

DBE Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Practice Note #3: How to choose the *type of evaluation*

While monitoring refers to the routine ongoing monitoring of programme inputs and outputs, evaluation refers to a more reflective assessment of a programme's design or effectiveness that is conducted at a strategic moment in a programme's life cycle. However, there are various types of evaluation that can be chosen from. The appropriate choice will depend on a combination of the intended purpose and what is practically possible.

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) have published a number of evaluation guidelines on their website, and these include guidelines for each type of evaluation:

<https://www.dpme.gov.za/keyfocusareas/evaluationsSite/Pages/Guidelines.aspx>

The table below summarizes the various evaluation types, as classified by the DPME.

TYPE OF EVALUATION	DESCRIPTION	TIMING
Diagnostic Evaluation	This is preparatory research (often called ex-ante evaluation) to ascertain the current situation prior to an intervention and to inform intervention design.	At key stages prior to design or planning
Design evaluation	Used to analyse the theory of change, inner logic and consistency of the programme, either before a programme starts, or during implementation to see whether the theory of change appears to be working.	After an intervention has been designed, in first year, and possibly later
Implementation evaluation	Aims to evaluate whether an intervention's operational mechanisms support achievement of the objectives or not and understand why. Looks at activities, outputs, and outcomes, use of resources and the causal links.	Once or several times during the intervention
Impact evaluation	Seeks to measure changes in outcomes (and the well-being of the target population) that are attributable to a specific intervention. Its purpose is to inform high-level officials on the extent to which an intervention should be continued or not, and if there are any potential modifications needed.	Designed early on, Baseline implemented early, impact checked at key stages e.g. 3/5 years
Economic evaluation	Considers whether the costs of a policy or programme have been outweighed by the benefits.	At any stage

Evaluation synthesis	Synthesising the results of a range of evaluations to generalise findings across Department, e.g. a function such as supply chain management, a sector, or a cross-cutting issue such as capacity. DPME will undertake evaluation synthesis based on the evaluations in the national evaluation plan and do an annual report on evaluation.	After a number of Evaluations are completed
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Factors influencing the choice of evaluation type

Timing: If a new programme is being designed or considered, that is an ideal moment to undertake either a Diagnostic Evaluation (if the nature of the problem being addressed is not fully understood and a programme has not yet been designed) or a Design Evaluation (if a new programme has been designed). A combination of a Design- and Implementation Evaluation can sometimes be a good idea during the early stages of programme rollout and questions about how to improve the design and implementation of the programme are paramount. It should be noted, however, that any of the evaluation types could be appropriate at the outset of a new programme. For example, an impact evaluation of alternative programmes could be a great way to inform policy direction in response to a particular problem.

Availability of data: This has very particular implications for whether an impact evaluation is possible. While it is almost always interesting to know what exact impact a programme had on its beneficiaries, this requires two things: 1) Outcomes data, and 2) An estimate of the counterfactual. In the case of education, relevant outcomes data could be learner achievement in mathematics or literacy, or it could be whether children stay in school and successfully completed matric. To estimate the counterfactual, we need to estimate what the outcomes would have been had the beneficiaries not received the programme under evaluation. In practice, the counterfactual has to be estimated using some sort of comparison or “control” group. How to identify a valid comparison group is ultimately an extensive methodological discussion, and consultation with an evaluation expert is recommended. But be careful – many comparison groups are not valid for measuring programme impact. For example, if an intervention is implemented in one district, it may not be reasonable to assume that the outcomes can simply be compared to those in a neighbouring district, as there may be other systematic differences between those two districts, clouding the comparison. Furthermore, if a programme is operating at full scale and all children are beneficiaries, it may not be possible to identify a comparison group of children who are not beneficiaries. In such cases, it might not be possible to conduct an impact evaluation, no matter how much it may be desired and even if the funds exist.

Cost: Sometimes the necessary outcomes data already exists and can simply be analysed to inform an evaluation. In other cases, it may be necessary to collect new information. Data collection activities can vary from School-level case studies, to Key Informant Interviews, to

quantitative data collection in a large sample of schools. The scale of the data collection will have significant cost implications, since in-person visits to schools or district offices will have personnel, travel and accommodation costs. Impact evaluation is essentially a quantitative method and therefore requires larger sample sizes, implying higher costs. In practice, financial considerations often dictate which evaluation type is feasible.

Conclusion

It is very important to plan what type of evaluation is to be conducted. This should be done early on when developing the M&E Framework for a programme and needs to be budgeted for accordingly. Since cost implications are not the only factor determining what type of evaluation is appropriate, a good idea can be to ask an evaluation expert or the directorate for Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation to conduct a scoping study to make recommendations on what type of evaluation to undertake.