ASIAN EVALUATION WEEK 2023

11–14 September
Bangkok, Thailand

Beyond Recovery:
Evaluation for Development
Effectiveness

SESSION NUMBER & TITLE
Parallel Session 10 - Going big, going small, and going outside your comfort zone: pushing the boundaries of development effectiveness evaluations

SESSION TAKE AWAY
Participants will learn about illustrative examples of panelists' organizations are applying innovative evaluation approaches to respond to the growing and sometimes conflicting demands of development evaluation as well as an interactive online resource to assist with matching evaluation questions with appropriate evidence approaches.

SUBTHEME
Innovations in evaluation

ORGANIZATION/S
- MCC   3ie   - WB   - IPA Philippines

PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #1: [Julian Glucroft, Associate Director, MCC]
2 KEY MESSAGES 1. Comfort Zone for Development Evaluation: - Evaluations within the comfort zone often focus on independent evaluations with a clear line between evaluators and implementers.   - Common evaluation approaches include impact evaluation and performance evaluation, especially for programs with well-defined project logic and consistent operational approaches.   - Complex interventions like policy and institutional reform (PIR) are typically outside this comfort zone due to their inherent complexity and the challenges of establishing linear cause-and-effect relationships.   2. Challenges of Staying Within the Comfort Zone: - Staying within the comfort zone can lead to evaluations that focus on the ex-ante theory of change rather than the reality of implementation.   - Performance evaluations may miss the mechanisms by which programs contribute to outcomes and overlook unanticipated outcomes.   - There can be a disconnect between program implementation and the contextual realities, leading to limited or unsustainable outcomes.

PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #2: [Neelakshi Mann, Program Director, Asia, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)]
2 KEY MESSAGES 1. Perspectives on Development Evaluation: - Evaluators need counterfactual designs for clear attribution and causal relationships, access to relevant information (including big data), buy-in from policymakers, and a focus on assumptions underlying recommendations.   - Policymakers require evaluations to address specific government questions, be time-sensitive, provide recommendations with pros and cons, consider feasibility and budget, and account for reaching marginalized populations.

2. Stepping Outside the Comfort Zone:
    - Development evaluations often challenge decision-makers when findings don't align with intended impacts or when remedial measures are difficult to implement.
    - Stepping out of the comfort zone is essential for relevance and policy impact and can lead to innovative approaches and improved communication of impacts.

PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #2: [Jeffrey Chelsky, Manager, Economic Management and Country Programs Unit, Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), World Bank (WB)]

2 KEY MESSAGES

1. Adherence to OECD Criteria:
    - Development evaluations typically conform to OECD criteria in terms of substance, structure, and presentation.
    - Evaluation findings are often structured around these criteria.
2. Need for Audience-Oriented Recommendations:
    - There is a call to write evaluations and recommendations in simple language for the intended audience, considering the incentives influencing their behavior.
    - The increased reliance on Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), especially during COVID-19, necessitates adaptation of evaluation methodology for more operationally useful recommendations.

PANELIST/DISCUSSANT #2: [Tara Marwah, Policy and Project Development Manager, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) Philippines]

2 KEY MESSAGES

1. IPA's Comfort Zone and Adaptation:
    - IPA (Innovations for Poverty Action) traditionally focused on rigorous impact evaluations, primarily through randomized control trials (RCTs) with academics.
    - There is a recognition of the need to move beyond the "proving" phase and support policy makers and partners in using evidence in various ways, such as adapting existing evidence and developing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.
2. Leveraging Data and Holistic Approaches:
    - IPA's Philippines Socioeconomic Panel Survey exemplifies intentional coordination of RCTs to create a bigger picture of social and economic development.
    - The approach involves policymakers from the outset, enhancing ownership and enabling faster innovation testing.
    - Evaluations should be context-tailored and closer to end users, helping policymakers apply evidence from other contexts and build their evaluation capacity.

MODERATOR: [Douglas Glandon, Chief, Strategic Innovations, 3ie]

3 KEY MESSAGES

1. Comfort Zone in Evaluation: Evaluators tend to operate within a comfort zone that includes linear, well-defined theories of change, adherence to initial plans, and an emphasis on independence. This comfort zone may lead to less adaptable and flexible evaluations.
2. Innovations in Evaluation: Some innovative approaches include prospective coordinated data planning and analysis, policymaker engagement, the development of new guidance for adaptive evaluation, and proposals for institutional reform.
3. Barriers and Recommendations: Key barriers to pushing the boundaries in evaluation include institutional structures, resistance to change, data limitations, and capacity constraints. Recommendations for moving forward include fostering intrapreneurship, shifting the evaluation function to focus on facilitation, engaging subject matter experts, and expanding the role of evaluators to address broader program development and implementation needs.

Q&A SUMMARY

1. To what extent are the challenges in pushing the boundaries of development evaluation driven by the fact that most evaluators come from economics or quantitative disciplines, leading to potential boundaries defined by their own discipline?
2. Would the perspective change if the lens shifted from policymakers to the citizens or beneficiaries of programs, where governments become just one means to an end? Are there more effective ways to engage with different partners to improve people's lives and reduce poverty?
    *   Disciplinary Influence: Disciplinary backgrounds, often in economics and quantitative fields, can influence their evaluation approaches and the definition of boundaries. There is a need for a wider variety of approaches and interdisciplinary perspectives.
    *   Rigor is Key: While encouraging diverse approaches, rigor is considered essential for credible evaluation, irrespective of the approach used.
    *   Beneficiary-Centric Approach: Shifting the perspective from policymakers to program beneficiaries is seen as important. This change in focus can lead to methodologies like Quality Assurance Sampling (QAS) that involve the local population in evaluation processes.
    *   Multidisciplinary Teams: Multidisciplinary teams, including experts from various backgrounds, are advocated to broaden the evaluation perspective.
    *   Transparency and Public Engagement: Transparency and making evaluation findings public are emphasized to engage civil society and create demand for better policies and reforms.
    *   Human-Centered Design: Human-centered design principles are highlighted as important for ensuring that the voices and needs of the population being evaluated are considered.
3. How did you manage drop-offs, and could you share your experience in handling them?
    *   The project is in its initial stages, and haven't faced drop-off issues yet. Have prepared for this by considering voluntary compensation for participants, although it remains voluntary. Anticipating challenges, we recognize the need to address tracing difficulties arising from changing contact details and complex naming practices in the Philippines. While we are aware of these potential challenges, we hope to keep drop-off rates minimal.
4. How can we find a balance between maintaining the independence of evaluators while also ensuring the credibility of evaluations by incorporating subject matter specialists, especially in disciplines where such specialists are limited in number?
    *   Independence in evaluations doesn't mean isolation; it's essential to manage the perception of independence while engaging in dialogue and maintaining an independent mindset. When hiring, it's crucial to seek candidates who can identify areas for improvement and suggest ways to enhance the evaluation process.

SESSION COORDINATOR

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