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A HISTORY OF THE DAC EXPERT GROUP ON AID EVALUATION

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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FOREWORD

Experience reflected upon is the handmaiden of progress. Evaluation is an integral part of individual and institutional learning. By doing, evaluating and doing again we learn to do better.

Since its founding over ten years ago, the DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation has been at the heart of the international evaluation community. This document highlights the efforts of the Expert Group to address the major issues and methodological questions facing the practitioners of evaluation over the last decade. Experience has been shared and methodology has been developed through a continuing dialogue amongst professional evaluators in the field of development assistance. The Expert Group's learning has been fed back into the management of the DAC Member agencies and shared with our development partners. Noteworthy is the recent approval by the DAC of the Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance which sets an important international benchmark.

The pursuit of applied knowledge is a long-term endeavour through which we all strive to foster more efficient and effective international development. Much has been accomplished over the last ten years and much more remains to be learned and to be applied.

I hope that this history of the Expert Group on Aid Evaluation will serve both as a source of insight into what has gone before and as an inspiration for what is to come.

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Jean Quesnel
Chairman
DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation

The Expert Group is unique in the sense that there is no other international forum where aid evaluation experts meet regularly to exchange experience and develop methodology. In most agencies aid evaluators represent a very small -- and often somewhat isolated -- group of people and the Expert Group therefore has an important function as a forum for a professional dialogue and as an opportunity for the newcomers to the profession to learn. Within the Expert Group ... a common language has evolved and to some extent a common understanding of the issues. The Group has played a significant part in the emergence of what can now probably be described as an international evaluation community.

Report by Mr. Klaus Winkel, former Chairman of the DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation, to the DAC Senior Aid Policy Officials Meeting, 20-21 June 1990.

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A HISTORY OF THE DAC EXPERT GROUP ON AID EVALUATION

I. Executive Summary

1. In an environment of "aid fatigue", a DAC Sub-Group of Correspondents on Aid Evaluation was established by the 1980 High-Level Meeting to determine aid effectiveness. Based on the evidence, the impact of aid could not be accurately assessed as the evaluation studies available were primarily concerned with delivery matters. However, the Correspondents believed that they could do much to strengthen evaluation as an aid policy-making instrument. Consequently, the 1982 DAC High-Level Meeting established the Expert Group on Aid Evaluation with a mandate to strengthen the evaluation activities of DAC Members, improve methodology, increase the co-ordination and exchange of information, seek and disseminate operational lessons for project and programme planning and design, pursue the issue of aid effectiveness and examine ways to support developing countries' own evaluation capabilities.

2. The first major contribution of the Expert Group was the "Lessons of Experience" document (1984). It was followed a year later by "Evaluation Methods and Procedures -- A Compendium of Donor Practice and Experience". These two major reports established the Group's reputation. By the spring of 1985 the Group's work was focused on three items: cross-cutting issues, non-project assistance (NPA) and an evaluation seminar with the developing countries. Studies on the cross-cutting issues of sustainability, women in development and environment obtained insights on issues which were immensely difficult to study in isolation. The results were published in an OECD general distribution series entitled "Selected Issues in Aid Evaluation". Work on NPA culminated in a 1987 report which wrestled with such complex issues as "causality"; policy-linked lending; balance-of-payments support; and sectoral programming. A first successful evaluation seminar with developing countries was held in Paris in March 1987. It was followed by regional seminars in Abidjan (May 1990) and in Kuala Lumpur (May 1992). A seminar is planned for Latin America and the Caribbean in 1993.

3. To encourage information exchange and joint evaluations the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has operated the DAC Evaluation Reports Information System since the autumn of 1988. The major undertaking to develop a consensus document entitled "Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance" was completed in 1991 and approved by the DAC High-Level Meeting the same year. Work also continued on evaluating technical co-operation, multilateral aid, donor feedback systems, institutional-building, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and self-evaluation. More recently, the issues of "technology choice", joint donor evaluations, women in development (WID) and good governance have received much attention. In 1992 Portugal and Spain joined the Expert Group as it moved into its second decade. Much has been accomplished. Evaluation is seen as a normal management tool and lessons from experience are being sought, disseminated and applied at the project, programme and even country levels. The challenge for the future will be to reinforce these efforts.

II. The Early Years

4. In 1961 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) established the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The DAC Members had agreed in the "Common Aid Effort" resolution that they should have as common objectives increasing the {volume} of resources made available to developing countries and second, improving the {effectiveness} of this assistance. These two objectives continue to describe the fundamental purposes of the DAC.

5. Late in each calendar year, the heads of the DAC Member aid agencies and/or their ministers convene in Paris at the annual DAC High-Level Meeting. It is at these annual meetings that the DAC's major policy decisions are taken. At its meetings in 1979 and particularly in 1980, the issue of aid effectiveness was a major item on the agenda. With increasing aid weariness after 25-30 years of effort and given the economic difficulties experienced by the industrialised nations during the "oil shock" decade of the 1970s, the DAC governments and their citizens wanted some assurance that their aid monies were having a positive impact. In essence, the DAC wanted to know if development assistance programmes worked.

6. As a result of these discussions, Mr. Robert J. Berg from the United States Agency for International Development (US AID), was appointed chairman of a new DAC Sub-Group of "Evaluation Correspondents". Aid evaluation was an early concern of DAC Members. The establishment of this Group was preceded by informal contacts among aid evaluators and a series of seminars under DAC auspices sponsored by Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries (1966 in Berlin, 1970 in Wassenaar, the Netherlands, leading to the first DAC publication on {Evaluating Development Assistance} in 1972, 1973 in Amsterdam and 1975 in Copenhagen). All the DAC countries were represented in the new Group as well as the World Bank which is a permanent observer at all DAC meetings. The Group served at "the pleasure" of the DAC Chairman and was to exist only as long as it was responsive to the needs of the high-level decision-makers. Following extensive consultations with the DAC Members and with the Chairman of the new Group of Correspondents on Aid Evaluation, the DAC Secretariat under Mr. Helmut Führer put forward the following terms of reference which were agreed upon :

- i) to establish and report on the existing evaluation findings concerning the effectiveness of aid;
- ii) to consider the question of feedback into policy-making;
 - iii) to report on ways in which evaluation could be supportive of public information; and
- iv) to consider ways in which donors could support evaluation work in developing countries.

7. There was broad agreement on the need to concentrate on the findings emerging from evaluations, rather than on evaluation methodologies. The need to feedback these findings to the policy-makers was clearly identified and reflected the DAC's long-standing view that evaluation was a management tool

where learning from experience led to better aid. The potential use of evaluation findings in public information programmes in support of foreign aid was explicitly recognised. It is also interesting to note that the strengthening of evaluation by and for developing countries was identified at this early stage.

8. The DAC Group of Evaluation Correspondents held its first of three meetings in May 1981 in Paris at the OECD headquarters. Over the years, participation in the Group and its successor has been mainly by officials from the evaluation units of member countries aid agencies. Officials from other parts of the aid agencies such as policy and planning, sometimes attended as did officials from other government departments, especially central agencies. Many countries are also represented by a member of their Permanent Delegation to the OECD. The head of each delegation was usually the Chief of Evaluation of the country's aid agency. This pattern of representation has been remarkably consistent from the beginning.

9. As with most on-going groups, the first meetings developed an operational style and approach which has lasted to this day. From the beginning the discussions have been both collegial and frank. This has been encouraged by the relatively stable attendance at meetings and the nature of "expert to expert" issue oriented discussions. The Secretariat has played a strong role in shaping the agenda and in providing continuity and consistency in the preparation of the work documents. The Chairman of the Group has traditionally played an active role in moving the work agenda forward as well as determining its focus.

10. The substantive work on a given issue is typically driven by one delegation which collects input from the Group and prepares the basic document for discussion, refinement, redraft and further discussion. Working groups are often established to focus and speed-up this process. This operating style does not require a large secretariat nor does it encourage excess control of the agenda. The work is spread around and refined in successive stages by the Group. Such a work style is non-bureaucratic and places a premium on individual initiative and co-operation by all. If a member wishes to champion a particular study within the overall mandate of the Group, the opportunity is there to forge ahead and mobilise the energy of his colleagues.

11. The first major policy debate within the Group of Correspondents was the degree to which evaluation findings could be used to strengthen public support for aid. There was a fear that such an emphasis would distort the Group's work. There was also a general belief that the direct input of evaluation results into public information programmes was rather limited. On the other hand, the Group acknowledged that the issue was a central concern of the DAC. The task facing the Group, therefore, was to consider how the findings of evaluation work could best be fed into the public policy debate, so that this debate could be pursued on the basis of firm evidence. It was important that failures as well as successes be openly examined in order to learn as much as possible and to maintain the Group's credibility.

12. This internal discussion concerning public information was an early example of the on-going dynamics between what the DAC wanted from the Evaluation Sub-Group and what the Group itself felt was possible or desirable. While acknowledging that its function was to service the DAC's needs, from the

very beginning the Group began asserting its obligation to refine the questions posed by the DAC to make them more amenable to meaningful study. As truly professional evaluators, the Group chose to be independent in its advice.

Report on aid effectiveness

13. The priority of the Correspondents Group was to establish and report on the existing evaluation findings concerning the effectiveness of aid. This task was to preoccupy the Group during its almost two years of existence. A consensus was achieved on the primacy of "impact" evaluation in attempting to determine aid effectiveness. This meant that the bulk of routine evaluation work which focused on project monitoring (operational evaluation) was peripheral to the Group's main concerns. This was an important strategic decision which greatly helped to clarify the Group's activities. Six selected sub-sectors of rural development (water, roads, livestock, health, integrated services, agricultural research) plus food aid and education and training were chosen as areas in which evaluation work was well enough established to provide sufficient data for a synthesis of lessons learned. Each of these eight topics was to be synthesised by a specific country. A one-page questionnaire was developed by a small working group to assist participants in assembling and presenting the data required. This co-ordinated, but dispersed, operational approach was to become the quintessential work style of the Evaluation Group.

14. The decision to compile cross-donor results of development assistance efforts implied an important commitment to share what had previously often been restricted information. Each aid agency in its own way and to a greater or lesser extent opened up its evaluation files to be shared with colleagues in other countries. Given the normal tendency towards secrecy of government bureaucracies this sharing in a common effort to learn from past mistakes and successes was no mean accomplishment. It was the hope of many early participants in the Evaluation Group that this pattern of sharing would continue and expand. Their hopes have not been disappointed.

15. It was recognised that the synthesis of the aid effectiveness data, even using the standard outline questionnaire, would be among the most challenging evaluation tasks ever undertaken. The classical evaluation questions of "significance of results" and "attribution" (cause and effect) would be sorely tested. As Mr. Berg observed in a letter to the DAC Chairman, "the grand thesis may elude us but the learning value of the exercise may be large. We must not over-promise results from this, but neither can we deny the historic value of the attempt."

16. The evaluators felt strongly that World Bank reports in the eight study areas should be included. However, it was also acknowledged that the scale and range of the Bank's efforts would overwhelm the bilateral studies and therefore its findings should be separately identified and be used mainly as a yardstick against which each donor might measure its own activities. This "yardstick" role has been one that the World Bank has played over the years.

17. Recognising that the findings emerging from a relatively small number of studies in eight specific areas of development assistance would be rather limited in answering the DAC's question on aid effectiveness, the possibility of a comparative review of country studies was considered. The Secretariat

produced a synthesis of the material available. In the end, it was decided that problems of comparability and the limited number of in-depth long-term evaluation studies of aid impact in macroeconomic terms precluded meaningful general conclusions being drawn. This macro approach has become more feasible with the completion of many evaluations of structural adjustment programmes.

18. The Correspondents Group also reviewed the availability of other types of evaluations as sources of information and knowledge on aid effectiveness which might be passed on to the DAC. There was insufficient material on non-project aid at that time to draw any conclusions. This lack of data also applied to studies on specific instruments such as the provision of experts and advisers or cofinancing with non-governmental organisations.

19. The Correspondents Group's basic observation was that the synthesis reports did not permit generalised conclusions, and therefore did not provide substantial evidence of the effectiveness of past aid. The Group was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, the DAC's High-Level Meeting was primarily interested in the broad concepts of aid effectiveness. "Does aid have an impact on the development of the recipient countries?" On the other hand, the principal objective of the evaluations being done was the improvement of aid procedures and instruments. It was clear that the present type of evaluation did not easily permit the broader sort of generalisation that the High-Level Meeting was seeking. In the past managers had not asked evaluators to examine the broader questions of aid effectiveness including whether policy objectives were being achieved. In addition, there was a division of opinion within the Group as to whether the aid effectiveness question could ever be answered, and if it could, what evaluation approaches might be available to achieve this goal.

20. There were major concerns that an incomplete, partial or entirely negative report to the High-Level Meeting would be badly received by the aid agency heads who were under increasing pressure to justify to the public the continued provision of aid. Such an approach might undermine the credibility of the Correspondents Group, threaten its existence, and restrict its opportunity to improve the scope, range and quality of future evaluations. The report to the High-Level Meeting, however, was also an opportunity to make the case for more and better evaluations and it was along these lines that the Secretariat was instructed to prepare a draft paper.

21. The Group struggled to find the appropriate balance and tone for its major report to the 1982 High-Level Meeting. At first the draft buried the unwelcome news that the aid effectiveness question could not be answered at this time, if ever. The tone was a bureaucratic shuffle from one foot to the other and left the impression that the Group was in some doubt as to whether its efforts should continue. At the urging of a number of participants led by the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), a much more positive report was prepared. It frankly acknowledged the negative conclusions concerning the Group's aid effectiveness findings from the data currently available. At the same time the report took a positive stance concerning the Group's future usefulness in addressing important and practical evaluation issues. It was necessary, the report argued, to make a "resolute departure" from the static retrospective approach taken so far (does aid promote development?) towards a dynamic outlook which emphasized what could be done to improve the impact of aid on development.

III. New Mandate, New Challenges

22. The report on "Aid Effectiveness" was tabled at the December 1982 High-Level Meeting and it was agreed that the Evaluation Correspondents should be asked to continue their work as a DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation, charged with the following tasks :

- i) strengthening exchange of information, experience and co-operation between national and, as appropriate, multilateral evaluation units, with a view to :
 - -- improving the evaluation activities of individual members;
 - -- encouraging standardization of methodological and conceptual frameworks;
 - -- laying the basis for improved donor co-ordination in the planning of major evaluation studies;
- ii) contributing to improved aid effectiveness by attempting to distil from evaluation studies operational lessons for project and programme planning and design, for consideration by the DAC;
 - iii) examining the feasibility of launching a set of joint or co-ordinated studies, undertaken by interested members, of aid effectiveness in a major sector, such as agriculture, or possibly in particular countries;
- iv) seeking ways to promote and support developing countries' evaluation capabilities.

23. Membership in the Group was the same as for the Evaluation Correspondents Group, namely, participants from the DAC Members, with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as observers.

24. From the beginning the Expert Group wished to invite the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to participate. The IDB, AsDB and AfDB have been invited to attend all Expert Group meetings from the second session onwards as has the OECD Development Centre. The UN system has been represented by the UNDP Central Evaluation Office at all meetings from the third onwards. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was invited to participate as from the autumn of 1992.

25. The first meeting of the DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation took place in March 1983. During a lengthy and probing discussion, a basic distinction was made between those elements in the work plan which called for a collective effort to strengthen the evaluation process (i, iv) and those (ii, iii) which sought operational lessons that could be reported back to the DAC to address their concern for improved aid effectiveness.

26. It is interesting to note that the previous mandate "to report on ways in which evaluation could be supportive of public information" was dropped. This reflected the High-Level Meeting's acceptance of the Correspondents Group's position that public information policy, including the appropriate use of the findings of evaluation, was outside their competence. This was an important decision. Freed from the pressures to {demonstrate} aid effectiveness, the group could now focus on {improving} aid effectiveness by learning from past experience. The orientation was changed from justifying aid to a sceptical public to improving the quality of aid programmes. The dynamic was forward-looking, with action leading to evaluation, then to new actions based upon the lessons learned in a continuous "virtuous cycle" of improving development assistance programmes.

27. Taking note of the other major goal of the Group, namely ways to strengthen the evaluation process, an initiative was launched to develop a work plan for improving evaluation practices. Important issues were identified as follows: exchange of information and analysis; feedback arrangements into decision-making processes; joint and co-ordinated evaluation studies; standardization of methodologies and conceptual frameworks (such as the logical framework analysis); macroeconomic and non-project assistance; and strengthening evaluation procedures, methods and processes of DAC Members. Over the next ten years each of these items was addressed to a greater or lesser extent by the Expert Group. In addition, by the mid 1980s substantial work was underway to promote and support developing countries' own evaluation capabilities.

Operational lessons

28. The first substantive item of the rejuvenated Group's agenda was a review of the operational lessons emerging from Member countries' evaluations of projects and programmes. Given that managers already knew a lot about aid effectiveness from experience, the basic question for the Expert Group was whether evaluators knew anything that aid managers did not already know and if so, how could this knowledge be better communicated.

29. It was agreed that knowledge should be collected in a form that would yield practical and specific conclusions which were capable of direct application. For example, "it is clearly not sufficient to say that provision for maintenance is important or to explain why on occasion maintenance may have been inadequately carried out." What one needed to know were the danger signals which would alert project planners that maintenance may require special attention and the range of preventive or curative instruments available.

30. On the issue of aid effectiveness at the sectoral or macro levels, the Expert Group recognised the relative lack of information, the great complexity of the issues involved and the need to develop different types of evaluation studies if progress were to be made. Although there was some early enthusiasm, this area of exploration was put on the back burner until 1985-86 when the evaluation of cross-cutting issues and non-project assistance was begun.

31. Early discussion of the operational lessons issue revolved around whether there should be a project focus, where past evaluation work had been concentrated and had much to say, or whether there should be an emphasis on the

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policy aid programming level. Since the DAC was looking for a "fresh assessment of key issues in the field of aid administration", it was decided to combine both levels of analysis in the report. The issues that many experts raised at the policy and programming level included:

- the gap between rhetoric and action (e.g the reasons why many problems and deficiencies in aid administration still occur despite the fact that they have long been recognised);
- linkages between the operational and policy levels;
- political expediency and commercial priorities;
- the appropriateness of the aid-giving institutions in relation to the real needs of the recipients; and
- inadequacies of the policy dialogue and of donor co-ordination.

32. In a process now becoming well established, a revised outline of the "Lessons" paper was prepared, on the basis of which participants sent comments to the Secretariat, which then prepared another draft to be reviewed by a working group before being submitted by the Secretariat for consideration at the next meeting of the Expert Group. A final report was then prepared and transmitted to the DAC for its Members to consider both at the annual Joint Review Meeting in the spring and at the annual High-Level Meeting before Christmas. This was, and still is, the standard process whereby an idea for study winds its way to consideration by the DAC as a formal policy, if the substantive material warrants it.

33. The "Lessons" paper was very well received and established the reputation of the Expert Group on Aid Evaluation. A solid piece of work had been completed in little over a year.

The compendium

34. It was at the second meeting of the Expert Group, chaired by Dr. Basil Cracknell (United Kingdom), that the other major study of the early years was begun. What was to eventually become the highly regarded "Evaluation Methods and Procedures -- A Compendium of Donor Practice and Experience" grew from a proposal by the United Kingdom to produce a handbook of evaluation techniques. The handbook was envisaged as a collection of information on existing evaluation methods and procedures and not as a normative ("thou shalt") document. The proposal recommended looking at such topics as the role of evaluation within the aid agencies; definitions and terminology; project data issues; conceptual problems in evaluating various types of aid; evaluation procedures; and feedback of findings into policy-making.

35. Taken somewhat by surprise and worried about the tight time deadlines for this initiative, the Secretariat expressed its concerns. It was particularly worried about a diversion of the Group's efforts away from the "Lessons" paper. The ability to service both projects with limited staff resources was also a concern. The Secretariat raised doubts too as to whether the proposed initiative, especially the items dealing with conceptual,

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definitional and methodological issues, were sufficiently within the DAC mandate to warrant a major report. However, given the broad evaluation mandate from the DAC and, most importantly, the energy and enthusiasm of the Expert Group led by its Chairman, the project went ahead.

36. France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Netherlands prepared working drafts of various chapters of the report. Unlike the "Lessons" paper which had been championed by the Secretariat as the perceived first priority issue of the DAC, the "Compendium" paper, at least in its early stages, was moved forward by the Chairman and other enthusiasts. It was agreed that the Chairman would take the lead in organising and co-ordinating further work. The United States would provide the staff resources needed to revise and expand the existing document based upon written material and comments from the Group. Furthermore, in a tradition now well established, a working group reviewed the drafts before they were submitted to the whole Group. This "inner cabinet" approach was thus able to harness, on behalf of the whole Group, the energies and expertise of those most committed to the paper. The working group was comprised of the United Kingdom, the United States, the CEC, the Netherlands, France and Sweden. To save time, participants agreed that preliminary working drafts on the "Compendium" could be distributed informally in either of the OECD's working languages (English, French) without waiting for translations to be done. It was also agreed that terminology should conform to the Glossary issued by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and any up-dating or additions to terminology would have to be undertaken in close co-operation with the JIU.

37. The Evaluation Group was very satisfied with the draft of the "Compendium" and expressed its great appreciation for the work of US AID. Minor changes were made to avoid "any suggestion that evaluation was exclusively a concern of donors" and to ensure that the paper's terminology, especially in the glossary, was "definitive". With these provisos, participants were unanimous in presenting the document to the DAC as "an agreed and collective statement of the group." At the end of the meeting, Mr. Haven North was unanimously elected the new chairman. The Group also paid tribute to the fourteen-month chairmanship of Dr. Cracknell (December 1983-January 1985) which "had been the major factor in the widely observed increase in the Group's output."

38. The success of the "Compendium" initiative was due to many factors. The original proposal had been well developed by a Member country which was prepared to provide leadership. It met a clearly perceived need and was therefore energetically embraced and supported by virtually all participants. In spite of heavy workloads on other issues, particularly the "Lessons" paper, progress was steady under a small working group which had the staff support not only of the over-extended Secretariat but also of a participant who was prepared to devote additional resources to ensure a successful conclusion.

Other issues and items

39. Preliminary work and discussion on other issues and items arising from the mandate commenced during the Expert Group's first years. Sweden volunteered to prepare a paper on promoting and supporting developing countries' own evaluation capabilities. The document prompted wide-ranging

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discussion of such issues as the transfer of evaluation information, knowledge and skills; the trade-off in local staff resources between evaluation and design/implementation; the feedback of meaningful evaluation and results into the developing countries' planning processes; and the crucial importance for the developing countries to request assistance for evaluation (demand oriented) rather than having evaluation thrust upon them. The final version of the study was incorporated into the "Compendium".

40. The topic of joint or co-ordinated studies was raised. However, the approach was still in the experimental stage for many donors and therefore it was agreed that the Expert Group should wait until the first six or a dozen joint studies had been completed before undertaking further analysis. This decision in effect removed the topic from the Group's active agenda for several years. It was not until Japan floated a think piece on past evaluations of non-project assistance in 1989 that the issue of joint evaluation surfaced again in any significant way.

41. The use of scoring systems as a means of assessing aid effectiveness was raised by the CEC. It had recently used this method to evaluate completed projects financed by the European Development Fund. Although some scepticism of this approach was expressed, it was agreed that the CEC should canvass the ideas and experiences of interested participants. When the Expert Group discussed this issue, diverging opinions were expressed on the usefulness of scoring systems. Some participants had tried out such approaches, but subsequently had abandoned them as too limited in scope as indicators of aid effectiveness. However, there was a consensus that a systematic and objective approach to the assessment of project performance was badly needed since the widely used internal rate of return indicator had major deficiencies when used in the social sector. While participants were invited to take another look at the scoring system issue as a basis for possible future discussion, it was clear that the Group was not yet ready to recommend this approach to the DAC. Although the CEC reported from time to time on its work in this area, no further detailed discussion was conducted by the Expert Group.

42. At its third meeting (April 1984) the Group heard a report on recent developments in evaluation in the UNDP. A representative of the Bureau of the DAC Correspondents' Group on Women in Development also made a presentation and note was made of three forthcoming DAC meetings on the sector issues of food aid, co-operation with NGOs, and basic education in rural areas. To assist the Secretariat in preparing papers for these meetings, the Group's participants were invited to send relevant evaluation studies to the Secretariat. Clearly, the Expert Group on Aid Evaluation was keeping itself plugged into DAC developments overall as well as activities in the wider evaluation community. It was a place to exchange information and insight and to work together with professional colleagues on issues of common concern.

43. Members were dismayed at the mounting evidence of inadequate feedback of evaluation results into the decision-making processes of aid agencies and were heartened by the strong support from the DAC to pursue the issue. The work of the Group on feedback culminated in the document "Good Feedback Practices" (1985) prepared by Dr. Cracknell. There was a general endorsement of the principle that feedback was important, but since it dealt with the internal management practices of the aid agencies the issue was too politically sensitive to be promoted to the stage of formal policy. Nevertheless, the Expert Group's paper was a useful contribution to the literature.

IV. Forging Ahead

44. By the spring meeting of 1985 the work of the Group under its new Chairman, Mr. Haven North (United States), was focused on three items, namely : cross-cutting issues, non-project assistance, and an evaluation seminar with the developing countries.

Cross-cutting issues

45. It had been suggested that the Group should periodically incorporate two or three "cross-cutting issues" of current concern into the terms of reference of all relevant evaluation studies. It was immediately recognised that this proposal offered a real hope of generating and bringing together, within a year or two, solid material on issues such as women in development or aid for maintenance which were immensely difficult to study in isolation. This approach would yield useful new data without having to deal with the larger political and administrative difficulties of securing agreement on full-scale joint or co-ordinated evaluation studies which Member countries as yet were unprepared to do. It has only been since the late 1980s and early 1990s that joint or co-ordinated studies have become more common.

46. The outline of a work programme was presented, the preliminary results of which were scheduled for mid-1987. A distinction was drawn between those cross-cutting issues which were inherent to all projects (e.g. sustainability) and those whose significance varied from project to project and for which the project planners had to identify factors which might not be apparent from the initial project design (e.g. impact on the environment, women). It was recognised that the choice of topics was a "political" act in which the Group's task would be, at a minimum, to define issues for consideration. Participation in this experimental study would be voluntary.

47. The following three topics were chosen for study: sustainability; impact on women; and impact on the environment. A standard set of questions for each of the topics was developed by the Secretariat for use by evaluation units, as well as a shorter set of standard questions, prepared by Denmark and approved by the Group, to be attached to the terms of reference of all relevant evaluations in 1986. It was decided that the first draft report of the findings would be confined to the DAC Members. The draft would then be submitted to the multilateral agencies participating in the Group for their comments. This procedure had been found effective in previous studies and would facilitate an explicit comparison of bilateral and multilateral experiences. If the 1986 experimental programme proved effective, it appeared likely that the Group would wish to establish this co-operative activity as a continuing component of its work.

48. By March 1987, however, it was apparent that Members were well behind schedule in sending in their findings from the 1986 experimental programme. In fact, the participation in the exercise to date had been disappointing. There was a separate discussion on each of the three original topics based on the presentation given by those responsible for synthesising the available material : sustainability (United States); impact on women (Canada); and impact on the environment (the Secretariat).

49. In all three areas the material available was "still very thin" and it was clear that more work would be required. Participants were urged to send in additional material from their evaluations as they were completed. Given the delay in the work, it was agreed to stay with the three original topics at least for another year rather than moving on to a new set of issues. France assumed responsibility for the environment issue from the Secretariat. At the tenth meeting in February 1988 it was agreed that the Canadian paper synthesising evaluation findings on women in development should be forwarded to the DAC and to the DAC Expert Group on Women in Development for consideration. This was done and the paper was endorsed by the Expert Group on WID.

50. A revised "Sustainability" paper was well received, especially a new "Summary Reference for Programme Managers". It was noted that the concept of sustainability should not be pursued too far since it might lead to an undue avoidance of risk-taking in the allocation of resources. The fact had to be faced that in some of the poorer countries, projects and programmes would not be sustainable, in the strict sense, for a very long time. The main theme of the discussion was the need to make a link between this paper and the work currently being done in the DAC on the principles for project appraisal. There was some feeling of regret that the work on project appraisal had not been allocated to the Expert Group. Other participants, however, applauded the fact that the issue had been taken up directly by the DAC in recognition of its urgency -- an urgency the Expert Group's "Lessons" paper had earlier identified. In fact, the "Sustainability" paper had a significant impact on the DAC document as it resulted in the sustainability issue looming much larger in that paper than would otherwise have been the case.

51. The environmental impact study received particularly useful input from US AID and the IDB. It was agreed that the revised synthesis of the findings should be transmitted to the DAC for information. In fact the three papers on cross-cutting issues submitted to the DAC were derestricted and made available as documents for general distribution. They had been reproduced in the same format as that for the "DAC Principles for Project Appraisal" and published under the generic heading "Selected Issues in Aid Evaluation".

Non-project assistance (NPA)

52. In 1985 the United States reported on its work in this field and outlined a proposed study of the methods and procedures for evaluating NPA. Thus was launched an inquiry into this complex and difficult topic which was to last for almost three years.

53. The main difficulty in evaluating NPA was to demonstrate "causal relationships". This was particularly challenging in the case of policy-linked lending. It was agreed that a questionnaire should be circulated to discover what analytical work had already been done on "the understanding that work in this area was still exploratory." Food aid was excluded on the grounds that it was already adequately covered by a large number of existing studies. With the exception of the World Bank, which reported a substantial body of evaluation work on its structural adjustment loans, it appeared that rather little had been done in this field by the bilateral donors or the regional banks.

54. In June 1986 US AID presented its latest work on synthesising the Group's experience in NPA and in developing a methodology. It appeared that significant efforts were being made in this area by Canada, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States in addition to the World Bank. What was needed was some simple practical guidance. At this stage, however, it was clear that there was not yet enough material to serve as a basis for some sort of "code of practice".

55. A draft final report was circulated in March 1987. Its key message was that aid agencies needed to give higher priority to evaluating non-project aid. Both Germany and France expressed concerns that the report "entered into policy issues that might be regarded as beyond the Group's mandate." There was no problem with the factual survey of existing NPA evaluations, but the effort to develop a methodology to deal with NPA was causing some second thoughts. Following further written comments and additional work on the draft a final report was submitted to the DAC in late 1987.

56. Robert Cassen, in his study undertaken for the Development Committee of the World Bank and the IMF entitled "Does Aid Work?", singled out the Expert Group's report for its significant contribution to the evaluation of NPA. As described by Haven North in Chapter IX of the DAC Chairman's Report for 1988, the report's major findings may be summarised as follows :

"The objectives of programme aid (NPA) often tend to be diffuse and need to be better focused and defined. Non-project aid should be fully incorporated as part of a multi-year programming process. Programme aid is most likely to be effective when it is concentrated on a sector, when it is combined with complementary input and when it is provided within an appropriate policy framework. Procurement-tied programme aid seldom proves to be as rapid in terms of disbursements as expected. Individual donors are rarely effective in promoting economic reform through non-project assistance. They should therefore work in concert with other donors and the international financial institutions. When urgent balance-of-payments assistance is required, tied programme aid should focus on imported recurrent input rather than investment goods. Non-project aid would considerably benefit from strengthened preparation and appraisal and a more consistent approach to implementation. Sectorally oriented non-project aid would usually benefit by being associated with technical assistance for institutional strengthening."

Evaluation seminar with developing countries

57. Since late 1983, Sweden had led the Group's efforts in support of the developing countries' own evaluation capabilities. As noted above, Sweden had played a substantial role on this issue during the preparation of the "Compendium" report. As experience had shown, practical results in this area of co-operation had been meagre. The developing countries tended to see evaluation as a low priority use of their scarce human resources and saw it as donor-oriented and accountability driven. The Expert Group therefore concluded that there was a need for a much more extensive dialogue with the developing countries to establish more clearly how they saw the role of evaluation from the perspective of their own managerial requirements. Until this difference in

perspective was at least better understood by all concerned, efforts to increase the evaluation capabilities in the developing world were unpromising. It was concluded that a workshop/seminar with the developing countries was a prerequisite for progress on the issue, but only if there was a real demand for such a dialogue from the developing countries. This last point was repeatedly emphasized by the Expert Group. To be successful, evaluation support was something that had to be asked for -- not something that was imposed.

58. By the fifth meeting of the Expert Group in June 1985 most Members agreed that the proposal had evolved to the point at which it could be given firm support, although there were some reservation as to whether the money might be better spent in direct support of actual evaluation studies in co-operation with the developing countries. Financing was provisionally offered by six participants "provided that the load was fairly spread." In the final analysis, the seminar had exceptionally wide financial support with eleven out of nineteen DAC Members contributing. To be cost effective, the seminar would be held in Paris at the OECD headquarters unless an individual member was prepared to take a leading role in sponsorship and financing. None did. Therefore, the seminar was held under the auspices of the DAC. It was also agreed that members should suggest possible participants from developing countries in "the form of a pair of linked names -- an evaluator and a user of evaluation." This approach reiterated the point that evaluation should be seen as an input into a positive cycle of continually improving programme management.

59. The proposed seminar caught the imagination of the Expert Group. A working group was established, open to all members, with Norway acting as the convener, to consider such issues as funding, timing, participation, the agenda and discussion papers. On 29 January 1986 the DAC gave its approval for preparatory work to begin. The working group hammered out the procedural details for the seminar and the Expert Group distributed a "Progress Report" to the DAC Members. Although such a progress report was not formally required, it helped to build support for the seminar and for the reputation and mandate of the Expert Group itself.

60. The seminar took place on 11-12 March 1987. The next day at the Group's eighth meeting there was general agreement that the seminar had succeeded in its primary purpose of initiating a meaningful dialogue. There had been 21 participants from the developing countries who had consistently taken the lead in the discussions. The Group was pleasantly surprised by the strong demands from the developing countries for closer co-operation in support of their own evaluation processes. Conventional wisdom had assumed that the developing countries tended to see evaluation as something imposed by donors.

61. The main specific conclusion to emerge from the seminar was the recent significant strengthening of evaluation in the developing countries and gains which could be made from more effective donor support. In Asia, where evaluation was well established, donors were requested to make their evaluation activities consistent with the recipients' priorities. In Africa, donors were asked to involve recipients in the donors' evaluations, partly as a form of training. It was widely recognised and accepted by the developing countries that donors needed evaluation for their own learning and accountability purposes. The main plea was for donors to co-ordinate their activities more effectively in order to reduce the demands on scarce professional resources in

the developing countries. There was a consensus that the scope of evaluation should be broadened as a way of assessing the effectiveness of development expenditure not only at the project level, but also in support of sectoral programmes and policy reform. It was also repeatedly noted that the cultural dimension of development was sometimes missing from donors' thinking.

62. The Secretariat reported that there was a substantial surplus in the special seminar account to which members had voluntarily contributed. Some of the funds were used to subsidise the publication of a report. Permission was received from the OECD Council to retain the rest of the surplus for "further activities of the same kind." Regional seminars have been held in Abidjan (1990) and Kuala Lumpur (1992), and a seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean is being planned for 1993.

Other issues and items

63. The work of the Evaluation Group did not take place in isolation. For example, the Group received an extensive briefing on the "Study on Aid Effectiveness" which had been commissioned by the World Bank/IMF Task Force on Concessional Flows. The issue of aid effectiveness was an on-going concern of the Expert Group. Work had begun on cross-cutting issues and NPA and in response to a specific request to the Group by the DAC, Germany undertook to prepare a paper on country programming. The report concluded that the principal value of country studies was as a vehicle for a policy debate with recipients. The Expert Group acknowledged that the evaluation of country programmes was both sensitive and beneficial. It was recalled that one of the important findings of the Group's "Lessons" paper was that "lack of a country strategy led to {ad hoc} project selection." Notwithstanding the importance of this issue it was tacitly left for others such as the World Bank to directly explore.

Automated retrieval systems

64. Following on from the Group's earlier work on feedback practices, timely availability of evaluation reports was identified as an area of interest. The Expert Group was divided between those who had already tried automated retrieval systems and found them not very useful or who feared an indigestible flood of material, and those who saw automated systems as an efficient way to manage large amounts of information to extract the essential points.

65. Canada held a workshop (Montebello) on this subject in September 1987 which was well attended by members of the Expert Group. As part of CIDA's computerised information retrieval system, a DAC Evaluation Reports Information System was being developed and was made available to members of the Group when it became operational in the fall of 1988. An Evaluation Plan Inventory was subsequently added to the system which encouraged members to undertake joint or co-ordinated evaluations. Aid agencies had often been criticised for failing to learn from each other's experience and the DAC Evaluation Reports Information System was a significant step towards remedying this deficiency.

66. An evaluation of the information system, which New Zealand volunteered to do, was completed in March 1991. Members agreed that the inventory should be continued beyond the pilot phase and that it should continue to be managed and paid for by CIDA for the next two years, at which point a further review would be undertaken. It was also decided, after some debate, that access to the inventory should remain restricted to participants of the Expert Group in order not to "dilute the value of the information put into the system, which should be as frank and open as possible." Updated inventory diskettes were distributed together with a bilingual users' manual.

67. In October 1991 it was decided to allow UN specialised agencies access to the inventory. A distinction was made between evaluation abstracts maintained in the inventory, which might eventually be available to the public, and the actual reports which are kept by the originating agencies and controlled in accordance with their own confidentiality regulations. In the summer of 1992 on-line access was provided on an experimental basis.

Evaluation of multilateral agencies

68. In February 1988 the United Kingdom representative presented a three volume study on the evaluation capacity of multilateral agencies which he had prepared for the Overseas Development Administration. He hoped it would be useful to both multilateral and bilateral agencies in their efforts to improve their evaluation systems and might form the basis for a "best practice" paper issued from the DAC. His proposal developed a "litmus test" which could be applied to the evaluation systems of individual agencies and which was accepted. The Expert Group decided, however, at this time not to undertake further work in this area for two reasons: in many donor countries the responsibility for the international financial institutions rested with the Finance/Treasury departments and not the aid agencies; and there was a feeling that great caution should be exercised in "approaching a task which probably lay beyond the Group's competence."

69. Generally speaking, there was a reluctance for the Expert Group to pursue the issue of evaluating multilateral agencies, although in principle it was a good idea. The experts shied away from making the evaluation of multilateral assistance a component of the Groups' workplan. However, Members, individually and jointly, and in association with self-evaluation by multilateral institutions, were encouraged to increase their efforts in this field. The evaluation of WHO/Essential Drugs Programme and of UNICEF are two examples.

Technical co-operation and institution building

70. Interest in evaluating technical co-operation goes back to the Correspondents Group and its importance was identified in the "Lessons" document. Members were unanimous that "there was a serious and growing problem arising from the absence of any established methodology for evaluating technical co-operation." It was especially difficult to measure the benefits. In 1988 Sweden agreed to organise a working group with the United Kingdom and Ireland to examine the methodology issue and the UNDP undertook to prepare a new paper on the specific problems of institution building.

71. These studies concluded that technical co-operation could not be evaluated in isolation, but needed to be analysed in terms of its effectiveness in support of particular and stated development objectives in specific countries. The type of technical assistance needed for structural adjustment and policy reform for example, was quite different than that needed for a specific sectoral programme. Aid agencies continued to make "the same old mistakes" and more attention had to be given to the training of co-operants and to the availability and use of local personnel.

72. The United Kingdom report noted approvingly the increased efforts to introduce quantitative factors into evaluation studies. On the cost side, measurement was relatively straightforward. It was much more difficult on the benefits side, but experience had shown that, with effort, quantification was more feasible than commonly assumed. The time had past where declaring that "results were simply unquantifiable" was acceptable. It was necessary to calculate the actual costs, to describe the impact, and then to make a judgement as to whether it was clear-cut that the impact did, or did not, justify the costs. A format for reporting on evaluations of technical co-operation projects was prepared and it was agreed that it be used for a trial period. In addition, a list of questions on institution-building was approved for inclusion in the terms of reference of relevant evaluations. Participants were to report their findings back to the UNDP by July 1993.

V. Towards the Future

73. The relationship between the Expert Group's work programme and that of the DAC has varied over time. Although it was a sub-group of the DAC and dependent upon it for its mandate and very existence, the Group's preoccupations sometimes did not clearly reflect those of its parent. As we have seen in the very early days there was a dichotomy between what the DAC wanted to know (does aid work?) and what the Expert Group felt it was able to determine. This tension was originally overcome by a shift in the DAC mandate from "proving the impact" of aid to learning and applying lessons about development assistance. Nevertheless, where the Group fit into the DAC's work programme was an on-going concern.

74. At the eighth meeting in March 1987, following the very successful seminar on evaluation with the developing countries, the Chairman raised the notion of becoming more broadly involved in the preparatory work for the functional/sectoral reviews which the DAC convened on a regular basis. Surely an evaluation of what had been done in a special sector or in a functional area was an important input which the Group could make. The participants, however, were hesitant. On the one hand, it was tempting to move beyond the focus on processes which had hitherto characterised the Group's work into the substance of development policy issues. On the other hand, there was a need to consolidate the Group's work with the aim of reaching firmer conclusions on questions of aid programming and the project cycle. On balance, most members favoured the latter approach as playing to their established strengths. As a consequence, the Group declined to make a collective comment on the DAC's major report "DAC Principles for Project Appraisal". It was thought more appropriate that the individual experts should express their views through their own

delegations to the DAC meeting. Nevertheless, guided by the Chairman, the Group did discuss, from time to time, issues scheduled for review at the DAC. The primary health care discussion in February 1988 led by the Netherlands was a case in point. There was also a general willingness "to hunt for relevant material" in the DAC work programme to find items suitable and congenial to the Expert Group.

75. In June 1988 the Group took very careful note of the review of the DAC's subsidiary bodies which had been submitted to the Council. The main concern expressed by the Permanent Representatives was that the activities of subsidiary groups, including the evaluation experts, should mirror the priorities of the DAC's work programme and that the groups' output should constitute "a visible response" to these priorities. Participants in the Expert Group acknowledged this concern and efforts were increased to provide more information to the DAC in support of its specific work programme.

Evolving work programme

76. At its twelfth meeting in February 1989, the Expert Group had a wide-ranging and interesting discussion on its work programme. The new chairman, Mr. Winkel, presented a thought-provoking paper which divided their work into three main areas :

- evaluation methodology (e.g. compendium of methods and procedures; non-project aid; technical co-operation; feedback; evaluation principles);
-
- sectoral work (mainly evaluation input into sectoral meetings of the DAC, e.g. primary health care); and
- cross-cutting issues (selected issues which were seen as both significant and specially elusive, e.g. sustainability, impact on women, environmental impact).

77. This categorisation was broadly accepted. It was noted that there were linkages between the three areas and that the Group's approach should be "inclusive rather than exclusive." It was self-evident that the Group should respond, and be seen to be responding, to the stated priorities of the DAC within the limits of the Expert Group's mandate and its field of professional competence. There was no disagreement about work on methodology. This was the "bread and butter" issue for a group of professional evaluators.

78. Concerning sectoral and cross-cutting issues, it was necessary to strike a balance in the work programme. There was little disagreement that they should respond positively to requests for contributions to DAC sectoral issue meetings. However, experience had shown that the Group required a longer lead-time than was usually available if it was to make a substantial contribution. Although evaluators had much to say on sectoral issues from both the methodological and experience points of view, sectoral specialists were probably the best qualified to arrive at sets of findings in their fields of expertise. In such areas, evaluators could best make a contribution to the DAC discussions through their respective national delegations. For example, key questions could be posed and relevant evaluation material could be brought to

the attention of their own sectoral specialists. A group position on sectoral matters might best be taken when questions of evaluation methodology arose.

79. The Group's comparative advantage lay in the identification of selected issues which required special attention, either because they constituted areas of weakness in existing evaluation methodologies, or because experience had shown that they tended to be ignored within the established routine of the project cycle. As evaluators they had insight into the issues and problems which were likely to appear in most aid projects irrespective of recipient country, donor, sector and type of aid. Commented Mr. Winkel, "I can think of no other international forum which is better prepared than we are to address such issues."

80. It was clear from the discussion that the Group was prepared to focus its efforts more on cross-cutting issues. To facilitate continuous forward planning, the Group drew up a relatively long list of potential topics, with the lead agency identified, for which "approach" papers would be prepared for consideration. It was generally agreed that the Group should not attempt to handle more than two or three cross-cutting issues at any time. The Commission of the European Communities also called for a more systematic and comprehensive approach to the identification of issues leading to a gradual accumulation of evaluation manuals.

Principles for aid evaluation

81. The Expert Group felt that they had achieved a large area of consensus on evaluation over the last eight years. This being so, they agreed to take up the challenge of producing a document on evaluation principles which would be comparable to the recently approved "DAC Principles for Project Appraisal". This paper was to become the Group's primary focus over the next two years.

82. The Secretariat prepared an extended draft outline of the paper for the meeting of June 1989. The paper provided the framework for a work programme of the evaluation principles document. There was a unanimous feeling that some sort of statement of basic principles was needed as a preamble and that it could be somewhat more normative than the remainder of the paper. Sector, and country studies; an updated compendium of existing evaluation papers; and chapters on neglected issues and collaboration comprised the body of the document.

83. In February 1990, the Secretariat presented a completed first draft of the "Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance". Based upon this document, the Group agreed to prepare a brief, policy-oriented paper which would clearly and concisely state the basic principles of aid evaluation. The target group for this short principles statement was senior policy makers and aid managers. Canada was asked to prepare a first draft. The Expert Group agreed to work towards a set of principles which could be approved by the DAC High-Level Meeting. Close co-operation among members was a necessity in order to reach agreement on a document which reflected the policies and experiences of the agencies represented in the Expert Group. In March 1991 a final text was agreed upon, endorsed by the DAC and published under the authority of the OECD Secretary-General.

Other issues and items

84. Concurrently with the preparation of the "Principles for Evaluation" document, work continued on a variety of cross-cutting and other issues such as technical co-operation and institution building; feedback procedures and the evaluation of multilateral agencies. New initiatives were also launched in a number of areas.

Evaluating non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

85. A joint United Kingdom and Danish paper on "Evaluating the Role of NGOs" aimed to produce a synthesis of a number of completed evaluations and a methodology for evaluating NGOs. The Development Centre noted its recent publication "Directory of Non-Governmental Organisations in OECD Member Countries" which contained descriptions of some 2 500 NGOs. Of these, appropriately 1 500 evaluated their activities and about half of this Group were prepared to share the results. A discussion of this issue took place at the Group's 1992 autumn meeting and it was agreed to continue work towards a synthesis report based on experiences in various donor countries involving consultations with the NGO community.

Choice of technology

86. During the past few years Denmark has led the Group's work on "technology choice". Participants generally agreed that the subject was an important one and a potential cross-cutting issue for study. Views differed, however, on the approach to be taken and the meaning of the concept "technology choice". Did it deal primarily with capacity-building in developing countries or with donor influence on technology choice which often was driven by commercial ambitions and/or procurement regulations? In June 1991 DANIDA hosted a workshop in Copenhagen to clarify the issue, and at its next meeting the Group approved a survey questionnaire for voluntary use among DAC Members with the results to be analysed by Denmark for further consideration.

Programme assistance

87. In 1990 the DAC began work on a set of principles for programme assistance. This paper was meant to complement and repeat the success of the "DAC Principles on Project Appraisal". A major reason for this initiative was the general concern, most forcefully articulated by Japan, that programme assistance should not undermine self-help efforts. At the Expert Group meeting in June 1989, Japan had introduced a "room document" which expressed concern about aid dependency and the need to identify self-help as an issue for evaluation. In addition, conflicting policy advice from donors usually accompanied programme assistance, and this was another reason to seek agreement amongst donors on a set of principles. The evaluators were asked by the DAC to help in developing the evaluation section of the paper. This was done through the efforts of a working group which provided input for the work of the DAC on "Principles for Programme Assistance".

Self-evaluation

88. Also during 1990 Switzerland had produced, for training purposes, a brief paper containing the basic issues, the methodology and their experience with self-evaluation. Links with the DAC work on participatory development were noted. Self-evaluation was seen not as an alternative, but as complementary to external evaluations. It was also linked to project progress reporting and monitoring and had an important impact on learning independence. The Group viewed self-evaluation as a promising area for future exploration and participants were urged to send additional comments and materials to the lead agency. After the Group's meeting in October 1991, Switzerland presented a well-attended half-day seminar on the issue.

Joint donor evaluations

89. Stimulated by a paper presented by Japan, the Expert Group held an extensive discussion on joint evaluation at its seventeenth meeting, presided over by its new Chairman, Mr. Jean Quesnel of Canada. It was noted that the topic was closely linked to the Group's mandate and members were encouraged to undertake more joint evaluations when there was a commonality of interests.

90. Based upon their experiences so far, a number of general conclusions were drawn. The sharing of experience and the opportunity to critically analyse and improve one's own evaluation techniques were important benefits. Joint evaluations tended to be of higher quality, appeared to have a greater influence on the recipient and executing agencies, and reduced the burden on the recipient by combining the evaluations of several donors. Joint evaluations brought different perspectives to the undertaking and enabled smaller donors to be involved in major country reviews which otherwise were beyond their means.

91. A range of obstacles was also identified. The most frequently mentioned was the challenge of developing comprehensive terms of reference which were manageable yet accommodated each country's preoccupations and interests. It was essential that the necessary time be taken at the planning stage to establish the terms of reference to everyone's satisfaction. Agreement was needed on the review of methodology, level of analysis, operating procedures, documentation to be considered and the structure of the final report. Care needed to be taken to ensure that each participant's funding and contracting procedures were met. Other obstacles included the political sensitivities of all parties, how to report divergent views, how to ensure equal access to all information, and the time-consuming but essential requirement of building trust in the evaluation team.

92. The discussions stimulated interest in the concept of joint evaluations, and a number of these have subsequently taken place, covering both projects and programmes. In 1991, major institutional evaluations commenced of UNICEF (by Canada, Denmark, Australia and Switzerland) and WFP (by Canada, Norway and the Netherlands). Germany, Canada and Finland are currently collaborating on a wide ranging assessment of the work of UNFPA.

Women in development

93. In 1991 Norway introduced a paper entitled "Proposal for Assessment of DAC Members' WID Policies and Programmes". The paper had been produced by a provisional task force consisting of members from the Evaluation Group and the DAC Expert Group on WID as part of the preparations for the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women. Although earlier work had been done (1986-1988) as part of the cross-cutting issues initiative, the Expert Group gave strong support to a new evaluation of the issue and welcomed the opportunity to work with the Expert Group on WID.

94. A three-pronged approach was agreed. The Netherlands would take the lead in looking at the integration of gender concerns into the work of the DAC. The United States and Switzerland would provide leadership in studying the institutionalisation of WID in donor agencies and Canada would take the lead in studying WID as a cross-cutting issue. It was noted that this was the first time that the Expert Group had been involved in evaluating the application of an adopted DAC policy principle.

Onwards

95. Member countries are continually involved in a wide range of evaluation activities. Some of their initiatives which may become future agenda items for the Expert Group include income distribution and poverty alleviation (Norway); evaluation of evaluation training (Denmark); and aid for promoting democracy, and good governance (United States).

96. Portugal and Spain joined the Expert Group on Aid Evaluation at its eighteenth meeting in March 1992.

97. A successful regional evaluation seminar was held in Kuala Lumpur in May 1992 and planning was well underway for a seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean scheduled to take place in November 1993.

END-OF-TEXT