

Partner-led evaluation: a policy research programme case study

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Our partners



Clear Horizon



Summary

- Partner-led evaluation involves **sharing ownership, leadership and responsibility**
- Based on a case study of a global policy research programme (2016-17) partner-led evaluation:
 - can support programmatic and organisational **learning**
 - has **challenges and tensions** including: coordination, bias, credibility, capacity and ownership
- Offers **potential for learning** and an opportunity to bring **partner values and voice** to the centre of the evaluation process
- But it is not easy!

What we mean by 'partner-led' evaluation?

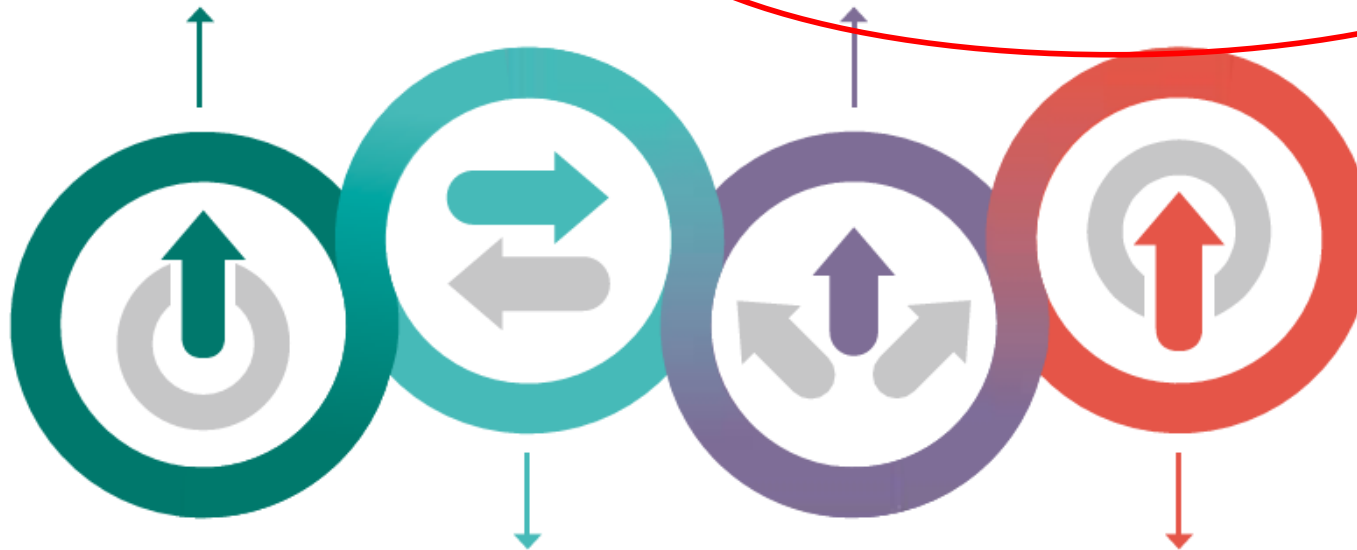
- 'Joint' evaluation as a means to 'improve understanding' and 'reduce administrative burden' (OECD, 1991)
- Evolved from being 'joint' donor/donor evaluations (circa 90's) to donor/implementer (2000's)
- Partners may be at a range of levels depending on type of intervention

EXTERNAL, INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

Conducted by organisations or people who are not part of the design and implementation of the project or directly accountable to those responsible for it.

PARTNER-LED EVALUATION

By partner-led we mean evaluations where the implementing partners are part of the design and take a lead role in managing and coordinating data collation, analysis and reporting.



EXTERNAL BUT PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Typically led by an external evaluator, though representatives of implementing organisations and other stakeholders (often including beneficiaries) are involved in design, data collection and analysing the results. The degree of participation can vary.

INTERNAL SELF-EVALUATION

An evaluation carried out by those who are also responsible for the design and delivery of the project.



The promise of partner-led evaluation

- To build evaluation **capacity and capability**
- To bring partner **voice and values** into the evaluation process
- To **contextualise findings** in the experiences of partners
- To build **ownership** of evaluation findings by partners
- To make **power dynamics** explicit in evaluation process; i.e. donor/implementer, between partners

Practice: KNOWFOR (2017)

KNOWFOR



UK supported partnership between CIFOR, IUCN and PROFOR, which ran from 2012–2017.



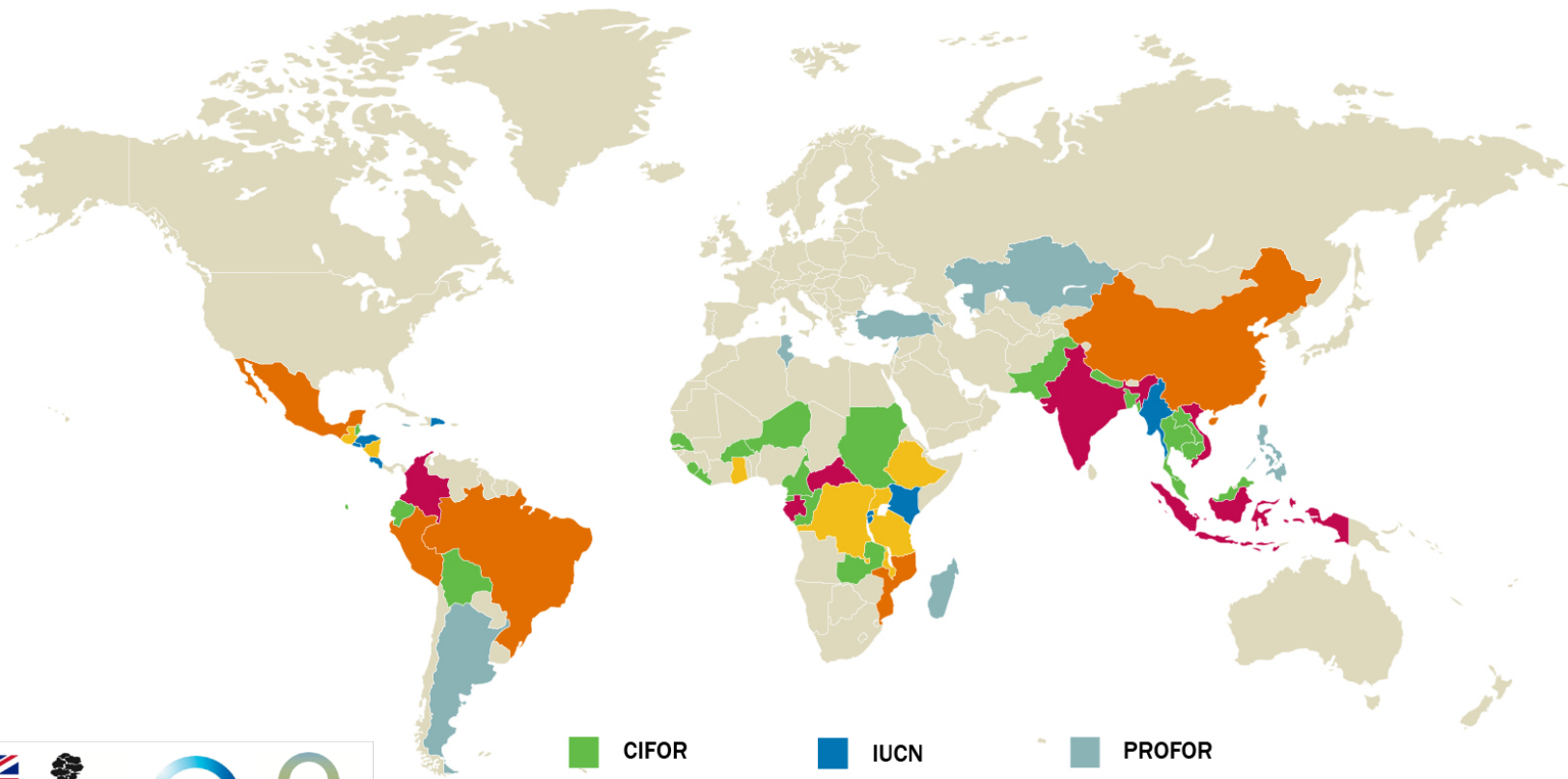
The mission was to equip developing country policy-makers and practitioners with forestry knowledge.



The evaluation's main aim was to assess the contribution of partner activities to intended programme outcomes.



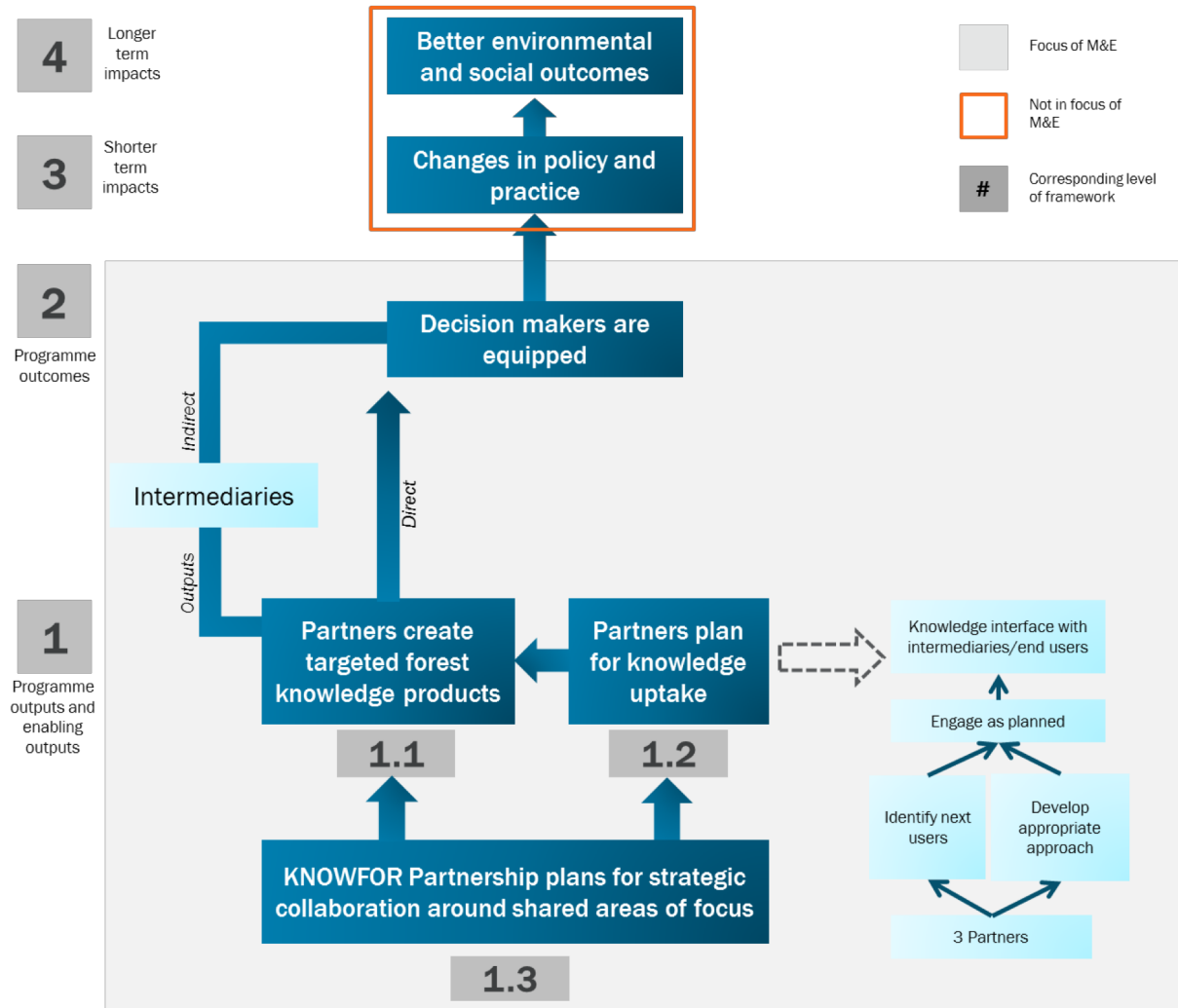
It used a 'theory-based' evaluation methodology combined with a 'partner-led' evaluation approach.



- CIFOR
- IUCN
- PROFOR
- CIFOR + IUCN
- CIFOR + PROFOR
- CIFOR + IUCN + PROFOR



KNOWFOR Theory of Change (ToC)



Partner-led evaluation design

In KNOWFOR, it was chosen for 3 reasons:

1. To build on and maintain strong partner ownership of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities
2. To further embed organisational learning on knowledge uptake evaluation
3. To enhance partners' abilities to learn from the evaluation

The partner-led approach we took



Figure 1. Partner-led evaluation: KNOWFOR process and timeline



On reflection: donor

From Donors perspective:

- Buy-in: the only reason we could do this in the first place is because everyone was on board; it was supported by DFID's 'learning agenda'
- Costly: but relatively similar to the same costs for an external evaluation of similar sized programme
- DFID review criteria (EQUALS) were not appropriate for judging this approach compared to traditional evaluations



On reflection: design

From Project Directors perspective:

- Collaboration with wonderful scientists often led to adding more into the methodology – stand firm!
- Collaborative design eats time - nearly 1 year to agree the TOR!
- Simplify methodology! We assumed people could handle a complex set of methods – rubrics, results charts, episode studies, performance story reports, outcome stories...
- Allow more time up front for capacity building for all

On reflection: coordination

From Project Managers perspective:

- Evaluator as facilitator
- Time-consuming: significant management and is coordination required; e.g. 6 months TOR
- Embedding evaluation capacity building; i.e. fortnightly meetings
- Competition between partners

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On reflection: partners

From Partner perspectives:

- Evaluation became a means for meaningful two-way dialogue about performance with donor
- Increased ownership of the evaluation process
- Increased capacity (Contribution analysis, ToC, rubrics etc.)
- Focus on programme learning at expense of partner learning



Reflection: Quality assurance

From QA perspective:

- Independence from bias was the main challenge
- QA function should have been brought in earlier; rather than waiting for ‘products’, i.e. considering quality of evaluation design



Some overall implications...

- Needs to be undertaken in the right circumstances
- Requires heavy lifting – from all involved
- Potential to decentre the traditional donor/proponent relationship
- Localisation/decentralisation; *‘aid should be as local as possible, and only international as necessary’*

More about partner-led evaluation...



Working paper 527

Partner-led evaluation for policy research programmes

A thought piece on the KNOWFOR programme evaluation

Tiina Pasanen, Stuart Raetz, John Young and Jess Dart

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Key messages

- In this paper, a 'partner-led evaluation' is where the implementing partners play a leading role in the evaluation design, data collection, analysis and reporting. An evaluation facilitator coordinates and supports activities, and a quality assurer helps to increase rigour, validity and quality.
- This evaluation approach is most appropriate when there is a strong focus on internal learning and capacity-building. It is more likely to increase partners' sense of ownership and, in turn, uptake of results.
- While the approach may be more prone to biases, such as assessing one's own work more favourably, it is possible to introduce measures to mitigate these potential biases and increase impartiality.

<https://www.odi.org/projects/2889-knowfor-partner-led-evaluation-quality-assurance>

More about evaluating policy influence and advocacy...



<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10259.pdf>