What is Developmental Evaluation?

Developmental Evaluation (DE) is an adaptive and learning-focused approach to program evaluation. It diverges from many of the assumptions and methods of formative and summative evaluation. DE emerged out of the realization that traditional evaluations offer little leeway from predefined measurement frameworks and external accountability reporting. These can fall short of delivering actionable guidance for program implementers.

DE is increasingly in demand in global development. Decision-makers recognize the need to understand the realities of new and complex interventions, which are highly dynamic and unpredictable, in order to respond effectively toward achieving program objectives.

Principles of DE:
- Adopts systems-thinking, acknowledging many interconnected program components operating at different scales, as well as diversity of perspectives and contexts that affect its implementation;
- Uses a complexity lens to illuminate non-linear, cause-effect relationships and unintended outcomes;
- Supports learning and innovation through continuous collaboration with program stakeholders from a program’s beginning to its end;
- Applies methods with flexibility and rigor to address the needs of intended users;
- Provides intended users with real-time feedback to enable timely decision-making; and
- Engenders ownership and meaningful use of evaluation information by intended users.

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION FOR THE USAID/BORESHA AFYA PROJECT

The USAID/Boresha Afya Project currently supports the Government of Tanzania (GoT) implement integrated healthcare delivery in three zones: Lake/Western Zone, North/Central Zone, and Southern Zone. This complex and large-scale innovation could help improve the health of Tanzanians, particularly women and youth; however, evidence on implementation and effectiveness of integrated platforms is limited. DE is well-suited to address this gap by supporting learning and adaptive management of Boresha Afya.

USAID’s Coordinating Implementation Research to Communicate Learning and Evidence (CIRCLE) is conducting a DE in the three Boresha Afya zones in coordination with USAID/Tanzania, implementing partners, and the GoT. The CIRCLE Project’s Principal Investigator and support team serve as “embedded evaluators,” partnering with implementers to iteratively develop program theories of change, indicators, and evaluation questions focusing on service quality, utilization, and efficiency. The embedded evaluators employ a variety of data collection methods and engagement tactics over the four-year DE project lifecycle to routinely provide evaluation insights to decision-makers on implementation process, results, and learning. They will also actively work alongside stakeholders to strengthen their capacity in, and ownership of, adaptive practices consistent with USAID’s Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting guidelines.

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