Partner-led evaluation: a policy research programme case study

Australasian Evaluation Conference Launceston, Tasmania 2018

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Our partners





Clear Harizon







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?

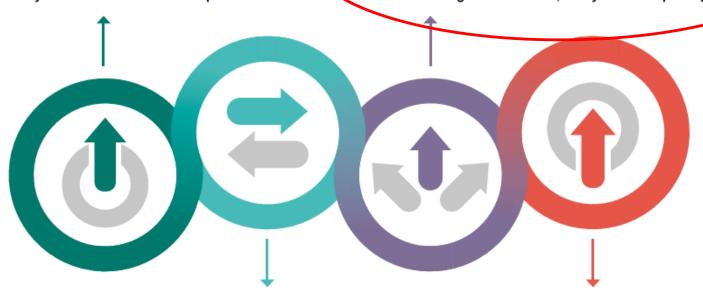
- 'Joint' evaluation as a means to 'improve understanding' and 'reduce administrative burden' (OECD, 1991)
- Evolved from being 'joint' donor/donor evaluations (circa 90's) to donor/implementer (2000's)
- Partners may be at a range of levels depending on type of intervention

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.



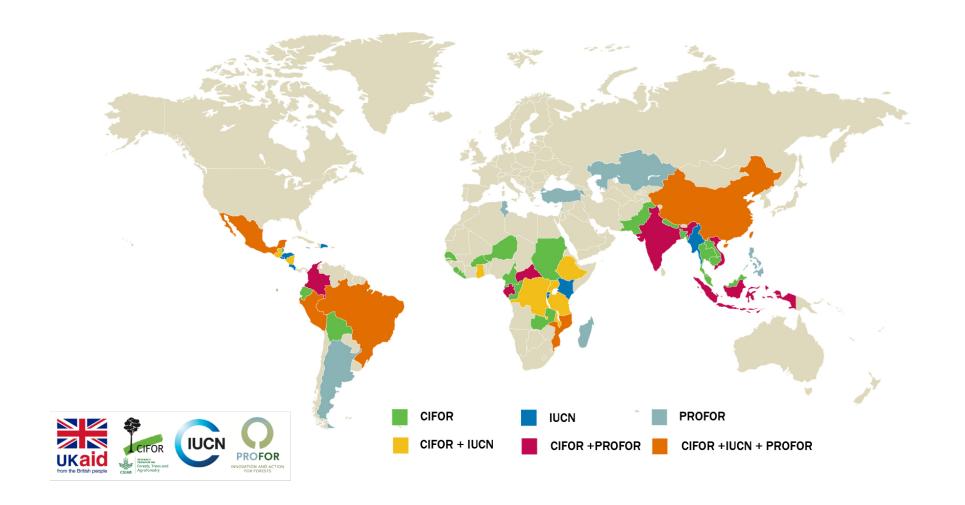
The mission was to equip developing country policy-makers and practitioners with forestry knowledge.



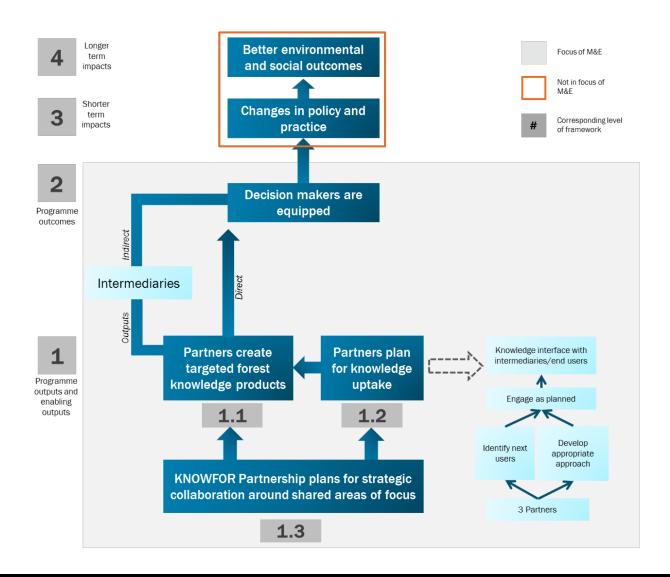
The evaluation's main aim was to assess the contribution of partner activities to intended programme outcomes.



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



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



Discussions

The partners, evaluation facilitator and donor determine the overall evaluation approach, roles and responsibilities.

Quality assurance review

The quality assurer provides feedback on all evaluation plans.

Workshop and follow up

At the workshop, and subsequently via email, they agree three key evaluation questions, the overall evaluation plan, and specific plans for each partner.

DATA COLLECTION

SEP 2016-MAR 2017

O Programme data collection

The evaluation facilitator conducts interviews and collates existing data to address the second and third evaluation questions.



O Project data collection

Partners gather data to answer the first key evaluation question. They produce a results chart, case studies and outcome stories.

Quality assurance review

The quality assurer reviews all outputs, providing feedback on methodology, contribution claims and evidence strength.

Data synthesis

The partners and evaluation facilitator synthesise and analyse their data.

Sense-making workshops

Each partner holds a workshop, with the evaluation facilitator, to share and reflect on the findings. A final summit workshop brings all actors together, to reflect on and agree the overall evaluation findings.

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INTERPRETATION

FEB-MAR 2017

Presentation of findings

The partners and evaluation facilitator present initial findings at a donor seminar, and they share experiences of the partner-led evaluation approach.



(i) Quality assurance report

The quality assurer writes a separate report on the appropriateness and robustness of the process and findings. This is included in the evaluation report.

Drafting the report and recommendations

The evaluation facilitator produces the first report draft. The partners, donor and quality assurer provide two rounds of substantive comments. Partners and the evaluation facilitator jointly produce the recommendations.

Communications outputs

The evaluation facilitator finalises the report and produces supporting outputs – including integraphics, a five-page summary and presentation. The quality assurer produces a thought piece on the merits of a partner-led evaluation.

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

January 2018



- 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