Chapter 6. CONTENTS

6. PLANNING AND MANAGING EVALUATIONS

6.1. Introduction

The view taken in this Guide is that although evaluation is important, establishing monitoring systems and review processes should be accorded a higher initial priority. It is possible to do without evaluation, but not monitoring, and many of the functions of evaluation can be incorporated in regular reviews (which are arguably more useful for project implementers).

The types of evaluation discussed here are major mid-term, completion and *ex poste* exercises, which is how evaluation has been destinguished from monitoring and review in this Guide. The emphasis will be on assisting ANGO program managers plan for and manage evaluations rather than on the conduct of field work. Program managers who plan to lead an evaluation themselves, rather than delegating this task to another member of staff or hiring a consultant, should refer to the short visit case study in Chapter 5, which can be expanded to provide the basis of an evaluation plan by allowing 15 to 20 days rather than 10. Additional resources on conducting evaluations are included in the select bibliography.

6.2 Reasons for evaluation

6.2.1. Evaluating to learn

Evaluation is primarily an instrument of learning so the key question is *why* an activity proved a success or a failure. If an evaluation is undertaken as a mid-term review the issue will be determining if modifications are required in the project and/or its management. If an evaluation is conducted at project completion or *ex poste* (after an interval) the focus will be on improving future interventions and supporting institutional learning.

The development record suggests that many organisations and agencies are slow to learn from their experience. Part of the problem is that not enough is done to capture the lessons and record them in an evaluation report. Procedures also have to be set in place to ensure that the lessons derived from completed projects shape policy and program planning. This is the hardest part - utilising evaluations to improve development practice.

The learning and development involved in evaluation should not accrue only to the party commissioning the evaluation. Evaluations should be a learning process for all concerned, an instrument of development dialogue. This can only be achieved if the evaluators are given a mandate to facilitate a process, not simply extract information, and if the NGO commissioning the evaluation is willing to allow the evaluation to reach critical conclusions. The usual reflex is to protect one's organisation from criticism and to keep other agencies and organisations at arm's length. This is definitely counterproductive to learning and development. Critical feedback from implementing partners and project participants can provide a 'reality check' on relevance, impact, process and effectiveness.

6.2.2. Empowerment

An ancillary purpose of evaluations, related to learning, is enhancing the capacity of partner agencies, project staff and project beneficiaries and participants to use evaluation as an instrument of learning and control. In the case of partner agencies this entails developing the capacity to conduct evaluations for their own purposes. In the case of project staff it entails fostering a 'culture of inquiry' and sharpening analytical skills. Beneficiaries and participants can use the occasion of an evaluation to come together and reflect critically on development assistance and seek more effective ways of utilising it.

6.2.3. Verification and control

There are a second set of reasons for conducting evaluation, distinct from those related to learning, and these concern accountability. For the NGO this usually means accounting to funding agencies on the use of funds (e.g. to AusAID). A government development agency has to account to its minister, the parliament and the public for funds provided to an NGO and this drives the agency's interest in ensuring NGOs acquit grants.

NGOs should also acquit themselves to their partner agencies and to project beneficiaries and participants in whose names funds were raised.

6.3 Criticisms of evaluation

6.3.1 Value judgements

Evaluations are criticised because they involve value judgements. Evaluations certainly should not be judgemental, in the sense of imposing values, but evaluations do make judgements about the development value of activities. That's what they are for. The issue is rather, whose values and interests are involved? The criteria by which success is to be judged has to be negotiated. To do so the manager of the evaluation may have to take the initiative and create the space for the negotiation of values and interests to take place. Practically this comes down to the quality of the consultation that goes into drafting the terms of reference and the ability of the person managing the evaluation to make room for the perspective of others.

6.3.1 External process

Despite the fact that projects have many stakeholders, not least beneficiaries and participants, evaluations are typically conducted by outsiders - normally international NGOs and/or funding agencies. Consequently local partner agencies are led to regard evaluation as an external requirement and (understandably) something to be wary of. Partly for this reason, partner agencies are not inclined to initiate evaluations for their own purposes.

For their part beneficiaries and participants aren't accorded the authority to conduct evaluations - at best they are consulted during the course of someone else's evaluation. The significance of this is that evaluations are not available as an instrument of learning and control to those for whom success or failure is most critical i.e. beneficiaries and participants. This is a serious flaw in the development process.

The challenge for NGOs is to enable partner agencies, beneficiaries and participants to use management techniques like evaluation for their own purposes. One should not be naive or simplistic about this. Empowerment is a complex process involving issues of both authority and capacity.

6.3.3 Power and control

External agents, including NGOs, have legitimate reasons for evaluating the performance of the projects they support and a lot can be done to ameliorate the problems inherent in the exercise by involving local parties. But however participative NGOs try to make them, evaluations are inclined to be one-way affairs - the accountability and performance of the partner agency is regularly put on the line, but not that of the NGO commissioning the evaluation. Partner agencies, beneficiaries and participants are not in the normal course of things given the opportunity to turn the tables and evaluate the performance of those above them in the development food chain.

An external evaluator may have more space to be objective in so far as less may be at stake for him/her personally. Nevertheless it has to be recognised that external evaluations can never be wholly objective or neutral and partner agencies will be reticent to criticise the party commissioning the evaluation because the fate of the project is normally in their hands i.e. they control access to the money.

6.3.4 Over-emphasis on accounting to funding agencies

The background to most evaluations is the need to provide funding agencies with an assurance that their money was not wasted, often coupled with an imperative to secure further funds. This orientation has several consequences. Firstly, it tends to lead NGOs and partner agencies into glossing over problems and talking up successes. The publicity people want success stories and AusAID will not want it to be advertised that taxpayer's money was wasted.

Smillie calls this a "false expectation system" and argues that it

" ... creates a barrier between NGOs and the individuals and institutions that support them. It promises results that cannot be delivered, it buries problems, curtails any serious learning from failure, and turns whatever evaluation there is into an adversarial control mechanism, rather than one that might promote better development. And it sets NGOs up, both individually and collectively, for a fall. It is, in fact, self-defeating."*

The growing emphasis on the management of funds tends to displace issues of development policy and practice, either because these aspects are simply lost sight of or because there is a reluctance to seriously question the development thinking the project is based on, particularly where it would involve criticism of ideas subscribed to by the funding agency (i.e. not wanting to bite the hand that feeds).

6.3.5 Evaluations create tension, they are an imposition

Evaluations can and usually do create unease and tension in the ANGO, the partner agency and at the project level - people feel they are being tested, and they often are. We all seem to suffer from a failure to appreciate the necessity for criticism (including self-criticism). Learning has become threatening.

Evaluations can also be an imposition on partner agencies and communities, involving as they do great demands on people and resources. Official funding agencies and NGOs alike are demanding of partner agencies and evaluations are likely to be resented.

6.3.6 Too late, too little impact

Evaluations are also problematic in that they tend to be conducted when it is too late to do anything i.e. at completion or *ex poste*. The findings can serve future programming but experience has shown that the impact of project evaluations on programming is doubtful. This is the problem of institutionalising lessons learnt. Unfortunately, evaluation reports tend to excite a short flurry of activity (often of denial) but after just a year or so few can recall in any detail what the evaluation found.

NGOs: Learning, Evaluation and the Real Life of Seals, Ian Smillie, pp 9-10. See also p 17.

6.4 Other issues

6.4.1 Learning and verification objectives

Acquitting a project, particularly to the extent that it involves auditing, can lead to tension with project partners, interfering with efforts to establish the trust required for a fruitful evaluation. It can be difficult to achieve learning and verification objectives at the same time. But both are important, neither can be sacrificed. The difficulties simply have to be acknowledged. It may be advisable to initially ask the partner agency to make their own assessment of the manner in which they have acquitted funds, steering it towards a self-evaluation.

6.4.2 Extraordinary factors in evaluations

Nobody is thinking of an evaluation early on in a project, whether or not provision was made in the project design for one, and by the time an evaluation is considered or the scheduled time comes around, a lot of water will have flowed under the bridge. Factors unforeseen at the outset will impact on the evaluation, some of them extraordinary. Thus an evaluation may end up being burdened with serious concerns raised internally or externally about the project (or overall program). NGOs have been known to commission 'independent' evaluations to kill off a project, to call a halt. And then there are the more prosaic, somewhat unsatisfactory, strategic considerations. For example an NGO may commission an evaluation to strengthen an application for further funding, that is, by demonstrating accountability and showcasing the project.

6.5 Planning an evaluation

6.5.1 Forward planning

Evaluations should be designed into projects at the project planning stage, not tacked on later. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, effective evaluations depend heavily on base line information and information collected during the course of the project. Evaluation information needs have to be anticipated. Secondly, evaluation should not be something that is sprung on everybody - a shared commitment to evaluation also needs to be established from the outset.

When the time for an evaluation is approaching it is important to allocate adequate preparation time, particularly where there are several stakeholders to consult and in those circumstances where there are inadequacies in the project design. Drafting an evaluation plan and terms of reference will take a lot longer if certain basics can't be adapted from the project design (e.g. key indicators and means of verification, information collection methodologies, etc.).

6.5.2 Consultative arrangements

Arrangements should be made within the ANGO itself to involve other staff members at key stages in the evaluation process to foster communication and shared learning and to ensure that the potential for disagreement or conflict concerning the evaluation's approach or its conclusions is minimised. Consultative arrangements should also be set in place to keep funding agencies, local partner agencies and other stakeholders informed and involved as appropriate throughout the course of the evaluation.

6.5.3 The use of ToR

The best format for developing an evaluation plan is probably the terms of reference (ToR). It is common practice to leave the drafting of ToR until the last minute, as if it were a mere formality, but this is counterproductive. It is the key reference document for everybody involved, including external evaluators if they are used. Accordingly the person responsible for the evaluation (we will assume herein that it is an ANGO program manager) should commence work on the ToR from the first day of preparation for an evaluation, ensuring that it becomes a comprehensive guide for the conduct of the exercise.

A checklist of questions and steps appears below. The checklist is intended:

- to ensure that the rationale for the evaluation and the proposed approach is questioned and tested before it is too late
- to systematically cover the matters that will need to be addressed in the ToR.

The division of the checklist into three phases should not be taken too rigidly. There may be every reason to re-order it to suit particular circumstances and preferences. Moreover, it will be appropriate to ask at various points in this sequence if the evaluation is really necessary and if it is feasible as conceived. Scrutiny of this kind may lead to a reorientation of the exercise, making it more productive. It may even lead to its abandonment. For example, if it becomes apparent that an evaluation has been proposed, in effect, as a substitute for managerial problem solving, the evaluation should probably be scrapped and the problem handed back to management where it belongs.

It is also possible that upon examination it will become evident that a particular project cannot satisfactorily be evaluated, for example because the objectives of the project are not clear or stakeholders cannot agree what they are. If the project has been completed it may be better to leave it un-evaluated and ensure subsequent projects are designed to be evaluated.

Evaluation Planning Checklist

First set

1. **Goal and objectives**: Question the overall goal or purpose of the evaluation and its necessity. Clarify specific objectives. Determine the scope of the inquiry.
2. **Planning process**: Decide who should be involved in planning the evaluation and how.
3. **Information needed**: Assess what information would have to be collected during the evaluation to satisfactorily meet these objectives.
4. **Approach to be adopted**: Consider what approach(es) to evaluation should be emphasised (in broad terms).
5. **Timing**: Determine when the evaluation should or would have to take place.
6. **Budget**: Estimate the cost of such an evaluation and the resources that would be needed.

Second set

7. **Methodology**: For each type of information needed, provisionally determine the methods that should be used to collect it.
8. **Participation**: Provisionally determine who should be involved in the actual conduct of the evaluation, and in what ways.
9. **Capacity building**: Provisionally determine what training/capacity building function the evaluation should serve.

Third set

10. **Draft ToR**: Draft and circulate a draft ToR for comment to all stakeholders or initiate the participatory drafting process as appropriate.
11. **Consultants**: If consultants are to be used, initiate the selection and contracting process.
12. **Advance information**: Begin collecting the documentation and advance information from the field that will be required for the evaluation.
13. **Briefings**: Schedule briefing meetings for evaluation team members.

The tasks and considerations involved in the foregoing points are discussed in more depth in the following sub-sections.

6.5.4 Clarifying the goal of the evaluation, developing objectives

The first task of an evaluation manager should be to ensure that:

- the goal and the objectives of the evaluation are well conceived and clearly focused
- there are compelling reasons for conducting an evaluation with supporting evidence
- the evaluation is not attempting to satisfy competing objectives
- there is a reasonable consensus between the main stakeholders concerning the goal and objectives of the evaluation.

In the normal course of things the evaluation manager will have to start with the original 'unformed' rationale for the evaluation and clarify the overall goal and develop precise evaluation objectives. This process could be initiated simply by calling colleagues together for a brain-storming meeting and asking: *Who asked for the evaluation? Why was it proposed? Who is it aimed at and how will we/they use the results? What is at stake? What is sensitive? Are there any issues that we or others are inclined to avoid? What are the projected benefits from the evaluation?*

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Such a discussion should clarify the rationale for the exercise and help formulate the overall goal. It is particularly important to be clear about any over-riding intent from the outset because it will colour everything else. For example, if the goal is to secure further funding for the project and the main audience is a funding agency, the evaluation is unlikely to be as self-critical as it might otherwise be. It will also be less likely to address the concerns of partner agencies and project beneficiaries and participants.

An evaluation might also be conducted with no particular intent, for example because it is just routine to conduct an evaluation at certain stages in the project cycle. In circumstances where expectations are low the evaluation manager should ensure that intelligent and challenging objectives are formulated to make the most of the opportunity (and the time and expense involved).

Objectives usually require further refinement in the lead up to an evaluation. The evaluation manager should ensure that they are well conceived and be prepared to consult further to achieve a sharp focus. The evaluation objectives should clearly state what is expected in specific areas and in relation to specific issues.

Evaluation objectives need not be complex. *What have we been trying to do and why? In what areas have we succeeded and in what have we failed? In each case, why? What should we do differently in future?* These are reasonable starting points - specific issues can be developed from them.

Project documentation might make explicit its objectives (e.g. improved health and sanitation facilities) but be silent on the issue of the process to be achieved (e.g. empowerment, conscientisation). In such cases evaluation objectives might have to make these explicit as an area of inquiry.

6.5.5 Determining the scope of the inquiry

Evaluation objectives will normally be framed principally to test whether or not the project achieved its stated objectives. *Is the project successful on its own terms?* However the scope of an evaluation should also be open or broad enough to enable evaluators to 'step outside' the project framework and re-examine its rationale and the way this was reduced to a project design. *Was it well conceived in the first place (good development and feasible)? Was it an appropriate intervention given the program objectives and mandate of the organisation? Were the goal, objectives and outputs as stated well focused? Was a clear logical flow achieved in the project's design?*

The scope should also be broad enough to enable evaluators to gauge unintended impact. A project might meet its stated objectives but have negative effects undermining its value to a community. On the other hand a project might fail to meet its stated objectives, but nevertheless have positive effects that enhance its impact. Ensure that evaluators ask: *What were the negative effects of the project? What did it achieve beyond its objectives?*

It is sometimes said that there is a choice to be made between adopting an objectives based approach (i.e. measuring achievement against objectives) and an open inquiry into impact (i.e. irrespective of the goals and objectives of the project, program or organisation). Some of the pros and cons of the two approaches are shown below, based on responses from participants in an ACFOA training workshop (PPME, Melbourne, February 1996).

In reality the issue is not which approach, it is rather a question of emphasis and balance. An evaluation has to test a project against its stated objectives but it should also explore unintended outcomes.

6.5.6 Incorporating other stakeholders' interests in the evaluation

In addition there may be particular issues that the partner agency, government and other stakeholders would like to see addressed. So far as practicable these should be reflected in the evaluation's objectives and the issues to be dealt with. If other parties have not indicated what they are particularly interested in focusing on the project manager planning the evaluation should consult them with a view to addressing their concerns in the evaluation.

If possible a participative planning meeting or workshop should be held with the partner agency, representatives of beneficiaries and participants and any other key stakeholders for this purpose. This might seem an inordinate amount of preparation but the alternative may be presenting the evaluation to others as a *fait accompli*. It is unrealistic to expect to secure people's participation in the conduct of an

Restricted to objectives	Open inquiry into impact
Pros	**Pros**
• Easier to assess and quantify; quicker	• Flexible
• More likely to clarify activity	• May examine unintended outcomes
• Funding agencies prefer it	• More needs based approach
• Easier to use in PR	• Makes analysis at various levels possible
Cons	**Cons**
• May not allow for change brought about	• Tendency for naval gazing
• Not able to capture other achievements	• Time consuming for agency and community
• Rigidity	• May raise new expectations which can't be met

exercise if they were not invited to fully participate in its planning. Participation is not a tap to be turned off and on when it is convenient. If participation is really problematic, avoid using the word. If no more than consultation is realistic, describe it as such.

6.5.7 Capacity building and training

The manager of the evaluation should determine what capacity building function the evaluation should serve. For example, could the evaluation incorporate training in evaluation techniques for the partner agency? This can be achieved indirectly. If the partner agency is closely involved in the conduct of the evaluation, skills will be imparted. For this reason it will usually be appropriate to invite the partner agency to assign a member of staff to the evaluation team, preferably someone who is already responsible for monitoring and evaluation.

6.5.8 Framing issues and questions

The evaluation manager will have to identify key issues and questions to refine the ToR and provide some practical guidance. The following headings are suggested for grouping issues and questions relevant to the intervention:

- Relevance
- Design
- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Impact
- Sustainability

Relevance

Questions should be framed to test the relevance of the project or program to the broader planning context within the ANGO. For example:

- Did the project contribute to the realisation of the mandate of the ANGO?
- Did it prove to be consistent with stated policy and priorities and with relevant program objectives?
- Have any policy based objectives been realised (e.g. human rights and good governance)?

The relevance of the intervention has also to be tested in the particular development context as the evaluators understand it. For example, was the project's concentration on rural credit appropriate? Questions of this nature require the evaluators to step outside the project and the ANGO's strategic plans and ask essentially - *Was it a good idea? How do project beneficiaries and other stakeholders value the project?*

Design

Evaluators should be instructed to study the original project design (in this regard refer to the section on Catch-Up Appraisal in Chapter 5) and ask:

- Did the project prove to be technically feasible?
- Did it prove to have a realistic implementation schedule and were management arrangements adequate?
- How well did monitoring systems and interventions by the ANGO manage risk and the problems that arose?
- What was assumed that should not have been? For example, in a hand-dug well project it might have been assumed that the community would contribute labour for construction and maintenance only to find that the community could not be mobilised as envisaged.
- In short, did the design 'work'?

Efficiency and effectiveness

Many issues and questions will arise under these headings. In relation to the use of funds, cost effectiveness or cost benefit analysis may be an appropriate tool:

- Did the program represent the best and most effective use of the particular inputs?
- Did it demonstrate sustainable benefits that exceeded their cost?

The performance of management is also relevant. Program managers should not leave their own performance out of what is to be evaluated.

Development impact, sustainability and measuring change

An evaluation has to examine development impact and sustainability:

- Who exactly has benefited from the project or program? In what ways?
- How long will these benefits last?
- What costs will have to be borne by government, the community or individual participants to maintain the benefits?
- Who has *not* benefited? Why not?
- Have the poorest groups achieved greater self-reliance?

The distribution of benefits is generally a key issue. This can be approached using 'participation analysis' or 'stakeholder analysis' which involve designing a simple analytical framework based on a determination of the makeup of the community (by age, gender, livelihood, language, ethnic background, income, political allegiance, etc.) and random surveys of beneficiaries to determine who participated and benefited and how they were 'selected'.

It should be borne in mind when conducting this type of analysis that there will be significant differences of interest and opportunity within any community and there will be pre-existing tensions, perhaps even conflicts. The project or program may have generated new tensions, particularly if changes have been brought about in the status quo. Evaluators can be prompted to ask:

- Has any conflict or tension been created or exacerbated?
- Have any mechanisms been identified/established to resolve conflict/tension? Were they effective?

In many respects development comes down to ***process*** and ***change*** - it should involve more than the delivery of a service. There are many pertinent questions that can be asked to explore this. For example:

- In what way did project beneficiaries participate in the implementation of the project?
- Was their involvement empowering in any sense?
- What skills did they learn? What roles did they assume?
- Has the project brought about any change in say the economic security of vulnerable groups or the status of women in the community?
- (In short) what exactly did the project change?

It may not be easy to come up with process indicators but with imagination it is possible.

6.5.9 Selecting evaluation criteria or indicators

The evaluation manager has to provide guidance in the ToR on the criteria or indicators which should be used to evaluate the *impact* of the project. This is a key task, yet it can be problematic. It is difficult to measure results in development, particularly if the emphasis is on social and political change. Criteria or indicators also need to be specified to evaluate the *processes* that were generated within the project or program.

What criteria?

Whose perspective?

Whose concepts?

Whose values?

Whose language?

Whose timeframe?

Whose agenda?

Whose needs?

The design document should already specify the performance criteria or key indicators to be used to measure progress against objectives, so this should be the starting point. However the criteria or indicators specified at the time the project was designed may well prove to be imprecise, even irrelevant. Moreover the evaluation will also be examining the overall rationale of the project and internal project criteria or indicators will be insufficient for this task. Thus it is inevitable that additional criteria or indicators will have to be developed for the evaluation.

Ideally all stakeholders should be consulted about how the project will be judged i.e. what criteria or indicators will be used. Perceptions may vary widely on what is significant and what counts for 'success'. For example, in a project that aims to generate employment the ANGO might be most concerned about the number of women who find employment, but the community might be more concerned about the number of young people employed (or vice versa). In a resource management project the community might maintain that they are more concerned about short and medium term benefits but the ANGO may seek to adopt a longer term conservation perspective (or vice versa). An evaluation should bring out these differences. If these differences cannot be resolved the evaluation will have to consider the project from both perspectives.

It may take time for these differences to become apparent so it is important for the project manager preparing the evaluation to make plain at an early stage what criteria or indicators he/she believes should be used. This would usually be achieved by circulating an early draft of the ToR for comment and later conducting a planning exercise at least with the main project partner to examine the proposed criteria or indicators, and if necessary rework them. If possible representatives of beneficiary groups should be present.

6.5.10 Assessing what information should be collected

Information needs will be governed by the criteria or indicators established for the evaluation. Accordingly, the evaluation manager should make a list of the different types of information that will probably be needed to determine if the criteria have been met and if the indicators are present.

The evaluation manager should also make an assessment of what methods should be used to collect and analyse this information. The methodology shouldn't simply be left open. Those who actually undertake the evaluation may have sound reasons to revise the recommended methodology but the manager of the exercise should have considered the question sufficiently to be able to provide guidance in the ToR.

In determining the information likely to be needed, the project manager should be wary of asking for too much data - it will hinder rather than help. Be wary also of being too prescriptive. The evaluation planning process should allow an opportunity for other stakeholders to signal what information they regard as significant and thereby influence what information is actually collected.

6.5.11 Sources of information

An evaluation should be able to draw on base line data established in the early stages of the project and on a data base developed in the course of ongoing monitoring and review. The strengths and deficiencies of existing project information should be checked before writing the ToR because it impacts greatly on the task. In preparation for an evaluation it may be appropriate to ask a partner agency to collate relevant information to ensure it is readily accessible to the evaluator(s) when they arrive.

An evaluation will also require the collection of information that is external to the project's data base. Additional information collected specifically for the evaluation will include existing information (e.g. government statistics, other NGO's reports) and new information generated by field work (e.g. survey results, stakeholder's views).

6.5.12 Analysis of information

It is important to consider how information will be analysed and how conclusions will be drawn from it. Some control must be retained over this aspect of the evaluation. It will be important to ensure that the conclusions are well supported by the information collected and with this in mind it would be prudent to make provision for a debriefing workshop to test the evaluators on their conclusions before they complete their report.

6.2.13 Deciding who should lead the evaluation

The initial question is likely to be whether or not to bring in an outsider, e.g. an independent consultant. Some pros and cons are listed below.

If a consultant is used to lead the evaluation team the evaluation manager should ensure that the skills the consultant brings to the task are imparted to participating program staff.

The ANGO does not have to retain control of the evaluation and appoint the team leader. In the interests of capacity building it may be wise to let the partner agency nominate the team leader and provide a resource person with evaluation skills to assist him or her.

6.5.14 Who else should be involved?

There will be many different people with an interest in the project, including the partner agency, project beneficiaries and participants and the funding agency. Their interests in the project will vary considerably. It is important to work out who should be involved, at what points and in what ways. Who should be represented on the evaluation team and who should not? Should a closely involved government department be invited to nominate somebody to be on the team? Should someone

External evaluator(s)	Internal evaluator(s)
Pros	**Pros**
• Well developed evaluation skills	• Closely involved with the activity
• No vested interest	• Valuable learning experience for person
• A fresh view, new eyes	• Develops in-house skills and capacity
• Can be participatory, given time and skill	• Findings more likely to be acted upon
Cons	**Cons**
• Constrained by individual style of consultant	• Staff/community members bring their own agenda
• Can be superficial (no heart)	• Can't stand back from the project
• Can give those being evaluated a negative perception of the evaluation process	• Lack of time to commit to evaluations
	• Divided loyalties
	• May be unwilling/unable to be critical
	• May lack appropriate training/skills

Underlying processes– notes to give to evaluation team

What you ask, who you ask and how you ask it are important.

Ask yourself what baggage you are carrying (preconceptions and agendas)?

What is the nature of the process that you are setting in train?

Are you serious about conducting a participative, empowering evaluation?

Who is framing the questions?

from the funding agency (e.g. AusAID officer posted to the country concerned) be invited to join in on field trips? What role should project beneficiaries and participants have in determining the focus of the evaluation? These are important questions and the success of the evaluation will depend largely on involving the right people at the right time in the right way.

Not everybody can be involved, certainly not at every stage, but as a general principle be inclusive and be prepared to make other stakeholders full team members. If someone is not to be involved, be clear about why they should be excluded. As others will actually be conducting the evaluation the evaluation manager needs to question how inclusive the evaluation team members selected are likely to be. What is the partner agency's track record with the community in this regard? Will marginalised people and groups get a look in or will community consultations be dominated by the ascendant and assertive?

6.5.15 Participative evaluation

It is now generally recognised that it is important to strive towards the greater participation of project partners and beneficiaries in monitoring, review and evaluation. Some people would say greater participation involves less reliance on the conventional model of objective scientific research (logical positivism) although this view seems to be based on the premise that beneficiaries and participants are less objective than outsiders, which does not necessarily follow. An outsider may be more systematic, and more intent on objectivity, but there is no single reality out there to be captured, however good the method.

More controlled, positivist approach	More subjective, participatory approach
Pros	**Pros**
• Quick; easy to quantify • Straight-forward methodology • Likely to be directly relevant to the manner in which the project was designed • Seen to be more accountable • Easier to deal with and does not raise complex issues related to control of the activity	• Views and perspectives of all stakeholders inform the result • Provides an opportunity for other realities to impinge (i.e. matters beyond the Project Framework) • Should lead to a closer mutual understanding and sense of shared purpose (the human foundation)
Cons	**Cons**
• Arrogant and insensitive • Results likely to reflect the Western values of the evaluator • Flawed assumptions about independent observation and capacity to capture 'reality' • Ignores human reality - change, political dynamics • Assumes simplistic cause and effect	• May not fit the project format or framework • Can substitute for a rigorous examination of the achievements of the activity against its objectives • Few evaluators really know how to use participatory techniques • Can raise expectations that won't/can't be met.

The pros and cons of the positivist approach compared to the participatory approach are listed opposite.

The main difference between the two approaches is that in the more traditional approach the evaluator plays the role of investigator, whereas in the more participative approach the evaluator acts more as a facilitator. The evaluation manager has to make a decision about what she or he thinks is appropriate. It will depend on the purpose of the evaluation and who it is really for.

6.5.16 Difficulties of conducting participative evaluations

It is increasingly common for evaluation ToR to state that an evaluation must be participative, that Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques must be used, etc. This marks a healthy shift in thinking but one should be cautious about making these injunctions. Don't impose requirements that cannot be met.

The meaning of the word 'participation' is fast being diluted. Much of what passes for participation in evaluations is no more than a limited form of consultation and much of what passes for Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is in fact Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), an effective but essentially 'extractive' technique. (See further the discussion of PRA and RRA in Annex 2 - Participatory Approaches.)

In trying to involve project partners and beneficiaries in evaluation don't ignore the underlying realities of effective power and control. Realistically assess what will be involved in aiming for a participative evaluation. It will involve giving up a certain amount of control of the planning and conduct of the evaluation. Evaluation team members will have to be prepared to make room for the judgement and experience of others and rely far less on their own judgement and experience. It will certainly take more time and money.

If an evaluation is really supposed to be participatory, spell out in what ways other stakeholders are to participate. If PRA techniques are really to be used, specify the actual techniques and make sure there is really enough time to use them.

6.5.17 Further options

There are other (not necessarily mutually exclusive) options that can be considered, including:

- joint or collaborative evaluation (e.g. NGOs working in the same sector pool resources to conduct a sector evaluation)
- swap evaluation (e.g. another NGO working in the same area evaluates your NGO's work and your NGO evaluates their work)
- reverse evaluation (e.g. the partner agency evaluates the performance of the supporting NGO)
- parallel evaluations (e.g. the NGO and the partner agency conduct parallel evaluations of a project and hold a workshop at the end to share findings and agree recommendations)
- self-evaluation (e.g. the implementing agency is assisted to evaluate its own performance)
- community (or user) evaluation (e.g. a water users group evaluates a water project)

It would be a good thing if there were more collaborative evaluations. There is a lot of duplication with individual NGOs and donors conducting their own evaluations without adequate reference to what others are doing. This is inefficient and too demanding of the agencies and communities on the receiving end. The manager of an evaluation should go out and look for evaluation partners, particularly other NGOs working in the same sector and/or area. It might mean re-jigging the timing, even the ToR, but it is the responsible approach. It is also wise to check with the partner agency if there is an exercise they wish to conduct that the evaluation can be combined with.

6.5.18 Budgeting for the evaluation

How much will the evaluation cost and what other resources are needed? Estimates should be made early. Be careful to match the scope of the evaluation to the funds and resources available.

For financial resources the budget should include the costs of staff and/or consultants, possibly translators, enumerators and other local support staff, international and local travel, expenses or per diems, communications, workshop materials, report production, etc.

In budgeting for staff and/or consultants, the amount of time needed for each stage should be detailed e.g. planning, desk research and preparation, pre-departure briefings, data collection and analysis, workshops and meetings, de-briefings and report production.

6.5.19 Timing

Evaluations usually take place mid-term, at completion or *ex post*.

In determining the precise timing it is important to check when it would best suit the partner agency and to seek the partner agency's advice about seasonal considerations, religious holidays, other major visits, etc. It is important to be sensitive to the demands that you are placing on the partner agency in terms of staff and resources.

A GANTT chart can be used to graphically plan the timing of each stage of the evaluation and monitor the completion of each stage within established timeframes. There are also several computer software packages available to help with this work.

6.6 Overseeing the conduct of the evaluation

6.6.1 Briefing evaluators and drafting workplans

Pre-departure briefings provide the last opportunity to directly influence the conduct of the evaluation work. Briefings should be well structured and should aim to bring evaluation team members together and ensure that there is a shared understanding about the conduct of the work. It may be appropriate to further amend the ToR at this stage.

The evaluation manager should assist the evaluation team to draft workplans, provisionally detailing the use of the time available and the main methodologies. This will reveal to the evaluation manager whether or not the evaluation team understand what is required, how well they are likely to work together and whether or not they are likely to adopt a sound approach. For example, the team may propose that they will spend comparatively little time in the villages covered by the project and that they will seek accommodation in a nearby town rather than staying on site. On the face of it this should be challenged.

The opportunity should also be taken to stress the process that should be adopted, e.g. bringing everyone together to seek consensus rather than allowing different 'cells' to develop, and to ensure evaluators are familiar with the tools you would like them to use, e.g. use cards and 'blu tack' in your own briefings to demonstrate how they can be used to externalise problems and build consensus.

It should be stressed to the team that the success of the evaluation will depend largely on the relationship they can build with the people whose work is to be evaluated. This does not mean that the team should be instructed not to express their doubts - this would be paralysing.

6.6.2 Delegation of in-country management of the evaluation

Arrangements need to be made for managing the conduct of the evaluation in-country. Assuming the manager of the evaluation does not participate in its execution the in-country management of the evaluation will have to be delegated either to the local office of the ANGO, to the local partner agency or to a member of the evaluation team. In these circumstances it will be critical to settle how the evaluation is to be managed and supported in-country and to set preparations in train well ahead of the commencement of the evaluation. A team leader should be appointed. Local resource requirements and logistical arrangements should not be left for the evaluation team to settle.

6.6.3 Intervening in the conduct of the evaluation

Ideally, evaluations are opportunities for dialogue and shared learning. However, evaluations sometimes take on investigative functions and this can lead to considerable tension. For example, an evaluation team leader may see the need to audit the books of the local partner agency or to inquire into the conduct of a member of staff. The controversy may be referred back to the evaluation manager. What should he or she do?

If the issue that has arisen is serious and/or of considerable significance it would be counterproductive to sweep it under the carpet but it may be appropriate to intervene and recommend that a separate audit or investigation be conducted. If it is decided that the matter should remain within the scope of the evaluation the evaluation manager should direct the evaluation team leader to ensure that the matter is dealt with fairly and that nobody is put at risk. The evaluation manager should intervene if he or she has any doubts about this, channelling the matter into a separate process (perhaps involving the establishment of a forum that brings together all parties, chaired by a mutually respected third party).

If a partner agency raises serious concerns about the ANGO in the course of an evaluation e.g. concerning the conduct of an Australian working on the project, the ANGO should have the courage to see that this is pursued in a similarly open manner.

6.7 Reporting

6.7.1 Debriefing and feedback

After completing field work in each location the evaluation team should debrief project staff and project beneficiaries and participants as to its preliminary findings. This is an important opportunity to clarify thinking and correct any misunderstandings the team may have. Once all the field work has been completed the evaluation team should spend a day or two writing up its preliminary findings and then debriefing partner agency staff in the province or capital. This is also an important opportunity for feedback. The team should then spend another day or more preparing a draft evaluation report for all stakeholders to comment on. This is the document the ANGO staff member or consultant participating in the evaluation should return home with. The draft should not be generated in Australia.

Shortcuts in the process of debriefing and feedback described above will result in an inferior product. Debriefings should be seen as opportunities for action. Think strategically about how to use debriefings to reach agreement on conclusions, lessons and recommendations.

6.7.2 Structure of the report

The content and structure required should be specified in the ToR. In terms of content it is important that the formal (or base) report include the following:

- a clear statement of the purpose of the evaluation (goal and objectives);
- the criteria and indicators used for judging 'success' or 'failure' and a critique of their usefulness and validity;
- the places visited, the people interviewed and the methods used to collect information including the reasons for choosing these places, people and methods and a critique of the usefulness and validity of the approach taken;
- a summary of findings and conclusions including an indication of how they were reached and an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the information base;
- a summary of the lessons that can be drawn;
- a summary of recommendations including some guidance about how they should be implemented and what difficulties may be involved;
- an assessment of the value of the evaluation exercise to all stakeholders and pointers for future practice.

The summary of key conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations for action is likely to be the most important outcome of any evaluation. Evaluation reports have to concentrate on learning and action.

6.7.3 Presenting the results to different stakeholders and for different uses

The formal evaluation report may not be a good means of communicating results to all stakeholders or for all purposes and additional forms of presentation may be required. For example, it may be useful to have the evaluators prepare a flip chart presentation summarising the formal report. This would serve as a useful visual aid for debriefing within the ANGO and could subsequently be used for presenting the results of the evaluation back to project partners and beneficiary groups.

In principle the results of an evaluation should not simply be made available, but made accessible, to all stakeholders. This may mean translating the formal report or a summary of it for beneficiary groups. The results should also be in a form that will be useful to all stakeholders. This may mean tailoring reports and/or presentations for different stakeholders. For example, the report for the partner agency may have an expanded section on the implementation of recommendations specifically relevant to the partner agency.

All stakeholders should be provided with an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation and on the way in which it was conducted. This should be seen as an opportunity to achieve a better understanding between all stakeholders and to improve future practice.

6.8 Institutional learning

6.8.1 What is done with evaluations?

Evaluations are wasted if they don't result in improved performance. In this regard follow-up is critical. It is not enough to generate an interesting discussion, to have a frank exchange between development partners in a workshop. The evaluation exercise will have been a failure if the output is a report gathering dust on a shelf and all parties return to business as usual. It is vital that a mechanism be put in place to ensure that the lessons learnt are institutionalised and that they have an impact on ongoing work. This will require that a meeting be held after the 'dust has settled' to agree what action the NGO should take and what on-going support will be needed to ensure implementation of the evaluations recommendations. Arrangements should be made to review progress after a period of time.

To improve their performance the parties concerned will have to be truly 'hungry' to do so - complacency always stands in the way of change. We need more iconoclasts.

6.8.2 Dealing with failure

A lot of development work is experimental and projects do fail. Unfortunately, failure tends to lead to financial punishment and NGOs are accordingly very reluctant to be seen to be learning from their mistakes. The link between evaluation results and ongoing funding tends to inhibit evaluations and turn them into self-serving exercises.

There is an ethical issue at stake. Keeping the wraps on problems and beating up project successes might be in the interests of an NGO but it is not in the interests of those in whose name development is conducted.

6.8.3 Institutional performance

It is important to go beyond the success or failure of a project or program and determine how much this success or failure had to do with the strengths and weaknesses of the NGO and its project partners. What do the shortcomings of the project say about our organisation? What do we have to change? How can we build on the successes achieved by the project?