GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT:
BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE INTERNAL EVALUATION FUNCTION FOR AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN AID PROGRAM

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STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

- Why was the model established?
- How does the model work?
- What impact has it had?
- Why did it work?
- Why should other organisations consider it?
WHY WAS THE MODEL ESTABLISHED?

- Evaluation function criticised for lacking independence
- Early optimism following establishment of ODE
- Disappointment

  • “Where have all the evaluations gone?”

  • Is ODE a ‘constructive critic’ or ‘agency advocate’?
INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF AID EFFECTIVENESS 2011

- The evaluation dimension is not working well
- A disconnected evaluation agency is one with little influence.
- But increased independence is important.
HOW DOES THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION COMMITTEE MODEL WORK?

Mr Jim Adams
IEC Chair

Dr Wendy Jarvie
Independent Member

Mr Stephen Creese
Independent Member

Mr Ewen McDonald
(DFAT) member
HOW DOES THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION COMMITTEE MODEL WORK?

• Very simple model.
• Meets three times a year. Reviews papers out of session.
• It reviews and provides comments on all of ODE’s work, including the annual workplan, TORs, evaluation plans, and evaluation reports.
• It endorses the workplan and reports prior to publication focusing on overall quality and credibility. It doesn’t have to agree on every detail.
HOW DOES THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION COMMITTEE MODEL WORK?

• Members participate in biannual seminars held at Development Policy Centre at ANU where ODE reports are discussed with academics and others.

• Also provides advice to DFAT on the Performance of Australian Aid report – a part of DFAT’s accountability under the PGPA Act.

Note:

• it’s an Advisory committee only.
WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THE MODEL?

Average number of evaluations published
2006 - 2013

Average number of evaluations published
2014 - 2017
Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program

Office of Development Effectiveness

January 2014

Evaluation of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program Final Report

Office of Development Effectiveness

August 2015

2014 AES Awards for Excellence in Evaluation
Public Sector Evaluation Award

WINNER

2016 AES Awards for Excellence in Evaluation
Public Sector Evaluation Award

WINNER
WHY DOES IT WORK?

- Because the Government agrees it (and ODE) is useful
- Because it provides encouragement and direction to ODE
- Because of the quality and nature of the advice it provides, and
- DFAT’s attitude to Independent members
WHY SHOULD OTHERS CONSIDER IT?

• Evaluation functions within government often struggle eg to get reports published, particularly ones in conflicted policy spaces, and to have external credibility.

• This model strengths internal evaluation functions – without losing the advantages of internal evaluations

• Provides a useful accountability role under PGPA Act.

But it relies on

• Careful choice of members, particularly the Chair

• Clear understanding of its role and its limits

• An organisation culture that can deal with bad news from time to time
QUESTIONS?

COMMENTs?
The credibility of evaluation hinges in large part on its governance, that is, on the set up of independent evaluation units that report to country legislatures or to governing bodies—or other independent verification mechanisms. This prerequisite of credibility is missing in the evaluation systems used by most governments, companies, and development agencies. The frequent option of resorting to consultants does not guarantee independence.

Robert Picciotto (2003)