

Consultation on OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria

CONSULTATION SUR LES CRITERES D'EVALUATION CAD DE L'OCDE (JUILLET 2018)

SUMMARY / EN RÉSUMÉ

The OECD has launched a broad consultation on the DAC Evaluation criteria. We are making our answers public to contribute to the general debate and hope to see others do the same. In a nutshell, we feel that:

- A reform of DAC criteria is an **opportunity** to the general improvement of evaluation practices, given that these criteria are used in many evaluations;
- The definition of current criteria is **ambiguous** (our proposals below). Emphasis should be put on valuing, not so much on measuring; relevance should not be confused with coherence with donor's policy; effectiveness and impact should be merged and clearly be about testing the Theory of Change, not mere delivery of activities and measure of changes;
- Besides comprehension, **capacity of commissioners and evaluators** alike is at stake: focus should be on better translation of DAC criteria to actual adequate questioning for the evaluated intervention.
- Resources should be put on **answering questions that matter**, not on dealing systematically (and badly) with all five criteria.
- **Internal and external coherence**, especially in a context of so many public and private local and aid policies, should be part of the array of criteria.

L'OCDE a lancé une consultation élargie sur les critères DAC. Nous rendons nos réponses publiques pour contribuer au débat global et espérons que d'autres feront de même. En quelques mots, nous pensons que :

- Une réforme des critères DAC serait une **opportunité** pour améliorer les pratiques évaluatives, car ces critères sont utilisés dans de nombreuses évaluations ;
- Les critères actuels sont **ambigus** dans leur formulation (nos propositions ci-dessous). Il faudrait insister sur **l'évaluation pour apprécier la valeur, plutôt que sur la mesure** ; la pertinence ne doit pas être confondue avec la cohérence avec les politiques des donateurs ; l'efficacité et l'impact devraient être fusionnés et viser explicitement à tester la théorie du changement, pas seulement la réalisation des activités et la mesure des changements ;
- Au-delà de la compréhension des critères, un enjeu majeur est la **capacité des commanditaires et des évaluateurs à mieux traduire les critères DAC** en questions pertinentes sur l'intervention évaluée ;
- Les ressources évaluatives devraient être **concentrées sur les questions qui comptent**, pas dispersées pour (mal) répondre systématiquement aux 5 critères ;
- **Les cohérences interne et externe** devraient faire partie des critères, dans un contexte où les interventions publiques ou privés, de développement ou nationales, sont si nombreuses.

Criteria	How adequate do you consider the current definitions to be:	Recommendations
Relevance	<p>In our view the original sin in this criterion has been to mix relevance with the consistency of intervention with donors' policies. But if a donor policy is irrelevant (for instance, ill-adapted to a country, a population, etc.), something that happens fairly often, a funded project may still be considered as relevant because it fits with a bad policy. Relevance should clearly be in the understanding of problems and the analysis of the solution provided as a way to solve or mitigate or adapt to that problem. Relevance is key to understand how different stakeholders frame problems in different ways; different framing may lead to different policies, and sometimes to huge inconsistencies among development policies targeting the same area or population. It should also be the starting point to elaborating the Theory of Change and the definition should reflect this.</p>	<p>The Relevance criterion should focus on problem understanding (rather than 'needs') and building a Theory of Change; consistency with donors' policies should be removed altogether or considered for a new criterion.</p>
Effectiveness	<p>We believe that there are two big issues with the current definition of effectiveness.</p> <p>The first is the focus on objectives. Objectives are what we want to do, while evaluation should be about the consequences of what we actually did on people, areas, sectors, etc. Actually, the current definition does not even mention stakeholders being targeted by interventions.</p> <p>This in our view leads to insufficient interest in outcomes and impacts and disproportionate interest in the delivery of outputs 'according to the plan', making development evaluations lean towards audits. The thing is, especially in the realm of international development, things tend not to go according to the initial plan, and for the better sometimes!</p> <p>We consider as evaluators that we should first value what have been the changes faced by the addressees (the women, men, children, the disabled, the unemployed, the farmers, the small companies, etc.) and only then interrogate the intervention, among other factors to understand why, how, when, to what extent did it contribute to these changes.</p> <p>The second issue is that, in our view effectiveness, impact (and to a lesser extent sustainability) should not be separated. Both should be considered along the Theory of change, which ability to solve or mitigate problems has been tested in the relevance question. In our view, the current separation also contributes to disproportionate interest in delivery rather than consequences.</p>	<p>The Effectiveness criterion should consider consequences on target groups rather than objectives; and embrace the whole Theory of Change</p>
Efficiency	<p>In our view evaluation is about appreciating the value, not measuring (which can be a means to that end). A definition of efficiency should reflect this appreciation of efforts compared to outcomes and impacts, not outputs (this is a job for financial auditing). But it should be possible to answer this question by considering other criteria such as relevance (an irrelevant intervention is inefficient by nature, how cost-saving its outputs are); and external coherence (how many cases when too many DFIs come to fund micro-credit in the same area without differentiating their efforts – an easy way to increase efficiency is then to pull activities in that area and either relocate them or differentiate them enough).</p>	<p>The Efficiency criterion should be about appreciating the value, not measuring; and consider 'cost-effectiveness' of outcomes and impacts, not output (which is financial auditing work).</p>
Impact	<p>As mentioned above, we consider that effectiveness, impact and sustainability should not be separated. However, we appreciate that the definition of impact includes unexpected consequences over stakeholders; if it were to be maintained separately, this could be a relevant focus for this criterion, especially when it comes to complex interventions. Also, if impact were to remain a separate criterion, we believe that there should be an emphasis on causal inference and impact evaluation methods (in the respect of the diversity of approaches and methods to causality).</p>	<p>The Impact criterion 'as is' should be merged with effectiveness to consider the full Theory of Change; and 'impact' could be used either when looking for rigorous impact evaluation (whatever the method or approach); or with a different focus on unexpected consequences.</p>
Sustainability	<p>As mentioned above, we consider that effectiveness, impact and sustainability should not be separated. However, if sustainability were to remain a separate criterion, we believe that it should focus on an assessment of all consequences of the intervention (beyond what was expected) and a comparison with the initial problem framing, with the aim to contribute specifically to the (re)design of development interventions.</p>	<p>The criterion could be maintained as a 'strategical/ political' criterion aimed at supporting (re) design of interventions.</p>

