

Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management

FOREWORD

The DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation (WP-EV) has developed this glossary of key terms in evaluation and results-based management because of the need to clarify concepts and to reduce the terminological confusion frequently encountered in these areas. Evaluation is a field where development partners – often with widely differing linguistic backgrounds – work together and need to use a common vocabulary. Over the years, however, definitions evolved in such a way that they bristled with *faux amis*, ambivalence and ambiguity. It had become urgent to clarify and refine the language employed and to give it a harmonious, common basis. With this publication, the WP-EV hopes to facilitate and improve dialogue and understanding among all those who are involved in development activities and their evaluation, whether in partner countries, development agencies and banks, or non-governmental organizations. It should serve as a valuable reference guide in evaluation training and in practical development work.

The selection of terms and their definitions in the attached glossary have been carefully discussed and analysed and have benefited from advice and inputs, notably from DAC Members and the academic evaluation community. A WP-EV Task Force, chaired by the World Bank, led the overall project, in collaboration with the Secretariat. France took the lead on the French version, whilst the Inter-American Development Bank produced the Spanish translation. Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and UNDP provided financial support for the initial collection and review work, and Switzerland contributed financial support for producing this free distribution publication.

The process has been guided by the highest considerations of clarity and conciseness and a spirit of collaboration and compromise in terms of the willingness of major development agencies and banks not to impose their specific vocabulary on others. Although terminology will continue to evolve alongside changing development practices and management instruments, this glossary is a “state-of-the-art” of key terms in use today.

Niels Dabelstein Chair of the Working Party on Aid Evaluation

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Working Party on Aid Evaluation is an international forum where bilateral and multilateral development evaluation experts meet periodically to share experience to improve evaluation practice and strengthen its use as an instrument for development co-operation policy. It operates under the aegis of the DAC and presently consists of 30 representatives from OECD member countries and multilateral development agencies (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, UN Development Programme, International Monetary Fund). Further information may be obtained from Hans Lundgren, Advisor on Aid Effectiveness, OECD, Development Co-operation Directorate, 2 rue André-Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France. Website: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation.

Accountability

Obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted in compliance with agreed rules and standards or to report fairly and accurately on performance results vis a vis mandated roles and/or plans. This may require a careful, even legally defensible, demonstration that the work is consistent with the contract terms. Note: Accountability in development may refer to the obligations of partners to act according to clearly defined responsibilities, roles and performance expectations, often with respect to the prudent use of resources. For evaluators, it connotes the responsibility to provide accurate, fair and credible monitoring reports and performance assessments. For public sector managers and policy-makers, accountability is to taxpayers/citizens.

Activity

Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources are mobilized to produce specific outputs. Related term: development intervention.

Analytical tools

Methods used to process and interpret information during an evaluation.

Appraisal

An overall assessment of the relevance, feasibility and potential sustainability of a development intervention prior to a decision of funding. Note: In development agencies, banks, etc., the purpose of appraisal is to enable decision-makers to decide whether the activity represents an appropriate use of corporate resources. Related term: ex-ante evaluation

Assumptions

Hypotheses about factors or risks which could affect the progress or success of a development intervention. Note: Assumptions can also be understood as hypothesized conditions that bear on the validity of the evaluation itself, e.g., about the characteristics of the population when designing a sampling procedure for a survey. Assumptions are made explicit in theory based evaluations where evaluation tracks systematically the anticipated results chain.

Attribution

The ascription of a causal link between observed (or expected to be observed) changes and a specific intervention. Note: Attribution refers to that which is to be credited for the observed changes or results achieved. It represents the extent to which observed development effects can be attributed To a specific intervention or to the performance of one or more partner taking account of other interventions, (anticipated or unanticipated) confounding factors, or external shocks.

Audit

An independent, objective assurance activity designed to add value and improve an organization's operations. It helps an organization accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to assess and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. Note: a distinction is made between regularity (financial) auditing, which focuses on compliance with applicable statutes and regulations; and performance auditing, which is concerned with relevance, economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Internal auditing provides an assessment of internal controls undertaken by a unit reporting to management while external auditing is conducted by an independent organization.

Base-line study

An analysis describing the situation prior to a development intervention, against which progress can be assessed or comparisons made.

Benchmark

Reference point or standard against which performance or achievements can be assessed. Note: A benchmark refers to the performance that has been achieved in the recent past by other comparable organizations, or what can be reasonably inferred to have been achieved in the circumstances.

Beneficiaries

The individuals, groups, or organizations, whether targeted or not, that benefit, directly or indirectly, from the development intervention. Related terms: reach, target group.

Cluster evaluation

An evaluation of a set of related activities, projects and/or programs.

Conclusions

Conclusions point out the factors of success and failure of the evaluated intervention, with special attention paid to the intended and unintended results and impacts, and more generally to any other strength or weakness. A conclusion draws on data collection and analyses undertaken, through a transparent chain of arguments.

Counterfactual

The situation or condition which hypothetically may prevail for individuals, organizations, or groups were there no development intervention.

***Country Program Evaluation/
Country Assistance Evaluation***

Evaluation of one or more donor's or agency's portfolio of development interventions, and the assistance strategy behind them, in a partner country.

Data Collection Tools

Methodologies used to identify information sources and collect information during an evaluation. Note: Examples are informal and formal surveys, direct and participatory observation, community interviews, focus groups, expert opinion, case studies, literature search.

Development Intervention

An instrument for partner (donor and non-donor) support aimed to promote development. Note: Examples are policy advice, projects, programs.

Development objective

Intended impact contributing to physical, financial, institutional, social, environmental, or other benefits to a society, community, or group of people via one or more development interventions.

Economy

Absence of waste for a given output. Note: An activity is economical when the costs of the scarce resources used approximate the minimum needed to achieve planned objectives.

Effect

Intended or unintended change due directly or indirectly to an intervention. Related terms: results, outcome.

Effectiveness

The extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance. Note: Also used as an aggregate measure of (or judgment about) the merit or worth of an activity, i.e. the extent to which an intervention has attained, or is expected to attain, its major relevant objectives efficiently in a sustainable fashion and with a positive institutional development impact. Related term: efficacy.

Efficiency

A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.

Evaluability

Extent to which an activity or a program can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion. Note: Evaluability assessment calls for the early review of a proposed activity in order to ascertain whether its objectives are adequately defined and its results verifiable.

Evaluation

The systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy or program. An assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of a planned, on-going, or completed development intervention. Note: Evaluation in some instances involves the definition of appropriate standards, the examination of performance against those standards, an assessment of actual and expected results and the identification of relevant lessons. Related term: review.

Ex-ante evaluation

An evaluation that is performed before implementation of a development intervention. Related terms: appraisal, quality at entry.

Ex-post evaluation

Evaluation of a development intervention after it has been completed. Note: It may be undertaken directly after or long after completion. The intention is to identify the factors of success or failure, to assess the sustainability of results and impacts, and to draw conclusions that may inform other interventions.

External evaluation

The evaluation of a development intervention conducted by entities and/or individuals outside the donor and implementing organizations.

Feedback

The transmission of findings generated through the evaluation process to parties for whom it is relevant and useful so as to facilitate learning. This may involve the collection and dissemination of findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons from experience.

Finding

A finding uses evidence from one or more evaluations to allow for a factual statement.

Formative evaluation

Evaluation intended to improve performance, most often conducted during the implementation phase of projects or programs. Note: Formative evaluations may also be conducted for other reasons such as compliance, legal requirements or as part of a larger evaluation initiative. Related term: process evaluation.

Goal

The higher-order objective to which a development intervention is intended to contribute. Related term: development objective.

Impacts

Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended

Independent evaluation

An evaluation carried out by entities and persons free of the control of those responsible for the design and implementation of the development intervention. Note: The credibility of an evaluation depends in part on how independently it has been carried out. Independence implies freedom from political influence and organizational pressure. It is characterized by full access to information and by full autonomy in carrying out investigations and reporting findings.

Indicator

Quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor.

Inputs

The financial, human, and material resources used for the development intervention.

Institutional Development Impact

The extent to which an intervention improves or weakens the ability of a country or region to make more efficient, equitable, and sustainable use of its human, financial, and natural resources, for example through: (a) better definition, stability, transparency, enforceability and predictability of institutional arrangements and/or (b) better alignment of the mission and capacity of an organization with its mandate, which derives from these institutional arrangements. Such impacts can include intended and unintended effects of an action.

Internal evaluation

Evaluation of a development intervention conducted by a unit and/or individuals reporting to the management of the donor, partner, or implementing organization. Related term: self-evaluation.

Joint evaluation

An evaluation to which different donor agencies and/or partners participate. Note: There are various degrees of "jointness" depending on the extent to which individual partners cooperate in the evaluation

process, merge their evaluation resources and combine their evaluation reporting. Joint evaluations can help overcome attribution problems in assessing the effectiveness of programs and strategies, the complementarity of efforts supported by different partners, the quality of aid coordination, etc.

Lessons learned

Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programs, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impact.

Logical framework (Logframe)

Management tool used to improve the design of interventions, most often at the project level. It involves identifying strategic elements (inputs, outputs, outcomes, impact) and their causal relationships, indicators, and the assumptions or risks that may influence success and failure. It thus facilitates planning, execution and evaluation of a development intervention. Related term: results based management.

Meta-evaluation

The term is used for evaluations designed to aggregate findings from a series of evaluations. It can also be used to denote the evaluation of an evaluation to judge its quality and/or assess the performance of the evaluators.

Mid-term evaluation

Evaluation performed towards the middle of the period of implementation of the intervention. Related term: formative evaluation.

Monitoring

A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. Related term: performance monitoring, indicator.

Outcome

The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs. Related terms: result, outputs, impacts, Effect

Outputs

The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.

Participatory evaluation

Evaluation method in which representatives of agencies and stakeholders (including beneficiaries) work together in designing, carrying out and interpreting an evaluation.

Partners

The individuals and/or organizations that collaborate to achieve mutually agreed upon objectives. Note: The concept of partnership connotes shared goals, common responsibility for outcomes, distinct accountabilities and reciprocal obligations. Partners may include governments, civil society, non-

governmental organizations, universities, professional and business associations, multilateral organizations, private companies, etc.

Performance

The degree to which a development intervention or a development partner operates according to specific criteria/standards/guidelines or achieves results in accordance with stated goals or plans.

Performance indicator

A variable that allows the verification of changes in the development intervention or shows results relative to what was planned. Related terms: performance monitoring, performance measurement.

Performance measurement

A system for assessing performance of development interventions against stated goals. Related terms: performance monitoring, indicator.

Performance monitoring

A continuous process of collecting and analyzing data to compare how well a project, program, or policy is being implemented against expected results.

Process evaluation

An evaluation of the internal dynamics of implementing organizations, their policy instruments, their service delivery mechanisms, their management practices, and the linkages among these. Related term: formative evaluation.

Program evaluation

Evaluation of a set of interventions, marshaled to attain specific global, regional, country, or sector development objectives. Note: a development program is a time bound intervention involving multiple activities that may cut across sectors, themes and/or geographic areas. Related term: Country program/strategy evaluation.

Project evaluation

Evaluation of an individual development intervention designed to achieve specific objectives within specified resources and implementation schedules, often within the framework of a broader program. Note: Cost benefit analysis is a major instrument of project evaluation for projects with measurable benefits. When benefits cannot be quantified, cost effectiveness is a suitable approach.

Project or program objective

The intended physical, financial, institutional, social, environmental, or other development results to which a project or program is expected to contribute.

Purpose

The publicly stated objectives of the development program or project.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance encompasses any activity that is concerned with assessing and improving the merit or the worth of a development intervention or its compliance with given standards. Note: examples of quality assurance activities include appraisal, RBM, reviews during implementation, evaluations, etc.

Quality assurance may also refer to the assessment of the quality of a portfolio and its development effectiveness.

Reach

The beneficiaries and other stakeholders of a development intervention. Related term: beneficiaries.

Recommendations

Proposals aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, quality, or efficiency of a development intervention; at redesigning the objectives; and/or at the reallocation of resources. Recommendations should be linked to conclusions.

Relevance

The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies. Note: Retrospectively, the question of relevance often becomes a question as to whether the objectives of an intervention or its design are still appropriate given changed circumstances.

Reliability

Consistency or dependability of data and evaluation judgements, with reference to the quality of the instruments, procedures and analyses used to collect and interpret evaluation data. Note: evaluation information is reliable when repeated observations using similar instruments under similar conditions produce similar results.

Results

The output, outcome or impact (intended or unintended, positive and/or negative) of a development intervention. Related terms : outcome, effect, impacts.

Results Chain

The causal sequence for a development intervention that stipulates the necessary sequence to achieve desired objectives beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes, impacts, and feedback. In some agencies, reach is part of the results chain. Related terms: assumptions, results framework.

Results framework

The program logic that explains how the development objective is to be achieved, including causal relationships and underlying assumptions. Related terms: results chain, logical framework.

Results-Based Management (RBM)

A management strategy focusing on performance and achievement of outputs, outcomes and impacts. Related term: logical framework.

Review

An assessment of the performance of an intervention, periodically or on an ad hoc basis. Note: Frequently "evaluation" is used for a more comprehensive and/or more in depth assessment than "review". Reviews tend to emphasize operational aspects. Sometimes the terms "review" and "evaluation" are used as synonyms. Related term: evaluation.

Risk analysis

An analysis or an assessment of factors (called assumptions in the logframe) that are likely to affect the successful achievement of an intervention's objectives. A detailed examination of the potential unwanted and negative consequences to human life, health, property, or the environment posed by development interventions; a systematic process to provide information regarding such undesirable consequences; the process of quantification of the probabilities and expected impacts for identified risks.

Sector program evaluation

Evaluation of a cluster of development interventions in a sector within one country or across countries, all of which contribute to the achievement of a specific development goal. Note: a sector includes development activities commonly grouped together for the purpose of public action such as health, education, agriculture, transport etc.

Self-evaluation

An evaluation by those who are entrusted with the design and delivery of a development intervention.

Stakeholders

Agencies, organizations, groups or individuals who have a direct or indirect interest in the development intervention or its evaluation.

Summative evaluation

A study conducted at the end of an intervention (or a phase of that intervention) to determine the extent to which anticipated outcomes were produced. Summative evaluation is intended to provide information about the worth of the program. Related term: impact evaluation.

Sustainability

The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed. The probability of continued long-term benefits. The resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time.

Target group

The specific individuals or organizations for whose benefit the development intervention is undertaken.

Terms of reference

Written document presenting the purpose and scope of the evaluation, the methods to be used, the standard against which performance is to be assessed or analyses are to be conducted, the resources and time allocated, and reporting requirements. Two other expressions sometimes used with the same meaning are "scope of work" and "evaluation mandate".

Thematic evaluation

Evaluation of a selection of development interventions, all of which address a specific development priority that cuts across countries, regions, and sectors.

Triangulation

The use of three or more theories, sources or types of information, or types of analysis to verify and substantiate an assessment. Note: by combining multiple data sources, methods, analyses or theories, evaluators seek to overcome the bias that comes from single informants, single methods, single observer or single theory studies.

Validity

The extent to which the data collection strategies and instruments measure what they purport to measure.