Comparative study on evaluation policies and practices

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Overview of study

Scope and Objectives
A descriptive comparative study of evaluation policies and practices in key agencies, to inform AFD reform process.

- key features of evaluation function (e.g. mandate, position, management, roles etc.)
- main aspects of evaluation systems, processes and tools
- practices involved in commissioning, managing and supporting evaluation

Activities
Desk Case Studies: DANIDA, EU, OXFAM, IMF (Evaluation Units)
Full Case Studies: DFID, SIDA, WB, AfDB, KFW (Evaluation Units)
+ Key Informants Interviews

Outputs
- Case Study Reports (AFD)
- Final Comparative Report
- Workshops: Mid Term (AFD Internal), Dissemination: AFD internal, ODI lunchtime meeting (Feb 08) and DAC network in March 08
Key messages

• Common ‘paradigms’, similar mandates and challenges, increased complexity, commitment to harmonisation and joint evaluation. Yet, a lot of **diversification** of practice: approaches, roles, products, management etc.

• A function in **search of identity** ..... getting any closer?

• **Disconnect** between rhetoric on strategic importance of development evaluation, and practice in development agencies.

• **Demand** for development evaluation: is it enough?

• An ‘**institutional gap**’? Need to invest in institutional role of evaluation, at different levels. Quality and use both key factors
Profiles of Evaluation Units - Overview

- Variability in budget and staffing

- Most EUs sit outside management structure or operational dept. Report to minister/boards etc.

- Many evaluation policies being reviewed, updated or created

- Mandate not always clear in policies: lack of clarity across organisation

- No single/unified methodology
Independence vs Integration

- All recognise tension between independence and integration. ‘Being involved’ as important as ‘being detached’.

- Position of unit important, but also rules for budget allocation, appointment of staff, disclosure (WB, IMF)

- Mostly mixed model of independent and external evaluation. Few examples of staff involvement (WB, KFW)

- Reliance on ‘usual consultants’: are they ‘really independent’ and ‘free’ to be critical? Is the market too concentrated?
Staff capacity, roles and responsibilities

- Main responsibilities: tendering, contracts and managing evaluation processes, not doing evaluation. Frustration and worries about professional development
- Different levels and intensity of consultation with other departments, more on implementation and dissemination, less at planning/decision phase
- Capacity and evaluation skills of EU staff a major constraint (DFID and others). Focus often on specific sectoral skills (e.g. economists at KFW)
- ‘New’ roles and responsibilities: KM and learning, communication, dissemination and capacity building
Types of evaluation and other activities

• Less **project evaluations** (also in Banks/lending agencies), almost discontinued in bilaterals (e.g. SIDA)

• EUs focus on ‘independent and external evaluations’. Internal reviews, self evaluation and monitoring carried out by operational depts/field offices

• Concerns on **quality** and control over evaluations carried out by operational departments/country programmes. Several attempts to address this (e. ratings, quality standards, meta reviews. WB, DFID, SIDA)

• Big shift towards **strategic and thematic evaluations**, mostly aimed at supporting ‘evidence based policy making’.

• **Joint evaluation** is ‘desirable’, experiences not very encouraging: time, cost, different accountabilities, internal incentives and diluting findings
Communication and dissemination

• Of increasing importance, beyond ‘dissemination of findings’ towards effective communication, reach and active engagement of client/stakeholders (big push at WB).

• Disclosure policies and transparencies, all reports on website

• Products: more than reports: synthesis, briefs, seminars, internet etc.

• Limited feedback and weak evidence on utilisation (AfDB)
Emerging trends

- A lot of organisational change and reform processes
- Away from projects, towards strategic, policy and joint evaluations. A ‘good thing’ but some concerns about loosing connection with field/programmes
- Diversification of activities: KM, ratings and quality control, management follow up, dissemination and outreach. Focus on learning and use
- Professionalisation, skills and career development of EU staff a concern: is it possible to have a career in evaluation? Incentives?
- Harmonisation and joint evaluation: advantages but several constraints
The institutional gap

Is it time for a new, more consistent institutional approach to development evaluation?

If so, what would this imply for UK actors?