Sustainability Evaluation: A Checklist Approach

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1. Sustainability: Macro and micro perspectives
2. Sustainability Evaluation Checklist (SEC)
3. Preliminary feedback
Sustainable Development - The macro level history

• Precursor
  - 1972: UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, Sweden)

• Key events
  - 1983: World Commission on Environment and Development (led by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway) - Our Common Future (1987)
  - 1997: Special sessions of the General Assembly (in New York)
  - 2001: European Council meeting in Göteborg
  - 2002: Johannesburg Summit
  - 2005-2015: UN Millennium Goals
Sustainable Development - The macro level (2005)

Green = implemented, Green striped = federal strategies, Orange = under development, Purple = no strategy, Yellow = no information
Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need (WCED, 1987, p. 43).
Sustainable development - The macro level

- **Ecological interpretation**
  - Resilience (maintained dynamic capacity) of a system to adapt to changes and disturbance (Hardi, 2007)

- **Transition interpretation (aka SD)**
  - A process of social advance that accommodates current and future generation’s needs by successfully integrating social, economic, and environmental considerations (Meadowcroft, 2007)
  - A series of changes (Hardi, 2007)
  - A process of social advance

- **Economic interpretation**
  - Substitution within different capitals. Cost of replacement via substitution (shadow) prices (Hardi, 2007)
  - Strong versus weak sustainability

- **Governance (Meadowcroft, 2007)**
  - Long-term viability of a community, set of social institutions, or a social practice. An alternative to short-term, myopic, and wasteful behavior
  - A standard against which institutions are to be judged
  - An objective toward which societies should move
Program sustainability
- Meso and micro level

Strategic and development interpretations

- Sustainability is the improvement of human quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems (World Conservation Unit, 1991).
- Sustainability is the maintenance of long-term functioning, efficiency and accessibility of resources, services, infrastructures, income generation, and community cohesiveness (Hardi, 2007; CIDA, 2002).
- A development program is sustainable when it is able to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial and technical assistance from an external donor is terminated (USAID, 1988).
- Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable (OECD DAC, 1991).
During program implementation:
- Local or community ownership and capacity building, i.e., extraorganizational capacity building
- Focus on process oriented sustainability strategies

After initial external funding for a program ends:
- Program continuation, i.e., maintaining services thus continuing outcomes
- Continuation of benefits
- Maintenance of community capacity
- Institutionalization, routinization, standardization as part of organizational change
- Extension of outcomes

Program sustainability - Health program literature
Factors (health promotion literature)

- Commonly suggested:
  - Leadership competence
  - Effective collaboration and networks
  - Understanding the community
  - Demonstrating program results
  - Strategic funding
  - Staff involvement and integration
  - Program responsiveness

- Less frequently suggested:
  - Socioeconomic and political considerations
  - Environmental considerations
  - Program duration
  - Training and education
  - Administrative structures and linkages
  - Integration capacity
  - Interpersonal relations
  - Transparent communications
  - Technology
  - Risk taking
  - Alignment with consumers’ needs
Checklists and their development

- Tools to support practitioners in the design, implementation, and metaevaluation of evaluations

- Mnemotechnic devices: points to consider

- Types (Scriven, 2005):
  - Laundry lists
  - Strongly or weakly sequential lists
  - Iterative lists
  - Diagnostic lists
  - COM lists

- Development requires (Stufflebeam, 2000):
  - Focusing the task
  - Gathering all relevant information
  - Categorizing, classifying, verifying, fieldtesting, and evaluating the information compiled
The sustainability evaluation checklist (SEC)

Prospective Evaluation FOR Sustainability:
Emphasis on context, input, processes, outputs en route

Retrospective Evaluation of Sustainment
Emphasis on outcomes/impact beyond the immediate reach and life cycle
• **Intended uses:**
  - Planning and implementation of sustainability evaluations of social change evaluands (program and projects, maybe policies) and parts thereof (e.g., outcomes or processes)

• **Intended users:**
  - Practitioners, funders, policy makers

• **Characteristics:**
  - General considerations
  - Identification of criteria
  - Prospective and retrospective approaches
SEC: General considerations

• About the EVALUAND
  - Definition of the evaluand
  - Scope/space/reach
  - Identification of key stakeholders and impactees
  - The evaluands nature and context
  - Resource availability and use

• About the EVALUATION:
  - Purpose of the evaluation
  - Direction (drivers) of the evaluation
  - Role of the evaluator
  - Audiences
  - Time point within the evaluand’s life cycle
  - Type of the evaluation
  - Key questions
  - Maximization of the evaluations cost-effectiveness
Identification of values/criteria

1. Criteria of significance

- Needs for human, social, economic, and environmental sustainability
- Interactions between merit and worth
- Spectrum (scope and scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detriment-Benefit Matrix (adapted from Davidson, 2005)</th>
<th>How detrimental would it be overall if the evaluand did very poorly on this dimension of sustainability?</th>
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<td>Not noticeably detrimental</td>
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<tr>
<td>How beneficial would it be overall if the evaluand did very well on this dimension of sustainability?</td>
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<td>Very beneficial</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Extremely beneficial</td>
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</table>
Identification of values/criteria

2. Criteria of merit

- Process-oriented criteria, e.g.,
  - M&E results
  - Leadership competence
  - Collaboration
  - In its context
  - Program responsiveness

- Outcome-oriented criteria, e.g.,
  - Capacity for sustainability (prospective)
  - Elements that have been sustained to date (retrospective)
Identification of values/criteria

3. Criteria of worth

- Focus on costs and resources:
  - **Time**: during and after initial funding, future needs
  - **People**: stakeholders and impactees
  - **Facets of costs**: actual costs to individuals, to a society, to the global community, opportunity costs
  - **Types of costs**
  - **Risks**

- Consider
  - Costs of sustainable development might be higher than costs for unsustainable development
  - Potential substitution
Preliminary feedback on the draft SEC

• Your Turn:
  - What is your understanding of a checklist? What features should a checklist have?
  - What is good about the checklist?
  - How can the sustainability checklist be improved?
  - What are the key issues and concerns?
  - Is something critical missing?
  - Should there be measurements or does the context dependency not allow for such? Is it better to provide guidance for developing indicators, weights, bars, and rubrics?
  - How do I best validate the checklist for my dissertation once it is finalized, if I do not have the opportunity to test it in the field in a timely manner?
  - What are your questions for me?
Specific questions: Please rate the checklist on the following criteria

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<th>Not at all</th>
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<th>2</th>
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