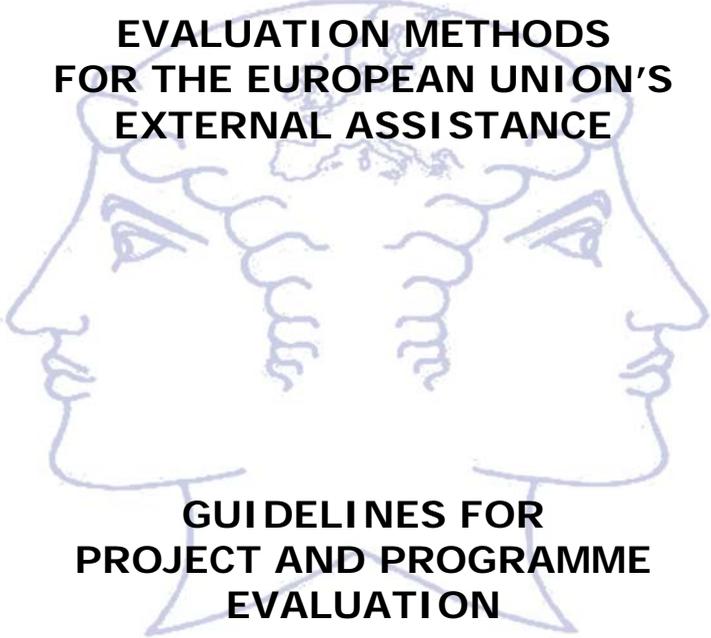


Directorate General External Relations

Directorate General Development

EuropeAid Co-operation Office

Joint Evaluation Unit



**EVALUATION METHODS
FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION'S
EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE**

**GUIDELINES FOR
PROJECT AND PROGRAMME
EVALUATION**

VOLUME 3

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A great deal of additional information on the European Union's external assistance can be accessed through the Europa server:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

ISBN: 92-79-00681-9

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Printed in France, 2006.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The European Commission has developed and formalised a methodology for evaluating its external assistance, in which the priority is on results and impacts. The aim is thus to maintain the quality of its evaluations on a par with internationally recognised best practice.

In the past, the evaluation of European external assistance focused primarily on projects and on programmes. The current methodological guidelines are designed to facilitate the move towards an evaluation practice focused more on programmes and strategies. It is intended mainly for:

- evaluation managers at European Commission headquarters and in the Delegations,
- external evaluation teams.

The methodology is also made available to all European external aid partners, as well as the professional evaluation community.

It is available in three languages (English, Spanish and French) and in two forms, optimised for reading and for navigation on the Internet, respectively.

The Internet version includes numerous examples and in-depth analyses. It is available on the European Commission website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/index.htm>

The printed version consists of four volumes. The first volume "Methodological bases for evaluation" presents the basic concepts and their articulation. The second volume is a handbook for "Geographic and Thematic Evaluation". It pertains to the evaluation of the entire set of Community actions on the scale of a country or region, and the evaluation of all actions relative to a sector or a theme on a global scale. This third volume is a handbook for "Project and Programme Evaluation". It concerns large projects, pilot projects, multi-country programmes and any other project or programme for which an evaluation is required. The fourth volume "Evaluation Tools" presents the main techniques available for structuring an evaluation, collecting and analysing data, and assisting in the formulation of value judgements.

Project and programme evaluation

This third volume completes and updates the project evaluation manual previously used by the European Commission. It is intended primarily for the evaluation of large projects and of programmes involving similar projects in several countries.

The manual proposes a fairly structured approach incorporating some of the European Commission's developments in the evaluation of more complex interventions, as well as good practices identified among other donors. The user can nevertheless simplify the approach in the case of a single project.

The volume is organised chronologically, with two approaches: that of the evaluation manager and that of the external evaluation team. A participatory evaluation option is also proposed.

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Summary of the evaluation process

Preparatory phase (phase 0)

A manager is appointed to conduct the evaluation. He sets up the reference group, writes the terms of reference and recruits the external evaluation team.

Desk phase (phase 1)

The external evaluation team analyses the intervention logic on the basis of official documents and proposes the evaluation questions and judgment criteria (also called "reasoned assessment criteria"). The evaluation questions are validated by the reference group.

The team then specifies the indicators and provides partial answers to the questions on the basis of existing information.

It identifies the assumptions to be tested in the field and develops its work plan for data collection and analysis.

Field phase (phase 2)

The evaluation team implements its work plan for data collection in the partner country or countries. It applies the specified techniques and begins to test the assumptions.

Synthesis phase (phase 3)

The evaluation team draws up its final report, which includes the findings and conclusions which respond to the questions asked, as well as an overall assessment. This report also includes recommendations that are clustered and prioritised. The final report is subject to a quality assessment.

Dissemination and follow-up phase (phase 4)

The evaluation (report, executive summary, article and/or presentation) is disseminated to policy-makers, to the concerned services and partners, and is posted on the Commission's website. The uptake of the recommendations is monitored.

1 Guidelines for the evaluation manager

1.1 Preparatory phase

1.1.1 Initial approach

As far as necessary, the commissioning service clarifies in writing what is precisely to be evaluated, and who are the main intended users of the evaluation.

An evaluation manager is appointed within the commissioning service.

1.1.2 Preliminary data collection

The evaluation manager reads the basic documents (project fiche, financial agreement, logical framework, review, monitoring report, etc.), and has informal talks with a few key informants.

If no logical framework is available, then the logic of the project has to be reconstructed by the project/programme manager currently in charge.

1.1.3 Constituting the reference group

The evaluation manager identifies the services and other interested bodies to be involved in the evaluation through a reference group.

Composition and role of the reference group

The reference group involves the project/programme management and the relevant EC services. If the evaluation is conducted in the partner country, then the group may involve development partners, experts, non state actors, and other qualified participants. Membership should remain manageable (no more than 10). The group is chaired by the evaluation manager.

The reference group discusses and comments all intermediary documents, generally at their draft stage: terms of reference, evaluation team's proposal, evaluation questions, work plan, debriefing of the field phase, and final report. It has generally an advisory role, but may be required to approve the evaluation questions.

A reference group entails substantial benefits in terms of access to information, accuracy of interpretations, and ownership of conclusions.

A note is sent to the services and bodies invited to join in, explaining the role played by the reference group. Timely circulation of working documents and minutes is essential.

1.1.4 Preparing the terms of reference

The main issues to be studied are identified by the evaluation manager. As far as a good logical framework is available and still valid, the evaluation manager may refine the issues to be studied into evaluation questions.

The profile of the external evaluation team to be engaged is specified as regards professional competence, sector expertise, and field work capacity.

A ceiling is set for the overall evaluation budget and the availability of resources is secured.

The time table is specified in line with institutional requirements if necessary. Alternatively, the deadline for delivering the report is fixed with a view to the needs of the intended users.

The evaluation manager writes a first version of the terms of reference (ToR).

The reference group members are consulted on the draft version. The evaluation manager finalises the document.

Evaluation questions

Earlier or later in the evaluation process, a series of precise questions (no more than ten) are selected with a view to satisfy the needs of the evaluation users, and to ensure the feasibility of the evaluation.

By focusing the evaluation on key issues, the questions allow the evaluation team to collect accurate data, to deepen its analyses, and to make its assessments in a fully transparent manner.

Questions are written in a simple and precise way. As far as possible, they do not cover areas where other studies are available or in progress.

The set of questions is composed in such a way that the synthesis of all answers will enable the evaluation team to formulate an overall assessment of the project/programme. For this purpose, the set of questions covers the various levels of the logical framework and the seven evaluation criteria in a balanced way (see Section 2.2.1).

Case of a participatory evaluation

The initial consultation process extends to a few key beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

The reference group involves a significant proportion (possibly 50%) of outsiders, i.e. group members capable to express the views of the whole range of stakeholders while holding no responsibility in the design or implementation of the project/programme.

On the website: [template terms of reference and menu of evaluation issues / questions](#)

1.1.5 Engaging the evaluation team

The evaluation manager receives the technical and financial proposal(s) prepared by the candidates. He checks that the proposal(s) covers:

- Understanding of terms of reference
- Indicative methodological design
- Planned time schedule
- Team members' responsibilities, CVs, and signed statements of absence of conflict of interest.

The evaluation manager assesses the quality of the proposal(s) and checks that the human and financial resources supplied are suitable for the particular difficulties identified while preparing the terms of reference.

The evaluation manager engages the external evaluation team in the framework of the applicable tendering/contracting procedure.

Externality and independence

The members of the external evaluation team are independent from the organisations which have taken part in the design and implementation of the project/programme.

Independence implies freedom from political influence and organisational pressure, full access to information and full autonomy in carrying out investigations and writing conclusions.

Externality and independence are meant to achieve credibility towards outside audiences, something which is particularly relevant if the evaluation is undertaken for providing accountability, learning transferable lessons or reallocating budgetary resources. Such evaluations are called "summative" as opposed to "formative" evaluations which are conducted for the benefit of those managing the project/programme, with the focus on improving their work and preferably with their full participation. Externality and independence may be of lesser importance in formative evaluations.

Checklist for assessing the quality of a proposal

Capacity

- knowledge and working experience in the field of evaluation
- demonstrated ability to carry out participatory approach (if relevant)
- technical and sectoral knowledge and expertise
- capacity to address essential cross-cutting thematic issues (e.g. gender equality, environment)
- experience in development cooperation, and EC cooperation in particular
- experience in the partner region, similar countries and/or the partner countries
- adequate language capacity

Understanding

- understanding of the ToR
- understanding of the context

Management

- proposed individuals have the time to successfully complete their task as planned in the time schedule
- clear sharing of responsibilities and adequate leadership skills for effective team management and successful relations with partners and stakeholders
- commitment to strengthen evaluation capacity in the partner country.

1.2 Desk phase

1.2.1 Inception

The inception stage starts as soon as the evaluation team is engaged, and its duration is limited to a few weeks.

Inception meeting

Within a few weeks after the start of the works, and after a review of basic documents complemented by a few interviews, the evaluation team defines its overall approach.

This approach is presented in a meeting with the evaluation manager and the reference group members. Subjects to be discussed include:

- Logical framework
- Evaluation questions, either from the ToR or proposed by the evaluation team
- Indicative methodological design
- Access to informants and to documents, and foreseeable difficulties.

The presentation is supported by a series of slides and by a commented list of evaluation questions. If relevant, the meeting may be complemented by an email consultation.

Case of a multi-country programme

The evaluation builds upon a number of country case studies which should be selected as soon as possible and preferably before the end of the inception stage.

Case of a participatory evaluation

The evaluation team extends its initial interviews in order to understand the expectations of beneficiaries and other outside stakeholders.

A stakeholder analysis is performed and discussed in the inception meeting.

Inception report

The evaluation manager receives an inception report which finalises the evaluation questions and describes the main lines of the methodological design including the indicators to be used, the strategy of analysis, and a detailed work plan for the next stage.

The report is formally approved by an official letter authorising the continuation of the work.

1.2.2 Desk report

The evaluation manager facilitates the retrieval of all relevant documents and the access to key informants in the European Commission and partner Government(s).

He receives the desk report which recalls the steps already taken and adds the following elements:

- Progress of the documentary analysis and limitations if there are any
- Definition of any unclear term as far as necessary
- First partial answers to the evaluation questions on the basis of available documents and interviews with EC services and partners
- Issues still to be studied and assumptions to be tested during the field phase
- Methodological design including evaluation tools ready to be applied in the field phase, and an approach to the overall assessment
- Work plan for the field phase.

The evaluation manager submits the draft report to the reference group members for consultation. If appropriate, he convenes and chairs a meeting where the report is presented and discussed. Comments are taken into account by the evaluation team in a final version of the report. Explanations are given if some comments are not taken on board. If necessary, the evaluation manager approves the report and authorises the launching of the field phase.

Approval of reports

The members of the reference group comment on the draft version of the report. All comments are compiled by the evaluation manager and forwarded to the evaluation team. The team prepares a new version of the report, taking stock of the comments in two distinct ways:

- Requests for improving methodological quality are satisfied, unless there is a demonstrated impossibility, in which case full justification is provided by the evaluation team.
- Comments on the substance of the report are either accepted or rejected. In the later instance, dissenting views are fairly recalled in the report.

The manager checks that all comments have been properly handled and then approves the report.

1.3 Field phase

1.3.1 Preparation

The evaluation manager checks that:

- Public authorities in the partner country/countries are informed of field works to come through the appropriate channel
- Project/programme management are provided with an indicative list of people to be interviewed, dates of visit, itinerary, name of team members
- Logistics are agreed upon in advance.

The work plan keeps flexible enough in order to accommodate for circumstances in the field.

Case of a multi-country programme

The country case studies allow the evaluation team to gather information on the programme at country level. Together with the desk phase, the findings of country case studies will feed the overall assessment formulated by the evaluation team. The work plan should make clear that country case studies are not to be considered as stand alone evaluations.

The time frame permitting, the first country case study can be used as a test of the method.

Case of a participatory evaluation

The work plan involves a series of workshops or focus groups allowing the beneficiaries to frame the data that are being gathered.

1.3.2 Follow-up

The evaluation manager facilitates interviews and surveys by any appropriate means like mandate letters or informal contacts within the Government.

The manager is prepared to interact swiftly at the evaluation team's request if a problem is encountered in the field and cannot be solved with the help of the project/programme manager.

Case of a multi-country programme

The evaluation team holds a briefing meeting in each visited country in connection with or with the participation of the Delegation.

1.3.3 Debriefing

One or several debriefing meetings are held in order to assess the reliability and coverage of data collection, and to discuss significant findings. At least one of these meetings is organised with the reference group.

The evaluation team presents a series of slides covering: the reliability of collected data, the scope covered and its first analyses and findings. The meeting(s) are an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base of the evaluation. No report is submitted in advance and no minutes are provided afterwards.

Case of a multi-country programme

The evaluation team holds a debriefing meeting in each visited country in connection with or with the participation of the Delegation. A country note is written and circulated to local actors in order to have a factual check.

Case of a participatory evaluation

The evaluation team may hold debriefing workshops involving beneficiaries and other external stakeholders, with a view to strengthen the quality of collected data, to help interpret data with the view point of field level stakeholders, and to empower civil society organisations locally.

1.4 Synthesis phase

1.4.1 Quality assessment

The evaluation manager receives the first version of the final report. The document should have the same format, contents and quality as the final version.

The evaluation manager assesses the quality of the report on the basis of an assessment grid including eight criteria. The assessment is double checked by a second person.

The quality assessment should enhance the credibility of the evaluation without undermining its independence. Therefore it focuses on the way conclusions are substantiated and explained and not on the substance of conclusions. The quality assessment must not be handled by those who are involved in the evaluated project/programme.

Quality assessment criteria

The following eight criteria are derived from international evaluation standards and are compatible with them:

1. Meeting needs

- Does the report precisely describe what is evaluated including the intervention logic and its evolution? Does it cover the appropriate period of time, target groups and areas? Does it respond to all ToR requests?

2. Appropriate design

- Is the evaluation design described in enough detail? Is it adapted to the project / programme? Are there well defined and appropriate indicators? Does the report point out the limitations, risks and potential biases associated with the evaluation method?

3. Reliable data

- Is the data collection approach clearly explained and coherent with the overall evaluation design? Are the sources of information clearly identified in the report and cross-checked? Are the data collection tools (samples, focus groups, etc.) applied in accordance to standards? Have data collection limitations and biases been explained and discussed?

4. Sound analysis

- Is the analysis based on the collected data and focused on the most relevant cause/effect assumptions? Is the context well taken into account? Have stakeholders' inputs been used in a balanced way? Are the limitations identified, discussed and presented in the report?

5. Credible findings

- Are the findings derived from the data and analyses? Are interpretations and extrapolations justified and supported by sound arguments? Is the generalisability of findings discussed?

6. Valid conclusions

- Are the conclusions coherent, logically linked to the findings, and free of personal or partisan considerations? Do they cover the five DAC's criteria and the two EC specific criteria?

7. Useful recommendations

- Are recommendations coherent with conclusions? Are they operational, realistic and sufficiently explicit to provide guidance for taking action? Are they clustered, prioritised and devised for the different stakeholders?

8. Clear report

- Is there a relevant and concise executive summary? Is the report well structured, adapted to its various audiences, and not more technical than necessary? Is there a list of acronyms?

The evaluation manager and the evaluation team leader discuss the quality assessment. Improvements are requested if necessary.

On the website: [template quality assessment grid](#), plus an [explanation on how to assess the criteria](#)

1.4.2 Discussion meeting(s)

The evaluation manager submits the draft report to the reference group members for consultation. If appropriate, he convenes and chairs a meeting where the report is presented and discussed. Special attention is paid to the utility of conclusions and feasibility of recommendations.

At this stage, the evaluation manager may also gather a discussion seminar with a view to discussing conclusions and recommendations in a wider arena. Attendance may include the Delegation staff, national authorities, other development partners, non state actors, project management, and/or experts.

1.4.3 Final report

Comments are taken into account by the evaluation team in a new version of the report. The evaluation manager also receives an electronic version of the slides presented by the evaluation team.

He checks that the comments received have been taken into account in an appropriate way, and that the report is ready for dissemination, including the full set of annexes.

He carries out a final quality assessment against the eight criteria of the assessment grid, writes qualitative comments for all criteria, and decides upon the overall quality rate.

The evaluation manager approves the final version of the report, sends with the quality assessment to the reference group members, and thanks them for their contribution.

1.5 Dissemination and follow-up phase

1.5.1 Informing the hierarchy

The evaluation manager sends the report to the hierarchy with a short summary (1 to 2 pages maximum) pointing out the most relevant conclusions, lessons and recommendations.

On the website: [structure of the summary](#)

1.5.2 Disseminating the final report

If requested by the hierarchy, the manager publishes the report, the executive summary and the quality assessment grid on the Commission's website. Links are posted on relevant other websites.

The evaluation manager circulates the full length report to the relevant Commission services and other evaluation users.

The evaluation manager ensures that the database of evaluation reports is updated at EC headquarters (Evaluation Unit).

Evaluation users

Decision-makers and designers use the evaluation to reform or renew the project/programme, to confirm or to change strategic orientations, or to (re)allocate resources (financial, human and others). They appreciate clear, simple and operational recommendations based on credible factual elements.

Managers and operators use the evaluation findings to adjust management, coordination and/or their interactions with beneficiaries and the target groups. They expect to receive detailed information and are ready to interpret technical and complex messages.

The institutions that funded the project/programme expect to receive accounts, i.e. a conclusive overall assessment of the project/programme.

Public authorities conducting related or similar projects/programmes may use the evaluation through a transfer of lessons learned. The same applies to the expert networks in the concerned sector.

Finally, the evaluation may be used by civil society actors, especially those representing the interests of the targeted groups.

1.5.3 Presentations

The evaluation manager may organise one or several presentations targeted at audiences like: expert networks in the country or region, media, government-donor coordination bodies, non state actors. The evaluation team may be asked to participate in the presentation.

The manager may write an article to facilitate the dissemination of the main conclusions and recommendations.

2 Guidelines for the evaluation team

2.1 Preparatory phase

The candidate contractor(s) prepare(s) proposal(s) in response to the Terms of Reference (ToR) issued by the commissioning service.

2.1.1 Basic assumptions

Considering the ToR and his/her own expertise, the author of the proposal formulates basic assumptions on:

- Areas requiring specific expertise
- Possibility to mobilise consultants with the right profile in the country or countries involved
- Number, nature and probable difficulty of the evaluation questions
- Existence, quality and accessibility of management and monitoring data
- Existence of previous evaluations which may be reused
- Existence of other documents (e.g. Court of Auditors' reports, reports from other donors).

2.1.2 Tasks, expertise and budget

The method is broadly designed within the constraints set in the ToR. The author of the proposal defines the main tools to be applied (see Volume 1).

The tasks are provisionally divided among:

- Consultants from partner country or countries and international consultants
- Senior, medium, junior consultants
- Experts in the sector(s) of the project/programme and professional evaluation consultants.

The core evaluation team members are identified and the absence of conflict of interest is verified.

Both the budget and the time schedule are specified within the framework of constraints set by the ToR.

Hiring local consultants

Local consultants may be involved to all or part of the evaluation tasks.

Benefits

- Possibility to involve a local perspective in data collection but also in data analysis
- Mastery of local language(s)
- Easy use of participatory approaches involving beneficiaries and targeted people
- Flexibility of work plan and reduction of travel costs
- Contribution to building an appropriate evaluation capacity in the partner country.

Risks

- Conflict of interest
- Difficulty of being independent from the Government in some countries.

2.1.3 Technical and financial proposal(s)

Checklist: content of the technical and financial proposal(s)

- Understanding of the context, purpose, and intended users of the evaluation
- Understanding of the themes or questions to be covered
- Indicative methodological design
- Core evaluation team members, their field of expertise and their role
- Time schedule
- Detailed price
- CVs of the team members in the standard format and declarations of absence of conflict of interest
- CV of an expert from outside the evaluation team who will be in charge of quality control.

2.2 Desk phase

2.2.1 Inception

The inception stage starts as soon as the evaluation team is engaged, and its duration is limited to a few weeks.

Collecting basic documents

One of the team members collects the set of basic official documents such as:

- Programming documents (e.g. project fiche), and subsequent modifications if there are any
- Ex ante evaluation, if relevant
- EC documents setting the policy framework in which the project/programme takes place (EC development and external relations policy, EU foreign policy, country strategy paper)
- Government strategy (PRSP).

Logic of the project/programme

The evaluation team reviews the logical framework as set up at the beginning of the project/programme cycle. In the absence of such a document, it is to be reconstructed by the project/programme manager currently in charge. As far as necessary, the evaluation team identifies the points which need clarification and/or updating. Any clarification, updating or reconstruction is reported in a transparent way.

The analysis of the project/programme logic covers:

- Context in which the project/programme has been launched, opportunities and constraints
- Needs to be met, problems to be solved and challenges to be addressed
- Justification of the fact that the needs, problems or challenges could not be addressed more effectively within another framework
- Objectives
- Nature of inputs and activities.

Of particular importance are the various levels of objectives and their translation into various levels of expected effects:

- Operational objectives expressed in terms of short term results for direct beneficiaries and/or outputs (tangible products or services)
- Specific objectives (project purpose) expressed in terms of sustainable benefit for the target group
- Overall objectives expressed in terms of wider effects.

Once the analysis has been performed on the basis of official documents, the evaluation team starts interacting with key informants in the project/programme management and EC services. Comments on the project/programme logic are collected.

Delineating the scope

The scope of the evaluation includes all resources mobilised, and activities implemented in the framework of the project/programme (central scope).

In addition, the evaluation team delineates a larger perimeter (extended scope) including the main related actions like:

- Other EC policies, programmes or projects, plus EU policies

- Partner country's strategy (PRSP), or sector policy or programme
- Other donors' interventions.

An action is included in the perimeter as far as it reaches the same groups as the evaluated project/programme does.

Management documents

The evaluation team consults all relevant management and monitoring documents/databases so as to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the project/programme covering:

- Full identification
- Resources planned, committed, disbursed
- Progress of outputs
- Names and addresses of potential informants
- Ratings attributed through the "result-oriented monitoring" system (ROM)
- Availability of progress reports and evaluation reports, if relevant.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation team establishes the list of questions on the following bases:

- Themes to be studied, as stated in the ToR
- Logical framework
- Reasoned coverage of the seven evaluation criteria.

Each question is commented in line with the following points:

- Origin of the question and potential utility of the answer
- Clarification of the terms used
- Indicative methodological design (updated), foreseeable difficulties and feasibility problems if any.

On the website: [menu of issues / questions](#)

Evaluation criteria

The following evaluation criteria correspond to the traditional practice of evaluation of development aid formalised by the OECD-

DAC (the first five criteria), and to the specific EC requirements (the last two criteria).

Evaluation criteria

Relevance

- Extent to which the objectives of the development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and EC's policies.

Effectiveness

- Extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.

Efficiency

- Extent to which the outputs and/or desired effects have been achieved with the lowest possible use of resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, administrative costs, etc.).

Sustainability

- Extent to which the benefits from the development intervention continue after termination of the external intervention, or the probability that they continue in the long-term in a way that is resilient to risks.

Impact

- Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

Coherence

- Extent to which activities undertaken allow the European Commission to achieve its development policy objectives without internal contradiction or without contradiction with other Community policies. Extent to which they complement partner country's policies and other donors' interventions.

Community value added

- Extent to which the project/programme adds benefits to what would have resulted from Member States' interventions in the same context.

Inception meeting

The evaluation team leader presents the works already achieved in a reference group meeting. The presentation is supported by a series of slides and by a commented list of evaluation questions.

Case of a multi-country programme

In that case, the evaluation builds upon a number of country case studies which should be selected as soon as possible and preferably before the end of the inception stage.

Case of a participatory evaluation

The evaluation team extends its initial interviews in order to understand the expectations of beneficiaries and other outside stakeholders.

A stakeholder analysis is performed and discussed in the inception meeting.

Inception report

The evaluation team prepares an inception report which recalls and formalises all the steps already taken, including an updated list of questions in line with the comments received.

Each question is further developed into:

- Indicators to be used for answering the question, and corresponding sources of information
- Strategy of analysis
- Chain of reasoning for answering the question.

Indicators, sources of information and steps of reasoning remain provisional at this stage of the process. However, the inception report includes a detailed work plan for the next stage. The report needs to be formally approved in order to move to the next stage.

Indicators

The logical framework includes “Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs)” and “Sources of Information” which are useful for structuring the evaluators’ work. As far as OVIs have been properly monitored, including baseline data, they become a major part of the factual basis of the evaluation.

Indicators may also be available through a monitoring system, if the project /programme is equipped with such a system.

Indicators may also be developed in the framework of the evaluation as part of a questionnaire survey, an analysis of a management database, or an analysis of statistical series.

Indicators may be quantitative or qualitative.

Strategy of analysis

Indicators and other types of data need to be analysed in order to answering evaluation questions.

Four strategies of analysis can be considered:

- Change analysis, which compares indicators over time, and/or against targets
- Meta-analysis, which extrapolates upon findings of other evaluations and studies, after having carefully checked their validity and transferability
- Attribution analysis, which compares the observed changes with a “policy-off” scenario, also called counterfactual
- Contribution analysis, which confirms or disconfirms cause-and-effect assumptions on the basis of a chain of reasoning.

The first strategy is the lightest one and may fit virtually all types of questions. The three last strategies are better at answering cause-and-effect questions.

2.2.2 Finalisation of the desk phase

This stage may be shorter or longer, depending on the amount of documents to be analysed.

Documentary analysis

The evaluation team gathers and analyses all available documents (secondary data) that are directly related to the evaluation questions:

- Management documents, reviews, audits
- Studies, research works or evaluations applying to similar projects/programmes in similar contexts
- Statistics
- Any relevant and reliable document available through the Internet.

It is by no means a review of all available documents. On the contrary, the evaluation team only looks for what helps answering the evaluation questions.

Interviewing managers

Members of the evaluation team undertake interviews with people being or having been involved in the design, management and supervision of the project/programme. Interviews cover project/programme management, EC services, and possibly key partners in the concerned country or countries.

At this stage, the evaluation team synthesises its provisional findings into a series of first partial answers to the evaluation questions. Limitations are clearly specified as well as issues still to be covered and assumptions still to be tested during the field phase.

Designing the method

The methodological design envisaged in the inception report is finalised. The evaluation team refines its approach to each question in a design table.

Design tables per question

The first lines of the table recall the text of the question, plus a comment on why was the question asked, and a clarification of the terms used if necessary. The table then specifies the indicators and the strategy of analysis.

The following lines develop the chain of reasoning through which the evaluation team plans to answer the question. The chain is described through a series of steps which are to be taken by the evaluation team, for instance in order:

- to inform on change in relation with the selected indicators
- to assess causes and effects
- to assist in the formulation of value judgements.

Steps of reasoning are associated with information sources and evaluation tools.

Developing tools

The tools to be used in the field phase are developed. Tools range from simple and usual ones like database extracts, documentary analyses, interviews or field visits, to more technical ones like focus groups, modelling, or cost benefit analysis. The Volume 4 describes a series of tools that are frequently used.

The evaluation toolbox (see Volume 4)

When designing its work plan, the evaluation team may usefully consult the fourth volume devoted to the evaluation toolbox. This guidance includes specific explanations, recommendations and examples on how to select and implement evaluation tools. The guidance also proposes a quality assessment grid specific to each tool.

However, it must be stressed that this guidance has been prepared for evaluations on higher levels (country, region, global) and might need some translation efforts when used in the context of project/programme evaluation.

The evaluation team relies upon an appropriate mix of tools with an aim to:

- Cross-checking information sources

- Making tools reinforcing each other
- Matching the time and cost constraints.

Each tool is developed through a preparatory stage which covers all or part of the following items:

- List of questions and steps of reasoning to be addressed with the tool
- Technical specifications for implementing the tool
- Foreseeable risks which may compromise or weaken the implementation of the tool and how to deal with them
- Mode of reporting within the evaluation team, and in the final report
- Responsibilities in implementing the tool
- Quality criteria and quality control process
- Time schedule
- Resources allocated.

From evaluation questions to interviews

The evaluation questions should not be copied and pasted into interview guides or questionnaires.

Evaluation questions are to be answered by the evaluation team, not by stakeholders.

The evaluation team may build upon stakeholders' statements, but only through a careful cross-checking and analysis.

Report of the desk phase

The team writes a draft version of the desk phase report which recalls and formalises all the steps already taken. The report includes at least three chapters:

- A question by question chapter including the information already gathered and limitations if there are any, a first partial answer, the issues still to be covered and the assumptions still to be tested, and the final version of the design table
- An indicative approach to the overall assessment of the project/programme
- The list of tools to be applied in the field phase, together with all preparatory steps already taken.

If required, the evaluation team presents the works already achieved in a reference group meeting. The presentation is supported by a series of slides.

2.3 Field phase

The duration of this phase is typically a matter of weeks when the works are carried out through a mission of international experts. The time frame can be extended if local consultants are in charge, with subsequent benefits in terms of in-depth investigation, and reduced pressure on stakeholders.

2.3.1 Preparation

The evaluation team leader prepares a work plan specifying all the tasks to be implemented, together with responsibilities, time schedule, mode of reporting, and quality requirements.

The work plan keeps flexible enough in order to accommodate for last minute difficulties in the field.

The evaluation team provides key stakeholders in the partner country with an indicative list of people to be interviewed, surveys to be undertaken, dates of visit, itinerary, name of responsible team members.

Interviewing and surveying outsiders

A key methodological issue is how far the project/programme objectives were achieved in terms of the benefits for the targeted group and wider impact. Achievement of objectives is therefore to be judged more from the side of the beneficiaries' perceptions of benefit received, rather than from the managers' perspective of outputs delivered or results achieved. Consequently, interviews and surveys should focus on outsiders (beneficiaries and other affected groups beyond beneficiaries) as well as insiders (managers, partners, field level operators). The work plan should clearly state the planned proportion of insiders and outsiders among interviews and surveys.

Surveying outsiders may require that language and/or cultural gaps be bridged.

Case of a multi-country programme

The country case studies allow the evaluation team to gather information on the programme at country level. Together with the desk phase, the findings of country case studies will feed the overall assessment formulated by the evaluation team.

Case of a participatory evaluation

In this case, the work plan includes a series of workshops or focus groups with beneficiaries.

2.3.2 Initial meeting

As far as relevant, the evaluation team proposes to hold an information meeting in the country or the area studied within the first days of the field works. The following points are covered:

- Presentation and discussion of the work plan
- How to access data and key informants
- How to deal with and solve potential problems.

2.3.3 Data collection and analysis

The evaluation team implements its field data collection plan. Arising difficulties are immediately discussed within the team. As far as necessary, solutions are discussed with the evaluation manager.

It must be clear for all evaluation team members that the evaluation is neither an opinion poll nor an opportunity to express one's preconceptions. Field work is meant to collect evidence, as strong as possible, i.e.:

- Direct observation of facts including track records, photographs, etc. (strongest)
- Statements by informants who have been personally involved
- Proxies, i.e. observation of facts from which a fact in issue can be inferred

- Indirect reporting on facts by informants who have not been personally involved (weakest).

Ethical behaviour in collecting data

The evaluation team has both a responsibility towards the European Commission and also towards the groups and individuals involved in the evaluation or concerned by it. That means that the following problems are to be carefully considered:

- Interviewers must ensure that they are familiar and respectful with beliefs, manners and customs of interviewees.
- Interviewers must respect people's right to provide information in confidence and ensure that sensitive data cannot be traced to its source.
- Local members of the evaluation team should be left free to either endorse the report or not. In the latter case, their restricted role is clearly described in the report.
- The evaluation team should minimise demands on interviewees' time.
- While evaluation team members are expected to respect other cultures, they must also be aware of the EU's values, especially as regards minorities and particular groups, such as women. In such matters, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is the operative guide.
- Evaluations sometimes uncover evidence of wrongdoing. What should be reported, how and to whom requires are issues that should be carefully discussed with the evaluation manager.

Preventing and correcting biases

The evaluation team members are constantly aware of potential biases like:

- Confirmation bias, i.e. tendency to seek out evidence that is consistent with the expected effects, instead of seeking out evidence that could disprove them.
- Empathy bias, i.e. tendency to create a friendly (empathetic) atmosphere, at least for the sake of achieving a high rate of answers and a fast completion of interviews, with the consequence that interviewees make overoptimistic statements about the project/programme
- Self-censorship, i.e. reluctance of interviewees to freely express themselves and to depart from the views of their institution or hierarchy, simply because they feel at risk.
- Strategy of interviewees, i.e. purposely distorted statements with a view to attract evaluation conclusions closer to their views
- Question induced answers, i.e. answers are distorted by the way questions are asked or the interviewer's reaction to answers.

The evaluation team improves the reliability of data by:

- Asking open questions, which prevents confirmation bias
- Mixing positive and negative questions, which prevents empathy bias and question bias
- Constantly focusing on facts, which allows for subsequent cross-checking of data and which prevents interviewees' strategy bias
- Promising anonymity (and keeping the promises), which prevents interviewees' self censorship.

2.3.4 Quality control

The evaluation team leader checks the quality of data and analyses against quality criteria set for each tool, and against general principles like:

- Clear presentation of the method actually implemented
- Compliance with work plan and/or justification for adjustments
- Compliance with anonymity rules
- Self assessment of the biases and the reliability of data.

2.3.5 Debriefing

The evaluation team gathers in a debriefing meeting at the end of the field phase. It undertakes to review its data and analyses, to cross-check sources of information, to assess the strength of the factual base, and to identify the most significant findings

Another debriefing meeting is held with the reference group in order to discuss reliability and coverage of data collection, plus significant findings.

The evaluation team presents a series of slides related to the coverage and reliability of collected data, and to its first analyses and findings. The meeting is an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base of the evaluation.

Case of a multi-country programme

The evaluation team holds a debriefing meeting in each visited country in connection with or with the participation of the Delegation. A country note is written and circulated to actors in the country in order to have a factual check.

Case of a participatory evaluation

The evaluation team may hold debriefing workshops involving beneficiaries and other external stakeholders, with a view to strengthen the quality of collected data, to help interpret data with the view point of field level stakeholders, and to empower civil society organisations locally.

2.4 Synthesis phase

2.4.1 Findings

The evaluation team formalises its findings, which only follow from facts, data, interpretations and analyses. Findings may include cause-and-effect statements (e.g. “partnerships, as they were managed, generated lasting effects”). Unlike conclusions, findings do not involve value judgments.

The evaluation team proceeds with a systematic review of its findings with a view to confirming them. At this stage, its attitude is one of systematic self criticism, e.g.:

- If statistical analyses are used, do they stand validity tests?
- If findings arise from a case study, do other case studies contradict them?
- If findings arise from a survey, could they be affected by a bias in the survey?
- If findings arise from an information source, do cross-checkings show contradictions with other sources?
- Could findings be explained by external factors independent from the project / programme under evaluation?
- Do findings contradict lessons learnt elsewhere and if yes, is there a plausible explanation for that?

2.4.2 Conclusions

The evaluation team answers the evaluation questions through a series of conclusions which derive from facts and findings. In addition, some conclusions may relate to other issues which have emerged during the evaluation process.

Conclusions involve value judgements, also called reasoned assessments (e.g. “partnerships were managed in a way that improved sustainability in comparison to the previous approach”). Conclusions are justified in transparent manner by making the following points explicit:

- Which aspect of the project/programme is assessed?

- Which evaluation criterion is used?
- How is the evaluation criterion actually applied in this precise instance?

The evaluation team strives to formulate conclusions in limited number so as to secure their quality. It either clarifies or deletes any value judgement which is not fully grounded in facts and fully transparent.

The evaluation team manages to use evaluation criteria in a balanced way, and pays special attention to efficiency, impact and sustainability, two evaluation criteria which tend to be overlooked in many instances.

The evaluation team synthesises its conclusions into an overall assessment of the project/programme, and writes a summary of all conclusions, which are prioritised and referred to findings and evidence. Methodological limitations are mentioned, as well as dissenting views if there are any.

The evaluation team leader verifies that the conclusions are not systematically biased towards positive or negative views. He also checks that criticisms may lead to constructive recommendations.

2.4.3 Recommendations and lessons

The evaluation team maintains a clear cut distinction between conclusions which do not entail action (e.g. “partnerships were managed in a way that improved sustainability in comparison to the previous approach”) and other statements which derive from conclusions and which are action-oriented, i.e.

- Lessons learnt (e.g. “the successful way of managing partnerships could be usefully considered in other countries with similar contextual conditions”)
- Recommendations (e.g. “the successful way of managing partnerships should be reinforced in the next programming cycle”).

Recommendations may be presented in the form of alternative options with pros and cons.

As far as possible, recommendations are:

- Tested in terms of utility, feasibility and conditions of success
- Detailed in terms of time frame and audience

- Clustered and prioritised.

The evaluation team acknowledges clearly where changes in the desired direction are already taking place in order to avoid misleading readers and causing unnecessary offence.

2.4.4 Draft report

The evaluation team writes the first version of the report which has the same size, format and contents as the final version. Depending on the intended audience, the report is written:

- With or without technical terminology
- With either a summarised or a detailed presentation of the project/programme and its context.

Structure of the report

In general, the report includes a 2 to 5 page executive summary, a 40 to 60 page main text, plus annexes:

- Executive Summary
- Tables of contents, figures, acronyms
- Introduction
- Answered questions
- Visibility of the project / programme
- Overall assessment
- Conclusions, lessons and recommendations
- Annexes.

The executive summary is a tightly drafted and self-standing document which presents the project/programme under evaluation, the purpose of the evaluation, the main information sources and methodological options and the key conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations.

The introduction describes the project/programme and the evaluation. The reader is provided with sufficient methodological explanations in order to gauge the credibility of the conclusions and to acknowledge limitations or weaknesses if there are any.

A chapter presents the evaluation questions, together with evidence, reasoning and value judgements pertaining to them. Each question is given a clear and short answer.

A chapter synthesises all answers to evaluation questions into an overall assessment of the project/programme. The chapter articulates all the findings, conclusions and lessons in a way that reflect their importance, and which facilitates the reading.

Conclusions and lessons are listed, clustered and prioritised in a few pages, and the same for recommendations.

The evaluation team leader checks that the report meets the quality criteria. The report is submitted to the person in charge of the quality control before it is handed over to the evaluation manager.

Quality certificate

The evaluation team leader attaches a quality certificate to the draft final report, indicating the extent to which:

- Evaluation questions are answered
- Reliability and validity limitations are specified
- Conclusions apply evaluation criteria in an explicit and transparent manner
- The present guidelines have been used
- Tools and analyses have been implemented according to standards
- The language, layout, illustrations, etc. are according to standards.

The evaluation team leader and the evaluation manager discuss the quality of the report. Improvements are made if requested.

Case of a multi-country programme

In that case, the country notes are published as part of the overall evaluation exercise in annexes to the synthesis report (so editing is required).

2.4.5 Discussion of draft report

The evaluation team presents the report in a reference group meeting. The presentation is supported by a series of slides which cover:

- Answered questions, and methodological limitations
- Overall assessment, conclusions and lessons learnt
- Recommendations.

Comments are collected in order to:

- Further check the factual basis of findings and conclusions
- Check the transparency and impartiality
- Check the utility and feasibility of the recommendations.

2.4.6 Discussion seminar

At this stage, the evaluation manager may decide to gather a discussion seminar with a wide range of stakeholders with a view to discussing the substance of the conclusions and the utility of the recommendations in the presence of the evaluation team. Attendance may include the Delegation staff, national authorities, the civil society, project management, other donors and/or experts.

Participants are provided with an updated draft report.

2.4.7 Finalising the report

The evaluation team finalises the report by taking stock of all comments received. Annexes are also finalised in one or the following forms:

- Printed out annexes following the report
- Annexes on CDROM.

The report is printed out according to the instructions stated in the terms of reference.

The evaluation team leader receives a final quality assessment from the manager. If necessary, he writes a note setting forth the reasons why certain requests for quality improvement have not been sustained. This response will remain attached to both the quality assessment and the report.

Annexes

- Terms of reference
- List of activities specifically assessed
- Logical framework and comments
- Detailed evaluation method including:
 - Options taken, difficulties encountered and limitations
 - Detail of tools and analyses
- List of interviews
- List of documents used
- Any other text or table which contains facts used in the evaluation.

Available on Europa Website

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

Template terms of reference

Menu of evaluation questions

Quality assessment grid

Structure of a summary

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Evaluation Methods for the European Union's External Assistance

2006 - 44 pp. – 21 x 14,8 cm

Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of the European
Communities

ISBN: 92-79-00681-9