



Evaluating what you are doing

Measuring the impact of any international development initiative starts with being clear about why the council is undertaking the activity and what objectives it sets at the outset. In this sense, much of the groundwork for good evaluation is covered in the 'making a start' section of this toolkit. Some of the key steps in evaluating council involvement in an international development project include:

What – decide what it is you are evaluating and why. Be clear about the outputs that you are measuring and the means of measurement and verification. In some projects, such as the installation of a clean water supply, one level of verification may be the simple fact of its successful construction and operation but this is meaningless unless evaluation goes on to include the extent to which the facility is accessible and being used by those it is intended to help.

Who – be clear about who you are conducting the evaluation for and which partners need to be fully involved. An evaluation looking at the impact of an initiative on a local community in the developing world will be different from one that is focused on reporting back to councillors on the contribution of the initiative to core aspects of a UK council's work.

Impacts – at the heart of an evaluation will be clarity on which impacts or outcomes are being measured. The 'home' benefits to a UK council include 'internal' and 'external' benefits. The former include measuring and recording the outcomes of international working in relation to its impacts to staff, their work within an authority and to councillors and their council activities. The latter include things such as raising cultural awareness (through educational activities and information provision), economic development (through building business links and employment opportunities), promoting community cohesion (through community events, joint trips), etc. Developing world impacts will be determined in conjunction with overseas project partners but the impact of many projects should also be evaluated with reference to the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations has produced a set of indicators for monitoring progress on these goals at a national level, many of which are also appropriate for local assessment. They are online at <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx>

Indicators - the choice of indicators to measure impacts need to be 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Accurate, Relevant and Time-bound). They need to connect clearly to the achievement of, or progress towards, the identified goals for the project. Some factors will be more qualitative in nature where it is not possible to have more quantitative indicators. Some local authorities, such as Southwark and Wolverhampton, have developed their own key performance Indicators for international working.

Data collection – primary research involves direct gathering of quantitative and qualitative information through techniques such as face-to-face and telephone surveys, online and mail-out questionnaires, or pooling more anecdotal evidence from community workshops, interviews and discussions at public meetings. Secondary research uses existing reports, surveys and monitoring activities that may already capture useful data can contribute to revealing the impacts of a project. This is clearly preferable in terms of cost and time, where data exists, but for many ongoing projects it will be necessary to capture up-to-date primary data in order to clarify the direct impact of a particular project.

Analysis and findings – after collecting the data, it is then necessary to pull-out the principle trends from the data and thus identify key impacts of the work. The analysis should enable the production of policy and project recommendations arising from the project and / or future activities.

Validation - any evaluation process should allow for community / stakeholder feedback and comment to enable verification / validation of the findings of the assessment.

Knowledge management - the results of the assessment, along with any validation feedback, should be used to revise the project, where necessary, and make key recommendations to the council and staff as well as project partner/s on the continued implementation of a project or to inform future projects.