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from action to impact

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About Independent Development Evaluation
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The concept of value for money (VfM) in development work is the subject of much debate and confusion. In VfM analysis by development agencies, four key terms known as the 4 Es are often used. These are Economy – minimizing costs; Efficiency – getting more results for the costs; Effectiveness – successfully achieving the intended outcomes; and Equity – reaching different groups.

How are these terms interpreted and applied by development practitioners? Are we getting value for money in development work—and that includes evaluation of development work? How important, if at all, is the growing focus on value for money in the current public and development context? Does it matter?
“Because it advocates transparent resource management, a value for money approach is synonymous with good governance. The approach strengthens an organization’s responsibility towards getting results, and upgrading its processes to improve its results.

Jean Yves Adou, African Peer Review Mechanism.
How effective is public aid? A look at Benin’s budget support policy provides insight

Evaluation practices are constantly changing in Benin. However, it is limited in terms of its contribution to improving the population’s living conditions. In Benin, despite the strong commitment of politicians and key players to evaluation, significant challenges remain in getting the practice to take root.

Abdoulaye Gounou, Director General, Prime Minister’s Office in Benin.

Value for money: the use of randomized framed staged field experiments

The paper contends that the Value for Money framework could be improved by running integrated randomized framed staged field experiments to test development interventions before they are implemented on a large scale.

Maria Sophia Aguirre, The Catholic University of America, Washington DC

Evaluating value for money in international development: The Ligada female economic empowerment program in Mozambique.

This paper makes the case that the 4Es approach to determining Value for Money can be strengthened through the use of explicit evaluative reasoning, using criteria and standards to guide evaluative judgments about Value for Money. A case study is presented of Ligada, a female economic empowerment program in Mozambique, where an evaluation-specific approach to Value for Money has been developed.

Luize Guimaraes, Oxford Policy Management, United Kingdom: Julian King, Julian King & Associates Limited

Aid allocation and comparative efficiency of interventions

Though intellectually tempting, the Value for Money approach is very difficult to apply in the allocation of development aid resources. In contrast, simpler approaches could prove effective in the evaluation of interventions and even contribute in orientating the allocation of funding.

Bertrand Savoye, French Development Agency
I have been driving the same car for 12 years. It is a high quality make, it was a major investment. I get it serviced regularly. I pay attention to how I drive it. I have paid shipping so that it moves around the world with me. I am happy to say it runs like a dream and shows no signs of age. I have a colleague who buys a cheap car in each new post but runs them into the ground. She has to replace the car once her poor driving technique has brought a premature end to the clutch. Who is getting value for money?

The answer is that we don’t know. Not only would we need to crunch some figures to find out, we would also need to know more about mine and my colleague’s objectives in having a car [for example: simple transport or also prestige? and how do you value reliability?] to know if we each got value for our investment. But whatever the answer, we each have a different approach to achieving value for money in our own lives, without judging who has it right, we both know that it matters.

The same is true in international development. Whether or not we are getting “bang for our buck” matters. It matters extrinsically – to the tax payers and philanthropists that subsidise the development industry. It matters intrinsically to each organisation and individual striving to make a difference – be they large multi-nationals or small charities. Most of all it matters to those people that development cooperation is expected to support.

So, we cannot dismiss value for money, but do we fully understand it? Do we all understand it in the same way? Can we conclude in a robust way when a project, a program or even an organisation is getting value for money or not, and compared to what? Can we really compare organisations that do different things in different parts of the world? The jury is out. That is why we have dedicated this whole issue of Evaluation Matters to the topic. The contributors give us a snapshot of this ongoing debate and the challenges of putting an idea into practice – including experiences from three African countries: Ethiopia, Benin and Mozambique.

The issue starts with some background, by republishing the 2012 OECD paper which sought to address confusion surrounding the concept of value for money and promote discussion about the relevance but also the limitations of the concept for development cooperation. It refers to the simple “three Es” framework – economy, efficiency and effectiveness, highlighting that all three matter in any sort of VfM assessment.

However, not everyone agrees the simple “three Es” framework it refers to (or now “four Es” if equity is added) is helpful. For example, recent discussion between Multilateral Development Banks resulted in a proposal instead to focus on looking at efficiency at every stage of the results chain in theory, and simply sticking to some broad indicators in practice.
While addressing questions around VfM in development, the issue leaves at least one important question for evaluators totally unaddressed: Are we – evaluators – value for money? Are rigorous evaluations worth the cost in every case? My own view is that not all evaluations require the same investment. Some can be quick and cheap, but others require significant analysis and data collection in order to address questions reliably, and this takes investment. So we need to focus our resources on questions that need answers, not evaluation for its own sake. This is true of all evaluation types including impact evaluations, where a fashion for impact studies should not lead us to spend limited resources confirming what we already know through countless previous studies. Another dimension of value for money in evaluations is their utility – even if you produce an impeccable evaluation that provides new insights into what works – if it is a year too late or is not properly disseminated then it does not have impact. If it does not make a difference then its value is seriously undermined. This discussion, however, would require an entire second issue to address!

So we have in this issue a rich conversation about VfM concepts and theory as well as experiences and challenges in practice. There are different views, varying priorities. One thing is clear – the debate on applying a value for money lens in international development cooperation (and evaluation) is by no means over.
Rakesh Nangia is the Evaluator General at the African Development Bank. Prior to joining the AfDB, he spent 25 years at the World Bank where he held several positions including Director of Strategy and Operations for the Human Development Network and Acting Vice-President for the World Bank Institute. He attended the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi and Harvard University and holds degrees in business administration and engineering.
This evaluation examines the African Development Bank’s assistance to Morocco over the 2004–2014 period as well as its contribution to the country’s development. It aims to draw lessons from past performance to improve the Bank’s future strategy and operations in Morocco. It is also one of the building blocks of the forthcoming Comprehensive Evaluation of the Bank’s Development Results.

Asian Evaluation Week, Xi’an, China from 5–9 September 2016

The first Asian Evaluation Week brought together evaluation experts from international development agencies in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America; and policymakers from across Asia.

On Day 4 of the event, a session organized and led by IDEV presented evaluation work on the theme of “Private Sector for Development: Making Growth Happen”. Rafika Amira made the keynote presentation and was a panelist, and Karen Rot-Munstermann moderated the session. Other panelists included Caroline Heider (Director General and Senior Vice President, Evaluation, Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank Group) and Hau Sing Tse (Executive Director and Former chair of the AfDB Board’s Committee on Operations and Development Effectiveness). The session aimed at
The first Asian Evaluation Week, brought together international evaluation experts from multilateral development banks in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America; and heads of evaluation units of UN agencies.

On Day 4 of the event, a session, organized and led by IDEV, presented Evaluation work from the AfDB perspective on the theme of “Private Sector for Development: Making Growth Happen”. Rafika Amira made the keynote presentation and was a panelist; and Karen Rot-Munstermann moderated the session. The session aimed at sharing evaluative evidence on the role played by the private sector in spurring economic growth and discussing how development partners can work together to maximize the private sector’s contribution to development.


“Sensitization event on impact evaluation at AfDB, Abidjan”

“Scaling up Impact Evaluation for better use of AfDB resources”

“Intensifier l’évaluation d’impact pour une meilleure utilisation des resources de la BAD”

14.07.2016
African Parliamentarians’ Network on Development Evaluation Grows in Size and Ambition

Members of the African Parliamentarians’ Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE) stressed the need for consolidation and expansion of the Network at the 2nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) held in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 15 and 16 August, 2016. Sixty-two participants from 16 countries took part in the meeting, with APNODE welcoming participants from Benin, Lesotho, Madagascar, Namibia and Sudan for the first time.

Five new Evaluations of the Bank’s Country Strategies and Programs online
IDEV presents its Annual Report to the Board of Directors

Using a three-minute animation, IDEV presented its Annual Report for 2015 to the AfDB Board of Directors. The report highlights IDEV’s achievements over the course of the year, but is also candid about the challenges faced, and briefly looks forward to the work to be delivered in 2016.

Revised Independent Evaluation Policy approved

The AfDB Board of Directors approved a revised Independent Evaluation Policy, which supersedes the previous policy dating from 2007. The new policy provides an updated and comprehensive governance framework for the independent evaluation function, taking into account the Bank Group’s core priorities as defined in the Ten Year Strategy and evolving international evaluation practices. It sets out the mission, core objectives and guiding principles of the independent evaluation function, and provides details on its governance, oversight and management.
Value for money and international development: Deconstructing myths to promote a more constructive discussion

Penelope Jackson, African Development Bank
Formerly at Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

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This paper seeks to address confusion regarding the concept of value for money (VFM), and promote a more constructive discussion about the relevance and limitations of this concept to development co-operation. It takes as its starting point the broad consensus that development funds should be used as effectively as possible: donor agencies and governments, tax payers, partner country governments and citizens all want aid to work as well as it can and agree that limited aid budgets need to be well targeted and managed. Yet the concept of value for money in the context of development co-operation has given rise to debate and, in turn, confusion. This paper argues that once this confusion is untangled, it is clear that value for money is relevant to development co-operation. The challenge then lies in applying it in a productive and pragmatic way so that it can promote development co-operation.
What is value for money and why is it on the agenda?

Value for money (VFM) is about striking the best balance between the “three E’s” – economy, efficiency and effectiveness. It is not a tool or a method, but a way of thinking about using resources well. In the United Kingdom it is often used as a framework for assessing cost effectiveness across the public sector. A fourth “E” – equity – is now also sometimes used to ensure that value-for-money analysis accounts for the importance of reaching different groups.

Value for money has become more prominent on the development agenda for a number of inter-related reasons. First, the development community has in the past been driven by performance criteria that are very different from those in other areas of public spending: how much is spent sometimes overshadows the more fundamental question of what the funds achieve. Second, aid agencies are increasingly expected to understand and demonstrate the value for money of their work to those who are paying the bills, i.e. tax payers. Third, a number of aid sceptics have claimed that aid does not work, is wasteful and should be downsized or abolished. Although these claims may not always be based on evidence, strong evidence is needed in order to demonstrate that aid is valid and managed well, and that those in charge of aid are constantly seeking to make it work better.

Untangling confusion

Ill-informed discussion has led to confusion about what value for money should mean and to what extent it is relevant to development co-operation. Some development practitioners dismiss VFM as not relevant, impractical and even inhumane; at the same time, policy makers want to see clear numerical evidence of the best possible value for money in all areas of government expenditure, including development co-operation. As is often the case in such polarized debates, the reality is somewhere between the two extremes. The following points must be made to allow VFM to be applied to development co-operation in a useful way.

Value for money is not the same as cost-cutting or efficiency...

Value for money is not synonymous with either economy (i.e. reducing the cost of inputs) or efficiency. Value for money is about finding the right balance between economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and cannot be assessed through only one of these dimensions in isolation. Reducing the costs of inputs and making efficiency savings can either support or undermine value for money. Figure 1 shows a simplified logical flow of economy and efficiency considerations when determining the effectiveness and therefore value for money for a specific project.

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1 These three terms – economy, efficiency and effectiveness – are used to mean three different things in this context. This is slightly different from some economic theories that consider economy and efficiency as both ways to increase the goal of productivity. In examining value for money it is important to distinguish between economy, as this refers to minimising costs, and efficiency which relates more to getting more results for those costs

2 ICAI (2011), Approach to effectiveness and value for money, Report No 1, ICAI
Value for money does not need to be about monetizing everything and applying cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analyses. These are tools which may be relevant to assessing value for money in some cases, but value for money is a much broader concept (Box 1 provides some definitions).

...and it aims at achieving good results.

Effectiveness is not at odds with value for money, but rather an important component of it. If the effectiveness of an activity is notably reduced because of a small cost saving, value for money is reduced. Similarly, while an activity may be very cheap and run efficiently, if it does not achieve results, it is not value for money. The quality of the outcomes is fundamental to understanding whether something is providing value. “Aid effectiveness” as defined in the Paris Declaration focuses on reducing inefficiencies in how aid is managed, which in turn can pave the way for aid to achieve good development results.

Value for money is relevant to development co-operation...

Some argue that development co-operation is fundamentally different to other areas of public spending and that value for money is not helpful, or that it dehumanizes the beneficiary. This argument states that development co-operation is different because i) it is just a small part of an intricate picture and ii) it takes a long time to see the benefits. But neither of these issues is specific to development co-operation; both are also challenges to understanding the results of domestic social spending in the most developed and wealthiest countries.

...but it has its limitations.

Assessing value for money is harder in the development context than elsewhere, for two key reasons. First, in some developing countries, the availability of reliable information, notably statistics, is often of too poor a quality to make any reliable assessment. There is rarely a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTS</th>
<th>TOOLS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Economy:</strong> Reducing the cost of resources used for an activity, with a regard for maintaining quality.</td>
<td><strong>Cost-benefit analysis:</strong> A method to evaluate the net economic impact of a project. Expected benefits are estimated and monetised with inflation accounted for, and offset against project costs. The approach is most commonly used to inform in major infrastructure investment in both developed and developing countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency:</strong> Increasing output for a given input, or minimising input for a given output, with a regard for maintaining quality.</td>
<td><strong>Cost-effectiveness analysis:</strong> This method is used where monetising outcomes is not possible or appropriate, most commonly in health. Common measures include “quality-adjusted life years”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness:</strong> Successfully achieving the intended outcomes from an activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Value for money:</strong> The optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality (or fitness for purpose) to meet the user’s requirement. It can be assessed using the criteria of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.</td>
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**Box 1: Some basic definitions**
One genuine difference between international and domestic public spending is that while domestically beneficiaries and tax papers are broadly the same people, in international development spending, these two groups have never met. This disjuncture has two main implications:

- Indecision amongst donors about whom they are accountable to, and whose voice is important in holding them accountable. Donors are increasingly listening to the voices of their core funding constituencies. But it is not so clear if the political voice of beneficiaries is also receiving increased attention, despite the fact that end users can provide the best information about effectiveness [including relevance and sustainability]. In many cases end users are not well enough represented to make their voice heard and remain hard to reach.

Value for money for whom?

There is a valid concern that value for money is a donor preoccupation and that what it may mean for a donor is not the same as what it means for partner countries or for individual beneficiaries. As stated at the outset, donors focus on getting value for money for their tax payers, but what about beneficiaries and partner governments?

history of investing in research or looking at cost effectiveness in public spending, so few comparators, metrics and ways of creating proxies exist. Second, there is a lack of agreement on value for money for whom, of what and by when – issues this paper will go on to discuss. In particular, in international development, the question of value for money from whose perspective is important since the immediate beneficiaries and funders are not the same.

Figure 1: Economy and efficiency considerations as part of value for money

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economy Considerations</th>
<th>Efficiency considerations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Can we get the same or equivalent inputs for less money?</td>
<td>Can we get the same results while saving on how we manage the activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would using cheaper different inputs risk the effectiveness including sustainability?</td>
<td>Would making savings on how the project is managed risk reducing the effectiveness, including sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would using cheaper inputs risk greater maintenance costs over the life of the project?</td>
<td>Would making savings on how the project is managed risk incurring other costs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Because tax payers do not experience first-hand the results of public spending, they demand detailed information. Tax payers want assurance that the people managing their taxes have thought about getting the most out of the money they have been entrusted with, that they have made decisions based on clear criteria and evidence, that they manage risk, and monitor and evaluate to ensure best possible outcomes.

While it is important to agree on whose perspective on value for money to understand, it is also possible to over-emphasise the difference. In reality, everyone wants results. While partner countries are less interested in the value for money a donor is seeking to achieve at the portfolio level, they have similar interests in getting good results and doing so as efficiently as possible in individual projects and programmes in their country. Individual beneficiaries are concerned with the benefits for their communities – sometimes short – and sometimes long-term. The value for money of an activity or programme can only be judged against intended objectives that are clearly stated and shared by donors and partners. If they are not shared, both aid effectiveness and value for money will be harder to achieve.

**Value for money of what?**

Of what exactly is there value for money? For some, value for money is at the level of the entire global portfolio, for others, it is of individual activities.

It is worth distinguishing between three main levels – the portfolio, country and project level – because value for money at different levels requires different approaches [Table 1]. For example, looking at unit costs may be useful in deciding between two providers of a service within a single project, but comparing unit costs between whole countries can be misleading. Similarly, it is hard to compare value for money between sectors: for example, both education and agriculture are important, but focusing on one over another is a policy decision, and not a value for money decision. There is also a question of division of labour and co-ordination: donors need to ensure they don’t all put their funds in the same countries and projects if this means other key areas – perhaps the riskier ones – are under-funded. Across all three levels, areas like procurement and administration costs have long been the focus of value for money considerations. For example, studies show that when procurement is tied, value for money is reduced: some believe by 15–30%.

**Value for money by when?**

Short-term and long-term perspectives also create confusion in this debate. By when should the benefits of an intervention be realised in order for the costs to be justified? Some fear that applying a value-for-money perspective will lead to short-termism, but there is no rule about timescales. The timeframe in which donors or partners expect to see returns on their investment should be defined in each case, as some types of interventions take much longer to bear results than others. The obvious exception to this rule is humanitarian assistance, which requires short-time horizons alongside linkages to longer-term perspectives.
projects where these things are harder to measure, encouraging a focus on things that are easier to measure rather than on what is most needed or even most effective. It can also discourage innovation, since it tends toward the tried and tested types of project, with comparators and data, picked for ease of measurement rather than expected effects. Ultimately, this type of risk aversion can be very damaging to real value for money.

- It can encourage a focus on easy-to-reach groups rather than riskier targets, such as those in harder-to-reach areas, minority groups and others – one

### Reducing risk aversion

There is a danger that applying value for money could lead to a risk-averse culture in development co-operation, for example:

- At the portfolio level, allocating aid to the “best performing” countries will mean the more difficult contexts, such as fragile states, lose out. However, by looking at where need is greatest and where conflict prevention can save millions, it can be seen as good value for money to invest in those countries.
- Insisting on exact measurements of efficiency, unit costs, and cost-benefit in all projects can exclude types of

<table>
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<th>Table 1: Different levels where value for money is relevant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The global portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors consider value for money when allocating their overall budget and resources. Some are concerned that applying a value-for-money mind-set at this level will encourage donors to avoid riskier countries and sectors. However, this depends on how objectives are defined. If the donor has an objective of conflict prevention or reaching the most vulnerable people, then working in fragile states can also be seen as good value for money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennium Challenge Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific country programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>A key consideration is how different parts of a programme fit together and how they dovetail with other activities, contributing to an overriding objective. A country programme should also seek to capture synergies and make connections, including with what other actors are doing. In contrast, different actors operating in silos, or the lack an overarching strategic framework bringing individual activities together may not provide good value for money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAid (Office of Development Effectiveness, or ODE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual projects and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is at the individual project level that cost-benefit analysis, cost effectiveness analysis and other tools may be relevant. In the majority of cases a less ambitious assessment of value for money will be more feasible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>Japan International Co-operation Agency</td>
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<td>International Finance Corporation</td>
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reason why adding an equity dimension to the analysis can be helpful. Ensuring the original objectives set out who should benefit also reduces this type of risk aversion. By forging a stronger link between risk analysis and value-for-money considerations, this potential for risk aversion can be reduced.

**Applying a concept not a straitjacket**

This paper has sought to deconstruct some myths and highlight the relevance and limits of the concept of value for money to development co-operation. The intention is to spur more discussion about the next steps in practice. It has argued that value for money can be useful and relevant to development co-operation, so long as the limitations of the concept are understood and it is applied pragmatically.

Applying the concept is possible and useful, but it is also subjective and different donors
do so differently. The crucial starting point is to define i) clear objectives and ii) clear parameters [such as acceptable timeframes and levels of risk] in each case and at different levels. Indeed, what in effect this paper has emphasised is good project planning, management and review. Adding a value-for-money dimension into good project management – if it is not there already – will more often mean making a series of informed but subjective management or judgement calculations, rather than mathematical calculations.

The paper has also outlined some key challenges. One is a simple question of the availability of data: the data to invest in and improve over time, the right decisions can be made now. One other big issue this paper has raised is the disconnect between funders and beneficiaries. Unlike in most other areas of public spending, in international development the funders and the beneficiaries are totally separate groups. This means donors and partner government have dual lines of accountability. The challenge lies in drawing the two together, even though both funders and beneficiaries basically want aid funds to be used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

In conclusion, there are limitations to value for money in development co-operation and challenges around data and accountability, but the concept is useful as part of good project management, applied pragmatically and realistically. So while different donors and organisations have achieved varying levels of progress in applying the concept of value for money – whether they call it that or something else – the focus now should be on taking the discussion further in order to raise the bar in practice and achieve as much as possible with aid funds.

Author’s Profile

Penelope Jackson is an experienced evaluator, currently working in the Independent Development Evaluation Department of the African Development Bank. Prior to joining the Bank in 2012, she was on the Review and Evaluation team of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Her specialisms include robust qualitative data collection and analysis, as well as planning, and strategy development. She has a special interest in value for money and working to ensure that every development dollar is used as effectively as possible. Penelope has an MSc in “Violence, Conflict and Development” from the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London).
Due to their limited aid budgets, development partners argue that aid provided to beneficiary countries should be well targeted and managed. That raises the issue of value for money in terms of aid resources as well as the effectiveness of development assistance. Is value for money applied in development activities, especially in the evaluation of activities? What is its importance and what are its shortcomings? This article seeks to shed more light on the importance of this concept, its various applications, and its limitations in development cooperation.
Concepts and definitions

There is no agreed definition of the concept of value for money. Some define it as proper business practice; Antinoja et al. [2011] describe it as a long-term ambition for the improvement of existing systems, the optimal use of resources, capacity building, and continuous learning. New Zealand’s aid programme defines it as the best possible way to meet objectives during the lifetime of an activity with regard to the total cost of managing and financing the activity, while ensuring the resources are used effectively, with no waste. According to the United Kingdom’s National Audit Office [NAO], it is the optimum use of resources to attain set objectives. The United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID), defines it as an optimal combination of total cost to attain the desired objectives. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), it is the optimal combination of overall cost and the quality of life to meet the customer’s need [Jackson 2012]. Value for money can be evaluated using economics, efficiency, and effectiveness, commonly referred to as the “3 Es.” Sometimes a fourth “E” – equity is added. It should be underscored that at the onset, value for money was a concept restricted to finance, but it progressively spread to development activities in a broader sense.

Various applications of value for money

1. Value for money as a tool to mobilize resources with development partners

Value for money can be applied in the preparation of development programmes and projects. Indeed, a well-prepared project or programme document in which the costs of inputs and expected benefits are well defined and estimated, and the cost-benefit comparison clarified based on the various options chosen, has more chances of obtaining financing for its implementation. The “economics” dimension of the concept takes its full meaning because economic evaluation is often an ex-ante exercise [CDI, 2015].

2. Value for money as a management tool for development activities

Value for money can equally be applied in the implementation phase of development activities. It is applied in the measurement and monitoring of the performance of development activities and is part of the annual review and monitoring/evaluation of development activities. The “efficiency” and “effectiveness” dimensions of value for money enable managers to make decisions during the implementation phases. While making resource allocation decisions, they help to validate the models or options chosen within the framework of development activities [Flemming et al. 2013].
3. Value for money as an evaluation tool of development activities

Value for money is also an evaluation tool for development activities. It can be applied to an ex-ante evaluation during the activity implementation phase, and to ex-post evaluation. Indicators for measuring value for money are in both instances linked to a chain of results, namely, resources-outcomes-outputs-impacts and analysed according to the four criteria that are: “economics,” “efficiency,” “effectiveness,” and “equity.” Within the framework of monitoring-evaluation, value for money indicators are categorized according to cost and analysed following the four criteria (4 Es).

4. Value for money as a good governance tool

Because it advocates transparent resource management, a value for money approach is also synonymous with good governance. This approach strengthens responsibility in view of obtaining results and contributes to the continued improvement of an organization’s processes. The practice of this concept in development activities leads to accountability and transparency at all levels. The public and other stakeholders are more confident about the preparation and implementation of public development policies. When applied to procurement and staff recruitment, value for money not only reduces costs, but also ensures greater transparency, and the inclusion of all sectors involved in the activity. Hence, the fourth dimension of value for money, namely, equity.
cost-impact correlation, social return on investment, and baseline analysis of resource efficiency. Various bodies use these methods depending on their needs. The World Bank uses cost-benefit analysis for the preparation and management of its development programmes and projects; the Asian Development Bank uses financial analysis and financial policy evaluation in the preparation and management of its programmes and projects; while USAID uses results-based management to answer certain critical questions relating to value for money (Farida F, 2003).

Limitations and constraints of value for money

The application of value for money and adherence to this concept in development activities or in development activity evaluation requires reliable data. Statistics systems in Africa are not sufficiently developed, which raises the issue of the availability of reliable data. Indeed, like every other measure, the measure of value for money requires reliable data in view of proper estimates of values. Its application to development activity evaluation also faces the problem of skills deficit in the agencies and countries benefiting from development funds. This, in a context where development partners increasingly
require that evaluation reports show proof of optimal use of money. Human resources capacities and even the mastery of money for value methods are often lacking in the beneficiary agencies and countries. Lastly, the concept’s application faces the problem of harmonizing methods and tools, which differ from one partner to another. The absence of a clear-cut framework, and harmonized criteria and methods is a real impediment to the effective application and adherence to value for money in development activities, including their evaluation.

**Conclusion**

Value for money, which from the onset was a concept restricted to auditing, increasingly developed to become a broader concept involving a larger number of actors and covering a good number of areas. Value for money is a necessity in development activities. It is beneficial to all stakeholders, especially in the current context marked by the scarcity of development aid. Numerous agencies and countries that benefit from aid apply and already enjoy value for money. However, a number of limitations hinder popularizing the concept’s application in evaluation activities. These include the lack of reliable statistical data, the lack of capacity of development aid beneficiaries, the non-harmonization of methods and criteria, as well as the absence of clear guidelines for implementing the concept. Efforts need to be made to eliminate the shortcomings. Partners should coordinate to agree on a common definition, harmonize their approaches, and build the capacities of the actors concerned in methodology and statistics.
Applications and limitations of value for money in development activities

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The objective of this paper is to discuss if the value for money (VfM) concept is really new by comparing it to conventional results tools, project management approaches and evaluation practices. As there is no standard definition of VfM, this paper will only focus on how this is applied to projects.
Introduction

Value for Money (VfM) is the latest emerging trend in development finance and is championed in different ways by funding agencies like DFID, AusAID, New Zealand’s Development Cooperation, Global Fund and UNDP. VfM emphasizes results in the wake of the budgetary crises at the beginning of the 21st century. It is also closely linked to the results agenda of the global aid and development effectiveness debate. However, many of the VfM building blocks – such as theory of change necessary to promote the 4Es (effectiveness, efficiency, economy and equity) are already part of conventional results tools, existing management practices and evaluation techniques.

The objective of this paper is to discuss whether the VfM concept is really new by comparing it to conventional results tools, project management approaches and evaluation practices. As there is no standard definition of VfM, this paper will only focus on how this is applied to projects. The first section emphasizes the evolution of the aid effectiveness debate and its relationship to VfM. The second section demonstrates that the results log-framework – as a theory of change and evaluation tool – is an essential building block for the VfM. The third section discusses how the VfM is applied in the project cycle and its relationship to existing project management practices and evaluation techniques. Finally, the paper concludes that although VfM is a rebranding of existing tools and practices, it is an important communication tool that helps promote accountability and transparency.

Aid effectiveness and VfM

Although aid effectiveness – which emphasizes the need to improve aid modalities by advocating for issues such as untying of aid, aligning to national development plans, coordinating with other development partners and being results oriented – was already being discussed in the 1960s, it only gained momentum as part of Monterrey consensus on Financing for Development [2002]. In this context, the aid effectiveness was part of the funding framework for the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs]. The aid effectiveness agenda was subsequently further elaborated in the various High level fora on Aid effectiveness in Rome [2003], Paris [2005] and Accra [2008] that, among others, gradually expanded the results and measurement agenda. The last two conferences in Busan [2011] and Mexico City [2014] focused on the changing aid architecture and advocated for inclusiveness of development through South-South cooperation and by ensuring coherence between aid, trade, debt, taxation, investment, remittances, climate change and illicit financial flows.

Despite the broadening from aid to development effectiveness, the results orientation of development cooperation is still critical and can be defined as “arrangement for the planning, management and deployment of aid that is efficient, reduces transaction costs and is targeted towards development outcomes including poverty reduction”
What is new in Value for Money?

[Stern et al, 2008]. This means that development results should not only focus on economy and efficiency, but also on the quality of the outcomes [Jackson, 2012]. The principles of VfM are similar as it emphasizes effectiveness, efficiency, evidence, value for money and results [ACFID, 2014]. VfM therefore does not only focus on reducing inefficiencies in how aid is managed, but also on achieving better development results.

Although VfM is aligned to the aid effectiveness principles, the concept does not have a standardized and uniform definition. It was first elaborated by the UK National Audit Office and was defined as “the optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes”. Overtime, other funders have different interpretations and applied it in various manners:

- DFID’s “maximise the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people’s lives” [DFID, 2011].
- UNDP applies VfM to governance and conflict programmes and is a term generally used to describe "an explicit commitment to ensuring the best results possible are obtained from the money spent" [Barrett et al, 2010]
- Global Fund’s “three elements of VfM to consider are effectiveness, efficiency and additionality” [Global Fund, 2012]. This has similar foundations to the Performance Based Financing.
- Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade “VfM has eight principles under economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity” [DFAT, 2015].
- New Zealand’s Aid Agency “achieving the best possible development outcomes over the life of an activity relative to the total cost of managing and resourcing that activity and ensuring that resources are used effectively, economically, and without waste” [NZAID, 2011]

These different definitions demonstrate a wide range of VfM interpretations and how it is applied. DFID uses this approach as a decision-making tool for management and funding; while the Global Fund’s Performance Based Financing – similar to concessional financing of other Multilateral Development Banks – can be a tool to promote VfM. This is because it is based on the linkages between “performance”, “results” and “effectiveness” which are part of both the VfM and the Performance Based Financing principles. The difference is that the Performance Based Financing does not have a clear results chain that measures inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact [Fan, 2013]. VfM can also be applied to country and thematic strategies, which raises the question on how issues such as coordination, selectivity and knowledge work are included in this analysis.

The effect of VfM is similar to other approaches that promote results. Often this leads to creating misalignments as the focus is on donor criteria and not the priorities of the country or community, which in turn is necessary for ownership and long-term sustainability. This long-term sustainability is also more difficult to demonstrate than simple short-term efficiency and effectiveness indicators. Another problem is that VfM leads to additional bureaucracy and costs, as data that is often scarce needs to be collected

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1 The eight principles are: cost consciousness, encouraging competition, evidence based decision making, proportionality, performance and risk management, results focus, experimentation and innovation, and accountability and transparency.
What is new in Value for Money?

Figure 1: VM and the result log-framework have similar functions

Source: DFID approach to Value for Money (2011) & African Development Bank
What is new in Value for Money?
and tracked. This will then be compared to peer groups in similar settings, which is essentially the same as an impact evaluation. Obviously, the additional bureaucracy created by requiring peer comparisons has a negative impact on the economy principle of the VfM that it seeks to promote. The VfM approach will also lead to projects that are easily designed and part of the “low-lying” fruit in the portfolio of implementation agencies. This would diminish the equity principle of the VfM. It is for these reasons that Multilateral Development Banks emphasize that the benefits of VfM should not exceed the costs prior to applying this approach to institutions (AfDB, 2016).

As indicated in Figure 1, the VfM approach and results log-framework have similar functions, including performing the functions of presenting a “theory of change” and using it as an evaluation tool. These results log-frameworks are an essential element in applying 4Es of VfM as it requires that interventions should be dissected into impact, outcomes, outputs, activities and inputs. These elements can be refined using monetary, quantitative and qualitative indicators (Barr and Christie, 2014). Therefore both the VfM and conventional results log-framework are used as a tool to apply standard evaluation techniques such as cost-effectiveness analysis, cost utility analysis, cost-benefit analysis and social return analysis. Broader portfolio analysis can also be applied including the ranking of correlations between cost vs. impact and basic efficiency resource analysis.

Besides some of the similarities between VfM and conventional results log-framework, there are two differences. Firstly, the conventional results log-framework aims at measuring outputs, outcomes and impacts based on initial objectives (such as SMART objectives), while VfM focuses on how outputs, outcomes and impacts are maximised for minimal inputs without compromising quality. Secondly, at the end of the project, the conventional results framework can analyze outputs, outcomes and impacts relative to objectives, while VfM largely involves an analysis of outputs, outcomes

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2 Cost effectiveness analysis compares relative costs to outcomes, cost utility analysis compares relative costs to outcomes in non-monetary terms based on individual preferences, cost benefit analysis compares total costs to its impact and social return on investment compares the economic value of social and environmental outcomes. This latter is based on perceptions of individuals or community, beneficiary groups would have to be interviewed.

3 The rank correlation of cost vs. impact approach ranks and correlated in terms of costs and impact, while the basic efficiency resource analysis compares the relative value by plotting based on four quadrant graph based on costs and impacts.
and impacts relative to inputs, and outcomes relative to outputs [Javasuriya, 2013]. This means in operational terms that VfM will require peer groups so that similar projects can be compared with each other to demonstrated effectiveness, efficiency, economy and equity.

In short, the conventional results log-framework is simply about measuring and it is implicitly meant to improve management, while the VfM is focused explicitly on improving management by dynamically comparing effectiveness, efficiency and economy, with different options and peer groups. The consequences are that conventional results tools emphasize improving efficiency and effective, while VfM focus on comparing efficiency and effectiveness across projects.

**Applying VfM in the conventional project cycle**

The dynamic approach promoted by VfM should lead to a system that reflects a “constant, critical, robust appraisal of why you’re doing what you’re doing” [IDRC, 2013]. That means a constant requirement to compare between projects and activities within a projects by the 4Es, including at entry, implementation and completion stages of the projects. In theory this improves the performance of the implementing agency by focusing on the balance of effectiveness and efficiency of delivering results [Vardakoulias, 2013]. However, many of these elements are also part of standard project management practices and evaluation techniques, and therefore the value added is minimum, while overhead costs will likely grow due to additional reporting and data collection requirements [McKay 2013].

As indicated in figure 2, the dynamic approach of VfM requires a constant comparison with peer projects and options, which would apply the 4Es at every stage. At entry this means that an ex-ante assessment will be undertake that compares various other funding options as a means to justify the financing of particular development outcomes. This means a high level assessment of the likely quality and cost of alternative modalities, designs, or contracting options [NZAID, 2011]. Although the VfM can take long-term effectiveness into consideration by for example focusing on alignment with national priorities or capacity building activities, the most likely political economy effect will be that implementing agencies submit projects that are easy to justify. The proposed project will then be compared to a peer group that has been pre-selected to ensure that the initiative stands-out positively thereby increasing the possibility of funding being approved. This will also require standardized output and outcome measures, while other more complicated interventions – such as capacity development, policy advice and budget support – will be left out. In short, standardization and avoiding risks, will be chosen over innovation and long-term effectiveness despite the fact that this is not the objective per se of the VfM.

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The second stage focusses on applying the VfM at implementation. The dynamic approach means the constant reviewing of alternatives to achieving outputs and outcomes, and competitive recruitment and procurement process [Arras, 2016]. This includes joint activities with other partners which is promoted under the aid and development effectiveness agenda. All these elements are part of standard project management practices and therefore the VfM does not provide any new perspectives. For example,
competitive recruitment, open tenders and dialogue with end beneficiaries are key to balance effective, efficient, economic and equity. These elements are consistent with both the VfM and current project management practices.

In the third and final stage, the VfM is applied at completion which emphasize evaluating and drawing lessons based on the 4Es and compare it with peer projects. In practice, this will require applying standardized evaluation techniques such as cost benefit analysis, cost effectiveness analysis and other methods [Fleming, 2013]. These findings will then be compared to other evaluations. This can be considered similar to an impact evaluation. Similarly to the implementation, VfM does not provide a new perspective to existing evaluation techniques. The main advantage is that VfM is a good communication tool that can be used to promote transparency and accountability towards outside stakeholders such as governments, parliament and the general public.

Conclusion

VfM is part of the results agenda that promotes aid effectiveness. Although this concept seems to be overshadowed by the global trend that emphasizes overall development effectiveness and inclusion of South-South collaboration and the private sector, aid effectiveness is still critical as a means to demonstrate the value of development cooperation in a context of budgetary pressures and limited public support. In this context, VfM is a powerful communication tool that emphasizes the 4Es, respectively effectiveness, efficiency, economy and equity. It is equally clear that funders have applied VfM differently ranging from project design, programme and strategies to being part and performance allocation framework. To ensure that this article remains focused, this paper only addresses the impact of VfM on projects.

Overall, it is evident that VfM is not a wholly new concept and has integrated many key elements of the conventional
results tools, existing project management process and evaluation techniques. All these require a clear theory of change, competitive tendering and standard evaluation techniques (e.g. cost benefit analysis, cost effectiveness analysis, etc.) to determine the right balance between the 4Es. The difference is that VfM requires peer comparison to demonstrate explicit improvements in relation to 4Es, while existing management techniques consider this implicitly. The explicit requirement of VfM leads to additional data collection cost, more bureaucracy, standardized and non-innovative projects, and alignment with donor rather than recipient needs. The focus of these projects will be also on short-term efficiency and effectiveness gains rather than long-term sustainability, which is difficult to measure. This is why applying VfM to institutions can only be done if the benefits outweigh the costs.

In conclusion, VfM approach is more a rebranding of conventional results tool and existing monitoring and evaluation practices. However, the real strengthen of VfM is that it provides a strong communication tool that can easily identify the 4Es – Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity – to a wider public. This supports transparency and accountability, which is an equally important dimension to justify and demonstrate relevance of the development financing. This is critical for long term political sustainability for both recipient and donor countries.
What is new in Value for Money?

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What is new in Value for Money?


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**Author’s Profile**

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Looking ahead to leave no-one behind: Evolution as another E-word for the Value-for-Money framework

Kate Stoney, African Development Bank

One of the over-arching aims of development work is to positively impact the lives of the beneficiaries, either directly or indirectly. Taking a case study from a Rural Water Programme in Ethiopia, the author suggests adding a human dimension to Value for Money, arguing that the 4Es approach of assessing economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity can be strengthened by a timescale to measure softer improvements in Quality of Life for the next generation of beneficiaries.
Introduction

The UK’s Department for International Development (DFID, year) describes a framework for evaluating Value for Money (VFM) in Development which focuses on the three Es of Economy, or the reduction of costs; Efficiency, or increasing output for a given input; and Effectiveness, or successfully achieving the intended outcomes. A 4th E, Equity is also acknowledged in the framework and has since been commonly adopted in VFM assessment.

This paper makes the case for an additional criterion in assessing VFM. For the purpose of continuity of concept, let us consider “Evolution” or a 5th E, as a potential candidate to the VFM assessment framework.

Wind the clock back a couple of millennia and contemplate what the description of personal fulfilment in life could have been. Seeing the sea? Thrice tasting berries and once sipping wine? Quality of Life and expectations have evolved as a result of the dynamics of individuals interacting with others.

In today’s world, technology is fast-forwarding changes in lifestyle at such a pace that today’s youth in the global North find it hard to grasp how society could function without Internet and mobile phones. Yet across sub-Saharan Africa, 319 million people still lack access to improved drinking water sources (JMP data, 2015). Many of these people spend a large part of their time each day simply fetching water. In addition, they are prone to chronic illness from exposure to surface-water bacteria. Many of them also suffer the distress of drought or the fear of drought, during the dry season. The UN recognizes access to water and sanitation as a Human Right; and their Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 6 pledges availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030.

The Value of Eliminating Hardship

A study of a community of fishermen (Hastrup, 2009:20), found that individual positive and negative perceptual emotional experiences are crucial mechanisms of social resilience.

In times of hardship induced by environmental factors, resilience in socio-ecological systems resides inside people and their perception of changes which impact their quality of life. “Social resilience is an outcome of applied knowledge regimes concerning technology, national and international markets, national politics – funnelled through the personality of the fishermen, their household members and significant others in the community” (Hastrup, 2009:20).

Here I would argue that if cultural and personal perceptions are significant in maintaining resilience in drought-threatened communities, then the positive experience of a change in environmental resources is significant in fostering well-being and an environment conducive to a better overall standard of living for the community and therefore a positive evolution in quality of life for the next generation of members of the community.
One’s quality of life is improved by removing the hardship associated with reliance on unsafe surface water, and long distances trekked to collect it. Whereas the standard of living index is largely defined and measured by income and available material goods and necessities, the concept of quality of life redirects focus to intangible cultural values experienced. If the children of beneficiaries of the water and sanitation programme grow up without the hardship of water scarcity, how then do we measure its economic implications on this generation?

Our fifth “E” – Evolution – for VFM imposes a scientific assessment of the psychosocial impact of the improved life quality brought about by having water close at hand.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has an established quality of life measurement framework, and clinicians have used quality of life as a parameter for making decisions on health issues since the 1960s. On the other end of the quality of life scale, Higgenbotham et al. (2006) established an “Environmental Distress Scale” to measure the biopsychosocial cost of ecological change. Originally tested on a mining community, the scale was adapted for use in a survey used to assess the impact of a change in water resources in Tampa, USA. The survey highlighted the emotional distress that participants felt due to the drying up of their wetlands.

Can we monetize well-being?

The following case study of a Water and Sanitation (WASH) program in rural Ethiopia invites us to think back only 10 years to 2006, when the AfDB’s RWSSI [Rural Water Supply and Sanitation initiative] started a program which would make water, more readily accessible in two of the neediest regions of Ethiopia.

If the generation of children who have never had to trek to distant water points, and suffer the hardship of water collection, grow up and collectively thrive as a community, what part of that success can be attributed to the well-being induced by having water at hand? And if a significant number of those persons also find employment which offers them a better standard of living [in economic terms] than their parents, what part of that gain can be attributed to the investment in WASH infrastructure as opposed to gain from other development, such as education or health programmes?

An assessment of Value for Money would seemingly benefit from a tool which estimates mean annual benefit of the increased Quality of Life as a result of having safe water close at hand. If ‘x’ children save a mean ‘y’ minutes per day throughout their school years, what is the economic value of the benefits that occur as a result? It should be able to assess the value, not only of time gained from having water at household level, but of how that time is spent by the younger generation and how they evolve as a result.
A rural WASH programme in Ethiopia: Two contrasting regions and different perspectives for the generation to come.

1. Water at home for the Tulu family in Saden Sodo, Oromia, Ethiopia

About two decades ago, the Kebshashe community, located in the Saden Sodo Woreda (administrative district) of Oromia regional state of Ethiopia, decided to set up a committee to present their case for water facility funding. Each of the households, including the Tulu family, contributed 115 ETB (5 euros) for processing the request. Furthermore, the men of the community also helped with labour during the construction of the scheme. Today the Kebeshashe community has a gravity-based water system with 7 communal distribution points and 1 cattle trough. Over half of the 300 households served have already managed to get their own yard connection, with a meter. Among them, the Tulu family.

Before the programme, Mrs. Tiknesh Tulu used to trek four hours to the leech-infested Acheber river to collect water for her family during the dry season. She would go as early in the morning as possible before cows started to wade in it. On market days, when the donkey was not available, she was forced to carry it home on her back. She had little time to care for her two young sons and her husband, a farmer. Water collection during her pregnancy and after childbirth was particularly challenging. The community was in constant worry about the health hazard both to people and cattle. They had to ration domestic use of water due to the difficulties (30 litres per household per day on average), thereby compromising personal hygiene. In 2009 when Mrs. Tiknesh Tulu’s children were aged 2 and 5, the spring pipe scheme built as part of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative (RWSSI) program brought water to a mere 5-minute walk from Mrs. Tulu’s compound. In 2013, she and her husband decided to apply for their own household connection. They paid around ETB 1,500 (65 euros) for the installation. She now appreciates the comfort and ease of having one’s own tap, “to get water whenever you want using whatever container you have” as she puts it. Water is no longer a problem. She says that she now has more time to take care of her family, socialize and go to the market. Above all, she is relieved of the physical burden of water collection and consequently, she says, enjoys better health.

The bigger picture of challenges in Ethiopia: Value for money against a backdrop of climatic vulnerability, and tradition.

On Return on Investment, the programme was designed to be sustainable in economic terms. Communal water enclosures have a locked gate and villagers pay a fee to the site manager to collect water during opening hours. Water rates are set at 3 ETB (0,13 euros) per household/month, for communal water points; and 3 ETB/1000 liters for a household connection. The rates were calculated to cover daily operation and maintenance costs. On socio-economic benefits, the main tangible benefit for the community of Saden Sodo, was that children no longer need to accompany their mothers to the
Looking ahead to leave no-one behind: Evaluation as another E-word for the Value-for-Money framework.

Mrs. Tiknesh Tulu of the Saden Sodo community.

Photo credit: Shoji Hikaru.
river or engage in domestic work in their absence. In the context of rural Ethiopia, women and children, particularly girls bear the burden of fetching water, often traveling long distance to the water source and queuing for several hours.1

Here, I would like to argue that Value for Money in assessing development impact cannot be assessed without our 5th E, Evolution. The quality of life that this generation will have, simply due to the fact that they will never have endured the hardship of water collection that their parents describe, will potentially affect their mentality, their ambitions in life and their chances of achieving their personal objectives.

In terms of eliminating hardship and emotional distress, the community was also able to limit livestock loss during the unusually long dry season of 2015.1

Furthermore, the community gained in peace of mind from not having to send their girls to walk long distances in search of water. They reported to an AfDB team visiting the community that the risk of the practice of abducting girls on the way to the distant water points had been reduced. One community reported cases of abduction before the arrival of the water points as a means to, or resulting in forced marriage.

I therefore contend that “Evolution” is an important concept in assessing Value for Money in development work, because only by eliminating fear and emotional distress can communities like those in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, make positive contributions to their own future and to the stability, including the economic stability, of the community.

2. A sedentary life for the Garbo Hadley community in the Awbare woreda of the Ethiopian Somali Region.

Around 26,000 pastoralists live in the Awbare woreda. The vast majority grow crops and also raise livestock. Due to the lack of surface water during the dry season, lasting four to six months each year, members of the community used to have to leave home for long periods with the cattle in order for them to drink. Those who remained in Awabare used to have to take their camels 25 km away to a deep well to collect water, a nine-hour round-trip. Consequently, the burden of water collection was heavy, both in terms of physical effort and economic strain from loss of productivity or opportunities to trade.

Water is now collected from a deep borehole well, built as part of the RWSSI programme. Distances have now been reduced to between 15 minutes and one-hour maximum to the borehole. Now that the water scheme is completed, the need for seasonal movement with livestock has been eliminated. Ms. Ubah Mohammed is a mother of five children in the Garbo Hadley community. Before the water point arrived, her husband used to collect water every 2–3 days with his camels. The 200 ETB/day [9 euros] she earns as cashier at the water point has helped her augment her family income. She reports that school attendance of her children, especially her three girls, is more regular now. Other women of the community mentioned having more time for trading along the border with Somaliland and work in handicrafts for household use.
In the case of the Garbo Hadley community, lifestyle has changed radically from nomadic to sedentary. Evolution over time as a result of the development in water resources is therefore very strong. Assessing VfM for the next generation would, at a basic level, involve calculating the benefits of children gaining continuous access to education and health simply from being able to remain in the community all year-round. But what will the community look like one generation down the line?

Evaluation of the WASH development in Ethiopia

In 2015, the AfDB sent a team comprising a water and sanitation engineer, a socio-economist and a financial analyst mandated to draft the Project Completion Report (PCR) of the RWSSI Ethiopia program. They met a number of government officers both in Addis Ababa and in the regions. They also met with local stakeholders who reported on how communities were benefitting from improved water supply services.

In Section B of the PCR, “Effectiveness”, one of the components of the DFID Value for Money framework, is measured according to multiple criteria including narrative assessment of outcome. Section C of the PCR measure “Efficiency”, another of our VfM E-words, according to criteria such as timeliness, use of resources and cost benefit analysis at completion.

Others sections were Relevance and Sustainability, neither of which can be equated to the Value for Money E-criterion of “Economy”, but which better lend to our concept of more focus the impact of WASH development on the generation to come. The PCR does not, however, infer to the socioeconomic progress which will be realized over time as a result of the development.

The Approach paper for an ongoing Impact Evaluation of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Program in Ethiopia”, by IDEV, implicitly supports the argument to include “Evolution” in VfM assessments.

1 Delayed seasonal rains in 2015 resulted in the European Commission classing the Oromia region as «in crisis» between July and September 2015. The European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) reported in July 2015 that food insecurity was “widespread” in the region.
It affirms that “The fundamental impact evaluation question of this study is ‘what would have happened to the outcome variables of interest in communities supported by AfDB’s RWSSP had the program not been implemented?’”

Impact evaluation uses the technique of comparing the outcomes for a community in two different regions, one with and one without the programme. Many factors which determine the outcome variables of impact evaluation, ranging from knowledge, attitude, income, to tastes and preferences, can change over time, yet the IE study conducted in Ethiopia measures programme impact in the form of evidence collected without taking into account any possible benefits for the next generation of beneficiaries of the water programme.

Conclusion

Because societies are dynamic formations arising from person-system relationships of mutual interdependence, the Quality of Life for communities such as those living in rural Ethiopia where water is a precious commodity, cannot evolve collectively until they gain access to year-round improved water. The socio-economic impacts of a water development programme, centred essentially on the health benefits of improved drinking water and their immediate knock-on effects to the local economy are easier to measure over time.

Ms. Ubah Mohammed of the Garbo Hadley community. Photo credit: Shoji Hikaru.
than changes in quality of life induced by the same programme. This is especially the case in rural areas where the hardship of water collection and the distress brought about by drought affect the way children grow up and evolve within and alongside the community. Today’s paradox, and chance for these populations, is that, because of the increasing availability of access to technologies of all kinds, the hurdles to the next levels of life standards are easier to cross. The evolution of these communities can therefore be extremely fast once this inhibiting hurdle is removed.

One way of assessing long term estimated benefits is to pay more attention to softer psychological and social evolutionary patterns, which are alluded to in verbatim and narrative assessment by stakeholders from both sides of the development fence. This kind of predictive assessment, or looking ahead, would particularly sway development planning cursors towards investing in rural areas where water collection represents physical hardship and emotional stress. Such a rationale, to my mind, is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals ambition of “leaving no-one behind”.

About the Rural WASH Programme in Ethiopia

A US$ 66 million WASH program supported by the AfDB and RWSSI ran from 2006 to 2014 in contrasting regions of Ethiopia, ranging from tropical forests south of Addis Ababa to the hot and desertic regions along the border with Somalia. Droughts and hence food insecurity still beset many regions. The Government of Ethiopia’s program aimed at providing sustainable and resilient infrastructure, supporting skills development and job creation especially for women and youth, strengthening sector governance and capacity, contributing to enhanced water and food security, and prioritizing the basic needs of under-served social groups.
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How effective is public aid? A look at Benin’s budget support policy provides insight

Abdoulaye Gounou, Director General of Evaluation, Benin Prime Minister’s Office.

Evaluation practices are constantly changing in Benin. However, it is limited in terms of its contribution to improving the population’s living conditions. In Benin, despite the strong commitment of politicians and key players to evaluation, significant challenges remain in getting the practice to take root.
Introduction

Benin is dependent on bilateral and multilateral aid to finance its development, with the average contribution of technical and financial partners about half of the total amount of the Public Investment Programme; excluding components not included in public accounting, notably those of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The concept of value for money in the public sphere will be a major concern of public interventions in the current context of increasingly scarce domestic and external resources. Major road infrastructure projects are carried out or planned although socioeconomic impact studies prior to the implementation of these major interventions do not contain cost-benefit analysis based on scientific rigor. In some cases, there are methodological difficulties, and in others, there are information systems issues. As a result, tens of billions of CFA francs are spent without any signs of the planned social wellbeing that the infrastructure development is expected to bring. This situation is even worse when it comes to social projects (education, health, water and sanitation, etc.).

How to obtain value for public resources?

Judging by certain socioeconomic policy choices, notably in the education sector, it is clear that extra efforts need to be made to obtain value for money in the sector, including resources used to conduct evaluations in the sector. Besides, given the level of democratic maturity in Benin and strides made in governance issues, budget support would be preferable to targeted official development assistance. Development assistance should be confined to improving administrative governance with a view to promoting development administration. But, is budget support an effective socioeconomic development tool?

Value for money concept

Value for money is synonymous with “getting your money's worth,” “cost-benefit ratio,” or “return on investment” ([CRDI, 2013, p.1]. In the public sector, it refers to maximizing the impact of each unit of account spent towards improving the living conditions of the population in general, and the poorer population or specific groups in particular [DFID, 2011]. The recommended strategy to ensure better value for money is, for any public intervention, to maximize the “3 Es”, namely economy, efficiency and effectiveness, without obscuring the equity in the analysis of effectiveness. In the same light, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommends that equity be made a fourth “E” [Jackson, 2012]. In addition, Bandy [2014] insists on the consideration of ethics to make it a fifth “E.”

The use of the value for money concept to evaluate public interventions, including development aid programmes, has significant methodological challenges that differ according to the type of intervention [simple or complex], the sector and its scope.

1The CFA franc for francophone Africa, including Benin.
Case study: Institution of free primary and nursery education in Benin

The case of measuring the impact of free nursery and primary education decreed in Benin illustrates the need for value for money in the implementation of public policies, notably in the primary education sub-sector. Upstream shortcomings, especially in costing, and inadequate implementation are the key reasons why the expected results of this public policy were not obtained.

Article 13 of the country’s Constitution of 11 December 1990 provides that primary education is mandatory and that the state shall progressively ensure that it is free in the public system [JO, 1991]. To ensure this law works, the Council of Ministers on 13 October 2006 passed a decree instituting free nursery and primary education in Benin. The government’s decision came into force ten [10] days after the 2006–2007 academic year started.

Basically, it is a relevant public policy in the sense that it provides a solution to the issue of the population’s low education levels and consolidated Benin’s commitment to the second Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Such relevance is also observed by all actors given the challenges of primary education for all and the coherence of this measure with national and international education guidelines [OCS, 2011; Jessen et al, 2012].

Politically, it was a profitable measure when referred to the “model of political offers” [Garraud, 1990 quoted by Kübler and Maillard, 2009, p.23]. Legislative elections were set for 31 March 2007 and were a first electoral test for the country’s new President who was sworn-in on 6 April 2006. Controlling Parliament, the country’s second institution, was a crucial challenge. Technically, the ministries of development, finance, and education were surprised by the measure, because it undermined the budget year’s programmatic framework.

It is following the decision by the Council of Ministers instituting free education, on 13 October 2006, that instructions were given to certain ministers and experts to propose options or an action plan to the Government. Thus, on 29 January 2007, the Council of Ministers published the contents of a measure in which the state paid the fees that were previously paid by parents, without distinction to gender, place of residence, race, or ethnicity. The state also covered the cost of textbooks and provided subventions to schools depending on their locations. The same process was applied to promote the institution of an emergency programme to build and equip 311 classrooms within 2 months, recruit and train 320 teachers, and provide the schools with the required capital appropriations [OCS, 2011]. It was necessary to provide funds to cover additional demand resulting from free education.

Besides exemptions from various charges, the content of the measure is in line with the continuity of ongoing public projects, with the exception that they have intensified. The formulation process has maintained the logic of Lindblom’s [1959] incremental model because it was a political and administrative arrangement in which most of the items contained in the measure were for the short term [Gortner, Mahler and Nicholson, 2010]. Better still, the context described above, in addition to the electoral calendar, limited the search for options and could not accommodate a cost-effectiveness analysis that would optimally combine the “4 Es.”
Judging by Howlett’s [2011] nomenclature on public policy implementation instruments, those used within the framework of free education and which did not promote the “4 Es”, were mainly informational and authoritarian tools:

a. Informational tool

There was an active information campaign strategy, spurred by the political context, and in particular, the legislative elections of March 2007. Government delegations comprising ministers, advisers to the President of the Republic, and high-ranking civil servants toured virtually all villages and city neighbourhoods at length. Contracts were signed with certain media outlets (television, radio, and print media) to cover the Government’s tours, and disseminate government press releases and messages about the measure. Although the costs of such contracts have never been made official, the various campaigns were very costly for Beninese taxpayers and donor countries. The media, including local radio and television stations, played a key role in disseminating the information and also misinforming the middle and lower classes of Benin’s population. Although most of them were private media outlets, their contract with the Government steered them towards making commentaries which fit with official expectations.

b. Authoritarian tool

The authorities resorted to market regulation in the building and equipping of classrooms. During the initial years of the programme’s implementation, the state used the Armed Forces to build and equip classrooms instead of allowing private companies to compete. As a result, the classrooms, most of which were makeshift structures, were more expensive due to the lack of competition that should have guaranteed better value for money.

Consequently, only 20% of infrastructure needs were covered and less than two-thirds of classrooms were built of solid materials [Jessen et al, 2012]. The student / teacher ratio is still a concern [53.1 in 2014], and repeat and dropout rates are not yet under control. Approximately three out of every ten students enrolled do not complete primary school [INSAE, 2013; MEMP, 2013].

Value for money in quality evaluations

The lack of value for money brought to light by two major evaluations in Benin’s primary education sub-sector is a concern and hampers the effectiveness of official development assistance. The first, is the impact of free nursery and primary education on poverty and society [a PSIA-type survey] conducted by the Observatory for Social Change (OCS) in 2011. The other is the mid-term evaluation of the 10-year education sector development plan in Benin [PDDSE 2006-2015] conducted in 2012. The two evaluations offer different perspectives. The first laid more emphasis on outcomes of free education after implementation, while the second dealt with the PDDSE implementation in general. However, it should be noted that free education was not included in the initial 10-year education sector development plan although it contributed to the plan’s outcome.

Poverty and Social Impact Analysis
If an evaluation specifically on the implementation of this measure had been done, it would, together with the PSIA of 2011, have provided a wealth of information that would have enabled implementers to better understand the policy and ultimately identify possible ways of improving the performance of the sub-sector. Yet, this policy decision was made without prior technical analysis by the various stakeholders.

**Budget support**

One of the value for money strategies of development assistance resources consists of focusing on budget support at the expense of targeted support or sector support. Benin has a development programme on very specific lines. Multiple technical and financial partners lend support to certain aspects of the programme, which often creates an imbalance in the synergy and coordination of the overall development programme. This imbalance could be avoided if all the donors worked within the budget support logic.

However, to establish a government capable of optimally controlling the national development programme, it is necessary to have targeted budget support. This includes aid programmes aimed at building the capacity of government officials and institutional, organizational and management systems of the public administration.

**Conclusion**

The planning, programming and budgeting system is an imperative for any government aspiring to induce change in society. Large-scale public actions must however be nurtured and tested prior to implementation. The decision cycle must be monitored so that the public intervention is evidence-based (Evidence-based policy making).

Just as the private sector invests in research and development to maximize profit, governments must invest in technology to improve organisation and decision-making, thereby cutting down on wasting resources.

The development of a policy of economic evaluation would be a useful tool to optimise economic policy.
How effective is public aid? A look at Benin’s budget support policy provides insight.
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The paper argues that the Value for Money framework could be improved by running integrated randomized framed staged field experiments to test development interventions before they are implemented on a large scale.

Maria Sophia Aguirre, Professor of Economics, Catholic University of America, Washington DC.
Introduction

The accountable, effective use of funds allocated to achieve sustainable development has become an increasingly topical concern in international organizations and among development practitioners. These concerns have become more pressing as development resources have dwindled over the last decade. To determine whether funds are used correctly, some governments have used the Value for Money (VFM) framework and its principle components of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity.\(^1\) But if VFM “is about finding the right balance between economy, efficiency and effectiveness, [it] cannot be assessed through only one of these dimensions in isolation.”\(^2\) The framework can be improved by integrating the various dimensions of VFM.

As part of the effort to increase accountability and cost effectiveness, investors have sought to improve impact evaluation work and the design of development interventions. While randomized control trials (RCTs) are used increasingly to test impact and/or theories and design,\(^3\) they tend to be cost inefficient because the outcomes often prove to be different from those that were planned.\(^4\) The use of randomized framed staged field experiments (RFSF) can improve both large scale RCTs and the VFM framework specifically by testing intervention design before going to scale and/or solutions to problems that arise during impact evaluations. RFSF could thus improve an intervention’s efficiency and effectiveness, and field results, and benefit development policy.

Integral Approach to Economic Development

An integral approach to economic development can be useful in carrying out impact evaluations and in designing RFSF experiments. Underpinning this approach is the recognition of an individual’s social dimension, which therefore considers the interpersonal-relational dimension of economic actions, i.e. the way people interact to help or jeopardize sustainable development.

An integral approach to impact evaluation seeks to clarify the effective channels of human relationships for making economic development sustainable. It gives primacy to measuring ‘actions’, and focuses on the direct beneficiaries of an intervention and on their interpersonal relationships, thereby going beyond the direct or immediate impact of an intervention. The approach requires that changes in the lifestyle and in the actions of program...
beneficiaries be measured and evaluated, and it defines success by the impact on the quality of life of beneficiaries, of their families, and if their community.

An integral approach to evaluation uses three tools: i) behavioral and experimental economics; ii) survey design and market research techniques modified to allow for a rigorous quantitative analysis, and iii) econometrics. In designing randomized experiments, the integral approach introduces proactive participatory incentives to encourage behavior changes that improve outcomes.

Randomized Framed Staged Field Experiments

The standard economic assumption that economic agents are motivated by monetary incentives to maximize utility is a simplistic assumption which does not take into account the integral approach of maximizing in a decision-making process. Insofar as this approach looks at an economic agent as a person who is social by nature, the randomized framed staged field experiment does not rely solely on monetary incentives to stimulate behavior change. Rather, as Schein (1999, 2009, and 2010) and other organizational sociologist/psychologists have pointed out, its incentive is the opportunity to engage in a participatory manner.

In this framework, as in standard experimental design, subjects are motivated by a desire to better their lives. They receive no cash or monetary compensation for participating in decisions, however, but rather, see the opportunities to make joint decisions and act accordingly as incentive. Like any standard randomized experiment, this framework requires a control group and baseline treatment. However, given that this is a brief, framed experiment, post data is only required from the treatment group.

A randomized field experiment is designed like a framed staged experiment, but it is carried out in stages. Using roleplaying situations that resemble real life, subjects participate more and more in decision making through the various stages. Their behavior changes from passive to proactive and in so doing, changes their mind-set and actions to maximize their personal utility in improving their lives and the lives of others affected by their decisions and actions. Participants develop an understanding of personal responsibility and the consequences for action (Figure 1).

Framed experiments can raise concerns about outcomes, insofar as part of the treatment group could respond to incentives in such a way as to bias results. Participants might be aware of the artifice of the arrangement and/or a self-selection problem, and thus bias the results. Yet both control and treatment groups are randomized, which eliminates the self-selection bias.

These issues can be addressed by framed randomized field experiments (FRFE) and roleplaying techniques. FRFE occurs in the context where subjects naturally undertake their tasks and thereby introduces randomization and realism. In roleplaying, subjects

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5 On the shortcomings and distortions generated by monetary incentives, see Bowles and Polania-Reyes (2012).
must put themselves in a hypothetical situation that they judge as they might judge a real-life situation. It should however be noted that role playing captures not actual but intended behavior. The method can capture subjects’ psychological processes while effectively generating acceptable levels of involvement (Fichtel 2009, Greenwood 2006). The value of roleplaying thus derives from its capacity to determine the adequacy of incentives by revealing how participants react to them.

**Figure 1: Framed Staged Experimental Design**

**Conclusions**

The use of randomized framed staged field experiments with an integral approach can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the VFM framework while respecting the objective of the intervention and its institutional and cultural realities. The methodology is useful for testing development interventions before they are scaled up. The tool can rigorously test the recommendations of an impact evaluation before scaling up an intervention while significantly reducing costs and increasing efficiency by avoiding ineffective large-scale randomized field experiments.
References


**Author’s Profile**

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This paper makes the case that the 4Es approach to determining value for money (VFM) can be strengthened through the use of explicit evaluative reasoning, using criteria and standards to guide evaluative judgments about VFM. It also outlines other ways in which the use of the 4Es can be strengthened to provide more valid and useful assessments of VFM in development contexts. A case study is presented of Ligada, a female economic empowerment programme in Mozambique, where an evaluation-specific approach to VFM has been developed.
Introduction

Value for Money (VFM) is a question about the merit, worth or significance of resource use [King, 2016a]. The concept of VFM has received increasing attention in international development as funding and delivery organisations strive to use limited resources well, to maximise their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to demonstrate value back to their benefactors and taxpayers.

The UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), for example, published DFID’s Approach to Value for Money in 2011, setting out the Department’s expectations for the assessment of VFM. DFID’s framework focuses on the three Es of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and an overarching concept of cost-effectiveness that ties the three together. A 4th E (equity) is also acknowledged in the framework (figure 1).

Jackson [2012] notes that VFM is not a tool or a method, but a way of thinking about using resources well. Her paper sought to address confusion regarding the concept of VFM and to promote a constructive discussion about VFM. It emphasised that development partners all want aid to work as well as it can and agree that limited budgets need to be well targeted and managed. The challenge today remains how to assess VFM in practice in order to support good resource allocation decisions.

This paper offers a way forward. VFM is an evaluative question about the economic problem of resource allocation (King, 2016a). It follows that an evaluation-specific approach (Scriven, 1991), using criteria and standards, is an appropriate
way to reach evaluative judgments that are transparent, valid, credible, and supported by empirical evidence. This approach is compatible with the 4Es and addresses key weaknesses in the way they are currently applied. It provides a way to synthesize mixed methods evidence which may include economic, quantitative and qualitative data.

The following case study shows a situation where it is crucial to think beyond indicator-based measurement to make a shrewd judgment about VFM.

**Ligada – a female economic empowerment programme in Mozambique**

Ligada, meaning ‘connected’, is a six-year DFID-funded programme, led by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), which aims to link girls and women more closely with Mozambique’s economic growth. Despite impressive growth in recent years, over half of Mozambicans still live in poverty [OPM, 2015]. Households headed by women are more likely to be among this number, with women’s exclusion from decent economic opportunities a major cause. Only 4% of the workforce are employed in the formal sector, and 19–24 year old females in Mozambique’s cities suffer the highest unemployment rates in the country [OPM, 2015]. It is this group of young, urban and largely economically excluded women who are the focus of the Ligada programme, with the aim of improving their recruitment and retention in secure, well-paid jobs and providing them with better access to markets.
Driven in part by its overarching objective – finding out how to achieve female economic empowerment in Mozambique by testing and learning – the programme has a unique structure and design. A long inception phase was designed to allow for decision-making about the interventions that would take place to be informed by studies commissioned for the precise purpose of finding out what would work best. The programme designed a system by which it will fund different project interventions in a selected number of identified female economic empowerment pathways. Beyond the overarching objective mentioned above, the programme’s goal is to measure and learn the impact and value of different pathways and approaches to female economic empowerment in causing real change for young women in urban Mozambique.

How does one assess the value of an innovative learning programme?

An explicit intent of the Ligada VFM framework was to incorporate an innovative approach to the evaluation of VFM, responding to specific challenges in the Ligada context while building on the DFID approach. VFM in Ligada is challenging for a number of reasons. Chief among these are that:

- Ligada is a learning programme. Some of the projects and approaches being tested have not been tried before, while others build on an existing evidence base. Part of the value of Ligada is derived from learning, including providing evidence about what works, what doesn’t work, and why.
- Ligada is an adaptive programme. Its value may be enhanced by the iterative approach to testing, reflection and adaptation that helps to incrementally improve interventions – but this also means traditional approaches to measuring and valuing success (which assume constancy of an approach for a duration) may not provide a valid assessment of VFM.
- Ligada is an influencing programme. One of the programme’s objectives is to influence stakeholders and social norms. The nature and full extent of these impacts will not become apparent until some time beyond the life of the programme.
- Female economic empowerment provides tangible and intangible benefits. Tangible benefits of Ligada (such as impacts on women’s earning power and effective use of household resources) can readily be monetised – though the full extent of these impacts will not be realised within the time frame of the evaluation. The intangible value of Ligada’s outcomes (for example, quality of life, agency, self-worth) are inherently valuable outcomes for the target groups but are difficult to value credibly in monetary terms.

The 4Es – strengths and challenges

The purpose of the 4Es framework is to track key drivers of programme performance and results, in order to support judgments about VFM associated with the approaches being carried out. From our knowledge of the approach usually taken when reporting VFM to DFID, there has traditionally been a strong focus
on the 3Es of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (and, in particular, the first of these from a procurement perspective). More recently, the 4th E of equity has gained more attention and is a critical area of interest for the Ligada programme.

One advantage of using the 3Es of economy, efficiency and effectiveness is that they divide the concept of VFM into sections of a programme’s results chain. Economy concerns the cost and value of inputs. Efficiency concerns the transformation of inputs, by sets of activities, into valued outputs. Effectiveness is the achievement of outcomes. Cost-effectiveness considers the relativity of costs to outcomes and impacts. This breakdown offers an explicit way of mapping VFM measures back to a programme’s intervention logic. It can make VFM more manageable to assess, for example, when a programme is in its early stages and has not yet produced outcomes, or where long-term outcome data are scarce.

The inclusion of equity is another strength of the 4Es framework as it highlights that VFM includes reaching intended target groups and achieving positive impacts with these groups. The inclusion of equity also implies that it may be necessary to balance multiple aspects of good resource use – for example, to consider trade-offs between equity and efficiency.

DFID’s approach to VFM also highlights that VFM isn’t just about what’s easiest to measure – though we do have to get better at measuring [including being clear about what we’re measuring, why we’re measuring it, what the chosen indicators mean and what they don’t mean]. It requires a judgment about whether the results justify the costs, based on the strength of evidence and making assumptions explicit.

However, while the 4Es provide a conceptual foundation for systematically assessing and reporting on VFM, there are some practical challenges in their use. First, they are expressed at a very broad conceptual level. Second, the 4Es alone do not provide a transparent basis for distinguishing ‘good’ VFM from ‘excellent’ or ‘poor’ VFM. ICAI [2011] suggests one way to address the second problem, through a traffic light rating system.

Strengthening the use of the 4Es in the Ligada programme

The Ligada programme employs an evaluation-specific approach to VFM [King, 2016a]. Schwandt et al. [2016] argue that evaluation is needed to address the complexity of SDGs. This involves thinking beyond indicator-based measurement:

The discipline of evaluation is underpinned by a logic of evaluative reasoning that enables judgments to be made from empirical evidence [Davidson, 2005; Scriven, 2012]. Evaluative reasoning
enhances the credibility and use of evaluation by providing a transparent and agreed basis for making judgments (King et al., 2013). The key steps involved in explicit evaluative reasoning can be summarised as follows:

1. Establish criteria of merit or worth
2. Define performance standards
3. Gather and analyse evidence of performance
4. Synthesise the results into an overall judgment (Fournier, 1995).

**Criteria of merit or worth** are selected dimensions of performance that are relevant to a particular programme and context. The Ligada VFM framework builds on and extends the 4Es by providing explicit definitions of these terms, tailored to the Ligada context. For example, definitions of criteria for effectiveness, reflecting the programme’s objectives, are specified in Table 1.

### Table 1: Effectiveness criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria of merit and worth</th>
<th>Sources of evidence (indicators and narrative)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong> as an urban female economic empowerment programme:</td>
<td>• Project-level outcome evaluations for low-risk approaches, against project-specific theories of change (Low-risk approaches are supported by the existing evidence base and are expected to produce positive outcomes – as distinct from innovative approaches that will generate new learning about what works/doesn’t work, and why).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ligada’s low-risk approaches make their intended contributions to capacity and/or agency and/or opportunity as defined in project-level Theories of Change, and are scalable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong> as a learning programme:</td>
<td>• Narrative summaries of local participation, relationships and knowledge contributing to project development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Local participation, relationships and knowledge contribute to project development;</td>
<td>• Number of reports on reflective meetings completed in a timely manner with evidence of Monitoring, Evaluation &amp; Learning (MEL) feedback positive impact loops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflective learning processes are occurring as intended; and</td>
<td>• Narrative summaries demonstrating that there is credible evidence about the effectiveness of every project (i.e., whether they are effective and why/why not).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ligada provides credible evidence about the effectiveness of every project, including evidence to enable decisions about which projects deliver better results.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong> as an influencing programme:</td>
<td>• Brand recognition: Increase in people sampled who recognize the Ligada brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ligada is a recognized brand in the communities in which it is working;</td>
<td>• Number of partners that adopt and/or scale up approaches based on influencing through Ligada engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ligada influences DFID’s programmes in the wider Mozambique context;</td>
<td>• Number of DFID policies and programmes that have changed as a result of evidence produced by Ligada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effective approaches are taken up and implemented by partners; and</td>
<td>• % of DFID programmes referencing evidence from Ligada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stakeholders become champions/agents of change.</td>
<td>• Narrative (anecdotal evidence, examples) of stakeholders becoming champions or agents of change.</td>
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</table>
Evaluating value for money in international development: the Ligada female economic empowerment programme in Mozambique.
Similarly, criteria (together with supporting indicators and narrative) have been defined for economy, efficiency and equity.

**Performance standards** are defined levels of VFM (i.e., excellent, good, adequate, and poor VFM), which, for Ligada were defined as follows (Table 2).

As can be seen from the effectiveness criteria in Table 1, evidence of performance will include a mix of quantitative evidence and qualitative narrative. Effectiveness of Ligada as a female economic empowerment programme involves aggregation and synthesis of project-level outcomes, contributing to judgments about programme-level VFM.

Additionally, the Ligada VFM framework seeks to add to the cumulative body of knowledge by identifying and documenting transferrable learning, including:

- The cost of investing in a programme of this nature – including cost structures and benchmarks associated with different projects and the programme overall;
- What has been learned about VFM in Ligada as an urban female economic empowerment programme, as a learning programme, as an adaptive programme, and in terms of procurement processes that support this type of programme;
- Which projects, pathways and methods trialled through the programme provide more/less VFM.

### Table 2: Ligada VFM standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VFM Level</th>
<th>Performance Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent VFM</strong></td>
<td>Performance targets (logframe) generally met or exceeded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good VFM</strong></td>
<td>Performance targets generally met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adequate VFM</strong></td>
<td>Performance targets generally or nearly met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor VFM</strong></td>
<td>Performance targets generally not met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

VFM is an evaluative question and requires well-reasoned judgments to be made on the basis of available evidence. Explicit evaluative reasoning, using criteria and standards, provides the overarching logic for making evaluative judgments. When defining criteria and standards for VFM it is important to be mindful that:

- There may be other dimensions of VFM besides the 4Es. Relevance and sustainability are two examples of other considerations that might help to determine how well resources are being allocated and used.
- Overseas aid funding might not be the only input. Local resources invested in a programme also have opportunity
costs. Resources are more than just money – e.g., people also invest and risk their time, expertise, relationships and reputations.

• Value is not just tied to results intended by the funder. Value to local beneficiaries and communities is important, and might look quite different through another cultural lens. Value can also be enhanced or diminished by unintended outcomes.

• The 4Es reflect a simple input > process > output > outcome > impact model. Although this can be a useful way to understand the intended working and results of a programme, its real-world functioning may be more complex than that. For example, emergent processes and outcomes may be more valuable than planned ones.

• As with any evaluation interested in outcomes and impacts, questions of causality (or contribution) need to be addressed to determine whether and to what extent changes came about as a result of the intervention or other factors [ICAI, 2011].

• Value can come from unexpected quarters – e.g., investments to promote innovation involve some appetite for risk/reward rather than sticking with tried-and-true approaches, therefore there is value in learning about what works and what doesn’t work – i.e., there is value in failure.

• Different forms of evidence can help us to understand value from different perspectives. For example, a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence may support stronger conclusions than an evaluation limited to a selection of logframe indicators alone [King, 2016b].

Finally, there is potential to make greater use of economic analysis to help determine VFM. Systematically evaluating costs and consequences yields insights that can’t be gained by looking at either factor in isolation. Quantitative modelling facilitates clear thinking about the relationships between costs and consequences, which can otherwise be difficult to intuit. Forecasting encourages systematic thought about a programme’s future value, beyond the window of investment. Scenario and sensitivity analysis facilitate transparency and robust thinking about uncertainty and risk [King, 2015].

Economic analysis can also help inform future investments through benchmarking of costs and consequences. Of course, caution is required in generalising from one setting to another, but there is real value in understanding cost structures and providing hard data demonstrating, for example, that if we want quality it’s not always cheap, if we want sustainable systems it takes time, and if we want to work with disadvantaged populations we may need to invest more than with highly educated ones.

**Conclusion**

The Ligada VFM framework builds on and extends the 4Es by providing explicit definitions of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity tailored to the Ligada context, with sub-criteria at programme and project levels supported by mixed methods evidence including quantitative indicators and qualitative narrative.
This framework illustrates how the use of the 4Es in a particular programme and setting can be improved through careful explication of how the overarching concepts of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity relate to specific aspects of the program’s design and performance. It also addresses wider considerations such as transferrable learning about how the Ligada programme’s approaches affect VFM.

There is significant potential to improve the assessment of VFM in practice. In order to really progress VFM – get better at investing resources well, to improve people’s lives – the VFM conversation in the development sector needs to shift from a focus on accountability and cost containment to one of investigating VFM through an evaluative lens, for collective learning and improvement. Hard-nosed evaluation of VFM is critical to tackle the big questions about what sorts of interventions, investment strategies, and levels of investment, can best support the ongoing journey of sustainable development.

In the end, evaluative reasoning needs to preside over measurement. It’s important we get the measurement right – but indicators can’t make judgments. Evaluation always requires a judgment to be made by a real person (be it an external or internal evaluator, a programme manager or sponsor). Explicit evaluative reasoning provides the means to make those judgments on an agreed basis, making use of multiple sources of evidence, and balancing multiple criteria.
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Authors’ Profile

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Though intellectually tempting, the Value for Money approach is very difficult to apply in the allocation of development aid resources. In contrast, simpler approaches could prove effective in the evaluation of interventions and even contribute in orienting the allocation of funding.¹
Introduction

The sector and geographic allocation of interventions by a bilateral aid agency is influenced by several factors. In France, aid allocation is regulated first and foremost by the goals set in the official development aid policy by the Inter-ministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development. Since 2013, the following requirements, among others, need to be met:

– at least half of State subsidies and two-thirds of AFD’s funding have to be allocated to a defined number of poor priority countries;

– at least 85% of official development funding has to be dedicated to sub-Saharan Africa and France’s neighboring countries in the South and the East of the Mediterranean;

– 50% of projects financed by AFD have to come with the guarantee of climate benefits.

Other factors add to this political framework, namely:

– France’s international financial commitments made in the past;

– consideration of sector positioning of French expertise, or economic interests, which may tend to favor some sectors of intervention;

– quality of governance which may result in renouncing collaboration with certain government departments, and therefore certain sectors, if public procurement rules are not respected or if the expenditure system is not watertight;

– capitalization on lessons drawn from past experiences, including through retrospective evaluations of completed projects that may encourage operational departments to replicate or abandon some interventions;

– the backlog of activities in portfolios where results can only be achieved as a consequence of long-term relationships, especially in a post-crisis or fragile States context;

– the positioning of other technical and financial partners (TFPs) in order to avoid overlap and the search for work on areas which may be overlooked by international aid.

It should be noted that “Value for Money” (VFM), or more generally any strategy aimed at optimizing the efficiency of interventions does not feature among the above factors. However, AFD applies a results-based management approach with predetermined achievement rates, or quality rating, which distinguish the

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1The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the French Development Agency.

2Thus, the commitment made by France during the 1999 Cologne Summit to step up its bilateral contribution to HIPC Initiative by canceling all ODA debt, a pledge that became effective with the designing of Debt Reduction and Development Contracts, explains why Côte d’Ivoire is now the major beneficiary of financing from the French ODA.

3This refers to qualitative lessons that makes it possible to understand past challenges in the low-cost housing or small-scale fisheries sectors, and not to quantitative lessons that may be likened to an efficiency evaluation of interventions.
successful sectors or geographical areas from the failed ones. However, this approach is not used in determining aid allocation.

**Limitations of Value for Money approaches**

In a context of scarcity of financial resources, why does the VFM approach, which serves to optimize the use of available resources, not feature among these factors, despite the links it establishes between impacts attributable to the interventions funded and costs resulting from these interventions?

The problem is that the VFM approach which helps in bringing the two extremes of an intervention logic closer, namely, the resources mobilized, on the one hand, and the outcomes achieved, on the other hand, presupposes a rigorous assessment of the contribution to these impacts. This analysis can only be done on a limited number of interventions, given the complexity (and the cost) of works resulting from that assessment. In fact, this approach requires (i) a meaningful assessment of costs, (ii) the availability of quantitative data on the selected impact indicators (which presupposes a clear and precise vision of intended goals and impacts), and above all, (iii) the ability, through a scientific impact evaluation (IE) or another econometric strategy, to isolate and assess impacts that are attributable to the intervention or the public policy under consideration.

In the past two decades, these scientific analyses have made remarkable progress, driven by the increased use of experimental methods, and various quasi-experimental methods. They are, however, often costly and difficult to implement because they rely on both the availability of data on the beneficiaries in the area of intervention; and outside the intervention area, on non-beneficiaries. Indeed, Impact Evaluation is still relatively rare in many African countries, although it can reasonably be thought that the situation will improve and be similar to prevailing practices in Asia and Latin America.

Should we therefore, if it is impossible to carry out or rely on rigorous impact analyses, abandon attempts to allocate aid resources based on optimizing cost? To avoid this all-or-nothing logic, often encountered in development policies, we are making some pragmatic proposals somewhat modified from the methodological approach mentioned above, that are likely to serve as warning mechanisms in the event of unusually high costs and at the same time help in better allocating development aid resources.

**Comparison of relative efficiencies as an alternative approach**

To this end, the proposal is to work on the links of the results chain that connects the financial resources mobilized to achievements and to easily observable outcome indicators, such as the frequency or use of facilities or services financed. We have avoided a “ballistic” approach that consists of directly bringing together the two extremes of the outcome chain and assuming that the same outcomes, or even further upstream, basically achieve the same impacts on the beneficiary population.

However, before pursuing this hypothesis, there is prior verification that the conditions
have been met for it to be considered credible, by integrating the lessons learned from two auxiliary sources, namely:

- A scientific impact evaluation synthesis or meta-evaluation conducted on relatively similar interventions. The work compares outcomes obtained in different contexts. If the same types of outcomes are observed as in the majority of cases within similar geographical regions with more or less similar contexts, it is a presumptive indicator of the validity of the hypothesis. Numerous analyses have already been covered by certain research institutions; like the many analyses carried out by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) or the European Stability Initiative (ESI). To respond specifically to an issue that may be insufficiently dealt with by these institutions, a synthesis may be done from existing databases on Impact Evaluation, such as the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) database.

- Qualitative evaluations carried out in the domain of intervention and in the same geographical zone allow us to check the causes and effect relationship and thereby judge whether it is reasonable to extrapolate the findings of the Impact Evaluation in this specific context.

If the link between achievements and impacts appears credible considering these exogenous parameters, we can therefore seek to deepen the upstream analysis of the link between means and achievements.

There are two particularly simple yet relevant investigations: the comparative cost analysis per capita, for direct beneficiaries, of certain interventions, and the more common one, which is nevertheless rarely carried out, the comparative analysis of unit cost of certain realizations.

**Prerequisites for the comparative cost analysis of projects per beneficiary**

- There must be data on the project beneficiary population, or of certain project components. Such relatively simple contextual data is rarely presented in evaluation reports or project documentation; or rough estimates are presented. Indeed, some intervention modalities lend themselves more easily to this type of exercise than others (social facilities more than transport infrastructure, and even more than institutional support components). Furthermore, information is communicated on the estimated beneficiary population of the entire intervention, yet the scope depends on the components of the intervention.

- It is necessary to refer to projects of the same type, even if the approaches are different (for instance, between an integrated approach and financing limited only to infrastructure, whether an implementation agency is used or not, etc.), and within the projects to relatively homogenous components.

**Case study**

An exercise conducted internally within the AFD, consisted of a rough analysis of nine projects to rehabilitate lower-income neighbourhoods (excluding expenses related to institutional support components) during a given period. The study reveals that cost differences can be
significant. They are three times lower in the project carried out in south-western neighbourhoods of Antananarivo in Madagascar [EUR 83 per inhabitant] than the PK12 neighbourhood project in the Balbala district in Djibouti [EUR 233 per inhabitant]. These differences can be explained by various factors related to:

- geography (interventions in small insular economies are often more costly, for example, due to input costs, as well as those undertaken in landlocked territories or in inaccessible terrain);
- project size (projects for small populations are often more costly due to fixed costs);
- socio-political contexts, since risk prevention leads to various additional costs;
- governance of the concerned sector policies and the proper functioning of markets.

Although approximate, this assessment can be useful in understanding at least the average per capita financial input that needs to be devoted to maintenance and upkeep (assuming for example that annual maintenance and upkeep costs amount to about 10% of investments).

Above all, in the absence of development outcome analyses, these observations could contribute to the search for the optimization of scarce resources of technical and financial partners. Assuming that the same achievements produce the same outputs on the beneficiary populations, which takes us back to the downstream analysis of the chains of intervention discussed above, these observations could orientate the allocation of financing provided by technical and financial partners towards more economical interventions.

Resource allocation based on a comparison in absolute terms would be meaningless because it would translate into the systematic allocation of financing to countries with the most efficient project implementation conditions. Conversely, such optimization could be made following the Ricardian reasoning of relative comparative advantages: if an investor were to equally distribute funds between countries A and B, and if the cost ratio per capita in country A is respectively twice higher than in country B for sector X and thrice higher for sector Y, the investor would, following this reasoning, distribute financing between sector X of country A and sector Y of country B. As such, he could motivate sectors Y of country A and X of country B to improve the intervention conditions of technical and financial partners.

The second approach, namely, the benchmarking of various unit costs (a metre of sanitation network, a classroom, a surveyed household, etc.), is not directly related to a value for money analysis. Its aim is to ensure that certain conditions necessary for the efficiency of projects are met. The difficulty is to analyse similar outcomes but the idea is simply to reveal cases of exorbitant costs, in...
view of what is commonly practiced, and which the intervention contexts may fail to justify. However, considerable differences are observed in certain areas, without necessarily being linked to misappropriation or corrupt practices: such differences may sometimes result from the simple application of “external” pricing to activities managed hitherto without referring to the international market of consultancy or expertise, but rather to remuneration practices of the local labour market.

A very simple initial measure could consist in TFPs contributing to the design of an observatory of prices practiced in development projects, a kind of international market rating scale. In the same vein, assuming that the more or less sustainability of projects has an impact on the real efficiency of projects, TFPs could work to establish an observatory of sustainability of development projects by relying, where appropriate, on information from the end beneficiaries of these projects.

**Conclusion**

Generally, in a value for money approach, it would be advisable to use statistical and cost accounting methods in day-to-day project and programme evaluations. These evaluations are rarely integrated into analyses on efficiency, which in itself is often only briefly examined, and the analysis is often limited to checking for gaps between estimated and actual budgets and duration. This lack of statistical or accounting research is due to what is perceived as the simplistic nature of these approaches which do not attract the attention of academia. It is certainly a consequence of the implicit line drawn between evaluative analyses and internal audit work.

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**Author’s Profile**

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Evaluation Matters: Value for money in development work

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