ASSIGNMENT THREE

NAME: FREDRICK M. MATE

1. Why is choosing the right question important in Monitoring and Evaluation?

There are various reasons why it is important to choose the right question during monitoring and evaluation. Some of the reasons include the following;

a) To understand the outcomes of different parts of the project/program

By setting questions carefully it is possible to evaluate different parts of the project (Development Dimensions Africa, 2018). Development Dimensions Africa (2018) further reports that if after the program starts and an essential feature of monitoring is added as the project runs it is possible to see its effects separate from the other previous features of the program or project if you concentrate on monitoring it. In the same line it is possible to look at various possible outcomes of the program or project as a whole.

b) To clearly define the evaluation process

Setting the appropriate questions makes it possible to clearly define what it is the evaluator is trying to do (University of Kansas, 2019a). This is because what the evaluator decides to evaluate defines what they intend and hope to achieve. University of Kansas (2019a) notes that by selecting evaluation questions at the beginning of a program or project makes it clear what the evaluator is intending to change, and what they want their results to look like.

c) To determine on where changes need to be made.

In the course or running programs or projects it is important to always anticipate and be prepared to deal with and conduct changes because they definitely take place (Andrade, Albuquerque, & Tefilo, 2016). Andrade et al. (2016) further explains that changes are acceptable and usually they are beneficial. However, there is need to manage them in the right way to avoid negative results. Every change has an expectation that should be the nearest possible to the final result of the change. Carefully selecting questions and making them specific to the program objectives should inform the evaluator exactly where the program is performing well and where there are challenges with getting the intended outcomes (University of Kansas, 2019a).

d) To be aware of the unintended consequences.

Evaluators should care about unexpected events because they limit their ability to be aware and explain the outcomes of the programs they evaluate (Morell, 2005). When an evaluator finds

unusual responses to the questions they selected, it often implies that their program has had some outcomes that were unexpected (Development Dimensions Africa, 2018; University of Kansas, 2019a). In some instances, these outcomes are positive, for example in a heart-healthy exercise program it was found out that not only did people in the heart-healthy exercise program gain in fitness, but a majority of them reported changing their diet for the better and losing weight as well. In some other times the outcomes are negative, for example, obese children in a healthy eating program actually gained weight, even though they were eating a healthier diet. The unintended consequences could also be neither positive or negative. University of Kansas (2019a) explains that just like the side effect of medication, the unexpected outcomes of a program can be as crucial as the program itself. For example, in the case given above about the heart-healthy exercise program, changing diet might have been found to have similar outcomes or even better more than exercising in maintaining a healthy heart. In such a scenario the focus of the program may be changed in some way towards changing diet.

e) **To enhance stakeholder acceptance of the program.**

In evaluations that are participatory, stakeholders are involved in determining the course of the program, therefore improving the chances of the program meeting community needs (Development Dimensions Africa, 2018; University of Kansas, 2019a). Coming up with questions motivates stakeholders to reveal what they believe the evaluation should answer, that is, what questions the stakeholders feel are more crucial to them (University of Kansas, 2019b). When stakeholders are involved in defining the questions and collecting data, they are more likely to accept the conclusions of the evaluation and to respond on its recommendations. Credible evidence is the raw ingredient of a good evaluation (University of Kansas, 2019b). Encouraging stakeholder participation enhances perceived credibility. The stakeholders should be able to view the information gathered as being believable, trustworthy, and relevant to answer their question.

f) **It provides focus for the evaluation and the program.**

Focusing the evaluation design may include a lot of activities (University of Kansas, 2019b). For instance, those who support and those who are skeptical about the program could be consulted to make sure that the evaluation questions that are proposed are politically viable. Careful selection of evaluation questions enables the evaluator to concentrate by not carrying out many activities at once and end up with failed effectiveness at all of the activities (University of Kansas, 2019a).

g) To guide on future decisions.

In the course of evaluation, it may be found that the program was a success in certain ways and unsuccessful in others and thus, these findings may for example, assist in deciding whether to emphasize on the successful areas more or to completely change the approach taken on the areas that are unsuccessful (Development Dimensions Africa, 2018; University of Kansas, 2019a). In turn this leads to change the emphasis of future evaluation as well.

h) To determine better quality and quantity of data gathered for evaluation.

In quality it means the appropriateness and integrity of information collected during an evaluation while quantity refers to the amount of evidence collected during an evaluation (University of Kansas, 2019b). To make the actual collection of the right quality and quantity data a clear selection of evaluation questions is important. Cultural preferences amongst different people and organizations dictate some acceptable ways of asking questions and gathering information, including the evaluator who program stakeholders may perceive as appropriate to ask them questions. Therefore, the right choice of questions makes it possible to meet these requirements.

2. *Using Archival data has its own bottlenecks. Name five and explain how to overcome them.*

Archival data refers to information that is already contained or stored by others (University of Kansas, 2019c). the data is originally generated for reports or research purposes, and it is stored because of statutory requirements, for referring, or as internal records. In general, since this data is from already finished activities it is not subject to amendments and is sometimes referred to as fixed data. The following are some of the obstacles in using archival data;

a) Government data is one of the sources of archival data. This data include census data, information form ministries and state departments that include data on environmental, farming practices, statistics on poverty and on public health matters (Development Dimensions Africa, 2018). Others include data from justice and court systems, where civil and criminal cases and their rulings and records are made public, the police records that include arrests, disputes, reports on injuries etc. In addition, government data also include copies of studies that are publicly funded, information on finances and demographic information. Development

Dimensions Africa (2018) explains that the obstacle with this source of archival data is that in some instances the government and its affiliated departments are reluctant to release this information to the public for various reasons include confidentiality, security reasons and public interest. To deal with this these bottlenecks one may utilize the existing laws on freedom of information that compels government to release information to the public (Development Dimensions Africa, 2018).

b) Different research organizations like consultancies, think tanks, independent oversight organization among others provide reports on various studies that they conduct (University of Kansas, 2019c). This information is a useful source of archival data. However, some of these organizations do not conduct politically independent and neutral studies. They have their agendas which influence and lead to interpretation of their research findings based on these agendas that they support. This makes the data biased and may give the wrong impression if it is used. To circumvent this obstacle, it is crucial to be aware of the bias of any archival data that one uses if they want reliability with their data. Another way is by the fact that many organizations with a political bias also try as much as possible to make their studies as objective as possible and their data can be reliable.

c) In the academic institutions research on health, human services, social matters, education, the environment, and the sciences is carried out by universities and institutions linked with them (University of Kansas, 2019c). This information is shared on research and publication website and can be accessed. Hospitals and other health care providers are linked to universities and they carry out research on different health matters. They also gather demographic and other statistical data on their patients, as well as information on the epidemiology, geographical location, and magnitude of various medical conditions. The University of Kansas (2019c) explains that one of the obstacles of some of the studies carried out or administrative data collected by universities and health providers, is that they may have some controls on them due to their confidential nature. These may be overcome by the fact that these restrictions usually cover access to records of individuals and identification of study participants, and generally do not present a restriction on accessing aggregate findings of researches,

assessments, or surveys that have no identification of individuals (University of Kansas, 2019c).

d) One of the primary challenges linked with archival data is that researchers have difficulties testing causal inferences or relationships (Hageman, 2008). Hageman (2008) explains that researchers study the relationships between some variables and try to control for other different explanations that may have influenced the relationship. The researcher can analyze the trends of the data, however, it is difficult to find out whether that a particular factor leads to another. The internal validity of the data is weak because it is difficult for the researcher to perfectly control for all other possible reasons for an observed relationship between phenomena. According to Hageman (2008), to overcome this obstacle is by matching of observations on certain characteristics rather than random selection and random assignment. The researcher may also establish internal validity by examining the relationship between an event occurring naturally and another comparison event.

e) Archival data is difficult to rely on due to measurement error (Hageman, 2008). Hageman (2008) reports that measurement error of the variables is in large numbers when archival data sources are used and is one of the key bottlenecks in the use of archival data to test the relationship among variables. In archival data threats to construct validity is specifically more common. Poor construct validity results in measurement error from the following reasons that are related, one the data may be measured very poorly measured, or unavailability of the data that is required to operationalize a theoretical construct from the archival dataset (Hageman, 2008). These obstacles may be alleviated by the use of first differences, in which lagging data over a period of time is carried out. In addition, control of cross-correlation in the dataset may also address these challenges.

3. Why is research important component in monitoring and evaluation? Give and explain four.

Carrying out research before evaluation and analyzing the findings could be the most important things that will make the program effective (University of Kansas, 2019d). The following are some of the reasons why this is important.

a) Offer Information on previous similar programs

Many different organizations most likely will have approached the same issue or implemented a similar program before (Development Dimensions Africa, 2018; University of Kansas, 2019d). Among the programs completed by these organizations some might have been successful and others failed, however, there is probably something that was learned in the process that is useful to the process the program managers are intending to carry out. It is not necessarily a must to repeat mistakes that others did that can be learned from or try to invent ideas that were discovered by others before when this previous experience could form a model to develop from (University of Kansas, 2019d). The University of Kansas (2019d) further explains that it there is a chance that the same bad ideas that others had are the same ones that the evaluators are thinking about. This saves the program managers from a huge amount of trouble and possibly give a difference from creating a program that may perform well or one that fails miserably based on the past experiences from others.

b) For deeper understanding of the issues

The initial step in finding out how to deal with a problem is to understand what you are dealing with (University of Kansas, 2019d). The better understanding that is gained on the problem causes, how it happens, the way those who are affected by the problem react, the consequences of the issue to individuals and the community and who may influence the issues, the more increased chances of determining on how best to approach it. Knowing the past experiences in a variety of different circumstances and understanding the issues from various different angles gives new insights and ideas for the program. The more different ideas program managers learn from and the different ways that can be used to approach them, the higher chances of coming up with something new that is more effective than the previous approaches (University of Kansas, 2019d).

c) As a source of program tools

Tools are needed to create the best program one can (University of Kansas, 2019d). These tools needed to plan and implement a program or intervention include lots of information. The University of Kansas (2019d) further explains that the more it is known what works, how to make things work, how to introduce or get rid of some conditions the more increased chances of planning a successful program that takes care of all aspects of the issues without leaving anything to chance. Different kinds of professional and interpersonal skills may assist in implementing a program, however, if what is being implemented is not effective, then it does not matter how skillful it is carried out.

d) Assist to understand culture

Carrying out research prior to program implementation can assist one to be culturally sensitive (University of Kansas, 2019d). It does not only assist one to learn more about the culture(s) of the communities they are working with, but it is possible to find out a number of approaches that previously have worked with the cultural group that is to benefit from the program. Equally, not all solutions are likely to fit all communities. According to the University of Kansas (2019d), the more information that is gathered with research the greater the variety of approaches, methods, and frameworks that one will have to select from. Having the right combination assists one to successfully take care of the specific needs of the community and population.

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