



Management Response

Position of the Management

Meta-Evaluation of ADA Project and Programme Evaluations

1. Purpose, approach and key findings

In its effort to combat poverty, ensure peace and preserve the environment, the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) is funding more than 600 projects and programmes globally that are implemented by partner organisations in key regions and priority countries. In 2018, ADA commissioned the first meta-evaluation of its project and programme (PP) evaluations to assess their quality and usefulness, and to make recommendations for PP evaluations to further contribute to effectively enhancing ADA's performance.

The meta-evaluation followed a participatory approach and combined inductive and deductive elements as well as a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. It assessed a randomly selected sample of 50 ADA PP evaluations completed between January 2016 and June 2018. The evaluations' Terms of Reference (ToR) and reports were analysed along four dimensions: (1) accuracy, (2) evaluation feasibility and process quality, (3) fairness and (4) usefulness and use. In addition to the document analysis, primary data was collected from ADA staff and ADA's partner organizations' staff by means of two semi-standardised surveys and two focus group discussions.

The meta-evaluation found that the quality, usefulness and use of ADA PP evaluations was overall satisfactory, but that there was room for improvement. Weaknesses were particularly found in relation to solid and realistic ToRs, a sound evaluation design and solid data collection and analysis, the adequate presentation and interpretation of evaluation results and the validity and usefulness of recommendations. The meta-evaluation also found that there is a strong focus of ADA staff on using evaluations as learning tools and a desire to use them more strategically rather than routinely, at least once during the project or programme cycle as per ADA PP Evaluation Guidelines (2009).

2. General response to evaluation

The management welcomes the conduct of the first meta-evaluation of ADA project and programme evaluations with the aim of enhancing the quality and usefulness of ADA project and programme evaluations and ultimately ADA's performance. It further welcomes the participatory approach chosen for this meta-evaluation, including ADA staff and partner organisations, as this will help to enhance learning and the likelihood for evaluation results to be used. The evaluation design and methods are found to be solid, data collection and analysis transparent and findings comprehensible. The ADA management welcomes that the evaluation issued a manageable number of eight recommendations, while noting that the recommendations themselves could have been formulated more concisely and clearly.

ADA's management concurs with the findings and commits itself to a fully-fledged management response ensuring adequate and timely follow-up of the recommendations. This is a welcome and timely opportunity for ADA to thoroughly review its evaluation system, processes, guidance and available resources for its project and programme evaluations. The management response process is participatory, including all relevant organisational units and coordinated by the ADA Evaluation Unit. The process of revising ADA's key reference document for project and program evaluations, the ADA PP Evaluations Guidelines, adopted in 2009, has already started building on the findings provided by the meta-evaluation.

Finally, the management considers the findings as a baseline for continuous improvement in the quality and use of ADA's PP evaluations. This is in line with the standards set by the Evaluation Policy ADC Plus adopted in August 2019, which notes that the quality of PP evaluations should be regularly assessed via meta-evaluations, to allow for continuing, qualitative improvement.

3. Response to each recommendation

Recommendation 1: Share the results of this meta-evaluation and invite feedback from various stakeholder groups (esp. ADA project and partner staff); in particular, try to find out the reasons for the somewhat differing perspectives especially in relation to the usefulness and use of evaluations; take this discussion as a starting point to learn more about the various stakeholders' expectations regarding evaluations and in order to improve on the more specific recommendations outlined below.

Response: The management ~~accepts~~**partially accepts**/~~rejects~~ the recommendation.

Rationale: Management agrees that the results of the meta-evaluation are disseminated and discussed within ADA (HQ and Field Offices) and that an inquiry into how to enhance the utility and use of ADA Project and Program Evaluations takes place in the context of the revision of the Guidelines. Beyond that, management does not see, at this stage, the need for additional or separate analyses, inquiries or consultations to help clarify discrepancies and diverging perceptions with regards to the utility and use of project and programme evaluations pointed up by the meta-evaluation. The next meta-evaluation could look into this.

Recommendation 2: This meta-evaluation was the first meta-evaluation conducted on behalf of ADA. In order to systematically enhance the quality and usefulness of ADA project and programme evaluations, this tool should become a strategic element of the ADA evaluation portfolio.

Response: The management **accepts/partially accepts/rejects** the recommendation.

Rationale: Management recognises the role and contribution of meta-evaluations in assessing and further improving the quality and performance of evaluations. This is also articulated in the 2019 Evaluation Policy of the Austrian development cooperation which stipulates that “*Evaluation reports at project, programme and strategic levels should be regularly subjected to external quality assessments (e.g. via meta-evaluations) to identify shortcomings, point out room for improvement and enable the continuous advancement in the quality of evaluation reports*” (OEZA, 2019:11)

Recommendation 3: Revisit ADA evaluation guidelines, most importantly, the requirement to do an evaluation in case of each and every ADA funded evaluation should be seriously discussed with regard to both the restricted resources available for ADA evaluations and the questionable utility of obligatory evaluations.

Response: The management **accepts/partially accepts/rejects** the recommendation,

Rationale: Management considers the revision of the ADA Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations (2008) an important priority for 2019/2020 and agrees that the establishment of criteria and/or thresholds for conducting meaningful evaluations should be considered carefully as part thereof, particularly in view of oftentimes limited project/programme and evaluation budgets available.

Recommendation 4: When planning an evaluation, determine the available evaluation budget upfront. On that basis, assess whether and under what conditions an evaluation is realistically feasible in terms of financial resources, and what can be expected from it considering the available resources.

Response: The management **accepts/partially accepts/rejects** the recommendation,

Rationale: Management agrees that there needs to be a realistic balance between evaluation scope and evaluation budget, and that a proper scoping exercise needs to take place during the planning stage of an evaluation in order to match expectations and demands with available resources.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that adequate ToR are drafted, which include the clear determination of evaluation purpose, questions as well as a realistic scope that corresponds to all the former as well as to the available resources, i.e. time and financial budget.

Response: The management **accepts/partially accepts/rejects** the recommendation,

Rationale: Management agrees that adequate that adequate ToRs are a backbone of solid and useful evaluations and that more attention should be paid to this area. Management therefore suggests that all ToRs for P&P evaluations are approved by ADA at the level of the project/program managers. In addition, also ADA wide guidance and capacity building on ToRs will be strengthened.

Recommendation 6: Pay thorough attention to a proper inception phase of any planned evaluation in order to ensure that not only data collection but also evaluation design and data analysis rest upon a methodologically sound basis. Furthermore, make sure evaluation stakeholders (especially commissioners) are sufficiently informed about the aforementioned issues in order to enable a smooth implementation process.

Response: The management **accepts/partially accepts/rejects** the recommendation,

Rationale: Management agrees that a proper inception phase is the fundament of a methodologically sound and solid evaluation and acknowledges that this is an area where more attention is needed. It therefore suggests that in future special attention is paid to the role and adequacy of the inception phase, in particular in the ADA Guidelines on P&P evaluation as well as related capacity building.

Recommendation 7: Establish an organisation wide mechanism or a platform for institutional learning, that is, a mechanism to share and communicate evaluation results across and within ADA units.

Response: The management **accepts/partially accepts/rejects** the recommendation,

Rationale: Management agrees that an organisation wide platform for institutional learning would be beneficial. In October 2019, the ADA managing director decided to promote an ADA wide learning forum that will start functioning in January 2020 at latest. The management agrees that this forum is also used to share and communicate evaluation results within ADA and thus promote learning from evaluations.

Recommendation 8: Conduct a needs assessment on the level of ADA and partner staff, and on that basis design appropriate measures to enhance evaluation capacity.

Response: The management **accepts/partially accepts/rejects** the recommendation,

Rationale: Management considers the findings of the meta-evaluation to provide sufficient evidence as to where major capacity development needs are; an additional needs assessment in relation to required capacity development measures is therefor considered unnecessary. Targeted capacity development efforts to address identified gaps and enhance evaluation capacity among programme and project staff at ADA Headquarters and Field Offices as well as among selected implementing partners will be implemented over the coming years based on the revised ADA PP Evaluation Guidelines.