Unpacking the 'E' in M&E:
FAQs on Evaluation

Purpose of this resource

This document provides step-by step guidance for health partnerships on how to effectively carry out an evaluation of their projects and partnerships in the form of commonly asked questions.

Q: What is an evaluation?

A: An evaluation is a structured way of reviewing and assessing how well a project, a programme, an organisation, or a partnership has met its objectives and overall goal. Importantly, it is also an opportunity to reflect on the lessons you have learnt.

Q: How is evaluation different to monitoring?

A: An evaluation goes beyond monitoring, which involves the assessment of your project's activities and immediate results. An evaluation assesses the value and impact of a project against its overall aim. Typically, it will analyse a project under the headings of relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability as described in OECD/DAC guidelines for evaluation. For example:

> *Every three months as part of their project delivery, a partnership monitors the understanding of infection prevention control (IPC) principles of hospital staff trained in hand hygiene and their uptake of good practice on the wards.*

> *At the end of their project, the partnership would like to find out if the staff's knowledge of IPC has been sustained. Therefore they will evaluate the extent to which IPC skills have been embedded into practice.*

An evaluation is also the opportunity to review your partnership including what are its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for growth and threats. These questions also form the elements of the SWOT analysis method which could be helpful to consider here.

> *As well as evaluating their project, the partnership would like to gain a better understanding of the sustainability of their work, for instance, are they engaging with the right stakeholders to ensure continuity and local ownership? The answers to this question will inform their future work and collaborations.*

A good evaluation may also uncover the unintended results – positive and negative – of a project and partnership.

> *The evaluation revealed that although IPC knowledge has been sustained, hospital staff are unable to fully abide to hand hygiene protocols because of shortages in hand gel on certain wards. The partnership learned from this finding that they need to do a more thorough assessment of the project environment to understand any external factors that will impact their progress. On a positive note, the evaluation showed that the training of different cadres in hand hygiene has improved multi-disciplinary working at the hospital and IPC issues are taken up in the hospital committee meetings.*

A summary of the differences between 'M' and 'E'

	Monitoring	Evaluation
When?	Ongoing throughout projects and the partnership	Scheduled to take place at a key milestone for the project or the partnership, such as end of a project, mid-point, before scale up, etc.
What?	Specific results of project and partnership activities – usually inputs and outputs. Progress with partnership development plans.	Assessment of change that can be attributed to a project and partnership - review of progress towards outcomes and goal. Review of partnership's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities
Why?	Check progress, identify issues and take action, update plans	Understand the difference a project has made. Review the quality of your partnership. Learn lessons that can be shared among partners and others in the health partnership community.
Who is responsible?	Partners and project teams in the UK and overseas working together. Sometimes there are designated M&E leads within the team. Certain activities may also involve project beneficiaries e.g. trained trainer collecting data from health workers trained, UK volunteer in-country supporting M&E.	Partners and project teams in the UK and overseas working together to plan and carry out an evaluation. As for monitoring, it can involve different stakeholders depending on the type of data you need. Partnerships may also commission an external evaluator.
How?	Using data collection tools and sources defined in your M&E plan, such as course registers, written assessments, observations of practice, audit results, questionnaires.	Define the objectives of your evaluation, by determining what you want to know about the project and partnership, why you need to know this (i.e. who is interested) and the resources you have to answer these questions.
Results	Regular reports and updates shared with your stakeholders, which will include your partnership, your beneficiaries and your donors.	Knowledge and understanding about the project and partnership usually communicated in an evaluation report which can be shared with stakeholders.

Q: I already evaluate my project against set objectives and report on the progress to THET every six months… What is the added value of carrying out a 'separate' evaluation?

A: Your THET reports do involve reporting change at outcome and goal level and also encourage some level of reflection on achievements as well as lessons learnt in a six-month period. Carrying out an evaluation in addition to regular monitoring will give you a better understanding of your project and partnership at a point in time when this information is particularly critical, for instance at the end of a project or before you plan a new phase.

You define your own parameters for an evaluation i.e. what do you want to know that the regular M&E activities have not told you about already? Are there any results that would benefit from deeper or additional evaluation? Evaluations are an opportunity for partnerships to take a step back from project delivery and reflect more objectively on whether their efforts/inputs have effectively accomplished the planned objectives. Consolidating evidence of impact through an evaluation,

including intended and unintended results, can yield recommendations for ways to strengthen a partnership and inform how you approach the next phase of a project.

IPC project example – evaluation questions

Questions	Value of findings
To what extent have the improved knowledge of hospital staff in hand hygiene and the implementation of IPC protocols in the wards been embedded into practice?	- Assess in more detail whether the changes brought about by the project can be sustained - Understand if there are any barriers to sustainability - Consider these results for future projects to improve their outcomes and sustainability of outcomes
How has the training provided benefitted the hospital staff?	- Validate/triangulate the findings from regular monitoring with regards to level of knowledge and skills in IPC - Identify any other learning points and benefits of the training beyond IPC such as soft skills gained, confidence, attitude - Consider any unexpected results (positive and negative)
Has the number of hospital acquired infections (HAI) decreased by the end of the project? If so, to what extent can it be attributed to the project?	- Determine whether the ultimate goal of the project has been reached at patient level. - Identify any external factors that influence this - Take these factors into account for the design and implementation of future projects - Find out if it is realistic to expect this level of change within the project timeframe
What lessons has the partnership learned that can inform future projects? What could the partners have done differently?	- Develop recommendations for the partnership's future work. - Consider how the partnership's structures and processes can be improved to maximise effectiveness of its work.

Q: I've decided to carry out an evaluation. Where do I start?

A: Whether you are carrying out an internal evaluation or commissioning an external evaluation, it is important to start by drafting a Terms of Reference (TOR) that states the purpose of the evaluation, audience (stakeholders), scope, and methodology. This generally includes:

- Aims and objectives of the evaluation
- The evaluation questions *e.g. have the results of the project been sustained? Were there any unintended results? How can the partnership strengthen its work?* For specific questions please see IPC project example – evaluation questions above.
- The audience for your evaluation findings
- Who is responsible for carrying out the evaluation
- Methodology

- Timeframe
- Resources and management: expected costs, skills and capacity required, etc.
- Evaluation outputs e.g. evaluation report, recommendations, stakeholder workshop, case studies, publication of findings in a journal, etc.

Q: How much does an evaluation cost?

A: Determining a budget for an evaluation will depend on a number of factors.

First of all, determine your evaluation questions in partnership e.g. will your evaluation focus on one or two elements of the project/partnership, or will it review the wider impact of the project? Then prioritise these questions based on the resources you have available (financial, people, skills, time).

When designing an evaluation and determining the costs, your primary aim is to make the best use of the resources you have: how can you get the most informative and useful answers to the evaluation questions? More often than not, we find that evaluations try to answer too many questions, or the questions are not specific enough. The risk here is an evaluation that does not tell you any more than you already know or the detail is insufficient to extract real, useable learning.

The evaluation methodology will also help you determine the costs of the evaluation such as assessment visits, equipment (e.g. laptops), printing, etc. Other financial resources required may include: recruitment costs and consultancy day-rates if you commission an external evaluation; any additional staff time/costs e.g. outsourcing data collection.

Q: How much time does an evaluation take?

A: Similar to the cost issue, the amount of time required for your evaluation will depend on the evaluation questions and the resources involved. You can start by outlining the timeframe that the evaluation should take place in, including when you need the evaluation results by. Look at the activities entailed in the evaluation and the time required to complete these with consideration for external factors that may prevent you from sticking to this timeframe such as team capacity, availability of stakeholders involved in the evaluation, political and socio-economic factors (e.g. upcoming elections, civil unrest, etc.). Map out how long the evaluation will take: agreeing the questions and methods, collecting and analysing data, write-up and dissemination of results.

Q: What methods are used to carry out evaluations?

A: An evaluation will be stronger if you use a range of different data sources. This is known as 'triangulation'. Sources can include (some of them are also relevant for monitoring):

- Structured observation of health workers' practice, perhaps using checklists, completed by local partners, UK team or external evaluator
- Self-assessments completed by health workers trained e.g. survey
- Interviews of health workers trained, hospital managers, UK volunteers
- Audits of hospital records
- In-depth analysis of trainee logbooks / feedback/ notes or recordings from focus group discussions with health workers trained or community members

For example, the partnership between Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust UK and the Kambia Government Hospital, Sierra Leone received a grant from the International Health Links Funding Scheme (IHLFS, 2013) to improve maternal and newborn health in the Kambia District, Sierra Leone. At the end of their IHLFS project, they carried out an evaluation to find out:

- To what extent have the health workers trained put their skills and learning into practice to deliver better care?

- Has the equipment provided to health workers through our project made a difference to the care they provide to mothers and babies?
- What are the next steps for our partnership?

The partnership had already collected data throughout the project as part of monitoring activities and conducted a mid-term evaluation. Their monitoring methods included: **visual inspections of equipment** provided; **pre- and post-training tests;** analysis of **patient admission rates;** and audit of **trainee logbooks**.

For the final evaluation, the partners collected further quantitative and qualitative data in order to confirm their findings, address any gaps in the evidence, make comparisons and analyse the data from different perspectives. Evaluation methods included:

- **Semi-structured interviews** of different stakeholders (hospital staff, Community Health Officers and Maternal and Child Health Attendants)
- **Further audits** of hospital referral, maternal mortality and birth records, etc.
- **Follow-up questionnaires** with all health workers trained to assess their competency

With all this data in hand, the partnership was then able to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the changes this project had achieved, more specifically:

- The detailed accounts and examples provided by stakeholders during interviews, gave the partnership a **better understanding of how skills from the training were implemented** in practice. They were also able to understand the **impact of the project on different stakeholders** e.g. hospital staff who might not have been trained through the project but who are receiving referrals from the community health workers.
- The further audits were crucial to assess the **impact of the project on services and patients** by making comparisons with data collected during the mid-term evaluation.
- The questionnaires were a helpful **additional assessment of trainees' competencies**, which had not been done properly before. The questionnaire responses confirmed the outcomes of the training.

The evaluation findings helped **inform future steps** for the partnership; they decided to apply for further funding to continue to train health staff in the Kambia district. The evaluation also provided **lessons for improving project management**.

Q: How can we evaluate our partnership?
A: As part of THET's on-going approach to quality improvement, we developed Principles of Partnership to support health partnerships to improve the quality and effectiveness of what they do. There are eight principles and each principle has hallmarks of good practice with resources (e.g. tools, guidance, case studies) to help partners improve the quality and effectiveness of their partnership. As part of a partnership evaluation, we encourage you to select one or two of the principles and reflect on the extent to which your partnership meets them, using the hallmarks to guide your assessment. You can also review your Partnership Assessment (submitted at application stage) and Partnership Development Plan to assess how things have changed. This can be done by:

- Making time to share experiences among partners (in a partnership meeting or similar sharing and learning activities)
- Gathering suggestions on ways to improve the partnership's approach (e.g. through engaging with different stakeholders involved in the partnership, developing feedback mechanisms…)
- Agreeing areas of improvement (e.g. writing up recommendations, revising partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU.))

Q: What do I do with my evaluation findings?

A: You will share your evaluation findings with the different stakeholders you have defined in the evaluation plan or Terms of Reference.

How you share the findings will depend on who the stakeholder is and how you hope the findings will influence or inform them.

Dissemination of evaluation findings

Stakeholders	Why/ What are the benefits	In what format
Partners / project team members	-Improve understanding of impact among wider partnership team. -Discuss how the findings and recommendations inform future projects and partnership work and agree steps forward together	Evaluation workshop Partnership meetings
Project beneficiaries e.g. health workers trained, health service users, health institution staff and management	-Encourage project beneficiaries to sustain project results -Collect feedback on evaluation findings from different perspectives to help inform future work and evaluations	Focus group discussions Meetings Conferences
Funders/potential funders	-Show evidence of the impact of a partnership to make a case for further funding and support (e.g. continuation of project, new projects, scale up…)	Donor reports Funding proposals Meetings
Health partnership community	-Share good practice and lessons learned to improve quality. -Add to the evidence base of HP impact and the benefits of a HP approach. -Make useful connections for future work.	Community of practice posts Presentations at THET/HP events. Publications in research journals
Other health institutions, NGOs	-Develop new links and partnerships. -Combine efforts to improve efficiency and effectiveness of different projects seeking similar goals.	Networking events Conferences
Policy makers and government	-Advocate for policy change -Influence government health priorities Encourage the adoption of an aspect of a project (e.g. training, protocols) more widely -Secure funding for scale up /national roll out.	Meetings with government officials Evaluation reports
Researchers/academics	-Support further research to demonstrate impact and inform future work. -Build more evidence of the benefits of a health partnership approach.	Community of practice posts Presentations at THET events and academic conferences Publications in research journals

For example, the Gloucestershire-Kambia partnership disseminated findings from their final evaluation during a local community radio show to the wider community in Kambia. The radio programme included the interviews with Kambia health staff who had participated in the training, a patient who received life-saving care from a trained worker, and senior health management at the Kambia District hospital. They published the final evaluation report on the Kambia Appeal website, and shared it with partners, THET and DFID. The case studies feature on their website.

Q: What are the advantages and disadvantages of external and internal evaluations?

A: This again will depend on what you are seeking to get out of the evaluation and your target audience. Consider the different factors that could influence your choice on whether to carry out an internal or an external evaluation, this includes budget, capacity, willingness to be objective and critical, and how you plan to disseminate and utilise the evaluation results.

This publication in The Evaluation Journal of Australasia provides a helpful checklist for deciding between internal and external evaluations:
http://www.aes.asn.au/images/stories/files/Publications/Vol4No1-2/fundamental_choice.pdf

Q: I would like to hire an external evaluator, how should I proceed?

A: Steps to commissioning an external evaluation

1. Follow all the steps above for defining your evaluation scope, questions, audience, budget, timeframe, and desired outputs.
2. Write a terms of reference that should include these headings as a minimum:
    a. Brief background to your health partnership and the project to be evaluated.
    b. Purpose of the evaluation, including the audience (stakeholders) and objectives.
    c. Evaluation questions, including clarity about the scope.
    d. Data availability and proposed methodology for collecting data e.g. interviews with trained health workers. You can invite applicants to propose improvements or changes to the methodology too.
    e. Outputs e.g. a written report (including length) and dissemination objectives.
    f. Timeframe
    g. Budget
    h. Application process.
    i. Initial implementation plan
3. Advertise the terms of reference in the form of an 'invitation to tender' for the evaluation. See below for a list of websites THET has used in the past to advertise consultancy posts.
4. Once you have selected your evaluator, it is useful to hold a project inception meeting to go over the ToR in detail. Agree how you will share data, responsibilities and points of contact, and any amendments to the evaluation approach.

Advertising the consultancy

We have used the following sites. If you have other sites that you have used, please share these with THET's community of practice: https://dgroups.org/thetlinks

- UK Evaluation Society: https://www.evaluation.org.uk/
- DEVEX: https://www.devex.com/

We are happy to share names of consultants we have commissioned in the past as well as those we have approached directly with an invitation to tender. For details, please contact Sophie Pinder, Evaluation & Learning Officer, sophie.pinder@thet.org

Further reading:

- OECD/DAC guidelines for evaluation:
  https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dcdndep/47069197.pdf

- Monitoring and Evaluation planning tool: http://www.thet.org/health-partnership-scheme/resources/tools-guidance/monitoring-evaluation-plan

- Principles of Partnership: http://www.thet.org/health-partnership-scheme/resources/principles-of-partnership

- Evaluation TOR guide: http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/TechNote2_TOR.pdf

- Step by step guide to evaluations:
  http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/769943/Evaluation-Step-by-Step-Guide.pdf

- Evaluation budget toolkit: http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/plan-budget/develop-a-budget/#a-sample-budget

- The Kambia Appeal evaluation documents: http://www.kambia.org.uk/international-health-link-funding-scheme/project-findings-and-reports

- *Developing a culture of learning in Malawi,* partnership case study:
  http://www.thet.org/health-partnership-scheme/resources/case-studies-stories/health-partnership-scheme-case-studies/developing-a-culture-of-learning-in-malawi

- Impact Evaluation guide:
  https://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Impact_Evaluation_Guide_0515.pdf