Module 6 – Topic 6:

Standards for Quality Evaluation

Certain standards of quality should be observed throughout the evaluation process. Rather than prescribe, the American Evaluation Association has established five general principles for guidance of evaluators: systematic inquiry, competence, integrity and honesty, respect for people, and responsibilities for general and public welfare.

Guiding Principles for Evaluators

- Systematic inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.
- Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.
- Integrity and honesty: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
- Respect for people: Evaluators respect the security, dignity, and self-worth of the respondents, programme participants, clients and other stakeholders with whom they interact.
- Responsibilities for general and public welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare. Evaluators should understand that the Guiding Principles do not supersede ethical standards.


World Bank (2004) offers a checklist for development managers to use in forming an opinion on whether or not to use evaluation information: impartiality, usefulness, technical adequacy, stakeholder involvement, feedback dissemination, and value for money.

Characteristics of Quality Evaluations

- Impartiality. The evaluation information is free of political or other bias and deliberate distortions.
- Usefulness. Evaluation information is relevant, timely, and written in an understandable form.
- Technical adequacy. Evaluation information meets relevant technical standards – appropriate design, correct sampling procedures, accurate wording of questionnaires and interview guides, appropriate statistical or content analysis.
- Stakeholder involvement. Relevant stakeholders have been consulted and involved in the evaluation process.
- Feedback and dissemination of findings. Evaluation information is shared in an appropriate, targeted, and timely fashion.
• Value for money. The cost of evaluation is proportional to the overall cost of the intervention evaluated.

The international community (e.g. OECD, DANIDA, SEVAL, UN, etc.) has established standards for the conduct of sound and fair evaluation. These standards are categorized into four: utility standards, feasibility standards, proprietary standards and accuracy standards.

• Utility standards. The evaluation should be guided by the information needs of its users.
• Feasibility standards. The evaluation should be carried out in a realistic, thoughtful, tactful and cost-effective manner.
• Proprietary standards. The evaluation should be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation as well as those affected by its results.
• Accuracy standards – The evaluation could reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine the value of the programme being evaluated.

The following should just be put as a link.

**Utility standards**

• Stakeholder identification – The interests and needs of persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified.
• Evaluator credibility – To be credible, those conducting the evaluation should be competent and trustworthy.
• Information selection – The information collected should be comprehensive enough to address the key evaluation questions about the programme.
• Transparency of assessment – The perspectives, rationale, and procedures used to interpret the findings should be carefully described, so that the bases for value judgments are clear.
• Report clarity – Evaluation reports should clearly describe the programme being evaluated including its context, and the purposes, questions, procedures, and findings of the evaluation.
• Report timeliness – Significant findings (interim and final) should be brought to the attention of the intended users, so that they can be used in a timely manner, especially when such findings have impact on decisions and future actions of intended users.
• Evaluation impact – Evaluations should be done in a manner that will ensure that stakeholders and decision makers will use the evaluation results and act on recommendations.


**Feasibility standards**

• Practical procedures – Evaluation methods and instruments should be practical to keep disruption to a minimum while the needed information is collected.
• Political viability – The evaluation should be planned and conducted taking into account the different positions of the various interest groups, in order to obtain a balanced presentation of different points of view.
• Cost effectiveness – Evaluations should produce information of sufficient value for informed decision-making, learning and accountability so that the resources expended can be justified.


Proprietary standards

• Formal agreement – Obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation should be agreed in writing, so that they are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or to renegotiate it.
• Protection of individual rights – Evaluations should be designed and conducted in a way that respects and protects the rights and welfare of individuals.
• Human interactions – Evaluators should respect human dignity and worth in their interactions with other persons associated with an evaluation so that participants are not threatened or harmed.
  • Complete and fair assessment – Evaluations should be complete and fair in their examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the programme being evaluated, so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

• Disclosure of findings – The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings is made accessible to the persons affected by and/or interested in the evaluation.
• Conflict of interest – Conflict of interest should be dealt with openly and honestly so that it does not compromise the evaluation process and results.

Source: UNFPA (2004):

Accuracy standards

• Defensible information sources – The sources of information used (as well as the criteria in selecting sources) in a programme evaluation should be described in enough detail so that their adequacy can be assessed.
• Valid and reliable information – The information gathering procedures implemented should provide assurance that the interpretation arrived at is valid and reliable. Validity is defined by the extent to which methodologies and instruments measure what they are intended to measure. A data collection method is reliable to the extent that it produces the same results repeatedly.
• Systematic review of information – The information collected, analyzed, and reported in an evaluation should be systematically reviewed and any errors found should be corrected.
• Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data – Quantitative and qualitative data should be analyzed in an appropriate, systematic way so that the evaluation can be effectively answered. Data analysis should follow rules of methodological soundness.
• Justified conclusions – The conclusions reached in an evaluation should be explicitly justified so that stakeholders can assess them. Evaluation conclusions are justified when they are based on a synthesis of empirical findings derived from the information collected. Conclusions can be both positive and negative. Controversial conclusions should be substantiated.
• Impartial reporting – Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any stakeholder group.
• Meta evaluation – The evaluation itself should be subject to an assessment of the evaluation’s process and quality upon its completion using these and other pertinent standards to determine its strengths and weaknesses.


**Reporting the Findings**

Evaluations are intended to provide timely, useful and relevant information to development managers, funders, government officials and other stakeholders that lead to improvement programmes, funding decisions, accountability and learning. As such, it is essential that results of evaluation are communicated clearly, accurately and appropriately to enable the audience to make use of the information. A communication strategy -- which identifies who needs to receive the results of evaluation, in what form and when -- is an essential ingredient of results-based evaluations (IPDET, 2007).

Stakeholders could be engaged from planning of evaluations to ensure that everyone understands what will be required and provided. During evaluation, it is important to keep everyone informed of the progress. After the evaluation, a more formal reporting, that is, written reports and presentations, would be necessary.

**Guidelines for writing reports**

• Keep the report simple, clear and easy to understand.
• Avoid using jargon and acronym.
• Provide minimum background to establish the context.
• Present the most important material.
• Place major points at the beginning of a section.
• Organize findings and recommendations around the evaluation questions or themes.
• Use graphs, charts and tables to show the big picture, patterns and trends.
• Put detailed data analysis materials in a technical appendix.
• Have a proofreader to review the preliminary report.
• Have a knowledgeable reader to review the draft.
Guidelines for oral presentation

- Plan your audience.
- When preparing the presentation keeping in mind the simple rule:
  - Tell your audience what you will tell them.
  - Tell them.
  - Tell them what you told them.
- Enhance your presentation.
  - Use few words.
  - Use clear visuals.
  - Use lots of white space.
  - Limit the amount of text to no more than eight lines, for a single slide.
- Practice your presentation.

Utilizing the Findings

In the previous section, we have discussed how evaluation can be used to focus on the broad political strategy and design issues, on operational and implementation issues, and better ways of approaching the problem. To reiterate, findings from evaluations would find immediate use in situations summarized below:

Ten Uses of Evaluation Results

- Respond to elected officials’ and the public’s demands for accountability
- Help formulate and justify budget requests
- Help make operational resource allocation decisions
- Trigger in-dept examinations of what performance problems exist and what corrections are needed
- Help motivate personnel to continue making improvements
- Formulate and monitor the performance of contractors and grantees
- Help provide services more efficiently
- Communicate better with the public to build public trust

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that results of evaluations can be used to generate feedback and promote knowledge and learning.

The OECD considers evaluation feedback as a dynamic process which involves the presentation and dissemination of evaluation information in order to ensure its application into new or
existing development activities. Accordingly, feedback, as distinct from dissemination of findings, is the process of ensuring that lessons learned are incorporated into new interventions.

UNDP describes learning in the context of results-based M&E as a continuous dynamic process of investigation where the key elements are experience, knowledge, access and relevance. Accordingly, it requires a culture of inquiry and investigation rather than one of response and reporting. Using findings for knowledge management thus entails capturing the findings, mapping and coding findings, and institutionalizing the application of lessons learned.

It is important to engage stakeholders in developing a process for feedback and knowledge sharing. World Bank(2004) suggests strategies to promote learning, knowledge building and greater use of evaluation results.

- Use wide array of strategies for sharing information to stakeholders
- Empower media to report evaluation results
- Open access to evaluation information
- Public annual budget reports
- Engage civil society and citizen groups
- Strengthen auditing and oversight
- Share and compare findings with development partners

For an illustration of how evaluation results could contribute to policy review and formulation, see discussion on Assessing the Effectiveness of Water and Sanitation Interventions in Flores, Indonesia.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Water and Sanitation Interventions in Flores, Indonesia

Background of the project
In response to a major earthquake and tidal wave in Flores Island in 1992, the Indonesian government and the Australian Aid Agency initiated the five-year Flores Water Supply and Sanitation Reconstruction and Development Project (FLOWS). FLOWS aims to promote social and economic development by increasing the provision, access, effective use and sustainability of water supply and sanitation facilities.

The purpose of the evaluation
The evaluation aims to contribute to the new national water and sanitation sector policy, by assessing FLOWS five years after its completion.
Evaluation methodology
A stratified and geographically representative random sample of 63 sites was drawn from the total of 260 sites which had been covered by the project. The Methodology for Participatory Assessment (MPA) was used, with fine-tuning to the local culture and language. This combines participatory research tools with quantitative analysis to assess sustainability and use of water supply and sanitation services, and the extent of gender and social equity achieved in project processes and outcomes.

Evaluation findings
Water schemes were completed in 87 per cent of villages and most were still working 3-8 years after construction. The 13 per cent of water schemes were never completed, mainly due to unresolved social conflicts between villages. Almost all toilets are still functional but there was a serious drop in service levels at half the sites.

The project design had envisaged and provided only communal water facilities, but many wealthy families also installed house connections. The poor had more limited access to toilets. Decision-making was monopolized by wealthier groups. Financial sustainability was threatened and poor were unfairly burdened.

Cost and duration of the evaluation
The total cost of the evaluation was approximately $150,000 and the draft report (in English) was completed in 12 months.

Recommendations of the evaluation
- Focusing on gender and social equity makes for better management and more sustainable services.
- Give more attention to project mechanisms for translating sector policy into action–deficiencies in policy implementation reduce project performance.
- During the planning phase, more attention should be paid to addressing potential community social conflicts.
- Offering and discussing service and cost options with all sub-groups within communities can minimize later social conflicts.

Estimating the impacts to which the evaluation contributed
The study reinforced the new national policy by showing that focusing on gender and poverty improves sustainability and effective use of services. The findings made policy-makers aware of the challenges of translating policies into practice at the community level.

Was the evaluation cost-effective?
Given that government expenditure in the water and sanitation sector over the next 5 to 10 years might be in the range of $150 million to $250 million per annum, the $150,000
expenditure on the evaluation would be very cost-effective if the implementation of the evaluation findings could improve program efficiency and sustainability by even a few percentage points. Equity impacts could be even greater if the recommendations can correct revealed weaknesses in gender and poverty targeting of water supply and sanitation.