DISSEMINATION AND EARLY USE OF THE PARIS DECLARATION EVALUATION

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Abstract: Reflecting the long experience of the main organizers of the Paris Declaration, evaluation, dissemination, and use of the national and synthesis evaluation results were conceived, born, and carried out with a consistent view to the usefulness of both its processes and products for policy. This shaped all aspects of the Evaluation: governance, stakeholder participation, setting the evaluation questions, design and implementation of the processes and methods, and injecting findings and recommendations into the policy bloodstream. The focus on utility imposed the challenges of combining rigorous evaluation with a high degree of transparency and accessibility for the intended users and audiences, while building a network of stakeholders sufficiently committed, engaged, and comfortable with the results to be able to champion them through the tools and channels available to them, individually and collectively. However, the early record of influence illustrates the limits of evaluation in the face of rapidly changing political agendas.
This article analyzes and assesses the different elements that went into the communications and dissemination strategies around the Paris Declaration Evaluation, which very consciously aimed to maximize the usefulness and use of both the process and the products of the Evaluation. The article begins by setting out what were fundamental “enabling conditions” for a communications and dissemination strategy that would be conducive to maximum usefulness. It then recounts the early steps taken, with professional communications advice, to formalize the strategy and the different elements making up the strategy. This is followed by an analysis of how the dissemination strategy was actually implemented. Finally, the article presents some assessment of the results achieved in these areas, drawing on self-assessment, expert independent observation, and some tangible early evidence. That evidence includes some discouraging indications of the limits on the real-world influence of even the strongest evaluations.

ENABLING CONDITIONS: MANDATE, PARTICIPATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND PLAIN LANGUAGE

Mandate

The starting point for the dissemination and use of the Evaluation results was a fairly strong one in one respect—the high-level endorsers of the original Declaration had explicitly built a requirement for monitoring and independent evaluation into the text itself, formally mandating these activities. Moreover, it was fairly clear that the results of monitoring and evaluation would be expected to be reported back to future High Level Forums, the successors of the Paris Forum in 2005, so that there was at least a formal home or target platform for the results. More generally, tying Evaluation activities and/or presentations to “forcing events” and “piggybacking” on meetings at the international and national levels was taken as an opportunity to keep the work timely and relevant, and to promote interest, dialogue, and use.
Genuine Participation

Less positively, the Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and its roots were never well-known outside a relatively small circle—mostly of informed officials—in any country, so that mobilizing wider interest and potential action would be a challenge, and even the regular changes of ministers or senior officials would require refamiliarization with this work, its reasons, and its importance. Moreover, a good number of non-governmental organizations in the development field, in the past a vocal part of any public debate around development issues, were for a long time ambivalent or even hostile about the Paris Declaration itself. Many saw it as a government-to-government compact that disregarded civil society participation and contributions. Finally, even within the interested circles there was a natural tendency to focus early attention on the immediate and ostensibly more tangible monitoring of the 12 indicators attached to the Declaration. Meanwhile, most of those concerned with the implementation of the Declaration probably assumed that the evaluation work would come later and be carried by a smaller group of specialists.

This was the opening setting for the long and hard ground-building work described in the article in this issue (Dabelstein & Kliest, 2012) on the preparation of the Evaluation. What needs to be recognized is that all those steps to enlist interest and participation in the governance and management of the Evaluation were also building a constituency of coordinators to help carry out the work and at the same time to act as “ambassadors” to ensure that it was known and supported both in interested circles in their own countries and internationally. It should go without saying that building this kind of “ownership” is a gradual process of building trust in the genuineness of accountability, balance, and participation. It cannot be done overnight, and any bias or manipulation would come to light over time, with damaging results.

Transparency, Communication, and Knowledge-Sharing

Reinforcing the emphasis on participation by a balanced group of coordinators from partner countries and donor countries and agencies was a consistent commitment to transparency in all the evaluation processes. This was reflected, for example, in the systematic and timely posting of all available reports and dissemination materials—such as drafts, workshop agendas, inputs, reports, briefing notes, power points, video, photos, interviews, audio productions, and
so on—on an open and easily navigable website (Paris Declaration Evaluation Documents, 2011). This transparency rule does not appear so much to have been a special decision as an ingrained good practice or habit among a group of organizers with extensive experience in multi-partner evaluations. Working with multiple partners across cultural and linguistic lines, full transparency becomes not just desirable but essential to build mutual confidence and constructive cooperation, gradually defusing possible suspicions of hidden agendas or biases among participants. As the article on preparing the evaluation admits, this transparency rule and other confidence-building practices were not always enough to provide the necessary reassurance to all, particularly at points in the first phase of the Evaluation, but broad consensus was eventually achieved.

In the second, more ambitious phase, the international Core Team supplemented the public posting of all key documents on the OECD/DAC website with the introduction of an internal communication and knowledge-sharing system within and among teams through the Evaluation’s Extranet site. This interactive mechanism, available to all national and international coordinators and teams, allowed for continuous knowledge-sharing, support, peer review, and quality assurance, backed by systematic and targeted literature review. This tool, which was well used by many teams, also served a confidence-building function, as well as clarifying tasks, guiding capacity-building support, and, not least, helping with the practical but critical challenges of version control through drafting and redrafting.

Plain Language

As in most other fields, jargon, acronyms, and specialized language are rife among both development specialists and evaluators. With its focus on usefulness to policy-makers and opinion leaders in many countries, it was critical for this evaluation to try to minimize the obstacles to communicating its findings and conclusions to its intended users by using plain language in all its reports and as much as possible in internal communications among the participants. It is clear that many specialists have either forgotten how to use plain language or deluded themselves that using pseudo-technical jargon somehow gives their ideas greater authority, when in fact it more often under-mines potential interest and influence. Within a multicultural and trilingual exercise like this evaluation, the use of straightforward language was even more at a premium, when many participants were operating in a second language or through interpreters or translators.
In this process, the discipline of insisting on clear communication started with the candid critiquing and revising of drafts among team and management group members with different language backgrounds, leading to documents that were more readily understandable to all. At the stage of writing the Phase 1 synthesis report, the Team, with Management Group support, pushed further, especially by eliminating all but a handful of acronyms from the report. In the second phase, the Team members who had worked on Phase 1 and the Management Group started with a determination to practice and encourage the use of plain language throughout all the operations of the Evaluation, as well as capturing the other pillars of effective dissemination and use. These conditions were highlighted in the Evaluation Framework for Phase 2 in December, 2009:

13. The goal of ensuring wide dissemination and use of the evaluation by its intended audiences should influence the process and products at every stage of the evaluation, by:
   a. Keeping the central questions and key audiences constantly in sight;
   b. Using straightforward language: minimizing acronyms, jargon and unnecessary technical language in all products;
   c. Open internal communications—as in the planned knowledge-sharing system within and among teams;
   d. Trilingual operation: specific work to ensure timely translation of key documents and balanced literature sources in 3 languages (English, French and Spanish);
   e. Building in the time needed for peer exchanges, edits, strong summaries;
   f. Critically, meeting deadlines for progress steps and draft and final reports and dissemination summaries. (Joint Evaluation of the Paris Declaration, 2009, p. 5)

It is clear from the above that the Evaluation built on a base of high-level political blessing, designing for user needs from the outset, enlisting a network of engaged advocates, and stating a strong commitment to transparency and clear communication.

Even with such a base, however, the Evaluation still needed a clear dissemination strategy and a suite of tools and techniques to carry it out. After describing and analyzing these, we will return in the final section of this article to the goals that had been set out for dissemination in the December 2009 Framework, and provide an assessment of
the Evaluation’s performance against each goal, together with additional key points about performance in dissemination and early use.

STRATEGIC THINKING AND EXPERT ADVICE ABOUT DISSEMINATION

In September 2007, early in the multiyear evaluation process, the Secretariat commissioned the preparation of a “Guiding Note on Dissemination and Communication” by a Danish consultancy specializing in communications and media in developing countries. With this focus, the guidance was mainly intended to “facilitate the development of dissemination strategies at national level in partner as well as donor countries,” but added that “The Management Group and Secretariat, who are responsible for preparation of a strategy for international dissemination of the synthesis, will also benefit from the contents of the note” (Danicom, 2007, p. 1).

In order to facilitate communications strategies, the guidance first had to help build a sense of the importance of the Evaluation participants and motivate them to invest the necessary attention and effort, particularly since this aspect of communications in evaluation is so often left to the last minute, or too late altogether. It began by quoting Erskine Childers, an eminent Irish communicator in the UN system, stressing the critical role of communication in development itself:

No innovation, however brilliantly designed and set down in a project plan of operations, becomes development until it has been communicated…. While it is fairly easy to control the production and distribution of the evaluation report, it is more challenging to ensure that the report is actually read and understood, and the findings used. This is the reason why this strategic framework put emphasis on information (generating and disseminating information, facts, and issues to create awareness) and communication (exchange of information and ideas, promoting dialogue, feedback, and increases understanding among various actors) indicating the need for dialogue based on the evaluation findings. (Danicom, 2007, p. 1)

The 2007 guidance note had set out a 10-step strategic framework for implementing a communication strategy, and 6 of these 10 points were used to organize the “Strategic Framework for Disseminating the Phase 2 Evaluation Results.” This had been produced by the
Secretariat in November 2010 to guide the dissemination of findings and results while ensuring coherence and coordination of messages and activities at the international as well as at the national levels. See Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1
Summary of the Strategic Framework for Dissemination of the Paris Declaration Evaluation Results

The strategic framework specified the objectives:

- To create awareness and promote dialogue and action on the results of the Phase II Evaluation
- To promote knowledge and understanding of what the Phase II evaluation results mean for aid and development

The strategic framework identified the primary target groups as those who are expected to take action on the findings of the evaluation and the secondary target groups as those who can facilitate action and transmit information. Both target groups were further detailed in 5 subgroups each.

The substantive content of the dissemination and communication activities should focus on the answers to the three core evaluation questions:

1. What are the important factors that have affected the relevance and implementation of the Paris Declaration and its potential effects on aid effectiveness and development results?
2. To what extent and how has the implementation of the Paris Declaration led to an improvement in the efficiency of aid delivery, the management and use of aid, and better partnerships?
3. Has the implementation of the Paris Declaration strengthened the contribution of aid to sustainable development results? How?

Of course, at the time of preparing the strategic framework the answers to these questions were not known, thus the relative importance of the different means of communication was left open. A whole array of means/products was identified, and all of them were subsequently used:

- Country evaluations and donor/agency studies
- Thematic Studies (Phase 1) and Supplementary Studies (Phase 2)
- Synthesis report based primarily on the 21 country evaluations, 7 agency studies, and Phase 1 updates
- Summaries/fact sheets/briefing notes
- Powerpoint presentations
- AV materials:
  - Video
  - Photos
- Website
- Electronic and print mass media
- Internal and external meetings and workshops

Plans of action for the production and dissemination activities at the international and national levels were to be developed and further elaborated as the results of the evaluation became available. This was in fact carried out fairly systematically at the international level and reportedly with more or less thoroughness in different partner and donor countries, although there was no across-the-board reporting or tracking.

The output of the communication activities was to be monitored by the PDE Secretariat and if necessary adjusted. This was done informally, with more attention at the international level.
It is important to note that by the time Phase 2 was launched, many of the elements of this strategic framework for dissemination had already been used, tested, and refined during Phase 1 of the Evaluation, and before that in the experiences of different members of the Management Group and Core Team—especially with joint and multi-partner evaluations—as well as by members of individual country or donor teams. At the same time, this was probably the most ambitious dissemination effort of its kind for any development evaluation up to this point. As has been seen, it required considerable advance planning, management, time, and attention, as well as considerable resources. The planned budget for dissemination amounted to some $880,000, although it is important to note that nearly one third of that total was used for translation to provide all the evaluation papers in English, French, and Spanish.

THE DISSEMINATION STRATEGY IN PRACTICE

Since the whole evaluation process was so decentralized, and what was done on dissemination and communication in individual countries was less systematically reported on than other aspects, the attention here focuses primarily on what was done at the international level, organized directly by the Secretariat and the Core Team. At the same time, however, any assessment of results of dissemination and communication work at the international level has to recognize that most of the actors at the international level were actually there in their capacity as national representatives. Furthermore, many of the most engaged actors at the international level came from countries where evaluations had been carried out, so that international results almost always build on or interact with a national base.

Country-level Dissemination and Dialogue

Although the reporting on this aspect was partial and far from systematic, there is evidence that most countries participating in the country evaluations and donor studies did, as intended, use the exercise as a vehicle for engaging stakeholders at key milestones in the process and around the results (see the survey results in Patton and Gornick, 2011).

At the dissemination stages, complementing and building on the consultation stages that were a required part of the evaluation in each partner and donor country being evaluated, most national reference groups included activities around the Evaluation results such
as in-person briefings to senior government officials, press releases, country-specific reports, and public sessions on the evaluation findings. Here again, as in the entire planning of the Evaluation, the timing of the reporting stage to feed into the preparatory processes for the High Level Forum in Korea was critical to making the most of dissemination. The approach of this “forcing event” raised the attention level of key decision-makers and opinion-leaders and provided an important stimulus and incentive for officials, journalists, civil society groups, and others to look for and use solid materials like the national and international Evaluation reports in preparing participants and briefing wider publics. In this context, the online accessing and circulation of hard copies of reports, briefing papers, and other Evaluation products becomes less supply-driven and more demand-led.

Statistics were not assembled on the distribution of individual country evaluation and donor study reports. At the international level, in addition to online accessing, some 6,000 copies of the final synthesis report were distributed, as well as 5,000 copies of the Executive Summary and additional thousands of sets of the policy briefs on key conclusions and recommendations. Interesting examples of requests for distribution included the NGO Reality of Aid coalition for 1,500 copies to be circulated worldwide; the Bangladesh organizers for 500 copies for national distribution; Malawi for 200 copies for its parliament; and many copies for global, regional, and national events preparing for Busan. The Paris Declaration Evaluation (PDE) Secretariat, Core Team, and Management Group members took part in these national activities in partner and donor countries where possible (some 36 cases in total), helping link information and the potential for national and international policy influence.

THE OVERALL RECORD OF COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION AGAINST THE STRATEGY

Selecting Target Groups

Selecting target groups was relatively straightforward in the Paris Declaration Evaluation since the High Level Forums and their preparations helped define and locate at least the primary target groups—those who are expected to take action on the findings of the evaluation. Moreover, the coordinators of most country evaluations and studies were known and credible to these audiences and were even able to engage some of them in the course of the evaluation.
work itself and then to reach them with the results. Identifying and reaching secondary target groups—defined as “those who can facilitate action and transmit information,” was necessarily a more diffuse challenge, and the results were consequently more scattered. It appears that, as the preparations around the world for the Busan High Level Forum began to heat up in the six or so months prior to the event, many in these categories in effect identified themselves. There was a growing demand for solid evidence, and the Evaluation results were there and in time to inform and help shape the preparatory processes. The fact that the Evaluation results were ready at this stage, and deliberately targeted to the preparatory phases for Busan, not just for the event itself, was the reflection of long experience and a deliberate strategy. The Evaluation organizers understood that the most fertile time for influence by evidence is usually in the early run-up to such major events, while the event itself is often more about fanfare, photo opportunities, and perhaps some last hard-fought political negotiations.

Defining Communication Objectives

Given the natural constituencies and the openings described above, a definition was straightforward for the first objective: “To create awareness and promote dialogue and action on the results of the Phase II Evaluation.” For the second objective, “To promote knowledge and understanding of what the Phase II evaluation results mean for aid and development,” success depended on the Evaluation being able to reach strategic-level conclusions and recommendations—which was well-achieved—and to connect with the evolving debates about the future of aid and development beyond the Paris Declaration. As will be seen below, it was in this final forward-looking area that some of the limits of this Evaluation, indeed of any evaluation, were to become most evident.

Developing Messages

The focus was on providing answers to the three core evaluation questions that had structured the whole Evaluation—explaining why reforms had advanced or not, then analyzing what the effects had been for aid effectiveness and then to the extent possible the contributions to development results. This proved effective in that there was a very solid base of evidence and thinking around the eventual answers. Within that broad range of answers, the instrument of the focused Policy Briefs allowed for drawing out short, policy-relevant pieces
based on the evaluation findings in areas where evidence was most clearly needed as the pre-Busan debates unfolded. Thus some of these more targeted messages were only pulled out some months after the overall report was published, in response to some recurring questions and themes arising in the course of presenting the report in dozens of countries and settings. Ultimately, much attention at Busan was in fact centred on the chosen policy brief themes of “Transparency, risk management and mutual accountability,” “Aid reforms and better development results,” “The changing landscape of cooperation,” and “Country ownership: Political correctness or a key to better aid?”

Means of Communication and Products

This category is where the arsenal of tools built up over decades of experience proved especially valuable. All the building blocks fit together to provide a solid foundation for dissemination and communication, with different layers of depth and ease of use to serve different audiences and occasions. All the traditional written vehicles—not lavishly but tastefully printed and packaged—played their part, and were ready in time to have maximum effect: country and donor/agency studies; Thematic Studies (Phase 1) and Supplementary Studies (Phase 2); the Synthesis report based primarily on the 21 country evaluations, 7 agency studies, and Phase 1 updates; summaries/fact sheets/briefing notes; and Powerpoint presentations. Audiovisual materials, particularly a useful series of short videos, went beyond the conventional and managed to make an otherwise dry story of evaluation come alive for some new audiences, and even for some tired or jaded Evaluation participants. The Evaluation’s easily navigable external website, hosted by the OECD/DAC, proved to be a major asset and resource, and all these materials were also posted on a special site on the overall Busan High Level Forum website as soon as it went live. All past and present print materials related to Phases 1 and 2 of the evaluation are available on the Internet (Paris Declaration Evaluation Documents, 2011).

Electronic and Print Mass Media

Targeted and direct means were implicitly favoured over these media, as organizers understood that the Evaluation and its messages (even in distilled form) were likely to be seen as specialized topics by the general media. This expectation was borne out, and the mainstream media coverage did prove to be limited. At Busan, which was a significant international media event, the substantive story of aid
reform was clearly not enough to engage most of the media or, in fact, many of the assembled leaders. The dominant story became the drive to involve the nontraditional development partners, such as China, Brazil, and India. Even the Evaluation’s accessible Policy Briefs and the simplified messages from the Monitoring Survey received little media attention.

Internal and External Meetings and Workshops

Live platforms for presentations and dialogue around the Evaluation, and eventually its results, were important. Extensive in-person presentations were made around the world by members of the Core Evaluation team, the Paris Declaration Evaluation Secretariat, and Management Group members, in some 36 national, regional, and international meetings and workshops in the lead-up to the Busan High Level Forum. This emphasis reflected the substantial but not massive interested public for the subject matter, the targeting and timing of the dissemination strategy tuned to the quickening tempo of preparations for Busan, and the availability and interest of active Evaluation coordinators—and thus potential event hosts and organizers—in different countries and regions. Included in this number of forums were a half-dozen international and regional evaluation events, where the lessons for the evaluation field could be explored and shared.

RESULTS IN EARLY USE AND COMMUNICATION

Process Use

On examination, it is clear that the intended usefulness of the processes in this Evaluation was built in alongside the focus on the ultimate usefulness of the products. The decentralized and “federated” governance and evaluation team structures and consultations at national and international levels served the objectives of building knowledge and constituencies around the subjects of the Evaluation, as well as strengthening capacities and participation. It is noteworthy that letters of support for the nomination of the Evaluation for the 2012 Outstanding Evaluation Award featured the contributions of the evaluation processes to policy debate prior to the completion of reports, and in the case of the letters of support from Uganda and the DAC Chair, the contributions to evaluation capacity-building. In his nomination, Michael Quinn Patton (2012) specifically pointed to the process contributions of the Evaluation in focusing attention on the Paris Declaration, its principles, purposes, and effects, and in
expanding knowledge of and engagement with the Paris Declaration principles for more effective aid.

Communication Results

As indicated early in this article, one way of assessing the Evaluation in this respect is to take stock of how it performed against the intended conditions set in the Evaluation Framework of December 2009 for achieving the goal of ensuring wide dissemination and use of the Evaluation by its intended audiences. Clearly there is no basis for a formal evaluation on this, but at least a critical self-assessment may be helpful and provide grist for discussion. Exhibit 2 provides this self-assessment.

Exhibit 2
Self-assessment Against Communications Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Framework condition for success</th>
<th>Self-assessment of success by Secretariat and Team (High/medium/low)</th>
<th>Comments or explanatory notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Keeping the central questions and key audiences constantly in sight</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>The focus on the High Level Forum and the flow-through of the questions in all the evaluation tools played key roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Using straightforward language: minimizing acronyms, jargon and unnecessary technical language in all products</td>
<td>Medium to high in the Synthesis, more mixed in individual studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Open internal communications—as in the planned knowledge-sharing system within and among teams</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Trilingual operation: specific work to ensure timely translation of key documents and balanced literature sources in 3 languages (English, French, and Spanish)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>With some high pressure and small glitches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Building in the time needed for peer exchanges, edits, and strong summaries</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>There can never be &quot;enough&quot; time, and deadlines must be set and kept. But delays on some component studies led at times to almost unsustainable pressures to deliver the overall product on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Critically, meeting deadlines for progress steps and draft and final reports and dissemination summaries</td>
<td>High at the Synthesis level, mixed among component studies</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Going beyond the self-assessments of communications performance in Exhibit 2, this article is able to draw on independent observations on the targeted delivery, early use, and influence of the Evaluation. In the course of the metaevaluation by Michael Quinn Patton and Jean Gornick (2011), and Patton’s subsequent nomination of the Evaluation for the American Evaluation Association’s 2012 Outstanding Evaluation Award, Patton highlighted a number of features conducive to effective dissemination and use. Introducing this topic, he said, “I have never seen such a comprehensive, multi-faceted dissemination strategy aimed at supporting intended use by intended users in the run-up to the Busan 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.” See Exhibit 3 for Exemplary Features in Dissemination of the Paris Declaration Evaluation.

Exhibit 3
Exemplary Features in Dissemination of the Paris Declaration Evaluation

- **Report published on time:** Finalizing the agenda for the High Level Forum by OECD officials began in late June 2011. The Final report was published at the end of May 2011. Meeting this deadline took enormous time management and long hours of work by all involved, especially the core evaluation team.
- **The French and Spanish versions** of the report were available two weeks after the English version.
- **Immediate website availability of the report.** The report was posted on the OECD/DAC website in early June. On June 17 the organizers of the High Level Form posted the evaluation on their own website.
- **The Executive Summary** of the Report was immediately widely disseminated throughout the international development community electronically and digitally.
- A **Powerpoint presentation** on findings that could be adapted to different audiences was generated at the same time as the report was published and made available to participants from partner countries and members of the International Reference Group.
- **Policy Briefs** were prepared on specific key issues of concern to international development policy makers. These are two-page summaries extracted from the overall evaluation findings.
- **All country and international agency studies** were posted on the Internet for full and open access.
- The independent **metaevaluation of the evaluation** was published at the same time as the final report and posted on the website with the report.
- **Video clips** on more than 30 topics were produced by a professional videography team that documented the Evaluation while it was being conducted, including field work in partner countries. These were made available on DVDs and on the web.
- In addition to these short clips a **15-minute film**, “Walk the Talk—A Message for the Fourth High Level Forum,” was released shortly before the Forum.
- Each partner country developed its own national dissemination plan that included in-person briefings to senior government officials, press releases, country-specific reports, and public sessions on the evaluation findings, both nationally and internationally.
- **Extensive in-person presentations** around the world by members of the Core Evaluation team, the Paris Declaration Evaluation Secretariat, and Management Group members.

In summary, taking into account the many different dissemination strategies and modalities, I personally have never been involved in or even heard about such a comprehensive, multi-faceted evaluation dissemination approach. This is certainly an exemplary model for evaluation dissemination.

Source: Patton (2012).
ACTUAL USE

The project completion report on the Evaluation notes that, although there has been no systematic survey of the uptake of the evaluation, feedback from members of the International Reference Group and the organizing Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF) indicate that the evaluation was used extensively during the preparations for the 4th High Level Forum in Busan. These contributions were specifically featured in the opening remarks at the Forum itself by the Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, J. Brian Atwood, and were reaffirmed in his letter of support for the nomination of the Evaluation as AEA’s Outstanding Evaluation of 2012:

The evidence emerging from this major evaluation contributed greatly to the positive outcome featuring in the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. By confirming the relevance of the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and their contribution to higher quality, more transparent and more effective development co-operation, the findings from the evaluation were essential for reaffirming the importance of efforts to improve the effectiveness of partnerships for development. (Atwood, 2012)

It is important to note that the timely submission of the report to the WP-EFF meeting in July 2011 was particularly useful to allow the WP-EFF to prepare for the Forum. Many documents produced for the Forum refer specifically to the Evaluation while, perhaps more importantly, the Evaluation results clearly influenced the shaping and featuring of some major themes and future directions, such as a strong focus on reforms at the country level, as well as the needs for greater transparency on all development resources and a more mature approach to risk management in aid. The deeper and more comprehensive and analytical evidence from the Evaluation gave shape and coherence to the combined inputs of monitoring, evaluation, and some major advocacy submissions. This systemic influence, like many other more specific inputs, reflects the findings and recommendations without reference or attribution—often a sign that an evaluation has found its way into the policy mainstream and even bloodstream.

A Somber Final Reminder of the Limits of Evaluation

In spite of all the evidence of the quality of the Evaluation processes and products and its effective dissemination to provide the authori-
tative base of evidence on the effects of the Paris Declaration up to 2011, the Evaluation’s influence appears disappointing almost a year after the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Korea. The shortcoming was not in the Evaluation, nor in the Paris Declaration campaign itself, but in the weakening commitment to the long, hard work of improving aid effectiveness in some key quarters internationally. Indeed, this falling-away had become increasingly clear over the months leading up to the Forum and was then confirmed in the proceedings of the Forum itself.

In principle, all accepted the Evaluation findings of limited and mixed results from aid reforms and the conclusion that there was much unfinished business on the still-valid principles and commitments of the Paris Declaration. But in practice most attention was diverted to negotiations to widen participation, especially to bring China and Brazil into a “new global partnership for development,” diminishing the focus on the “traditional” aid providers in the OECD. The focus shifted to trying to mount a campaign for a poorly defined concept of “development effectiveness” in the place of the politically incorrect but more operational “aid effectiveness.”

Although a solid group of aid-receiving countries and an (admittedly shifting) group of donors were still resolute in pushing ahead with the proven aid reforms, the fuzzy rhetorical compromises won the day, and the tougher commitments in the Paris agenda were politically sidelined and watered down in favour of “common goals and differential commitments.” Those donors and partner countries whose performance in carrying out their Paris commitments had been lagging, or who had tired of the marathon, quietly welcomed the reduced pressure. Also diluted was the concept of “aid” itself, which had been refined and disciplined among traditional aid-providers from its politically and commercially dominated forms in the 1950s and 1960s through the OECD/DAC. But now it was opened up again to accommodate the “pre-DAC” forms of “aid” being provided by a country such as China, and also appealing to new governments in some donor countries. At the same time, even the basic standards of transparency around aid and other flows were also clearly going to be eroded, since the non-DAC providers had no commitment even to report.

A “perfect storm” had resulted in sidelining the decades-long effort to improve aid that had culminated in the Paris Declaration, which had gathered an unprecedented group of countries and international
organizations to support a detailed reform agenda. The collateral damage from this setback included, of course, much of the immediate policy influence of the Evaluation, although its final influence will only be known in the longer term. In retrospect, it may be tempting to suggest that the Evaluation was mistaken (or at least not prescient enough) in its finding that the Declaration remained relevant. But that finding of relevance was in relation to aid effectiveness, and it could not have been anticipated that the concern for more effective aid itself could be so readily and rapidly pushed aside.

REFERENCES


Bernard Wood has over 40 years of experience as an evaluation specialist, senior multilateral manager, think tank director in development and security policy, and parliamentary advisor. He has worked in more than 60 countries. In the 1980s he pioneered taking evaluations of official programs of development assistance to the critical country level and deepening assessments of civil society assistance. He led the international core team for one the largest ever development evaluations—the Evaluation of the Paris Declaration. He has led some 50 complex evaluations, reviews, and organizational assessments at different levels. From 1993 to 1999 he served as the Director of Development Cooperation and head of the DAC secretariat at the OECD in Paris. Earlier he was Deputy Director of the Parliamentary Centre, then founding CEO of the North-South Institute for 13 years, and CEO of the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security. He twice served as Personal Representative of the Prime Minister of Canada in the fight against apartheid. He holds an M.A. from the School of International Affairs at Carleton University, Ottawa (International Development). In 1992–93 he was a Center Fellow at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University.

Niels Dabelstein was Head of the Evaluation Department of Danida, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, from 1988 to 2007. During his tenure the department managed and published some 200 evaluations. In 1994 he initiated and led the Joint Evaluation of the International Response to Genocide in Rwanda. He chaired the Steering Committee comprising 39 donor, UN- and international agencies. As a follow-up he promoted the creation of Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) and was the first chairman of the board of the Humanitarian Accountability Project (now the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership). He was also instrumental in initiating and managing the Tzunami Evaluation in 2006. From 1997 to 2002, he was Chairman of the OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation and continued as Vice-Chairman until 2005. He led the drafting of the DAC Principles for Aid Evaluation in 1991, the Guidelines for Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in 1998, the DAC Evaluation Glossary in 2002, the DAC Guidance for Joint Evaluation in 2005, and the DAC Evaluation Quality Standards in 2006. He was also one of the “founding fathers” of the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) in 2002. Most recently (2007–2012) he managed the Joint Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration.