



**AN ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION ON
METHODOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF DEVELOPMENT
ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE'S EVALUATION CRITERIA**

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Abstract:

Monitoring and evaluation are modern approaches used to study project logic and these help in solving project problems. Taking a few muscles and bones from social research these studies are growing in the fields. Monitoring and evaluation studies take key methods and tools from social research, particularly operational research. Therefore, these are deemed identical to social research but monitoring and evaluation are not social research. These are deserted children of social research who are growing independently in the fields based on needs. This discussion paper doesn't explore the history of evaluation but explains the conceptual trajectory of evaluation starting from its mandate to the practice. Development or humanitarian sector is not running based on the theory of demand and supply. The development sector is based on the logic of need and fulfillment. Therefore, evaluation in the development sector is also grounded in need. While explaining the conceptual roots and practices of evaluation in the development sector. Commonly used OECD/DAC evaluation criteria are taken for discussion. Hence the evaluation is an abductive approach of study that focuses on project logic and helps in solving project problems or measuring project results. Therefore, an abductive approach to examination is used in this paper. Coming with the deductive approach, the review starts with theory and ends at practice, and following the inductive approach review starts with practice to help generalizing concepts. Both approaches have limitations when applied to examine evaluation practices and mandate. Because the practices and mandate are already existing in the vacuum of evaluation. Therefore, this specific analysis is an attempt to cognize the linkages between existing evaluation theory and practice. Vivid cognition in building trajectory between evaluation ideology and practice. Leads to recognize the scope of evaluation that ultimately contributes to sophisticated evaluation practices. The journey of this analysis embarks with fundamental questions, why the OECD/DAC criteria are being used for evaluations in the development sector, and considered useful? What are the logical links among

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evaluation mandate, evaluation approach, evaluation frame "OECD/DAC criteria", and evaluation methods?

Keywords: abductive study, realistic evaluation, evaluation framework, evaluation methods

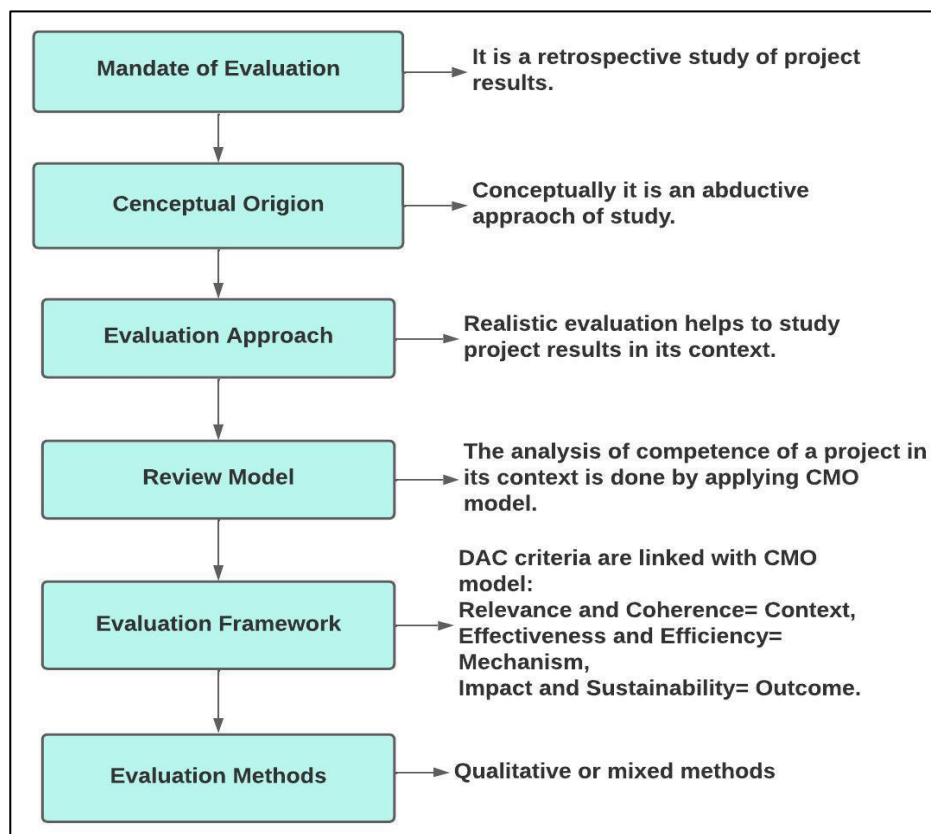
1. Introduction

Modern evaluations in the development sector widely follow OECD/DAC criteria to review the project contributions. OECD stands for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and DAC stands for Development Assistance Committee. Evaluation criteria are commonly cited as OECD or DAC evaluation criteria. That contains six aspects of review, relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. At the outset, five criteria evolved with the field experience and now there are six criteria (OECD, 2021). These are criteria for evaluation that help in practice or conducting evaluation studies. These are not methods or approaches of evaluation. This is stated under purpose on page 18 of the guidelines published by OECD in 2021 that evaluation criteria are not methodology. These criteria are a framework to be used for evaluation. That framework helps in designing evaluation tools and questions to put in the tools. If the DAC evaluation criteria are not the methods, then what are the methods and approach of evaluation? Do these DAC evaluation criteria have some closeness with certain evaluation approaches? Do these criteria share some conceptual grounds with the mandate and approach of evaluation? If yes, through which approach and how? Evaluation practitioners hardly define the approach of evaluation under which these criteria could be grounded. Evaluation methodology chapters are often full of the mixed methods of data collection and sampling approaches used for evaluation. Methodology chapters end with providing OECD/DAC evaluation framework. Therefore, readers of evaluation methodology could hardly cognize a trajectory of starting from evaluation mandate, approach, and ending at evaluation criteria and methods. Provided methods of data collection and analysis, sampling, and OECD/DAC evaluation criteria could not answer what was the evaluation approach and why.

OECD/DAC evaluation criteria or framework often supports qualitative or mixed methods of study. The questions asked against six criteria are mainly qualitative. These are asked of project stakeholders including implementing partners, donors, government departments, and beneficiaries. Frequently used data collection methods are desk reviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. These are qualitative methods and tools for data collection. However, quantitative methods can also be used particularly against effectiveness criterion. To quantify the outcome level results of a project. That quantitative tool could be surveying beneficiaries. Therefore, qualitative, or mixed methods of study could be used against OECD/DAC evaluation framework. The criteria given by OECD/DAC are technically termed as 'evaluation framework' rather than methods or approaches. Defining the evaluation

approach is important to understand if the study is getting to the mandate of evaluation. Hence, evaluation is not research but it's a type of study and that type of study has its philosophical scope or mandate that distinguishes it from social research. If the approach is not obvious and the mandate is not hit vividly, it would be hard to categorize the study as an evaluation. However, the application of OECD/DAC evaluation criteria is serving the purposes of abductive review and solving problems. Therefore, these criteria must have links with the evaluation approach and philosophy or mandate. The discussion given examines these conceptual linkages among evaluation mandate, approach, criteria, and methods. It is important to build a complete trajectory commencing from the philosophy or scope of evaluation and ending at the evaluation approach and methods. That are closest to the OECD/DAC evaluation framework. Figure 1 below depicts the chronological order of mind map or thinking used under evaluation studies conducted against the OECD/DAC evaluation framework. This model is developed based on how an evaluation study appears when it is conducted against the OECD/DAC evaluation framework.

Figure 1: Chronological Mind Map

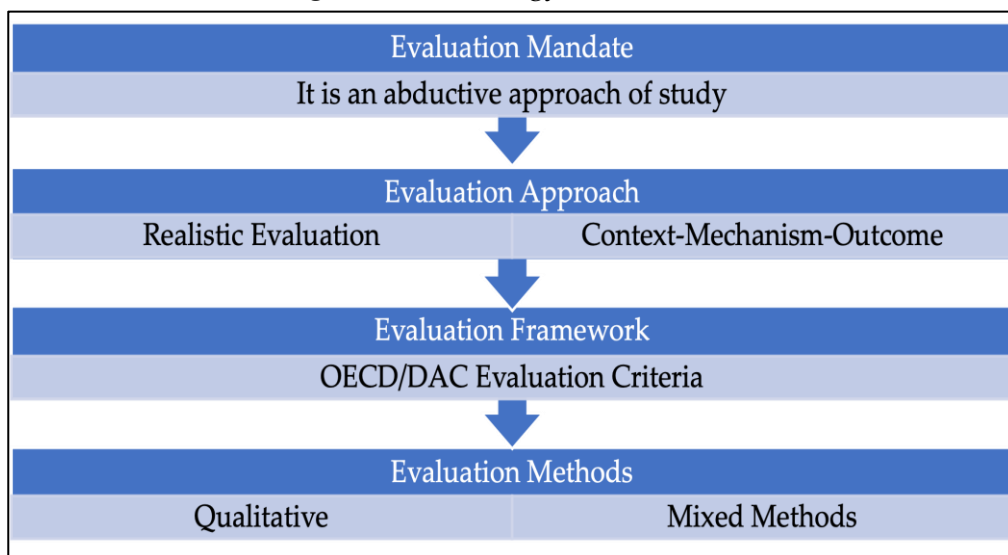


2. Discussion

The word evaluation is taken from of French word 'Evaluer'. That means merit/value or to draw out value. To understand it easily, the appropriate meaning of evaluation in the

context of development projects is 'to draw value' (Barry, 1990). Despite evaluations utilize research tools to measure the project results. These are different from research because monitoring and evaluation studies focus on project theory, project contexts, and achieved results. Social research has a wider focus on social theories and complex social behavior. However, the focus of the evaluation is limited to the level of the small logical world of a project. The recommendations established on monitoring and evaluation findings are used to solve project problems. Evaluation is an abductive approach to study its scope is to solve daily life problems of projects (Rozalis,2003). Considering the abductive nature of evaluation, we observe how the evaluation methods are designed to achieve that goal. To achieve the goal of solving project problems, evaluations focus on project approaches, their context, and results achieved. Evaluation is a study of the competence of a project theory in its context to achieve results. The closest approach to this mandate of evaluation is the realistic evaluation approach. Realistic evaluation aims to study the results of a project in its context. It is the analysis of the context, mechanism, and outcome (C-M-O) model (Pawson and Tilly, 1997). This realistic evaluation approach is further evolved to be used in the fields. The practical aspect of realistic evaluation is the widely used OECD/DAC evaluation framework. The OECD/DAC framework is associated with the CMO model of analysis or review given under the realistic evaluation approach. Below given conceptual tree depicts the journey of evaluation from theory to practice.

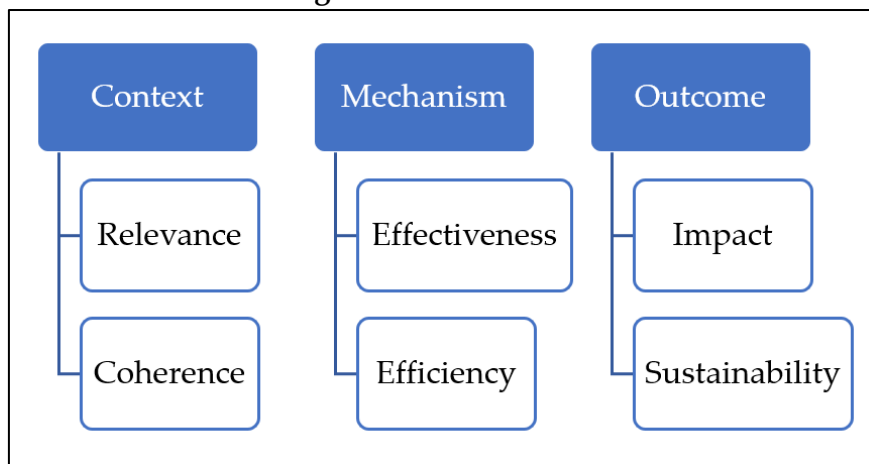
Figure 2: Chronology of Process



The OECD/DAC evaluation framework has six criteria, relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. These six criteria are logically linked with the CMO model given in the realistic evaluation approach. Below given review model depicts the relation between DAC evaluation criteria and the CMO model. The set of two criteria could be seen under each aspect of the CMO model. Therefore, these two criteria support each other in examining the ultimate concept of the CMO model. For

example, relevance and coherence support each other to examine the context of a project. Effectiveness and efficiency support each other to examine the operation or project. Effectiveness is the study of results and efficiency is the study of support provided under operation to achieve the results. Therefore, if the effectiveness is good that means efficiency could also be good. Similarly study of impact and sustainability together helps examining the outcome and these criteria support each other. The set of two criteria under each component of the CMO model. The utilization and measurement of all these six criteria will help to complete the CMO review model of realistic evaluation.

Figure 3: Review Model



3. Conclusion

Established on the above analytical discussion it could be concluded that the OECD/DAC evaluation framework helps in utilizing the CMO model for project review. The CMO model of results review is theoretically grounded in the realistic evaluation approach. The realistic evaluation approach is the closest approach to the abductive mandate of evaluation. Therefore, the use of the OECD/DAC evaluation framework is putting evaluation philosophy into practice. The complete trajectory of evaluations conducted against the OECD/DAC framework could be, a realistic evaluation approach, CMO model for review, OECD/DAC evaluation framework, and evaluation methods (qualitative or mixed methods).

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest, it is author's original work.

About the Author(s)

Author is working as an independent consultant in the field of evaluation.

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