

CHAPTER 1

DECIDING TO DO AN EVALUATION



Most evaluations follow a standard process that begins with a planning stage and ends with the actions taken to follow up on the evaluation's recommendations.

While the evaluation manager's responsibilities in each stage of an evaluation may vary depending on the type of evaluation, in general the evaluation manager is expected to be involved throughout the entire process. Sometimes the evaluation manager will be responsible for carrying out the particular stage – e.g., writing terms of reference – while other times s/he might simply review the work of others. Regardless of the specific expectation, general guidance has been provided that is required to fulfil the role as manager at each stage of the process.

1.1 Establishing the Need for an Evaluation

Evaluations are formal activities that use government resources. As such, concerned officials need to make wise decisions about what should and should not be evaluated. It is important to remember that not all programmes need to be, or can be, evaluated.

Evaluation studies can be grouped into two broad categories. The first category is that which deals with specific schemes, programmes or projects. This is the most common form of evaluations. They are generally taken up by the respective line departments / agencies. They go by the specified budget lines. They are called 'General Purpose Evaluations'. There are standardized methods and procedures for taking up these evaluations. Since the number of schemes/programmes/projects in a department/agency is known, the evaluations can be planned and scheduled. In contrast, second category deals with broad subjects and issues like a policy, law, theme, concept, principle or an organization. These are generic evaluations and may or may not have specified budget lines. But they are the pivots for governance and development. These less structured but highly complex studies are called 'Special Purpose Evaluation'. They can neither be timed nor evaluated with the same degree of precision like the other group.

Irrespective of the category, a good number of procedures are common to both the evaluations. For example, any study should have clearly laid down Terms of Reference and a detailed Work Plan. All studies have to

be carried out through independent External Consultants. The difference lies in who initiates the study and who will utilize the findings. All General Purpose Evaluation Studies will be initiated by the line department/agency and they will only utilize the findings and recommendations. Special Purpose Evaluations may be initiated by the line department / agency concerned or by the government.

Evaluation is not the only tool available to managers. There are other tools, such as audits, performance appraisals, strategic planning processes and regular monitoring activities that can provide answers to questions and address issues and problems that arise during the implementation of a project or programme.

The following reasons often prompt the need for evaluations in an organization:

Accountability: An evaluation may be necessary for the department to fulfil its fiduciary role – for example a contractually required evaluation, or a statutory requirement.

Policy and Programme Relevance and Renewal: An evaluation may help the department improve policies and/or programme delivery. When a programme has reached the end of one phase and another is to be planned, an interim evaluation might be a useful input to planning the next phase.

Innovation: A review of a new innovative programme or project may help to determine whether to apply the approach with confidence elsewhere.

Learning and Change: Evaluation may represent a major opportunity for learning and change by capturing the reasons for successes or problems or failures in your programme/project and applying them elsewhere.

Responding to Changed Circumstances: If there has been a significant change in the external or internal operational environment for the project or programme, an evaluation may help to make the necessary adjustments.

Box 1

1.2 Assessing Evaluability

An evaluability assessment is an exercise that helps to identify whether an intervention can be evaluated, and whether an evaluation is justified, feasible and likely to provide useful information. It assesses whether the evaluation can achieve its objectives within the proposed time frame (for example, it may be too early to assess certain kinds of outcomes or impacts), and within the proposed budget and time inputs. Its purpose is not only to decide if the evaluation can be undertaken or not, but also to prepare the intervention to ensure that necessary conditions for an evaluation are in place. The evaluability should also indicate any particular political, social and cultural challenges as well as the technical challenge in conducting evaluation. This will inform decisions on the level of equity-analysis that the evaluation can realistically cover.

Once the need for an evaluation has been established, it is important to assess whether or not an evaluation is feasible at this time. Is the project or programme able and ready to conduct the evaluation? In this context, the

manager needs to make an overall judgement with respect to the availability of resources (people, time, money), information about the project/programme and the probability that changes can occur as a result of engaging in the evaluation process. The following criteria may help in making this decision:

Table 1: Criteria for assessing the feasibility of evaluation

Timing and stakeholder availability:

Are there competing demands on staff and other stakeholders right now? Will the people that need to participate in the evaluation be able to do so at this time? Are there other matters that are more pressing?

Programme and project design elements:

Are the objectives, outputs and activities clear enough to be able to evaluate progress, results and impact?

Available information:

Is there adequate information to engage in an evaluation?

Financial considerations:

Are sufficient funds available for the evaluation? Can additional resources be raised? Is the evaluation cost-effective? Are the benefits greater than the costs?

Utility:

Is there a high probability that the evaluation exercise will be used to improve the project or programme?

A detailed template for assessing the evaluability of a programme has been provided in **Annex 1.1**.

At this stage it is also necessary to decide on what type of evaluation is possible given the availability of information and stage of the programme. The decision tree¹ given below will help in making the choice.

A decision tree is a tool that serves as a guide through a sequence of choices. In the tree below, choices along the decision path have implications for the type of impact evaluations that will be most appropriate. The tree provides a warning to those who elect to proceed against the advice the diagram offers, such as choosing to use an experimental design even though the size of an evaluation’s treatment and control groups would be small and thus tests of differences between groups might be statistically underpowered and inconclusive.

1.3 Purpose of Evaluation

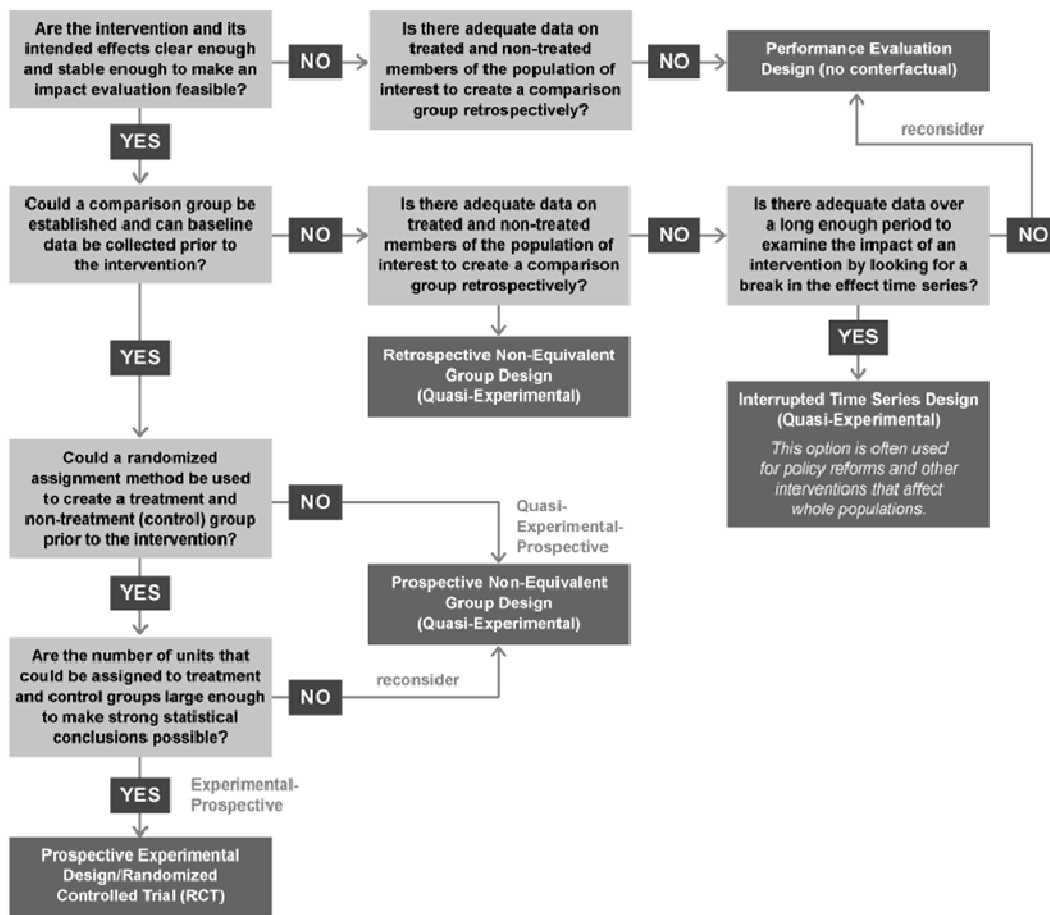
All evaluations start with a purpose, which sets the direction. Without a clear and complete statement of purpose, an evaluation risks being aimless and lacks credibility and usefulness.

The purpose and timing of an evaluation should be determined at the time of designing the project or programme document.

The purpose statement can be further elaborated at the time the evaluation ToR is drafted to inform the evaluation design. Evaluations may fill a number of different needs from which the purpose can be derived. The purpose should answer the following questions:

¹Adapted from USAID Impact Evaluation Decision Tree

Chart 1: Impact evaluation decision tree



1. Who commissioned the evaluation?

The evaluation might have been foreseen in the project document, decided on by department’s senior officials, requested by state government or identified for strategic reasons by the M&E Team.

2. Why is the evaluation being undertaken at that particular point in time?

An evaluation can be undertaken halfway through a project or at the end of the project. The evaluation might have to be presented at a special event.

The reasons for choosing the specific timing for an evaluation must be documented and stated as evaluation purpose in the project document and in the evaluation ToR.

3. Who will use the evaluation findings?

Department officials need to identify the stakeholders who are expected to make use of the evaluation results. The level and nature of stakeholders’ involvement ought to be specified, possibly in the project or programme documents. These ought to be involved throughout the entire evaluation process.

The officials also need to identify those stakeholders who will be consulted in the course of the evaluation exercise. This group includes the future users of the evaluation results (as mentioned above) and others, for example stakeholders who are consulted because they are key informants or because they have an interest or stake in the programme or project to be evaluated.

The stakeholders are to be involved in the identification of the evaluation purpose. Depending on the number of stakeholders, agreement on the purpose of the evaluation may take time. This consultation period has to be planned for in advance.

4. How will the evaluation findings be used?

Usually the purpose of an evaluation is to derive recommendations and lessons learned from measuring the achievements, outcomes and impact (both positive and negative) produced by the programme or project, to be used for improving project and programme planning, design and management.

Lessons learned are the generalisations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programmes, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance and outcomes.

Evaluation results can also be used to feed into a specific decision-making process, e.g., for continuing, rolling out or terminating the project or programme.

Some evaluations may also be used as inputs for larger evaluations, which would be another valuable purpose for an evaluation. It is often the case that Participatory Self-Evaluations feed into Independent Project Evaluations or In-Depth Evaluations.

1.4 Scope of Evaluation

The evaluation scope narrows the focus of the evaluation by setting the boundaries for what the evaluation will and will not cover in meeting the evaluation purpose. The scope specifies those aspects of the project or programme and its context that are within the boundaries of the evaluation: what the evaluation aims to find out and what the evaluation will focus on. These aspects should, to the extent possible, be discussed with all major stakeholders.

The scope of the evaluation can be identified in the project or programme document. However, the scope is optional and is not required in the project document.

The scope will be refined at a later stage to constitute the core of the evaluation. In determining the scope, the following points should first be considered:

- The unit of analysis to be covered by the evaluation, such as a cluster of related programmes, a single programme, a cluster of projects, a single project, or a subcomponent or process within a project;
- The time period or phase(s) of the implementation to be covered by the evaluation (e.g., 2011–2015);
- The geographical coverage of the evaluation (e.g., national or sub-national);

- The target group or beneficiaries to be included;
- The evaluation criteria focus.

Depending on the purpose of the evaluation, the size of the programme or project, the stage at which the evaluation is taking place and the resources available (in terms of time, budget and staff), the evaluation might focus on selected evaluation criteria (for instance, on the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the programme or project) and put less emphasis on other criteria.

The scope helps focus the selection of evaluation questions to those that fall within the defined boundaries. These questions are to be developed in the evaluation ToR.

The questions to be answered by the evaluation relate to both the purpose of the evaluation and the evaluation criteria that the organisation's programmes and projects are expected to fulfil: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. Additional criteria might be added by the Evaluation Manager according to the needs and specificities of the evaluation, e.g., design, partnerships and cooperation, and innovation, gender and human rights. Questions could also relate to the project design, implementation, deliverables and management issues.

1.5 Involving Stakeholders

All evaluations have multiple stakeholders. A stakeholder is defined as any person or group who has an interest in the project being evaluated or in the results of the evaluation. Stakeholders include senior management, programme staff and administrators, project participants, community leaders,

collaborating agencies, and others with a direct, or even indirect, interest in programme effectiveness.

Involvement in the design, planning and implementation of the evaluation of the stakeholders (especially worst-off groups) directly affected by an intervention (be they the implementers or intended beneficiaries), is a fundamental principle of any evaluation.

Box 2: Determining the degree of stakeholder participation

The following questions should be considered when deciding the appropriate degree of participation by stakeholders:

1. How can stakeholders, including worst-off groups, be involved in the process with varying degrees of intensity? What will be the implications in terms of effort, timeline and budget?
2. Should all stakeholders be involved together or separately? If involved together, what will be the process for ensuring all perspectives are fairly heard, avoiding bias because some may be more reticent than others for a variety of reasons (power differences, literacy levels, confidence levels, etc.), mediating differences, building agreement, and making decisions where differences cannot be reconciled)?
3. How can the level of participation envisaged by the evaluation process be ensured, even if the reality is that the intervention to be evaluated has had limited participation so far? How can the evaluation generate lessons for the intervention to overcome the participation challenges?

4. Is there a clear communication strategy with all stakeholders, regarding who will participate, who will be consulted and who will make decisions when there are differences of opinion?
5. Does the evaluation manager have the appropriate level of commitment, understanding, facilitation skills and experience for the level of participation decided upon?
6. Have the gains in credibility of the evaluation results, from a particular level of participation, been considered?
7. Has sufficient consideration been given to participation to ensure the credibility of evaluation results?

The degree and level of stakeholder participation in an evaluation process varies and various challenges – institutional, budgetary and time – need to be taken into consideration. However, guaranteeing stakeholder participation strengthens accountability, builds trust and agreement in the evaluation process and generates credibility. Evidence also shows that stakeholder participation enhances the use of evaluation conclusions by increasing ownership. The evaluation manager will need to weigh-up the level of stakeholder participation against the benefits and constraints. As far as possible, stakeholders should be involved in the evaluation from the early stages of the evaluation process, and a stakeholder analysis is the most effective tool to help identify who the different groups in an intervention are and why, and how and when they should be included in the evaluation process.

Awareness of the diversity of stakeholders is a critical factor in any process that is sensitive to equity. This means not treating groups, including worst-off groups, as uniform, but understanding and acknowledging that different sub-groups exist and are affected by an intervention in different ways.

A stakeholder analysis is also a helpful tool to address the problem of positive bias in evaluations. Evaluations subject to budget and time constraints interview primarily the direct beneficiaries and implementing agencies for the intervention. Consequently, most of the information received tends to be relatively positive if the intervention is progressing well. Often, however, information is not collected from worst-off groups. However, in equity-focused evaluations these groups should be involved as much as possible and as appropriate within the local socio-cultural context.

1.6 Identifying the Intended and Unintended Users

The indicator of a successful evaluation function is the strategic use of the evaluation findings. Experience suggests that, while the production of high-quality evaluation reports is a necessary fundamental product, it is not sufficient to ensure the use of evaluation findings.

Any evaluation should determine from the very beginning what the intended use should be and who the intended users are. This is very important to ensure that the purpose and the evaluation questions will be relevant to the information gaps of strategic stakeholders, including worst-off groups. Only when this is the case will they actually use the evaluation findings in a meaningful manner. However, it is important to be aware

that the strategic use of evaluation findings is not only determined by hierarchical positions within an organisation or community, but also by real, live, caring human beings. To assure actual use of an evaluation, it is very important to carry out a departmental decision-making analysis to determine:

- a. who are the key actors in need of information to solve problems, and,
- b. who is likely to use the evaluation findings and to support follow-up actions based on the evaluation's recommendations

This is not meant to imply that only top management should be actively involved in the evaluation process from the start. In fact, very often the key actors are middle managers, officers and stakeholders responsible for developing and implementing the programme in the field. In any case, the personal factor is a key element for guaranteeing the use of evaluation findings. Patton (1997) defines the personal factor as the presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and its findings. The personal factor thus represents the leadership, interest, enthusiasm, determination, commitment and caring of specific individual people. Therefore, when identifying the intended use by intended users, both the organisational structure (leadership and authority) and the personal factor (interest, enthusiasm, and commitment) must be taken into consideration.

Once the intended users, including worst-off groups, are identified, they should be invited – as appropriate given the particular context

of each evaluation – to be members of the Steering Committee² responsible for: identifying the purpose and scope of the evaluation; the key evaluation questions; approval of the Term of Reference, including the evaluation framework and methods, and the final report; and, most importantly, for leading the dissemination, communication and use of the findings.

1.7 Establishing an Organisation for Evaluation Management

In many cases, the necessary contacts between the evaluation manager and different stakeholder groups can be maintained without establishing a formal organisation for evaluation management. However, in complex evaluations, where several stakeholder groups have major interests, a reference group or steering group is usually formed.

While a reference group is an advisory body, a steering group is formed to give stakeholders an opportunity to participate in deciding key issues during the evaluation process. Involving representatives of major stakeholder groups is likely to enhance the credibility of the evaluation and may also create a more active interest in the results of the study among those involved.

A typical steering group would include representatives of at least one of the following groups: co-operation partners,

²There can be different reference groups constituted to support the evaluation process including Steering Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, Evaluation Reference Group etc. Some of them may have different roles as defined in the work organisation of the evaluation process and many a time they may have overlapping roles.

implementing organisations and co-financing donors. These are typical tasks for a steering group:

- Providing inputs to the terms of reference;
- Formally accepting the terms of reference;
- Monitoring the recruitment of external evaluators;
- Approving the selection of evaluators;
- Commenting on draft reports; and
- Approving the final report.