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Evaluation

“Evaluation” emerged in the 1990s as an important, now essential, element in the efforts to enhance the quality of humanitarian aid. An evaluation is typically defined as a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program, or policy, including its design, implementation, and results. An evaluation should provide useful and credible information that enables the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making processes of recipients and providers of such aid.

The purpose of such evaluations is to improve ongoing or future projects, programs, and policies through the feedback of lessons learned and/or to provide a basis for accountability, including the provision of information to the public. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has identified five major evaluation criteria and developed a main standard for evaluation. These are:

- *Relevance*: the extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient, and donor;
- *Effectiveness*: a measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objective;
- *Efficiency*: this measures outputs—qualitative and quantitative—in relation to the inputs. It is an economic term that signifies the aid uses the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results;

- *Impact*: the positive and negative changes produced by aid intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended;
- *Sustainability*: this is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn.

The OECD DAC has carried out its own studies of how evaluations are conducted by their members (e.g. OECD 2016) or synthesized evaluation findings conducted by member countries on, for instance, how to respond to the refugee crisis (Ruauudel and Morrison-Métois 2017; OECD 2017). DAC also maintains a searchable database of evaluations of development aid, including humanitarian aid.

The DAC criteria have been in place since the early 1990s and are widely used by many organizations and actors in the evaluation of development programs. They are reflected in policies and manuals, and in the terms of reference in a wide range of individual evaluations by development ministries, agencies, banks, partners, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for example. The DAC criteria consequently have a strong influence on current evaluation practice. In 2018, DAC began a process of exploring how the evaluation criteria could be adapted to new scenarios, including humanitarian aid in complex and protracted crises, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

DAC's members are governments and intergovernmental organizations. Outside this framework there is another important network addressing evaluations in the humanitarian sector: the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP). ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, United Nations agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics, and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve responses to humanitarian crises. It was set up in 1997 following the genocide in Rwanda and new demands for increased professionalization of the humanitarian sector. ALNAP was established in the belief that by improving the quality, availability, and use of knowledge and evidence from previous responses the system would perform better and be more accountable. ALNAP's activities are managed and implemented through a Secretariat hosted by the Overseas Development Institute in London.

ALNAP maintains an online library—the biggest repository of lessons learned in the sector—and seeks to develop guidance on humanitarian evaluation. In 2016, it released the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide, which consolidated current knowledge about initiating, managing, and completing an evaluation of humanitarian action, offering a common reference point for humanitarian evaluators (ALNAP 2016).

The technical and professional quality of evaluations has steadily improved. However, the use of evaluations is highly uneven, especially at strategic and

policy level of donor agencies and implementing institutions. This is partly because evaluation reports are just one of several inputs into decision-making and these decisions can also be shaped by competing interests. Moreover, the need for rapid response in emergency situations often overrides attention to lessons learnt from evaluations. Participation (Rossignoli et al. 2017), capacity building (Vallejo and When 2016), and the role played by donors (Andersen, Bull and Kennedy-Chouane 2014) represent key aspects of humanitarian evaluations and may significantly affect their quality.

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Expatriates

Hundreds of thousands people work on an international assignment in countries where humanitarian, development, or peace-building interventions are