

REFLECTIONS ON THE STATE AND PROGRESS OF THE EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION INTERVENTIONS

General Directorate for Planning and Evaluation of Development Cooperation Policies (DGPOLDE), State Secretariat for International Cooperation (SECI)

Introduction

'Basing ourselves on the statements, reflections and questions raised in the initial document, DGPOLDE (the office responsible for planning and assessing Spanish development cooperation policy) will describe the advances made and the processes launched by this office. In addition, we offer a critical analysis of the major challenges facing Spanish development cooperation actors in terms of evaluation.

In the 1998 Law on International Cooperation for Development, article 19.4 outlines the role to be played by the State Secretariat for International Development Cooperation and Latin America (SECIPI), signalling that 'it will assess development cooperation policy, the programmes and projects financed with state funds currently being implemented or finalised, from their very design and definition to the results achieved. This evaluation will take into account the relevance of project objectives and their degree of completion, as well as the level of efficiency and effectiveness, the impact achieved, and their tested viability'. Since this law was passed, many advances have been made in the development cooperation system and, concretely, in the evaluation system.

More recently, the Spanish Master Plan for Development Cooperation 2005-2008 describes evaluation in its chapter 8 on 'Aid Quality' as a mechanism which, alongside planning and monitoring, will contribute to improve aid quality, reinforcing its importance within the Spanish development cooperation system.

What purpose does evaluation serve?

The aim of evaluation...

The definitions proposed by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the Spanish Master Plan 2005-2008 are a worthy starting point:

'The systematic and objective assessment of a project, programme or policy currently being implemented or finalised, including its design, implementation, and results, as well as its relevance, efficacy, effectiveness, impact, and viability for development'. DAC, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

"The evaluation of development cooperation policies and projects is one of the most relevant activities to know the functioning, results and effects of Spanish official development aid; it is an **especially necessary tool to improve the quality and**

**efficacy of Spanish development cooperation activities carried out abroad'.
Spanish Master Plan for Development Cooperation 2005-2008.**

In addition to being a tool for analysis, evaluation should also be used as a necessary mechanism in development cooperation to gain information regarding the performance and results of a given activity. As such, it is an **instrument for learning** which allows lessons to be learned in order to improve the activity evaluated or similar activities, and a fundamental element to manage and plan current and future development aid activities. In this sense, a fundamental task associated to evaluation is the **effective use and application of its conclusions and recommendations**. As declared within the Master Plan 2005-2008, linking the different Spanish development cooperation actors in this area is key.

The evaluation of public policies is ever more present as is demonstrated by the creation of the State Agency for the Assessment of Services and Public Policy Quality within the Ministry of Public Administration. This agency was officially created on June 29 of this year along with the approval of the Law on Agencies.

In order to improve aid quality and efficacy...

Evaluation, thus, not only serves as a mechanism for accountability but also, fundamentally, as an instrument for learning. This implies incorporating all the lessons learned throughout the management cycle, applying these to future development interventions, and preparing a mandatory document for the entities that have to prepare the Plan of Action. As the office responsible for assessing development cooperation intervention, **DGPOLDE**, under the **Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC)**, will monitor the procedure for incorporating recommendations, thereby guaranteeing the system's coherence. In the current design for the different phases within the evaluation cycle, these activities are included in Phase 3 - 'Communicating Results and Incorporating Recommendations'.

The evaluation process has to be **independent** from the Spanish development cooperation management process in order to ensure its credibility and efficacy, respecting the principles of impartiality and independence.

Since the approval of the Master Plan 2005-2008 and by the challenges of improving aid quality, even though the need to carry out evaluations is maintained, evaluation processes take on a more strategic character. DGPOLDE has launched a programme to assess instruments (such as the Micro-credit Concession Fund), programmes and policies (such as the Araucaria Programme and Spanish Development Cooperation Policy in Morocco, respectively). All three of these evaluations are currently underway and undergoing Phase 2 of the evaluation process.

Other ongoing strategic evaluations aimed at developing new instruments include the assessment of agreements in which development NGOs are financed by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECI); budgetary support, and the Sector Wide Approach Programme (SWAP) for health in Mozambique, among others.

During the development of the evaluation process, the **fundamental players** with a role in intervention management are linked by means of a **Follow-up Committee** which has a key role in Phase 1 of the evaluation cycle. In addition, this committee also plays a part in defining objectives and questions to which the evaluation must answer and which will be presented in the document on technical prescriptions, as well as in supplying the necessary information and documentation,

and in presenting results and implementing conclusions during Phase 3 of the evaluation process.

The various Follow-up Committees created for strategic evaluations coordinated by DGPOLDE during 2006 include representatives from the main agents participating in those interventions: the EU, decentralised development cooperation institutions, the General Administration, AECI, and the development NGO Coordinator, among others.

The Spanish **International Development Cooperation Annual Plan 2006 (PACI)** includes the following principle guidelines: **'Improve the coordination between Spanish development cooperation agents'** (guideline 1), and, especially in terms of evaluation, **'strengthen the monitoring and evaluation systems for Spanish development cooperation'** (guideline 8).

PACI 2006 foresees making headway in terms of strengthening the monitoring and evaluation systems for Spanish development cooperation. To this end, DGPOLDE 'will revise and update the monitoring and evaluation methodologies adapted to the current sectoral and geographical planning cycle and will move forward in coordinating and standardising evaluation procedures among the different players within the system as well as exchange information and training capacities on evaluation, in particular, with decentralised development cooperation'. All of these processes are currently underway.

Real Impact of Evaluation Changes

The reform launched throughout the entire Spanish development cooperation system has had the following important effects:

Organisational Reform

In terms of development cooperation, Royal Decree 755/2005, dated 24 June, 2005, established the creation of the General Directorate for Planning and Evaluation of Development Cooperation Policies (DGPOLDE) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) and under the State Secretariat for International Development Cooperation (SECI). This office substituted the General Sub-directorate created by Royal Decree 1416/2004, dated 11 June, 2004, thereby modifying the basic structure within the MAEC and implying the definitive disappearance of the former Planning and Evaluation Office (OPE).

The new DGPOLDE, endowed with a greater organisational, functional and budgetary structure, bolsters development intervention planning and evaluation and its participation at the national and international levels. At the same time, the creation of the State Agency for the Assessment of Services and Public Policy Quality within the Ministry of Public Administration implies an important step forward in the public policy evaluation system.

Coordination between Players and Harmonisation of Procedures

One of the general guidelines of PACI 2006 includes the important challenge of 'promoting and strengthening coordination between Spanish development cooperation agents'. The diversity and heterogeneity of the agents is, at the same time, a great asset and yet, one of the biggest challenges to its coordination. The creation of **Working Groups within the Inter-territorial Commission and the Development Cooperation Council** has supposed throughout 2006 the ideal opportunity to foment coordination processes between agents and bolster aid efficacy.

The **Inter-territorial Commission's Working Group on Evaluation** has prepared a diagnosis on the work of Autonomous Communities and local institutions thus far and has also designed and launched a training programme for technicians or heads of evaluation services.

Decentralised development cooperation has a very important role in the technical structures created to revise and update procedures and methodologies, as well as in the Follow-up Committees for strategic evaluations coordinated by DGPOLDE. Evaluations are increasingly requested by financial institutions and included within the requirements for their subventions, along with a revision of economic justification, audits, mandatory qualitative evaluations aimed at measuring the degree to which objectives are met, and the real impact of their interventions, all according to Spanish development cooperation methodology and the processes and procedures guaranteeing system coherence.

Level of Implementation and Transparency

Until the II Master Plan was approved, the OPE had carried out 21 external evaluations. These were done with little budget and were aimed primarily at assessing projects or mixed commissions.

Strategic evaluations carried out between 2005 and 2006 (on the Micro-credit Concession Fund, the Araucaria Programme, and the Morocco Policy), have been characterised, among other things, with Phase 2 being assigned to an external consulting firm through a bidding process. This required designing a new model for technical and administrative requirements adapted to the evaluation cycle (Phases 1, 2, and 3) in which special emphasis was placed on the conclusions and recommendations, in line with the application of lessons learned as described in the Master Plan 2005-2008.

Results are communicated both to the Follow-up Committee as well as to the interested parties, national implementing agents and beneficiaries. The strategic evaluations, currently underway, will be presented and their conclusions communicated with the greatest transparency and objectivity possible in the countries where the evaluated interventions take place.

DGPOLDE has contributed to the communication of good practices by sharing and publishing the findings of its evaluations carried out since the publication of the Master Plan, offering the complete report in Spanish and a summary in the language of the country where the intervention has taken place.

Strengthening the Planning-Evaluation Nexus

DGPOLDE has included evaluation in the methodology used in the creation of Strategic Planning Documents, both sectoral (in Sectoral Strategies) as well as geographical (Country Strategy Documents and Special Action Plans), including the definition of indicators and base lines which will facilitate their follow-up and evaluation with the aim that these evaluations have an impact on subsequent planning processes and thereby guarantee that all interventions are coherent with the reference frameworks and strategic and operative priorities.

All the evaluations are carried out by means of a complete evaluation cycle consisting of three phases (preparation, execution, and re-application) and end with a document of administrative recommendations to improve management and planning.

In addition, PACI 2006 includes more complete guidelines and goals than previous ones and has dedicated a specific section to evaluation (guideline 8).

Revision of the Evaluation Methodology of the Spanish Development Cooperation

In this sense, the Master Plan 2005-2008 indicates: 'To guarantee the adequate management of the evaluation process, Spanish development cooperation players must use the *Spanish Development Cooperation Evaluation Methodology*, which will be revised and complemented with practical manuals to implement these evaluations'.

PACI 2006 also considers other actions such as the development of Action Protocols in terms of Spanish development cooperation evaluation. The aim of the latter is to standardise the evaluations carried out by different administrative bodies, as well as to publish a Management Manual and to carry out evaluations. To date, the following actions have been carried out, within the revision of Evaluation Methodology framework, by means of a participatory process: different agents from the Spanish development cooperation have been consulted and a technical support structure has been created in which experts from academia, AECI technical personnel, and decentralised development cooperation are all participating. This group met in April of this year and will meet again in September to express their opinion on the products being developed. A number of evaluation consultants will soon be convened to facilitate private sector participation in the processes already launched.

This process is being carried out jointly with the IDR (Institute for Regional Development, University of Seville) by means of a collaborative agreement signed with DGPOLDE.

Practical and Realistic Recommendations

Evaluation reports should highlight the appropriate conclusions and recommendations for the instrument being evaluated as an essential part of their focus. As such, the reference terms have to deal with the need to quantify and avoid generic or empty affirmations and facilitate that these can be incorporated into the following intervention planning and management cycles.

The analysis of intervention *evaluability* has to continue to be a central concern for managers and policy makers in terms of evaluation, guaranteeing that this is the case from the very development of these interventions and the adaptation of evaluation criteria to the objectives, to the type of intervention being assessed.

Phase 3 within the evaluation process is aimed at guaranteeing that results are fed back into the process, and that they are communicated and adapted. This will undoubtedly contribute to participatory mechanisms throughout the evaluation as well as to transparency and communication.

Evaluation professionals and evaluation managers must be very rigorous when designing the methodologies of analysis used and the definition of the indicators and base lines.

Improved Level of Training

Sector professionalisation is another of the important challenges that both independent professionals working from the private sector and technicians responsible for evaluation in the Central Administration or decentralised development cooperation face.

In June, the first course within the Evaluation Training Plan for decentralised development cooperation was held in Cáceres, Spain. It was organised by the

Autonomous Community of Extremadura and designed within the framework of the Inter-territorial Commission's Working Group on Evaluation. The Training Plan focuses on training development cooperation managers in the area of evaluation. The course, in which the progress of the Manual of Evaluation Management was presented, will also be carried out in other Autonomous Communities.

Improvements in Aid Quality Measurement

A reliable information and statistical system has been one of the elements lacking within Spanish development cooperation, causing important weaknesses and limiting follow-up analyses, evaluations and, as such, impacting the design of new interventions.

DGPOLDE has launched an internal process of continued statistical improvement which has already had its first results, PACI 2006 and the Follow-up on PACI 2005. This process was undertaken jointly with the Polytechnic University of Madrid (UPM) which, during the first half of 2006 carried out a diagnosis on SECI information systems, proposing different projects for their improvement.

During the next few months, the technical improvements suggested by UPM will begin to be implemented, while at the same time a study of the most appropriate ways to strengthen AECI and other Spanish development cooperation agents' information systems will be conducted.

Greater International Presence

The Master Plan 2005-2008 itself highlights Spanish participation in national and international evaluation networks, in particular the OECD's 'DAC Network on Development Evaluation' which will be fundamental to coordinate mutual efforts, harmonisation, and learning.

DGPOLDE's presence in DAC subgroups has intensified over the last year, in part as a result of its higher status as a 'General Directorate' and due to the increase in its resources and personnel. Specifically, DGPOLDE is present in the following subgroups: the Paris Declaration, Evaluation of the Total Official Development Aid at country level, Budget Support, Quality Standards, Joint Evaluations, Peer Review,¹ Multilateral Organisations, and Knowledge Management. Significant advances have been made at the methodological and harmonisation levels in all these subgroups.

At the international level, the content of the evaluations coordinated by DGPOLDE have already been made available to other agencies through the DAC evaluation group. At the national level, an exchange of information regarding the evaluations carried out or programmed by any administration, development NGO or institution is recommended.

ALL OF THIS PERMITS US TO AFFIRM THAT A REAL CHANGE IS TAKING PLACE WITHIN THE SECTOR.

Given that the culture of evaluation is relatively new for Spanish development cooperation, efforts should be focused on teaching players to 'think evaluatively' and to put into practise the recommendations made, in addition to publishing the manuals and protocols.

¹ Spanish development cooperation will be evaluated by DAC (via Peer Review) once more in November 2007, this time by Austria and France.

More and Better Evaluations

More is being evaluated... The community of Spanish players involved in the evaluation of development cooperation projects, programmes and policies continues to be very limited. It has training and specialisation needs in the evaluation of development cooperation, given the important peculiarities of this sector within public policy evaluation.

Few official organisms have their own internal evaluation department as exists within the Ministry of Defence. The same is true within the Autonomous Communities and local governments. Furthermore, few NGOs have the capacity (financial or human resources available) to carry out evaluations.

Currently, some financing tools consider evaluations mandatory, such as is the case with AECI subsidies for **development NGOs** which **have to carry out** final evaluations on all projects receiving more than 350,000 Euros and intermediate evaluations on all agreements between AECI and accredited development NGOs. This implies that the number of evaluation managers - understood as those who design, order, and coordinate evaluations whether these be external, mixed, or assisted – has grown. The need for training has also grown, though specialisation continues to be very low.

The Law on Subsidies 38/2003 dated 17 November, 2003, highlights the importance and mandatory nature of a follow-up system by means of monitoring and evaluating objectives. This would permit those actions being subsidised which do not meet the desired objectives or those actions which are not appropriate for the resources invested to be changed for other more effective or efficient actions, or terminated if necessary.

Evaluations are better... In the area of Spanish development cooperation, the paradigm used to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate actions continues to be the Logical Framework. This tool, which is still the best alternative, offers several advantages, especially in terms of planning management. However, it also has some disadvantages in terms of defining indicators and base lines that guarantee the design can be evaluated; results-management; and, the framework's rigidity when evaluating the impact on beneficiaries. This is a debate which is taking place at the international level and in which Spain is participating.

To facilitate the work of those carrying out and managing evaluations, DGPOLDE offers them tools and updates the methodologies (revising and updating evaluation methodology, preparing a Management Manual, designing Follow-up Protocols, and project justification according to new tools for strategic and operative planning).

Some of the Challenges Facing Evaluation at this Stage

These are the important challenges currently facing DGPOLDE and other Spanish development cooperation players in terms of evaluation:

1. Spread the culture of evaluation and the need to guarantee coherence within the planning and evaluation system and cycle feedback;
2. Move forward in the harmonisation of procedures and the coordination and complementariness of development cooperation players, especially among decentralised development cooperation and the scientific community;
3. Stimulate evaluation within the humanitarian action area (with its own specific design);

4. Promote Spain's participation in joint evaluations at the international level; and
5. Continue to professionalise the evaluation sector (within development NGOs, consulting firms, and academia). The essential role which scholars, consultants, independent professionals, and development NGO technicians/experts play in these evaluations should not be forgotten

Foroaod – Spanish Development Aid

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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