

EVALUATION

Context

The main message of the Spanish Master Plan for Development Cooperation 2005-2008¹ is '*more aid, better aid*'.

The Master Plan further declares that '*evaluating development cooperation policies, programmes, and projects is one of the most relevant activities to determine how official development aid is working, its results, and its effects. It is a necessary tool to improve quality and effectiveness*'.

This backgrounder is dedicated specifically to Evaluation. Its objective is to foment and orient the debate on how the evaluation process is contributing to the quality of aid.

The aim of this document is to establish the bases for debate in order to contribute to reflection and collective learning.

Why is evaluation necessary?

Evaluation permits the assessment of the successes achieved by organisations participating in specific interventions and policies insofar as they have contributed to producing changes for the beneficiaries. Evaluation also contributes to the elaboration of lines of action and finding solutions to meet objectives which have not yet been achieved, with the aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of aid.

Evaluation can essentially have one or two specific ends: on the one hand, to provide accountability for donors, citizens, or organisations that have managed specific programmes or policies; and, on the other, learning. The latter implies incorporating the lessons learned through systematic evaluation and analysis of interventions into the entire management cycle. This learning must be a part of any evaluation process.

Evaluation is based on the principles of impartiality, independence, neutrality, and professional ethics.

Over the last few years, attempts have been made to evaluate more development cooperation instruments as well as projects so that evaluations can have an even greater impact. Included among these instruments are, for example, public programmes and policies and direct budgetary assistance for governments of recipient countries.

The approach is more participatory and oriented towards reaching broader development objectives. Hence, evaluation is increasingly linked to quality management systems.

¹ http://www.maec.es/NR/rdonlyres/63D1D276-85B5-41C4-BE66-97678A6BC292/0/Plan_Director_Esp.pdf

Is there a difference in Spain between official discourse and reality?

It is commendable that the political discourse in this legislature has incorporated key words, phrases, concepts, and milestones already in use within the international community, at least among country members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Hence, it is commonplace to hear concepts such as: harmonisation; alignment with policies of recipient countries; fomenting appropriation among beneficiaries or citizens; support for new instruments such as direct budgetary assistance; and the mention of important meetings such as the 2005 Copenhagen Summit,² the Paris Declaration³ or Good Practices of Humanitarian Action, known as Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD).⁴

Nevertheless, several questions remain unanswered. How can it be ensured that harmonisation and alignment are effectively taking place? How can it be verified whether Spain complying with the GHD 23 principles? How is this measured? Who is measuring it? Is there a debate in Spain regarding the challenges presented by the Paris Declaration in terms of evaluation?

The creation of an Evaluation Agency within the Ministry of Public Administrations and, in terms of external development cooperation, the General Directorate for the Planning and Evaluation of Development Cooperation Policies (DGPOLDE)⁵ which, in turn, depends on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) through the State Secretariat for International Cooperation (SECI), demonstrates the political will to bolster Evaluation and Planning. The former Planning and Evaluation Office (OPE) was restructured and refocused, and given a more ambitious and farther-reaching mandate.

However, according to the Association for the Quality of Development Assistance (ACADE)⁶, time must be spent on planning to orient evaluation towards managing quality.

According to ACADE, if the documents stipulated within the Master Plan regarding sectoral strategies and country planning are prepared too hastily, there are three risks: 1) *'the prior diagnoses and evaluations needed to use learning as a basis for future options will not be in-depth'*; 2) priorities will not be very well established due to an excessive accumulation of objectives and areas of action; and 3) *'planning exercises will not be adequately connected to the management tasks associated to aid'*.

DGPOLDE has contributed to the diffusion of information about these good practices by sharing and publishing the findings of evaluations already carried out.⁷

² World Summit on Social Development

³ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/56/34580968.pdf>

⁴ www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org

⁵ <http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Cooperacion+Internacional/Estructura+de+la+SECI/Dirección+General/Competencias/>

⁶ 'España: más ayuda, mejor ayuda. Desafíos para la cooperación española', June 2006.

⁷ *Evaluaciones de la Cooperación Española 2004-2005. Difusión de Resultados*, event to present evaluation results, 21 April 2006.

Noteworthy among these is the evaluation of Spanish health assistance in Mozambique. This is one of the few evaluations which have assessed new development cooperation instruments such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), or the sectoral approaches.⁸ We trust that the DGPOLDE is also aware of relevant documents published in this context by various organisations such as the Development Assistance Committee (DAC).⁹

But, is all this enough to truly analyse the global results of these new cooperation instruments as well as to monitor, coordinate, and evaluate official Spanish development aid? Does DGPOLDE¹⁰ have the financial and human resources necessary to carry out its mandate? Does the office coordinate with the different ministries evaluating reimbursable development aid and the guidelines for debt reduction and relief?

Three important evaluations organised by DGPOLDE transcend beyond mere projects to focus specifically on development cooperation programmes: the evaluation of the Araucaria Programme an evaluation of Spanish development cooperation in a priority country (Morocco); and the evaluation of the Micro-credits Programme.

In practice, however, evaluations, excluding these by the DGPOLDE, continue to focus on specific projects more than on programmes,¹¹ strategies, public policies, or the performance of organisations.

Similarly, how do other committees and official organisms such as AECI, the ministries of Treasury, Industry, and Defence measure their results? Who evaluates their impact? Who is accountable to those citizens who want to know if, in fact, poverty is being reduced?

Are more evaluations taking place?

The number of Spanish actors involved in evaluating projects, programmes, and development cooperation policies is very limited. This figure is even smaller in terms of those dedicated to evaluating Humanitarian Action.

Few official organisms have an evaluation department as exists within the Ministry of Defence. The same is true for Autonomous Communities and other local institutions. There are also very few NGOs with the capacity (both financial and human resources) to carry out these evaluations.

The evaluation community in Spain, understood as those who, in practice, are dedicated to carrying out these assessments, and excluding DGPOLDE, consists of people linked to academia, consulting firms, and agencies offering assessment services, as well as a greater number of independent consultants. This situation is

⁸ SWAP, Wide Sectoral Approach.

⁹ DAC Evaluation Series, *Lessons Learned on Donor Support to Decentralization and Local Governance*, OECD, 2004.

¹⁰ <http://www.mae.es/es/MenuPpal/Cooperacion+Internacional/Estructura+de+la+SECI/Dirección+General+Competencias/>

¹¹ An exception is, for example, the Autonomous Community of Madrid which is evaluating its entire development programme between the years 2000-2004 implemented by 12 NGOs and in different countries. This evaluation serves to extract lessons from the experience and share results.

merely a reflection of a country without the necessary foundations to support a culture of solid evaluations.

The truth is that the evaluation community was very hopeful when the Master Plan was launched. The government expressly made clear its aim to stimulate and foment this culture of evaluation. However, after two years, the advances made have been much slower than what was hoped for. Internal demand at the national level for these evaluations has increased but not as much as expected.

Are we evaluating better?

Within Spanish development cooperation, the paradigmatic tool used to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate is still the Logical Framework approach. This tool has yet to be surpassed and it offers many advantages, especially in terms of management planning.

But putting greater emphasis on achieving results and meeting objectives rather than on the process itself and how actions are carried out also has some disadvantages, such as a lack of flexibility due to excessive rigidity, especially in terms of evaluating direct and indirect changes for beneficiaries produced by interventions.

Is Spain aware that in international evaluation forums the use and abuse of this methodological tool is being questioned?¹²

What efforts are being made to keep up with the international debate aimed at finding new and complementary tools which may help to better measure the direct and indirect effects of intervention and their impact?

What does the Spanish evaluation community know about new methodologies such as Outcome Mapping?¹³ Methodological tools such as this one are neither better nor worse but they do have a different approach which, at times, may be very useful to measure the changes found among the actors involved, especially in terms of work carried out with partners.

Why bilateral Spanish aid organisms are not participating in important, joint evaluations like agencies in other EU countries such as the UK, Denmark, or Sweden? In terms of Humanitarian Action, two important evaluations have taken place. The first was a joint evaluation regarding Rwanda in the 1990s,¹⁴ and the second was the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC).¹⁵

¹² Oliver Bakewell and Anne Garbutt, *The use and abuse of the logical framework approach*, SIDA, SEKA-Resultatredovisningsprojekt. November 2005.

¹³ AAVV, 'Outcome Mapping: Those Who Dream Make a Difference', article from *Outcome Mapping*, a CD published by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, September 2004. http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-1-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

¹⁴ DANIDA, *The International Response to conflict and genocide: lessons from the Rwanda Experience*, 1996, <http://www.um.dk/en>

¹⁵ <http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org/>

Compared to other EU countries, participation by Spanish evaluation agencies, consulting firms, and NGOs in EU-level evaluations is very low, including those convened by Europeaid¹⁶ and by ECHO.¹⁷

Is Spain aware that emphasis is being placed on these evaluations leading to organisations assuming responsibility with respect to beneficiaries and not just donors and organisational heads? Is there an interest for initiatives such as those proposed by HAPi¹⁸ to develop standards and indicators to assess accountability with respect to beneficiaries? How can empowerment among the citizens affected by the actions of different agencies or organisations that evaluate these be measured?

These are just a few of the questions which are enriching the debate within the international evaluation community and presenting it with new challenges. Spain cannot afford to stay on the sidelines.

How much space is dedicated to learning?

Could Spain (with the central government serving as coordinator) participate more actively in the important international forums organised by societies, organisations, and networks such as EES,¹⁹ IDEAS²⁰ or ALNAP?²¹

The fact is that the majority of actors within the Spanish evaluation community dedicate little time to reflection and learning, including organisations that represent civil society. For example, there were no NGOs present at INTRAC's²² Sixth Evaluation Conference.

How can we foment evaluation training? Should we measure more and better organisational performances? What tools do we use to measure success? In many OECD countries there are a series of organisations dedicated exclusively to this task, both in the field of development cooperation as well as in humanitarian action.

Among these agencies, PSO,²³ MOSAIC, INTRAC, and the URD Group²⁴ aim constantly at improving management quality. How can the government stimulate

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/comm/europeaid/index_en.htm

¹⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/>

¹⁸ HAPi, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership- International 'making humanitarian action accountable to beneficiaries'. Accountability and quality management standards development, Bangladesh Workshop, 31 May to 1 June 2006. Co-hosted by Oxfam Bangladesh. <http://www.hapinternational.org/en/>

¹⁹ EES, European Evaluation Society. In the conference held in Berlin in October 2004, there were no representatives from the central government, the Autonomous Communities or local institutions. <http://www.europeanevaluation.org/>

²⁰ IDEAS, International Development Evaluation Association, First Biennial Conference. 'Evaluation for development: beyond aid', New Delhi, 12-14 April 2005, <http://www.ideas-int.org/>

²¹ ALNAP, Accountability Learning Network Active Performance. ALNAP is the most important international network in the field of Humanitarian Action. It organises two meetings every year. The last one (13-15 June 2006) was held in Nairobi even though meetings are often held in Europe. <http://www.odi.org.uk/alnap/>

²² INTRAC, International NGO Training and Research Centre. Sixth Evaluation Conference. 3-5 April 2006, Netherlands, <http://www.intrac.org/>

²³ PSO Capacity Building in developing countries, <http://www.pso.nl/en/pso/index.htm>

²⁴ Urgence Rehabilitation Development, http://www.urd.org/index.php?page=home_es&language=es

organisations to improve their management quality so that their results, effects, and impact are more significant?

How do we assimilate the lessons learned and recommendations presented in the evaluations? Do these then go back and influence the project cycle and do they condition future planning? Or is there insufficient time to learn? Are these evaluations simply left on the shelf?

How do we ensure that evaluations are participatory throughout the entire process: from the moment the terms of reference are defined, the mission is determined and how findings are shared, to communicating the evaluation report, and presenting the results, recommendations, and lessons learned to all actors?

What are the main challenges to meeting the proposed objectives?

To conclude, we present three important proposals which DGPOLDE should implement:

- 1) Promote evaluation in the area of humanitarian action;
- 2) Promote Spain's participation in joint evaluations; and
- 3) Participate more in international development, humanitarian action, and evaluation organisations. That is, incorporate and participate in international debates on evaluation, on its objectives, methodological tools and the evaluation approach.

The participatory focus seems to be the most appropriate to assess whether development interventions are moving towards poverty reduction, and to evaluate whether humanitarian action interventions alleviate human suffering.

FRIDE organised the project **"Spanish Development Aid - Mid-term Review and a Proposal for a Participative Consultation"** between June 2006 and April 2007. This project aims to develop a consultation process about the current Spanish government's development cooperation policy. We have created a forum for participation and debate, in order to assess the Spanish development cooperation reform agenda and to identify the main achievements and shortcomings in operationalising the initiatives based on the principle of "More Aid, Better Aid". A set of recommendation guidelines were developed, through participative methods, with the objective of putting into practice the aspirations of the Spanish development cooperation policy.

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