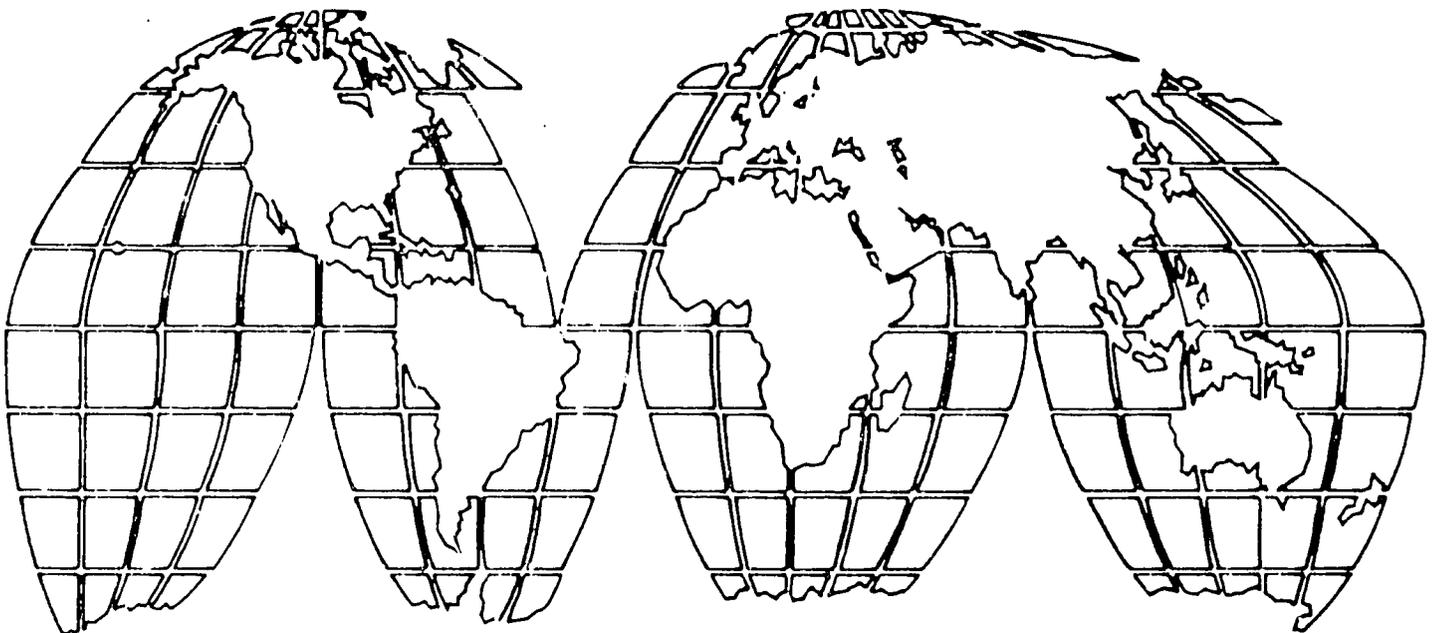


PN-ABE-562

65057

AN OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION IN THE AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



OCTOBER 1986

CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND EVALUATION
BUREAU FOR PROGRAM AND POLICY COORDINATION

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20523

AN OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION IN AID

Prepared for the 1986
American Evaluation Association Conference

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October 1986

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Agency for International Development.

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AN OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION IN AID

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of evaluation efforts in the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). It portrays evaluation in AID as a dynamic process that has undergone numerous changes in approach and has had an expanding role over the twenty five year history of the Agency.

The paper begins by examining AID's legal and regulatory mandate to evaluate and by reviewing the major purposes and issues of evaluation in AID. It then summarizes the organization and utilization of evaluation work in the Agency's decentralized management system. Next the paper reviews the Agency's evaluation planning and implementation process in this decentralized organizational context. Finally, the paper examines in more detail the special functions and efforts of AID's central evaluation office, the Center for Development Information and Evaluation.

AID's Mandate to Evaluate

AID's mandate to evaluate its projects and programs derives from the Foreign Assistance Act (as amended) and from Office of Management and Budget directives that govern all executive branch agencies of the U.S. Federal Government.

The OMB circular 117 requires all federal agencies to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their programs. Several sections of the Foreign Assistance Act direct AID to improve the assessment and evaluation of its programs and projects, and to report on the effectiveness of the foreign assistance program to Congress. Section 621, amended in 1968, requires the establishment of a management system that identifies the objectives of AID projects and programs, develops quantitative indicators of progress toward these objectives, and adopts evaluative methods for comparing actual results with those anticipated in the planning stage. The system was to relate expenditures to accomplishment of program objectives, and to help set program priorities.

Objectives of Evaluation in AID

Although AID is required to evaluate its projects and programs by law, the main motivation for evaluation is internal. AID's primary objective for evaluation is to improve its policies, programs and projects by applying lessons from experience to future management decisions and actions. Thus, evaluation in AID today is very utilization oriented. Examples of the types of actions that evaluations are intended to affect include:

- o decisions about on-going projects to improve performance;
- o decisions concerning the design of future projects and Programs;
- o decisions concerning broad shifts in resource allocations to improve overall effectiveness of AID assistance;
- o formulation of AID policies and procedures; and
- o dialogues with developing country counterparts concerning the impacts of their policies upon program effectiveness.

In addition to the primary focus of utilizing evaluation for management decisions, there are several secondary purposes of evaluation in AID.

ACCOUNTABILITY. As discussed above, AID is accountable by law to Congress and to other oversight agencies to assess and report on program performance and accomplishments.

KNOWLEDGE GAIN. Analysis of accumulated evaluation experiences can help improve our general understanding of the development process and the role of interventions. AID shares this knowledge gain primarily in the form of evaluation documents distributed to other donors, developing country organizations, academic communities, and AID contractors.

EDUCATION OF STAFF. Participation in evaluations can be an important educational experience for AID staff and for LDC counterparts as well. The broadening experience of participating in evaluations by project designers and managers will promote their greater understanding of the value of experience, and the factors which influence project success.

The Magnitude and Nature of Evaluation Work in AID

AID does not have a complete count of all evaluations done by AID since the early 1960s, but the number must be in the thousands. AID's document "memory", the Development Information System (DIS) includes over 3,000 evaluation reports on projects and programs active since 1974. Evaluative documents, including monitoring reports, audits, end of project reports, as well as the project evaluation summaries and special evaluations, number over 7,000.

In recent years, AID has undertaken about 200 to 300 evaluations annually. These evaluations cover roughly a quarter of AID's active project portfolio. Most evaluations in the DIS are of single projects and are interim or mid-term evaluations undertaken during project implementation. Less frequent are final evaluations, undertaken at project completion, and ex post evaluations, done several years after project completion. Most single project evaluations originate and are carried out by the AID field missions.

Increasingly in recent years, AID evaluations go beyond the single project focus to examine and compare multiple projects in the same sector or sharing the same development objective. There are also growing numbers of evaluations of non-project assistance programs, such as PL480 food aid, commodity import programs and cash transfers, and also evaluations of complete country assistance programs, of AID policy effectiveness and of cross-cutting issues. Evaluations going beyond the single project focus are typically initiated by AID's regional bureaus or central evaluation office, as opposed to individual AID missions.

Commonly used evaluation terminology in AID are briefly described below:

ONGOING EVALUATION refers to the routine, continuous efforts by program/project management to track and assess progress towards meeting objectives. Ongoing evaluation is part of internal monitoring. Generally a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is established to gather relevant data required to meet project management's routine needs for information.

INTERIM, FINAL AND EXPOST EVALUATIONS refer to periodically scheduled evaluations undertaken on a selective basis to address special evaluative issues and information needs. These special evaluations are generally carried out by outside contractors and result in evaluation reports. These evaluations are referred to as interim, final, or ex post, based on their timing relative to the project's stage of implementation.

IMPACT EVALUATIONS refer to evaluations that address the project's ultimate impact upon the target beneficiaries, in terms of improvements in their incomes, quality of life, behavioral changes or other development objectives.

AUDITS are a separate function of the AID Office of Inspector General. Their scope usually includes the traditional audit functions concerned with whether funds are properly dispersed and that all regulations and procedures governing AID assistance efforts are followed. However, since 1972 audits may include the assessment of the results of foreign assistance, thus causing some overlap with evaluation functions in AID.

MONITORING has also not always been clearly distinguishable from evaluation in AID. Traditionally, monitoring was supposed to be concerned with implementation and management problems and concerns (such as keeping on schedule with obligation of funds, seeing that project inputs arrive and that project outputs are accomplished) whereas, accomplishment of project purpose or higher level goal impact was the focus of evaluation. Today there is a move toward dropping the distinction between monitoring and evaluation, and to think instead of different kinds or levels of evaluation along a continuum, some of which focus on improving implementation while others focus on impact, effectiveness and relevance to development aims.

AID EVALUATION SUMMARIES are specially formatted, required summaries that must accompany all special evaluation reports. They include a summary of the evaluation's findings, conclusions, and recommendations, action decisions taken as a result of the evaluation, and information on the evaluation team and costs. They replace the old project evaluation summaries, PESS.

PROJECT ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORTS are reports required within six months of project completion. They draw on the project manager's experience and any special interim or final evaluations that were done to summarize project's problems and progress in achieving intended results and lessons learned. Although a requirement for all projects, a recent review indicates that only a small percentage of completed projects currently submit PACRs.

Evaluation Issues in AID

There are currently no rigid standards or requirements in AID regarding what evaluations must address. Rather, evaluation issues and methods in AID today are driven by managements' specific needs for evaluative information. The contents of evaluations follow from their scopes of work, which list the questions and issues that various stakeholders want addressed.

Nevertheless, below are listed some typical evaluation issues that AID evaluations may address regarding the assessment of project/program performance and factors influencing that performance.

RELEVANCE. The continued relevance of the project's objectives and approach may be assessed. Development problems and priorities may change as may AID policies, strategies and program emphases.

EFFECTIVENESS. Most evaluations should examine the effectiveness of the project in achieving intended purposes or effects as planned in the design. Evaluations of project effectiveness usually examine whether the project's services, technical packages or other products are actually being utilized by the intended target group; whether there is equity or bias in access, and whether coverage of the target group is as planned.

IMPACT. Some evaluations gather evidence regarding accomplishment of the ultimate development goal of a project. For example, whether the beneficiary group's socioeconomic status improved as a result of the project. Unintended impacts may be studied as well as the intended impacts.

EFFICIENCY. Evaluations that examine the results of a project in relation to its costs are concerned with efficiency. Cost-effectiveness analyses are increasingly being done in AID to examine and compare the efficiency of alternative approaches to achieving a given objective. (For example, comparing the costs per infant death averted of primary health care to potable water projects). While cost issues were frequently ignored in AID evaluations in the 1970s, they are of increasing concern during the 1980s.

SUSTAINABILITY. Also of growing concern in AID is the issue of whether the institutions, services and benefits established while AID was funding the project will continue to be self-sustaining thereafter. Sustainability issues usually include assessments of institutional capacity and stability, ability to cover recurrent costs, community participation, the policy environment, and other factors.

SPECIAL PERFORMANCE ISSUES. Evaluations may also address special concerns of the Agency, such as the impact of projects or programs on women, on the private sector's development, or on the environment.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PERFORMANCE. For evaluations to be operationally most useful, the factors that influenced a project's successful or unsuccessful performance should be identified. These factors may include aspects internal to the project, such as choice of the implementing organization, and distribution system, the appropriateness of the technology being promoted, etc., as well as external factors, such as the host governments commitment to providing recurrent budget support to the project and to creating a favorable policy environment.

The Organization of Evaluation Work in AID

AID is a highly decentralized organization with substantial authority for project approval and implementation delegated to overseas missions. (See attached AID organizational chart). AID's evaluation system is also decentralized, keeping the evaluation work and findings close to the focus of decision-making. AID's organization involves several levels of management decision-making and corresponding evaluation units.

AID OVERSEAS MISSIONS located in recipient developing countries are headed by Mission Directors. Program and project managers are responsible for the design, implementation, and evaluation of their programs and projects. Mission evaluation officers ensure that the Mission Director's evaluation concerns are met, coordinate evaluation work at the mission level, and provide assistance to project/program managers in their evaluation work. These mission evaluations make up the bulk of the Agency's evaluation efforts.

AID BUREAUS located in Washington, D.C. are directed by Assistant Administrators and Office Directors who oversee a collection of programs and projects organized either geographically (in the regional bureaus) or functionally (in the central bureaus). The bureaus have evaluation officers and many offices within the bureaus also have individuals who are assigned part-time evaluation functions. The Bureau evaluation officers oversee, coordinate, and assist with the evaluation work of their bureaus and missions. They provide guidance and set up procedures for evaluation work in their bureaus. They consolidate evaluation information to meet the needs of the bureau management and occasionally undertake evaluations beyond the project level; e.g. multi-project, program level or inter-country evaluation efforts.

AID SENIOR MANAGEMENT consists of the AID Administrator and the senior staff of the Agency responsible for the full range of AID's foreign assistance efforts. The Center for Development Information and Evaluation located in the Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination (PPC/CDIE) is the Agency's central evaluation office. This office responds to the senior management's evaluation information needs, and conducts a series of special evaluation studies and syntheses to meet these needs. CDIE is also responsible for coordinating Agency-wide evaluation plans, and providing guidance and technical assistance to offices and missions in evaluation methodologies. Finally, CDIE manages the Agency's Development Information System (DIS), a central repository or "memory" of AID project and program documentation, including technical, design and evaluation reports. Developed in the mid-1970s, the DIS is an automated system that stores, and retrieves evaluative and technical information, making it available on request to AID staff, developing country organizations and counterparts, the academic community, the Congress, other U.S. Agencies, the press, the public, and AID contractors.

Utilization of Evaluation Findings in AID

While much the responsibility for managing AID evaluation work and for retaining and disseminating evaluation reports and findings lies with the evaluation officers, the responsibility for utilizing evaluation findings and lessons is more broadly distributed across AID staff. The primary responsibility for utilization of evaluation findings rests with Agency managers at all levels as they plan, develop and administer the foreign assistance programs, projects, and policies. The different management levels of AID have differing needs for evaluation information. AID managers have a responsibility for formulating the evaluation questions -- what they need to know for upcoming decisions and actions -- and they have the ultimate responsibility for applying evaluations -- taking action on the evaluation findings and recommendations.

Typical uses of evaluations in AID include; (a) improving ongoing project or program implementation; (b) improving new project or program designs; (c) influencing country strategic planning and reporting on progress in meeting country development objectives; (d) influencing broad resource allocation decisions among project/program types; and (e) influencing Agency policy and procedures so that guidance reflects development experience.

Certain responsibilities for utilization and feedback have been required in AID to help strengthen the application of lessons from experience.

- o Copies of all evaluation documents must be submitted to CDIE to be abstracted, microfiched and entered into AID's "memory" (the DIS) and thus be available for future reference and analyses.

- o Project and program managers and Mission Directors are responsible for applying the recommendations of evaluations directly into project and program revisions and redesign.

- o Regional and central bureau managers are responsible for introducing lessons learned from experience with past projects into the project approval process. Project designers are required to query the DIS for pertinent evaluation experience and lessons.

- o Similarly there are requirements in the guidance for preparation of country development strategy statements, annual budget submissions, and action plans that mission and bureau managers must consider findings and lessons from past evaluation experience in the development of these planning and strategy documents.

- o CDIE is mandated to serve as a repository for AID's evaluation and other reports and to make them readily accessible to Agency managers at all levels. A special Reference and Research Service has been established in the Development Information Division of CDIE to answer individual queries from AID staff and others, involving the search and analysis of available documents for the most relevant experience. The Program and Policy Evaluation Division of CDIE is responsible for synthesizing findings for key sectors or issues from the document database (DIS). In addition to the syntheses of existing evaluation information, the Division plans and implements a series of special field studies, frequently addressing project and program impacts for particular sectors/sub-sectors, or focusing on priority Agency concerns, cross-cutting themes and policy issues. Over 130 evaluation studies have been published by CDIE and predecessor offices since the establishment of this central evaluation series in 1979. Utilization of findings and lessons from these series are meant to inform many audiences in AID, from the Administrator and senior management staff to the project and program managers in the field designing and implementing their projects/programs.

The Annual Evaluation Planning Process in AID

Following the management structure, evaluation planning is a decentralized process in AID, although it is centrally guided and coordinated. Each year, CDIE initiates the evaluation planning process by issuing guidance to bureaus and missions. AID revised its longstanding requirement for evaluation planning in 1981 to focus it more upon the future decisions and actions that managers would be required to make over the next two years, and the types of evaluative information that would facilitate those decisions; for example decisions about project expansions or follow-on projects, requirements for preparation of country strategy statements, evaluative information for policy formulation, etc. The annual planning process forces managers at all levels to specify the purposes of the evaluation (i.e. the actions and decisions for which the evaluation information is needed); the types of questions that require answering; and the scheduling or timing of evaluations to meet the action/decision needs.

The annual evaluation planning process takes place at three levels:

MISSIONS AND OTHER OPERATING UNITS prepare their plans for the next two years (on a rolling plan basis).

GEOGRAPHIC AND CENTRAL BUREAUS then negotiate any changes in priorities or additions with their respective missions and offices. They then consolidate these evaluation plans together with bureau level evaluation activities that address their special evaluation concerns and submit them to CDIE.

CDIE takes these consolidated evaluation plans and adds its own evaluation studies agenda, which taken together forms an Agency-wide evaluation plan.

Through the process of planning for evaluations in this manner, the chances are increased that evaluations will be utilization oriented, providing relevant answers to questions posed by different levels of management in time for critical decisions and actions. The process is also intended as a means of sorting out evaluation priorities among competing demands and to avoid duplication of efforts through coordinated planning.

CDIE has used the evaluation planning process as a means for tracking the completion of evaluation reports throughout the Agency. At the end of each fiscal year, the actual evaluation reports received are compared to those planned, and double checked with the originating office or mission for missing evaluations. In this way CDIE's role as a repository of evaluation documents can improve coverage or completeness.

Also, such a tracking system is useful for monitoring what proportion of planned evaluations are actually implemented by the Agency. During the 1980s the percentage of planned evaluation reports completed has varied considerably from year to year, averaging about 50%.

Evaluation Considerations in the Design of Projects and Programs

There are three major evaluation concerns that AID project and program designers must consider; (a) they must search the Agency's "memory", the DIS, for relevant evaluation findings and apply these lessons in their design; (b) they must provide a clear basis for future evaluation by specifying objectives and measurable indicators of progress according to the Agency's "logical framework"; and (c) they should prepare a plan for evaluating the project/program as a special component of the project/program, including scheduling, data requirements, budget, etc.

(a) Consideration of Previous Experience

Project and program designers are required to present evidence in their design reports of consideration of previous evaluation experience, not only in the recipient country but also by referring to syntheses of experience with similar projects elsewhere. Lessons from previous experience should be applied to design considerations, thus avoiding duplication of past mistakes.

(b) The Logframe as a Basis for Evaluation

The LOGFRAME (logical framework) is a tool for facilitating project design and evaluation that was developed in the early 1970s. It was first applied to technical assistance (grants) projects in 1970 and later expanded to other projects in the loan portfolio in 1974. It was the result of a review of the evaluation system in the late 1960s that identified lack of clearly specified project objectives at the design stage as a major evaluation problem. The logframe became a way of thinking about the major elements of a project and their assumed linkages to project objectives. The logframe called upon designers to clearly identify project inputs, outputs, purposes and goals, to identify quantitative measures of progress in meeting objectives, and to identify hypotheses about linkages and assumptions about conditions in the project environment that must exist for the hypothesized linkages to occur (between inputs, outputs, purposes and goals).

(c) Design Stage Evaluation Plans

AID requires the designers of new projects and programs to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan as an integral part of the design process. A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is an on-going system for gathering relevant data required by project management, including LDC counterparts as well as AID managers and contractors, to ensure that projects progress towards intended development results.

M&E plans typically should include identification of the evaluation issues or questions that will be monitored (e.g. achievement of targeted results, efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation approach, unplanned effects, sustainability, etc.). Furthermore the plan should identify the types of indicators or measures that need to be tracked to answer the questions, and the routine and special data collection and analysis techniques required. The necessary resources to implement the M&E system, including institutional arrangements, counterparts, technical assistance requirements, and estimated budget all require specification. Finally, a preliminary schedule for interim and final evaluations should be prepared, tying their timing to anticipated key management decision points. The development of an M&E plan should be a joint effort involving LDC counterparts as well as AID staff.

Implementing Evaluations

AID guidance for implementing evaluations has recently been revised to make them more responsive to management's information needs and to present findings in the most readable, useful format. The sections below discuss three aspects of implementing evaluations in AID; (a) preparation of evaluation scopes of work; (b) selection of evaluation teams; and (c) the preparation of the evaluation, including choice of data collection and evaluation design and reporting requirements.

(a) Evaluation Scopes of Work

The scope of work or terms of reference for an AID evaluation should explicitly state the priority questions that the users of the evaluation want answered and that the evaluators should focus upon. Also it should be clear that the evaluators will be required to provide in the final report their findings (i.e. evidence), their conclusions (i.e. their interpretations of the evidence and judgements), and their recommendations for actions by management. Scopes of work should also include method and procedures to be followed, such as research design, data collection techniques, size and composition of the evaluation team, timing and duration of the evaluation, and costs.

Drafts of the evaluation scope of work should be reviewed by project managers and other stakeholders to ensure agreement on the focus of the evaluation and the key issues to be addressed. A collaborative approach including LDC counterparts in the process is stressed by AID.

(b) Evaluation Teams

AID has no rigid rules for selection of evaluators. Selection should flow from the scope of work, relating technical and disciplinary qualifications to the sector and questions being examined. Knowledge of local conditions, language, evaluation skills, communication skills, and objectivity are also important criteria for selection. There

are both pros and cons to choosing internal (AID staff) evaluators with external evaluators. Frequently AID staff does not have the expertise or time available for in-house evaluation and most evaluation efforts rely upon contractors. A "mixed" team, including external evaluators with special skills and fresh perspectives and internal evaluators with intimate knowledge of the project and Agency procedures, provides the advantages offered by both.

A team planning meeting prior to the evaluation effort is recommended procedure in AID. Team planning meetings generally prepares team members to work effectively with each other and with evaluation stakeholders, clarifies the scope of work, and deals with logistical and administrative aspects of the evaluation process.

(c) Preparation of Evaluations in AID: Reporting Requirements, Methods, and Quality

The current evaluation reporting system in AID was installed in 1970. There was a standard reporting format for a "project evaluation summary" (PES) that highlighted decisions resulting from the evaluation, a synopsis of the evaluation findings organized according to the terminology of AID's logical framework, such as inputs, outputs, purpose, goals, unplanned effects and lessons learned. A full evaluation report sometimes accompanied the PES. Throughout the 1970s PESs were annual requirements for all AID projects. Another requirement was a "project assistance completion report" to be completed within six months of project completion. This final report had a similar standard format following the logframe terminology.

During the 1980s there have been several efforts to evaluate AID evaluations. A review of the PES system in 1980 concluded that use of the logframe as a rigid evaluation structure was inappropriate. The PES reporting instructions, which called for a methodology of using experimental or quasi-experimental designs to statistically infer impacts on the intended target groups, was not proving practical. The costs and administrative burdens of such statistically rigorous sample surveys were high. It frequently took years before evaluation results were available. Many evaluation baseline surveys never had follow-on surveys completed. Others reached inconclusive findings despite large expenditures on surveys. In addition the findings of such evaluation designs (whether developmental impacts actually resulted from the project) missed many of the management issues regarding factors responsible for project success or failure. The design frequently treated these concerns as a "black box". Also, this design approach frequently ignored cost effectiveness issues in its concentration on measuring results.

Furthermore, the requirement to evaluate annually meant that frequently there was a large gap between evaluation methodology guidance and actual practice. Most PESs in fact emphasized materials on inputs and outputs, with discussion on purpose and goal achievement being vague judgements and lacking data on beneficiaries

Thus by the 1980s, there was a growing awareness of the limitations of using a single evaluation model -- the quasi-experimental design approach favored during the 1970s. Today, there is acceptance of many evaluation methodologies and experimentation with alternative rapid appraisal data collection techniques that are less rigid statistically than sample surveys. Emphasis is upon finding intermediate results measures that are easier to measure than the ultimate impacts. Also there is a greater concern for tailoring the evaluation approach and methods to fit the questions posed by management. That is, letting the methodology be driven by a utilization focus rather than letting the results be driven by the methodology.

The requirement for annual evaluations, which was reducing many of them to mere monitoring summaries with little relationship to management needs, was dropped by the early 1980s in favor of periodic evaluations scheduled to meet specific information needs of management. The old PES format is now being replaced by a newly formatted AID Evaluation Summary that allows for greater flexibility in evaluation purpose and methodology, and is not rigidly tied to the logframe or to inferential testing of impact indicators.

During the early 1980s there were several efforts made to review, assess, and rank the quality of evaluation reports. These efforts concluded that the technical quality of many, if not most, of AID's evaluation reports needed improvements. The evaluations were rated on factors such as whether they stated the evaluation questions, whether they addressed these questions, the appropriateness of the evaluation design to the questions, data collection approaches, implications for action, etc.

Similarly, a recent audit of AID's evaluation system and reports has concluded that quality of many evaluation reports could be improved through adoption of standards for report preparation. Most of the recommendations of the audit concerning report format will be included in new evaluation guidance, such as the requirement that all evaluation reports have a table of contents, an executive summary, a clear statement of purpose, and sections on methodology, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned. In addition, quality of evaluations should be enhanced as CDIE publishes the updated evaluation guidance handbook and continues to publish a series on alternative data collection and analysis approaches, including low cost, rapid appraisal techniques.

The Central Role of CDIE in AID's Evaluation Work

This final section examines in more detail the history and special functions of the central evaluation office of AID, including the design and implementation of a series of special evaluations, the maintenance of the Agency's evaluation (and other development) information system, evaluation synthesis and feed-back or "applications", and various planning, repository, coordination, and guidance functions for the decentralized evaluation system.

(a) Evaluation Studies Series

In 1978 a central office of evaluation was created in the Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination (PPC). In 1979 this office began a special series of "impact evaluations" at the request of the AID Administrator. As discussed above, most evaluations done by AID until this time had been of single projects and tended to be more monitoring documents than development results oriented, despite guidance to the contrary. The impact evaluation series was to help fill the gap of lack of summative, ex post assessments focusing on impacts. While the focus of this series was to assess purpose and goal level achievements, the methodology employed was to send a multi-disciplinary team of experts to the field for a few weeks ex post of project completion to investigate results in a "New Yorker" journalistic style. Thus, this series of "impact evaluations" did not follow the rigorous quasi-experimental design approach advocated by Agency guidance during the 1970s. Given the lack of base-line data for most projects it would not have been possible to take such an approach.

These impact evaluation series began to look beyond the single project focus of most previous evaluation work in the Agency. While individual project "case studies" were evaluated, they were done in series of six or eight per sector according to a common scope of work, with a final synthesis effort at the end to draw common findings and lessons relevant to a whole sectoral program. Findings were presented and discussed at final conferences attended by senior agency management, technicians, and project level management. Publications were widely disseminated to an audience of about 2,000 both inside of and outside of AID. A special audience was Congressional staff that had urged the Agency to do more results-oriented evaluation. Impact evaluation series of this type completed include rural roads, rural potable water, rural electrification, irrigation, agricultural research, agricultural services, area-focused rural development, education, and PL480 food assistance. Many of these early topics were chosen by the AID Administrator.

By 1983 a reorganization took place creating the Center for Development Information and Evaluation in PPC. CDIE continued and broadened the concept of the special evaluations series. Work continued on the sectoral oriented impact evaluations, starting new series in agricultural higher education, health, and participant training. Special evaluation series were now also being initiated for cross-cutting themes and policy-oriented issues that were not sector specific and that focused on development means as well as ultimate beneficiary impacts. For example, series began that assessed the processes of encouraging technology transfer, improving development management, engaging women in development, and utilizing the private sector in development efforts. Several country level evaluations were undertaken that assessed the whole AID assistance program in a country context. Evaluations were also undertaken of special development programs, for example of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Appropriate Technology International, the AID narcotics control program, and the African emergency relief program.

CDIE was also broadening their methodological and implementation approaches towards evaluation as well as their substantive agenda. The traditional approach involved sending a multi-disciplinary team composed of 3-4 AID staff and outside experts for 3-4 weeks to each field site. Now CDIE began experimenting with numerous variations and alternatives. More emphasis was placed on use of contractors as it became more difficult to find direct hire staff with available time and expertise. The amount of emphasis placed on fieldwork varied. Some special "desk" studies involving synthesis of existing evaluation documents were completed with no fieldwork while others experimented with limited "ground truthing" at a few field sites to check the findings of desk studies. Other studies tried a more "extensive" approach to field work, sending smaller teams to more sites (10-15) for shorter periods (1-2 weeks) than the traditional impact evaluation approach. Other recent experiments have included phasing of evaluation fieldwork and the inclusion of indigenous survey and research firms or agencies in the evaluation effort. Dividing site visits into two stages, a design and an implementation effort, enables more careful planning of the evaluation and greater participation by CDIE management in the process. Special data collection and appraisals can be contracted out at low cost to local firms at the design phase to provide data in time for the final evaluation.

Each of these approaches have advantages and disadvantages and choice among them depends on factors such as (a) timing--when the study results are required; (b) budget concerns--how much money is available for a study; (c) adequacy of existing evaluation documentation on a topic and importance of knowledge gaps requiring further fieldwork.

CDIE has experimented for several years with different methodologies for synthesizing findings and lessons from existing evaluation reports from the DIS system, referred to as desk studies. At first an attempt to utilize techniques of meta-analysis was tried, but it quickly became evident that AID's existing evaluations did not provide the sort of comparable, quantitative outcome or results measures required to employ meta-analysis techniques. Rather, the CDIE analysts involved in evaluation synthesis work use a variety of more qualitative, comparative approaches, borrowing ideas from the case survey approach and from pattern analysis techniques. Evaluation syntheses typically attempt to summarize performance (e.g. the effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) of similar types of projects or programs in different settings, and to account for variability in performance by identifying explanatory factors such as differences in project approach, or in the project's environment.

The variability in the quality and coverage of existing evaluation reports is a constant problem for the CDIE analysts attempting evaluation synthesis. As discussed above, many AID evaluation reports are interim reports and focus on "monitoring" types of issues rather than providing indicators of development results. Another problem for synthesis efforts is the lack of comparability among evaluation reports given that many focus on different issues (their utilization focus on specific management concerns means many address a unique set of questions that don't necessarily lend themselves to comparisons), and employ a wide variety of evaluation methodologies and results indicators. Because of the problems with desk reviews, they are often used as first steps towards a series of CDIE directed field evaluations, or combined with more limited field "ground truthing" efforts, to help fill in knowledge gaps and to generate more comparable evaluation findings across project cases.

CDIE's evaluation studies are published in various categories of reports. Since 1979, about 130 publications have been produced, most with a circulation of about 2,000 copies each to AID staff, other donors, AID contractors, academic organizations, developing country agencies, etc. The various types of evaluation publications produced include:

- o DISCUSSION PAPERS that uncover issues or review the literature on a particular topic, usually issued prior to the initiation of a impact evaluation series.
- o PROJECT IMPACT EVALUATIONS that discuss the findings and lessons of impact evaluations of particular field projects.
- o PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORTS that synthesize the findings and lessons learned from a whole series of impact evaluations in a given sector and of concluding workshops

- o SPECIAL STUDIES that examine findings for particular cross-cutting or policy concerns evaluations, for evaluations of special programs, or for special desk studies synthesizing sectoral experience.

- o PROGRAM DESIGN AND EVALUATION METHODS REPORTS that provide guidance for the Agency in analytical methods and data collection techniques for project and program evaluation and design.

- o OCCASIONAL PAPERS on important topics of interest primarily within AID as opposed to the broader development community. These papers generally have a smaller distribution of about 200 copies each.

(b) Evaluation Applications

CDIE has special responsibilities for seeing that CDIE evaluation findings, and those of the Agency more broadly, are brought to the attention of AID management for "application" to future project, program and policy decisions. In order to promote use and application of evaluation findings within the Agency, CDIE places special emphasis on innovative mechanisms for dissemination, including:

- o Using specialized mailing lists for CDIE publication distribution to targeted audiences with special topical interests;

- o preparing brief abstracts of CDIE publications to distribute widely among AID management and busy executives to inform them of key evaluation findings and lessons in 2 to 4 pages;

- o responding to special short term requests from the AID Administrator and other top management for summaries of AID's experience in certain sectors or on certain issues. These syntheses generally rely upon an analysis of recurring "patterns" found in existing evaluation documentation from the DIS;

- o working with offices responsible for the formulation of Agency strategy and policy to ensure that findings from experience are incorporated;

- o reviewing key AID project, program and policy documents and commenting on whether past experience is appropriately reflected;

- o developing an automated project manager's reference system that will assist the non-specialist AID project manager in making operational decisions and in managing the work of specialists, by providing him with key lessons from experience and with references on where to get additional information and technical assistance. The PMR system will eventually cover a number of key sectors and topics;

- o holding workshops, conferences and meetings with AID management and technical staff to brief them of the evaluation study findings and operational implications.

(c) Evaluation Systems and Methods Support for AID's Decentralized Evaluation System

Evaluation systems and methods activities are directed at providing centralized leadership, coordination, guidance, and support services for the the Agency's decentralized evaluation system. The activities include:

- o tracking AID mission and bureau evaluation plans and completed evaluation documents via an automated monitoring system. Reporting on the proportion of planned evaluations completed, and ensuring the evaluation documents are entered into the Agency's DIS;

- o Preparing occasional analyses of the Agencies annual evaluation documents, such as syntheses of substantive findings and lessons, or reviews of the quality of evaluation reports;

- o holding periodic meetings of the Program Evaluation Committee to discuss common evaluation issues and problems and to share news of Agency evaluation activities;

- o assisting and participating in Agency training efforts, particularly in data collection and evaluation methodologies;

- o providing methodological guidance reports in data collection and evaluation techniques for the Agency to follow;

- o providing direct technical assistance to AID missions and AID/W offices in data collection, rapid appraisal techniques, evaluation methods, and information/ M&E systems, on a selective basis.

(e) The AID Library

CDIE operates the AID library collection of over 150,000 development related documents, which serve the current development information needs of AID staff and serve as a repository for its major documents. The library maintains collections of key AID documents, such as Congressional presentations, annual budget submissions, and AID financial reporting documents. It has a special reference collection including international yearbooks, statistical compilations, encyclopedias, atlases, area handbooks, development journals, newsletters, and books. In addition, the library maintains microfiche collections of AID project and program design, evaluation and technical documents, and of World Bank and F.A.O. documents and reports.

(f) The Development Information System

The creation of CDIE in 1983 involved the merger of the old Office of Evaluation with the old Office of Development Information and Utilization (DIU). The reorganization was in part the result of a GAO report prepared in 1982 which faulted the Agency for not analyzing and learning from its past experience. While DIU had established a vast library and automated development information system (DIS) consisting of tens of thousands of AID design, evaluation and technical documents, utilization of these facilities and services was limited due to lack of research and analysis staff. The reorganization was to place an increased emphasis upon secondary analysis and utilization of AID's documented experience by merging with evaluation staff skilled in evaluation synthesis and pattern analysis techniques.

The Development Information System or DIS is an automated database containing abstracted information on over 6,000 AID projects and programs, and contains references to over 40,000 AID design, evaluation, technical and research documents issued since 1974. Through a system of key words, obtaining printouts of relevant documentation on any subject, geographic location, project or author is relatively easy. Documents referenced in the DIS may then be obtained in paper copy or microfiche form upon request. DIS is based upon MINISIS software operating on an HP minicomputer. Last year a version referred to a MICRODIS was developed for microcomputers to enable portions of the DIS database to be transferred to the AID field missions' information centers or shared easily with other donors, LDC institutions and other development organizations interested in AID's accumulated documents. CDIE provides technical assistance to AID missions in establishing local development information centers, including the establishment of microcomputer-based library automation systems for use by AID missions and other small development libraries.

Also, CDIE produces the AID Research and Development Abstracts (ARDA), a quarterly bibliography of citations and abstracts of current AID-funded research and technical reports. The purpose of ARDA is to promote awareness and use of AID sponsored development research and studies worldwide by AID staff and key developing country institutions.

(g) Research and Reference Services

A special CDIE research and reference service was established in the last few years to provide expert searches and quick syntheses of AID's document databases and publications upon request. These analysts work in response to specific queries from individuals in AID missions and offices and outside of AID, on virtually any development related topic on which AID has accumulated experience.

(h) Agricultural Technical Inquiry Service

This special service enables AID mission and developing country counterpart staff to have access to agricultural science literature. The Agricultural Technical Inquiry Service is provided by the USDA's Office of International Cooperation and Development under a contract with CDIE and involves literature searches of the collections of the USDA the Library of Congress, the National Agricultural Library, and numerous other organizations.

(i) Economic and Social Data Services

CDIE operates an automated statistical databank providing a wide range of economic, financial, social and demographic indicators of developing country progress and trends. The Economic and Social Data Bank (ESDB) obtains data from a variety of international sources, including the World Bank, the IMF, the USDA, and the FAO. The full ESDB is maintained on the AID mainframe computer and is accessed using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software, which enables statistical report generation, statistical analyses, and graphics displays of the data. Recently, country data has also been made available on diskettes for microcomputer use, making the database more directly assessible to AID missions overseas. CDIE services requests from AID staff for this statistical data and is also responsible for preparation of annual statistical reports, including the Congressional Presentation datapages, the 620(s) report to Congress on military expenditures, the human rights statistical report, and a recently installed requirement for tracking LDC indicators of progress towards AID strategic goals of achieving economic growth and meeting basic human needs.

(i) Collaboration with Other Donors and LDC Organizations in Evaluation Work

CDIE has taken initiative in sharing evaluation findings, methodologies and systems with other development-oriented organizations, such as other donors and LDC counterparts. Examples of such collaborative efforts include:

- o a recent agreement with the World Bank to share their respective automated development information systems;
- o assistance to several other donors and LDC organizations in establishing automated development information systems based on MINISIS or MICRODIS and sharing AID's DIS database. Similar agreements to share the ESDB databases with other donor and LDC organizations;
- o widespread, regular dissemination of CDIE evaluation publications to other donors and LDC institutions;

o a leadership role in the DAC's evaluation committee, a forum for donor's to share their evaluation findings, and to discuss common issues of evaluation methodologies, systems and procedures.

o a key role in the development of collaborative workshops on evaluation, where donors and LDC counterparts can learn and discuss evaluation purposes and approaches in a collaborative style.