

**DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE**

**DCD/DAC/M(2010)5/FINAL
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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 912TH MEETING - PEER REVIEW METHODOLOGY

held on 30 March 2010 at the OECD Conference Centre, Paris

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Peer Review Methodology
DAC Meeting, 30 March 2010
Summary Record

1. Adoption of the Agenda

1. The agenda was adopted (DCD/DAC/A(2010)6).

2. Mid-term reviews: lessons from the 2009 pilot and next steps [DCD/DAC(2010)17]

2. The Chair recalled that the DAC had decided, in January 2008, to initiate a mid-term review process of peer review recommendations. Mid-term reviews were piloted in 2009, on a voluntary basis, for DAC members reviewed in 2007. The Chair explained that the intention of the discussion was to assess the results and benefits of mid-term reviews, and reach an agreement on the opportunity and ways to pursue these reviews.

3. The Secretariat noted that the objectives for mid-term reviews are to maintain the momentum to implement previous peer review recommendations, and to allow for the Secretariat to stay informed about how members' systems are evolving between peer reviews. The costs for mid-term reviews are limited and covered by the core peer review secretariat budget.

4. The DAC welcomed the Secretariat's paper, *Mid-term reviews: lessons from the 2009 pilot and next steps [DCD/DAC(2010)17]* and its addendum, which included feedback on the results and benefits of mid-term reviews by the reviewed members. Delegates agreed that the objectives of mid-term reviews had been achieved and that the reviews should be continued as a standard practice for DAC members. There was consensus that the process should be kept light and flexible, and that mid-term reviews should be undertaken on a voluntary basis. Focus should be on assessing progress on previous peer review recommendations and on bottlenecks to achieving these recommendations. Documents prepared for a mid-term review will be regarded as working papers, and will not be shared with the Committee.

5. Some members were hesitant to the need for posting the mid-term review outcome document on the OECD web site while others perceived it as an opportunity to increase transparency. It was therefore agreed that it will be optional to have the document posted on the OECD web site. The Secretariat will issue a guidance note for DAC mid-term reviews [DCD/DAC(2010)22], for approval by the DAC through written procedure. Comments on the guidance note should be submitted to the Secretariat by 30 April.

3. Guidance for selecting field visit(s) as part of the peer review process (DCD/DAC(2010)19)

6. The DAC discussed guidance proposed by the Secretariat on the selection of field missions as part of Peer Reviews. This document had been prepared following the DAC's request of 8th January 2010. It outlined the objectives of visits to partner countries, criteria for selecting countries to be visited, and the number of countries that should be proposed by the reviewed member for the review team's consideration.

7. The Committee welcomed the succinct guidance paper. It confirmed that the objective of visits to partner countries was to verify how headquarters policies and strategies are implemented in the field, to

probe into aid effectiveness efforts by the reviewed donor country, and collect lessons to be shared with the DAC.

8. DAC members agreed that having a range of criteria, as listed in paragraph 3 of the guidance document, is helpful and necessary for two purposes. Firstly, they guide the examined country in proposing co-operation programmes to be visited, and secondly, they help the examining team in defining the suitability of a given country for a field visit. The DAC agreed, however, that while such a list of criteria should guide the selection of countries to be visited, it should not be used in a rigid way. They noted that:

- (i) Although the country visited should be a significant partner, it would be too prescriptive to limit the choice to the top ten recipients of the examined donor's aid, noting that the size of the programme is not always a measure of its significance.
- (ii) In selecting a partner country the peer review team should consider the administrative burden that such missions cause, and how many missions the country in question can absorb. This would be a better criterion than determining the maximum frequency of peer review visits to a given country, and to rule out visiting a partner country for two successive peer reviews of the same donor. The DAC requested the Secretariat to circulate a list of all partner countries visited recently (see Annex).
- (iii) Although suggestions were made to balance a visit to a fragile context with a visit of a non-fragile country or to give preference to small island states, it was agreed that such additional criteria would further restrict the peer review teams in the choice of partner country to be visited, and should therefore not be added to the list of criteria.

9. Regarding the number of countries to be visited, delegates agreed that the reviewed member should suggest three partner countries where the peer review includes one visit, or six in cases where it includes two – as reflected in paragraph 4 of the draft guidance (DCD/DAC(2010)19). They agreed that the number of field visits depended on the size of the donor and on the nature of its programmes, and should be decided on a case by case basis for medium-size donors.

10. Further, some members suggested that the findings of the visit to the partner country be better incorporated in the whole report, and into the discussion at the peer review meeting. Some delegates stressed that peer reviews should bring hosting field offices more benefit by ensuring that it lends them a voice, including on issues such as human resources, reporting, and administrative resources.

11. The Secretariat will revise the guidance note in light of the discussion and issue it by 15 April for approval by the DAC through written procedure. Comments on the revised guidance note should be submitted to the Secretariat by 30 April.

4. Learning through peer reviews – Special themes (2007-2008) Synthesis report (DCD/DAC(2009)34/REV1)

12. In July 2007, the DAC had approved the *Learning through Peer Reviews Action Plan 2007-2008*, which calls on the Secretariat to submit synthesis reports for the biennium on the three special themes: capacity development (mandatory for all reviews) and “governance, accountability and anti-corruption” or “conflict, peace, security and fragile states” (options for a second theme). The synthesis report prepared by the Secretariat responded to that requirement by presenting the findings of peer reviews on all three themes in a single document. The paper presents the lessons from including these special topics in peer reviews, as well as the limitations of this exercise.

13. The Committee welcomed the report. It appreciated in particular its frankness in recognising that the inclusion of special themes within the peer reviews has not yet yielded the intended learning outcomes. This stems from the lack of a critical mass that would allow lessons to be drawn, which in turn results from the possibility to select among several topics and the limited time of coverage (two years). Another reason has been the emphasis put on accountability rather than on learning.

14. The DAC delegates, however, expressed a strong desire to keep the learning dimension in peer reviews, with a special focus on topics that benefit the Committee as a whole. The discussion underscored the difficulty to select sector topics that are of interest to all members since donors do not focus on the same sectors, in line with the principles of the division of labour. The secretariat added that drawing lessons from sector themes requires specific expertise that peer review teams may first need to acquire. This may not be an efficient use of resources if this acquired expertise only serves for a handful of reviews. A proposal to solve this issue would be to look at generic issues common to all donors that are already in the ambit of peer reviews, but could be explored further. Examples include communicating on development aid to improve public and political support; managing for development results; managing human resources (having the right competence in the right place, reliance on local staff). Triangular co-operation was also put forward. Several delegates suggested continuing with capacity development as a special issue, either within the broader context of aid effectiveness or with a focus on technical assistance to maximise learning through a more concrete approach.

15. However, the conclusions of the report in paragraph 5 (DCD/DAC(2009)34/REV1) that proposed ways to optimise thematic learning in the future were not adopted. Some delegates disagreed that themes should become mandatory. Also, the Committee did not reach a conclusion over whether special topics should be examined for more than one biennium.

16. The content of the synthesis report will not be amended since it analyses topics covered in the 2007-08 biennium that have since been discontinued. The report will, however, be reissued with an amendment in the box on the front page. It will note that the report has been discussed by the DAC and that, although its conclusions were not adopted, the discussion and findings of the report will feed into the process to revise the DAC peer review content guide later in 2010.

5. Content guide: scope and steps for adjusting the content guide (DCD/DAC(2010)18)

17. The Content guide provides a common analytical framework for all DAC peer reviews. It ensures that all DAC members are assessed against the same standards and criteria. It also allows for comparability, tracking progress overtime for each donor aid programme, and allowing comparisons between donors. The current version of the peer review content guide needs to be adjusted to reflect emerging issues and respond to the recommendations that resulted from the DAC reflection exercise. Meanwhile, structure and format should be kept as close as possible to the existing version in order to ensure comparability over time and across reviews - especially as the current version has not yet been applied to reviews of all 24 members. The revision is also an opportunity to simplify the content guide and make it more user-friendly. The paper prepared by the Secretariat aimed to not only support the discussion of the Committee, but also to i) facilitate an agreement on the steps and timeline for reviewing and adjusting the peer review content guide; and ii) solicit members' views on the scope of its revision.

18. The Committee approved the process described in paragraph 7 of the document. However, it suggested several adjustments: the draft version of the content guide shared with the Committee in early June will be subject to written comments rather than discussed at a DAC meeting at the end of June. Comments should be provided before the end of June. The Secretariat will then adjust the draft in light of the comments received. It will issue another version before mid-July for consideration by DAC members,

with comments provided to the Secretariat by 24 August in written form. The Secretariat will then finalise the content guide for approval by the DAC in early September 2010.

19. The Committee endorsed the Secretariat's proposal that it would work with a group of DAC delegates to receive their ideas and feedback on an early version of the revised content guide. Canada, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal and the UK volunteered to be part of this group.

20. In introducing the document, the Secretariat reminded to the Committee that, over the last years, the tendency has been to add new items in the content guide without dropping previous ones. Given that peer reviews will be delivered with the same level of resources, it invited to Committee to focus on what should be the fundamental pillars, then looking at what can be left behind.

21. The Committee agreed on the five key pillars presented in the document (paragraph 10, first bullet point), while suggesting that the content guide should make explicit what DAC members will be held accountable for. This would mean specifying which instruments will be tracked in peer reviews and what the benchmarks are. Delegates also agreed to include the DAC membership criteria as a key element in the content guide. They welcome a stronger focus on management and organisation, which is an area where the DAC adds specific value to the international discussion on aid¹. Selecting special topics pertaining to management and organisation (*e.g.* measuring impact and outcomes) would allow a stronger focus in this area. The Committee confirmed its desire to keep the two dimensions of learning and accountability in peer reviews.

22. As regards humanitarian aid, the Secretariat underscored that the assessment against the good humanitarian donorship principles requires specific expertise which is not available in DCD or elsewhere in the OECD. Pursuing such assessments will, therefore, continue to be subject to additional funding through voluntary contributions. Were resources not made available, the peer reviews would only be able to cover humanitarian assistance as a sector/channel among others in terms of general policy orientations and aid allocations.

23. The 'beyond aid' agenda and its implication on peer reviews still need to be clarified (*e.g.* coverage of non-aid flows in chapter 3, treatment of global public goods in relation to development co-operation policies). Issues raised also included the lack of indicators and benchmark for assessing progress in 'beyond aid' issues. Their relation with policy coherence for development should also be clarified, as well as the nature of the requirement anchored in the draft Council recommendation on good institutional practices in promoting policy coherence for development (SG/PCD(20101/REV2). However, the latter might not affect the current scope of peer reviews, which focus on the three building blocks for policy coherence, rather than examining specific policies.

24. The Secretariat will outline the steps for revising the Content guide. It will be communicated to the members who volunteered to be part of the review group.

6. Any other business

25. Belgium would welcome a comparative study which would allow seeing where a DAC member stands vis-à-vis the others. This synthetic tool would usefully assist the examiners in their assessment of a member. The Secretariat responded that conducting such additional analysis could not be absorbed given current resources.

1. The working party on aid effectiveness in December 2009 welcomed the "Toolkit on donor Incentives" as a relevant tool for donor self assessment on a voluntary basis. It was agreed to share this tool with the DAC for possible consideration in its peer review methodology.

ANNEX

List of partner country visited in the framework of peer reviews

Year	Review Country	Countries visited
2010	United Kingdom	India, Rwanda
	Belgium	Burundi
	Germany	Morocco, Zambia
	Portugal	Cap Verde
	New Zealand	Vanuatu
	Japan	Bangladesh, Kenya
2009	Ireland	Uganda
	Austria	Ethiopia
	Sweden	Mozambique
	Switzerland	Albania, Nicaragua
	Italy	Lebanon
2008	France	Mali and Central African Republic
	Luxembourg	Burkina Faso
	Norway	Tanzania
	Australia	Indonesia and Vanuatu
2007	Finland	Vietnam
	Spain	El Salvador and Columbia
	Canada	Mozambique and Haiti
	EC	Benin and Pakistan
	Denmark	Ghana and Nepal
2006	Portugal	Timor Leste
	United Kingdom	Nepal and Zambia
	Netherlands	Bangladesh and Uganda
	Greece	Albania
	United States	Indonesia and Georgia
2005	New Zealand	Solomon Islands
	Sweden	Burundi and Kenya
	Switzerland	Bosnia and Vietnam
	Belgium	RD Congo and Morocco
	Germany	Bolivia and Ethiopia
2004	France	Benin and Mauritania
	Italy	Mozambique and Tunisia
	Austria	Bosnia and Nicaragua
	Norway	Zambia
	Australia	PNG and Cambodia

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Review Methodology**

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Methodologie des Examens par les Pairs**

30/3/2010 - 30/3/2010

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