

Heifer International External Evaluations: What Needs to Improve?

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Background

- The partnership between The Evaluation Center (EC) at Western Michigan University and Heifer International is in place for two years now—initial negotiations started at the 2004 AEA conference in Atlanta.
- It was established based on Heifer’s need to develop independent evaluations of their programming worldwide.
- The importance of conducting such external evaluations reside at least in four aspects:
 - Independent confirmation of Heifer efforts alleged impact by a reputable professional evaluation organization;
 - Provision of a more precise estimate of the size and depth of Heifer impact;
 - Discovery of unexpected/unintended effects which may need to be addressed by Heifer; and
 - Identification of suggestions to improve Heifer operations.
- So far, the EC team has conducted two rounds of evaluations.
 - “Round 1” was conducted in 2005 and included Heifer projects in Peru and in two southern states in the U.S.;
 - “Round 2” took place in 2006 and encompassed Heifer projects in Albania, Nepal, and Thailand.
- Negotiations between the EC and Heifer for “Round 3” of external evaluations have already started.
- The Director of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation at Heifer would like “Round 3” to establish and document a consistent and robust methodology to orient future external evaluations at Heifer.

Basic info about Heifer International

- Heifer International is a U.S.- based nonprofit organization in operation for more than 60 years.
- Projects supported by Heifer have reached millions of people in 128 countries, by providing families with a food and income source, animals in most cases, rather than short-term relief—“help hungry people to feed themselves.”
- Perhaps the most interesting feature of their approach is called “passing on the gift”—those receiving the animals must pass on as many animals they received to another family within a short period of time—guinea-pigs can take as little as 6 to 8 months while cows might take as long as 4 to 5 years.
- This commitment to sustainability has worked well and puts Heifer ahead of many international interventions for needy families.
- Along with the animals Heifer also provides support and training in key areas such as livestock care, environment protection/recuperation, development of income generating activities, gender equity, leadership, etc.

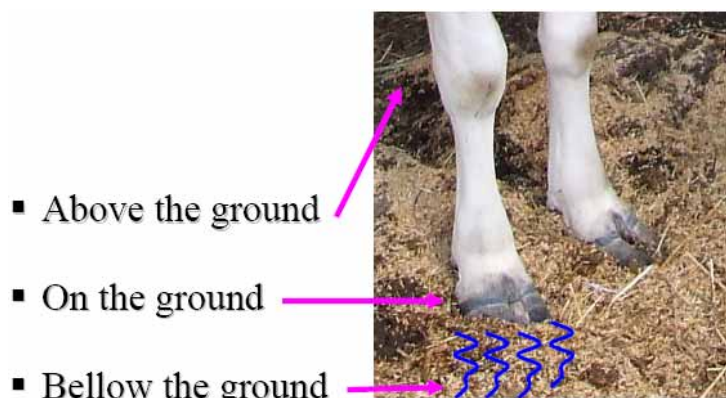


The 2005 External Evaluation

- Heifer had already conducted many evaluations and the staff of the organization had a general sense of the effects of their efforts in different countries. However, they wanted to get an independent, credible and valid assessment of the impact their work was producing in the lives of many families and communities affected by their interventions.
- The evaluation included 13 projects: 8 in the states of Louisiana and Mississippi (USA) and 5 in Peru.
- The entire evaluation spanned approximately 130 days of intense work.
- Travel of members of the WMU evaluation team included: (i) Arkansas (where they met with all leaders of Heifer projects in South-Central U.S.), (ii) Louisiana and Mississippi (site-visits to 8 Heifer projects), and Peru (site-visits to 5 Heifer projects).
- It cost roughly \$50,000, plus travel expenses (paid directly by Heifer).
- The evaluation team was comprised of seven evaluators from the EC (two senior and five PhD students), one master's student from Cornell University and one evaluator based in Peru.
- The team used multiple data collection methods:
 - Interviews and focus group with more than 200 project participants.
 - On-site direct observations of 13 projects.
 - Analyses of documents related to the projects available at Heifer.
 - Phone and face-to-face interviews with 30 representatives of organizations working within the same geographic area of Heifer projects or working on similar issues.
 - Interviews and discussions with approximately 15 Heifer staff in the U.S. and in Peru.

The Heifer Hoofprint Model

- The evaluation team adopted one of the most general tools available for program evaluation—the Key Evaluation Checklist (KEC).
- The KEC challenged the evaluators to look beyond projects' more obvious impacts and cover many other relevant matters such as side-effects, process (e.g., ethicality and adherence to current knowledge), costs (monetary and non-monetary), etc.
- In designing the impact assessment, the evaluation team used a metaphor of a footprint—the impact on the environment left by a traveling creature. In this case, the creature is a heifer, and its conventional impact is the footprints or tracks it leaves *on the ground*.
- These represent material changes of the most apparent kind (e.g., income, herd ownership, education, health), though they are often so slight that identifying them requires the skills of a professional tracker (evaluator).
- Two other dimensions of the “Heifer Hoofprint” were also sought:
 - (i) tracks left *above the ground*, corresponding to the broken brush and branches that mark the heifer's path (impacts in the communities, region, etc.); and



- (ii) impact *below the ground*, representing the desired changes in fundamental values, especially increased sense of loyalty to the group rather than just to oneself and one's family and increased social capital.

2005 Main Evaluation Findings

- The evaluation team was able to identify, beyond reasonable doubt, evidence of 36 impacts attributable to the efforts supported by Heifer by using rival hypothesis exclusion and Modus Operandi techniques.
- Impacts were observed at all three levels of impact:
 - On the Ground—e.g., improvement in food and economic security
 - Above the ground—e.g., adoption of Heifer practices by non-Heifer families
 - Below the ground—e.g., passing on more and better animals than received
- The evaluators' overall conclusion about Heifer efforts in the US and in Peru was quite positive: *“In the vast range of programs aimed at national and international economic and social development, the efforts of Heifer International stand out as exceptionally successful. This success is particularly remarkable on two goal-dimensions that are of great importance in that context because they have proved particularly difficult to achieve there: sustainability and cost-effectiveness.”*
- Additionally, the evaluation team developed 19 specific recommendations for improving Heifer's work. E.g., great ideas newsletter.
- The preliminary evaluation findings and recommendations were discussed with Heifer staff in the U.S. and in Peru during the last day of the site-visits.
- The final report was discussed at Heifer Headquarters in Little Rock, AR on a full-day meeting with approximately 15 Heifer staff, and also at Heifer's monitoring and evaluation conference in Little Rock in the Winter 2005.



The 2006 Evaluation

- In November 2005, Heifer approached the EC asking once more for a proposal to design and implement a new round of impact evaluations of completed initiatives in three different countries: Albania, Nepal and Thailand.
- A total of about 757 individuals in 26 project sites were interviewed; about half in their homes and half in larger groups; almost all in the absence of any Heifer representatives.
- Local evaluators interviewed approximately 10 representatives of organizations operating in each one of the selected countries for the above the ground study.
- The 2006 evaluation involved a team of 12 evaluators from WMU and from the local countries (above the ground study) divided in three groups.

- The WMU evaluators spent between two and four weeks in each country, spending between 1 and 2 days in each village.
- We used a mix-method approach to the evaluation, employing both qualitative and quantitative methodology whenever most appropriate:
 - Document review of country evaluation reports, project reports, and project profiles.
 - Individual interviews with project recipients, project leaders, representatives from project holders (intermediary organizations managing Heifer's support in different villages/regions), and with representatives from governmental and nongovernmental agencies for the 'above the ground' study, conducted by local evaluators.
 - Focus group with project recipients and non-recipients, and in some cases project leaders (e.g., members of the savings group or livestock committees)
 - Observations of households and their surroundings, livestock, animal shelters, villages' common spaces, conditions of environment and signs of its degradation, water resources, crops, interactions among community members with special attention to gender equity issues, etc.
- The evaluation cost approximately \$140,000 plus travel costs—covered directly by Heifer.

Main Differences between the 2005 and the 2006 Evaluations

- EC team picked the sample of projects to be visited in each country.
- Sample included mostly completed projects, but also a few new projects.
- Evaluation teams spent adequate amount of time in each project site to collect the necessary data (with few exceptions).
- More structured interview protocols for the different groups of interviewees.
- Reports for individual countries, plus overall report.
- Work with local evaluators and interpreters in each country, independent from Heifer, selected by the EC team.
- Strategies to develop evaluation capacity of Heifer staff, including an evaluation workshop for eleven HPI staff from seven Asian countries.
- Development of a framework (The Heifer Six Values) to orient data collection and analyses by synthesizing Heifer's 23 values.



The Heifer Six Values

- The 'Heifer Six Values' were developed by the WMU evaluation team as a way to make the evaluation manageable and consistent enough to address the main impact questions raised by Heifer.
- They reflect the synthesis of the 23 values expressed on Heifer's 12 Cornerstones, 4 Goals, and 7 Indicators. (see Appendix A)
- Indices with specific indicators were developed by the evaluation team to help data analysis, not only for the present evaluation, but also for future impact studies of Heifer projects. (see Appendix B)

- The indices were designed to enable the evaluators to develop a summary quantitative score of the projects' current situation regarding key aspects related to the Heifer Six Values and the specific contribution Heifer made to improve the current situation. (see Appendix C)
- Scores were provided based on the evaluators best estimation using all qualitative and quantitative information gained during the process.

2006 Main Evaluation Findings

- The 2006 evaluation conclusions were mostly positive, even though important limitations in some of the projects were identified by the evaluators.
- With respect to what is probably the most important Heifer value—food and economic security—very substantial benefits from Heifer’s efforts are demonstrable at all sites, and in almost all cases these show unusually strong signs of sustainability and cost-effectiveness
- With respect to the other Heifer values, the results vary considerably, not only between the three countries, but also within each country, sometimes to an extreme degree.
- The replacement of livestock by microcredit systems in many projects in Thailand is an example of an important shortcoming identified by the evaluation team.
- The EC team identified 26 suggestions to substantially improve many of the limitations identified without significant increases in costs.



Main Issues with the First Two Rounds of External Evaluations and Ideas to Improve Round 3

| <i>Main Issues</i> | <i>Ideas to Improve “Round 3”</i> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of baseline data on projects. • Impossibility of setting up no-treatment control groups to which communities could be randomly allocated, or collecting data from comparable villages not receiving support from Heifer. • Difficulties to get a sense of Heifer’s “above the ground” impacts in large communities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget more training for evaluation teams prior to departure to fieldwork, especially on strategies to infer causation without RCTs. (e.g., Modus Operandi), and sorting out Heifer impacts in larger communities. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible losses in data quality due to difficulties in translations (e.g., in many hilltribes in Thailand there was the need to work with two translators) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide one translator for each evaluator in the team to make the site visits more efficient by decreasing the amount of time needed at each site. Schedule meeting with translators prior to start interviews to explain methods and procedures. |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperfect balancing in the selection of villages to be visited (e.g., high number of Lahu villages visited in Thailand, and most of the communities visited in Nepal located in the Terai region.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay closer attention when selecting sample of projects to ensure greater cultural and geographic diversity among selected villages to be visited by the external evaluation team. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of positive bias due to interviews been conducted largely with successful participants, since project leaders were the ones selecting the interviewees. (especially relevant to Albania) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluators should try to interview non-participants of Heifer interventions and project participants who were not included in the initial list of interviewees presented by the project leaders or Heifer staff. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in defining scores for “Ideal Situation,” “Current Situation,” and “Heifer Impact.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Heifer staff (at headquarters and at each country included in the external evaluations) to define what would contexts be “ideal situations” (people’s needs) for the different indicators and indices so they will be appropriate to the specific realities. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of substantial clarity on the main indicators of the Heifer Six Values by the evaluators before going to the field. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a more structured scoring scheme (maybe using checklists) prior to fieldwork. Such scheme should allow evaluators to score projects on the Heifer Six Values (and related sub-values and indicators) during the site visits—which should increase efficiency in data analysis and report writing. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited consistency in data collection, analysis and report writing among the evaluation teams. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the existing data collection guidelines and instruments to facilitate and ensure greater consistency in observations, interviews, and review/gathering of secondary data. • Scores provided by the evaluators for each indicator, sub-value and value in each village should be substantiated by clear evidence—the data collection instrument should provide enough space for the inclusion of the required justifications. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time for the evaluators to look at the collected data while in the field, which led to some important gaps in the data regarding the indices that might have been caught had the evaluators had time to review their notes before leaving the country. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget at least half a day between projects (plus travel) to provide enough time for the evaluators to enter field notes, summarize findings, and do the scoring. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in resources invested for data entry, data analysis, and report writing among the three evaluation teams. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget more time for data analysis and report writing. • Provide clearer guidelines and expectations regarding country reports. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of formal, professional metaevaluation (some efforts for metaevaluation included discussions among | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the possibility of including a formal metaevaluation as a budget item for the next round of evaluations. |

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| WMU evaluation team members, feedback from Heifer country offices and HQ | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak data on sustainability of passing on the gift over generations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure to capture information about the number of generations who received passing on livestock, training, seeds, etc. Use opportunity of passing on the gift ceremonies for Heifer staff to collect data on the quality of livestock |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from country offices took much longer than expected | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget more time for country-offices feedback on evaluation report |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget was short for data analyses and report writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget more time for data analyses and report writing Improve budget accuracy by taking into consideration the real amount of work invested by each member of the WMU team |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WMU teams were not equally aware of the resources they could use to help in data entry, analyses, and report writing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure the different teams know what kind of help they will be able to receive from WMU students while writing the report or conducting data analyses. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost analysis in the reports were weak or inexistent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devise a better strategy up-front to do a better cost analysis of Heifer projects (caution: it is hard to calculate the investment of Heifer staff time at HQ and country offices to the projects!) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The idea of “Heifer Six Values” has not been completely bought by Heifer staff, including the Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation Director | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate a two-day workshop with Heifer staff for in-depth discussions about the Six Values and its indices, including issues related to the determination of ideal situations (needs). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participation of IDPE students in parts of the evaluation process could have been better structured and more inclusive to provide more meaningful learning opportunities for them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ways to engage more students in the evaluation process: (i) making the formative and summative meta-evaluation of the evaluation (design, implementation, reporting, etc.) as part of class assignment for Eval 6010 or 6000; (ii) provide students the opportunity to participate in fieldwork training for data collection, as well as to review data collection instruments; (iii) provide students the opportunity to engage in activities related to the evaluation as part of their required fieldwork or independent study credit hours. |

Appendix A: Heifer Six Values



Appendix B: Indices for The Heifer Six Values

| Criteria | Indicators |
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| Value 1: Meeting Basic Needs (100) | |
| 1.1. Year-round, adequate and nutritious food (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staples: corn, rice, beans, potatoes (5) • Supplements: vegetables and fruits (5) • Other protein: chickens, pigs, fish (5) • Use of appropriate crop strain for area (5) • Adequate storage procedures (5) |
| 1.2. Adequate safe water year-around (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient provision for drinking, washing, and irrigation (5) • Water monitoring system in place (5) • Sustainable access year-round (river, well, piped from mountain) (5) • Adequate method of storage (catchments/ dams/ tanks) (5) • Fencing livestock off drinking supply (5) |
| 1.3. Adequate shelter (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roof and walls to provide needed protection (5) • Sanitary toilets (5) • Fireplace with chimney, raised from the floor for safety, sanitation, and health (5) • Windows (ventilation, illumination) (5) • Area (size: whatever is healthy and acceptable given the conditions) (5) |
| 1.4. Sustainable income and assets (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Healthcare (5) • Better energy sources (biogas, solar, eolic) (5) • Better farm and home (TVs, DVDs, washing machine, etc) equipment (5) • More assets (savings, large animals) (5) • Better transportation (bicycles, scooters, cars) (5) |
| Value 2: Livestock Care & Management (50) | |
| 2.1. Livestock in good condition (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness (2.5) • Not underfed (2.5) • Evidence of illness (lack energy, visible deformities, presence of flies) (2.5) • History of illness or death (2.5) • Record of required vaccination (for larger animals) (2.5) |
| 2.2. Animal shelters in adequate condition (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roof (2.5) • Floor (2.5) • Walls (2.5) • Cleanliness (including use of microbes to reduce odor) (2.5) • Accessibility of food and water for animals in shelter (2.5) |
| 2.3. Appropriate animal healthcare (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of vet support (none, experienced neighbor, trained technician, veterinarian) (2.5) • Accessibility to professional vet (not available; emergencies only; easy access) (2.5) • Availability of vaccines and medicines to prevent/treat major diseases (2.5) • Number of villagers volunteering for expert training on animal care (2.5) • Record-keeping of vaccination and other medications (2.5) |
| 2.4. Family with adequate knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices regarding animal care (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper feeding (2.5) • Recognizing/handling common diseases (2) • Appropriate utilization of vet support (use of community/ regional/ professional expert) (2) • Appropriate breeding (strategies, practices, records) (2) • Required vaccinations and other health preventive measures (2) • Animal containment/management (2) |
| Value 3: Environment Care and Management (50) | |
| 3.1. Appropriate land management (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land designated for specific uses (wood, watershed, fruit trees, crops, etc.) (5) • No use of chemicals on crops (7.5) • Reforestation activities (7.5) • Watershed preservation/conservation (5) |

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| 3.2. Appropriate waste management (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling (5) • Composting/organic fertilizer (5) • Biogas (5) • Clean public areas (5) • Clean household areas (5) |
| Value 4: Education for a just and sustainable world (50) | |
| 4.1. Adequate and equal access to basic education (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys and girls receiving equal levels and quality of education (7.5) • More children attending school (7.5) • More children staying in school longer (10) |
| 4.2. Quality and responsive to needs training (25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal participation by men and women in training activities (e.g., leadership, social justice, government) (7.5) • Training (presentations and materials) available in a commonly understood language and with clear practical applications to the specific contexts (5) • Development of specialists in relevant areas such as animal care, mechanical maintenance, horticulture, reforestation, accounting, management, and computer services (7.5) • Strategies in place to increase awareness and access to relevant subsidies and support (e.g., aid to education, school building funding, fence subsidies) made available by different agencies (government, nonprofits, and private sector) (5) |
| 5. Empowerment of Family & Community (50) | |
| 5.1. Full participation (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In nomination and election of leaders (5) • In selection of project recipients (passing on the gift, micro-credit) (5) • Of youth in community activities (2.5) |
| 5.2. Gender Equity and Children's rights (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In household work/ownership (animals, kitchen garden, etc.) (2+2.5) • In community/youth group leadership (4) • In family decision-making (4) |
| 5.3. Solidarity (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing-on what is received (2.5) More/better animals (2.5) • High proportion of retention of members (2.5) • Working on community projects (2.5) • Helping others (2.5) |
| 5.4. Self-reliance (12.5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up independent businesses (co-ops, handicrafts) (5) • Establishing outside commercial relationships (finding markets for goods) (2.5) • Problem-solving/attention to conflict resolution re community issues (2.5) • Development of responsibility through household chores (chore ownership) (2.5) |
| Value 6: Systems & Policy Improvements (50) | |
| 6.1. Appropriate local community procedures/sets of rules (30) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems in place to ensure full participation (regular election of leaders, youth involvement, gender equity, etc.) (7.5) • If micro-credit system, then with suitable control (7.5) • Establishing accountability and transparency in group finances and decision-making (e.g., regular financial report—oral and written; contracts and agreements; dated records of decisions made)—coupled to strong monitoring practices (7.5) • Establishment of new community organizations (e.g., neighborhood associations, grassroots NGOs, etc.) (7.5) |
| 6.2. Impact on larger community, region, country, or internationally (20) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of Heifer frameworks, including transparency and accountability, by government and non-government agencies (15) • Reduction of oppression (5) |

Appendix C: Example of Graphic Representation of Village Performance on Heifer Six Values

