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A STUDY OF THE FAMILY CARE FIRST IN CAMBODIA DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

How does developmental evaluation work in the **USAID** context, what factors help and hinder its success, and what is its value to stakeholders?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity (DEPA-MERL) under the US Global Development Lab's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning innovations (MERLIN) program at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is testing the effectiveness of developmental evaluation in the USAID context. Developmental evaluation was created to evaluate innovative programs that operate in complex environments and are thus expected to adapt over time. From November 2016 to March 2018, DEPA-MERL conducted a developmental evaluation with Family Care First (FCF) in Cambodia, in service of FCF's goal of increasing the number of children living in safe, nurturing family-based care. The DEPA-MERL consortium consists of: Search for Common Ground (Search), which implemented the developmental evaluation with FCF, including hiring, managing and supporting the Developmental Evaluator; Social Impact, which served as the prime awardee on the consortium and provided support to Search on the FCF developmental evaluation; and the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan (WDI), which studied the effectiveness of this approach in FCF.

EVALUATION BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This report focuses on better understanding the implementation of the developmental evaluation approach in USAID programming. Readers of this report include USAID stakeholders, organizations funding or implementing developmental evaluation, and Developmental Evaluators themselves. Using the information collected, the DEPA-MERL consortium aims to build on existing literature and offer readers targeted data and guidance to improve the effectiveness of developmental evaluation. Additionally, the findings from this study will be compared to findings from other developmental evaluation pilots conducted by DEPA-MERL. This across-case comparative report is expected to be released in September 2019.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

During all 15 months of the FCF developmental evaluation, WDI (henceforth called the team) collected data to answer the following three research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** How is developmental evaluation able to capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings¹ in support of ongoing development of programming, in a complex system, in the USAID context? (Please note: emergent learnings are defined as new programmatic or environmental developments, including new information gained, changes in existing stakeholder relationships etc.)
- **Research Question 2:** What are the barriers and enablers to implementation of developmental evaluation in the USAID context?
- **Research Question 3:** What do key informants consider to be the value (added or lost) of conducting a developmental evaluation compared to a traditional evaluation approach in this instance?

The team used a mixed-methods approach including outcome harvesting to answer these questions. The team conducted a document review, semi-structured interviews with the Developmental Evaluator and key FCF stakeholders, and an electronic survey administered to key FCF stakeholders. Limitations of the study were respondent selection bias, funding bias, resource constraints (time and money), and lack of a counterfactual.

¹ Emergent learnings are defined as new programmatic or environmental developments, including new information gained, changes in existing stakeholder relationships etc. Capturing emergent learnings in developmental evaluation is important because it can affect program implementation and success. For example, a key component of the Developmental Evaluator's role is to capture ideas and interactions which can then be discussed with program staff to inform options for future development of the program.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: How is developmental evaluation able to capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings in support of ongoing development of programming, in a complex system, in the USAID context?

A systematic review of the 17 outcomes harvested reveals that the developmental evaluation used a variety of different approaches to *capture, promote, and enable the utilization* of emergent learnings. The Developmental Evaluator documented emails, meetings, and one-on-one conversations that he had with stakeholders to capture emergent learnings. He conducted key informant interviews and facilitated workshops to gather and promote emergent learnings and data with all relevant stakeholders. He attended meetings and shared recommendations both formally and informally to enable the utilization of emergent learnings for program adaptations with the goal of increased impact. The team presents the following key takeaways:

1. **The developmental evaluation captured (n=3), promoted (n=3), and enabled the utilization (n=11) of emergent learnings across three types of changes** (engagement and relationships, institutional and policy, and knowledge and capability) **and four levels of change** (program-level, sector-level, government-level and USAID-level).
2. **Nearly one out of every five outcomes of the developmental evaluation (24%) had both positive and negative impact** in the short-term on the FCF program, while only two of 17 harvested outcomes of the developmental evaluation (12%) resulted in short-term negative impact on the FCF program.
3. **The developmental evaluation contributed to changes of all sizes:** small (18%), medium (65%) and large (18%) in the short-term.
4. Even when issues are known amongst stakeholders, the developmental evaluation can formally capture these issues and develop recommendations to address them. In FCF, **the Developmental Evaluator served in a valuable role because he was a third-party, independent voice** and raised challenges with leadership.

Research Question 2: What are the barriers and enablers to implementation of developmental evaluation in the USAID context?

Results of the analysis of barriers and enablers using data collected from monthly interviews with the Developmental Evaluator and from the substantiation interviews with key FCF stakeholders, show that:

1. *Leadership, stakeholder relationships, and integration of Developmental Evaluator* were the top barriers to implementing developmental evaluation in FCF. *Skills of the Developmental Evaluator, data collection and sharing, and leadership* were the top enablers to implementing the approach in FCF. However, **the Developmental Evaluator and FCF stakeholders did not always agree on which factors influenced the evaluation most frequently.**
2. **Factors that influenced the implementation of the developmental evaluation served as both barriers and enablers.** For example, in FCF, the *skills of the Developmental Evaluator* enabled the Developmental Evaluator to document, collect, and synthesize data throughout the evaluation. However, some of the methods the Developmental Evaluator used to communicate information to stakeholders were not well received and were considered a barrier to implementation.
3. **The prevalence of some key barriers and enablers were not dependent on time.** That is, they were important from beginning to end of the developmental evaluation. For example, different aspects of *developmental evaluation readiness* and *integration of the Developmental Evaluator* were coded just as frequently in the beginning, middle, and end of the developmental evaluation.

4. **Developmental evaluation readiness and integration of the Developmental Evaluator overlapped the most with USAID dynamics.** For future developmental evaluation, this signifies that that USAID plays a role in how ready the Mission and/or Bureau will be to partake in a developmental evaluation and how successfully the Developmental Evaluator will be integrated into the program team.

Research Question 3: What do key informants consider to be the value (added or lost) of conducting a developmental evaluation compared to a traditional evaluation approach in this instance?

Based on the analysis of the *value of developmental evaluation survey* completed by 14 FCF stakeholders (53.85% response rate), including three USAID staff, WDI found:

1. Respondents said **the developmental evaluation was valuable overall:** They found the FCF developmental evaluation *better* than traditional evaluation on six of the eight sub-items on which respondents were asked to compare the two approaches.
2. Respondents reported that **interactions with the Developmental Evaluator were mostly positive and that he provided value to the FCF program.** A majority of respondents reported receiving useful information and feeling understood by the Developmental Evaluator.
3. Feedback was not all positive: **Five out of 14 respondents (36%) reported the Developmental Evaluator only addressed the challenges they faced about half the time or less.**
4. Two main areas identified **as value lost through the use of developmental evaluation were the cost-effectiveness and time savings of the approach.** For cost-effectiveness, three out of 14 respondents (21%) reported the developmental evaluation was *somewhat worse* or *much worse* than traditional evaluation in FCF. An equal number said that the FCF developmental evaluation was *much worse* than traditional evaluation in terms of time savings.
5. Results showed that the average composite score of respondents from **implementing partners** for all sub-items related to interactions with the Developmental Evaluator and for comparing the FCF developmental evaluation to traditional evaluation in this pilot **was higher than the average of USAID respondents.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the combined findings of the three research questions outlined above, the team identified seven key recommendations. These recommendations are organized into themes which follow the order in which one would execute a developmental evaluation, from deciding whether to select developmental evaluation as the evaluative approach and launching a developmental evaluation, to utilizing developmental evaluation data for decision-making.

Theme	Recommendations
Selecting developmental evaluation as the evaluative approach	1. The funder(s) should confirm that a learning culture exists within the organization before selecting the developmental evaluation approach
Launching a developmental evaluation	2. The funder(s) and the Developmental Evaluator should identify and work with a diverse set of developmental evaluation champions from the start 3. The Developmental Evaluator should develop familiarity with stakeholders to design and implement activities from the start
Implementing a developmental evaluation	The Developmental Evaluator should... 4. Include technical evidence and use interpersonal skills when sharing negative findings 5. Maintain objectivity and impartiality to stakeholders of the developmental evaluation The funder(s) should... 6. Find strategies for promoting the objectivity of the evaluation
Utilizing developmental evaluation data for decision-making	7. The Developmental Evaluator should provide program decision-makers with tools to make well-informed decisions