

UNEG Commentary
on document
'DAC Evaluation Criteria'
version of 27-28 February

Comments from UNICEF, FAO, WFP, UNFPA, ILO, (IFAD earlier version)

(Includes also some comments to 1 January version and key points from survey to UNEG heads on experience with current DAC criteria)

GENERAL COMMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

General comments on the approach to the revision

- UNEG welcomes the revised OECD DAC criteria and is pleased to see that the input from UNEG complied input to the DAC criteria survey has been considered. UNEG will consider whether to officially adopt them or adopt a modified version, especially considering the context of the SDG era.
- Some of additional criteria that UNEG has adopted or worked on over the years to complement the OECD DAC criteria are now reflected in this revised version (e.g. rigour of design, gender and enhanced focus on targeting, scaling up, challenges with efficiency, coherence, equity etc.). Adapting them further to the new reality of the SDGS, joint-work, normative work, partnerships etc. would be useful as these continue to not necessarily be adequately captured in the criteria.
- Overall the revised criteria are a better reflection of the current external context including the SDGs and provide more clarity on the definition through the use of dimensions. The criteria might need to be unpacked in line with Agenda 2030. The paradigms of Agenda 2030 are a set of principles perhaps rather than specific criteria. The set of dimensions as “sub-criteria” and the “examples of areas of consideration” (which currently contains many of the SDG concerns – e.g. under “contribution to long term change” dimension) will potentially provide much of the scope for including agenda 2030 issues as part of a mainstreaming so making sure the dimensions do that might be a way forward without too many changes.
- Adding dimensions to existing criteria and recognition of relationally dimensions are welcome and should lead to more nuanced assessments of increasingly complex interventions. The use of a “set of dimensions” as almost sub-criteria and the “examples of areas of consideration” with many key aspects to look at in evaluations, adds considerable value by providing the basis for the further contextualization and specification to individual institutional context and system and is therefore welcome. This is perhaps where UNEG can work on the link to the Norms and Standard and individual agencies within these on the institutional version of the dimension. While maintaining the universality, common overall language and basis for collaboration and comparison as appropriate. This is in line with how the evaluation questions are at the core and come first, and these can be based on and within the criteria as appropriate, as also stated in the document.

- The broad principles for use (section 2.2) should be seen as welcome reminder of the adaptability of the OECD DAC criteria.
- The further guidance suggested is also welcome and should if possible be based on broad but relevant and focused range of experiences. Reviewing and updating the “examples of areas of consideration”, including to specific institutional contexts, should be a key component of this.
- It is useful for consistency that four out of the six proposed evaluation criteria remain the same as the initial DAC criteria, with due considerations of the various issues raised further in these comments on the dimensions proposed for each criterion
- To strengthen the overall applicability of the criteria, including with UN system, other partners (e.g. private sector) and the countries itself, the criteria should perhaps not be labeled as “OECD/DAC” criteria but more as “international criteria for evaluation”. This would be in line with the focus of Agenda 2030 on the combined, coordinated and partnership nature of work in support of the SDGs.

Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus

- For UN the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus is key so the applicability of the criteria – in full or in part (particular using the dimensions as “sub-criteria”) is important. For these criteria to have applicability to the whole UN system, the criteria should therefore not be seen or labelled as only “development evaluation criteria”. While SDG is with development at the core, there are clearly humanitarian and peace dimensions as well as normative and human rights dimensions that might not be directly considered as where the criteria can be used if these are considered “only for development”.
- In line with that, a summarising overall definition of “development effectiveness” would reinforce the “development only” nature or primary focus that might not be that useful for UN system. Also, it would confine the use to development situations and therefore in principle perhaps not be considered to apply to many of the national programmes, policies and funding focusing on public services etc. – and therefore also not necessarily be globally applicable, including for so-called developed countries.
- Para 7 footnote 7 clarifies that the term intervention refers to both development and humanitarian interventions. However in the criteria there is no consideration given to adherence to humanitarian principles which has to be assessed when evaluating humanitarian interventions.

Comments related to each criteria

Relevance

- Responsiveness to needs: as currently expressed this dimension does not guarantee at all that the evaluation will assess the extent to which no one is left behind which is at the core of the SDGs intent.
- Agility - it might be helpful to make more explicit the need to assess the agility of interventions along the triple nexus.
- There is some duplication in relevance and synergies

Effectiveness

- The redefinition of effectiveness is preoccupying. Indeed the redefinition does not require any longer that an intervention achieves its objectives but simply that it contributes to them. There is a growing tendency when developing interventions to set very ambitious objectives that are actually not achievable by the intervention. This redefinition will contribute to overbidding in terms of objectives formulation while there will be less expectations of their achievements as an intervention will be considered effective provided there is contribution only to the objectives.
- “Examples for areas of consideration” for additionality is somewhat limited in its focus and perhaps does not address dimensions often seen as complementarity and related to linking with other interventions. ‘Additionality’ also relates to relevance or synergies and moving there could be considered. It highlights the issue “inter-connectedness” of the criteria as well as the dimensions
- Adding quality of results to effectiveness
- Perhaps not sufficient clear why “unintended” effects is seen as related to “inclusiveness of process and results” – it could perhaps be more usefully included under dimension 1. Achievements of results – e.g. positive unintended benefits is a form of achievement of results

Long-term change

- The change from “impact” to “longer term changes” while reflecting a reality in trying to define and measure impact within most interventions (which clearly came from the responses to our survey on criteria), then the term and focus of impact is probably what countries and the “constituents” of the UN system would like to see. So if the dimensions contain the idea of “progress towards impact” and deal with the complexity, maintaining the idea of impact is advisable. As it is, it is not clear that there is an added value of no longer referring to impact as an evaluation criteria.
- It would be helpful to clarify if we refer to changes in the long term or change with lasting effects

- There is some duplication in sustainability and long term change
- Transformative change

While the revised criteria cover most relevant aspects, there is a need for a more explicit focus on how the interventions have brought about transformational change, which is at the core of the Agenda 2030 as is therefore a critical element for evaluations to cover. It refers to structural, systemic or broader behavioral changes induced by interventions beyond the scope of intervention in time and space. For instance, knowledge or practice promoted by demonstrative projects need to be replicated by those who are not direct beneficiaries, or embedded into the local or national systems. Currently, some aspects of transformational change are captured in several dimensions (e.g. dimension 4 of Effectiveness; dimensions 1, 2 and 3 of Long Term Change; and dimensions 1, 2 and 3 of Sustainability). However, the focus is rather on time (Long Term, Sustainability) but not on breath (beyond target beneficiaries, societal changes, etc.). Given that these revised criteria are likely to generate a common language for evaluators and other stakeholders, it is suggested to expand the concept and introduce the term transformative change explicitly as a terminology. Note that some agencies (e.g. GCF) has introduced this concept as evaluation criteria. Below is a proposed way to reflect these changes:

No.	Page, Section, paragraph	Original text from the document	What we propose/suggest	Why
1	Page 13	Long-Term Change Long-Term Change: Extent to which the intervention contributed to, or can reasonably expected to contribute to inclusive long-term changes for key stakeholders (positive or negative), including intended beneficiaries.	Transformative Change Transformative Change: Extent to which the intervention induced, or can be reasonably expected to induce transformative changes that are longer-term and broader in scope than the direct results of the intervention	See above
	Page 13, Dimension 1	Contribution to long-term change (in three places)	Contribution to transformative change	
	Page 12	Effectiveness, Dimension 4 Additionally	Move this dimension to Transformative change	

- Removing the criterion of impact is certainly a positive decision – because impact could be seen as a type of effect rather than an evaluation criterion. However, placing the emphasis on the “long term” dimension of change could lead the evaluators to neglect the measurement of important short to medium term effects of an intervention. This issue is particularly visible under dimension 3 of the criterion - Contribution to reduced inequality and /or increased inclusion: are we suggesting that the reduction of inequalities can only be achieved in the long term?

This is very debatable. A number of inequalities can and should be achieved in the (very) short term - e.g., access to health services and commodities or the termination of some practices (e.g. mutilation) etc. This cannot be left to the long term. It should be expected that the changes observed as a result of interventions are enduring effects we can observe during a long period of time.

- Some interventions aim at changing the life of the target beneficiaries now and ensure that the benefits /changes are sustainable - Placing HR, Gender inequalities and equity considerations as “long-term” issues - implicitly: challenges that take a long time to be resolved only acknowledge the current state of affair (the large disparities) rather than the time necessary to address / resolve them.

Sustainability

- Definition now refers to after external support has come to an end rather than the intervention itself has ended – the earlier definition was broader, more inclusive as it did not suggest the use of the criteria only when external support = donor funding was involved but could be for any intervention whether external funded programme/project or partnership or national policy or even innovative funding initiations, such as impact investment funding
- Definition refers to effects – why not keep the term result used previously. It would avoid risk of confusion. The term “continuation of positive effects” can potentially be seen as continuation of the programme/project as it was first initiated (e.g. continuation of the externally funded project) which is perhaps not the message to send. Hence also why it is continuation of the results/changes brought about by the intervention – e.g. continuation of the use of the capacity built by the intervention, not continuation of building the capacity
- There is some duplication in sustainability and long term change
- Where scalability best fits (currently under sustainability although they are different)

Synergies (Coherence):

- UNEG concerns as reflected in the responses in many cases relate to the “three Cs” – particularly in the humanitarian-peace context – and this is therefore key to get into the criteria. Establishing a separate criterion is one way to but perhaps more mainstreaming or integrating this under the existing criteria in the various dimensions would be the key. I am personally not sure that “coordination” and “coherence” is a criteria at the level of relevance for instance as the three Cs are more sub-criteria under effectiveness, efficiency and with the dimensions there might be an opportunity to get such integration. “Synergies” as an alternative makes it even more of a process issue than an outcome or results, not as directly related to ultimate beneficiaries as other criteria.
- Naming the criterion after the only dimension which deals with "(policy) coherence" does not seem appropriate. In fact, coherence is dealt with under the relevance criterion, where it belongs. Perhaps the "policy coherence" dimension should be removed under this criterion and added under relevance with specific reference to how the interventions fits in with relevant policy, strategies and other programme frameworks, at country and other levels.

- As far as the two other dimensions are concerned, dimension 2 "strategic partnerships", could be perhaps be replaced by "complementarity", as partnerships are only a means to an end, i.e., achieving good coordination and complementarity of interventions. "Synergised implementation" is perhaps not immediately clear and could be seen as "coordination".
- Adding the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus and inter-sectorality to synergies
- There is some duplication in relevance and synergies

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

No.	Page, Section, paragraph	Original text from the document	What we propose/suggest	Why
2	Page 4, Section 2.1, last bullet point under para 11.	'Support future improvement of development and humanitarian interventions, through generating and feeding back findings and lessons'.	Revise to read as: 'Support continuous improvement of development and humanitarian interventions, through generating findings and lessons learned for future policy and programme development'.	Revision is meant to emphasize that evaluation should support continuous programme improvement and focus on generating relevant findings and lessons for adaptive programme development.
6	Page 15, Efficiency Dimension 1 issue	'Issue: The extent to which inputs were converted to results in the least costly way possible'.	Revise to read as: 'Issue: The extent to which resources and inputs were converted to results in cost-effective manner'	Revision is meant to emphasize the notion of cost-effectiveness as compared to least costly way , which are different concepts.
9	Page 17, Sustainability Dimension 1.		Propose to add a question 3: 'To what extent were local capacities developed to assume ownership of intervention results?'	Revision is meant to complement the focus on overall sustainability strategies with specific considerations of whether required local capacities were developed for this purpose.
11	Page 18, Coherence Dimension 1 Issue	'Issue: Degree of coherence with the policies and priorities of other actors in the context, and with human rights, gender and other inclusion considerations'	Revise to read as: 'Issue: Degree of coherence with the policies and priorities of key and relevant stakeholders in the context, and with human rights, gender and other inclusion considerations'	Revision is meant to emphasize focus on Key and relevant stakeholders , as compared to 'other actors' , which is too vague.

12	Page 19, Coherence Dimension 2		Propose to add a question: 'To what extent an intervention complemented the work of other development partners working toward similar objectives?'	While design, coordination and comparative advantages are reflected in the areas for consideration, the proposed additional question could also focus on actual (or missed) complementarity opportunities during the implementation.
13	Page 19, Coherence Dimension 2, Question 3	'To what extent was the intervention linked in to relevant co-ordination systems in the context (e.g. sector working groups, the cluster system)?'	Revise to read as: 'To what extent was the intervention linked in to relevant co-ordination systems in the context (e.g. national coordination mechanisms, sector working groups, the cluster system)?'	Revision is meant to incorporate focus on national coordination mechanisms