
Evaluating Community Development Projects Using the OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria

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Enoch Assan Ninson
Center for Comparative Research and Development

Background: Community development has over the years become very popular in the development circles. However, efforts and resources expended in improving rural communities through development projects appear to be eroded over time. Failure to integrate evaluation in the project design and periodically assess intended objectives and current results is a major contributory factor. Evaluation has become very significant especially in this era of dwindling donor support. It helps to identify strengths and weaknesses of a project and aids in averting erosion of efforts. This paper practically evaluates community development projects implemented in 4 rural communities in the Eastern region of Ghana using the OECD/DAC five project evaluation criteria which are efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability.

Purpose: The study was conducted to provide a practical example of how community development projects can be evaluated using existing criteria. Also, it is intended to add to existing knowledge on evaluation and encourage project implementers to consider evaluation as an integral part of their implementation.

Setting: The study was conducted in four rural communities in two districts in the Eastern region of Ghana. Eastern region is one of the ten regions in Ghana. The projects involved in the study were a School, Clinic, Oil Palm processor, and a Soap and Cosmetics project.

Intervention: The study shows practically that evaluation is uncomplicated and can be undertaken in interventions. It outlines clearly the gains and losses that can be generated by community development project. It also outlines the threats and opportunities that exist in the implementation of community development projects. This can be applied in other settings.

Research Design: The sample size was 40 made up of 6 NGO staff, 4 local government staff, 2 health assistants and 28 community members including leaders. The community members were sampled randomly while purposive sampling was used for local government, NGO staff and community leaders.

Data Collection and Analysis: Data collection included primary methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, photographs, observations, and questionnaire administration as well as secondary methods such as reviews of relevant books, photographs, project reports, policy papers, and relevant websites. Analysis of the data collected was done qualitatively with simple statistical tools.

Findings: Some findings of the evaluation were that the school was more relevant, efficient, effective and sustainable. It also had maximum impact. The Oil Palm processor was also more relevant, effective and sustainable. It was however less efficient. The Clinic was less relevant, efficient and effective. It also had less impact on the community. The Clinic was not sustainable. The Soap and Cosmetics project was not relevant, not efficient, not effective not sustainable and did not have any impact on the community.

Keywords: *development; community; evaluation; projects; relevance; efficiency; effectiveness; impact; sustainability*

Introduction

Theoretically, the modern concept of development has gone through many approaches from the emergence of classical approaches like the modernization theory (late 1940s) with proponents such as W.W. Rostow and Arthur Lewis through the dependency approach (1960s to 1970s), neoliberal approaches (1980s) to the alternative approaches in the 1990s and beyond. Even though most of the approaches were driven mostly by central government, key stakeholders such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, communities and the private sector have been very influential. National development was for a long period of time popular due to the major role of the central government in modern development approaches. The emergence of the alternative approaches introduced strongly the bottom-up approach and popularized community development.

However, the popularity of community development and efforts being made to achieve it appears to be plagued by the erosion of gains made. This erosion has been attributed to several factors including inadequate community and stakeholder involvement in project implementation. Project implementers normally show more interest in the execution of projects and less interest in periodically matching up intended objectives with current results or trends through evaluation. Evaluation has with time been seen as a necessary pill especially in this era where donor support continues to diminish. Again, evaluation has become necessary since varied local conditions determine development efforts.

This paper practically evaluates community development projects implemented in 4 rural communities in the Eastern region of Ghana using the OECD/DAC five project evaluation criteria which are efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability.

Literature Review

According to the OECD (2013), 'evaluation is at the heart of current efforts to make development co-operation more effective at supporting economic growth and reducing poverty.' The UNDP (2011) conceptualizes evaluation as 'judgment made of the

relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of development efforts, based on agreed criteria and benchmarks among key partners and stakeholders'. Despite different conceptualizations such as Patton's traditional and developmental (2006) and Preskill and Beer's developmental, formative and summative (2012), several authors including the OECD (2013) have underscored the imperativeness of evaluation. These authors accept that evaluation has shaped current development approaches and has provided donors with more steady evidence especially in the face of dwindling resources.

According to Chianca (2008), the most widely used evaluation criteria after the 1990s has been the OECD/DAC five project evaluation criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability). Several institutions including African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Austrian Development Agency and the Joint Information Systems Committee have either used this criteria or criteria that have some of its elements.

The African Development Bank's evaluation of an integrated rural development project in Tunisia in 2003 concluded that the objectives were consistent with policies and the project was relevant. Their evaluation criteria consisted of relevance, efficacy, effectiveness, impact and performance of partners. They define efficacy as achievement of objectives. The OECD on the other hand uses effectiveness to match intended results with objectives. Like the African Development Bank, IFAD's methodological framework for project evaluation (2003) and their evaluation of the Vegetable oil Development project in Uganda in 2011 also added performance of partners as one of their broad areas of evaluation criteria. The other broad areas outlined in their framework included performance of project (relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency) and Impact (sustainability, innovation and replicability/ scaling up and impact on gender equality and women empowerment). The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies also adopts the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria for humanitarian aid which

includes relevance/appropriateness, coherence, effective-ness, coordination, efficiency, impact and connectedness/sustainability.

The imperativeness of an appropriate criteria for evaluation has been emphasized by many authors. Segone (1998) has identified two factors: dynamism of paradigms and generation as key for shaping the evaluation criteria. It is therefore very important for the criteria to answer the evaluation question (OECD 2013).

Methods

The study was conducted in 4 rural communities in the Eastern region of Ghana. The projects included a School, Clinic, Soap and cosmetics and Oil palm processor. The sample size was 40 made up of 6 NGO staff, 4 local government staff, 2 health assistants and 28 community members including leaders. The community members were sampled randomly while purposive sampling was used for local government, NGO staff and community leaders. The study included primary sources of data from interviews, focus group discussions, photographic comparisons, observations, and questionnaire administration as well as secondary data from relevant books, photographs, project reports, policy papers, and relevant websites. The analysis of the data collected was done qualitatively with simple statistical tools.

Results

Relevance

Relevance focused on the benefits and suitability of the project to the priorities and goals of the beneficiary communities. All respondents agreed that their projects were relevant. Approximately half, 21 out of 40, saw their project as very beneficial, while 19 considered it beneficial, representing 52% and 48% respectively. None of the respondents saw the project as either less beneficial or not beneficial.

Impact

Impact considered relevant economic and social changes witnessed in the communities after the inception of the project. All respondents mentioned that their projects had caused relevant changes. Most respondents 22 out of 40 which is 55% said the changes were very significant while 11

representing 27.5% said they were significant. Seven (7) respondents (17.5%) perceived the changes as less significant.

Efficiency

Efficiency examined the appropriate sources of least cost resources. The results indicated that resources were acquired from three main sources: the communities, local government and the NGOs. All 40 respondents generally agreed that much of the resources were contributed by the NGOs in the form of building materials, expertise and finance. Five respondents mentioned that the local government contributed some human resource expertise and transportation for building materials. With the communities, all 10, 12 and 7 respondents of the School, Oil Palm processor and Soap and Cosmetics project respectively contributed building materials, land, communal labour and financial resources. For the clinic, 9 out of the 11 respondents said the community contributed only land while 7 also mentioned communal labour in addition to the land but they admitted the community did not contribute finance and building materials.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness was assessed by matching the intended results with objectives of the project. Almost all, 33 out of 40 respondents (82.5%) perceived the objectives as fully achieved while the remaining seven (7) respondents believed they had been partially achieved. No respondent conceived the project as not achieved its objectives.

Sustainability

Sustainability emphasized preservation for future use by appreciating the current state of the projects and maintenance. About half, 17 out of 40 respondents (42.5%) said their project was in very good states and 25% (10) good state. Four (4) respondents (10%) said bad state while 7 representing 17.5% saw their projects as more or less abandoned. Those who condemned their project as abandoned were 2 representing 5%. With respect to maintenance, 12 out of the 40 mentioned 6 to 8 times while 10 said 3 to 5 times. Seven (7) respondents also cited less than three times while a substantial 11 out of 40 believe there had been no maintenance on their project.

Discussions

Relevance

School. From observations and interactions, it was noted that most of the pupils were from the community and therefore no longer travelled long distances to schools in nearby communities which was the situation before the inception of the school. This together with other interesting factors had led to an increase in the number of children attending school in the community. One of the interesting factors was that parents were compelled to take their wards to school because they contributed substantially to the project. Again, some parents preferred to dump their children in school in order to be free to engage in their economic activities in the day. It is no wonder that all respondents mentioned that the school very beneficial.

Clinic. Even though most respondents agreed that the clinic was beneficial, just a few were actually deriving some benefits from the project. For the community, the presence of the clinic improved physical accessibility since they were accessing health care in neighboring communities. The Health Assistants at the Clinic however held a contrary view. They indicated that they treated only minor cases since most of the community members still preferred treatment from neighboring communities. Further interactions and studies have shown that this problem may be as a result of a number of factors including inadequate medical personnel, social distance, lack of appropriate logistics, lack of community ownership and many more. However, a section of the population that were generating great benefit were pregnant women and nursing mothers. They were receiving quality ante and post natal care since there was a midwife assigned to the facility. With these, the benefits of the clinic can be described as minimal.

Table 1
Relevance

Project	Benefits and suitability to priorities and goals
School	Reduced travelling distance to school Increased number of school children in the community
Clinic	Improved physical accessibility to health facility Improved access to ante and post natal care
Oil Palm Processor	Increased income for workers Establishment of community fund
Soap and cosmetics	Few community members still working with the skills acquired

Oil palm processor. One of the most important benefit of the Oil Palm processor to the community was increased income for the workers through their alternative livelihood. They could not however approximate their earnings. It could not be ascertained whether this was as result of illiteracy or they deliberately refused to disclose the earnings. However, it was evident that the processor served as their second job while they engaged in their routine farming activities. Again, incomes had increased because the processor was providing additional services and markets had been expanded. The workers were milling palm fruits for neighboring communities as an additional service. Another interesting benefit was the establishment of a community fund. This fund was populated by a percentage of proceeds from the processor. This was an innovative way of ensuring all the community members derived some benefits from the project since they all contributed various resources during its construction. This is unique to

this project since none of the project had exhibited this communal benefit. Perhaps, this communal benefit compelled all respondents to unanimously agree that their project was very beneficial.

Soap and cosmetics. The availability of alternative livelihood in addition to farming was the main benefit of this project. However, this benefit was limited to the few remaining workers who produced limited quantities at home for their personal use. This was because the project had stalled and the workers had decreased drastically from 35 to 3. They blame the stalling of the project to poor packaging and unsuitable location of the project. They complained that the dusty road near the project site discolored the products dried in the sun and does not make them attractive. These issues accentuate reasons why factors such as location, literacy education, financial management education, marketing, and packaging are key to the success of alternative livelihood projects. It is

therefore surprising that none of the respondents conceived the project as neither less beneficial nor not beneficial.

Table 2
Impact

Project	Remarkable changes in the communities
School	Increased enrolment of the school and spillover to neighboring communities
Clinic	Increased literates from the community
Oil Palm Processor	Attraction of similar projects
Soap and cosmetics	Increased desire of parents to take their children to school

Impact

School. A remarkable impact noted was the exponential increased enrolment. The respondents indicated that the first batch to enroll in the school was 25 but enrolment after 6 years stood at 530. Some community leaders believed that this increased enrolment over time has increased literates from the community since many of the pupils were now in tertiary institutions. Even though data was not available, it was easy to notice that most of the pupils were from the community while a few were from neighboring communities. This makes an interesting case of spillover of project impacts and why neighboring communities should pull resources together in implementing such projects. Again, there was the increased desire of parents to take their children to school emanating from their wish to dump their wards in school to engage in economic activities and the feeling of being cheated if their children were not in the school.

Another remarkable change noted was the execution of similar projects after the completion of the school. The community leaders indicated that other NGOs were enthused by the role and contribution of the community in the construction of the school and as such have assisted them to construct 2 new schools in the community. These impacts accentuate the respondents' agreement that the changes as a result of the project were very significant.

Clinic. Accessibility to ante and post natal care was a remarkable change in the community. The presence of a midwife in the Clinic improved greatly accessibility to ante and post natal care. Also, the Clinic harbored community health nurses

who visited the community for routine ante and post natal care. Respondents who universally agreed that the project changes to the community was significant believed the challenges that confronted pregnant and nursing mothers such as bad roads networks and lack of transportation had been alleviated. The Health Assistants at the Clinic also confirmed this impact. Another remarkable impact was the labeling of the community as malaria free by the Ghana Health Service after the inception of the Clinic. The coordinator of the NGO confirmed that the community previously had a high incidence of malaria. A major question worth exploring however is the contribution of the clinic to the declaration of the community as malaria free since malaria prevention goes beyond clinical activities.

Oil palm processor. One remarkable change was the establishment of a community fund with a percentage of proceeds from the processor. Remarkably, this fund had been used to construct a nursery school for the community. The fund was a way by which the whole community could benefit from the processor.

Another remarkable impact stated was the empowerment of women in the community. With most of the workers at the processor being women, they believed an increased income meant empowerment for the women. According to the female workers, they could now come together and put petitions before community leaders. They were also happy they were contributing to the development of their families and their community. All respondents including the female workers mentioned that the project changes were very significant.

Soap and cosmetics. It was very difficult to identify a remarkable change for this project because it was abandoned and production had stopped in the

facility. Few workers produced limited quantities from home mainly for personal use. The workers recounted how they could previously produce on a large scale and market even in the district capital. They were however quick to admit that such

impacts have been eroded since they no longer produced in the facility. It is not amazing that they conceded that the changes were less significant.

Table 3
Efficiency

Project	Sources and use of appropriate least cost resources
School	Community (local resources), Local government (expertise) and NGO (foreign resources)
Clinic	NGO (All materials)
Oil Palm Processor	Community (local resources) and NGO (foreign resources)
Soap and cosmetics	Community (local resources) and NGO (foreign resources)

Efficiency

School. Resources used for the construction of the school were from three sources: the community, local government and an NGO. The community contributed resources that were available locally such as land, sand, stones, wood, communal labour and water. They also contributed some financial resources. All these local resources were readily available and so were acquired at least cost to the project. It is important to note that the school was initiated by the community members after which the NGO supported them to complete. According to available records, the total contribution of the community stood at 9.22% but this excludes the land and what was initiated before the NGO support. The local government's contribution was valued at 7.70% in the form of the expertise of the site engineer and transportation of some local resources. The expertise and means of transport were readily available at least cost to the local government. The NGO contributed the remaining 83.08% of the resources for the School. This was in the form of resources which were foreign to the community such as cement, roofing sheets, locks, electrical materials and iron rods. It is evident that the School was efficient.

Clinic. According to the coordinator of the NGO, the Clinic was initiated and completed entirely without community or local government support. Some community members however argued that they contributed land and labour but the coordinator and opinion leaders of the community divulged that the NGO paid compensation for the land and labour. It was unclear whether the community deliberately refused to contribute

resources to the project or the NGO felt it had all resources necessary to initiate and complete the project. For the local government, it was very clear that they were not consulted during the construction of the project. Failure to distribute resource burden during implementation made the Clinic less efficient.

Oil palm processor. Resources for the construction of the processor were from the community and an NGO. The community members contributed materials available locally at least cost such as land, sand, stones, wood, communal labour and water. The NGO contributed all the materials that were foreign to the community including roofing sheets, cement, iron rods and fittings. There was no local government support. It is necessary to point out that the processor was initiated by the community but with encouragement of the NGO. Again, interactions with the community members hinted that they together with the NGO felt they could accomplish the project without local government support. There was no indication of local government consultation and this made the processor less efficient.

Soap and cosmetics. This project had similar characteristics like the processor. The community initiated the project with encouragement by the NGO. Also, resources were from the community and the NGO. The community's contribution was local resources at their disposal while that of the NGO were resources not readily available in the community. Again, there was no local government support to the project. Again, there was no indication of local government consultation and this made the project less efficient.

Effectiveness

School. The School had two major objectives: reducing travelling distance to school and increasing number of pupils in the community. Current results show that the School is present and

functions effectively. Again, the community members and the headmaster confirmed that most of the pupils in the school are from the community. These indicate that the current results match with the intended objectives.

Table 4
Effectiveness

Project	Intended objectives	Sources and use of appropriate least cost resources
School	Reducing travelling distance to school	Community (local resources), Local government (expertise) and NGO (foreign resources)
Clinic	Increasing number of children attending school	NGO (All materials)
Oil Palm Processor	Minimizing incidence of malaria in the community	Community (local resources) and NGO (foreign resources)
Soap and cosmetics	Serve as motor accident emergency unit	Community (local resources) and NGO (foreign resources)

Clinic. The Clinic also had 2 main objectives which were to minimize the incidence of malaria and to serve as a motor accident unit. The project coordinator indicated that the community had been declared malaria free by the Ghana Health Service. Sign posts in the community also confirmed this declaration. This declaration showed that current results matched the first intended results. However, there was no indication that the clinic had served as an accident unit after its inception. It was rather popular for ante and post natal care. This contrary situation showed the current result did not match the second intended objective. This gave an indication that the community may have had different needs and objectives from that of the NGO.

Oil palm processor. The objective of the Oil Palm processor was to increase income by creating alternative livelihood for the community members. Current results showed that the workers had increased their working days from 1 to 2 days in a week to 3 to 4 days. Also, production has increased and additional services of milling palm fruits were being provided by the workers to nearby communities. Workers disclosed that they have had increased income from their alternative livelihood. These confidently concludes that current results matched the intended objective.

Soap and cosmetics. This project also had the objective of increasing income by creating

alternative livelihood. Current results indicated that workers had diminished from 35 to 3 who were producing very limited quantities at home for personal use. The working days which used to be daily was now based on the convenience of the 3 workers. Also, the project had stalled and was engulfed by bush. These current results did not match the intended objective.

Sustainability

School. Examination of the physical state and comparison with photographs of the project after completion proved that it was strong, robust, painted and had erosion checks constructed. The community members had also undertaken 6 to 8 times maintenance on the project. These confirmed the respondents' believe that the school was in a very good state, would last for more than 5 years and was sustainable.

Clinic. Physical examination and photographic comparisons showed that it was dirty, had cracked walls and torn window nets. Additionally, it was earmarked for demolition due to the expansion of the highway. Again, it had not received any maintenance after its completion. Interestingly, there was confusion as to person responsible for the maintenance. The community expected the NGO to maintain the project while the NGO did not feel obligated since they had moved out of the community. The respondents rightly pointed out that the project was in a very bad state, would not last to serve the future generation and unsustainable.

Table 5
Sustainability

Project	Current physical state	Maintenance
School	Strong, painted, erosion checks constructed	6-8 times
Clinic	Dirty, cracked walls, torn window nets, earmarked for demolishing	No repairs
Oil Palm Processor	Strong, dirty, needed painting	6-8 times
Soap and cosmetics	Strong, engulfed by bush, abandoned	Less than 3 times

Oil Palm processor. Observations and photographic comparisons showed the Oil Palm processor was strong and robust even though it appeared dirty externally but this was blamed on the finished product. Despite the external

appearance, the project like the School had been maintained 6 to 8 times but most of them have been maintenance on working equipment. The respondents were highly optimistic the project would last for more than five years and serve future generation. They also believed their project was in a very good state.

Soap and cosmetics. Observations and photographic comparison portrayed that this project was engulfed by bush and abandoned even though it appeared strong. There had also been just one or two maintenance. Respondents pointed out outright that the project had been abandoned. They were also not certain whether it was sustainable and would serve the future generation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that the School was more relevant, efficient, effective and sustainable. It also had maximum impact. The Oil Palm processor was also more relevant, effective and sustainable. It was however less efficient because only the community and NGO shared the resource burden without local government involvement. The Clinic was less relevant because only pregnant women and nursing mothers derived some benefits even though it was meant for the whole community. The Clinic had minimal impact because it has not brought about any major change to the community. Even though the community had been declared malaria free, the Clinic has not improved accessibility to health care since majority of the community members still receive health care in nearby towns. Again, the Clinic is less efficient because the NGO initiated and completed the project. The community did not contribute any resource even though they had some local resources at their disposal. There was also no involvement from the local government. Finally, the clinic was not sustainable since it was earmarked for demolition. The Soap and Cosmetics project was not relevant, not efficient, not effective and not sustainable. It also did not have any impact on the community.

Table 6
Findings by Criterion (1 = More, 2 = Less, 3 = None)

Project	Relevance			Impact			Efficiency			Effectiveness			Sustainability		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
School	■			■			■			■			■		
Clinic		■			■			■			■				■
Oil Palm	■			■				■			■			■	
Soap and Cosmetics			■			■		■				■			■

The study recommends that stakeholders should be involved in the implementation of community development projects. Also, it is necessary to synchronize objectives of all stakeholders before implementing the project.

Secondly, communities should be encouraged to move beyond involvement to project initiation. This is because communities feel obligated to use and sustain such projects.

Thirdly, the study recommends that since benefits and impacts of projects spill over to nearby communities, it is important for nearby communities to collaborate in the implementation of projects. This would create greater efficiency by increasing the local resources base for the project. This would reduce cost burden on governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Also, implementation of alternative livelihood projects should include training on some topical issues such as adult literacy, financial management, records keeping, marketing and packaging in order to make them more successful and sustainable.

Finally, alternative livelihood projects should put in place measures like the community fund to ensure the whole community benefits and not only the workers.

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