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# META-EVALUATION OF USAID/UGANDA EVALUATION REPORTS

**April 2010**

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID/Uganda). It was prepared by John D. Wooten, Jr. from The Mitchell Group, Inc. for the Uganda Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services (UMEMS) Project, herein referred to as UMEMS, Number 617-C-00-08-00012-00

# **Meta-Evaluation of USAID/Uganda Evaluation Reports**

**Prepared for  
United States Agency for International Development  
USAID/UGANDA**

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**DISCLAIMER:**

Views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government

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Any errors of fact contained herein are the sole responsibility of the author.

## Acronyms

ACE	AIDS Enhancement Capacity Project
ADS	USAID Automated Directives System
AO	Assistance Objective
CCT	Cross-cutting Themes
CDIE	USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation
CSS	Cross-sectoral Synergies
DEC	USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse
FACTS	Foreign Assistance Coordination and Tracking System
GOU	Government of Uganda
IP	Implementing Partner
NGO	Non-governmental Organization(s)
NUMAT	Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS and Tuberculosis Program
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
SOW	Statement(s) of Work
TMG	The Mitchell Group, Inc.
UMEMS	Uganda Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services
UNITY	Uganda Initiative for Teacher Development Management Systems and the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy Communication to the Youth
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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## Meta-Evaluation of USAID/Uganda Evaluation Reports

### Executive Summary and Recommendations

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Uganda Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services (UMEMS) is a four-year USAID/Uganda project (2008-2012) whose purpose is to provide a comprehensive performance management, monitoring and reporting program, including evaluation services, to the Mission, serving Assistance Objective (AO) Teams and their implementing partners (IPs) in carrying out their performance measurement, activity monitoring, and planning responsibilities in a wide array of programs, except for HIV/AIDS. The project is implemented under a contract with The Mitchell Group.

The purpose of this evaluation is to conduct a meta-review of three UMEMS-supported evaluations conducted to-date, with a view to improving the quality of future evaluations activities. The evaluation is based on: examination of the evaluation statements of work (SOW), the final evaluation reports, and select background reports on each project (e.g., annual reports, quarterly progress reports, and performance monitoring plans). Specific tasks include:

- a. Review the project evaluations conducted to date under UMEMS:
  - End-of-Project Evaluation of the AIDS Enhancement Capacity Project (ACE), July 2009
  - Mid-term Evaluation of the Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS and Tuberculosis Program (NUMAT), August 2009
  - Mid-term Evaluation of the Uganda Initiative for Teacher Development Management Systems and the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy Communication to the Youth (UNITY), December 2008
- b. Conduct a meta-evaluation of the evaluations according to an agreed set of evaluation standards that is acceptable to USAID, assessing each evaluation conducted
- c. Provide a set of recommendations for improving evaluations
- d. Develop a series of checklists/tools for UMEMS staff to use at different stages of the evaluation process to ensure quality data and deliverables

Following is an *excerpt* of key recommendations for consideration by USAID/Uganda and, as relevant, its implementing partners and stakeholders. In addition to evaluation, they also address project design and implementation issues that determine evaluation outcomes. Two sets of recommendations are discussed and justified in Section II. General Overview Comments on All Reviewed Evaluation, respecting (1) evaluation statements of work (SOW) and (2) the evaluation reports themselves. Section III. Summary of Recommendations lists all recommendations.

## Key Recommendations<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Evaluation Statements of Work - Background Statements

USAID/Uganda should ensure all evaluation SOW establish projects within their broader development framework in which they operate, and encourage evaluation teams to take a broader, contextual view. This includes:

- a. The relevant USAID strategy framework, which includes the results framework, and clearly distinguished output and impact targets and assessment indicators
- b. The framework of relevant host country policies, and other donor programs supporting target sector and program areas
- c. An unambiguous project design, including a clear, unique purpose statement, measurable end-of-project status statements, and key assumptions upon which the project's design rests

### 2. SOW - Purpose of Evaluation

- a. USAID/Uganda and its evaluation planners should ensure that all evaluation SOW include a clear, succinct statement of the purpose of the evaluation
- b. Without revealing potentially sensitive information, the Mission should consider encouraging evaluation planners to elaborate in the SOW specific management decisions the evaluation report is intended to support.

### 3. SOW - Key Evaluation Questions

- a. Decisions to evaluate a project should, in the best scenarios, be joint, and communicated as such in the SOW, signaling the readiness of stakeholders to engage
- b. Evaluation SOW should jointly reflect the perspectives and key research requirements of key stakeholders in the interest of furthering joint objectives
- c. Evaluation SOW should identify a small number of key questions and specific issues answerable with empirical evidence
- d. Evaluation SOW should encourage and be structured to allow evaluation teams to probe

### 4. SOW - Information Sources

- a. The Mission should mobilize a project's partners and stakeholders to organize in advance, relevant background reading materials that would clearly support the pending evaluation exercise, well beyond USAID-centric, project documents.
- b. The Mission should encourage and allow evaluation teams to read more broadly in preparation for evaluation exercises, and require a full bibliographic annex in each evaluation report.

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<sup>1</sup> The numbering of recommendations *excerpted* in the Executive Summary do not necessarily correspond to their numbering or packaging within the report's text.

## 5. SOW - Evaluation Methodologies

The Mission should consider more flexible, responsive, and higher quality *evaluation research designs* other than the typical “30 day parachute team, comprehensive study” approach in order to increase value-for-money returns on its evaluation investments. Numerous alternative approaches are discussed herein including, for example:

- Sector, thematic, and cross-sectoral meta evaluations. In light of persistent issues with achieving sustainable capacity development, and tight strategy and project timeframes, perhaps this issue may warrant such a review. Such approaches may also increase aid effectiveness. Thematic meta evaluations might help in other problematic areas such as training-led organizational capacity development; replication of pilot activities; pilot vs. service delivery orientations; embedding projects within ministries; etc.
- Extended research efforts conducted over several months, or possibly parallel to a project during implementation. A combination of intermittent in-country visits and off-site work would support the design of more responsive, higher quality research designs.
- Staggered evaluation team inputs. In some cases, this approach could possibly facilitate a better, overall experience and higher quality product.

## 6. SOW - Evaluation Team Composition

The Mission should be more flexible and considerate regarding evaluation team compositions, in concert with numerous issues and recommendations discussed herein. The “*one international expert and several local experts*” model to evaluations demonstrates little creativity or vision concerning how best to achieve the Mission’s evaluation purposes.

## 7. SOW - Deliverables

The Mission should be more creative in structuring evaluation team deliverables, in concert with numerous issues and recommendations discussed herein. Involving partners and stakeholders more intimately in all (joint) evaluation decisions, including what the deliverables should be, might help catalyze a potentially more valuable set of highly useful deliverables, and help ensure broader use of evaluation findings.

## 8. SOW - Roles and Responsibilities

USAID/Uganda’s evaluation planners should examine the full set of implications (*pros* and *cons*) of participatory evaluations, and be absolutely clear in the SOW. Moreover, after reviewing the evaluation SOW and report, the reader should not have to guess,

“What was the extent, nature, and benefit of USAID’s and the stakeholder’s representation on the team?”, as is currently the case. Moreover, the Mission should ensure that its evaluations are both *jointly planned* and *participatory* in their implementation.

#### 9. SOW - Sustainability

USAID/Uganda should:

- a. Require project design teams to lay out clear, unambiguous sustainability expectations, per component or element of its projects, and require jointly-developed and agreed sustainability plans and roadmaps from implementing partners and stakeholders. These approved plans should be sufficiently specific so as to facilitate empirical assessment by an external evaluation team.
- b. Consider that such plans should include duly inflated recurrent cost projections of the post-project budgetary (operating *and* re-investment costs) implications of project interventions; as well as plans for developing within assisted institutions the associated financial analysis and fundraising skills
- c. Adequately reflect the above considerations into future evaluation SOW
- d. In context of the above recommendations, consider restating the sustainability question in evaluation SOW. Rather than a focus on “sustainability of donor-aided interventions”, perhaps the need is for a clearer, more concerted focus on ownership and affordability - the components of sustainability, as is inferred in the UNITY evaluation report. (pp. 49-50) This may help change the emphasis from an “objective, distant focus” (sustainability of donor-aided programs) to a more personalized, subjective focus on the entities which are expected to continue program benefits because of inherent, meaningful benefits. Thus, an operative key evaluation question or task might be:

*Assess the extent to which those specific elements of the project targeted for continued benefits in the design stage (per approved sustainability plans) are increasingly owned and potentially affordable by relevant stakeholder groups.*

#### 10. SOW - Cost effectiveness

USAID/Uganda should:

- a. Require project design teams to perform adequate cost effectiveness analyses, in accordance with USAID ADS guidelines, and to lay out clear, unambiguous expectations, per component or element of its projects, of cost effectiveness expectations and responsibilities during implementation. This is critical to support empirically-basis evaluation
- b. Promote and seek to inculcate cost effectiveness considerations into the cultures of assisted institutions, including helping them to develop and apply relevant skills and appropriate tools to support cost effective decision-making
- c. Adequately reflect the above considerations into future evaluation SOW

## 11. SOW - Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- a. USAID/Uganda should ensure evaluation SOW clearly task evaluators to:
  - 1) Revisit and assess the project’s design, including key assumptions, in light of continuing policy, organizational, and field developments during implementation
  - 2) Conduct rapid literature reviews of recent, relevant development experience (lessons learned and best practices), first and foremost within USAID’s extensive Development Experience Clearinghouse database, and other relevant sources that may be readily available (e.g., World Bank, British aid, and especially other donors working in-country in the targeted sectors)
  - 3) Fully document all references used – in a full bibliography, not simply citing “selected materials”
  - 4) Assess and report project-specific lessons learned and best practices within the broader development context
  - 5) Promote initiatives to inculcate within the Mission’s culture “doing DEC reviews” (e.g., coin an appropriate verb out of DEC”, just as “Google” has become a verb.
- b. The Mission should ask itself:

*How might the quality of our project design, implementation, and monitoring experiences improve if our Mission’s culture proactively encouraged Mission and key implementing partner staff to read annually the most recent or relevant 25 USAID evaluation and audit reports?*

## 12. SOW - Evaluation Levels of Effort

USAID/Uganda should ensure that:

- a. The duration and size of evaluation teams carefully correlate with the level of financial and strategic investment USAID is making in the sector and the project, and the critical importance of USAID investments to host country strategies, rather than be guided by some artificial “norm”
- b. Evaluations of highly complex projects should perhaps not be artificially shoe-horned into the normal 25-30 page limit, but reflect the more realistic needs corresponding to USAID investments

## 13. SOW - Mission Management

For the more comprehensive evaluations, USAID/Uganda should consider the potential benefits from requiring evaluation teams to include in their assessments, a brief review of the Mission’s management role, rather than limiting evaluation focus to its partners and stakeholders. This would help ensure a more balanced, objective evaluation since the Mission is “*also a stakeholder*” in development.

#### 14. Overly Ambitious, Ambiguous Designs

The foundation of a successful evaluation experience is a *well designed project*. From another perspective, a well-designed project serves as the *first conceptual draft* of the evaluation SOW. Therefore, results frameworks, logical frameworks, and performance monitoring plans (PMPs) -- the tools of solid designs, should also guide development of evaluation SOW. Thus, to achieve better project evaluations and program impact, USAID/Uganda should consider opportunities to enhance the quality of its project designs and “*project packaging*” (i.e., what components and elements comprise a given project), based on the numerous issues and recommendations discussed herein. For example, the Mission should proactively consider where and how it can:

- a. “Do less with more - *sustainably*”, rather than the traditional push to “do more with less” in order to sponsor more realistic projects befitting stakeholders resource constraints.
- b. Seek pivotal changes at the margins, *well within* assisted institutions’ resource envelopes (policies, systems, staff, budgets, facilities, and material resources)
- c. Evaluate or reassess current, potentially overly ambitious project designs to ascertain ways and means to increase the likelihood of success, possibly including mid-course restructuring or *redesigns*
- d. Follow the guidelines of ADS 201.3.11.4 in designing projects, and attaching approved project logframes to evaluation SOW to facilitate quick comprehension of the project’s structure and key assumptions.
- e. Ensure its project purpose statements follow ADS guidelines, carefully avoiding “stacked” purpose statements that confuse the Mission’s objectives. This should one step should greatly help improve the quality of the Mission’s evaluations.

#### 15. Training as Organizational Capacity Development

- a. USAID/Uganda, its implementing partners and stakeholders should consider the *pros* and *cons* of embracing training as key inputs, rather than output results. This approach might *fundamentally* change the mindsets across USAID programs, from design-to-evaluation, and help keep the focused on a project’s purpose.
- b. USAID/Uganda should ensure that its project designs are sufficiently clear regarding the anticipated role(s) that project-funded training will play in the multi-faceted arena of sustainable organizational capacity development. This includes specifying to what extent implementing partners will integrate training approaches into sustainability plans. This recommendation recognizes that all training initiatives are not necessarily targeted for sustainability.

#### 16. Use of Local Contractors

USAID/Uganda, its implementing partners, and stakeholders should ensure future evaluations rigorously address the quality and affordability of potentially sustainable

partnerships with local contractors and consulting firms, otherwise, donor projects may be building “bridges to nowhere”. In some cases, this may be an issue that may warrant research apart from (e.g., before) comprehensive evaluations.

#### 17. Program Synergies and Aid Effectiveness

To make cross-sectoral synergies and cross-cutting themes more meaningful beyond the strategy articulation phase, the Mission might consider the value of:

- a. Requiring implementing partners to address in their performance reports progress, problems, and opportunities relating to program synergies
- b. Encouraging evaluation teams to be more programmatic in identifying broader benefits of and opportunities catalyzed by the projects they assess
- c. Using the above to leverage greater cross-sectoral readership both of project evaluations and performance reports across the Mission

#### 18. Post-Implementation Monitoring

USAID/Uganda should ensure its project designs and evaluations:

- a. Systematically discuss post-implementation impacts with a view to seeking workable, affordable ways and means to enable the identification, capture, and reporting of substantive impacts for a reasonable post-implementation period.
- b. Thereby, help channel on-going lessons into, not only future programming, but also into increasingly important USAID historical databases, and the donor community, more broadly.