

Norwegian Development Network

Resource and competence milieu for non-governmental development organisations

Paper for

OECD/DAC workshop Partners in development evaluation – learning and accountability

Session 1: Evaluation Practices

Evaluation Challenges

as seen by

Norwegian Non-governmental Organisations and Partners

Prepared by the Norwegian Development Network

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1 Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to provide an example of emerging evaluation trends in a national development community.

The paper sets out to:

- Present guiding principles that Norwegian NGOs adhere to in their evaluation work.
- Present and discuss innovative approaches to evaluations.

Several methods of information gathering have been employed:

- A set of evaluation reports has been checked for description of evaluation methods, stated purpose, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, role of external evaluator and the extent to which the OECD/DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance (1991) have been addressed.
- Questionnaires filled in by 34 member organisations of the Norwegian Development Network (NDN) on knowledge and use of OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (1991) and experience in innovative evaluation practices have been compiled and analysed (enclosure 1).
- Questionnaires filled in by 13 individuals in 11 member organisations on their personal experience in participatory evaluation have likewise been compiled and analysed (enclosure 2).
- Discussions have been held with NDN member organizations and an external facilitator at the two-day workshop “Learning through participatory monitoring and evaluation” arranged by NDN in Oslo February 3-4 2003.
- Experience from a participatory evaluation carried out by an NDN member and a partner in Peru has been analysed so as to draw lessons from choice of methods and usefulness to the local partner and target beneficiaries.

2 Evaluation practices of Norwegian NGOs

2.1 Findings from nine evaluation reports on projects aimed at women

The paper draws on a set of nine evaluation reports from projects concerned with women’s general empowerment and/or education and health in Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda. The projects are implemented by local organisations in co-operation with Norwegian NDN members and partially funded by NORAD. External evaluation teams carried out the evaluations in 2002.

2.1.1 Description of evaluation methods

In general, the evaluation reports do not detail the evaluation methods employed. In three of the reports inadequate description of methods may give reason to doubt validity of findings and recommendations. In three reports the same applies with respect to reliability.

2.1.2 Purpose of the evaluations

One report states that the purpose of the evaluation was learning, primarily by the NGOs, national authorities and back-donor involved – with no mention of learning by the target group. One report states that the purpose of the evaluation is for managerial reasons, another that it is to provide information, a third that it is control and a fourth that the

evaluation is carried out simply because it is mentioned in the project document. Four reports have no mention of purpose.

2.1.3 Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

In four cases the back-donor was the party, which proposed that the evaluation should be carried out - in one instance together with the Norwegian NGO. Five reports make no mention of who initiated the evaluation.

Only two reports have information about who prepared the ToR. One back-donor wrote the ToR on their own, another wrote the ToR in co-operation with the collaborating NGOs and the external evaluator.

Three reports have no information on who defined the questions to be posed. According to the reports, it seems that the external evaluator defined the questions alone in one case, together with the back-donor only in three cases, with the back-donor and the local partner organisation in one case and with the Norwegian NGO and the local partner in one.

The target group was involved in all the evaluation processes, limited however to the stage data collection, i.e. as providers of the information collected. Likewise, local partner organisations provided information to all the evaluations. The back-donor provided information to five evaluations, the Norwegian NGO to one. Only in one of the nine countries concerned did the national authorities provide information. In eight of the nine cases the external evaluator did the data analysis, in one case this was done by the target group, the local partner organisation and the national authorities. The external evaluator in all cases was responsible for implementing the evaluation, making the recommendations and preparing the report.

2.1.4 Assessment of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria:

Relevance:	In eight reports the relevance of project objectives was assessed either to a large or to some extent. In one report this issue is not addressed.
Effectiveness:	In all reports effectiveness was assessed.
Efficiency:	In one report efficiency was assessed to a large extent, in one to some extent, while four reports have no reference to this criterium.
Impact:	In all reports impact was assessed - in seven to a large degree and in two to some degree.
Sustainability:	In four reports sustainability was addressed to a large extent, in four to some extent, while one report does not address this criterium.

2.2 Findings from questionnaires filled in by NDN members

The following type of organisations have filled in a questionnaire on the OECD/DAC evaluation principles and innovative approaches to evaluation:

Annual development turnover – Euro	Members of NDN	Filled-in questionnaires
More than Euro 1,3 mill	6	5
Between Euro 660 000 and 1,3 mill	21	11
Less than Euro 660 000	18	9

The answer rate was 50 per cent or more in each category of organisations. In addition, nine members of an umbrella organisation have filled in the questionnaires. The sample

reflects the member organisation not only with respect to size, but also their value basis, geographical and thematic foci. It is representative enough to draw conclusions.

13 individuals from 11 member organisations have filled in a questionnaire about their personal experience with participatory monitoring and evaluation. The sample is not representative for NDN, thus the information generated is referred to only in passing.

2.2.1 Use of the OECD/DAC Principles and Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance

One in four organisations, irrespective of size, makes use of the OECD/DAC evaluation principles and criteria. A similar number may use them from time to time, but not systematically. Two medium-sized and five small organisations know the principles and criteria, but never use them. Some mention that the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD) has no specific guidance or requirement as to the use of the principles and guidelines. Five organisations do not know the principles and criteria. Several organisations leave the choice of using the principles and criteria to external evaluators.

2.2.2 Purpose of evaluations

Learning stands out as the main purpose of evaluation, often combined with motivation, management and/or accountability. Only one sees assessment of fulfilment of plans as a main purpose; another see this as important only as an end-of-project activity. Five organisations see all the mentioned purposes as equally important.

2.2.3 Impartial and independent evaluations

A little more than half of the organisations agree that *'the evaluation process should be impartial and independent from the process concerned with policy-making, and the delivery and management of development assistance'*. The rest take issue with this OECD/DAC principle: some question 'impartiality', some 'independence'. Several state that participatory evaluations are preferable due to their compatibility with learning.

2.2.4 Systematic and objective evaluations to determine relevance, fulfilment of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability

Nearly all organisations agree with the OECD/DAC definition of evaluations, though many have reservations. Several question the concept 'objective'. While the definition may be suitable for external evaluations, many find it inadequate for participatory evaluations because such evaluations are contrary to objectivity and because there may be different notions of the term 'systematic'.

2.2.5 Distribution of roles in participatory evaluations

Around half of the organisations claim to be engaged in participatory evaluations. Their definition of participation, however, varies considerably. Several seem to consider that an evaluation is participatory if the local partner is involved in the preparation of the ToR, if the evaluation team has representatives of the collaborating NGOs in addition to external consultants, or if the target group is given the opportunity to answer questions or discuss findings. Only four organisations clearly state that participation means that all types of different stakeholders should participate in all or some of the evaluation stages.

2.2.6 Participatory evaluation

The respondents to the questionnaire on participatory evaluation had experience from participatory evaluation in a wide range of fields including civil engineering, substance abuse reduction, education, health, micro finance, natural resource management, slum development and sports. Twelve of the 14 respondents were generally positive to their experience with this type of evaluation, while two could not yet draw any conclusions. Their concerns relating to participatory evaluation comprised:

- How to get all stakeholders - including back-donors - and commercial consultants believe in and adopt the principles of true participation.
- How to build participatory methods into the ToR.
- How to get all relevant stakeholders take part in the relevant evaluation stages.
- How to make the target group and local partner capable of participating in evaluations at the same level as other stakeholders.
- How to find enough time for true participatory monitoring and evaluation.
- How to address conflicts and power struggles.
- How to link participatory monitoring and evaluation to planning.
- Whether or not visiting Monitoring and Evaluation Personnel have the ability to determine validity of progress reports presented by local partner.
- How to bring the approach from local to country level.
- How to produce information which will satisfy back-donors.

3 Emerging issues

Section 2.1 above shows that neither evaluation methods nor purpose are always clearly described in evaluation reports. External evaluators and donors may still be the dominant parties in evaluations, while local partners, target beneficiaries and national authorities may have but minimal roles. Effectiveness and impact seem to be addressed more often than the remaining OECD/DAC evaluation criteria relevance, efficiency and sustainability.

Section 2.2 shows that the concepts ‘impartial’, ‘independent’, ‘objective’, ‘systematic’ and ‘participatory’ are neither widely adopted nor well understood by the informants. There are trends of change, however, as detailed below. These trends were discussed among a group of participants at a recent workshop on participatory monitoring and evaluation in Oslo.

3.1 Control vs learning as purpose of evaluation

For the last decade and a half, national and local responsibility and ownership to development processes have been a dominant paradigm in development co-operation. The paradigm surfaced in response to a notable lack of lasting impacts of earlier project-oriented development initiatives, which were planned and to some extent implemented by donors and other Northern development actors. At the same time, it has become widely recognized that transparency, commitment, motivation and active involvement by the target population as well as local and national organisations and institutions is vital. It stands to reason that in this context traditional donor-driven, external evaluations have lost much of their relevance. Such evaluations may still be of value in cases of possible misappropriation, embezzlement or fraud, and should perhaps be classified as some kind of a management audit. It follows that a continuous cyclic learning process of consultation,

action and reflection, where experiences gained are evaluated and ploughed back into the project process should become standard practice in all monitoring and evaluation.

3.2 Impartiality and independence vs reliability in evaluation processes

It may be difficult to achieve a true measure of impartiality in social interventions. We all have our experiences and reference grids, which we carry with us, and which bias our information seeking, compilation and analysis. Some argue that those covering evaluation costs may also, directly or indirectly, willingly or not, influence choice of design, approach and results. Therefore, impartiality and independence should perhaps be replaced with a more value-oriented quest for honesty and integrity, and thus enhanced reliability. This would imply that all stages in the evaluation process may be validated through a series of methods such as peer evaluation, use of traceable sources of information, search for contrary information including different opinions etc. Local and national stakeholders may of course provide reliability on line with any other development actors, be they from the South or from the North. It should also be recognised that learning may have little value if it does not lead to action. Having evaluations as an intrinsic part of planning and management would greatly enhance their usefulness.

3.3 Objectivity vs subjectivity

At a time when objectivity and neutrality generally have been abandoned as a realistic guiding principle in social sciences and the media, it would seem pertinent to let go of such a principle also in development co-operation. The people affected by the social change through development co-operation would appear to be the most suitable evaluators, both for basing the analysis and conclusions on relevant information and for learning. In such an approach it is a major challenge to establish that the evaluators are truly representative of the groups on whose behalf they act. Though the concept 'participation' is not yet well embedded in the development community, many still recognize the participation of stakeholders, in particular the target groups and the local partner organisations, as crucial to the understanding of the relevant issues, ownership of the development process and change. To them, objectivity is irrelevant to the design of future policy, strategies and activities. In participatory evaluations the role of external consultants is that of a facilitator rather than an evaluator. This may require more knowledge about the issues and greater integrity compared to external evaluations. The facilitator may be required to propose relevant and realistic options for the perusal of the target groups and other stakeholders.

3.4 Characteristics of a good participatory evaluation

The recent evaluation workshop in Oslo came up with the following characteristics of a good participatory evaluation, not all of them necessarily appearing at the same time:

- Initiative taken by any stakeholder.
- 'Need to know' rather than 'nice to know' approach.
- Amplifying voices, which have not been heard before.
- Giving room for surprises and unexpected suggestions or approaches.
- Readiness for changes in evaluation design during the evaluation process.
- Target groups and other stakeholders showing interest in the process.
- Target groups and other stakeholders taking active informed part in all relevant stages the process, i.e. deciding whether to evaluate, purpose of evaluation, what to evaluate, evaluation methods, collection, compilation and analyses of information, recommendations and decisions about follow-up action.
- Findings valid and reliable.
- Results trustworthy and acknowledged by participants.

- Relevance checked.
- Possibly resulting in changes in power bases.
- Possibly resulting in changes in the development initiatives evaluated.

3.5 Towards a complementary definition of evaluation

In view of the above, we may suggest the following definition of an evaluation process:

‘The evaluation process should be an integral part of policy-making, planning and management of development initiatives, initiated and carried out by or together with relevant stakeholders, with learning leading to action as the main purpose. The aim should be to assess the relevance of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and/or sustainability.’

4 Case study: Evaluation of the Adolescent Mothers Centre, Lima, Peru

4.1 Project background

In 1998, Centro de Desarrollo Técnico Productivo (CEDETEP), a Peruvian NGO based in Lima, together with the Ministry of Work conducted a training programme for young mothers and girls in the area of Cono Sur. A group of participating teenage mothers – many of them victims of rape and violence - shared concerns, worries and problems related to their personal, family and social situation. CEDETEP responded by approaching the Stromme Foundation, Norway, to assist in the establishment of a house for young mothers who had been victims of family violence. The Stromme Foundation, having Children at Risk as a priority target group, was positive to the proposal.

A wide range of potential stakeholders was invited to plan the project, by use of the ZOPP method. The process came out with the following general objectives:

- Reduce the number of young mother cases in Southern Lima through information work.
- Give special attention to young mothers and their children through a programme with the purpose to reintegrate them into family, society, education and work life.

The project was to sensitise the community, provide legal support to young mothers, help traumatized girls recover and rebuild their self esteem, develop a positive relationship between mother and child, teach girls about reproductive health, nutrition and child care and promote education and vocational training for the mothers so that they could start to earn an income.

The four-year project named the Adolescent Mothers Centre started in 1998.

4.2 Preparation of the evaluation

In the summer of 2002, the Stromme Foundation initiated a mid-term evaluation of the Adolescent Mothers Centre, as stipulated in its agreement with the back-donor NORAD. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess strategies, policies, actions and progress to date, to address challenges of the project and to adjust the approach if needed. CEDETEP and the Stromme Foundation agreed on the following evaluation principles:

- Focus on learning aspects. The mothers should be invited to participate in the process and share their views, experiences and concerns. The learning should provide a basis for addressing challenges and adjusting project approach if needed. The learning should be shared with other development initiatives in the region.
- Evaluation methods and techniques should be chosen which the mothers and other stakeholders could continue to employ for the further improvement of the Centre.
- The evaluation should focus on process, rather than on a specific product. Nonetheless, a report describing the evaluation process and project impacts on the lives of the target group should be prepared.

The ToR were prepared by the partner organisations in a process of deliberations and discussions. CEDETEP wanted to find out how they could better serve the young mothers with respect to mother and child health, local fundraising and other interventions. The Stromme Foundation wanted to test and assess participatory methods and techniques that could be used also in other educational projects and projects working with Children at Risk. In preparatory meetings the partners:

- Identified main stakeholders and participants in the evaluation process.
- Selected impact as the most important criterium to be assessed.
- Agreed that methods and techniques that seemed the most appropriate to generate participation by different stakeholder groups should be defined and selected.

The partner organisations each appointed members of the evaluation team. The team was composed of representatives from CEDETEP, the Stromme Foundation Regional Office and Headquarter and a psychologist from Action Aid. One team member had experience in using participatory methods with traumatised children and youngsters, including a variety of games, techniques and tools to open people's minds, create trust and improve their self awareness and self esteem. Another member had experience in traditional PRA/PLA tools and tools used in organisational psychology, like Appreciative Inquiry. The team could also draw on applied psychological techniques from "Presencia Amorosa" of Ron Kurtz and social psychology/operative groups from Pichòn Rivere and Bleger. The team selected the methods that appeared the most appropriate, each serving a specific objective. To extend the learning experience to a wider audience, each method and technique was to be documented in the report, with attached objective, result and conclusion. Thus, the evaluation would help evaluation teams make informed choices for other contexts from a wide selection of methods and techniques.

4.3 Report vs process

Often, the evaluation report is the most visible outcome of an evaluation, assessing progress according to set objectives and the financial aspects of an intervention. As for the Adolescent Mothers Centre, audit reports have confirmed that the considerable construction works that are part of the project had progressed according to plan. The "softer" part of the project was the target of this evaluation; more specifically the impact on the life of the girls. The process was to be the most important outcome, in combination with what it could spark of positive changes after the evaluation. The participatory learning process itself and the experience gained through the process were to be the main foci of the evaluation report. It has turned out to be a methodological challenge to communicate and transfer this kind of information to outsiders, as it is not easy to document the participants' individual and group learning, perceptions, attitudes and understanding. The report was written just after the evaluation process; too early for inclusion of any lasting change in

these aspects. To document the continuation of the process, a “Step 2” report may be built into the continuation of the project as part of a participatory monitoring and evaluation system.

4.4 After the Evaluation – the process continues

The participatory methods involving the young mothers made them discover realities that they had not perceived before. Today they are more conscious of the benefits the Centre provides and feel more competent to assume responsibilities and roles that will increase project relevance, achievement of objectives, effectiveness, efficiency, impacts and sustainability.

The participative evaluation instigated both enthusiasm and concern in CEDETEP and the Stromme Foundation for implementing the proposed changes to improve the Centre. Among CEDETEP’s announced measures/actions are to:

- Strengthen the organisation’s planning capacity to reach their short, medium and long-term objectives.
- Involve the adolescent mothers in project planning and implementation.
- Train mothers in preventative health care for children.
- Provide mothers with vocational training at basic, intermediate and advanced level, taking into account profitability and marketing.
- Approach parents, other family members and members of the community and seek their active participation in the project.
- Involve teachers from schools where preventative work is carried out, to add and improve the curriculum of the topic “Sexuality in Adolescence” as a means to reach a bigger number of adolescents at risk.
- Strengthen networking with institutions working with related issues.
- Strengthen relationship with Ministry of Education with a view to establish kindergardens.
- Introduce new fund-raising methods for the project, so as to gradually achieve sustainability.
- Expand the outreach of the project.

CEDETEP has already taken several measures as a follow-up of the evaluation:

- The strategy for assessing the mothers needs and attending to them has been redefined.
- Project staff and the Centre’s executive board have attended a seminar on Logical Framework Analysis.
- Plans have been made for staff training in the use of computers and in English.
- More attention has been given to health, psychological needs, legal advice and child care.
- Vocational training has started.
- Contact has been made with partners and mothers of the adolescent mothers.
- An Adolescents Mothers Supportive Committee has been established with adolescent mothers as members. The young mothers have started to give talks about pregnancy prevention in primary and secondary schools and on the radio, participate in vocational training, exhibitions and sale of goods produced and engaged in fund raising.

- Approval has been received by the Ministry of Education to get teachers for a project kindergarden.
- A process has started to establish a Pro Adolescent Mothers Foundation. The foundation will run the Centre after the project comes to an end in two years' time. The parties involved are CEDETEP and an NGO in care of the infrastructure at the Centre, the local municipality authorities and the Stromme Foundation.
- Having had its project planning capacities improved, the organisation is presently preparing two new projects.

In addition to being a channel of financial resources, the Stromme Foundation Regional Office provides capacity building in project preparation, planning, implementation and evaluation. After the evaluation, the office has:

- Supported seminars on the Logical Framework Analysis and on accounting.
- Given advice on financial management, preparation of project proposals and reports and efficient fund raising.
- Participated in the committee preparing the Pro Adolescent Mothers Foundation.
- Linked the Centre with another similar project in the region for the sharing of experiences and ideas.

4.5 Future of the Centre

The processes and steps taken after the evaluation reflect that CEDETEP is geared at continuous adjustment and improvement. The project aims at the following in its fourth year of operation:

- Train all CEDETEP staff in strategic planning.
- Further a wholistic approach to the young mothers.
- Involve the parents even more in project activities.
- Train all members of the Adolescents Mothers Supportive Committee in leadership and help them become "role model" to their peers.
- Train teachers and student leaders at secondary level to be responsible for the topic "Sexuality in Adolescence" so that they can replicate the mothers' preventative talks in their schools.
- Continue with radio programmes with young mothers.
- Carry out fund-raising campaigns in a more professional way.

The above list may seem ambitious. However, the Stromme Foundation Regional Office looks at the future with optimism and great expectations and will continue to support the Centre so that it can achieve its goals and objectives.

Enclosure 1: Evaluation Challenges as seen by Norwegian NGOs and partners

Questionnaire on knowledge and use of OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (1991) and experience in innovative evaluation practices

This questionnaire should be filled in by a person or a group of persons in your organisation who is informed about the evaluation practices in your organisation .

Name(s)	
Organisation	
Date of filling in this form	

Questions	Answers
1. Does your organisation make use of the OECD/DAC Principles and Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance? If not, why?	
2. In general, what does your organisation see as the main purpose of evaluations: control, steering, learning, motivation, general information and/or others?	
3. Does your organisation agree that the evaluation process should be impartial and independent from the process concerned with polity-making, and the delivery and management of development assistance?	
4. Does your organisation subscribe to the following definition in full or in part, including its concepts and terminology: "Evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors"? If no or partially no, please explain.	
5. If your organisation engages in participatory evaluations, which of the stakeholders make the Terms of Reference, define which questions are relevant during field work, collect and analyse data, make recommendations, define follow-up action etc?	
6. Have you engaged in any other type of new approaches and methods of evaluation. If yes, please give some details.	
7. Please give some key words relating to your evaluation practices which you think other development actors would benefit from learning about.	
8. Have you engaged in a participatory or other innovative evaluation which may be presented as an interesting case study showing both advantages and disadvantages of this type of evaluation in the OECD/DAC workshop in Paris in March 2003? If yes, please give some details.	
Any other relevant information you want to pass on.	

To be returned to sekretariat@bistandstorget.no by **January 15 2003**.

Enclosure 2: Evaluation Challenges as seen by Norwegian NGOs and partners

Questionnaire on personal experience in participative evaluation

This questionnaire should be filled in by individuals in your organisation with experience in participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E).

Name(s)	
Organisation	
Date of filling in this form	

Questions	Answers
How many years of experience with participatory M&E do you have? Indicate years or months, eg Oct 1998 to June 1999.	
Where was your experience? List which country and name of project/initiative.	
What role did you play in this? Indicate whether this was designing, implementing, facilitating, reviewing, managing (locally), and/or managing (at head office of funding agency)	
What sector was your experience in?	
How would you classify your experience? Indicate whether this was generally positive, generally negative, not sure yet.	
What currently are your top three concerns and/or questions about participatory M&E?	

To be returned to sekretariat@bistandstorget.no by **January 15 2003**.