. *The type of performance information used varies by level (Operating Unit and Agency-wide) and purpose.* USAID experience indicates that managers at the Operating Unit level need information tailored to the specific country program and objectives (results) sought. This type of information is also used in reporting on country program progress to the U.S. Congress and reflects the level at which USAID is *more directly responsible for results achieved*. USAID also monitors and reports on more highly aggregated data (including economic, social and political development trends) that include contributions of the partner country and other donors.
8. *Centralized acquisition, research and dissemination services enhance Agency-wide learning.* Initiated more than two decades ago, USAID collects and disseminates documents on USAID experience, including evaluations, results performance reports, and various analyses undertaken by USAID and its partners. As discussed above, CDIE also provides research and reference searches on request for USAID staff and partners that assist staff in sharing and applying experience from a number of sources in planning and implementing programs.

# Assessing and Learning in Managing for Results in USAID:

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## Lessons Learned

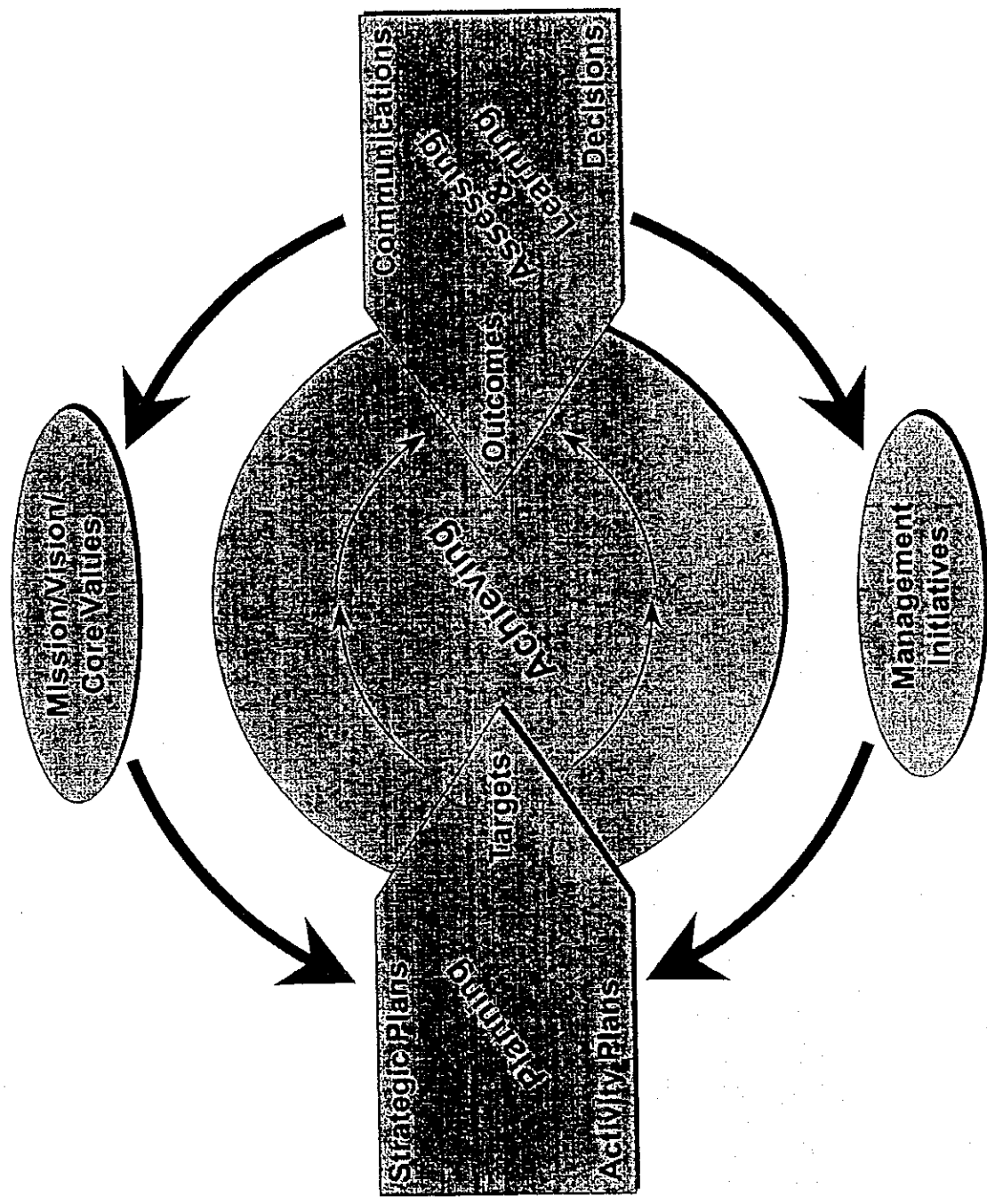
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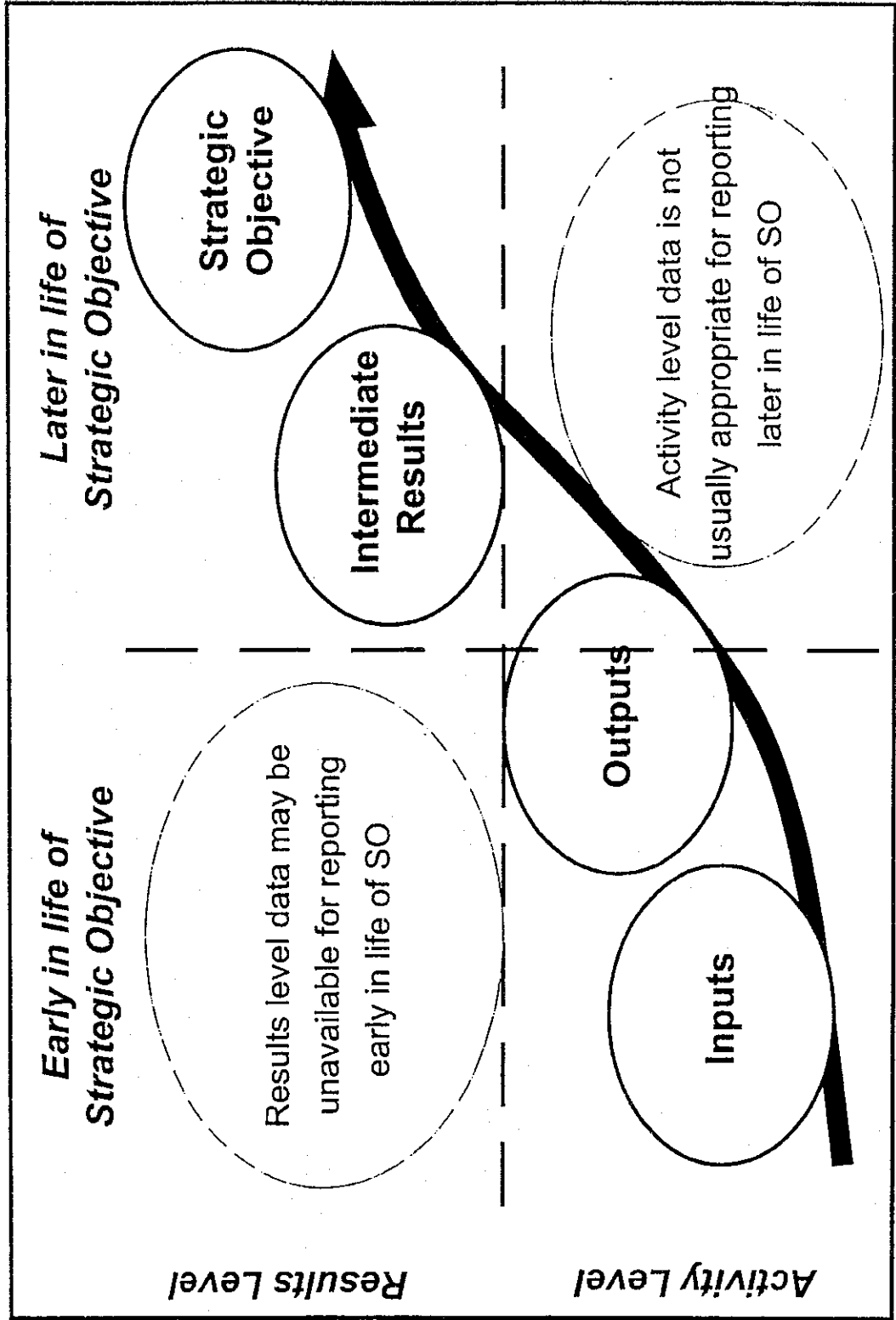
Jean DuRette

Center for Development Information and Evaluation

# USAID's Managing for Results Programming System



# Achieving Results: Data and Causal Pathway



## Lessons Learned

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2. Use of a variety of sources for performance information is important to assess performance fully.
3. Planning for performance monitoring is necessary.
4. Establishing standards and criteria for performance indicators and data is important for obtaining credible and useful information.



## Lessons Learned

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5. Annual performance assessment and reporting must be balanced with the need to obtain long-term, sustainable results.
6. Progress on results achievement is but one factor in determining future program budget allocations.
7. The type of performance information used varies by level (Operating Unit and Agency-wide) and purpose.
8. Centralized acquisition, research and dissemination services enhance Agency-wide learning.





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**Role and Responsibility  
of  
Central Evaluation Unit**

**Submitted by**

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**“ Role and Responsibility of Central Evaluation Unit”**

**Mitsunori Shirakawa**

## 1 Recent situation and movement surrounding ODA in Japan

Now, everywhere in Japan people are talking about "evaluation" e.g. policy evaluation by all Government agencies, evaluation of public construction project and so on. Why so much interest in evaluation? Reasons are simple: Stagnating economy, severe budgetary constraints, strong criticism by the public against the provision of aid, more voices for increased transparency and accountability.

The Administrative Reform Council in its final report published in Mar. 1997 emphasised the importance of a mechanism and system to properly reflect the findings of rational and precise evaluation of policies. The Basic Law for the Reform of Central Government Offices enacted in Jun. 1998 states that "all government offices must strengthen their objective evaluation function and reflect the evaluation findings on policies."

The Council on ODA Reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, ad-hoc advisory group for Minister for Foreign Affairs, in its final report published in January 1998 called for, among other things, further improvement of the present evaluation system, e.g. improvement of methods, clarification of the division of the roles played by the MOFA and JICA and JBIC, publication of the evaluation findings and other issues] The Resolution of External Economic Relations Ministerial Committee of November 1998 stated the necessity of improving the transparency and efficiency of ODA.

To improve effectiveness & efficiency of aid programs, we are expected to play pivotal role and making the best use of our budget and our evaluation system. Evaluation can play an important role in improving our aid assistance & in helping our partner countries' economic development in a more mutually satisfactory manner.

The recent circumstances surrounding ODA & evaluation have made our task more demanding, but equally challenging too. Now is the critical time for ODA evaluation. And this trend is reflected by the public opinion.

## 2. Movement toward reform of evaluation system

To meet the increased demand for evaluation, and following the recommendations made by the Council on ODA Reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a working group was established in October 1998, under the ODA Evaluation Reviewing Panel, as advisory body to the Director-General of Economic Cooperation Bureau, to discuss

the desirable improvement of the ODA evaluation system. The Evaluation Working Group submitted a report with a series of recommendations to the Minister for Foreign Affairs March 2000 after more than one year of study. Those recommendations include many aspects of the Japanese ODA evaluation system ranging from its framework to technical matters.

The key points are as follows:

- (1) Introduction of policy-level evaluation and expansion of program-level evaluation.
- (2) Establishment of a consistent evaluation system, (from the advance evaluation to the ex-post evaluation) which formulates a pre-project evaluation plan and promotes quantitative methods.
- (3) Clarification of the division of the roles played by the MOFA and JICA and JBIC.
- (4) Improvement of feedback system through ;
  - Establishment of feedback system to policy-making process.
  - Co-ordination between MOFA, JICA, JBIC and co-ordination with other central government organisations.
- (5) Promotion of national understanding of the evaluation through public relations, including active use of the Internet and other means.

Following these recommendations, we are making various attempts to improve Japan's ODA evaluation system. We sent study missions to North America and Europe to learn about establishing proper methods for policy- or program- level evaluation, and consistent evaluation systems.

In order to conduct further study on several issues mentioned in the recommendations submitted by the Working Group, a new advisory group called "ODA Evaluation Study Group" was formed. It is composed of university professors, aid experts from the private sector, international organizations, the business community, journalists, NGOs and officials of MOFA, JICA, JBIC. Observers from 17 ODA-related government agencies are also participating in this Study Group.

The new Study Group has been discussing many issues such as program/ policy level evaluations, evaluation feedback etc. I will explain later the fruits of our constructive discussions.

### 3. Problems to be dealt with.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs ( MOFA) is the central force in forming our aid strategy and plays a central role in evaluating our aid programs. JICA and JBIC are well-known implementation organisations of Japanese ODA. They also conduct various kinds of evaluations. Each has its own evaluation system. This year is 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of MOFA's evaluation division. No one or no organization is perfect. Our short history shows that our evaluation system as central unit has never been perfect. To be honest, there are many things that we can do to change the present system, and especially the evaluation feedback system. Let me share my observations. Many points are shared by our colleagues in the ODA Evaluation Study Group.

- (1) Present system lacks feedback system to influence policy/decision-makers. Within the organization, there should be a mechanism to effectively feedback the evaluation results, follow-up items, make recommendations for future programs or policies. MOFA needs stronger mechanism for that purpose. In my opinion, the judgement of evaluation work should not based on the thickness, quality or recommendations of evaluation papers. Instead, the judgement should be based on how much impact and influence the evaluation results will have on improvement of present projects & on future ODA policies. As our task to coordinate our aid programs is becoming more complex and challenging, our role of evaluation also becomes more complex.
- (2) People involved with aid programs in our organization lack "evaluation mind." Those in operational departments need to look at evaluation not as faultfinder but as co-worker (constructive criticism). There is an increasing need for cooperation among evaluation department and operational departments.
- (3) People need to understand the effectiveness of evaluation. Evaluation should be used as a tool to change policies, improve programs and promote better project management. The more you build in monitoring systems, the more likelihood there is for the certain projects or programs to improve reflecting continuously changing situations (rather than simply saying that projects or programs will succeed.)
- (4) There is an increasing need not only for donor countries, but also for international organs such as WB, UNDP etc., together with partner countries, to carry out joint evaluations. We need to improve developing countries' capabilities to collect data in areas such as health, education, welfare and economic wellbeing. In any event, we need to depend on them.
- (5) Feedback to the public should keep up with our Internet age. Since this past July, MOFA started to use our homepage to promptly inform the Japanese public



about evaluation results. Their responses are positive. It took us about 2 years to publish the results of the evaluation as a part of the Evaluation Report. This is a change for the better.

- (6) Consistent evaluation system is essential. Until recently, focus on ex-post evaluation has been dominant. Consistent evaluation activities from the planning , so-called 'ex-ante', stage to ex-post stage should be conducted. There may be occasions when it is more advantageous to modify the original plan to suit the actual conditions in the field due to an unanticipated situation caused by the occurrence of a natural disaster, the spread of an infectious disease or the upheaval of the international economy.



## RECENT ACTIVITIES IN JAPAN TO IMPROVE ODA EVALUATION

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The ODA evaluation system is now truly in "a period of reform." Following "the Report on Improvement of the ODA Evaluation System" in March 2000 (see the attached paper), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is proceeding with wide-ranging efforts to further improve the ODA evaluation system. Similar efforts are being made by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), the implementation organizations. In this chapter, the ongoing improvement efforts are concisely explained.

### 1. Attempts to Evaluate Policies and Programs

The MoFA has decided to conduct studies on the evaluation methods for policy-level evaluation and program-level evaluation within its budget for FY 2000. The first step will involve dispatching study missions to other donors and international organizations. The goal of these missions will be to study existing and proposed methods of evaluation, and to determine which type of policy-level and program-level evaluation methods are suitable to introduce in Japan. After examination, the next step will be to apply the proposed examination methods to specific developing countries in order to verify their applicability. In particular, a study on evaluation methods was conducted from late June to early July with international aid organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, OECD and FAO as well as national aid agencies such as the USAID, CIDA and those in the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Scandinavian countries. The study findings will then be compiled in a report. The application of the evaluation methods proposed by the said report to several selected developing countries in late 2000 is planned to verify the effectiveness of these methods and to produce further recommendations for the improvement of the ODA evaluation system.

Moreover, the existing country program evaluation (the subject countries in FY 1998 were El Salvador and Mongolia) and evaluation of the aid implementation system (the subject country in FY 1998 was Senegal) which the MoFA has been conducting for some time will be expanded in the coming years with emphasis, in principle, on policy-level evaluation rather than on project evaluation. Program-

level evaluation should be conducted in several fields and themes which are deemed to be of increasing importance in the future. Such evaluation will take the results of the above-mentioned study into consideration.

Furthermore, evaluation needs to be carried out for the schemes said to have insufficient evaluation by the report. To be more precise, the Training in Japan, the Dispatch of Experts and the Dispatch of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) will be evaluated in due course. The evaluation of different sectors and schemes will be conducted by close collaboration among the MoFA and implementation organizations (i.e. JICA and JBIC). These organizations, which have conventionally focused on project evaluation, plan to expand their scope to include program-level evaluation.

## **2. Establishment of Consistent Evaluation Process Incorporating Advance (ex-ante), Mid-Term and Ex-Post Evaluation**

The Final Report includes recommendations for the establishment of a consistent evaluation process incorporating advance (ex-ante), mid-term and ex-post evaluation as well as for the introduction of "performance indicators" to determine the degree of target attainment.

While project completion evaluation and ex-post evaluation have been the mainstay of evaluation up to the present, the JICA and JBIC have begun to examine viable performance indicators for each aid scheme and sector and they plan the trial application of performance indicators to several projects for which the advance (ex-ante) evaluation is conducted in 2000. They intend to establish a consistent evaluation process featuring advance (ex-ante), mid-term and ex-post stages as soon as possible using the know-how obtained from the trial application. With regard to the expansion of cost-efficiency analysis and the development of guidelines, one idea to be examined is the promotion and expansion of the inclusion of an economist or similar expert on cost-efficiency analysis, that has been conducted mainly in loan-type projects in the study team at the advance (ex-ante) evaluation stage. The scope of cost-efficiency analysis is to be expanded to the fields of social development and technical cooperation to which the application of this type of analysis has so far been considered difficult.

### **3. Expansion of Information Disclosure and Publicity Activities Using the Internet**

The Final Report also underlines the importance of the disclosure and publicity of evaluation data. In the past, the public announcement of the evaluation findings has required a certain time lapse. However, there is a growing demand for swift information disclosure to the public and for consistent transparency. In response, the MoFA intends to swiftly publish the outline of evaluation findings on its Home Page in addition to the long-standing publication of the annual evaluation report. In accordance with this policy, the outline of the evaluation of eight cases was published on 6th July. The MoFA Home Page will soon include a single-page outline of the evaluation findings of each case by third party experts shortly after the completion of an evaluation study. ※ This outline will incorporate as many photographs of the project site and scenes of the evaluation by third party experts as possible and will not only include the evaluation findings but also recommendations for further improvement to assist the planning of future policies. An e-mail system for collecting comments from Home Page viewers is already in place and these comments will be referred to in efforts to improve the ODA evaluation system.

### **4. Establishment of "ODA Evaluation Study Group"**

The Final Report puts forward a proposal to establish the ODA Evaluation Study Group (tentative name) under the AID Evaluation Reviewing Panel for the purpose of conducting the expert examination of desirable evaluation methods and an effective feedback system. This study group was, in fact, established in mid-July and its first meeting has already been held.

This study group is discussing wide-ranging themes including : (1) policy-level and program-level evaluation methods, (2) a feedback system, (3) the training of evaluators and (4) enhancement of the collaboration between ODA-related government agencies. It is anticipated that the study group will compile practical recommendations for improving the ODA evaluation system, taking the findings of the forthcoming "Study on Policy-level and Program-level Evaluation Methods"

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※ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/oda/report/index.html>

and "Study on Training of Evaluators" of the MoFA into consideration. As it is inadequate for the evaluation of ODA to be conducted only by the MoFA, other government offices implementing ODA should actively participate in discussions on government-wide collaboration for ODA evaluation by the study group.

#### **5. Expansion of Third Party Evaluation**

There have been frequent references to the need to consolidate the evaluation system by third parties with the recommendation of the actively recruit university professors and other academics, accountancy firms, NGOs, think tanks and consultants. The expansion of joint evaluation with NGOs as well as the ODA monitoring system of the private sector through the participation of the public have also been proposed.

The MoFA has historically implemented third party evaluation and plans to further expand the scope of evaluation by third party experts, think tanks, consultants and others. The JICA and JBIC also plan to expand the scope of third party evaluation in the coming years.

The MoFA has also been engaged in joint evaluation with NGOs and has developed a concrete plan to expand joint evaluation from FY 2000. The number of monitors dispatched under the ODA monitoring system of the private sector was doubled last year and this trend of expansion will be maintained.

#### **6. Promotion of Liaised ODA Evaluation through the Government**

In addition to the improvement of ODA evaluation by the MoFA, it is essential for other ODA-related government offices to be involved in the evaluation of ODA projects. The Final Report recommends the promotion of collaboration and liaison between ODA-related government offices with the MoFA playing a central role, and therefore the MoFA is aiming to improve the quality of ODA evaluation through collaboration with other government offices.

#### **7. Other Improvement Efforts**

(1) Improvement of evaluation by overseas diplomatic offices:

The MoFA is now examining the new status of ODA evaluation by its overseas offices in view of the recommendation made by the Final Report.

(2) Training of evaluators:

Many recommendations have been made in regard to the training of evaluators. In response, the MoFA plans to conduct a "Study on Training and Effective Utilization of Evaluators" in FY 2000. This study will involve the dispatching of a study team abroad to obtain recommendations on the future training and effective utilization of evaluators in Japan. The study team will then examine viable measures to improve the training of evaluators and compile its recommendations in a report.

(3) DAC Evaluation Workshop and Seminar in Tokyo:

We are hosting DAC Tokyo Workshop on "Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability" 26-28 September in Tokyo. On 29 September, Japan takes the opportunity of the gathering of experts from donor countries and international aid organizations to organize a seminar on ODA evaluation which will be open to the public after the Workshop.





Report on Improvement of the "ODA Evaluation System" (Key Points)  
AID Evaluation Reviewing Panel/Working Committee for Evaluation Research

March, 2000

< Purposes of Evaluation >

① Accountability, ② support for implementation management; ③ feedback; ④ promotion of understanding and participation of the public

< Subjects of Evaluation >

- Policy level (medium-term ODA policies and country-specific plans and others); program level (by sector, theme and others); project level (individual projects)
- Expansion of evaluation of trainee acceptance scheme, expert dispatch scheme, JOCV projects and grassroots grant aid, etc.

< Evaluation Framework >

- The MoFA mainly focuses on policy-level evaluation while the JICA and JBIC mainly focus on program-level and project evaluation.
- The MoFA plays a central role in promoting of the collaboration and liaison between ODA-related government offices.

< Evaluation System >

- Establishment of the ODA Evaluation Study Group (tentative name) to conduct more concrete and intensive studies
- Active utilization of academics, accountancy firms, NGOs and consultants, etc.
- Expansion of the evaluation implementation system by overseas diplomatic establishments as well as overseas JICA and JBIC offices to regularly identify local needs and responses, etc.

< Evaluators >

- Introduction of a registration system for evaluation experts
- Improved quality of aid evaluation experts through the establishment of the Japan Evaluation Society (tentative name)

< Timing of Evaluation >

- Establishment of a consistent process incorporating pre, mid-term and ex-post evaluation with special emphasis on the strengthening and active use of the evaluation function of overseas diplomatic establishments and overseas JICA and JBIC offices

< Evaluation Methods >

- Urgent study on evaluation methods for policy-level evaluation and program-level evaluation
- Examination with a view to establishing "evaluation indicators" to measure the objectives and degree of attainment of individual projects
- Strengthening of the implementation system and development of guidelines for cost-efficiency analysis

< Feedback of Evaluation Findings >

- Establishment of a feedback system among the MoFA, JICA and JBIC to cover the entire ODA arena

< Disclosure and Publicity of Evaluation Data >

- Expansion of swift disclosure on home pages; adjustment of the evaluation forms and creation of a database of evaluation reports
- Expansion of joint evaluation with NGOs and the private sector monitoring system for ODA through the participation of the public, etc.



# DAC Tokyo Workshop on Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability

DAC WORKING PARTY ON AID EVALUATION

## Evaluation Feedback: Experiences and Recent Changes

Submitted by

'Ministry of Foreign Affairs'  
Netherlands

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Hosted by the Government of Japan  
26-28 September 2000



**Evaluation Feedback: Experiences and Recent Changes  
Policy and Operations Evaluation Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands**

**Rob D. van den Berg & Ted Kliet**

**Paper prepared for:  
The OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation Workshop on Evaluation Feedback  
for Effective Learning & Accountability, Tokyo, 26-28 September 2000**

## Introduction

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for independent evaluation in all fields of foreign policy, including development cooperation. Moreover, it aims to feed the results of these evaluations back into the Ministry's knowledge cycle. IOB's evaluation reports are used to improve both policies and their implementation. With the information on the results of previous efforts at their disposal, policymakers can prepare new interventions more purposefully and more effectively.

IOB is an independent unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and reports directly to either the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Minister for Development Cooperation, depending on the subject evaluated. The Minister sends the evaluation reports to Parliament, which has always shown great interest in IOB's work. The Minister also sends Parliament a policy response addressing the issues identified in the evaluation reports. Parliament's Permanent Committee on Foreign Affairs then puts the evaluation report and the policy response on its agenda for discussion with the Minister. The results of this discussion are regarded as policy statements having a bearing on future policy formulation and implementation.

IOB's independent policy evaluations focus mainly on specific themes, sectors, programmes and countries. The Ministry's operational departments, including embassies in developing countries, also commission evaluations. These "decentralised evaluations" are mainly implemented as part of project and programme cycle management, but are occasionally concerned with policy.

The objective of this paper is to provide insight into feedback practices connected with IOB's evaluation work. It does not deal with feedback in relation to decentralised evaluations.

Since IOB's feedback practices have evolved in tandem with its methods of evaluation, this paper will briefly discuss the evolution of IOB's evaluation procedures, then describe current feedback practices. A distinction is made between feedback within the Ministry ("internal feedback") and feedback involving other parties, such as partner countries, Parliament, academia, the general public, the press, and so on ("external feedback"). The last section of the paper highlights a number of steps planned or already taken by IOB to improve its feedback practices, in order to increase the usefulness of its evaluations and encourage the implementation of evaluation results.

### Box 1. Feedback defined

"Evaluation feedback has been broadly defined as a dynamic process which involves the presentation and dissemination of evaluation information in order to ensure its application into new or existing development activities... feedback, as distinct from 'dissemination' of evaluation findings, is the process of ensuring that lessons learned are incorporated into new operations."

Source:

G. Barnard & C. Cameron, Efela: Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning & Accountability, report prepared for the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation Workshop, Tokyo 26-28 September 2000.

## **1. Feedback practices of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department**

### **1.1. The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department**

The history of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) began some 22 years ago. In 1977, the Minister for Development Cooperation decided to establish an independent "Inspection Unit". The Operations Review Unit (IOV) became operational in 1978. Its objective was to verify the disbursement of Netherlands development cooperation funds by performing field inspections of the activities funded. At that time, the evaluations (or inspections) covered individual aid interventions, mainly projects. During the 1980s, however, the focus of IOV's work shifted, with more and more evaluations covering programmes, themes, sectors, and regions. Gradually, its reports, which had at first been confidential and Ministry internal, became public and were distributed widely.

In 1996, as a result of a review of foreign policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was reorganised. The name of the unit was changed from Operations Review Unit (IOV) to Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB). Its field of operations was extended to cover all aspects of the Netherlands' foreign policy. Development cooperation plays an important role in this policy. Approximately 70% of the budget for international affairs is spent on development cooperation.

Since its inception, IOB's approaches and methods have been changing constantly. The initial approach, whereby individual projects were inspected, was abandoned for an approach whereby projects were selected in such a way that the evaluation findings provide information relevant to wider policy areas. Subsequently, in the mid-1980s, thematic and sectoral evaluation studies were conducted, dealing with multiple aid interventions in a variety of regional contexts. In the 1990s, this approach was extended with the introduction of country programme evaluations.

IOB has a staff of ten evaluation specialists and its own budget. Given the growing complexity of policies and interventions, a multidisciplinary approach to evaluation is required. This calls for evaluation expertise as well as specialist expertise in a large number of fields. For this reason, IOB uses external consultants and specialists, whenever possible from countries with which the Netherlands cooperates. IOB's inspectors (senior evaluators) take part in the studies, lead the consultants and bear final responsibility for the evaluation. To ensure quality, IOB often works with reference groups of stakeholders and external experts.

## 1.2. Current feedback practices

### *General aspects*

Feedback of evaluation results is an integral part of the evaluation process. It involves presenting and disseminating these results in order to encourage policy makers and operational staff to make use of them when formulating new policies or adapting existing policies and their implementation. The dissemination and propagation of evaluation results is the task of the evaluators. Policy makers and aid administrators are responsible for incorporating the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation into policy formulation and implementation.

Since evaluation aims to influence policy and practice, the most important function of feedback is to set in motion a process which "guarantees" or "ensures" that the evaluation results and lessons learned are indeed put to use. The authors of the Efela report rightly point out that this process is characterised by uncertainties and difficulties and show that donors have developed different mechanisms to institutionalise learning.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, evaluators commonly assume (as of course they should) that their work influences policy and practice. However, they are also very much aware of the many factors which hamper or even prevent full consideration of their work by policy makers, let alone implementation of their evaluation findings in policy practice. Since this issue is discussed in detail in the Efela report, the various obstacles to evaluation feedback are not dealt with here. Rather, the next sections try to throw some light on how IOB has attempted to organise its feedback process.

The most important function of evaluation is to provide clear, focused insights into matters which are highly relevant to both policy and practice. Some insights may be obtained at the very start of the evaluation, and others only later. In any case, it could prove very worthwhile for evaluation departments to start providing feedback at the earliest stage of the evaluation.

One of the many challenges that evaluation units face, when ensuring (or attempting to ensure) that enough evaluation feedback takes place for learning and accountability purposes, is to establish the legitimacy of their evaluations. The legitimacy of an evaluation partly depends on the ways in which the interests, perceptions and perspectives of the stakeholders (or users of the evaluation) are taken into account in the design and implementation of the studies. Accordingly, the evaluator should be aware that stakeholders always have the last word on whether an evaluation is useful to them. Legitimacy, however, also relates to the rigour of the methodology applied and the validity of the evaluation results.<sup>2</sup> In sum, the extent to which evaluation results are accepted and used depends on organisational interests, the level of tolerance for scrutiny of policy implementation and the transparency of the evaluation process.

Although evaluation should not be considered the only source of valuable lessons, evaluators with a "change-agent" mentality, i.e. those wishing to actively contribute to or even participate

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<sup>1</sup> G. Barnard & C. Cameron, Efela: Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning & Accountability, report prepared for the Workshop of the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation, Tokyo 26-28 September 2000.

<sup>2</sup> In the context of this paper it is not possible to further elaborate issues of legitimacy and methodology. Some of these issues are addressed in "Future Challenges in Evaluation of Development Cooperation", a paper presented by the Netherlands at the Canberra Seminar of the DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation, 1996.



in the organisation's learning process, may produce the most useful evaluations.<sup>3</sup> Evaluation units within donor agencies may function optimally only when they provide adequate and usable information to policy makers and operational staff. However, it is also clear that the informational value of evaluations will be sharply reduced if one or more important stakeholders, e.g. institutions in the partner country, rightly or wrongly perceive the evaluation exercise as a one-sided, donor-driven and donor-controlled initiative.

Consequently, the main challenge for IOB is to try to serve the interests of widely varying groups of stakeholders and users. IOB's mandate, "to meet the need for independent evaluation in all fields of foreign policy" and its responsibility for the contents of its reports can however be difficult to reconcile with these diverse interests. Nevertheless, IOB has attempted to both optimise the involvement of stakeholders - inside and outside the Ministry - in its evaluations and safeguard its freedom to independently determine how studies will be conducted and how results will be reported. Below, we describe the place of feedback in IOB's evaluation process.

### *Feedback before and during IOB studies*

Before IOB embarks upon an evaluation, it establishes terms of reference in collaboration with the staff of relevant units in the Ministry and at the embassy or embassies involved. This process of dialogue is meant to ensure that the evaluation focuses on the appropriate issues and to facilitate feedback of evaluation results. Although IOB remains responsible for the content of the terms of reference, the Minister is invited to provide suggestions and comments.

IOB often uses reference groups to ensure the quality of its evaluation work. These groups consist of Ministry staff and external experts. They function mainly as a sounding board for IOB throughout the evaluation process. However, they also play a role in the feedback process. This applies to Ministry staff in particular, who through their participation in these groups have the opportunity to become very well informed about the evaluation and its preliminary findings.

In its country programme evaluations, IOB has also established reference groups in the partner country, consisting of local officials and external experts. This practice enhanced in-country quality control and encouraged learning and feedback among the partner country officials (see box 2).

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance Sonnichsen, R.C. Effective internal evaluation: an approach to organisational learning. In: F.L. Leeuw, R.C. Rist, and R.C. Sonnichsen. *Can Governments Learn?: comparative perspectives on evaluation and organisational learning*. 125-141. New Brunswick: Transaction Publisher.

Besides formally discussing the evaluation in the reference groups, IOB keeps subject matter specialists, senior officials and other stakeholders in the Ministry informed about its progress. Although these contacts are informal, they are considered extremely important in maximising learning in the organisation.

**Box 2. Trying to improve feedback in the partner country: the case of country programme evaluations**

To date, IOB has undertaken seven country programme evaluations, in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Egypt, India, Mali, Tanzania and the Palestinian Territories. The overall objective of each of these studies was to assess the policy relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the results of the bilateral aid programme. Each one covered the full period of the bilateral development cooperation relationship and had a similar approach and structure. The evaluation started with an inventory of all activities. Subsequently, a number of sectors were selected for detailed evaluation involving field investigations. Teams of independent experts, including Dutch and local evaluators, carried out all studies. Each country programme evaluation was coordinated by an IOB staff member and one external advisor, who were responsible for writing the final report.<sup>4</sup>

Attempts were made to involve the authorities, other stakeholders and local experts in the design and implementation of the country programme evaluations in order to:

- improve the quality of the evaluation by incorporating the views of these institutions into the analysis and making use of their detailed knowledge of society and social change in the partner country; and
- stimulate the feedback of the evaluation in the partner country by exchanging ideas about the results of the evaluation and, where possible, reaching a shared understanding of the issues to be addressed in order to improve policy implementation.

Participation took place through a combination of approaches, which generally involved sharing draft terms of reference with the local authorities, conducting intensive discussions with partner institutions at various stages of the evaluation, working with an in-country advisory group of independent experts, involving local experts as evaluators, organising workshops with stakeholders to discuss the setup of field studies, sharing preliminary results and organising a seminar involving all relevant stakeholders at the end of the evaluation study. Moreover, the official response by the partner country authorities was incorporated into the final evaluation report.

During field investigations, and when the results are analysed, the respective embassy or embassies are brought up to date on the evaluation at regular intervals. Generally, IOB invites comments on its draft reports from a wide range of stakeholders, including institutions in the partner country. Frequently, discussions of these reports take place in seminars and interactive workshops (see Box 3).

<sup>4</sup> For a full description of the way in which IOB's country programme evaluation on Egypt was conducted, refer to the proceedings of the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation's seminar "Evaluating Country Programmes", Evaluation and Aid Effectiveness No. 2, OECD/DAC, 1999.

**Box 3. Feedback involving in-country stakeholders: the study "Institutional Development in the Water Sector", Mozambique<sup>5</sup>**

Following field investigations and initial analysis of the results of the study, IOB organised a seminar in Maputo in order to share the results with a wide range of stakeholders such as the embassy, the field staff of the development activities studied, senior staff of counterpart institutions, and other donors. During the meeting the purpose of the evaluation was reiterated and its results presented. The participants were invited to voice their views on the preliminary outcomes of the study. Where points of view differed and where the accuracy of the findings had been questioned, the evaluators followed up with additional investigations and analyses. Later, the draft of the evaluation report was distributed among the stakeholders, who were invited to comment on its contents.

Sharing evaluation information with stakeholders and encouraging them to participate at an early stage contributed to the acceptance and implementation of the findings. It also gave donors sufficient time to adapt their planned activities in the water sector. Counterpart organisations were able to use the information in negotiations with the Netherlands and other donors, which were scheduled to take place before the final report on the IOB evaluation could be published.

*Feedback after the study has been completed*

Upon completion of the evaluation, IOB sets a formal feedback process in motion. The evaluation report is presented to the Minister, then sent on by the Minister to Parliament, accompanied or followed by a policy response. The preparation of the policy response is the task of the foreign ministry's policy or operational units. For instance, the relevant regional departments, in collaboration with thematic departments, prepared the policy responses for the above-mentioned country programme evaluations. Although IOB's formal role is limited to providing comments on the draft policy response, with particular attention to whether the evaluation results are properly represented in the document, its actual role in the process often involves active and intensive engagement in the discussions leading to the policy response.

IOB produces a short bulletin on each of its evaluation studies. This bulletin is released when the evaluation report is published, together with a press release compiled in close collaboration with the Ministry's Information and Communication Department (DVL). Both documents are also distributed to all units within the Ministry and to all Dutch embassies. In some cases, an evaluation report is launched at a press conference, where IOB provides additional information to the Dutch press. It has been observed that press coverage varies considerably depending on the type of evaluation, its results and the moment of publication. For instance, the press showed considerable interest in IOB's evaluation of Dutch humanitarian aid to Somalia,<sup>6</sup> which was published at a time when humanitarian crises in several areas (such as the former Yugoslavia and the Great Lakes region in Africa) were receiving a great deal of attention in the Dutch media.

Parliament's response to IOB's evaluations varies depending on the type of study and the subject evaluated. Parliament's Permanent Committee on Foreign Affairs normally puts the evaluation report and the policy response on its agenda for discussion with the Minister. IOB

<sup>5</sup> Institutional Development: Netherlands Support to the Water Sector, 1988 - 1998. IOB Evaluations No. 284, March 2000

<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian Aid to Somalia. IOB Evaluations No. 264, 1994

participates directly in these discussions. Upon request, IOB's Director and the inspector responsible for conducting the study provide the Committee with information concerning the ways in which the study was conducted and how IOB reached its conclusions. The Minister discusses the policy response with the Committee. The deliberations of the Permanent Committee on Foreign Affairs have frequently had a noticeable impact on policy formulation and implementation.

**Box 4. The impact of IOB's country programme evaluations on India, Mali and Tanzania: a case of evaluation reports arriving at the right time.<sup>7</sup>**

IOB's evaluations of the country programmes for India, Mali and Tanzania were published together with a special report which synthesised the findings and lessons of the three separate evaluations. All these reports became available right after the general elections, as a new government was being formed. At the time, the effectiveness and efficiency of Dutch development cooperation was the subject of intense debate in the media. Consequently, the results of IOB's studies received considerable attention from politicians, the press and the public. The final outcome of the various discussions was the incorporation of the main findings of the country programme evaluations, in particular those addressing aid effectiveness, into the newly formed government's four-year policy plan. Furthermore, those findings were then discussed in Parliament. In fact, the results of the country programme evaluations were used as justification for a subsequent review and reorganisation of the Netherlands' entire foreign policy. This resulted in the "decompartmentalisation" of the ministry and greater coherence among different areas of international affairs.

One special IOB feedback activity has been the publication of a synthesis report on the major findings of IOB's evaluations over a ten-year period.<sup>8</sup> This report was compiled at the request of the Minister for Development Cooperation as part of the 1995 review of Dutch foreign policy (see Box 4). The report synthesised the main findings and conclusions of 28 different evaluations, including sectoral studies, thematic evaluations and country programme evaluations, as well as studies dealing with the organisation and management of development cooperation. It was organised around a number of cross-cutting development cooperation issues. As a follow-up, the Minister for Development Cooperation produced a policy document<sup>9</sup> including information on how the findings and conclusions of IOB's evaluations had been incorporated into policy and practice.

Another form of feedback (once an evaluation report is published and the policy response is discussed in Parliament) is the involvement of IOB evaluators, in their capacity as subject matter experts, in further follow-up activities within the Ministry. For instance, IOB staff often participate in departmental task forces.

<sup>7</sup> Evaluation of Netherlands Aid to India, Mali and Tanzania. IOB Evaluations No. 260, 1994

<sup>8</sup> Netherlands Aid Reviewed, 1983-1994. IOB Evaluations No 266, 1995

<sup>9</sup> "Aid in Progress: Development Cooperation and the review of Dutch Foreign Policy", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995.

In addition to the above-mentioned formal and ad hoc feedback processes, IOB engages in many other types of formal and informal feedback activities. For instance, IOB inspectors regularly participate in the Ministry's staff training programmes and take part in ad hoc thematic seminars and workshops. They also provide advice to policy and operational units on specific issues which have been covered in IOB studies. It is believed that the effects of these activities will only become visible in the longer term.

Finally, IOB staff actively participates in public debate on development cooperation in the Netherlands whenever possible. This includes providing interviews to the media, participating in regular courses and seminars at major Dutch universities and other institutions and contributing articles to academic journals.

## **2. Recent developments in IOB's field of operations and their implication for feedback**

### **2.1 The changing context of international cooperation**

In the coming years, a number of important developments in international cooperation will make it necessary for IOB to redefine its role. Since this will affect the way feedback of evaluation results is organised, some of these developments are briefly described below.

The renewed emphasis on the sectoral approach to planning and administering aid in Dutch development cooperation will gradually begin to place new demands on the design of IOB's evaluations. When Dutch funding is no longer easy to trace or is spent in combination with funding from other donors, as will eventually be the case in sectoral programmes, multi-donor evaluations will make more sense than bilateral ones.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the growing emphasis on ownership in development cooperation will change perspectives on the role of the partner country and counterpart institutions in policy-making and policy implementation. This in turn will lead to joint donor-partner evaluations and could ultimately result in recipient-led evaluations.

The review of the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance<sup>11</sup> and the results of a user survey of IOB's users inside and outside the Ministry, carried out as part of this review, raised the following issues relevant to improving IOB's feedback strategy:

- Do evaluation studies have a significant impact? The answer to this question depends on their relevance and the way feedback is organised. Therefore, it is important to ensure optimal interaction between the supply side (the evaluation unit) and the demand side (policy makers and aid managers). Adequate dissemination and feedback is a major concern of those on the demand side. Users believe that in order to integrate evaluation results into policies and programmes, the responsible parties – policymakers, senior officials and operational units – need to stimulate learning by conducting staff workshops and seminars. Actions on the supply side which make a vital contribution to the impact of evaluations are well-written, concise reports, the use of summaries, customisation of reports and summaries for different audiences, the use of inventive dissemination

<sup>10</sup> For additional arguments see "Effective Practices in Conducting a Joint Multi-Donor Evaluation", Evaluation and Aid Effectiveness, Number 4, OECD/DAC, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> This study was commissioned by the OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation. See "Review of the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance", OECD/DAC, 1998.

mechanisms, and the provision of just-in-time information services (OECD/DAC, 1998, p. 79). Special attention should be paid to customising evaluation reports for users in partner countries, since it was noted that IOB's evaluation reports, in their current form, were read only by a relatively small group of experts in these countries.

- It was also noted that evaluation units could and should regularly monitor the follow-up to evaluation results. Two questions are especially relevant:
  - (i) To what extent has policy changed in response to the evaluation and has the policy change been implemented?
  - (ii) What is the capacity of the organisation to absorb and implement different policy changes in a given period (ibid.)?
- The usefulness of evaluations is a question of demand; thus, when planning and programming evaluations due consideration should be taken of suggestions by users. The evaluation unit needs to determine whether senior officials have a genuine desire to feed evaluation results back into the design of new policies, programmes and projects. The review indicated that evaluation departments could satisfy the needs of their users much better by programming a mix of long-term, wide-ranging studies and more narrowly focused short-term evaluations.
- Finally, increased participation in evaluation by institutions in partner countries would make evaluation results more applicable and useful in those countries.

## 2.2 A process of change

To address the points discussed above, IOB initiated a process of change in 1999, setting the following goals for itself:

- To diversify working methods and programming in order to arrive at a more "client-driven" approach: critical but result-oriented and tailor-made studies addressing specific issues relevant to current policy. This will also entail expanding IOB's range of products.
- To increase interaction with the Ministry's policy and operational units, including the embassies. This closer cooperation should not, however, come at the cost of IOB's independence - its freedom to determine what issues an investigation will address, what approach it will take and how the results will be reported. Improving the feedback process is one important element of reaching this goal (see section 2.3).
- To update and diversify evaluation approaches and methodologies. This involves ongoing training of staff in evaluation techniques applicable to development cooperation as well as new evaluation approaches and techniques relevant to evaluations in other policy areas. IOB's intention is to continue concentrating on formative evaluation, while also taking theory-based evaluation approaches into consideration.

One of the first steps was to cluster evaluations by policy theme in IOB's current programme. This approach allows comparison of evaluations and makes it possible to draw main conclusions for policy-making based on a series of studies conducted within a specific cluster. This in turn will generate synergy and allow IOB to devote more attention to the spearheads of Dutch foreign policy, like poverty reduction in developing countries, good governance (i.e. the

performance of public authorities and civil society organisations in partner countries), issues of international order and the promotion of Dutch interests abroad.

### **2.3. Measures to improve feedback**

This section presents a number of initiatives IOB is taking to further improve its feedback practices, in order to make its evaluations more useful and encourage its clients to apply the results.

#### **Consult with stakeholders during evaluation programming.**

Presently, IOB has an ongoing two-year evaluation programme. Topics for evaluation are selected on the basis of legal requirements, prior coverage and requests from Parliament or stakeholders within the Ministry. IOB has already increased the intensity and range of its consultations with these stakeholders in order to take fuller advantage of their interest in IOB's work.

#### **Organise the programme in thematic clusters.**

The present programme comprises four clusters: (1) poverty reduction, (2) governance, (3) international order and (4) economic, cultural and other forms of cooperation. This makes it possible for several IOB evaluators to specialise in each cluster, thereby enhancing the quality of peer commentary, improving backup possibilities, and allowing better consolidation of evaluation findings. IOB intends to regularly synthesise the findings and conclusions of evaluations carried out in the various clusters. Such syntheses, representing the most important knowledge accumulated over a longer period, would be very useful to IOB's users.

#### **Explore the relevance of new evaluation methodologies.**

One of the most critical conditions for proper feedback is the quality and transparency of evaluation reports. With the move away from projects to other types of aid interventions and the inclusion of new themes in the development debate, it is clear that IOB must explore innovative evaluation methods to keep on producing useful evaluation reports. For a long time, IOB has largely relied on mainstream methods of aid evaluation. While these approaches and methods have proved successful, IOB will explore the relevance of novel and innovative evaluation methods and approaches by making use of them in its evaluations, especially when covering topics outside the field of development cooperation.

#### **Reduce the lead time of evaluations.**

The proper timing of the publication of evaluation results has always been a thorny issue. IOB has therefore decided to reduce the lead time of its evaluations to a maximum of about one year. Studies that require more time should produce interim reports containing the results of specific studies carried out in the context of the evaluation (e.g. desk analyses, sectoral studies, specific surveys including statistical analyses, etc.).

### **Reduce the length of the evaluation reports and reorganise their contents.**

The length of evaluation reports will be restricted to a maximum of approximately 150 pages, including the summary and the main findings. In order to address the needs of all its users, IOB will also further diversify its range of products. In future, IOB's products will include evaluation reports, synthesis reports, working documents prepared by external consultants, review reports, brochures, summaries and fact sheets presenting major findings, lessons learned and issues to be addressed. IOB has already launched a series of working documents. This series will comprise documents prepared by external consultants in the context of IOB evaluations. Previously, such documents were not published but could be provided on request. For publication, working documents must conform to minimum standards of quality and style. This initiative will increase the transparency of the evaluation and provide a variety of stakeholders with the opportunity to access knowledge that may be particularly relevant to them.

In its evaluation reports, IOB plans to distinguish between the various types of findings and conclusions, taking into consideration their relevance to different groups of stakeholders. For instance, a distinction will be drawn between conclusions dealing with accountability and policy issues and those focusing on technical and operational matters.

### **Follow up on evaluations.**

In order to ensure that the Minister's policy responses on IOB studies are put to use, IOB has suggested incorporating them more thoroughly into practice and monitoring their implementation. As a result, the Ministry has decided to formalise the follow-up to IOB studies using action plans. Operational and/or policy departments will be responsible for drawing up the plans, which should contain well-defined proposals and a schedule for the implementation of the Minister's policy response. For monitoring purposes, progress in the implementation of action plans should be reported annually.

IOB evaluators regularly interact with senior officials and other stakeholders within the Ministry. These contacts are not formal, but extremely important in terms of their educational value for those involved in aid implementation. IOB aims to continue and where necessary intensify this interaction.

### **Establish a knowledge centre.**

IOB plans to establish a help desk, or knowledge centre, for decentralised evaluations. Its primary function will be to provide advice on methodology to staff - in other units in the Ministry and at embassies - involved in commissioning evaluations at project or programme level. In order to improve and safeguard the standard of decentralised evaluations, IOB also plans to use the help desk to provide quality control. Alongside these tasks, the knowledge centre would be responsible for promoting the use of the results of these evaluations. Thus, feedback activities could include disseminating the results of these evaluations, compiling synthesis reports and documents on lessons learned, organising seminars etc. In addition to serving as a clearing house for the findings of decentralised evaluations, the knowledge centre will serve as a channel for feedback of lessons learned from policy evaluations carried out by IOB as well as those carried out by evaluation units within other donor organisations.



**Use the internet.**

In order to improve the effectiveness of evaluation feedback to constituencies outside the Ministry, IOB has recently commissioned Euforic, a European Internet association, to create an IOB website. This site will provide easy access (through key words) to IOB reports and provide links to other evaluations. In addition to opening up new ways of organising, storing and sharing evaluation information, Euforic will provide a link to a One World-Euforic Think Tank with a special focus on evaluating development, running on a joint Euforic-One World website. Finally, the IOB site will provide opportunities for electronic conferencing and special topic groups. Once this site is fully developed, it will be important to keep it well maintained, so that visitors receive prompt replies to their queries or comments.

**Conduct user surveys.**

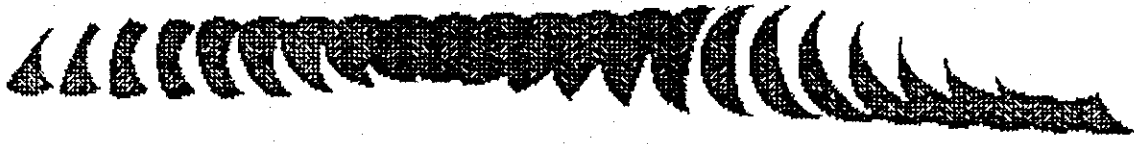
Finally, IOB could conduct regular surveys among its users on ways of further improving its evaluations and feedback practices.



# Feedback to Parliament, the media and the public

Policy and Operations Evaluation  
Department (IOB)

Presentation Tokyo September 27 2000



## Future efforts

- Articles in journals and newspapers by evaluators
- Participation in seminars, conferences and workshops
- Internet: indexed database
- Electronic forum
- Annual report

## Impact

- 1978-1984: reports are confidential
- 1984: MP's Herfkens and Knol ask for publication of all reports
- 1990: all reports become public
- 1994: report catalyst in re-assessment of all foreign policies
- 1999: Minister Herfkens guided by IOB reports in her reorganisation of bilateral aid

## Output of IOB (1988-1999)

- 41 IOB policy evaluation reports
- 11 multi-donor evaluations
- 6 studies of the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation
- 2 synthesis reports of earlier IOB reports
- 30 billion NLG covered
- 7 evaluations on request of the Minister
- 9 evaluations on request of Parliament

# Media and public

- Report becomes public when sent to Parliament
- Press release
- Articles in newspapers depending on sensitivity
- Same for discussion in Parliament
- Reports source for public debate

# Feedback to Parliament

- IOB presents report to minister of FA or minister for Development Co-operation
- The minister sends the report to Parliament
- The minister sends a “policy reaction” to the report to Parliament
- Report and policy reaction are discussed in Parliament with the minister



# Mandate IOB

- Independent evaluation in all fields of foreign policy, including development co-operation
- Policy level: themes, sectors, programmes and countries
- Independence in programming, TOR, implementation of evaluation, reporting
- But always willing to incorporate requests from ministers or Parliament

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