DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

CASE OVERVIEW: SUPPORTING COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN CAMBODIA

Funder
USAID

Family Care First
Cambodia

Timeline
November 2015 - present

Purpose
Increase the number of children living in safe, nurturing family-based care in Cambodia

Implementing Partners
Save the Children (Integrating Partner)
Global Alliance for Children (Backbone)
Nearly 50 partner organizations

What is Developmental Evaluation?

Developmental evaluation (DE) is an approach that supports continuous adaptation in complex environments, and differs from typical evaluations in a few ways: (1) DEs have a Developmental Evaluator embedded alongside the implementation team; (2) DEs emphasize iterative, real-time data collection and regular reflection to support adaptation; (3) DEs are methodologically agnostic and adjust analytical techniques and evaluation questions as the project changes. For more information on DEs, consider reading _Developmental Evaluation_ from Better Evaluation.

Family Care First in Cambodia (FCF) is a network of organizations working together to help children live in safe, nurturing, family-based care. Since 2015, FCF has been working in Cambodia to advance transformational solutions to prevent family separation and strengthen the social service workforce. FCF is guided by the Collective Impact approach (Figure 1) to support multiple layers of stakeholders across different sectors.

Why DE?

FCF is a highly complex project, with numerous stakeholders and many unknowns regarding the Collective Impact model and the project's ultimate theory of change. The DE was intended to support improved coordination among all FCF partners. FCF selected DE because the evaluation approach could adapt to shifting circumstances, relationships, and implementation strategies tomeet FCF's changing needs over time.

> 66 **[DE] offers a fundamentally different approach to evaluation, with richer results and more diverse thinking that challenges the traditional narrative of evaluations.** 99
>
> – FCF Stakeholder

What is Collective Impact?

A framework for organizations to work together to tackle complex social problems. Collective Impact initiatives are characterized by five core characteristics:

1. A **Common Agenda** that is a mutually accepted vision for change;
2. A **Shared Management System** with common indicators to track progress and maximize transparency and accountability
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities** that employ each organization's strengths;
4. **Continuous Communication** to develop trust; and
5. A **Backbone Support Organization** that plays the role of key advocate and coordinator, helping partners interact positively and effectively.

It's great to have a [supporting] team member with some dedicated time to bounce ideas off of, to talk through what types of tools or approaches you're thinking of taking... someone to pull you out of the weeds once a week or so and help you see the bigger picture, re-orient [you] to the DE research question, remind you when things are getting personal.

— DEPA-MERL Developmental Evaluator & FCF DE Administrator

Design & Implementation

The Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity (DEPA-MERL) conducted a DE with FCF from November 2016 to March 2018. DEPA-MERL hired a Developmental Evaluator (Evaluator) who worked full-time from January 2017 to March 2018 and was embedded within the initiative. Given FCF's size and geographic reach, the Evaluator traveled to visit FCF implementing partners as needed. Several staff from DEPA-MERL members Search for Common Ground, Social Impact, and the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan further supported the Evaluator . These "DE Administrators" contributed to DE implementation in key ways:

- Helping launch and overseeing the DE –The DE Administrators oversaw the initial design of the DE and then recruited a skilled Evaluator whose competencies were well-matched to the FCF team's needs. During the DE, the DE Administrators managed the agreed-upon budgets and timelines and served as liaisons to the funder (USAID).

- Providing technical support to the Evaluator – The DE Administrators also helped the Evaluator work through complex and emergent issues. They provided extra support for data collection and analysis, and provided quality assurance on deliverables.

The DE sought to answer three main questions, which the Evaluator and FCF members collaboratively identified throughout the DE's 15 months. The first evaluation question focused on core FCF members' roles and responsibilities and collected data on how FCF could execute the Collective Impact model. Second, the DE examined FCF's role in Cambodia's child protection sector more broadly. For the final DE question, the Evaluator helped FCF collect data to understand what systems, tools, and strategies enabled Save the Children to strengthen knowledge sharing across partners.

In answering these questions, the DE documented numerous emergent findings that influenced the structure of FCF awards and inter-partner relationships. For example, USAID restructured the awards to the Backbone organization and Network Facilitator, and FCF's members restructured their meetings and events to improve local ownership, buy-in, and voice. FCF partners had various perspectives on the changes to the initiative: in some cases, the emergent findings negatively affected buy-in; while in other cases, FCF implementing partners and USAID staff found the data and evidence the DE collected useful in documenting the need for additional coordination and changes to FCF.

> **[DE] gets you to reflect on processes, which is important but is sometimes overlooked when you move straight into delivery.**
>
> **– FCF Stakeholder**

Value of DE

Using interviews, detailed notetaking, and keen observation, the Evaluator helped FCF make numerous adaptations that improved program implementation, including:

Prioritizing local voices at meetings and events. For example, Save the Children is now working with local partners to offer simultaneous translation from Khmer to English. Prior to the DE, meetings were held primarily in English.

Restructuring the USAID awards. Based on information the DE documented, USAID restructured awards to the Backbone organization and Network Facilitator, changing the implementing partners' roles and responsibilities. USAID made this significant adaptation to FCF's initial design to better serve FCF's partners and achieve its programmatic objectives. As one stakeholder put it, "What the developmental evaluation excelled in doing was that it made the necessary change happen sooner through the 'greasing of wheels' and setting things into motion."

Establishing provincial meetings to make FCF less Phnom Penh-centric. FCF established quarterly provincial meetings to respond to stakeholders' needs outside of the capital. Following DE recommendations, Save the Children hired more staff to provide added support to provincial partners' and communities' needs. This significant adaptation shifted FCF away from being a Phnom Penh-centric initiative, improved buy-in to co-creation processes, and resulted in actions that better address the unique challenges faced by Cambodia's different regions.

Stakeholders noted that the Evaluator played a particularly valuable role because he was a third-party, independent voice that could work through challenges with leadership. Additionally, FCF and USAID staff reported the biggest added value of participating in the DE was that the DE **built trust and listened to stakeholders' needs while collecting relevant evidence and data for strategic decision making.**

FOSTERING SELF-RELIANCE: SUSTAINING RESULTS

Strengthening Local Institutions: In funding the DE, USAID helped foster Cambodia's Journey to Self-Reliance by tailoring the program to local needs. DE-generated evidence helped the lead implementer make strategic decisions that strengthened its commitment to building local capacity of its Cambodian partners. For example, the DE contributed to establishing quarterly provincial meetings to foster local leadership and support the needs of implementers working outside of the capital. FCF team meetings and events are also now led in Khmer rather than English. These efforts support FCF's shift toward locally led co-creation processes and cross-sector collaborations that better address the unique challenges faced by implementers.

FOSTERING SELF-RELIANCE: INVESTING FOR IMPACT

Strategic Choices: Fostering the Journey to Self-Reliance requires investing for impact, including actively engaging institutions who can contribute to self-reliance in ways that catalyze wider and more meaningful change. The FCF DE contributed toward this goal by helping USAID take balanced risks and reimagine the FCF partnership. In particular, the DE facilitated USAID's decision to restructure the awards to FCF's Backbone organization and Network Facilitator. After DE data collection and communication with FCF partners, USAID recognized programmatic tradeoffs and made some hard choices to restructure the FCF awards. In doing so, USAID better served FCF's partners and helped them achieve sustained programmatic results.

Lessons Learned

1 Integrating the Evaluator was a continual process and occurred across all stages of the DE

Integrating the Evaluator into FCF was a key factor in the DE's success by allowing the Evaluator to have high-quality engagements and establish trust with FCF stakeholders. This integration happened continuously throughout the DE. For example, although the DE Administrators explained the roles and responsibilities of the Evaluator at the start of the DE, the Evaluator's role had to be re-clarified as his responsibilities and objectives changed over time. Additionally, the Evaluator was also included on team emails and operational meetings, which facilitated buy-in and allowed the Evaluator to collect data through observation without being burdensome to implementation teams.

> **A critical barrier to the developmental evaluation was the award. The cooperative agreement and the different levels of understanding that USAID had in terms of what leeway they had to change the [governance] structure and use different intervention strategies…. there was lack of clarity on what could be done.**
>
> **– FCF Stakeholder**

2 Additional staff from DE Administrators supported the Evaluator and enabled DE effectiveness

DEPA-MERL members provided oversight and technical support to the Evaluator, helping him complete evaluative efforts he would not have had the time or capacity to do alone. This additional support was also instrumental in ensuring objectivity, brainstorming ideas, discussing data findings, and testing different solutions for how to use DE data to inform FCF adaptations.

3 USAID played a critical role in managing the DE

As a funding partner and key stakeholder, USAID staff involved in the FCF DE helped mitigate barriers to and promote enablers of DE implementation. For example, in the DE's first five months, USAID staff importantly clarified the funding and procurement boundaries of the award so DE stakeholders could understand what types of changes could be implemented. This high-level support enabled better buy-in for both the DE and the subsequent adaptations.

> **A lot of new approaches were being used in FCF for the first time; but then this is exactly when you want to use a developmental evaluation over a traditional approach because you can receive and use that feedback in real-time versus months or years later.**
>
> **-FCF Stakeholder**

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Stakeholders felt that DE offered unique value to their program.

DE Administrators surveyed 14 FCF stakeholders and found that 71% of respondents said they would recommend DE to other organizations. Compared to other types of evaluation, at least 50% of survey respondents said the FCF DE was much better at facilitating program adaptations, being aware of local environmental complexities, and uncovering program inefficiencies. Further, they said the DE was most valuable because it built trust, listened to stakeholders' needs, collected relevant evidence, and improved communication among stakeholders (Figure 2).

In what ways was the DE most valuable?

Builds trust and listens to stakeholders
9 out of 14 respondents

Collects relevant evidence and data
6 out of 14 respondents

Improves communication among stakeholders
5 out of 14 respondents

In what ways was the DE least valuable?

Timing of feedback could have been improved
8 out of 12 respondents

Evaluator lacked decision making power
4 out of 12 respondents

Required significant resources
2 out of 12 respondents

Would you recommend the DE approach to other organizations?

YES - 10 out of 14 respondents

DE Case Studies

This case study is part of a series on how developmental evaluation is being conducted within the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other projects. The case studies were written by the Developmental Pilot Activity (DEPA-MERL) consortium— part of the USAID Global Development Lab's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations Program. DEPA-MERL seeks to pilot the use of DE, assess its feasibility and effectiveness in the USAID context, and share learnings globally. These case studies and other resources on DE, including A Practical Guide for Evaluators and Administrators, are available on the DEPA-MERL website. The consortium is led by Social Impact, with partners Search for Common Ground and the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan.

Conclusions

Upon its conclusion in 2018, the DE provided FCF leadership and stakeholders with learnings on how to fulfill FCF's purpose. As FCF partners worked together to maximize benefit from their Collective Impact model, the DE flexibly covered the range of FCF's activities and the evolving nature of its work. USAID relied on DE findings to restructure the FCF awards and take steps to increase local ownership and buy-in across FCF's partners. For stakeholders, the DE successfully built trust, listened to their needs, and collected and analyzed data rigorously. The DE succeeded in this approach in part due to resources and support from its Administrators, and also due to USAID's role in clarifying what changes would be feasible.