Process Evaluation Needs Assessment:
Current state of knowledge and implementation of process evaluations in CARE programs, informed by CARE Staff

Learning Brief

OVERVIEW

This work is part of the [CARE-Emory Collaboration](#) and the [CARE-Emory Implementation Science Research Project](#) which aims to enhance program impact and improve the state of the knowledge for implementation science and research by addressing the "know-do" gap: the gap between what we "know" to do and "how" we do in practice. This collaborative grant between CARE USA and Emory University is designed to **enhance program impact and improve the state of implementation science and research in the highly interrelated areas of gender equity, economic empowerment, WASH, and nutrition**. As part of this work, we aim to improve the ability of CARE to integrate process evaluation into their programs, leading to improved understanding of factors that may impact intervention implementation and system requirements to support effective implementation.

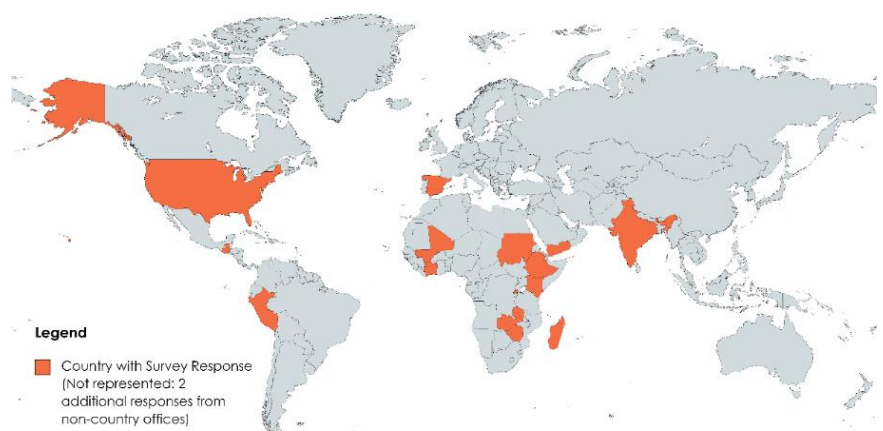## Process evaluation is an important tool in program implementation and evaluation

A process evaluation is a method used to determine if a program's proposed activities were implemented as designed and may reveal why outcomes were or were not achieved. It focuses on the types and quantities of services delivered, the beneficiaries of those services, the resources used to deliver the services, the practical problems encountered, and the ways such problems were resolved. To inform this, implementation monitoring is conducted during delivery of the intervention to document the process of a program's implementation. **This is in contrast to impact and outcome evaluations**, which measures a program's results and determines whether, how and why intended outcomes were achieved. Process evaluation enhances understanding of factors affecting implementation of interventions, strengthens reporting ability to inform policy and practice, and provides an accurate foundation for impact and outcome evaluations to be conducted.

Process evaluation needs assessment survey with CARE staff

In June-July 2023, we administered [a survey](#) to get feedback from CARE program staff to help understand what barriers and needs there might be when it comes to integrating process evaluations into programs. The purpose of the survey was to: (1) identify existing knowledge and awareness of the application of process evaluations and (2) solicit existing guidance material on process evaluations that CARE staff may be aware of and/or using. This feedback will be used to help develop the necessary tools, resources, and support mechanisms to aid CARE staff in carrying out process evaluations.
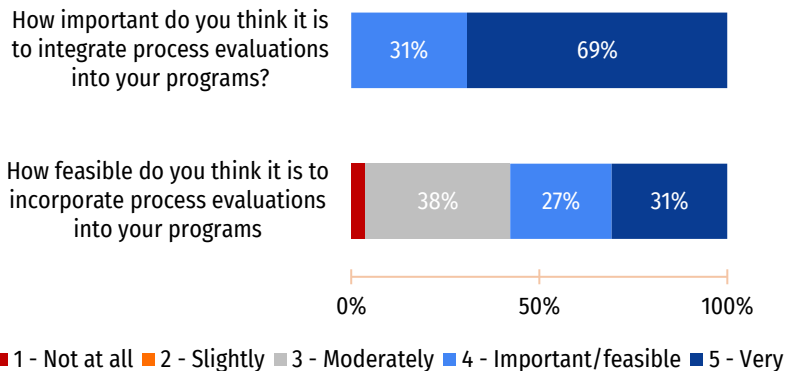
WHO DID WE ASK?

A survey was circulated to 57 CARE staff, from 27 different country offices. 26 CARE staff participated in the survey, from over 17 different countries and HQ offices. Respondents included program officers and managers (11), technical advisors (8), MEAL officers (5), a business development and program quality director, and a chief of party.

Legend

■ Country with Survey Response
(Not represented: 2 additional responses from non-country offices)
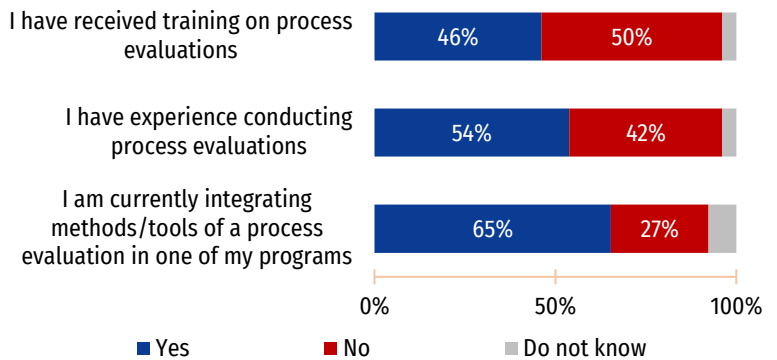
WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Importance and feasibility

We asked respondents to rate how important and feasible they think integrating process evaluations into their programs are. Respondents indicated that integrating process evaluations into their programs is highly important (average score of 4.7 out of 5, which is very important). However, the feasibility rating of integration was lower and more varied (average score of 3.8 out of 5, which is very feasible).
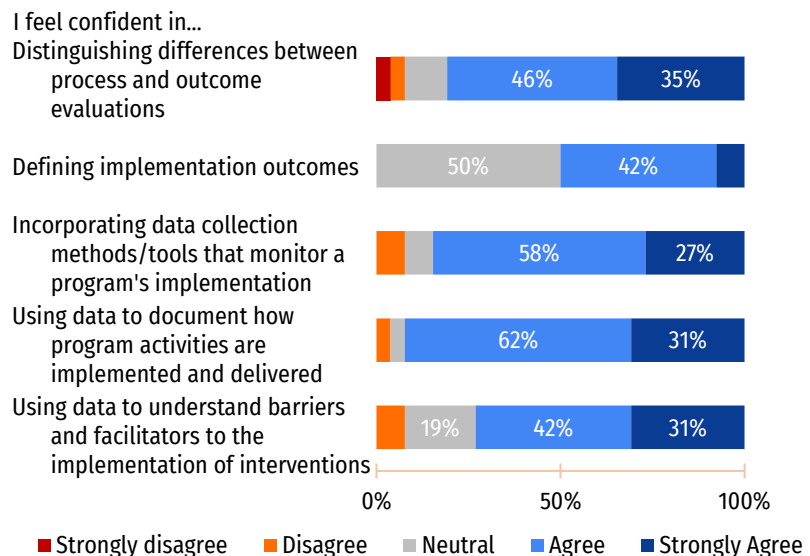
How important do you think it is to integrate process evaluations into your programs?
31% | 69%

How feasible do you think it is to incorporate process evaluations into your programs
38% | 27% | 31%

Legend: ■ 1 - Not at all ■ 2 - Slightly ■ 3 - Moderately ■ 4 - Important/feasible ■ 5 - Very

Training and experience

We asked respondents if they have received training; have experience conducting; or are currently integrating process evaluations into one of their programs. Training and experience conducting process evaluation was mixed. 46% of respondents indicated that they have received training in process evaluations, and 54% have experience conducting them. 65% of respondents indicated that they are currently integrating methods and tools of a process evaluation in one of their programs.

I have received training on process evaluations
46% | 50%

I have experience conducting process evaluations
54% | 42%

I am currently integrating methods/tools of a process evaluation in one of my programs
65% | 27%

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No ■ Do not know

Comfort levels

We asked respondents to rank their agreement with five statements of confidence related to conducting process evaluations. Overall, respondents indicated the highest confidence in using data to document how program activities are implemented and delivered. There were respondents who indicated lower confidence (disagreement) for all statements expect defining implementation outcomes. Although, 50% of respondents were neutral of their ability to define key process evaluation outcomes.
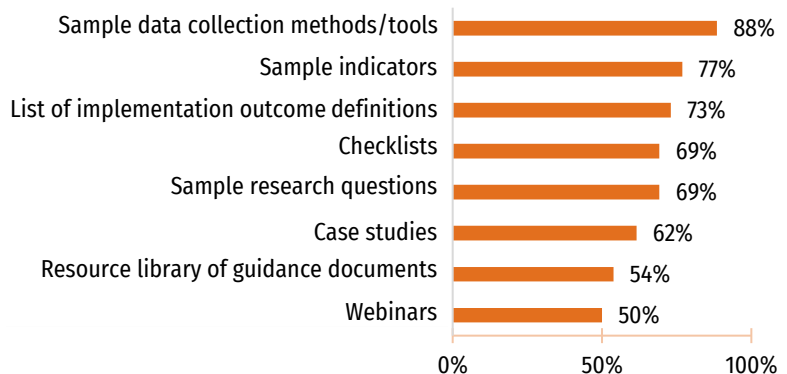
I feel confident in...

Distinguishing differences between process and outcome evaluations
46% | 35%

Defining implementation outcomes
50% | 42%

Incorporating data collection methods/tools that monitor a program's implementation
58% | 27%

Using data to document how program activities are implemented and delivered
62% | 31%

Using data to understand barriers and facilitators to the implementation of interventions
19% | 42% | 31%

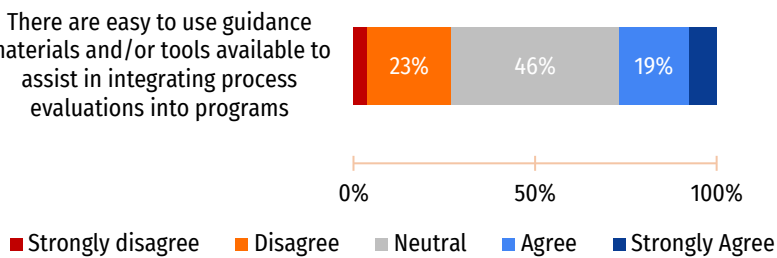Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Guidance materials

We asked respondents about the availability of guidance materials and to share any materials they may be familiar with or types of resources that they believe would be helpful. Overall, respondents indicated that easy to use guidance materials to assist in integration process evaluations into programs are limited. Only three respondents shared resources they were familiar with (Evaluation Toolkit website by BetterEvaluation, Guide for the management and implementation of projects for project managers and CRS programs by Catholic Relief Services, and Evaluation Toolkit website by USAID Learning Lab).

Respondents voted on which methods and tools would most help CARE integrate process evaluations. Individuals freely suggested the implementation of peer support groups, collaborative platforms with think-tanks and academia for cross-learning, and clear guidelines indicating clearly what, when, and how to monitor.

There are easy to use guidance materials and/or tools available to assist in integrating process evaluations into programs

23%	46%	19%	

0%   50%   100%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Sample data collection methods/tools	88%
Sample indicators	77%
List of implementation outcome definitions	73%
Checklists	69%
Sample research questions	69%
Case studies	62%
Resource library of guidance documents	54%
Webinars	50%

0%   50%   100%

RESPONDENT FEEDBACK

Challenges

Budgeting and staff capacity: Multiple respondents highlighted "budget constraints to conduct evaluations" as the major challenge to implementing process evaluations.

- "Apparently, project implementers do not see the importance of these exercises and end up not allocating the appropriate resources to help understand implementation gaps. To make it worse, in some cases, MEAL related activity budget lines are always the first ones to be removed in times of planning and budget adjustments."
- "I believe it is very important tool to capture learnings/challenges, understand failures/success at early stage with high possibility for correction/scaling. At the same time, it will come with additional requirements such as finance, staff time, capacity/skill to properly and timely use the data, project life data management and use. So, such issue shall also be considered from the very beginning."

Integration: A respondent noted the lack of clear, separate requirements for process evaluations.

- "We usually use regular monitoring and reviewing of project progress as process monitoring even though not systematically organized. The regular monitoring mainly focus on output level progresses and challenges, don't have much on using the monitoring input to track paths towards intended outcomes, long term sustainability, effectiveness, relevance, possible consequences (positive/negative-social, environmental)."

Suggestions

Guidance material: Four respondents explicitly indicated interest in guidance materials and training on how to conduct process evaluations.

- "There is a need [in] making available guiding materials describing how process and impact evaluations can be conducted. This way, we will promote standards and results will be credible for onward utilization and significantly contributing to data-based decision making."

Measuring fidelity: A respondent indicated support for process evaluations as a way to compliment outcome evaluations of CARE programs.

- "[Measuring] fidelity of implementation is the perfect scenario where process evaluation can be very applicable, and a value added beyond the measurement of impact or outcomes."

Support mechanisms: A need for organizational support was noted through an activity suggestion of "Peer support/groups."

- "CARE should set up a community of practice with some annual events to discuss about the WASH challenges within the word."

CONCLUSION

Through the survey questions and free responses of CARE staff, it can be gathered that CARE staff have at least general knowledge and awareness of the application of process evaluations and the value they can add to CARE programs and evaluations. These findings will be used to **help outline the requirements (why, when, and what) needed for tools, resources, and support mechanisms that can help CARE staff integrate process evaluation into their programs**, leading to improved understanding of factors that may impact intervention implementation.