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PERFORMANCE MONITORING & EVALUATION

TIPS

USING RAPID APPRAISAL METHODS

ABOUT TIPS

These TIPS provide practical advice and suggestions to USAID managers on issues related to performance monitoring and evaluation. This publication is a supplemental reference to the Automated Directive System (ADS) Chapter 203.

WHAT IS RAPID APPRAISAL?

Rapid Appraisal (RA) is an approach that draws on multiple evaluation methods and techniques to quickly, yet systematically, collect data when time in the field is limited. RA practices are also useful when there are budget constraints or limited availability of reliable secondary data. For example, time and budget limitations may preclude the option of using representative sample surveys.

BENEFITS – WHEN TO USE RAPID APPRAISAL METHODS

Rapid appraisals are quick and can be done at relatively low cost. Rapid appraisal methods can help gather, analyze, and report relevant information for decision-makers within days or weeks. This is not possible with sample surveys. RAs can be used in the following cases:

- for formative evaluations, to make mid-course corrections in project design or implementation when customer or partner feedback indicates a problem (See ADS 203.3.6.1);
- when a key management decision is required and there is inadequate information;
- for performance monitoring, when data are collected and the techniques are repeated over time for measurement purposes;
- to better understand the issues behind performance monitoring data; and
- for project pre-design assessment.

LIMITATIONS – WHEN RAPID APPRAISALS ARE NOT APPROPRIATE

Findings from rapid appraisals may have limited reliability and validity, and cannot be generalized to the larger population. Accordingly, rapid appraisal should not be the sole basis for summative or impact evaluations. Data can be biased and inaccurate unless multiple methods are used to strengthen the validity of findings and careful preparation is undertaken prior to beginning field work.

WHEN ARE RAPID APPRAISAL METHODS APPROPRIATE?

Choosing between rapid appraisal methods for an assessment or more time-consuming methods, such as sample surveys, should depend on balancing several factors, listed below.

- Purpose of the study. The importance and nature of the decision depending on it.
- Confidence in results. The accuracy, reliability, and validity of

findings needed for management decisions.

- Time frame. When a decision must be made.
- Resource constraints (budget).
- Evaluation questions to be answered. (see TIPS 3: Preparing an Evaluation Statement of Work)

USE IN TYPES OF EVALUATION

Rapid appraisal methods are often used in formative evaluations. Findings are strengthened when evaluators use triangulation (employing more than one data collection method) as a check on the validity of findings from any one method.

Rapid appraisal methods are also used in the context of summative evaluations. The data from rapid appraisal methods and techniques complement the use of quantitative methods such as surveys based on representative sampling. For example, a randomized survey of small holder farmers may tell you that farmers have a difficult time selling their goods at market, but may not have provide you with the details of why this is occurring. A researcher could then use interviews with farmers to determine the details necessary to construct a more complete theory of why it is difficult for small holder farmers to sell their goods.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR ENSURING USEFUL RAPID APPRAISAL DATA COLLECTION

No set of rules dictates which methods and techniques should be used in a given field situation; however, a number of key principles can be followed to ensure the collection of useful data in a rapid appraisal.

- Preparation is key. As in any evaluation, the evaluation design and selection of methods must begin with a thorough understanding of the evaluation questions and the client's needs for evaluative information. The client's intended uses of data must guide the evaluation design and the types of methods that are used.
- Triangulation increases the validity of findings. To lessen bias and strengthen the validity of findings from rapid appraisal methods and techniques, it is imperative to use multiple methods. In this way, data collected using one method can be compared to that collected using other methods, thus giving a researcher the ability to generate valid and reliable findings. If, for example, data collected using Key Informant Interviews reveal the same findings as data collected from Direct Observation and Focus Group Interviews, there is less chance that the findings from the first method were due to researcher bias or due to the findings being outliers. Table 1 summarizes common rapid appraisal methods and suggests how findings from any one method can be strengthened by the use of other methods.

COMMON RAPID APPRAISAL METHODS

INTERVIEWS

This method involves one-on-one interviews with individuals or key informants selected for their knowledge or diverse views. Interviews are qualitative, in-depth and semi-structured. Interview guides are usually used and questions may be further framed during the interview, using subtle probing techniques. Individual interviews may be used to gain information on a general topic but cannot provide the in-depth inside knowledge on evaluation topics that key informants may provide.

EVALUATION METHODS COMMONLY USED IN RAPID APPRAISAL

- Interviews
- Community Discussions
- Exit Polling
- Transect Walks (see p. 3)
- Focus Groups
- Minisurveys
- Community Mapping
- Secondary Data Collection
- Group Discussions
- Customer Service Surveys
- Direct Observation

MINISURVEYS

A minisurvey consists of interviews with between five to fifty individuals, usually selected using non-probability sampling (sampling in which respondents are chosen based on their understanding of issues related to a purpose or specific questions, usually used when sample sizes are small and time or access to areas is limited). Structured questionnaires are used with a limited number of close-ended questions. Minisurveys generate quantitative data that can often be collected and analyzed quickly.

FOCUS GROUPS

The focus group is a gathering of a homogeneous body of five to twelve participants to discuss issues and experiences among themselves. These are used to test an idea or to get a reaction on specific topics. A moderator introduces the topic, stimulates and focuses the

discussion, and prevents domination of discussion by a few, while another evaluator documents the conversation.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN RAPID APPRAISAL

Certain equipment and technologies can aid the rapid collection of data and help to decrease the incidence of errors. These include, for example, hand held computers or personal digital assistants (PDAs) for data input, cellular phones, digital recording devices for interviews, videotaping and photography, and the use of geographic information systems (GIS) data and aerial photographs.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This method involves the selection of approximately five participants who are knowledgeable about a given topic and are comfortable enough with one another to freely discuss the issue as a group. The moderator introduces the topic and keeps the discussion going while another evaluator records the discussion. Participants talk among each other rather than respond directly to the moderator.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

This method takes place at a public meeting that is open to all community members; it can be successfully moderated with as many as 100 or more people. The primary interaction is between the participants while the moderator leads the discussion and asks questions following a carefully prepared interview guide.

DIRECT OBSERVATION

Teams of observers record what they hear and see at a program site using a detailed observation form. Observation may be of the physical surrounding or of ongoing activities, processes, or interactions.

COLLECTING SECONDARY DATA

This method involves the on-site collection of existing secondary data, such as export sales, loan information, health service statistics, etc. These data are an important augmentation to information collected using qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and community discussions. The evaluator must be able to quickly determine the validity and reliability of the data. (see TIPS 12: Indicator and Data Quality)

TRANSECT WALKS

The transect walk is a participatory approach in which the evaluator asks a selected community member to walk with him or her, for example, through the center of town, from one end of a village to the other, or through a market. The evaluator asks the individual, usually a key informant, to point out and discuss important sites, neighborhoods, businesses, etc., and to discuss related issues.

COMMUNITY MAPPING

Community mapping is a technique that requires the participation of residents on a program site. It can be used to help locate natural resources, routes, service delivery points, regional markets, trouble spots, etc., on a map of the area, or to use residents' feedback to drive the development of a map that includes such information.

COMMON RAPID APPRAISAL METHODS
Table 1

Method	Useful for Providing	Example	Advantages	Limitations	Further References
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS					
Interviews	– A general overview of the topic from someone who has a broad knowledge and in-depth experience and understanding (key informant) or in-depth information on a very specific topic or subtopic (individual) – Suggestions and recommendations to improve key aspects of a program	**Key informant:** Interview with program implementation director Interview with director of a regional trade association **Individual:** Interview with an activity manager within an overall development program Interview with a local entrepreneur trying to enter export trade	– Provides in-depth, inside information on specific issues from the individuals perspective and experience – Flexibility permits exploring unanticipated topics – Easy to administer – Low cost	– Susceptible to interviewer and selection biases – Individual interviews lack the broader understanding and insight that a key informant can provide	TIPS No. 2, Conducting Key Informant Interviews K. Kumar, Conducting Key Informant Surveys in Developing Countries, 1986 Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry, Real World Evaluation, 2006 UNICEF Website: M&E Training Modules: Overview of RAP Techniques
Minisurveys	– Quantitative data on narrowly focused questions, for a relatively homogeneous population, when representative sampling is not possible or required – Quick data on attitudes, beliefs, behaviors of beneficiaries or partners	– A customer service assessment – Rapid exit interviews after voting	– Quantitative data from multiple respondents – Low cost	– Findings are less generalizable than those from sample surveys unless the universe of the population is surveyed	TIPS No. 9, Conducting Customer Service Assessments K. Kumar, Conducting Mini Surveys in Developing Countries, 1990 Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry, RealWorld Evaluation, 2006 on purposeful sampling
GROUP INTERVIEWS					
Focus Groups	– Customer views on services, products, benefits – Information on implementation problems – Suggestions and recommendations for improving specific activities	– Discussion on experience related to a specific program intervention – Effects of a new business regulation or proposed price changes	– Group discussion may reduce inhibitions, allowing free exchange of ideas – Low cost	– Discussion may be dominated by a few individuals unless the process is facilitated/ managed well	TIPS No. 10, Conducting Focus Group Interviews K. Kumar, Conducting Group Interviews in Developing Countries, 1987 T. Greenbaum, Moderating Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Group Facilitation, 2000

Group Discussions	– Understanding of issues from different perspectives and experiences of participants from a specific subpopulation	– Discussion with young women on access to prenatal and infant care – Discussion with entrepreneurs about export regulations	– Small group size allows full participation – Allows good understanding of specific topics – Low cost	– Findings cannot be generalized to a larger population	Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry, RealWorld Evaluation, 2006 UNICEF Website: M&E Training Modules: Community Meetings
Community Discussions	– Understanding of an issue or topic from a wide range of participants from key evaluation sites within a village, town, city, or city neighborhood	– A Town Hall meeting	– Yields a wide range of opinions on issues important to participants – A great deal of information can be obtained at one point of time	– Findings cannot be generalized to larger population or to subpopulations of concern – Larger groups difficult to moderate	Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry, RealWorld Evaluation, 2006 UNICEF Website: M&E Training Modules: Community Meetings
ADDITIONAL COMMONLY USED TECHNIQUES					
Direct Observation	– Visual data on physical infrastructure, supplies, conditions – Information about an agency's or business's delivery systems, services – Insights into behaviors or events	– Market place to observe goods being bought and sold, who is involved, sales interactions	– Confirms data from interviews – Low cost	– Observer bias unless two to three evaluators observe same place or activity	TIPS No. 4, Using Direct Observation Techniques WFP Website: Monitoring & Evaluation Guidelines: What Is Direct Observation and When Should It Be Used?
Collecting Secondary Data	– Validity to findings gathered from interviews and group discussions	– Microenterprise bank loan info. – Value and volume of exports – Number of people served by a health clinic, social service provider	– Quick, low cost way of obtaining important quantitative data	– Must be able to determine reliability and validity of data	TIPS No. 12, Guidelines for Indicator and Data Quality
PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES					
Transect Walks	– Important visual and locational information and a deeper understanding of situations and issues	– Walk with key informant from one end of a village or urban neighborhood to another, through a market place, etc.	– Insiders viewpoint – Quick way to find out location of places of interest to the evaluator – Low cost	– Susceptible to interviewer and selection biases	Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry, Real World Evaluation, 2006 UNICEF Website: M&E Training Modules: Overview of RAP Techniques
Community Mapping	– Info. on locations important for data collection that could be difficult to find – Quick comprehension on spatial location of services/resources in a region which can give insight to access issues	– Map of village and surrounding area with locations of markets, water and fuel sources, conflict areas, etc.	– Important locational data when there are no detailed maps of the program site	– Rough locational information	Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry, Real World Evaluation, 2006 UNICEF Website: M&E Training Modules: Overview of RAP Techniques

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For more information:
TIPS publications are available online at [insert website].

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