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Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development
Zewo Guidelines for Projects and Programmes

Step 3: Plan the outcome and impact assessment

Even before the project is implemented, plans must be laid for how its effects are to be measured and assessed. The results of this step must be written down.

How it is done

Activities	There must be clarification of what has to be answered to whom for what purpose. This gives indications of ho findings of the impact assessment are to be <u>compared</u>, and <u>who</u> will later carry out the evaluation. The targete outputs and effects must be converted into <u>indicators</u> and target values must be defined. For each indicator, th <u>methods</u> used to collect the necessary data must be planned.
Questions	Coming up with answers to the following questions can be the third step in an impact assessment: • What do we want to find out? • What will we compare the results against? • Who is to carry out the impact assessment, and who is responsible? • Which indicators can we use to measure our outputs (deliverables) and outcomes (effects)? • What are the sources of this data? • How is the data collected and who is responsible for doing it? • Has everything been considered in the drawing up of the terms of reference for the impact assessment?
Results	• Responsibilities have been defined. • The indicators, data sources, collection methods, frequency and timing of the measurements are clear, as the reference figures for the purposes of comparison. • The design, plan and <u>terms of reference</u> for the impact assessment have been formulated.
Resources	• <u>Logical Framework Approach</u>: Logical Framework Matrix • <u>Outcome Mapping</u>: Outcome and Performance Monitoring, Evaluation Planning • <u>Theory of Change</u>: Developing Indicators
Examples	• <u>Well building</u>: objectives, indicators, measurement • <u>Health course</u>: objectives, indicators, measurement • <u>Medical care</u>: objectives, indicators, measurement

IMPORTANT

There are important feedback loops within this step and also to the previous steps (<u>Define the project objectives</u> and <u>Develop a results model</u>):

• Formulating the objectives through indicators helps to check that the planned project objectives are realistic and achievable.
• Planning data collection helps to check whether the indicators can be measured in a timely fashion and at a justifiable cost.
• Combining the two shows whether the evaluation question can be answered.

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Comparisons

Planning an assessment always also involves defining a standard of comparison to evaluate the subject under study. How the standard of comparison is defined determines to a great degree how the measurements should be approached. The following dimensions must be kept in mind when doing this:

- **Timing**
  The measurements can be taken before the project, at the end, or after completion. If the aim is to investigate what happens over the course of the project, then additional measurements need to be made during the project.
- **Reference values**
  Actual performance can be compared with the objectives, the initial situation or with a control group.

Basic models

The following basic models can be used to measure the achievement of objectives, changes in the target group or the project's influence.

Target/performance comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group		Measurement 1	

Before & after comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	

Comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Target group		Measurement 1	
Control group		Measurement 2	

Before & after comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	

IMPORTANT

A rigorous impact assessment can in principle only be carried out with a before-and-after comparison combined with a control group. This makes it possible to clearly attribute observed changes to the project and to exclude external influences. In practice, institutional donors increasingly demand this kind of comparative model. However, they are hard work; at least four measurements are needed. The choice of the control group and the taking of samples are no laughing matter. Smaller organisations in particular will hardly have the necessary resources to carry out such rigorous impact assessments, and even larger organisations have to consider when and where they make sense.

We would like to argue here that simpler models may sometimes be appropriate. They are, for example, suited for learning within organisations. However, to enable before-and-after comparisons a measurement must be made at the beginning of the project (baseline study); to enable target/performance comparisons clear objectives must be set.

It requires rigorous impact assessment methods to clearly attribute a result to an intervention. Simpler approaches are sufficient to make a plausible case that an intervention has made a contribution to achieving overarching goals. Whatever the case, it must be clear how the impact assessment has been conducted and what conclusions can be derived from it.

N.B.

It is frequently the case that, in practice, only the final situation of a project is described. Yet, for an impact assessment, a simple description of the target group with no link to the objectives, the initial situation or a control group is not sufficient.

Expanded models

More complex models that allow for firmer assertions can be created by expanding and combining basic models.

Before & after and target/performance comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	

Ex post comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	Measurement 3

Ex post and target/performance comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	Measurement 3

| Ex post comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	Measurement 5
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	Measurement 6

Target/performance comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group		Measurement 1	
Control group		Measurement 2	

Before & after and target/performance comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	

Ex post and target/performance comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	Definition
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	Measurement 5
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	Measurement 6

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Target/performance comparison
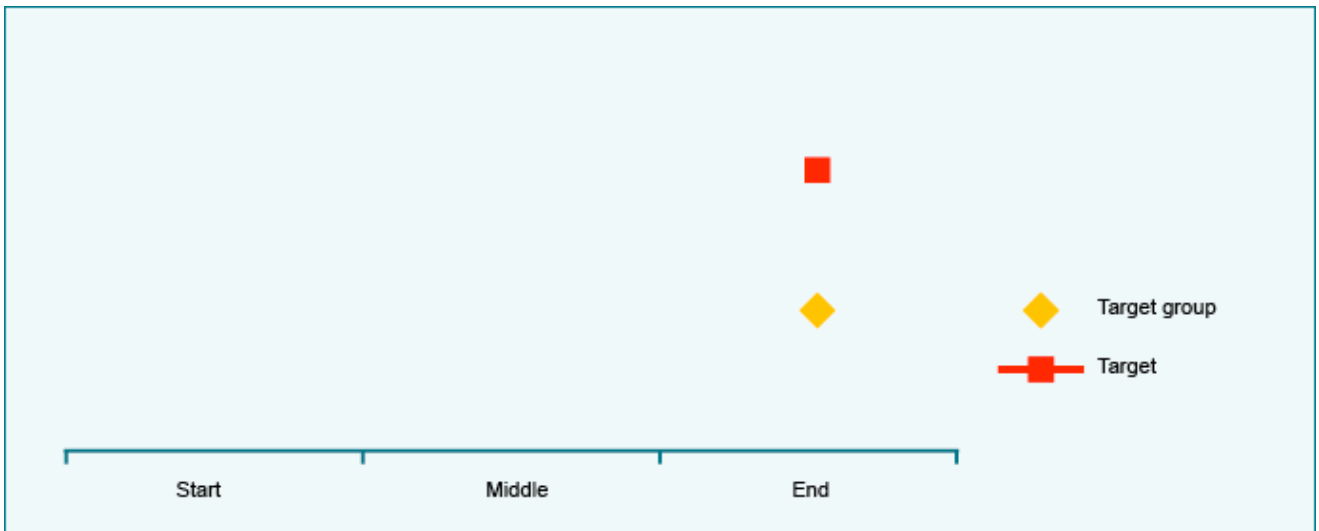
Characteristics

This is a snapshot that compares the actual situation of the target group at a specific point in time with the intended situation at that point in time.

Example

At the end of the process, 40% of young mothers in the region know about the link between clean drinking water and health. That is markedly less than planned (target).

| Advantages	Disadvantages
A simple way of recording that the objective has been achieved.	There is no link to the initial situation – it is not known whether and how the target group's situation has changed since the beginning of the intervention.
The investment in data collection is low.	It is not known whether and how the target group's situation would have changed without the project.
The methodological know-how is available internally or can be learnt.	No assertions can be made about the effects.
	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

This model is partly suited for steering by the organisation and for learning within the organisation. It is suitable for legitimising when there are agreed objectives. It is of particular use when there is a lack of data about the initial situation and a lack of suitable control groups – or when these can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. A one-off target/performance comparison is not suitable for an impact assessment.

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Before & after comparison
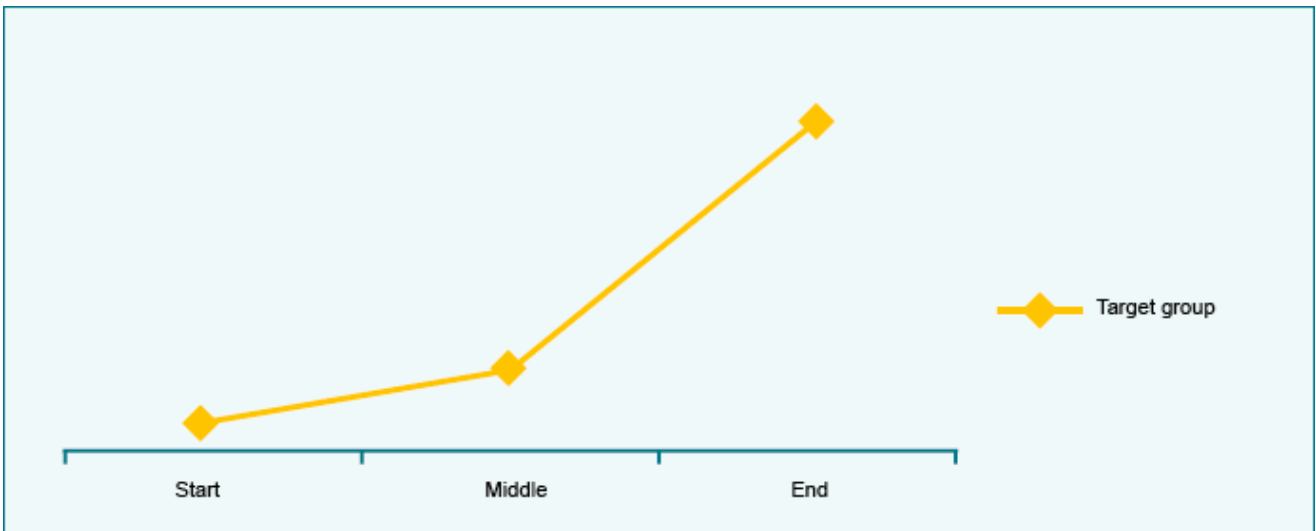
Characteristics

It describes how the target group of a project or programme develops, for example from the start and until the end of the project. Additional measurements provide information about the evolution of the project.

Example

70% of the rural population in Region x is within 15 minutes' walk to drinking water. At the beginning of the project, only 10% of the population was within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water.

| Advantages	Disadvantages
A plausible case can be made wether an intervention has contributed to the targeted effects or not.	It is not known whether and how the situation of the target group would have changed without the project. It is not possible to clearly attribute the results to the intervention.
The effort required for data collection can often be justified.	There is no link to the objective. It is not known whether and to what degree the organisation has achieved the planned results.
Methodological know-how is often available internally or else can be learnt.	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

This model is suitable for learning from the observed changes, as well as for legitimising the project when making a plausible case for effects is enough. It is of use when there is data about the initial situation or else can be reconstituted at an acceptable cost, and if there is a lack of suitable control groups or if these can only be put together with a disproportionate amount of effort, or else if there are ethical reservations about a comparison with control groups.

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Comparison with control group
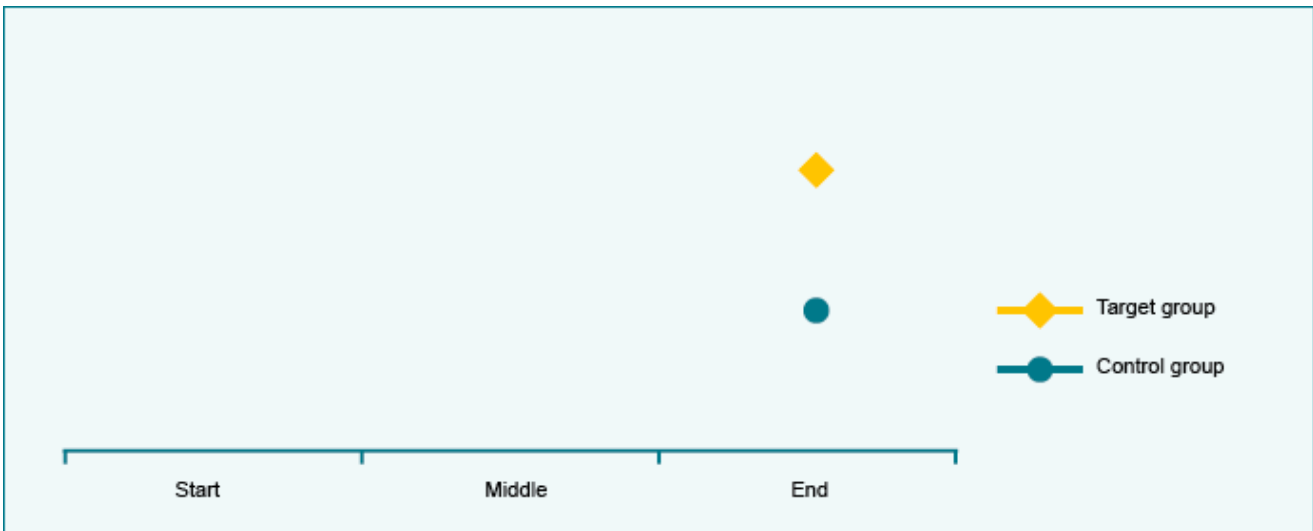
Characteristics

This is a snapshot in which the situation of the target group is compared with the situation of the control group at a particular moment in time.

Example

90% of children suffering from diarrhoea in Region x received successful medical treatment. In the control group in Region Y, only 60% of the children suffering from diarrhoea received successful medical treatment.

| Advantages	Disadvantages
A plausible case can be made wether an intervention has contributed to the targeted effects or not.	There is no link to the initial situation. It is not known whether and how the situations of the target and control groups has changed since the start of the intervention.
If the target and control groups were identical at the start, it is possible to make assertions about the effect of the project on the target group.	Often there are no identical groups and methodological know-how is required if control groups have to be reconstituted. The choice of the control group is no small matter.
The cost of data collection (2 measurements) is often justifiable.	There is no link to the planned objectives. It is not known whether and to what extent the organisation has achieved its objective.
	Es sind keine Aussagen zur Nachhaltigkeit möglich

Suitability

A comparison with a control group is more meaningful and therefore better suited to legitimising a project, as long as suitable control groups are available or can be constituted, and as long as there are no ethical reservations. It is used in cases where there is a lack of data about the initial situation or where these can only be obtained at great cost.

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Before & after comparison with control group
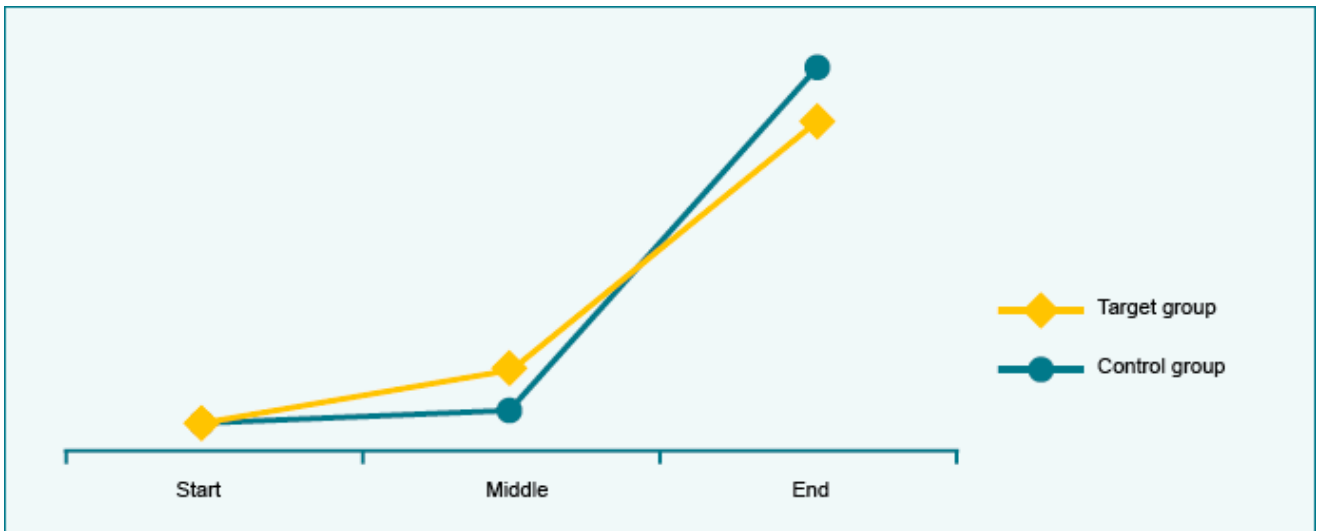
Characteristics

The development of the target group is compared with that of the control group. Additional measurements provide information about the evolution of the project.

Example

90% of children suffering from diarrhoea received successful medical treatment. That is far more than at the start of the project, but the situation of the control group has improved even more over the same duration without any intervention.

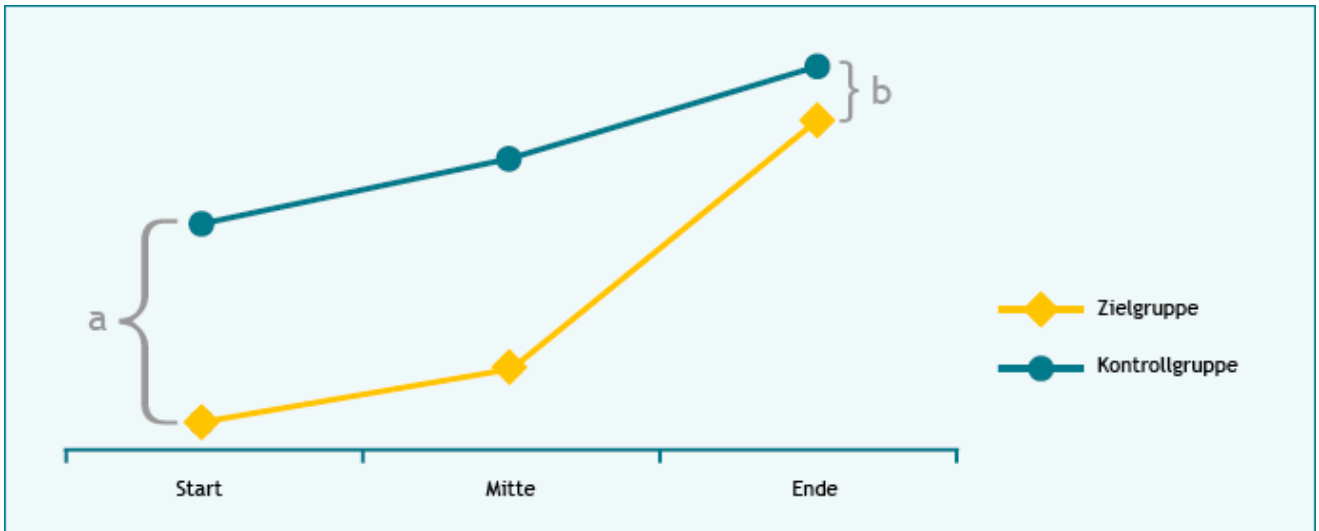| Advantages	Disadvantages
A certain effect can be attributed the intervention or denied.	Data collection is difficult and at least 4 measurements are required.
The approach has a sound methodological basis.	This method is methodologically demanding.
	The achievement of the objectives is not measured.
	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

This model is well suited to legitimising projects, but also for steering and learning inside the organisation. It is used when the effect needs to be proved clearly and there are no ethical reservations about comparisons with control groups. It must be possible to define or constitute suitable control groups.

Chart legend: Zielgruppe, Kontrollgruppe. X-axis: Start, Mitte, Ende. Brackets labeled a (at start) and b (at end).

If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, then the difference between the target and the control group must be defined at the start (a) and at the end (b) of the project. The assertion about the effect of the project depends, in this case, whether the difference has increased or decreased. This method is known as "difference in difference".

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Before & after and target/performance comparison
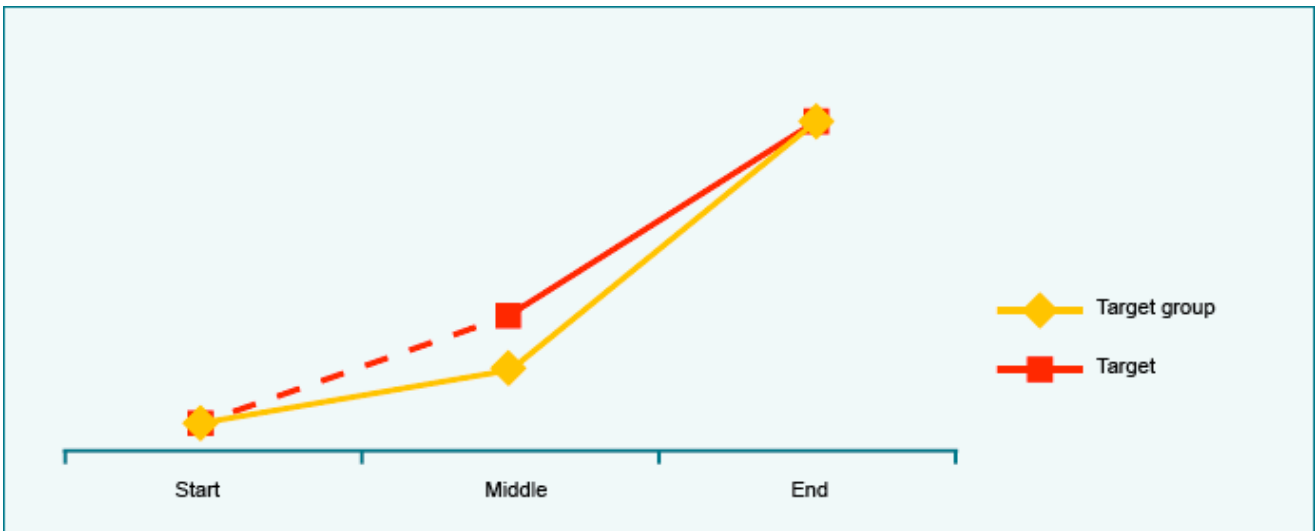
Characteristics

The target group's actual development is compared with the target group's planned development. Additional measurements provide information about the evolution of the project.

Example

80% of young mothers in Region x know about the links between clean drinking water and health. That is three times as many as at the start of the project and as many as intended.

| Advantages	Disadvantages
It shows the degree to which the set objectives could be achieved.	It is not known whether and how the situation of the target group would have changed without the project. It is not possible to clearly attribute the effects to the intervention.
A plausible case can be made whether an intervention has contributed to the targeted effects or not.	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.
The investment in data collection (2 measurements) is often justifiable.	
The methodological know-how is often available or can be learnt.	

Suitability

It is suitable for learning and especially for steering the organisation. It can also serve legitimation purposes when the agreed objectives require only a plausible case for effects and data about the initial situation is available, and if there are no suitable control groups or if there are ethical reservations about the comparisons with control groups.

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Ex post comparison
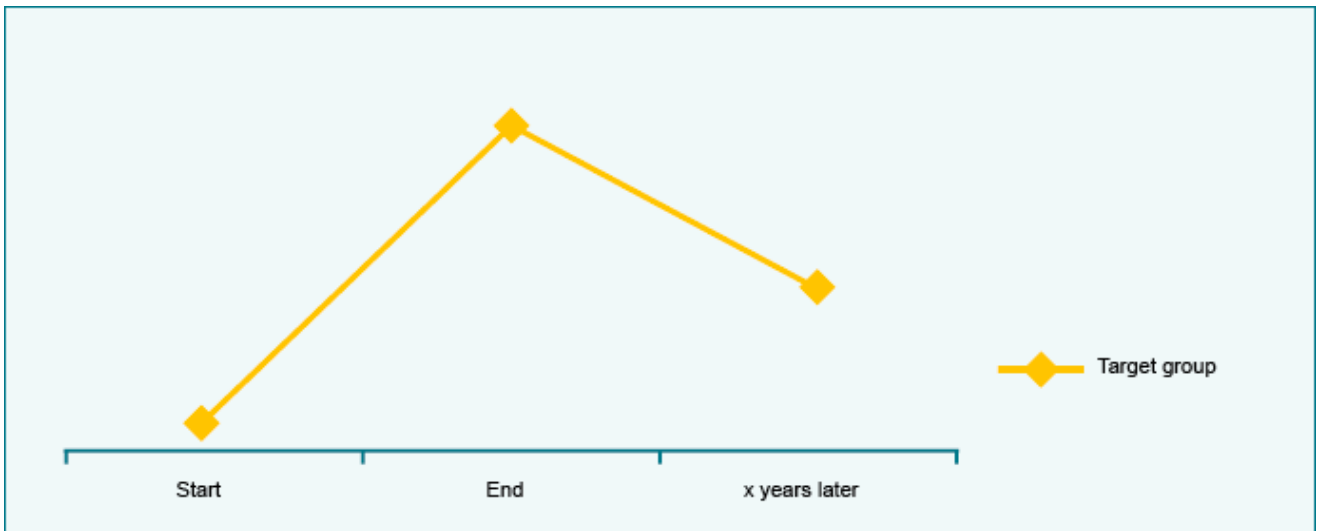
Characteristics

The target group's development is examined beyond the end of the project.

Example

Three years after the end of the project, 70% of the rural population of Region x live within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water. That is more than before the project, but less than at the end of the project.

| Advantages	Disadvantages
The investment in data collection can often be justified.	External influences cannot be excluded, as there is no comparison with a control group.
The methodological know-how is often available internally or can be learnt.	It is not clear whether the set objectives have been achieved.
A plausible case can be made for whether an intervention has made a contribution to the planned effects or not.	The findings only become available years after the completion of the intervention.
It can show whether the intervention was sustainable or not.	

Suitability

It is put to use when the sustainability of an intervention needs to be studied. Due to the time lag, the information is generated too late for short-term legitimising and for immediate steering and learning. It can, however, be used for the organisation's long-term development and strategic direction.

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Ex post and target/performance comparison
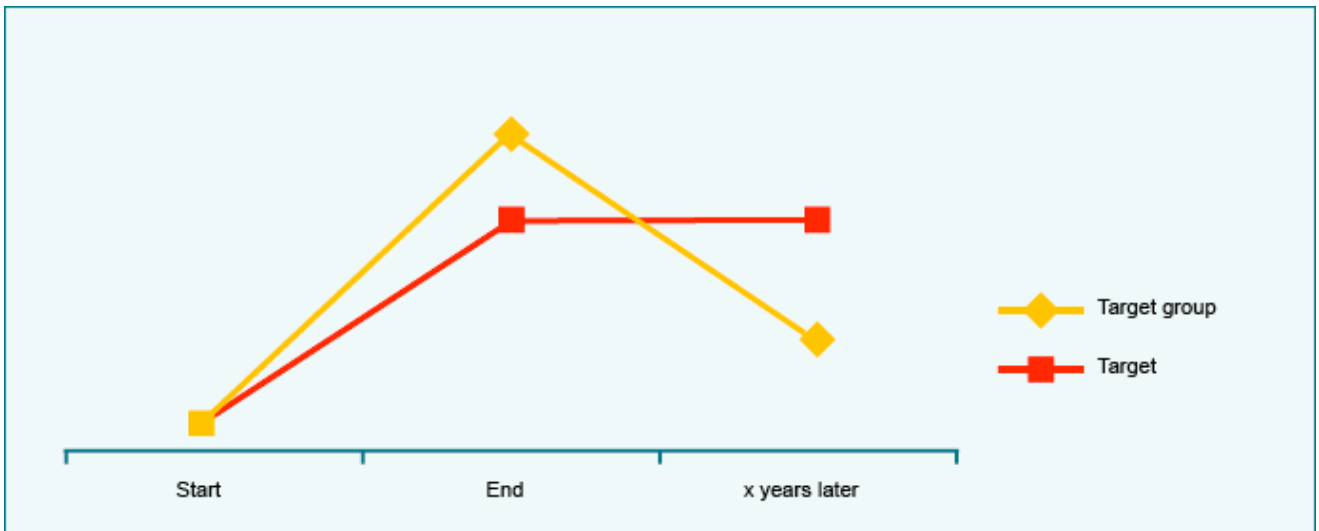
Characteristics

The target group's actual development is compared with the planned development beyond the end of the project.

Example

Three years after the end of the intervention, 30% of young mothers in Region x know about the link between clean drinking water and health. This is more than before the project, but less than at the end of the project, and less than planned.

| Advantages	Disadvantages
It shows to what degree the set objectives were achieved.	It is not known whether and how the target group's situation would have changed without the project. It is not possible to clearly attribute the effect to the intervention.
A plausible case can be made for whether an intervention has made a contribution to the planned effects.	
It can show whether an intervention was sustainable or not.	
The methodological know-how is available or can be learnt.	

Suitability

It is suitable as a legitimising factor when there are agreed objectives or when it is enough to state a plausible case for an effect. It is put to use when the sustainability of the intervention needs to be studied, and when a comparison with a control group is too much work or ethically questionable. Due to the time lag, the information is available too late for immediate legitimation and for short-term steering and learning. It can, however, be used for the organisation's long-term development and strategic direction.

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Ex post comparison with control group
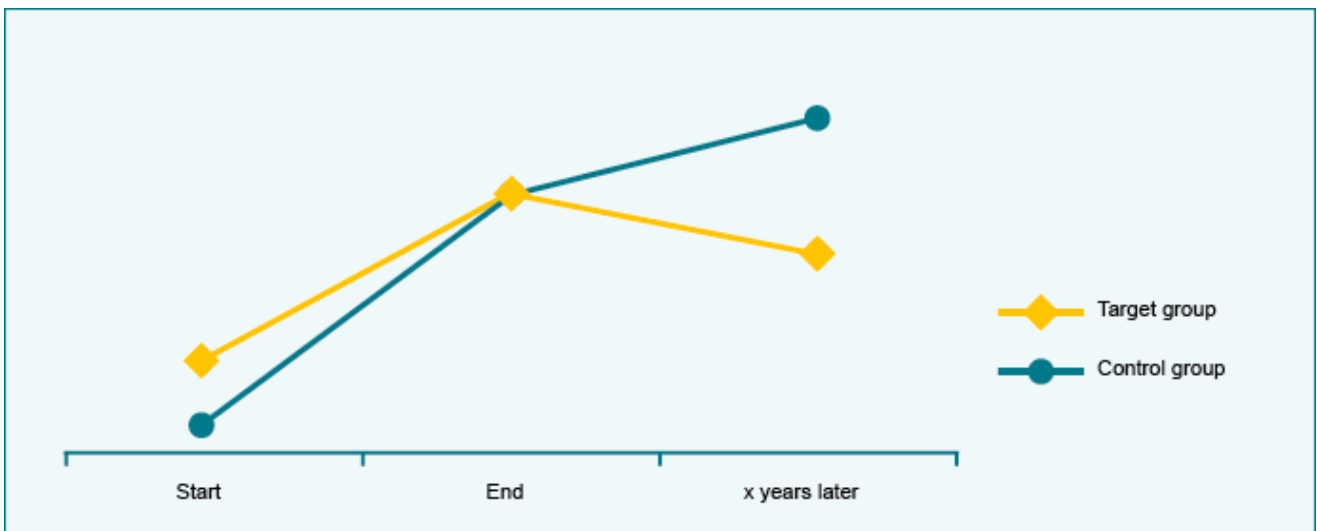
Characteristics

The target group's development is compared with that of the control group beyond the end of the project.

Example

30% of young mothers in Region x know about the link between clean drinking water and health. That is more than before the project, but less than at the end of the project. The level of knowledge of the control group has progressed from a weak initial position to the level of the target group over the same period, and is continuing to improve.

Advantages

It can be scientifically proven whether an intervention had a sustainable effect or not.

Suitability

This model is suitable when there needs to be a scientific examination of whether the intervention has had a sustainable effect. It is put to use when there are no reservations about comparisons with control groups and suitable control groups can be defined or constituted. Data about the initial situation might have to be reconstituted. If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, then it is the difference between the target and the control groups that needs to be analysed. Assertions about the effects depend in this case on whether the difference increases or decreases. Due to the time lag, the information becomes available too late for legitimising the project in the short term and for immediate steering and learning. It can, however, be used for the organisation's long-term development and strategic direction.

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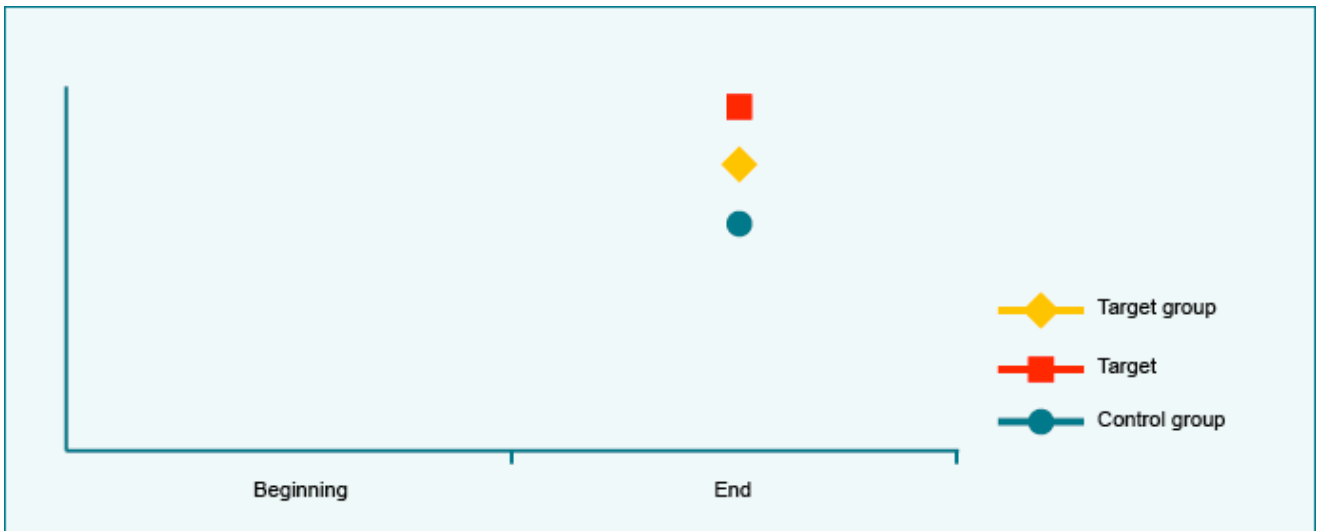
Characteristics

This is an occasional examination, whereby the situation of the target group is compared at a specific point in time with the objectives and with the situation of the control group.

Example

70% of young mothers in Region x know about the link between clean drinking water and health. That is more than in the control group, but less than intended.

| Advantages	Nachteile
The investment in data collection is often still justifiable.	There is no link to the initial situation. It is not known whether and how the situation of the target and control groups has changed since the beginning of the intervention and whether they started from the same initial position.
It is a simple way of recording the achievement of objectives.	There are often no identical control groups.
If there are identical control groups, then assertions can be made about the effects of the project on the target group.	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

This model is only partly suitable for steering and learning within the organisation. It can however be used for legitimation purposes with agreed objectives. It is used in practice when data about the initial situation is lacking or can only be obtained at a disproportionately high cost, and when there are suitable control groups.

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Before & after and target/performance comparison with control group
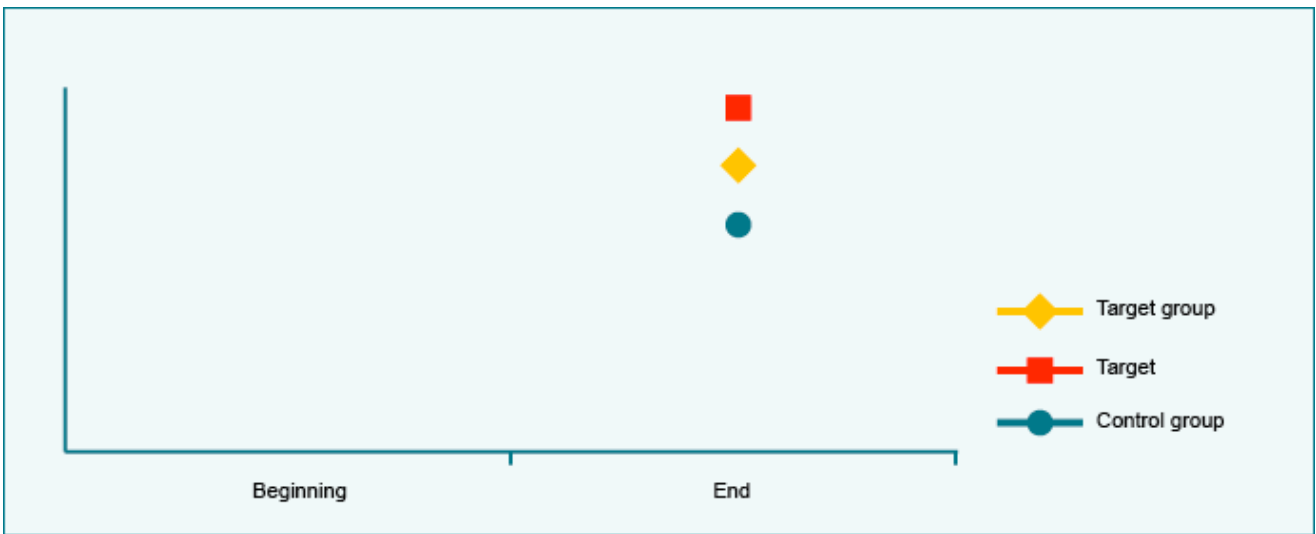
Characteristics

The development of the target group is linked to that of the control group and the objectives.

Example

50% of the rural population in Region x lives with 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water; at the beginning of the project it was only 30%. The improvement of 20 percentage points is just as good as in the control group in Region y, whose access to drinking water improved over the same period from 50% to 70% of the population. The target of 60% could not be achieved.

| Advantages	Disadvantages
It can be shown what changes the intervention has brought to the target group	Data collection is difficult and requires at least 4 measurements.
It can be recorded whether the objectives have been achieved.	The approach is methodologically demanding.
The approach is methodologically sound.	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.
It is possible to attribute the effect to the intervention.	

Suitability

This model is suitable for learning, steering and legitimation. It is used for agreed objectives and in particular applied when effects must be clearly demonstrated and there are no ethical reservations about comparisons with control groups. Suitable control groups must be able to be defined or constituted. If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, the difference between the target and the control group must be established at the beginning and at the end of the project. Assertions about the effect depend in this case on whether the difference has increased or decreased. This method is known as "difference in difference".

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Ex post and target/performance comparison with control group
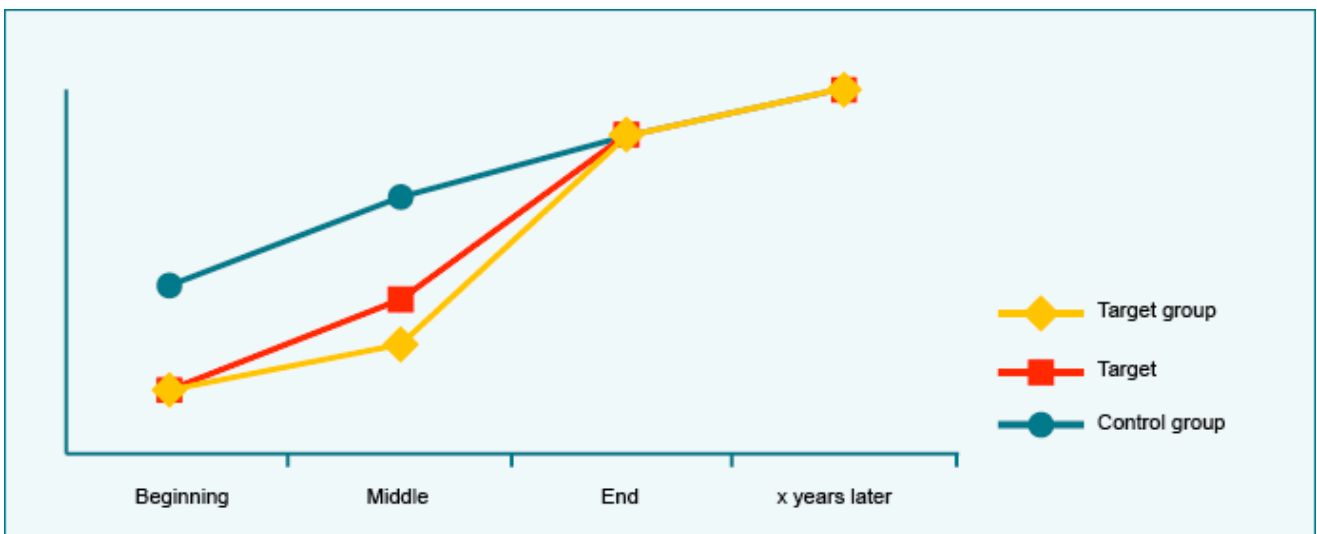
Characteristic

The development of the target group is compared with that of the control group beyond the end of the project and linked to its objectives.

Example

55% of children suffering from diarrhoea received successful medical care. That is 25 percentage points more than before the project. Over the same period, the situation in the control group only improved by 15 percentage points. After the end of the project the development of the target and control groups runs in parallel. The project achieved its target objectives.

Advantages	Disadvantages
It can be scientifically proved whether an intervention was effective and sustained, and whether the objectives were achieved in the long term.	Data collection is very difficult (at least 6 measurements).
	The approach is methodologically demanding.

Suitability

This model is suitable for testing the organisation's long-term development policy and its strategic direction. It is well suited for legitimising the sustainable results towards third parties. Due to the time lag, this approach is less appropriate for immediate steering and learning. It is used whenever sustainable results need to be demonstrated and there are no reservations about comparisons with control groups. One must be able to define or constitute

suitable control groups. If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, the difference between the target and control groups must be looked at. Assertions about the effects depend in this case on whether the difference increases or decreases.

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Description
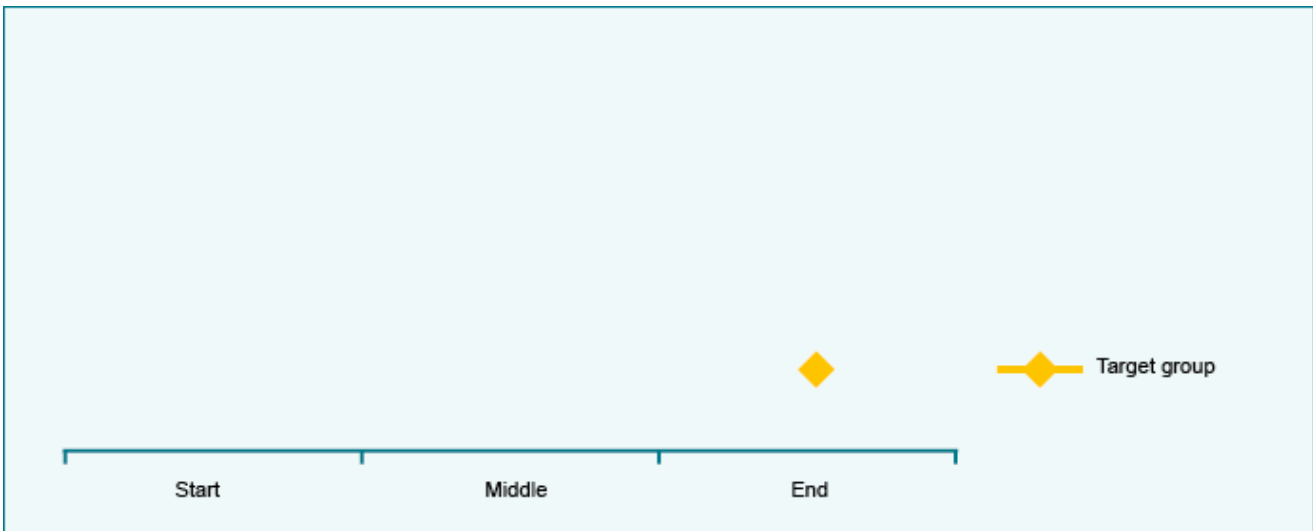
Characteristics

This is a one-off observation, which describes the situation of the target group at a specific point in time.

Example

70% of the rural population in Region x live within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water.

Advantages	Disadvantages
The investment required for data collection is low.	There is no link to the set objectives. It is not known whether and to what degree the organisation has achieved its objectives.
The methodological know-how is available.	There is no link to the initial situation. It is not known whether and how the target group's situation has changed since the beginning of the intervention.
	It is not known whether and how the target group's situation would have changed without the project.
	No assertions can be made about the effects.
	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

Due to its limited meaningfulness, one-off descriptions are less suitable for organisational steering and learning. In practice, organisations tend to resort to one-off descriptions when no objectives have been defined and data about the initial situation and control groups are lacking, or if these can only be reconstituted at a disproportionately high cost. However, a simple description of a situation is not suitable for an impact assessment.

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Planning and suitability

The timing of the measurements must be planned. Frequent measurements increasethe accuracy of the results – but also the amount of work. The following table shows when what type of measurement is needed, what they are suited to, and how widely used they are in practice.

Planning the timing and frequency of measurements

Timing	Before the project (ex ante)	During the project	During the project At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Necessity	Necessary when data about the initial situation is missing	Necessary if processes need to be overseen	Necessary if success of project needs to be evaluated	Necessary if the sustainable effect of the project needs to be evaluated
Suitability	Suitable to take a decision about implementation	Suitable for monitoring and steering implementation	Suitable for steering and for accountability	Suitable for reviewing strategy and policy
Use	Seldom used, and if so for major programmes	Frequently only used at the output level (monitoring)	Also used at the outcome level	Seldom used, and if so at the impact level

Merely describing a situation says as little about the effects as traditional target/performance comparison. If it is to be possible to make statements about the effects of a project or programme, then the situation achieved by the target group must be related to its initial situation or to a control group. The combination of the two is sometimes described as the 'gold standard' of impact assessment. The following table gives an overview of which comparisons are possible and what they are suited to.

Suitability of comparisons

Meaningfulness	Achievement of objectives	Effects	Contribution	Attribution		Susta
Basic models of comparison						
Target/performance comparison	OK					
Before & after comparison		OK	OK			
Comparison with control group		OK	OK			
Before & after comparison with control group		OK	OK	OK		
More complex models and combinations						
Before & after and target/performance comparisons	OK	OK	OK			
Ex post comparison		OK	OK			OK
Ex post and target/performance comparison	OK	OK	OK			OK
Ex post comparison with control group		OK	OK	OK		OK
Target/performance comparison with control group	OK	OK	OK			
Before & after and target/performance comparison with control group	OK	OK	OK	OK		
Ex post and target/performance comparison with control group	OK	OK	OK	OK		OK
No comparison						
Description						

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Implementation

An impact assessment can be implemented in various ways. There must be planning as to who will collect the data and evaluate it. The impact assessment can in principle be carried out by project managers themselves (self-evaluation) or by independent third parties (external evaluation). There are a range of mixed forms in between (hybrid evaluation).

The following must be borne in mind:

- **Independence**
  Depending on the purpose of the impact assessment (e.g. for legitimising or learning), external experts or project managers must have the necessary independence so that they are perceived as sufficiently impartial and unprejudiced by those who use the results of the assessment
- **Credibility**
  The team must have the requisite specialist and methodological competence to be able to carry out the evaluation correctly.
- **Acceptance**
  The team must have the requisite sensitivity and experience so that it can be accepted by those who use the results.

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Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a method whereby the experts directing the practical work are identical with the assessors. This means that the actors check their own activities - they are therefore at the same time responsible in practice and responsible for the appraisal.[1] In terms of content, the questions in a self-evaluation are no different from those in an external evaluation. The focus is on appraising a project's relevance, effectiveness and economic viability. In a supported self-evaluation, a recognised institute or a recognised expert assists the project managers in planning, implementation and reporting of the self-evaluation.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Greater motivation of those being evaluated	Less distance
Insider knowledge can be used	Fundamental questions asked less
Evaluators are familiar with the subject	Lack of evaluation knowledge
Ownership of results leads to swift implementation	Less legitimacy for outside world
Greater acceptance of results within the organisation	
Less costly to organise	

Suitability

Self-evaluation is particularly suitable for appraisals that are carried out for the purpose of learning. It is well suited to analysing processes and to bring about step-by-step improvements. Self-evaluations can also be carried out when funds are tight.

[1] *Source: Hildegard Müller-Kohlenberg, Wolfgang Beywl (2003): Standards der Selbstevaluation, Begründung und aktueller Diskussionsstand. Zeitschrift für Evaluation 1/2003, Cologne.*

IMPORTANT

Attention must be paid even in self-evaluations to ensuring that there is enough time and resources, the requisite know-how exists or is made available, and responsibilities are clearly defined. Self-evaluations will otherwise often fail due to the complexity of the methods and a lack of resources.

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External evaluations

The responsibility for carrying the evaluation lies with people who have not been involved in the implementation of a measure. Experts obtain information about the subject of the evaluation and provide feedback to the managers about what they think about it.

Advantages	Disadvantages
No "insider blindness"	Little involvement to the field of work
Impartiality	No link to the context and lack of expert knowledge
Methodological competence	Less legitimacy within the organisation
Greater acceptance by others	

Suitability

External evaluations are particularly well suited to evaluations that are carried out to legitimise a project. External evaluations are used if the organisation's own staff resources are tight or if there is little evaluation know-how within the organisation itself.

IMPORTANT

The purpose and the questions to be asked during the evaluation must be clearly defined. The choice of suitable external evaluators is decisive for the success of the evaluation. Evaluators must of course bring with them the requisite specialist knowledge, but they must also show the necessary sensitivity in contact with stakeholders and be accepted by them. Lastly, schedules and budgets must be realistic.

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Hybrid evaluations

A combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation can be termed a hybrid evaluation. This combines the advantages of a self and an external evaluation. The focus of this approach is a systematic process of self-evaluation assisted by an independent evaluation team. The evaluation team supports the project managers for the self-evaluation and the critical evaluation of the project. The data and information on which the evaluation is based are verified by the evaluation team, thereby bringing up additional questions and posing alternative hypotheses for data interpretation. This method guarantees that the evaluation is closely aligned with the needs of the project team, while still maintaining the necessary distance.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Information can be made available for the project at the right time	Roles not always clear
Atmosphere focused on learning	Takes time for everyone to get used to their roles

Suitability

Hybrid evaluations are suitable both for learning and for legitimising. A hybrid appraisal is the best option if the organisation's own resources are tight or if there is little evaluation know-how available internally, and yet it does not wish to lose the advantages of a self-evaluation.

IMPORTANT

The purpose and the questions to be asked during the evaluation must be clearly defined. The choice of suitable external evaluators is decisive for the success of the evaluation. Special attention should be paid to allocating roles and defining responsibilities.

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Indicators

To measure effects and review whether objectives have been reached, then these must be expressed in concrete, objectively measurable quantities. This kind of objectively measurable quantity is known as an indicator. An indicator answers the question "How are we going to find out whether what we have planned has actually occurred and that we have achieved our objectives?" An indicator for an intended objective therefore announces how we measure the effects and when we consider the objective to have been achieved:

Objective	Indicator
Improved access to drinking water	Nearest well is within 15-minute walk
Child mortality falls	Child mortality falls from x% to y%

IMPORTANT

A good indicator ought to be **SMART**:

- Specific: the indicator must be unambiguous and clear.
- Measurable: the indicator must be measurable and the costs for measurements appropriate.
- Achievable: the target value given by the indicator must be achievable.
- Relevant: the information provided by the indicator should be relevant for the project manager.
- Time-bound: the indicator must show when the objective ought to be achieved.

Source: European Commission, PCM Guidelines

Coming up with and selecting good indicators is a crucial factor for an impact assessment to be able to supply useful information, but it is by no means an easy task. Participatory development is especially important here; a good indicator will be accepted and considered significant by the target group in particular.

It is often necessary to define several indicators for an objective. In practice, quantitative and qualitative indicators are frequently combined. Fundamentally, though, one should confine oneself to as few indicators as possible to avoid producing an unnecessary amount of data.

One constant feature of an indicator is information on the data sources and the methods used for data collection. This ensures that the indicator is measurable. If in the process it becomes apparent that the data for the indicator cannot be collected or only with disproportionate effort, then the indicator must be replaced by a simpler one. The possibility must also be considered of resorting to existing sources, e.g. national statistics or data from partner organisations.

In practice, there are various ways of defining <u>objectives and indicators</u> and/or differentiating them in practice. They are all equally valid. One should nevertheless always bear the chosen definition in mind and use it in a consistent fashion. This is an unavoidable subject of discussion. Attention should be paid to the fact that an indicator in the sense it is used here (the indicator shows whether the objective has been achieved or not) always contains a target and therefore implies selecting <u>a method of comparison</u>.

Indicators should be set not just at the outcome and impact level but also at the output level.

Examples

- **Child health programme**
  Objective: Child health in the poorest parts of the country should be improved.
  Indicator: By 2015, child mortality should be reduced to …% in Regions x, y and z.
- **Well-building project**
  Objective: People in Region x, y and z should have better access to clean drinking water.
  Indicator: By 2015, 80% of people in Regions x, y and z live within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water.
- **Education programme**
  Objective: Communities have better access to formal and informal education.
  Indicator: 70% of the 14,000 people who have learnt to read and write confirm that their livelihood has been improved by this.
- **Empowerment project**
  Objective: Socially and economically disadvantaged people influence decision-making in the region.
  Indicator: Public hearings are held for 90% of local political projects.
- **Project to promote farmers' organisations**
  Objective: The farmers' organisations improve their institutional and organisational capacities.
  Indicator: 100% of the farmers' organisations describe their institutional and organisational capacities as medium or good in their self-evaluation.
  Objective: The farmers' organisations improve the management of their economic activities.
  Indicator: 60% of the farmers' organisations describe their outputs regarding the development of a partner network as medium or good in their self-evaluation.

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Example of well-building project

New and repaired wells improve the local population's access to clean drinking water.

	Objective	Indicator	Measurement
Outcome objective (O1)	Improved access to clean drinking water	Walk to nearest well is <15 minutes for 80% of households	Observation
Performance objective (P1)	Build new wells	50 new wells in the region	List
Performance objective (P2)	Repair faulty wells	80 wells repaired	List

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Example of health course project

A course is offered for mothers with small children to inform them about the link between clean drinking water and health.

	Objective	Indicator	Measurement
Outcome objective (O1)	Participants know the link between clean drinking water and health.	Participants can use the information they have learnt in a role-playing game.	Video, evaluation by project managers
Performance objective (P1)	Provide courses	100 courses	Project report
Performance objective (P2)	The courses are well attended.	At least 35 participants per course	Attendance list

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Example of medical care project

With the introduction of mobile health clinics, children can be successfully treated for diarrhoea.

	Objective	Indicator	Measurement
Outcome objective (O1)	Children suffering from diarrhoea can be cured more often.	95% of children with diarrhoea are treated successfully.	Case studies
Performance objective (P1)	Children suffering from diarrhoea are medically treated.	1,000 children with diarrhoea treated per year.	Treatment statistics
Performance objective (P2)	Mobile health clinics come to the region regularly.	3 operational mobile health clinics	Timetable, schedule of operations

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Example of project logframe

Health courses

	Strategy of intervention	Indicator	Source
Impact	Contributes to mothers' making increasing use of clean water	90% of households mainly use water from clean sources	Survey
Outcome	Mothers know about links	Participants in the courses can use the information received in a role-playing game.	Video, evaluation by project managers
Output	Mothers attend courses	100 courses offered with an average of 35 participants per course	Project report Attendance list
Activities	Give courses for mothers		

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Example of programme logframe

Child health

	Strategy of intervention	Indicator	Source
Impact	Contributes to improved child health – child mortality falls	Child mortality in Regions x, y and z reduced from 10% to 2%	National statistics
Outcome	1. Mothers know about links	Course participants can use the information received in a role-playing game	Video, evaluation by project managers
	2. Sick children can be successfully treated	95% of children are successfully treated for diarrhoea	Case studies
	3. Improved access to clean drinking water	Walk to nearest well <15 minutes for 80% of households	Observation
Output	1. Courses	100 courses given	Project report
	2. Treatment	1,000 children treated per year	Treatment statistics
	3. Wells	50 new wells in the region	Project report
Activities	1. Give courses		
	2. Run mobile health clinics		
	3. Build wells		

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Data collection methods

Various data collection methods can be employed as part of an outcome and impact assessment. As a rule, one can distinguish between qualitative and quantitative collection methods. Aside from the choice of data collection methods, it is important to consider, as a second step, whether all or only a part of the affected units, target groups or cases are represented in the data collection for the impact assessment (unit of analysis). Furthermore, it is important to conduct a critical review of the quality of the collected data (data quality).

Package of methods

It is normal in contemporary research routine to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to benefit from the advantages of both methods. This is what people call a package of methods, or triangulation. The usefulness of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is undisputed and has become regulation practice in meaningful impact assessment. This means, for example, that the effectiveness of a programme is measured firstly by distributing a standardised questionnaire to the target groups and, secondly, by conducting interviews with staff or holding a group discussion with experts. The specific form the collected data takes (minutes of interviews, minutes of conversations with experts, percentages from a survey, frequency of observation, etc.) depends on the collection methods chosen. The data must therefore be analysed using appropriate analytical methods.

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Quantitative methods

Quantitative methods involve describing and recording behaviour and changes in numerical form as precisely as possible.

Number of units of analysis	Many
Assumptions	Clear idea of relevant links
Starting point	Verifying ideas
Focus	Researchers' knowledge is central
Intention	Evaluating theory

Suitability

Due to their standardised form of questioning and observation, quantitative methods are suitable for researching large samples and for applying statistical evaluation methods to measure and quantify facts in an objective manner. They are ideal for comparing objective data over time and for interpreting change. Quantitative data collection methods make it possible to examine a large amount of information using predefined methods. The information gained can be analysed and compared using statistical methods and analytical techniques.

Collection

Quantitative data is collected using the following techniques:

- Structured observation, measurement, counting
- Analysis of secondary data (statistics, process data)
- Various forms of surveys and experiments

Sample size

The choice of sample size depends on how precise the results of the survey are supposed to be. The easiest thing, therefore, is if all the units of analysis can be surveyed. This is known as a total population survey. In a total population survey, there is no need for any statistical tests on the significance of differences because the data is not based on a sample that is extrapolated to the whole population. It can be seen from the table below that a total population survey is the best option for units of analysis containing less than 300 cases. It also shows that 300 surveyed units allow one to make relatively reliable statements about large populations.

N = size of population	n =	n =
Size of population	Minimum sample size with a margin for error of +/-3 percentage points	Minimum sample size with a margin for error of +/-5 percentage points
100	92	80
200	169	132
300	234	169
400	291	196
500	341	217
1000	516	278
5000	880	357
10 000	964	370
100 000	1056	383
1 000 000	1066	384

Analysis

With quantitative data collection methods, analysis is carried out using various statistical methods and figures including frequency, percentages and means, as well as more complex statistical methods.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Precisely quantifiable results	No flexibility during the investigation due to the standardisation of the investigation situation. The questions are determined in advance, and it is not possible to listen to the individual test people.
Makes it possible to ascertain statistical links	Does not reveal what caused a result or an attitude such as dissatisfaction. The use of open questions is recommended in order to reduce this problem.
Makes it possible to investigate a large sample and obtain representative results	Gives no suggestions for improvement. This disadvantage can be reduced by including open questions.
High external validity through large sample	
Greater objectivity and comparability	

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Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods are used to describe, interpret and understand connections.

Number of units of analysis	Few
Assumptions	Less hard-and-fast knowledge about how results are connected
Starting point	Need for detailed information
Focus	Actors' knowledge is central
Intention	Constructing theory

Suitability

Qualitative data collection methods make it possible to study a specific subject of investigation in detail and in depth. This can also reveal new and unexpected information. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the subject of investigation, but does make it more difficult to make generalisations about matters beyond the subject itself. Qualitative surveys and observations are characterised by an approach that delivers undistorted and comprehensive information and is therefore suitable in all situations in which a differentiated and detailed description of individual opinions and impressions is called for. Qualitative methods are particularly ideal for collecting detailed suggestions for improvement and for discovering causes (for facts such as dissatisfaction).

Data collection

Qualitative data are collected by the following methods:

- Various forms of interviews (individual conversations, group interviews, focus groups)
- Analysis of documents

Sample size

There is no unanimity in the literature about the number of conversations that should be conducted. The opinion of what constitutes a suitable sample size varies between a few conversations and about 200 people, although - depending on the questions being investigated - theoretical saturation sets in beyond a certain number of conversations. This means that the gain in terms of knowledge cannot be further increased through additional conversations. The required sample size is in general distinctly smaller than when using quantitative methods. The principles of theoretical sampling apply to the composition of the sample, meaning that the sample should be adapted to the theoretical considerations and the evaluation questions, put together heterogeneously and contain representatives that are as typical of the population as possible.

Analysis

In qualitative data collection, analysis is carried out using various forms of content analysis. These are based on summarising and gradually reducing the data-set. Important: Data that has been collected qualitatively can also be assessed quantitatively.

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Unit of analysis

The choice of units, target groups and cases for the impact assessment depends substantially on the design and/or the comparisons.

Ideally, all relevant units, target groups and cases are taken into account during data collection for the impact assessment. Such cases are called a total population survey. In practice, total population surveys are not always possible for specific reasons or due to the cost. There must therefore be a decision as to which cases should be taken into account for the impact assessment. With quantitative methods this is known as a sample.

The disadvantage of samples compared to total population surveys is that information is only ever collected for a portion of the interesting observations. As a result, it must be considered whether the results of the sampling hold for the whole of the unit of analysis. If this is not the case, then the sampling has not been carried out correctly and/or the cases have not been correctly selected.

Selection criteria for qualitative methods

It is not only for quantitative methods that the sample selection is an issue. One must also consider when using qualitative methods which cases or units should be studied. The number of units to be considered is generally automatically determined by the selection criteria. One would generally seek to consider one or two units per selection criterion. From a theoretical point of view, the number of cases or units is sufficient when the principle of saturation sets in. A selection or sample is said to be saturated when additional cases bring no new data and knowledge gains are saturated with the material already collected. One can use a three-step approach to work out the correct selection of cases:

- The first recommended step is to specify what facts are required from specific groups;
- The second step is to make sure that every possible form and feature of the unit of analysis have been considered during the selection process;
- The third step involves verifying again after data collection which constellations and features do not feature in the data already collected. That also means that the choice of the cases should not be carried out in one step as is the case with quantitative methods.

Selection criteria for quantitative methods

To avoid mistakes or biases due to choosing the wrong cases, it is necessary to clarify who or what is included in the population under investigation. Special attention is to be paid to taking adequate account of groups that are difficult to reach (e.g. geographically) and marginalised groups such as religious minorities or women during sampling. There is also a need to determine the size of the sample, the main criterion being how accurate the results need to be. The size of the population – at least for fairly large populations – has little influence on the minimum sample size (also cf. quantitative methods). Of course, in practice, the time available and the costs also play an important role.

There are various samples to choose from when using quantitative methods. Fundamentally, one must differentiate between "random sampling" and "non-random sampling", which are put together according to specific criteria. If the sample is to be composed randomly, everyone in the population has the same likelihood of being "picked" for the sample. Some of the main selection methods are described in the next section.

Random samples

- **Simple random samples**

  Each unit in the population has the same likelihood of being picked (e.g. names drawn from a pot or every n^{th} house).

- **Layered random samples**

  The units of analysis are subdivided into groups (layers) according to a particular feature (e.g. villages, courses). Samples are then taken randomly from these sub-populations.

- **Graduated random samples**

  First, the graduation criteria (e.g. Regions A-D) are determined. The population is then divided up and a random selection made (e.g. Regions B and D) and limited to a certain number of primary units, which are then investigated (e.g. 10 wells per region). The remaining sub-populations are ignored. From the randomly selected primary units (e.g. 10 wells), random sampling of the units with the feature (each of 20 households in a 15-minute radius) is now carried out. In each of the two regions are 200 housholds are surveyed, which are then grouped together into an overall sample.

Non-random samples

- **Quota samples**

  First, the elements of the population are divided into groups. The sample now has to be drawn so that the group relation in the sample looks as identical as possible to that in the population, in an attempt to imitate the desired population structure within the sample. The interviewers are also provided with guidelines as to which characteristics those to be interviewed should have. Yet it is up to the interviewer whom he or she chooses.

- **Homogeneous and heterogeneous case selection**

  The observations are selected for the sample in such a way that they display as similar/ - or dissimilar - characteristics as possible. In case studies (which, by definition, do not constitute samples), two observations are for example often investigated with the most contrasting characteristics possible.

- **Selection of typical cases**

  This involves selecting the observations for the samples that one knows - or assumes – to have typical, average or no extreme characteristics.

- **Selection of critical cases**

  The study deliberately includes cases whose inclusion are known – or assumed – to be crucial to the study's credibility or acceptance.

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Data quality

Information or data quality is the term used to describe the relevance and correctness of information. It provides clues as to how well the data describes reality or actual situations. The quality of the collected data is crucial for an impact assessment to be able to supply exact results. There are two criteria for quality that the collected data needs to satisfy according to scientific data collection methodology:

- **Reliability**
  The term "reliability" refers to the relevance and correctness of information. A data collection method is deemed reliable if a rerun of the data collection or measurement in the same conditions leads to the same results.
- **Validity**
  Data collection is valid if it measures what it was intended to measure. A measurement or survey is valid if the data collected provide fitting figures for the question under investigation.

Checking data and data sources

Data and data sources should be checked for reliability and validity. That is especially necessary when there are outside data sources or if new data sources are being used. New collection and processing methods should also be checked. It can be worthwhile doing a test run for data collection. It should also be checked whether the surveys deliver the desired information.

Identify and minimise sources of error

There are various sources of error that should be avoided when one is collecting or recording qualitative and quantitative data. If an organisation carries out its own data collection using qualitative and quantitative collection tools, then these tools (questionnaires, conversation guidelines, etc.) should where possible be pre-tested. This involves checking the collection tools on test individual or test cases. These should, where possible, be similar to the target group in the survey or the cases to be analysed. In addition, the pre-test should be carried out under conditions that are as similar as possible to the planned survey. Depending on the results of the pre-test, these collection tools might need to be revised or adjusted. It is therefore important that the time this takes is taken into account at the planning stage. Sources of error often come from the selection of the unit of analysis.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Flexible application of methods; the method is adapted to the subject of investigation and not the other way around.	The required qualifications of the people observing or interviewing are really quite high. The quality of the data also to a certain extent depends on these qualifications.
The openness of the method makes it possible to discover new and previously unknown facts.	Analysis relatively intensive, especially compared to quantitative methods.
Since the participants have no guidelines, one receives fairly truthful and complete information about the subjective view of the interlocutors.	One cannot derive any numerical figures from qualitative data.
The focus is determined by the participants themselves and is therefore directed towards facts that are of relevance to them.	
The personal interaction offers the possibility to ask for background information and to clear up uncertainties.	
High validity of content through non-predefined approach	
More in-depth information through open questioning	
Greater subjectivity of results	

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Formulating the terms of reference

If effects are to be measured and evaluated by an internal team, but especially if an external or mixed team is in charge, the terms of reference and the planning of the impact assessment should be set down in writing.

The terms of reference for an impact assessment may follow the following structure for evaluations in general:

Template

Rationale and purpose
Why is the evaluation being conducted and what will the findings be used for?
For example:
- To optimise processes or methods,
- To further improve strategy or policy,
- To decide on the future conduct of a project or programme,
- To show accountability to funders or the public.

Objectives
What is the evaluation supposed to show?
For example:
- To confirm that the project has had a particular output, achieved a particular outcome for the target group or made a contribution to the overarching goal;
- Assess whether a specific intervention was efficient, effective and relevant;
- Present observations, conclusions and recommendations about a specific project or programme.

Scope
The scope of the evaluation needs to be clearly defined, with a clear description of the key framework principles.
For example:
- The topics investigated,
- The time period to be studied,
- The activities to be studied,
- The resources already employed,
- The geographical scope,
- Target groups.

People involved and affected
Who is involved in the evaluation and affected by it? Which interests and needs do these individuals/groups have? How are these taken into account?
For example:
- Project managers and staff,
- Mediating organisations,
- Target group,
- Partner organisations,
- Government.

Reporting

How are the findings reported? Are there other "deliverables" alongside the conventional report?
For example:

- Conventional report,
- Workshop with people involved,
- Debriefing with project managers,
- Presentations for line managers,
- Lessons learnt in writing.

Budget

- Are the costs proportionate to the complexity of the questions asked and the value of the desired information?

What agreements need to be set down in writing?

- Write down objective, rationale and point of view of the evaluation;
- Formulate evaluation questions;
- Agree deadlines and budget;
- The terms of reference can be based on quality standards (e.g. DAC, SEVAL, SDC);
- Define the reporting format.

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DAC Evaluation Quality Standards

The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has published guidelines for good practice in development evaluation. These standards are designed to improve the quality of evaluation processes and products, and to facilitate cooperation. The principles behind them were developed internationally on a consensus basis. They are organised according to the typical stages of an evaluation and include all aspects of the process – from the description of the rationale, the point of view and the context as well as planning, design, implementation and reporting right through to learning and using the findings – that are crucial for a high-quality evaluation.

Download

DAC Guidelines and Reference Series Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, 2010. Unabriged

Link

Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD-DAC)

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SEVAL Evaluation Standards

The Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) is a multidisciplinary organisation that actively engages in improving the quality of evaluation and its diffusion. The Swiss Evaluation Society's goal is to foster the exchange of information and experience in the field of evaluation between politics, administration, academia, NGOs and the private sector. SEVAL's evaluation standards are meant to contribute to the professionalization of evaluation in Switzerland. They define the quality requirements for evaluations and are addressed to both evaluators and those commissioning evaluations. The guidelines are for evaluations of all kinds, with the exception of personal appraisals. They are divided into four subject groups. The utility standards ensure that the evaluation is oriented towards the information needs of its intended users. The feasibility standards ensure that an evaluation is conducted in a realistic, well-planned, diplomatic and cost-conscious manner. The propriety standards ensure that an evaluation is conducted in a legal and ethical manner and that the welfare of the stakeholders is given due attention. Lastly, the accuracy standards ensure that an evaluation produces and disseminates valid and usable information.

Download
SEVAL Standards, Evaluation Standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society, 2000. Unabridged. In German.

Link
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Guidelines for SDC Evaluations

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) plans to commit **0.6-0.8 percent** of its total annual budget to evaluations and reviews in order to show accountability for its actions. This is in line with the average for other development agencies. Bilateral donors devote between **0.1 and 2.5 percent** of their total budget to evaluations. The SDC publishes its annual evaluation schedule and the completed evaluations on its website.

The SDC's evaluation policy underscores the importance of evaluation and places it in a wider context. It reveals the main national and international trends in evaluation and provides an overview of its evaluation framework. This policy is normative in nature and lays the foundation for the definition of minimum quality assurance standards. It deliberately does not go into a detailed discussion of individual evaluation methods. The DAC/OECD standards, the standards for humanitarian aid (ALNAP Standards) and the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) standards together form the binding framework.

The SDC's evaluation policy is organised around 10 guiding principles that reflect the core values of SDC's evaluation activities and form an overarching and binding framework for all its employees. They are as follows: independent evaluation teams, impartiality, objectivity and credibility, transparency, partnership, feasibility, utility, complementarity, subsidiarity, controlling, and data protection and confidentiality.

Downloads

SDC Evaluation Policy, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2008. Unabridged. In German.

ALNAP Standards – Evaluating Humanitarian Action Using the OECD-DAC Criteria, 2006.

Links

SDC

ALNAP