

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF EVALUATION



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Evaluation Practice Around the World

Afghanistan

Seeds Against Malnutrition in Afghanistan: An Experience in Participative Performance Evaluation Training

Following political changes in Afghanistan, French medical NGO Aide Médicale Internationale (AMI) felt the need to reassess its interventions in a country where it had been present for more than two decades. Through a participative and consensual process with actors in the field and in France (using the Delphi technique with 33 persons, who were contacted by e-mail), the following evaluation question was defined: Which criteria can be used to evaluate program performance?

To allow for a better appropriation of the evaluation results, we combined two original participative approaches—we focused on the needs of those using the results and we allowed for maximum involvement of stakeholders. Three training and action workshops were carried out over 3 days in Mazar-e-sharif, Gulbahar, and Kabul (three regions where AMI is involved) with 77 people from local communities, the Ministry of Health, and AMI medical and non-medical staff. The aim of those workshops was to make participants aware of the basic concepts of program evaluation and to teach them a logical model that would help them to determine what to expect from projects in their local context. The AMI logical performance model served as a tool for sharing a common vision of projects by identifying the chain of results from output to impact.

This method, which aims at creating useful and usable indicators of performance through training sessions, may have appeared somewhat laborious at the time. However, it emphasized the importance of using a participative method. It would have been easier and faster to implement WHO indicators in AMI programs in Afghanistan, but it would have been unnatural, and nobody would actually have used that method of performance evaluation. This approach had already been used, with a partially similar organization, in Québec, but it was necessary to adapt examples and exercises to the Afghan public, all the more so since the group members had very diverse backgrounds (which we take pride in), and there were some illiterate members. Having doctors and farmers work on the same project is not customary, in Afghanistan or anywhere else! It was therefore necessary to adapt training tools both before and during the workshops to take into account the various reactions of the participants to the examples. For instance, it was very useful to illustrate the concepts of the

logical model through concrete examples inspired by everyday life, such as the example of seeds (inputs) to obtain apple trees (outputs) then apples (outcomes) used to feed children and reduce malnutrition (impact). To illustrate the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity, we used the example of a judge who had to hear a case of excessive use of a field by a neighbor who happened to be the judge's brother. Numerous role-playing sessions, simulation games, and practical exercises were used to alternate with useful but austere theoretical and conceptual sessions.

The ethical dimension, whether for evaluation or simply for intervention, was very new to all stakeholders. Much to my surprise, when I explained the concept, the moderator-interpreter (who was also a medical doctor) turned to me and asked me what I meant by "ethics." There is a long way to go in that respect.

These workshops led to the creation of a list of indicators related to the concerns of local actors. To that list, we added generic indicators—usually used for this type of program and indicators used in AMI. Through the two AMI local experts, a first selection of significant and useful indicators was carried out, using criteria of quality and relevance. This work constitutes an answer to the need for tools to facilitate continuous feedback and periodic production of reports evidencing the results.

The process is not finalized yet, but we believe this approach (collective workshops and permanent support through our local experts) will lead to the creation of tools for project evaluation.

Performance evaluation of health programs is difficult, particularly when it aims at making sure that NGO activities intended to help the poorest populations in the world have a significant impact on the health and well-being of the destitute. However, rather than evaluating impact, it is more realistic to focus on outcome (change for the beneficiaries of programs) rather than on the activities carried out (output: consultation, training, etc.). To achieve this, it remains indispensable that all stakeholders involved in the implementation of a development (or an emergency) program participate in the definition of expected outcomes. For that reason, the participative approach used during this mission in Afghanistan seemed relevant to us, and verbal and formal feedback on the workshops was extremely enthusiastic.

This work is difficult, because the evaluator has to understand that he is only an expert in the "container" (as opposed to the contents). He needs to share his knowledge and act as an animator and facilitator, whereas local actors are experts in the content and need to be involved in the evaluation, from the choice of evaluation questions to the analysis and interpretation of data. The viability and usefulness of such an evaluation mechanism for projects depends on the approach used. Active (and not fictitious) participation of stakeholders (from communities to the Ministry of Health) in the process is difficult yet must not be seen as a constraint but as a crucial viability and usefulness factor.

—Valéry Ridde

Further Reading

Johnson, H., & Fafard, A. (2002). *L'évaluation, mieux la comprendre et l'entreprendre* [Evaluation: Better

understanding and operationalization] (Project of the Régie régionale de la Santé et des Services sociaux Chaudière-Appalaches). Québec, Canada: Johnson and Roy.

Ridde, V. (2001, November 12). *L'approche participative et l'influence sur la prise de décision dans un contexte international d'aide d'urgence: Une évaluation en Afghanistan* [The participative approach and its influence on decision making in the international context of emergency aid: An evaluation in Afghanistan]. Paper presented at the 10th Annual Meeting of the Société Québécoise en Évaluation de Programme, Montréal, Canada.

World Health Organization. (1996). *Catalogue of health indicators: A selection of important health indicators recommended by WHO programmes* (WHO/HST/SCI/96.8). Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

UTILIZATION OF EVALUATION

Evaluation utilization (or evaluation use) refers to the way that evaluations and information from evaluations affect the programs on which evaluations are conducted. Were progressive changes made in a program as a consequence of an evaluation? Did an evaluation generate a new understanding of or a modification of beliefs about the program or aspects of the program?

The concern for evaluation utilization initially developed in the United States during the 1960s. There were many reasons for this, including the enormous growth in demand in these years for evaluations to be conducted. Major social programs were initiated that often mandated end-of-year evaluation reports. The subsequent rush to evaluate attracted many researchers who lacked awareness of the distinctions between research and evaluation and who failed to understand properly the contexts in which evaluations were to take place. The result was a multitude of evaluation reports that lacked relevance to program personnel. This was particularly true for evaluations conducted at the local program level, such as those in schools, school districts, mental health clinics, social welfare agencies, and the like. Thus, many evaluation reports sat on the shelf, fulfilling the requirement of evaluation but generally disregarded.

Although prior to the 1960s some conceptualization had been done on aspects of knowledge and research use, there had not been much interest in extending this to a consideration of evaluation use. The distinction between research and evaluation is an important one: *Research* refers to generalizable knowledge and thus potentially may be used very broadly and in a variety of contexts. Research may also have influence many years after it is completed. *Evaluation* refers to the activity of examining the process and the impact of a specific program at a specific time. Thus, evaluation use is restricted to the program under examination and, roughly, the time frame during which the evaluation is implemented. With an evaluation, program personnel are known, the specific context is understood, and the evaluator has a role in helping to define the particular areas to be evaluated. Further, evaluators can, through their actions, seek to define an evaluative role, relationships, and procedures that may enhance utilization. Consequently, use is potentially more achievable for evaluation than for research.

RESEARCH ON UTILIZATION

The concern expressed by Carol Weiss in 1972 for greater understanding of evaluation utilization ushered in a period in which great attention was paid to conducting the necessary research. In addition to Weiss, important studies were conducted by Michael