



THE DEPA-MERL CONSORTIUM

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# Advancing the Use of Developmental Evaluation

A summary of key questions answered during a multiyear study of developmental evaluations implemented at USAID



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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
BACKGROUND	7
CONCLUSIONS	9
RECOMMENDATIONS	11
FINDINGS	18
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41
APPENDIXES	43

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

D2FTF	Digital Development for Feed the Future
DE	Developmental evaluation
DEPA-MERL	Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity-Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning
FCF DE	Family Care First in Cambodia Developmental Evaluation
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning
Search	Search for Common Ground
Uptake DE	Sustained Uptake Developmental Evaluation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WDI	William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan

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## CONSORTIUM INFORMATION

The DEPA-MERL consortium consists of Social Impact, Search for Common Ground, and the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION PILOT ACTIVITY-MONITORING, EVALUATION, RESEARCH, AND LEARNING (DEPA-MERL) BACKGROUND

DEPA-MERL—situated in the U.S. Global Development Lab’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations Program at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)—is testing the effectiveness of developmental evaluation (DE) in the USAID context. DE was created to evaluate innovative programs that operate in complex environments and are thus expected to adapt over time.

### REPORT PURPOSE AND EVALUATION BACKGROUND

Since 2016, there have been three DEPA-MERL DE pilots. This report shares findings and lessons learned from across the experiences to facilitate learning from the implementation of DE in the USAID context. Findings shared in this report are based on an independent across-case analysis conducted by one of the DEPA-MERL consortium partner organizations: the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan. The WDI team collected data to answer the following four research questions:

- Research Question 1: How does DE capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings in support of ongoing programming in a complex system, such as in the USAID context?
- Research Question 2: What are the barriers and enablers to implementation of DE in the USAID context?
- Research Question 3: What do key stakeholders consider to be the value (added or lost) of conducting a DE compared to a traditional evaluation approach?
- Research Question 4: What are the key lessons learned from building and managing buy-in for the DE approach in the USAID context?

To answer these questions, a mixed-methods approach was used and included outcome harvesting, document reviews, semi-structured interviews with the Developmental Evaluators and DE stakeholders, and an electronic survey administered to stakeholders.

### CONCLUSIONS

Should DE be used in the USAID context? Findings from this research suggest, *yes, DE can be an appropriate and valuable evaluation approach in the USAID context*—but only if it is supported by leadership, has the right Developmental Evaluator, and is used strategically to support innovative programming. Based on combined findings from the four research questions, WDI offers the following crosscutting conclusions:

- DE can support the adaptive management of USAID programs in complex settings, but the level and benefit of any adaptations are highly dependent on the context and the USAID teams participating in DE.
- While DE stakeholders highly recommend DE, there are barriers that must be overcome and managed for a DE to be successful in the USAID context.

- Buy-in for DE needs to be developed at the start of DE and continually maintained throughout the DE's period of performance.
- DE can provide added value to USAID programs, but it is not a substitute for other evaluation approaches.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The WDI team offers eight key recommendations for implementing DE in the USAID context. The recommendations are organized into themes that follow the order that one would execute a DE. As much as possible, the recommendations are meant to offer holistic and crosscutting guidance that does not draw from a single DE, research question, or finding. Rather, they should be considered general best practices based on findings from across the three DE pilots conducted by DEPA-MERL.

Stage of Implementation	Recommendations
<b>Selecting DE</b> as the evaluative approach	1. Confirm that DE is the right fit for the USAID context and team
<b>Launching a DE</b>	2. Select the right Developmental Evaluator for the team 3. Use targeted activities to increase USAID stakeholders' buy-in and familiarity with DE 4. Make sure the Developmental Evaluator is fully embedded in the USAID team and context
<b>Implementing a DE</b>	5. Work with a diverse set of DE champions who can help support the Developmental Evaluator 6. Bolster the Developmental Evaluator's autonomy to conduct independent, objective, and utilization-focused evaluation activities
<b>Using DE data</b> for decision-making	7. Be prepared to help mobilize USAID stakeholders to make data-driven changes
<b>Closing out a DE</b>	8. Take steps to close out the DE and transition the Developmental Evaluator's responsibilities to the USAID stakeholder teams

## FINDINGS

**Research Question 1: How does DE capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings in support of ongoing programming in a complex system, such as in the USAID context?**

A systematic review of 39 outcomes of the DE (henceforth called DE outcomes), which were harvested during two DEPA-MERL DE pilots,<sup>1</sup> revealed that DEs can capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings in a variety of ways within the USAID context. The WDI team presents the following key takeaways:

<sup>1</sup> Using the six-step outcome harvesting approach, the WDI team harvested 39 DE outcomes in total (17 DE outcomes were harvested during the FCF DE and 22 DE outcomes were harvested during the Uptake DE). Due to timing and resource constraints, outcome harvesting was not used to study the attempted DE with a large USAID Bureau.

1. DE outcomes in the USAID context can present as follows: (a) large or small, (b) positive or negative, (c) program- or sector-level, or (d) relational- or institutional-level changes.
2. The DEs helped catalyze several adaptations to each program’s strategy based on data collected and shared by the Developmental Evaluators. Jointly, two DEs *captured* (n = 6), *promoted* (n = 8), and *enabled the utilization* (n = 25) of emergent learnings throughout their implementation.<sup>2</sup>
3. The DEs provided value to DE stakeholders in a wide variety of areas: from improved knowledge management and sustainability planning to Mission engagement. The largest number of DE outcomes (36%; 14 of 39 total outcomes across the two DEs) resulted in improved operations for DE stakeholders. Improved operations included refining program activities, updating branding or communication, and establishing new operating procedures.

**Research Question 2: What are the barriers and enablers to implementation of DE in the USAID context?**

Data from interviews with the Developmental Evaluators and with DE stakeholders on barriers and enablers to the implementation of the DE methodology, revealed the following:

1. Several factors that influenced DE implementation in the USAID context were discovered. Further analysis revealed that each factor could serve as both a barrier and an enabler to DE.
2. Overall, *skills of the Developmental Evaluator*, *data collection and sharing*, and *data utilization* (by the stakeholders participating in the DE) were the top enabling factors. *Leadership* (of the program being evaluated) and *USAID dynamics*<sup>3</sup> were the largest barriers to DE implementation.
3. The prevalence of different factors varied overtime depending on the stage of the DE.
4. As a funding partner and key stakeholder, certain USAID staff involved in a DE play a critical role in managing the barriers and enablers to DE.

**Research Question 3: What do key stakeholders consider to be the value (added or lost) of conducting a DE compared to a traditional evaluation approach?**

Based on the analysis of the Value of Developmental Evaluation Survey, which included responses from 30 stakeholders across the two DEs, the WDI team found the following:

1. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents said they would recommend DE to other organizations. Respondents’ top reasons for recommending DE were that it: (a) provided data-driven recommendations in real-time, (b) improved strategic management and evaluative thinking, (c)

<sup>2</sup> The “role of the DE” is incremental in nature because each subsequent subcategory builds off the previous category. For example, if the role of the DE was to *enable the utilization* of an emergent learning, then the DE needed to first *capture* and *promote* that learning. Each outcome was categorized as one category. For example, if the DE *captured* an emergent learning and then subsequently shared or *promoted* a related recommendation, the outcome was categorized as *promote*, not *capture*.

<sup>3</sup> The dynamics related to USAID culture and/or administrative processes that were perceived as affecting DE implementation.

offered a fundamentally different approach to evaluation, and (d) included a Developmental Evaluator who is embedded within the teams.

2. The Developmental Evaluators themselves were one of the biggest reported sources of added value of DE. The intimate nature of the Developmental Evaluators' embeddedness allowed them to share useful and timely information with stakeholders in a way that was understanding of their needs and complexities.
3. Compared to other evaluation approaches, such as a performance evaluation, respondents said that DE was better because it was aware of complexities in the local environment, allowed for evidenced-based decision-making, facilitated adaptations to their program, and provided feedback in a timelier manner.
4. Some stakeholders lacked data to form a judgment on DE cost-effectiveness and time savings. More than half of respondents (52%) said they did not know how cost-effective their DE was. In addition, nearly a quarter of all respondents (24%) did not know if the DEs resulted in more time savings for their teams.

**Research Question 4: What are the key lessons learned from building and managing buy in for the DE approach in the USAID context?**

Research from the three DEs shows that buy-in for the DE changes over time and can vary significantly across stakeholders. One of the most notable learnings was that the level of stakeholder buy-in for DE exists on a continuum. Six critical steps for building DE buy-in in the USAID context were identified: (a) selecting DE as the evaluative approach, (b) hiring the Developmental Evaluator, (c) educating DE stakeholders on the DE approach, (d) embedding the Developmental Evaluator, (e) collecting and sharing DE data effectively, and (f) adapting the program/innovation regularly based on DE data.

## BACKGROUND

### THIS REPORT

This report provides a high-level overview of lessons learned by the Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity-Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (DEPA-MERL) consortium from three developmental evaluation (DE) pilots conducted between December 2016 and September 2019 within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It includes **Background** information on the DE approach and the DEPA-MERL consortium, followed by the most significant **Conclusions** and **Recommendations** that were drawn from the experience of conducting the DEs in the USAID context. Next, this report shares the in-depth **Findings** that support these recommendations, including specific data related to each of the four research questions that formed the DEPA-MERL learning agenda.

### WHAT IS DE?

DE is an evaluative approach aimed at facilitating the continuous adaptation of innovative interventions. According to the definition offered by Michael Quinn Patton, DE helps “to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments.<sup>4</sup>” In this context, it involves having one or more Developmental Evaluators integrated into the implementation team, usually on a full-time or part-time basis.<sup>5</sup> These Developmental Evaluators contribute to modifications in program design and targeted outcomes throughout implementation. They participate in team meetings; document decisions, processes, and dynamics; and collect and analyze data, feeding it back to teams on a regular basis. DEs are methodologically agnostic and utilization focused. They adjust evaluation questions and methodological and analytic techniques as the project changes and deliver contextualized and emergent findings on an ongoing basis.

**Note:** This report assumes the reader has existing knowledge of DE theory and practice. If more information is needed, consider reading *Implementing Developmental Evaluation: A Practical Guide for Evaluators and Administrators* or *Implementing Developmental Evaluation: A Practical Guide for Funders*. A useful overview of the DE approach can also be found at [betterevaluation.org](http://betterevaluation.org).

### THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION PILOT ACTIVITY

Programs in complex settings or with untested theories of change often face challenges when trying to use a traditional midterm or final evaluation to assess their impact. In such programs, other evaluation approaches may fail to provide useful information in a timely fashion or capture important outcomes not defined at the outset of the innovation. To help address this issue, the U.S. Global Development Lab’s (hereinafter, “the Lab”) Office of Evaluation and Impact Assessment at USAID funded the DEPA-MERL—a mechanism to pilot the use of DE and assess its feasibility and effectiveness in the USAID context. DEPA-MERL is an initiative under the Lab’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations

<sup>4</sup> More information can be found at [betterevaluation.org](http://betterevaluation.org): [https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental\\_evaluation](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental_evaluation)

<sup>5</sup> In the case of the DEPA-MERL DE pilots, all the Developmental Evaluators worked full-time.

Program and is implemented by Social Impact (prime awardee), Search for Common Ground (Search), and the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.

## THE DEPA-MERL LEARNING AGENDA

The WDI team’s role in the DEPA-MERL consortium is to facilitate learning on the implementation of DEs in the USAID context. To date, there have been three DEPA-MERL DE pilots (**Figure 1**). As part of the learning agenda, the WDI team analyzed the Family Care First in Cambodia (FCF) DE, the Sustained Uptake DE with the Lab, and an attempted DE with a large USAID Bureau in Washington D.C. The DEPA-MERL consortium aims to build on existing literature focused on the practice of DE. Readers of this report—including USAID stakeholders, as well as current (or potential future) DE funders, Administrators, and Developmental Evaluators—can use the data and recommendations to strengthen their own use of the DE approach.

Figure 1: Three DEPA-MERL DE pilots were conducted to study DE in the USAID context

## The DEPA-MERL Developmental Evaluation Pilots

THREE DE PILOTS WERE CONDUCTED TO STUDY DE IN THE USAID CONTEXT

1



A STUDY OF THE FAMILY CARE FIRST IN CAMBODIA DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

How does developmental evaluation work in the USAID context, what factors help and hinder its success, and what is its value to stakeholders?

FAMILY CARE FIRST IN CAMBODIA

"The FCF DE"

From November 2016 to March 2018, DEPA-MERL conducted a developmental evaluation (DE) with Family Care First (FCF) in Cambodia, in service of FCF’s goal of increasing the number of children living in safe, nurturing family-based care. Search implemented the DE with FCF, including hiring, managing, and supporting the Developmental Evaluator.

2



A STUDY OF THE SUSTAINED UPTAKE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

How does developmental evaluation work in the USAID context, what factors help and hinder its success, and what is its value to stakeholders?

U.S. GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT LAB

"The Uptake DE"

From March 2017 to December 2018, DEPA-MERL conducted a DE with the U.S. Global Development Lab. The Sustained Uptake DE (hereinafter, “the Uptake DE”) was conducted in service of the Lab’s mission to source, test, and scale development solutions. Implemented by Social Impact, the DE helped several teams to collect, analyze, and disseminate learnings regarding the sustained uptake of innovations the teams seek to promote within and beyond USAID.

3



KEY LESSONS FROM AN ATTEMPTED DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION PILOT

December 2019

A LARGE USAID BUREAU IN D.C.

"The attempted DE"

From December 2018 to September 2019, DEPA-MERL attempted to conduct a DE with a large USAID Bureau in Washington D.C.. The goal of the DE was to help the Bureau develop a knowledge management process that would be transitioned over to a proposed new bureau being created as part of the USAID Transformation process. However, the attempted DE never progressed beyond the start-up phase and stakeholders never fully engaged in a DE process; hence, it is referred to as an "attempted DE."

## CONCLUSIONS

The fundamental purpose of this report is to answer the question, “Should DE be used by USAID?” The short answer is *yes, when appropriate*. The longer answer is *yes, when appropriate—and only if it can be supported by leadership, has the right Developmental Evaluator, and can be used strategically to support innovative programming*.

To arrive at this answer, the authors of this report—the WDI team—conducted 30 surveys and over 100 hours of interviews with 28 DE stakeholders and three Developmental Evaluators. The work, which culminated in the analysis of 465 pages of qualitative and quantitative data across four research questions, led the WDI team to conclude that whether DE should be used at USAID also depends on the evaluation’s scope of work: *who* is planning to participate in DE, *how* they intend to engage in it, and *what steps* they will take to use DE to innovate appropriately. The WDI team’s conclusion is supported by crosscutting findings associated with the four research questions, which are explored in detail later in the report:

*“[DE] is an expensive and time-consuming tool that should be used judiciously. But when used well, as it was in this [case], the results keep continuing to provide benefits.”*  
~ DE stakeholder

- **DE can support adaptive management<sup>6</sup> of USAID programs in complex settings, but the level and benefit of any adaptations are highly dependent on the context and the characteristics of the USAID teams participating in DE.**

Findings from Research Question 1, specifically the analysis of 39 harvested outcomes from the FCF and Uptake DEs, showed that DEs helped catalyze adaptations of each USAID program in several different areas; DE outcomes presented as follows: (a) large or small, (b) positive or negative, (c) program- or sector-level, or (d) relational- or institutional-level changes. To engage effectively in a DE that supports adaptive management; however, program teams needed to exhibit a high level of *DE readiness* (Research Question 2). They had flexible institutional structures that supported adaptation and were also able to prioritize the DE by allocating sufficient resources (funding, time, and access to information) to the Developmental Evaluator.

Related recommendations: 1, 2, 5, and 7.

- **While DE stakeholders highly recommend DE, there are barriers (some of which are USAID specific) that must be overcome and managed in order for a DE to be successful in the USAID context.**

For example, DE stakeholders said they would recommend DE in the USAID context because they liked having the dedicated attention of a skilled and embedded Developmental Evaluator

<sup>6</sup> Adaptive management is an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments to new information and changes in context. The goal of adaptive management is to incorporate learning into program delivery and improve a program’s activities and implementation. Definition adapted from *ADS Chapter 201*: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/201.pdf>

who understands their local complexities (Research Question 3). At the same time, findings from the analysis of barriers and enablers (Research Question 2) show that it took significant effort to physically, functionally, and socially integrate the Developmental Evaluator within a stakeholder team. One USAID-specific barrier the Developmental Evaluators experienced was receiving facilities clearance in a timely manner.

Related recommendations: 3, 4, 6, and 7.

- **Buy-in for DE needs to be developed at the start of DE and continually maintained throughout the DE’s period of performance.**

In the DEPA-MERL DE pilots, DE buy-in changed over time and sometimes varied significantly across stakeholders (Research Question 4). It was not solely the responsibility of the Developmental Evaluator to develop buy-in among DE stakeholders; it was also the responsibility of the DE funder and DE Administrator to serve as DE champions, as well as the leadership and program management who were using the DE. The WDI team documented six steps for building and maintaining DE buy-in.

Related recommendations: 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8.

- **DE can provide added value to USAID programs, but it is not a substitute for other evaluation approaches.**

Stakeholders reported that DE provided greater value than other more traditional evaluation approaches<sup>7</sup> in certain areas: being aware of complexity, allowing for evidence-based decision-making, providing timely feedback, and facilitating adaptations (Research Question 3). At the same time, a program may have needs that would be best served by other evaluation approaches, such as a performance evaluation. A DE will not be able to satisfy those needs. This is particularly true in the USAID context where fluid adaptations to a developing program may not be possible because of the context it is operating in (e.g., there is an institutional structure, leadership hierarchy, non-flexible contractual agreements, or multisite implementation strategy that does not allow for fluid adaptation or innovation).

Related recommendations: 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this study, “other” or “traditional” evaluation approaches refer to any formative, summative, or accountability-based evaluation approach that stakeholders may be more familiar with in the USAID context. This includes evaluations that measure the difference between pre- and post-program activities on a subset of the population that receives a treatment or intervention, as well as “one-off” evaluations that provide a snapshot or cross-sectional analysis of a program. DE is not a replacement for other evaluation approaches.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on findings from three DE pilots conducted by the DEPA-MERL (see “Background” for more information), the WDI team offers a streamlined set of eight recommendations for using DE within USAID (**Table I**). Each recommendation falls into one of five stages that align with the implementation path of a DE. The recommendations target USAID staff and implementing partners who are interested in participating in, executing, or funding a DE, as well as for Developmental Evaluators themselves.

As much as possible, the recommendations are meant to offer holistic and crosscutting guidance that does not draw from a single DE, research question, or finding. Rather, they should be considered general best practices based on findings from across the three DE pilots conducted by DEPA-MERL. Supporting evidence for the recommendations is found in the **Findings** section of the report.

**Appendix A** shares resources related to a recommendation, where applicable.<sup>8</sup> Additional recommendations related to DEPA-MERL’s research findings for the DEs conducted can be found in the following reports: [A Study of the Family Care First in Cambodia Developmental Evaluation](#) and [A Study of the Sustained Uptake Developmental Evaluation](#).

*Table I: Key recommendations to strengthen DEs in the USAID context*

Stage of Implementation	Recommendations
<b>Selecting DE</b> as the evaluative approach	1. Confirm that DE is the right fit for the USAID context and team
<b>Launching a DE</b>	2. Select the right Developmental Evaluator for the team 3. Use targeted activities to increase USAID stakeholders’ buy-in and familiarity with DE 4. Make sure the Developmental Evaluator is fully embedded in the USAID team and context
<b>Implementing a DE</b>	5. Work with a diverse set of DE champions who can help support the Developmental Evaluator 6. Bolster the Developmental Evaluator’s autonomy to conduct independent, objective, and utilization-focused evaluation activities
<b>Using DE data</b> for decision-making	7. Be prepared to help mobilize USAID stakeholders to make data-driven changes
<b>Closing out a DE</b>	8. Take steps to close out the DE and transition the Developmental Evaluator’s responsibilities to the USAID stakeholder teams

<sup>8</sup> Please note that DEPA-MERL has not tested or used all resources identified in this report.

## SELECTING DE AS THE EVALUATIVE APPROACH

### I. CONFIRM THAT DE IS THE RIGHT FIT FOR THE USAID CONTEXT AND TEAM

Stakeholders need to be honest about whether DE is the right fit for them. Stakeholders' willingness and readiness to adapt a program iteratively, in real time, constituted a critical component for ensuring that the DE was able to function effectively. Decision-makers would benefit from taking the time to make a realistic assessment of whether their contract allows for changes to the program. Understanding what changes are feasible within the context of the contract or operating unit will provide an idea of the potential scope (as well as if that scope would actually be useful to the team). If the context does not allow for change, DE likely is not a good fit. It can be verified that DE is a good fit if the potential DE stakeholder team(s) has

- a program that is operating in a complex environment and/or does not have an existing theory of change
- confirmed that other evaluation approaches are neither sufficient nor appropriate to meet their needs;
- identified one or more opportunities to make strategic and innovative adaptations to their program, as well as potential decision points that may help make such changes;
- established that the institutional context allows for changes to be made to the program; and
- exhibited a high level of ownership, buy-in, and prioritization of innovation, DE, and adaptation.

DE stakeholders need to be willing and able to prioritize the DE. The DE experience will be far more valuable if stakeholders are willing and able to conduct adaptive management, which includes engaging in continuous learning activities and taking time to reflect on DE data such that it can be used to make timely changes to adapt the program. A culture of reflective practice and critical thinking at an organization is an essential condition for using the DE approach. The funder and/or leadership from teams participating in the DE should survey and/or interview stakeholders before selecting the DE approach to understand the learning culture<sup>9</sup> of the potential teams or organizations that may participate in the DE and determine if there is a fit.

## LAUNCHING A DE

### 2. SELECT THE RIGHT DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR FOR THE TEAM

When considering the qualifications and fit of candidates to serve as the Developmental Evaluator, DE funders and DE Administrators<sup>10</sup> must examine the depth and breadth of a potential evaluator's monitoring and evaluation toolbox—that is, the diversity of their technical and nontechnical MERL skills and experiences. Do they have experience implementing both quantitative and qualitative efforts? Just as

<sup>9</sup> A learning culture exists when both leadership and staff are willing to accept (and learn from) both favorable and unfavorable performance data or program outcomes and when stakeholders can share uncomfortable information transparently without fear of repercussion from the leadership.

<sup>10</sup> The "DE Administrator" is the person (or group) who is managing the overall process of the DE. The DE Administrator has two primary roles: (a) being in charge of launching and overseeing the DE and (2) providing technical support to the Developmental Evaluator. For more information, consult the following resource: [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/ImplementingDE\\_Admin\\_20.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/ImplementingDE_Admin_20.pdf)

important, the selected candidate should possess vital soft skills and emotional intelligence to be an effective Developmental Evaluator. For example, will the Developmental Evaluator be comfortable with sharing negative data and findings? What experience do they have in conflict resolution? How easily can they manage ambiguity, handle and navigate situations where they will be a stranger in the room, or read cues to understand stakeholders' social dynamics and develop trust with various personalities? How well can they prioritize numerous (and sometimes competing) requests for data from stakeholders? Ask these critical questions in an interview with a potential Developmental Evaluator. Lastly, the selected candidate must have strong facilitation skills because, often, that will be their role as they lead workshops and discussions to ensure that DE data influences program strategy in sufficient ways.

Depending on the envisioned scope of work for the DE, the Developmental Evaluator may (or may not) need to have sectoral experience. Specialized skills and experience related to the program's sector may be desired, but are they necessary? In the case of the DEPA-MERL DEs, some stakeholders noted that sectoral expertise was not the most relevant skill. Rather, it was the Developmental Evaluator's ability to recognize big picture patterns and trends, as well as facilitate action, adaptation, and sensemaking using DE data. If implementing a DE within USAID, it is important to note that some stakeholders mentioned that they felt it was necessary to hire an evaluator who could work on the DE full-time and who had strong knowledge of USAID's relationship-centric culture—or was able to learn it quickly and be comfortable in that context.

### **3. USE TARGETED ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE USAID STAKEHOLDERS' BUY-IN AND FAMILIARITY WITH DE**

There are several activities that can help increase stakeholders' knowledge and understanding of what DE is, as well as their buy-in and support for engaging in the DE process. For example, Developmental Evaluators can conduct key informant interviews with key stakeholders, decision-makers, and program implementers prior to an Acculturation Workshop,<sup>11</sup> with the latter being a key activity in helping stakeholders understand the DE approach and cocreate the DE's research questions. USAID project leads and award management can help coordinate the Acculturation Workshop, as well as attend the training program. Data from the analysis of barriers and enablers showed that establishing two-way communication channels is a must for creating buy-in during the DE process. USAID stakeholders' acculturation—or socialization—to DE cannot be limited to document review; stakeholders find value in building familiarity with DE through regular face-to-face interactions with the Developmental Evaluator. Likewise, the Developmental Evaluator needs to have high-quality engagements with all stakeholders to support their work.

In addition, the Developmental Evaluator should work with stakeholders to identify and leverage opportunities to create quick wins—small, rapid activities or deliverables that provide value to

<sup>11</sup> An "Acculturation Workshop" is a program that convenes DE stakeholders to educate participants about DE and the Developmental Evaluator's role, refine evaluation questions, begin development of the work plan, and establish common expectations and communication protocols.

stakeholders. These can include developing a timeline, stakeholder maps, options memos,<sup>12</sup> etc. Creating quick wins can help the Developmental Evaluator build trust with stakeholders and develop credibility for the DE approach from the start. These early wins also help develop strong alliances with key persons in the teams and create virtuous cycles. To identify quick-win opportunities, Developmental Evaluators can use systematic data collection techniques—such as key informant interviews, focus groups, or surveys—to identify areas of immediate (and long-term) value-add for stakeholders. Findings from this study reveal that it is important to stakeholders that the Developmental Evaluator remains “*evaluatively minded*” and *recognizes “big picture”* trends and patterns throughout the period of the DE.

It is critical to acknowledge that developing buy-in is not a binary outcome conducted by the Developmental Evaluator at the start of the DE. Rather, developing buy-in should be viewed as an ongoing process conducted by the Developmental Evaluator and DE “champions” (see Recommendation 5) throughout the period of performance of the DE. At different stages of the DE, varying levels of buy-in will be needed from decision-makers, such as funders and program managers, especially when making evidence-based changes to the program. For this reason, the Developmental Evaluator, in particular, will need to develop buy-in explicitly and implicitly for the DE approach throughout the course of the DE. This can be done by continuing to update key stakeholders on DE progress, identifying and developing quick wins, communicating success stories of the DE with various stakeholders, etc.

#### **4. MAKE SURE THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR IS FULLY EMBEDDED IN THE USAID TEAM AND CONTEXT**

The process of integrating the Developmental Evaluator goes hand-in-hand with developing buy-in. Just like buy-in, integration is not a binary outcome but rather a continuous process that the Developmental Evaluator should track throughout the period of the DE.

Embedding the Developmental Evaluator helps with conducting a successful DE and means that DE stakeholders must aim to accomplish two related objectives quickly: (a) physically co-locate the Developmental Evaluator with the teams, when possible, and (b) socially embed the Developmental Evaluator within the teams’ operational processes (e.g., copied on emails, included in meetings and team outings). The Developmental Evaluator’s close physical presence and proximity to the teams they work with—those who are direct beneficiaries of (and participants in) the DE’s work—supports strong integration.<sup>13</sup> Embeddedness includes a social and cultural aspect as well: two-way communication channels between the Developmental Evaluator and stakeholders are especially important, which requires DE stakeholders to get comfortable with a new person “joining” their team and being present in meetings.

<sup>12</sup> In the DEPA-MERL DEs, the Developmental Evaluators generated an “options memo” to summarize findings from a certain evaluative activity and provide a written description of possible adaptations (including required resources and potential implications of the adaptation) to guide USAID stakeholders forward.

<sup>13</sup> DEPA-MERL recognizes that not all DEs include a full-time Developmental Evaluator or even one who is co-located in the same geographic location as the stakeholders/program participating in the DE. Based on DEPA-MERL’s experience, however, it would be very difficult for a Developmental Evaluator to embed fully into a program without having a close physical presence and proximity to the teams with whom they worked.

Another important part of embedding is ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of the Developmental Evaluator are clearly outlined and understood at the start of the evaluation, although these are organic and may change as the DE work evolves. For example, a Developmental Evaluator should have clarity on whether they have the authority to share data from the evaluation with all DE stakeholders directly or if that information should be shared with a specific set of stakeholders first.

From the start of the DE, the Developmental Evaluator should actively work to identify ways to integrate into teams in order to collect and share data and findings to enable adaptive management. Examples of purposeful attempts to integrate could include making sure the Developmental Evaluator has an opportunity to introduce themselves and their role to all relevant stakeholders at the beginning of the evaluation, reminding team members to include the Developmental Evaluator on emails, and establishing which team meetings the Developmental Evaluator should attend on a regular basis.

## **IMPLEMENTING A DE**

### **5. WORK WITH A DIVERSE SET OF DE CHAMPIONS WHO CAN HELP SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR**

In the DEPA-MERL DE pilots, the Developmental Evaluators recognized the value brought by DE “champions.” DE champions are key persons who support the DE, educate stakeholders on the approach, and problem-solve with the Developmental Evaluator during moments of crisis. They can be internal to the team or external, and often, are persons of authority and/or influence. In addition to increasing stakeholders’ understanding and buy-in, DE champions helped facilitate interactions and data sharing between the Developmental Evaluator and key stakeholders. They also identified tangible ways to help properly embed the Developmental Evaluator (see Recommendation 4).

From the very start, DE funder(s) and DE Administrators, as well as the Developmental Evaluator, should be encouraged to identify persons who can play the critical role of DE champions. Ideally, these persons should intimately understand team dynamics, be well-liked by others and have social capital, and believe in the value of adaptive management. DE champions should be individuals with either decision-making power or influence who can help integrate the Developmental Evaluator into the culture of the stakeholders and transparently share information relevant to the DE. They should understand the culture and informal norms of the team and yet, identify levers to address challenges and guide the Developmental Evaluator.

In programs that have teams at U.S. headquarters (HQ) and worldwide, the Developmental Evaluator and DE Administrator should identify persons to serve as DE champions in both locations. In such cases, these champions’ role must also include helping facilitate increased timeliness and transparency of communication between HQ and local country teams. The Developmental Evaluator should interact with these DE champions regularly to keep them abreast of challenges in the HQ local country dynamics.

### **6. BOLSTER THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR’S AUTONOMY TO CONDUCT INDEPENDENT, OBJECTIVE, AND UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION ACTIVITIES**

A Developmental Evaluator is not a traditional evaluator who conducts evaluation activities at baseline, midline, and/or endline. Rather, the Developmental Evaluator serves as a strategic advisor to promote innovation and even co-implement changes with DE stakeholders. During the DE, allow the Developmental Evaluator enough autonomy and independence such that their role and relationships with

teams can evolve to support the changing needs of the DE. Ideally, the Developmental Evaluator should be invested in the program team's success and day-to-day operations while still maintaining enough independence from the funder and the team to direct the course of activities objectively based on program needs. For example, the Developmental Evaluator may engage directly with DE end users to share DE data and strategize solutions without consulting the funder first. The risk that comes from not maintaining independence from the funder is that the DE will not be able to support fluid adaptations to the program. Further, having a Developmental Evaluator who can ensure that the DE approach and its results are perceived as independent and objective from the needs of the funder has significant advantages. Namely, the trust stakeholders put in the Developmental Evaluator (and the DE approach) is at least partially connected to their perceptions of the Developmental Evaluator, the evaluation's funder, and the relationship between these two parties.

## **USING DATA FOR DECISION-MAKING IN A DE**

### **7. BE PREPARED TO HELP MOBILIZE USAID STAKEHOLDERS TO MAKE DATA-DRIVEN CHANGES**

In DE, the Developmental Evaluator's work does not stop with the collection of data and facilitation of the development (or co-development) of recommendations based on those findings. Stakeholders' work most certainly does not end there either. As data from the DEPA-MERL DE pilots reveal, the Developmental Evaluator and DE champions need to be prepared to mobilize stakeholders to facilitate change and adaptation. From the stakeholder's perspective, that means recognizing that being "too busy" to participate in reflective data review sessions or requests to meet with the Developmental Evaluator to discuss findings is a false barrier. From the Developmental Evaluator's perspective, this means taking a seat at the strategy table, going beyond co-created recommendations, and providing critical support to guide adaptations or changes to the program. This may also require the Developmental Evaluator to investigate reasons behind why implementing partners and/or award management are not adapting the program in real time. Being prepared to use DE data for decision-making can be achieved by the following: (a) creating space for reflection through, for example, quarterly pause-and-reflect sessions or resharing findings during "manager briefings" or "prep sessions"; (b) engaging in collaborative conversations about the action-oriented opportunities to adapt programs based on the DE's findings; and (c) following up with stakeholders to ensure that agreed upon "next steps" are acted on and completed.

Just as importantly, program changes identified based on the findings of the DE should also be prioritized by decision-makers and program managers. The Developmental Evaluator should track their progress and, if need be, raise red flags on adaptation timelines, but in the end, the responsibility for responding to DE data (with tangible changes to the program) lies with stakeholders.

## **CLOSING OUT A DE**

### **8. TAKE STEPS TO CLOSE OUT THE DE AND TRANSITION THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE USAID STAKEHOLDER TEAMS**

DEs close out most effectively when the following takes place: (a) there is an action plan to allow the Developmental Evaluator to decouple from the participating DE stakeholders and (b) when steps are taken to fill any void that is created when the Developmental Evaluator leaves their role. A Developmental Evaluator may join stakeholder teams with the sole role of being an evaluator. With time, however, they will build relationships and become an advisor whom stakeholders consult for a variety of reasons. After months of engagement, the Developmental Evaluator may even conduct tasks that

become critical to the teams. For an effective DE close, these aspects should be transferred to team staff members and a comprehensive handover should be executed.

The Developmental Evaluator should give relevant teams multiple reminders of their departure during the final weeks. They may need to facilitate closeout workshops to help teams set themselves up for success. The Developmental Evaluator may also need to provide additional technical coaching to fill the gap in skill set when they leave the team. In addition, the Developmental Evaluator may require time to review and prioritize current (or previous) recommendations with stakeholders during this period. The Developmental Evaluator should treat the closeout of the DE carefully and actively plan for it at least three months prior. Lastly, the DE stakeholders should also have an after-action review in which they share and report on lessons learned from the DE.

# FINDINGS

## OVERVIEW

This section of the report shares the findings from the four research questions that were used to frame the DEPA-MERL learning agenda. For each research question, the WDI team first shares a direct answer to the question using the data collected during the learning agenda. In some cases, a question may also include one or more sub-questions that are also presented and answered.

**Table 2** lists the data collection methods and data sources for each DEPA-MERL learning agenda research question. More information on the methods used in this study is available in **Appendix B**.

In total, the WDI team conducted over 100 hours of interviews and analyzed 465 pages of qualitative data and 30 surveys completed by DE stakeholders.

*Table 2: DEPA-MERL assessed the DEs based on three research questions and a mixed-methods approach*

Research Question	Methods	Data Sources	Associated DE Pilot
1: How does DE capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings in support of ongoing programming in a complex system, such as in the USAID context?	Outcome harvesting (qualitative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly reflection interviews with two Developmental Evaluators (n = 35)</li> <li>Substantiation interviews with key stakeholders at endline of two DEs (n = 26)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FCF</li> <li>Uptake</li> </ul>
2: What are the barriers and enablers to implementation of DE in the USAID context?	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly reflection interviews with two Developmental Evaluators (n = 35)</li> <li>Substantiation interviews with key stakeholders at endline of two DEs (n = 26)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FCF</li> <li>Uptake</li> </ul>
3: What do key stakeholders consider to be the value (added or lost) of conducting a DE compared to a traditional evaluation approach?	Survey (quantitative /qualitative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value of DE Survey with stakeholders at endline (n = 30)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FCF</li> <li>Uptake</li> </ul>
4: What are the key lessons learned from building and managing buy-in for the DE approach in the USAID context?	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly reflection interviews with three Developmental Evaluators (n = 41)</li> <li>Substantiation interviews with key stakeholders at endline of three DEs (n = 28)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FCF</li> <li>Uptake</li> <li>Attempted DE</li> </ul>

*Note: Reviews of relevant literature and project documents were also conducted for each research question and DE pilot, as needed.*

## I: HOW DOES DE CAPTURE, PROMOTE, AND ENABLE THE UTILIZATION OF EMERGENT LEARNINGS IN SUPPORT OF ONGOING PROGRAMMING IN A COMPLEX SYSTEM, SUCH AS IN THE USAID CONTEXT?

Using the six-step outcome harvesting approach (**Appendix C**), the WDI team conducted a systematic review of 39 outcomes of the DE (henceforth called DE outcomes)<sup>14</sup>, which were harvested during the FCF and Uptake DEs.<sup>15</sup> The analysis revealed that DEs can capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings in a variety of ways within the USAID context.<sup>16</sup> The Developmental Evaluators employed a methodologically agnostic approach to collect, analyze, share, and support the use of data. They documented emails, meetings, and one-on-one conversations they had with stakeholders to capture information. Data was collected via the key informant interviews, outcome harvests, and stakeholder mapping exercises they conducted. They also facilitated workshops with stakeholders to capture and promote emergent learnings based on data. They attended meetings and shared recommendations both formally and informally to enable the utilization of emergent learnings for program adaptations with the goal of increased impact.

In asking the previous question, the WDI team also sought to understand whether, and how, DEs contribute to adaptive management within the USAID context. Thus, the remainder of this section shares findings and conclusions to several sub-questions about how DE supports ongoing or emergent programming within USAID. In addition, it includes lessons learned about how the FCF and Uptake DEs contributed to changes for their respective program teams.

### THE DEs SUPPORTED ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND CHANGES TO PROGRAM STRATEGY WITHIN THE USAID CONTEXT

If implemented correctly in the right USAID context, DE can support data-driven changes to ongoing and innovative programming (**Box I**). The FCF DE and Uptake DE helped catalyze several different adaptations to each program's strategy based on data collected and shared by the Developmental Evaluators. Jointly, the two DEs *captured* (n = 6), *promoted* (n = 8), and *enabled the utilization* (n = 25) of emergent learnings throughout their implementation.<sup>17</sup>

For example, **Figure 2** shows how the Uptake DE was able to *capture*, *promote*, and *enable the utilization* of emergent learnings in support of evolving program adaptations and processes. The example focuses on one of the teams that the Developmental Evaluator worked with: the Digital Development for Feed

<sup>14</sup> A DE outcome is any change in behavior, relationship, action, policy, and/or practice of stakeholders that the DE contributed to, either directly or indirectly. Contributions of the DE include the Developmental Evaluator providing documentation, collecting data, developing recommendations, and/or promoting ideas and best practices. In this study, a DE outcome also includes products and deliverables produced by the DE."

<sup>15</sup> Using the six-step outcome harvesting approach, the WDI team harvested 39 DE outcomes in total (17 DE outcomes were harvested during the FCF DE and 22 DE outcomes were harvested during the Uptake DE). Due to timing and resource constraints, outcome harvesting was not used to study the attempted DE with a large USAID Bureau.

<sup>16</sup> "Emergent learnings" are programmatic or environmental developments, including new information and changes in existing stakeholder relationships.

<sup>17</sup> The "role of the DE" is incremental in nature because each subsequent sub-category builds off the previous category. For example, if the role of the DE was to *enable the utilization* of an emergent learning, the DE needed to first *capture* and *promote* that learning. Each outcome was categorized as one category. For example, if the DE *captured* an emergent learning and then subsequently shared or *promoted* a related recommendation, then the outcome was categorized as *promote*, not *capture*.

the Future (D2FTF) team. It emphasizes the refinement of D2FTF’s exit or “off-ramp” strategy (i.e., the processes they put into place to ensure that their program work and outcomes would continue even after the team itself dissolved as a unit). **Figure 2** explains the evolution of the outcomes related to the team by pinpointing the following: (a) challenges identified during the Uptake DE, (b) contributions of the Uptake DE to promote change, (c) additional change agents who contributed to the outcomes, (d) resulting changes within the team, and, lastly, (e) any related D2FTF objectives that were affected.

*Box 1: The goal of DE is to support innovation development. If a program is not innovative, starting a DE will not help make it so*

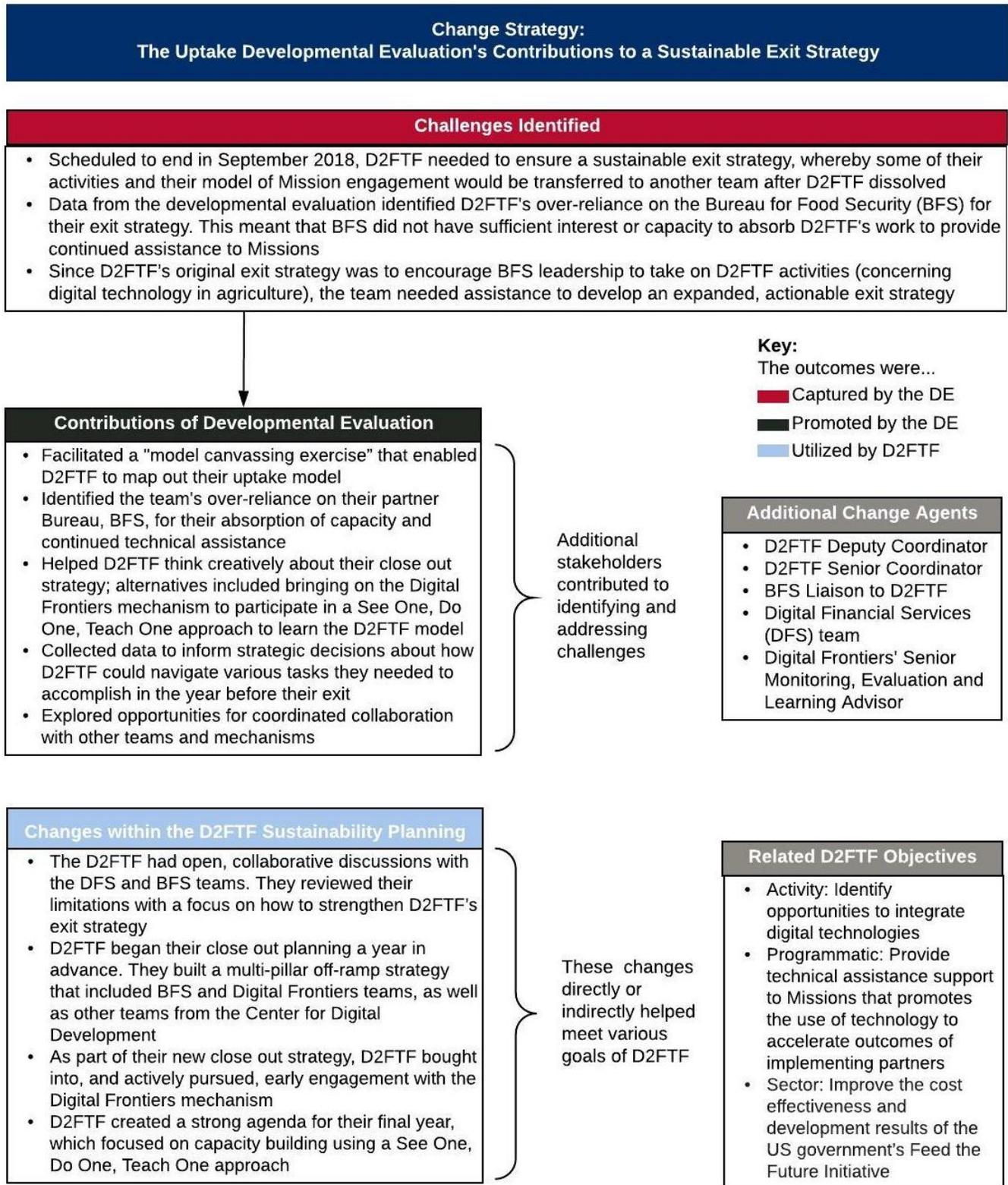
**DE enables and supports adaptive management,  
it is not a substitute for adaptive management**

According to DE founder Michael Quinn Patton, DE is used to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments. During a DE Clinic hosted by DEPA-MERL in June 2019, Patton further explained, “*The more dynamic the context and the more innovative the intervention, the more DE will be emergent and adaptive.*” It is important to keep this relationship front and center because “*it’s not about DE by itself, it’s about the interdependency and interconnection of an innovative intervention and innovative evaluation [DE].*”

DE is not a substitute for adaptive management. Rather, DE *supports* adaptive management and innovation. To do so, DE depends heavily on the characteristics of the DE stakeholders, the program, and the context in which it operates. If the context is not emergent or adaptive, or it doesn’t allow program teams to be innovative, then a DE placed in that context cannot possess those characteristics either.

For example, this is a lesson we learned during the DEPA-MERL’s attempted DE pilot with a large USAID Bureau. The attempted DE pilot occurred during a time where there was a high level of ambiguity and DE participants lacked sufficient structure to support innovation—delays were caused by the government shutdown, there was high turnover among staff, leadership had other competing priorities, and the program was in a temporary state of confusion due to the ongoing organizational restructuring. In short, the U.S. government furlough and the ongoing Transformation of USAID contributed to a context that made it difficult for DE to foster adaptations effectively. “*We are in a tumultuous time with the Transformation,*” said one DE stakeholder, “*people’s attention and focus is not going to be on piloting something new in terms of adaptive management.*”

Figure 2: The Uptake DE contributed to changes in the D2FTF team's sustainable exit strategy



Using the FCF DE as an example, **Figure 3** demonstrates how outcomes harvested during the DE informed changes to a programs’ leadership and governance approach over time. Adapted from Mintzberg’s Strategy Model, **Figure 3** shows a selection of the harvested outcomes comprising FCF’s *intended*, *realized*, and *unrealized* strategy:

- **Intended strategy:** In complex contexts, a program may be launched with a nascent understanding of types of activities, processes, and partnerships that will be pursued. This *intended strategy* is based on the reality that exists during the design phase of the program.
- **Realized strategy:** Often, a programs’ outcomes and processes unfold in ways that were not initially conceived or planned for during the design phase. Leadership may find that their planned approach does not work, or they gain access to data that informs the creation of alternate activities, which form to create their program’s actualized or *realized strategy*.
- **Unrealized strategy:** At the same time that a program is adding new activities or changes, they may decide that other previously intended outcomes are not achieved and/or envisioned processes should not be implemented. These are the *unrealized strategies* of the original design.

While *realized* and *unrealized* strategies could result for a variety of reasons, it is important to note that neither is inherently good nor bad. These strategies are simply the result of leadership gathering new information and making decisions to develop or adapt (or stop) an activity in a manner that was not previously conceived at the start of the program. Indeed, changes within the intended, unrealized, and realized strategies show an example of how DE enabled the use of emergent learning.

Figure 3: Several “realized” and “unrealized” strategies related to FCF’s leadership and government structure occurred during the developmental evaluation



## CHARACTERISTICS OF OUTCOMES THAT OCCURRED DURING THE FCF AND UPTAKE DEs

Evidence collected for this study shows that DE outcomes in the USAID context can present as follows: (a) large or small, (b) positive or negative, (c) program or sector-level, or (d) relational- or institutional-level changes. To show the kinds of outcomes that may be expected from a DE in the USAID context, **Table 3** provides examples that were classified during the FCF and Uptake DEs.

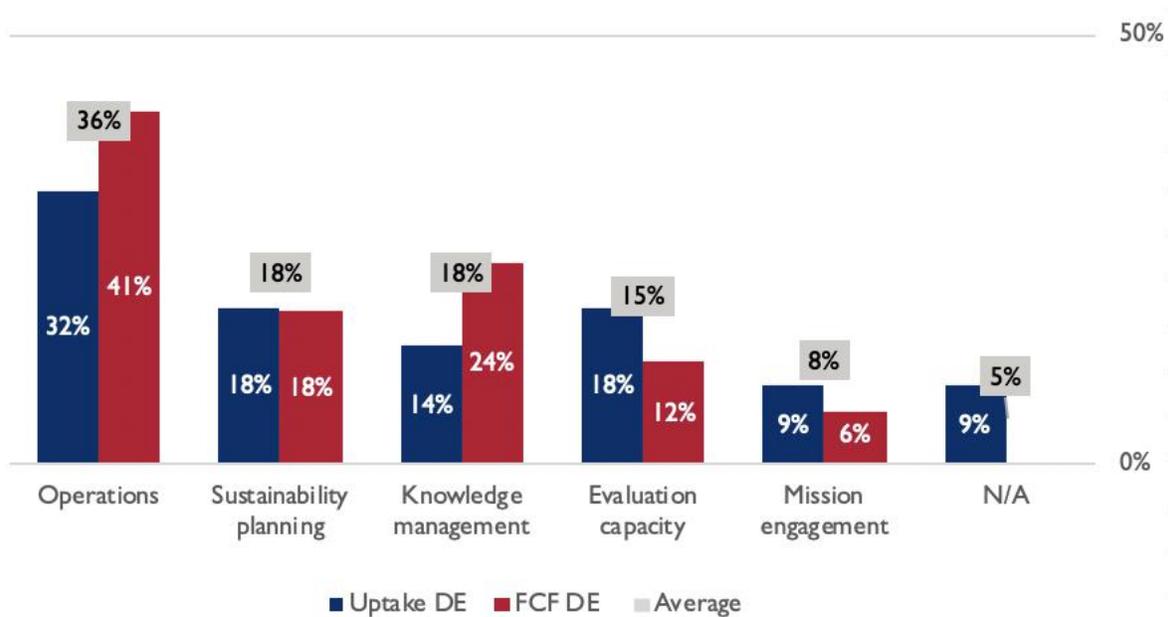
*Table 3: DE outcomes were classified into multiple categories, including the size, level, and type of change, as well as the type of value that the outcome provided to the program (e.g., improved operational efficiency or knowledge management practices)*

Outcome Category	Description
<b>Size of Change</b>	The size of the change associated with the particular outcome varied. Some changes were <b>small</b> (e.g., affected one to two teams), others <b>medium</b> (e.g., affected two to three teams), and some <b>large</b> (e.g., affected more than three teams).
<b>Level of Change</b>	DE outcomes affected different levels of a system: the <b>operational level</b> (e.g., procedural changes within a project), <b>program level</b> (e.g., project- or partner-level changes), the <b>sector level</b> (e.g., the child protection or biodiversity sector), the <b>government level</b> (e.g., a country government), or the <b>funder level</b> (e.g., USAID).
<b>Type of Change</b>	Outcomes occurred in many different areas, including reflecting changes primarily related to the <b>knowledge and capabilities of stakeholders</b> , to <b>stakeholder engagement and relationships</b> , or to formal <b>institutional and policy changes</b> .
<b>Value of Change (to the Program)</b>	DE outcomes provided various types of direct value to a program or set of stakeholders. Some changes influenced a team's <b>knowledge management practices</b> or <b>evaluation capacity</b> , as well as their <b>operational efficiency</b> and <b>Mission engagement strategies</b> .

*Note: The classification of outcomes within each of these categories may vary by DE. For example, the standards for size will vary depending on the scope of the DE and the size of the program.*

As shown in **Figure 4**, the FCF and Uptake DEs provided value to programs in a variety of areas. The largest number of outcomes (36%; 14 of 39 total DE outcomes across the two DEs) resulted in improved program operations for DE stakeholders. Examples of this included refining program activities, updating branding and communication guidelines, and establishing new procedures for how stakeholders should act in a given situation. In addition, seven combined DE outcomes (18%) related to improvements to the teams' sustainability planning and knowledge management activities. Six DE outcomes (15%) improved the teams' evaluation capacity. In comparison, the DEs benefited the teams' Mission engagement less frequently (5%; 3 of 39 total DE outcomes), which was not surprising since Mission engagement was not the primary focus of the FCF DE and was only a primary focus for a subset of the Uptake DE stakeholders.

Figure 4: While the largest number of DE outcomes provided value to the teams' operations, the DEs also provided value to the programs in a variety of other areas



Another interesting finding is that, of the 39 total DE outcomes harvested during the FCF and Uptake DEs, 28 DE outcomes (72%) had a positive short-term effect on the programs. In contrast, only 2 of 39 harvested DE outcomes (5%) resulted in a short-term negative effect on the programs. Interestingly, nearly one in four harvested DE outcomes (23%, 9 of 39 DE outcomes) had both positive and negative effects in the short-term. For example, while some DE outcomes were perceived as positive in the long-term, the level of effort and flexibility required of teams to implement some changes were perceived as negative in the short-term. In addition, the WDI team learned during stakeholder interviews that an outcome of the DE, could be perceived as both positive and negative depending on how different stakeholders experienced the outcome.

## 2: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO IMPLEMENTATION OF DE IN THE USAID CONTEXT?

Over the course of nearly four years of DE, the WDI team identified several factors that affected DE implementation and could serve as a barrier and/or enabler to DE success in the USAID context (**Appendix D**). Each of the monthly reflection interviews conducted with the Developmental Evaluators from the FCF DE (n = 14) and Uptake DE (n = 21), as well as the 28 interviews conducted with their DE stakeholders, were coded to identify how frequently each factor was perceived to affect DE

implementation.<sup>18</sup> The three most frequently referenced factors were as follows: (a) *leadership* (of the USAID program participating in the DE), (b) *data collection and sharing*, and (c) *skills of the Developmental Evaluator*. In contrast, the three least frequently referenced factors were the following: (a) *local and international dynamics*, (b) *funding dynamics*, and (c) *DE readiness*.

### MANY FACTORS INFLUENCED DE IMPLEMENTATION IN THE USAID CONTEXT

Based on data collected during the FCF and Uptake DEs, the WDI team identified 10 factors that most frequently served as a barrier and enabler to DE implementation in the USAID context. Overall, *skills of the Developmental Evaluator*, *data collection and sharing*, and *data utilization* by the stakeholders participating in the DE were the top enabling factors. *Leadership* (of the program being evaluated) and *USAID dynamics* were the largest barriers to DE implementation. Interestingly, some of the factors that the WDI team originally thought might influence the DE implementation in the USAID context, such as *geography* and *cultural norms*, did not seem to have a large effect on the DEs’ potential for success.

**Table 4** displays the 10 factors, their definitions, and the corresponding percentage of total enablers and barriers each represented. Notably, all factors listed in **Table 4** served as both barriers and enablers in the implementation of the FCF and Uptake DEs. The factor *integration of the Developmental Evaluator* offers a prime example. For instance, stakeholders were *communicating and sharing information openly* with the Developmental Evaluator, which served as an enabler. On the other hand, *integration of the Developmental Evaluator* also served as a barrier in the later stages of the evaluation as stakeholders and the Developmental Evaluator learned how to navigate ending the Developmental Evaluator’s integration during the close of the DE.

Table 4: *Skills of the Developmental Evaluator was the biggest enabler, while leadership was the biggest barrier to DE implementation*

Factor	Definition	Percent of All Enablers*	Percent of All Barriers*
Skills of the Developmental Evaluator	This includes the skills perceived to be needed for a person to function efficiently and effectively as a Developmental Evaluator. These include “hard” technical skills, as well as “soft” interpersonal skills.	17%	8%
Data collection and sharing	This factor consists of the methods, tools, and processes for collecting and sharing data or information produced by the Developmental Evaluator or the DEPA-MERL consortium as part of the DE.	16%	10%
Data utilization	Data related to the DE is used by the stakeholders (e.g., USAID, four Lab teams) to help achieve the goals of the DE or program.	12%	8%

<sup>18</sup> Data collected during the attempted DE with a large USAID Bureau is *not* included in the analysis of barriers and enablers to DE implementation. Although a lot was learned from interviews with those stakeholders and the Developmental Evaluator, the WDI team decided that including data from the DE would be misleading and inaccurate because the attempted DE never progressed beyond the start-up phase, and stakeholders did not engage with DE in a serious manner. Data collected from the attempted DE focused on DE start-up and buy-in processes and, hence, has been included in response to Question 4: What are the key lessons learned from building and managing buy-in for the DE approach in the USAID context? The analysis included barriers and enablers to DE start-up and buy-in.

Factor	Definition	Percent of All Enablers*	Percent of All Barriers*
Integration of the Developmental Evaluator	Engagement between stakeholders and the Developmental Evaluator that affected the Evaluator’s assimilation into stakeholder team(s). Integration includes efforts by stakeholders to assimilate the Evaluator physically, functionally, or socially. This could include the Evaluator’s participation (or lack thereof) in events and email communications, as well as stakeholders’ perceptions of the Evaluator as an “insider” or “outsider.”	11%	10%
Leadership (of program being evaluated)	The fulfillment (or lack thereof) of a person’s or organization’s assigned roles and responsibilities, including their roles and responsibilities related to implementation of the DE.	11%	15%
Stakeholder relationships	Any change or evolution in the roles and relationships of stakeholders within the scope of the DE. This includes collaboration and engagement efforts among different DE stakeholders, the Developmental Evaluator, and/or the DEPA-MERL consortium.	9%	11%
DE readiness	Willingness and/or preparedness of stakeholders to engage fully in the DE. Readiness includes any reference to stakeholders’ understanding of the purpose of DE or their buy-in and support for DE.	8%	8%
USAID dynamics	The dynamics related to USAID culture and/or administrative processes that were perceived as affecting DE implementation.	7%	14%
Funding dynamics	The influence, real or perceived, that funding had on different stakeholders involved with the DE.	2%	6%
Local and international dynamics	Stakeholder relationships that focused on the dynamics between local (Washington, DC) and international stakeholders.	2%	4%

\* Percentages do not total 100% because only the top-10 factors coded across de pilots are shown in this table.

## TOP-FIVE PRIORITY FACTORS IN THE USAID CONTEXT

To gain a more nuanced understanding of barriers and enablers to DE in the USAID context, the WDI team selected five “priority factors” for further analysis: (a) *integration of the Developmental Evaluator*, (b) *data utilization*, (c) *DE readiness*, (d) *skills of the Developmental Evaluator*, and (e) *USAID dynamics*. To select the factors, the WDI team considered which were least researched and could offer the most significant insights for future DE implementation in the USAID context. For example, although *leadership* was one of the most frequently coded factors, it was not selected for further analysis because a wide variety of literature already exists on the effectiveness of different leadership styles. In contrast, far less is known about *integration of the Developmental Evaluator* or the *DE readiness* of a particular program.

The WDI team conducted a deep-dive analysis into the five priority factors to better identify and understand sub-themes that occur within them. In-depth qualitative interviews with the DE stakeholders and two Developmental Evaluators were used to determine how different factors affected DE success.

**Figures 5–9** provide a snapshot of some of the most critical barriers and enablers associated with each factor. More detailed write-ups of these sub-themes that include critical insights and analysis on when they occur in different stages of the DE can be found in the learning agenda reports for the [FCF](#) and [Uptake DEs](#).<sup>19</sup>

Exploring each factor’s sub-themes allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how the parent factors influenced implementation of the DE. For example, the WDI team found that DEs that developed strong trust between stakeholders and the Developmental Evaluator had more successful *integration of the Developmental Evaluator*, as well as higher levels of support for the Developmental Evaluator’s evolving role on the team (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5: Top barriers and enablers to integration of the Developmental Evaluator in the USAID context



The study found that *DE readiness* was not only affected by stakeholders’ readiness and preparedness to adapt to DE (which is often influenced by the institutional structure of the team) but also the fact that DE was a new and sometimes difficult concept for stakeholders to grasp (**Figure 6**). In all DEPA-MERL DE pilots, it was important to repeatedly establish how DE was different from other evaluation approaches that the teams may have been more familiar with.

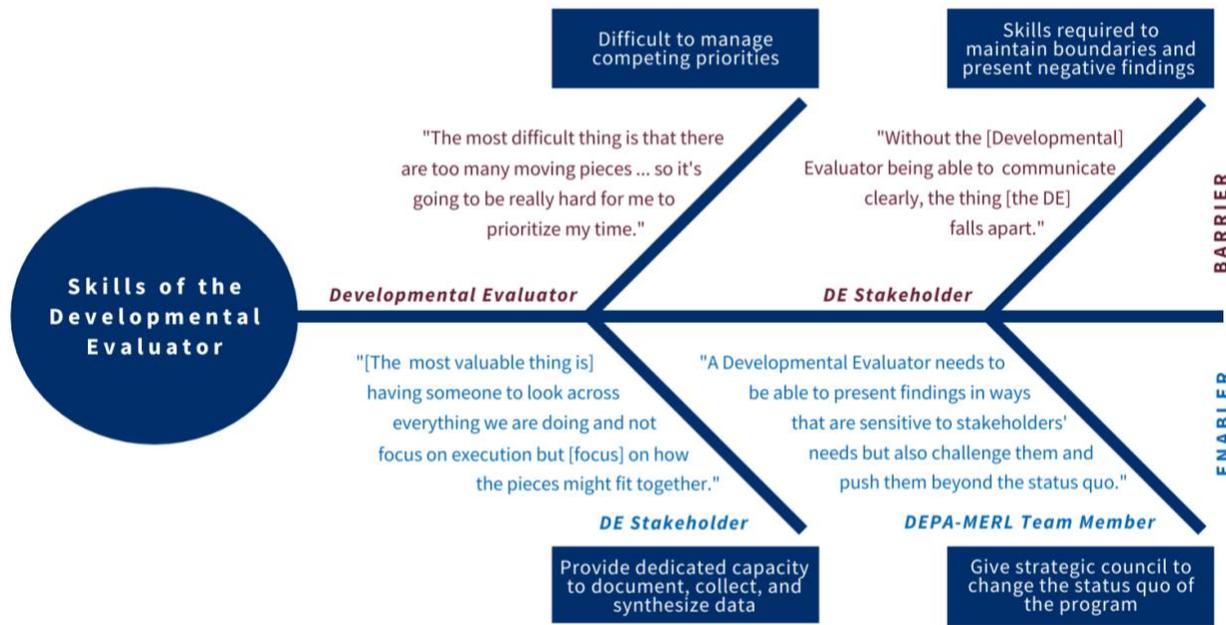
<sup>19</sup> A study of the FCF DE in Cambodia pilot: <https://www.usaid.gov/GlobalDevLab/MERLIN/DEPA-MERL/family-care-first/final-version> ; A study of the Uptake DE pilot: <https://www.usaid.gov/GlobalDevLab/MERLIN/DEPA-MERL/uptake-developmental-evaluation-de/outcome-harvesting-report-uptake-de/report>.

Figure 6: Top barriers and enablers to DE readiness in the USAID context



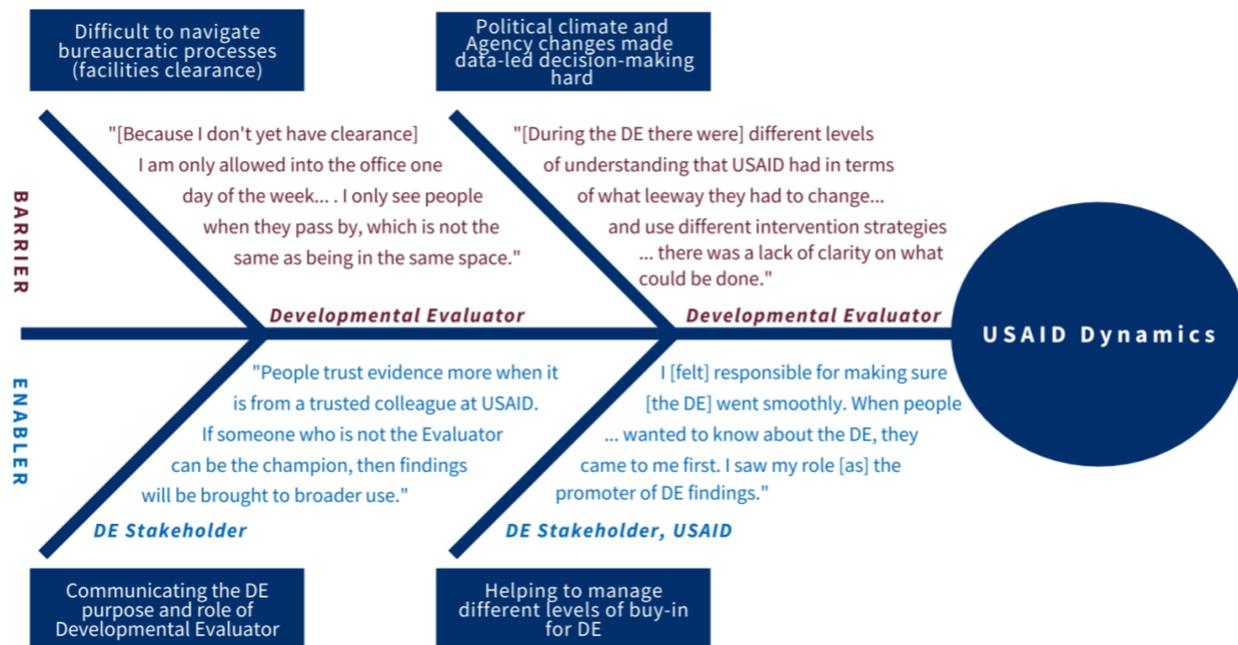
With regard to the skills of the Developmental Evaluator (Figure 7), one of the biggest barriers was being able to manage competing priorities in the face of the many “moving pieces” associated with conducting DE: (a) collecting data, (b) engaging stakeholders in sensemaking, and (c) navigating ambiguity. From the stakeholders’ perspective, however, they felt that having the dedicated and skilled capacity of a Developmental Evaluator was one of the most valuable contributions of a Developmental Evaluator. In addition to providing data-driven and strategic guidance, the involvement of a Developmental Evaluator helped stakeholders innovate on the status quo of their program.

Figure 7: Top barriers and enablers to skills of the Developmental Evaluator



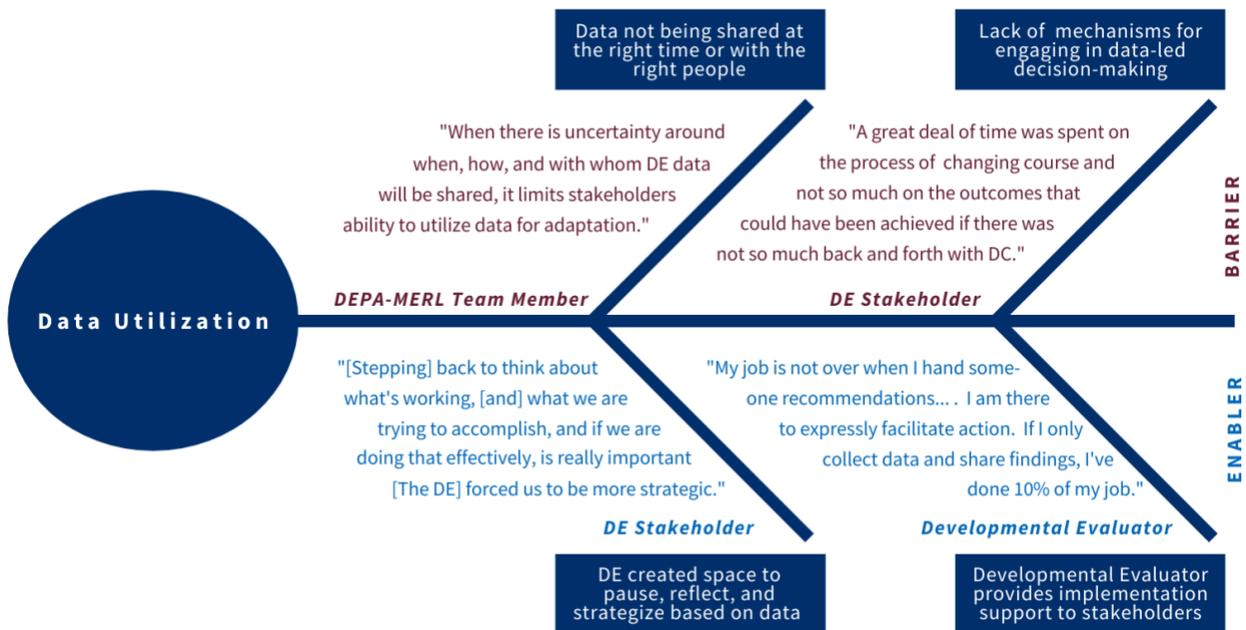
Throughout the FCF and Uptake DEs, *USAID dynamics* (Figure 8) represented the largest barrier. In addition to the series of Agency-level changes that affected decision-making and innovation, the Developmental Evaluators experienced difficulties navigating USAID’s bureaucratic processes (such as receiving facilities clearance in a timely manner, which influenced their ability to embed and integrate). In contrast, however, USAID stakeholders also played a critical and positive role in enabling DE success in two ways: (a) they helped communicate the purpose and value of DE and (b) worked to manage and maintain stakeholders’ buy-in for each DE.

Figure 8: Top barriers and enablers to USAID dynamics



Lastly, as shown in Figure 9, the WDI team found that *data utilization* was most positively impacted when the DE created space for stakeholders to pause and reflect on information gathered through the DE and when the Developmental Evaluator provided implementation support to stakeholders during the adaptation process.

Figure 9: Top barriers and enablers to data utilization in the USAID context



### INFLUENCE OF PRIORITY FACTORS OVER TIME IN THE USAID CONTEXT

Data for the five priority factors were grouped into four stages (beginning, middle, end, post-DE)<sup>20</sup> to analyze how the factors changed over time, as well as how often each was perceived to be either a barrier or enabler to DE implementation. For this analysis, it is important to note that only data collected from monthly reflection interviews with the FCF and Uptake Developmental Evaluators were used and findings may be different from what other DE stakeholders may note.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 5** and **Figure 10** display the results of the analysis.

In **Table 5** below, the darker the color, the more frequent a factor was reported. Findings indicate that the frequency in which factors influence DE implementation does vary by time. In fact, none of the factors were mentioned with the same frequency by the Developmental Evaluators across all four stages of the DE.

<sup>20</sup> The number of months included in each stage varied by DE. "Stages" were determined using natural breaks/evolutions that occurred for each respective DE. The Uptake DE stages were Beginning, Months 1–6; Middle, Months 7–11; End, Months 12–16; Post-DE, Months 17–22. FCF DE stages were Beginning, Months 1–5; Middle, Months 6–10; End, Months 11–15; Post-DE, not applicable.

<sup>21</sup> For this analysis, only data collected from monthly reflection interviews with the Developmental Evaluator were used; data from DE stakeholders were not used because those interviews were collected at one point in time (endline) and not throughout the DE. Note: The only exception was that stakeholder interview data was used to understand how the *skills of the Developmental Evaluator* changed over time.

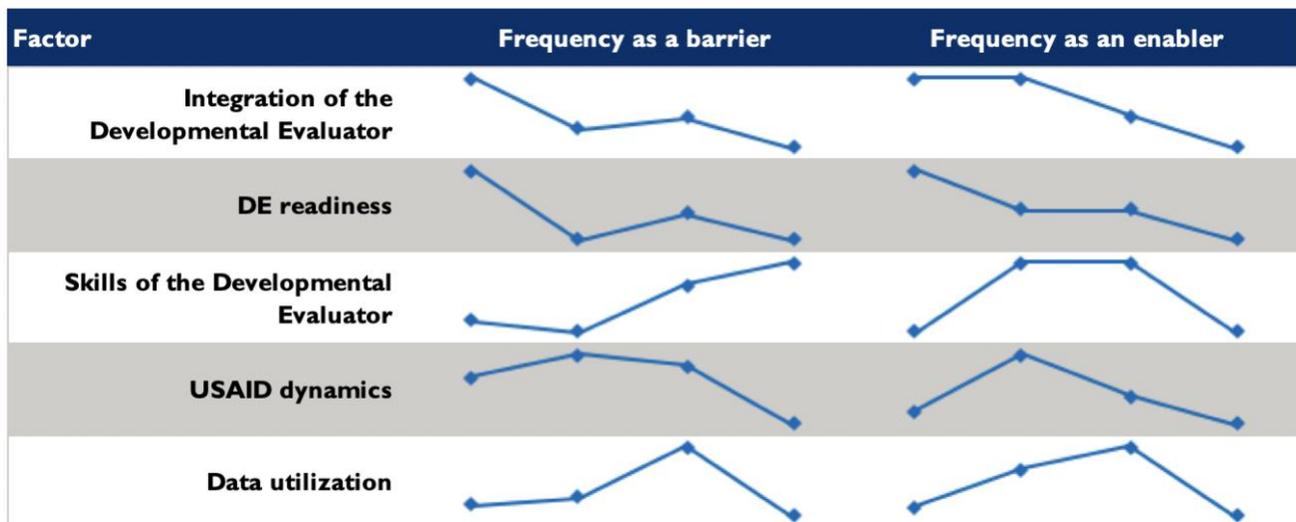
Table 5: The frequency in which factors influenced the FCF and Uptake DEs varied by the evaluation stage.

	Stage of DE*			
	Beginning	Middle	End	Post DE
Integration of the Developmental Evaluator	High	Medium	Medium	Low
DE readiness	High	Low	Medium	Low
Skills of the Developmental Evaluator	Low	Medium	High	Medium
USAID dynamics	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Data utilization	Low	Medium	High	Low

\*Uptake DE stages: Beginning, Months 1–6; Middle, Months 7–11; End, Months 12–16; Post-DE: Months 17–22.  
 FCF DE stages: Beginning, Months 1–5; Middle, Months 6–10; End, Months 11–15; Post-DE, not applicable.

Figure 10 shows how often a factor was referenced as either a barrier or enabler across the four DE stages.

Figure 10: The frequency of factor being referenced as a barrier or enabler to DE varied over time



Note: Final (post-DE) stage only includes data from the Uptake DE.

**Beginning stage:** The Developmental Evaluators reported on many factors during the beginning months of the DE. However, the *integration of the Developmental Evaluator* and *DE readiness* of the stakeholders participating in the DE were more frequently referenced in the first six months of the DEs than at any other point in time. Both factors were more likely to serve as barriers at the beginning of the DE because more effort was required to embed the Developmental Evaluator and ensure that stakeholders were fully prepared to engage in the DE process. In contrast, *data utilization* and *skills of the*

*Developmental Evaluator*<sup>22</sup> were mentioned only about a third as often during the same period and were more likely to be referenced as enablers to the DE.

**Middle stage:** In the middle of the DEs, the most frequently referenced factors were *data utilization*, *integration of the Developmental Evaluator*, and *USAID dynamics*. Interestingly, in terms of their overall percentages, all factors were less likely to be mentioned as a barrier in the middle stage of the DE compared to the beginning stage. While the reason for this shift is unknown, the WDI team did observe that it takes a number of months for the Developmental Evaluator and stakeholder teams to develop a rhythm for working together. This is possibly why more barriers were reported in the initial months of the DE. For example, during the early part of the DE, the Developmental Evaluator is concerned about integrating into their teams and starting to collect relevant data that can help inform innovations to program strategy. It isn't until later months (e.g., the middle stage), that they may begin to share key data results and employ the *skills* required to share findings and facilitate the use of the DE data effectively while navigating *USAID dynamics*. Relatedly, *skills of the Developmental Evaluator* were referenced as an enabler 90% of the time during the middle stage—more frequently than other points in the DE.

**End stage:** More factors were coded in the end of the DE than any other stage. *Data utilization* was the most frequently mentioned factor, which is interesting since the largest number of strategy-level outcomes were harvested during this stage of the DE (see Research Question 1). The second most frequently coded factor was *skills of the Developmental Evaluator*. Indeed, the Developmental Evaluators' work during this stage was characterized by their facilitating action and adaptation with DE stakeholders while also helping teams to stay focused and manage competing priorities as they closed out various DE activities. The continued importance of the *skills of the Developmental Evaluator* highlights how critical their role is, which is why several of our recommendations relate to supporting these Evaluators effectively. Lastly, *USAID dynamics* was least likely to be referenced (in terms of total number of references) at the end stage of the DE.

**Post-DE stage:** Only data from the Uptake DE is included in this post-DE stage. Because the Uptake DE was structured in three distinct phases<sup>23</sup>—where the final phase included work with an entirely different team, but the Developmental Evaluator still continued to work (unofficially) with the teams from Phase I and Phase II—the post-DE months opened a unique analytical opportunity to continue collecting data on barriers to and enablers of DE implementation *after* work with the DE stakeholders from Phase I and Phase II had officially ended. The most frequently referenced factors during this stage were *skills of the Developmental Evaluator* and *USAID dynamics*. Notably, continued *data utilization* post-DE was the biggest enabler.

<sup>22</sup> *Skills of the Developmental Evaluator* may have been coded less frequently because data was coming from the Developmental Evaluators themselves.

<sup>23</sup> For more information regarding the focus and participants of the Uptake DE, see the *Developmental Evaluation Pilot Report for the Uptake DE* written by Social Impact: [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00TMMP.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TMMP.pdf).

## USAID PLAYS A ROLE TO HELP MANAGE BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO DE

As a funding partner and key stakeholder, the USAID staff involved in a DE plays a critical role, including that of a DE champion. DE champions are key persons who support the DE, educate stakeholders on the approach, and problem-solve with the Developmental Evaluator during moments of crisis. During the FCF and Uptake DEs, DE champions in particular helped manage the various factors that served as barriers to DE implementation, while also promoting enablers that contributed to the DEs' success.

The following resources share findings on what USAID staff did well, as well as what they could have done better, to manage the barriers and enablers associated with each DE pilot:

- Analysis of [USAID involvement in the FCF DE](#)
- Analysis of [USAID involvement in the Uptake DE](#)
- [Top tips for conducting DE at USAID](#) include eight consolidated pointers for USAID staff to help manage barriers and promote enablers that affect the implementation of DE

In addition to helping to manage those barriers and enablers, one area where USAID played a significant role was setting the terms of the contract or Joint Partnership Plan (JPP) for each DE. One barrier to implementing the DE approach is limited resources—and not just financial capital but also human capital. One approach to combating this issue—which can be addressed, at least partially, in the JPP—is to use a phased or tiered approach to funding and implementing DEs.

From a financial perspective, this worked successfully in the Uptake DE. The evaluation underwent three phases of expansion and had one financial partner (i.e., the Office of Evaluation and Impact Assessment) that helped set the stage for other Lab teams to opt in financially.

From the perspective of human capital, DE work can be time-consuming and hard for stakeholders to prioritize. In the Uptake DE, the full, successful participation of stakeholders was enabled when their level of involvement in the DE was progressive (and they could opt in to continue to be more involved or add more teams in later stages). For example, early in Uptake DE, the Developmental Evaluator took on more of the initial workload and responsibility for encouraging stakeholders to reflect and incorporate data into teams' discussions. Later, once there was broader support for DE, the Developmental Evaluator transitioned her role such that stakeholders took on more tasks and responsibilities to ensure that they were actively engaging in their own data-driven decision-making.

### **3: WHAT DO KEY STAKEHOLDERS CONSIDER TO BE THE VALUE (ADDED OR LOST) OF CONDUCTING A DE COMPARED TO A TRADITIONAL EVALUATION APPROACH IN THE USAID CONTEXT?**

Results from the 30 stakeholders from the FCF and Uptake DEs who responded to the Value of Developmental Evaluation Survey showed that DE has the potential to add value to USAID teams and programs.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the majority of respondents said that they would recommend continued use of DE

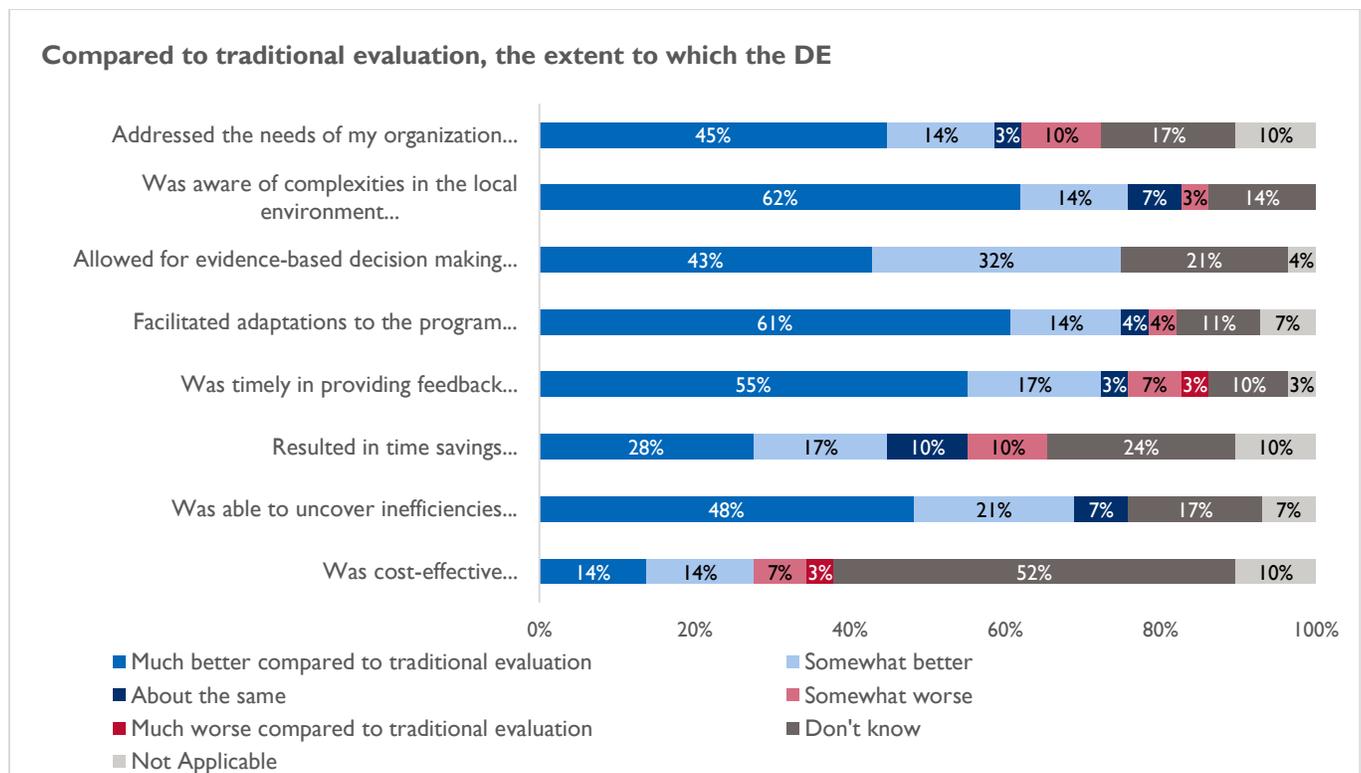
<sup>24</sup> The survey was not given to stakeholders who participated in the attempted DE since the pilot was not classified as an actual DE.

at their organization. Compared to other evaluation approaches, such as a performance evaluation, respondents said that DE was better because it was aware of complexities in the local environment, allowed for evidenced-based decision-making, facilitated adaptations to their program, and provided timely feedback. The Developmental Evaluators themselves were one of the biggest reported sources of added value. The intimate nature of the Developmental Evaluators' embeddedness allowed them to share useful and timely information with stakeholders in a way that was understanding of their needs. According to stakeholders, the least valuable aspects of DE were the following: (a) there are trade-offs (financial, informational, human capital) with other types of evaluations; (b) the success of the DE depends heavily on leadership buy-in; (c) Developmental Evaluators may lack the decision-making power to make changes.

### VALUE OF DE COMPARED TO OTHER EVALUATION APPROACHES

The WDI team assessed how the value of DE compared to other evaluation approaches using a question with eight sub-items and a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (*much worse*) to 5 (*much better*). The combined results are reported in **Figure 11**.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 11: In all areas, except DE cost and time savings, survey respondents said the DEs were more valuable than traditional evaluation (n = 29)



<sup>25</sup> For individual results from each DE, please refer to the final learning agenda reports, which can be found here: <https://wdi.umich.edu/programs-projects/advancing-the-use-of-developmental-evaluation-at-usaid-depa-mer/>.

Generally, respondents reported that DE was more valuable than other more traditional evaluation approaches.<sup>26</sup> On six of the eight sub-items, more than 40% of respondents reported that their DE was *much better* than a traditional evaluation. For half of the sub-items, more than 70% of respondents said that the DE was at least *better* than other traditional evaluation methods they had used because it was

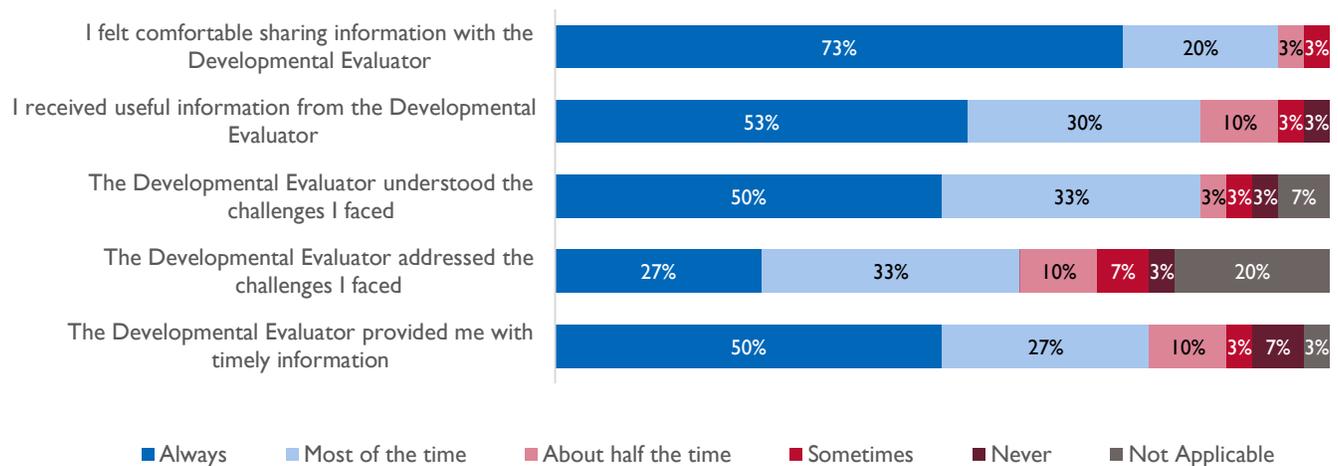
- aware of complexities in the local environment,
- allowed for evidence-based decision-making,
- facilitated adaptations to the program, and
- provided timely feedback.

Notably, more than half of all respondents (52%) said they did not know how cost-effective the DEs were.<sup>27</sup> In addition, nearly a quarter of all respondents (24%) did not know if the DEs resulted in more time savings for their teams (compared to a traditional evaluation).

### VALUE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR

The WDI team assessed the value of respondents’ interactions with the Developmental Evaluator through a question with five sub-items using a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Combined results from the DEs are shown in **Figure 12**.

Figure 12: Survey respondents reported largely positive interactions with the Developmental Evaluator (n = 30)



<sup>26</sup> As stated earlier in the report, “other” or “traditional” evaluation approaches refer to evaluation approaches that stakeholders may be more familiar with in the USAID context, such as performance evaluations. Survey respondents did not suggest that DE is a replacement for other evaluation approaches; DE was simply perceived to be better at providing stakeholders value in certain areas (e.g., being aware of complexity, providing timely feedback).

<sup>27</sup> The funding structure of the DEs varied, and responses related to the cost-effectiveness of the DE do not account for these differences. For example, in FCF, USAID was the sole funder, and for the Uptake DE, two of the four DE stakeholder teams did not contribute financial resources to participate in the DE.

As shown in **Figure 12** above, a large majority of respondents reported positive interactions with their Developmental Evaluators. On all except one of the five sub-items, at least 50% of respondents used the highest rating of the scale (i.e., *always*). Respondents reported least positively to the sub-item that stated, “*The Developmental Evaluator addressed the challenges I faced.*” Less than one third of respondents reported the Evaluator “always” addressed their challenges. Interestingly, nearly as many respondents (20%) answered “not applicable” to the sub-item. Based on qualitative responses to the survey, it seems that some respondents did not feel it was the Developmental Evaluators’ responsibility to address their specific challenges.

*“The DE is most valued because [of] the Developmental Evaluator [who] understands the context of any challenges and can provide recommendations that are specific and applicable to that challenge.”*  
~ Uptake DE stakeholder

### MOST VALUABLE ASPECTS OF THE DES

In response to the question, “In what ways was the DE most valuable?” respondents (n = 26) emphasized the DEs’ ability to

- improve communication among stakeholders,
- collect relevant evidence,
- build trust by listening to stakeholders’ needs,
- integrate data into strategy and decision-making, and
- provide dedicated attention from a skilled evaluator.

One respondent, who participated in the Uptake DE, explained the value of having access to relevant and timely data during the DE, “*[The DE] integrated evidence-based analysis into regular ways of working for the team, so that they built stronger theories of change [and] adapted to opportunities and challenges to improve strategic implementation.*” In addition, respondents commented on how valuable it was to have dedicated attention from the Developmental Evaluator.

### LEAST VALUABLE ASPECTS OF THE DES

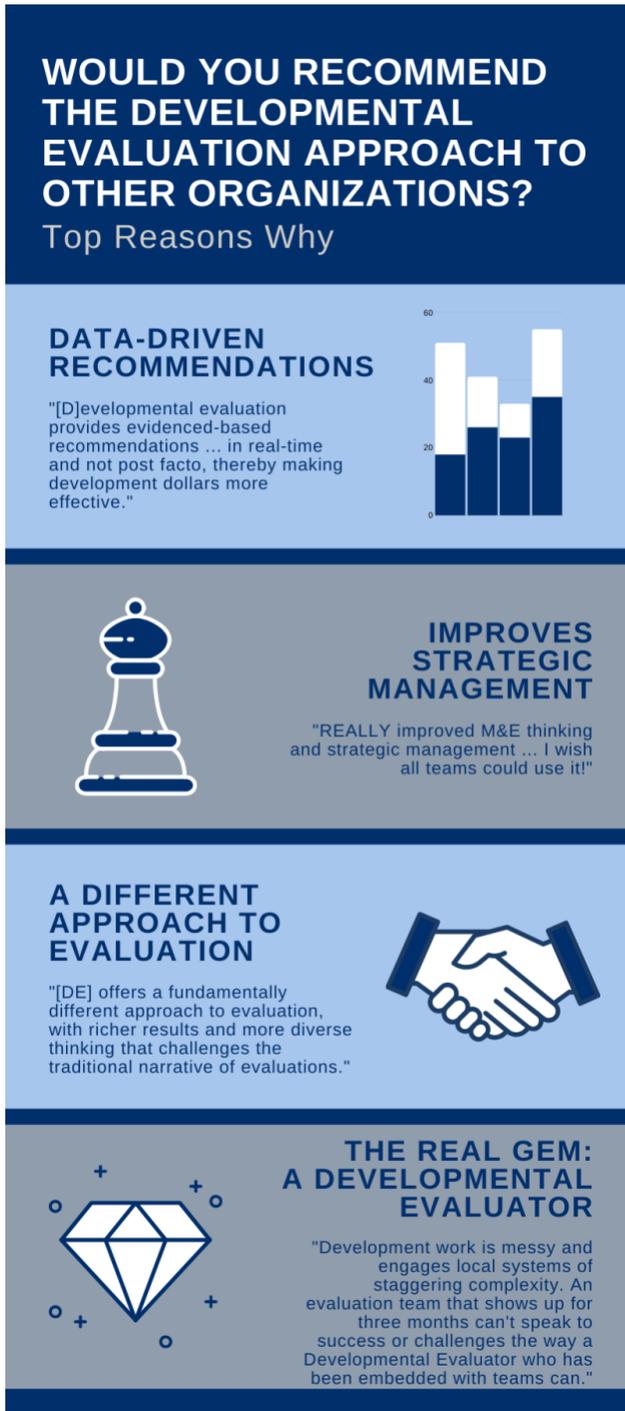
In response to the question, “In what ways was the DE least valuable?” respondents (n = 26) shared that

- DEs had trade-offs (financial, informational, human capital) with other types of evaluations,
- success of the DE depends on leadership buy-in,
- Developmental Evaluators sometimes lacked decision-making power, and
- timing of DE feedback could have been improved.

According to the respondents, the least valuable aspect of the DE was that it had financial and informational “*trade-offs,*” compared to other types of evaluations. For example, cost-effectiveness and time savings were cited as one of the least valuable components of FCF DE.

In some cases, having too many stakeholder teams participate in a DE with only one Developmental Evaluator was also reported to be a challenge. For example, one respondent from the Uptake DE said, “*As our Evaluator was increasingly stretched to meet the needs of the other teams, I would say that the attention our team got definitely waned. Not terribly so, but enough that we felt we were more on our own to implement the changes than perhaps we were ready for.*” Lastly, two thirds of respondents (67%) from the FCF DE reported that the timing of feedback was the least valuable aspect of the DE. For example, some

Figure 13: Ninety-six percent of survey respondents said they would recommend DE (n = 26)



respondents said that the evaluation should have happened sooner. Others commented more specifically about the feedback provided during the evaluation. One person commented that *“it was challenging to get written feedback in a consistent and timely manner.”*<sup>28</sup>

### DO STAKEHOLDERS RECOMMEND USING DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION?

Respondents from the FCF and Uptake DEs were asked two separate questions about whether they would recommend the DE approach. **Figure 13** highlights key reasons why respondents said they would recommend DE.

First, they were asked a closed-ended question about whether they would like to see DE continued at their own organization. Of the 26 respondents who answered the question, only one person (4%) said *no*, they would not like to see the continued use of DE at their organization. In fact, more than two thirds of respondents (69%, 18 of 26) said *yes* and the remaining seven (27%) said *yes, but with changes*. The second question, which was open-ended, asked respondents whether they would recommend the DE approach to other organizations. Eighty-five percent of respondents (22 of 26) said *yes*, while only 15% of respondents (4 of 26) said *no*.

During the substantiation interviews, the WDI team also gained insights related to stakeholders’ preferences regarding the future use of DE at USAID. While nearly all substantiators recommended DE for reasons similar to those listed in **Figure 13** above, there were notable dissenting opinions. Specifically, two substantiators questioned the ability to scale and sustain DE at USAID. While these individuals said DE was a

<sup>28</sup> The size of the change required to address the challenge influenced the time line in which it could be implemented. Furthermore, all stakeholders had unique perspectives and were not necessarily aware of all the work streams that the Developmental Evaluator was engaged in.

valuable approach for the Agency, they did not envision DE as a widely scalable approach for two main reasons: (a) resource constraints and (b) the need to have the right highly skilled Developmental Evaluator. “Having a [Developmental Evaluator] is a luxury from a resource standpoint,” said one senior USAID staff member. “How [do you] scale this without hiring a bunch of [Developmental Evaluators]; it is not feasible.” Another senior staff member concluded, “[DE] is an expensive and time-consuming tool that should be used judiciously. But when used well, as it was in this case, the results keep continuing to provide benefits.”

*“A lot of new approaches were being used in FCF for the first time...exactly when you want to use a developmental evaluation over a traditional approach because you can receive and use that feedback in real time versus months or years later.”*  
~ FCF DE stakeholder

#### **4: WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM BUILDING AND MANAGING BUY-IN FOR THE DE APPROACH IN THE USAID CONTEXT?**

Research from the DEPA-MERL DEs shows that buy-in is an outcome that changes over time and can vary significantly across stakeholders. One of the most notable learnings about buy-in for DEPA-MERL was that it is not a binary outcome. That is, assessing buy-in for a particular DE is not as simple as saying “yes, buy-in exists” or “no, buy-in does not exist.” Rather, the level of stakeholder buy-in for DE often exists on a continuum. For instance, one stakeholder may be bought into certain aspects of the DE and not others. That same stakeholder’s perception of the DE can also shift, being more positive at certain stages and more negative at other points in time. For this reason, buy-in for the DE needs to be supported and developed throughout the DE, from the first day of engagement to the final day of the DE. It is not solely the responsibility of the Developmental Evaluator to develop buy-in among the DE stakeholders, although they do play a critical role. It is also the responsibility of the DE funder and DE Administrator to serve as DE champions, as well as the leadership and program management that are using the DE.

One additional (and cautionary) finding across all DEs was that some stakeholders expressed complete support and buy-in for DE without fully understanding the DE approach. In cases such as this, they may verbally support the DE at the beginning, but as the DE unfolds, they have issues with fully participating in DE activities. For example, in the DEPA-MERL DEs, key stakeholders said they fully supported DE while also requesting that the Developmental Evaluator “operate independently” to conduct various evaluation activities. This contradicted the collaborative nature of the DE approach. During the DEs, it also became clear that some stakeholders understood the purpose of DE better than others. For example, some key stakeholders were very willing to provide physical space for the Developmental Evaluator to attend their weekly meetings. In these meetings, DE data that directly related to team strategy was shared and, subsequently, influenced decisions made during those meetings. Other teams, however, did not engage or reflect on DE data findings as regularly. On more than one occasion, when a Developmental Evaluator uncovered negative findings that would require the team to adapt to better meet their goals—as DE often aims to do—a limited number of stakeholders attempted to discredit the Developmental Evaluator instead of reflecting on potential adaptations that could be made. To the WDI team, this represented stakeholders’ lack of complete understanding of the purpose, goals, and objectives of DE—or at least the need to overcome the fear that DE is used as an accountability mechanism.

## CRITICAL STEPS FOR BUILDING DE BUY-IN IN THE USAID CONTEXT

While it is impossible to know exactly how a DE's buy-in will evolve, the WDI team found that there were several critical DE activities that posed unique opportunities for building (or failing to build) buy-in. While the steps are listed somewhat sequentially in **Figure 14** below, they may overlap and occur iteratively throughout the DE. For example, once a Developmental Evaluator successfully embeds into the program (step 4), they may collect and share data (step 5) that surfaces a disagreement among stakeholders. When such data is shared, it may lead to heightened tensions and uncertainty on how the team will proceed given such conflicts (or inconsistencies), making it important for the Developmental Evaluator to circle back to step 4 to make sure their embeddedness does not suffer as a result.

Finally, a key question is who is responsible for these steps? Since DE is a cooperative evaluation approach, completing these steps requires the participation of all key DE stakeholders: USAID staff, the Developmental Evaluator, the DE Administrator, and leadership and program managers from the team participating in the DE.

Figure 14: Steps for managing DE buy-in in the USAID context



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# APPENDIXES



## APPENDIX A: RECOMMENDATIONS WITH RELATED RESOURCES

### SELECTING DE AS THE EVALUATIVE APPROACH

#### I. CONFIRM THAT DE IS THE RIGHT FIT FOR THE USAID CONTEXT AND TEAM

##### Resources that can help:

- Read “[Are You Really Ready for Developmental Evaluation? You May Have to Get Out of Your Own Way](#)” as a primer to see if DE is the right fit for your team and context.
- For more information on assessing the appropriateness of DE in the USAID context, see Module 2 of DEPA-MERL’s [Implementing Developmental Evaluation: A Practical Guide for Evaluators and Administrators](#).
- Consider assessing readiness for DE by using or adapting questions from the [DEPA-MERL DE Readiness Survey](#), a tool adapted from the Tamarack Community’s [DE Diagnostic Checklist](#). The Spark Policy Institute’s [Readiness for DE Assessment Tool](#) can also help determine whether the contracting mechanism, organization culture, and program scope are ripe for adaptation.

### LAUNCHING A DE

#### 2. SELECT THE RIGHT DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR FOR THE TEAM

##### Resources that can help:

- For guidance on selecting the right evaluator, see Module 2 of DEPA-MERL’s [Implementing Developmental Evaluation: A Practical Guide for Evaluators and Administrators](#). The guide includes a sample terms of reference (i.e., job description) for a Developmental Evaluator, as well as other useful information related to launching a successful DE.
- The blog [Determine the Evaluator Qualities](#) on [BetterEvaluation.org](#) is a good primer for identifying Developmental Evaluator skills.

#### 3. USE TARGETED ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE USAID STAKEHOLDERS’ BUY-IN AND FAMILIARITY WITH DE

##### Resources that can help:

- One way to increase knowledge of and buy-in for DE is to read more about DE theory and practice. Don’t know where to start? Consider reading, sharing, and discussing “[State of the Art and Practice of Developmental Evaluation: Answers to Common and Recurring Questions](#)” with USAID stakeholders and funders.

#### 4. MAKE SURE THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR IS FULLY EMBEDDED IN THE USAID TEAM AND CONTEXT

##### Resources that can help:

- See Module 7 of DEPA-MERL’s [Implementing Developmental Evaluation: A Practical Guide for Evaluators and Administrators](#) for more information on “being embedded” as a Developmental Evaluator in the USAID context.

### CLOSING OUT A DE

#### 8. TAKE STEPS TO CLOSE OUT THE DE AND TRANSITION THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR’S RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE USAID STAKEHOLDER TEAMS

##### Resources that can help:

- Consult USAID’s [After-Action Review Guidance](#) on how to conduct an After-Action Review.

## APPENDIX B: METHODS AND DATA TREATMENT

The WDI team used mixed methods to understand the effectiveness of the DE approach, how it can be strengthened in practice, and what value it provides for its stakeholders within the USAID context. In total, the WDI team conducted over 100 hours of interviews and analyzed 465 pages of qualitative data, as well as 30 surveys completed by DE stakeholders. To DEPA-MERL’s knowledge, research of this kind—a systematic evaluation of DE—has been conducted only in a handful of other instances.

For the first two DEPA-MERL DEs, the WDI team collected data to help answer Research Questions 1–4 of the learning agenda. For the attempted DE, the WDI team only collected data related to Research Question 4 of the learning agenda. This decision was made as the work with the large USAID Bureau never fully launched into a DE, which made Research Questions 1–3 largely not applicable. Although this experience was markedly different than the other DEPA-MERL DE pilots, it is not an exception to other DEs that have struggled to realize their intended objectives. More information about each pilot can be found in the learning agenda reports for the individual pilots.

### RESEARCH QUESTION I

*How does DE capture, promote, and enable the utilization of emergent learnings<sup>29</sup> in support of ongoing programming in a complex system, such as in the USAID context?*

To answer this question, the WDI team used the outcome harvesting approach because of its usefulness for understanding how individual outcomes contribute to system-wide changes, particularly for complex programming with unclear cause-and-effect relationships. Using this six-step approach, researchers “collect (harvest) evidence of what has changed (outcomes) [in a program] and then, working backward, determine whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.” (See **Appendix C** for a diagram of the six steps.) The WDI team defined a DE outcome as any change in the behavior, relationship, action, policy, and/or practice of stakeholders that the Uptake DE contributed to, either directly or indirectly. Contributions of the DEs included documentation provided by the Developmental Evaluator, data collected, recommendations, or promotion of ideas or best practices.

For each outcome harvested, the WDI team created written outcome descriptions to summarize what had changed (in stakeholders’ behavior, relationships, strategy, and/or policy), the contributions of the DE, and the significance of the change for stakeholders. Outcomes were substantiated through document reviews and interviews. The WDI team worked with the Developmental Evaluators from the Uptake and FCF DE pilots to select and schedule interviews with 30 stakeholders. After all interviews were completed, the WDI team updated the outcome descriptions to align with what each substantiator had shared to make the outcome descriptions as accurate as possible. For example, in some instances, the WDI team edited outcome descriptions to reflect how a stakeholder’s behavior had changed or how key deliverables of the Uptake DE were being used. After the substantiated outcomes were updated by

<sup>29</sup> “Emergent learnings” are programmatic or environmental developments, including new information and changes in existing stakeholder relationships.

the WDI team, the Developmental Evaluator and the DEPA-MERL consortium reviewed them for accuracy. The following sources were used to gather data during outcome harvesting:

- **Monthly reflection interviews:** The WDI team conducted 35 monthly reflection interviews via phone with the Developmental Evaluators: 14 for the FCF DE and 21 for the Uptake DE. In total, 39 outcomes were harvested (FCF DE, 17 outcomes; Uptake DE, 22 outcomes). On the calls, the WDI team gathered the following information: details on high-priority emergent learnings, resulting changes (or lack thereof) to the teams, significance of emergent learnings for the DE stakeholders, and relevant actions of the Developmental Evaluator related to these learnings or changes. As needed, the Developmental Evaluator shared supplemental documentation.
- **Substantiation interviews:** The WDI team conducted substantiation interviews with 26 stakeholders (8 FCF stakeholders; 18 Uptake stakeholders). The DEPA-MERL consortium selected substantiators (i.e., persons who substantiated the outcomes through interviews) who were both knowledgeable and independent of the harvested outcomes. These substantiators discussed the harvested outcome descriptions, the outcome's significance to their team, and the DE's contribution to the outcome. The WDI team also asked substantiators if there were other contributing factors to the outcomes.

## RESEARCH QUESTION 2

*What are the barriers and enablers to implementation of DE in the USAID context?*

During the monthly reflection and substantiation interviews, the WDI team asked open-ended questions to learn of barriers to and enablers of the implementation of DE. These could include factors that the interviewees experienced or faced that were particular to the program and/or factors due to the local context. The WDI team used the NVivo software and conducted line-by-line coding<sup>30</sup> of interview summaries for barriers and enablers. The WDI team ensured an intercoder reliability of 80%–90% on all codes or factors and discussed any coding-related discrepancies during internal weekly meetings. Before the launch of the DEs, the WDI team conducted a literature review to identify (using a deductive approach), key factors that could influence the implementation of DE (**Appendix D**). The WDI team also identified and added new factors by carefully reviewing the incoming data itself (using an inductive approach).

## RESEARCH QUESTION 3

*What do key stakeholders consider to be the value (added or lost) of conducting a DE compared to a traditional evaluation approach?*

The WDI team administered an anonymous online survey to answer Research Question 3. The WDI team distributed the Value of Developmental Evaluation Survey to 49 DE stakeholders to assess the DE

<sup>30</sup> Coding is an analytical process in which data, in qualitative form (such as interview transcripts), are categorized to facilitate analysis. See Miles et al. (2014).

approach in the context of the FCF and Uptake DEs. A total of 30 people responded (61% response rate), of which 26 completed the entire survey.

The Developmental Evaluators identified stakeholders who should receive the survey based on their role in their respective Des.<sup>31</sup> Survey respondents were selected with the objective of selecting a diverse set of stakeholders who represented different teams and different levels of involvement in the DEs. The data were analyzed using Qualtrics and Microsoft Excel software.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 4

*What are the key lessons learned from building and managing buy-in for the DE approach in the USAID context?*

To answer this question, the WDI team conducted 41 monthly reflection interviews via phone with the Developmental Evaluators—14 for the FCF DE, 21 for the Uptake DE, and 6 for the attempted DE with a large USAID Bureau in Washington D.C..<sup>32</sup> In addition, data from the DE stakeholder interviews were used to inform lessons related to the DE buy-in and start-up processes.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

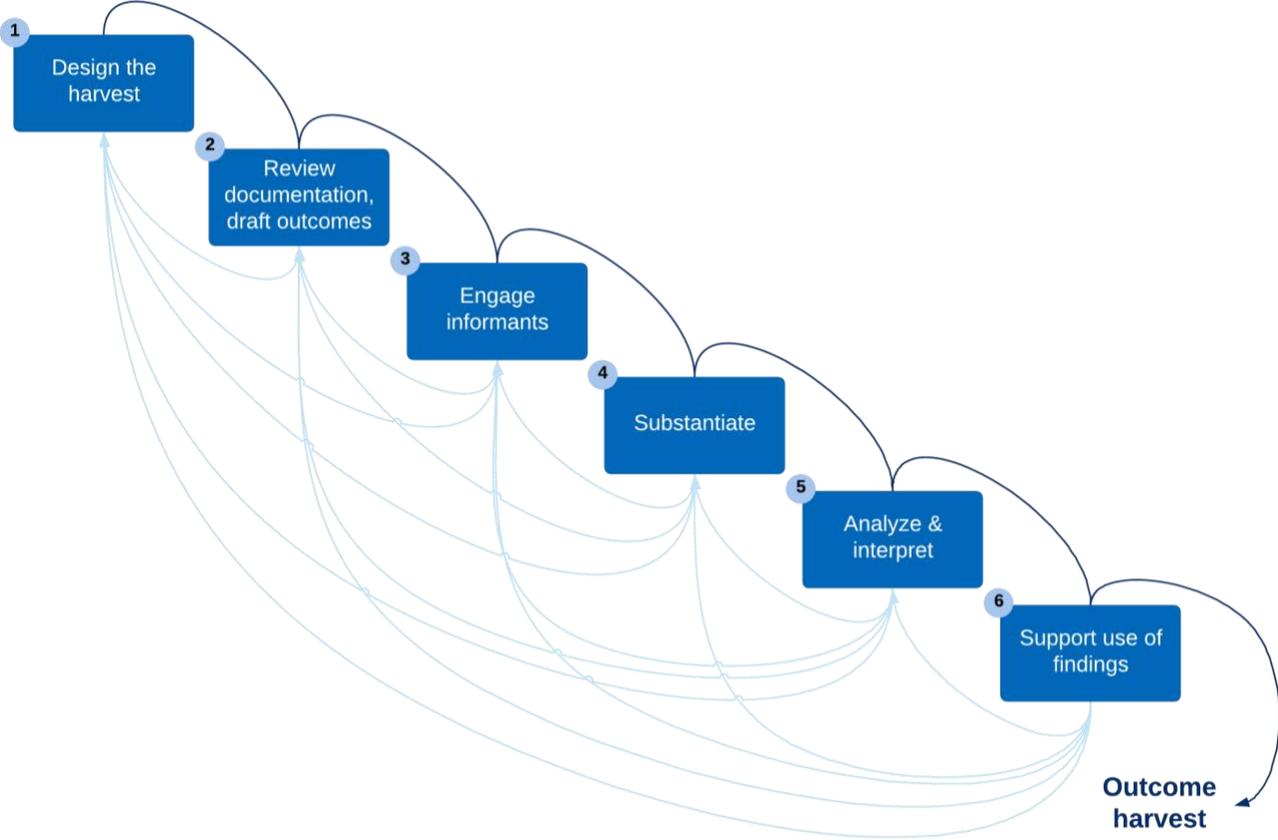
The WDI team faced challenges in collecting data during the DEs. These are related to the following:

- **Resources (time and funding):** Because of the time-intensive nature of interviews with the Developmental Evaluator and substantiators, the WDI team could not interview all participants in the DEs.
- **Selection bias:** The WDI team used purposive sampling to select stakeholders who had robust knowledge of the FCF and Uptake DEs when identifying substantiation interview participants and endline survey respondents. To reduce the possibility of selection bias, the WDI team worked with the Developmental Evaluators to co-select persons who would have both positive and negative perceptions of each DE.
- **Funding bias:** Several different funding structures were used across the DEs. For the FCF DE and the attempted DE, there was only one funder. For the Uptake DE, however, there were several: Some teams contributed funds, while others did not. Hence, any data related to DE cost-effectiveness may have been influenced by these differences.
- **Lack of a counterfactual:** There was no counterfactual available for this study. As an alternative, the WDI team triangulated data through verification from multiple sources, conducted ongoing data collection to reduce recall bias, and asked substantiators about other contributing factors (besides DE) that may have influenced the harvested outcomes.

<sup>31</sup> The DEPA-MERL consortium validated this list of stakeholders, but it was not reviewed by any stakeholders themselves.

<sup>32</sup> The monthly reflection interviews for the attempted DE were conducted with the goal of collected data on the DE buy-in and start-up process; the FCF and Uptake DE interviews were conducted with a broader scope (see Research Questions 1 and 2 of the learning agenda), but were also used to answer this question as they included a wealth of information related to DE buy-in.

# APPENDIX C: SIX STEPS OF OUTCOME HARVESTING



Adapted from Wilson-Grau, R. (2015). *Outcome harvesting*. Better Evaluation. [http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome\\_harvesting](http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting)

## APPENDIX D: KEY FACTORS IDENTIFIED AS INFLUENCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DE, LISTED ALPHABETICALLY

Factor	Definition
Cultural norms	Cultural and social norms related to the region that could influence the DE process
Data collection	Methods, tools, and processes for collecting data and information that will be analyzed by the Developmental Evaluator or the DEPA-MERL consortium as part of the DE
Data sharing	Activities or processes for sharing data and information between the Developmental Evaluator and the stakeholder teams
Data utilization	Utilization of data related to the DE by stakeholders (e.g., USAID, four Lab teams) to help achieve the goals of the DE or the program
DE readiness	Willingness and/or preparedness of stakeholders to engage fully in the DE. Readiness includes any reference to stakeholders' understanding of the purpose of DE or their buy-in of and support for the DE
Funding dynamics	Influence that funding had on different stakeholders involved with the DE
Geography	Geography of the regions that affected the DE
Integration of the Developmental Evaluator	Engagement between stakeholders and the Developmental Evaluator that affected the Developmental Evaluator's assimilation into stakeholder team(s). Integration includes efforts by stakeholders to assimilate the Developmental Evaluator physically, functionally, or socially. This could include the Developmental Evaluator's participation (or lack thereof) in events and email communications, as well as stakeholders' perceptions of the Developmental Evaluator as an "insider" or "outsider"
Leadership	Fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of a person's or organization's assigned roles and responsibilities. This includes roles and responsibilities related to the implementation of the DE
Local and international dynamics	Stakeholder relationships that focused on the dynamics between local (Washington, DC) and international stakeholders
Political dynamics	Political dynamics related to the region or regions (where programs are being implemented) that affected the implementation of the DE. For example, this could include references to government processes or laws, political conflicts, elections, etc.
Skills of the Developmental Evaluator	The skills (needed or desired) for a person to function efficiently and effectively as a Developmental Evaluator. These include "hard" technical skills as well as "soft" interpersonal skills referenced by the Developmental Evaluator or stakeholders
Stakeholder relationships	Any change or evolution in the roles and relationships of stakeholders within the scope of the DE. This includes collaboration and engagement efforts among different stakeholders, such as interactions among the Lab teams, the Developmental Evaluator, and/or the DEPA-MERL consortium
USAID dynamics	Dynamics related to USAID culture and/or administrative processes that were perceived as affecting the implementation of the DE