Using Ex-Post Evaluations to Measure Program Sustainability

World Vision's Experience in Kenya and Uganda

American Evaluation Association poster (2015)

World Vision's programs are:

- Multi-Sectoral
- Long-term (approximately 15 years)
- Designed to affect change in children, families, and communities

But are they sustainable?

Sustainability was assessed through two ex-post evaluations:

- Conducted ≈ five years after program closure using mixed-methods among multiple respondent types
- Assessed long-term outcomes among beneficiaries
- Measured extent to which program activities and groups continued and community capacities for promoting child well-being

Photo from: Chris Huber, 4/5/2015, Kenya

Defining Sustainability

Most relevant concepts emerging from the literature included: "benefit persistence", "dynamic sustainability", and "static sustainability".

The ex-post evaluations sought to expand World Vision's current definition and assess a more balanced understanding of sustainability.

Static Sustainability

Ability to maintain and improve upon the outcomes and goals achieved with external support after that support has ended[1].

Ongoing positive changes in services or behaviors that benefit an individual or community that can be attributed directly or indirectly to the project[2].

Dynamic Sustainability

Framing the Study

Factors influencing ex-post evaluation design:

- Complex, long-term program design
- No previous evaluation data from unexposed comparison groups
- Limited/ unreliable historical program records

→ Therefore, the study hypothesized a "best case" scenario. If affects were not observed among direct beneficiaries, then they would not be expected for the broader community.

Evaluation focus:

- Following up with program beneficiaries (individuals, households, groups)
- "Static" assessed in dichotomous manner for infrastructure and community groups
- "Dynamic" assessed using appreciative inquiry and case study approaches

Research Questions and Evaluation Methods

RQ 1: What are the long-term outcomes and contribution of programs' work in the current education, health, and employment status of individuals who participated in program as children?

- Surveys with formerly registered children 18+
- In-depth interviews with formerly registered children and other beneficiaries

Individual: level of education, employment, perception of health, and economic well-being

Households: economic well-being and capacity to participate in the development of communities

- Surveys with caregivers of formerly registered children who also currently cared for children

RQ 4: What has been the value, meaning, and effects for those participating in the program?

RQ 2: (How) have our programs enabled communities to sustain improvements in child well-being?

Societal: General context changes, community capacity, and enablers of sustainability

Community: Infrastructure and groups (status and functionality)

- Key Informant interviews with local leaders
- Situation analysis
- GIS data and mapping of infrastructure investment and groups

- Focus groups with community groups who were part of the exit strategy and caregivers who have lived in the community for the last 5-10 years

RQ 3: To what extent have the outputs and/or immediate results of our interventions been sustained in the program area?

Promising Tools

- Success Case Method[3] *(adapted)*
- Mobile data collection (ODK)
- Life-course model[4] *(adapted)*
- Community Capacity Index[5] *(adapted)*
- GIS mapping
- Use of standardized survey items (e.g. Hunger Scale)

Key Learnings

Through ex-post evaluations, World Vision:

- Gained insight into life trajectory of program beneficiaries and potential programming gaps.
- Observed limitations of current organizational definition of sustainability and tested a more comprehensive view of "benefit persistence".
- Improved understanding of factors contributing to sustainability by looking beyond program efforts to improve *anticipated sustainability* instead to *actual sustainability*.

Practical Considerations

- Lack of onsite staff and organizational ties to community increases time and cost of evaluation.
- Preparations for ex-post evaluations need to take place at program closure. These go beyond audit compliance.
- There are unique ethical considerations and additional burdens for ethical review.
- Challenges in tracing beneficiaries and groups are both limitations to the study and to the findings in and of themselves.

References

1. World Vision International. (2007). *LEAP, World Vision's approach to Design, Monitoring and Evaluation* (2nd ed.).
2. Clarke, M., Feeny, S., & Donnelly, J. (2014). Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Interventions in the Pacific: Defining, Assessing and Improving 'Sustainability'. *Eur J Dev Res European Journal of Development Research*, 26(5), 692-706.
3. Brinkerhoff, R. O. (2005). The Success Case Method: A strategic evaluation approach to increasing the value and effect of training. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 7(1), 86-101.
4. Tafere, Y. (2013). *Intergenerational Relationships and the Life Course: Changing Relations between Children and Caregivers in Ethiopia*. Young Lives.
5. Underwood, C., Boulay, M., Snetro-Plewman, G., Macwan'gi, M., Vijayaraghavan, J., Namfukwe, M., & Marsh, D. (2012). Community Capacity as Means to Improved Health Practices and an End in Itself: Evidence from a Multi-Stage Study. *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*, 33(2), 105-127.