

**2017 ANNUAL EVALUATION CONFERENCE**  
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# How can Evaluability Assessments improve the usefulness of, and learning from evaluations?

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# Plan of the Session

- Context
- Objectives of the Session
- Researching this paper
- Forms and structures of EAs
- Evaluability of strategic plans
- Making EAs more useful and enhancing learning
- The Sustainable Development Goals

# Context

- Role of EAs is continuing to grow (after an interest in the 1980s)
- The well-used definition of evaluability is ‘the extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable or credible fashion’ (OECD-DAC)
- EAs can help evaluators, implementers and commissioners ‘get on the same page’, identify appropriate evaluation methods and provide greater participation by stakeholders at the design stage.
- Growing literature on what works best and when; whether to do them or not

# Objectives of this Exploratory Session

- To explore the 'horses for courses' ideas of what works best where and when and for whom
- To reflect on nature of the design stage, especially for large strategic plans and the like
- Can EAs improve the capacity of programme staff to be more 'evaluative' and learn from the process.

# Methods for this paper

- Based on literature review for, and feedback from the paper by Longhurst, Wichmand and Perrin on the ILO child labour work: 'Building Evaluability Assessments into Institutional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Frameworks
- Some further literature search
- A simple google search focussing on documents available online for the UN system EAs
- A ring-round talking to half a dozen colleagues in the UN system and at IDS asking about their experiences in EAs of large programmes (some of which I call "Christmas trees")

# Forms and Structures of EAs

- Mostly used as a free-standing exercise at the design stage- a 'strategic pause'; some are checklist-driven
- USAID's useful 5 steps of: i) clarify purpose; ii) involve stakeholders, iii) document activity design; iv) document activity implementation, data, capacity and v) analyse readiness for evaluation
- For large programmes there is the option of a 'running tap' EA (ILO-IPEC), built into ongoing comprehensive M&E
- EAs may not be cost-effective; may not be needed where log frame culture is embedded and activities are not complex
- Can expand EAs a part of a quality assurance process

# What causes design of activities to create difficulties for future evaluations ?

- Various factors can contribute to the design causing difficulties for later evaluation
- These factors include the number of different partners (e.g. several UN agencies, national governments, civil society).
- Demands for multiple cross cut /mainstreaming such as gender, equity, resilience, human rights
- Needs to enhance capacity, especially M&E
- Implementation is not linear,
- Incentives at the design stage to add in lots of components ('Christmas tree') and sort it out later.

# Evaluability of Strategic Plans (1)

- For the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) EAs could be used to good effect
- Design needs to be enhanced with ToC incorporated
- M&E systems better integrated
- Getting many actors to get on the same page
- Better linkages between components and levels, outputs and outcomes.
- Programmes are complex and some people are working together for the first time

## Evaluability of Strategic Plans(2)

- Recent EAs of the Plans of some UN agencies show:
- Lots of hands in the cooking pot at the design stage – making of hard choices avoided
- Need for coordination perceived as expensive on transaction costs
- Plans are often ‘visionary’ rather than measurable
- Hard to make linkages between outputs and outcome stages
- Not always best suited to structure alongside the lines of the OECD-DAC five criteria

## Evaluability of Large Programmes (3)

- Some country programmes are made up as a 'melange'
- Problems linking up components
- Complex programmes mean that there should be a 'running tap' EA or yearly efforts to implant a MEL system and re-adjust to new realities (all related to cost)
- May generate the participatory aspects required to facilitate implementation
- Not only or even an EA but consider other techniques: mid-term evaluations may not be necessary or fit the bill, hive off thematic areas for separate evaluation, use other reviews to enhance learning

# Making EAs more useful and enhancing learning

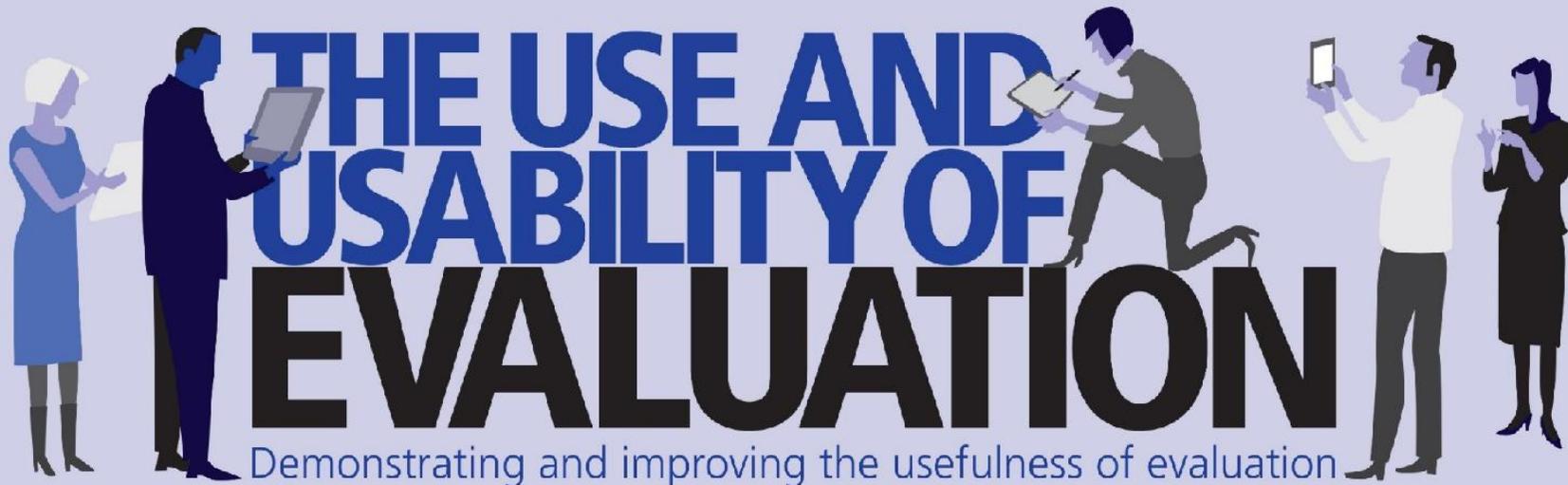
- Evaluators have to recognise the facts of life at the design stage, and not moan about them
- EAs give the opportunity for design staff to take a second shot at the Theory of Change, and own it and to enhance participatory systems: to be a corporate 'glue' to aid coherence
- EAs can generate products (e.g. management and programme information) of value to staff in implementation
- EAs should be considered in terms of the whole range of expected evaluation tools: evaluators might have to curb their enthusiasm for more techniques

# Evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Evaluating the SDGs will reflect all of these characteristics and more, include SDGs in results frameworks and use EAs to show how evaluation can be done
- SDGs are universal
- National ownership with country led evaluations and national M&E capacity
- Interlinkages of and across SDGs (provides challenges to attribution)
- Focus on human rights, gender equality and sustainable development
- Key role of partnerships and their evaluation at many levels

# That's all folks !

- It gets really complicated from now on!



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