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THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT EVALUATION

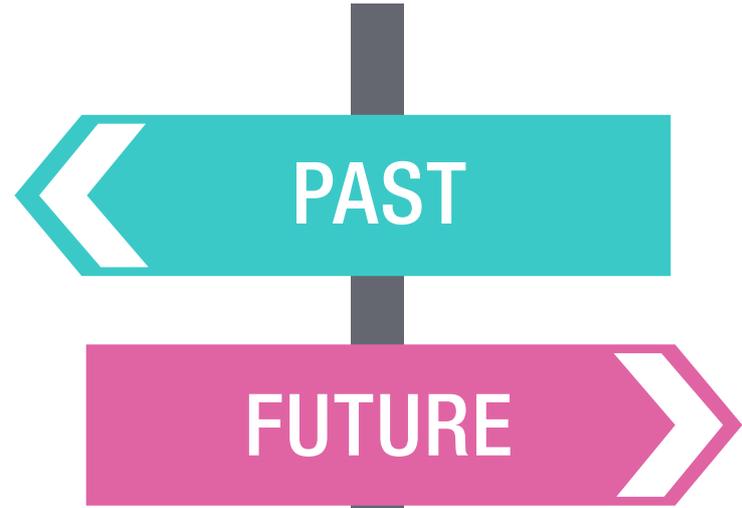


1

WE CAN'T DO DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT IT

Development often involves working with scarce resources in uncertain and risky environments. To spend these resources wisely, we have to understand what works, what doesn't work – and why.

That's why good evaluation is essential. It is a systematic process to assess the value of our activities and learn from them to inform future decisions.



2

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

Some evaluations make broad statements about 'success'.

Good evaluations go beyond this and ask: what specific changes occurred (both positive and negative, intended and unintended), how and, for whom? It applies transparent criteria or standards to judge to what extent the project was worthwhile.

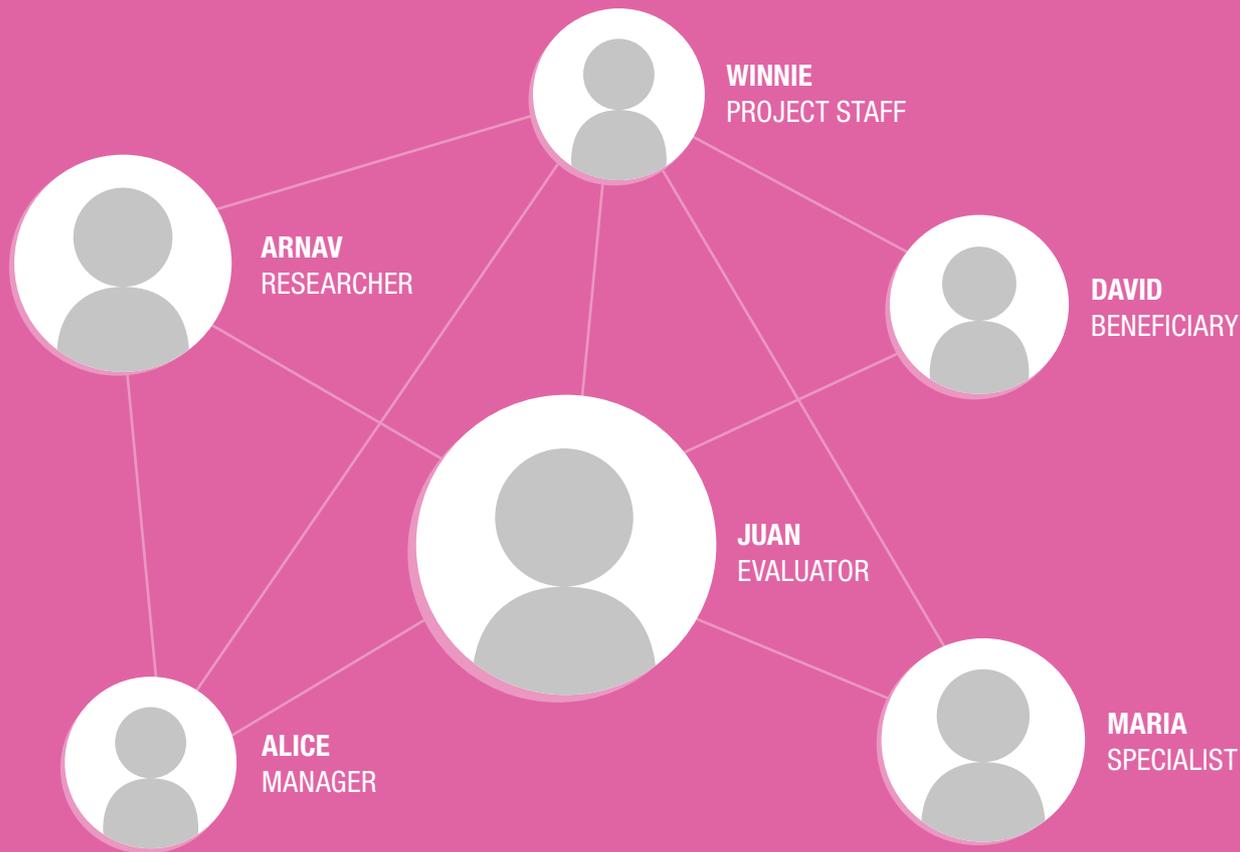


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EVALUATION INVOLVES EVERYONE

Deciding who should do evaluation depends on time, resources available and the purpose of the evaluation. It is often undertaken by skilled external consultants or in-house specialists, but project staff, funders, participants and beneficiaries all play an essential role. Good evaluation has the potential to give people a real say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Develop your evaluation skills at:
www.tinyurl.com/BetterEvaluation-Skills



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MONITORING AND EVALUATION ARE NOT THE SAME THING

Although interlinked, they are two distinct processes.

Monitoring is an ongoing system of gathering information and tracking project performance. Indicators are used to measure progress and if a project is on track to achieve the desired results.

Evaluation aims to assess the overall relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability or impact of the project design, implementation and outcomes in order to support decisions about what to do next.



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'FAILURES' ARE IMPORTANT

Evaluation is sometimes driven by desire to show that a project was successful or worthwhile. Yet evaluations will almost always show mixed results. Understanding and sharing what doesn't work is just as important as what does.



EXAMPLE

An evaluation of a health, education and water programme in Mali revealed that a failure to establish terms of engagement led to divisions and miscommunication affecting the programme's implementation. 'Results improved after the organisation, community leaders and church representatives developed a memorandum of understanding: www.admittingfailure.org/failure/nicole-mcIellan-greg-madeley/

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EVALUATIONS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

There are different types of evaluation for different purposes. Common types include: impact evaluation, performance assessment, economic evaluation, and process evaluation. They can be short or long term and be done by one person or entire teams.

There is also no one best method for evaluation. Evaluations often use a combination of methods to gather, analyse and interpret information. Deciding which method will depend on the evaluation purpose, the context, and the resources and information available.



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EVALUATION IS QUESTION-DRIVEN

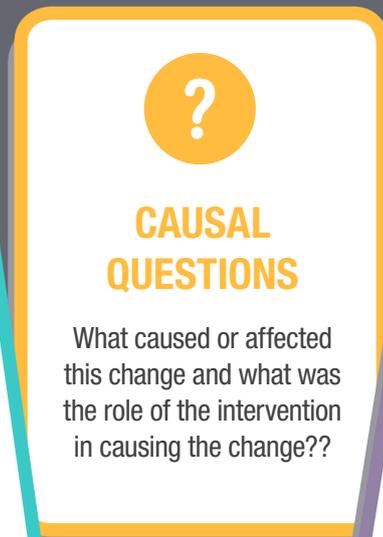
Credible, question-led evaluation will show mixed results and recognising this is an important part of the learning process.

Begin by asking questions about the purpose and scope of the evaluation: what needs to be evaluated? Who needs the information? Why do they need it? What data or resources are available?

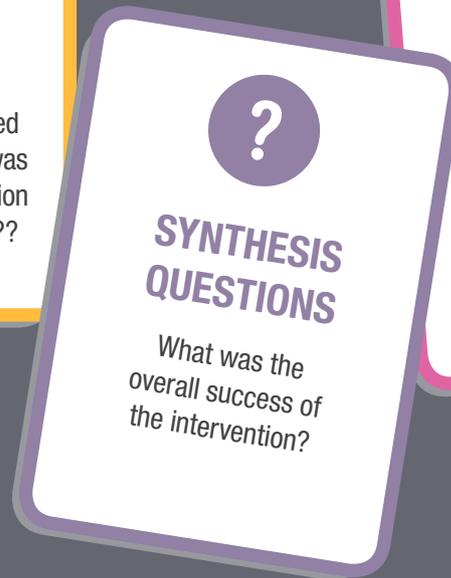
Then, identify the specific evaluation questions.
Four types of question should drive the process:



A white card with a teal border and a teal question mark icon at the top. The text reads: **DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS**
What has happened or what has changed?



A white card with an orange border and an orange question mark icon at the top. The text reads: **CAUSAL QUESTIONS**
What caused or affected this change and what was the role of the intervention in causing the change??



A white card with a purple border and a purple question mark icon at the top. The text reads: **SYNTHESIS QUESTIONS**
What was the overall success of the intervention?

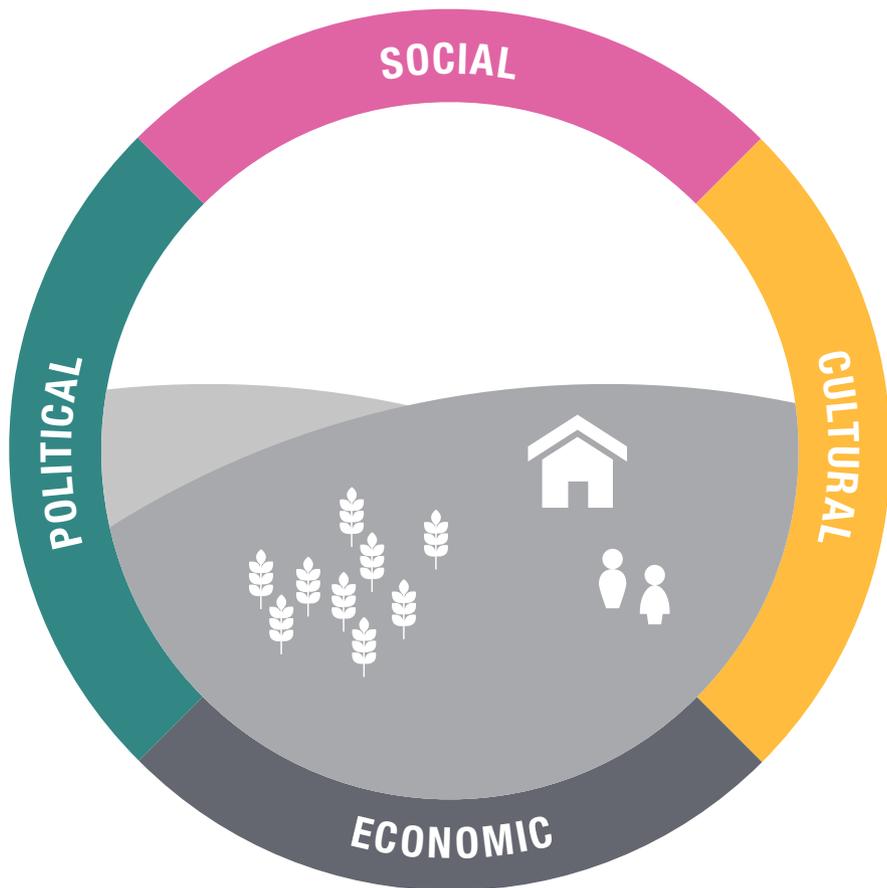


A white card with a pink border and a pink question mark icon at the top. The text reads: **ACTION QUESTIONS**
What should happen next?

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CONTEXT IS PARAMOUNT

Evaluation must take social, cultural, economic and political contexts into account. Crucially, what works in one context may not be replicable in another.



EXAMPLE

To replicate the success of an initiative in Tanzania that saw an increase in crop yield, the evaluation must consider external factors such as weather patterns, local attitudes, or government incentives for using new technologies.

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IT IS NOT JUST AT THE END

Evaluation can take place in formal and informal settings throughout a project's life, not just at the end. Informal evaluations can be undertaken on a daily basis, during the researching, designing, managing or administering of a project.

The more evaluation questions and processes are integrated into a project, the more useful evaluation systems will become. In complex initiatives, evaluation should be planned and undertaken by evaluators from the outset, so that learning is fed back into the project design and implementation.



10

FINDINGS NEED TO BE COMMUNICATED

Findings inform what happens next in a project and can influence broader policy decisions. You can encourage people to use the evaluation's findings by involving them in the evaluation process. Making reports publicly available can also help others to improve practice.

Evaluators can use multiple formats to effectively communicate findings to different groups, from infographics and multimedia to community theatre.

Find out more: www.tinyurl.com/BetterEvaluation-Use



ANNE BUFFARDI
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**Research
& Policy in
Development**

Design: Lucy Peers

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