

Indicator One

Country Ownership and Results

Development co-operation is focused on results that meet developing countries' priorities

Draft Assessment and Proposals

1. Introduction

Track Three of the MAG's work plan is to provide advice on the continued relevance and usefulness of the GPEDC monitoring framework to the GPEDC Co-Chairs and Steering Committee. The MAG initiated this review process at its February 2016 meeting.

In doing so, three working groups examined the ten indicators in three clusters – ownership and results, inclusiveness, and transparency and accountability. At its February meeting, MAG members contributed perspectives on the continued relevance of the indicator (in light of the SDGs and Agenda 2030), the effectiveness and efficiency of the methodology at a practical level in gathering data, and the usefulness of the indicator for GPEDC stakeholders. The draft assessment and proposals for each indicator is the result of this work. The MAG is also examining issues affecting the structure of the monitoring framework as a whole.

These documents are posted on the [MAG's Teamworks web site](#) for review and comments. Our advice will be finalized at the MAG's next meeting, June 4-6, in Paris.

Comments and suggestions are very welcome from GPEDC stakeholders. Comments can be provided on the site, or submitted to the MAG Chairperson, Brian Tomlinson (brian.t.tomlinson@gmail.com).

2. Overview

The purpose of indicator one is to provide objective information on the extent to which, and the ways in which, existing country-led and country-level results frameworks are used by providers as a guiding tool to focus development co-operation on results that meet developing countries' priorities.

This is a new indicator. The proposed methodology was developed against the lessons learnt from piloting a previous approach in eight countries during the Global Partnership's 2013-14 monitoring round, and through follow-up consultation rounds with groups of experts on results framework and development planning in developing countries and providers of development co-operation. The detailed methodology for this indicator can be found in the [Monitoring](#)

[Guide](#). The focus is on the number of projects (over \$1 million) in 2015 where the provider's objectives are found in sectoral or country results frameworks.

While the indicator focuses on mapping out providers' behaviour in different countries and sectors, the data collection is complemented with an additional module that provides a descriptive self-assessment on the existence and characteristics of existing CRFs in the country (or alternative country-specific priority-setting mechanisms). This qualitative information is an important addition that can contextualize the country-level findings on the use of country results frameworks. This module should provide a complete snapshot of the situation at the country level and help inform policy discussions on how to strengthen collaboration between the country's priority-setting institutions and providers of development co-operation.

Relevance This indicator focuses on the Paris Declaration, Accra and Busan key commitments on principles on country ownership. The Busan commitment §18.b states,

“where initiated by the developing country, transparent, country-led and country-level results frameworks would be adopted as a common tool among all concerned actors to assess performance based on a manageable number of output and outcome indicators drawn from the development priorities and goals of the developing country. Providers of development co-operation also agree to minimise the use of additional frameworks, refraining from requesting the introduction of performance indicators that were not consistent with countries' national development strategies”.

The first Busan principle for effective development cooperation is about ownership of development priorities by developing countries: “Partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs.” An indicator focusing on ownership and results is therefore highly relevant.

The MAG acknowledges improvements in the indicator to ensure its greater relevance, following its advice in June 2015. The MAG welcomes for example the focus on use of country monitoring systems and national statistical services. These questions improve relevance in relation to the ownership of aid, but it also promotes good development cooperation practices through an additional incentive to have internal monitoring systems.

A second addition is even more important – a focus on planned ex post evaluations supported by the government. The question improves the assessment of the degree of commitment on results, since it incentivises providers to engage governments in joint evaluations and governments themselves to evaluate development co-operation interventions. This question links monitoring to results in an important way, because it commits recipient governments, both to evaluation and to work for results.

Efficiency While the principle of democratic ownership is linked to modern theories of development, measuring it is not easy. Ideally, for every development co-operation project it is

important to understand how exactly the recipient country and all its stakeholders decided, designed and implemented the project, according to country goals. This goal would imply recording almost every dialogue between the country's stakeholders and the providers, to make sure that the leading voice comes from the recipient country.

Such a comprehensive approach is not possible, and it is essential therefore to rely on indirect methods, such as using country-led results frameworks as a reference point. As it is very difficult to measure precisely if development co-operation is really led by recipient countries, any indicator will not be fully efficient. On the other hand, it is critical to have some indicators that at least indirectly can help assess the degree of country ownership and progress on the commitments made in Busan in this regard. But a potential additional source of inefficiency is the fact that there might be more than one official document demonstrating the country's priorities (national development plans, sectorial programs, log models, etc).

The process of linking development cooperation resources to country priorities may be relatively easy (i.e. efficient) in that almost all development co-operation projects can usually be linked to one of these priorities. But then the indicator will likely miss important catalytic, capacity-related and intermediate interventions that affect country ownership, and would therefore make an indicator solely related to a CRF inefficient in capturing relevant data. To capture these important dimensions of intermediate interventions in national plans, on the other hand, is unrealistic, as it would make such plans voluminosely bulky.

Usefulness Considering the above concerns about the efficiency of this indicator, it leads to the conclusion that the indicator may therefore not be very useful. It can be seen that in many countries, most program/project managers find ways to formally link their programs/projects to national priorities, no matter how far they really are from true government priorities.

Furthermore, if in the first place providing countries tend to also be at the table when countries establish national and sector plans and strategies, in the name of inclusiveness, providers claiming alignment would be aligning to what they may have already 'inserted' into the plans, in view of the state of play of power relations, confounding the idea as to who truly owns the plans.

However, complementary questions for a qualitative self-assessment of the priorities' plan in recipient countries, has a lot of potential in clarifying the country context for CRFs, which can be used in strengthening future iterations of indicator one.

3. Key Issues and Challenges

a) Issues in focusing on country results frameworks The use of country-led results frameworks (CRFs) assumes that every country has a set of decision making mechanisms, translated to formal and clear documents, and decided democratically, including the points

of view of the majority in the country. However, as those who have been involved in constructing CRFs can witness, they are seldom fully transparent or as clear as they should be.

In practice there are various problems with CRF mechanisms: In most cases, civil society and the private sector participate (if they do at all) on the side in the development and assessment of these frameworks. The main results goals are subject to constant changes over time, but often the main documents do not change. The goals may not have (proper) indicators. Not all countries have the same degree of institutionalisation of their planning procedures and certainly the quality of indicators linked to priorities is still low, even in middle-income developing countries.

The MAG points out that in fact government's development priorities may be articulated through alternative mechanisms - policy and legislation, for example. Indeed, if a country's CRF is to have real world relevance then its intent will need to be reflected in legislation and regulation and grounded in legitimate inclusive political processes. The JST took MAG advise into account (June 2015) in that the focus can be on "(various) government-led results frameworks, plans and strategies", which implies that there is not likely to be only one document summarizing the government view.

- b) Potential lack of focus on providers' actual practices** While the current methodology took on board MAG's preliminary advice for this indicator and makes it possible to focus on one or more priority-setting mechanism (and not only a specific CRF), this approach of assessing these mechanisms may still allow providers to avoid the question of ownership. They can do so with an easy excuse of "Let us first see whether CRFs/government plans are in place and have quality; if not, we are not required to follow them or need to adjust them in our project to meet our own objectives." As a result, instead of the methodology assessing providers directly on their behaviour, it instead may perpetuate the historical and inappropriate practice of providers and, by extension the GPEDC itself, monitoring and assessing only the practices/quality of plans for developing countries.
- c) Access to verifiable information on ownership and results** While most of information regarding ownership and focus on country results must come from governments, it is also true that government may not keep most of this information in a systematic way. This situation is especially likely in the case of middle income countries with relatively low percentage of their budget relying on aid (in comparison with low income countries). The implication may result in a degree of scepticism about data for this indicator, which is compounded by the additional fact that the monitoring exercise is only voluntary.
- d) Weak capacities to respond to evaluation findings** The indicator focuses some attention quite rightly on evaluation. However, particularly low income and least developing countries, with weaker institutions, are often challenged in that they do not have adequate uptake mechanisms for the results of any evaluations of interventions undertaken. This situation can result in redundant findings. As such criteria for replication or correctional

measures for future interventions is not 'owned' by the country for lack of a depository with retrievable capabilities for appropriate decision making. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that would for example allow auditor generals to pick up these issues and get parliaments to challenge implementation may be a proxy means of gauging uptake of findings.

- e) Attribution issue for some projects** The focus at the sector level (i.e. education or health) and on aid transactions above \$1 million may make it easier to identify relevant country results frameworks. It may be easier to link larger projects to national goals and priorities under this mechanism. But a nuance should be made on the implication that all aid projects should use the same country performance indicators. In the case of very large projects, where their contribution could be traced from input to impact, it should be easier to link a theory of change related to their intervention to the indicators' framework of the national programmes. However, some development cooperation flows and projects are meant to have only intermediate results or work as catalysers, where attribute to a country results framework is an issue.

These issues and challenges, while significant, do not imply that indicator one should be abandoned. Rather the MAG is suggesting that additional effort is required to explore further creative ways to measure a crucial element for development: recipient countries' stakeholders should lead their own development process.

4. Steps Forward

The MAG is well aware that it is exceptionally difficult to effectively measure the degree to which development co-operation is based on the recipient country priorities. At the moment, weaknesses remain in the current methodology.

While its advice on indicator one is partly reflected in this methodology, the MAG suggests taking account proposals it made in June 2015 for ways to further improve this indicator. The MAG believes they may be still relevant alongside additional proposals.

- a) Implement further conceptual work on links between development cooperation and country development priorities and democratic ownership** The MAG agrees that having Country Results Frameworks in place, including sector frameworks, offers a number of benefits to both developing and providing countries (clarity of priorities, efficiency in coordination and alignment). But it also comes with the above limitations. The MAG suggests that what needs to be unpacked is not whether CRFs are in place (either one or multiple documents), but what it means, in the context of the Busan commitment to promote "democratic country ownership," for development cooperation to be focused on "results that meet developing countries' priorities." In this consideration, some further conceptual work is required on Indicator One.

b) Establish a baseline and promote dialogue to enhance learning on the use of CRFs The MAG suggests that the monitoring framework be used to establish a baseline. Does the country know where it wants to go? Do they have CRF(s) in place? Are they using some other mechanism to determine their priorities? In this regard, the framework should also promote policy dialogue and learning. The initial aim of monitoring in this essential area to make progress might be to undertake descriptive monitoring to enhance our understanding and clarify issues, not in the first instance an evaluative assessment for accountability purposes.

Whilst gauging the existence of a results framework is important, it is also essential to understand the degree to which, and the ways in which, all actors in the country concerned have developed and subsequently use the framework. Having a framework is not the same as making use of what this framework seeks to achieve. The key question is the utility of outputs from the use of the CRF (or alternative priority setting mechanism) by both the developing country actors and the country's providers.

It is important to assess not only the link to national and sectorial priorities for development co-operation, but it also would be important to learn how better to analyse how exactly projects are being implemented as a function of country ownership. How is the recipient country involved with operations?

c) Improve the attention to issues of inclusion in processes related to CRFs Given the seeming importance of these processes for shaping a country's priorities, in the context of the Busan commitment to democratic country ownership, the MAG suggests that a question, now a guiding question on involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in defining priorities, be made a mandatory question (i.e. bold). The MAG also notes that it may be possible to draw an analytical correlation with the outcomes of indicator 2 (CSO enabling environment module of CSO-government policy dialogue), indicator 3 (on public private sector dialogue), and indicator 7 (on mutual accountability) in relation to quality of the process in developing a CRF in a given sector.

d) Develop a more balanced approach by focusing questions on provider behaviour change The methodology should consider an additional module that addresses questions to providers:

- On the process for determining providers' country assistance strategies and the degree of alignment with relevant country results frameworks;
- On the degree to which providers are using modalities such as budget support and sector wide approaches (previously a Paris Declaration indicator #9); and
- On the degree to which providers coordinate missions and undertake joint country situation analyses with developing country counterparts (formerly Paris Declaration Indicator 10).

For some MAG members, it was also important to include the number of parallel donor project implementation units (Paris Declaration indicator 6) as a measure of aid dispersion and fragmentation. However, this was not a consensus. For other MAG members, having some PIUs can be useful and necessary in some resource-constrained countries.

- e) **The relative proportion of country ODA covered by the indicator** Compare Consideration should be given to a comparative analysis on the proportion of ODA reported in this indicator compared to the total amount of country ODA.
- f) **Expand the consideration of relevant evaluations** The MAG suggest that the current emphasis on evaluations be expanded to include not only the evaluations financed by recipient countries, but also those evaluations financed by external agents. In general, external evaluations have the advantage of being independent. When in these evaluations there is a participation of local researchers, the evaluation itself is a source of local capacity building.
- g) **Look at the institutionalization of country-driven evaluations** While welcoming the increased focus on actual evaluations in place, the MAG suggests that the recipient country's commitment to results should include an assessment about whether there is in place a systematic country-driven means for evaluation local programs and projects. It is important that providers not only drive impact evaluations, but that also they are institutionalised in the recipient country. Do recipient countries have a systematic way of evaluating its own projects? If this the latter is the case, evaluating development co-operation projects would be easier and would also mean good practices in terms of accountability and learning in public policy. This suggestion complements the one the MAG proposes for indicator 9.

The MAG will want to examine more closely the experience of the second monitoring round with respect to all the pilot indicators, including indicator one. With respect to the latter it may be important to undertake a qualitative analysis of perhaps 10 countries and providers, for which we can have more in depth findings about the issues and challenges for this indicator, and whether the data reported is really linked to the reality of government's priorities.

Several MAG members pointed to potential other sources of data. The Centre for Global Development, for example, brings together data on donor performance, some of which includes some measures for those mentioned in (d) above. This data is available in its QuODA dataset, accessible at www.cgdev.org/page/quality-oda-quoda.