

DCA Evaluation Policy

Introduction

In 2006 DCA decided to strengthen its evaluation function with the purpose of enhancing its use for learning and accountability within DCA. This decision came out of an intention to improve the quality of the assistance and to know more about the impact at the level of the rights-holder. In the future this will concern the entire organization, but for practical purposes we begin where a solid experience already exists, namely within the international work. This policy has been drafted in the spirit of harmonization and alignment with other likeminded NGOs and reinforces best practice in the field¹.

A first step is to clarify the purpose, practice and understanding of the role of evaluation in DCA to ensure a certain degree of standardisation and transparency. The following draft policy clarifies the institutional set up of the evaluation function and definition of roles and responsibilities including who decides which evaluations to undertake and when; a definition of the criteria and principles adhered to; an explanation of how the evaluations are planned, managed and budgeted; how the findings feed into the organizational learning loop and a clear statement on disclosure and dissemination. The draft is based on a workshop with staff held in December 2005 where the main elements of a desired evaluation practice were discussed, a review of the current evaluation practice finalized in October 2006, and discussions with staff in international department.

The fact that DCA works through partners, and only rarely finds itself in the role of implementing agency in direct contact with the rights-holder, means that the partner is central in the evaluation process. The evaluation process and products must reflect the values and standards spelled out in the DCA Partnership Policy for International Co-operation such as mutual ownership, accountability, participation, equality, harmonization and alignment. In practice, this means for instance that evaluations are designed jointly with the partner on equal terms, that the process is transparent, that the partner and DCA are accountable to each other, to the rights-holders and to a possible back donor for the agreements made and resources spent. Finally it means that DCA and its partners will seek to have joint evaluations at the level of partners and/or the level of funding agencies to increase cost-efficiency. The partnership approach also means that there are two entities with different responsibilities to be assessed during an evaluation. In short, the partner will be assessed on the capacity to deliver the agreed service to the right-holder, and DCA will be assessed on its capacity to support the partner based on the agreements made.

It is the intention that when approved, this policy will be operationalised through a revision of the existing evaluation guidelines elaborated in 2000, and the development of guidelines for programme evaluation. These guidelines will translate into practice the above mentioned values to ensure that learning and accountability benefits all stakeholders such as rights-holders, partners, sister agencies, donors and the general public.

1. The purpose of evaluation in DCA

A widely accepted definition of evaluation, and the one DCA adheres to, is that of OECD/DAC: *“An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of on-going or completed activities, their design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and*

¹ The evaluation policies and guidelines of ICCO, Christian Aid, ACT International have been consulted during the drafting process. Additionally, the principles established in “Building Bridges in PME”, a statement of intent by international NGOs, have been included.

*fulfilment of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of a project, programme, policy or other types of interventions*².

DCA uses evaluation for the three following purposes. The evaluations will usually include all three elements, but typically emphasize one aspect over the other. It is important to clarify which of the aspects are the most important for each evaluation as it has implications for the process, the selection of the team and the methods applied.

- **Promote learning**

An evaluation shall explore the reasons for success and failure of activities supported by DCA, and hereby produce information that can help achieve results more effectively. This concerns expected results at the level of partners as well as among the rights-holders themselves. The evaluation process shall ensure participation of DCA staff, partners, rights-holders and other stakeholders so that it becomes an opportunity to reflect and learn from experience.

- **Promote accountability**

Accountability is here understood as the obligation to document the use and the results of aid resources, and is not limited to financial accountability. The key audience for this function are the rights-holders, the partners, other relevant actors in the programme country, funding agencies and the general public in Denmark.

- **Documentation and systematization of experience**

Evaluations shall provide decision makers, the general public and other interested parties with independent, unbiased and evidence-based information about DCAs and partner's activities, and they shall feed into the institutional memory about lessons learned from the organization's activities abroad.

Evaluation is often confused with other planning or management tools such as reviews and appraisals. DCA understands reviews as tools to monitor whether a project or programme is on track and produces the immediate outputs or outcomes agreed upon. A review is usually led by DCA staff, and is more likely to focus on implementation issues and can limit itself to pre-identified problem areas. DCA understands an appraisal as an assessment of the relevance, feasibility, and potential sustainability of a development intervention prior to a decision of funding, and is therefore forward looking as opposed to reviews and evaluations that look to the past to learn for the future.

2. Link between Monitoring and Evaluation in DCA

Monitoring is the ongoing systematic follow up of the project and programme implementation based on indicators to ensure that it is on track compared to the objectives. Evaluation is an in-depth assessment of a project or programme at a certain point of time, e.g. upon completion to assess the extent to which the project or programme has had the intended effect. While a monitoring system seeks to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation process, and is the managers' principal tool for following the progress of the interventions they are responsible for, evaluations may question the overall relevance of the project/programme and its effect on different stakeholders. Evaluation relies heavily on information captured through the monitoring system and is thereby often as strong/or weak as the monitoring data available. The principal outputs from DCAs monitoring system that feed into the evaluations are baseline studies, monitoring reports, programme reports and project and programme reviews carried out at midterm,

² DAC Principles for Aid Evaluation, OECD-DAC, 1991. (The definition was reconfirmed in DAC's Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management in 2002)

3. What does DCA evaluate?

The core of all DCA evaluations is the extent to which the operations, be it project or be it programme, have achieved or are likely to achieve the intended and unintended results. This means that the point of departure is the project or programme document including the predefined objectives and its indicators. Currently, DCA evaluates more or less systematically at project level. As DCA is changing from project to programme approach, the evaluation function should follow and focus on the programme level. At the moment, we have yet to undertake the first programme evaluation, as only very few programmes have finalized so far. Guidelines for this still have to be developed. To the extent that planning takes place at country level in the future, it will become relevant to evaluate DCA activities at country level too. Thematic evaluations are carried out when the examination of a particular topic could benefit from a cross-regional approach.

• Project evaluation

All projects running over three years with annual budgets above 250.000 DKK have to be evaluated upon completion. The funds have to be included in the project budget at design point. The funds allocated to project evaluation are transferred to the partner, to ensure their complete ownership of the process. DCA staff is consulted in the design of the exercise, the selection of the consultant, the quality control and the discussion related to the implementation of the recommendations. In case of limited capacity, the partner can decide to let DCA manage the evaluation budget and process. Regardless of the mechanism, the process must live up to the values stipulated in DCA's partnership policy. Project evaluations should be jointly planned and financed with other funding partners, and if one agency has already evaluated the project, it is likely not to be necessary to repeat the process. Also, partners with similar projects can decide to jointly undertake an evaluation, possibly using the partner platform as the coordinating body. This would minimize the workload and increase shared learning between the partners and DCA. Should the partner wish to cancel the evaluation this can be discussed with DCA.

Given that DCA is usually not directly involved in the implementation of projects, in practice, the project specific evaluations become evaluations of the partner's capacity to implement. The guidelines will be more specific about how to go about this. However, this focus does not teach DCA much about its capacity as a partner, and with this policy we want to ensure that all project specific evaluations contain information about the relationship between DCA and the partner, the relevance and effectiveness of the partnership, etc. The revised guidelines and formats for ToRs and reports will show how this can be done in practice. The main clients are the rights-holders, Regional Office, the partner, and DCA staff managing or approving similar projects elsewhere.

• Programme evaluation

Programme evaluations are to a larger extent about DCA's capacity as a partner and the capacity to achieve its own strategic goals as set out in Vision and Plan, therefore they are led by DCA using external consultants for maximum independence. The partners are involved in this exercise through the platforms. They contribute to the design of the exercise by commenting on the TOR, and making sure that what they see as key issues at the programme level are included in the TOR. By default they are also key informants during the exercise and they participate in the debriefing and the final workshop, where the follow up to the recommendations are decided upon. All programmes should be evaluated upon completion unless there are valid arguments for a different timing or a different tool to assess the extent to which the objectives were met and to extract lessons that could improve programming locally and/or in other countries³. Here, joint evaluations with other funding partners are more difficult given the particular programme approach of DCA, but if relevant and possible

³ It could be argued that reviews or thematic evaluations could be more appropriate given certain circumstances. This decision lies with the international directorate

joint evaluations should be pursued. If practical, thematic evaluations of a programme type carried out across countries may supersede individual programme evaluations.

Programme evaluations must not become only the sum of findings from project evaluations, but must also assess the extent to which the project portfolio is relevant to the programme objectives, DCA's added value or whether the programme approach has improved the results achieved at output, outcome and to the extent possible impact level, DCA's capacity as a partner in the development process, and the extent to which the programme is contributing the achievement of the strategic objectives as defined in Vision and Plan. Guidelines and formats for programme evaluation will give more details about how this can be done.

- **Thematic evaluations**

These types of evaluations are particularly useful for learning as they typically look at a certain topic in various different scenarios and thus enable generalizations and abstractions from specific circumstances. They typically highlight strengths and weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that have affected performance and outcome. They may for instance assess the effectiveness of the programme approach, or the implementation of the cross cutting issues, such as Rights Based Approach and Gender, or they could look into the strategic objectives of Plan and Vision. *See the draft evaluation plan attached to this document for examples of evaluations that could be carried out in coming years.* Through consultations with staff and the Board, the International Directorate decides which thematic evaluations will be undertaken. A funding mechanism for these evaluations needs to be identified and put in place. An ad hoc funding mechanism could easily jeopardize this important opportunity for learning⁴.

Common for project, programme and thematic evaluations is that the findings and recommendations are produced by external consultants to ensure independence, objectivity, contextualization and a comparative perspective. Lessons learned must be easily extractable from the evaluation reports, and together with the main findings they will be made available to all staff in DCA through the intranet to enable learning across projects, programmes and countries. All evaluation processes must be finalized with a workshop with all relevant stakeholders in country and if relevant in HQ, where a plan for the implementation of the recommendations is developed and co-signed by the involved parties.

4. Learning from evaluations

DCA wants to enhance the learning potential of its evaluation function; therefore emphasis is put on the entire evaluation process apart from the report itself. The evaluation process is seen as an opportunity for DCA staff and partners to look back and reflect about a particular intervention, a policy or an approach and form conclusions about what can be learned from it. The process should be participatory from beginning to end and include all stakeholders including the rights-holder, the partners, other funding agencies involved, and the back donor when relevant. The revised guidelines will have more details about how this can be done. The main opportunities for learning in the evaluation process are:

- the design of the ToR with partners and DCA staff in Country and HQ
- the contact with the rights-holders, DCA staff and other stakeholders during the field visit
- the discussion of the evaluation team's findings in country and in HQ
- the discussion of DCAs response to the recommendations

⁴A thematic evaluation could be expected to cost 200.000-300.000 DKK. This estimate is based on salaries, per diem and tickets for 3 consultants (2 international and 1 local) for 30 days.

- when relevant, wider public discussions
- when the lessons learned are used in the discussion of a new project, programme or policy and applied
- when lessons learned are included in the annual report and other reports to the external environment

5. Organizational set up and responsibility for the evaluation process

Ideally the evaluation function should be independent from the units that design or implement the activities being evaluated. However, given the limited staff time allocated to the central evaluation function and the current combination with the monitoring function, the optimal organizational placement is within Programme Development Unit (PDU) for the time being. To ensure a minimum of independence and a natural structure for follow up action to the evaluation recommendations, the decision making related to programme evaluation lies with the International Directorate. This includes the approval of the evaluation plan, and the response to the findings and recommendations. The responsibility for the plan for thematic evaluations and response to the recommendations lie with the Senior Management team⁵ through the International Directorate. Main findings, recommendations and planned follow up action to programme evaluations are submitted to the Board for information through the annual report on Vision & Plan. Thematic evaluations are also submitted to the Board separately. The Board is consulted on the topics for thematic evaluations.

The International Directorate approves the policy and the evaluation plan. In practice, the approval of project level evaluations is delegated to the RR in close collaboration with partners. The responsibility for the planning, design and management of the evaluations lie with the Regional Offices for project and programme evaluations. The RRs update the evaluation plan annually, and it is posted on the intranet. To the extent that capacity allows, the evaluation function at HQ can support with the design of TOR, selection of consultants and quality control of the reports at programme level. PDU is responsible for the management of the thematic evaluations and for the sharing of findings from all three levels of evaluations subject to availability of capacity. If necessary, the management could be outsourced, or managed by other DCA staff, but care must be taken not to jeopardize internal learning and the independence respectively.

6. Evaluation criteria and standards⁶

For development evaluations DCA applies the 5 basic criteria defined by OECD/DAC and applied by most evaluation outfits in the NGO sector, the bilateral agencies and the UN;

Relevance: Are the development interventions relevant to DCA and partners' development policies, goals and strategies: Is the activity relevant in relation to the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries?

Effectiveness: Achievement of objectives: Have the primary objectives identified been achieved? Have the planned or expected results been achieved, including whether the intended population was reached?

Efficiency: How economically have resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) been converted to results? Are the investment and recurrent costs justified? Could the same results have been achieved with fewer resources?

⁵ Staben

⁶ Evaluation criteria and standards are inspired by OECD/DAC and INTRAC for development and ALNAP for Humanitarian Action. The evaluation guidelines suggest how to apply the criteria in practice. The guidelines for humanitarian action will build on SPHERE guidelines.

Impact: What positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects have been produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

Sustainability: The probability of long-term benefits. Will the intended benefits continue when development cooperation is terminated? Is local ownership established?

- **Humanitarian Action**

In the case of evaluation of DCA's humanitarian operations, the primary criteria is impact at beneficiary level, sometimes described as effectiveness. Coverage (including targeting) is given equal importance. Relevance is usually more obvious, and is not likely to be the focus of a humanitarian evaluation. Sustainability may not be as important given the often short duration of the assistance, but connectedness (the link between relief and development) becomes very important. The ALNAP defines the additional humanitarian evaluation criteria in the following way:

Coverage: The need to reach major population groups facing life-threatening suffering wherever they are, providing them with assistance and protection proportionate to their need and devoid of extraneous political agenda.

Connectedness: Connectedness refers to the need to ensure that activities of a short-term emergency nature are carried out in a context that takes longer-term and interconnected problems into account.

All evaluations in DCA must live up to international standards. They must be independent, impartial, transparent, participatory, feasible, cost-efficient, accurate, fair and must not single out individuals for judgement. Additionally, the standards set out in the DCA partnership policy such as mutual ownership, accountability, equality, harmonization and alignment must be applied. In case of humanitarian evaluations The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere standards) must be applied.

Furthermore, DCA evaluations must consider the following cross cutting issues that are central in DCA operations.

- Organizational learning
- Rights perspective
- Gender
- Outcome monitoring
- Partnership relations

7. The Evaluation Process

Following is a brief outline of the evaluation process that shows the potential points for learning. More details, a list of dos and don'ts will be included in the revised evaluation guidelines.

7.1 Preparation

The design of the ToR is a participatory process between the evaluation manager (be it a staff member of the partner or DCA) and relevant stakeholders such as other staff with relevant competencies, rights-holders, other partners and interested parties. Before an evaluation is set in motion, the Evaluation Manager prepares, a concept paper or a description of the evaluation that covers:

- The main objective of the evaluation.

- The scope of the evaluation
- Key issues to be covered by the evaluation.
- Prospective approach and methodology.
- Time schedule
- Budget allocated

Based on this, the ToR are drafted by the evaluation manager and consulted with all relevant stakeholders. For thematic evaluations it can be useful to involve prominent outsiders at design point to ensure the quality in the contextualization, and to learn from practice elsewhere.

7.2 Budgeting

The resources for Programme and Project evaluations are included in the budget at design point. For project evaluations, the funds are allocated to the partner to manage, as is already the practice in many offices. As a guiding principle, a minimum of 1% of the overall budget should be allocated to evaluation. The thematic evaluations are funded centrally, and funds should be allocated as separate budget lines every budget year. The funds are managed by PDU.

7.3 Selection of Evaluation Team

The criteria for the selection of the evaluation team are professional competence, experience in relation to the task, independence (no conflict of interest) and the quality of the evaluator's proposal. The team must constitute a representation of the relevant professional expertise. If the team is hired internationally, it must include professional expertise from the partner country. If time and resources allow the team leader can be asked to produce an inception paper, to ensure a mutual understanding of the task at hand. Observers from DCA, partners, or a back donor could be added to the team for learning purposes, but they do not hold drafting responsibilities.

7.4 Method of data collection

The method for data collection has to be finally decided upon by the Team leader, but it will be a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and will always have interviews with rights-holders and partners as a main ingredient. Triangulation with other sources such as staff, sister agencies or other actors on the ground will be carried out. Control groups (contact with rights-holders that have not received DCA assistance) will only be used if they are inherent to the process or are not at risk of being discriminated. The interviews can have many forms and this is highly contextual. Suggestions will be included in the guidelines.

7.5 Implementation

Evaluations are typically carried out in three phases. In the *first phase* the tem leader prepares an operational evaluation plan, consistent with the Terms of Reference. The operational evaluation plan details specific questions, assessment criteria, approach, design, data collection methods, analytical framework, preliminary findings based on documentary review and interviews, provisional conclusions, report outline, and a detailed work plan for the second phase. Any changes from the Terms of Reference are justified and agreed with the Evaluation Manager.

Upon approval of the detailed operational plan by the Evaluation Manager or, in the case of joint evaluations the steering committee, the evaluator proceeds to the *second phase* that includes collecting, consolidating and analysing data, establishing and clearing findings of fact, formulating conclusions and recommendations, preparing and clearing the draft report with all relevant actors. The most important points for institutional learning are the debriefing sessions held in country and, if relevant and cost efficient, at HQ. At these sessions the evaluation team presents the findings to DCA staff, partners and other stakeholders. To ensure accountability to the right-holders, the

responsible partner or DCA will inform them of the results of the evaluation in the way most appropriate to them. The debriefing sessions should be seen as time for reflection, and an effort to reach a consensus about what should be learned from the intervention in question. The *third phase* entails finalising the report based on a consultation process with all relevant stakeholders.

7.6 Independent Reporting

The evaluation team has the final responsibility for the contents of the report. Any disagreements among the evaluation team or between the evaluation team, DCA, and relevant partners that are significant to conclusions and recommendations must be reflected in the report, either in the form of comments in the text, footnotes or as a special section.

8. Dissemination

Keeping the purpose of evaluation in mind (Learning, Accountability and Documentation), the users for the evaluation reports are cooperating partners, DCA staff and board, funding partners and the general public. To ensure accountability and transparency, all evaluations along with DCAs response are made public through an evaluation site on the internet, unless specific considerations need to be taken regarding the safety of partners and DCA staff, or the effectiveness of a strategy or advocacy campaign. Considering the vast amounts of project evaluations, it is practical to limit this to programme and thematic evaluations. The project evaluations are, however, available on request unless otherwise indicated by the partner.

To ensure the sharing of the lessons learned from all types of evaluations, conclusions, recommendations and lessons to be learned are highlighted on the intranet, along with the full reports. Public events can be considered for particularly interesting evaluations. It should be considered on a case by case basis whether the programme and thematic reports should be published in the form of printed reports. It could be useful for public events and for enhancing visibility of certain issues.

Considering the different needs of the different stakeholders, 4 page briefs will be produced for all programme and thematic evaluations. The briefs cover the principal findings, recommendations and lessons learned of the evaluation, and DCAs response to them. This could be done by the central evaluation function according to capacity, but they could also be produced by the external consultants. Other products could be developed based on the evaluation to cater for different readers.

9. Follow up

At the conclusion of an evaluation, a workshop is held with the partners and other stakeholders at country level (project/programme evaluation) or HQ (thematic evaluation) to jointly identify the response to the recommendations and how to implement them. All relevant stakeholders participate. A follow up memo is prepared to record the decisions made. In the case of programme and thematic evaluations, the follow up memo is approved by the directorate of the international department. The head of the responsible unit reports annually on the follow up through the usual channels e.g. programme reports, reports to Danida, etc. The guidelines will suggest ways to carry out these workshops.