

CRISP FRAMEWORK FOR POST-PROJECT EVALUATION

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CRISP Framework for Post-Project Evaluation

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Abstract

Development projects do not continue for infinite duration. Funding and implementing agencies withdraw from the program area after a certain point of time. Phasing out of programs is a critical phase fraught with several challenges. Most of the agencies and donors do not have a mandate for post-project evaluations and therefore commit little or no funds for post-project evaluations. Post-project evaluation examines if the project has led to sustainable outcomes and practices in the community. The paper outlines relevant case studies and explores challenges associated with post-project evaluations. It proposes a framework to address the envisioned objectives of post-project evaluation encapsulating sustainability of Community, Resources, Institutional and Processes (CRISP). It further suggests Difference-In-Difference research design for conducting post-project evaluation.

Keywords: Post-project evaluation, Sustainability, Phase-over, Difference-In-Difference

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Introduction

Agencies and donors withdraw from project areas at some point of time. True, interventions cannot happen *ad infinitum*. The phase-over of projects is subject to several challenges. The timing of phase-over and establishment of linkages forms the core of phase-over process. Flawed phase-over can spell disaster for the program. Years of hard work can be undone by flawed phase-over. Well-planned phase-over ensures sustainability of the program. Typically, an endline evaluation spells and flags the end of a project. Most of the agencies, donors and government do not have a mandate for post-project evaluation. Also, agencies and donors commit little or no funds for post-project evaluation and the financial resource allocation for the same is negligible or at times absent.

Post-project evaluation is important and critical. Post-project evaluation plays a decisive role in evaluating the sustainability of the program. It answers critical questions: Whether the linkages established have succeeded in sustaining the program? Whether the program beneficiaries are still benefiting from the program? What is the fate of the program beneficiaries after the phase-over of the program? In addition to answering crucial questions, post-project evaluation offers decisive perspective to factors responsible for sustaining the project. It offers a fair learning ground for agencies and donors to understand the nuances of sustainability and linkages. Most importantly, lessons imbibed from post-project evaluation could be implemented and accounted in others projects. It could help agencies and donors to effectively design projects that adequately account for establishment of linkages and sustainability of the project. While post-project evaluations are in the interest of the beneficiaries; more importantly, post-project evaluations are in consonance with the achievement of development goals.

Agencies implement projects and then move out. The learning from the project are often not documented or shared. Post-project evaluation facilitates sharing of learning from projects. Successful implementation of exit strategies and phase-over could be learned, imbibed, shared and replicated in other projects. Failures and flaws in one project could be avoided in other projects.

Therefore, it is quintessential to factor in post-project evaluation in project designs. Also, it becomes imperative to have robust evaluation design so as to answer all the relevant questions that need to be addressed through post-project evaluation.

Current Practices in Post-Project Evaluation

Post-project evaluation is an emerging area in social research. However, there have been several instances where development projects have been designed without much foresight especially with regard to evaluation of the project. Impact evaluation of a development projects answers three significant questions:

Whether there is a change?

Whether the change was due to the project?

What are the specific factors responsible for the change?

Sound impact evaluation of development projects requires a baseline study of project and comparison group; and endline study of similar project and comparison group. There are evaluation designs available to evaluate projects where no baseline study had been done or no comparison group had been taken. But in such studies it becomes difficult to establish a counterfactual (Ravallion, 2001). However, evaluation of a project doesn't end with endline evaluation.

An extension of evaluation can be post project evaluation that captures the sustainability of the program. When a project is designed, the sustainability of the program needs to be taken into account. Otherwise, the idea of designing a project to bring sustainable changes at the community-level gets defeated. In this light, it makes immense sense to ensure the sustainability of the project at the conception of the project itself. But how would one do that?

Forward Thinking: Post-Project Evaluation in USAID Projects

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Title II program in India is a long standing program that has contributed significantly to reduce food insecurity by targeting and reaching vulnerable women and children with food, nutrition and other health services. CARE and CRS were the implementing partners for USAID funded project in India. CARE's program was closely aligned with the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program and the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) program of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) (USAID, 2007). Catholic Relief Services (CRS) implemented the three pronged food security program that included maternal and child health and nutrition (MCHN), natural resource management and agriculture and food for education (Rogers & Macias, 2004).

The Title II program from India later phased over in a staggered manner. USAID worked with CARE and CRS to develop the phase-over plans spread over three years (2007-2009), which aimed at ensuring process and result sustainability. One of the challenges for the program was to ensure that the program benefits and practices sustained after the phase-over. Implementation of effective exit strategies was followed by a post-project evaluation to examine if the impacts of Title II program were sustainable.

USAID appreciated the fact that at some point of time it had to withdraw from the program area and at the same time ensure the sustainability of the project by aligning the project activities with ICDS and NRHM. The project was designed in such a manner that the project could be linked with other programs of the government to ensure sustainability of the project. Such linkages could be termed as phase-over of the project. USAID has commissioned a study for the post-project evaluation of CARE and CRS programs in India, which is scheduled in 2011. The objective of the study is to assess how the beneficiaries are faring after its withdrawal from the project and whether the project led to sustainable results and processes for the community.

The case studies drives home two crucial points:

To ensure sustainability of project, at the inception of the project itself, linkages must be thought over. A futuristic outlook is required to answer one crucial question: What would happen after withdrawal from the program?

Post-project evaluation is crucial for the well being of the people. It provides avenues to work out changes in phase-over strategy, if the project is not yielding benefits to the beneficiaries after withdrawal from the project. Further, if the phase-over strategy appears to be successful it could be replicated and incorporated when other projects are designed. Either ways, post-projects evaluation is in the interest of the beneficiaries.

Challenges in Post-Project Evaluation

Post-project evaluation is subject to several challenges. The challenges are:

Resources: Agencies have limited funds. By and large, when a project is designed, agencies mostly focus on designing the intervention part of the project. At present, little or no thought is given to post-project evaluation. If at all, agencies mull over post-project evaluation, the problem of resources crops up. What goes through the mind of the agencies? The implementing agencies and donors commit huge funds for intervention and impact evaluation of the project but do not allocate resources for post-project evaluation.

Ownership: In general, implementing agencies intervene in the project area, carry out impact evaluation of the project and move out. The ownership of the project terminates with endline impact evaluation. In this light, few questions crop up: Who takes the ownership of post-project evaluation? Who should commit funds for post-project evaluation?

How to measure post-project impact evaluation: Post-project impact evaluation is relatively new area of inquiry. Little or no concrete precedents are available to guide measurements in post-project impact evaluation. However, an exploration of evaluation study design and statistical methods suggests Difference-in-Difference as one of the methods for measurement of post-project impact evaluation. However, the suggested method is subject to certain assumptions:

- There is a project and comparison group.
- Data has been collected in baseline and endline evaluation for project and comparison group.

This topic will be dealt in detail subsequently.

Building post-project evaluation initially: One thing must be clear: individual activities in an impact evaluation study cannot be separated from the whole of the evaluation. An impact evaluation study is a whole system of activities not a collection of parts. Each stage in an impact evaluation study is connected with another stage. Any missing link could sabotage the impact evaluation objectives. In this light, it is crucial to build post-project evaluation at the inception of the project itself. So, it is important to have forethought about having a project and a control group coupled with collection of data from baseline and endline study. Further, the sustainability of the project also needs to be looked into right from the point the project is conceived.

Audience for sustainability: A few pertinent questions arise: Who would be the audience for the results of sustainability that are captured through post-project evaluation? Would the policy makers be interested in the results of sustainability? Would they acknowledge and leverage the results of the post-project evaluation?

CRISP Framework for Post-Project Evaluation

Post-project evaluation can be done within one or two years of endline evaluation. The research design for post-project evaluation should be *quasi-experimental* in nature. A comparison group should be selected along with the project group for post-project evaluation. The study should adopt a judicious mix of both qualitative and quantitative techniques so as to provide a complete picture of the post-project situation. The key areas of inquiry for post-project evaluation are the design and implementation of phase-over strategies and the sustainability of the project.

Sustainability here has a two stage reference. The first stage of sustainability subsumes the *Process sustainability* and *Results sustainability*. The processes and practices initiated during the project should continue to function for the achievement of the stated objectives of the project even after the phase-over. The results-level sustainability encompasses the sustainability of impact and outcome level indicators in the community.

The second stage of sustainability includes the *Community* and *Institutional-level* sustainability. Community-level sustainability refers to the sustainability of impact and also the processes. Institutional-level sustainability refers to the sustainability of institutions or groups that were purposefully formed during the implementation of the project.

The institutional-level sustainability holds importance especially in projects related to natural resource management. The construction of infrastructure in natural resource projects involves considerable cost and requires maintenance over time. However, there is always the possibility that the infrastructure will deteriorate after phase-over and the impact generated during the project will not be sustainable. The funding agencies should also ensure appropriate return for their investments (RoI) in such projects. For this reason, it becomes imperative to undertake the post-project evaluation to assess the institutional-level sustainability.

Thus, the post-project evaluation framework should help assess sustainability of a project *vis-à-vis* community, results, institutions and processes. The figure given below schematically illustrates the CRISP framework for post-project evaluation.

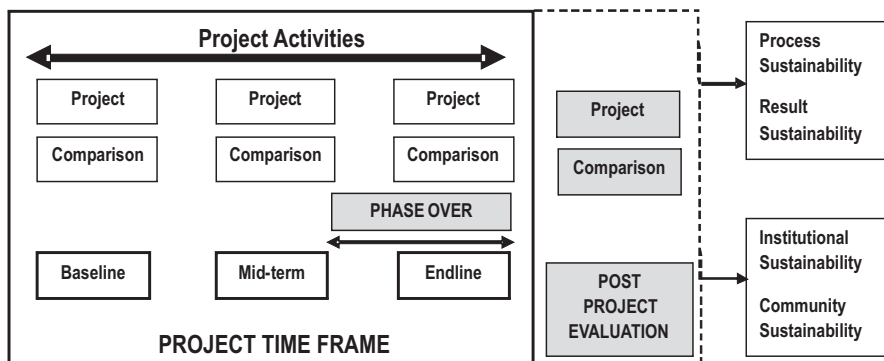


Figure 1: CRISP Framework for Post-Project Evaluation

Post-project evaluation using quantitative data from statistically representative samples are better suited to measure the values of impact-level indicators for assessing sustainability of the project. However, qualitative methods allow in depth study of phase-over design and implementation methodology, cases, or events and can provide critical insights into beneficiaries' perspectives, the dynamics of a particular reform, or the reasons behind certain results observed in a quantitative analysis (Khandkar, Koolwal, & Samad, 2010).

For the purpose of evaluating the design and implementation strategy for phase-over, strong qualitative component should be incorporated in the post-project evaluation design (International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 2009). The qualitative component would essentially focus on how the phase-over was planned and designed by the project personnel, when and how was it communicated to the community and what was the response of the community on phase-over. The focus is on understanding processes, behaviors, and conditions as perceived by the community being studied. This would include assessment of the phase-over strategies by the community adopting participatory techniques.

However, the sustainability of the processes that were initiated during the project and the result-level indicators can be measured through quantitative tools. The key objective of the quantitative tool would be to evaluate whether the change in result-level indicators continued as desired after the phase-over of the project.

Difference-In-Difference Method

Double difference or difference-in-difference method is one of the methods for post-project evaluation, in which we can compare the project and comparison group (first difference) before and after the program (second difference) (Baker, 2000). In case of post-project evaluation, the first difference comes from the difference in impact level indicators of the project and comparison groups in the endline assessment.

$$Y_{\text{(first difference)}} = Y_3 - Y_2$$

Where³

Y_3 = value of key indicator of Project at endline

Y_2 = value of key indicator of Comparison at endline

The second difference comes from the difference in project and comparison groups for the same indicators in the post-project assessment. There can be two alternate directions in which the impact level indicators can move after the phase-over of the project. There can be a sustainable improvement in the project level indicators even after the phase-over or the value of the indicators can show a downward trend due to failure in establishing sustainable practices after the phase-over.

$$Y_{\text{(second difference)}} = Y_5 - Y_4$$

OR

$$Y_{\text{(second difference)}} = Y_6 - Y_4$$

Where,

Y_5 = increasing value of key indicator of Project for post-project

Y_4 = value of key indicator of Comparison at post-project

Y_6 = decreasing value of key indicator of Project for post-project

The two differences in the endline and post-project evaluation can then be compared statistically to ensure if the project impact was sustainable even after the phase-over.

³Here, difference in value of key indicator of project and comparison group at baseline would be:

$$Y_{\text{(difference)}} = Y_0 - Y_1$$

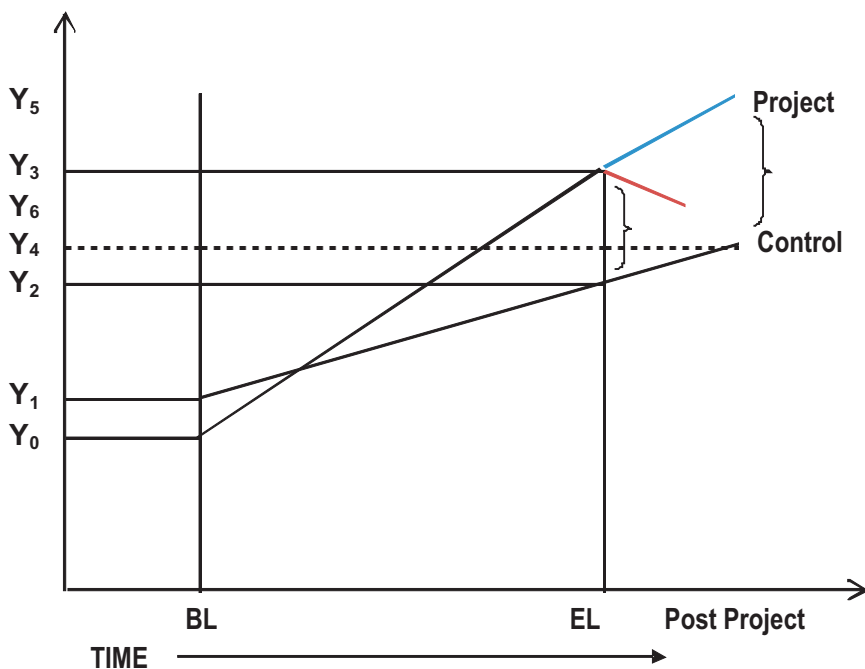


Figure 2: Difference-in-Difference in Post-Project Evaluation

In this quasi-experimental design, *propensity score matching* can be applied to strengthen the double difference method. In this type of matching, the comparison group can be matched to the project group on the basis of a set of observed characteristics; the closer the propensity score, the better the match (Baker, 2000). With matching methods, the objective is to find a comparison group that is almost exactly similar to the project group for a set of observed characteristics. On matching the project and comparison groups in post-project evaluation, the average difference in outcomes across the two groups can be calculated to know the impact of project after the phase-over.

However, one of the limitations of this method is that it can be only used in post-project evaluations where the project and comparison groups in the endline had been evaluated. Further, the method requires selection of a comparison group along with the project group in post-project evaluation. The evaluation design for a study is context specific. However, the applicability of other evaluations methods like Propensity Score Matching, Regression Discontinuity or Instrumental Variable can also be explored depending on the evaluation design.

Conclusion

There is need to create conducive climate for post-project evaluation. Implementing agencies and policy makers must appreciate the importance of post-project evaluation in achieving development goals. Post-project evaluation is an emerging area in research. There is need to build on strong research methodology for post-project evaluation. This will require constant dialogues and knowledge sharing among the academicians, researchers and evaluators. Peer-to-peer review can also assist in bolstering and shaping the appropriate methodology for post-project evaluation. A reliable knowledge base also needs to be built up, which can facilitate knowledge sharing. Further, funding and implementing agencies must be sensitized about the implications and benefits of post-project evaluation.

To finally conclude, it must be stated that project design must be robust enough to ensure the sustainability of the project. Further, it must also be appreciated that project ownership does not terminate with endline evaluation of the project. The ownership continues until post-project evaluation has been done. With sustainability being the underlying theme of all development interventions, there is a strong case for factoring post-project evaluation in project designs and implementing it using robust evaluation designs.

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