Lecturer: Colm Allan. Director Governance and Development Unit,
INTRODUCTION

This course provides you with an insight into key approaches to programme evaluation and offers an opportunity to engage with the practical application of programme evaluations in a development context.

Social programmes are organised efforts to address social problems, including the problem of how to bring about sustainable development. For this reason, it is not only important to be able to hold programme implementers to account for their performance in solving social problems, but policy makers, funders, planners, taxpayers and programme beneficiaries all have an interest in being able to distinguish between effective and ineffective development programmes. Programme evaluation is about the use of social research methods to investigate the effectiveness of social programme interventions. It includes the ability to assess programme need, design, implementation, impact and efficiency.

The ability to undertake credible evaluations of development programmes is critical for purposes of being able to explain which programmes work, under which circumstances, and why. In 2016, development aid reached a new peak of USD 142.6 billion per year. Development programme evaluations play a critical role in holding donors and partner governments accountable for their performance in using these vast sums of development funding. But this requires rigorous and credible evaluations, which, in turn, requires, competent and credible programme evaluators. Demand for credible evaluation evidence is set to increase with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We start off in our first seminar by asking the question, ‘What is programme evaluation, and why is it relevant for development?’ We review the ‘paradigm wars’ within programme evaluation between competing claims that evaluation should be based on positivist versus naturalistic (hermeneutic) assumptions. And acquaint ourselves with key approaches to programme evaluation, including: experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation versus naturalistic (or qualitative) evaluation. We also review the norms and standards used by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Action Committee (DAC) Network on Development Evaluation and ask whether these constitute an adequate basis for assessing the impact of development programmes.

In our second seminar, we delve into key approaches in the positivist tradition in more detail. We review the approach to conducting evaluations based on experiments, the Randomised Control Trial (RCT) or Randomised Field Experiment approach. We ask whether RCTs really are the ‘gold standard’ for conducting development programme evaluations. We illustrate the RCT approach via its application to an early childhood development programme in Pakistan. And we explore the methodological and practical limitations of using RCTs to assess the impact of development programmes.

In our third seminar, we look at the naturalist tradition in more detail. Here we explore: fourth generation/constructivist evaluation; participatory/empowerment evaluation; and utilisation focused evaluation. And familiarise ourselves with the approach of Outcome Mapping as a way of undertaking participatory evaluations of development programmes. We assess the adequacy of this approach in explaining programme impact by reviewing a case study on the use of Outcome Mapping in strengthening a social accountability initiative in Tanzania.

In our fourth seminar, we turn to a critical realist approach to evaluation, called ‘realistic evaluation’. This approach seeks to overcome the theoretical and practical limitations of positivist and naturalistic approaches to evaluation. We illustrate the realist approach to evaluation by reviewing a case study involving the evaluation of a civil society social accountability programme in Tanzania.
In our final seminar we familiarise ourselves with the key concept of a ‘theory of change’, which is at the heart of realist evaluation, but also cuts across all approaches to programme evaluation. And, we look at the emergence of ‘contribution analysis’ as a way of avoiding assumptions of linear causality in attributing observed changes to programme interventions. And ask whether it provides a way of evaluating complex development programmes, where multiple interventions seek to improve development outcomes, like in the governance domain.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

This course will be conducted on the basis of a weekly seminar. Attendance at all meetings is compulsory. You will be required to prepare a discussion paper at each seminar. In addition, you will be required to submit two essays of a maximum of 5000 words in length. Clearly it is in your best interests prepare a discussion paper for each seminar and to make your choice of essay topic based on these seminar preparations. Seminar discussion papers should be around 1000 words in length and should be structured in the form of an argument in response to the seminar topic. Both the essays and discussion papers should be typed in a legible font and in 1.5 spacing.

You have been provided with a list of the preparatory readings for each seminar topic. It is incumbent on you to ensure that you obtain timeous access to these readings and that your read and reflect carefully on each of the core seminar readings in preparation for each seminar. These readings constitute the bare minimum necessary for beginning to develop an understanding and a perspective in relation to each topic. You are expected to go beyond these readings in developing your own perspective and for that reason a list of supplementary readings is also included on your outline for each seminar. In addition to this you are encouraged to consult the university library catalogues and on-line facilities for the purposes of complimenting this material.

**SEMINARS AND READING LIST**

**SEMINAR 1: PROGRAMME EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

What is programme evaluation and why is it relevant for development? Do OECD DAC norms and standards provide a compelling basis for evaluating the impact of development interventions?

**Prescribed Readings**


SEMINAR 2: RANDOMISED CONTROL TRIALS (RCTs)

Are RCTs the ‘gold standard’ for conducting development programme evaluations? What are the methodological and practical limitations of using RCTs to assess the impact of development programmes?

Prescribed Reading


Supplementary Readings


SEMINAR 3: NATURALISTIC (QUALITATIVE) EVALUATION

What is naturalistic evaluation and how does it differ from quasi-experimental evaluation? Does Outcome Mapping provide an effective way of undertaking participatory evaluations of development programmes and of evaluating their impact?

Prescribed Readings


Case Study


Supplementary Readings


**SEMINAR 4: REALISTIC EVALUATION**

What is the key focus of realistic evaluation? Does it provide a more credible explanation of programme impact than quasi-experimental and naturalistic evaluation? Does it help overcome the problem of attribution?

**Prescribed Reading**


**Case study**


**Supplementary readings**


SEMINAR 5: THEORIES OF CHANGE AND EVALUATION IN COMPLICATED AND COMPLEX SETTINGS

What is a theory of change and what criteria do you think a credible theory of change should meet? What role do you think the testing of programme theories or theories of change should play in programme evaluation? And how do we evaluate the contribution of interventions in complex developmental settings (where more than one intervention may have contributed to observed outcomes)?

Prescribed Reading


Supplementary readings


