Evaluating International Inter-organizational Networks: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges and Lessons Learned

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Introduction

- **Why this presentation?**

- **Objectives of the presentation**

- **Link with the theme of the panel**

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Increased awareness that cross-borders problems need collaborative action → Increased role played by networks in international development → Increased investment of donors in networks → Increased demand for network evaluations

BUT…

Inadequacy of existing evaluation conceptual frameworks and methodologies to evaluate networks

Definition of Networks

- Broad definition: "formal or informal structures bringing together diverse social actors to enable them to actively pursue common goals" while maintaining an acceptable level of autonomy (adapted from Wilson-Grau&Nuñez, 2007)
- Our focus: international networks of not-for-profit organizations
- Main characteristics:
  - Voluntary
  - Goal-driven, synergistic
  - Built on collaboration, trust, mutual responsibility
  - Complex membership and "fuzzy" boundaries
  - Flat structures

ANALYSIS OF DAC-OECD CRITERIA

Effectiveness/ Impact

Assumption

- The development objective can be achieved only (or better) collectively

DAC Definition

- **Effectiveness: A measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives.**
- **Impact: The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended**

Analysis

- **Effectiveness of networks changes over time according to their stage of evolution**
  – What constitute results varies over time
- **Different perceptions of a network's effectiveness**
  – Networks are multi-stakeholders entities
- **Different levels of effectiveness**
  – Inside the network, inside the members and outside the network
  – When a result can be attributed to the network and when to its members?

Assumption

- Networks value participation in their decision-making processes

DAC Definition	Analysis
• Efficiency measures the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to the inputs. It is an economic term which is used to assess the extent to which aid uses the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results. This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs, to see whether the most efficient process has been adopted	• Efficiency of network's activities <u>and</u> efficiency of network itself • Cost of participation • Additional cost related to maintaining relations/ties/trust • Efficiency varies according to the stage of evolution

Relevance

DAC Definition

- **The extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor.**

Analysis

- **This definition does not take into consideration:**
    - **The complexity of a network's stakeholders system (Multi-stakeholder nature)**
    - **The network's contexts (Multiple environments)**
    - **The network's culture and set of values**
    - **The temporal dimension of relevance**
    - **The concept of adaptability to change**

Sustainability

Assumptions

- Networks can be temporary entities

DAC Definition

- Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn.

Analysis

- Sustainability of the network's resources and relationships
- Variety of factors affecting sustainability:
  - Continued relevance to the context and to the stakeholders
  - Stakeholder's satisfaction with network's results
  - Organizational dimensions (beyond DAC criteria)
- Importance of internal monitoring and "maintenance" processes to secure sustainability through adaptability

Additional Dimensions

- **Crucial dimension for networks' evaluation (not covered by DAC-OECD criteria):**
  - Membership structure
  - Governance structure
  - Management structure
  - Strategic leadership
  - Coordination and communication mechanisms
  - Business model
- **Cross-cutting issues:**
  - Participation, ownership, buy-in
  - Internal culture, values, trust

Alternative/ Complementary Approaches

- **Organizational dimensions**
  - **i.e. IOA**

- **Developmental approaches**
  - **i.e. Life Cycle**

- **Participatory and process-oriented methods**
  - **i.e. stakeholders analysis, perception analysis, outcome mapping**

Questions, Comments...

- **Do you identify any other challenge in applying DAC criteria to network evaluation?**

- **What other criteria/approaches would you suggest to evaluate networks?**

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