TIPS FOR EX POST EVALUATIONS

Based on experience from World Vision and Lutheran World Relief

PROJECT/SITE SELECTION

- Clearly define criteria for project/site selection
    - Include discussions on how long the project has been closed; consider whether programming that ended several years ago will still provide insight into current approaches
    - Consider opportunities to evaluate multiple closed projects in the same geography at once, if programming was similar or overlapped in target areas
- Include in that criteria the need for relevant project documents, which ought to be readily available:
    - Proposal and any other materials that describe Theory of Change, exit strategy
    - Budget and any modifications
    - Baseline and endline/evaluation reports including raw data and the sample frame
    - Any other studies conducted since the end of the project, ideally with their raw data
- Before finalizing selection, all these documents ought to be available to ex post evaluation team
- Check to see if former project staff are available, either to be hired as consultants to the evaluator or as interview subjects
    - If there are no longer any staff in the geographic area, determine if anyone has institutional memory of the project as access to such individuals is imperative for useful findings
- Alert program staff as early as possible and begin to work with them on a timeline for the life of the evaluation
    - Determine the major project milestones that will require Level of Effort (LOE) from program staff
    - The LOE from program staff should be agreed upon from the outset with their role and time commitment as clear as possible

STUDY DESIGN APPROACH

- Evaluation design for ex posts should be as flexible as possible. Until the status of certain major aspects of the legacy of programming are clear design will be based on assumptions. Assumptions that do not hold will frustrate the evaluator's ability to investigate the most important aspects of a project's sustainability and/or impact.
- If budget and time permit, consider a two-phase evaluation design approach.
    - <u>Phase I</u>: Measure the status of the major aspects of programming (e.g. status of groups established during the project, infrastructure, community processes, local effects of government policies that changed since the project closed, etc.) and use that information to determine which of the selected closed projects is best placed to proceed to Phase 2;
        - Review relevant project documents
        - Convene former staff and any other local actors (government, CBOs, etc.)
        - Reconstruct project's Theory of Change, timeline, activities, locations, targeting strategy

        - Understand what the project accomplished and how this was measured during implementation
        - Understand the sustainability/exit plan and how it was undertaken
        - Understand how the project's impact is viewed by those most closely associated with it (mostly through focus groups and interviews)
    - Phase 2: Use those findings to design a more in-depth study, focusing on outcomes or impact
        - Based on Phase 1 findings (and the decision that those findings support the likelihood that a second phase will result in deeper investigation of outcomes/impact) develop specific evaluation questions to understand the impact of interventions
        - Consider appropriate evaluation approach- quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method- that justifies the depth and breadth of the evaluation questions.
        - Consider a variety of data collection methods that can help answer the evaluation questions, such as fidelity assessments, surveys, focus group discussions and interviews
        - Where possible, consider replicating (in part or in its entirety) the final quantitative evaluation survey
        - Where possible, consider actual or proxy (based on secondary data) control groups
        - Ground-truth findings with staff closest to the closed project (e.g. country/national office staff)

Evaluator Selection

- Depending on budget and design approach, consider whether local or international evaluators will best meet ex post needs
    - If using the two-phase design suggested above, local evaluators can be used for data collection and first-level analysis in phase two. MEL staff will need to conduct the first phase and be closely involved in the second.
    - If time or other constraints do not permit use of the two phase approach, consider partnering with a high-capacity evaluation team with a diverse skills and previous ex post experience who can be flexible in their approach
- Terms of Reference (TOR) should be developed collaboratively between the MEL staff overseeing the ex post and local/technical staff overseeing the project.
- Determine one Point of Contact (POC) within the organization for negotiating contract, payments, and logistics (usually a MEL staff overseeing the Ex Post evaluation study)
- Target previously vetted evaluators with TOR and consider asking them to submit simple proposals
- All TORs should include the following:
    - Inception report and meeting, which should include appropriate MEL and project staff.
    - Determine the contracting mechanism
    - Evaluation questions should be written so as to explore what happened AFTER the project ended rather than re-examining what happened during the project; they will be most helpful if they focus on why project activities/experiences led to post-project findings
    - Clear timeline
        - evaluator should be knowledgeable about documents provided before they begin data collection
        - set aside time to negotiate contract so it is settled before work begins

        - regular check-in meetings between evaluator and POC
        - reflection and validation opportunities with POC, the implementing partner, and project participants should be included; double check with POC that timing for these events is possible
- TORs for international consultants should also include:
    - All local hires (data collectors, translators, etc.) must be hired and managed by consultant and paid out of their contract
    - Requirement for at least one member of consulting team to be in-country
    - include time to co-create communications/dissemination materials
- Interviews with potential international evaluators should include:
    - Be honest with potential evaluators about the desire for guidance and intentional learning throughout evaluation process
    - Request writing sample from previous ex post evaluations
    - Inquire about structure of staffing/contracting arrangements and be clear that you would only contract with one entity
    - Inquire about how many other concurrent contracts evaluator is working on to ensure that your evaluation study is properly staffed
- Consider any areas of potential contention from budget in the bid and be prepared to accept or reject them
- The POC should be the only person who engages with potential consultants (receives proposals, sets up interviews, etc.) to establish that person as the main contract representative

Preparing for Consultant-led Data Collection

- Ensure all contractual and logistical arrangements are finalized before data collection begins; any areas of contention should be resolved beforehand and/or negotiated in a manner that does not interfere with data collection planning
- In-country kick-off meeting should be focused on refining details for data collection and analysis; ensure this expectation is clear to evaluator. The evaluator should arrive in-country already familiar with the project's original plans and findings from the final evaluation.
- Program staff should be prepared to introduce evaluator to project implementers and community members
- Establish regular communications (i.e. a weekly standing meeting) for the duration of data collection, analysis, and learning between evaluator and POC
- Where the two-phase approach is not possible, in-country staff can help clarify lessons already learned through final project evaluation; discussing this will help the evaluator explore what happened since the end of the project and how that was influenced by what happened during the project. The evaluator should plan to interview relevant staff with perspective on the project's original Theory of Change.
- Reiterate that the report will likely state lessons that your organization learned through the project's final evaluation, but that rather than focusing on those, the evaluator ought to find a way to analyze how those lessons played out after the project and what project activities did lead to or would have led to desired outcomes

Data Collection, Analysis and Validation, and Learning

- Connecting the ex post evaluator to the project's final evaluator is helpful where possible

- Appropriate project staff and decision makers should be present at any validation meetings with project participants
- Continue any regular meetings throughout analysis and validation to ensure evaluator understands organizational needs for the final deliverables
- Insist upon future-oriented recommendations; remind the evaluator that this project has ended and programming in this community is not feasible (if applicable)
- POC and evaluator should co-create evaluation communications or dissemination materials