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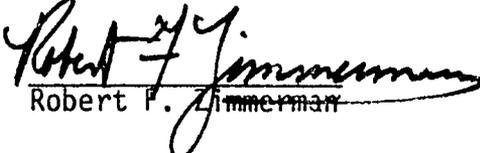
IMPROVING THE NEAR EAST BUREAU EVALUATION PROCESS

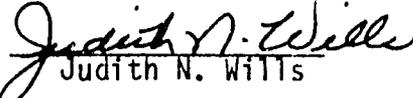
NE/DP/PAE
August, 1983

-- NOTE OF SPECIAL APPRECIATION --

NE/DP/PAE would like to express its appreciation for the cooperation and support received throughout the NE Bureau and in the field since the inception of this project. A great many people participated and contributed in many different ways. But special commendation must go to Holly Wise, Ken Schofield and Pamela Johnson who became key members of our quality working group for preparing this report over the final six weeks. We had nearly a dozen meetings and went through many drafts.

Finally, but certainly not least, we would like to commend our secretary, Ms. Ann Reid, for her excellent work in keeping us supplied with one clean working draft after another. Deciphering our inserts and changes and retyping over and over again is tedious and sometimes demoralizing. Ann, however, did not weaken. She deserves our special thanks.


Robert F. Zimmerman


Judith N. Wills

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the final product of a five month study of the Near East Bureau's evaluation process. The purpose of this effort was to define the strengths and weaknesses in the Bureau's evaluation process and to develop specific responses for overcoming identified weaknesses. Drawing on perceptions shared by project backstop officers and project managers in AID/W and the field as well as mission and Bureau management, the findings indicate that the NE Bureau's evaluation system is only partially effective in terms of its utility for evaluation and management of the Bureau's ongoing project portfolio, in the design and planning of new project activities, and in laying the framework for the design of overall assistance programs and strategies. It is a system overburdened with monitoring information requirements that should be addressed routinely through a management information system rather than through the evaluation system. This situation derives from a lack of mutual understanding of what the evaluation process is or should be and a lack of a formalized management information system which addresses both mission and Bureau information needs.

Parts I and II describe the methodology used in preparing this study and discuss the current NE Bureau Evaluation Process, its problems and the objectives for an effective evaluation process. These objectives are:

1. Project officers, supported by mission leadership, view and practice evaluation not as a hoop to jump through or a potential fault finding exercise but an opportunity for organized USAID-Host Country cooperative study, thought, discussion and recording of what a given assistance project or program is accomplishing, how it works or doesn't and why -- all with a view to making necessary changes in course and objectives or for application in future development efforts;
2. Lessons learned are clearly, objectively and comprehensively delineated in evaluation reports and easily retrievable for future consideration and application during project/program planning and design;
3. NE Bureau offices and NE missions regularly seek out this evaluation experience and knowledge and apply it whenever and wherever feasible.

Part III identifies the elements of an effective evaluation and information process. This section attempts to delineate both Bureau and mission evaluation and information needs and discusses evaluation and information products currently being generated. A major problem identified, though not discussed in the report, is a lack of evaluation history in the major sectors in which the Bureau's strategy is focused (population, urbanization and water) and a preponderance of information in technical areas which are given less importance in the Bureau's forward planning (health, education and rural development). Other more generic problems include: the uneven quality of

impact evaluations; profusion of monitoring systems and reports; confusion over purposes, types and timing for evaluations and special assessments; uneven AID/W backstopping support; and, inadequate conceptual framework for evaluation efforts.

Part IV addresses problem areas which cut across all of the evaluation work being done by the Bureau. These include the varying quality of external evaluation reports (both contractor and AID/W TDY prepared); proforma or non-existent host country participation in evaluation; confusion among personnel both in AID/W and the field about evaluation policies, documentation and techniques; and, a lack of trained and experienced evaluation officers with clearly defined and understood roles. This section also addresses evaluation training requirements and takes a preliminary look at the state of economic analysis in our evaluation work.

Both Sections III and IV include recommendations for Bureau management (and in some cases Agency management) consideration. The major recommendations in priority order are as follows:

1. Establish a permanent NE Bureau Senior Evaluation Committee (NESEC) chaired by the Deputy Assistant Administrator and including representatives from DP, from each technical support division (TECH and PD) and from each geographic subregion (desks). This committee would meet quarterly to reach decisions regarding: Bureau level evaluation policies, priorities and interests including funding and personnel requirements; inadequate contractor performance; recognition for well done evaluation work; and, requirements for support or coordination with other bureaus. (Page 12)

NEAC Decision:

NEAC decided another senior level committee was unnecessary. A Project Evaluation Review Committee (PERC) chaired by NE/DP/PAE including the same office representation as above would be sufficient. Controversial issues would be subject to NEAC review.

2. Establish a new Management/Monitoring/Implementation report possibly drawing on USAID/Tunisia's Project Program Implementation Report as a model, and, except for the Alert List, discontinue all other quarterly status reports now being cabled to AID/W. (Pages 10 - 11)

NEAC Decision:

Planned October 14, 1983 workshop on the NE Bureau's MIS process is first step in implementing this recommendation.

3. Require that an assessment of economic impact be included in evaluations of projects that were originally justified on an economic basis. This requirement must be set out during the project design stage with appropriate funding resources and data collection needs clearly identified. (Pages 21-22)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

C

4. Require that scopes of work for evaluations that involve AID/W TDY or contractor evaluators be screened by AID/W project specific PRCs and agreement reached with missions. (Pages 21 and 30)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

5. Establish a budget within the PD&S account for evaluation to be administered by NE/DP/PAE on approval of plans by the NESEC. This could be supplemented by funds from other Bureaus (PPC or S&T) where warranted. (Not addressed directly in the report.)

NEAC Decision:

Unnecessary. PAE to submit PD&S request as part of annual Evaluation Planning exercise.

6. Reinstate contractor performance reports. Require contractors to be familiar with AID evaluation policies and documentation requirements as well as specific project background data prior to departure for the field. Include in the contract some form of performance guaranty which can be invoked on the scene to enable field missions or AID/W leverage over the quality of the evaluation work being submitted. (Page 17)

NEAC Decision:

Not approved pending further exploration of legal constraints and possible alternative approaches (See page 17)

7. Require that missions define who is primarily responsible for evaluation at the mission level. This issue should first be reviewed by the NESEC. (Pages 13 - 16)

NEAC Decision:

Approved. Guidelines to be developed as part of revision of the Evaluation Chapter in the NE Bureau's Project Officer's Handbook.

8. Be very selective in doing impact evaluations. The Bureau should determine which projects will require impact evaluations and should help fund and administer them, perhaps in cooperation with other bureaus. (Page 9)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

d

9. Revise NE Bureau guidance on Project Paper (PP) evaluation plans to include:
 - (a) A management information system for the project including identification of the means of collecting routine monitoring information addressing progress on achieving outputs, etc.
 - (b) Relationship to host country's information and evaluation procedures/systems and interest in and capacity for participation in planned evaluations of the project.
 - (c) Discussion of utility and need for formal evaluation which, when indicated, would include information gathering as necessary.
 - (d) Budgetary or personnel requirements for proposed MIS/Evaluation Plan. (Page 13 - 24)

NOTE: The above is not at variance with Handbook III, but needs to be reinforced through the NE Bureau Redefinition of Authority Guidelines.

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

10. Conduct training workshops in field. These workshops would deal with Bureau evaluation policies and documentation and perhaps actually perform project specific evaluations as training exercises in selected missions. (Pages 34 and 40)

NEAC Decision:

Approved. NEAC suggested incorporation into already scheduled project implementation workshops.

11. Establish an awards system for outstanding evaluation performance. Issue special guidance for EER reporting on positive or negative contributions to the evaluation process. (Not addressed directly in the report.)

NEAC Decision:

Special NE Bureau award system not approved. Deemed more appropriate for Agency consideration.

12. Allocate a small portion of OE money to provide for AID/W and third mission participation in evaluations which have import beyond the confines of a given mission program. OE or PD&S funds also should be available to seed cross fertilization of lessons learned within the Bureau. (Not addressed directly in the report.)

NEAC Decision:

Not approved. Viewed as unnecessary.

Part V of this report describes activities NE/DP/PAE is already initiating or intends to begin unless otherwise instructed.

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Improving the Near East Bureau Evaluation Process

I. Introduction

This report is the final product of a five month effort to study the Near East Bureau's evaluation process and to develop recommendations for improving its effectiveness. The report briefly discusses the nature of the current process and its weaknesses as revealed by the study. It sets forth the basic elements of a process that we believe will most effectively meet the needs of the Bureau and its field missions. We define evaluation as we intend to apply it. We delineate information needs, the types of evaluation activities and

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The study process that led to this report took a total of five months, of which approximately two months was full time. It began with a preliminary PAE test of the quality and effectiveness of the current Bureau's system for receiving, reviewing and utilizing evaluation reports, particularly in relation to our PID and PP development exercises. Based on apparent weaknesses, we developed a list of questions for use in nearly 40 one-on-one interviews with Bureau staff at all levels. PAE then completed five group discussion sessions on the findings of these interviews concerning what is useful, useless and possible in evaluation. Next, PAE professional staff, using a somewhat revised questionnaire, visited five field missions (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen), and interviewed another 60-odd USDH and held six small group discussions in Egypt (3), Yemen (1), Jordan (1) and Tunisia (1). Based on the results of these interviews, we then prepared a discussion paper that outlined thirteen problem areas, their causal factors and recommendations for addressing the problems. This discussion paper was distributed throughout the Bureau, to PPC/E and to field missions for additional comment and critique. We then held a series of five one hour meetings to provide opportunity for interested Bureau staff and others to discuss the recommendations. Unfortunately, very few officers participated in these meetings. In any event, we then ended up with a five person task force including Holly Wise, Ken Schofield and Pam Johnson from the Desk and TECH offices and Judy Wills and Bob Zimmerman of PAE. This group met nine more times in order to produce this document.

PAE is especially grateful to these three people and to those twelve or so other Bureau staff who attended the five one hour meetings or provided written comments which we could take into account for our last discussion paper. In addition, USAID/Cairo provided comments by cable followed up by an extensive

letter by Emily Baldwin, the Mission's Evaluation Officer. Our missions in Damascus and Lisbon also provided perspectives that have helped our deliberations.

This final report is both an end and a beginning. It is the end of a process of active participation to one degree or another by well over 100 AID personnel across a wide spectrum of responsibilities, experience and perspectives to define a more relevant evaluation process. It is a beginning in that it is now up to the senior management of this Bureau and its missions, with PAE as process manager, to see that what we have proposed here becomes operational reality rather than simply another document that is honored more in word than in deed.

II. The Current NE Bureau Evaluation Process

The Near East Bureau is charged with overseeing the implementation of all evaluation activities initiated and planned at both Bureau and mission levels, improvement in the quality of this evaluation activity, increased utilization of evaluation findings in program and project design and management of the evaluation system for receipt, logging, review and distribution of project evaluation reports.

The NE Bureau's evaluation process is interactive and dependent upon: (a) project officer and mission attitudes toward and performance of high quality project evaluations; (b) the attitude, time and capacity of project backstop officers in Washington; (c) the effectiveness of PRC and NEAC review and discussion of evaluation reports, including follow-up thereon; (d) the attitude, the time, personnel, opportunity and capacity of the PAE staff to provide additional backstopping and guidance at Bureau and occasionally even at mission level; (e) the retrievability and quality of AID experience and knowledge through the DIU; and finally, (f) the political constraints imposed by our greater national interests and objectives in the Middle East.

A. Project Officer/Mission Attitude and Practice

The general attitude toward and practice of evaluation in our field missions is confused. All too often evaluation is not taken seriously and is still seen as simply another "hoop" to jump through. There is often little appreciation of the differences between project monitoring and evaluation. With few exceptions, the evaluations we have reviewed are not high quality. Timing of evaluations is often not related to key decision points in project implementation. Few evaluations even bother to distill lessons learned. The evaluation plans provided in PP's are generally simple statements of intent with a few dates thrown in. There is seldom any discussion of purposes of proposed evaluations, possible methodologies or the nature and scope of host government involvement. Even when bibliographies include reference to an evaluation document, there is seldom any discussion in PID's and PP's of past experience or which lessons are being drawn upon in the design of the project proposed. Finally, the record of missions requesting such references is mixed, a not unexpected situation given the poor quality of evaluations already submitted and/or the difficulty of retrieving documentation from DIU.

The political interests and objectives of the United States in the Near East also appear to affect the attitudes and priorities of mission and Bureau staff at all levels. The majority of those interviewed generally believe that when push comes to shove effective evaluation and utilization of past experience will be overridden or compromised for larger political interests. There does not appear to be a full appreciation of the need for a creative balance between political and developmental objectives. Perceptions that the political aspects of our programs are overriding must be countered. Projects which are indeed based solely on political imperatives should be evaluated in terms of political impacts with lessor weight placed on the developmental aspects of the projects. For the great majority of projects, however, the

basic rationale for our involvement is firmly based on developmental objectives. The political environment, while it does affect project development and implementation, is an outside factor and should be addressed in an evaluation context accordingly.

B. Near East Bureau Backstop Officers

Many project backstop officers do not appear to have the time, even given the inclination, to become familiar enough with all the possible sources and available literature to be able to respond quickly to mission inquiries for evaluation materials. Occasionally, they can and do respond to mission requests when the mission provides specific references or if by chance the backstop officer has worked in a given field or office long enough to be familiar with the relevant literature. In addition, the backstop officers can only be as helpful as the quality of the inputs (i.e., evaluations or other AID documentation) permits them to be. Backstop officers are also handicapped by weaknesses in AID's retrieval system. One activity in which backstop officers often are most helpful is in PRC meetings and subsequent actions decided thereby (see below).

C. The Development Information Unit (DIU)

DIU has been most cooperative in trying to provide documentation relevant to project design and has provided an informative orientation on its actual and potential service capability to NE Bureau staff. Nevertheless, the DIU has so far been unable to provide much assistance to PAE or many other backstop officers in their attempts to retrieve AID evaluation reports or essential lessons that can be used either during PRC meetings or sent to missions. DIU's weaknesses, however, do not appear to be of their own making. They are so understaffed, underfunded and clearly innundated with innumerable ad-hoc requests that even basic processing of incoming information for later retrieval is hopelessly backlogged. In addition, the poor quality of evaluation reports received, with few seriously attempting to discuss lessons learned and their possible implications, only reconfirms the adage, "garbage in garbage out". The gap between AID's expectation of and commitment to DIU could not be wider.

D. PRC/NEAC Meetings

The PRC/NEAC meetings are effective and result in helpful support for field missions. They are, probably, the best current source of relevant evaluative experience for immediate application in project planning or for reviewing project evaluations. The current practice of submitting evaluation reports for PRC/NEAC review is effective and should continue. The PRC/NEAC in effect is the Bureau's quality control forum. These meetings also provide opportunity for Bureau staff to apply their collective service experience, often with some debate which makes the exchanges all the more interesting. It is clearly apparent during these meetings that AID personnel do have knowledge, can evaluate objectively and assess lessons learned from their experience.

E. The Project Analysis and Evaluation Staff (PAE)

PAE currently performs an essentially overview role in the Bureau evaluation process. PAE manages the system that has been established to review, log and distribute evaluation documentation received from field missions and is expected to help ensure utilization of evaluation materials by missions, though project backstop officers continue to be responsible for the actual collection and provision of evaluation material. PAE also attempts to improve the quality of evaluation planning through its participation in PRC and NEAC review of PIDs and PPs. PAE, as opportunities permit, works to improve the quality of specific mission generated evaluations by reviewing scopes of work and collaborating with project backstop officers.

PAE has two foreign service professional staff assisted by one secretary who is being trained in computer techniques in order to access DIU. PAE tries, within staff and time constraints, to assist project backstop officers in our Bureau wide effort to improve utilization of relevant evaluation materials. The staff also participates in PRC meetings on all reviews of evaluation reports and, if necessary and possible, helps make revisions to improve the quality and future utility of these reports.

To date, however, PAE and its role and competencies still need to be fully established. The staff will always be operating under the very real constraints imposed by our being only three people who will often have to deal with short time frames and competing demands from every Bureau office. Also because both the professional staff are foreign service and will be returning to overseas duty, the system developed will, by necessity, continue to be decentralized with project backstop officers holding the principle role in terms of AID/W backstopping of evaluations.

F. Conclusion: Problem and Objective

Drawing on perceptions shared by project officers, project backstop officers and mission and Bureau management alike, our working group concluded that our evaluation system is not very effective in terms of its utility for either management and implementation or design and planning of assistance programs and projects, and further, that this situation derives in large measure from a lack of mutual understanding of what the evaluation system is supposed to do or can be expected to produce.

The ultimate purpose of this study, including particularly the extensive exchange of views with staff at both the Bureau and mission levels, has been to improve the quality and effectiveness of the NE Bureau's evaluation process. The primary measure of our success will be the production and utilization of quality, timely evaluation reports and information by or for Near East field missions. We seek, in sum, an evaluation process wherein:

1. Project officers, supported by mission leadership, view and practice evaluation not as a hoop to jump through or a potential fault finding exercise but an opportunity for organized USAID-Host Country

cooperative study, thought, discussion and recording of what a given assistance project or program is accomplishing, how it works or doesn't and why -- all with a view to making necessary changes in course and objectives or for application in future development efforts;

2. Lessons learned are clearly, objectively and comprehensively delineated in evaluation reports and easily retrievable for future consideration and application during project/program planning and design;
3. NE Bureau offices and NE missions regularly seek out this evaluation experience and knowledge and apply it whenever and wherever feasible.

III. Toward an Effective Evaluation and Information Process

A. Near East Bureau and Mission Evaluation and Information Needs

The Bureau and the NE missions have a range of needs for information on project design and implementation, the developmental progress of the countries we work with, and what AID has contributed to the development of individual countries. Some of this information is gathered through evaluation, some through other management information systems. This section attempts to provide a perspective on where evaluations should fit within our broader information systems.

The Bureau and missions require information on: (a) project design; (b) project implementation; (c) country development status; development strategies; and (d) AID history. Bureau and mission needs are similar, but not the same, and information is obtained from different sources. Host countries are usually only interested in a fraction of the information we generate.

Project Design

The Bureau, missions, and host countries want access to good project design information and previous project experience to help design new projects. Information on project design is generated in-country by pilot projects, obtained from impact evaluations done in several countries, or obtained from the experience of contractors and AID staff who have worked with similar projects in the past. Sometimes host country personnel are sent to other countries to observe successful projects. Most project experience is shared through people not documents. Periodic information on the status of the project design is provided in budget documents such as the ABS, periodic project development reports and cables.

Project Implementation

Of primary concern to missions and host countries is the monitoring of project progress and effectiveness, and the identification of implementation bottlenecks or problems. Mission management relies on meetings with host country and project officers, quarterly project reports, portfolio reviews, evaluations, and audits. The Bureau is not as involved in project monitoring, except to the extent that problems are identified which require Bureau awareness or attention. The Bureau used to rely primarily on monitoring and audits to identify major problems but has recently instituted an Alert List system to bring problems to Bureau management attention on a monthly basis.

The Bureau desires information on the contracting process to be able to respond to inquiries from US technical assistance, commodity, and construction services suppliers, and information on project progress and achievements to be able to provide effective backstop support to missions and to defend projects, programs and the Agency as questions surface, especially from the Hill. The first is provided through the NE Bureau's quarterly Project/Program Assistance

Implementation report, the remainder through portfolio reviews, Congressional Presentation (CP) submissions, and evaluations.

Country Development Status and AID Strategies

The Bureau and missions must defend country programs on the basis of the impact of AID's projects on the socio-economic development of those countries. In addition to information on progress toward achievement of project purpose and the impact of individual projects, the Bureau and missions need information on sector and macro-economic trends. Missions theoretically use host country socio-economic data series and special studies, surveys and assessments and periodic project evaluations to follow development progress to identify assistance requirements and opportunities and to measure the effectiveness of that assistance. This information usually is presented to the Bureau in summary form in the Country Development Strategy Statement (CDSS).

AID History

Because of the continual transfer of AID personnel, it is important that each mission keep track of what AID has financed in its country. This can be done through final evaluations, project completion reports, or through a comprehensive program review.

B. Evaluation and Information Products

As shown in the previous section, on the one hand evaluations are not the only or even principal source of information used to satisfy our program information needs. On the other hand, we tend to use "evaluations" to satisfy a wide range of information needs some of which may not be appropriate for the evaluation function. It is important therefore to be clear at the outset, that evaluation and implementation monitoring are two different processes with different purposes.

Implementation monitoring is the means for assuring that resources for a given project are available and adequate, that implementation actions are occurring on schedule and that planned outputs are being achieved.

Evaluation, on the other hand, seeks to answer three basic questions relevant to all forms of economic assistance:

- Effectiveness - Are the targets for outputs and purposes being achieved? What are the reasons for success or failure? Are the lessons learned then utilized to improve implementation? Are they being incorporated into new project designs?
- Significance - Will the achievement of the targets contribute to economic development or other higher goals beyond the project purpose? To what extent? What are the activity's advantages over possible alternatives? What about unintended, unplanned effects (positive or negative)?

Efficiency - Do the benefits justify the cost? Are there more efficient means of achieving the same targets?

Evaluation reviews and examines all aspects of the project design including the feasibility of purpose and output targets, the viability of the causative linkages between outputs and project objectives, and the underlying implicit and explicit assumptions.

With these definitions in hand we can now proceed to a discussion of the types of information products which missions and the Bureau might produce to meet specific needs. The following sub-sections describe a variety of evaluation and information products and discusses when each might be appropriate and who should be responsible for producing them.

1. Impact Evaluations

Impact evaluations should provide the Agency with information on: (a) the types and magnitude of benefits from specific projects and programs; (b) the effectiveness of past projects and programs; and (c) the factors which influence whether or not the potential benefits of a project or program are likely to be or have been achieved. Impact evaluation should be able to isolate causal relationships and often look at goal level impacts. They are likely to be expensive, time consuming and complicated.

Current Problems

One of the major problems with impact evaluations is that the results don't tend to be available when we need them; a related problem that cuts across all types of evaluation reports, is their uneven quality. Impact evaluations may be available for projects which are no longer in vogue, or AID's or the host country's eagerness to begin a new project outweighs our willingness to wait several years for evaluation results of a similar project in another country. Getting the timing right requires people guessing correctly as to future AID program priorities and information needs so that data collection for impact evaluations can be started today. In addition, host countries are often not interested in using "their" AID funds to cover an "evaluation overhead".

---Recommendations

Impact evaluations should be done sparingly to study project approaches with which the Agency has had little experience, often in relation to pilot or demonstration projects. The Bureau should be responsible for identifying which sectors and projects should receive impact evaluations and help fund and administer them, perhaps in cooperation with other Bureaus. The quality problem is addressed in Section IV of this report. (Agency/Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

2. Progress/Implementation Reports and Portfolio Reviews

This category covers the variety of monitoring systems used by the Bureau and missions to provide reliable information on what is happening, or not happening, in AID-financed projects. Management information systems should be keeping track of the procurement process, status of programs toward outputs, and problems and their resolution. Evaluation should not be necessary to provide this information.

Problems

Monitoring systems vary from country to country and have not provided useful information in all three areas. The quarterly Project/Program Assistance Implementation report has been refocused on procurement to respond to outside suppliers. This change has lessened its value as a management tool. There is no one report which provides periodic information on the status of project implementation against planned targets. As a result, a variety of measures including the evaluation process have been developed or used to fill this gap. For example, in Egypt, the semi-annual portfolio reviews have been developed to provide progress information and to highlight problems. The Alert List has recently been developed to surface problem issues on a monthly basis. Various forms of quarterly implementation status reports are cabled in by missions, but this information is not pulled together in a usable format to enable project backstop officers or senior management in AID/W to have a current up-to-date overview of where the project stands in terms of progress toward outputs. Some missions continue to perform annual project evaluations for selected projects as a monitoring tool even though this practice is discouraged.

---Recommendations

a. The Bureau should review its non-evaluation project information systems to see if useful and timely information can be provided in a structured format which addresses progress toward achieving output targets and resolving implementation problems. Such a report would be in addition to the Project/Program Assistance Implementation report which would be continued for its special audience, i.e., potential contractors. We would recommend that the title of that report be changed to reflect the nature of the report. The Management Monitoring/Implementation report being proposed here would have as its primary audience both mission and Bureau management. In its preparation, the report would first serve mission needs in supplying timely monitoring/implementation information. For this purpose it is suggested the USAID/Tunisia quarterly Project Implementation Status report may serve as a potential model, though the Bureau would want to add some entries which reflect specific Bureau information needs. With the exception of the Alert List and certain financial reports, all other quarterly status reports currently being cabled to AID/W would be discontinued as this information would be contained in the above report. In the interest of timeliness, it is recommended the WANG system be used to its fullest capacity with missions supplying updated information in diskette form. Upon receipt, the report would be run and reproduced for full internal NE Bureau distribution. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved in principle. October 14 workshop on NE Bureau's MIS process viewed as first step towards this end.

b. Establish a formalized system for requiring project managers to prepare end of tour reports on each of their projects; alternatively, mission could consider scheduling inhouse evaluations of all projects managed by individual project officers prior to onward assignment. Ideally, that officer's replacement would be available to participate. (Bureau/Missions)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

3. Periodic, issue driven evaluations of individual projects

There are a number of reasons why the Bureau and missions may want to conduct an evaluation, for example: (a) to review issues which were raised during project design which could only be resolved during implementation, (b) to find solutions to intractable implementation problems, (c) to document success stories or failures, (d) to bring a project to the attention of high-level host country officials, (e) to relate progress toward outputs to purpose and reassess periodically the continued relevance of project purpose, assumptions and the whys of implementation difficulties.

Problems

The overall problem here is that the current evaluation system has not facilitated obtaining formal Bureau/USAID agreement on what types of evaluations are needed, the purpose for carrying out such evaluations, the detailed scopes of the evaluations, and their timing. There are often communications problems as to what constitutes evaluation. As a result, the Bureau may not be satisfied with evaluations received from the field and find that, from its perspective, they appear to be focussed on the wrong issues and not useful for decision making. In addition, the following specific problems complicate this situation and hinder implementation of an evaluation process that provides the information on the issues listed above.

Uneven AID/W backstopping support for mission-level evaluation needs

AID/W support for mission-level evaluation varies according to the project backstop officer's other work priorities, availability of related evaluation materials, confusion over and inadequate understanding of roles, and the nature of senior level management support for evaluation.

Inadequate conceptual framework and/or scopes of work from which effective evaluation is possible

Evaluations often end up being ad hoc and/or poorly planned resulting in reports which are not satisfactory for either the missions or AID/W. It is unrealistic to expect evaluators (either AID/W TDY or contractor) to generate the quality reporting we are seeking unless the terms of reference for their work are carefully laid out prior to the evaluation. Experience has shown that unless evaluation is planned for during the design stage, the framework and the data collection for effective evaluation will not be developed. Finally, projects evolve. Logframes developed during the design stage in many cases do not reflect the reality of the project being implemented.

Uneven follow-up on evaluation recommendations

Evaluation recommendations are not always implemented. Subsequent evaluations many times reveal the same problems and contain identical recommendations which may or may not be implemented.

----Recommendations

a. Establish a permanent NE Bureau Senior Evaluation Committee (NESEC) chaired by the Deputy Assistant Administrator with organizational assistance from NE/DP/PAE, including representatives from NE/DP, the technical support divisions (TECH and PD) and from each geographic subregions (desks). (Bureau

This group would meet at least once every quarter to (1) review the general status of implementation of the Bureau Evaluation Plan; (2) establish selected project evaluation priorities; (3) consider instances of inadequate contractor performance; (4) delineate Bureau level evaluation interests, including funding and personnel requirements, (5) review and act as necessary on special studies or assessments proposed by either an individual mission or an office within the NE Bureau; (6) consider requirements for support from PPC/E and other central offices; and (7) determine appropriate Bureau responses such as formal recognition for exceptional work in evaluation.

NEAC Decision:

NEAC decided another senior level committee was unnecessary. A Project Evaluation Review Committee (PERC) chaired by NE/DP/PAE including the same office representation as above would be sufficient. Controversial issues would be subject to NEAC review.

b. The PRC should have a role in drafting scopes of work, particularly to ensure that all evaluations utilizing AID/W TDY personnel or contractors utilize scopes of work agreed to by both AID/W and field missions. The PRC is the appropriate mechanism for reviewing and finally reaching agreement with missions on scopes of work initiated in the field or AID/W. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

c. Consistently apply the Redefinition of Authority guidelines which require that PIDs include a draft logframe (columns one and four) and a preliminary evaluation plan. Failure to include these in the PID should be sufficient reason to defer decision on the PID by AID/W. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

d. Ensure that provisions (including funding if necessary) for information needs are part of every project design. There must, for example, be a close relationship between the evaluation plan and proposed data collection efforts. The expenditure for data collection and evaluation should reflect the type of project (is it a pilot or experimental activity?) and the magnitude of the overall investment. (Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

e. Require as a matter of policy, that original logframes as well as a draft updated logframe (if necessary) be included as an annex to the PES. Note: Radical change may require prior AID/W concurrence and possible PP amendment in accordance with the Redefinition of Authority guidelines. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

f. Require that missions clearly define who is primarily responsible for evaluation at the mission level, and then clarify the role of the Mission Evaluation Officer and establish a formalized system for mission follow-up on evaluation recommendations. AID/W should be kept informed, perhaps through the Mission Quarterly Management/Implementation reports recommended in Section C.2. above. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

g. When missions do not agree with particular evaluation recommendations, they should include their views in the final evaluation report as an attachment. (Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

h. Address actions on recommendations in previous evaluations in a separate section, so entitled, in each subsequent evaluation. (Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

i. When evaluation recommendations are beyond the capacity of the host country to implement, then missions should consider the desirability of revisions in the project to provide technical or other assistance as necessary. (Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

4. Assessments and Special Studies

Assessments and special studies are used to examine cross cutting issues within one sector or across several sectors. They may be country specific or involve similar experience or issues in several countries. They may be evaluations when prior AID experience is a major focus on the study or their purpose may be to develop new information in an area where AID's experience is limited. Rarely are they project specific though they may involve a review of clusters of projects (or sub-projects under a very large umbrella project) within a given sector. The impetus for doing assessments or special studies may come from the field, the NE Bureau or from PPC/E as part of their overall impact evaluation series. These studies are usually issues driven and may be focused on AID or host country policies.

Problems

The current evaluation system has not facilitated obtaining formal Bureau/USAID agreement on whether a special evaluation or assessment is needed, the purposes for carrying out such studies, the detailed scopes of the evaluations or studies, and their timing. For Bureau sponsored studies or evaluations as well as backstopping for field initiated activities, there is no one office within the NE Bureau filling a coordinating role. As a result Bureau support is fragmented among several offices and information is not always shared.

----Recommendations

a. All proposed assessments and/or special studies, including their scopes of work, whether initiated by the field or the Bureau should be submitted to the NE Bureau Senior Evaluation Committee (NESEC) for review and concurrence (see page 12). (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved -- substitute PERC for NESEC.

b. NE/DP/PAE should be a member of all Bureau special interest working groups and PRC's called to review proposed assessments and special studies whether of an evaluative nature or not. PAE's primary role will be to act as representative from the NESEC though PAE may take a more active role when dealing with studies or assessments which fall within the broad definition of evaluation. As a standing member of all such committees, PAE can facilitate exchange of information between all concerned offices. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved on trial basis.

5. End of Project Evaluations/Reports

There are two types of reports that may be carried out at the end of a project. (a) final evaluations and (b) project completion reports. Final evaluations tend to look at a project's impact on beneficiaries, possible economic return and lessons learned while completion reports emphasize inputs, outputs and end of project status indicators, though lessons learned should be highlighted. Another key difference is that while final evaluations usually involve several evaluators at some cost to the mission or project, a Project Completion Report is usually prepared by the USAID Project Officer on site.

Problem

The Bureau does not have a policy which requires either report to be produced at the end of a project even though the Handbook III guidelines indicate that at a minimum a Project Completion Report is required to close out a project. There is the possibility of losing part of AID's history in a country if neither is produced.

----Recommendation

In line with Handbook III, that project completion reports be required of all AID-financed projects, including PVO activities. That this requirement be waived if it is decided that a final evaluation is appropriate. The automatic inclusion of final evaluations in PIDs and PPs should be discontinued. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

IV. Major Cross Cutting Problem Areas

This section of the report addresses several cross cutting problem areas that affect to one degree or another all evaluation activities. The problems are fairly well known and came up repeatedly throughout our interviews and general discussions. We are simply presenting each problem in order of priority with a brief expansion on its nature and then recommending action(s) to respond to the problem. The recommendations presented here are those for which formal agreement at the top management level is required.

A. Lack of trained and experienced mission evaluation officers with clearly defined and understood roles

In accordance with Agency policy, the Mission Director or Deputy Mission Director is "de jure" the Mission Evaluation Officer. The officer who usually holds the title, however, serves more in the role of an Evaluation Process Manager. The degree to which this officer also serves as an "evaluator" varies from mission to mission. There is only one mission within the NE Bureau which has a full time evaluation officer, i.e., staff level. Mission staff level evaluation officers usually have other work assignments which have priority over evaluation. In several cases, the Mission Evaluation Officer is an Assistant Program Officer and consequently may have limited influence with project development staff and senior management. In almost all cases, the role of the mission staff evaluation officer is defined by the officer occupying the position. This in turn is influenced by that officer's prior experience and personal attitude toward evaluation.

---Recommendations

As a first order of business, the Near East Senior Evaluation Committee should (a) resolve the confusion over where the primary responsibility for the development and implementation of the mission evaluation system lies, including the nature and scope of evaluation activities to be performed at the mission level, (b) develop a clearly defined role for Mission Evaluation Officers, including the degree of autonomy therefor, and (c) include as criteria for minimum qualifications for Mission Evaluation Officers some prior experience in project design, managing project implementation, budget and programming experience, and stated interest. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved for development of guidelines for review by the PERC and approval by the NEAC.

B. Uneven quality of external evaluation reports

External evaluation teams, whether contractor, AID/W TDY or a combination of both, often fail to produce timely, balanced, relevant reports with feasible recommendations usable by decision makers either in the field (both mission and host country) or AID/W.

----Recommendations (Contractor prepared reports)

1. Select IQC contractors on the basis of proven capability. To assess this capability, AID needs to reinstate the contractor performance report for contractors performing evaluations to be filled out by the requesting office (either mission or AID/W) at the conclusion of each evaluation. IQCs (or individuals within IQCs) who fail to provide quality work should be dropped from AID consideration for future evaluation work. This same criteria would be applied to individuals contracted for on the basis of PSCs. Copies of contractor performance reports would be maintained by NE/DP/PAE for Bureau reference. (Agency/Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Not approved -- pending further exploration of legal constraints and alternative approaches. General agreement that greater specificity in delineating expectations from contractors would facilitate subsequent control of contractor performance.

2. Include in contractor scopes of work provisions requiring a review of AID evaluation policies and documentation requirements, a review of project related DIU documentation and an indepth review of project files prior to departure to the field to do the evaluation. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

3. Require that every contractor prepared report include executive summaries which follow the PES format and which highlight key findings and recommendations. These executive summaries should not be confused with one page abstracts, which should also be required, but are used for entry into the DIU system. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

4. Include in the contract for consultants doing AID evaluations some form of performance guaranty which can be invoked on the scene either by a USAID Mission or by AID/W. Payment should not be based only upon the level of effort of the individual consultants, but rather on the quality of the product, the evaluation report, for which these services were contracted. Missions in particular need to have some leverage with the contractor while the contractor is still in the field should the initial draft prove to be unacceptable. This leverage could take the form of the mission advising the contractor that they are prepared to recommend withholding payment until the report is revised to meet their quality expectations. Approval for time extensions and/or additional funding to make such revisions should be at the discretion of either the mission for mission funded evaluations or AID/W.

These provisions should be clearly stated in the contract, in either the scope of work or the standard contract language. Further discussion on this with appropriate Agency offices (SER/CM) is required. (Agency/Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Not approved. Same considerations apply as for Recommendation Number 1 in this section.

----Recommendations: (AID/W TDY Prepared Reports)

1. Require that AID/W via the PRC and the mission reach a mutual agreement upon the Scope of Work prior to the departure of AID/W TDY evaluators. This Scope of Work should have been shared with the host country and ideally reflect their direct input. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

2. As a standard operating procedure, require that AID/W TDY evaluators complete a draft of the evaluation report for mission review and acceptance prior to return to AID/W. If such a draft has not been completed or the mission is not satisfied with the quality or utility of the report, by the time of the AID/W TDY's scheduled departure, then the mission should consider extension of the TDY until a usable draft is completed. (Bureau/Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved on a case by case basis.

However, the integrity of the evaluation report should not be compromised. If the mission or the host country hold dissenting views about part of the evaluation, then these views should be included as separate attachments to the final version of the evaluation.

NEAC Decision:

Agree.

C. Uneven, proforma, or non-existent host country participation in evaluation efforts

This problem varies from country to country. For all countries in the region, however, there is the perception that the host country is not attuned to evaluation, that evaluation equates to audit and inspection, and that evaluation as a learning process is an American management tool which will take time to transfer to the local environment. Missions generally are not consistently seeking to engage host country personnel or agencies in dialogue and action regarding joint evaluations.

----Recommendations

1. Include in the NE Bureau guidance for developing PID or PP evaluation plans a requirement that the design officer discuss the degree of host country interest in and capacity for participation in the planned evaluations of the project. Where interest and capacity are shown to be weak, include in the evaluation plan what the mission proposes to do to address these weaknesses whether through the project itself or through some other approach. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

2. As matter of policy, require that missions provide the full text of the project evaluation plan to the host country either as an annex to the Project Agreement or in a Project Implementation Letter (PIL). (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

3. Require missions to develop and report on efforts to establish regular liaison with host country offices or agencies concerned with evaluation. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

4. Designate the Mission Evaluation Officer's position as a language position. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Not approved.

5. When appropriate provide technical assistance or training to counterpart evaluation agencies or organizations. (Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Concurred in principle.

D. Heavy reliance on external evaluations

The NE missions, with some exceptions, tend to rely very heavily on external evaluators (contractors). Joint mission/host country evaluations tend to be the exception and, as a consequence, the positive learning aspects of evaluation by participation in the process are lost to mission staff, AID/W TDY staff and the host country.

----Recommendations

1. As a policy, reduce Bureau reliance on external contractors for evaluation. Make available operating expense funds earmarked for evaluation to cover travel expenses for AID direct hire employees to engage in evaluation. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved in principle.

2. Encourage missions to do most routine evaluations using inhouse and host country staff. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved in principle.

3. During the design process, ensure that the evaluation plan, data collection requirements and resources for evaluation are tightly interwoven into the project implementation plan. (Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved in principle.

4. Identify and utilize host country social scientists and economists as members of both inhouse and external evaluation teams. (Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved in principle.

E. The need for training in evaluation in terms of the process as well as methodology

There is considerable confusion among AID personnel both in AID/W and the field about evaluation policies, documentation and techniques. This confusion clearly contributes to most, if not all, of the problems identified in this report. Given different levels of experience and different audiences, it is obvious that several training approaches need to be developed. The following recommendations are focused primarily on training for AID/W and mission staff (both USDH and FSN).

----Recommendations

1. Conduct training workshops in missions as well as at the Bureau level on the application of the PES methodology to different types of projects. As part of the workshop, an evaluation of a specific project using the PES could be undertaken and then critiqued on the spot. Senior mission management

should participate in such workshops. (Bureau) (See Section V, Page 24 for further information.)

NEAC Decision:

While not disapproved, there was general agreement that we should first seek to incorporate training into existing training programs.

2. Provide opportunities for middle level officers to participate on an Agency or Bureau impact evaluation team. This should become part of a standard career development program particularly for those officers in Washington on rotation assignment. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

3. Recommend that missions make time available for officers on their staffs to participate on evaluation teams evaluating similar projects in nearby countries and invite participation of officers from other country programs on teams doing evaluation locally. (Bureau/Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved in principle.

4. Recommend that missions encourage officers from one sector to participate in evaluation of projects in another sector within the mission. (Bureau/Mission)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

F. Limited Economic Impact Analysis

As part of the project design process, all project papers require some form of economic analysis. This requirement is not generally carried over to the evaluation plan even for those projects in which the project paper presents a quantified economic analysis. Rarely is the data collected to enable evaluators to gauge impact in economic terms. The exception tends to be in projects which require micro data to enable project implementors to make periodic adjustments in project design during implementation. Data for determining impact is usually tenuous to nonexistent at the design stage and a system for collecting baseline information (including total costs) is usually excluded from the design.

----Recommendations

1. Require that whenever projects justified on an economic basis are to be evaluated, they also include in the evaluation an assessment of economic impact. As part of this effort, during the design stage, provide the resources necessary to ensure data will be collected over time for this purpose. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

2. Require discussion of host country capacity for analyzing and collecting data in both the evaluation plan and the economic analysis of the project paper. When the host country capacity is considered weak and the type of project or magnitude of the investment warrants it, training elements to improve this capacity should be integrated into the project. (Bureau)

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

FYI: The Bureau is considering developing during FY 1984 a special handbook addressing economic analysis and evaluation using economic parameters.

V. Current and Planned PAE Activities re Selected Problem Areas

During the course of this study we have identified many activities that PAE, in cooperation with other Bureau offices and field missions, already carries on to some degree or can begin initiating immediately. These efforts relate primarily to three problem areas: utilization of prior experience in either project design or implementation, AID/W backstopping and some aspects of training. Unless otherwise directed PAE will continue to expand and intensify these activities.

NEAC Decision:

Approved.

A. Utilization of Prior Experience/Lessons Learned

AID, in addition to its difficult to retrieve store of knowledge in the printed word, still possesses a wealth of experience in its employees. This experience makes itself felt during PRC and other Bureau level meetings. We believe this experience can also be applied even more directly during the project design stage if individual project backstop officers have reliable information about other AID personnel who have had experience relevant to the project at hand.

PAE Action:

1. PAE intends, in cooperation with the Office of Personnel Management and the Sector Councils, to try to develop and test the utility of lists of AID personnel on rotation assignment in AID/W with specific project experience and include their current telephone numbers and addresses. This information will be provided to all Bureau backstop officers to facilitate direct contact. PAE, in cooperation with PPC/E, will also attempt to develop clearer guidelines (for review and approval by the PERC) delineating the types of lessons learned that we are most interested in searching for as we evaluate projects or programs. We will include discussion of the particular types of evaluations (i.e., final and impact vs. mid project and/or interim and clustered vs. single) which tend to be more conducive to generating lessons learned information.
2. NE/DP/PAE will attempt to work with DIU in reviewing abstracts received to date in terms of quality and developing guidelines to assist missions to improve them.

B. Backstopping

PAE Action:

1. PAE has already begun distributing examples of good evaluation work and recommending for DAA approval commendatory memoranda for the employees or

missions who prepared the reports. We will continue this practice.

2. PAE will also develop guidelines that delineate evaluation backstopping responsibilities of AID/W officers and offices and a set of standards by which missions, the PRC and NEAC will judge the quality and usefulness of evaluation work. The PERC will review and approve these guidelines.

3. PAE will develop guidelines in cooperation with NE/PD for the evaluation of capital projects and guidelines which delineate what the Bureau expects missions to address within a PID/PP Evaluation Plan for capital projects.

4. PAE will develop guidelines in cooperation with PPC/E on how to prepare for an evaluation prior to departure for all contractor and AID/W TDY evaluators to follow.

5. During its participation on PRC evaluation review meetings, PAE will increasingly focus on issues related to the quality and appropriateness of evaluation methodology and presentation.

C. Evaluation Documentation:

Evaluation reports do not follow a consistent outline and are often poorly organized. The Agency's PES format provides a useful outline for categorizing and presenting findings, but many project officers, evaluators (both AID and Contractor) are unfamiliar with or are uncomfortable with the PES guidelines.

----Recommendations

Enhance the status of the PES as a valid framework for evaluations. PAE should expand guidelines for using the PES, including a more readable format and issue these to field missions. In addition, the PES should be the standard format for AID/W TDY prepared evaluation reports.

D. Training

During the course of our study it became increasingly apparent that a great many AID personnel are unaware of existing AID policies regarding evaluation and the documentation relevant thereto. Few officers could remember ever having had evaluation training or, if they did have training, they found it ineffective.

PAE Action

1. PAE will begin working with PM/Training to determine what form of inhouse training programs should be developed to deal with such subjects as developing a logframe, writing scopes of work, utilizing the PES methodology, etc.

2. From the experience gained in conducting inhouse training exercises, we will develop a project related field seminar format for a series of seminars in selected missions. These seminars would actually do an evaluation of a

mission project and then critique it as part of the training course.

3. Finally, we intend to encourage missions to undertake evaluation workshops with host country personnel (perhaps host country personnel could be identified to participate in proposed evaluation workshops for AID personnel) and to provide evaluation training for USAID FSNs.