DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

CASE OVERVIEW: UPTAKE OF INNOVATIONS AT THE US GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT LAB

Funder

U.S. Agency for International Development:

Office of Evaluation and Impact Assessment

US Global Development Lab

U.S. Global Development Lab

Timeline

2014 - Present

Purpose

Bring together diverse partners to catalyze the next generation of breakthrough innovations to advance USAID's mission to support partner countries on their journey to self-reliance

Program

U.S. Global Development Lab: Multiple programs addressing internal and external scaling, acceleration and sustained uptake

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.

Established in 2014, the U.S. Global Development Lab ("the Lab") serves as an innovation hub powered by USAID. The Lab is comprised of seven centers and offices who take smart risks to test new ideas and harness the power of innovative approaches that accelerate development impact. The Lab's mission is two-fold:

1. To produce breakthrough development innovations by sourcing, testing, and scaling proven solutions to reach hundreds of millions of people.
2. To accelerate the transformation of the development enterprise by opening development to people everywhere with good ideas, promoting new and deepening existing partnerships, bringing data and evidence to bear, and harnessing scientific and technological advances.

From March 2017 to December 2018, the Lab participated in a developmental evaluation (DE) led by the Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity (DEPA-MERL). The DE worked with several of the Lab's teams to learn about the sustained uptake of innovations these teams seek to promote within and beyond USAID.

> " Because of the flexible nature of DE, it's super valuable to the teams... what we are getting out of DE is radically different than what we are getting from a traditional evaluation. "

-USAID, U.S. Global Development Lab Staff

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE   SOCIAL IMPACT   WILLIAM DAVIDSON INSTITUTE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN   Search for Common Ground

Why Developmental Evaluation?

The Lab has evolved its programming to source, test, and scale development solutions. Aligned with this mission, the Lab wanted to undertake active learning to enable them to better understand and implement different approaches to scale and sustain uptake. The DE appealed to the Lab teams given its innovative and rigorous nature and, most importantly, its emphasis on providing on-demand, and utilization-focused deliverables.

Design and Implementation

The DE team included both full and part-time staff from USAID and DEPA-MERL. A full-time Developmental Evaluator was hired to conduct the work and was embedded within the Office of Evaluation and Impact Assessment (EIA) in Washington, D.C. The Developmental Evaluator's work was supported by several part-time staff from the DEPA-MERL consortium (Search for Common Ground, Social Impact, and the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan). These "DE Administrators" contributed to DE implementation by helping to launch and oversee the DE, as well as by providing technical support related to the DE's evaluation activities. Lastly, the DE received critical support and high-levels of engagement from internal USAID staff, most importantly the COR from EIA and the Team Leads from each of the teams directly involved in the DE.

EIA played a significant role in all three phases by helping to guide the technical direction of the pilot, using and promoting DE results, and— in the final phase— directly benefiting from implementation of key recommendations.

Developmental Evaluator (External)
- Responsible for leading the DE
- Primarily designed DE tools & processes
- Full-time, 100% on DE

DE Administrators (External)
- Provided technical support for DE activities
- Primary point of contact for external evaluator
- Part time, up to 50% on DE activities

Team Leads & other Lab Staff (Internal)
- Involved in all DE meetings/learning processes
- Up to 40% of time on related activities

Contracting Officer's Representative (COR)/ DE Activity Manager from EIA (Internal)
- Helped launch DE and integrate the Evaluator
- Main point of contact for Lab on the DE
- Part-time, up to 30% on DE

Phase 1 Months 1-6

The DE focused on understanding which conditions and working relationships help achieve sustained uptake internally (with Missions and Bureaus) and externally. This work was conducted with two teams: D2FTF and SOGE.

Phase 2 Months 7 - 16

The DI and DFS teams joined the DE, expanding the scope. The evaluator helped all four Lab teams make strategic changes to their programs. The DE also collected evidence about the most replicable elements from the different sustained uptake models and shared guidance on effective ways to secure strong Mission partnerships.

Phase 3 Months 17-22

The DE examined the work of two additional teams under the Lab– the Innovation Design and Advisory (iDesign) and the Program and Strategic Planning Office (PSP)– to help them engage in sustainability planning training and implementation.

Value of DE

Many significant outcomes and adaptations occurred during the DE. Some occurred as a result of the planned evaluation activities and scope, while others emerged based on new learnings uncovered during the course of the DE. Outcomes and adaptations included:

Theories of Change & Results Frameworks:
During the DE, the SOGE team updated their results framework and developed metrics for measuring success and achieving sustained uptake. These metrics better measured strategic efforts undertaken by the team, captured the collective impact of SOGE's partnerships, and allowed them to assess some ecosystem level impacts.

Mission Engagement:
Although it was not envisioned as part of the original scope, The DE created and disseminated the Mission Engagement Playbook – a how-to manual built on DE evidence of how to work with USAID Missions effectively. This helped to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Mission-Headquarters (HQ) relationships for teams who implemented the guidance.

Sustainability Planning & Exit Strategies:
The DE helped six teams develop and initiate implementation of Sustainability Plans and exit strategies, thereby improving sustainability of programmatic outcomes and increasing the understanding of pathways to scale for the teams' innovations.

Culture of Evaluative Thinking and Adaption:
The DE embedded evaluative thinking within the Lab teams. it contributed to an improved learning culture for five teams focusing on developing action-oriented, adaptive decision-making.

> " Developmental evaluation provides evidence-based recommendations in which program leaders can make more informed and more effective decisions about their work, in real-time and not post facto, thereby making development dollars more effective. "
>
> **– DE Stakeholder**

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> " It was very useful and the learning had a tremendous impact on how our team makes decisions. It also bred a very healthy learning culture within our team. That has served us very well. "
>
> **– DE Stakeholder**

Lessons Learned

1 A Developmental Evaluator is more than just an evaluator

In addition to having a diverse set of technical and interpersonal skills, DEPA-MERL learned early on that the Developmental Evaluator need to take on a diverse set of job functions. The nature of the activities she was conducting varied a lot by the DE's phase and which team she was working with. For example, her role was not limited to collecting and analyzing data. She also supported Lab teams in their CLA practice and helped them to prioritize and implement recommendations. In the final phase, she also offered facilitation and capacity building support. To enable the evolving role of the Developmental Evaluator, it is important that the role and responsibilities of the Developmental Evaluator are co-developed with the team at the start of the DE and that these are shared with stakeholders early on. Stakeholders will also want to revisit and, potentially, revise the Developmental Evaluator's role as the evaluation evolves so that they are getting the most out of the DE.

Lessons Learned

2 The DE scope and timeline can be adjusted to provide more value

DE priorities and evaluation questions may shift over time. As a result, the Lab learned took a flexible approach to DE, changing its size and scope as needed. What was initially intended to be a 12 month DE, turned into 22 months because the Lab decided to engage in two three-month DE extensions. Depending on the needs of the Lab, they added (and removed) teams from the DE as the scope evolved. Adding the final phase (Phase III), also gave the Developmental Evaluator extra time to de-integrate from the teams she had worked with in Phases I and II.

> " My job is not over when I hand someone the recommendations ... I help them by scheduling a strategic learning debrief. I am there to expressly facilitate action, to facilitate change and adaptation. If I only collect data and share findings, I've done 10% of my job. "
>
> **-Developmental Evaluator**

3 DE can help mobilize stakeholders to make data-driven changes

The DE teams' willingness to embrace adaptations based on the DE findings enabled the Lab to get full value out of the DE. The DE was able to mobilize the DE team to make data-driven changes because they were committed to engaging with the Developmental Evaluator and receiving constructive feedback based on DE data. When it came to implementing changes based on DE data or recommendations, the Developmental Evaluator helped by offering advice or providing co-implementation support.

Top reasons why stakeholders stated they would recommend DE to other organizations:

Data-driven recommendations: "[The DE] integrated evidence-based analysis into regular ways of working for the team, so that they built stronger theories of change [and] adapted to opportunities and challenges to improve strategic implementation."

Improves strategic management: "The DE evidence showed how D2FTF could help Feed the Future Missions utilize digital tools and technologies in their Global Food Security Strategy [GFSS] work. It helped the team leverage entry points and align with Mission priorities to ultimately increase cross-sector integration in their work."

Leads to new understanding: "DE takes a rigorous approach to understanding strategic and operational challenges, leading to better-informed options for adaptation and continuous improvement."

The real gem: the developmental evaluator: "Development work is messy and engages local systems of staggering complexity. An evaluation team that shows up for three months can't speak to success or challenges the way a Developmental Evaluator who has been embedded in teams can."

FOSTERING SELF-RELIANCE: INVESTING FOR IMPACT

Harmonize Investments in Sustainable Growth: Fostering the Journey to Self-Reliance requires **leveraging the central role enterprise plays as an engine of development**. The DE worked with the Scaling Off Grid Energy (SOGE) team in this area, providing several recommendations for adapting their relationship with Power Africa. This kicked off adaptations and efforts from SOGE, particularly from leadership, to engage more with the Power Africa team; and which led to improved relationships, decision-making processes, and communication and expectation setting. The DE data also showed that SOGE was having a hard time capturing ecosystem level outcomes around market acceleration. Seeing the DE evidence led the team to revise their theory of change to enable better measurement of their success in changing the solar enterprise ecosystem; and to devise a strategy for eventual handover of partnership management away from USAID.

FOSTERING SELF-RELIANCE: INVESTING FOR IMPACT

Harmonize Investments in Sustainable Growth: In funding the DE, the Lab helped foster the Journey to Self-Reliance (J2SR) by **promoting cross-sectoral integration** in the areas of food security and digital technology. Utilizing data and evidence from the DE, the Digital Development for Feed the Future (D2FTF) team developed technical guidance on digital technology for the Global Food Security Strategy's country planning process and made a number of services available to USAID Missions to further support the integration of digital approaches into their respective programming.

> **[The DE] REALLY improved M&E thinking and strategic management on the teams ... Wish all teams could do it!**
>
> **– DE Stakeholder**

DE Case Studies

This case study is part of a series on how developmental evaluation is being conducted within the U.S. 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.