

# EVALUATION CONTENT AND CRITERIA

## 9. Relevance

### Principles and Norms

#### DEFINITION

9.1 *Relevance* is the extent to which the objectives and design of the program are consistent with (a) current global/regional challenges and concerns in a particular development sector and (b) the needs and priorities of beneficiary countries and groups. Shortcomings in relevance occur when the supply or the demand for the program is not well founded; when the program's activities are competing with or substituting for activities that individual donors, beneficiary countries, or other GRPPs could do more efficiently; or when the program's design and implementation are inappropriate for achieving its objectives.

Based on DAC Glossary and IEG evaluation criteria

#### NEED FOR GRPP EVALUATIONS TO ASSESS RELEVANCE

9.2 All GRPP evaluations should assess the relevance of GRPP objectives and design. The relevance of a GRPP typically arises from the interplay between global/regional challenges on the one hand and beneficiary needs and priorities on the other, since the interests of all partners and participants do not always coincide. Indeed, the divergence of benefits and costs between the global/regional and country levels, or the inability of existing institutional arrangements to reflect shared interests is often a reason for financing the provision of global/regional public goods.<sup>51</sup>

Draws on IEG's experience with reviewing GRPPs

9.3 The assessment of relevance includes assessing whether the objectives and the design of the program are still appropriate at the time of the evaluation, given that circumstances may have changed since the program was started or its objectives last revised. The assessment may also include the relevance of the program in relation to specific priorities, sector strategies, operational policies, and guidelines of the program's partners, if this is specified in the TOR.

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51. It should be recognized that donor countries can also be important beneficiaries of global public goods programs such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (the outputs of which are also being used in donor countries), the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol (which has reduced emissions of ozone-depleting substances for the benefit of all), and global health programs that are mitigating the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

## Standards and Guidelines

### ARTICULATION OF CURRENT OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIVITIES

9.4 Building on previous evaluations (where applicable), an evaluation of a GRPP should articulate the current objectives and design of the program as well as changes that have occurred since the inception of the program and during the evaluation period. This would include a description of the objectives, strategies, and major activities of the program – for example, the extent to which the program is engaged in facilitating the operation of a network, in generating and disseminating knowledge, in advocating an approach to development in a sector, or in financing or delivering technical assistance or investments.

### LACK OF CLEARLY ARTICULATED OBJECTIVES OR STRATEGIES

Draws on IEG's experience with reviewing GRPPs

9.5 The evaluation needs to be based on a clear statement of the objectives and strategies of the program. In cases (a) where the objectives and strategies have not been well articulated, (b) where these have changed during the evaluation period, or (c) where their articulation in historical program documents is different from that in the TOR, evaluators will need to construct a clear and agreed-upon statement of the objectives and strategies in consultation with the governing body (or oversight subcommittee or external panel) that is overseeing the evaluation. The evaluators may even propose constructing a logical framework for the program in consultation with the program management.<sup>52</sup>

9.6 If the two parties agree to create a logframe for the purpose of the evaluation, this should be done in such a way that does not compromise the independence of the evaluation. Although logframes are common in project evaluation, placing responsibility for the creation of a logframe on the evaluators themselves is more problematic for GRPPs. Many GRPPs have extensive authorizing environments, and the construction of a logframe should ideally be a participatory exercise among all the partners and participants in order to enhance accountability for results.

### IMPLICIT OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM, IF ANY

9.7 The evaluators should also attempt to ascertain the extent to which the program has objectives that have not been explicitly articu-

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52. See paragraphs 2.33 and 2.34. All GRPPs should be designed with some form of logical framework, agreed upon by program partners, that includes an articulation of the program's objectives and indicators to measure the achievement of its objectives. This expectation is in line with the development community's commitment to provide development assistance in accordance with a results agenda.

lated, such as influencing the approaches of other donors and organizations operating in the sector. It may be necessary for the evaluators to assess the relevance and the achievement of these objectives as well, in order to capture the full range of outcomes of the program. Particularly where these implicit objectives are well understood and agreed on by the program's partners, it is important to hold the program accountable for their achievement (or lack thereof) and to recommend that the program adopt a more explicit and complete statement of its objectives.

#### ASSESSING THE RELEVANCE OF THE OBJECTIVES OF GRPPS

9.8 The relevance of the objectives should be assessed against each of the following four criteria.

9.9 **The existence of an international consensus that global/regional collective action is required.** Such a consensus can be articulated in a variety of ways, such as formal international conventions, less formal international agreements reached at major international meetings and conferences, or formal and informal standards and protocols promoted by international organizations, NGOs, and others. This criterion may be viewed as relevance *from the supply side*. Sponsorship of a GRPP by a number of significant international organizations generally enhances its relevance from the perspective of their membership (donor and beneficiary countries) and from the perspective of the profession (technical experts), but these alone are not sufficient. There needs to be a consensus not only on the need for action but also on the definition of the problem, on priorities, and on strategies for action. What is the authorizing environment for the program? Was the assessment of the global/regional public policy gap that led to the creation of the program correct? For continuing relevance, evidence should be presented that the original consensus that led to the creation of the program is still present, and that the program is still needed to address specific global/regional public concerns. For those programs (such as global and regional environment programs) that are implementing international conventions, to what extent are their objectives and strategies still sufficiently aligned with the objectives of these conventions (which constitute their authorizing environment)? For donor-driven programs, to what extent has there been a plan in place to increase the relevance of the program to beneficiaries over time?

9.10 **Alignment with beneficiary needs, priorities, and strategies.** Relevance to beneficiaries should be assessed against their priorities, strategies, and political and institutional contexts as articulated in the countries' own Poverty Reduction Strategies and donors' participatory strategies (such as World Bank Country Assistance Strategies and UN Development Assistance Frameworks). This may be viewed as

Elaborates on IEG criteria for Global Program Reviews

relevance *from the demand side*. Where beneficiary countries are signatories to the international conventions or declarations that gave birth to the programs, this enhances relevance. But even donor and supply-driven programs may acquire beneficiary ownership over time by demonstrating positive outcomes and impacts. Obtaining evidence of beneficiary ownership of the program is particularly important if the representation of beneficiaries in the governance or implementation of the program has been deficient in the past or present.

**9.11 Consistency with the subsidiarity principle.** This principle concerns the most appropriate level — global, regional, national, or local — at which particular activities should be carried out in terms of efficiency and responsiveness to the needs of beneficiaries. This may be viewed as relevance *in the vertical sense*. In general, GRPPs are an appropriate level for activities for which the benefits of collective action relative to the transaction costs of operating the global or regional partnership exceed the net benefits arising from individual donors' using their normal instruments. The activities of GRPPs should not be competing with or substituting for activities that individual donors or countries could do more efficiently by themselves. Evaluators should pay particular attention to those programs that, on the face of it, are primarily supporting the provision of national or local public goods. For programs that are providing global or regional public goods that cannot or will not be provided by individual countries or entities acting alone, consistency with the subsidiarity principle is more straightforward (Box 2).

#### **Box 2. What Are Global and Regional Public Goods?**

Public goods produce benefits that are non-rival (many people can consume, use, or enjoy the good at the same time) and non-excludable (it is difficult to prevent people who do not pay for the good from consuming it). If the benefits of a particular public good accrue across all or many countries, then this is deemed a global or international public good.

In their pure form, true global public goods are rare. Therefore, the International Task Force on Global Public Goods, 2006, adopted a practical definition, as follows: "International public goods, global and regional, address issues that: (a) are deemed to be important to the international community, to both developed and developing countries; (b) typically cannot, or will not, be adequately addressed by individual countries or entities acting alone; and, in such cases (c) are best addressed collectively on a multilateral basis."

This definition implies that information and knowledge about development — an output of many global programs — are not necessarily global public goods. There is, for instance, no shortage of knowledge now being disseminated globally on the Internet. Useful knowledge also tends to be contextual, and its global public goods characteristics must be verified through empirical research.

9.12 **The absence of alternative sources of supply.** This may be viewed as relevance *in the horizontal sense*. Such an analysis could be done from several perspectives. First, what is the comparative advantage, value added, or core competency of the program relative to other GRPPs with similar or complementary objectives? Is the program providing additional funding, advocacy, or technical capacity that is otherwise unavailable to meet the program's objectives? Is the program providing these things more efficiently than other GRPPs? Second, to what extent are the goods and services being provided or supported by the program in the nature of public goods? Are there alternative and more efficient ways in which these could be delivered? Is the program providing goods and services that could be provided by the private sector under regular market conditions?

#### ASSESSING RELEVANCE OF THE DESIGN OF GRPPs

9.13 This concerns the extent to which the strategic approach and the priority activities of the program are appropriate for achieving the objectives of the program. Is the balance between the various types of activities appropriate in light of the program's resources, the needs and priorities of beneficiaries in the sector, the subsidiarity principle, and alternative sources of supply? Is the geographic coverage of the program consistent with the objectives of the program, such as addressing extreme poverty or the particular needs of fragile states? Are the strategies of the program still appropriate for achieving the objectives, given recent developments in the sector, such as the development of new technologies?

Draws on IEG's experience with reviewing GRPPs

9.14 GRPPs support diverse types of activities. While almost all advocate greater attention to – as well as improved donor coordination in relation to – specific issues or specific approaches to development in their sector, they are doing so on different scales:

- Some, generally small, programs are primarily policy or knowledge networks that facilitate communication, advocate policy change, and generate and disseminate knowledge and good practices in a particular area of development.
- Other, somewhat larger, programs also provide country or local-level technical assistance to support national policy and institutional reforms and capacity strengthening, and to catalyze public or private investment in the sector.
- The largest programs also provide investment resources to support the provision of global, regional, or national public goods.

9.15 For each type of activity (networking, advocacy, knowledge creation, technical assistance, or investments), the evaluators should assess the validity of the assumptions underlying the expected rela-

tionship between the activities and the achievement of the objectives. The expected outcomes and impacts may be achieved either through command and control within bureaucracies, through voluntary exchange in markets, through a common interest in collective action, or through some combination of these. The expected outcomes and impacts will also depend on the nature of the goods or services being provided (whether excludable or rival), the motivations and the capacities of the partners and participants, and the rules that govern their interactions. For instance, in cases where the interests of donor and beneficiaries may diverge (such as the preservation of biodiversity of global importance), the assessment of relevance needs to ask whether the program is providing appropriate incentives (such as incremental-cost financing) to overcome these divergent interests.

9.16 Assessing the relevance of the design of the program is greatly facilitated if the program has formally articulated a results chain or logical framework along with qualitative or quantitative indicators. To what extent do the results chain and accompanying indicators capture the distinct contributions of each type of activity to the program's objectives? Does the results chain clearly identify the extent to which the achievement of the objectives depends on the behavior of organizations and individuals – whether public or private, and functioning in bureaucracies, markets, or collectivities?

9.17 For programs that are providing global/regional public goods, an important consideration in designing a program is the manner in which the individual efforts of the partners contribute or add up to the collective outcome for the program as a whole – that is, whether the collective outcome equals the “best shot,” “summation,” or “weakest link” of the individual efforts.<sup>53</sup> For best shot aggregation technologies (such as an AIDS vaccine), the individual partners should pool their efforts, because the collective outcome equals that of the best individualized effort. For summation technologies (such as mitigating climate change), the collective outcome equals the sum of the individual efforts. Therefore, one partner's contribution (or lack thereof) can substitute for (or nullify) another partner's contribution. For weakest link technologies (such as the eradication of an infectious disease), the smallest provision (or lack thereof) determines the collective outcome. If one necessary partner does not do anything, the disease will not be eradicated.

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53. For a current treatment of these different aggregation technologies, see Scott Barrett, 2006, “Making International Cooperation Pay: Financing as a Strategic Incentive,” in Inge Kaul and Pedro Conceição, eds., *The New Public Finance: Responding to Global Challenges*.

9.18 Under the rubric of the Millennium Development Goals and the Paris Declaration, both donor and recipient countries have declared their commitment to harmonize and align aid delivery. Therefore, the design of the GRPP should not detract from efforts to align donor activities and strengthen beneficiary country capacity for planning, budgeting, and sectoral performance assessment.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the design should not contradict the operational policies and guidelines of the program's partners in relation to special considerations such as environmental management, indigenous peoples, gender equality, etc.

#### ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR REGIONAL PROGRAMS

9.19 Regional partnership programs are often sub-regional in scope, with a contiguous geographic dimension to them such as a body of water (like the Aral Sea or Lake Victoria), a river system (like the Nile), or a transport or power system. More than for most global programs, these programs exist for the specific purpose of resolving collective action dilemmas among the participating countries regarding the use of the common resource. Therefore, it is important for evaluators to assess both individual country ownership of the program and the appropriateness of the incentives for cooperation that have been built into the design of the program. Experience has shown that the absence of either can have serious consequences for the effectiveness of the program.

Draws on IEG's forthcoming review of regional programs

9.20 For these regional programs, the assessment of relevance needs to ask to what extent there has been an adequate assessment of the costs and benefits to the countries individually, particularly in programs where countries have to make difficult trade-offs, such as water sharing or usage agreements. Has there been sufficient analysis of the political context and the inter-partner relationships that enable the development of trust, confidence measures, and conflict resolution mechanisms? Has there been an assessment of the capacity of the countries to implement their part of the regional programs? Has the design of the program taken into account how the partnership expects to transfer some or all of its functions to national institutions and structures over time? Is there a plan for sustainability and a clear understanding of the time period and the extent for which external financing will be needed? (See also Chapter 14, Sustainability, Risk, and Strategies for Devolution or Exit.)

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54. See the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, March 2, 2005.