

THE ROLE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION IN DEVELOPMENT

This paper attempts to outline some of the program evaluation concepts, methodological issues, practices and organizational implications which confront development organizations, whether donor or recipient, multilateral or bilateral, government or private. The paper is based on operational experience in A.I.D.

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Definition of Program Evaluation

A retrospective analysis of experience to see what happened and to determine how, and why, it happened.

The Integration of Program Evaluation

Program evaluation should be incorporated at several levels within the program structure:

- as an integral phase of the project management cycle;
- as an essential element of program development and project design;
- as a rational basis for policy formulation.

Purposes of Program Evaluation

- To determine effectiveness; did the program/project achieve its planned targets?
- To determine significance; did the program/project make a substantial contribution to development?
- To measure efficiency; did we achieve a satisfactory cost/benefit ratio; could we have accomplished our targets at lower cost.
- For lessons which can be applied to similar activities elsewhere.

The Differences between Program Evaluation and Implementation Monitoring

EVALUATION - challenges the relevance and need;

- questions the design and the underlying assumptions;
- assesses induced change and progress toward planned targets;
- establishes causality;
- results in redesign and replanning.

MONITORING - is concerned with the procurement, delivery and installation of resource inputs;

- assures compliance with required standards and procedures.

Relationship of Project Design and Evaluation

It is neither possible nor desirable to consider the subject of evaluation independently of the subject of design:

- The intent of evaluation is to produce improved design.
- Evaluation can only be done well when it is based upon good design.
- Evaluation is done best when evaluative elements are explicitly built into design.

Design Concepts

Basic design concepts include the following:

- A definitive statement of project purpose which is explicit, precise, verifiable and finite.
- The preconditions for achieving the defined project purpose must be explicitly formulated: (a) inputs from whatever source, (b) implementation plan and means, (c) outputs which flow directly from prudent management of inputs, (d) design assumptions which must be comprehensive in coverage, explicit, critical to project success and have a high probability of happening. The design assumptions should be the result of feasibility analysis or other study.
- Causative linkages between inputs, outputs and project purpose must be viable and subject to verification.
- Accomplishment of project purpose must contribute in a significant and demonstrable way to solution of stated developmental problem impeding accomplishment of higher order goal.

- The causal/contributory linkage between project purpose and the higher order sector or program goal must be explicitly defined.

In addition to these basic design elements, the following evaluative elements must be incorporated in the design:

- Baseline data must be collected to measure those conditions which will be directly/indirectly changed by the project.
- Progress indicators must be formulated to permit periodic measurement of planned progress toward defined outputs, project purpose and higher order sector or program goal.
- Data to support the progress indicators must be identified and routinely collected during implementation.
- In situations where results are less predictable, an experimental design should be followed with treatment and control areas.

To accomplish the improved project design described above will require the publication of qualitative standards and guidelines as well as systematic training and advisory services.

Evaluation Concepts

If the project design is carried forward as described above, the evaluation process can be relatively simple and routine. It consists basically of three elements:

- Measuring progress toward planned targets (as well as the determination of unplanned results) using the previously formulated progress indicators.

- Reaffirming the continued relevance of the project purpose and its relationship to the higher order sector or program goal in the light of changes over time in host country circumstances.
- Determining causality, i.e., what internal elements of project design and/or what external factors caused success or lack of success.

Joint Review of Evaluation Findings

The evaluation findings should be reviewed to establish implications and conclusions for further action. The review should include all interested parties: the host country, the implementing agents, all donors. The climate should be collaborative and constructive, not threatening. For ongoing programs/projects, the objective of the review is replanning and improved implementation. For completed programs/projects, the objective is the distillation of operationally useful lessons for application elsewhere. Feedback of findings is discussed in the following section.

Implications for Organization and Management

Two closely related pairs of issues require thoughtful consideration.

Centralization vs Decentralization

Should the evaluation responsibility be centralized (i.e., evaluations performed by a central evaluation unit) or decentralized?

The critical criteria is that responsibility for conducting evaluations should be located functionally and organizationally as close to the decision making point as possible, i.e., the feedback of findings into decision making should be as direct and immediate as possible. Application of this criteria suggests that:

- # evaluation of progress and of continuing relevance of individual projects be decentralized to the project management team.

- # evaluation of experience to formulate policy and program criteria be done by a centralized unit concerned with policy and program coordination.
- # evaluation of programs and groups of projects for program management purposes be done at an intermediate level, e.g., regional or technical offices.

Outside Experts vs In-House Staff

Should evaluations be conducted by in-house staff (e.g., those with program/project implementation responsibilities) or by outside experts? Operational experience shows that project managers can evaluate progress and the continuing relevancy of their own projects candidly and objectively if there is a climate of constructive enquiry rather than a climate of recrimination. There are simple criteria to guide the choice:

<u>IN-HOUSE</u>	<u>OUTSIDE EXPERTS</u>
-- Greater knowledge of the environment and of specific operations is required.	-- Disinterested objectivity is paramount and must be demonstrated.
-- Direct and immediate feedback of findings into replanning.	-- Greater and more recent technical knowledge is required.
-- Lower unit cost - Broader evaluation coverage.	-- Evaluation must be free from operational workload for extended period.

Basically, it should not be an either/or choice. Both kinds of evaluation are needed and a combination of inhouse and outside experts often provides the best arrangement.

Evaluation of Ongoing Programs/Projects vs Ex Post Evaluation

Many institutions engage in an either/or debate about the comparative advantages of ongoing evaluation vs ex post evaluation of completed programs/projects. Both are needed.

-- Evaluation of Ongoing Projects - This is a program management function intended to:

- # assure the efficient use of scarce resources;
- # measure effectiveness in achieving planned project objectives;
- # confirm the continuing relevance of the project objectives in the light of changing circumstances.

Evaluation of ongoing projects is qualitatively different from routine implementation monitoring and should be done periodically. It can be done easily and at low cost if progress data has been routinely collected as a regular part of implementation.

-- Ex post Evaluation of Completed Projects - This is a program policy and management function and is intended to:

- # give a final accounting to the sponsors and supporters of the donor institution;
- # identify possible follow-on opportunities for the host country;
- # derive lessons from past experience which can be applied to the design of similar projects and to the formulation of program criteria and policy.

Ex post evaluation is meaningful only if it is supported by an information system which distills and matches evaluation findings to similar programs/projects elsewhere.

The Role of a Central Program Evaluation Unit

Irrespective of the extent to which program evaluation is decentralized, there is a need for a central program evaluation unit to assure that evaluation is occurring and:

- is professional/rigorous;
- addresses operational concerns;
- evaluation components are built into programs and projects;
- effective methods/techniques are available, understood, used skillfully;
- findings are channelled into replanning and decision making.

The services which such a central program evaluation unit might give to evaluators in the organization would include:

- # coordinate evaluation activities and the preparation of annual evaluation plans;
- # advise on, and participate in evaluations;
- # administer evaluation contracts and consultant services
- # develop improved methodology, guidance, instructional material;
- # provide training in evaluation methodology;
- # provide central evaluation document and reference service.