

# **Donor Support for Evaluation Capacity Development: From the Perspective of Recipient-country**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, the issues on donor support for ECD in recipient-countries have attracted a great deal of attention. However, most of the reports were made from a donor perspective and could hardly reflect the experiences from recipient-countries. Rather than systematically elaborate on donor support for ECD, the article will focus on the issues from the recipient country perspective.

This paper will first present a brief analysis of ECD in recipient countries. From author's personal view recipient countries have not attached enough importance to ECD yet. The author points to a paradox in China, where the economy has grown but capacity has not kept pace and donor support has not inserted a desired influence on the ECD in China.

By studying the documents on ECD, the author try to sum up the issues of ECD from the donor community and to pose some questions from the respective perspectives of recipient countries which may bear more thinking, discussing and debating. The dialogue should help identify where the obstacles exist for donor support for ECD.

Then the author raises the key point that it is a more effective way for donor to support ECD. But for the moment we still have insufficient experience in joint evaluation between donors and recipient-countries

The article introduces the two cases based on author's own experience drawn from the evaluations jointly conducted with the donors. The author has realized that joint evaluation is a good evaluation mode. It helps strength evaluation capacity building of recipient-country and is a good start for developing countries, which are short of evaluation experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is written by the authors in her personal capacities. The views and opinions expressed in the paper do not necessarily correspond with the views of NCSTE.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In terms of development and cooperation, ECD has become a hot issue. Donors tend to pay more and more attention to the ECD in recipient countries and some progress have been made in improving evaluation capacity. One issue is frequently discussed on many occasions and in a lot of articles: Can donors contribute to enhancing evaluation capacity in recipient countries? What is the effective way for donors to support ECD in recipient countries?

The DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation has endeavored to enhance ECD in developing countries through collective activities. At the DAC evaluation seminars in recent years, the issues on donor support for ECD in recipient-countries have attracted a great deal of attention. In 1996 the Working Party conducted a survey on the issue<sup>2</sup>.

The author observed that the studies and surveys mentioned above were made from a donor perspective and could hardly reflect the experience from recipient-countries. Therefore, rather than systematically elaborate on donor support for ECD, the article will focus on the issues from the recipient-country perspective:

*How shall we understand the ECD in recipient countries? Is ECD a hot issue as well as in recipient countries? Does this issue also attract as much attention in these countries as it does in donor community? If not, why?*

*Since the joint evaluation (or in current lingo: partnership in evaluation) is recognized as a very good mode, why is it rare that donor and partner countries undertake joint evaluations in full partnership? What are the major barriers for that?*

*How should we deal with the issue of the Asymmetric Relationship occurring in the joint-evaluation? How can we reduce the negative impact of it?*

## 2. ECD IN RECIPIENT COUNTRIES

### What do the people in recipient countries think of ECD?

Generally speaking, developing countries have not attached enough importance to ECD yet. While being considered a strategic issue, ECD continues to be discussed and argued about in donor community, it is a relatively new concept among both evaluators and managers in developing countries.

For instance, the author noticed a paradox in China, where the economy has grown but capacity has not kept pace. In China the concept of ECD is quite new to either evaluators or managers. Even few of those involved in evaluation can utter the definition of ECD. If we carry out a search for the papers on evaluation in China, we can hardly find one concerning ECD.

In 1999 National Center for Science and Technology Evaluation of China (hereafter

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<sup>2</sup> See REFERENCES, Evaluation Capacity Building: Donor Support and Experiences, at DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation, OECD, 1996

NCSTE), entrusted by UNDP, hosted an international conference on ECD in developing countries, attended by the representatives of about developing countries and donors. It probably was the first conference on ECD ever held in China. The conference was later referred to as 'Beijing Conference' in the concerning UNDP documents and was considered by the evaluators of the recipient countries a key milestone marking the commencement of ECD in developing countries and countries in transition.

While preparing for the conferences, NCSTE, as the host, has conducted face-to-face investigations on the issue of ECD among our colleagues who are evaluators and some officials from the Ministries who are the clients/consignors of evaluation contracts and the users of evaluation results. First, we asked the evaluators and the officials, "Have you heard of ECD?" Few could give a positive answer. Then we gave them a brief definition of ECD and organized a discussion. But people differ from each other in understanding the definition. We realized that although we have spared no pain spreading the issue of ECD on various occasions, there are still few who have any idea of it. That is to say, to make the Chinese evaluators and officials reach a consensus on ECD, we still have a long way to go.

Does this mean that ECD is not important in China or that China has not practiced ECD yet? Absolutely not. For instance, some officials who have opener minds have more than once pointed out that the increasing demands of evaluation capacity in China were becoming particularly crucial and had great influence on the application of evaluation results to decision-makings.

## What does the donor community think of the ECD in recipient countries?

By studying the documents on ECD, I try to sum up the issues of ECD from the donor community and to pose some questions from the respective perspectives of recipient countries which may bear more thinking, discussing and debating.

### *Underlying Assumption of Donor Support for ECD*

In donor community, the underlying assumption of donor support for ECD is based on the knowledge transfer, for instance:

*The underlying assumption of filling these gaps with knowledge transfer:* Developing countries lack important skills and abilities in evaluation, and outsiders can fill these gaps with knowledge transfer.

*The underlying assumption of removing the barriers with knowledge transfer:* The evaluation in developing countries has little impact on policy and management decisions due to a number of barriers, and knowledge transfer can be the effective way to remove the barriers.

From the perspective of recipient-country, the underlying assumptions above mentioned are reasonable. But according to the actual condition of China, the following phenomena bear further analysis and discussion.

In the recent twenty years, China has received a large number of aid projects, which did through technology transfer exert a great influence on enhancing the local

capacity building in technology fields, such as the water management technology, environmental protection technology, and so on. However, in my humble opinion, the donor support has not exerted a desired influence on the ECD in China. While conducting the aid projects, the donors sent experienced institutions or experts to China to work out high-quality evaluation reports. However, the author observed that neither the governance departments nor the recipient institutions have the professional post of evaluation or can even find anyone who is able to understand and express DAC principles for Aid Evaluation.

During evaluations, foreign experts certainly have proved that they can get the job done: field working, analyzing the data, drawing the conclusion, and making suggestions. However, these evaluations have not really appeared to transfer knowledge in ECD. Evaluation capacity of local institutions and of countries as a whole has not been enhanced as much as expected.

Apparently it is impossible to list all the reasons this result is owed to. But the author observes that one factor can not be neglected---how much the recipient country is involved in the project. The Chinese experts are actively involved in the implementation of the aid project, such as experimenting, adjusting and using the equipment. But they are less involved in the evaluation of the project. Generally speaking, only those who take charge of the project are required by the donor to provide information, give interviews and attend meetings. Occasionally, the donor also invite experts to participate in the evaluation, but they only give technological consultation rather than understand the purpose, procedure and criterion of the evaluation. As a result, although a number of evaluations of aid projects have been conducted in China, the ECD of China is far from satisfactory.

### *ECD at Three Levels*

In donor community, ECD is addressed at three levels:

- *Individual:* This involves helping individuals obtain existing knowledge and skills and improving their capacity for learning, so as to extend this knowledge in accordance with the demands of the recipient country.
- *Institutional:* This mainly involves helping the present evaluation institutions obtain knowledge and skills. Donors need to construct new institutions if necessary.
- *Societal:* This involves capacities in the society as a whole. For instance, creating environment to enable the people to use and expand their capacities to the fullest.

The three levels mentioned above are certainly important. But besides, from the perspective of the Recipient-country, the author also suggests the following two aspects for ECD in recipient-countries:

- The evaluator's capacity for conducting the evaluation;
- The capacity of the person in charge or the decision-maker for using the result of evaluation.

The past studies of ECD have paid adequate attention to the first aspect, i.e. lack of qualified evaluation personnel, but inadequate attention to the second, i.e. lack of qualified evaluation officials. In fact, the gap between developing countries and developed countries in ECD is mainly caused by the deficiency in the second aspect.

Most people maintain that the strongest barrier of ECD appears to be the lack of demands. But as far as the author knows, although evaluation institutions exist in many developing countries, most have little impact on policy and governance decisions. To change this situation, efforts should be put into from two aspects: on the one hand, improving the professional evaluation capacity to provide credible evaluation result; on the other hand, improving the capacity of the person in charge or the decision-maker for applying the result of evaluation. The two aspects on ECD mentioned above are helpful to solve this issue.

### 3. EVALUATION PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN DONORS AND RECIPIENT COUNTRIES

The concept of Evaluation Partnerships encompasses several aspects<sup>3</sup>. Through the 1990s, the donor community came to pay more attention to developing better relationships between donors and recipients and put the emphasis on “partnership” in development assistance. With this trend, evaluation partnerships have become an important aspect in development evaluation. Nevertheless, rather than have made apparent progress, the development evaluation for the moment still has insufficient experience in joint evaluation between donors and recipient-countries and the evaluation capacity in developing countries remains worrisome.

We always encounter difficulties in conducting joint-evaluation, such as recipients’ unwillingness or lack of interest to participate in joint evaluations, time constraints, higher costs and communication problems and delays. Insufficient evaluation capacity of the partner country has been identified as the most important impediments to effective partnerships in evaluation. Although in some stages of the whole evaluation process, the joint work between donors and recipient countries has been tried, this can not be called joint evaluation in a real sense. To sum up, it is rare that donor and partner countries undertake joint evaluations in full partnership.

The article will introduce two cases based on the author’s own experience drawn from the evaluations jointly conducted with the donors. As a local partner, the institution (NCSTE) led by the author participated in the evaluation for Norwegian Mixed Credits Program<sup>4</sup> jointly conducted with a Norwegian consulting agency and that for Danish Mixed Credit Program<sup>5</sup> with Nordic Consulting Group (local partner’s role in joint-evaluation, see Box1 and Box2)

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<sup>3</sup> The following are important partnerships for evaluation

- *Partnerships between evaluation societies* at the international and local levels ;
- *Partnerships between central development agencies and line agencies*. Central agencies can develop evaluation guidelines and direct line agencies to implement them, or they can work together to develop guidelines for evaluation that support the needs of both;
- *Partnerships between donors*. On many occasions (multi-donor assistance efforts with common objectives) evaluations require greater donor collaboration;
- Partnerships between donors and recipient-countries;
- Partnerships among independent service deliverers. They work together to develop, review and revise the evaluation manual.

<sup>4</sup> Evaluation of the Norwegian Mixed Credits Programme, A evaluation report prepared by Fafo, Oslo, October 2000

<sup>5</sup> Evaluation on Mixed Credit Programme, A evaluation report prepared by Nordic Consulting Group August 2002

The author has some statements on the two cases above mentioned:

The author calls the two cases the joint evaluations but it is also explicit that they are not the joint evaluations in full partnership. In the two cases, the joint work is mainly limited to the evaluation stages (after the TOR has already been given) and the local partner had little participation in the stage of the initiating and designing the project. To conduct the joint-evaluation in a real sense, the evaluators from both the donor community and the recipient countries need to further study how to develop the joint work in each single stage of the evaluation project.

The other characteristic of the two cases mentioned above is that the local partner is a professional evaluation institution instead of individual expert. The author maintains that in China, this way is more helpful to develop the local evaluation capacity and more important to guarantee the quality of evaluation.

The two cases also had positive after-effect. As the partners of the both sides were content with their cooperation and also realized that joint-evaluation was a good mode indeed, the Nordic Consulting Group invited the project team led by the author to participate in an evaluation of venture investment in 2003. Besides, a French consultancy, commissioned by the French Ministry of Finance to carry out an evaluation of an aid project (in the field of energy) in China in 2003, also invited NCSTE to get involved in concerning evaluations. The evaluation official from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs also invites the author to put forward a proposal on the joint evaluation with the expectation that the project will involve a full joint-evaluation.

#### 4 KEY ISSUES

Development evaluation finally should be done by evaluators from the recipient-countries and under their responsibility. Therefore donor support for ECD in recipient-country should play an important role in development evaluation.

Form the perspective of recipient-country, the conventional ways of donor support for ECD, including staff training, conference/seminar, etc. are necessary but far from enough. For example, although a number of evaluations of aid projects have been conducted in China, the ECD of China is still not satisfactory yet.

The author raises the key point that the joint-evaluation is a more effective way for donor to support ECD. As the joint evaluation creates more opportunities for the evaluators of the recipient countries to participate in the evaluation practice it helps strengthen ECD of recipient-country, especially of developing countries, which are short of evaluation experiences.

So far it is rare that donor and partner counties undertake joint evaluations in full partnership. Therefore, to identify the main obstacles or constraints while we practice the partnership strategy for evaluation and to make evaluation partnership become a real operational procedure are the demands of both donors and recipient-countries.

We must realize that in terms of the relationship between donor and recipient, the

asymmetry issue is inevitable. Donors will always ultimately control the funds. None can ignore the fact that this asymmetry can be an obstacle to building evaluation partnerships. One of the solutions is to raise the voice of recipient countries in development evaluation. At the international level, the donors already have the OECD/DAC. No such forum exists for recipient countries to share their experiences. So encouraging recipient to participate in the discussions related to DAC and developing guidelines from a recipient perspective will be definitely significant.

## **Box1**

### **The roles of NCSTE as the local partner in joint evaluation**

As a local partner, NCSTE has conducted joint work with international institutions. For instance, NCSTE has evaluated Norwegian Mixed Credits jointly with a Norwegian consulting agency (Fafo) and Danish Mixed Credit Program jointly with Nordic Consulting Group (NCG). This introduction mainly focuses on NCSTE involvement in the various stages of the evaluation of Mixed Credit Program as a local partner.

#### *Proposing and designing the evaluation*

So far, the evaluation is proposed by the Donors. We participate in the design of the project.

#### *Preparing the evaluation*

During this stage, one of the important tasks of the local partner is to contact and coordinate the government at various levels and sectors involved in the evaluated. Meanwhile, we need to make specific preparations for the practice of the evaluation. In accordance with our experience, the local partner plays a crucial role in this stage. At the end of this stage, we submit a report on the progress of the preparations; at the same time, we put forward our proposals and issues that call for attention in the next stage.

#### *Implementing the evaluation*

The activities in this stage include field study, questionnaire survey, seminar, information collection and analysis. The local partner and the donor act in close coordination and conduct various activities together. For example, in the outline for interview design by NCG, some of it is not suitable for China, e.g. some questions are difficult to for Chinese officials and project stakeholders to understand. We have to transform it, i.e., change the OECD form into something easy to be understood by the Chinese for the purpose of collecting information.

#### *Drafting and discussing the report*

In this stage, the role of the local partner is mainly represented in the three aspects:

- (1) In accordance with the findings in the evaluation, submits an informal report, meeting minutes to the evaluation team for discussion, which will be a reference for the final evaluation report.
- (2) Collect and provide some cross cutting information of Mixed Credits (MC), mainly including:
  - Actors involved in MC, their role and corresponding responsibility in the MC implementation;
  - Development Plan and their Relationship with Norwegian MC;
  - Relevant Policies Bearing Impacts on MC.
- (3) Gives response/comments to further improve the quality of final evaluation reports.

**Box2**

In the TOR of evaluation of Danish Mixed Credit Program, the role of local consultant team was defined as:

“The activities performed by local consultant team include but are not limited to:

1. Responsible for all practical aspects regarding the planning and implementation of Field Study
2. Prepare meetings with all relevant stakeholders of each of the 10 projects to be evaluated in clo role of the local consultants team se co-operation with MOF. It is important t role of the local consultants team role of the local consultants team o identify stakeholders relevant to each of the 10 projects.
3. Act as a process consultant during the actual interview process where the formulation of the "right" evaluation issues for each MC project is one of the most important factors for the success of our work. Local consultants need to collect enough information to be able to brief the international consultants regarding local constraints (financial, technological, managerial, organisational etc.) under which the individual projects are prepared and implemented. This initial briefing is a very important input to the actual interview process.
4. Report the minutes of the Field Study meetings.
5. Discuss findings with the international consultant and collect follow up information.”

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