



REDEFINING THE ROLE OF EVALUATION MANAGERS TO FOSTER IMPROVED EVALUATION QUALITY AND USE

Prepared by

Pact South Africa

Authors

Rita Sonko-Najjemba
Addis Berhanu

October 2012



Disclaimer: This publication was made possible through support provided by the Office of HIV/AIDS, Bureau for Health, U.S. Agency for International Development, under the terms of USAID South Africa Associate Award No. 674-A-00-08-00001-00. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Pact or the U.S. Agency for International Development.

ABSTRACT

Ideally, decisions about evaluation design and implementation draw on the knowledge and expertise of the commissioning agency, evaluators and other relevant stakeholders. However standard procurement processes and existing power differentials often preclude this, leading to evaluations which don't adequately engage the different stakeholders, reflect the real issues or address their needs. Based on experiences from Pact's work in South Africa, this paper examines emerging evidence and lessons on a redefined role for evaluation managers. In this approach, evaluation manager play a brokering role which aims to reduce these power differentials and develop a common understanding of evaluation to support dialog within an environment where evaluation is required to be undertaken by independent, external evaluators. Active participation in the planning of the evaluation by key stakeholders including the organisations subjected to evaluation is a key element of the approach. Emerging evidence on ways in which managers might contribute to strengthening evaluation quality and use is explored.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluations, particularly in low resource settings, are often commissioned, designed and implemented in less than ideal situations, where as a result of the limited consultation of key stakeholders, priorities are not addressed. Standard contracting processes particularly in cases where evaluation is required to be undertaken by independence external evaluators, usually tend to limit opportunities for stakeholder engagement. In such cases, common practice is that terms of reference (TORs) are mainly focused on addressing the information needs of the commissioner/funders, with limited attention paid to the needs of other key stakeholders such as the organisations/programs whose work is under scrutiny. It has also been suggested that evaluation of a project or programme should be regarded as a cooperative venture, not as an information service for a sponsor's own exclusive use (Kemmis, 1986, p. 126).

From literature, managing evaluations is increasingly gaining recognition as an important practice which, until recently was invisible (Baizerman, M., & Compton, D.W. 2009, p8). Various roles managers should play in the evaluation process have been suggested including, as noted by Bell (2004, p.602) developing rational proposals, clarifying the evaluation mandate, monitoring interim progress and ensuring product quality and usefulness. Bell goes on to state that valid and useful evaluations depend as much on effective management as on elegant design (p.603).

However there seems to be varying perceptions about the role managers should play in managing contracts and the skills needed for the job (Newcomer K,E. 2004. p.202). Dibella (1990, p177) suggests that the evaluation managers' role should be to bridge the orientation of evaluators and the expectations of program managers as evaluation users. He proposes that. *"basically, the evaluation manager becomes a buffer between the self interests of the user, who may seek or hope*

for particular results, and the evaluator who may emphasize a research orientation rather than applicability or relevance of recommendations.”

In addressing the common pitfalls of standard contracting processes, Pacts approach to managing evaluations seeks to reduce the power differentials at play among major evaluation stakeholders through development of a common understanding of evaluation to support dialog. This approach requires an expanded role for evaluation managers, whereby stakeholder engagement activities coupled with evaluation capacity building form the basis for enhancing effective participation of program staff. This report presents key findings and lessons learnt regarding evaluations managers’ role to enhance quality and use. Recommendation on how evaluation management might be strengthened, are made.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Since 2004, Pact has facilitated the efficient flow of grant funds to over 100 PEPFAR partners and sub-partners in South Africa playing valuable roles in the response to HIV and AIDS, while ensuring compliance with USAID rules and regulations as well as general principles of sound management. Pact’s strategy integrates grant making with capacity building for enhancing effectiveness and sustainability through the development and implementation of documented organizational systems and human capacity development at management and operational levels. Through rigorous grant management and individualized capacity building, partners have dramatically increased the scope, scale and quality of services they offer through all nine provinces of South Africa. As part of the capacity development support to partner organisations, Pact offers a wide range of evaluation capacity building services. These include technical support, training and mentoring to design and implement sound data management systems in line with needs of partner organisations and programs.

Early in the fiscal year 2011, Pact received guidance from USAID on the commissioning of external evaluations for partners’ programs. Pact employed a participatory approach in developing the terms of reference for the evaluations, meeting with each partner to discuss evaluation priorities and potential evaluation strategies. TORs for 13 partner evaluations were finalized and approved by USAID, following which Pact published a call for expressions of interest in conducting program evaluations. Out of 32 applicants, six firms were shortlisted by the technical review committee and were then invited to submit full proposals for specific evaluations. In a few instances, the responses from the shortlisted firms were either poor or no proposals were submitted. In those instances, Pact reissued an open solicitation and was thereby able to identify a suitable contractor from outside the six shortlisted firms. In total, Pact contracted seven evaluation firms to undertake the 13 partner evaluations over a period of about 12 months. Some of the contractors were awarded 2 contracts while others were contracted for one evaluation, based on their responses to the various requests for full proposals. Pact carefully documented the management approach, including undertaking a survey to gather feedback on partners’ and evaluators perspectives.

METHODS

Extensive document review

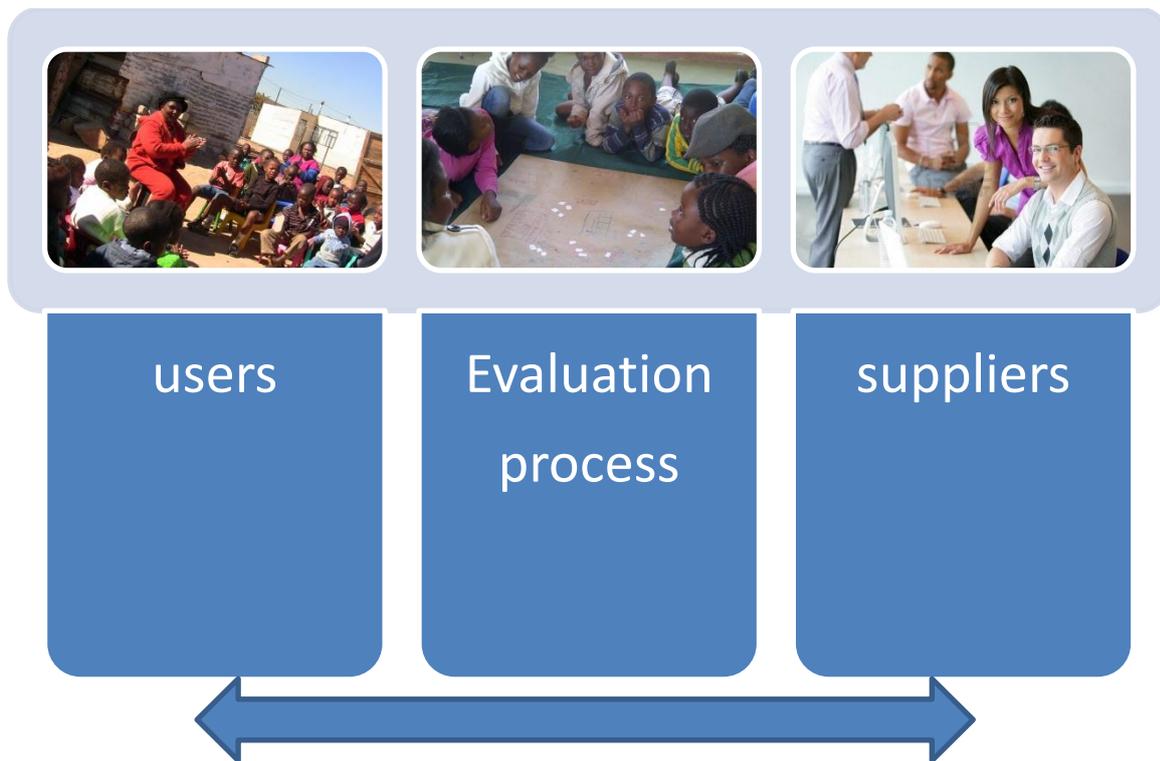
Throughout the process of planning, commissioning and managing the evaluations, the Pact MERL team proactively documented and filed information generated during the different activities. These included notes from various meetings with stakeholders, activity reports, contractual documentation, notes from internal reflection meetings as well as reports from various evaluation capacity building processes. Extensive review of all these documents was undertaken and enabled the identification and documentation of the various roles that pact evaluation managers play.

Online Feedback Survey of partners and evaluators

An online survey was undertaken using Survey monkey to gather feedback from partners and evaluators on their perspectives about Pacts evaluation management approach. Specifically, partners and evaluators were requested to complete 13 questions (taking about 30-40 minutes to complete) to provide their views on effectiveness of the various aspects of the evaluation management processes, what worked, what didn't and what lessons they had learnt. The questionnaire included a combination of open ended questions as well as others that required rating using scales that were provided. Additionally, respondents were requested to provide additional comments related to the rating questions.

The survey targeted individuals at partner organisations that were involved in coordinating and planning the evaluations. All evaluation consultants (evaluators) were requested to participate in the survey as well. Partners and evaluators that participated in the 10 evaluations that had been finalised by September 30th 2012 were invited to participate. The tool was designed as an anonymous survey and the questionnaires were intended to gather individuals' perspectives rather than organisational view. As such, requests were sent out to all individual evaluators and partner staff via email. In total, 20 evaluators and 41 partner staff were invited to participate and the response rates were 70% and 68.3% respectively.

Documented roles based on Pact experience



Managers play a role in supporting evaluation quality across the spectrum

Evaluation Use: the focus here is primarily on evaluation capacity building (ECB). Working with partners and communities, our goal is to enhance evaluation knowledge through participatory ECB techniques. Focus is on increasing appreciation of evaluation and its value for programs and beneficiaries. ECB activities include skills building workshops on data gathering and use for decision making, data quality management, techniques for gathering community feedback, identifying the right questions and learning to ask questions the right way, etc.

Through ECB, interest in and demand for evaluation is enhanced while at the same time enabling program staff to identify the most crucial information needs that would ultimately improve service delivery. One of the main goals of ECB is enhancing effective participation of program staff and beneficiaries in the evaluation processes. By learning more about why evaluation is important, program staff are more energized and eager to support evaluation efforts.

Evaluation process: the focus here is acting as “evaluation broker” with the aim of supporting all key stakeholders to engage effectively in the planning, design, implementation, review, dissemination and use of the evaluation. This role involves the provision of information, coordination of various stakeholder engagement processes and ensuring effective collaboration in decision making regarding what, when and how evaluation should take place.

Evaluation suppliers: managers play two key roles here i.e., commissioning evaluations and providing peer review and support to evaluators.

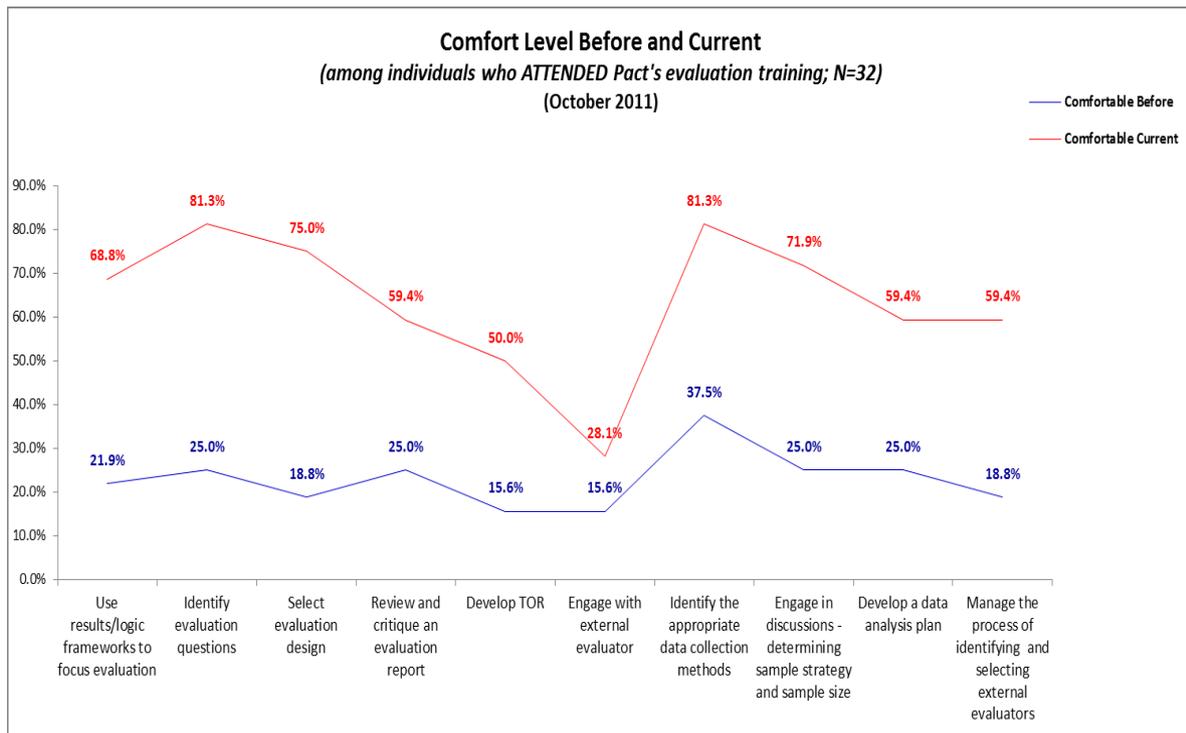
As commissioner of evaluations, managers undertake activities aimed at identifying suitable evaluators. Effective solicitation processes, based on the rules established usually by donors and or organisations ensure that suitable evaluators with appropriate skills and experience for the job at hand are identified. This process entails development of high quality terms of reference, efficient and effective contract negotiation processes including specifying the scope of work and agreeing on the budget for the evaluation.

As peers and supporters to evaluators, managers provide the necessary and required technical assistance in various stages of the evaluation process including decisions on appropriate design and methods, planning, data gathering processes and stakeholder coordination. Managers also very importantly provide technical input in the review and approval of deliverables, and ensure that these are of high quality.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PARTNERS AND EVALUATORS SURVEY

Evaluation Capacity Building Role

Pact assists each partner organization in developing comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems for tracking progress against both PEPFAR and organizational indicators. Pact provides a wide range of MERL technical assistance to partners to ensure the continuous building and improvement of systems in order to adapt to changing programmatic and organizational requirements. Assistance includes: review and development of effective data collection tools; analysis and reporting of data; setting realistic targets; establishing and strengthening data quality management systems; conducting internal data quality audits; and verifying and validating partner and sub-partner data submission support. Over the past two years, Pact has implemented an evaluation capacity building initiative, with the aim of further enhancing partners' knowledge and skills in: basic concepts and principles of evaluation relevant to field programming ; methods for data collection commonly used in field based evaluation; how to develop a comprehensive evaluation plan including a detailed terms of reference for the evaluation; managing evaluations in the field including managing external evaluation consultants and effective communication and utilization of evaluation finding. Based on findings from evaluation of the ECB initiative conducted in Oct 2011, the program seems to be highly effective as reflected in the results below;



“The training demystified the mystery of evaluation for us”

“After training for the first time, we commissioned baselines for all our sub-partners. Have completed 2 to date”

“Fear is worsened by lack of information but now we know”

“Before the training I did not know anything about design and methodology for evaluations. I just knew programs have to be evaluated”.

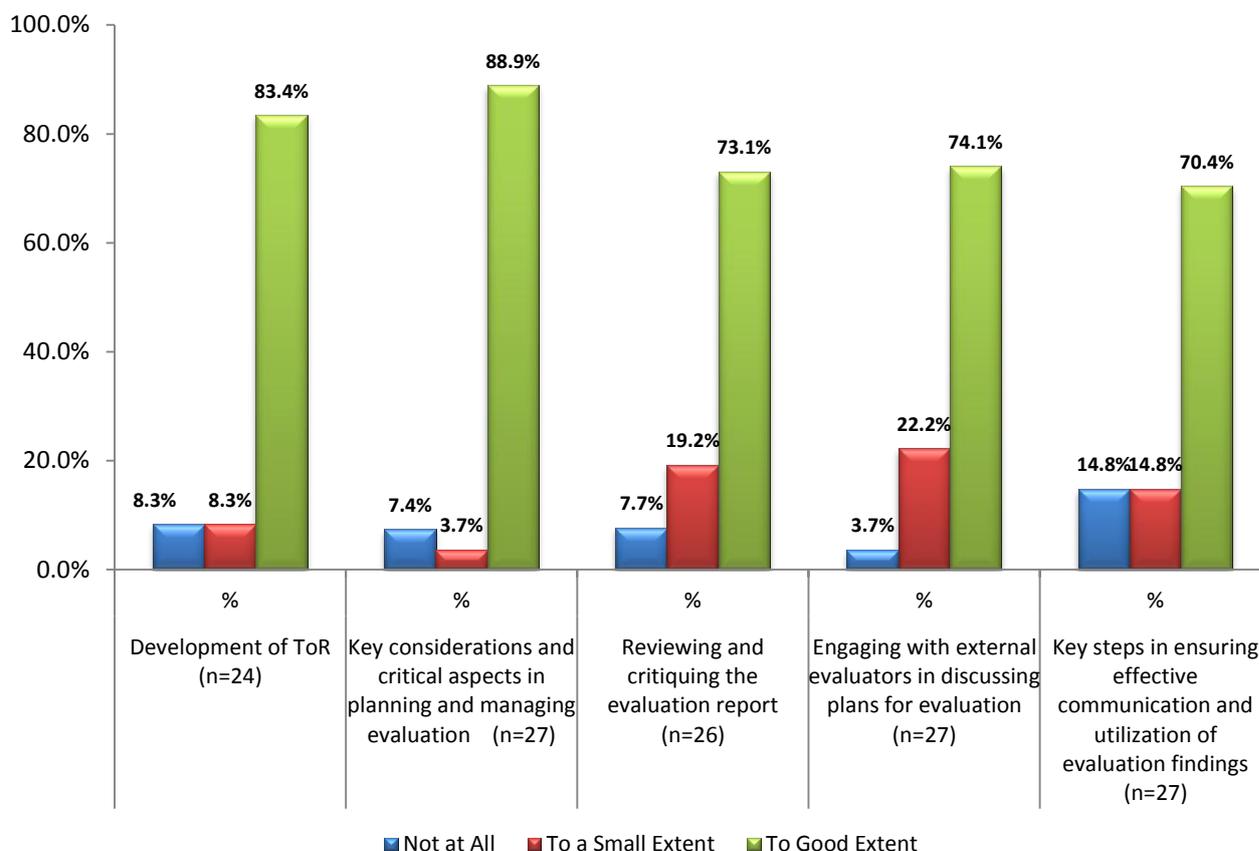
The ECB role was further assessed as part of the feedback survey (2012). Partners reported that participation in evaluation processes had resulted in good or very good improvement in their capacity to;

- 1- Develop terms of reference for evaluation- 83.4%
- 2- Identify key considerations for effective management of evaluations-88.9%
- 3- Critique evaluation reports-73.1%
- 4- Effectively communicate and use of evaluation findings-70.4%

“Our programme and M&E staff attended the PACT evaluation training and have had previous evaluation experience. Nevertheless, it was enlightening to experience in practice PACT's detailed, technical and professional approach to the whole evaluation process.” Partner

“The experience of participating with PACT in the design, contracting, implementation and dissemination of the evaluation findings has strengthened (our) capacity to conduct future internal and external evaluations.” Partner

Partners Participation in Evaluation Processes Resulted in improvement of Capacity



Evaluation Broker Role

Both partners and evaluators provided very positive feedback on the stakeholder engagements processes implemented by Pact and the effect these had on enhancing effective participation the evaluation processes. Overall, both partners and evaluators agreed that the management approach had enabled effective communication among stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. 85% of partners and 71.4% of evaluators agreed/agreed strongly with this.

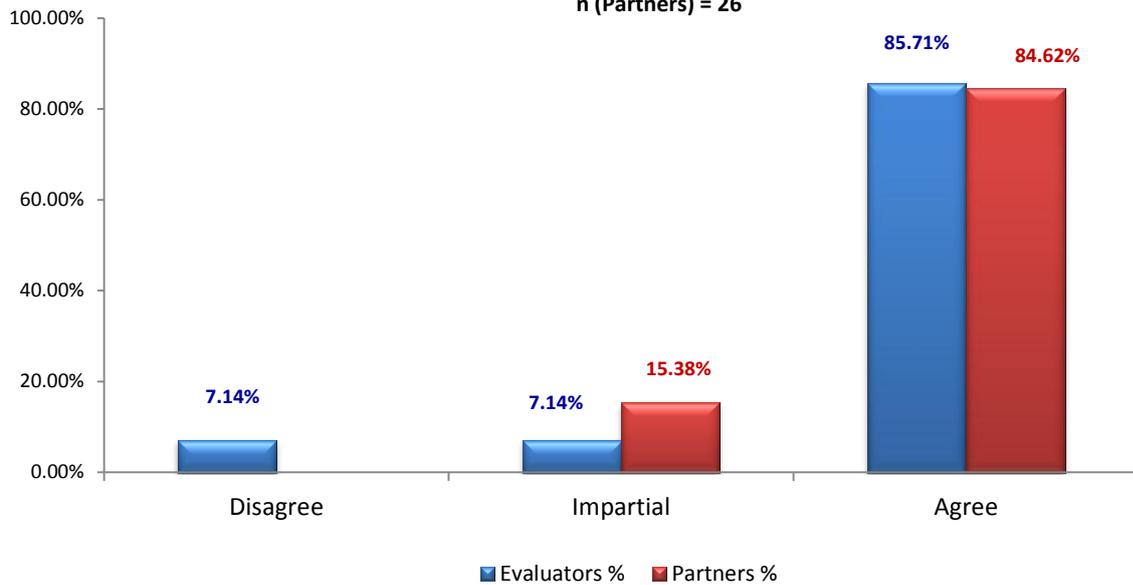
Evaluation TOR: Partners reported that the terms of reference reflected a clear evaluation purpose (92.8% Agreed or strongly agreed) and clear key evaluation questions (85.7% Agreed or strongly agreed). However, a challenge cited by some of the partners was that they found it challenging to prioritise questions given the rare opportunity to undertake evaluations of their programs. *“It was extremely difficult to reduce the evaluation to address a specific scope for quite an integrated and complex programme. We knew that we would not be able to get certain answers from the evaluation.”* Partner

Evaluation planning meetings: The evaluation planning meeting greatly helped to ensure that all stakeholders were clear on the purpose and agreed on the priorities for the evaluation. The meetings also provided opportunity to clarify stakeholder roles in the evaluation and exactly what to expect at different stages.

Evaluation Planning Meeting - Enhanced Ownership of the Evaluation Process

n (Evaluators) = 14

n (Partners) = 26



“the pre evaluation planning meeting was critical - it spelt out each stakeholders role and the planning and preparation that needed to be done to ensure smooth implementation of the research.”

Partner

“They (Pact) were extremely involved which allowed us not to be lost and get overwhelmed by the (evaluation) process.”

“Meeting gave us a picture of the programme we were to evaluate and we agreed on the instruments to use. It was a productive experience”. Evaluator

78.6% of evaluators agreed/strongly agreed that stakeholder engagement processes had led to enhanced shared understanding and consensus on the key evaluation questions and approach.

74% of partners reported that through participation in these evaluations, they had acquired more experience in engaging with external evaluators.

“In fact it was the first external review that we felt we could connect to in a constructive manner, they were not stuck in theoretical arrogance (which is often the case) and really tried to understand the project and to provide insights into what worked and what did not - which is exactly what we need on the ground”. Respondent to partner survey

Several respondents however, felt that perhaps more time was needed for these planning sessions in order to deepen discussions related to logistical planning and to provide more information on the context for the benefit of the evaluation team.

“The data gathering process and identification of participants required additional refinement and a lot of logistical planning due to the sampling strategy required and the context of the study.”

Evaluator

“More emphasis and attention of the details on management of the fieldwork could have streamlined and avoided issues that emerged.” Partner

Similar to the partners, evaluators also rated the evaluation planning sessions very highly. 78.6% agreed/strongly agreed that the sessions had helped in identifying a suitable design and in identifying suitable respondents. 71 % agreed/strongly agreed that the sessions helped in effective planning of data gathering processes.

“We found the facilitation role of Pact extremely valuable - they moderated the relationship between the evaluand and the evaluator and provided leadership when it was needed, to either party.”

Evaluator

Table 1: Feedback on Level of Engagement /Participation of Evaluand in Planning and Decision Making

	 Good	 Fair	 Not Good
In development of the terms of reference (n= 25 : partners feedback)	64%	28%	8%
In planning of field work (n= 13 : evaluators feedback)	61.5%	30.7%	7.6%
In decisions on key questions and approach (n= 13 : evaluators feedback)	53.8%	30.7%	15.4%
In review and feedback on reports (n= 23 : partners feedback)	86.9%	13%	0%

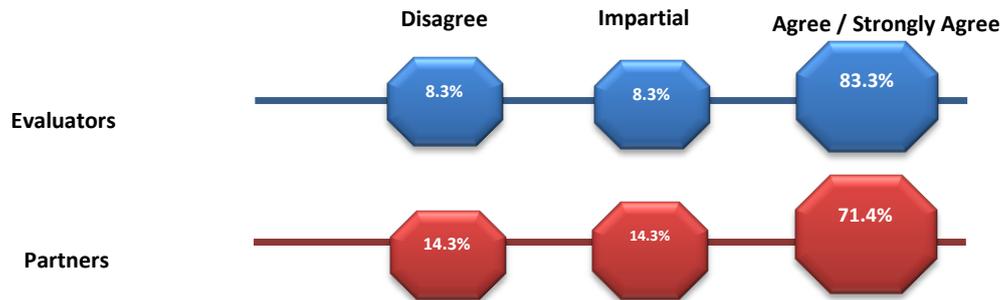
Review/ feedback on evaluation reports & the Feedback Meetings:

Respondents provided generally positive comments on the evaluation feedback meeting and felt that it had helped greatly in enhancing understanding of the report and helping stakeholders to reach consensus on the overall conclusions. 83.3% of evaluators and 71.4% of partners agreed/strongly agreed with these sentiments.

The Evaluation Feedback Meeting helped to Reach Consensus on the Overall Conclusions

n (Evaluators) = 12

n (Partners) = 21



On whether the meeting had enabled the identification of feasible recommendations, there was more disparity in the feedback, with 91.66% of evaluators agreeing/agreeing strongly compared to just 61.90% of partners.

Evaluation Commissioner Role

Rating of the quality of TORs

Evaluators were asked to rate the TORs based on whether the evaluation purpose and questions were clear and whether sufficient background information was provided on the program to be evaluated. 92.8% reported that they agreed/agreed strongly that the evaluation purpose was clear, while 85.7% reported similarly on clarity of evaluation questions. 71.4% agreed that sufficient background information had been provided.

“The TOR was very clear - the tables outlining the research questions from different stakeholders were especially useful.” Evaluator

However, some evaluators felt that more information was needed to effectively respond to the request for proposals.

“The TOR did not provide sufficient and correct information on the ground ..., consequently it was difficult costing the evaluation.”

Scope of work and budget

Regarding the scope of work, the majority (76.92%) agreed/strongly agreed that this as stated concisely in the contract. However with regards to the budget, several evaluators reported experiencing challenges with the process and in meeting Pact’s requirement of comprehensive budgets ahead of issuing the contract.

A common challenge reported by a number of evaluators was that due to the budget being negotiated ahead of the planning meeting, evaluators found that they didn’t have sufficient information to make informed decisions about all the line items. This may have contributed some budgets being found to be insufficient for the scope of work. A number of respondents also found

the budget negotiation process too long, requiring substantial investment of time in order to provide all the required information before approval could be provided.

“As the budget was finalised prior to the evaluation planning meeting, it was impossible to adjust based on the final field work plan.” Evaluator

“The strict regulations regarding the budget force the researchers to plan well, but takes so much time.” Evaluator

Table 2: Evaluators Feedback on Fairness of Budget Negotiated for the Evaluation

	 Agreed	 Neutral	 Disagreed
The final budget negotiated was reasonable for the evaluation (n= 13 : evaluators feedback)	46.15%	23.07%	30.76%

The sequencing of budgeting versus planning of the evaluation resulted from the fact that Pact needed to have issued a contract before the evaluator could commence work. As such, a budget and SOW had to be finalised before. Evaluators also reported that it was difficult to identify all the key line items for the budget before the engaging with the evaluand. Once this happened though, several issues about the context and required approach became clearer, and new budgetary requirements were identified. However as the contracting mechanisms used were fixed price contracts, there was no room for flexibility after the contracts had been issued.

“The agreement on a budget took very long because of the detail expected in the budget. Eventually everything was specified but with no room for changes or unforeseen circumstances. That means that we completely under-budgeted - because did not have any leverage built in for not getting the required sample size, translations taking longer than planned, report writing taking longer than planned and we did not include an editor in the budget.” Evaluator

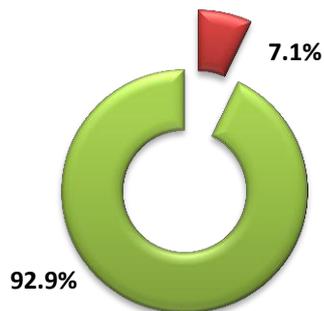
Some of the evaluators however also found the detailed budgeting process quite useful as it enabled them identify several aspects of work that they hadn’t initially accounted for. Respondents also acknowledged the valuable assistance they received from the contracts team at Pact in addressing the requirements.

“Very good systems in place which also helped us to improve the way implementation plans are generally done on other projects too. Thank you for this learning experience.” Evaluator

Pacts' monitoring of the evaluation process and overall level of involvement

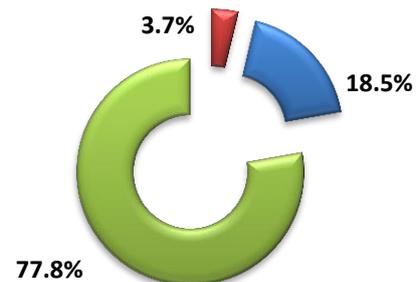
Pact's monitoring of the evaluation process rated highly and evaluators found it helpful.

Pact's Approach of Monitoring the Progress of Evaluation Implementation was Adequate
(Evaluators, n = 14)



■ Disagree ■ Agree / Strongly Agree

Pact's Approach of Monitoring the Progress of Evaluation Implementation was Adequate
(Partners, n = 27)



■ Disagree ■ Impartial ■ Agree / Strongly Agree

Some interesting quotes from the evaluators;

"The relationship was one of encouragement and support and not an evaluative and punishing relationship. That created a positive climate to work in and enabled us to work effectively"

"this was well done with little interference."

"We found the facilitation role of Pact extremely valuable - they moderated the relationship between the evaluand and the evaluator and provided leadership when it was needed, to either party."

"Regular contact and availability of managing staff was superb and expedited fieldwork"

"Pact did a sterling job in this area. The guidance Pact gave was helpful and constructive"

Evaluators generally agreed that Pacts level of involvement was appropriate, with 78.5% agreeing/strongly agreeing with this.

Table 3: Evaluators Feedback on Pact Level of Involvement

		 Agreed	 Neutral	 Disagreed
Pacts level of involvement in the evaluation was appropriate	Evaluators feedback (n= 14)	78.57%	14.28%	7.14%
	Partners feedback (n= 28)	71.42%	25.0%	3.57%

Evaluation Peer Review/Support Role

Evaluators were requested to rate Pacts performance with regards to the quality of technical support provided at different stages of the evaluation. The feedback was largely positive and highlighted the value evaluators place on having peer support while making key decisions on the evaluation as well as when issue arise during the process.

“It was a pleasure to work with PACT staff as they had knowledge about evaluation methodology and research. They fed technical expertise into the process of sampling and design of the research. usually organisations lack the technical knowledge so we are left very much to make up our minds about approach on our own - it was great to have support. They also gave technical support during the process of data collection if we had a query” Evaluator

Table 4: Evaluators Feedback on Rating of Pact’s Technical Input /Support

		 Good	 Fair	 Not Good
Rating of Pact’s Technical Input /Support on	Evaluation planning (n=13)	84.6%	15.38%	0%
	Evaluation design (n=13)	92.30%	7.6%	0%
	Sampling approach (n=14)	85.71%	7.14%	7.14%
	Data collection methods (n=13)	76.92%	23.07%	0%
	Feedback/comments on deliverables (n=14)	71.4%	14.28%	14.28%

The quotes below are illustrative of evaluators’ sentiments with regards to technical support provided.

“The technical input was particularly useful. We also appreciated the fact that our own expertise was recognised and used - we have particular skills in working with children and the Pact staff trusted us to do this even though our approaches are sometimes a little unconventional. They were keen to learn from our expertise and were not rigid in their approach at all.”

“Professionalism of staff, Exceptional knowledge about M & E Availability Readiness to provide constructive criticism and to seek collective solutions to fieldwork problems as they arise.”

“Another very helpful aspect was the support they gave us in the field when we had some difficulties with field staff in the organisation we were evaluating. Pact staff were quick to help us get what we needed in order to do the evaluation.”

Overall Feedback on Influence of Pact’s Approach on Evaluation Quality and Use

Overall, partners and evaluators generally agreed that Pacts approach enhanced the quality of the evaluations as is evident from the table below.

Table 5: Feedback on whether Pact’s Approach Enhanced Evaluation Quality

	 Agreed	 Neutral	 Disagreed
Pact's approach of managing the evaluation enhanced quality (n= 14 : evaluators feedback)	78.57%	21.42%	0%
Pact's approach of managing the evaluation enhanced quality (n= 28 : partners feedback)	85.71%	10.71%	3.57%

Evaluators highlights several ways in which quality had been enhanced including the support in planning and implementation of the evaluation and the technical support provided in improving the quality of reports. Below are some illustrative quotes;

“The feedback on the report was very useful as it gave us clear direction about the kind of report needed by USAID. The changes we needed to make were explained clearly. This made the second contract much easier to write up as we knew what was needed. The main lesson here was that the report needs to be concise while being detailed”.

“Highly experienced and skilled PACT staff resulted in concise feedback on reports and therefore resulted in a good quality report.”

“We feel positive about this meeting. It helped to align our final recommendations better to the needs of the client.”

“Some of the points raised at the first feedback meeting were very valid and did lead to an improved product.”

Partners also highlighted several aspects of the approach that enhanced quality. Many of these related to their level of engagement and participation, which were generally rated very highly. Partners also appreciated the quality of final products and the practical recommendations provided for program strengthening. In some cases however, partners also felt that the quality of reports was lacking, particularly in the depth of analysis provided by the evaluator.

“We were very impressed with the final result - thought it was fair and highlighted important sections but also had constructive recommendations”

“It has been handy to have a third party assist with helping to frame the evaluation and get a tight design done. The disadvantage of a third party management of an evaluation is that the programme feels a bit more removed from the outcomes of the evaluation - with not being directly able to influence presentation of the results, how it is contextualised etc”

“The findings of the evaluation could have been richer in terms of analysis - this was through no fault of PACT's but seemed to be more due to the level of competence applied by the evaluation agency.”

Several examples were provided on how the evaluation findings were being used by partner organisations particularly in improving program implementation strategies and addressing gaps identified by the evaluations. Partners highlighted the value gained from having external evaluation results to support applications for new funding as well as for use as baselines for new programs. Some of the partners however also underlined frustration with the fact that the evaluation had come too late for them to influence current programs as they were in final months of implementation. Many however acknowledged that the evaluations provided great insights into required changes for future programs.

“The evaluation was quoted, and the findings were used to inform the planning, in a recent application for funding to USAID. Having an external evaluation was listed as a strength by USAID in their response to the application.”

“The evaluation will serve as a baseline for future projects. It will inform the planning for future projects.”

“...we did no doubt benefit from learning with regard to some practices and have applied some of that learning already, both within the Pefar programme as well as other projects.”

“It was clear to us from the evaluation report that even though we have been involved in HCT (HIV counselling and testing) as an organisation, we had not marketed its effectiveness to the community and schools that we work in.”

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence suggests that Pact's evaluation management approach has been highly successful in achieving the following;

- ✓ Effective collaboration by stakeholders in the planning, design and implementation of evaluations. Good communication, evaluation technical capacity and a proactive management approach were identified as key contributors to success
- ✓ The approach increased opportunities for effective participation of partner staff in the evaluations. This was greatly valued by organisations
- ✓ Partner staff gained practical experiences in evaluation, which they feel increased their knowledge and skills. Some respondents stated that they had not been actively engaged in or appreciated the value of external evaluations before this.
- ✓ In all cases, Pact helped to enhance the quality of the evaluation products as acknowledged by evaluators as well as partners. Contributors to quality strengthening include Pact's technical input, effective contract management processes, close coordination and communication among stakeholders.
- ✓ Evaluations have been used by several partner organisations to identify strategies for strengthening future programs. In some cases, partners have benefited from the evaluations by being able to show-case effectiveness of their approach in support of new funding proposals.

The evidence also highlights a number of areas that require review and strengthening including the following;

- ✓ Budgeting was clearly a challenge for most contractors, with many finding this to be the biggest shortcoming with the evaluation. Questions are raised regarding how much (\$\$) is realistic for what scope of work. The challenging contextual issues such as difficulties in finding evaluation respondents especially in rural areas coupled with all sorts of unpredictable emerging challenges during the field work phase make effective budgeting difficult. More information about the evaluation context by the evaluators is essential for better budget forecasting.
- ✓ Sequencing of processes related to negotiating the contracts and those related to planning the evaluation require review. It's evident that budgeting challenges were in part due to lack of sufficient information by the evaluators. Budgeting processes are likely to be more effective if done after the planning meeting with the evaluand as opposed to before.
- ✓ Time allocation for the different phases of the evaluation may require review. In several instances, respondents identified time constraints as a drawback to achieving greater success such as in the planning and fieldwork phases.

- ✓ Although most respondents reported positively on the value of feedback meetings, a number found them limiting in terms of openness to discuss issues due to the presence of the donor. It may be useful for evaluators to provide feedback in two different sessions, one targeting the partner organisation and the second meeting targeting a broader audience including the Donors. Partners felt that they couldn't openly discuss challenges in the presence of the donor.
- ✓ Although much effort was expended on solicitation processes with the intention of identifying high quality contractors, this was not always achieved. In some cases, evaluators required so much technical support that once was left wondering if it was worth contracting the evaluation out in the first place. Analytical and report writing skills seem to be the biggest areas of weakness among evaluators.
- ✓ Evaluation use was/will be somewhat limited by timing, as partners are transitioning out from current funding mechanism. In some cases, organisations are not guaranteed future funding, which brings into question the extent to which some of the programs may be sustainable.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Manager's skills and competencies

In low resources settings characterised by a limited pool of highly skilled evaluators and low evaluation capacity among users, managers are likely to play a critical role in ensuring evaluation quality. Such individuals must not only be effective & proactive managers with ability to drive and monitor the evaluation process, but must also be knowledgeable about evaluation techniques and key considerations for design and methodological choices. Technical input by managers in the planning, design and critiquing/review of evaluation products was found to be highly beneficial in Pacts experience. The right balance between management skills and technical know-how is needed in order to contribute to quality strengthening at different levels

Manager Roles

Evidence suggests that managers must play multiple roles at different levels in order to ensure that all the different stakeholders are supported to participate effectively in the process. All four roles; Capacity builder; evaluation broker, commissioner and Peer reviewer/supporter are essential in enabling successful evaluations. Maintaining effective communication between all parties throughout the evaluation process helps lessen challenges and improved evaluation quality. The context is an essential consideration and some of these roles may be less important in settings where evaluation users are highly developed organisations, and skilled/ highly resourced evaluators are in abundance.

Solicitation processes

In the case of South Africa and other similar contexts where only a few experienced evaluators can be found, there is need to consider more rigorous processes for checking evaluator competencies against the requirements of the evaluation. This may require going beyond the standard practice of

assessing the quality of response to request for proposals, to include face to face interviews and proactive reference checks.

Contract negotiation and specifications

A two-step process whereby evaluators are initially contracted to work on the planning phase, followed by a second contract for implementing the evaluation is recommended. This approach makes it feasible for evaluators to work out details for evaluation requirements through engaging with key stakeholders, thereby allowing for more effective budgeting.

Another key lesson is that contracts must specify upfront what the final product should look like. That way, evaluators are able to ensure that all requirements for reporting are addressed in the planning and implementation phase.

Lastly, contractors that make use of sub-contractors, should be required to disclose this upfront and to seek approval for the distribution of the scope work between parties. This requirement is likely to help increase transparency, as well as clarity of expectations and commitments by all parties concerned.

REFERENCES

Kemmis S. (1986). The seven principles of program evaluation in curriculum development and innovation. In *New directions in Educational Evaluations*, House Ernest R (Eds.) Routedledge Falmer, Abington Oxon. Pages 117-133.

Baizerman, M., & Compton, D.W. (2009). A perspective on managing evaluation. In D.W. Compton and M. Baizerman (Eds), *Managing program evaluation: towards explicating a professional practice. New Directions for Evaluation*, 121, 7-15.

Bell, J.B. (2004). Managing evaluation projects. In J. S. Wholey, H. P Hatry, and K Newcomer (Eds), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (2nd ed., pp 571-603. San Francisco: Jessey-Bass

Newcomer, K. (2004) How might we strengthen evaluation capacity to manage evaluation contracts? *American journal of Evaluation*. 25:209-218

Dibella, A. (1990) The research managers role in encouraging evaluation use. *American journal of Evaluation*. 11:115-119

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are particularly grateful for the insight, technical support and guidance provided by USAID staff in South Africa: Anita Sampson, Naletsana Masango and Cephas Goldman. We are equally grateful for the support and technical input of our colleagues at Pact: Malika Magagula, Vincent Titus, Daniel Bakken, Mathabo Molobi, Shawn Malone and Irene Gathinji. This study is made possible by the staff from partner organizations and evaluation consultants that participated in the feedback surveys. We are most grateful for their support. We further extend our appreciation for the hard work of our monitoring and evaluation officer, Ndinda Makina.

For more information email: Rsonko@pactworld.org or drritans@hotmail.com