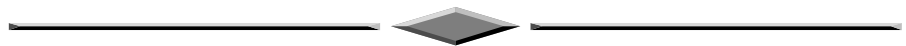**DAC Network on Development Evaluation**

REVIEW OF THE QUALITY OF EVALUATIONS

Appendix 1

THE 'MINIMUM-SUFFICIENT' GROUP OF EVALUATION STANDARDS

Amended October 2004
(Amendments and comments in italics)

This issues and option paper has been prepared by Australia for discussion at the meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation on 9 – 10 November, 2004.

2nd meeting
9 – 10 November 2004

THE 'MINIMUM-SUFFICIENT' GROUP OF EVALUATION STANDARDS

1.   Overview

The 'Minimum-Sufficient' Group of Evaluation Standards has been developed to assess the quality of DAC Member evaluation **reports**[1]. These standards are not intended to assess the quality of the demand, the quality of the evaluation function or the dissemination and integration of recommendations in Member countries.

The Standards have been organised into groups in accordance with the existing DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (hereinafter referred to as the DAC Principles). The Standards have also been influenced by the interpretations of these principles contained within the relevant DAC documents[2].

This approach has been taken because the Principles are still broadly relevant and are well known and established in the evaluation offices of Members. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this approach creates some difficulties; for example, the Credibility principle and standards are essentially dependent upon the Participation and Design and Implementation principles and standards, which is not ideal. Nevertheless, the potential benefits of maintaining the principles that are known and accepted by Members outweigh the difficulties created thereby.

The Principles of specific relevance[3] to the current TOR relate to evaluation purpose, impartiality and independence, credibility, usefulness, participation of donors and recipients, design and implementation, and reporting.

Each principle (and group of standards) is first briefly summarized and introduced. These introductory statements are quoted and/or derived from the relevant OECD DAC documents[4].

The individual standards in each group are numbered, given a short title, and briefly described. The individual standards, as well as the seven groups of standards, are left unweighted. This approach is not only relevant with respect to the current activity; it also recognises that the significance of any given standard or group of standards varies from evaluation to evaluation.

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[1] They will also assist evaluators to prepare high quality reports.
[2] Development Assistance Committee "Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance" OECD Paris 1991; DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation "Review of the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance" Paris 1998
[3] Those principles, or points within principles, that are not relevant to the current TOR have been omitted. A detailed analysis and justification has been provided in earlier documents.
[4] Opcit OECD 1991 DAC WPAE OECD 1998

2.   Evaluation Standards

Evaluation Purpose
The main purposes for the conduct of evaluations are:

- to improve future aid policy, programmes and projects through feedback of lessons learned;
- to provide a basis for accountability, including the provision of information to the public.[5]

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1.   Clear Purpose   The Terms of Reference (TOR) and the Evaluation Report clearly state the primary purpose of the evaluation as determined by the commissioning body.

Design and Implementation of Evaluations
Each evaluation must be planned and Terms of Reference drawn up which adequately define the purpose, the evaluation issues to be addressed, stakeholders, methodology, performance standards, resources and budget required to complete the evaluation.[6]

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2.   Stakeholders Identified   The *TOR and* report clearly identify the stakeholders participating in, and affected by, the evaluation.   Specifically, the report identifies: (i) the ultimate beneficiaries of the object of evaluation; (ii) those persons who most need to learn from the evaluation; and (iii) those who are best positioned to implement the recommendations contained in the evaluation report.

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3.   Evaluation Objectives Clear   The *TOR and* report clearly describes the objectives of the evaluation and the process adopted to ensure that all stakeholders understand them *and have had the opportunity to comment.* Clarifying the objectives of an evaluation is often not fully possible at the outset of an evaluation, but instead calls for a lengthier process that should be regarded as a central element of the evaluation process itself. Where this is so, the process of clarifying the objectives is clearly described.

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4.   Relevant Scope   The TOR and the Evaluation Report clearly state the *geographical* areas, *issues/themes and time periods* to be addressed by the evaluation [scope of work]; the information identified for collection; the standards against which performance is to be assessed or analyses are to be conducted; the resources and time allocated and reporting requirements. The TOR render it possible to ask pertinent questions about the object of evaluation and take into account the interests and needs of the parties commissioning the evaluation, as well as other stakeholders.

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[5]Development Assistance Committee "Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance" OECD Paris 1991 Section II paragraph 6.
[6] Ibid Section IX paragraphs 32 ff

5.   Precise description of the Object of Evaluation   The object of evaluation, be it a measure, program, or organization, is clearly and precisely described, documented, and unambiguously identified. Particular attention has been paid to any discrepancies between the original form the object of evaluation was anticipated to take and its actual form in practice or when implemented.

6.   Defensible Methodology   The questions to be addressed in the evaluation, and the methods and procedures chosen to address these questions, have been carefully documented. *Contextual influences (eg. social and political climate, relationship among stakeholders, hidden agendas etc.) and other* constraints have been identified and methods for dealing with the constraints have been explained. The report contains a detailed description of the organization of the evaluation, data collection and processing, analysis and reporting. Major methodological options have been discussed, including the risks associated with alternative options, and choices justified. Selected methods and procedures have been applied as stated and in accordance with their own quality standards (e.g. statistical tests, validity thresholds, attrition biases). Limitations faced in data collection and analysis have been described. Any changes that have occurred in proposed methods and procedures during the course of the evaluation have been described and justified.

7.   Valid, Reliable *and Trustworthy* Information   The data collection instruments selected, developed and employed are valid and reliable, *and sources of data are trustworthy*. Validity is determined by assessing the degree to which the instruments employed accurately reflect the concepts they are intended to measure. Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of the quality measured, whether between measurement instruments, persons, or over time. *Trustworthy sources are sufficiently precisely described so that their adequacy can be assessed.* All potential biases or errors are systematically identified, analysed and corrected as far as possible by recognised techniques.

8.   Sound Analysis   Data are appropriately and systematically analysed or interpreted according to the state of the art. Major cause-and-effects relationships, *plausible relationships* and underlying assumptions are made explicit. Critical exogenous factors have been identified and taken into account.

Credibility
The credibility of an evaluation depends on the expertise and independence of the evaluators and the degree of transparency of the evaluation process.[7]

9.   Demonstrated Professionalism and Competence   The evaluation report demonstrates the competence and trustworthiness of the evaluators. [Note: ~~*Performance with respect to this standard must be deduced rather than directly assessed.   Evaluation reports assessed as being of a high quality with respect to other standards (e.g. 8-20) would be rated high with respect to this standard.]*~~ *This information is only available to the organisation contracting the evaluation. - The reputation of the source agency for the document is a guide.]*

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[7] Opcit OECD Paris 1991 Section IV paragraph 18.

> **10.   Transparent Evaluation Process**   The evaluation report contains a clear and sufficient explanation of the process and methods for conduct of the evaluation that is accessible to relevant stakeholders. [Note: Performance with respect to this standard is partially dependent upon assessed performance with respect to 12, 13, 14, 17, 20].

Usefulness

For an evaluation "to have an impact on decision-making, the findings, conclusions, recommendations *and lessons* must be perceived as being relevant and useful and be presented in a clear and concise way. They should fully reflect the different interests and needs of the many parties involved in development cooperation. Easy accessibility is also crucial for usefulness. The evaluation process itself promotes a further clarification of objectives, improves communication, increases learning, and lays the groundwork for follow-up actions. Evaluations must be timely in the sense that they should be available at a time that is appropriate for the decision-making process."[8]

> **11.   Demand Responsive**   The evaluation report adequately addresses the information needs of the commissioning body *and other stakeholders.* It answers all question included in the Terms of Reference in a way that reflects the stated level of priority.

> **12.   Robust Findings**   The report provides stakeholders with a substantial amount of new knowledge (findings) *and has considered their views on the draft findings.* Findings are clearly identified. They follow logically from, and are justified by, data, interpretations and analyses through logical reasoning that are carefully described and do not contradict each other. Logical reasoning is developed as far as possible and necessary. When relevant, the report indicates which findings are generalisable and under which conditions.

> **13.   Clear Conclusions**   The conclusions reached in the evaluation report are clearly and explicitly described, together with their underlying assumptions**.**

> **14.   Useful Recommendations**   Recommendations are not mixed with conclusions, but they are derived from them, *as are lessons.* Recommendations *and lessons* are presented in sufficient detail and with an operational focus. The report indicates that practical constraints have been taken into account when formulating recommendations *and lessons* (e.g. regulations, institutions, budget).

Impartiality and Independence

"Impartiality and independence are closely inter-related concepts. In fact, the aim of impartiality is best achieved where evaluation activities are independent from operations personnel and managers who have interests in showing accomplishments and good performance. Impartiality also depends on the professionalism of evaluators and the methodology applied."[9]

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[8] Ibid Section V paragraphs 21 and 22.
[9] DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation "Review of the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance OECD Paris 1998 Pg 24

15.   Impartial and Independent Evaluation Function   The *ToR and/or* evaluation report clearly indicates the degree of independence of the evaluation function from the operations and management functions *of the commissioning agency*. Conflicts of interest are addressed openly and honestly so that they compromise the evaluation process and conclusions as little as possible.

16.   Complete and Balanced Assessment   The evaluation report is complete and balanced and presents the strengths and weaknesses that exist in the object being evaluated, in a manner that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

17.   Impartial and Substantiated Conclusions
The process employed in reaching conclusions is described. [It should be noted that conclusions go further than findings in the sense that they include value judgements.] The conclusions are based on explicit and agreed judgement criteria and benchmarks. The judgement criteria take into account all legitimate standpoints. Conflicting points of view and issues are presented in a balanced way.   There are no discrepancies between stated criteria and benchmarks and those that have been actually applied.

18.   Neutral Reporting   The evaluation report is free from distortion through personal feelings or preferences on the part of any party to the evaluation. Evaluation reports present conclusions in a neutral manner.

Participation of Donors and Recipients
"Whenever possible both donors and recipients should be involved in the evaluation process. "[10]

19.   Evidence of Participation   The evaluation report details the way in which donor *and* recipient *government* participation has been encouraged in the planning, execution and presentation of the evaluation. Where the purpose of an evaluation is to investigate the impact of the object of evaluation, be it a measure, program or organization, on the lives and welfare of beneficiaries, evidence *of the extent* of participation/consultation with those beneficiaries is provided.

Reporting

20.   Comprehensive and Clear Reporting   The final evaluation report is logically structured and outlines the evaluation context, goals, questions posed, and procedures used, as well as any constraints encountered that substantively hindered its ability to fulfil its purpose and adhere to good evaluation practice.   The findings, conclusions, recommendations reached *and lessons learned* are outlined in such a manner that the most pertinent information is readily accessible and comprehensible.

The report is free of superfluous information and analyses that do not substantiate the conclusions.

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[10] Ibid Section VI paragraph 23

The report contains a short executive summary. *This should describe the goal and context of the evaluated activity* and highlight the key findings, conclusions, recommendations *and lessons* in a balanced and impartial way. Appendices contain technically difficult information that is not accessible to all stakeholders.