Using Transformative Evaluation in Impact Investing

A case study with Engineers Without Borders Canada and M-Shule

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Canada

AUTHORS

Lucy A. Wakiaga was an Independent Evaluator/ Consultant with Engineers Without Borders Canada during this project. She is a research associate and senior lecturer, with over 20 years of experience in the field of education. Her areas of specialization include program evaluation, qualitative research, school leadership, and teacher training.

Courtney Bolinson is an independent evaluation consultant specializing in impact investment, systems evaluation, and transformative evaluation. She was the Impact Evaluation & Learning Manager at Engineers Without Borders Canada during this project.

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Summary:
Transformative evaluation (TE) emphasizes engaging stakeholders early, often, and in a culturally-appropriate way in order to achieve social justice. This case study demonstrates how TE was used effectively to gauge the status of social startup M-Shule and demonstrate their customers' outcomes. In addition, TE methods enabled M-Shule to deepen their understanding of customer experience and satisfaction levels, as well as strengthen their relationships with customers.

> *Startups don't have good ways to prove impact from an early stage. Especially in a funding environment where as a business you are trying to make money. Even though you care about whether your business product can truly change people's lives, you might not know if it will truly do this for another 10 years. The [impact investing] community is now looking beyond the number of people reached, which is good. But it's a tough time because we don't have a good valid tool that shows if you are on-track to demonstrate impact. Having a tool like transformative evaluation that can actually show this is huge.*
>
> **Claire Mongeau, M-Shule co-founder and CEO**

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

There is a broad spectrum of work that currently fits under the title of "impact investment." Tying these together are the social entrepreneurs, impact investors, accelerators, and other intermediaries who share the desire to make the world a better place through social business. However, to actually achieve this aspiration, we must find a way to effectively measure and understand the extent of social outcomes that result from impact investments.

To address this, Engineers Without Borders Canada (EWB) explored a way to conduct social impact measurement (also called *evaluation*) with social startups and impact investors that is more attainable, appropriate, and usable. This approach used *Transformative Evaluation* (TE) methods[1]. TE is a decades-old approach to impact measurement that emphasizes engaging program participants (beneficiaries) early, often, and in a culturally-appropriate way in order to achieve social justice.

We felt that using TE in impact investing would lead to better decision making and increased social and financial return on investment precisely because of the way stakeholders are engaged. As such, we began to explore how TE could provide proven strategies, tools, methods, and principles to both entrepreneurs and investors for engaging beneficiaries in effective, culturally-responsive, and inclusive ways, and what effect(s) this type of engagement might have.

In this case study we provide an example of how we conducted a TE with M-Shule, an education startup in Kenya. This was EWB's first full TE and should be seen as an example rather than a template. There are boxes throughout this document that share tips, lessons learned, and very specific examples of what TE can look like at different stages of the process.

As a pilot project, EWB focused on an area of impact investing that we know well – impact-first, seed-stage social startups. This case study exemplifies a version of TE that worked well in our context. While we feel elements of TE could be applied at any level of the impact investing system, this case study may not be relevant for all stakeholders. We encourage readers to view our complementary publication, "A Transformative Evaluation Toolkit for the Impact Investing Sector" (2019) for broader examples of how TE might be utilized by a more diverse group of investors and entrepreneurs.

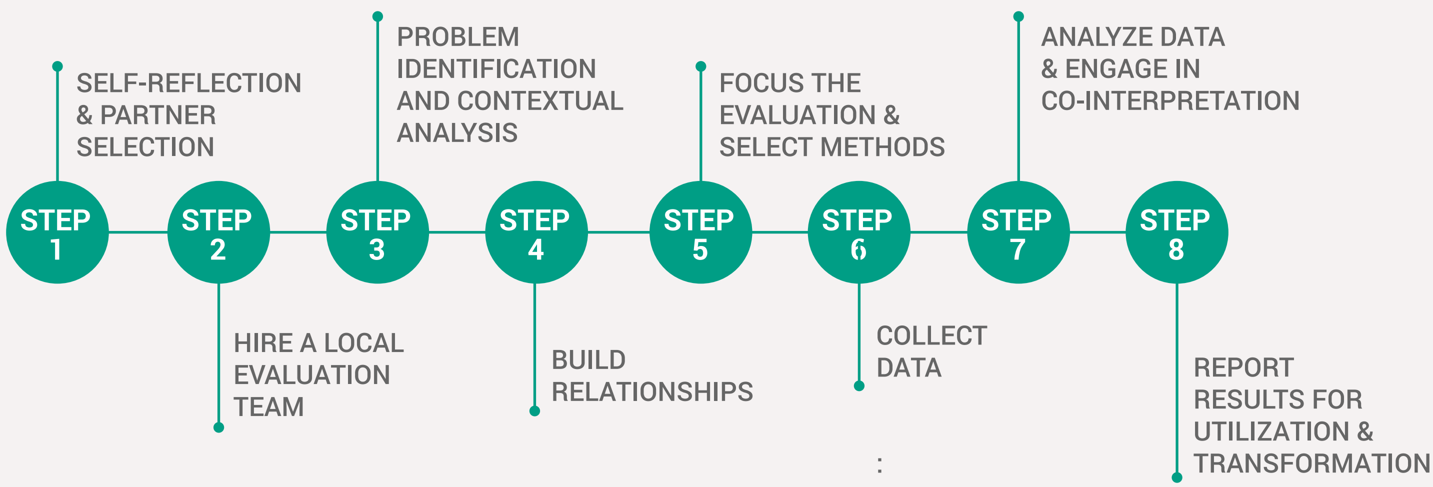
BACKGROUND

EWB deploys investment capital, talent and mentorship to support founding-stage social enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2017, social enterprise M-Shule received a seed investment from EWB. M-Shule is an adaptive, mobile education platform that uses short message service (SMS) to deliver personalized English and Math lessons to students in upper primary school in Nairobi, Kenya and beyond. M-Shule also provides data insights to schools and families regarding individual student performance.

Both M-Shule and EWB are challenged to demonstrate the social impact of the investment in M-Shule. While later-stage businesses tend to have large quantities of longitudinal customer data, seed-stage businesses are constrained in this regard. This creates a significant challenge for evaluation at the seed-stage.

EWB hypothesized that using transformative and Made in Africa[2] evaluation to assess the cultural responsiveness and business performance of seed stage social enterprises could enable those businesses to effectively show both their early outcomes and potential for later impact, as well as support data-driven operational and strategic decisions to improve their offering to their target clients and communities.

With support from the 2018 ANDE Catalyst Fund for Impact Measurement, Global Affairs Canada, and the generous donors of EWB, we carried out a transformative evaluation of M-Shule between June 2018 and June 2019. This case study is written to be actionable – it is detailed so you know what we did, how we did it, and what we learned so you can try it too.



STEP 1
SELF-REFLECTION & PARTNER SELECTION

Before diving into a TE, you need to make sure that everyone involved is prepared. There are 6 criteria we deemed necessary for a successful TE: access to ultimate beneficiaries, access to other key stakeholders, capacity for the project, openness to evaluation results, desire to understand impact, and key personality traits of the implementing team. See Figure 1 for a TE readiness rubric we created to score ourselves and our implementing partner (M-Shule). The rubric includes a detailed description of what the criteria would look like at a score of 3 (excellent), 2 (good), 1 (satisfactory), or 0 (poor). We suggest that at a minimum, everyone on the implementing team (e.g., investee, investor, evaluator(s)) should score a 1 for relevant[3] categories. Ideally, the social enterprise being evaluated would score 11 – 18. The rubric is tailored to scoring the social enterprise, but can be used for self-reflection by others as well.

Since TE was unfamiliar to M-Shule, the evaluation team spent time up-front describing the principles of TE, the typical activities, the expected workload for M-Shule, and an estimated timeline. This was a critical part of building a foundation for the evaluation. To help ensure shared expectations for the TE, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was drawn up between M-Shule and EWB stating the expected timeline for the evaluation, the duties and responsibilities of each party, communication expectations, confidentiality, ownership of work/materials/data, and a termination agreement. We suggest that potential users of TE create similar documentation and take the time to confirm shared expectations.

Figure 1: TE READINESS RUBRIC

	EXCELLENT (3)	GOOD (2)	SATISFACTORY (1)	POOR (0)
Access to ultimate beneficiaries	Very good relationship with a large and diverse group of beneficiaries, including marginalized individuals; Already engage directly with beneficiaries on a frequent basis; able to easily identify key opportunities to meet with/work with beneficiaries (e.g. community meetings) and help build coalitions and relationships.	Good relationship with many beneficiaries with some diversity who they engage with directly; aware of additional relevant beneficiaries they have yet to engage with, but very interested in building a relationship with such group(s).	Acquaintance relationship with some beneficiaries and a willingness to engage new beneficiaries as needed.	No relationship with ultimate beneficiaries.
Access to key stakeholders	Connected to a large and diverse group of key stakeholders such as government, local civil society, ultimate beneficiaries, intermediate beneficiaries, other local actors in their business sector; able to easily connect team to key stakeholders; can easily identify key opportunities to work with/meet with stakeholders (e.g. local events) and help build coalitions and relationships.	Strong awareness of who the key stakeholders are; Connected to a few key stakeholders who could potentially connect team to a larger group; Can identify potential opportunities to meet with stakeholders.	Awareness of key stakeholders, but few connections.	Few connections to stakeholders, and only a vague awareness of who the key actors might be.
Capacity	Have the necessary time and expertise to identify and connect team to key stakeholders and beneficiaries, input into the evaluation questions, provide feedback on the appropriateness of data collection methods, and provide feedback on analysis; Always respond in a timely manner to requests (e.g. to email requests, surveys, quarterly reporting).	Have the necessary time and expertise to identify and connect team to key stakeholders and beneficiaries, input into the evaluation questions, provide feedback on the appropriateness of data collection methods, and provide feedback on analysis; Typically respond in a timely manner (e.g. to email requests, surveys, quarterly reporting).	Don't currently have the time or expertise, but would be able to reprioritize to make time for participating in the transformative evaluation; not immediately responsive to requests, but will respond after a reminder email.	Don't have the time and expertise, and won't be able to make time. Require significant prodding to get a response to requests.
Openness to evaluation results	Demonstrated learning organization - they have made changes to their business model and/or practices based on stakeholder feedback; self-reflective; Demonstrated ability to respond well to feedback.	Currently collecting data from stakeholders, but yet to make any significant changes based on feedback; It is expected that they would make changes once they receive significant feedback.	Stated willingness to make changes to their business model and/ or practices, but have not demonstrated this; self-reflective.	Demonstrated no interest in making changes to business model and/or practices based on stakeholder feedback.
Desire to understand impact	Already conduct their own M&E and devote resources to it.	Stated desire to conduct M&E and/or actively seeking support to begin conducting M&E.	Willingness to conduct M&E, but not actively seeking/prioritizing it.	Not interested in M&E.
Key personality traits	All of: honest, respectful, humble, flexible, good at communication.	Some of: honest, respectful, humble, flexible, good at communication.	One of: honest, respectful, humble, flexible, good at communication.	None of: honest, respectful, humble, flexible, good at communication.
				TOTAL SCORE

Additional notes and things to consider (to be filled out by scorecard user):

STEP 2:
HIRE A LOCAL EVALUATION TEAM

Since TE focuses on culturally-appropriate evaluation methods, it is important to have a local evaluation team. In our TE, evaluators were hired to support with the design, implementation, analysis and reporting of the evaluation. All three evaluators were Kenyan and had varying degrees of experience with the evaluation stakeholder populations. Their local understanding and experiences contributed to a culturally relevant and contextually appropriate evaluation. For example, the evaluators were familiar with appropriate participation incentives, commonly referred to in the evaluation population as "bus fare." The evaluators also had direct experience working in disadvantaged communities similar to the M-Shule evaluation population, and so were able to interpret results in nuanced ways that an outsider would have been challenged to do.

TIP

Reach out and post job/contract descriptions through regional evaluation networks to find local talent. Also, for a TE, it is best to hire evaluators with experience in culturally-responsive, equity-focused, participatory, transformative, or regionally-specific/indigenous evaluation. In particular, look for a demonstrated ability to build relationships with beneficiary communities, and experience with facilitation and qualitative methods.

STEP 3:
PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION & CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

A contextual analysis involves identifying power dynamics, cultural context, historical factors, and systemic oppression. This should be done at the start of a TE to set the stage for the rest of the evaluation design. In our TE, we began with an in-depth contextual analysis to build an understanding of the social, political and economic context in which M-Shule operates. This included a general profile of Kenya and Nairobi, and an investigation in Kenyan education policy, primary school education data, general trends in digital technology, and education sector stakeholder identification. The contextual analysis also involved an initial meeting with M-Shule to get a background of the M-Shule product and its business model. This was an important foundational step that helped the evaluation team determine which stakeholders to engage, how to build relationships, and how to design the evaluation in a way that was appropriate given the local context.

TIP

Data may be difficult to access, depending on the context.
Useful sources that tend to be publicly available are national census results, local country/city/county development and strategic plans, national bureaus of statistics, and World Bank and UNDP databases. Remember to incorporate traditional knowledge, local news sources, and other local sources of data, as these are highly relevant for building cultural and contextual understanding.

STEP 4:
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

A common mechanism for including ultimate beneficiaries in a TE, especially those who are most marginalized, is establishing a Local Advisory Committee (LAC). LACs are made up of a representative group of beneficiaries or stakeholders who are included in the evaluation process from beginning to end in order to advise on evaluation decisions. Evaluators must be willing to listen and to adjust design, implementation, analysis, and data-use decisions based on feedback from the LAC.

In our TE, before recruiting LAC members, the head local evaluator worked with M-Shule to determine the localities that best represented M-Shule's targeted users. Together, they determined individuals in the schools that would best serve as initial points of contact, and reached out to them. The head local evaluator also made initial contact with the patron of the school association of which most of the schools in the locality were members. She then attended a school association function where she met the patron and secured a calendar of events. Later she got invitations for two of these events where she attended as an observer to get a feel of the culture and meet head teachers of the various schools. At these events she was able to secure appointments from the head teachers to visit their schools individually. As the evaluator met with each head teacher one-on-one she was able to secure contacts of possible members for the LAC.

Two LAC meetings were held during the course of the M-Shule TE, with slightly different participants in each. The first LAC meeting was conducted before the onset of the evaluation (before a methodological design was finalized and implementation started) and consisted of two head teachers, a school director, a parent, a parent/teacher, and a student. The diverse nature of the LAC membership was representative of the schools' stakeholders. Outcomes from the first LAC meeting are described in step 5.

TIP

Remain flexible when scheduling a LAC meeting. It can be difficult to find a time and location that works for a diverse group of stakeholders, especially if some participants have inflexible day jobs, are farmers, have domestic duties, travel restrictions, disabilities, etc. You may need to provide transportation money, child care, payments for participant time, refreshments, or other incentives to make it easier for individuals to join the LAC. You may also need to make culturally appropriate adjustments to accommodate the diversities present in the group, e.g., have separate groups for children and adults, for men and women, etc. Additionally, it is important to follow local customs for meeting facilitation, such as starting meetings with a prayer, if that is customary.

STEP 5:
FOCUS THE EVALUATION & SELECT METHODS

Based on the contextual analysis, the evaluation team drafted an evaluation plan to share during the first LAC meeting. The evaluation plan contained a description of the purpose of the evaluation, draft key evaluation questions, and an implementation plan. The proposed data collection involved focus group discussions and key informant interviews with students, parents, teachers, and head teachers at 5 schools in one neighborhood of Nairobi. The schools were selected to represent a diversity of student users of M-Shule (e.g., engagement levels with the platform, genders, and ages).

EWB received feedback from the LAC regarding the selection of schools and selection of participants for the evaluation. LAC members gave pointed suggestions regarding how best to recruit parent participants, the best time of day to conduct student focus groups, which subject teachers to include in the evaluation, how best to engage with some of the schools, stakeholders that should be included in the study as well as the best approaches for contacting them. During the first LAC meeting the group also reviewed the appropriateness of the questions that were to be used in the evaluation. The LAC members identified questions that needed to be simplified or articulated differently. They also provided feedback regarding how best to manage the informed consent process in a culturally-appropriate way and how to structure debriefing sessions after conducting focus groups. Feedback from all these discussions informed and shaped the methodological framework of the TE.

Key evaluation questions are high-level questions that guide an evaluation. Data collection instruments, such as focus group scripts or surveys, pose more specific questions that will collectively answer the high-level ones.

The final key evaluation questions and sub-questions were:

What characterizes the implementation of M-Shule?

- *How does actual implementation compare with intended implementation?*
- *Who is participating in using M-Shule?*
- *To what extent is M-Shule able to identify and include marginalized members of the target population?*
- *Who is not using M-Shule and why?*
- *What challenges have arisen in implementation?*

To what extent does M-Shule have value to the intended beneficiaries?

- *How accessible is M-Shule based on price?*
- *How satisfied are participants with what they gain from M-Shule?*
- *To what extent are participants getting what they want/need out of it?*
- *To what extent are participants achieving their own goals?*
- *What do users like about M-Shule? What do they feel is missing?*

How are the cultural norms and beliefs of the intended beneficiaries incorporated into M-Shule?

- *How are teachers, parents and students involved in the design and adaptations of M-Shule?*
- *How well does M-Shule fit in the social setting (education needs, learning styles, costs, cultural norms and beliefs)?*
- *How are power differences identified and addressed at all levels of M-Shule?*

What are the effects of using M-Shule?

- *What are the anticipated or unintended results (positive or negative)?*
- *In what ways is M-Shule transformational?*

TIP

It is critical to bring a draft evaluation plan to the LAC to review, rather than expect the LAC members to start from scratch. However, it's also important to recognize that LAC members may not have experience with evaluation design, so they must be appropriately brought into the design process in a way that builds their capacity to contribute. Finally, make sure to actually incorporate the feedback received from the LAC, and be transparent about what is and isn't being incorporated and why – this is part of building trust and reciprocity.

Typical implementation and impact evaluation questions	Transformative evaluation questions
What are the components of this product/business model?	How are stakeholders involved in the design and adaptations of the product/business model?
How is the relationship between the product/business model's components, outputs and outcomes most accurately explained?	What social problem is the product/business model trying to solve?
How is the product/business model being implemented and how does that compare to the initial plan for implementation?	How are power dynamics addressed throughout the product/business model (e.g., via the product itself, the marketing plan, etc.)?
To what extent is the product/business model serving intended participants?	How well does the product/business model fit in the social setting, including cultural norms and beliefs?
Is the product/business model achieving its objectives?	How accessible is the product/business model to marginalized members of the target population?
Which aspects of the product/business model have had an impact on the intended beneficiaries?	To what extent are participants achieving their own goals?
What would have occurred if the program had not been implemented?	What barriers need to be overcome to ensure equity in terms of participation and impact? How are those barriers overcome?

Typical evaluation questions can be integrated with TE questions; they are not mutually exclusive. The main difference is that TE raises questions not typically asked in order to gain understandings about the inclusion and experience of members of marginalized communities.

The table uses questions from Chapter 8 in Mertens and Wilson Program Evaluation Theory and Practice (2012). Note: These are sample questions. Not all questions are relevant for all products/business models, nor is the list complete.

STEP 6:
COLLECT DATA

Data collection took place via focus groups (FGs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and short demographic surveys. These mostly qualitative data collection methods allowed for deeper understanding of user experience and were approved by the LAC. The data collection process involved regular interactions with the participants during pre-visits, data collection visits, and post-data collection calls.

THE NUMBERS

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- 14 FGs (parents, students, teachers, M-Shule staff)
- 22 KIIs (M-Shule co-founders, EWB evaluator, head teachers, school director, parents)
- 42 surveys (parents, students)

STAKEHOLDERS

- 33 students (20 girls, all were low-income)
- 17 teachers
- 5 head teachers/school directors
- 25 parents (all were low-income)
- 5 schools (all were informal schools catering to low-income students)
- 1 neighborhood in Nairobi (low-income)

EXAMPLE FG AND KII QUESTIONS:

- *How are your expectations being met?*
- *What do you feel you have to gain from using M-Shule?*
- *Did you give M-Shule any ideas about how it works? How have they responded to your ideas?*
- *Do you have classmates who don't use M-Shule? Why do you think they aren't using it?*
- *What role have you played in designing and implementing M-Shule? How do you rate your overall participation? How would you like to participate?*
- *Based on how you live, how students learn, everything around here in your community or in Kenya – what should be included in projects like M-Shule?*
- *Among your students, who do you describe as typically left out or treated badly? Why do you think this is the case? How do you see these individuals/ groups using M-Shule? Why are or aren't they using M-Shule, from your perspective?*

During data collection, informed consent of the participants was sought and data were recorded via audio recording and note taking. The primary languages used to conduct the FG sessions, KIIs and surveys were English and Kiswahili. Scripts and surveys were translated from English into Kiswahili beforehand by local evaluators and translators fluent in the Kiswahili language. Questions would be asked in English or Kiswahili depending on the preference of the FG or interviewee. During data collection, local evaluators further re-phrased the questions as needed in order to provide clarity for the participants. For example, questions would be simplified for students compared to adults. Examples of FG and KII questions that reflect a TE approach are provided in the side box on the previous page. Survey data were collected from students and parents regarding their family size, socio-economic status of parents, area of residence, and students' use of the M-Shule platform.

The survey data were used to provide contextual information regarding the participants and their localities. After the data were collected for each session, evaluators would follow up with a phone call to the participants to confirm any unclear responses.

TIP

There are many things to consider when preparing for data collection such as wearing culturally-appropriate attire, scheduling data collection to be as undisruptive as possible, and providing appropriate incentives (e.g., a drink and snack) provided in ways that do not to create new power dynamics (e.g., have student participants finish their snack before returning to class). In addition, depending on the security of the data collection sites, it may be best to take notes by hand and/or audio recorders, and leave the laptops at home.

STEP 7:
ANALYZE DATA & ENGAGE IN CO-INTERPRETATION

The qualitative data that were collected were coded and analyzed for emerging themes and sub-themes[4]. NVivo 12 (a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software) was used to aid the data management and analysis process. After analysis, the results were shared with the stakeholders in the second LAC meeting for their feedback regarding the findings as well as the fidelity of the TE process. The second meeting included the same members that were in the first, plus some additional stakeholders who had participated in the data collection process.

The second LAC was designed to be a data-sharing and co-interpretation session. This was a form of reciprocity and ensured evaluation participants had an opportunity to see the data, ask questions, and give their perspectives on the meanings of the results. As such, a sample of the evaluation participants were invited to join the second LAC meeting. The second LAC meeting included four head teachers, one teacher who was also a parent, two parents, two teachers, and six students.

One lesson learned from the first LAC meeting was that the students were unable to freely express themselves in the presence of adults. Therefore in the second LAC, the children were separated from the adults to enable them to engage more freely in the discussions. Thus they were able to provide more objective feedback without feeling intimidated by the adults.

TIP

Co-interpretation is critical because it provides an opportunity to check in with study participants and stakeholders and make sure results haven't been misunderstood. It also provides a touch point for stakeholders to reflect on their experience in the evaluation. Co-interpretation is also an opportunity to conduct meta-evaluation, to learn how well the evaluation was implemented from the perspective of participants. Data parties, focus groups, local/indigenous techniques, or other methods of data-sharing can be used to create this space.

STEP 8:
REPORT RESULTS FOR UTILIZATION & TRANSFORMATION

In this TE, three reports were produced:

M-shule report

This was a detailed report that summarized the design, data collection methods, findings and recommendations. It targeted the M-Shule team. A draft report was shared with M-Shule and a subsequent review meeting was held with EWB and the M-Shule team. During the review meeting, EWB presented the report and highlighted the major findings. This was followed by a discussion. Both parties, starting with M-Shule, provided their candid feedback on the contents, especially the findings and how best to use them to refine the product and give users value for money. How M-Shule would use the findings to forge stronger partnerships with the user community was also a major point of discussion. Following this dialog, comments and feedback from the review meeting were incorporated appropriately into a final report.

School association report

This was a two-page report that included a brief summary of the TE methodology, the evaluation findings and M-Shule's response and future plans. It targeted the school community, especially the directors, head teachers, teachers, students, and parents of the participating schools. An EWB evaluator went to each of the schools individually to hand over a copy of the school association report. The head teachers reviewed the findings of the report and also provided feedback, including their openness to future collaborations with M-Shule on their new product initiatives. EWB shared this feedback with M-Shule.

Case study

This document targets the impact investing community. It highlights the structure and process that were used by EWB to conduct a TE. The hope is that this case study can be used as a framework for other practitioners interested in conducting a TE with a social enterprise.

TIP

Make sure to provide a tailored version of the report back to the evaluation participants as part of reciprocity. Rather than sharing a full, detailed report, it might be more appropriate to share a tailored version that is aligned with the interests and desired use(s) by the participant community.

TIP

In addition to reviewing the report with the social enterprise, it is also a great opportunity to share the results with relevant impact investors as well. Even if the enterprise would like the specific details redacted, some of the high level findings and planned applications of the results can build a stronger relationship between investor and investee.

TAKEAWAYS

TE, and qualitative data collection, were a good fit for M-Shule

It is tough to demonstrate product value in a way that external funders or investors will understand or respect. This is especially true in a sector like education, where impact is generally demonstrated by extremely long-term metrics like increased exam scores, graduation, and future job prospects. M-Shule is in a business stage where they can't demonstrate most of those results because data aren't available or they don't have the resources or tools to collect them. TE offered a respected way to conduct an evaluation such that M-Shule could understand what is most important at their startup stage: whether stakeholders feel like the product is helping them.

Sharing M-Shule's response to feedback felt important

A major difference with TE was the sharing of results back with the communities, including their interpretations and M-Shule's feedback. In the past, M-Shule has incorporated user feedback into their product design, but they hadn't explicitly told their customers about this. M-Shule appreciated the opportunity to respond to customers and share how they planned to utilize their feedback.

Increased participation of M-Shule was valuable

- The TE emphasized participation from both M-Shule and M-Shule's beneficiaries – both stakeholders who often are less involved in evaluation processes. With regard to M-Shule's participation, two successes stood out
- M-Shule felt the summative meeting with the evaluation team to review the draft final report and discuss the results and their meaning for M-Shule made the evaluation more effective than usual. This meeting created designated space for M-Shule staff to engage with the evaluation results and consider how to apply them.
- This was also the first time M-Shule staff members from outside of their internal evaluation team were involved in an evaluation. It allowed more M-Shule staff members to understand and appreciate how evaluation works, engage with the data, and use the results for data-driven decision-making.

Participatory methods with M-Shule's beneficiaries were valuable

The co-interpretation of results during the second LAC provided new insight for M-Shule. The startup hadn't done co-interpretation of results before and they provided a different kind of information that was more specific and robust. For M-Shule, it was valuable to hear the voices of every stakeholder group and get their feedback. In addition, the delivery of school reports and sharing back of evaluation results were key aspects of the TE and were highly successful. For the evaluation participants, getting the final reports delivered back to them was transformative as these are individuals who need the data the most and often don't get it. The TE process ensured the data were put back into the hands of the stakeholders who had provided it in the first place.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This was a pilot project and our first full TE. We gladly ran into hurdles along the way as we charted the course and learned how to do TE effectively. Based on our lessons learned, here are some of the challenges we faced and how we would go about it differently next time.

Challenge: Accessing stakeholders and recruiting individuals to the LAC.
Recommendation: Determine beforehand who the gatekeepers of the community are and how best to access them early enough. Look for relevant groups (e.g., the local school association) that might facilitate access to a wider pool of potential participants.

Challenge: Scheduling fieldwork.
Recommendation: Begin planning fieldwork early, especially if participants have structured schedules (e.g., school calendars). Flexibility on the part of the data collection team is critical.

Challenge: Power dynamics.
Recommendation: Power dynamics are everywhere – within the stakeholder community, between students and teachers, between teachers and parents, between the social enterprise and their customers, between the evaluation team and evaluation participants, between investors and investees, and between Westerners and non-Westerners, to name a few. It is important to identify these dynamics early-on and make process adjustments to minimize any potential harm.

Challenge: Trust and reciprocity.
Recommendation: There are many ways to go about this. As already mentioned, recruiting a LAC and involving them throughout the evaluation process is a primary way to develop trust and build an explicit plan for reciprocity. Other actions include respecting cultural norms, conducting an evaluation by accessing gatekeepers first, and providing appropriate incentives. You should also communicate evaluation elements clearly and often, such as the evaluation purpose, confidentiality and consent protocols, data ownership, and methodology. The evaluation team can also build trust by making themselves available to answer any and all questions, and explicitly discuss how the evaluation team will give back to the evaluation participants (in our case, it was through the second LAC discussion and hand-delivered summary reports).

CONCLUSION

We hypothesized that TE would be more attainable/accessible for startups and lead to better decision making and higher social and financial returns on investment. It is too early to demonstrate the latter, but this case study did provide evidence of greater accessibility and better decision-making. Initial self-reflection and contextual analysis (steps 1 & 3), guiding questions that focused on social justice, inclusion and equity (step 5), the engagement of local advisory committees throughout (step 4), and a facilitated meeting focused on data utilization (step 8) all particularly contributed to higher-quality, more complete, and highly-usable data for M-Shule. The About This Case Study section at the beginning of the document provides additional evidence of the value investors find in the TE approach.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE TRANSFORMATIVE EVALUATION

- **Quality of business implementation**
- **Population being served**
- **Potential areas for business expansion**
- **Potential areas for product development**
- **User experience**
- **Accessibility of the platform**
- **Benefits to users from using M-Shule**
- **Fit with localized cultures/contexts**
- **Value for money**
- **Unintended results**

We welcome thoughts, feedback, questions and other examples from our colleagues in the sector. A full report on our research into transformative evaluation, as well as a practitioner toolkit, are available on EWB's website.

There is a spectrum of what transformative evaluation can look like in impact investing. This case study is an example of a full transformative evaluation developed and executed in part by an external evaluation team. This cost around USD $15,000, with about 2/3 of that going toward external evaluation personnel. We estimate that a similar transformative evaluation with a fully-local independent evaluation team would cost around USD $11,000. We recognize that this may be prohibitive for a startup if they do not have designated funding from an investor, grantor, etc. That being said, the data collection process (focus groups, interviews, surveys) only cost around USD $800, therefore it might be possible for **an effective version of transformative evaluation to be implemented for under USD $1,000**. The investment in evaluation is justified by the improvement that is possible through the use of a TE approach.

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CONTACT

Engineers Without Borders Canada
info@ewb.ca
+1 416-481-3696
www.ewb.ca

For research questions:
Courtney Bolinson
Principal Investigator
M-Shule Transformative Evaluation Project
courtneybolinson@ewb.ca
www.courtneybolinson.com

TE PRINCIPLES[5]

This case study was anchored on the principles of TE, which are outlined in the table below:

PRINCIPLES OF TRANSFORMATIVE EVALUATION

PRINCIPLE	SUMMARY	HOW WE APPLIED IT
1. Incorporation of the intent to advocate for an improvement in human rights and social justice through addressing issues of power and establishing respectful relationships.	The importance of understanding that the current socio-economic status, societal structures and political institutions discriminate against some groups and benefit other groups. Evaluation methods are structured to address power differences. Examples of these systems are racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism.	Addressed issues of power by hosting separate focus groups for teachers, students, and parents. Established respectful relationships by going through the school association (a gatekeeper), spending time with stakeholders before recruiting them to the study, and using a local advisory committee.
2. Reciprocity, or designing the evaluation to enhance benefits for the community.	Evaluations need to be structured to support transformative action; strategies to support this include inviting stakeholders to participate throughout the evaluation (e.g., help identify the problem and relevant contextual factors) and interpretation of results with a focus on transformative action. This includes setting goals to benefit the community.	Incorporated feedback from the local advisory committee into the final evaluation design. Co-interpreted the results in the second local advisory committee meeting. Provided a summary report with M-Shule's responses and next steps to each participating school.
3. The evaluation methodologies are responsive to and supportive of communities that may be marginalized, underrepresented or vulnerable.	The evaluation methods are selected based on relevant intersectional perspectives and needs from marginalized communities such as women, LGBTQ, low-income families, children, people with disabilities, etc. Mixed methods are generally recommended.	Focus groups and interviews were selected based on feedback from the local advisory committee. Parents were given a small financial incentive to participate, based on feedback from the local advisory committee.
4. The evaluation contributes to increased social, economic and environmental justice.	The evaluation contributes to the identification of economic development strategies that incorporate both social and environmental justice. For instance, economic development projects consider the impact on the environment and social justice in the form of who causes pollution and who suffers from pollution.	The evaluation team facilitated a utilization-focused discussion with M-Shule after the evaluation ended. This conversation helped M-Shule understand the evaluation results and consider how they might improve their product so that it contributes to increased social and economic justice. For example, how to provide a more accessible product to the most marginalized members of the school communities.
5. The evaluation should promote cultural respect.	The evaluation understands, respects and takes into account the values and beliefs of the communities, such as language, social group, institutions, etc. It should be designed to challenge norms and beliefs that sustain an oppressive status quo.	It is common for students, especially primary school students, to be left out of evaluations in Kenya. We intentionally included this stakeholder group in the evaluation and helped them feel comfortable participating by using a mix of English and Kiswahili, providing culturally appropriate snacks, and asking probing questions to get them talking. The focus groups, interviews and survey were offered in a mix of English and Kiswahili. Local advisory committee meetings were opened with a prayer.

6. Evaluation engages stakeholders in dialogue and encourages a democratic role for participants.	Stakeholder contribution, participation and relationship building are encouraged and highly valued.	A local advisory committee was engaged throughout the evaluation, and their feedback was incorporated into the evaluation design and analysis.
7. Literature review includes discussions of diversity. Problem identification and contextual analysis should go beyond literature review to engage with stakeholders in respectful ways.	The literature review includes a diversity of sources. The literature should be rich and have a variety of approaches. For instance, the use of Western and non-Western authors, as well as articles from developing and developed countries. Personal interactions are also sources of knowledge that are valued.	The contextual analysis included data from Kenyan sources, Made in Africa evaluation literature, and transformative evaluation literature. The problem was defined and characterized through a Kenyan lens.
8. Evaluation includes a contextual analysis and needs assessment.	The contextual analysis and needs assessment actively identify and characterize power dynamics, diversity, cultural context, history and systems of oppression.	The contextual analysis included a characterization of the social justice problem being addressed by M-Shule, the history of education in Kenya, a characterization of vulnerable and marginalized populations in Kenya, and a discussion of the implications of these topics for the evaluation design.
9. Utilization of evaluation results.	The results must be utilized for transformative purposes. For instance, for policy change, to refine an intervention and/or to improve and expand relationships.	The evaluation process, results interpretation, and report-back all involved M-Shule's stakeholders and enabled M-Shule to improve and expand on those relationships. Designated time was spent reviewing the evaluation results and discussing how the data might be utilized by M-Shule to refine their theory of change and business product.

1. For more information on transformative evaluation, visit transformativeresearchandevaluation.com. For a table showing how TE differs from other forms of evaluation and research, see "Framing Participatory Evaluation" (1998) by J. Bradley Cousins and Elizabeth Whitmore published in New Directions for Evaluation.

2. In addition to transformative evaluation principles, the M-Shule evaluation followed Made in Africa evaluation principles. This case study focuses on the transformative evaluation aspect of the project. To learn more about Made in Africa evaluation, please visit https://afrea.org/made-in-africa-evaluation/

3. Not all categories are relevant for all stakeholders (investors, evaluators, entrepreneurs). For example, it is not necessary that the evaluation team has prior relationships with ultimate beneficiaries. They would rely on the entrepreneur to facilitate that access. So evaluators do not need to score a minimum of 1 for the beneficiary access category.

4. For information and resources on qualitative data analysis techniques, please visit https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/rainbow_framework/describe/analyse_data

5. Table created by Dulce Maria Calderón Noguez, based on work by Dr. Donna M. Mertens. More information on the transformative paradigm can be found in Mertens' book, Transformative Research and Evaluation (2009) and Mertens and Wilson (2019) Program Evaluation.

Cover photo: M-Shule co-founders Claire Mongeau (left) and Julie Otieno (right)

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