

National Evaluation Capacities 2017

Pre-conference workshop

Theory-based evaluation in practice

Facilitator

Jos Vaessen (Ph.D. Maastricht University) is adviser on evaluation methods at the Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank Group. Since 1998 he has been involved in evaluation research activities, first as an academic and consultant to bilateral and multilateral development organizations and from 2011 to 2015 as an evaluation manager at UNESCO. Jos firmly believes in a strong link between research and practice. His ongoing involvement in some evaluation-related research and teaching activities as honorary lecturer at Maastricht University contributes to the necessary cross-fertilization between these two domains. Jos has been author of several internationally peer-reviewed publications, including three books. He regularly serves on reference groups of evaluations for different institutions and is a member of the Board of the European Evaluation Society.



Level

Beginning/intermediate

Workshop content

Interventions are theories and evaluation is the test. This well-known reference is indicative of an influential school of thought and practice in evaluation, often called theory-driven or theory-based evaluation. While having been around for more than four decades, over the last decade theory-based evaluation has received new impetus and has become part and parcel of the toolkit of program evaluators across the globe.

The past decade has also seen a dramatic increase in impact evaluation debates and practices. While theory-based evaluation has often been cast as an alternative to quantitative counterfactual-based impact evaluation, in practice the two can reinforce each other. At the same time, the scope for applying different expressions of theory-based evaluations is much broader than impact evaluation only. The workshop will address the following main themes:

1. What is theory-based evaluation and why is it important?
2. What are useful principles for reconstructing a program theory?
3. How can we apply theory-based evaluation in practice?

Learning outcome

After this course, participants have developed an initial (but sound) understanding of the role of theory in evaluation and how to apply theory-based evaluation in practice.

Learning modalities

- Short interactive lectures
- Group exercise and presentations on the basis of an empirical case

Tentative agenda

- Welcome and introduction of participants
- Course content and objectives
- The role of theory in evaluation: what is it about and why is it important?

Break

- Reconstructing a program theory: different approaches and basic steps
- Explanation of group exercise: reconstructing a program theory (based on an empirical case)
- Group work: reconstructing a program theory

Lunch

- Group presentations of program theories and discussion

Break

- Examples and illustrations of applying theory-based evaluation in practice (e.g. causal analysis, multi-level and multi-site interventions and 'nested' theories, systems perspectives on program theory)
- Evaluation and closing remarks