TYPES OF EVALUATION

There are many different types of evaluation. Each type has its own set of processes and/or principles. Many factors influence decisions over what type of evaluation to use. Evaluations can be categorised according to their purpose, who conducts them, when they are carried out, the broad approach used, and cross-cutting themes. Many CSO evaluations don't use any particular methodology or approach.

There are many different types of evaluation. Each type has its own set of processes and/or principles. Sometimes the list can seem a bit overwhelming, especially for those new to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). This paper categorises and explains the key features of common types of evaluation. The categorisation is based on five criteria (see ActionAid (2016), based on IFRC (2011)). The criteria are:

- the purpose of the evaluation;
- who conducts the evaluation;
- when the evaluation is carried out;
- the general approach used; and
- cross-cutting themes.

It is important to note that the different types of evaluation described in this paper are not mutually exclusive. For example, an evaluation can be both an impact evaluation and an external evaluation at the same time. Or it can be a summative evaluation and a participatory evaluation.

There are many factors that can influence decisions over which type of evaluation to use. These include (but are not limited to):

- the main stated purpose or purposes of the evaluation;
- the primary stakeholders that will use any findings or recommendations;
- the evaluation questions that need to be answered;
- the context in which a project or programme is operating;
- the type of work being evaluated;
- the budget available for the evaluation;
- the expertise necessary and / or available to carry out the evaluation;
- the extent of participation of different stakeholders required;
- the timing of the evaluation; and
- the extent to which an evaluation has been planned from the start of a project or programme.

For the remainder of this paper, for simplicity's sake, it is assumed that the focus of the evaluation will be a project or programme, unless otherwise stated. However, it is possible for evaluations to focus on many other levels, including organisations, strategies, sectors, training courses, events, policies, funding mechanisms, relationships and partnerships, to name just a few.

The purpose of the evaluation

Evaluations may be categorised according to their purpose. This is perhaps the most important criteria of all, because the purpose of an evaluation often dictates who carries out the evaluation, how it is carried out, and when it is carried out. The two types of evaluation described below – formative and summative – are not mutually exclusive. Many evaluations contain a bit of both. But one purpose is usually more dominant.

- A **formative** evaluation is normally carried out during a project or programme, often at the mid-point. The purpose of a formative evaluation is to help shape the future of the project or programme concerned, and thereby improve performance. A formative evaluation tends to be more focused on learning and management than accountability.

- By contrast, a **summative** evaluation is often carried out at the end of a project or programme. It is usually designed to assess what was achieved, and how. Summative evaluations are often implemented when a project or programme has ended, or is about to end, and it is no longer possible to make changes to that project or programme. However, lessons may still be learned that could help shape future interventions.

Who conducts the evaluation

Another way of categorising evaluations is according to who conducts the evaluation. Most evaluations conform to one of the following categories.

- **External or independent** evaluations are carried out by a person or team who are not part of the project or programme being evaluated, or part of the organisation carrying out the project or programme. This is probably the most common type of evaluation. The rationale is that external people are more likely to be objective in their assessment of performance than project or programme staff. External people may also bring expertise that is not normally available within the project or programme.

- An **internal or self**-evaluation is carried out by staff who are part of a project or programme. Most monitoring systems have some degree of self-evaluation. This is because staff are regularly asked to collect and analyse information on change throughout the course of a

project or programme. But where specific resources are made available to do this in more depth it is known as an internal evaluation. Internal evaluations are sometimes perceived by donors as being more subjective or biased than external evaluations, because people are being asked to judge their own work. For this reason, self-evaluations are more often focused on learning than accountability.

- Many large agencies, such as UN bodies and the World Bank, have separate evaluation units that carry out evaluations across their organisation. These are known as **semi-independent** evaluations. The units are part of the organisation running the project or programme, and the people employed by those units often have extensive knowledge of the organisation itself. But they are not part of the project or programme being evaluated.

- A **joint** evaluation can mean one of two things. Firstly, it can mean an evaluation carried out by both internal and external people. This means getting the best of both worlds – having internal staff who know the context, whilst also bringing in external people with potentially greater expertise and / or objectivity. Secondly, a joint evaluation may refer to an evaluation that involves people from different organisations. For example, this could be where a number of different donors fund the same intervention, or where several different project partners collaborate within an evaluation of a programme.

- **Peer** evaluations are carried out by staff from the same organisation but from a different project or programme to the one being evaluated. For example, in larger NGOs it is common to ask staff from one region (e.g. Africa or Asia) to conduct an evaluation of a project or programme in a different region. This has the great advantage of facilitating learning between different parts of an organisation. Again, objectivity is sometimes raised as a challenge.

- A **participatory** evaluation emphasises the participation of key stakeholders, especially the intended beneficiaries of a project or programme. Sometimes, beneficiaries are only involved in the collection, analysis and use of data (see section below on cross-cutting themes). But sometimes the beneficiaries can lead the process themselves.

When the evaluation is carried out

Some evaluations are categorised according to when they are carried out, relative to a project or programme.

- Sometimes known as a mid-term review, a **mid-term** evaluation is carried out halfway through a project or programme. It is generally designed to assess whether or not a project or programme is on track, and what could be done differently. A mid-term evaluation is therefore often a formative evaluation, even though it may describe progress against objectives.

- A **final** evaluation is carried out at the end of a project or programme, and tends to focus more on what has

been achieved (or what has changed) and why. It is therefore often described as a summative evaluation. Many donors insist on final evaluations as a condition of funding.

- **End of phase** evaluations are used in multi-phase initiatives. They are summative in that they seek to understanding what has been achieved in the current phase, and formative in that they shape decisions for the next phase. End of phase evaluations are more commonly used in complex projects or programmes, operating in difficult or uncertain environments.

- An **ex-post** evaluation is carried out a while after a project or programme has finished. This can be anything from six months to ten years afterwards. Ex-post evaluations are normally designed to address issues of impact and sustainability. They are almost entirely summative.

- A final type of evaluation in this categorisation is a **real-time** evaluation (RTE). RTEs are primarily designed to be used in emergency settings, and are often carried out near to the start of a humanitarian project or programme. Their purpose is to provide feedback in real time to those managing the project or programme. They are almost entirely formative in nature.

General approaches

There are a few types of evaluation that can loosely be categorised under broad approaches. These are described below. (Note that a single evaluation can conform to multiple broad approaches).

- A **process** evaluation specifically focuses on internal project or programme issues. It might include assessments of whether activities have been carried out, the quality of work conducted, how internal management practices have affected work, and any other internal issue relevant to the process of delivering a development intervention.

- At the other end of the scale, an **impact** evaluation is carried out to assess the impact of a piece of work. Whilst most evaluations seek to assess impact to some degree or other, an impact evaluation is normally an evaluation with an explicit and robust methodology (either quantitative or qualitative or both) designed to establish change and causality (contribution to that change). Impact evaluations tend to be more expensive than other kinds of evaluation, because they cannot be done quickly or cheaply.

- A **theory-based** evaluation starts with a theory of change that shows how a project or programme should work, and maps out the causal pathways between interventions and desired changes. Sometimes, the theory of change is developed before an evaluation is commissioned. Sometimes, it is developed (or adapted) as part of the evaluation. A theory-based evaluation normally seeks to collect evidence at different stages along the theory of change to establish what has changed and why. It therefore seeks to test the theory.

Many impact evaluations are also theory-based evaluations.

- **Case-based** evaluations try to systematically investigate change in a sample of cases in order to draw wider conclusions. They are often carried out in situations where there are too few overall cases to conduct any kind of quantitative analysis (e.g. where a programme has attempted to influence a small number of government policies, or develop capacity in a small number of institutions). Case-based evaluations usually rely on the development and analysis of a series of case studies, and comparisons across those case studies.

- A **realist** evaluation is a specific type of theory-based evaluation. It is based on a philosophy (realism), and is primarily concerned with identifying causal mechanisms. This means understanding what works, in which circumstances, and for whom. Realist evaluations pay particular attention to how projects and programmes are interpreted by, and influence, stakeholders in different circumstances and situations.

- **Synthesis** evaluations bring together a range of separate evaluation reports on a similar theme into a single report in order to generate common findings and conclusions. They are mostly used by larger agencies that conduct multiple evaluations across different sectors or geographical locations.

- In theory, **meta**-evaluations are used to assess the evaluation process itself. They are basically *'evaluations of evaluations'* and are often used to assess compliance with evaluation policies, and see how well evaluations are conducted and used across an organisation. However, meta-evaluation and synthesis evaluations are sometimes understood as the same thing.

- **Developmental** evaluation refers to long-term, partnering relationships between evaluators and those engaged in development initiatives. It is mostly used in situations where projects and programmes are innovative, or carried out in complex situations. Developmental evaluation processes are designed to support decision-making on an ongoing basis.

It is important to note that many CSO evaluations are general in nature, and don't use any identifiable methodology or approach. CSO evaluations often involve a light-touch review of progress and lessons learned, based on a literature review, a few simple data collection exercises, and discussions with different stakeholders. ActionAid (2016) calls these descriptive evaluations. They describe what has been done and/or achieved by a project or programme, but with less analytical rigour.

Cross-cutting approaches

The evaluation types described below are broadly cross-cutting. They can be adopted alongside any other type of evaluation. In some cases two or more cross-cutting approaches can be used in a single evaluation. On the other hand, many evaluations use none of these approaches.

- **Utilisation-focused** evaluation is an approach based on the principle that an evaluation should be judged on its usefulness to its intended users. It has two essential elements. Firstly, the primary intended users of the evaluation must be clearly identified and personally engaged at the beginning of the evaluation process. Secondly, evaluators must ensure that these intended users guide all other decisions during the evaluation process. Utilisation-focused approaches are designed to maximise the probability of findings being used.

- A **gender-responsive** evaluation has two essential components: what the evaluation examines, and how it is undertaken. A gender-responsive evaluation should assess the degree to which gender and power relationships have changed because of an intervention. A gender-responsive evaluation should also be a process that is inclusive, participatory and respectful. Above all else, gender-responsive evaluations seek to ensure that women can influence and benefit from the process of evaluation.

- Many gender-responsive evaluations contain elements of **feminist** evaluation approaches. However, feminist approaches to evaluation are often keener to explore and challenge inequalities, rather than simply identifying, documenting and understanding them.

- **Equity-focused** evaluations explore the equity dimensions of different projects and programmes. They tend to use qualitative inquiry to explore behavioural change, and complex social processes and attitudes. They also attempt to collect information on hard-to-reach or socially excluded groups.

- As stated above, **participatory** evaluations can be led by the intended beneficiaries of a project or programme. More often, however, intended beneficiaries are involved to some degree in decisions over the collection, analysis and use of information. In a participatory evaluation, data is not just extracted from a community. Instead communities are supported to help generate findings and act accordingly.

- An **empowerment** evaluation is a specific form of participatory evaluation. It seeks to provide communities with the tools and knowledge they need to better understand their own situation, and take action to improve their own lives.

Evaluations using different methodological approaches

Finally, evaluations may also be categorised according to the primary methodology used to collect and analyse information. Almost all evaluations use common tools such as interviews, observation and focus group discussions. But some use specific methodologies such as randomised control trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental approaches or qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). A list and explanation of many different tools and methods used for data collection and analysis within evaluations can be found in the data collection section of the M&E Universe.

Further reading and resources

This section of the M&E Universe contains a number of short papers on specific types of evaluation. These are as follows:

▶ Case-based evaluation   ▶ Developmental evaluation

▶ Gender-responsive evaluation   ▶ Impact evaluation

▶ Participatory evaluation   ▶ Process evaluation

▶ Realist evaluation   ▶ Real-time evaluation

▶ Theory-based evaluation   ▶ Utilisation-focused evaluation

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has produced a useful guide to different types of evaluation (see http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/monitoring/IFRC-ME-Guide-8-2011.pdf).

BOND has pioneered an evaluation tool that can be used to select different types of evaluation. This can be accessed at https://www.bond.org.uk/resources/evaluation-methods-tool.

The Better Evaluation website (www.betterevaluation.org) contains the largest set of resources in the world covering evaluation in the social development sector. The site offers step-by-step guidance for those managing or implementing evaluations. Experienced evaluators or those with an interest in evaluation are recommended to go to that site and search through the different materials.

References

- ActionAid (2016). *How to… Select a Methodological Approach for the Evaluation*. Evaluation Technical Briefing Note, #7. ActionAid, UK.
- IFRC (2011). *Project/programme Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Guide*. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Geneva, 2011.

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