

Challenges for Spanish Development Cooperation: Towards an Endogenous Evaluation Model

Nils-Sjard Schulz

Independent Consultant

Evaluations have always represented a challenge to development aid, since they often take place in contexts adverse to profitability and efficiency, that is, where it is difficult to achieve clear results.

From the 1980s onwards, and coinciding with the appearance of fundamental criticism of the international aid system, agencies started to develop management models in order to demonstrate results. This accountability to the developed societies that finance aid through their taxes, constitutes the first pillar of evaluation.

The definition of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 clearly suggested the need to revise international aid, which often lacked tangible 'successes'. Several agencies are re-orienting their management activities towards specific and measurable results and impact. Nowadays, development cooperation still needs feedback from learning and reflection processes to improve its effects.

Evaluation practices are still new and fragmented in Spain, in spite of the country's 25-year experience in the field of development cooperation. Nevertheless, the extensive reform process promoted by the current Spanish government represents an almost unique opportunity - as well as an obligation - for evaluation. There are two main reasons for this. First, the considerable increase in funds requires a new management model that is oriented towards quality and learning, and at the same time, accountable to the Spanish society regarding the use of solidarity financed with 0.5% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Second, Spanish development cooperation must respond to the new strategic alignments at both the national level (Master Plan, Country Strategy Papers and Sectoral Strategy) and the multilateral level (Millennium Declaration, Paris Declaration, European Consensus on Development), which impose non-conventional criteria and are not yet fully followed in the proceedings of the different institutions.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse some of the challenges faced by Spanish evaluation culture in a constructive manner. It provides potential solutions to each challenge proposing models adapted to the current Spanish development cooperation and consistent with the Paris Declaration.

Challenge 1: Decision-making process for allocating funds: Defining the quality of aid

In Spain, the variety of financing bodies and the organic dependence of agencies, specially the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), are clear limitations to independent decision-making processes for allocating funds. However, as indicated by the Association of Professionals for the Quality of Development Cooperation (ACADE) in its presentation, one of the main challenges for ensuring quality resides in the fact that it is virtually impossible to carry out a results-based intervention or an adequate review of achievements without a coherent planning adjusted to the needs and demands of the target groups and institutions. The absence of an operational base line, a prior fragmented analysis, the non-involvement of recipients in the planning or the prominence of a 'hidden agenda', not directly related to the fight against poverty, are serious obstacles to evaluations oriented towards learning and reflection.

Development cooperation is usually financed by sources which are not involved in the execution of interventions (general budget of the state and of the Autonomous Communities, annual budgets of private donors and social work, among others). Therefore, a special commitment is required to ensure quality and transparency in the decision-making process. Furthermore, in light of higher budget assignments,¹ it is desirable to define more profoundly good financing practices, particularly by public donors, so as to encourage interventions that meet basic common quality criteria.

Challenge 2: Design models and the complexity of human development

Nowadays, as pointed out by FRIDE's backgrounder, the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) represents one planning instrument among other methodologies. In fact, within the context of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), there is an ever-growing focus on results and objectives, which also implies greater flexibility at the level of the so-called supplies (in the language of the logical framework, budget and activities and, to a certain extent, outcomes). Thus, the German GTZ, promoter of the ZOPP,² has already parted away from the LFA as an exclusive option to give priority to a more agile results-based management framework.³ less importance is given to services foreseen, that is, forecasts focus on outcomes and indicators. This provides more flexibility when responding to risks and opportunities during project execution. Similar re-

¹ Allocating 0.5% of the GDP to international solidarity is an electoral promise that the PSOE government seems to be able to reach in 2008. From 2004, Spain has remarkably increased the funds for development cooperation. In 2006, the [General Administration of the State allocated some 2,423 million Euros](#) to Official Development Assistance (ODA). This means a 22% increase compared to the 1,984 million Euros from the General Budget of the State for 2004. A quantitative rise in the development cooperation of the Autonomous Communities is also observed, positively influencing the increase of funds. As an example, the [Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation increased its funds by 230 percent between 2004 y 2006](#) and the [Autonomous Community of Madrid boosted its international assistance funds fourfold between 2002 y 2006](#), reaching 44 million Euros and 30.2 million Euros, respectively.

² 'Planning of objectives-oriented projects' (*Zielorientierte Projektplanung*); it is the equivalent of the LFA in Spain. This model sets forth a participative identification and design process within a broader results-management cycle. CIDEAL has published in Spain a key manual in this sense: 'El ciclo del proyecto de cooperación al desarrollo - La aplicación del marco lógico', first edition, 1999.

³ The [Framework for managing contracts and development cooperation policies](#). (AURA) focuses on the effect of interventions (outcome), introduces a more agile design and notably increases flexibility in execution (budget, activities and results).

orientations are observed in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Canadian, US and Swedish agencies.⁴

Given the volatile conditions under which human development is promoted, it seems advisable to count with a planning model adjustable to multiple potential changes. This is particularly interesting in the case of medium- and long-term programmes and strategies. In Spain, the strict application of the LFA to all sorts of interventions still hinders efforts to achieve intended objectives and impact, and instead, insists, for instance, on an exaggerated level of breakdown regarding activities and budget forecasts, assuming lineal logics that sometimes are not very realistic.

This does not place Spanish actors outside the European consensus,⁵ but it does seem appropriate not to ignore the importance of the planning methodology and to find options beyond the LFA or, at least, to favour its flexibilisation. Aside from the long-awaited technical debate within the sector regarding the different options⁶ available and given their influence on the working processes of Spanish development NGOs, donors should be willing to redefine their funding offers, directing it towards desired objectives and impact, and adequately lead demand towards methodologies that are more coherent with the realities of intervention areas.

Challenge 3: Continuous evaluations

Although evaluations have a place in the Spanish solidarity culture, they are still carried out only in very specific situations. In line with the statements of Rubén Cano, evaluations should be a continuous commitment with learning, reflection, justification and appropriate decision-making. The current non-continuous nature of evaluations (either intermediate, final or ex post) may blur the lessons learned during the execution process, which could provide useful feedback for future interventions. In addition, non-continuous evaluations (either external or internal) often serve only to confirm initial planning mistakes, as well as diversions or needs that may not have been considered, without providing specific solutions, that is, solutions directly executable by the actor responsible for the implementation.

⁴ The UNDP introduced in 1999 the 'culture of performance' and a chain of results through monitoring and evaluating effects. For more details, see [Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluating for Results](#) (2002) and [Guidelines for Outcome Evaluators](#) (2002). In the case of the Canadian agency, see 'Framework of Results and Key Success' in [CIDA Evaluation Guide](#) (2004). CIDA does not waive the LFA completely, but tries to re-focus its tools towards the management of results. See [The Logical Framework: Making it Results-Oriented](#) (2002). One of the main references for changes in the USAID may be found in [Results-Oriented Assistance: A USAID Sourcebook](#) (2002). This document proposes to contemplate contributions from other actors in the achievement of results, as well as continuous evaluation and learning. On the other hand, the Swedish approach focuses on the management of contributions and therefore considerably detaches itself from the strictures of the logical framework, only keeping its evaluation criteria; see [Sida at Work – A manual on Contribution Management](#) (2005). For a broader opinion, see the handbook of [good practices recently identified for managing development results](#) (2006) of the OECD, particularly from page 145 onwards. This large document, promoted by the BID, the World Bank, NORAD, CIDA and the Danish government also offers 20 examples of results-management at a country level, including projects and sectoral programmes.

⁵ In fact, the European Commission applies the LFA in an orthodox way in most of its funding lines for development cooperation. This means a consensus of minimum requirements on methodologies for development assistance among European actors.

⁶ Proposed by the Canadian International Development Research Centre, the outcome mapping methodology represents one of the most largely discussed tools to renovate planning processes for development assistance. This approach may even complement the LFA, by introducing a greater concern for processes and people, that is, changes at the level of relationships, attitudes and actions of the actors directly involved in an intervention.

It seems obvious that local execution teams should have a profound knowledge of the realities of the field they work in. In order for them to be able to not only value advancement, but also to propose and implement solutions to existing obstacles, it is necessary to set-up a monitoring and evaluation system reinforced 'from the bottom' that may alert and rapidly respond to potential challenges. A much closer control is undoubtedly required, as well as a more flexible control regarding compliance with objectives and the operational ability of the initial technical approach. A more agile planning and execution methodology (especially with regards to supplies and outcomes) may be a much more efficient solution to the multiple problems observed in interventions in developing countries.

Challenge 4: Operational shortcomings and implications for monitoring and evaluation tasks

The focus of current management models on supplies (activities, budgets, amongst others) usually fails to provide adequate room for the preparation and definition of operational objectives and indicators, both quantitative and qualitative. Therefore, the intermediate, final or ex post monitoring and evaluation tasks sometimes lack the appropriate analytical references, putting at risk the coherence of evaluation, learning and accountability exercises.

Given the considerable number of interventions showing a 'grey' planning, that is, with little relevance to monitoring and evaluation, it would be advisable that donors establish batteries of basic indicators for each line of action, sectoral strategy and geographic area.⁷ This pragmatic response would enable a better alignment of the work of each evaluation team on its own (sometimes, in collaboration with Southern and/or Northern entities) when planning deficiencies are observed. The process related to an ex ante evaluation focused on opportunities and context could be useful to identify the relevant base lines and indicators, paying special attention to multilateral strategic alignments and the national development strategies of recipient countries.

Challenge 5: Leadership in the definition of objectives and strategies

In the past years, planning participative processes have been promoted by both the General Administration of the State⁸ and the Autonomous Communities.⁹ These have sought to break the philosophy of the previous legislature, marked by some 'administrative autism' in relation to development NGOs.¹⁰ Despite the positive changes, it should be noted that planning should be promoted from the donor as an official body with enough legitimate power to define its own forecasts. This does not exclude the fact that strategic planning benefits from the broad experience existing in the sector. Currently, the Master and General Plans tend to reflect the entire array of sectoral and geographic preferences of a large number of actors of Spanish development cooperation; most of them lack enough democratic institutional support. This form of 'participative culture' results in a strong overload of action

⁷ In the case of the AECl, the [Country Strategy Papers](#) may be regarded as a favorable framework to set up this type of indicators in coherence with national development plans.

⁸ [Spanish Master for Development Cooperation 2005-2008](#)

⁹ By way of example, see [Master Plan for Development Cooperation 2003-2006 of the Catalan Government](#), [General Plan for Development Cooperation of the Autonomous Community of Madrid 2005-2008](#) and [Master Plan for Cooperation 2004-2007 of the Autonomous Community of Valencia](#)

¹⁰ For a general view of the Spanish development cooperation during the previous legislature, see the [Statement for Dialogue and Participation](#) (2002) of the Confederation of Development NGOs in Spain (CONGDE). It is one of the few press releases of CONGDE that [has been translated into English](#).

lines badly disguised as goals or aims. At times, planning does not even count with enough resources to reach all sectors. In many cases, the analysis and identification of needs are superficial, fail to evidence the active involvement of Southern actors and institutions, and are scarcely aligned with national development plans.

Although well oriented towards the fight against poverty as its main goal,¹¹ the strategic planning of the Spanish public donors suffers from a clear excess of action lines. In order to focus goals more clearly, a better leadership is required, which does not need to take into consideration all the demands and capacities of development NGOs. However, ex ante analyses concerning the different sectors and countries do have to be promoted more emphatically, trying to involve Southern agents more actively under the form of participative processes.

Challenge 6: The involvement of the South as a sine qua non of results-based evaluation

The involvement of target groups, on which several planning and evaluation methodologies are based, at least in theory, is one of the biggest challenges of a results-based management. Surpassing their role as mere recipients of aid implies considerable efforts, especially because technical tools are not aseptic from the cultural point of view and may even become an obstacle to communication and learning.¹² Therefore, a rigorous, but non-participative application of the LFA (or any other methodology)¹³ may hinder the involvement of the institutions and individuals recipients of aid.

The question is how aid recipients may have a stronger voice in terms of planning and how to encourage their involvement in evaluations, in reflections on good practices and in the decision-making process concerning ongoing interventions. Once again, a feasible option could be to strengthen the follow-up and evaluation system 'from the bottom', listening to the opinions of Southern actors on the management model for the new Spanish development cooperation.

Challenge 7: Need for a methodological revision and adaptation of management models and coherence with the Paris Declaration

The budget increase and the renewed strategic planning require a serious investment in the management of development cooperation quality. There is an opportunity to define the new 'rules of the game' within enhanced technical capacities. Wasting such opportunities could cause serious setbacks in the Spanish development cooperation system and the widespread support received from society. So far, advances in the evaluation culture of the AECI have been discreet. Apart from a modernised rhetoric, only a dozen external evaluations have been

¹¹ A notable exception of this positive evaluation is the [Plan Africa 2005-2008](#) of the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC). It includes aspects not directly relevant to the fight against poverty, such as, without limitation, the fight against illegal immigration, the promotion of Spanish investments and the promotion of the Spanish language.

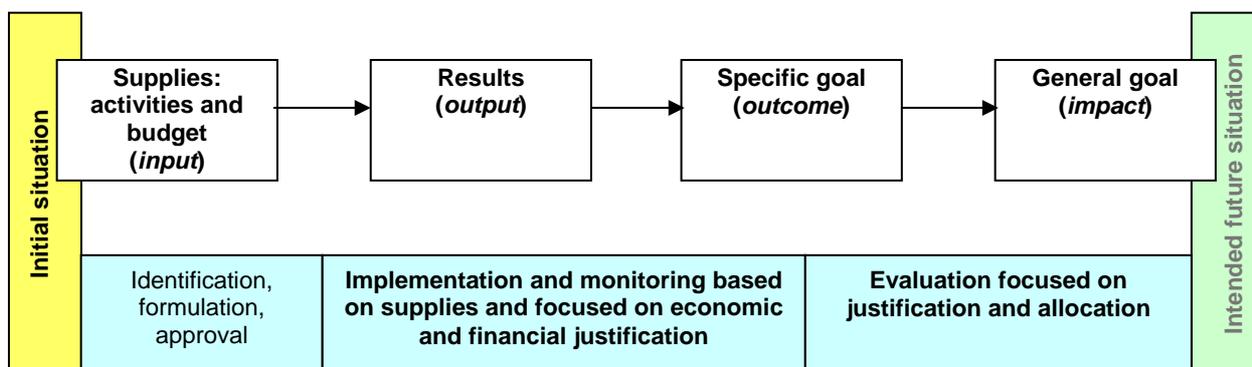
¹² There is a compacted summary of the cultural obstacles in the SIDA report [The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach](#) (2005). Its annex contains a valuable bibliography on the cultural feasibility of the LFA in non-European contexts; see particularly, Lisa Bornstein, [Management standards and development practice in the South African aid chain](#), 2003, and Ken Harley, [Learning from logframes: reflections on three educational development projects in East and Southern Africa](#), 2005.

¹³ For instance, outcomes mapping is an extraordinarily complex methodology that requires a strong continuous investment in the management of information, which is often very difficult to achieve in developing countries. It is also based on social change assumptions at the level of relationships and attitudes that may be inconsistent with the cultural context in which interventions take place.

published, some three strategic evaluations have been promoted and the Spanish State Secretariat for International Cooperation (SECI) has been timidly reinforced through the new General Directorate for the Planning and Evaluation of Development Policies (DGPOLDE). This does not yet reflect the quality, flexibility and debate of a Spanish endogenous model, beyond the 'justification corset'.¹⁴ Since the publication of the its evaluation methodology in 1998, reviewed in 2000, no further methodological renovations have taken place regarding Spanish development cooperation. Indeed, as stated by FRIDE's backgrounder, the Spanish contribution to the debate within the OECD on evaluation is virtually non-existent. It should also be noted that there are no tools available for the new stage at which the Spanish system for development cooperation is right now. On the other hand, both the Paris Declaration and the EU Consensus on Development present enormous challenges for Spanish development cooperation in terms of evaluation, and more particularly, in relation to (1) the adherence to the progress indicators defined by the Paris Declaration; (2) the application of non-conventional criteria, such as appropriation or harmonisation; and (3) innovative processes, such as joint evaluations.¹⁵

With respect to a results-based management, Spanish development cooperation is still based on a conventional model based on a linear logic, according to which supplies have an almost direct impact on goals. Added to this is a follow-up and evaluation system mainly based on justification, as showed in the following graph:

Graph 1: Conventional management model

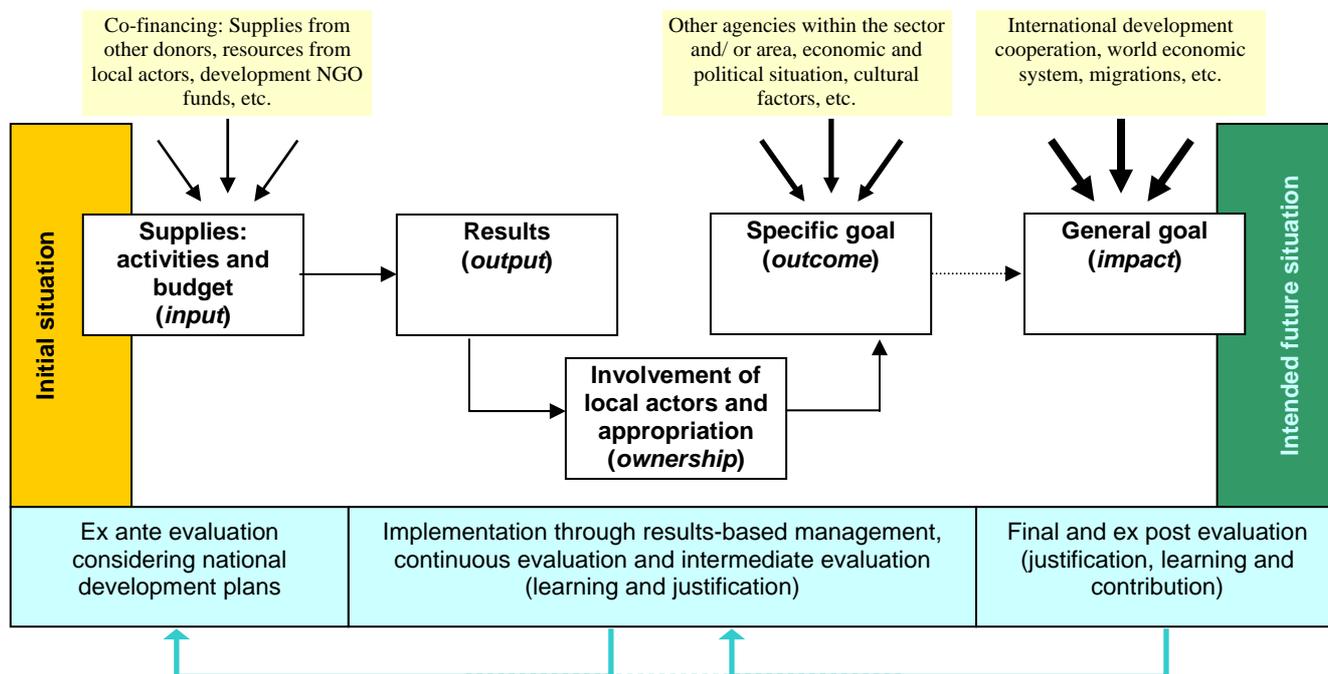


In this sense, the current debate on evaluation, the spirit of the Paris Declaration to be renewed in the course of the Third Roundtable Meeting on Results-Management to be held in Hanoi in February 2007, and a greater consideration of context factors of international development cooperation, also represent an opportunity to shape the appropriate management framework for Spanish development cooperation. So in order to promote the debate in view of the next evaluation of Spanish aid by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD in November 2007, the following model based on results and quality improvement could be proposed:

¹⁴ See Rubén Cano's notes in this sense. It does not seem advisable to focus an intervention only on the appropriate justification of expenses at the first stage of the results chain.

¹⁵ See the recently published [joint EU-French development cooperation with Mali between 1995 and 2004](#), a priority country in the Spanish Master Plan for Development Cooperation and most of the Autonomous Communities. The document also describes the challenges for an adequate articulation of synergies between two important agencies beyond their common elements at the sectoral level.

Graph 2: Proposal for a model for Spanish development cooperation in coherence with the Paris Declaration



Challenge 8: Cultural foundations of evaluation in the Spanish system

A profound renovation of the methodologies and the proceedings requires discussions and supplies from groups and people specialised in evaluation. However, it is necessary to create encouraging frameworks and strategies, so that the human capital gets involved in the definition of a new management model. It is essential to keep moderating the atmosphere marked by the lack of confidence between actors, soften the confrontation culture, avoid taking criticism personal and surpass, little by little, relationships based on financial dependence among donors, on the one hand, and think-tanks, consultants and development NGOs, on the other.

Therefore, it is advisable that public donors invest in consultation and participation formulae that make actors feel more comfortable. The experience of efforts made in the past two years seems to evidence that the most effective option is that of direct consultations, as well as the use of specialised working groups with a reduced number of participants, as opposed to more open and 'catchy' modalities, such as virtual fora or conferences. However, it is necessary to share in a more detailed and constant way all information managed and the details of the debate, so that little by little it reaches a larger audience.

Foroaod – Spanish Development Aid

FRIDE organised the project “Spanish Development Aid - Mid-term Review and a Proposal for a Participative Consultation” between June 2006 and April 2007. This project aims to develop a consultation process about the current Spanish government’s development cooperation policy. We have created a forum for participation and debate, in order to assess the Spanish development cooperation reform agenda and to identify the main achievements and shortcomings in operationalising the initiatives based on the principle of “More Aid, Better Aid”. A set of recommendation guidelines were developed, through participative methods, with the objective of putting into practice the aspirations of the Spanish development cooperation policy.

www.foroaod.org