

# Supporting Evaluation Capacity Development

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Tips for  
"Capacity-friendly"  
evaluation in  
development  
agencies

# INTRODUCTION

International development partners recognise that credible, effective evaluation systems are an important dimension of good governance. Evaluation can provide useful evidence to enhance our understanding of how development works and improve transparency and mutual accountability by demonstrating the results of aid. Evaluative evidence can help development partners manage programmes more effectively. Many development agencies have invested heavily in strengthening their own capacities to assess development results. Increasingly, donors are focusing on institutional and individual capacities for evaluation in partner countries, with the aims of strengthening domestic accountability, facilitating collaboration with partners and improving development effectiveness at the country level.

Beyond the capacity building and technical cooperation units typically involved in this type of work, a growing number of evaluation units in bilateral and multilateral agencies are tasked with engaging in capacity development activities with partner countries. While this is sometimes achieved through targeted trainings or other specific capacity programmes, the evaluation process itself is increasingly viewed as an opportunity for learning and a point to leverage and strengthen evaluation capacities.

Experiences demonstrate that the way donor evaluation departments' operate has capacity implications – both positive and negative. For example, involvement in evaluation processes can provide opportunities to learn about how evaluations are managed or to become more familiar with evaluation methodologies. On the other hand, if donors don't share their evaluation plans this can result in multiple, overlapping or uncoordinated field visits – putting pressure on in-country capacities to respond to data requests or provide input on evaluation questions.

By taking partner capacities into account in their own day-to-day work, evaluators and evaluation management in development agencies can capitalise on learning opportunities and avoid inadvertently undermining evaluation capacity.

This tip sheet draws on Network experience in capacity development and joint evaluation to provide some basic “tips” to advise managers and evaluators in development agencies on how best to support evaluation capacity development in partner countries through their regular evaluation work. It outlines elements of a more “capacity-friendly” approach to evaluation, based on the key principles of **harmonisation, alignment** and **use of partner country evaluation systems**.

Approaches for supporting more direct forms of capacity support have been discussed extensively elsewhere (see Further Reading). Recognising that evaluation staff are often over-stretched, the focus is on practical changes that can be incorporated into ongoing work.

### Note 1. Commitment to use country systems

Developing countries have committed to strengthening their systems, including evaluation systems, and donors have committed to using those systems to the maximum extent possible (Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 2005). In evaluation, country systems include government monitoring, performance management and evaluation departments, independent audit units, universities, think tanks and research centres, and local evaluators. In Accra in 2008, donors further agreed:

- to use country systems as a first option for aid programmes managed by the public sector
- to be transparent when they decide not to use country systems
- to support country-led reform programmes
- to develop corporate plans for using country systems

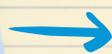
This tip-sheet is targeted primarily to evaluation staff and management, and those involved in managing the evaluation function in development agencies. Beyond evaluation units, in headquarters and the field staff and management should also be made aware of these implications, and work towards systematic and collaborative involvement of partner country stakeholders in the assessment of development projects.

### A few words on capacity development...

Capacity development is a long-term, endogenous process of change. While this process can be supported by external partners, capacity development should be owned and driven by partner countries themselves. Likewise, the primary goal of strengthening evaluation systems in partner countries is to inform policy making and increase accountability in-country, in support of shared development goals. Donors will also benefit from more effective country evaluation capacities, including through

increased partner participation in evaluation, cultivation of a more receptive environment for implementing recommendations and enhanced accountability mechanisms to monitor how aid is contributing to development results.

No single approach will work in every context. These tips are intended not as a road map, but rather as a point of departure to spur on critical thinking, discussion and action within development agencies.



## 10 TIPS

### for a capacity-friendly approach to evaluation

It is widely agreed that joint evaluations involving recipient countries have great potential for capacity development. In fact, this is often a driving motivation for undertaking joint work. But there are a number of barriers to joint evaluations, and capacity development is not always a priority for donor evaluation staff busy with full work programmes of their own. This tip-sheet, therefore, addresses ways to strengthen the capacity dimension of joint work and also points to ways that donors' own everyday work can be made more capacity friendly.

To ensure credibility and feasibility, these tips should be used in conjunction with the DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, and in accordance with country and agency regulations.

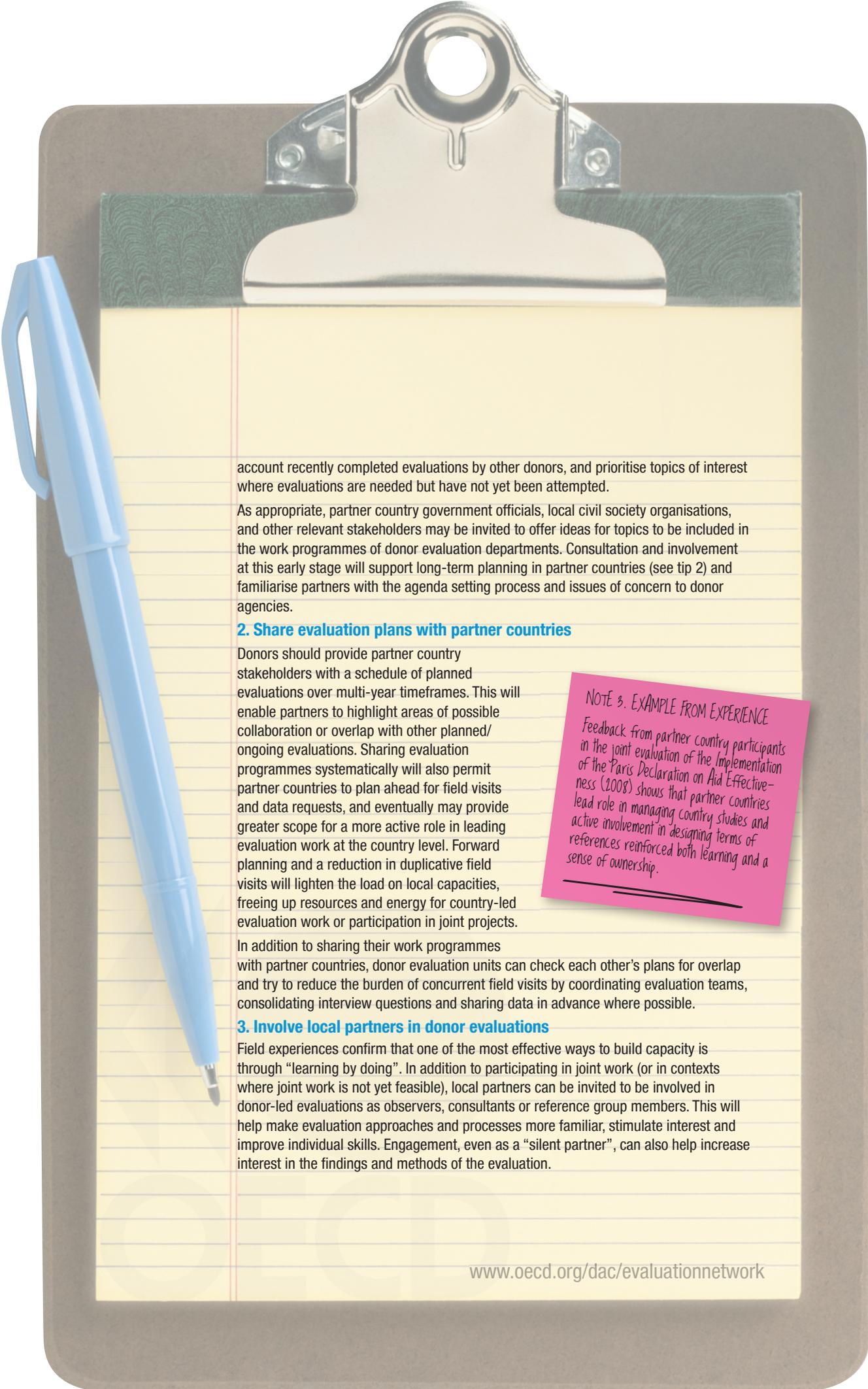
#### **1. Select topics of mutual interest and relevance**

When choosing policies, themes or programmes to evaluate and formulating the evaluation questions, think about how your evaluation might also assist in meeting the learning and accountability needs of partners. Donor evaluation departments can look for opportunities to produce evaluations that are timely, relevant and useful for partner countries' own development planning and management processes, in addition to responding to the needs of their own agency.

For instance, one way to make results more relevant to the needs of partner countries is by expanding the scope of the evaluation. Rather than focusing exclusively on the effectiveness of the donor's (individual) contribution, seek instead lessons on the country's own development strategies. Alternatively, an evaluation unit may choose to focus on a sector, say education, which is currently under debate in the country, or for which country policies are being developed. Evaluation managers should take into

Note 2. For policy makers and agency managers:

Evaluation departments need a clear mandate to participate in joint evaluation and to support country-led evaluations.



account recently completed evaluations by other donors, and prioritise topics of interest where evaluations are needed but have not yet been attempted.

As appropriate, partner country government officials, local civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders may be invited to offer ideas for topics to be included in the work programmes of donor evaluation departments. Consultation and involvement at this early stage will support long-term planning in partner countries (see tip 2) and familiarise partners with the agenda setting process and issues of concern to donor agencies.

## **2. Share evaluation plans with partner countries**

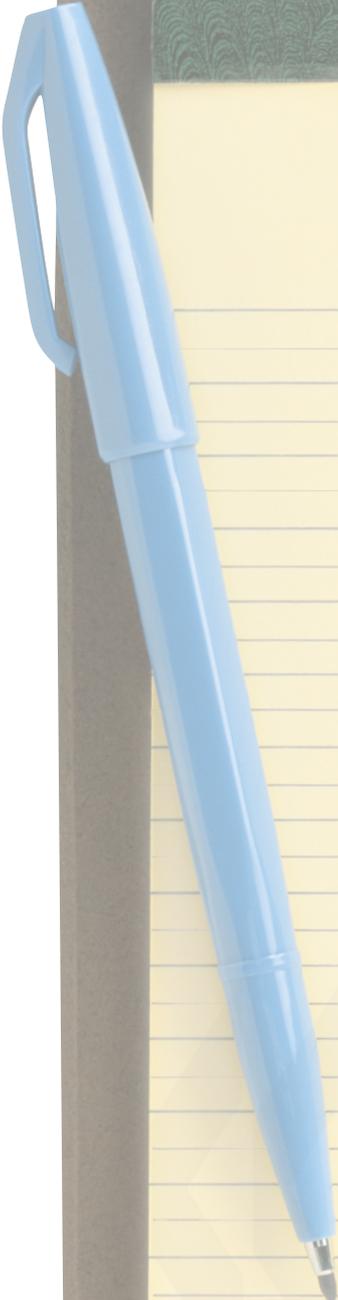
Donors should provide partner country stakeholders with a schedule of planned evaluations over multi-year timeframes. This will enable partners to highlight areas of possible collaboration or overlap with other planned/ongoing evaluations. Sharing evaluation programmes systematically will also permit partner countries to plan ahead for field visits and data requests, and eventually may provide greater scope for a more active role in leading evaluation work at the country level. Forward planning and a reduction in duplicative field visits will lighten the load on local capacities, freeing up resources and energy for country-led evaluation work or participation in joint projects.

In addition to sharing their work programmes with partner countries, donor evaluation units can check each other's plans for overlap and try to reduce the burden of concurrent field visits by coordinating evaluation teams, consolidating interview questions and sharing data in advance where possible.

## **3. Involve local partners in donor evaluations**

Field experiences confirm that one of the most effective ways to build capacity is through "learning by doing". In addition to participating in joint work (or in contexts where joint work is not yet feasible), local partners can be invited to be involved in donor-led evaluations as observers, consultants or reference group members. This will help make evaluation approaches and processes more familiar, stimulate interest and improve individual skills. Engagement, even as a "silent partner", can also help increase interest in the findings and methods of the evaluation.

**NOTE 3. EXAMPLE FROM EXPERIENCE**  
Feedback from partner country participants in the joint evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2008) shows that partner countries lead role in managing country studies and active involvement in designing terms of references reinforced both learning and a sense of ownership.



#### 4. Facilitate a more active role for partners in joint evaluation processes

During joint evaluations, involve relevant partner stakeholders actively and early on in evaluation processes. To maximise capacity development opportunities, relevant stakeholders should have an active role in the topic selection, set-up and design of the evaluation, and not be viewed simply as informants. Partners should also be engaged in responding to and following up on evaluation recommendations. Having direct responsibility for evaluation processes and outputs strengthens capacity and reinforces ownership.

#### 5. Hire local experts where possible

Using country systems can include hiring local experts to conduct an evaluation or serve as members of the evaluation team, reference group or steering committee, depending on the evaluation scope and context. The use of locally-based institutions, consultancy firms or organisations can be particularly effective in ensuring long-term sustainability and moving beyond individual skill building to advance a culture of accountability in the partner country. Local and regional evaluation associations can be good entry points to help identify resources. Joint efforts to develop freely available country-specific evaluation resource lists could also be considered.

Where possible, donors should consider using local procurement systems when hiring evaluation experts. In the context of strengthening and using country systems (see Note 1), donor rules on how to conduct evaluation should give a legal mandate for the use of local procurement systems. Support should also be given to strengthening these systems where needed.

#### 6. Don't assume there is no evaluation capacity, even if it isn't immediately apparent

Donors should always look at the most up-to-date facts when judging whether or not suitable partners are available to lead or conduct evaluations or undertake a joint evaluation. Existing capacity is often under-used or hidden due to a lack of support systems, low demand for evaluation from management or weak accountability systems in-country. National and regional evaluation associations can be good entry points for identifying and mobilising local capacities.



Meeting of the Africa  
Community of Practice in Managing  
for Development Results -2008

A newly trained evaluator in Vietnam hones her skills while collecting field data.



### **7. For learning and accountability, focus on using evaluation results in partner countries**

Even where evaluations are conducted primarily for donor accountability purposes, the analysis, findings and data provided in the final report may be of use to civil society groups, government or other national development partners. Suitable dissemination in-country should be planned and budgeted for at the outset of an evaluation of programmes in that country, and possibly even of relevant sectors or topics. If evaluation findings are not used, there will be little incentive to increase or maintain the capacity to produce them. Evaluators can help create an environment that is more conducive to evaluation and by supporting both process use and final use of evaluation findings in partner countries, for instance by holding local workshops at several points in the evaluation process. Where possible, evaluation reports should be translated to local languages in a timely fashion, to facilitate use by country partners.

### **8. Share examples**

Donor evaluation departments can share positive examples from their own experiences or facilitate learning opportunities among developing countries. Sharing examples of how high-quality evidence can be useful in informing development policies can help stimulate partner stakeholder interest and bolster demand for capacity development activities.

### **9. Co-ordinate with other donors**

Donors have committed to harmonise development evaluation to avoid creating unnecessary demands on partner systems that overwhelm local capacities and pull evaluation expertise away from partner country systems. Donors should use available platforms to co-ordinate with one another and work towards more collaborative processes.

### **10. Use common, harmonised standards**

Whenever possible, donor evaluation departments should use internationally agreed definitions and standards for evaluation to avoid confusion and support harmonisation. For instance, the DAC Quality Standards on Development Evaluation outline the core elements of a credible evaluation process and product and can be used to assess public policies in developing countries. Harmonisation will, in turn, lead to more consistent – and therefore more effective – capacity development.

## TOWARD OVERALL GOAL



## RELYING ON PARTNER COUNTRY SYSTEMS

development cooperation should increasingly become evaluated by partner countries, via their own national systems.

### FURTHER READING

DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation (OECD DAC 2010)

Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008)

"A strategic approach to Evaluation Capacity Development for the DAC Network on Development Evaluation: What is known and suggestions for moving forward" background paper by the Secretariat for the 9th Meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation (June 2009)

"The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working Towards Good Practice." (OECD DAC, 2006)

"Fact-finding survey on evaluation capacity development (ECD) in partner countries" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan for the OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (2006)

"Challenges, opportunities and approaches for increasing joint donor programming of evaluations" (Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation, 2008)

"Partnership in Joint Country Assistance Evaluations: A Review of World Bank Experience" The World Bank Operations Evaluation Department, 2005)

"Supporting Capacity Development - the UNDP Approach" (UNDP, 2007)

Mensa-Bonsu and Andersen: "Involving Developing Countries in the Evaluation of Development Cooperation: The Case of a Joint Evaluation of Development Cooperation between Ghana and Denmark" in Evaluation, volume 16, number 3 (July 2010)