



ODA Evaluation in the Visegrad Four

Western Balkans Case Study

A study produced by Lucy Maizels, Pontis Foundation



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Abbreviations Used

CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSP	Country Strategy Paper
CZDA	Czech Development Agency
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DfID	UK Department for International Development
EU	European Union
GNI	Gross National Income
HUN-IDA	Hungarian-International Development Assistance
IDC	International Development Co-operation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGDO	Non-Governmental Development Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAIDC	Slovak Agency for International Development Co-operation
SaM	Serbia and Montenegro
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
V4	Visegrad Four

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1. Executive Summary

Evaluation Definition

According to the OECD, development evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed development project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The OECD goes on to identify the two main purposes of evaluation as improving future aid policy, programmes and projects through feedback of lessons learnt and providing a basis for accountability, including the provision of information to the public.

Despite some good intentions and tentative steps, none of the Visegrad Four (V4) countries undertake full and independent evaluations of their Official Development Assistance (ODA) policies, programmes or themes. In varying degrees, the main challenges to progress comprise **budgetary constraints**, the **lack of personnel capacity** and **limited policy leadership** on the issue from the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

Although infallible figures are difficult to locate, it is estimated that the V4 countries have collectively spent **over 40 million Euro in the Western Balkans since 2003**¹. This significant sum has been spent without knowing the impact or outcomes of its use. Evaluation is the basis on which programming adjustments are made. Without evaluation, ODA funds from the V4 countries will continue to be spent without regard to value for money, policy priorities, or impact on development in the recipient or partner countries.

Non-V4 ODA agencies freely provide a spectrum of **tools and mechanisms** from which V4 countries can learn best practises. Information on how to constitute terms of references, define indicators and recruit an external evaluation team is all available online. Additionally the evaluation process itself and recommendations for dissemination of the final evaluation report are also on hand from ODA agencies such as SIDA, DANIDA, SDC and others. The V4 should use these lessons learnt as a basis for constituting their own evaluation policies. But moving forwards can only come from arriving at the final decision to **make evaluation a central component of ODA policy**.

Dedicating at least one staff member to evaluation is fundamental. Defining specific programming priorities, planning achievable indicators, allocating extra funding for external evaluations and making more use of V4 embassies in the field are all additional ways for evaluation to become a constituent part of ODA culture.

The recipient countries deserve to have the projects carried out in their own countries evaluated. The V4 tax payers deserve to know how their money is spent. Without exploring what works and what does not, V4 ODA can be equated with money thrown down the drain. It is for these reasons that V4 Ministries of Foreign Affairs must embark on a path towards forming **effective evaluation policies** as soon as possible, as a starting block to finally begin the necessary level of ODA evaluation.

¹ Pontis Foundation estimate based on figures supplied by all V4 ODA agencies.

2. Introduction

The nations of the Visegrad Four (Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic) began the late 1980s and early 1990s as recipient counties of development assistance from around the world. This soon changed as all Visegrad (V4) countries entered onto the path towards EU membership, achieved in 2004. Despite the relatively small amount assigned by V4 countries to ODA over the past decade, all four have now firmly established themselves as solid members of the international donor community.

Table 1: Official Development Assistance² as a percentage of Gross National Income between 1998 and 2008.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Czech Republic	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.11
Hungary	--	--	--	--	--	0.03	0.07	0.1	0.14	0.08	0.07
Poland	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	--	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.09	0.1	0.08
Slovakia	--	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.07	0.12	0.1	0.09	0.1
EU 15	0.33	0.32	0.32	0.33	0.35	0.36	0.35	0.43	0.43	0.39	0.42

Source: Eurostat, 2009

Table 1 illustrates the fact that no V4 country has passed the UN target figure for official development assistance of 0.7 per cent of GNI, or even come close. However the EU 15 average also does not approach the UN target figure, so the V4 figures should be viewed within this context. The countries of the V4 have come a long way in the realm of development assistance since the 1990s, but it is important to recognise the challenges they face and areas where real improvements should be made, not only in the amount of funds made available, but in improving institutional capacity. One area where there is a real need for improvement is the area of evaluation.

Studies have constantly shown that the systems currently in place are not sufficient to effectively monitor how, where and why assistance is spent. Up until now, V4 governments have been sceptical of the inherent usefulness of evaluation. Allocating already scarce funds to evaluation has in part, been regarded as waste when there are other important ODA projects which also require funding. Understanding the central aim of evaluation within ODA programming has to an extent been lost.

² Countries class what constitutes ODA differently. Some include assistance such as debt cancellation, refugee support and other tied aid. Others include just those funds allocated to bilateral or multi-lateral development projects in partner counties. It is for this reason that ODA figures should be approached with some caution.

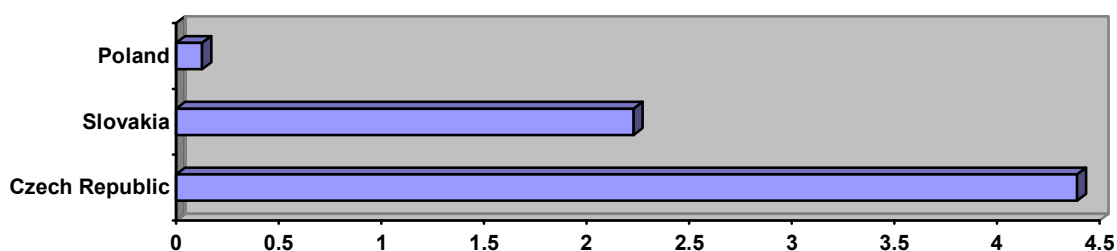
Both those in the partner countries and V4 taxpayers have the right to know whether this money was spent wisely. Was it allocated to the right projects? Was it used effectively? Did the projects realise their aims? And perhaps most importantly, did the money make a difference? The answers to these questions represent the core reasoning behind evaluation. Without knowing the impact of its ODA at even the most basic level, the countries of the V4 are risking further waste and fund inefficiency.

This study is funded by the International Visegrad Fund small grants programme and aims to examine the evaluation tools currently used by the ODA agencies of the V4 in the monitoring of funds and projects. The study aims to outline V4 development assistance using the Western Balkans as a case study region in which a large proportion of V4 ODA money has been spent³ and examine current methods of evaluation. A brief analysis will be made of the tools employed by non-V4 development assistance agencies such as USAID, CIDA, ADA, DfID, and UN, whilst a final section comprises suggestions for how the V4 ODA agencies can move forward in designing their own method of evaluation.

3. V4 Development Assistance to the Western Balkans

The countries of the Visegrad Four have long regarded the Western Balkans as partners in the area of development assistance. The two regions have a lot in common, mostly due to a shared experience of communism and transition. Language links between some of the countries have also proved to be important, as has the presence of V4 minorities living in some Western Balkan countries. The V4 nations often feel that they have unique understanding of the current path the Western Balkans are on, especially now the policy onus is firmly on EU membership; a process all V4 countries have experienced recently. Despite the similarities, each V4 country has developed its own relationship with the Western Balkans, focusing its development assistance in different areas. With the exception of Poland, the Western Balkans constitutes a priority ODA region for the other V4 countries. As such, the region makes for a good initial case study in which to start evaluation.

Table 2: Amount of funds allocated to ODA in the Western Balkans in 2008 (in Euro millions).



[Figures for Hungary were unfortunately not made available to the study author]

³ The Bratislava-based Pontis Foundation has been working in the Western Balkans since 1999 and now advocates on behalf of an improved system of ODA in Slovakia. The Western Balkans also constitutes the largest part of Slovak ODA. It is for these reasons that this study uses the Western Balkans as a case study, although recommendations are applicable to all ODA partner regions.

3.1 Slovakia⁴

Serbia and Montenegro are programme countries for SAIDC, the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation, known commonly as Slovak Aid. This means that Serbia and Montenegro have their own strategy papers and more resources allocated, mostly to Serbia. In 2008, Serbia received a significant 56% of all Slovak ODA.

Before the establishment of Slovak Aid, development cooperation with Serbia and Montenegro was financed through the Bratislava-Belgrade Fund, which was administered by the Civil Society Development Foundation and UNDP. The current Serbia and Montenegro Country Strategy Paper outlines three sectoral priorities: firstly, the promotion of civil society; secondly the development and reconstruction of basic infrastructure; and thirdly, assisting with the integration of the country into international associations and organisations. Territorial focus has largely been on the northern province of Vojvodina, with projects geared increasingly towards democracy promotion and infrastructure development such as bridge building.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia are also priority countries for Slovak Aid, although in 2008 only projects from Bosnia were included in those activities supported. Microgrants to Serbia and Bosnia are distributed from the Slovak Embassies in Belgrade and Sarajevo.⁵

During 2008, the following amounts of contracted ODA were distributed to the Western Balkans⁶.

Serbia	52 052 384 SKK	[approx 1.73m EUR]
Bosnia	9 782 788 SKK	[approx 0.325m EUR]
Montenegro	5 000 000 SKK	[approx 0.166m EUR]
Macedonia	2 830 882 SKK	[approx 0.094m EUR]

3.2 Czech Republic

The newly-established Czech Development Agency (CZDA) is the implementing body for Czech ODA. Serbia and Bosnia have been programme countries for the Czech Republic since 2004 following a series of government resolutions, although formal assistance has been allocated to both countries since 2001. Kosovo is now classed as a project country. For Serbia⁷ there is a territorial focus on the southeast and central regions of the country, with sectoral focus on industrial development, transport, environment and health and social care. In Bosnia⁸ there is a territorial focus on the northeast of the country, with sectoral focus on industrial development, transport and agriculture. In Kosovo sectoral focus is on health care and environment. There is no territorial focus on Kosovo. There are country strategy papers for both Bosnia and Serbia, including Montenegro.

⁴ Slovak Aid, *Medium Term Strategy for Official Development Assistance of the Slovak Republic for the years 2009 – 2013*, March 2009. <http://www.slovakaid.mfa.sk/en/index.php/article/articleview/102/1/2>

⁵ <http://www.slovakaid.sk/index.php/article/view/399/1/1>

⁶ Figures from Slovak Aid

⁷ Serbia Country Strategy Paper, *Program rozvojové spolupráce mezi Českou republikou a Srbskem Černou horou na období 2006-2010* <http://www.czda.cz/files/sim.pdf>

⁸ Bosnia Country Strategy Paper, *Program rozvojové spolupráce mezi Českou republikou a Bosnou a Hercegovinou na období 2006-2010* <http://www.czda.cz/files/bih.pdf>

During 2008, the following amounts of contracted ODA were distributed to the Western Balkans, representing 14.2% of all Czech ODA⁹.

Serbia	74.534 m CZK	[approx 2.88m EUR]
Bosnia	37.6 m CZK	[approx 1.453m EUR]
Regional	1.5m CZK	[approx 0.58m EUR]

3.3 Hungary

Hungary's International Development Cooperation policy is based on tasks laid out by the International Development Cooperation (IDC) Governmental Committee, which is coordinated by the MFA's International Development Cooperation Department. The implementation of bilateral development projects is overseen by HUN-IDA¹⁰ which has been contracted since 2006 as Hungary's implementation agency. The existing partner-country system was reformed in 2008, meaning priority and partner countries as well as those eligible for tied Hungarian development assistance are now specified¹¹. In the Western Balkans mid-term strategy paper, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are described as strategic priority countries. Project-based cooperation is undertaken with Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, which are known as partner countries. Each country has different sectoral focus, with the majority of projects in Serbia for example, focusing on strengthening civil society, capacity building of public administration and supporting economic development. Like Slovakia, there is a territorial focus on the northern province of Vojvodina, where a significant Hungarian minority reside.

3.4 Poland

Polish Aid, Poland's development assistance cooperation agency, was established in 2005. The Western Balkans is not a priority region for Polish development assistance. Their focus lies to the East in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Belarus; to Afghanistan and the Palestinian Authority; and to Angola. However, a small amount of funding is made available bilaterally, to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in the form of embassy small grants or via direct channels from the MFA in Warsaw. There is also a small amount allocated for projects in the Western Balkans, totalling 127 504.28 EUR in 2008. This went to three projects, one in Kosovo supporting the economic activity of women in the Dukagjini/Metohija region and two projects in Macedonia. One supported education using the Polish experience and another supported economic transformation in the finance sector. During 2008, just over 2% of overall Polish ODA went to projects based in the Western Balkans.¹²

⁹ Czech Development Agency, *Annex 1: Development Assistance Themes in Priority Countries 2008*. http://www.czda.cz/files/plan_zrs_2008_priloha1.xls

¹⁰ The position of HUN-IDA, although still Hungary's implementing agency, is in some doubt following the end of the most recent contract between the agency and the MFA in September 2009. The next tender is due to be opened in February / March 2010.

¹¹ Report on Hungarian International Development Cooperation Activities in 2007 <http://www.kulugyminiszterium.hu/NR/rdonlyres/B7A232DE-1A66-4E74-9D94-C3BDE3334D5D/0/besz2007EN.pdf>

¹² Polish Aid, 'List of Development Assistance Grants Awarded in 2008' <http://www.polishaid.gov.pl/files/aktualnosci/kwiecien%202008/wyniki%20pz%202008.pdf>

Kosovo	286 305 ZI	[approx 68 125 EUR]
Macedonia	249 580 ZI	[approx 59 385 EUR]

4. Visegrad Four and Evaluation: The story so far

None of the V4 countries currently evaluate their ODA projects, programmes or policies effectively. Some progress has undoubtedly been made, but challenges in many forms are blocking the path towards undertaking proper evaluations. There are similarities among the countries in terms of the challenges they face, especially the lack in financial capacity and personnel capability. Even without the current global economic crisis, budgets are low¹³. In many quarters, there exists a lack of high level political will to accept ODA as an essential and integral part of foreign policy, although this differs from country to country. The issue of staff rotation and the resulting deficiency in long-term institutional expertise is also problematic. Undoubtedly these problems vary in intensity throughout the V4, but it seems the core challenges of money and staff inexperience are common to all V4 ODA agencies and departments, albeit to a varying degree.

4.1 Slovakia

Although evaluation of its official development assistance is not currently carried out, steps are being made towards its inception, albeit at a slow pace. In the words of one stakeholder, “we are only at the beginning”. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds the overall responsibility for the evaluation of Slovakia’s development assistance, but due to perceived inactivity, the country’s Ministry of Finance took the decision to begin laying the foundations for a future evaluation process by commissioning a guideline report entitled ‘Methods and Procedures Manual on Monitoring and Evaluation’, published in April 2008¹⁴. The report was recognised as adequate, but limitations to its usefulness in practise were identified by certain stakeholders. The report is now viewed as a good basis for recommendations and a springboard from which to begin evaluating.

The two main challenges to effective evaluation of Slovak ODA seem to capacity (both in financial and personnel terms) and the lack of political will from the side of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide decisive leadership on evaluation policy.

Significantly, evaluation is recognised as vital by the new Slovak Aid management. But cash flow difficulties and budget constraints in particular represent further stumbling blocks to progress. The issue is mentioned in Slovak Aid strategic documents and is acknowledged as a central area in which improvements must be made. This in itself is encouraging, as are moves by the MFA to train its personnel on evaluation techniques. But the onus is now squarely on the top management of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to begin implementation of an as-yet undecided, final evaluation strategy and on the authorities as a whole to recognise the need to allocate further funds for the act of evaluation.

¹³ ODA budgets for the next year have suffered enormously in the V4 countries due to concerns over the economic crisis. In Hungary there will be no calls for proposals this year. In Slovakia the budget for ODA in 2010 has been cut by 42.6% to 3,285,000 Euro from 7,562,000 Euro in 2009, although Foreign Minister Lajčák has been quoted as promising to find extra funds for ODA.

¹⁴ Ormal, Chris et al, *Methods and Procedures Manual on Monitoring & Evaluation of the Slovak Official Development Assistance*, IPM, April 2008.

4.2 Czech Republic

The ODA provision of the Czech Republic is currently undergoing intense restructuring. The former system, which was characterised by a complicated arrangement between various stakeholders, is now being replaced by a simplified structure, although the transformation is not yet complete, as some ongoing projects continue to be overseen by line ministries. The new Czech Development Agency (CZDA) will be the sole implementing body of Czech ODA.

Between 2003 and 2007 evaluations were carried out by the old Czech Development Centre, which followed an internal handbook containing all guidelines for effective evaluation of projects. The inter-ministerial advisory 'Foreign Aid Council' has now been tasked with updating this handbook to relaunch evaluations in 2010 or 2011. The evaluations under the former system were not ideal. They were classed by one interlocutor as "semi-independent" with the Czech Development Centre assuming the responsibility of evaluating jointly with line ministries. Final recommendations were not adopted as the line ministries often saw the evaluations as effective critiques of their work. There was no real ownership of these former evaluations, which is something the new system is hoping to change.

In some ways, Czech ODA finds itself in a position of advantage compared to its V4 neighbours. They have experience of evaluation and have made good use of local training offered to their staff on the topic of evaluation.¹⁵ However they also face many challenges. The new evaluation guidelines are due to be discussed at the same time as the formulation of new country strategy papers (CSPs). The question of whether to include specific country indicators within the CSPs will have to be decided simultaneously as more general evaluation indicators; a potentially tricky operation. The government will also have to think very carefully about why and what should be evaluated. The MFA will hold the primary responsibility for evaluation, but are not used to making policy decisions based solely on the area of ODA.

The lack of a market of independent Czech evaluators may also act as an obstacle. If the decision is made to contract external evaluators, the deficiency in experienced personnel will mean both the contractor and contracted learning together. There is still the danger that a political decision will be made that external evaluation is too costly. But this can be placed in the wider context of the need to include ODA into MFA policy thinking. In addition, suggestions to cooperate within V4 on the evaluation of projects are stunted by the Czech language of all project material.

The CZDA website is the most advanced when offering open information regarding their evaluation policy. They list how they plan to evaluate, and include some good examples of evaluation guides from international development agencies such as CIDA, DANIDA, UNDP and OECD-DAC. The potential is here for a proper evaluation process to be formulated in the next few years, although a great deal depends on the twin and interlocking issues of budget constraints and political decisions.

¹⁵ The Czech NGO Czech Det (www.dww.cz) organises training on evaluation which is attended by Czechs and others from the region.

4.3 Hungary

Unlike other V4 countries, Hungarian ODA is evaluated, but only internally. Effective and thorough evaluation undertaken by external experts is not currently foreseen due to budgetary constraints. The task of monitoring and evaluation rests with the implementing and coordinating agency HUN-IDA, whereas overall responsibility for ODA policy rests with the International Development Cooperation department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Uniquely, HUN-IDA personnel along with their MFA colleagues have been involved in field monitoring projects, in order to assess the quality management of state-funded ODA projects implemented by Hungarian NGOs. They have been assisted in the task of desk and field monitoring by consultants from Finland and Canada, who have designed a questionnaire for use by HUN-IDA and MFA officials when they evaluate projects such as those in Serbia, Ukraine, Cambodia, Mongolia and Vietnam. Audits are also carried out within this framework.

No evaluation reports are available on the websites of HUN-IDA or the International Development Cooperation department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The current dire economic climate in Hungary has meant the suspension of calls for proposals for new ODA projects for this year. However, it is planned that next year's calls will include the requirement for NGOs to take account of evaluation in their mid-term or final reports. Self-assessments are encouraged, which will form the basis for site visits by officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, there is concern that the Ministry lacks the capacity to train their personnel to a necessary level to undertake such evaluations. The key issue of money once more comprises the main challenge.

4.4 Poland

Despite good intentions, Poland does not currently undertake any evaluation of its ODA. There were plans to set aside a certain amount of the annual budget for the consulting of external evaluators. Unfortunately this objective was not achieved in 2008. However, it does show a willingness to accept that independent evaluation should be undertaken. The plan currently under consideration is to evaluate internally the projects within the Polish Georgian programme. This is planned to take place in 2010. A particular problem for the Polish ODA department within the MFA is the unusually short project cycle of one year. This creates difficulties when attempting to undertake even the monitoring of projects, as the turnover of implementers and projects is so fast, it leaves little time to evaluate even on the most basic terms. This short project cycle also constitutes a challenge to cooperation on evaluation within the V4.

5. Learning from others: Evaluation process models from non-V4 ODA agencies

There are a number of excellent models freely available online. Among others, CIDA, SDC, USAID, DANIDA, UNDP, NORAD and DfID¹⁶ all publish their evaluation methods online. Many outline the exact methods they use and trace the steps necessary to carry out effective evaluation. In designing a tool for V4 ODA agencies, the commissioning organisation could learn a lot from their colleagues within the donor community.

¹⁶ See page 20 for full references.

Overall, there are many similarities between how different development assistance agencies evaluate their work. Below is a simplified outline of the evaluation process, which most donor agencies adhere to, albeit with slight differences. Taking into consideration the exceptional circumstances which are experienced by the V4 ODA agencies with regard to budget, many of these steps may not seem realistic. However, by streamlining the process and giving more weight to certain steps, contractors can save money.

5.1 *Establishment of an Evaluation Unit*

A dedicated staff unit, even if it numbers just one member, is essential to ensure targeted responsibility for the planning and organisation of evaluation cycles. The unit performs the tasks of disseminating evaluation recommendations, undertaking follow-up controls and managing external contracted evaluators. Without a dedicated person or team of persons, effectively managing evaluations is extremely difficult. OECD-DAC in particular has stressed that the institutional structure for managing evaluation is crucial to ensure the process is effective. Shaping the process from the beginning and seeing it through to the end is central to a successful evaluation.

5.2 *Deciding what to evaluate*

This may seem a simple assignment, but getting a decision on which projects, themes or programming policies (known together as ‘development interventions’) to evaluate can become a time-consuming and complicated task. This is especially true when there are many stakeholders involved. Effective decisions on what to evaluate should come primarily from policy makers to ensure aid policies are improved by the eventual recommendations borne out of evaluation. CIDA recommends the following questions¹⁷ are answered prior to beginning evaluation:

- Why the evaluation is to be carried out
- The issues to be addressed
- Resources available for conducting the evaluation
- Anticipated cost
- The expertise required to complete the evaluation
- The time frame for completion.

The answers to these questions will provide the basis for discussion of the terms of reference.

5.3 *Terms of Reference*

One of the key tasks of an evaluation unit or dedicated staff member is to ensure that each evaluation is sufficiently planned and terms of reference are drawn up. Terms of references are the guidelines which define the evaluation. They lay out what, why and how the evaluation will take place. DANIDA recommends following the structure¹⁸ below when outlining terms of reference:

¹⁷ CIDA Evaluation Guide [http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Performancereview5/\\$file/English_E_guide.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Performancereview5/$file/English_E_guide.pdf)

¹⁸ Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Evaluation Guidelines, Chapter Four: Evaluation Questions* <http://www.netpublikationer.dk/um/7571/html/chapter05.htm>

- Background
- Objective
- Output
- Scope of work
- Methodology
- Workplan
- Composition of evaluation team
- Documents available

The terms of reference are usually agreed consensually with all stakeholders.

5.4 *Selecting indicators*

This can be a difficult area, but the key is to keep it simple. The defining of clear goals and priorities for each programme country is the key to developing workable and achievable indicators. Without designating specific areas for development in accurate Country Strategy Papers (CSPs), defining indicators for eventual evaluation becomes difficult. In other words, clear and achievable objectives as laid out in CSPs and project proposals can form the basis for indicators to be evaluated.

With budgetary constraints in mind, the DAC indicators detailed below¹⁹ of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, can be used to select indicators in the same way as many donor agencies such as DANIDA.

DAC Indicators

- **Relevance**

The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirement, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies.

- **Efficiency**

A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.

- **Effectiveness**

The extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.

- **Impacts**

The positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

- **Sustainability**

The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed. The probability of long-term benefits. The resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time.

¹⁹ Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Evaluation Guidelines, Chapter Four: Evaluation Questions*
<http://www.netpublikationer.dk/um/7571/html/chapter05.htm>

Additional project-specific indicators can then be included, to focus evaluation on key areas of potential impact. For example, under the indicator of 'relevance', supplementary areas such as adherence to ODA policy or programme objectives can be examined, illustrating the importance of involving policy makers as well as ODA specialists in the formation of indicators.

5.5 *Recruiting the team*

This is the responsibility once more of the Evaluation Unit or dedicated staff member. CIDA²⁰ believes the following attributes are crucial when contracting the individual(s) charged with undertaking an evaluation.

- Knowledge to organise and carry out all aspects of the evaluation
- Have a track record that demonstrates the ability to successfully complete evaluations respecting time and cost restraints
- Possess the leadership skills needed for effective evaluation management and for dealing with partners and stakeholders
- Meet the requirement for technical and sectoral knowledge and expertise, including the ability to address crosscutting themes such as gender equality, the environment and poverty reduction
- Have the capacity to work in developing countries
- Have an adequate understanding of local social and cultural issues, and possess the language skills necessary for functioning in the recipient country
- Understand how to carry out participatory evaluations and the need to engage local professionals.

The lack of a market of professional external evaluators in the V4 countries may prove a problem. Although there are many international consultancy firms which have the experience and know-how to undertake development assistance evaluations, the likelihood of most V4 ODA project materials being in a language other than English limits the possibilities for using international consultants. This may make V4 ODA agencies lean more towards making use of available in-house personnel to undertake evaluations. But there are many downsides to this method.

5.5.1 *Internal vs. External*

A central dilemma of those contracting evaluations is the decision whether to undertake external evaluations or keep the assessments in-house for reasons of economy. The key strength of external evaluations is the independence and distance of the assessor. External evaluators are experts who can make recommendations based on their own experience by comparing with past evaluations. Questions of sustainability, impact and effectiveness can be examined in a more transparent way, with no interference (good and bad) from policy-makers or other interested parties.²¹

There are undoubtedly advantages to internal evaluations too. Certainly they can be quicker and cheaper to establish. But the costs of an external evaluation can be brought down

²⁰ Canadian International Development Agency, *How to Perform Evaluations: Getting Started*, 2000 [http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Performancereview3/\\$file/Getting_Started-b.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Performancereview3/$file/Getting_Started-b.pdf)

²¹ Swiss Development Agency *External Evaluation* www.sdc.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_23673.pdf

considerably with careful planning and pre-assessment at the originating agency. In terms of specific projects, an element of self-assessment by implementers themselves also helps reduce costs. According to the Swiss Development Agency (SDC), an external evaluation involving local experts working out of the partner country for between two to three weeks and performed in the field should cost (according to European rates) between 10,000 and 20,000 Euro²².

Internal evaluations can be beneficial, especially when the assessor knows the project or programme in detail and is aware of the background and past experiences of those implementing the project. They may also have good contacts in policy-making circles that can be approached for their opinions. But overall, it is accepted that if possible, external evaluation is better. External evaluators can explore wider themes and see things in a broader context. They are not restrained by protocol, political pressures or the burden of policy. Put simply, they are independent, suggesting an independent evaluation.

5.6 *The evaluation process*

Although plenty of preparatory work can be done within the contracting country, evaluation steps in the field are likely to produce the most interesting outcomes and most useful recommendations. This fieldwork should take the form of information gathering from various stakeholders in the partner country, followed by analysis and assessment with input from professionals on the ground. Feedback from local target groups such as politicians, NGOs and those affected by the project is also viewed by most as representing an invaluable contribution to evaluation. This is why it is generally agreed that research in the field should constitute the bulk of the time spent on the evaluation research stage.

For reporting purposes, some development assistance agencies prefer evaluations for contracted projects and programmes to take the form of a set structural format. SIDA, DANIDA, SDC, DfID and CIDA all adhere to this viewpoint. They argue that evaluations in a standard form are easier to read and use. It is suggested that evaluation reports should not consist of more 30 pages. Quality rather than quantity should be kept in mind. Below are two examples of structures for evaluation reporting.

SIDA Evaluation Template²³

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- The Evaluated Intervention
- Findings
- Evaluative Conclusions
- Lessons Learned
- Recommendations
- Annexes

CIDA Evaluation Template²⁴

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Investment Profile
- Evaluation Profile
- Evaluation Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Lessons
- Annexes

²² Ibid.

²³ SIDA, *Looking Back, Moving Forwards*, 2007.

http://www2.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=121&a=1521&language=en_US

²⁴ CIDA Evaluation Guide [http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Performancereview5/\\$file/English_E_guide.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Performancereview5/$file/English_E_guide.pdf)

More general recommendations for the reporting of evaluation are easily found. The majority focus on the need to keep the report focused, simple and as targeted as possible, avoiding jargon and highlighting significant lessons to be learnt. CIDA also recommends using colours, graphics and attractive layouts to increase the chance that people will pick up and read the final document. Overall, the evaluation should be readable, contain realistic, clear and useful recommendations and focus on key questions such as those put by SDC: Are we doing the right things? And are we doing them right?²⁵

5.7 *Evaluating the evaluation*

The question of what makes a good evaluation is an important one and is not necessarily dictated by how much money it costs to produce. SIDA gives plenty of good advice concerning the attributes a good evaluation holds. Among others, a useful evaluation should meet expectations; bring focus to the agency's mandate, programming priorities and themes; inform decision-making and promote organisational learning; concisely articulate results and present recommendations in a useful and pragmatic way; involve stake-holders; and be impartial, neutral, transparent and fair.

There are three ways to ensure the quality of an evaluation. The first way is to plan ahead and manage the overall process from the side of the commissioning agency. Ensuring that the evaluating team is the best and most fitting to the task constitutes the second means. And finally examining the draft evaluation and co-operating on the dissemination of the final results and recommendations is also key²⁶. Dutch development cooperation²⁷ points to the need to evaluate the evaluation, by examining these three questions:

- Validity – did the evaluation measure what was intended to be measured?
- Reliability – are the evaluation findings dependable?
- Usability – can the evaluation results be used?

Within the specific conditions under which the V4 ODA agencies find themselves, this kind of internal audit or assessment of the evaluation is a smart way to ensure the final product meets initial expectations. It is also essential to re-iterate the importance of keeping a steady level of involvement throughout the evaluation process. This is especially vital if evaluating on a budget.

5.8 *Dissemination*

The dissemination of recommendations resulting from the evaluation can be discussed at groups, workshops or seminars consisting of the main stakeholders, with the particular involvement of policy-makers. This is a cheap and definite way to ensure lessons learnt are passed on directly to those who can improve policy accordingly. It also guarantees evaluation results are geared towards audience's needs and interests. Some agencies such as SIDA, also consider making sure evaluations are made available in the language of the partner country in which the evaluation took place, via their embassies or offices in-country.

²⁵ Swiss Development Agency *External Evaluation* www.sdc.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_23673.pdf

²⁶ SIDA, *Looking Back, Moving Forwards*, 2007.

http://www2.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=121&a=1521&language=en_US

²⁷ Ted Kliet, Evaluation quality standards in Dutch Development Cooperation, 2009
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/16/7/42249812.ppt>

Evaluations should be published in an easily accessible way on the websites of the contracting agency. UNDP does this well, with different sections for country, thematic and other evaluations laid out simply and easily.²⁸ If this is not possible, a summary of the evaluations should be included on the DAC Evaluation Resource Centre website.²⁹ Some go further, such as SIDA which publishes its own evaluation newsletter³⁰ or NORAD, which publishes information about on-going evaluations.³¹

6. Evaluating on a limited budget: Designing a workable tool for V4

The V4 ODA agencies are to varying degrees, relative novices when it comes to the evaluation process. This provides a good opportunity for them to learn from the lessons and mistakes of others and design a workable tool which takes into consideration the specific nature of V4 ODA, encompassing both its strengths and its weaknesses.

It is important to recognise that the evaluation methods and techniques used by non-V4 development assistance agencies and organisations are in no way perfect. External evaluation of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) Western Balkans programme highlights the absence of proper objectives and indicators.³² Meanwhile USAID have been criticised for its focus on programme management and monitoring, rather than evaluation. Between 1994 and 2001, the number of USAID evaluations fell by over 80%. Since 2005 an on-going move to revitalise the evaluation process has been put in place.³³ Faultless systems are not yet in place in some of the most established donor agencies, illustrating how important is it to note that the V4 ODA agencies are not alone in their journey to adopt effective evaluation strategies.

The OSCE-DAC principles laid out below³⁴ provide general guidance on the role of development evaluation in the aid management process, with the following central messages:

- Aid agencies should have an evaluation policy with clearly established guidelines and methods and with a clear definition of its role and responsibilities and its place in institutional aid structure.
- The evaluation process should be impartial and independent from the process concerned with policymaking, and the delivery and management of development assistance.

²⁸ United Nations Development Programme, Assessment of Development results at Country Level

<http://www.undp.org/eo/country-evaluation.htm>

²⁹ OECD, DAC Evaluation Resource Centre

http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3343,en_35038640_35039563_35067327_1_1_1_1,00.html

³⁰ SIDA http://www2.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=255&a=41976&language=en_US

³¹ NORAD <http://www.norad.no/en/Evaluation/Ongoing+evaluations>

³² Claudia Conrad, Mladen Momcilovic, *Country Programme Evaluation: Serbia 2006-2008*, 2008

[http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:ubDr5PbDR5AJ:www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/Evaluation_of_the_Country_Programme_Serbia_2006-](http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:ubDr5PbDR5AJ:www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/Evaluation_of_the_Country_Programme_Serbia_2006-2008.pdf+kek+country+progamme+evaluation+serbia&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk)

[2008.pdf+kek+country+progamme+evaluation+serbia&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk](http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:ubDr5PbDR5AJ:www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/Evaluation_of_the_Country_Programme_Serbia_2006-2008.pdf+kek+country+progamme+evaluation+serbia&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk)

³³ USAID, *The Initiative to Revitalize Evaluation at USAID*,

http://www.usaid.gov/policy/evalweb/a_overview/1_history/TheInitiativetoRevitalizeEvaluationatUSAID.pdf

³⁴ OECD/ Development Assistance Committee, *Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance*, 1991

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/31/12/2755284.pdf>

- The evaluation process must be as open as possible with the results made widely available.
- For evaluations to be useful, they must be used. Feedback to both policymakers and operational staff is essential.
- Partnership with recipients and donor cooperation in aid evaluation are both essential; they are an important aspect of recipient institution-building and of aid coordination and may reduce administrative burdens on recipients.
- Aid evaluation and its requirements must be an integral part of aid planning from the start. Clear identification of the objectives which an aid activity is to achieve is an essential prerequisite for objective evaluation.

These fundamental guidelines, which should form the basis of V4 evaluation procedures, are not costly. The first step, that of forming an evaluation policy with clearly established guidelines and methods, is fundamental. Each V4 ODA agency has it in their power to produce this. The agency or Ministry tasked with producing an evaluation strategy must provide more timely and decisive leadership over the process. Very often, it is this policy leadership which is lacking. Capabilities in personnel management, budgeting and prioritising policies must be in place before any effective evaluation strategy can take hold.

It is clear that when designing a workable tool for V4 countries to evaluate their ODA, further considerations such as money and time constraints should be borne in mind. Although much of the processes described in section 5 may look beyond the budgetary realm for most V4 countries, many steps can be taken to streamline the methods and identify what is most important, or rather on which steps scarce resources should be concentrated.

The so-called 'shoestring approach' to evaluation³⁵ was formulated to take into account time and budgetary constraints. The model it recommends is based on a number of steps. Central to this is the importance of the planning stage and the flexibility to modify the evaluation plan according to cost restrictions. Although the approach is not seamlessly transferable, there are elements which can be useful for V4 ODA evaluators. The fundamental principle of relevance is that the evaluators must understand which issues are critical and so should be explored in depth, and which are less essential and can be examined less intensively. By planning in great detail and with precise requirements on the table, evaluators can evaluate in a more costly way.

At least one member of staff dedicated to evaluation is achievable within each V4 ODA agency. With the realisation that evaluation constitutes a core part of ODA, comes the understanding that equal if not more attention must be paid to this area. Making more use of V4 embassies in the field, possibly by encouraging embassy staff to visit and give updates on the progress of local V4 ODA implementers is one way to constitute the beginnings of an evaluation culture. Additionally, more informal impact assessments between ODA agency project managers and V4 implementers in the capitals is another way to ensure project objectives and actual achievements are better aligned. Although costs are clearly limited,

³⁵ Michael Bamberger et al, *The Shoestring Evaluation Approach: Six steps to better impact evaluation when working with budget, time and data constraints*, 2004
<http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/iarc/edais/word-files/ShoestringEvaluationAJE-Steps1-3.doc>

and a certain level of evaluation can be undertaken within these constraints, further funds must be allocated for evaluation purposes, in order for real and useful evaluations to take place.

7. Concluding remarks

At the heart of evaluation are the questions of accountability and impact. Without evaluating effectively where and how money is spent on development assistance, we have no idea if the money has been well spent or if the assistance made any impact at all. The amount of money being spent deserves to be evaluated, especially if that amount is relatively small. The Western Balkans is the ideal region to begin evaluation due to its priority status in three of the four V4 countries and its geographical proximity.

Expertise on the Western Balkans is already in place throughout the V4 countries. Pooling this knowledge can be beneficial, especially when applied to evaluation. Although a number of challenges to coordinating ODA evaluation on a V4 level have been mentioned, most notably the language and different project cycle lengths of all four V4 countries, there still exists the logic that some level of cooperation would be to the advantage of all V4 countries³⁶.

The recipient countries deserve to have the projects carried out in their own countries evaluated. The V4 tax payers deserve to know how their money is spent. Without exploring what works and what does not, V4 ODA can be equated with money thrown down the drain. Undertaking evaluation would not only bring vast benefits and improvements to policy-making, but would also bring V4 ODA in line with the major donors and finally cement their reputation as donor organisations to be taken seriously. After all, measuring results is one of the five pillars of the 2003 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

The global financial crisis has affected V4 countries to differing levels. Some, such as Hungary, have had to face hard choices, with ODA losing out. Others, such as in Slovakia, are facing budgetary problems of a different nature. Regardless of the root cause, a decrease in ODA should not mean the issue of evaluation is put on the back burner. It is even more important to evaluate when budgets decrease. Cost efficiency in terms of the impact of ODA projects and programmes can only be assessed via the independent, timely and thorough process of evaluation. It is this process that the V4 countries should embark on, boldly and immediately.

³⁶ V4 coordination in their ODA to Serbia was the subject of a workshop co-organised by Pontis Foundation and Slovak Aid. The workshop brief can be found at http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/en/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000023291/090930_V4Workshop_Brief.pdf

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