Valuing Voices at
CEKAN CONSULTING LLC:
Sustainable Solutions
for Excellent Impact

Evaluability Checklists

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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:

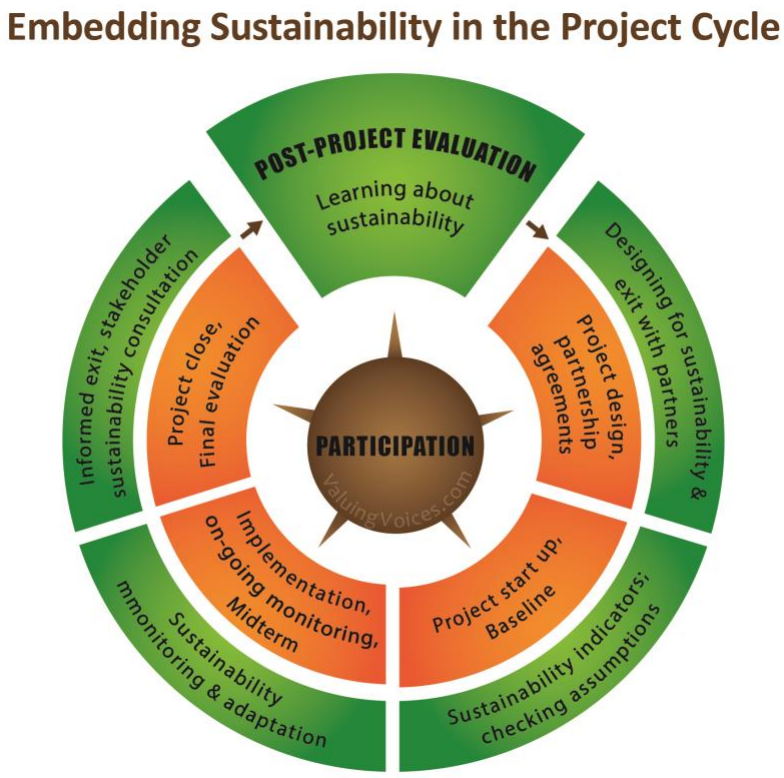
a) shared characteristics with the study treatment sites, including similar demographic or economic changes during and after project close;
b) potential contact with (and "contamination" from) the project - either intended or unintended (for instance because of movement of project stakeholders or when 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

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:

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- ✓ Capacity and commitment assumptions about institutions expected to take up or continue delivery of project services or information
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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)