Toolkit

Development Ethics Toolkit:

Project Evaluation Tool: Methodology

The Project Evaluation Team

Introduction

The Project Evaluation (PE) Tool assesses to what extent a program, project, or policy promoted ethical development by applying the Values of Worthwhile Development, as articulated by Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher in *The Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics*. The evaluation process proceeds through three sequential phases —the design phase, the implementation phase, and the outcomes phase— each designed to examine a different stage of the project cycle. Further, the seven Values of Worthwhile Development—Well-Being, Equity, Empowerment, Sustainability, Human Rights, Cultural Freedom, and Government Responsibility—serve as a foundation in evaluating the ethical implications of such programs, projects, and policies through each phase. At the end of each phase, users will be prompted to score their project, program, or policy from a scale of 0-100%, with 0% indicating a complete failure to promote efficient ethical development and a 100% indicating a complete success.

The purpose of this evaluation metric is twofold: to ensure consistency and transparency. First, it establishes a standardised scoring system that guarantees consistency across evaluations of multiple case studies, ensuring that every case study is judged by comparable criteria. Second, it makes the evaluative process itself transparent and replicable, enabling scorers, researchers, and external users of the Toolkit to understand how each grade was produced. The following write-up outlines the methodology behind this internal evaluation metric, describing the theories that inform it, the structure of the scoring system, and the reasoning guiding the methods of the PE tool.

Background

Traditional metrics of international development have relied on monetary indicators, such as GDP and income growth (Frediani, 2010; Sen, 1999; UNDP, 1990; OECD, 2013). However, since the 1980s, new schools of thought in developmental economics have emerged, highlighting the necessity of including non-monetary measurements. Amartya Sen presented the concept of poverty as the deprivation of multiple freedoms and capabilities (Sen, 1999). Similarly, Martha Nussbaum highlighted the need to consider the structural mechanisms that may be driving an individual or a nation's stunted prosperity, which may be due to non-economic institutions such as political and social structures (Nussbaum, 2009). Such scholars allowed for the rethinking of international development through a holistic approach rather than one simply focused on

maximising monetary growth. As a result, additional indicators of successful development were considered, such as health, education, and living standards, along with subjective values of human well-being and happiness (UNDP, 2025; Sen, 1999).

From such advancements in development theory, a new field of ethical development was born. The Routledge Handbook of Worthwhile Development by Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher highlights a specific framework of ethical development that emerged during this period. Drydyk and Keleher present a series of seven core values that define ethical development, outlining the essential goals that development should advance: well-being, equity, empowerment, sustainability, human rights, cultural freedom, and responsible government conduct (Drydyk & Keleher, 2019).

Evaluation Procedure

The PE tool is broken into three major phases of evaluation: the design, implementation, and outcomes phases. In Phase 1: Project Design, evaluators assess how ethically and thoughtfully the project was conceptualized. Drawing from questions provided in the tool, users identify key stakeholders, clarify intended outcomes, and determine whether the project's goals align with the relevant Values of Worthwhile Development. This phase emphasizes whether the project addresses genuine needs and integrates ethical considerations at the outset. At the end of the phase, evaluators assign a numerical score (0–100%) and classify the project as Poor, Developing, Good, or Superior, based on how well it satisfies the criteria outlined in the guiding questions

In Phase 2: Project Implementation, the tool evaluates how effectively the project was executed in practice. Users compare actual project outcomes to its intended goals and examine whether implementation respects ethical principles such as minimizing harm, protecting rights, and responding to community needs. Negative externalities are assessed for magnitude and significance, and evaluators determine whether these harms outweigh the project's benefits. As in Phase 1, users assign a percentage score and tier classification based on the project's demonstrated ethical performance during implementation

Phase 3: Project Outcomes focuses on the long-term effects and sustainability of the project. Evaluators determine whether the project created lasting institutional or behavioral change, whether outcomes are likely to persist without continuous external support, and whether the project is coherent with the local institutional, cultural, and economic context. Additionally, this phase assesses whether the project achieved legitimacy among stakeholders and policymakers. A phase score and tier classification are again assigned based on how well the

outcomes align with the ethical criteria established by the tool Finally, the user aggregates the percentage scores given in the previous stages of evaluation into a final score. During this phase, the user can weigh certain phases more depending on the goal of their project, program, or policy.

Throughout this process, users are encouraged to refer to a guideline which contains all seven Values of Worthwhile Development along with a set of questions to guide users in determining the goals of such values. This list is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Guiding Questions for Values of Worthwhile Development:

Well-being	Capability Expansion - Does the case study expand people's real freedoms and opportunities? - Are people able to do or be things they could not before? - Does the project target more than minimum survival and basic necessities? Multidimensionality - Does the case study address multiple areas of well-being (health, education, security, income) and consider the interconnectedness of these areas? - Does it consider the interconnectedness of people's needs? Avoidance of Harm - Does the intervention minimize harm or unintended negative effects? - Are risks properly considered and mitigated? Depth of Impact - Are improvements significant and lasting? - Does the project reach vulnerable groups or only those easiest to help?
Equity	Distribution of resources - Who benefits? Who does not? - Are there clear disparities in who receives support or resources? Structural Inequalities - Does the intervention reduce or reinforce pre-existing inequalities? - Does it challenge systemic barriers, or avoid addressing them?

	Reach
	   - Does the case study include the groups who are most affected as stakeholders of the project, policy, or program?
	   - Are benefits spread across relevant populations, especially marginalized ones?
	Depth
	   - Does the project address root causes or only symptoms of inequality?
	   - Does it meaningfully shift power and access?

Empowerment	Decision-Making Power
	   - Do community members participate in meaningful decision-making in the case study?
	   - Who has final authority (the community, government, donors, outside experts)?
	Participation and Voice
	   - Are communities consulted at multiple stages (design, implementation, evaluation)?
	   - Is stakeholder participation active and direct or symbolic?
	Protection of Autonomy
	   - Does the case study respect community needs/wants, privacy, and consent?
	   - Are people coerced and pressured into agreement with the case study's project, policy, or program?

Sustainability	Climate/Ecological Protection
	   - Does the project protect natural resources and ecosystems?
	   - Does it consider long-term environmental consequences?
	Mitigation of Environmental Degradation
	   - Are climate risks assessed and addressed?
	Risk Management
	   - Are environmental risks identified and managed responsibly?
	   - What safeguards are in place? Are there any?
	Long-Term Impact
	   - Does the project ensure environmental sustainability and resilience over time?
	   - Could benefits today cause harm tomorrow?

Human Rights	Rights Protections

	- Are basic rights respected? - Are marginalized groups protected from discrimination? **Freedom From Harm** - Could the case study expose stakeholders to variables that undermine human rights? - Are vulnerable groups safeguarded? **Adherence to Norms** - Does the case study follow international human rights standards?
Cultural Freedoms	**Protection of Identity** - Does the project respect different cultural practices, languages, and beliefs? - Does it strengthen or weaken the allowance of different cultural identities? **Avoidance of Cultural Imposition** - Does the case study's project, policy, or program avoid imposing outside values or norms? - Are communities pressured to change culturally? **Inclusion of Local Knowledge** - Are local traditions, norms, and beliefs incorporated/considered in the case study? **Involvement** - Are different cultural groups involved in the project's design and/or implementation? - Did the case study's project, policy, or program respect cultural norms?
Government Responsibility	**Transparency** - Is information about funding, decisions, and project design openly shared? - Are communities kept informed of the government's actions **Accountability** - Who is responsible if something goes wrong? Are they actually held accountable through legal structures? **Anti-Corruption** - Are financial flows clear and monitored? - Are there systems of checks and balances? - Are there democratic government systems? **Fairness in Case Study Implementation** - Do elites disproportionately capture benefits?

These questions allow for users to better understand each of the seven Values of Worthwhile Development, enabling them to accurately evaluate each phase of their project, program, or policy.

Evaluation Rationales

The tool's 3-phase structure was derived from internationally accepted practices from the United Nations, the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) criteria. Using the simulation provides a transparent, systematic, and credible approach for assessing project performance, while ensuring that results are evidence-based and grounded in a globally recognized framework.

The approach begins with a Design Phase, in which the project's Theory of Change (ToC) and results framework are developed or reconstructed. The World Bank emphasizes that an evaluation is linked to its underlying causal logic. The Theory of Change links inputs, activities, outputs, and intended outcomes with explicit assumptions and risks (IEG, 2012). The Evaluation simulation tool prompts evaluators to examine project goals, stakeholders, tangible steps toward change, and anticipated results. Furthermore, this phase parallels the relevance and coherence criteria of the OECD by asking whether the project's objectives respond to actual needs, fit within broader institutional priorities, and logically connect to expected outcomes (OECD, 2021).

The implementation phase evaluates the efficiency and procedural soundness with which the project carried out its intended activities. This corresponds to assessing and implementing quality through monitoring data, financial reports, and process assessments. The Evaluation simulation tool aligns well with World Bank and UN monitoring and evaluation guidance, which emphasize routine data collection and data quality assessments (IEG, 2012; UNPDF, 2025). At this stage, evaluators examine whether activities were completed as planned, whether resources were used efficiently, and whether any unexpected challenges or negative externalities came up.

The outcomes phase finally evaluates the extent to which the project achieved its intended results and whether those results are sustainable, equitable, and contextually appropriate. This phase aligns with the OECD effectiveness, impact, and sustainability criteria by examining whether the project produced meaningful improvements, reduced structural or social inequalities, and generated long-term institutional or behavioral change (OECD, 2021). The PE tool prompts evaluators to assess whether outcomes persisted beyond implementation, whether unintended harms emerged, and whether the project gained legitimacy among local institutions and communities. By doing so, the tool ensures that evaluators move beyond short-term outputs to assess lasting effects consistent with global evaluation standards.

Conclusion

Taken together, this evaluation methodology enables the Toolkit to assess development projects, programs, and policies from a holistic, bird's-eye view. By grounding the scoring method in Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher's Values of Worthwhile Development and operationalising those values through a transparent set of indicators, this approach aims to evaluate development beyond simple monetary, output-based assessments. Instead, it intends to examine the larger ethical implications of each case study, such as its contributions (or harm) to well-being, equity, empowerment, sustainability, human rights, cultural freedom, and responsible governance. This holistic evaluation procedure ensures that case studies are assessed in proportion to their intended and realised outcomes, with scores reflecting not only what development was achieved materially, but also how it shaped the capabilities, opportunities, and lived experiences of targeted individuals and communities.

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