



VALUING VOICES

Building the evidence base for post project evaluation:

Case study review and evaluability checklists

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

3F	Faster Forward Fund (funder)
ADB	Asian Development Bank (multilateral agency)
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
Agric	Agriculture
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CRS	Catholic Relief Services (non-profit)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia, bilateral agency)
DFID	Department of International Development (UK bilateral agency)
EDC	Education Development Center Inc (not for profit)
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (research project for USAID)
FH	Food for the Hungry (non-profit)
GO_	Government of _ (Burundi, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines)
IEG	World Bank Independent Evaluation Group
IGA	Income Generating Activities (part of microfinance)
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency (bilateral agency)
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation (bilateral US agency)
MCHN	Maternal Child Health/Nutrition
Microfin	Microfinance
MoEVT	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [Zanzibar]
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OECD/DAC	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development–Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC)
PACT	PACT (non-profit)
PROSAN	Food Security and Nutrition Program (CRS/ Niger project)
SC	Save the Children (non-profit)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEIE	Sustained and Emerging Impacts Evaluation
TOC	Theory of Change
TOS	Theory of Sustainability
TOSI	Theory of Sustained Impact
Tufts	Tufts University
USAID	United States Agency for International Development (bilateral agency)
VB	Village Banks also known as Village Savings Banks
Wat/San	Water and sanitation
WV	World Vision (non-profit)

Abstract

A review of eight projects with end-of-project and post project evaluation reports suggest that post project evaluations can contribute to better understanding of the sustainability of project impacts and identify unexpected and emerging outcomes years after project close. The review highlights some of the methodological issues that are unique to post project (as opposed to end of project) evaluation, and point to the advantages of planning for sustainability measurement from the outset of the project. In the majority of cases, the sampling approach adopted at the endline proved challenging to replicate post project because it was not designed to measure sustainability, or because of access to or demographic changes in the beneficiary population. Finding suitable projects for this review was difficult because so few post project evaluations are done, fewer are publically available, fewer still had comparable final evaluations and included local voices. Agencies that fund post project evaluations offer a range of reasons for doing so: to learn, to promote a success, to inform replication or scale, to provide justification for future funding, to promote accountabilities. What is less explicit is how findings are used within implementing and donor agencies, shared with partners, and influence future programming. As part of this report, Valuing Voices offers an evaluability checklist for doing a post project evaluation from the onset of the project, and a checklist for measuring sustainability through the entire project cycle.

Executive Summary

Fewer than 1% of all international development projects were evaluated after they ended. With a global investment of 1.6 trillion in foreign assistance since 2000, this seeming disinterest in assessing sustainability—particularly in light of the international commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals—is concerning.¹ Valuing Voices was established to promote greater attention to the value added of from learning from sustained results in terms of what to continue doing *and* what to discontinue.

With grant funding from Michael Scriven's Faster Forward Fund we set out to demonstrate the value added of post-project evaluation. To do this, we compared findings documented in final (endline) evaluations to findings documented in post project evaluations for the same projects². Available funding enabled assessment of only eight cases, and sourcing even this number of cases from amongst publically available documents proved challenging. These eight case studies highlight some of the methodological issues that are unique to post project (as opposed to end of project) evaluations, and point to the advantages of planning for sustainability measurement from the outset. They also highlight the difference between the trajectory of anticipated or inferred sustainability outcomes at the design and end of project stage, and what actually happens on the ground. Returning to investigate impacts that emerged from the efforts of communities and partners, as well as what unanticipated results contributions insights that are unique to post project evaluations.

While post project evaluations are often done to generate learning, raise a project's profile and funding potential, or to inform policy change or accountability purposes, more investigation is needed into how post project evaluations have actually informed and influenced organizational learning and even broader sectoral dialogue.

Checklists included in this report offer items to think about for tracking sustainability around the project cycle, and for undertaking an evaluability assessment for conducting a post project evaluation during a project or after a project has closed.

Interest is slowly rising in doing post project impact evaluations that look at sustainability. The industry would benefit from guidance on taxonomies, knowledge management about evaluation, data retrieval/ retention, analysis, use and dissemination. A future, expanded, study would benefit from more time for case selection, analysis and dissemination. This study reminds us that the participants we assist have had lives before and after our projects, and that we need to listen to them in order to understand whether our investments have built resilience and contributed to positive, and durable outcomes. To that end, Valuing Voices puts forward a new vision for what post project, sustained impact evaluations typically do, by adding the 'emerging impacts' dimension, namely looking at what emerged post-project that was not only intended or unintended, but also entirely due to the efforts and resources of participants and partners after project investments stopped. More on these Sustained and Emerging Impacts Evaluations (SEIEs) at Better Evaluation, cited later in the report.

¹ https://ssir.org/articles/entry/when_funders_move_on

² <http://valuingvoices.com/clients-grants/>

1. Introduction

Post project evaluation remains an important but still rare event in the project cycle. While most international development projects aim and claim sustainability of their interventions, and the international community has signed up to an ambitious array of Sustainable Development Goals, fewer than 1% of development projects are evaluated after funding ends. As one senior evaluator stated:

most “sustainability assessments” are in fact prospective studies that assess whether the effects of an intervention are likely to be sustained. The assessments are usually based on a set of assumptions about the conditions under which elements of the intervention would continue. However, in most cases there is no follow-up study to test these assumptions.

Genuine post project sustainability impact evaluations can promote learning, lead to greater efficiencies and effectiveness and boost accountabilities.

Valuing Voices received a research grant of \$10,000 from the Faster Forward Fund to explore the value-added of post project evaluation³. The research included a comparative review of eight end-of-project evaluations and evaluation results of the same projects conducted between 2 and 13 years after project closure. The study aimed to see whether the post project evaluation revealed helpful information about sustainability of project impacts, as well as unexpected outcomes, and particularly whether those findings differed in any way from the snapshot of results at the end of the project. Only projects which incorporated the voices of project participants were included (hence no desk studies). All of the cases also included at least some quantitative indicators.

Selection of projects aimed to include a cross section of development sectors, funders, locations and project sizes. As described in Section 2, it was surprisingly challenging to identify a pool of cases sufficient to meet all of these criteria—reflecting the dearth of such evaluations and the size of this research project. Our search also illuminated attitudes, including from large funders, towards the perceived value of post project evaluation, as discussed in Section 3.

Our research looked at the variety of methodologies adopted by evaluators who conducted the post project studies, summarized in Section 4. Section 5 provides an overview of the types of insights post project evaluations added to what was assumed in project design or endlines, including unanticipated and emerging outcomes. In Section 6 we explore how results of post project evaluations are used. With insights from this study, inputs from experts, and other resources, we developed two checklists: an evaluability checklist for evaluators planning a sustainability impact evaluation during or after a project has closed, and a planning checklist for use in monitoring sustainability through the project cycle, presented in Section 7.

Post project evaluations can contribute to organizational and sectoral learning and promote accountabilities. This was a modest first step in an important journey. We hope it will provoke greater interest, initiative and investment in making sustainability evaluation a regular element of the project cycle.

³ In this report, this term is used synonymously with ex-post and post-completion and, for taxonomy, ‘post-project’ or sustainability impact evaluation.

Evaluation cases reviewed for this study

Case Reference & Country	Implementing Agency	Sectors	Project Name	Project funder	Implement-ation dates	Final Evaluation dates	Post-project evaluation dates	Project budget
1. CRS/Niger	Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	MCHN and Agric	Nutritional and Food Security Program (PROSAN Rayuma)	USAID	2006-2012	2011	2016	\$30 mil
	This food security project aimed to sustainably increase agricultural production and agro-enterprise, improve household health/nutrition, reinforce health system capacities, contributing to community resilience. Implementing agencies included CRS, CARE and HKI. The mixed-method post project evaluation was done among 500 people in 6 villages and relied largely on respondent recall because of an incomparable end-line. Results: strong sustained consumption/agriculture results; other results mixed.							
2. EDC/ Zanzibar (Tz)	Education Development Center (EDC)	Education	Radio Instruction to Strengthen Education (RISE) and Zanzibar Teacher Upgrading by Radio (ZTUR)	USAID	2008-2009	2006-11	2015	N/A
	This primary education, early childhood development and teacher training project was designed to improve access to high quality instruction and materials for preschool to Grade 2 pupils in Zanzibar. Quasi-experimental panel study using quantitative methods to compare learning gains of participants and controls. Rigorous evaluation design point to strong organizational sustainability but showed limited learning gains.							
3. FH/ Kenya	Food for the Hungry (FH)	MCHN, Agric, Wat/ San, NRM, Microfin	Marsabit Integrated Food Security Program	USAID	2004-2008	2008	2009, 2010, 2011	N/A
	This is one of USAID/Food for Peace's 4-country study on sustainability and exit. A key focus of this Integrated Food Security Program on Agriculture & NRM, Livestock, Microfinance, Maternal Child Health/Nutrition, Water/Sanitation as health and nutrition of families. While Food for the Hungry (FH), ADRA and CARE were implementers, the post project evaluation focused on FH interventions only through three rounds of annual qualitative data collection of and a randomized household survey including anthropometric measures conducted two years after full phase out. Results: mixed, if more positive than negative results.							
4. SC/ Honduras	Save the Children (SC)	MCHN, Agric, IGA, NRM	Proyecto de Gestion Rural en Seguridad Alimentaria (PROGRESA)	USAID	2005-2009	2009	2009, 2010, 2011	N/A
	This Rural Management and Food Security Project was also one of the USAID/ FFP studies on sustainability and exit strategies. The sectors were Agriculture/NRM, Income Generation, Maternal/ Child Health and Nutrition. Implementers included: SC, ADRA and WV. Three rounds of qualitative data collection and a final randomized household survey were conducted. Mixed results.							

Case Reference & Country	Implementing Agency	Sectors	Project Name	Project funder	Implement-ation dates	Final Evaluation dates	Post-project evaluation dates	Project budget
5. PACT/ Nepal	PACT	Gender, Microfin	Women's Empowerment Program (WEP) "WORTH"	USAID	1999-2001	2001	2008	\$5.8 mil
	This women's empowerment through credit project model used mixed methods to evaluate nearly 300 (of 1500) village banks for sustainability post-project. Project evaluation methods and sampling changed over the years, culminating in mostly qualitative ex-post interviews supplemented by survey and observation. Post project considered women's (and partners) ability to create and save wealth, generate new incomes, be literate, and tackle broader issues such as domestic abuse and community development—both emerging findings. So too was the failure of village banks to be sustained, or to spread; data was used to inform next project design. Overall positive results although absence of a number of indicators leads to questions about its overall success.							
6. JICA/ Burundi	Government of Burundi	MCH	Strengthening Capacities of Prince Regent Charles Hospital and Public Health Centers in Bujumbura City for Improvement of Mother and Child Health	JICA	2009-2012	2012	2014-15	\$3 mil (290 yen)
	JICA funded this capacity building project for the health system designed to improve maternal and child health. The post project evaluation used mixed methods including HMIS data, observation and a client survey. JICA scoring as evaluation method was used also to evaluate organizational sustainability. Post project found mostly positive results.							
7. JICA/ Philippines	Government of Philippines'	Wat/ San	Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (V), loan	JICA	1999-2007	2007	2014-15	\$3.3 mil (456mil yen)
	This rural water supply and sanitation project and loan involved collaboration between JICA and various levels of the Philippine government, focused on constructing wat/san facilities over 8 years which extended to 15 yrs. Elements of the report include a delayed final evaluation as well as a look at ex-post results. Notably the cost of the project was 2.7 times the original estimate and only 23-65% of facilities were constructed but satisfaction about those – high.							
8. World Bank/ Nigeria	Government of Nigeria	Agric & Conflict Mitigation	Second national Fadama Development project IDA-38380"	World Bank	2004-2009	2010	2014	\$134 mil
	Community-based project designed to improve livelihood production and resolve conflicts between farmers and herders. This was the only World Bank case VV found at IEG that included strong participant voice in the post project evaluation. As with other evaluations, mixed methods, Post project evaluators noted issues with baseline and endline data, nonetheless positive results on income but negative results in sustainability of conflict resolution initiatives. Includes compelling lessons for future community development projects.							

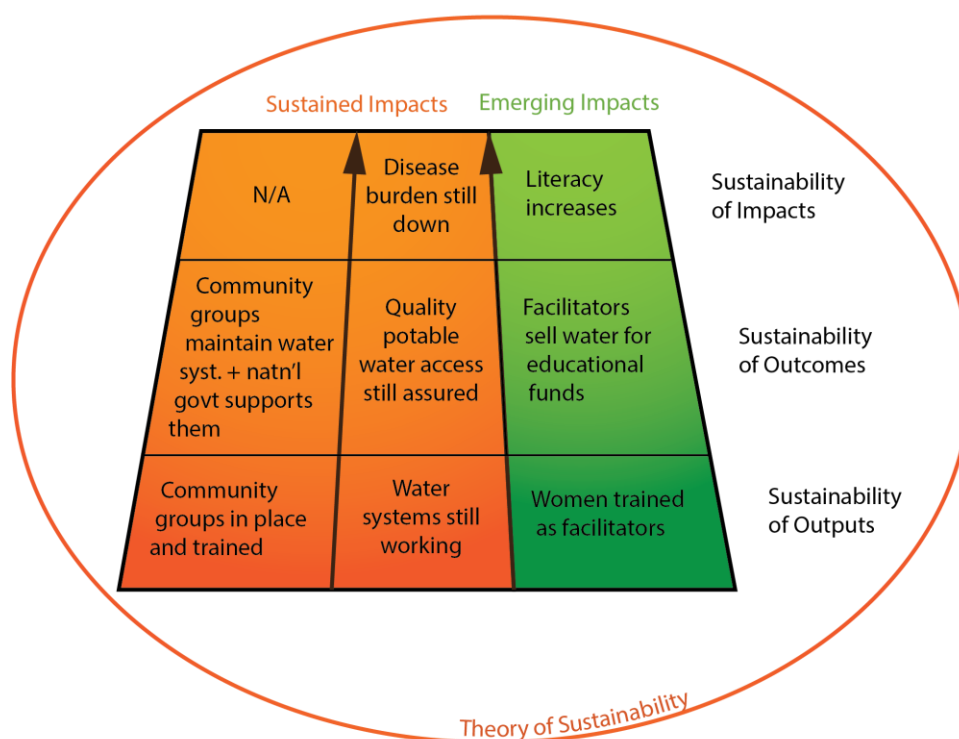
2. Concept of Sustainability and Definitions

There are many definitions for sustained impact of projects and programs. The definition put forward by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development–Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC)’s is the most widely used:

*The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed. The probability of continued long-term benefits. The resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time.*⁴

The agencies included in this research study use slightly different **definitions of sustainability**⁵. Most share an emphasis on longitudinal durability of outcomes.

Theory of Sustainability: *Evaluating along the results chain from outputs to impacts (from a hypothetical WASH project)*



The research illuminated for us that not only are there levels of sustained outputs, outcomes and impacts, but also **different kinds of sustainability to evaluate**.

⁴ OECD-DAC. 2002. Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management. Paris. p. 36.

⁵ Cited in <https://www.adb.org/documents/post-completion-sustainability-asian-development-bank-assisted-projects>

This ranges from hoped for preconditions such as organizational and resource/ financial sustainability at local and national levels, to programmatic sustainability of infrastructure and capacity, to emerging, entirely unexpected outcomes and impacts. Examples are evidenced in the hierarchy illustrated by a hypothetical water/ sanitation and hygiene project. Notably, some projects may only have a ‘lower’ level of sustainability to evaluate as their aim, e.g. whether potable water is of a sufficient quality and access to it is assured, whereas others will aim to assess a higher-level goal—for instance whether the disease burden has decreased or even, unexpectedly finding, literacy increased.

In a helpful list of six factors that characterize taxonomies for **defining impact** as used in evaluation, Simon Hearn (http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/blog/what_is_impact) includes the immediacy rate and durability of change⁶

The search for suitable post project evaluations for this research suggests that the terms “final” and “post project” are often used interchangeably⁷. This has served to confuse the purpose of each. The OECD-DAC Glossary (2010) defines a **final evaluation** as:

The systematic and objective assessment of [a]...completed project or programme, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

This assessment of whether expectations have been achieved happens as funding is winding down. Genuine assessment of sustainability—which by definition can only be validated after project resources are no longer flowing—must take place at some remove from a final evaluation. Both types of impact assessment are valid; only one measures sustainability. JICA’s lexicon makes a helpful distinction in terms of the timing and emphasis, and **purpose of a post project evaluation** as an:

evaluation...conducted after a certain period has passed since the completion of a target project with emphasis on the effectiveness and sustainability of the project. This evaluation aims at deriving lessons and recommendations for the improvement of... programs and for the planning and implementation of more effective and efficient projects.

These definitions broadly informed our identification of cases for this review.

3. Identifying post project evaluations for review

Since 2013, Valuing Voices has periodically searched for ex-post evaluations in the publicly available repositories⁸ of most major development funders and implementers.⁹ While tens of

⁶ As per Simon Hearn’s #5 on Impact: http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/blog/what_is_impact

⁷ Notably, many final evaluations, even if conducted after project close (which we call ‘delayed’ in this report), were characterized as post project evaluations. This complicated the search for genuine post project evaluations, as discussed below. An evaluation labeled as a post project by IDB from Colombia for instance included only an impact evaluation, which was conducted during implementation rather than at the end of the project.

⁸ Valuing Voices, has relied on its own volunteer resources to compile a repository of publically available post project evaluations.

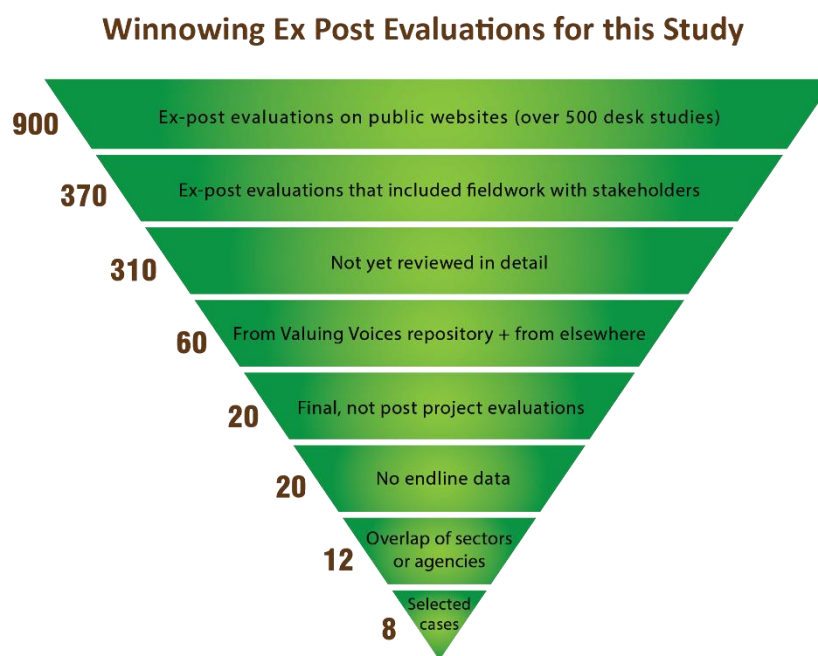
thousands of documents are tagged as ex-post, post-project or post-completion evaluations, the vast majority are actually process evaluations (baseline, midterms, finals) that *mention or recommend* that an evaluation be carried out after the project close.

This is challenged further by the reality that many of the databases which refer to such evaluations, including from UN agencies, the World Bank and many of the regional development banks are inaccessible to those outside the organizations.

Valuing Voices searched in databases at USAID and OECD, JICA (which have by far the largest publicly available evaluation repositories) and a variety of other bilateral and multilateral databases for post project evaluations that looked at sustainability. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is touted to be a rigorous agency looking at impact. But among seven listed as ‘post project’ only two were publicly available. Further examination found these two MCC ‘post projects’ were actually delayed project final evaluations. No ex-posts were found in the Asian Development Bank (ADB) repositories, for while the ADB had delayed some final evaluations until after closeout, we were told by a senior evaluator that no evaluations have been done 5-15 years ex-post - the ADB’s definition of post project.

We revisited more of the evaluations stored in our Valuing Voices repository and found more delayed final evaluations from CIDA and NORAD. A further search yielded no genuine post project evaluations on their sites. Similarly, a search on other major donor sites—including DFID, DFAT (AusAid) found no post-project or ex-post evaluations. Among foundations, the Bill and Melinda Gates and Hewlett Foundations listed no such evaluations.

Searching for terms ‘ex-post’, ‘post project’ and ‘post completion’ amongst existing databases surfaced about 900 documents. However, over 500 appear to be studies that relied completely on



⁹ These include USAID, the European Commission, the OECD, JICA, DFID, NORAD, Dutch Aid, SIDA, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Hewlett Foundation and major multilaterals of the World Bank’s IEG Group, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and on websites of major US INGO’s.

secondary sources—typically reports and data from the funder and implementing agency.¹⁰ The other 370 involve fieldwork that included some ‘stakeholders’. In these cases, demographic and other details about stakeholders was quite general, and details about fieldwork and methodologies, evaluation tools, and even results often were described only in general terms—so it is possible a range of stakeholders were consulted but details were left out. A smaller subset of these included identifying information on which voices of local implementing partners and project participants were cited.¹¹ Another 310 post project evaluation documents (mostly in JICA and OECD iLibraries) were not reviewed in detail in order to achieve diversity of donors (two of the early cases selected were from JICA) and diversity of countries (OECD had no post project evaluations from Latin America or the Caribbean which in the end had only one case included in this study). In other cases, data were presented in aggregated format in large reports such as the ADB Post-Completion Synthesis (2010) or IDB’s Development Effectiveness Overview (2014) and the detailed project-specific reports were inaccessible.

The 60 post project evaluations that were reviewed were selected based on a review of those in the Valuing Voices repository, supplemented by purposeful searches in multilateral and non-USAID databases. The search sought to achieve maximum variation across sector, geography and funders for the current study. Inclusion of detail on methods and results comparing final to post-project were further requirements for inclusion. Of the 60 reviewed, 20 were found, on further investigation, to be actually final, not post project, evaluations, so they were excluded. Another 20 post-project studies did not have matching endline report so they were excluded,¹² leaving 20 studies. Of these, 12 had overlapping sectors or agencies, so where multiple examples of food security or health projects were already included, for example another sector such as water/ sanitation or conflict were selected instead, which led to the final 8 cases.

This arduous process points to numerous lessons related to taxonomies and knowledge management of project result, accessibility and transparencies, some of which are being addressed by Open Data policies discussed later in the report.

Over the last few years we have written a series of blogs speculating on why so little attention has been paid to this key element of program learning and accountability. With support through this project and our research study advisors, we were able to gain additional insight into how some of the major donor agencies regard post project evaluations. A senior evaluation leader at the Asian Development Bank tried unsuccessfully to help us find a case to

¹⁰ This is from a quite detailed search of these databases, and based on a scan of the executive summaries.

¹¹ In VV research of ex-posts by the World Bank’s IEG group, for instance, we found 33 post-project evaluations, of which three clearly included participant voice in the evaluation, one of which is included in this study.

¹² The original research was focused on finding cases that were rigorously quantitative and qualitative, rather than those relying on the weaker recreation of retrospective endlines. The research took several days, as did discussions and queries to multilateral contacts in search of the most robust cases, so in the end, two of these types were included from Valuing Voices database as quite a few used this method to be able to draw conclusions about sustainability, and the financial and time limits were pressing. This was quite frustrating as even when we had identified rare, robust post-project evaluations, often we were unable to find the final evaluation for the same project. This, resulted in the exclusion of several, interesting ones from the 1970s-80s commissioned by USAID.

include in our study. This person commented that ADB can't return to evaluate now-closed projects, because

nobody is there any more...we no longer have any responsibility...many things could have happened, [it is] difficult to track and analyze.

Another senior evaluator at a bilateral aid agency told us that for this research they tried to

identify a decent post project evaluation but we couldn't come up with any. Our evaluation office often talks about the need to undertake medium/long term post project impact studies but doesn't actually do any.

In response to our query about post project evaluations, one MCC informant noted that

there aren't very many ex-posts because all of our major projects are required to undergo a dedicated performance or impact evaluation... [so] all projects must be evaluated alongside and during implementation per MCC policy.¹³

It appears that post project evaluation was seen as an alternative to a final impact evaluation, not an opportunity to consider sustainability outcomes after resource flows ended.

Part of the ambiguity noted here may be related to the (explicit or tacit) purpose various development institutions associate with post project evaluation—is it for learning or to improve the rigor of accountability? All of this adds up to serious questions about commitment to measuring sustainability impact, including investigating return on investment when objectives are assumed to deliver enduring results. There is also strong evidence that investments in and sharing of post project evaluations favor initiatives that are seen as successful and thus promote the implementer or funders stature. While this may contribute to learning lessons about sustainability, it undermines opportunities to learn from what doesn't work—which is equally important.

The difficulty in finding sufficiently robust cases also says much about our industry's weak knowledge management, speaks to the wide array of taxonomies used, as well as the lack of standardized methods across this 'new' field. Summing up, as a senior evaluator stated:

while development agencies and governments can explain why it is institutionally and politically difficult to conduct retrospective sustainability assessments (funding for evaluation ends when projects close, there is no political appetite to focus on sustainability as opposed to seeking funding for new programs etc.), it should be a matter of concern to the development community that we have launched a fifteen year commitment to promote sustainable development with very little consideration to date on how we will assess whether, and under what conditions, different kinds of interventions have been, or are likely to be sustained.

¹³ At the same time, this informant also said "our 'final' evaluation reports would be based on data and analysis collected well after a project ended, depending again on the program logic and timeline for expected results". VV's review of the two publically available "post project" evaluations suggest they were not ex-post.

4. Post project methodologies

Senior evaluator and member of the review panel:

There are very few studies that are based on evidence collected after the intervention has been operating for a number of years. The methodologies for conducting such a study would be similar to those used in the prospective sustainability assessments, but with the critical difference that they would be based on empirical data and not untested assumptions. Students of political economy will not be surprised to find that these assumptions are at the optimistic, rather than the pessimistic end of the spectrum so that there is a tendency to over-estimate the likelihood of sustainability.

This study offered an opportunity to investigate methodologies adopted in a range of post project evaluations. The inclusion of end of project evaluations in the study also allows for a look at how endline data has been deployed in post project evaluations, and also whether and how sampling approaches and instruments used in monitoring and evaluation have enhanced or challenged post project assessment of sustainable impact.

In undertaking this investigation, we did not assume that there is a desirable blueprint or best practice methodology for post project evaluation. Indeed, given the diversity of sectors, implementation contexts and intervention approaches, one size fits all is not viable or desirable. These eight case studies highlight some of the methodological issues that are unique to post project (as opposed to end of project) evaluations, and point to the advantages of planning for sustainability measurement from the outset.

The findings that follow are based on end of project and post project documents that were readily available. In some cases, the reviewer had access to additional final evaluations, but in general other documentation about the project was not sought. About half of the post project reports include **reflections from the evaluators** about the methodological challenges they faced, and insights into the reasons they adopted the approaches they ultimately used for assessing observable changes related to sustainability of results. Key findings:¹⁴

a) Framing the evaluation

Most development projects make assumptions about the *trajectory of change* and the likelihood for sustainability as part of a justification for investment. These assumptions can be explicit—as presented in a Theory of Change or sustainability objectives—they can also be implicit, and suggested by statements in a project's design about the potential durability of anticipated project cycle outcomes or long-term return on investments. Whether explicit or implicit, genuine validation of such expectations can only be done after project inputs have ceased.

Amongst the eight cases reviewed for this study, a minority of projects had an explicit **Theory of Change** that offered a starting point for the post project evaluation. The Pact/Nepal post project evaluation borrows a World Bank ToC in order to situate the post

¹⁴ For more information see the project matrices in the Annex

project assessment in the sector. The SC/Honduras and FH/Kenya studies are part of four-country, 12-project study that explored post project outcomes of Food for Peace projects. The study adopted a **Theory of Sustainability** as a starting framework for the multi-country enquiry, examining the impact of four factors – capacity, resources, motivation and linkages – on sustainability outcomes. A theory of sustainability is an important starting point for a post project evaluation that seeks to explore causal inferences that attribute sustainability to a specific intervention (or set of interventions). It is valuable, even if such a theoretical framework is developed as part of the post project evaluation exercise (see Checklists in Section 7).

Many but not all of the post project evaluations referenced **measurable life of project targets**¹⁵ and objectives, presenting project cycle and post project achievement in terms of original targets (see Matrices in the Annex to this report). The SC/Honduras and FH/Kenya post project evaluations adopted indicators to test a theory of sustainability framed by the research agency FHI 360/Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project supported by Tufts for USAID Food for Peace¹⁶, which carried out four recent post project studies. In doing so, it set aside many of the impact indicators from the projects. This is internally consistent and served to answer their research questions but in the larger picture, it raises questions about how organizations select and report on what they evaluate (and who selects them). (Other post project evaluations, such as Pact/Nepal also used select indicators from the project cycle in their post project evaluation). Valuable lessons, particularly related to limited or negative impact, may be lost in this way. Some of the projects relied on a just a few **outcome and impact indicators**. JICA/Philippines tracked the number of water/sanitation facilities built and number of beneficiaries and added women's empowerment in the ex-post assessment.

An additional point of reference for assessing sustainability outcomes is the project's **exit strategy**. Three of the eight cases (SC/Honduras, FH/ Kenya and CRS/Niger) note the availability of an **exit strategy**—which is now typically required in USAID/ Food for Peace proposals and closeout. Most of these strategies are built around anticipated handover to other implementers. None offered benchmarks or quantifiable targets for achievement of exit strategy objectives, making it hard to evaluate whether such strategies promoted sustainability.

b) Methods and instruments

All of the post project evaluations included **mixed methods**. Five included a household survey and all had Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. A range of other methods were also included, for instance facility or compliance observation, client satisfaction surveys, and panel studies.

Valuing Voices was only able to identify one case in which a post project evaluation replicated the methods from the **endline** findings (EDC/Zanzibar). This was because the post

¹⁵ Project-cycle targets were valuable at post project stage (and for this analysis) to understand achievements anticipated at the outset of the project.

¹⁶ <http://valuingvoices.com/learning-about-sustainability-and-exit-strategies-from-usaids-food-assistance-projects/>

project evaluation was envisioned from the outset and seen as integral to the learning objectives of the project.

Most of the post project evaluation methods relied to some extent on **instruments** used in the endline studies, with additional methods included. A number of the post project evaluations (for instance FH/Kenya) noted that evaluation instruments used during the project—including specific wording of questions—were adopted to ensure comparability of findings. In others (JICA/Burundi, Pact/Nepal) despite availability of instruments used within the project cycle for measuring outcomes, other instruments were developed instead. The post project evaluation conducted by the IEG of the World Bank in Nigeria raised concerns about definitions and monitoring methods used during the project, and had a clear presentation of why alternative instruments were used in the post project evaluation.

In all of the post project evaluations in this study there was a **significant reliance on self-reporting** with a range of methods used to gather insights into what the project meant in the lives of respondents. While this is of course a logical component of any retrospective study, in the absence of statistical endline data to validate (or not) the perceptions held during or at the end of a project, an individual's view about value added after the fact may be clouded by many unknown factors. In the CRS/Niger study, for instance, raw endline data was not available in disaggregated form, so the post project evaluation relied almost entirely on **participant recall** to draw conclusions about sustainability of interventions.

Observation was deployed in infrastructure projects (JICA/Philippines) where water facilities were observed during the user survey. An engineering assessment was carried out as well to address operational sustainability¹⁷. Observation was also effective in observing whether hospital and clinic staff continued to use equipment provided by the project (based on signed observation sheets) in the JICA/Burundi case.

c) Data availability

A surprising number of the post project evaluations reviewed in this study were carried out without reference to **baseline data**. Indeed, retention of baseline and monitoring data in country and in implementing partner archives emerged as an issue that cut across agencies. In all but one of the cases reviewed (EDC/Zanzibar), baseline data was either unavailable or available in reports that aggregated it at a level that was not easily analyzable in the post project assessment. For one post project evaluation (World Bank/Nigeria) the qualitative available data was considered unreliable.

A few of the post project evaluations relied on mid project data either because no **endline data** was available or because endline data that was available was deemed unreliable (e.g. PACT/ Nepal). In two cases (JICA/Burundi and World Bank/Nigeria) government partner agencies had not gathered endline data as agreed at the outset of the project—a fact that only came to light in the post project evaluation.

Knowledge management of data and information about how evaluation findings are retained and shared is a key issue. In a hopeful sign, recent USG **Open Data** requirements

¹⁷ Other water ex post projects failed to use observation to look at sustainability.

(Automated Directives System 579) will make access to some raw data far more accessible online (unless proprietary), they do not mandate retention in country, and how data is retained in-country for further learning remains a surprising point of contention.

d) Sampling

Sampling posed particular challenges for post project evaluators. Some struggled with aligning post project sampling to the samples from endlines or midlines. Claims to statistical comparability of results from endline to post project is problematic unless evaluators use the same sampling frame and method.

Focus site selection for a number of the post project evaluations (for instance, PACT/Nepal and CRS/Niger) were arrived at in consultation with government or implementing partner officials. Criteria ranged from security considerations to intensity of the project during the implementation to perceived performance of the project. Transparencies in documentation of such choices is important, as they may introduce bias.

Three of the post project evaluations relied on **population-based studies** (FFP/Honduras, FH/Kenya, JICA/Philippines). While population based studies are appropriate for measuring end of project results, they are more problematic for post project evaluations if the characteristics of the target population has changed in significant ways, such as beneficiary movements, aging up of beneficiary populations, and other confounding factors associated with the passage of time. In such cases, more purposive sampling might be considered.

Knowledge management of projects data is a preeminent concern for post-project evaluations. Contact information for individuals who participated directly in project activities can be used in a variety of ways, and is invaluable. In the cases we reviewed, **beneficiary lists** were unavailable in all but two cases (EDC/Zanzibar; World Bank/Nigeria), although in the CRS/Niger evaluation, the evaluators recreated beneficiary lists through a painstaking process of copying participant logs held at sampled villages. The World Bank/Nigeria study was able to re-contact a 10% sample of beneficiaries interviewed in the project mid-term (used for the post project as an endline). This post project evaluation had the advantage of being organized around beneficiary user groups, which were somewhat easier to recontact than individuals or households. Similarly, the PACT/Nepal post project evaluation adopted the Village Bank as the unit of analysis, and sampled from amongst participant groups (conducting the post project evaluation amongst those that were still functioning with a small comparison group amongst individuals who were not participants in a group). This approach has the advantage of easier access, but may miss important lessons from failed groups or individuals who were eligible but did not join, unless they are also included.

The benefit of including a **comparison group**¹⁸ in a post project evaluation was clear to many evaluators grappling with trying to distinguish change that could be reliability attributed to interventions sometime after project close. One of the projects in this review (EDC/Zanzibar) included a comparison group in the M&E framework, which helped account

¹⁸ None of the post projects were structured as randomized controlled trials [RCT] research initiatives with control groups, which in any case could be quite problematic for a post project.

for confounding variables. Two of the post project evaluations (World Bank/Nigeria; Pact/Nepal) introduced a comparison group at the post project stage as a way of further triangulating their findings.

Selection of respondents in a post project is as critical as the questions they are asked. As in any evaluation the inclusion of all voices—and particularly more marginalized, potentially less visible or vocal stakeholders—is critical. In a post project evaluation, this requires careful attention to site selection, sampling, and key informant inputs—decisions which may not always be straightforward even with comprehensive endline information, as noted elsewhere in this report.

e) Evaluation team

The majority of the post project evaluations reviewed in this assessment were undertaken by a team of evaluators who had no prior involvement in the project. Notably, evaluators from the development Banks (JICA and the World Bank) deployed teams from within their agencies to do their post project evaluations. The Pact, SC and FH post project evaluations were carried out by independent consultants or agencies. The balance between objectivity and ownership is an important consideration in selecting a team in any evaluation. The inclusion of government stakeholders in the EDC/Zanzibar evaluation process and implementing partner representatives in the CRS/Niger post project evaluation appear to have contributed to the credibility and use of the findings.

Inclusion of staff or partners who were involved in the project is particularly valuable in a post project evaluation in which knowledge about historical contextual and project details are essential for understanding what endured. At the same time, staff or partners may find it difficult to parse context from project, and reliance solely on recall may be problematic in this regard. Further as in any evaluation, those who “own” or have owned the process may also be biased in their interpretation of results, so it is important to clarify roles in the exercise, as noted in the Checklists in Section 7.

f) Mitigating factors

In general, the **absence of contextual data** is striking. Indeed, considerations of **contextual factors** which were covered in post project evaluations to explain the nature and trajectory of change more often than not rested on reflections of key informants. In any post project evaluation such considerations are fundamental, as changes in climate, policy, security, public health etc. can affect what endures from a project, and illuminate how impacts were achieved. Few post project evaluations referenced situational analyses or anticipated risks, and none linked indicators related to these contextual factors with analyses within the project cycle or after the project was over. Adoption of a **realist evaluation approach** may help address these issues.

When an agency has worked in a location for a long time, a post project evaluation that seeks to isolate and attribute the impact of a specific project conducted during *part* of that period may be challenging. **Legacy considerations** were important in a number of evaluations in this review, as a number of the NGO implementers had been working with

communities in the project area for some time before the intervention being evaluated was launched. The SC/Honduras study, for instance, suggests that prior programs and partnerships extending over ten years were important building blocks for the water committees and Community Health Worker activities in the project that was being evaluated. The CRS Country Representative in Niger posited that project investments during the ten years prior to the project under evaluation had a strong effect on the positive post-project results. Positive outcomes from long term programming, and in these cases the legacy effect was included as contextual in these post project evaluations.

Similarly, the “noise” created by **other development projects** launched between close out and post project evaluation may complicate the attribution of sustainability findings. Few of the post project evaluations in this review considered whether other development initiatives may have influenced the results they were finding from interventions before or after the project in question and none cited statistical data to validate such confounding interventions. The CRS/Niger evaluation of the PROSAN project did investigate the after, and found that other local NGOs and international organizations had built on the project’s success, using land previously managed by the project for a new vegetable gardening training program; building hygiene programs on past health awareness efforts; and extending agricultural credit for inputs. It was especially important to ‘isolate’ the PROSAN project being evaluated from the other confounding projects that overlapped or ran concurrently. To what degree projects from different organizations supported or undermined each other’s effects was captured somewhat during the post project evaluation, though the data was almost entirely anecdotal.¹⁹

The EDC/Zanzibar evaluation offers a different type of insight into the drivers of sustainability. The report suggests that the GoZ was unable to fully continue agreed activities post project because of competing pressures from other USAID local Mission programs on the same Ministry.

Contextual factors also posed challenges to site selection. Post project evaluations in Honduras and Niger faced **security and health epidemic challenges** to full access during fieldwork, and the Pact evaluation in Nepal came after a long period of political insurgency in project areas. Site selection and timing of evaluation were adjusted to accommodate team safety and participant/ partner access.

Financial resources inevitably influence the contours of a post project evaluation, though there was no information available about the budgets assigned to the post project evaluations reviewed. As such we have no evidence that size of the project was in any way related to investment in the post project evaluation. The SC/Honduras post project (budget unknown) included one survey and three cycles of qualitative data capture, while the JICA/Burundi (\$2.6m) included two trips by a consultant and some very modest survey work.

¹⁹ Controlling for this is possible, even mandatory, during design and implementation of the ex-post. See the checklists and methods sections.

5. What the post project evaluations tell us about sustainability

Comparing final evaluations to ex-post²⁰ evaluations enables us to test design expectations about the trajectory of change, and begin to unravel the reasons why some outcomes were sustained, or not, in a particular context. This suggests that findings at the end of a project are not always adequate predictors of sustainability. Findings point to the value that post projects can add to development learning, practice and accountability including:

- a) Understanding what elements of a project intervention were sustained after project close (and which were not);
- b) Related to this, deeper insight into how practices spread, diffused or were replicated including through anticipated and unanticipated, pathways;
- c) Understanding causal factors related to 1. and 2. (the *why* and *how*);
- d) Identifying unexpected and emerging outcomes that came about post-project—outcomes which were not anticipated in the design

What we did not examine, nor had sufficient cases to do so, was whether the timing of the post project evaluation itself in terms of the gap between the end of project and when an evaluation was conducted might surface as an important influence on results.

In light of our assessment, a number of issues are explored briefly in this section.

a) Measuring sustainability

All of the post project evaluations reviewed offered insight into the trajectory of change post project. Returning to assess water infrastructure and associated management structures the JICA/Philippines post project evaluation found that only 22% of the planned water facilities covered by their loan had actually been completed. Nonetheless at the time of the post project evaluation up to 80% of those built were still functioning and they were serving 150% of the originally targeted populations. The EDC/Zanzibar post project evaluation found that 179 of the 180 early childhood learning centers established by the project were still functioning under the MoEVT's management, but the project showed little impact on learning outcomes.

Some of the post project evaluations reviewed adopted the endline as the benchmark. In the CRS/Niger case, 92% of respondents reported improvements in food consumption in the three years since the final evaluation, though health indicators were less positive. The FH/Kenya post project evaluation pointed to stasis in mothers' retention of key messages about childhood illness since the endline, but a drop-in retention of HIV prevention information amongst young adults.

²⁰ It appears to be the norm to use ex-post and post project interchangeably, so we continue to do so in this research.

b) Assessing sustained diffusion and multiplication

Many of the projects reviewed, and many projects worldwide, include expectations about how individuals and institutions that benefited directly from a project will continue to spread new information or ideas, share skills, or broaden access to benefits for more people (indirect beneficiaries), beyond the life of the project. Post project evaluations allow implementers and funders to test such assumptions. As noted elsewhere the SC/Honduras and FH/Kenya projects show mixed adaptation of targeted behaviors post project. Repeated retrospective qualitative investigations allowed the evaluations to probe the reasons for these results the PACT/Nepal post project evaluation points to significant spread of their Village Savings Banks, remarkably even during the height of the Maoist insurgency. Notwithstanding other mixed results, six years after closeout 64% of the original banks were still functioning, and the original participating women reported launching a total of another 400 more groups in that period.

c) Understanding the determinants of sustainable impact, including context

Several of the projects showed that returning afterward was key to learning about the quality of design and implementation strategies and was potentially valuable in terms of making improvements in both. **Contextual factors** were also important. For example, the FH/Kenya post project evaluation notes that because of drought in Northern Kenya, unreliable water supply reduced the motivation to pay for water, threatening the resources required to maintain water systems. Hygiene behaviors, also a priority of the project, were also affected.²¹ The end of project World Bank/Nigeria report on an ambitious project that sought to reconcile conflicts amongst herders, farmers, hunters and gatherers and service providers deemed the project a success. Replication and scale up in other parts of the country was underway as the post project evaluation was being undertaken. But the post project evaluation includes two findings which also caution against assuming success will be sustainable:

- *Socially and culturally sensitive project design... [with] inclusive development opportunities to all affected parties [are needed] for technical interventions that transform land related assets.*
- *Community based approaches to local development require sustained and phased commitment. None of the Fadama villages visited by IEG demonstrated a present-day capacity to participate in local development planning in a socially inclusive and accountable manner, in despite of the project's efforts to instill this.*

These are significant insights for this as well as other similar programs, which were not evident or noted in the final evaluation. It was not clear in the reports reviewed whether these findings were addressed in the new and on-going phase of the project.

Relying on participant recall, the CRS/Niger post project concluded that there had been a 30% improvement in food self-sufficiency since the end of the project. Respondents largely

²¹ https://www.fantaproject.org/sites/default/files/resources/Kenya-Exit-Strategies-Report-July2016_0.pdf

attributed this to improvements in food production linked to the inputs and technical assistance provided by CRS, in addition to continued good rainfall.

Many post-project evaluations that Valuing Voices has reviewed highlight the tendency of project holders to overestimate the ability or **commitment of implementing partners**—and particularly government partners—to sustain project activities after funding ends. Post project evaluations can shed light on what contributes to institutional commitment, capacity, and continuity in this regard. The SC/Honduras post project evaluation found significant improvements in household food security amongst household members engaged in off-farm labor, as measured by average number of months of food provision. But this was accompanied by a decline in agricultural participation (endline 40.8%, falling to ex-post 13.9%). The team hypothesized that increased dependence on remittances had made food purchases possible for all households. Evaluators also found that the government had failed to meet written commitments to support farmers with training and technical assistance after the project ended, most likely because of resource, capacity and motivational limitations. These are unanticipated, important findings that were not evident at the end of the project.

d) Unanticipated and emerging outcomes

In addition to projected impacts, a post project evaluation offers the opportunity to explore whether other, unanticipated or emerging outcomes associated with the project's interventions are evident.

Unanticipated outcomes relate directly to a project's theory of change and may reveal the extent of and reasons why assumptions or objectives deviated from what was anticipated in the design. The two Tufts studies offer insights into why food security and related objectives were achieved, or not and in particular the non-project factors that contributed to these achievements, as mentioned above. In the JICA/Philippines project, women's empowerment was a hoped-for outcome from the outset, but apparently went unexplored until the post project evaluation. As noted above, the World Bank/Nigeria post project evaluation suggests that ambitious conflict resolution initiatives that appeared to be working within the project cycle dropped with declines in resourcing for institutional support.

Emerging outcomes consider how project participants used their own means to carry project initiatives forward, and may inform future approaches to incentivizing sustainability. After the CRS/Niger project finished, community leaders picked up on health initiatives that encouraged clinic-based deliveries and introduced stringent incentives for this practice. They also created 'tithing' mandates for guests at weddings and baptisms which contributed to support for health care maintenance. The post project evaluation also revealed that local and regional governments had realigned their budgets to continue funding for some of the health and agriculture activities introduced by the project.

Similarly, the PACT/Nepal ex-post evaluation found that members of the Village Banks that were still functioning derived not only financial benefits, but were also helping one another deal with domestic disputes and related problems. Forty three percent (43%) of women said that domestic violence had reduced because of their membership in a Village Bank group.

Both unanticipated and emerging outcomes can be positive or negative, and both offer generous opportunities for learning and accountability. A complexity lens can be helpful in this regard.

6. Use of post project evaluation results

Agencies that fund post project evaluations offer a range of reasons for doing so:

- a) to advance agency or sectoral learning, including providing lessons for replication or scale;
- b) to provide justification for future funding;
- c) to provide evidence for policy change;
- d) to promote accountabilities.

These elements will be considered here and also a pending question about how findings have been actually absorbed and applied within implementing and donor agencies, with partners, and in the sector more broadly.

a) Promotion of learning

In all of the cases reviewed the pursuit of greater insight into the drivers of sustainability in context was an articulated or implied reason for undertaking the post project evaluation. As with any evaluation, normal evaluation feedback mechanisms would suggest that most contributed to understanding about impact and sustainability of the particular project in context, though it is less clear whether this understanding was institutional or just amongst the individuals directly responsible for the evaluation. JICA is unique in terms of the number of ex post evaluations supported (200+ on their website), two of which were reviewed in this study. We sent a query to the agency about how learning from their post project evaluations is used, but received no response. The World Bank/Nigeria post project report notes that the evaluation was undertaken at the same time as the follow-on Phase III Fadama initiative was being launched. The document does not explain how findings of the post project evaluation of Phase II would be incorporated into the next phase, if at all. The post project reports states only that the findings would be shared through normal Bank-Government channels. On the other hand, the EDC/Zanzibar evaluation is outstanding in its deep engagement with government agencies in the measurement of results through the project and focus on assessing sustainable impact post project. The evaluation report suggests that this contributed to Ministry ownership of findings as well as aspects of the project.

Overall, to make best use of post project evaluation findings, they would benefit from clearer learning strategies, as highlighted in the evaluability checklists in Section 7.

b) Contribute to fundraising

The Pact/Nepal and CRS/Niger post project evaluations were both undertaken to inform fundraising efforts. The model evaluated in Nepal has been successfully been replicated in up

to a dozen countries with support from private donors such as Coca-Cola and the MasterCard Foundation, presumably in part at least on the basis of findings from the post project evaluation. CRS widely publicized their results, and referred to them in fundraising materials, including to USAID/ Food for Peace.

c) Promote policy change

Arguably the most far-reaching result of post projects in our study came from the suite of post project evaluations commissioned by Food for Peace, which included two of the evaluations in our study (SC/Honduras and FH/Kenya). These studies contributed to a change in policy and the program format for FFP programming globally (including more attention to the benefits of post project evaluation).

d) Advance accountability

A further use of post project evaluation, of course relates to **accountability**. So often our accountability leads to the taxpayers and donors who fund projects rather than intended beneficiaries. For this reason, projects with participant voice were selected for this study. In some (notably CRS/Niger and EDC/Zanzibar) and effort as made to feed findings back to local stakeholders as part of the evaluation. (The extent to which feedback equated with voice in terms of planning future initiatives is unknown based on the documents reviewed).

Only one of the evaluations covered in this study conducted a formal rate of return analysis (JICA /Philippines). Nonetheless, all of the evaluations offer insights into whether investments paid off and in particular whether participants and partners valued what they were offered enough to continue to use or practice what the projects promoted.

Another important sustainability question relates to the return on investment of the project over the longer term in the view of the presumed beneficiaries and partners to whom the projects were ostensibly handed over²². How accountable are our projects to them and what do *they* would estimate the ROI is from their labor, time and what measures of sustained impacts such as resilience, longevity and other measures would they recount if asked?

7. Evaluability checklists

The original Terms of Reference from the Faster Forward Fund challenged Valuing Voices to present a model to *promote standard practice for systematic review in order to inform others how to do high-value, high-utility and cost-effective Sustained and Emerging Impacts Evaluation (SEIE)*. The checklists presented in this Section were conceived in order to promote higher quality SEIEs going forward. They draw on findings from the case review as well as current and emerging thinking in the field. They are meant to provide practitioners with:

- Things to look at before launching a SEIE (considering evaluability) in Checklist 1
- Planning to monitor and evaluate sustainability through the project cycle, in Checklist 2

²² Recent thinking on how such inquiry can be operationalized can be found in *Value for Money in ActionAid: Creating an Alternative*, Francescsa D'Emidio, with Wallace, Henon and Buckles

As noted elsewhere in this review these checklists take as a starting point the view that there is no methodological blueprint for conducting quality SEIE. These checklists are designed to help program planners and evaluators consider projects across the range of project sectors, sizes, and localities. They are, also very much, living documents which will benefit from use, reflection and refinement.

Evaluability Checklist for Post Project Evaluation

Considerations for planning a post project evaluation during the project, at the end, or after it has closed.

Essential

Organizational considerations

- ✓ The organization commissioning the evaluation and the implementing agency perceive the study as an opportunity to contribute to learning and program quality
- ✓ Organizational leadership, staff and partners have a shared understanding of the purpose of the evaluation
- ✓ There is clarity and agreement on [roles and responsibilities](#) among funder, implementer, partner staff for the study
- ✓ The evaluation team includes individuals with [local knowledge](#), including knowledge about the project
- ✓ There is an explicit plan for dissemination of findings, including to project participants and partners, and a pathway for organizational learning
- ✓ Organizational leadership is committed to the study and dissemination plan

Methodological considerations

Documentation about the project must be available, including:

- Design documents
- Clear objectives
- Measurable targets and [indicators](#)
- ✓ For statistical assessment of change since project close, comprehensive M&E project data must be available: at minimum, an endline survey or review, with background information on sampling frames and methodology and survey design
- ✓ [Data quality](#) must be acceptable to undertake a post project
- ✓ [Endline sampling details](#) that are transparent and can be replicated or, minimally, align with sampling at post project are available
- ✓ [A theory of sustainability](#), including indicators associated with the project and relevant contextual factors is available or can be developed in the post project evaluation inception phase
- ✓ Information about other development interventions that could have influenced sustainability outcomes must be available
- ✓ Explicit definitions, assumptions and information about [direct and indirect beneficiaries](#) are available
- ✓ Approaches for capturing [unanticipated and emerging outcomes](#)
- ✓ [Use of multiple methods](#) and incorporation of the voices of multiple stakeholders

Choice of projects, sites, timing

- ✓ Projects have been closed out for [at least two years](#)
- ✓ Site where
 - There was an intensity of programming during the project
 - Site is demographically and/or geographically representative of some or all of the project intervention sites
 - There has been minimal activity on the part of other development agencies in the same sectors in the intervening years (or a lot is known about those interventions)
 - [Any legacy effects](#) of the implementing agency can be distinguished from the project under evaluation
 - In or out migration is minimal, or if high, representative of the project sites overall
 - There is sufficient site specific endline data to allow for rigorous comparison of data collected in post project
 - Security issues are not an obstacle to fieldwork
- ✓ Evaluation can be undertaken at a time when participants don't have competing priorities (livelihood activities, exams, holidays, etc.)
- ✓ Evaluation is timed to align with the timing of the endline, particularly if seasonality may influence variability of project outcomes (as in nutrition, agricultural, education projects.)

Good to have

- ✓ Planning and design documentation including
 - Request for Proposal or other solicitation documentation
 - Situation analysis and design documents, including proposal and any major amendments
 - Theory of Change underlying the project design
- ✓ Baseline data and associated sampling details
- ✓ Data about key contextual and risk factors
- ✓ Monitoring data
- ✓ Contact lists for project participants, implementing staff and partners
- ✓ An exit strategy with measurable indicators, if relevant to design.
- ✓ Sustainability indicators from the inception or M&E plan, if relevant to design.
- ✓ Data about a comparison group or about similar communities not involved in project activities

Hyperlinks for evaluability checklist

Organizational considerations

Roles and responsibilities. There are always a number of stakeholders in a post project evaluation. At minimum the funder, the implementer, the local partner—government and/or non-government, and project participants need to be heard. Staff who participated in the project are particularly valuable as they hold institutional memory and insights into situational and decision factors that may be invisible in project documentation. Also, they may still have access to key informants who have moved. Staff of course also have a vested interest in seeing their work in the best light and their participation should be managed wisely. On balance, we would recommend inclusion of former staff on any post project evaluation as advisors or full team members, with appropriate orientation into evaluation principles, clear role delineation, and necessary protections in place to allow them to contribute freely, and control for bias. [\(go back\)](#)

Local knowledge. Local knowledge and insight are essential in arriving at a full picture of the drivers and barriers to sustainability in a post project evaluation. This may be particularly important for projects that worked across different types of locations and technical areas. Local knowledge comes through a number of sources including input from direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project, staff involved in implementation, partners, former evaluators or researchers etc. Vested interest and the reliability of recall must be considered, and triangulation amongst sources and methods used to confirm conclusions.

Inclusion of evaluators from the country and region under study can also add significant value in terms of linguistic, cultural, contextual insights, as well as build local capacities. [\(go back\)](#)

Indicators. USAID has a set list of several hundred indicators to choose amongst for reporting depending on the commissioning Bureau. The SDGs offer almost two hundred indicators, creating a database of results across comparable indicators—a ripe opportunity for post-project sectoral learning. [\(go back\)](#)

It should also be noted that while measurable targets or indicators are desirable, for a project that was initially framed as formative or where the post project evaluation seeks to explore known emerging outcomes in some depth, a statement of the expected trajectory and nature of change could provide a sufficient starting point for the post project evaluation.

Methodological considerations

Data quality. It is important that evaluators receive and directly review endline data before engaging in a post project evaluation and not rely on assurances from the implementing or contracting agency. Transparency about what is available is essential to planning the best post project approach. The decision about whether such data is of acceptable quality can then be arrived at. For some post projects, endline data which is incomplete or does not cover all of the sustainability questions may be deemed a sufficient starting point. [\(go back\)](#)

Endline sampling details. In order to draw conclusions about sustainability, the sampling approach adopted at endline, as well as instruments used must be available to post project evaluators, so that they can develop post project sampling frames and methods that replicate endline studies as closely as possible. It is not always possible to conduct an identical post project study, however, particularly when planning begins after the project has ended. There may be an unreplicable sampling frame; a lack of respondent lists; untraceable movement of beneficiaries; resource or access constraints. When the endline is a population-based study this is particularly problematic unless stratification related to intensity of exposure is part of the sampling. ([go back](#))

A **Theory of Sustainability** is much like a theory of change in that it presents the causal assumptions underlying a project design, and anticipates short and longer-term outcomes, and sustainability impacts associated with project interventions. Like in a Theory of Change, contextual factors and risks that may affect causal assumptions are explicit in a Theory of Sustainability. These considerations are particularly important in a Theory of Sustainability as a post project evaluation should consider the potential independent and contributing influence of situational factors on outcomes associated with project interventions beyond the life of the project. A ToS developed at the time of the post project may benefit from inclusion of relevant situational factors that were not known during the project design. A ToS developed at the design phase has the benefit of being able to track sustainability indicators and relevant situational factors over the life of the project and adapt programming accordingly.

The Theory of Sustainability should make explicit:

- ✓ Which type of outputs or outcomes are expected to be sustained and the anticipated trajectory of sustainability. These could include financial, systemic, organizational, infrastructure, behavioral results. Some projects may not expect everything the project contributed to or achieved would endure, and also may anticipate different trajectories for different project elements.
- ✓ Capacity and commitment assumptions about institutions expected to take up or continue delivery of project services or information
- ✓ Assumptions about diffusion of skills and information from targeted recipients to wider strata of the population (or inter-generational)
- ✓ Contextual prerequisites that would enable or impede anticipated sustainability (e.g. related to policy, climate, security, broader development initiatives, etc.) ([go back](#))

Direct and indirect beneficiaries are those who were targeted directly by the project, such as leader farmers, members of credit or water schemes, etc. (*direct* beneficiaries) and those anticipated to benefit *indirectly*—for instance neighbors, peers or other family members who are supposed to be influenced or may receive downstream information, enhanced livelihood or other benefits. These two groups can be identified through i) project participant lists of direct beneficiaries; ii) those who self-identify as direct or indirect beneficiaries when contacted in the post project evaluation—i.e. can confirm they were reached by the project directly or by association. ([go back](#))

Unanticipated and emerging outcomes are important for understanding the drivers of sustainability.

Unanticipated outcomes relate directly to a project's theory of change and may reveal the extent and reasons why assumptions or objectives deviated from what was anticipated in the design, including what endured, what didn't, and why.

Emerging outcomes consider how project participants used their own means to carry project initiatives forward, and may inform future approaches to incentivizing sustainability. Emerging outcomes might also include how project participants adapted skills or assets they acquired in the course of a program to a completely different use. [\(go back\)](#)

Multiple methods; multiple voices. A post project evaluation that enables a robust retrospective view, relies on multiple methods and multiple voices. Triangulation amongst a number of methods and amongst the voices of a variety of stakeholders will enhance the reliability of findings and quality of data and is essential where findings rely on qualitative data. Participant recall is important but insufficient for a quality post project evaluation, as recall can be biased.

Sequencing of methods is an important consideration. Results of a survey post project can be probed more deeply via qualitative methods, but a qualitative investigation may similarly point to the need to validate findings with statistics.

Secondary data like government MIS statistics or DHS data can also be used to establish contextual trends and provide another data point. [\(go back\)](#)

Choice of projects, sites, timing

Years post project. Waiting at least two years from close of project will ensure residual inputs from the project have ceased. Decisions about how long is too long after project close is highly contextual and depends on the purpose of the evaluation, and considerations of other factors in this checklist. Social impact may be harder to measure if a new generation is engaged in project-relevant activities—so a rule of thumb could be within a 15-year period. Still, our database includes at least one post project that returned after 30 years. [\(go back\)](#)

Legacy effects—where any agency has a history with a community that preceded the project under evaluation—need to be made explicit and treated as contextual influencers which may have impacted on sustainability. If the post project evaluation is focused only on one cycle of funding, the effects of longer-term programmatic precursors must be accounted for. This is particularly critical if the sustainability elements of specific interventions are being considered for scale in sites that have not received historical inputs from the implementing agency. Similarly, the historical and subsequent government services or changes in government policy may be important to distinguish in a post project that seeks to isolate impacts of a particular intervention.

In practice, it may be challenging to tease project results out of broader program outcomes. Review of project-based monitoring data, timeline exercises with participants, and

triangulated recall from project staff who have a history with the program may be valuable in this regard. ([go back](#))

Good to have

Inclusion of a comparison group in any study designed to measure impact or change is desirable. However, in a post project evaluation identification of a site which did not receive the project treatment must take into account other factors including:

- a) shared characteristics with the study treatment sites, including similar demographic or economic changes during and after project close;
- b) potential contact with (and “contamination” from) the project - either intended or unintended (for instance because of movement of project stakeholders or when policy or service delivery changes from the project also affected non-project sites);
- c) other development interventions in the treatment or the comparison site that could have directly or indirectly affected the pace or nature of change. If both treatment and comparison sites were reached by the same interventions in the intervening years, synergies with project treatments need to be considered when drawing conclusions about the pace or nature of change in non-project sites.

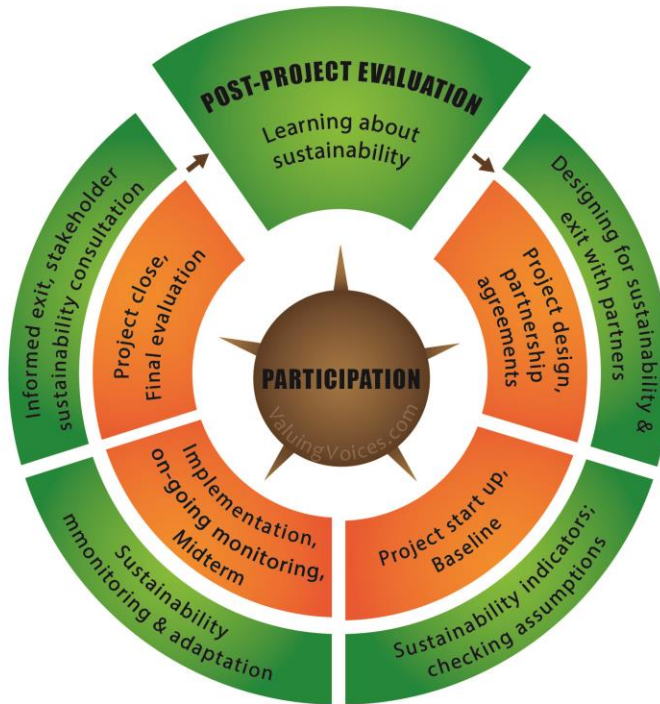
Natural comparison groups should be considered if possible. For instance, when interventions are phased in to discrete population clusters over a project cycle, it may be possible to compare sustained impact between such clusters. This assumes many other factors were consistent over time, of course.

Checklist for Measuring Sustainability through the Project Cycle

M&E considerations when sustainability is already an impact objective during the proposal and project design.

- A [Theory of Sustainability](#) as part of the project's theory of change
- An M&E plan that includes explicit [sustainability goals](#), [impact objectives](#), and methods for flagging [unexpected and emerging outcomes](#)
- Measurable [sustainability indicators](#)
- A monitoring plan that minimally includes feedback loops to funders, implementers and partners, and is accompanied by an adaptive management strategy
- An [exit strategy](#) with measurable or observable actions and assumptions about institutional handover and responsibilities post project
- [Project cycle sampling and methods](#) that can be repeated post project
- Sufficient budget for data collection and analysis during the project cycle

Embedding Sustainability in the Project Cycle



Organizational considerations

- Funder, implementer and partner commitment to measuring sustainability
- Resource earmark within project budget for post project evaluation
- Contracting mechanisms for managing an evaluation after project close
- Project implementers maintain (open) project cycle data into the post project period
- Project implementers maintain linkages with key participants and partners throughout the project cycle and into the post project period

Hyperlinks for Checklist for Measuring Sustainability through the Project Cycle

Building blocks in project design

A **Theory of Sustainability** is much like a theory of change in that it presents the causal assumptions underlying a project design, and anticipates short and longer-term outcomes, and sustainability impacts associated with project interventions. Like in a Theory of Change, contextual factors and risks that may affect causal assumptions are explicit in a Theory of Sustainability. These considerations are particularly important in a Theory of Sustainability as a post project evaluation should consider the potential independent and contributing influence of situational factors on outcomes associated with project interventions beyond the life of the project. A ToS developed at the time of the post project may benefit from inclusion of relevant situational factors that were not known during the project design. A ToS developed at the design phase has the benefit of being able to track sustainability indicators and relevant situational factors over the life of the project and adapt programming accordingly.

The Theory of Sustainability should make explicit:

- ✓ Which type of outputs or outcomes are expected to be sustained and the anticipated trajectory of sustainability. These could include financial, systemic, organizational, infrastructure, behavioral results. Some projects may not expect everything the project contributed to or achieved would endure, and also may anticipate different trajectories for different project elements.
- ✓ Capacity and commitment assumptions about institutions expected to take up or continue delivery of project services or information
- ✓ Assumptions about diffusion of skills and information from targeted recipients to wider strata of the population (or inter-generational)

Contextual prerequisites that would enable or impede anticipated sustainability (e.g. related to policy, climate, security, broader development initiatives, etc.)

A ToS developed at the inception phase can anticipate, define, and contribute to tracking such factors over the life of the project and beyond. Programming can be adapted in response. The ToS also provides the conceptual framework for a post project evaluation. ([go back](#))

Sustainability objectives and indicators look beyond change anticipated during the life of the project cycle. Based on the Theory of Sustainability they anticipate the trajectory of change post project close. Such objectives may reflect end of project objectives, for instance in terms of skills, attitudes, behaviors, infrastructure, livelihoods, etc. In such cases they would be framed in terms of changes anticipated after a specified number of years. Other indicators might anticipate adaptation, diversification or emerging change not possible during the project cycle, for instance in terms of impacts that are systemic, epidemiological, demographic or policy changes that the project seeks to effect but cannot expect to achieve within the implementation period. Indicators related to contextual factors, including risks, that may affect achievement of sustainability objectives should also be included, and when not measurable, proxy indicators should be sought. ([go back](#))

Unexpected and emerging outcomes are important for understanding the drivers of sustainability.

Unanticipated outcomes relate directly to a project's theory of change and may reveal the extent and reasons why assumptions or objectives deviated from what was anticipated in the design, including what endured, what didn't, and why.

Emerging outcomes consider how project participants used their own means to carry project initiatives forward, and may inform future approaches to incentivizing sustainability. Emerging outcomes might also include how project participants adapted skills or assets they acquired in the course of a program to a completely different use.

An M&E plan that is broad enough to capture such complexity during the project cycle, and enables a robust retrospective view, would rely on multiple methods and voices. [\(go back\)](#)

An **exit strategy** anticipates in an explicit way how roles and responsibilities for sustaining the continuity of project activities will be maintained post project. In social service delivery projects, this is most often related to handover to government, though sometimes a private entity may be expected to assume responsibility when a cost recovery mechanism is built in. In community development projects, it would include assumptions about the capacity and motivation of household, community or civil society structures to continue offering benefits to participants. The strategy is an integral part of the Theory of Sustainability, and ideally should have objectives that can be measured in a post project evaluation. This strategy might consider the financial resources needed, necessary information linkages, and other incentivizing factors that need to be in place for a smooth exit.

A post project evaluation *can* be done without an explicit exit strategy, but this means design assumptions about institutional responsibilities post project need to be clarified so they can be examined. [\(go back\)](#)

An **M&E plan that prioritizes measurement of sustainability** needs to describe how impacts and outcomes associated with the project can be isolated and attributed. Where project objectives include measurable change at a population level, try to use a **sampling frame and instruments** for capturing project cycle results that can be repeated post project. Determinations about sampling frame and instruments will depend in part on budget and learning objectives. In anticipating of a post project evaluation, the plan should also consider:

- ✓ **Stability** in terms of how viable it will be to track individual participants over time. To assess this, project planners should consider how factors like migration, graduation, change in demographic status, land tenure, climate etc. could affect access to respondents over time.
- ✓ Clear identification of anticipated **direct and indirect beneficiaries**. Individuals who receive training or inputs directly may be expected to share them with others. This diffusion or cascade assumption can be tested by stratifying throughout the project cycle, and at very least in the post project (though self-identification). An M&E plan should anticipate whether direct beneficiaries will “graduate” naturally out of that role over time, for instance if they retire, change position, are no longer

pregnant, graduate etc. Stratification of project-cycle beneficiaries in both current and past designations can be done within a population survey.

- ✓ Inclusion of a **comparison or control group, not participating in the project**, offers the potential for a reliable validation of sustainability and statements related to impact. However, ethical issues and the challenges associated with identifying a genuine comparator (and maintaining key contextual factors which define the comparison group even post project) will often make this design element impossible.
- ✓ **Anticipated programming in years after project end**—including government or other development initiatives in similar sectors and negotiated access to design and impact data about those initiatives—will contribute to sampling considerations and other aspect of the post project design. ([go back](#))

8. Conclusions

After over six decades of international development work, and a second round of global commitments to sustainable development goals, post project evaluation that measures sustainability remains the exception in practice. This can be seen from the small number of such evaluations relative to hundreds of thousands of projects across the globe. Post project evaluations are seen in some corners as too hard, too expensive, not important, or just plain unnecessary. Sometimes, when they *are* done, they are seen as incriminating, and thus not shared. This study took a small step towards providing evidence of the value added of returning post project to investigate what happened after project resources finished, and highlighted how much they can teach us for future design, implementation, M&E around the project cycle, or even beyond ‘projectized’ aid.

As illustrated in Section 3, much work is needed in the taxonomy, knowledge management, and robustness of content associated with post project evaluation. Endline or end of project evaluations are sometimes confused with post project evaluations. Specifically, it is also important to distinguish between what can be learned from an evaluation undertaken while resources are still flowing or just winding down and what we will find years after the project investments have stopped.

As our cases show, a range of assumptions are made about the trajectory of change and sustainability impacts projects will foster. Evidence from just eight case studies in which project endline findings were compared with evaluation results 2 to 13 years later confirms that change trajectories are neither linear nor entirely predictable. Post project evaluations offer insights into what endured *in fact* and an opportunity to consider outcomes in light of the *theoretical* assumptions that informed a project’s design. A critical mass of post projects in a single sector can also surface thematic lessons that cut across context, scale and other project-specific considerations. This is beginning to happen in the area of food security and livelihoods, where these have been commissioned by major donors.

A post project evaluation is likely to surface unexpected results—both positive and negative. Unanticipated outcomes can contribute to informing design decisions, ways of working, policy decisions, and the framing of objectives and targets established in future

programs. Emerging or adaptive outcomes—how participants used their own means to continue initiatives begun in the project to move their development forward—can offer instructive insights into how projects incentivize sustainability of positive initiative in particular contexts²³. To this end, we have proposed a name for referring to such new kinds of evaluations: Sustained and Emerging Impacts Evaluations (SEIEs), described in more detail as a new theme on the Better Evaluation site.

Evaluators have used a range of methods to carry out post project evaluations, often creating workarounds to limited data availability, challenges to tracking project participants and project M&E measurement approaches that cannot be reliably replicated post project. The inclusion of a plan to measure sustainability at the outset of a project would go a long way to addressing these challenges. Open data policies will also contribute to more internal consistency when it comes time to conduct a post project evaluation. Inclusion of implementation partners—particularly those responsible for carrying initiatives forward post project—in the M&E investigation from the outset is also valuable. Situational factors need to be included in post project evaluations, in order to understand sustainability outcomes in context. When such factors as climate, security, migration, policy change are anticipated and tracked through the project cycle it is easier to understand why specific interventions endured.

A few agencies have invested more than others in post project evaluations, often with an explicit learning objective, and sometimes with a tacit future resourcing objective. International not for profit organizations are leaders in this regard. Amongst the cases in this study, the findings of some contributed to policy change, and some contributed to multiplication of a model. More investigation is needed into how post project evaluations that have been done have informed and influenced organizational learning and even broader sectoral dialogue.

In our search for cases for this study as well as in discussions at evaluation conferences in years past, it became clear that some post project evaluations have been completed but never shared. More transparency, even and especially for projects which stumbled, contributes to collective learning and helps avoid repetition of errors and wasted resources, particularly in context. Incentives for doing more honest retrospective analysis and sharing that analysis, irrespective of the findings, need to be found. More meta-analysis of publically available post project evaluations (and more of such evaluations which are made publically available) promises to contribute to learning, accountabilities, coordination and achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals.

²³ None of this is necessarily black and white and it is often the nuance that makes returning post project most compelling. For instance, a project that successfully built a landowning class as a result of the introduction of cash crops may be a boon for the national economy, but marginalize small holders who do not have the means to adapt to new cultivation patterns.

9. Next Steps

This assessment points to a number of next steps for readers to consider:

Post project evaluation needs to be elevated to the same status that end of project evaluations has come to assume—as an integral component of the project cycle.

This means:

- Aid agencies, including multilateral banks investing in knowledge management, taxonomies, differentiating delayed final and actual post-project evaluations as well as analyzing existing results and funding new studies;
- Organizations trying out these Valuing Voices' checklists and improving them and sharing results.
- Discussions and fora on this neglected but rising topic at OECD/ DAC and other national and regional evaluation conferences²⁴, as well as fora linked to the measurement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with topical interest groups being formed to share findings about how post-project results were being used and furthering changes in the next rounds of funding, designs and project cycle
- Advancing post project evaluation as an important and integral element of donor and recipient accountability
- What else? What can you imagine you could help us achieve, together?

²⁴ Valuing voices presented with Better Evaluation and Tufts on this topic at the recent AEA <http://valuingvoices.com/presenting-lessons-on-post-project-sustained-and-emerging-impact-evaluations-from-the-u-s-aea-conference/>