Barking up a Better Tree: Lessons about SEIE Sustained and Emerging Impact Evaluation

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Agenda

1. Sustained and Emerging Impact Evaluation: global context
2. SEIE: definitions and methods
3. Case studies: findings from post project evaluations
4. Designing an SEIE: Considerations
5. Q&A
Returning post-project to evaluate impact answers how sustainable our development is, why, and how to boost locally-owned development solutions. We can design and fund based on these lessons to build the capacities, (and systems), resources, linkages and motivation for permanent exit. Transparent, accountable aid puts participants and partners the center of their own development.
We have to stand in our participants’ shoes, and demand evaluation of sustained impact.
$137 billion was spent in 2014 on development projects; We have spent $5 trillion on foreign aid since 1945…

But we’re not sure if what we’re doing is actually sustainable post-exit

- Less than one percent of projects has been evaluated *after they ended* to learn what genuinely changed
- Valuing Voices found **only 370 public ex-post evaluations**.
- Rarely are project participants consulted
Dearth of post-project evaluation documents/ partner input in publicly-available databases:

* 900+ documents in USAID’s DEC database - only 12 actual post-project evaluations with fieldwork have been done in 20 years, most of which asked participants (more earlier).

* 12,000 World Bank projects - only 33 post-project evaluations asked ‘stakeholders’, only 3 showed clearly they talked to participants.

In 2010 Asian Development Bank conducted 491 desk reviews of completed projects, and did 18 actual field-based post-project evaluations that included participant voice.

* We found no evaluations by recipient governments of aid projects’ sustainability.
Valuing Voices found only 27 international development organizations have evaluated whether impacts were sustained post-project

* 4 organizations publicly shared over 100 post-project evaluations: JICA, OECD/ EU, World Bank, USAID (dated)

* 7 huge organizations have publically shared fewer than 4 post-project evaluations: Canada’s CIDA, European Commission, AusAID, US’ MCC, UK’S DFID, Norway’s NORAD, African Development Bank.

* 7 US INGOs have done 1-2 and 8 European NGOs did fewer than 4.
ROI: These evaluations cost fractions of the projects' investment & learning may increase efficiencies & success rates of future projects… once priorities are realigned to sustained impact

Are we willing to “accept more modest results in the near term if they can be delivered in a way that will yield more sustainable gains over time”?

USAID/ Food for Peace’s Director in *Sustaining Development*
Defining Sustainability
How do we define sustainability in different contexts?

The OECD’s DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance define sustainability as: “concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable.”

Broader definitions need to be explored:

- Sustainability as participation
- Sustainability as duration or longevity
- Sustainability as ongoing financial support
- Sustainability as continued benefit flows (to participants)
- Sustainability as capability

Source: Revised by Meenakashi Sankar from Rogers & Kimberley 2005 Sustainability and Legacy
Key Concepts

• **Sustainability**
  - The ability to achieve persistence of impacts (and sometimes activities) among project participants
  - The ability to achieve diffusion of impacts (and sometimes activities) to new populations

• **Exit**
  - From specific activities
  - By the implementing agency
Key Concepts

Sustainability Plan

• All the elements of project design that promote sustainability and increase the likelihood that project activities, outcomes, and impacts will continue post project

Exit Strategy

• An operational and logistical plan for how an organization will withdraw its resources while ensuring that achievement of project goals is not jeopardized and that progress toward these goals will continue
Conceptualizing Sustainability Pathways

Sustained Impact

Sustained Behaviors and/or Service Utilization

External Factors

- Sustained Service Delivery
- Sustained Access
- Sustained Demand

- Sustained Resources
- Sustained Capacity
- Sustained Motivation
- Sustained Linkages

Project Exit Strategies
Possible impact trajectories after a project ends – stable impacts
Possible impact trajectories after a project ends – increasing impacts
Possible impact trajectories after a project ends – eroding impacts

Impact

Time

Project lifespan
Operating status of water systems

Figure 2.1: Operating status of water systems around the world

Source: Prepared by the authors based on WaterPointDataExchange figures on 230,000 rural water systems in developing countries. The trend line was constructed with a cubic polynomial.

Note: Cubic polynomial regressions of the probability of a system being operational at a given point in time from installation. Not all coefficients of the adjusted polynomial are significant.
Possible impact trajectories after a project ends – emerging impacts
Embedding Sustainability in the Project Cycle
Embedding Sustainability in the Project Cycle

POST-PROJECT EVALUATION
Learning about Sustainability

PARTICIPATION

Project Close, final Evaluation
Project Design, Partnership Agreement
Implementation, on-going monitoring, midterm
Project start up, Baseline
Embedding Sustainability in the Project Cycle
Sustained and Emerging Impact Evaluation

Methods for evaluating impact post project
<table>
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<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>SOME OPTIONS</th>
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| Types of impacts                               | Sustained intended impacts  
Sustained unintended impacts                        | Emerging impacts |
| How results are measured or described          | Measurement of physical properties  
Direct observation  
Key informant interviews  
Community interviews | Questionnaire/Survey  
Secondary data – e.g. census data, social statistics  
Remote sensing |
| Causal inference strategies                    | *Experimental* – randomized control group  
*Quasi-experimental* – e.g. matched comparison, propensity score matching, regression discontinuity | *Non-experimental* – e.g. actor attribution, Qualitative Impact Protocol, Process Tracing, Qualitative Comparative Analysis, Collaborative Outcome Reporting |
| Who conducts the evaluation                    | Project funder  
Funding partner  
External Evaluation team | Local evaluation team  
Local community |
| Whose values underpin the evaluation – criteria, standards, evidence, synthesis | Original funders’ stated goals, targets or principles  
International norms or standards | Local implementers  
Local community |
Case studies: lessons from SEIEs

What the case illuminated about
• Intended and Emerging (unexpected) impacts
• Measurement approaches, including types of data
• Approach to causal inference
• Values associated with interpretation of findings
• Ways of reporting and uptake of findings
Valuing Voices Case Studies:

- Ethiopia (2200, interviewed 120) looked at **projected sustainability** at the end of project, Niger 2 was **6 months post** (500, interviewed 70), Niger1 was **3 years post** (20,000, interviewed 500).
- All included review of project data baseline or endline to post-project
- All were **for internatl non-profits**, namely the Red Cross, Lutheran World Relief and Catholic Relief Services.
- Ethiopia and Niger1 were **participatory with direct observation**, Niger2 added a **quantitative HH survey**
- Ethiopia and Niger2 added **external stakeholder views** to that of participants, including government and donors.
- Ethiopia used findings to shape the next intervention and **donor reporting**, LWR used it for donor reporting, CRS used it for **global learning** and dissemination to donors and the public, including **sharing results with government and participant communities**.
Ethiopia – SEIS at Valuing Voices

- Asked participants what they consider self-sustainable assets – overall agreement across three communities but against donor and GOE priorities of plough oxen, dairy cows, bees

- Communities knew what indicators to monitor for design-for-impact
Key Findings Niger Food Security

CRS Niger1:
* 3 year post-project, intended and emerging
* Thanks to intensive partnerships, 80% of project activities were self-sustained, feeding themselves longer 3 years post-project. Why succeeded? Saw immediate benefits
* 20% failed due to unsustainable incentives and design of un-demanded activities (TII)
* Plan for youth involvement over LT needed

LWR Niger 2: OK results but Unexpected:
Water Access up ➔ No Gender violence
Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004

- Australian federal government funding program supporting 635 short-term projects, with different starting and finishing dates
- Part of the evaluation involved following up a random sample of 113 completed projects 1-2 years after funding ended
- Focus was on sustained activities and sustained capacity (not subsequent sustained impacts)
- Data - project questionnaires, contract management documents and telephone survey
- Causal inference – actor attribution, plausible narratives
Findings and use of findings

• Projects that achieved sustained activities after Strategy funding ended, and those that expanded their activities, were more likely to:
  • have had several different sources of funding,
  • have engaged in a number of different activities undertaken to engage community support,
  • have received effective support from their auspice organisation during development, and
  • have had a more successful project.

Lessons learned – and incorporated in next funding round:
• Be clear about the types of sustainability that are desirable and feasible
• Develop a sustainability strategy early
• Identify other parties that need to be involved in implementing your sustainability strategy
Long Term Impact of Development Interventions in Koshi Hills area, Nepal

• Aimed to understand impacts of multiple interventions across 40 years
  • Longer time period to observe impacts
  • Taking into account multiple projects and other historical events and contexts
  • Including the perspectives of those at the centre of the change

Mapping projects, plans, other developments across time
Methodology

• Five different research studies:
  • Documentary review - over 1,000 independent data sources
  • Geographical information systems (GIS) mapping key changes to land-use.
  • Analysis of district-level poverty data
  • Economic analysis of national, sub-national and district-level inward investment and growth trends
  • Qualitative ‘reality checks approach’ (RCA) study - 'light touch' participant observation

• Retrospective casual analysis ‘plausible causal narratives’ –
  • causal process mapping, key node analysis, and strength of evidence assessments to identify key drivers in a complex system.
Food for Peace Sustainability and Exit Strategies
4-Country study
This presentation is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Health, Infectious Diseases, and Nutrition, Bureau for Global Health; USAID Office of Food for Peace, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance; and USAID/India, under terms of Cooperative Agreements GHN-A-00-08-00001-00, AID-OAA-A-11-00014, and AID-OAA-A-12-00005, through the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA), managed by FHI 360.
Study Methods Overview - Illustrative

Study Methods Overview

- 2002: Awardees collect **baseline** quant data
- 2004: Awardees collect **midterm** quant data
- 2008: Awardees collect **endline** quant data
- 2009: Tufts collects initial qual data
- 2010: Tufts collects post-program qual data
- 2011: Tufts collects post-program qual data; **follow-up** quant survey replicates awardees' endline surveys
Evidence of project success at time of exit does not necessarily imply sustained benefit over time

Number of projects in which select MCHN impact indicators were sustained
Three factors—resources, capacity, and motivation—are critical to achieving sustainability; a fourth factor, linkages, is often important.

- Water and sanitation: Bolivia and Honduras
  - Beneficiaries motivated to pay for piped water
  - User fees provide resources to maintain and repair the system
  - Water committees have technical and managerial capacity reinforced through practice
- Water and sanitation: Kenya
  - Unreliable supply reduced motivation to pay, threatening resources for system maintenance
Linkages are more successful when their purpose and role are explicit and when the linkage partner has resources, capacity, and motivation

• **Vertical linkages to health system**
  – Effective in Bolivia, with government commitment to decentralized health care and resources to support it
  – Ineffective in Kenya due to lack of capacity and resources

• **Linkages to markets and buyers**
  – Essential to success of agricultural commercialization of individual farmers and producer associations
  – Buyers are motivated by a secure supply of quality products; have resources and capacity to provide technical assistance and credit
A gradual transition from project support to independent operation is important for sustainability

- Producer associations had established market linkages and had experience with value chains prior to exit

- Microfinance groups were functioning independently and creating new ones prior to exit (Kenya)

- Water quality testing was not sustained (Bolivia and Honduras); awardees transferred responsibility for testing only at exit
## Maternal and Child Health/Nutrition (MCHN)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainability Strategy</th>
<th>Key Assumptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage (expect) community health workers (CHWs) to continue working after project exit</td>
<td>• Satisfaction of providing services and appreciation of the community will motivate CHWs without material incentives</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Establish links between CHWs and government public health system to provide supervision, training, materials, and support | • Health system has motivation, capacity, and resources to support CHWs  
• Health staff recognize the value of CHW services and will work with them |
<table>
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| Teach beneficiaries to replace rations with locally available nutritious food          | • Mothers have time and resources to purchase or produce and prepare food  
• Mothers are motivated to continue participation in growth monitoring without rations |
| Teach improved health practices that beneficiaries will continue to apply after project exit | • Mothers recognize the health benefits of the practices  
• Mothers remember what they have learned  
• Mothers have time and resources to apply practices |
Ensuring “expansion” can be more challenging than ensuring persistence of benefits among project participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Lifelong benefits—no persistent behavior change required</th>
<th>Continued benefit from persistent behavior change/service use</th>
<th>Innovation/capitalization on initial project investment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Beneficiaries</td>
<td>Project-trained providers service new beneficiaries</td>
<td>Project-trained beneficiaries disseminate behaviors to peers</td>
<td>Project-trained beneficiaries disseminate behaviors inter-generationally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

★ = Continued service provision by trained providers required
Designing a SEIE: considerations
Preconditions for Successful Sustained and Emerging Impact Evaluation (SEIE)

- Organizational Commitment
- Project and Site Selection
- Need: Time, Material, Project Expertise
- Shared understanding why something works well pulls our industry forward. Learning to share what doesn’t work helps us avoid pitfalls. Such knowledge is missing without SEIE.
Early… Methods for SEIE post-project

Clear discussions with partners (see conditions for SEIE), shared vision, shared commitment to participants/ partners)

Use and Learn from national evaluators
Mixed methods (Quant-qual, or qual-quant), participatory

Compare post-project results to baseline/ endline, Use of Comparison groups

Debriefs with communities, partners, national level (including PVOs), fostering conversations to inform current partner and other NGO programming, LEAVING LEARNING LOCAL: LEAVE DATA, DATA, Learning
Methodological recommendations from the Koshi Hills study

1. Multidisciplinary (or better still an interdisciplinary) approach
2. Wideranging review of existing evidence
3. Effective integration and synthesis of information utilizing a strong common evaluation framework routed in systems thinking.
4. Iterative development and testing of preliminary hypotheses and counterhypotheses (narratives, suggested chains of causation), including additional fieldwork
5. Independent “reality” checks of preliminary theories
Incorporating Sustainability Concerns into Project Evaluations

• Follow projects periodically from baseline through exit and post-exit
• Incorporate control sites starting at baseline
• Seek appropriate comparative data from secondary sources if necessary
• Alternative rigorous systematic non-experimental approaches
Incorporating Sustainability Concerns into Project Evaluations

• Identify the ‘theory of change’ underlying each intervention and assess it realistically

• Consider entire communities (or regions), not only targeted beneficiary groups

• Consider indirect (second- and third-order impacts) as well as direct impacts
Incorporating Sustainability Concerns into Project Evaluations

• Even evidence of continued impact at one point in time post exit may not predict long term sustainability

• Planning for phase-over at exit must identify linkage partners that fulfill the criteria for sustainability
Incorporating Sustainability Concerns into Project Evaluations

Challenge is to identify indicators of potential for sustainability of impact in advance of exit:

• Have all four critical factors for sustainability been addressed?
• Have underlying assumptions been made explicit and critically assessed and are they justified?
• Are the activities that were planned to contribute to impact continuing independently?
“Hope Is Not a Strategy”

- For sustainability planning, make elements of the strategy explicit...
- And make the underlying assumptions explicit
- Then critically assess the assumptions
- If they are not realistic, seek an alternate strategy....
- ...do not rely on “hope”!
Let’s continue the discussion...

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- [www.fantaproject.org/research/exit-strategies.ffp](http://www.fantaproject.org/research/exit-strategies.ffp)