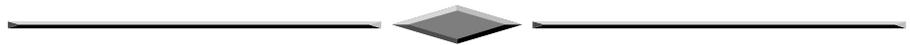




Country led evaluations: a discussion note

Prepared by WB/OED, UNDP/EO and IOB



**37th meeting
27-28 March 2003**

The purpose of this note is to provide a frame of reference for the informal discussion about country led evaluations that will take place on Friday, March 28th, 14:30-16:30 at the OECD after the formal session of the DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation has ended. This note has been prepared by IOB, OED/World Bank and EO/UNDP. The informal session will be chaired by IOB.

1. The fact that most evaluations of development aid have been led by donors and were done to satisfy donors' requirements had at least two significant consequences: lack of country ownership of these evaluations and a proliferation of donor evaluations leading to high transaction costs for the countries.

2. As development assistance is moving towards a policy-oriented programmatic, country led approach, it is also worthwhile to promote country led evaluations that will assess the new modalities of development aid and that would also increase country ownership (and therefore usefulness) of evaluations, reducing at the same time the countries' transaction costs associated with evaluations.

3. Experiences so far have been mixed if not disappointing. IOB, OED/WB and EO/UNDP have offered to support independent country-led evaluations in a number of partner countries. A link to the PRSP-process has been explored in 2001 with a selection of partner countries. However, these countries give priority to monitoring in the short run. Initiatives to set up evaluation units and to start up evaluations of development and of the role of donors have been taken in some partner countries. Only a few requests for support have been received.

4. The mixed results can perhaps be explained through a discussion of various aspects. One element is that the drive towards ownership is partly supply-driven, as is the case with PRSPs in general. The upcoming CDF evaluation will provide additional insights in the progress towards ownership. A second element is that evaluation as an instrument of learning in current management theories (as in Results Based Management) is often downplayed vis-à-vis monitoring. This is visible in most PRSPs. A third element may be the perceived risk on the side of partner countries that independent evaluations of donor support may have political and financial consequences. A heavy aid dependency could translate in a reluctance to evaluate the role of donors independently. A fourth and perhaps crucial element is that our offer of support was not integrated into the policy cycles of PRSPs, Consultative Groups, Round Tables and other regular mechanisms of interactions between donors and partner countries. A fifth element may be the time frame that we adopt: starting up a process towards a country led evaluation may require much more time than we expected because of the necessary internal negotiations between ministries, actors, evaluators and so on.

5. The challenge for the future is to ask attention for the crucial role of independent evaluation in development for learning purposes and to provide a basis for accountability. This role of evaluation has been recognized in donor policies and programs and is enshrined in the DAC Principles on Evaluation of Development Assistance. There is no similar recognition in for example the PRSP-framework and in current discussions on results based management in development. This recognition may provide a more solid basis to overcome the obstacles as mentioned in the previous point. The next challenge is then for country led evaluations to be incorporated in these policy processes.

6. Country led evaluations (CLE) require evaluation capacities at the country level. At the same time, a crucial way to develop these capacities is through "learning by doing". Suitable training and technical assistance can serve as catalyzers in the process of developing evaluation capacities, but actual opportunities to use these capacities, such as those that can be provide by a CLE, play a crucial role both in mobilizing these capacities and in ensuring their sustainability. Involving nationals (mobilizing existing national capacity) in the evaluation of external assistance projects is one of the ways to start the process of learning by doing.

7. It should be noted that CLEs are “country” led, i.e., not led by the donors, nor only exclusively by governments; also civil society can lead the CLE process and/or it could play a key role in evaluating the performance of public services through different means that can allow them to articulate their voice. The donors could still play a role, particularly in the “first generation” of CLEs, by nurturing the country’s demand for this type of evaluation (for example, through brainstorming sessions and/or workshops and also by asking for mutual evaluation under the ownership of the country concerned).

8. The country could lead the evaluation by determining which evaluations will be done, steering and managing them. In some cases the evaluations could be contracted out by a governmental and/or civil society organization. Some donors may be able and willing to contribute to set up a fund that countries could use to pay for these evaluations (a “country-led evaluation fund”, CLEF).

9. The CLEs could range from evaluations at the project level to sector and country level evaluations. The latter would evaluate development aid in the country from the country’s perspective. It could be preceded by evaluations at sector level (country sector evaluations), which could use project evaluations as building blocks, promoting also the development of self evaluation by public agencies.

10. A vision that could guide the CLEs would be to develop a Country Led Evaluation System (CLES) that at a later stage will be able to produce evaluations useful for the country and the donors, based on evaluation capacities developed at the country level, with high country ownership of the evaluations and with low transactions costs for the countries and for the donors. This system at a later stage could also play a key role in the evaluation of all national development efforts, whichever the source of their funds. Donors could periodically assess the quality of country-led evaluations and could use CLE results as not a negligible factor for own evaluation needs.