Evaluation use within a humanitarian non-governmental organization’s health care user-fee exemption program in West Africa

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Résumé

L’évaluation de l’action humanitaire (ÉAH) est un outil valorisé pour soutenir l’imputabilité, la transparence et l’efficience de programmes humanitaires contribuant à diminuer les inéquités et à promouvoir la santé mondiale. L’ÉAH est incontournable pour les parties prenantes de programme, les bailleurs de fonds, décideurs et intervenants souhaitant intégrer les données probantes aux pratiques et à la prise de décisions. Cependant, l’utilisation de l’évaluation (UÉ) reste incertaine, l’ÉAH étant fréquemment menée, mais inutilisé. Aussi, les conditions influençant l’UÉ varient selon les contextes et leur présence et applicabilité au sein d’organisations non-gouvernementales (ONG) humanitaires restent peu documentées. Les évaluateurs, parties prenantes et décideurs en contexte humanitaire souhaitant assurer l’UÉ pérenne détiennent peu de repères puisque rares sont les études examinant l’UÉ et ses conditions à long terme.

La présente thèse tend à clarifier ces enjeux en documentant sur une période de deux ans l’UÉ et les conditions qui la déterminent, au sein d’une stratégie d’évaluation intégrée au programme d’exemption de paiement des soins de santé d’une ONG humanitaire. L’objectif de ce programme est de faciliter l’accès à la santé aux mères, aux enfants de moins de cinq ans et aux indigents de districts sanitaires au Niger et au Burkina Faso, régions du Sahel où des crises alimentaires et économiques ont engendré des taux élevés de malnutrition, de morbidité et de mortalité. Une première évaluation du programme d’exemption au Niger a mené au développement de la stratégie d’évaluation intégrée à ce même programme au Burkina Faso.

La thèse se compose de trois articles. Le premier1 présente une étude d’évaluabilité, étape préliminaire à la thèse et permettant de juger de sa faisabilité. Les résultats démontrent une logique cohérente et plausible de la stratégie d’évaluation, l’accessibilité de données et l’utilité d’étudier l’UÉ par l’ONG. Le second2 article documente l’UÉ des parties prenantes

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1 Cet article fut publié dans la revue *Evaluation and Program Planning* en 2013.
de la stratégie et comment celle-ci servit le programme d’exemption. L’utilisation des résultats fut instrumentale, conceptuelle et persuasive, alors que l’utilisation des processus ne fut qu’instrumentale et conceptuelle. Le troisième article documente les conditions qui, selon les parties prenantes, ont progressivement influencé l’UE. L’attitude des utilisateurs, les relations et communications interpersonnelles et l’habileté des évaluateurs à mener et à partager les connaissances adaptées aux besoins des utilisateurs furent les conditions clés liées à l’UE.

La thèse contribue à l’avancement des connaissances sur l’UE en milieu humanitaire et apporte des recommandations aux parties prenantes de l’ONG.

**Mots-clés :** Évaluation de programme, utilisation de l’évaluation, transfert de connaissance, organisation non-gouvernementale (ONG), humanitaire, Burkina Faso (Afrique de l’Ouest), exemption de paiement des soins, équité d’accès aux soins, santé mondiale.
Abstract

Evaluation of humanitarian action (EHA) is increasingly deployed as a means to enhance accountability, transparency, and efficiency of humanitarian programs aimed at reducing health inequities and promoting global health. EHA has become a vital tool for program stakeholders, funding agencies, and policy-makers seeking to render practice and decision-making more evidence-based. However, considerable uncertainty remains about evaluation use (EU), as EHA is frequently conducted without being used. Moreover, conditions that influence EU vary across contexts and their applicability in humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remains unclear. Program evaluators, stakeholders, and policy-makers in humanitarian contexts have little guidance to support long-term EU, given that few studies have documented EU and its conditions over time.

The aim of the present qualitative thesis is to shed light on these issues by documenting EU and the conditions influencing it over a 29-month period within an evaluation strategy embedded into a humanitarian NGO’s health care user fee exemption program. To facilitate access to care, the exemption program subsidized the health service fees of mothers, children under five, and indigents in health districts of Niger and Burkina Faso—West African Sahel regions where food crises and poverty have engendered high rates of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality. Initial evaluation of the exemption program in Niger led to development of the evaluation strategy subsequently integrated into the same program developed in 2008 in Burkina Faso.

The thesis consists of three articles. The first\(^3\) presents an evaluability assessment (EA), a preliminary step undertaken to determine whether an EU evaluation was feasible. Results showed the evaluation strategy’s logic was coherent and plausible, data was accessible, and evaluation strategy stakeholders deemed an EU study to be useful. The second

\(^3\) This article was published in *Evaluation and Program Planning* in 2013.
article documents how stakeholders engaged in EU and how it served them and advanced the NGO’s mission. Results showed that stakeholders used findings instrumentally, conceptually, and persuasively, but used evaluation processes only instrumentally and conceptually. The third article identifies the conditions stakeholders saw as influencing EU over time. Key influential conditions were users’ attitudes toward evaluation, stakeholders’ interactions and communications, and evaluators’ skill in producing and sharing evaluation-based knowledge tailored to users’ needs.

This thesis furthers knowledge on EU in the humanitarian action context and provides practical recommendations for stakeholders of NGOs.

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This article was published in Health Research Policy and Systems in 2016.
Keywords: Program evaluation, evaluation use/utilization, knowledge transfer, non-governmental organization (NGO), humanitarian, Burkina Faso (West Africa), user fee exemption, equity of access to health care, global health.
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List of acronyms

**ALNAP:** Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action

**DRS:** Directeurs Régionaux de la Santé (Regional Health Director)

**EA:** Evaluability Assessment

**ECHO:** European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department

**EE:** External evaluators

**EHA/EAH:** Evaluation of humanitarian action/évaluation de l’action humanitaire

**EP(s):** Evaluation partner(s)

**ER:** ECHO representative

**EU:** Evaluation use

**HELP:** The non-governmental organization is called HELP “Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.”

**HS:** HELP staff

**KT:** Knowledge transfer

**MCD:** Médecins Chefs de Districts (District Chief Physician)

**MDG:** Millenium Development Goals

**MoH:** Ministry of Health

**NGO/ONG:** Non-governmental organization/organisation non-gouvernementale

**WHO:** The World Health Organization
“The sciences should be at the service of humanity as a whole, and should contribute to providing everyone with a deeper understanding of nature and society, a better quality of life and a sustainable and healthy environment for present and future generations...”
(Excerpts from the Declaration on Science and the Use of Scientific Knowledge at the World Conference on Science, 1999)

“It often seems that researchers, practitioners, and policy makers live in parallel universes. Researchers cannot understand why there is resistance to policy change despite clear and convincing evidence for it. Policy makers bemoan the inability of many researchers to make their findings accessible and digestible in time for policy decisions. Practitioners often just get on with things. Yet, better application of research and evidence in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life”
(Young, 2005, p. 727)
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1. Introduction

1.1. Program evaluation

The field of program evaluation as a professional practice first emerged in the 1960s in the United States as a means to assess the effectiveness, and guide the attribution, of funds for federal education, welfare, poverty alleviation and housing programs (ALNAP, 2001). According to Patton (2008a), the program evaluation field really crystallized with publication of the first *Handbook of Evaluation Research* in 1975. Since then, evaluation journals have been created, textbooks have been published, training institutions have been founded, and evaluation standards have been developed, all together forming the global, rich, and diverse evaluation field of today (Patton, 2008a). Along with these developments, numerous definitions of program evaluation have been formulated, such as that of Cousins, Goh, Elliott, Aubry, and Gilbert (2014), who defined it as “systematic inquiry used in the formulation of judgments about an evaluand’s (e.g., program, strategy, innovation) merit, value or significance, or in support of decision making concerning the evaluand” (p. 2).

Some confusion exists concerning the relationship between program evaluation and research (Levin-Rozalis, 2009). Establishing standards or values is a crucial element that distinguishes evaluation from the more typical discipline of social science research, which prides itself on conclusions exempt of value and judgment (Scriven, 2003-2004). Scriven, however, suggests that elements of evaluative inquiry have progressively integrated the realm of social science research as it increasingly seeks to address real-life social matters and to evaluate interventions, thereby going beyond its conventional purpose of empirical science striving to advance scientific knowledge. Patton (1990) suggests that, when evaluative inquiry “is conducted systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis, one is engaged in evaluation research” (p. 532). The knowledge that research and evaluation generate is important and must be based on information collected, analyzed, and communicated following appropriate social scientific methods to ensure objectivity, reliability, and validity of the results (Alkin & Taut, 2003; National Research Council, 2002). Levin-Rozalis (2009) explains eloquently how evaluation and research differ despite their
common use of concepts, instruments, and methods. Evaluation is project-specific in application and pertinence. Its goal is to provide concrete feedback to users, whereas research is intended to have broad and generalized applicability, and its primary goal is to advance general scientific knowledge (Levin-Rozalis, 2009). While evaluation relies on field context (e.g. projects) to generate knowledge that can later be informed by theory, theory is both the source and objective of research. In evaluation, conceptual frameworks and methods are chosen based on field considerations, whereas in research such choices are based on theory. Levin-Rozalis (2009) also explains that, while internal validity is considered important in both evaluation and research, it holds a central place for evaluators, helping them understand causal relationships. Other authors have suggested that, contrary to basic research, the primary purpose of evaluation is to provide context-specific and time-circumscribed information specifically attuned to the needs of evaluation’s intended users (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Patton, 1997). Program evaluation is sometimes employed for summative purposes, rendering a judgment for the sake of accountability, while at other times it is employed for formative reasons, to foster learning about the evaluand’s strengths and weaknesses for the sake of improvement (Buchanan-Smith & Cosgrave, 2013; Cousins et al., 2014). Buchanan-Smith and Cosgrave (2013) suggest evaluation can sometimes also serve developmental purposes, for instance, by enhancing learning at the organizational or sectoral level that could spark policy innovations.

1.2. Evaluation of humanitarian action (EHA)

In the 1970s and 1980s, humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were rarely scrutinized through rigorous program evaluations; as a result, mistakes tended to be repeated (Crisp, 2004). The 1990s were marked by a sharp and sustained increase in “frenetic” activity and high expenditure in the humanitarian sector (ALNAP, 2001, p. 1.2), accompanied by highly publicized scandals and wrongdoings, all of which heightened concerns regarding the accountability of NGOs (Ebrahim, 2003; Gibelman & Gelman, 2001). Moreover, the inability of the international community to intervene effectively in complex humanitarian crises, such as the 1994 civil war and genocide in Rwanda, also raised concerns and criticisms and emphasized the need to evaluate, document, and draw lessons from these experiences.
(Beck, 2003; Barton & Eriksson, 2004; Darcy & Knox Clarke, 2013; Oliver, 2008). Rising demands for improved accountability and for learning mechanisms in the humanitarian sector led to the development of initiatives such as the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), codes of conduct, and minimum standards such as those put forward by The Sphere Project (ALNAP, 2001; The Sphere Project, 2011). Ever since, humanitarian NGO programs have been increasingly scrutinized and evaluation has been ingrained into the humanitarian system and used as a tool to verify and improve accountability, transparency, and practice (ALNAP, 2001; Beck, 2003). Program evaluation in the humanitarian context is frequently referred to as evaluation of humanitarian action (EHA), defined as the “systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability” (ALNAP, 2006).

In ideal circumstances, EHA serves as a tool for systematic and objective examination of experiences from which individuals and organizations can extrapolate lessons, render their decisions and actions more evidence-based, and improve their practices (ALNAP, 2001). However, in real life, the conduct of evaluation is sometimes undermined by poor evaluation practice and inadequate funding (ALNAP, 2001). Conducting quality program evaluation is complicated by the highly politicized humanitarian context, often characterized by complex interventions that are notoriously difficult to evaluate (ALNAP, 2006; Crisp, 2004; Dagenais, Malo, et al., 2013; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Oliver, 2008). The severe disruptions often associated with the humanitarian sector tend to give rise to a sense of urgency, diminished access to quality data, high staff turnover that can complicate data collection and undermine institutional memory, changing circumstances that render evaluation findings quickly irrelevant, polarized viewpoints limiting objectivity, as well as debates about the allocation of limited and direly needed resources (ALNAP, 2006; Beck, 2003; Crisp, 2004; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). Such challenges complicate the conduct of evaluations in the humanitarian context and, in turn, impede evaluation use, a topic to which we next turn our attention.
1.3. Program evaluation use

Program evaluation attends to real-life issues, problems, or interventions (Scriven, 2003-2004), and knowledge derived from evaluations is meant to contribute to change and improvement in desired directions (Hendricks, 1994). Often, however, and for numerous reasons, evaluation-based knowledge does not translate into evaluation use (EU, sometimes called evaluation utilization) (Cousins, 2004; Sandison, 2006). A myriad of conditions can enhance or interfere with the process of knowledge transfer (KT) between evaluators and intended users of an evaluation and can thereby influence whether EU occurs on not (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Dagenais, Malo, et al., 2013; Hendricks, 1994; Johnson et al., 2009; Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2003; Podems, 2007). EU is indeed a complex matter that gained visibility through Patton’s writings, beginning with his ground-breaking book Utilization-Focused Evaluation (1978), in which utility is seen as the best indicator of an evaluation’s merit (Patton, 1978; Patton & LaBossière, 2009). In this view, evaluation is “done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses” (Patton, 2008, p. 37). From this premise, EU is crucial and should not simply be an aspiration, but should be planned and integrated from the start of an evaluation (Patton, 1997). EU has been a growing concern for many program evaluation experts and a topic explored by many authors in the evaluation literature (see Alkin & Taut, 2003; Cousins & Shulha, 2006; Johnson et al., 2009; Kirkhart, 2000; Leviton, 2003; Shulha & Cousins, 1997).

At first, the literature on EU concerned primarily the use of evaluation findings and how evaluators could enhance the uptake of their final recommendations (Hendricks, 1994; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Increasingly, evaluators became aware that, by participating in the evaluation process, intended users learned and acquired new information about their program and about program evaluation (Patton, 2008c). Among other things, they learned evaluation logic, critical thinking, data interpretation, priority setting, and the importance of attending to program outcomes (Patton, 2008a). Patton (1997, 2008b) consequently expanded the conceptualization of EU to account for what he called process use, defined as “individual changes in thinking, attitudes, and behaviour, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during evaluation process” (Patton, 1997; p. 90). The realization that
exposing stakeholders to the evaluation process could engender learning and capacity building in individuals and their organizations was the impetus for a wealth of literature on collaborative and participatory forms of program evaluation (Cousins, 1998; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Preskill & Boyle, 2008). Many authors have attempted to conceptualize and further categorize the different forms of EU. Alkin and Taut (2003) proposed a conceptual framework for EU that was particularly insightful for the present study. It includes instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic/legitimative forms of both process and findings use (for reasons explained in article 2, we have adapted this third category, grouping symbolic and legitimative use together into what we have called persuasive use). Hence, in their framework, evaluation processes and findings can lead to instrumental use, which is the most direct form of use, whereby the evaluation process or findings bring about concrete changes in the action or decisions of intended users. Conceptual use (also called enlightenment use) refers to changes occurring conceptually in peoples’ minds or affect, rather than in their actions or decisions, after they have participated in the evaluation process or heard of its findings. Finally, Alkin and Taut (2003) refer to symbolic process use, to describe stakeholders’ engaging in the evaluation process simply to demonstrate willingness to undergo scrutiny, and legitimative findings use, in which evaluation results are used to legitimize decisions already taken (Alkin & Taut, 2003). We have chosen to integrate symbolic and legitimative uses of evaluation under an umbrella term, persuasive use, to refer more generally to EU that is intended to convince or persuade others (Leviton & Hughes, 1981). Along with symbolic and legitimative forms of EU, it is important also to acknowledge evaluation that is used persuasively for constructive and honest purposes by engaging “others” in the evaluation process or exposing them to evaluation findings with the intent to influence their understanding of, or actions in, matters such as health service accessibility (Leviton & Hughes, 1981; Weiss, 1977). We believe viewing EU through this adapted lens of Alkin and Taut’s (2003) framework may help deepen the appreciation of EU in the humanitarian sector.

1.4. Evaluation use (EU) and knowledge transfer (KT)

Similar to the commonalities and divergences between program evaluation and research described above, there are also areas of overlap and distinctions between program
evaluation use and knowledge or research use (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). Numerous researchers, including Graham et al. (2006), Blake and Ottoson (2009), and Ottoson (2009), have sought to bring conceptual clarity to utilization inquiry so that knowledge producers and intended users can share a common understanding of the complex, iterative, and organic processes involved in moving knowledge into action. An important step involved clarifying the multiple terms and theories applied to knowledge-to-action processes. One such term is knowledge utilization, sometimes described metaphorically as an umbrella overarching various subfields (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). Rooted in the convergence of science and philosophy (Blake & Ottoson, 2009; Ottoson, 2009), this term concerns specifically the movement of empirical knowledge into action and thus includes research utilization (Graham et al., 2006) and, we would suggest, evaluation use (or utilization). Program evaluators have contributed over time to the evolution of, and inquiry into, knowledge use (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). As a matter of fact, the literature on knowledge transfer and use offers insight into evaluation use (EU), just as the EU literature informs on KT and knowledge use (Blake & Ottoson, 2009; Ottoson, 2009).

Many authors have focused on the consequences of program evaluation and research or, more specifically, on the use of the knowledge they produce. Indeed, the knowledge-to-action gap generates numerous consequences, including excessive time lags between knowledge production and application in real-life settings, such as in the humanitarian and health sectors, and consequently suboptimal practices and policies (Graham et al., 2006). Research in these domains has collectively been referred to by Cousins and Shulha (2006) as utilization inquiry, which encompasses research on knowledge use, exchange, dissemination and diffusion, transfer, implementation, and translation (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). These different terms, which are attempts to describe some or all of the knowledge-to-action processes, tend to be used interchangeably in the literature, which introduces confusion to utilization inquiry (Graham et al., 2006). While Cousins and Shulha (2006) describe these as “cognate fields”, others, like Blake and Ottoson (2009), describe them as related disciplines that are rooted in different fields and have evolved to complement one another by offering diverse lenses through which to view the change processes involved in moving knowledge into action (Blake & Ottoson, 2009; Graham et al., 2006; Hawe, Bond, & Lauscher, 2009). For
the sake of clarity, we will use a single term, *knowledge transfer (KT)*, which is rooted in science and technology (Ottoson, 2009) and refers to the process of getting stakeholders to use knowledge. Knowledge can, however, be vast and include empirical knowledge as well as all forms of knowing (Graham et al., 2006). The KT literature spans numerous disciplines (Ottoson, 2009) and includes criticism about its process being exclusively unidirectional or limited to the first phase, i.e., knowledge dissemination, with little attention given to ensuring actual use. These points are debated, however, with others interpreting KT as a complex and bidirectional, lateral, or hierarchical process spanning the entire knowledge-to-action process (Graham et al., 2006; Ottoson, 2009). It is in this latter more complex and inclusive manner that we will conceptualize KT. Recurrent themes in the knowledge use literature are that use is complex, that consensual and meaningful definitions are lacking, and that use is of great importance to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

More than 60 theoretical models of knowledge transfer and use have been proposed by a multitude of authors (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012; Graham et al., 2006; Nutley, 2011). These have been named and grouped in a variety of ways by their respective authors (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012). There is, however, a particularly common way to group models, involving three categories: “science push”, “demand pull”, and “social interaction” (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012). The premise for the science push model, also called knowledge push, is that high quality knowledge will, with no specific intervention, eventually be used (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012; Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001). For example, it is common for knowledge producers simply to push knowledge by disseminating and diffusing their findings to assumed potential users (Gagnon, 2009). Yet research on factors influencing use has shown the relatively limited impact of promoting use solely through dissemination and diffusion (Dagenais, Malo, et al., 2013). On the other hand, the demand pull model, sometimes called the problem solving model, posits that intended users seek and implement strategies to pull in knowledge that is deemed relevant for their information needs (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012; Gagnon, 2009). On this basis, research results are considered more likely to be used if they provide concrete answers (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012). According to Weiss (1980), evidence-based knowledge is more likely to be used when intended users are involved from the start of knowledge production. This leads us
to the social interaction, or exchange model, in which interactive collaboration between knowledge producers and intended users is highly valued and occurs intentionally in some, or ideally all, of the different phases of knowledge production, diffusion, and implementation (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012; Gagnon, 2009). Unlike the push and pull models, which are considered one-way models, knowledge in the social interaction/exchange model travels bi-directionally between intended users and researchers. According to Lavis, Robertson, Woodside, McLeod, and Abelson (2003), cultural shifts can occur when such two-way exchange processes are sustained over time and equivalent value is afforded to the transmission of knowledge from intended users or decision-makers to researchers and vice-versa. Such cultural shifts, they argue, tend to sustain long-term knowledge use (Lavis et al., 2003). Also, in interactive models intended users are anticipated to take ownership not only of research findings but also of the research process, and researchers are expected to share the responsibility of ensuring knowledge use with intended users and decision-makers (Blackburn & Demers, 1996; Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012). Research partnerships, such as the one we examine in the present study, are founded on social interaction models of knowledge transfer and use (Dagenais & Équipe Renard, 2012; Denis, 2000), and while such models tend to have greater use success (Lavis et al., 2003), their actual implementation is generally under-documented (Dagenais, Malo, et al., 2013), and this is particularly true in the humanitarian context (Sandison, 2006).

1.5. Evaluation use (EU) in the humanitarian sector

Even though the practice of EHA has increased considerably, experts in the field have suggested that, too often, evaluations are still not used to their full potential to enhance learning and to improve practices, performance, and accountability (ALNAP, 2001; Hallam, 2011; Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Harveu et al., 2010; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; WHO, 2004). EU in the humanitarian sector merits study because decisions and practice in this context, as elsewhere, continue to be motivated by ideological convictions as well as by political and funding opportunities, even in the presence of contradicting empirical evidence in the form of evaluation-based knowledge (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). Program evaluation is generally believed to have contributed to improving the humanitarian assistance system, yet
the way EHA is practiced and followed up has been the target of much criticism (Beck, 2003; Harveu et al., 2010). A common worry is that international humanitarian NGOs tend to undergo evaluations or follow-ups of project outcomes in a rather disconnected and mechanical fashion, with insufficient analyses of the intervention context and of resulting EU (Hallam, 2011; Harveu et al., 2010; Sandison, 2006). It would seem that many organizations lack follow-up mechanisms intended to assure EU (Oliver, 2008).

The issue of EU in the humanitarian sector gained increased attention and coverage following Peta Sandison’s (2006) chapter on The utilisation of evaluations (see Bonino, 2014; Darcy, Stobaught, Walker, & Maxwell, 2013; Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Neuman, Shahor, Shina, Sarid, & Saar, 2013). According to Sandison (2006) “we do not know even how many evaluations are conducted, let alone how many are used. The source of concern regarding non-use in the sector is mostly anecdotal” (p. 90). Although her chapter presents an uncertain and sometimes bleak portrait of EU, Hallam and Bonino (2013) and others have described successful cases of EU and conditions that promote EU in international humanitarian NGOs (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Oliver, 2008). Still, the literature on EU in the context of EHA lacks in-depth analysis of the full spectrum of both process and findings EU (e.g. instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive) and the way these evolve over time within a humanitarian NGO. Many conditions influence whether the full potential of evaluations is realized, but rarely have such conditions been documented empirically over time within the humanitarian context (D’Ostie-Racine, Dagenais, & Ridde, 2013). In other words, little is known about the different conditions that over time enhance or impede use of evaluation process and findings. The aim of the current thesis is to shed light on these issues within the context of a specific humanitarian NGO.

1.6. Introducing the case

1.6.1. The context: Burkina Faso and Niger in the West African Sahel

The present study took place in Niger and Burkina Faso. Both these countries lie in the West African Sahel region, where access to health care has been a major challenge ever since the independence of West African countries in the 1960s (Traoré, 2012). Despite important
efforts of African states to facilitate geographic access to health care by developing health establishments and decentralizing health systems, health services use has remained low (Traoré, 2012). Following the “welfare state” era of the 1970s and 1980s, access to health services was further limited, especially for the worst off, by the introduction of user fees for health services (Traoré, 2012). Gradually, as momentum gathered to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s), debates around the effects of user fees re-appeared on global and national agendas (James et al., 2006; Robert & Ridde, 2013). By the 1990s, most West African countries had implemented subsidy or exemption programs covering certain health services or had suppressed user fees for certain populations (Traoré, 2012). Such changes in health policy represented a break with previous ways (Ridde & Queuille, 2012), and West African decision-makers remained unsure about the efficacy of user fee exemptions and how they would contribute to the MDGs, as the majority of global health disparities persisted (WHO, 2004, 2014).

Implementation of these new policies was often only partial and insufficiently planned and evaluated (Ridde, Robert, & Meessen, 2012), and health sector deficiencies persisted as health indicators remained disquieting (Amnesty International, 2009; WHO, 2004). In 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that, while Africa bore 25% of the global burden of disease, it benefited from only 2% of global health expenditure (WHO, 2004). *The Global Burden of Disease: 2004 Update* WHO report indicated that Africa was disproportionately represented (45%) in the 10.4 million global death toll of children under five, with 4.7 million such deaths (WHO, 2008). In the *World Health Statistics 2011* report, maternal mortality rates (per 100,000 live births) in 2008 were estimated at 560 in Burkina Faso and 820 in Niger, and mortality rates for children under five (per 1,000 live births) in 2009 were estimated at 166 for Burkina Faso and 160 for Niger (WHO, 2011).

In light of these health inequities, and following drastic health policy changes, the need to document and evaluate the implementation of innovative financing policies was clear. Decision-makers and practitioners needed to be informed about the processes and effects of user fee exemption programs to inform their decisions and actions with empirical evidence (Ridde & Queuille, 2012; Traoré, 2012; WHO, 2004, 2013; World Conference on Science, 1999).
1.6.2. HELP: a humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO)

The present case study examined EU and the conditions that influenced EU over time as they played out within the German humanitarian NGO HELP (*Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.*), which provides assistance to vulnerable populations internationally. In line with the MDGs, HELP’s primary mandate in the two West African countries where it operates, Niger and Burkina Faso, is to reduce rates of maternal and child malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality (HELP, 2008; WHO, 2011). In an era of health service privatization, user fees appeared to exacerbate health inequities and to undermine the ability of many to access health services (HELP, 2008; James et al., 2006; Ridde, 2003; Ridde & Queuille, 2010; WHO, 2004). To overcome such financial barriers to health care access, HELP established a health service user fee exemption program subsidized by the European Union as part of the greater “Plan Sahel” scheme, whose main objective is to reduce child mortality rates. The user fee exemption program was first implemented in Niger in 2006 targeting two districts: Tera and Mayahi (Ridde, Diarra, & Moha, 2011). Beneficiaries of the exemption program were pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, children under five, and indigents (Ridde, Diarra, et al., 2011). At the request of HELP’s funding agency, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), the exemption program underwent an external evaluation in 2007. The third co-author of the present thesis was selected as a principal external evaluator based on his long-standing research experience in West African health policies and in program evaluation. As the evaluation progressed, that evaluator noticed that HELP managers were particularly keen to understand evaluation findings and to make consequent changes to the exemption program.

Over the following year, it became clear to HELP managers that a similar exemption program to the one in Niger was needed in Burkina Faso, as women and children needing health services were crossing the border to access free health care in Niger. HELP’s regional coordinator and managers consulted the external evaluators from the Niger evaluation to plan the exemption program, which they ultimately implemented in 2008 in two districts of Burkina Faso: Sebbas and Dori. The four beneficiary districts of the exemption program were chosen, in part, because they lie in the African Sahel in a context of economic poverty where
rates of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality were (and still are) exceedingly high (HELP, 2008; INSD, 2010; Ridde & Queuille, 2010; WHO, 2007, 2014).

Aware that empirical evidence can improve decisions and practice in the humanitarian sector (WHO, 2004, 2013), HELP managers seized the opportunity to collaborate with the Niger external evaluators to develop an evaluation strategy, embedded within the user fee exemption program, to render it more evidence-based. Rather than wait for HELP’s funding agency to make a request each time before conducting an evaluation, the evaluators and HELP staff obviated such requests by asking for an evaluation strategy specific budget, which was approved. Upon receiving the approval, the evaluators and HELP staff quickly planned and implemented the evaluation strategy as they would an actual program, with coherent logic linking necessary resources, objectives, activities, and short- and long-term objectives (D’Ostie-Racine, Dagenais, & Ridde, 2013; Dagenais, Queuille, & Ridde, 2013). The evaluation strategy, funded by ECHO, was initially intended to be implemented in both Niger and Burkina Faso, but the development in 2008 of both the exemption program and its evaluation strategy in Burkina Faso required intensive attention. Starting in 2008, evaluation efforts were therefore concentrated in Burkina Faso, with the evaluation strategy progressively implemented by HELP staff and the evaluation team. In Niger, following the 2007 evaluation, plans to undergo new evaluation activities did not progress beyond the embryonic stage. HELP’s evaluation strategy in Burkina Faso presented a special opportunity to explore and document the course of EU and the conditions influencing it among stakeholders. The initial plan for the present case study had been to examine EU in both Niger and Burkina Faso, but following internal disagreements and managerial changes within the NGO, the regional coordinator decided to halt (at least temporarily) evaluation plans in Niger. Hence, the present case is focused on the evaluation strategy in Burkina Faso and examines the discourses of those involved in the strategy, whom we refer to as “evaluation partners” (EPs). While it would have been interesting to compare and contrast the experiences of EPs in both Niger and Burkina Faso, it seemed more essential at the time to focus our attention and resources on the evaluation strategy in Burkina Faso, where it was developing, active, and alive, unlike the situation in Niger. Documenting EU and its conditions were the two central objectives of the present thesis, preceded by an assessment of the feasibility of such a study. A timeline of
HELP’s exemption program and evaluation strategy along with the present study can be found in Appendix A.

1.7. Thesis objectives

The aim of the current thesis is to examine EU and the conditions that influenced it as HELP’s evaluation strategy was progressively developed and embedded within the health service user fee exemption program as a means of enhancing transparency and accountability and of integrating evidence into decision-making and practice. More specifically, the thesis focuses on three general objectives pursued over two data collections (2009 to 2011). The first objective (article 1) was to explore, through an evaluability assessment (EA) conducted as a preliminary phase of the first data collection, the potential and relevance of researching EU with stakeholders of HELP’s evaluation strategy. EA studies examine the coherence and plausibility of a project’s design (in this case, that of the evaluation strategy) and its theory of change to verify the readiness, pertinence, and possibility of evaluating or studying it (Davies, 2013; Wholey, 1994).

The second objective (article 2) was to document EU among HELP’s evaluation partners (EPs). Based on Alkin and Taut’s (2003) EU framework, the second article examines the various ways in which stakeholders of HELP’s evaluation strategy used the evaluation processes and findings. Stakeholders explained how the evaluations influenced their thinking, interactions, and work, thereby shedding light upon the wide-ranging consequences of evaluations. The discourses of participants from 2009 were analyzed separately from those of 2011 to examine any changes related to EU that may have occurred over time.

Finally, article 3 focuses on the third objective, which was to clarify the conditions that influenced, either positively or negatively, the progress of EU among the evaluation strategy stakeholders from 2009 to 2011. Many conditions were documented (related to characteristics of intended users and of evaluators, organizational context, knowledge produced and how it was transferred, etc.) that can be influenced and sometimes even controlled by evaluators and stakeholders (Dagenais, Queuille, et al., 2013; Sandison, 2006). The third article highlights key conditions described by participants in 2009 and in 2011 that were influential and relevant to that particular humanitarian NGO context.
While HELP’s evaluation strategy developed and bloomed progressively in Burkina Faso, the same cannot be said for Niger. In fact, after the first data collection in 2009, no evaluations were conducted in Niger’s exemption program, such that data collection was not possible in 2011. As the aim of the current study was to explore the evolution of EU and its conditions over time using a diachronic approach, Niger was necessarily omitted from the study following the first data collection. Hence, the second and third articles document only the experience of the evaluation strategy stakeholders in Burkina Faso. A blueprint of the thesis methodology and of the three articles is presented in Appendix B.
2. The three articles
2.1. **Article 1. An evaluability assessment of a West Africa based Non-Governmental Organization’s (NGO) progressive evaluation strategy**

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Abstract

While program evaluations are increasingly valued by international organizations to inform practices and public policies, actual evaluation use (EU) in such contexts is inconsistent. Moreover, empirical literature on EU in the context of humanitarian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is very limited. The current article focuses on the evaluability assessment (EA) of a West-Africa based humanitarian NGO's progressive evaluation strategy. Since 2007, the NGO has established an evaluation strategy to inform its maternal and child health care user-fee exemption intervention. Using Wholey's (2004) framework, the current EA enabled us to clarify with the NGO's evaluation partners the intent of their evaluation strategy and to design its program logic model. The EA ascertained the plausibility of the evaluation strategy's objectives, the accessibility of relevant data, and the utility for intended users of evaluating both the evaluation strategy and the conditions that foster EU. Hence, key evaluability conditions for an EU study were assured. This article provides an example of EA procedures when such guidance is scant in the literature. It also offers an opportunity to analyze critically the use of EAs in the context of a humanitarian NGO's collaboration with evaluators and political actors.

Keywords: Evaluability assessment, evaluation use, humanitarian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Africa, Burkina Faso, exemption
Introduction

The evaluation of humanitarian action has been defined as the “systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability” (ALNAP, 2006, p. 14). The current article will examine the case of a humanitarian Non-Governmental Organization’s (NGO) evaluation strategy developed to support its health care user-fee exemption program based in Niger and Burkina Faso. According to Crisp (2004), such evaluations are “attracting unprecedented levels of donor funding and agency commitment, as well as public and political interest” (Crisp, p. 4). While humanitarian evaluations are on the rise (Wood, Horton, & Apthorpe, 2001), empirical knowledge of evaluation use (EU)- which refers here to the use of evaluation results and processes (see Patton, 2008b)- in such contexts is limited and the few existing studies generally depict ineffective or even absent EU (Hendricks, 1994; Podems, 2007). The literature describes various use-promoting factors, but whether these are applied in the humanitarian sector and the factors that affect their usefulness remains unclear and largely undocumented (ALNAP, 2006; Johnson et al., 2009; Ridde, Goossens, & Shakir, 2012; Sandison, 2006).

To document conditions favorable to EU in a humanitarian context, we approached the earlier mentioned NGO because of its evaluation strategy that was developed to produce and diffuse empirical knowledge of its exemption program. A few particularities made us believe this evaluation strategy presented a great case to study EU. For example, we were told that its partners were working together since 2007 in the evaluation strategy and were particularly proactive and eager to integrate EU in the NGO’s exemption program. In addition, they had actually developed a knowledge sharing/diffusion plan for disseminating evaluation results (Dagenais, Queuille, et al., 2013). Our intended evaluation was to examine the conditions that influence the use of scientific evidence produced by the evaluation strategy. Yet, such evaluations require extensive resources (e.g., time, effort, funds) and hence, we deemed it wise to first assess the program readiness for an evaluation (Kaufman-Levy & Poulin, 2003; Sanou, Kouyaté, Bibeau, & Nguyen, 2011). We therefore, assumed that a first sensible step was to conduct an evaluability assessment (EA) using Wholey’s (1994) framework. The objective of the current paper is to determine whether the evaluation strategy is ready to be evaluated and
whether such an undertaking is at once defensible, feasible, and deemed useful by its intended users. This last point on the usefulness of conducting an evaluation is particularly interesting because an EA has the potential to indicate the perceived usefulness of a future evaluation on EU to those involved in the evaluation strategy. As Wholey (1994) suggested, if intended users are not receptive to evaluation findings, even the most informative of evaluations are a waste of time and resources. Hence, attending to the perceived usefulness of assessing the evaluation strategy and its ability to promote EU by those involved in the NGO’s exemption strategy is an objective of the current EA of undeniable importance.

The current article provides an innovative stance as it presents in detail the conduct of an EA on an evaluation strategy in Africa. From our research in the literature and to our knowledge, this is the first EA of its kind in Africa to date. As noted in an ALNAP Annual Review Series (2001), evaluations in the humanitarian sector face particular challenges including considerable time pressures, insecurity, logistical difficulties, and increased risk of illness to name a few. Moreover, Wood et al., (2001) revealed that an important problem with humanitarian evaluations concerns a lack of clarity on the purpose and focus of humanitarian evaluations. Clearly then, EA is an extremely relevant activity to consider before undertaking any evaluation in a humanitarian context, yet it has so far received little attention in the associated literature in either African or other contexts. The current article will at once describe the steps undertaken by the authors to conduct their EA as well as the challenges they encountered using Wholey’s (1994) framework.

The Study Context

Burkina Faso and Niger lie in the African Sahel, a region that was ravaged by a food crisis in 2005 and remains threatened by exceeding poverty and food scarcity (Ridde & Diarra, 2009; Wuehler, Hess, & Brown, 2011a, 2011b). In the 2011 Human Development Report, Burkina Faso and Niger were ranked 181 and 186, respectively, out of the 187 countries listed in the human development index (UNDP, 2011). In 2009, life expectancy was estimated by the World Health Organization (2011) at 52 years in Burkina Faso and 57 years in Niger. While highlighting that the probability of death by age five is a critical indicator of children’s well-being, the latest UNICEF report (2012) positioned Burkina Faso in third rank for the
world’s highest under-five mortality rate and Niger in the twelfth rank. In addition, maternal mortality ratios (per 100 000 live births) were estimated by the World Health Organization (2011) in 2008 at 560 in Burkina Faso and at 820 in Niger. These statistics illustrate clearly the dire situation in both countries.

In response to this crisis, HELP “Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.”, the humanitarian NGO central to this paper, intervened with the chief objective of reducing maternal and child malnutrition, morbidity and mortality rates. The NGO established its user-fee exemption as an attempt to alleviate financial barriers to health care access. Hence, since 2006, the NGO subsidizes medical care for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and children under age five in two districts of Niger, i.e. Tera and Mayahi (Ridde & Diarra, 2009; Ridde, Diarra, et al., 2011). A HELP stakeholder reported that in 2007, their donors, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), requested an external evaluation of the exemption program (Health Staff 4). Ever since, the NGO has progressively increased its evaluation utilization and efforts. In 2008, the exemption was extended to two districts of Burkina Faso (Dori and Sebba) where an actual evaluation strategy was developed in order to provide feedback and ongoing support to the exemption. The evaluation strategy was developed progressively by a group of “evaluation partners” from Niger and Burkina Faso comprising of the NGO HELP staff, external evaluators, a representative from the donor agency ECHO and finally the Directeurs Régionaux de la Santé (DRS) and Médecins Chef de District (MCD), who are the regional and district Ministry of Health authorities where the NGO’s exemption is implemented. Progressively since 2007, these evaluation partners have shown a keen will to collaborate in support of the evaluation strategy and to integrate EU in their work. Evaluating the evaluation strategy and the conditions that have fostered progressive EU by strategy’s partners and the exemption program personnel is our eventual objective but first, we have deemed essential to establish the evaluability of the evaluation strategy.

**Evaluability Assessments (EA)**

Evaluability assessments (EA), also known as feasibility studies (Tucker, 2005), refer to the “systematic process for describing the structure of a program [the program here is the evaluation strategy] and for analyzing the plausibility and feasibility of achieving objectives; their suitability for in-depth evaluation; and their acceptability to program managers, policy
makers, and program operators” (Smith, 2005). In 1979, Wholey documented the first exploratory EA process (Smith, 2005; Trevisan, 2007). It examines four preliminary conditions to ascertain that: 1) the program intent and its logic model are clear and thus that program goals, objectives, important side effects, and priority information needs are well defined; 2) the program is plausible and hence its goals and objectives are conceivable; 3) relevant data is accessible; and finally that 4) the utility of an evaluation is clear among its intended users (Wholey, 2004, 1994).

**Method**

**Participants**

For the current qualitative case study, Wholey’s (Wholey, 2004, 1994) EA framework was used to clarify whether the evaluation strategy was ready to be evaluated. For this assessment, 20 evaluation partners were interviewed in Niger and Burkina Faso during the summer of 2009. Participants were selected according to two *purposeful sampling strategies* (Patton, 1990). The primary evaluator and the NGO’s head of mission were first selected according to the *intensity sampling* strategy (targeting persons greatly affected by the phenomenon studied) (Patton, 1990). From there, the *snow-ball sampling* strategy was employed whereby each informant was asked to recommend other information-rich sources. Caution was maintained throughout the EA to seek out the views of all evaluation partners and minimize the risks of “encillage” (i.e. the risk for the researcher to be assimilated within a given clique and estranged from other groups and/or the larger group as a whole) as Olivier de Sardan warned (2003, p. 49). One author of the present study has accumulated over ten years of professional experience in the study context and his local knowledge was particularly helpful in avoiding sampling biases such as encillage. Interviewing multiple participants among the various categories of evaluation partners in both Niger and Burkina Faso was also done in order to increase the number of viewpoints and bolster the validity of our data collection and analyses through data triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). This intra-group diversification also served to increase the number of perspectives from evaluation partners and to seek out a global and diversified understanding of their collective experience (Pires, 1997; Stake, 2010). In the end, the sample consisted of 14 locals and 6 expatriates.
Participants had collaborated on the evaluation strategy for a duration ranging between 3 and 28 months averaging to 14.7 months. Involvement in the evaluation strategy was ongoing for 14 participants while it was intermittent for the other six. Table 1, presents the number of interviews conducted with the different participants who collaborated on the evaluation strategy either in Burkina Faso, in Niger or in both of these countries. Three participants were interviewed twice as they were intensely engaged in the evaluation strategy and had more information to share than a single interview permitted (Table 1, numbers in brackets). Hence, a total of 23 interviews were conducted.

**Insert Table 1**

The semi-structured exploratory interviews lasted an average of 55 minutes, included open-ended questions and followed an interview guide approach. Interviews were conducted in French and their content was translated by the first author who is bilingual (French and English). The interview guide was not pre-tested as the explorative nature of the qualitative approach used in the EA sought flexibility in the use of the interview guide thus allowing it to evolve over the course of the EA. The investigation targeted Wholey’s four conditions of evaluability assessment and sought to elicit descriptions of the items described in Table 2. Throughout all interviews the interviewer verified her understanding (i.e. “member checking”) of the participants’ viewpoints in order to bolster the validity of the findings (Stake, 2010; Van Der Maren, 1996). Interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed. Transcriptions served as the primary material for analysis. Documentation relevant to evaluation activities (e.g., evaluation plans/reports or evaluation partners’ emails) was also collected to complement interview data in order to triangulate data sources and to sustain the study’s validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006).

**Insert Table 2**

Analyses

Qualitative analysis of the interviews was completed using a thematic content analysis approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using a mixed codebook, some codes emerged directly from the participants’ discourse while others were based on the literature. For example, Alkin
and Taut’s (2003) evaluation, human, and contextual factors known to influence EU helped discern themes and patterns in the interviews. Wholey’s four evaluability conditions were also used to form four columns of our matrix in which the different themes were classified. This helped organize the emergent themes. To assure coding consistency, the coder re-examined and adjusted, when necessary, the correspondence between all coded excerpts and the codebook. While the data analysis itself was not validated by a second person, the preliminary findings were presented to three key evaluation partners (the principal evaluator, the evaluation strategy coordinator and the NGO’s chief stakeholder) for validation purposes. Findings were generally validated while some modifications were recommended and upheld on the logic model. Each column was analyzed by itself and compared to those of other participants. This process enabled us to obtain a comprehensive understanding of evaluation partners’ respective and shared experiences within the evaluation strategy.

Results

Program Intent and Logic Model

Interviews with the evaluation partners revealed a great deal of information on the first evaluability condition the purpose of which is to discern the intent and logic model of the program (i.e. of the evaluation strategy) (Wholey, 1994). Participants made clear that while EU was a shared goal during the first evaluation in 2007 in Niger, the intent to develop an actual evaluation strategy to inform the exemption program via a series of evaluations was not an explicit goal from the start. To create a coherent logic model of the evaluation strategy we examined the initial dynamics that spurred its development.

As illustrated in the preliminary logic model (Figure 1), the NGO’s first evaluation was conducted in 2007 in Niger (top row) by the principal evaluator from the Université de Montréal who was accompanied by two colleague evaluators from a Niger research institution. Members of the NGO staff, stakeholders and donors along with the Ministry of Health representatives participated in various ways in the evaluation. It is hypothesized that various factors may have promoted the implementation of the evaluation strategy and of EU within the NGO’s exemption program. Such hypothesized factors include the fact that the evaluation employed a practical participatory and utilization focused approach and that evaluators were
experts in the field and knew the NGO context. Other interpersonal factors may have also contributed. These factors remain hypothetical as they will need to be verified during the future EU evaluation study. In the months following the first process evaluation in Niger, the principal external evaluator noticed that the evaluation recommendations were being upheld by the NGO (Ref 2). Evaluation partners learned new things about the exemption program, began changing their views of evaluators and the evaluation process (e.g., as helpful rather than punitive), and began using evaluation findings to bring change to the NGO’s functions. This encouraged the evaluator to maintain contact with the NGO stakeholders.

As a donor representative mentioned, Burkinabes were crossing the border to seek free health care in Niger’s HELP funded clinics (ECHO Representative 1). This spurred the organizational will to extend the exemption program into Burkina Faso. While planning for this extension, the NGO director solicited the expertise of the principal Niger evaluator who subsequently acted as a scientific advisor for the NGO’s planning phase in Burkina Faso, which began over the year 2008 (bottom line of logic model). Care was taken to integrate lessons learned in the Niger evaluation and the key decision was to develop the evaluation strategy to undertake 1) documentation and 2) advocacy activities in order to support the scaling up of the exemption program.

Incorporating EU further into Burkina Faso’s exemption program (bottom line of logic model) meant that funds, evaluation and networking activities (e.g., with a Groupe de Travail made up of various NGO’s) were increased significantly. For example, a staff member was employed specifically to coordinate the scientific activities. In addition, more collaboration was sought from the Ministry of Health DRS/MCD who provided precious access to valuable data (e.g., collected at their health centers) and a credible voice within existing political platforms. Numerous factors are hypothesized to have contributed to EU and examining such factors will be the central objective of our future EU evaluation study. The number of evaluation activities increased notably with evaluations examining the processes and effects of the exemption program. During the EA, we also sought evaluation partners’ objectives for the evaluation strategy.

By integrating participatory evaluations into the exemption’s mission, evaluation partners intend (outcome section of the model) to gain insights on the exemption, build their
evaluation capacities and feel increasingly comfortable using evaluations. However, the main goal of the documentation activities is to produce evidence on the NGO’s exemption. The goal of advocacy activities is to disseminate this knowledge via national workshops, reports, policy briefs to Burkina Faso’s civil society, the scientific community, international NGO’s and organizations, and most importantly, government authorities in Burkina Faso and the Sahel Region. These activities all aim to inform policy makers on effective user-fee exemption strategies so that decisions concerning maternal and child healthcare may be based on evidence and in turn be more equitable.

The long-term intended impact is that EU becomes routine in evaluation partners’ practice and that policy makers collaborate increasingly with them to mainstream evidence into their decision-making process. Ultimately, evaluation partners hope that via gradual EU, maternal and child morbidity and mortality rates will be reduced. Hence, through the interviews participants provided sufficient information about the evaluation strategy activities, resources and shared goals that it was possible to create a logic model.

**Plausibility of the Evaluation Strategy**

The second evaluability condition examines program reality (Whooley, 1994) and hence, in this case, it is meant to examine the plausibility of achieving the evaluation strategy’s goal and to examine whether the preliminary logic model is realistic. In other words, Whooley (1994) suggests that the intended program, and logic model, should be compared with the actual program resources, activities, and outcomes to examine whether the links between these components are deemed plausible. He also suggests examining the feasibility of measuring program performance and estimating the likelihood of program success. Seen as EU is the ultimate goal and that its measurement is not one of our objectives, we determined it would be more valuable to examine in detail the types of evaluation activities and the factors that seem to support the evaluation strategy so far. In this manner, we will assess whether these factors and activities are linked to the actual outcomes and whether the goals seem achievable in the given context. This is where Alkin and Taut’s (2003) three categories of factors (i.e. *evaluation*, *context*, and *human factors*) known to influence EU were useful in grouping our findings.
**Plausibility: Evaluation and evaluator factors.** The first factor concerns the evaluation process and the evaluator characteristics. If we turn to 2007, evaluation findings from the first evaluation in Niger were presented to the NGO stakeholders and staff who were receptive to the evaluators’ constructive criticism and recommendations. Yet, they were resistant to have the “negative” results divulged to their donors fearing that funding would be compromised. Following frank but difficult conversations, the principal evaluator tactfully negotiated to have the final report sent to the donors. According to a donor representative it was normal and even important: “we really want to advance [...] to question principles that are obvious to others but are not at all obvious to us and we want to militate, and this is the spirit I recognize [in the evaluations] which pleases me” (ECHO Representative 1). He also appreciated the quality of the scientific activities because as he says “they are all pertinent and interesting” (ECHO Representative 1). In the end, the NGO’s funding was renewed and its personnel were able to apply the evaluation-based recommendations to improve the exemption program. One of the NGO stakeholders (HELP Staff 4) noted that ever since the Niger evaluation, the exemption program has benefited from ongoing scientific activities and the advice of the external evaluators. Evaluations performed within the evaluation strategy generally employ a pluralistic participatory approach that is utilization focused (Patton, 2008b). Hence, evaluation partners are involved in, and generally in accord with, the various stages of the evaluation process. A positive interplay between resources allocated to the scientific activities and the quality of the evaluations appears to perpetuate a positive collaboration among evaluation partners and the ongoing implementation of the evaluation strategy. Interviews therefore suggest that a relatively high level of trust and satisfaction has been established among the evaluation partners. It appears that all of these factors act in favor of EU and strengthen the links between the evaluation activities and the goals of the evaluation strategy.

Evaluator characteristics emerging from the interviews concern mostly the principal evaluator who has been in contact the longest with other evaluation partners (other evaluators had shorter contracts). The NGO hired him based on his expertise in the field of health equity in the Sahel Region and on the fact that he “had a plethora of publications on the subject [and that] he is very involved and skilled” (ECHO Representative 1). The evaluator was described as one who seeks out pertinent knowledge, who is friendly and with whom a relationship of
mutual trust was established. As one stakeholder mentioned: “we really feel that he wants things to work and he wants things to change [...] even in between evaluations we can always address our questions to him” (HELP Staff 4). As an evaluator suggested, another important resource was the staff member hired to coordinate the scientific activities in Burkina Faso (External Evaluator 3). As one stakeholder said: “we ourselves don’t have the scientific expertise to take on the evaluation responsibilities” (HELP Staff 4). Numerous evaluation partners affirmed that the evaluators are regularly emailing documents for program or funding opportunities and that collaboration has become routine. The links between the evaluation activities and EU by evaluation partners seem indeed supported by the quality of the relationship among the partners of the evaluation strategy.

Hence, interviews show that a number of important evaluation- and evaluator-related factors are already associated with some of the intended outcomes. For example, the ability of evaluation partners to trust and rely on the expertise of the principle evaluator and his ongoing and honest communication with NGO stakeholders. Another example includes the evaluation approach that is participatory and utilization focused. Together, these examples demonstrate factors strengthening the link between evaluation activities and the intended outcomes (e.g., increased documentation, understanding and diffusion of the exemption program’s effects). These factors appear to support the plausibility of the evaluation strategy.

**Plausibility: Contextual Factors.** Alkin and Taut’s (2003) description of the contextual factors include “inter- and intra- organizational characteristics, as well as external community factors” (p. 5). Generally favorable intra-NGO factors have been alluded to throughout this article including the strong collaboration among evaluation partners, the fairly stable NGO context (i.e. little turnover), and the funds allocated to develop the evaluation strategy. Although little was said about the external factors, many did emerge during the interviews. As several participants noted, local politicians are reluctant to the concept of fee exemptions as they have been accustomed, over the years, to the principles and logic of cost recovery strategies where patients pay user-fees. Nevertheless, recent political decisions are more favorable to user-fee exemptions such as Burkina Faso’s 2006 exemption policy that covers 80% of obstetrical and neonatal emergencies fees (SONU) in order to minimize financial barriers to health care accessibility (Amnesty International, 2010). Moreover, as an
evaluator indicated, Burkina Faso’s context of political decentralization has enabled the regional and district level Ministry of Health authorities to partake in the NGO’s exemption program without requiring consensus from the national authorities. Embarked on the exemption program, they are witnessing enhanced utilisation of health centers by the targeted populations (HELP, 2008). Their political position and ability to testify on the merits of the exemption to their national level Ministry of Health colleagues undeniably support the evaluation strategy’s advocacy goals (External Evaluators 3 & 8). Moreover, a consultant working intermittently with HELP describes the current Burkinabe public health policy context as increasingly favorable to EU whereby even government programs must prove their worth (External Evaluator 5).

At a global level, the elaboration of the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals (MDG) includes specific objectives to improve maternal health and to reduce child mortality (United Nations, 2009). According to one evaluation partner the MDG influence donor agencies and African policy-makers to increasingly seek out evidence based knowledge on alternatives to direct payment in order to improve maternal and child health (External Evaluator 5). An external evaluator also specified that another potential influence includes Amnesty International’s (2010) report on maternal mortality (External Evaluator 5). Such external pressures may indeed come to influence political receptivity to HELP’s documentation and advocacy efforts.

**Plausibility: Human factors.** According to Alkin and Taut (2003), human factors include intended users’ (i.e. the evaluation partners’) organizational, personal and professional characteristics. These same authors also suggest that the most important features are the intended users’ interest and commitment to evaluation and its use. In this respect, the donor representative underlined that it is due “to the greatly motivated NGO team who found other very motivated and competent people that we are now hopeful of having a mid-term impact on Burkina Faso’s national policies” (ECHO Representative 1). As he said, documentation and advocacy activities were not initially part of the mandate. Evaluators on their side, affirm that NGO stakeholders show a keen interest towards EU, an unusual openness towards constructive criticism and are particularly proactive in rectifying glitches in their practices that were unveiled by evaluations (External Evaluators 3 & 8). For example, prior to the first
evaluation, the NGO’s exemption program was run in parallel to the state’s health system and the principal evaluator recommended that NGO stakeholders strive to integrate their intervention within Niger’s health system. As the evaluator stated “they completely reorganized the way they worked” around evaluation recommendations. Remarkably also on the positive collaboration with the DRS/MCD, one evaluator said “the first phase enabled us to establish a relationship with them [...] they found interest in our documentation activities and we were motivated to have them participate” (External Evaluator 3). One MCD said “I can see that the evaluations are pointing to data that will help us improve what we do on the field” (Minister of Health15). He also mentioned his concern regarding the exemption’s sustainability fearing that the state cannot absorb the financial costs of maternal and child health. But as he said “maybe with the advocacy activities that we are targeting towards the national level, it will permit decision takers to be more involved, to see that it is a reality, that it’s possible in any case to ameliorate health accessibility via the exemption program” (Minister of Health15). Interviews made apparent that human factors were definitely in support of the evaluation strategy’s goal attainment acting as reinforcing links between the resources, activities and goals of the evaluation strategy.

Accessibility of Relevant Data

Wholey’s (1994) third condition concerns the availability of meaningful data. Undeniably, all evaluation partners contacted were receptive to partake in a future EU evaluation study and provided ample information about their collaboration within the evaluation strategy. Evaluation partners were already able to identify numerous occasions where evaluations had been used and useful supporting the assumption that relevant data will be accessible via the evaluation partners.

Evaluation use was indeed observed at different levels of the evaluation strategy. For example, organizational level changes were manifested when the evaluation partners attempted to integrate the evaluation strategy into the exemption mandate. Another example was seen when HELP’s stakeholders sought out more collaboration from the district and regional Ministry of Health following the evaluators’ recommendation to heighten their integration within the national health system. Evaluation use at the level of the exemption program was also identified. For example, an action-research project demonstrated that many
community members were not informed about the NGO’s exemption and so many women who could have received medical assistance had unattended deliveries. As one participating MCD affirmed “we realized we needed to double our sensitization efforts. This is included in our 2010 action plan” (Minister of Health 15). Capacity building via process use also seems apparent as various evaluation partners explained they understood better, and were more skilled in their respective work at using evaluation methodology and data, logic models, and public health knowledge after participating in evaluation activities. For example, several evaluation partners noticed their heightened ability to write research/evaluation reports and scientific articles after having participated in an Action Research project. Others who collaborated as evaluators in the evaluation strategy noted gains in their capacity to interview participants efficiently and in their ability to analyse quantitative data as a result of working with, and learning from, the principal evaluator. Collectively, these examples clearly demonstrate a rich variety of EUs by the evaluation partners and that obtaining such information from participants during a future evaluation is feasible.

Evaluation partners also shared with us various types of documents pertaining to their evaluation and advocacy efforts. These documents include evaluation activity plans and reports, scientific articles, policy briefs, poster and oral presentations, conventions with partnering organizations, and over 500 relevant emails between themselves. These documents help clarify the preliminary model and corroborate interview data. In conclusion, there is no doubt that evaluation activities are abundant at the NGO, that an evaluation culture is emerging, and that evaluation partners are able and willing to provide sufficient information and materiel for a comprehensive examination of EU.

The Utility of an Evaluation Use Study

The fourth condition identifies potential users’ intended uses of an evaluation (in this case of the evaluation strategy) (Wholey, 1994). While most participants took advantage of the evaluability assessment to share their concerns regarding the evaluation strategy, many also suggested that evaluating EU would enable them to improve their work. More specifically, evaluation partners made clear that while the general development of the evaluation strategy has been surprisingly productive, important concerns remain. For instance, when examining the goals of the evaluation strategy it became clear that the respective weight attributed to
various forms of EUs vary slightly across the evaluation partners. That is, for some (e.g., NGO staff), evaluations serve primarily to identify and rectify glitches in, or validate, the exemption’s implementation. Conversely, other evaluation partners (e.g., DRS, MCD, and donors) focalize more on accumulating evaluation-based knowledge to drive the advocacy efforts and support political decision-making processes. Although these refer to different categories of EU in the literature (see Rich, 1997; Weiss, 1998), they are compatible and fit collectively nicely within the preliminary logic model. Nevertheless, it implies that evaluators are striving towards numerous short- and long-term goals at once and interviews revealed how this has provoked some confusion and tensions among the evaluation partners. This will need to be addressed in order to facilitate further collaboration.

Other related concerns were raised by participants. For example, some suggested that evaluation goals and the potential benefits of conducting evaluations were not always clear. One NGO stakeholder reported that some staff members have reported feeling as though evaluators come and go as they would in a laboratory, they collect data and then they leave (HELP Staff 4). Stakeholders believe these feelings maybe due to a lack of communication between the NGO staff and the evaluators on, for example, evaluation goals and timing. While it was noted earlier that evaluation partners communicated regularly, stakeholders expressed a desire to have more formality in their communication. They want meetings to underline the goals, collaboration plans, procedures, and general time-frame of evaluations in order to coordinate evaluation activities and to minimize misunderstandings. An evaluator acknowledged these needs and affirmed that they are increasing their efforts in this direction. Evaluating the evaluation strategy may help assess current communication and discern any ongoing difficulties in this sense.

Another challenge evaluation partners noted regards the level of participation that evaluations require. In general, evaluators found their partners remarkably committed to evaluations but some irregularities and resistances were noted. Some evaluation partners admit that despite their motivation, it is difficult to integrate evaluation activities to their busy schedules. One MCD noted that his health center staff complained about the sheer number of evaluations (Minister of Health14). One NGO staff noticed that evaluations requiring NGO resources (e.g., vehicles) provoke more resistance as it sometimes conflicts with the NGO’s
own interventions (e.g., routine health center supervisions). The challenge, according to evaluators, is for their partners to abandon the idea of parallel and disconnected mandates but rather aim for a real integration of the evaluation strategy into the exemption mandate. Several participants evoked the need to further understand the factors that constrain the level of participation in the evaluation activities of some of their colleagues. This reflects at once the utility of an EU evaluation study for participants and the need in the scientific community to further our knowledge of participatory evaluations (Daigneault & Jacob, 2009).

An additional key challenge concerns the respective pace and priorities of the three domains in which evaluation partners are involved: humanitarian emergency relief (the NGO), policymaking (Ministry of Health representatives), and evaluation (evaluators). As a research consultant commented “politicians are sometimes pressured to take decisions before evidence-based data are even available or in directions that contradict available data” (External Evaluator 5). As he sees it, the role of the evaluation strategy is to make evidence available for decision makers. The rhythms of these different domains rarely coincide. Moreover, while documentation activities require time, emergency funds do not permit to plan activities on a long term basis and as one evaluator said “we are obliged to juggle with different agendas” (External Evaluator 8). This places the entire mandate in a challenging position. Seen as the exemption program is based on short-term humanitarian funding, evaluation partners are striving to convince policy-makers and donors to adopt and fund the exemption program in a more sustainable manner, an objective the NGO cannot afford. Several participants suggested that the NGO should be relieved of its funding responsibility and instead provide technical and evidence-based assistance to the exemption strategy. According to one participant, a comprehensive evaluation of EU conditions may therefore, provide suggestions as to ways that evaluation/documentation and advocacy strategies may be improved to support the adoption of a sustainable exemption policy by the state (ECHO Representative). Generally, intended users agree that an evaluation study on EU has two broad utilities 1) to help improve evaluation partners’ teamwork and in turn 2) to assist the evaluation strategy’s mandate.

Finally, a summary of the findings relevant to the four conditions of feasibility, which we deem fulfilled, is illustrated in Table 3.

** Insert Table 3 **
Discussion

Wholey’s (Wholey, 2004, 1994) evaluability framework has enabled us to examine four conditions and in turn ascertain the evaluability of the NGO’s evaluation strategy. Indeed, it was possible to identify the intent inherent to the evaluation strategy and to create a logic model for its partners. It was also possible to determine that evaluation strategy’s objectives were plausible and that informative data for a future study on EU and its influential conditions within the evaluation strategy should be accessible. Finally, EPs were eager about undergoing an evaluation to better understand EU and its conditions, thus confirming the value for intended users of our future study. Hence, the four conditions of evaluability were fulfilled.

Limitations constrain however, the scope of our findings. First, seen as we did not interview all evaluation partners the results may not represent the view of them all. Results may be more representative of those in Burkina Faso where a greater number of interviews were conducted. On the other hand, we deem it less essential to interview all evaluation partners for the evaluability assessment than it will be in the future and more comprehensive evaluation study of EU.

Another possible limitation concerns the role of the external evaluators within the NGO and the issue of objectivity. According to Patton and LaBossière (2009), an evaluator’s role varies with evaluation goals. When the goal is to determine a program’s global value, evaluators act as judges but when the goal is to help improve a program they act as advisors. In the context of the exemption program, both mandates apply and external evaluators have negotiated a combination of these positions. Indeed, the relationship between the external evaluator and other evaluation partners dates from 2007 and may influence our results by limiting the expression of any discomfort or disapproval among evaluation partners or generally towards evaluation. Our current and future interviews may therefore be tainted by a normative discourse.

Wholey’s Evaluability Assessment (EA) framework provided very helpful guidelines for the current assessment. However, attempting to adapt his framework was no easy task. A recurrent issue concerns the idea of thresholds for what qualifies enough versus too little evidence to consider a condition met. For example, how much evidence do we need before
assuming that the goals of the evaluation strategy are appropriate and feasible? Or another example concerns the third evaluability condition which examines whether relevant “performance data” can be obtained. Performance data makes sense in a summative evaluation but it is less intuitive in the current case where our future process evaluation will be exploratory and where a “performance” measure of EU is difficult to conceive and not really our aim. Seeking through the literature to see how other researchers have dealt with this issue proved to be futile because to our knowledge no authors have addressed this point. We therefore decided that any form of EU would provide some support for the relevance of evaluating the evaluation strategy. The interviews actually revealed that EU is very prolific among the evaluation partners and so it turns out that the issue was not problematic in our case. But, what constitutes a satisfactory amount or kind of the studied phenomena to ascertain that the condition is met remains an ambiguous element of the framework. We could not agree more with Trevisan’s (2007) statement that “there is considerable work the evaluation field could do to improve the implementation and use of EA” (p. 298). Trevisan (2007) also pointed out that “there is little guidance on the actual implementation and use of EA” (p. 299) and that the concept and method of EA lacks clarity. While different EA frameworks exist (see Smith, 1989; Thurston, Graham, & Hatfield, 2003; Trevisan & Yi, 2003), none seemed particularly helpful in resolving the difficulties we encountered. We chose to use Wholey’s framework as his work is very prominent in the evaluation literature and his framework is simple and targets the four conditions that seemed most crucial to examine in the current case study. While it was our chosen model we still would recommend future evaluability assessors to consider the different EA frameworks described in the literature and choose the most fitting for their context and objectives. Trevisan’s (2007) article presents an overview of the state of EA practice over time and provides interesting insights regarding the uses and methodologies of EA. In the current context, conducting an EA was a crucial step that validated the idea of realising an evaluation study of EU and at the same time helped orient this upcoming evaluation study. As Thurston et al. (2003) suggest, “EA is a cost-effective solution recommended by the authors for projects in formative stages looking for assistance in direction, evaluation, and setting up a monitoring system” (p. 220). Wholey’s framework offered suitting guidelines for our EA but further research clarifying EA’s various uses and
methods in diverse contexts may prove useful for other researchers needing to glimpse at their study context in order to secure the feasibility of their endeavour.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, numerous authors have documented the gap existing between the production of knowledge and its application in general practical settings including within the humanitarian sector (Ahmed, 2005; ALNAP, 2001; Bellman, Webster, & Jeanes, 2011; Crewe & Young, 2002; Crisp, 2004; Dobbins, Ciliska, Cockerill, Barnsley, & DiCenso, 2002; Karan, 2009; Lomas, 1991; Proudlock, Ramalingam, & Sandison, 2006; Sandison, 2006; Utterback, 1974). Especially in the health and humanitarian sectors, such a research-practice gap can have deleterious effects on vulnerable populations (Adhikari, Maskay, & Sharma, 2009; Dobbins et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2001). The World Health Organization (2004) stipulated that the “links between health systems and health research systems need to be strengthened to generate and use relevant knowledge” (p. 1). Furthermore, Hoffman et al., (2012) highlight that efficient investments in health systems rely heavily on empirical evidence and it is for that reason that the World Health Organization will target exactly these issues in an upcoming 2012 report. The current NGO’s exemption program is making great strides to facilitate health care access for vulnerable populations (Ref 5). With the intent to bolster the NGO’s efforts via the use of scientific knowledge, evaluation and advocacy activities have been integrated to the exemption program in Niger in 2007 and from the start of the Burkina Faso mission in 2008. As Young (2005) noted, financial barriers challenge the production of research throughout Africa and limit access to institutions and trained manpower for the production of high quality empirical research. International organizations, such as the current NGO and its donors (ECHO), that are able to fund and produce scientific knowledge, are still confronted by such questions as “what makes a good evaluation with high chances of being used?” Indeed, the success of the evaluation strategy relies heavily on the assumption that evaluations will be utilized. An evaluation study of EU that is now deemed feasible has the potential to clarify a number of critical issues in this respect.
**Competing interests:** The first author has benefitted from HELP’s logistical assistance. The second and third authors have both worked as consultants for HELP. The funders and the NGO HELP did not take part in decisions on the study design, data collection or analysis, preparation or publication of the manuscript.

**Ethical issues:** Ethical approval was granted from the ethical committee of the Université de Montréal. Following a description of the study’s objectives and procedures, evaluation partners’ participation was solicited and in positive responses the setting and time of interviews were determined according to their preference. Interview transcriptions were anonymized to conserve the confidentiality of the participants.

**Acknowledgments:** The data collection was funded by the le Centre de Recherche du Centre Hospitalier de l’Université de Montréal (CRCHUM). The first author is funded by the Strategic Training Program in Global Health Research, a partnership of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Québec Population Health Research Network. The authors are immensely grateful for the participation and kind assistance of the HELP stakeholders and staff, the external evaluators, the “équipes cadre de districts” of Dori, Sebba (Burkina Faso) and Tera (Niger) and the ECHO representative for making this study possible. Many thanks also to the different colleagues who have read the manuscript and provided their insights. Valéry Ridde is a New Investigator of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The funders and the NGO had no role in the study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish or preparation of the manuscript.
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Table 1. Distribution of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of evaluation partners</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Both countries</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HELP staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>7 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External evaluators</td>
<td>5 (1)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>8 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO representative</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH authorities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>20 (3)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluability assessment framework</td>
<td>Interview guide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **1) Program intent & Logic Model** | • Planned evaluation and diffusion activities.  
   • The intended impact of EU upon evaluation partners and the exemption.  
   • The conditions that promoted the collaboration among evaluation partners. |
| **2) Program plausibility** | • Evaluation and knowledge diffusion activities undertaken.  
   • EU by evaluation partners.  
   • The development of the evaluation strategy in the exemption and its  
     professional and political context.  
   • The conditions and factors that facilitate and challenge the objectives of the  
     evaluation strategy. |
| **3) Data accessibility** | • How the participants experience, engage with, act upon, and value EU.  
   • Existing evaluation-related documentation (e.g., evaluation-related plans,  
     reports, and emails) and whether it may be accessible for analysis. |
| **4) Utility of an evaluation** | • Participants’ perceptions of the usefulness of an evaluation of EU.  
   • The strengths and limits of the evaluation strategy’s activities.  
   • The value of EU in the NGO’s exemption program. |
### Table 3. Summary of the findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluability conditions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1) Program intent & Logic Model** | • The logic model illustrates the progression of scientific activities, the evaluation partners’ shared goals and commitment to EU onto a coherent timeline.  
• The preliminary model provides an important blueprint orienting our future evaluation study. |
| **2) Plausibility** | • Results suggest a multitude of factors are aligned with the evaluation strategy goals:  
  1) **Evaluation factors**: an approach that is participatory and utilisation focused.  
     **Evaluator factors**: an expert, adheres to exemption goals, trusting relationship, provides ongoing support.  
  2) **Context factors**: relatively stable NGO personnel and funds, the local and global political climate is increasingly favorable to exemption programs and to evidence-based knowledge.  
  3) **Human factors** (evaluation partners): motivated, competent and proactive with EU. |  
• Evaluation strategy activities are progressing well and are deemed as helpful by participants. |
| **3) Accessibility** | • Participants demonstrated they were involved in the evaluation strategy and with EU thus attesting to the presence of relevant data.  
• Participants accepted to partake in a future evaluation study on EU during which they would provide more relevant information.  
• The NGO’s evaluation strategy provides an EU-rich environment presenting a great case to explore EU in a humanitarian context. |
| **4) Utility** | • Participants agreed to partake in a future evaluation study hoping it may foster further EU.  
• Participants underlined challenges needing further examination and sensitivity.  
• Participants suggest evaluation study of EU may help improve their effective teamwork and support the success of the evaluation strategy. |
**Figure 1.** The preliminary logic model of the evaluation strategy

### NIGER Evaluation (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Hypothesized contributing factors</th>
<th>Evaluation activities</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Impact short-term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Evaluation partners (EPs)  
- Evaluators  
- HELP (stakeholders, actors, donors)  
MoH authorities | Evaluation/evaluator  
- Approach, expertise  
Context  
- NGO, National, Global  
Human  
- Communication, trust, EP motivation + receptivity | 2007 Process evaluation of exemption  
- includes: preparation, communication, data collection, analysis, restitution + final report | Learn about exemption + evaluation  
- Donors gain interest in evaluation and exemption program | - EPs collaboration continues  
- EU (process + findings) |

### BURKINA FASO Evaluation Strategy (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Hypothesized contributing factors</th>
<th>Evaluation activities</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Impact short-term</th>
<th>Impact medium-term</th>
<th>Impact long-term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Additional EPs  
- HELP staff  
- Evaluators  
- DRS+ MCD  
Groupe de Travail members (other NGO’s) | Same as Niger + more:  
- Funds  
- More interest in evaluation + motivation to collaborate  
Clarity + formality of communication  
Timing: when MoH take decisions, when donors finance, when possible to collect data | More evaluation + diffusion activities  
Exemption:  
- Process  
- Effects: service utilization, population, community, medical prescriptions, COGES finances, beneficiary satisfaction, costs, evacuation + caesarian section services  
Groupe de Travail Action Research Knowledge transfer + advocacy activities:  
- Policy briefs  
Evaluation training | ↑ EU by Eps  
- Process + findings  
↑ documentation, understanding of exemption + evaluation → empowerment of EPs + NGO  
↑ diffusion of evaluation-based knowledge: Findings shared by DRS+ MCD to national and other West African MoH | ↑ EU in organization  
- Evaluation logic + EU = routine + mainstreamed  
- ↑ networks + attention centered on program objectives, questions  
- ↑ evaluation data available | ↑ credibility  
- ↑ appreciation of exemption at National MoH, donor agencies + scientific community | ↑ EU at macro level  
↑ EU for policy making, program planning + decision making  
EU → to aid HELP achieve exemption objectives: ↓ child + maternal morbidity + mortality |
2.2. Article 2. A qualitative case study of evaluation use in the context of a collaborative program evaluation strategy in Burkina Faso

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Abstract

**Background:** Program evaluation is widely recognized in the international humanitarian sector as a means to make interventions and policies more evidence-based, equitable, and accountable. Yet little is known about the way humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) actually use evaluations.

**Methods:** The current qualitative evaluation employed an instrumental case study design to examine evaluation use (EU) by a humanitarian NGO based in Burkina Faso. This organization developed an evaluation strategy in 2008 to document the implementation and effects of its maternal and child health care user fee exemption program. Program evaluations have been undertaken ever since, and the present study examined the discourses of evaluation partners EPs in 2009 (n=15) and in 2011 (n=17). Semi-structured individual interviews and one group interview were conducted to identify instances of EU over time. Alkin and Taut’s (2003) conceptualization of EU was used as the basis for thematic qualitative analyses of the different forms of EU identified by stakeholders of the exemption program in the two data collection periods.

**Results:** Results demonstrated that stakeholders began to understand and value the utility of program evaluations once they were exposed to evaluation findings and then progressively used evaluations over time. EU was manifested in a variety of ways, including instrumental and conceptual use of evaluation processes and findings, as well as persuasive use of findings. Such EU supported planning, decision-making, program practices, evaluation capacity, and advocacy.

**Conclusions:** The study sheds light on the many ways evaluations can be used by different actors in the humanitarian sector. Conceptualizations of EU are also critically discussed.

**Keywords:** Evaluation use, utilization, knowledge transfer, program evaluation, Burkina Faso (West Africa), health care, user fee exemption
Introduction

Humanitarian assistance organizations are increasing investing in program evaluation to enhance performance, practice, and accountability (Beck, 2003; Crisp, 2004; Darcy & Knox Clarke, 2013; Hallam, 2011; Hallam & Bonino, 2013). Yet ensuring knowledge derived from evaluation of humanitarian action (EHA), defined as the “systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability” (ALNAP, 2006, p. 14), is actually used remains an important challenge (Beck, 2003; Dagenais, Queuille, et al., 2013; Hallam, 2011; Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Harveu et al., 2010; Sandison, 2006). A common difficulty highlighted by Hallam (2011) is that “too often, humanitarian evaluations exist as a disconnected process, rather than becoming embedded as part of the culture and mindset of humanitarian organisations” (p. 3). The literature offers few examples of evaluation strategies that have been integrated into a humanitarian aid program, used effectively, and documented over time (Cousins & Shulha, 2006). Rare also are studies that document the perspectives of both knowledge producers (e.g. evaluators) and intended users (Cousins & Shulha, 2006).

The present article examines evaluation use (EU) by HELP (Hilfe zur Selbshilfe e.V.), a German humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Burkina Faso that has developed an evaluation strategy, which it has embedded into its health care user fee exemption program (HELP, 2008; Ridde, Heinmüller, Queuille, & Rauland, 2011; Ridde & Queuille, 2010; Ridde, Queuille, et al., 2012). The exemption program was implemented in Burkina Faso in part because of the country’s high rates of mortality and morbidity and its context of economic poverty, in which user fees undermine the accessibility of health services for many (HELP, 2008; INSD, 2010; Ridde & Queuille, 2010; WHO, 2007). Especially in the Sahel region, where HELP implemented its user fee exemption program, maternal and infant rates of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality are exceedingly high, as shown in the World Health Organization’s 2014 statistical report (HELP, 2008; Ridde & Queuille, 2010; WHO, 2014). HELP’s program is aimed at exempting indigents, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children under five from user fees (Ridde & Queuille, 2010). HELP had previously implemented a similar exemption program in Niger, which had been evaluated in 2007. Some HELP staff and evaluators continued their collaboration through the evaluation strategy in
Burkina Faso’s exemption program. The evaluation strategy was developed in Burkina Faso in 2008 to document the exemption program’s implementation and effectiveness for purposes of accountability, program learning and improvement, and advocacy (Dagenais, Queuille, et al., 2013; Ridde, Heinmüller, et al., 2011). Ridde, Queuille, et al. (2012) have described in detail 12 of the studies undertaken (Table 1) by HELP as part of the evaluation strategy. Stakeholders of the strategy, referred to in this article as evaluation partners (EPs), were primarily HELP’s exemption program staff and the external evaluators, but also included the Sahel regional health director (directeur régional de la santé, DRS), the district chief physicians (médecins chefs de district, MCDs), and representatives from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO, the funding agency), as well as advocacy partners, including a journalist and a representative of Amnesty International.

Following an evaluability assessment of EU in Burkina Faso as part of the evaluation strategy described by Ridde, Queuille, et al. (2012), it was clear the experiences of its EPs presented a rich opportunity to examine progressive EU over time (D’Ostie-Racine et al., 2013). More specifically, the present study is innovative in examining the different forms of EU in depth, using a diachronic approach to observe any variations in EU between 2009 and 2011 from the varied perspectives of the different EPs. EPs who had collaborated both on the Niger 2007 evaluation and on the evaluation strategy in Burkina Faso were able to discuss variations in EU between 2007 and 2011.

**Evaluation use (EU).** Evaluation use (EU), sometimes also called evaluation utilization, has been defined as “the application of evaluation processes, products, or findings to produce an effect” (Johnson, Greenseid, Toal, King, Lawrenz & Volkov, 2009, p. 378). Traditionally, EU has been viewed solely as the use of evaluation findings—referring, for example, to the application of evaluation recommendations (Herbert, 2014; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). In this view, after reading an evaluation report, staff in a humanitarian program aimed at alleviating malnutrition could, for example, strive to implement a recommendation to increase the supply of a given nutrient to toddlers of a given community. Current definitions of EU, however, include not only *findings use* but also *process use*, a term originally coined by Patton (2008b) to refer to the “individual changes in thinking, attitudes, and behavior, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture that occur among those
involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process” (p. 155). Patton (2007) explained that process use could, for instance, manifest as “infusing evaluative thinking into an organization’s culture” (p. 103), which might be seen in attempts to use more clear, specific, concrete, and observable logic (Patton, 2008b). Humanitarian staff for the same nutritional program could, for example, learn during an evaluation process to specify clearer program objectives, beneficiary selection criteria, program actions, and success indicators. Such process use could enhance shared understanding among them and potentially lead to program improvements and ultimately to lower rates of malnourishment. In the present study, we have attempted to attend to a broad spectrum of EUs by according no primacy to findings use over process use and by documenting unintended uses as well as uses that occurred over time in a cumulative or gradual manner.

The principal objective of the present study was to examine the diverse uses of evaluation findings and processes engendered by the evaluation strategy. A related objective was to examine whether any changes in EU occurred between 2009 and 2011. Hence, the focus was not on the use of a particular evaluation study, but more generally on how EU evolved over time, as the evaluation strategy was developed and more than 15 evaluation studies (Table 1) were conducted. For the present study, we employed an adapted version of Alkin and Taut’s (2003) conceptualization of EU to ensure its diverse manifestations were identified. In their model, EU is either findings use (instrumental, conceptual, legitimative) or process use (instrumental, conceptual, symbolic). Instrumental use involves direct use of evaluation-based knowledge for decision-making or for changing program practices (Alkin & Taut, 2003). Conceptual use refers to indirect use of knowledge that leads to changes in the intended user’s understanding of program-related issues. Symbolic use relates to situations in which those requesting the evaluation simply seek to demonstrate their willingness to undergo evaluation for the sake of reputation or status (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Lastly, legitimative use occurs when evaluation findings are used to justify previously undertaken actions or decisions (Alkin & Taut, 2003). We adapted Alkin and Taut’s (2003) conceptualization by integrating its symbolic and legitimative uses under the broader concept of persuasive use, to also account for what Estabrooks (1999) described as using evaluation as a persuasive or political means to legitimize a position or practice. Leviton and Hughes (1981) further clarify the interpersonal influence that is integral to persuasive use, explaining that it
involves using evaluation-based knowledge as a means to convince others to subscribe to the implications of an evaluation and hence to support a particular position by promoting or defending it. We added this term to stress the point made by previous authors that persuasive forms of EU can also serve constructive purposes (Leviton & Hughes, 1981; Weiss, 1977). For instance, empirical evidence can be used persuasively to advocate for equity in global health. Symbolic and legitimative EU are terms that commonly carry negative connotations and are not easily applied to such constructive purposes. Persuasive use is included to draw attention to the different and concurrent ways in which evaluations can be used to influence reputations, judgment of actions, or political positions.

Some examples may help clarify these different forms of EU. For instance, discussions during the evaluation process about the lack of potable water in a given village could lead intended users to think about strategies to bring water to the village; they might also recognize how helpful evaluations are in highlighting water needs for that village and how hard village locals have been working to fetch their water. These are forms of conceptual process use, in that intended users’ conceptions changed as a result of discussions during the evaluation process. Had such conceptual changes occurred as they learned of evaluation findings, this would have been conceptual findings use. Had intended users come to meet with locals and/or decided to dig a well, that would illustrate instrumental process use. It would have been instrumental findings use, had this decision to build a well been taken based on findings showing, for example, high morbidity rates associated with dehydration. Having already taken the decision to build the well, stakeholders could ask for an evaluation solely to demonstrate empirically the need for a well; this would be legitimative use. Or, they could have their well-building intervention evaluated without any intent or effort to use evaluations, but simply for symbolic use, to demonstrate their willingness to be evaluated. Then again, the well-building intervention could also undergo evaluation to provide convincing data that could be used in political claims advocating for human rights to potable water policies, thereby constituting persuasive use.

**Insert Table 1**
**Method**

**Research Design**

This evaluation used a qualitative single case study design and a descriptive approach to examine EPs’ discourses about EU over time (Yin, 1999, 2014). This was an instrumental case study, in that HELP’s evaluation strategy was chosen for its ability to provide insight into EU (Stake, 2003). To document the evolution of EU over time, two waves of data collection were conducted by the first author in Burkina Faso using a diachronic approach with an interval of 29 months (July 2009, November 2011). The 2009 data collection lasted five weeks and employed individual interviews. The one-month 2011 data collection involved individual interviews as well as one group interview. Documentation and non-participatory observation provided contextual complementary information.

**Recruitment Procedures**

Objectives and procedures of the present study were explained to EPs upon soliciting their participation. When EPs responded positively, interviews were scheduled at a time and place of their convenience. Recruitment for individual interviews in 2009 and 2011 followed two *purposeful sampling strategies* (Patton, 1990). The *intensity sampling* strategy (targeting persons intensely affected by the studied phenomenon) led us to recruit the principal evaluator and the NGO’s head of mission as the first participants (Patton, 1990). Thereafter, the *snowball sampling* strategy was used, in which participants were asked to suggest other information-rich respondents. A conscious effort was made to limit the risks of “enclage” (a French term describing the risk that the researcher would be assimilated into a given clique and estranged from other groups and/or the larger group as a whole), as cautioned by Olivier de Sardan (2003, p. 49). The extensive experience in the study context of one of the authors helped avoid such potential sampling biases. Data triangulation was also achieved by recruiting multiple participants with diverse relationships to HELP’s evaluation strategy as a means of obtaining varied perspectives and enhancing the study’s validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). Such intra-group diversification was a conscious attempt to collect multiple viewpoints for a comprehensive appreciation of EPs’ individual and collective experiences (Pires, 1997; Stake, 2010).
Participants, data collection instrument and protocol

Thirty-six semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in 2009 (n = 15 respondents, 17 interviews) and in 2011 (n = 17 respondents, 19 interviews) in Ouagadougou, Dori and Sebba. In each round of data collection, an extra interview was conducted with two EPs who had been particularly active and involved in the evaluation strategy and had more to say after a single interview; hence the number of interviews exceeded the number of respondents by two in both collections. Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents for both data collections. Six EPs were interviewed in both 2009 and 2011. All EPs from HELP involved in the evaluation strategy were interviewed at least once, either in 2009 or 2011. EPs interviewed only in one data collection were either not working with HELP or out of the country during the other collection. Length of collaboration in the evaluation strategy ranged from three to 52 consecutive months for 16 EPs and was intermittent for the others. Eighteen EPs were locals from Burkina Faso, three were from West Africa, and five were international expats. Five were women, three held management positions, one was an evaluator, and another was a community outreach worker.

Individual interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes. Interviews (individual and group) were semi-structured and followed an interview guide flexibly enough to allow it to evolve as the study progressed (Patton, 1990). Questions were open-ended and solicited descriptions of EPs’ experiences and perceptions, as they had evolved over the course of the evaluation strategy, of: 1) the evaluation strategy; 2) evaluation use; 3) collaboration with other EPs; and 4) the influence of evaluation upon them, other partners, and their work environment. For most EPs, questions focused on the years 2009 to 2011, but those who had collaborated in the Niger evaluation were also free to recall their experiences starting in 2007. Specific examples of interview questions are presented in Table 3.

**Insert Table 2**

**Insert Table 3**

The group interview was conducted at the start of the 2011 data collection before the individual interviews, as a means of discerning interpersonal dynamics and spurring collective
brainstorming on the general questions of the present study. It lasted 90 minutes. This was a small group (n = 3) of HELP personnel who had been responsible for evaluation-related activities; these were a manager and two coordinators. Inspired by Kitzinger’s (1994 ; 1995) suggestions for focus groups, we used open-ended questions to foster interactions among them as a means of exploring emerging themes, norms, and differences in perceptions regarding the evaluation strategy, EU, and interpersonal dynamics among EPs. They were encouraged to explore different viewpoints and reasoning. Significant themes were later discussed in the individual interviews.

Interviews were conducted in French (Table 3), recorded digitally, transcribed, and anonymized to preserve confidentiality. Transcripts were the primary data source for analyses.

Two additional sources of information provided insight into the study context, although not formal study data. Non-participant observation shed light upon EPs’ interpersonal dynamics and HELP’s functioning, as the first author spent four weeks during each of the two data collections in HELP’s offices interacting with HELP staff and with visiting partners. In 2011, she also accompanied HELP staff from all three sites on a five-day team trip, during which a team meeting was held. Documents relevant to the evaluation strategy (e.g. evaluation plans and reports, scientific articles, policy briefs, meeting summaries, emails between EPs, advocacy documentation) were also collected to deepen understanding of the study’s context. These data provided opportunities for triangulating data sources, thereby strengthening the validity of EPs’ discourses.

**Analyses**

Qualitative thematic content analyses were performed on the interview transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994) using a mixed (inductive and deductive) approach and codebook. Coding and analysis were facilitated by the use of QDA Miner data analysis software. An adapted version of Alkin and Taut’s (2003) model was used to identify and code different forms of EU. We used their conceptualizations of instrumental and conceptual EU but adapted the model, as mentioned earlier, by adding persuasive EU as a broad term encompassing the concepts of symbolic, legitimative, and advocacy forms of EU. A specific code entitled “change” was also created to capture any observations of changes related to EU mentioned
and discussed by respondents in the 2011 interviews. For example, if a respondent in 2011 noticed that more evaluations had been conducted and disseminated and that this had led to more instances of EU, the code “change” was applied to this sentence and integrated into the 2011 analyses and results (described below). Special attention was paid to ensuring that a broad range of EUs would be detected. After coding, we retrieved each type of EU and examined the coded excerpts for 2009 and for 2011 separately to identify and describe any apparent differences emerging from the respondents’ discourses on EUs between 2009 and 2011. In this manner, a thematic conceptual matrix was created, facilitating the organization and analysis of specific instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive (including symbolic/legitimative) uses of evaluations in both 2009 and 2011. A summary of this matrix is presented in Table 4 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first author performed all the coding and analyses but met twice with a qualitative research consultant, six times with a co-author, and 10 times with a research colleague to discuss and verify the codebook and to ensure coding consistency and rigour over time (coding conferences). The iterative analysis process allowed for review of coded excerpts and hence continuity of the coding and interpretations. Attention was paid to capturing EPs’ interpersonal dynamics, as well as their individual and collective experiences over time (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995). As mentioned, both non-participant observation and documentation helped the first author gain a deeper understanding of HELP’s context, but neither was analyzed systematically, due to lack of time and because interview data were already abundant. Analyses were not systematically validated by a second researcher, but two EPs active in the evaluation strategy commented on and validated a draft of the present article. The research was approved by the Ministry of Health of Burkina Faso. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Montreal’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences and by the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health of Burkina Faso.

**Verification**

Member checking was undertaken at various times and with different EPs to strengthen the validity of the findings (Stake, 2010). For example, during data collections the first author frequently verified her comprehension of the issues raised by EPs either during the interviews or after. The different themes emerging from analyses were discussed with several
respondents to see whether they reflected EPs’ experiences and whether additional themes should be included. Drafts of the articles were sent by email to four participants who were thought to be most likely to have the time to read and comment on the drafts; two were able to respond to these member checking calls. Their feedback was always integrated into the iterative analysis process and usually also into the article drafts. Such member checking took place in informal discussions, during interviews, and even in email correspondence. Other strategies were used to ensure responsiveness, sensitivity, and reflexivity in the researcher’s approach and to support the validity of the present study (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002); these included co-coding and code discussions with a peer, using an iterative process in the analyses, peer debriefing (discussing the research methodology and analyses with academic peers), and keeping a log book of questions, ideas, challenges, and decisions related to the study (Patton, 2005; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

Results

We first present results on use of evaluation findings for 2009 and 2011, followed by results on use of evaluation processes for 2009 and 2011. In the 2011 interviews, respondents frequently mentioned EU examples similar to those presented in 2009. For the sake of brevity, we present only the examples from 2011 that cover new ground. Results are summarized in Table 4. It should be noted that the column on the left in Table 4 lists respondents speaking about use by intended users; hence, when external evaluators (EE) are indicated, it refers to themes discussed by evaluators about intended users’ EU, and not their own.

Use of evaluation findings in 2009 and 2011

Instrumental use of evaluation findings. In 2009, participants described various ways in which evaluation findings were used instrumentally. An evaluator was pleasantly surprised by HELP’s interest and proactivity in implementing recommendations from a previous evaluation in Niger in 2007 (Table 1: study 9): “They took our recommendations into consideration and completely changed their practice and the way they intervened” (EE3). A HELP staff member corroborated this affirmation and described how they used evaluation findings to plan the exemption in Burkina Faso, paying specific attention to avoiding mistakes
underscored in the previous evaluation report (see Ridde & Diarra, 2009). For example, as recommended by evaluators, HELP sought the collaboration of the DRS and MCDs—as representatives of the Ministry of Health (MoH)—right from the start of the user fee exemption program in Burkina Faso instead of setting up its intervention in parallel to the State’s health system, as had unwisely been done in Niger. EPs also noted that evaluation findings had helped them identify and resolve problems in their program and its implementation. For example, a HELP staff member recalled learning about preliminary evaluation findings (Table 1: study 7) that indicated some intended beneficiaries did not know they could be exempted from user fees. In response, HELP increased its awareness-raising efforts through radio information sessions and pamphlets. EPs also spoke about how evaluation findings had been used to identify solutions that were concrete, locally meaningful, and applicable. According to a HELP staff member and MoH representatives, some findings were not used immediately but guided planning and decision-making. For example, following the presentation of an action research report (Table 1: study 15, Dori), MoH representatives decided to incorporate into the district’s annual plan the recommendations to set as priorities improving health services quality and raising awareness of the exemption.

The 2011 interviews revealed that findings were being used for similar purposes as in 2009, including to improve practices and to guide decisions. For example, three HELP staff members referred to evaluation findings that had helped them better identify, select, and recruit eligible beneficiaries (Table 1: studies 6 and 14). In that study, findings highlighted that, while indigents were a target group of the exemption, little had been done to reach out to them. This led HELP staff to test and use an effective selection strategy for indigents. Additionally, findings showing that the cost to exempt indigents was lower than expected led to a decision to increase the number of indigent beneficiaries for each health centre. Another use noted by an EP was that evaluation findings validated their decision to advocate for free health care, which enabled HELP to pursue its actions in this direction. Participants noted that evaluation findings were also used to identify, explain, and resolve certain challenges they encountered. For instance, HELP staff recalled findings from study 7 (Table 1) showing that some intended beneficiaries were being deceived by health centre staff into paying user fees. This valuable information was used to resolve the problem by investing in efforts to raise awareness about the exemption program, its services, target beneficiaries, and criteria.
Another example concerned findings that demonstrated medical staff were complying with and respecting norms for medical prescriptions, contrary to rumours that they had been issuing excessive and inappropriate prescriptions since the exemption for personal gain. This valuable information guided the responses of the medical supervisors in the field, who were reassured to learn they did not need to worry much about this issue. Findings from another evaluation on workload (Table 2: study 16) suggested that, while the exemption program did increase the medical staff’s workload, it did not correspond to the World Health Organization’s definition of work overload (Antarou, Ridde, Kouanda, & Queuille, 2013). An MoH representative noted that these findings had helped him to organize and manage his health centre’s resources, motivate his health care staff, and better adapt to the increase in consultations. An MoH representative also said evaluation findings were used to acknowledge accomplishments, review objectives, and correct practices when necessary. A HELP staff member correctly noted that changes in their practices (instrumental use) were preceded by changes in awareness (conceptualization).

**Conceptual use of evaluation findings.** In 2009, respondents described a few instances of conceptual use of findings. One useful aspect of evaluation findings was that they provided the HELP staff with another, more external perspective. For example, one staff member observed that, at HELP, “we have an internal vision because we work inside it” and that evaluation findings (Table 1: study 12) could shed light on their partners’ views on various issues, such as when reimbursements for medical fees arrived late. HELP staff knew the reasons for this delay were outside their control, but “it was interesting to see how the others [partners] perceived and sometimes criticized this; some even said it was because HELP was too late with reimbursements” (HS4). Similarly, a funding agency representative suggested that evaluation findings gave the agency a better understanding of people’s reactions to the exemption and, hence, of the field reality. Another EP suggested that findings pointed to deficiencies in the exemption program and were helpful in reflecting upon potential solutions: “In my opinion, evaluations gave us a lot of experience and lessons to learn from” (HS10).

In 2011, various EPs described how learning of the evaluation findings gave them a better understanding of the impacts of their work and of the exemption program. A HELP staff
member recalled findings (Table 1: study 7) demonstrating that user fees were the primary barrier to health care accessibility, above and beyond geographical and cultural factors. Such findings validated the exemption program’s mission and counteracted previous arguments against user fee exemptions. Many of the findings also revealed positive effects of the exemption program on, for example, health service use. Consequently, another benefit of evaluation findings was that they boosted EPs’ motivations for their work:

“I think this study [Table 1: study 3] was really useful and it had pretty important impacts on us. Speaking of the effects on the community, that was a motivating factor for us, it enabled us to see that by going in and out of the community all the time, we were actually bringing something” (HS22).

After evaluation reports were presented, an MoH representative noted he felt more capable when examining the health centre’s clinical data or even dealing with his patients after hearing about the different findings. One EP explained how some findings had changed his conception of the exemption and of program evaluation. He realized evaluations could detect the multiple effects of interventions, including some unexpected ones. For example, findings revealed that mothers felt empowered since the exemption implementation, as they could consult without their husbands’ approval and money (see Samb, Belaid, & Ridde, 2013). Another participant also observed that hearing about evaluation findings changed many EPs’ receptivity to program evaluation. EPs were more forthcoming and followed evaluation activities better after attending report-presentation workshops (French: ateliers de restitutions) and hearing about the different evaluation findings. He recalled health workers saying, “…the evaluators ‘come take our data and leave!’ but after attending report-release workshops, they understood the findings and their utility; it encourages them to collaborate” (HIS2). Participants also believed evaluation findings enhanced their capacities and their understanding of the field reality.

**Persuasive use of evaluation findings.** In 2009, persuasive use of evaluation was alluded to by EPs describing how evaluations supported their advocacy work. HELP staff said HELP’s major challenge was to disseminate evidence and convince their partners. Another explained their advocacy strategy, which involved partnering with the regional MoH (DRS and MCDs) and having them disseminate evaluation findings at national MoH meetings. The
overarching goal was to convince policy-makers of the benefits of user fee exemptions. HELP staff and MoH EPs suggested that the evaluation strategy validated their exemption work and bolstered their advocacy: “We hope that maybe, with the expected results, a funding agency […] perhaps even the State, can participate [in the exemption].” Hence, HELP used findings persuasively to try to convince regional and national politicians to support and scale up the exemption in Burkina Faso. One EP noted that findings were used in project proposals and reports as a means to convince others of the worthiness of pursuing HELP’s exemption program.

In the 2011 interviews, EPs also spoke of using evaluation findings to influence partners and policy-makers. HELP staff recalled partnering with University of Montreal researchers to produce and compile evidence on HELP’s exemption program. Their studies demonstrated the value of the exemption, thereby establishing the pillars of HELP’s advocacy work. Evidence suggested that lifting the financial barriers to health access was commendable and logical. HELP staff recalled presenting findings to the MoH at national and international conferences to promote adoption of a national exemption program. Some also spoke about partnering with Amnesty International to advocate for evidence-based policy-making by the State (Amnesty International, 2009). HELP frequently shared scientific documentation with its funding agency, advocating for a national exemption program. An evaluator acknowledged HELP’s limited success in convincing politicians to adopt and scale up the exemption program, which sometimes led HELP and its partners to question “…the use of all our work?” (EE8). He explained how HELP and the evaluation strategy’s decision-makers had opted to end the evaluation strategy activities gradually, as it had already produced sufficient knowledge on essential questions, and to focus instead on HELP’s advocacy to find ways to increase politicians’ use of scientific evidence. Funding agency representatives criticized HELP’s persuasive use, suggesting that HELP needed to be more proactive in its advocacy strategy, to seek and seize every diffusion opportunity:

“I have the impression that HELP doesn’t really know how to show the value of its research […] Diffusion activities were good but I think they could have done even better. One example is the last diffusion activity; they weren’t able to meet with the Ministry of Health, even though this is a key stakeholder” (ER).
Meanwhile, HELP staff suggested that further targeting diffusion efforts to community members would benefit the exemption program’s activities. One difficulty with this, alluded to by an MoH representative, was the necessity of translating many of the presentations into local languages, as many in the community did not speak French. An evaluator explained how financial constraints led to the prioritization of KT activities targeting political leaders, in hopes this would produce greater impacts. Nevertheless, he explained how evaluators with HELP had sought creative means, such as policy briefs and short films, to reach a diverse audience, focusing particularly on policy-makers.

In both 2009 and 2011, one challenge underscored by EPs was that of interesting policymakers in these evidence-based findings and in the exemption itself. In 2009, the discourse was hopeful, while the 2011 interviews expressed more disappointment and doubt regarding the feasibility of advocacy objectives. From the 2011 interviews, it was clear that HELP had used evaluation findings to try to persuade others of the value of the exemption program. Whether they succeeded in their persuasive attempts is another interesting question, distinct from the present article’s focus specifically on EPs’ own use.

Overall, EPs described instances of instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive use of findings in both 2009 and 2011. However, they discussed using more evaluations in 2011 than in 2009. One evaluator asserted that there was so much more EU by EPs in 2011 that it was not comparable to 2009. An evaluator also suggested this was because only one study, along with the action research project, had been finalized by the time of our first data collection in 2009. EUs were also described in greater detail by EPs in 2011 than in 2009.

**Use of evaluation processes in 2009 and 2011**

**Instrumental use of evaluation processes.** Recommendations are often associated with findings, as they are frequently presented in the final evaluation report. However, in 2009, EPs recalled various lessons learned already during the evaluation process. For example, HELP staff recalled having discussions with evaluators and pointing out a problem, which was that the eligibility criterion for HELP’s user fees exemption for breastfeeding mothers was too vague, because breastfeeding duration varies widely across mother/baby pairs (Table 1: study 13). Based on discussions during the evaluation process, HELP stakeholders operationalized mothers’ eligibility to two years following a baby’s birth, and this information was then shared
via guidelines disseminated to all health centres. Also, EPs who had been involved in the 2007 evaluation in Niger (Table 2: study 9) recalled learning that, because the evaluation had only been organized near the end of the project, it was not possible to use a pre–post design, which would have been the most meaningful methodologically. Having learned from this experience, HELP coordinators consulted the evaluator while planning their Burkina Faso exemption program to ensure pre–post designs could be used in the evaluations to measure the program’s efficacy more reliably. The coordinators had worked both in Niger and then in Burkina Faso and, hence, carried over such lessons. An evaluator recalled how his being consulted at the beginning of the Burkina Faso program led HELP stakeholders to delay implementing the exemption there in order to collect baseline data, despite the ethical dilemma that delaying the exemption meant delaying saving lives. Process discussions clarified that, irrespective of when the exemption would be implemented, the duration of the program was fixed and therefore the number of lives saved in the given time frame would be identical. Moreover, if careful planning led more convincing evidence of the exemption’s beneficial effects, HELP’s advocacy would have greater persuasive power. It was also made clear that funding a series of evaluations could produce useful knowledge for advocacy. Stakeholders made use of these discussions and decided (instrumental process use) to seek funds from a funding agency. They received funding to develop the evaluation strategy, which evolved over time into an extensive series of evaluations. New collaborations and networks with different African institutions were also born out of this initial evaluation partnership.

In 2011, an evaluator suggested the initial collaboration process between HELP and evaluators had stimulated a proliferation of partnerships and networks among EPs, which developed further into their own respective documentation and advocacy projects. An MoH representative reported having learned a great deal about writing research protocols while collaborating with the external evaluators, which led him subsequently to write his own internal research protocol. Another MoH representative also recalled an evaluation of obstetric service use in which community members were, to his surprise, stakeholders in the research process even though they had little education (Table 1: study 8). He quickly realized the added value of their participation, as they gradually understood and supported the findings, became more proactive than usual, and identified sensible means of increasing obstetrical service use. Another instrumental use described by an evaluator and an MoH representative was that their
collaboration may have sparked some EPs’ interest and motivation to develop their capacities further, as several subsequently chose to pursue graduate studies in health research. The evaluator believed that, for some EPs, the experience of networking with researchers and developing new contacts with local and international supervisors may have facilitated admissions to graduate schools and scholarships.

**Conceptual use of evaluation processes.** In the 2009 interviews, HELP staff described experiencing capacity building during evaluations and said their methodological, conceptual, and technical understanding of the different research phases had been reinforced or updated. A HELP coordinator suggested his comprehension of public health had also improved during evaluations, which aided his management of the NGO. Other conceptual changes were noted. As another HELP staff member explained, "*What was good was that we were participating and engaging [in the evaluations] so it was not something external that just fell upon us... the fact that we had to ask questions meant we had to think about it*" (HS2). Through this process, they realized they could ask pertinent questions that strengthened their confidence. One HELP staff member said that participating in evaluations sparked a “*spirit of curiosity*” necessary to ask research questions and stimulated a sense of agency in pursuing answers. He believed more needed to be done to maintain such capacities and make the staff more autonomous. Another HELP staff member described how EPs’ interactions facilitated discussions and fostered the development of a common vocabulary infused with values such as scientific rigour and evaluation use. An evaluator believed evaluation processes had also led to the harmonization of EPs’ perceptions of the exemption and its impacts.

In 2011, EPs conveyed numerous examples of conceptual process use, including capacity building in evaluation (conceptualization, application, and practice). An evaluator reported improvements over time in many of the HELP staff’s research, professional, and management skills. One HELP staff member said working closely with evaluators was a source of inspiration, guidance, and feedback that made him feel stronger and supported. Some reported that participating in evaluations helped their thinking become more rigorous, gave them another perspective on the program, highlighted the importance of measuring program effects, and heightened their receptivity to evaluation. Another HELP staff member noted that it was when EPs really got involved in evaluations that they began to understand the
findings and the value of evaluation, which in turn facilitated integration of EU into the HELP organization. HELP staff member said that participating in the evaluation dissemination process had many benefits, because the preparation and interactions involved required them to reflect more actively on the findings, which, in turn, enhanced their assimilation of the findings, making those more applicable. In his opinion, evaluation processes deepened and harmonized partners’ understanding of the exemption program, helping them find a common direction. A HELP coordinator also said, “By rubbing shoulders with the evaluation culture, we were won over!” (HS7). He described staff as being more prudent in their communications, using language that was measured, succinct, goal-oriented, scientific, and evidence-based: “It prevents us from arguing over facts that are not backed up” (HS7). Another HELP staff member learned that precise communication with evaluators was helpful in obtaining results in tune with his information needs. An EP explained how the evaluation strategy expanded their professional networks, which facilitated information sharing and knowledge transfer. For all these reasons, various respondents believed other humanitarian NGOs involved in emergency action would also benefit from documenting the effects of their work.

Descriptions of conceptual process use examples changed between 2009 and 2011, as EPs suggested they had learned a great deal about evaluation, which changed their attitudes and behaviour with regard to evaluation activities. In 2011, respondents had more to say and were more enthusiastic about sharing the changes in their work, attitudes, and understanding brought on by evaluation. Conceptual use appeared to have increased over time. Looking back over the evolution of the strategy, an evaluator highlighted the fact that the first evaluation activities, which proved useful for HELP, opened the way for more and for progressive development of the evaluation strategy as new funding was granted for each successive phase of the exemption project. In 2009, EPs were impatient to hear about the evaluation findings, but once the evaluations were completed and the results shared, EPs became much more receptive to evaluators and convinced program evaluation was pertinent for HELP. The evaluator pointed out that, as evaluation questions were answered, more were raised, and the evaluation strategy team developed progressively more evaluation activities. This was corroborated by documentation produced and shared by the evaluation strategy team. Thereafter, EPs used evaluation findings more frequently and EU became progressively mainstreamed into HELP’s exemption program.
**Persuasive use of evaluation processes.** In both 2009 and 2011, no respondent described any form of persuasive process use. In no instance did EPs describe having engaged in the evaluation process simply to satisfy the wish of their funding agency, to promote their own reputation, or to convince others. As noted earlier, some spoke about engaging in the evaluation process, but their focus was more on using the findings than on the evaluation process itself.

The 2011 interviews shed light on the dynamics between some HELP staff and evaluators that inevitably influenced evaluation processes and perhaps EU. While these conditions influencing EU are a topic of their own to be covered in a future article, a few details provide valuable insight into the present study’s findings. For example, participants suggested that some HELP staff were reluctant to participate in the evaluation process partly because they did not completely trust the motives of evaluators who, according to them, may have been more concerned about furthering their research careers than about HELP’s actual mission. They expressed their discomfort to colleagues and to evaluators, but did not object to the conduct of evaluations and, in the end, found them useful.

As described in the methods section, non-participant observation and documentation provided valuable contextual information on the evaluation strategy and EPs. While systematic analysis of these data was not feasible due to time constraints, both sources provided relevant information. Non-participant observation enabled the first author to become immersed in the study context, to detect welcoming, collaborative, and friendly dynamics between most EPs, and to observe that EPs were generally at ease in communicating with each other about questions and concerns. Certain other dynamics were also apparent, such as the relatively peaceful and friendly interactions between HELP staff and EPs. HELP staff tended to joke, tease one another, and laugh together. They had social gatherings on evenings and weekends. It was also apparent that some HELP staff tended to have more affinity than others with evaluators. All evaluators were warmly welcomed by HELP staff. While reluctance to trust evaluators’ motives was discussed only in individual interviews, informal discussions revealed that these issues had been discussed explicitly in team meetings. Team meetings appeared to foster frank and direct communication. Even so, various participants mentioned that, in Burkina Faso, anyone dealing with politics learns to communicate using a “*langue de
bois”, a diplomatic way of avoiding discussing sensitive issues directly, and this was indeed observed in interviews and interpersonal dynamics.

Collected documentation relating to the evaluation strategy and to collaborations among EPs also helped the first author become immersed in the working dynamics of EPs. It corroborated EPs’ discourses about increasing efforts over time to formalize agreements together by documenting contracts, report presentations, and collaboration plans. Documents relating to evaluation activities and results (e.g. reports, scientific articles, policy briefs) proliferated between 2009 and 2011, supporting EPs’ descriptions of an increase in evaluation activities and EU over time. Emails between the principal evaluators and HELP coordinators were frequent from 2009 and too numerous to examine systematically, but generally their content demonstrated frank and transparent problem-solving, brainstorming, and sharing of information about activities, events, and scientific articles. As noted earlier, these forms of data were collected by the first author to complement the individual and group interview data and as a means of becoming better acquainted with the EPs’ working environment.

**Insert Table 4**

**Discussion**

The present study enabled us to identify and provide rich descriptions of the different forms of EU in which EPs engaged between 2009 and 2011, as HELP’s evaluation strategy was rolled out. Descriptions of EU, including instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive use of findings and/or processes, were generally more elaborate and specific in 2011, and EPs emphasized that EU had increased since 2009. EPs described all the forms of EU found in Alkin and Taut’s (2003) categories, with the exception of persuasive (and symbolic) process use. Indeed, evaluation findings were used instrumentally by EPs for numerous purposes, including to identify program malfunctions and come up with solutions, to guide decisions and actions, and to manage and motivate colleagues. EPs also used findings conceptually in many ways, such as learning to see their program and work from an external perspective, recognizing the value of the exemption program and of their own work, communicating and motivating staff, and gaining an appreciation for the field reality and for program evaluation.
EPIs also used findings in a persuasive manner to convince others to support and scale up the exemption program. Persuading political decision-makers proved challenging, which corroborates Dagenais et al.'s (2013) findings in the same national context and points to the common difficulty of making policy-making more evidence-based (Crewe & Young, 2002; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). It became clear by 2011 that scientific knowledge was abundant and accessible to anyone interested, and therefore the evaluators felt they had done their work. It had also become clear that, to conserve the scientific rigour and neutrality expected of university researchers, the principal evaluators had to rethink their involvement in advocacy activities. Negotiating where KT ended and advocacy began presented an interesting challenge for external evaluators, HELP coordinators, and other EPIs. Financial limitations also led to difficult decisions regarding what KT activities could be undertaken, by whom, and for whom.

Participating in evaluations also prompted many instances of process use. Overall, the evaluation process provided countless opportunities for EPIs to reflect upon their program and how they worked together and interacted. It provided opportunities to develop partnerships, communicate problems, and identify and implement potential solutions. It was clear, however, that issues of mistrust regarding evaluators’ motives and the allocation of evaluation resources were still taboo for several participants and not discussed openly among EPIs. This may have negatively influenced their collaboration. Finding ways to overcome such challenges might result in more successful collaboration, evaluation participation, and EU. Nevertheless, evaluation activities led EPIs to learn about their program, evaluation processes, and research methodology. By engaging in evaluations and interacting with evaluators, EPIs learned to think in a different way about programs and scientific rigour. Since Patton’s original work (1978) on utilization-focused evaluations, which described the benefits of participatory approaches and process use, many authors have documented the importance of engaging participants in the evaluation process (Buchanan-Smith & Cosgrave, 2013; Cousins, 1998, 2003; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Hallam & Bonino, 2013; King, 2007; Patton, 2008a). The literature suggests that participation should ideally begin at conceptualization of an evaluation study (Patton, 2008b). While this may be ideal, the limited time and financial resources common to humanitarian practitioners, including in HELP’s organizational context, led some EPIs to disinvest or invest only partially in the evaluation strategy. This was a source of frustration for evaluators and those more invested in the evaluation strategy. Yet some EPIs described how participating
principally in the dissemination phase was helpful to them as a creative way of dealing with this issue of limited time, as it led them to invest in and reflect upon all the previous phases of evaluation that had led to the results they were mandated to present. This is an interesting option to consider when participating in all stages of all the evaluations is impossible, as it was for some EPs.

The reason for the absence of persuasive (symbolic) process use was not explained by our respondents, but Højlund’s (2014) thoughts on an organization’s internal propensity and its external pressures to engage in evaluations provide interesting insights. More specifically, from the individual and group interview data, it was clear that, while HELP’s funders had requested the first evaluation, EPs felt little external pressure to undertake evaluations. The propensity to evaluate came from the inside, primarily from HELP’s coordinator, and the overall motives for evaluation were clear: to have credible findings to inform advocacy for accessible health services, and to learn about and improve the exemption program. Engaging in an evaluation process for symbolic reasons simply did not seem to be a concern for EPs. Respondents intended to use the evaluation findings, but not the process, for persuasive purposes.

A frequent challenge during the present study was to determine what exactly sparked EU. For instance, in the section above on instrumental process use in 2009, we discussed how evaluation discussions led participants to reconsider their approach and to seek more evaluation resources, develop the evaluation strategy, and form new collaborative networks and partnerships. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when and why such attitude changes and decisions occurred. Were they prompted directly by discussions during an evaluation activity, which would clearly fall under process use, or did they arise simply from EPs’ being immersed in an evaluation strategy and thus in frequent interaction and communication with evaluators? This points to a limitation of the present study associated with respondents’ difficulty in recalling specifically what triggered a given decision or action. This issue was discussed by Leviton and Hughes (1981), who described how, under such conditions, it is difficult to decipher where conceptual use ends and instrumental use begins and, in turn, to categorize use according to a specific EU taxonomy such as that of Alkin and Taut (2003).

In the real-word setting of the present study, instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive uses often overlapped and were not easily teased apart. For this reason, current EU taxonomy
has received its share of criticism for operationalization challenges or for constraining the scope of evaluation consequences (Henry, 2003a, 2003b; Kirkhart, 2000). We encountered this challenge of limited scope when, for example, EPs discussed long-lasting effects the evaluation process had on them (e.g. expanded professional network, increased funding for the evaluation strategy). While we were sufficiently able to decipher the source of such effects so that we could categorize them using Alkin and Taut’s (2003) EU taxonomy, it is true that Kirkhart (2000) integrated theory of evaluation influence is better adapted to such situations. That author implored researchers to expand the scope of EU by acknowledging the full range of evaluation influences and suggested that existing conceptualizations of EU tend to overlook the value of process use and of uses that occur unintentionally or incrementally over time (Kirkhart, 2000). However, that model would also have presented its share of challenges, as our respondents were frequently unable to provide specific information about the source, intentionality, or timeframe of influence, the three principal dimensions of the model. Providing such information was difficult for them, possibly because of the sheer number of evaluation activities undertaken as part of the evaluation strategy. We therefore concur with other authors in believing that Alkin and Taut’s (2003) taxonomy of EU remains relevant (Cousins & Shulha, 2006), as we found that it facilitated our in-depth examination of the multiple facets and specific forms (instrumental, conceptual, persuasive) of EU processes and findings over time. We agree with Mark (2011) that, rather than reinventing the wheel, a reasonable solution would be to see the concept of evaluation use not as competing with that of evaluation influence but rather as being complementary to it. This may help researchers, evaluators, and intended users attend to an evaluation’s broad array of potential consequences when planning for, conducting, or studying evaluations (Mark, 2011).

Another potential limitation of the study stems from the high mobility and turnover among participants, such that we were able to capture the evolving perspectives of only six EPs over the two data collections. Clarke and Ramalingam (2008) discussed the fact that high turnover is common in humanitarian NGOs and presents both challenges (e.g. loss of organizational memory) and opportunities (e.g. bringing on new staff in line with evolving program objectives). Interviewing the same participants in both phases of the study might have produced different results, but the present findings reflect change processes that are common to the humanitarian sector reality. Patton (1997) described turnover as the Achilles’ heel of
utilization-focused evaluation and discussed the importance of working with multiple intended users so that the departure of one is not necessarily detrimental to EU. This challenge and solution apply to the present study, in which our aim was to follow multiple intended users who were present for either part or all of the study period. In fact, those interviewed in both data collections were four of the primary intended users (from HELP), an external evaluator, and an MoH representative. Hence, the study enabled us to examine the evolution of EU and how it was influenced by interpersonal dynamics and changing realities, such as turnover, that are common to many humanitarian NGOs, through the perspectives of EPs who had experienced the evaluation strategy in a variety of ways. A third potential limitation of the study is that all three authors have, over time and to different degrees, developed professional and friendly relationships with various EPs—the second and third authors having acted as consultants for HELP. In a collaboration that evolves over time, this is not surprising and perhaps sometimes even desirable, but may make it difficult to maintain the neutrality required of an external evaluator. Mitigating these human dimensions while navigating the numerous potential evaluator roles, as described by Patton and LaBosseire (2009), may have led to forms of normative discourse. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the first author completed the research in total independence and without interference from HELP in the data. She undertook the study without payment and received only periodic material or logistical support from HELP when necessary to conduct the data collection. Also, only the first author, who never worked as consultant for HELP, conducted the interviews and analyzed and interpreted the data. While most evaluation studies have examined a single evaluation study or a specific evaluation program at one point in time (for examples see Sandison, 2006), the present study examined EU over time, with data collections separated by 29 months, and during an ongoing series of evaluation studies that were part of the evaluation strategy which originated from a single evaluation study in Niger in 2007. This was challenging because the literature provided few examples to guide the conceptualization and conduct of the present study. Yet this was also the strength of the study, as it presented an innovative standpoint from which to examine EU. Future research may provide further guidance for the study of EU following a single evaluation or multiple evaluations embedded within an organization’s routine operations. Clearly, in our study context, evaluation partners’ EU evolved over time, and the study’s design enabled us to decipher the multiple forms in which EU occurred, including not only
instrumental and conceptual forms of process and findings use, but also persuasive findings use. The study’s methodology was bolstered by our ability to seek out multiple groups of participants and thereby to triangulate perspectives. An important new contribution of the present study is, in fact, that it presents the views of both evaluators and intended users.
Abbreviations:

DRS: Directeur régional de la santé (regional health director)
ECHO: European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department
EHA: Evaluation of humanitarian action
EP: Evaluation partner
EU: Evaluation use
HELP: The non-governmental organization is called HELP (Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.)
KT: Knowledge transfer
MCD: Médecin chef de district (district chief physician)
MoH: Ministry of Health
NGO: Non-governmental organization

Competing interests: The first author has benefited from HELP’s logistical assistance. The second and third authors have both worked as consultants for HELP. The funders and the NGO HELP did not take part in decisions on the study design, data collection or analysis, nor on the preparation and publication of the manuscript.

Authors’ contributions: All three authors conceptualized and designed the research project. Throughout the research project, LDR worked under the supervision, guidance, and support of CD and VR. She developed the interview questions, collected the data, developed the thematic codebook, transcribed some interviews, and analyzed and interpreted the data independently. She also produced the manuscript. CD and VR reviewed and commented on drafts of the manuscript, providing input and guidance.

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Christian Dagenais, Ph.D., is associate professor at the University of Montreal. His research interests are centred around program evaluation and knowledge transfer (KT). He coordinated a thematic segment of the Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation in 2009 and is a co-author of the book Approches et pratiques en évaluation de programme published in
2012. Since 2009, he has led the RENARD team (see: www.equiperenard.ca), which is funded by the Fonds de recherche du Quebec – Société et culture and is the first cross-disciplinary group in Quebec devoted to studying KT in social interventions, including educational, health, and community services.

Valéry Ridd, Ph.D., is associate professor of global health in the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine of the University of Montreal School of Public Health. His research interests are centred around program evaluation, global health, and healthcare accessibility (see: www.equitesante.org). VR holds a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funded Research Chair in Applied Public Health [CPP 137901].

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation of effects</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Assessment of effects on the population through a survey of a representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>panel of households</td>
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<td>2. Assessment of effects on health facilities using an interrupted time-series</td>
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<tr>
<td>analysis</td>
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<td>3. Assessment of the community context and of health centres (CSPS)</td>
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<td>4. Accounting study assessing the financial capacities of the community-based</td>
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<td>health centre management committees (comité de gestion: COGES) in the two districts</td>
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<td>by comparing data 12 months before and six months after the experiment</td>
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<td>5. Appropriateness of prescriptions for children under the age of five years</td>
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<td>6. Effectiveness of an indigent selection process assessed using a quantitative</td>
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<td>methodology</td>
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<td>7. Assessment of effects on childbirth costs (n=849) and particularly the estimation of excessive expenses for households</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Effects on community participation and the empowerment of community-based health centre management committee (COGES) members and women</td>
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<th>Assessment of processes and relevance</th>
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<tr>
<td>9. A process evaluation of user fees abolition for pregnant women and children</td>
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<td>under five years in two districts in Niger (West Africa)</td>
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<td>10. User fees abolition policy in Niger: Comparing the under five years exemption</td>
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<td>implementation in two districts (Ridde, Diarra, et al., 2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. A case study into the times taken to reimburse procedures performed without</td>
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<td>payment, in a sample of ten CSPSs</td>
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<td>12. A study on the costs of reimbursed procedures for children under the age of</td>
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<td>five years</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. A process assessment of an intervention’s progress, strengths and weaknesses,</td>
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<tr>
<td>chances of continuing, merits and relevance</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Analysis of relevance of an indigent selection process, performed during the</td>
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<td>same data collection for effects on community participation (see above)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Action-Research guided by Réseaux d’Accès aux Médicaments Essentiels (RAME)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dori team: Quality of health services</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sebba team: maternal morbidity in the context of cost sharing, SONU, and HELP’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>exemption.</td>
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<td>- RAME team: Treatment coverage at the Yalgado Ouedraogo Hospital in the context</td>
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<td>of the prepaid emergency kits</td>
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<td>16. Assessment of health centre staff workload</td>
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<td>17. Evaluation of HELP’s knowledge transfer strategy</td>
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Adapted from Ridde et al. (2012)
### Table 2. Distribution of evaluation partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation partner (EP)</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External evaluator (EE)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP Staff (HS) NGO requesting evaluation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Health (MoH)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO representative (ER) Funding agency Advocacy Partner (AP)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* EPs in both 2009 and 2011: EE: 1; HS: 4; MoH: 1; total: 6*
Table 3. Interview guide: examples of questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009 &amp; 2011</th>
<th>What are your perceptions and experiences concerning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1) The evaluation strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How did HELP’s evaluation strategy begin?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What activities were planned, realized? What were</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the effects observed?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- When and how did you begin to collaborate in the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>evaluation strategy?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- In which evaluation did you participate? How were</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you involved?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- How do you feel about the way the evaluations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>went? Are there things you appreciated or things</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you did not like about the way the evaluations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>went?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>2) Using evaluation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Among the evaluations in which you participated,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>which ones struck you as having something of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>interest? How so?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Were some of the evaluations useful? How so?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Were some not useful? How so? Examples?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Were some of the evaluations used? How so?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Did you or other EPs gain something from</td>
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<td></td>
<td>participating in an evaluation activity?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>3) Collaborating with other EPs</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- How would you describe the collaboration among</td>
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<td></td>
<td>evaluation partners?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>**4) Observed influences of evaluation upon yourself,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>other EPs and your work environment**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Did you or your partners learn anything during</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the evaluations or from the evaluators? How so?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- How have evaluations influenced you, your work?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What are the pros and cons of conducting</td>
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<td>evaluations at HELP?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What place does evaluation have at HELP? What</td>
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<td></td>
<td>place do you think it should have at HELP?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>- Since 2009, have you noticed changes in the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>evaluation strategy? How so?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- How would you describe the state of the evaluation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>strategy now?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Have you noticed changes over time in the way</td>
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<td>evaluations were used? How so?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- How would you describe the way evaluation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>partners have collaborated over time?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What challenges and successes have you noted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>about the evaluation strategy and the collaboration?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Over time, have you noticed different ways in</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>which evaluation influenced you and/or the work</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and dynamics at HELP?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Use of evaluation findings and processes for 2009 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPs</th>
<th>~ FINDINGS USE ~</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS, EE</td>
<td>Instrumental findings use 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHS</td>
<td>Avoid previous pitfalls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS, MoH, EE</td>
<td>Identify program malfunctions</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, EE</td>
<td>Identify and implement locally sound and applicable solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS, EE</td>
<td>Prepare and disseminate presentations, proposals, articles, policy briefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, AP</td>
<td>Instrumental findings use 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, MoH</td>
<td>Improve practices and take decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS, MoH</td>
<td>Identify, explain and plan for certain situations</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Conceptual findings use 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, MoH</td>
<td>Provide external perspective on the program and its effects</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, MoH</td>
<td>Understand program malfunctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Conceptual findings use 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, AP</td>
<td>Understand effects of exemption and validate its mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>HHS, MoH</td>
<td>Validate exemption program and boost team motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Change perceptions of exemption program and of program evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH, ER</td>
<td>Foster understanding of field reality and clinical data, cultivate a proactive and inquisitive approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS, MoH</td>
<td>Persuasive findings use 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS, MoH</td>
<td>Validate exemption, promote collaboration with regional MoH</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, ER, AP</td>
<td>Persuasive findings use 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, EE, ER</td>
<td>Support advocacy strategy to persuade policy makers and funders</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, EE, ER</td>
<td>More persuasive use needs to target politicians</td>
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<th>EP</th>
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<tr>
<td>HS, EE, MoH</td>
<td>Instrumental process use 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Improve evaluation appreciation and influence decisions (seeking funds, evaluation design, beneficiary criteria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Cultivate new collaborations and networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, EE, MoH</td>
<td>Instrumental process use 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>Enhance EPs’ networks, promote partnerships and evaluation activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>Foster inclusion of usual outsiders to engage and resolve challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, MoH, EE</td>
<td>Conceptual process use 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Facilitate capacity building (e.g. evaluation methodological, conceptual, technical understanding; humanitarian health field)</td>
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<td>HS</td>
<td>Prompt curiosity and reflexive attitude; boost confidence</td>
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<td>HS, EE, MoH</td>
<td>Facilitate communications increasingly tainted by scientific values and expectations</td>
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<td>EE</td>
<td>Prompt cognitive changes facilitating evaluation use</td>
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<td>HS, EE, MoH</td>
<td>Conceptual process use 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS, EE</td>
<td>Increase interest and capacities in exemption and in program evaluation</td>
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<td>HS, EE</td>
<td>Change logic fostering receptivity, ability and yearning for scientific rigor</td>
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2.3. Article 3. Examining conditions that influence evaluation use within a humanitarian non-governmental organization in Burkina Faso (West Africa)

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Abstract

**Background:** Program evaluation can support capacity building and inform practice and policy. Yet long-term efforts to ensure evaluation use (EU) in the humanitarian sector are seldom documented, leaving much uncertainty about EU conditions. This study, conducted from 2009 to 2011, examined conditions that influenced EU by stakeholders of a humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO) in Burkina Faso striving to base its health care user fee exemption program on solid evidence.

**Methods:** This process evaluation used 36 qualitative semi-structured interviews and a single case study design to document EU conditions over 2009 and 2011 from the perspectives of evaluation strategy stakeholders (n = 26), including external evaluators, NGO stakeholders, Ministry of Health, the funding agency, and advocacy organizations. Characteristics of five broad conditions known to influence research use were employed to analyze EU conditions.

**Results:** EU was facilitated by intended users with proactive attitudes, research experience, and willingness to participate in evaluations. Also helpful was an organizational culture that valued learning, feedback, and accountability, wherein leaders collaborated toward common goals, engaged in evaluations, and communicated about needs, resources, and evaluation objectives. Evaluation-based knowledge that met information needs and that was actionable, contextualized, and quickly accessible enhanced EU. Knowledge transfer strategies promoting EU were diverse, participatory, adapted to needs, and regularly followed up. Evaluators who were trusted, experienced, credible, adaptable, inclusive, pedagogical, collaborative, communicative, transparent, well-connected, and sufficiently funded promoted EU most effectively. Conversely, EU was compromised when intended users felt distrusting, uninformed, or unable to engage in evaluations. Organizational barriers included divergent obligations and objectives, passive leaders, insufficient communication, and inadequate funds. Knowledge that contradicted expectations or was deemed inapplicable impeded EU. Adapting knowledge transfer strategies required time and interactions. Initially, these were not sufficiently adapted and put into plain language, which hampered EU. EU was also hindered when evaluators had difficulty communicating with intended users and relating to their needs.
Conclusions: EU conditions are numerous and intricately interrelated, but interpersonal relationships, trust, and effective communication are key conditions for evaluators and stakeholders wishing to promote EU.
Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has suggested that a judicious way to improve global health is to eliminate the gap between health research knowledge and its application in health practices and policies (WHO, 2004, 2013). WHO’s *World Health Report: Research for Universal Health Coverage* (2013) includes program evaluation as a viable source of empirical evidence. Yet ensuring effective evaluation use (EU) is no easy task, especially in the humanitarian sector (ALNAP, 2006; Beck, 2003; Crisp, 2004). Indeed, evaluation of humanitarian action (EHA), defined as the “systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability” (ALNAP, 2006, p. 14; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014), is frequently conducted, but ensuring EU remains a challenge (Darcy & Knox Clarke, 2013; Hallam & Bonino, 2014; Sandison, 2006). In a previous article, we documented how HELP, a German non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Burkina Faso, developed an evaluation strategy that involved progressively conducting over 15 program evaluation projects and then mainstreaming EU to inform the practices, decision-making, and advocacy efforts of its stakeholders and partners, whom we refer to collectively as evaluation partners (EPs). EPs included HELP staff members, external evaluators, the Sahel regional health director (*directeur régional de la santé*, DRS), district chief physicians (*médecins chefs de district*, DRS), and representatives of the funding agency ECHO (European Commission's *Humanitarian* Aid and Civil Protection department) and of advocacy partners such as Amnesty International (D’Ostie-Racine, Dagenais, & Ridde, *under review*). The ultimate objective was to make HELP’s health care user fee exemption program more evidence-based and efficient, and for the program to serve as an example for scaling up user fee exemptions to the national level. That previous study demonstrated that EPs used evaluations in various ways between 2009 and 2011 (see Table 1). Indeed, EPs not only used evaluation *findings* for numerous purposes but also demonstrated various uses of evaluation *processes*, described by Patton (1997) as “individual changes in thinking, attitudes, and behavior, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process” (p. 155). The present article sheds light on the conditions that influenced EU over time.
Research on knowledge transfer (KT) and use of program evaluation has identified a myriad of conditions that influence the use of empirical knowledge. For example, the literature points to the added value of having interactive KT strategies that engage intended users with academic knowledge providers (e.g. researchers) (Dagenais, Malo, et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2009; Lavis et al., 2010). Moreover, two-way knowledge exchange processes that enable both parties to learn from one another tend to be more effective than one-way processes (e.g. when knowledge is either “pushed” by researchers or “pulled” by intended users) (Dagenais, Malo, et al., 2013; Lavis et al., 2010). Studies have also highlighted the importance of building trusting relationships over time to facilitate knowledge sharing and change (Mitton, Adair, McKenzie, Patten, & Waye Perry, 2007; Patton, 2008b). While rigorous evidence remains limited, the generalizability of findings is complicated by the strong influence of contextual factors, and studies of EU in the African and humanitarian contexts are scarce (Dagenais, Malo, et al., 2013; Mitton et al., 2007).

Dagenais, Queuille, et al. (2013) nevertheless described characteristics of five broad categories of conditions frequently documented in the literature as influencing the use of evaluation and/or research. These are related to: 1) intended users; 2) organizational context; 3) knowledge produced; 4) knowledge transfer and support strategies; and 5) researchers and their institutional affiliations. In that framework, characteristics of intended users that can influence their tendency to use empirical evidence include their attitude and receptivity toward research, whether they perceive research as useful, and their level of expertise regarding the knowledge produced. Organizational characteristics that may act as conditions influencing EU include the organizational culture, the organization’s level of involvement in the KT process; the presence of strong leaders, having a shared understanding of information needs and of goals, and having resources available for KT. Characteristics of the evidence-based knowledge itself that may influence the likelihood of its being used include whether it fits the values and needs of intended users, whether it is applicable, accessible, and timely, and whether intended users participated in its production. The characteristics of the KT strategy that influence use
include the exchange mechanisms used (formal and informal), whether it is based on a relationship of trust with intended users, whether it uses a shared language and the knowledge is presented in a format tailored to intended users, and whether the strategy is followed up and supported. Finally, researchers’ attitudes toward collaboration and ability to relate to others, their skills in adapting evidence-based knowledge, their perceived credibility, their access to funding for KT, and the recognition accorded to KT in their own institutions are all researcher-specific characteristics that, according to Dagenais, Queville, et al. (2013), can influence the likelihood of empirical evidence uptake.

Studies examining the presence and influence of EU conditions over time are scarce, especially in the humanitarian sector. The objective of the present study was therefore to document and analyze evaluation partners’ (EPs’) discourses in 2009 and 2011 on the conditions believed to have influenced EU over time in relation to HELP’s evaluation strategy.

Method

Design

For this qualitative process evaluation, conducted in Burkina Faso, we employed a single case study design to describe conditions that, according to the EPs, influenced their EU (Yin, 2014). The specific case was instrumental; HELP’s evaluation strategy, was chosen because it offered a relatively rare opportunity to shed light upon conditions that influence EU over an extended period of time (Stake, 2003, 2010). A diachronic approach was used to track EPs’ discourse over time, with a first data collection in 2009 of five weeks and another in 2011 lasting one month.

Participants

A total of 36 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in two waves, the first in 2009 (n = 15 respondents, 17 interviews) and the second in 2011 (n = 17 respondents, 19 interviews). A group interview (n = 3) was also conducted in 2011. Table 2 presents the distribution of participating EPs, who were HELP staff members, external evaluators, the
Sahel regional health director and district chief physicians from the Ministry of Health, along with representatives of the funding agency (ECHO) and of advocacy partners.

**Data collection instrument and protocol**

To recruit EPs for interviews, we first used the *intensity sampling* strategy, followed by the *snowball sampling strategy* (Patton, 1990). The sample was diversified to strengthen the study’s validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). After receiving respondents’ informed consent, the first author conducted individual interviews of approximately 60 minutes. In both data collections (2009 and 2011), two participants needed more time and were therefore interviewed twice, as they were actively engaged in the evaluation strategy and provided much contextual information. Six EPs were interviewed in both data collections. EPs interviewed only once were either not working with HELP or out of the country during a data collection. In the semi-structured interviews (individual and group) open-ended questions were used to solicit EPs’ perceptions about the conditions influencing EU among them, as well as their perceptions of EU and the evaluation strategy more generally (see Table 3).

In addition to individual interviews, a 90-minute group interview with three EPs was conducted by the first author at the beginning of the 2011 data collection to identify current key themes and to observe their interpersonal interactions and dynamics while discussing the evaluation strategy and EU. Member checking was performed during the individual and group interviews to validate understanding (Stake, 2010).

In addition, non-participant observation and documentation provided complementary sources of information. The first author spent each day of data collection interacting formally and informally with HELP personnel and partners, and in 2011 travelled with the HELP team over a five-day period. This experience enabled her to become immersed in the field reality and to observe and take note of EPs’ interactions, workdays, and activities. Documents such as evaluation plans, reports, conference presentations, emails, and written agreements were collected to gain insight into EPs’ evaluation activities and communications.

**Analyses**
Interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed thematically using a mixed approach and codebook (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and the thematic analyses were conducted iteratively.

To analyse EU conditions in the present study, we used the conceptual framework of conditions influencing research use described by Dagenais, Queille, et al. (2013). That framework was chosen because it had previously been developed and employed in the present study context (i.e., the evaluation of HELP’s knowledge dissemination strategy) and had been deemed useful and relevant for that context. The framework formed the basis of our codebook, and additional themes emerging from EPs’ discourses were added progressively. We adapted the category “characteristics of knowledge transfer and support strategies” by incorporating “characteristics of knowledge production” to account for the knowledge transfer between evaluators and intended users that occurs through process use during participatory evaluations. QDA Miner software was used to code interview transcripts, to support the retrieval of coded segments in organized categories, and to facilitate analyses. Coded segments for each of the five categories of conditions were analyzed by EP groups and by year of data collection.

Non-participant observation notes were reviewed during analyses, but were not analyzed systematically, nor were the collected documents. They served as a means to better understand the study context, activities, and interpersonal dynamics but were not treated as data per se, because the interview transcripts provided ample data for analysis.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Montreal’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences and by the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health of Burkina Faso.

** Insert Table 2 **

** Insert Table 3 **
Results

Each of the five categories of conditions specified by Dagenais, Queuille, et al. (2013) was found to be pertinent to EU in the study context. Each category is discussed below from the standpoint of respondents’ understanding of how such characteristics influenced EU from 2009 to 2011. The findings detailing subthemes or subgroups of conditions facilitating and impeding EU for participants are summarized in Table 4.

Characteristics of intended users

Intended users presented a variety of characteristics that influenced the likelihood that they and/or other EPs would use evaluations. Influential characteristics included the intended users’ attitudes toward evaluators, evaluation, and EU. The tendency to participate and degree of involvement in evaluation activities also varied across EPs and influenced EU. EPs’ level of confidence in their own evaluation competences, which sometimes related to their past evaluation experiences, also influenced their likelihood of becoming involved in and using evaluations. Their inclination to be either proactive or resistant toward evaluation activities tended to influence their EU. Whether evaluation was formally integrated into their job definition also seemed to influence EU for some, but not all, EPs. The following paragraphs describe these user characteristics in greater detail.

Evaluators were surprised from the beginning to see many EPs’ keen attitudes and willingness to welcome them and to engage in and use evaluations. HELP staff indeed expressed a receptive attitude to evaluation: “We are very interested […] ideally, we will be able to prove that, with the exemption, we can have an important impact on the use of health services and, insha’Allah, on the health of the general population” (HS4). Especially at the beginning of the evaluation strategy, certain partners were sceptical about evaluators’ motives and credibility, the evaluators’ work, and their own ability to understand evaluations. For many EPs, it was only as they learned of the evaluation findings or became more involved in evaluations that they realized the utility of program evaluations. As such, their receptivity toward evaluation and EU and their perception that EU could be useful to improve the exemption program increased over time. Certain EPs conveyed receptive attitudes toward evaluation and EU while nevertheless remaining on the margins of evaluation activities, which complicated the collaboration with evaluators and other EPs actively engaged in the evaluation
strategy. Intended users’ level of participation was an influential condition of EU. Those who participated more tended to have a better understanding of the objectives, necessary resources (e.g. costs), methods, findings, and utility of evaluations.

All respondents, except for one, had university training, some even with a scientific research component. Some of the EPs who had research experience suggested their inclination to view the evaluation strategy and evidence-based knowledge as learning opportunities was based on their previous contact with research and/or program evaluation. Some of the EPs lacking prior research experience said they felt like incompetent imposters and refrained from participating, worried they would slow down the evaluation research. Hence, previous evaluation experience and confidence in one’s ability to contribute to evaluations were two themes associated with EPs’ disposition toward evaluation, which influenced their level of participation as well as their tendency to use evaluations. Some of the HELP staff who initially lacked confidence in their ability to understand and contribute to evaluation reported that they eventually realized that what initially seemed difficult (e.g. scientific terms) could be explained and understood, and this made them more comfortable with collaborating with evaluators. For these EPs, a clear and positive evolution in their likelihood of being involved in EU was observed between 2009 and 2011.

When EPs were proactive in the evaluation strategy, EU was facilitated, and when they resisted attending or participating in evaluation activities, evaluation processes and EU slowed down. For example, being assigned responsibility for certain evaluation activities seemed to boost some EPs’ sense of ownership and proactivity toward evaluations and EU, as they were called upon to reflect on program evaluation, ask questions, and communicate with evaluators and other EPs. On the other hand, some EPs viewed evaluation activities as extra work, and therefore would perform their tasks only sometimes, and usually after everything else, which thwarted EU. Evaluators sometimes had to wait a long time for EPs to answer emails and review evaluation protocols or reports, which delayed the conduct of studies or diffusion of findings. This impeded opportunities for EU and for witnessing its benefits and sometimes dissuaded evaluators from using a truly inclusive and participatory approach. Over time, the EPs who were evaluation strategy leaders focused their attention on collaborating with certain other EPs who were becoming increasingly invested and who devoted time to participating in evaluation activities.
Characteristics of the organizational context

Learning processes and values associated with evaluation research (e.g. verification, feedback, rigour, transparency, and accountability) were integrated into and valued within the organizational culture, and this appears to have facilitated the integration of EU into HELP. For example, parallel to the evaluation strategy, HELP established its own monitoring and supervision mechanisms (i.e., medical on-site supervisions). All respondents also explained how, either before or during the evaluation strategy, they had come to understand and value evaluation as a learning opportunity.

Another important condition facilitating EU was the commitment of managers not only at HELP but also from partner organizations (e.g. the MoH’s DRS, MCDs) to the evaluation strategy and their involvement in many evaluation decisions, planning, and activities. Indeed, HELP’s director and funding agency representatives were active promoters of developing EU at HELP. Still, integrating the evaluation strategy into HELP presented certain challenges in terms of organizational culture. As a HELP coordinator explained, “I’m not used to working in long-term projects with studies and all, and they’re not used to working with NGOs with administrative obligations […] It’s a bit like two different worlds” (HS4). Respondents explained that these issues improved over time, through frank discussions and collaborative efforts to adapt their respective ways of working.

Especially in the beginning of the evaluation strategy, information needs and evaluation study protocols were not always explicitly discussed before evaluations took place, which frustrated some EPs. Over time, such discord was communicated to the evaluators, who learned the importance of meeting with as many EPs as possible before undertaking each study to explain its objectives and procedures. Nevertheless, once the findings were reported, EPs usually found that evaluations responded to important information needs.

One difficulty in integrating the evaluation strategy into HELP had to do with divergent priorities. HELP’s major objective was to save lives directly through medical interventions and supervisions at health centres. Another objective was to evaluate and document the exemption program to inform HELP’s advocacy strategy, which was also aimed at saving lives, although less directly. Prioritizing similar objectives and resource allocation was clearly a frequent source of frustration for some HELP staff. For example, they “...had difficulty understanding why all the vehicles were requested for a field study. They don’t understand,
because to them it feels as though the study is more important than our daily activities. It didn’t go down very well!” (HS2).

For principal evaluators, the uncertainty surrounding future funding of the exemption program and of the evaluation strategy complicated the planning of long-term evaluation research and the hiring of evaluation staff. Even though financial resources were limited, funds were obtained and used specifically to hire an evaluation coordinator and to conduct evaluation studies. A related positive condition, noted earlier, was that many EPs at HELP and in partner organizations had personal characteristics favourable to EU. Because the evaluation strategy relied heavily on a small group of proactive individuals, every instance of turnover jeopardized the stability of the evaluation strategy and of EU. However, evaluators speculated that HELP’s relatively low turnover rate, in comparison with humanitarian NGOs, potentially helped EU.

**Characteristics of the knowledge produced**

With few exceptions, EPs found overall that knowledge produced through the evaluation strategy corresponded well to their values and information needs. As a funding agency representative said, “What interests me most is the content, the lessons we can learn from the implementation of the exemption, and that’s what they usually cover in their scientific publications” (ER20). Respondents were generally pleased with the knowledge produced and stated their explicit preference for knowledge that was clearly contextualized and applicable.

EPs found, however, that some evaluations either were not sufficiently contextualized or contradicted HELP staff’s expectations. In those situations, some HELP EPs contested the methodology and wanted the opportunity to discuss and clarify findings. For example, an evaluation examining health staff complaints of increased workload following the exemption implementation (Antarou et al., 2013) demonstrated that problems encountered were related to organizational difficulties rather than to work overload. EPs in the present study rejected such results: “If they go and present these findings, it’s not sure that health staff will accept the findings because [...] our observations in the field are that people work continuously” (HS22). It was suggested that, while the methodology was scientifically rigorous, some important contextual considerations needed to be discussed and clarified with evaluators. Disappointed that many EPs kept such doubts to themselves, another respondent noted the
importance of addressing these concerns in results-reporting workshops, called ateliers de restitution.

Conditions such as the timing and season chosen for conducting evaluations sometimes influenced the timeliness of knowledge production and access. Evaluations planned for rural areas in July and August were difficult, because beneficiaries were busy farming and roads were wet and hazardous for evaluators to travel. This, along with the refusal of some health centre staff to undergo evaluation and to collaborate with evaluators, sometimes delayed the evaluation process, thereby postponing findings. In 2009, some EPs expressed concerns regarding the accessibility of the evaluation findings:

“Results were not coming in. During monthly meetings, for example, we wouldn’t discuss evaluations or the progress of evaluation activities, and people had difficulty understanding where we were at, what was going on with all the data they had collected, where it would go, and what purpose it would serve.” (HS2)

As evaluators explained, this complaint arose primarily because, in 2009, few evaluation studies had yet been completed, which was not surprising, as the intervention and its evaluation strategy began only in 2008. By 2011, EPs were much more satisfied with the quantity of evaluation findings to which they had access. Another condition influencing timely production and access of evaluation-based knowledge was that many EPs found it challenging to add evaluation activities to their already busy work schedules and would postpone or neglect their evaluation responsibility, which delayed the evaluation process. Levels of involvement in the production of evaluation-based knowledge varied greatly across EPs due to personal characteristics, interpersonal dynamics, and time availability.

**Characteristics of the knowledge production, knowledge transfer, and support strategies**

The characteristics of the knowledge production (i.e., evaluation) and KT strategies were developed and fine-tuned over time to better target EPs’ needs. In fact, the evaluation strategy was not explicit from the start, but developed as HELP managers discussed with evaluators various ways in which evaluations could respond to information needs. The first relatively positive evaluation experiences led to other evaluations as new questions and funding opportunities arose. By 2009, the evaluation strategy was well under way, but studies were
planned and undertaken with no certainty of funding for their completion. Similarly, the KT strategy described by Dagenais, Queuille, et al. (2013) developed progressively between 2009 and 2011.

The format and language in which evaluation-based knowledge was presented were also fine-tuned to the needs of EPs. HELP staff clearly preferred results-presentation (restitution) workshops over written material, and short reports and policy briefs over long reports or traditional scientific journal articles. Long reports and articles were simply too time-consuming for many EPs to read. Meanwhile, funders appreciated the full spectrum of reports, policy briefs, and scientific publications, but sometimes wished the restitution materials and activities would better target political decision-makers. In conducting and presenting evaluations, the evaluators became increasingly creative, using interactive teaching approaches. They popularized evaluation findings by clarifying and/or simplifying scientific jargon, using such vehicles as short documentaries and cartoons (Queuille & Ridde, 2014).

The progressive development of trusting relationships between evaluators and other EPs contributed significantly to the development and use of the evaluation strategy. Respondents explained how the sustained involvement in the evaluation strategy of pivotal EP colleagues (two principal evaluators, six HELP staff members) also facilitated improved communication and in most cases resolution of any interpersonal mistrust or disagreement. However, as an evaluator explained:

“What happens sometimes is that our approach becomes a little less participatory, after one, two, three, four failures or partial failures [of soliciting participation] and we have the tendency to just do it ourselves [...] Maybe sometimes we go faster than we should, and that just widens the gap between the evaluation strategy and its partners.” (EE8)

Evaluation partners noted a clear and progressive integration of the evaluation strategy and EU into HELP’s exemption program between 2009 and 2011. Many associated this with a complex interaction of conditions, including enhanced participation of EPs in the evaluation strategy over time, facilitated partly by improvements in communication between and within all EP organizations. Formal and informal exchange mechanisms were progressively established as communication became more frequent and fluid despite geographical distances (e.g. HELP’s three sites, evaluators frequently abroad). As a HELP coordinator said:
“At first, I think, it was a communication problem, but after a few months we began to communicate, and we realized that if we wanted to participate in the evaluations we had to be a little more informed about evaluation objectives […]. People are more able to participate, even if only logistically, when they know what it’s for! […] On their side, they [evaluators] strove to share more and to ask our opinion, etc.… Because of my mandate, I responded and assumed my role, and increasingly I read reports and all, and the big benefit is that they were very reactive. As soon as you show interest and ask questions showing you’ve read, well, they [evaluators] respond the same day!” (HS2).

With monthly meetings and regular follow-ups, EPs began to feel more informed and better supported and were able to develop a common language, which facilitated collaboration and ownership of the evaluation strategy. Some EPs wanted more follow-ups, to verify HELP’s application of evaluation recommendations. While HELP staff believed that was the evaluators’ role, the latter believed it was HELP’s responsibility. It took some time to establish regular and effective exchange mechanisms, but improvements were noted between 2009 and 2011. Still, in 2011, some HELP staff worried that not all evaluations would be followed by a restitution workshop, while evaluators urged EPs to have more patience and trust in them, reassuring them that they always conducted restitutions. Other HELP staff were confident there would be restitutions and deplored the fact that their colleagues rarely shared their concerns openly in formal or informal settings.

While some partners were satisfied with the timing and frequency of KT activities and publications, others felt the time between conducting an evaluation and sharing its findings was too long. Once again, enhanced communication clarifying the time required to complete the different phases of evaluations helped resolve such frustrations.

Other conditions that influenced EU were also mentioned. Several EPs explained how participating in the dissemination phase of KT had enhanced their appreciation and use of evaluations. They tended to take more responsibility to engage with, understand, and apply the findings when participating in such activities. EPs also reported that, through the evaluation strategy, they had developed a strong network of collaborators, which helped their KT strategy and EU.

Characteristics of the evaluation researchers
The characteristics of the evaluators and of their relationships with other EPs were influential conditions that evolved positively over time and influenced the development and use of the evaluation strategy. EPs spoke mostly of two principal evaluators who had worked on the evaluation strategy since 2008, because it was with them that they had developed the evaluation strategy and interacted most regularly over time. Respondents noted that principal evaluators generously welcomed students or contractual evaluators by introducing them to EPs and by providing practical (e.g. introducing them to the working context) and evaluation guidance. With the exception of two evaluators discussed below, EPs described evaluators as very competent and professional, good collaborators who generated useful knowledge.

Principal evaluators’ ability to develop sustained relationships with many EPs contributed positively to EU. EPs appreciated that evaluators were frank and willing to communicate frequently, both formally and informally, in a friendly and constructive manner and without pretence. Speaking of an evaluator, one HELP staff member explained that, from the beginning of the collaboration with the evaluator, “I was very pleased, because he tells the truth and we could feel that he wants things to work and things to change, and I really had the impression we could always address our questions to him” (HS4).

The above passage also highlights the importance of evaluators’ attitudes, objectives, and approach. EPs were pleased to see evaluators who had vision and were committed to learning, innovating, and rectifying inequities. They found evaluators’ approach to be most helpful when it was participatory, interactively educational, and tailored to the needs of intended users. Indeed, HELP staff observed that evaluators had learned over time to adapt their activities to different audiences and to communicate in ways that facilitated participation and evaluation capacity building for all.

Respondents spoke of the value of having a competent and credible principal evaluator who was reputed in his field, had developed extensive networks, and collaborated with a large pool of expert researchers and students in West Africa and overseas, which multiplied the human resources available to the evaluation strategy. As such, evaluators’ ability to collaborate and connect with quality professionals to undertake evaluations and KT was another important consideration.
Evaluation partners mentioned exceptions involving problematic collaborations with evaluators. First, EPs were dissatisfied with a study in which the analyses did not meet HELP’s information needs and expectations.

“We [HELP managers and a principal evaluators] discussed this with the [evaluator], asking that certain details be taken into account. He told us not to worry, but when we received the interim report, we got what we had feared. We replied with comments about missing this and that [...] It wasn’t the quality we expected in terms of data and costs” (HS2).

The response from the evaluator also disappointed EPs: “He responded as if our criticism of the report was an insult to his intelligence” (HS2). Disappointed EPs abandoned their requests and discontinued the collaboration.

The management of financial, technical, and human resources was another source of conflict between HELP managers and evaluators. At times, evaluators went into the field without first meeting HELP managers or signing contracts with them and without explaining the aim of the specific evaluation activity and the necessary resources. Communication had been too vague, informal, and rushed. HELP managers acknowledged having had quick, informal discussions with evaluators that provided them with a general understanding of which evaluators would be going where and for what purposes, but they were missing important information and had not had time to work out logistical and contractual arrangements with evaluators (such as from which evaluation budgets evaluators would be paid—HELP or University of Montreal). HELP managers felt frustrated and disconnected from evaluators, evaluation, and its use. The lack of such communication became all the more obvious when an evaluator asked for a money transfer directly from HELP’s bank account in Germany: “Thank God, the bank said they don’t transfer money abroad without a contract or bill...” (HS4). Such difficulties were subsequently attenuated when contracts, mandates, and the management of resources needed to conduct evaluations (e.g. vehicles, funds) were clarified and formalized. Frustrations around the coordination (and occasional co-opting) of resources influenced the interpersonal dynamics between evaluators and intended users. These frustrations and conflictual situations made intended users less inclined to collaborate with evaluators in conducting and using evaluations.
Respondents explained how HELP’s partnerships with ECHO and University of Montreal were a key condition that allowed evaluators to develop the evaluation strategy and to work on KT, by making financial and human resources available for evaluations (e.g. funds, students who could do lower cost evaluations). Nevertheless, as noted earlier, resources remained limited, and evaluators were frequently confronted with the dilemma of having to choose between funding evaluations versus KT activities. Moreover, principal evaluators reported that, while it was evident that KT strategies needed to be increasingly creative, this was time-consuming, and KT activities received little recognition from their universities. Gradually, between 2009 and 2011, a researcher specialized in KT began working with the evaluation strategy team (Dagenais, Queille, et al., 2013), which further informed HELP on ways to promote EU and improve KT.

**Insert Table 4**

**Discussion**

In the present study, the five broad conditions of use described by Dagenais, Queille, et al. (2013) were found to have influenced evaluation use by EPs. Our findings provided insight into how specific characteristics exerted their influence. In fact, intended users’ characteristics played an important role in determining the likelihood of EU. Their attitudes and willingness to participate actively and to take on evaluation mandates varied not only across individuals but also over time, as some became increasingly invested the evaluation strategy between 2009 and 2011. Some, although very few, EPs left HELP’s employ, ending their collaboration on the evaluation strategy. One challenge, described by Patton (1997) and Sandison (2006) and experienced by the EPs responsible for the evaluation strategy, was to identify receptive intended users from the start—or users who could eventually become receptive—and then to collaborate specifically with them to develop evaluation activities and EU. At the same time, as Patton (1997) warned, it was important to have a diversity of key EPs engaged in the evaluation to compensate for turnover. Another strategy to contend with high turnover in humanitarian NGOs, which was used by EPs in our sample, was to seek the perspectives of ex-staff and key informants abroad via phone or internet (Buchanan-Smith & Cosgrave, 2013).
Yet another challenge was to understand and address the concerns of those who seemed reluctant to engage in evaluation activities and EU. As Brehaut and Eva (2012) suggested, cognitive psychology constructs, such as cognitive dissonance and coping strategies, are useful concepts to consider when, for example, intended users’ explicit attitude (e.g., positive attitude toward evaluation and EU) was discordant with their behaviour (e.g., not collaborating with EPs, not using evaluations). Such constructs may be helpful in designing KT strategies aimed at aligning actual practices with best practices (e.g., EU) (Brehaut & Eva, 2012). Lavis, Boyko, and Gauvin (2014) raised the question of whether intention to use evidence is a good indicator of actual behavioural change. In the present study, some participants expressed a favourable attitude toward evaluation and a desire to participate in and to use evaluations, but then, for various reasons and due to obstacles mentioned above, did not follow through when opportunities arose. Intent to use would therefore seem to be a complex question that merits further investigation.

Organizational characteristics reflected many of the EPs’ individual characteristics. Indeed, the receptivity of many EPs and their propensity to engage in and value EU were reflected in HELP’s organizational culture. While several EPs criticized the absence of discussions on information needs, study objectives, and protocols, EPs generally found that the study findings (and processes) responded to important information needs. Hence, it seems probable that evaluators managed to decipher important information needs through their informal exchanges with key EPs and HELP managers. Respondents said the next crucial step would be to set up a formal structure in which information needs and evaluation protocols would be discussed in greater detail and with more EPs prior to undertaking evaluations. They faced the continued challenge of obtaining funds and finding efficient and feasible means of bringing together and informing busy EPs working in different regions, on different schedules, and with different allegiances to the evaluation. A common financial and ethical challenge for researchers and organizations in Africa, sometimes alluded to by our respondents, concerns expectations of receiving per diems for attending workshops; the fact that HELP evaluators tended to avoid providing such compensation may have discouraged the active participation of EPs (Ridde, 2010).

Producing the right knowledge at the right time is no easy task. As we have seen, many conditions, including seasonal variances, can affect the evaluation process and delay access to
evidence-based knowledge. Having intended users participate in the evaluation process is constantly cited as an important condition of EU (Alexander & Bonino, 2014; Alkhalaaf, 2012; Patton, 1997), but two challenges remain. First, in our study, some EPs had committed to evaluation activities without fully understanding the resources, especially time, that would be required. Hence, carefully estimating and communicating the expected time commitment might have helped prevent EPs’ dropping out or delaying both the evaluation process and, by extension, access to evaluation findings. Second, some EPs were reluctant to have their work evaluated and did not, at first, want to participate. The reluctance of health staff to have their work evaluated and sometimes criticized and the denial and discrediting of evaluation methodology when findings do not correspond to intended users’ expectations, beliefs, and values have been documented in Burkina Faso by Richard et al. (2009) and Ridde, Kouanda, Yameogo, Kadio, and Bado (2013). Studies have demonstrated that, when faced with knowledge (e.g. evaluation findings) that contradicts existing beliefs, ideas, and values, a common strategy to protect one’s ego and to cope with the psychological stress of cognitive dissonance is to avoid the conflicting new knowledge by discounting it (Brehaut & Eva, 2012; Case, Andrews, Johnson, & Allard, 2005). Such defensive reactions waned in the current case as study objectives, methodology, and potential application of findings were clarified in discussions. For example, health staff became more receptive after their superior, a motivated Ministry of Health (MoH) EP, explained that findings would not be used to criticize employees but rather to better organize their work and the health centre. Attending to the underlying causes of resistance to having one’s work evaluated (e.g. fear of criticism) may help promote the participation of intended users. Other EPs became receptive to evaluations and to collaborating with evaluators only after seeing the findings of the first evaluations. Hence, as suggested by Hallam and Bonino (2013), it may be wise to act quickly and seize the “easy wins” first to ensure useful findings can be quickly produced and disseminated, so that intended users can experience early on the utility of evaluations. While this might stimulate their receptivity and participation in future evaluations, producing useful good-quality findings (e.g. through pre–post designs) often takes resources (e.g. time)—always a challenge in resource-limited contexts. In our study case, evaluation-based knowledge likely to be used depended on numerous interwoven conditions that influenced one another iteratively:
knowledge quality, credibility, accessibility, evaluation process and timeliness, as well as interpersonal dynamics among study participants, EPs, and evaluators.

Participants generally agreed that between 2009 and 2011 knowledge production and KT strategies were increasingly tailored to the different EPs, as evaluators and other EPs learned to adapt to each other’s needs, to the context, and to time-limited funding opportunities. Formal and informal exchanges became increasingly flexible over time, but several EPs would have liked more opportunities to discuss evaluations, while others suggested opportunities existed but were not seized. Worries that evaluators might come and go without sufficiently considering or sharing findings with participants and intended users may be assuaged by more frequent communication about expected timeframes for evaluation activities and restitution workshops. Lavis et al. (2014) highlight the importance of ongoing communication and suggest that sharing summaries of findings prior to restitution workshops is helpful to participants. Gaining a better understanding of why intended users might hesitate to speak up may also foster more effective collaboration. Finally, it is very important to clarify whose mandate KT falls under.

The benefits of including intended users in the research or evaluation process have been highlighted in the KT and evaluation literatures (Chaskin, Goerge, Skyles, & Guiltinan, 2006; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lec, 2004; Graham & Tetroe, 2009; Patton, 1996, 1997; Walter, Nutley, Percy-Smith, McNeish, & Frost, 2004). EPs in both data collections frequently expressed their wish to participate in or discuss evaluations more often, saying this helped them better understand the exemption program, as well as program evaluation and its utility and methodology. This corroborates Patton’s position in his famous debate with Scriven (1991), in which he advocated for going beyond formative and summative purposes and recognizing objectives involved in knowledge production; such objectives would focus on conceptual findings use, developmental evaluation, and use of the evaluation process. We, in fact, adapted the five broad conditions described by Dagenais, Queuille, et al. (2013) by integrating “knowledge production” into the “knowledge transfer and support strategies” category to account for conditions that can influence such forms of use. While the KT literature acknowledges the value of participatory approaches in knowledge production (Graham & Tetroe, 2009; Walter et al., 2004), to our knowledge there is no equivalent in the KT literature for the various forms of process use (i.e., instrumental, conceptual, and
persuasive) that are well documented in the EU literature. Because the present study was on evaluation use, and because the literature on evaluation includes extensive writings on process use, we were sensitized to this concept and were therefore attuned and able to detect many examples of process use by EPs. However, the literature on research use and KT does not, to our understanding, have an equivalent to “process use”. Yet there is no reason why intended users could not make instrumental, conceptual, or persuasive uses of the research process, as they could of the evaluation process. The concept of research process use may present an interesting avenue from which to explore participatory research. Indeed, it may prove enlightening for researchers studying research use and KT to explore how participating in the research process might produce similar uses (instrumental, conceptual, persuasive), as well as individual and organizational changes.

Another important consideration emerging from the present findings concerns intended users’ involvement in the process of disseminating findings, a subject rarely discussed in the literature. The present study’s results suggest it may be an interesting avenue to explore further, as several EPs described how their understanding of and support for evaluation and EU flourished by participating in dissemination workshops.

Many characteristics of evaluators changed over time in ways that pleased EPs, which suggests that one of the benefits of long-term collaborations (Boutilier, Daibes, & Di Ruggiero, 2011) is that they allow partners time and opportunity to adapt to each other’s realities, expectations, practices, and needs. The sustained and trusting relationships principal evaluators were able to develop with other EPs provided the backdrop for a shared and viable reflective space in which they could envision overcoming differences to collaborate in the long term on common goals (Boutilier et al., 2011) and to plan evaluations and KT well beyond the usual short timeframe of humanitarian funding cycles. Interestingly, Boutilier et al. (2011) discovered that long-term research partnerships tend to display an enhanced ability to function and to sustain themselves beyond short funding contracts when there is a “coherent and compelling motivation” (p. 2) keeping them together despite financial uncertainty, and that this renders them more fundable by various funding agencies. In fact, the development of long-standing relationships among EPs may have played an important role in their understanding of each other’s practices, roles, and needs, as was suggested by the research of Lavis, Lomas, Hamid, and Sewankambo (2006). Evaluators seemed to have used an approach
that was both pragmatic and adaptive, which Ridde and Haddad (2013) have described as most appropriate for responding to the needs of those implementing complex health interventions. Respondents expressed being generally pleased with how evaluators demonstrated these dispositions. The relationships of trust likely also facilitated integration of other external evaluators who collaborated over shorter time periods. The evaluators’ expert reputations certainly facilitated the initial collaboration with other EPs, but their personalities and working approaches clearly played a role in maintaining the collaboration and sustaining EU. Finally, it was also clear that evaluators’ efforts and abilities to mobilize resources to support the evaluation strategy and KT activities played an important role in developing the evaluation strategy and promoting EU. As reported in previous studies, principal evaluators went beyond their mandates to transfer the knowledge that had been produced, despite a lack of recognition for KT activities from their universities (Dagenais, Queuille, et al., 2013).

Collaborative evaluation research programs, such as HELP’s evaluation strategy, that rely on partnerships between academic researchers and NGOs may be particularly useful for overcoming common barriers to integrating evidence into humanitarian practices (e.g. limited time and/or funds, frequent staff turnover, lack of coordination) (Banatvala & Zwi, 2000; Boutillier et al., 2011; Crisp, 2004; Dijkzeul, Hilhorst, & Walker, 2013). Such partnerships may also help counteract the phenomenon of external consultancies being engaged to conduct evaluative research. Those mandates are time-limited, costly, and of questionable quality; they tend to drain resources away from academic research while lacking the scientific rigour of international research standards to which evaluation researchers are bound (Olivier de Sardan, 2011).

Social desirability bias is frequent in international development studies (Olivier de Sardan, 2008) and may be a limitation of the present study. Efforts were made to minimize such bias by seeking the views of diverse EPs with varied positions in the different partner organizations. In interviews, whenever divergences of opinions were alluded to, respondents were encouraged to discuss these issues further, and most did not hesitate. Strengths of the study included the two-wave design, which enabled us to capture EPs’ perspectives of EU and its conditions as they evolved over time from 2009 and 2011.

The present study demonstrated how the collaborating EPs built lasting relationships, adapted over time to each other’s realities and needs, solicited evaluation funding from both
the humanitarian funding agency and the university, and together developed an evaluation strategy research program. This evaluation strategy gathered robust evidence-based data that provided a wealth of information for decision-making and practice innovations, which over the long term hopefully will contribute in some way to social betterment and health equity, important objectives of program evaluation (Mark & Henry, 2004), global health research, and KT (Tugwell, Robinson, Grimshaw, & Santesso, 2006; WHO, 2004). A complex array of conditions influenced how EPs used evaluation processes and findings between 2009 and 2011, among them the positive attitudes of many intended users, who saw the utility of conducting and participating in evaluations and EU. Conditions linked to the organizational context include HELP’s organizational culture and leaders who valued collaboration, open communication, learning, KT, accountability, and using evidence to verify and improve practices, decisions, and policies. According to EPs, most of the evaluations produced knowledge that satisfied information needs by being of good quality, applicable, and contextualized, although some intended users would have wanted faster access to the knowledge. Evaluation-based knowledge production, KT, and support strategies generally responded well to the needs of the different EPs. Indeed, the external evaluators progressively tailored their strategies to the needs and contexts of the different users. EU was also greatly influenced by close collaboration and communication with the principal evaluators, whom EPs appreciated for their ability to inspire trust and maintain good working relationships, as well as for their credibility and flexibility that favoured participation, capacity development, transparent and ongoing communication, networking, and collaboration.

It is clear from the present study that EU conditions exerted influence in an intricate and interwoven manner. The rich descriptions gleaned from our respondents provide useful information for evaluators, practitioners, and policy-makers seeking to promote the use of evaluation-based evidence. Many conditions highlighted in this study’s findings correspond to Core Standards for humanitarian action proposed by The Sphere Project (2011), and while such standards may be difficult to implement in non-ideal humanitarian contexts (Griekspoor & Collins, 2001), the present study provides a detailed example of a collaborative effort to engage in and use evaluation as a means of improving humanitarian action. Among the diverse conditions found, it is clear that the evaluation strategy and EU depended heavily on EPs’ interpersonal dynamics. Facilitating and impeding conditions of all sorts were at play, but
communication among EPs seemed to be a common denominator for overcoming barriers, understanding needs, improving collaboration, and promoting EU. Hence, paying attention to interpersonal dynamics and facilitating open and constructive communication appear to have great potency, as the EPs collaborating on the evaluation strategy were, after all, fundamentally human beings attempting to foster what Hallam and Bonino (2013) called a “virtuous cycle of EU” to promote equity in population health.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have identified characteristics in five broad categories of conditions that influenced EU among stakeholders of HELP’s evaluation strategy. These include characteristics of: 1) the intended users; 2) the organization; 3) the knowledge produced; 4) the knowledge production, transfer, and support strategies; and 5) the evaluation researchers and their institutional affiliations.

The study demonstrated that intended users’ attitudes and receptivity toward evaluation was relatively positive from the start but increased over time, and that this positive outlook promoted EU. Also, findings showed how, for some, issues of mistrust and scepticism tainted their attitudes and interfered with EU. When intended users understood and perceived the utility of evaluations, they were more inclined to use them. Conversely, and unsurprisingly, when they felt uninformed about such utility, they were more reluctant. Perceived utility increased over time among EPs. Participating in evaluations also fostered EU. Participation increased between 2009 and 2011 for most participants, although more for some than for others. Less involved participants were correspondingly less able to learn about evaluation (purposes, usefulness, resources required) and tended to be more resistant to evaluations and EU. Hence, we found that a key strategy to promote EU involved targeting intended users who were particularly proactive and who participated actively in evaluation and EU efforts. Between 2009 and 2011, proactivity increased for many EPs, but those who remained passive tended to slow down the evaluation process and opportunities for EU. Also, intended users’ expertise, whether self-perceived or experience-based, tended to influence their likelihood of engaging in evaluations and EU. Those who felt incompetent tended to shy away from EU. Finally, intended users who were mandated with evaluation tasks sometimes felt energized by
this new responsibility and increased their involvement to ensure EU, while others remained passive, which slowed evaluations and EU.

Various aspects of the organizational culture influenced EU. The value placed on learning, feedback, and accountability within HELP and partner organizations certainly helped EU. There were occasionally cultural clashes in administrative practices between HELP and certain evaluators but these were resolved over 2009 to 2011. Management leadership in the partner institutions also influenced EU, as those leaders had significant responsibility for promoting EU. Open communication among collaborating organizations regarding needs and objectives was crucial for EU, as was sharing a common vision and objectives. When short- and long-term objectives differed across partner organizations, EU was much more difficult. Having stable access to human and financial resources supported EU; in times of instability (e.g. staff turnover, financial constraints) partners were forced to limit evaluation resources, thereby limiting EU opportunities.

The knowledge acquired through evaluation has, in itself, characteristics that influence its uptake. For example, in the present study, we found that knowledge that fit with intended users’ values and information needs tended to be used more readily, while knowledge that did not fit was met with more resistance from intended users, who were less likely to make use of it. Knowledge that was clearly applicable was preferred over findings that were either not contextualized or not easily applicable. Sometimes knowledge was gained at the right time, meeting a current information need, which enhanced its chances of being used by evaluation partners. Conversely, long delays in the production or transfer of knowledge rendered intended users more reluctant to hear and apply it. Generally, alignment of timing improved over the course of the evaluation strategy and its use.

Evaluation use among EPs was clearly influenced by knowledge production, transfer, and support strategies. When these were tailored to EPs’ characteristics and needs, they tended to use evaluations. It took time for evaluators to decipher such needs and determine how best to respond to them, but they became better at this between 2009 and 2011. In the case under study, such strategies needed to be diverse and adapted to specific EP groups, using language that suited their respective vocabularies and generally avoiding scientific jargon and long written formats. Another important characteristic of these strategies was their reliance on relationships founded on trust and sustained over time. When trust was not established,
intended users were less drawn to collaborate on and use evaluations. Such strategies also worked best when accompanied by formal and informal exchanges between intended users and evaluators, when they were followed up and supported by evaluators, when they were based on a participatory approach, and when they were relatively frequent and timed to align with the needs of intended users.

Finally, characteristics of evaluators and their institutional affiliations had undeniable influence on EU. Relationships with evaluators and those evaluators’ interpersonal skills were deemed very important in fostering EU. Conflictual relationships tended to interfere with the conduct of evaluations and with the value attributed to findings. Evaluators who were collaborative, communicative, adaptable, creative, credible, and transparent, and who used interactive teaching approaches and sought to build the capacities of intended users, were found to promote EU. When evaluators did not communicate sufficiently or were unable to meet intended users’ information needs, EU opportunities were limited. When evaluators had large professional networks into which they integrated EPs, this tended to multiply the opportunities for collaboration and for EU. Finally, the human, time, and financial resources to which evaluators had access for carrying out evaluations and KT activities greatly influenced opportunities for EU. The more people, time, and funds available, the more evaluators were able to meet information needs and the more EU prospered. Conversely, when resources were limited, there was less emphasis on the participatory nature of evaluations, fewer evaluations and transfer strategies were carried out, and less attention was paid to ensuring EU.

In conclusion, the findings of the present study shed light on the intricate nature of EU. It was clear that, for EPs, the EU conditions were numerous and multidimensional, and their influence was multidirectional. The study’s findings offer insight into the details of EU, underscoring, among other things, the value of communicating and of striving to meet intended users’ information needs by including them in the evaluation process and tailoring the ways in which knowledge is produced and transferred. Opportunities for EU are plentiful, but, as we have seen, ensuring that the essential conditions for EU are present requires special attention to the numerous characteristics of the intended users, organizations, knowledge produced, knowledge production and transfer strategies, and evaluators. Paying attention to the ways in which these multiple characteristics may influence one another to affect EU is a complex but key condition for success. We hope the present article provides helpful insight
into how to attend to such characteristics as a means of promoting evaluations that are tailored to the needs of intended users and thereby lead to effective EU.
**Competing interests:** The first author has benefited from HELP’s logistical assistance. The second and third authors have both worked as consultants for HELP. The funders and the NGO HELP did not take part in decisions on the study design, data collection, or analysis, nor in the preparation or publication of the manuscript.

**Ethical issues:** Ethical approval was granted by the University of Montreal Research Ethics Committee. Objectives and procedures of the present study were explained to potential respondents upon soliciting their participation, and when they agreed to participate, interviews were scheduled at a time and place of their convenience. Interview transcripts were anonymized to preserve the participants’ confidentiality.

**Authors’ contributions:** All three authors conceptualized and designed the research project. Throughout the research project, LDR worked under the supervision, guidance, and support of CD and VR. She developed the interview questions, collected the data, developed the thematic codebook, transcribed some interviews, and analyzed and interpreted the data. She also produced the manuscript. CD and VR reviewed and commented on drafts of the manuscript, providing input and guidance.
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Table 1. Examples of evaluation use documented in 2009 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINDINGS USE</th>
<th>~ FINDINGS USE ~</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental use</strong></td>
<td>Findings helped in identifying and implementing locally sound and applicable solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Findings helped EPs identify, explain, and plan for certain situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptual use</strong></td>
<td>Findings provided an external perspective on the program, its malfunctions, and effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Findings helped EPs understand the effects of the exemption and validated HELP’s mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasive findings use</strong></td>
<td>Findings were used to validate the credibility of the exemption and promoted collaboration with regional Ministry of Health authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Findings were used in advocacy strategy to persuade policy makers and funders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCESS USE</th>
<th>~ PROCESS USE ~</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental use</strong></td>
<td>Process discussions improved appreciation of evaluation and influenced decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging in evaluations and the evaluation strategy promoted more evaluation activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptual use</strong></td>
<td>Process prompted curiosity, a reflexive attitude, and confidence, and built up capacities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participating in evaluation process changed EPs’ thinking, making them more receptive and capable of scientific rigour and enhancing evidence-seeking behaviours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from D’Ostie-Racine, Dagenais, & Ridde (2016)
**Table 2.** Distribution of evaluation partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation partner (EP)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External evaluator (EE)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP Staff (HS) NGO requesting evaluation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Health (MoH)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO representative (ER)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding agency Advocacy Partner (AP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* EPs met in both 2009 and 2011: EE = 1; HS = 4; MoH = 1; total = 6*
**Table 3. Examples of interview questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 &amp; 2011</td>
<td>Which evaluations helped or impeded your work? How so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How were evaluations useful or not useful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How did the evaluations influence your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the pros and cons of conducting evaluations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What conditions influenced the way evaluations were used by yourself and colleagues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Since 2009, how have evaluations gone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How has the evaluation strategy evolved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What conditions influenced these changes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Since 2009, have you observed certain changes in the way evaluations have been used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What brought on such changes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators</td>
<td>~ CHARACTERISTICS ~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTENDED USERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive and positive <strong>attitude</strong> toward evaluation ↑</td>
<td>Scepticism and <strong>mistrust</strong> of evaluators ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived <strong>utility</strong> of evaluation research ↑</td>
<td>Reluctance if <strong>not informed</strong> of evaluation purpose ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong> in evaluation process ↑</td>
<td><strong>Non-participation</strong>, impeding learning of evaluation purposes, utility, needed resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to <strong>target proactive intended users</strong> ↑</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual and perceived evaluation <strong>expertise</strong> ↑</td>
<td><strong>Feelings of being imposter</strong> + incompetency ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to be <strong>proactive</strong> - for some EPs ↑</td>
<td><strong>Passivity</strong>, slowing evaluations and EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to take on/complete evaluation <strong>mandates</strong> enhanced proactive EU behaviour</td>
<td><strong>Inability to take on/complete evaluation mandates</strong>, slowing evaluations + EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORGANIZATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational culture</strong> that values learning, feedback, and accountability measures ↑</td>
<td><strong>Organization cultural clashes</strong> (e.g. different administrative obligations and deadlines) ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong <strong>leadership</strong> by many management level EPs (e.g. HELP managers, DRS, MCDs) ↑</td>
<td>Failure to take active leadership role in evaluations by some influential EP leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EPs from multiple organizations</strong> engaged in evaluations ↑</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicating</strong> on needs, study objectives ↑</td>
<td><strong>Insufficient communication</strong>, causing friction ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common vision</strong> of long-term objectives, integration of short- and long-term objectives ↑</td>
<td>Divergent and <strong>competing short-term objectives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources remaining relatively stable</strong> despite uncertainty, facilitating evaluation and EU</td>
<td><strong>Uncertain resources</strong> forcing prioritization, limiting planning, and challenging EU continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation-based KNOWLEDGE (K)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K corresponding to values and information needs</strong></td>
<td>Some evaluations <strong>contradicting expectations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K actionable and applicable</strong></td>
<td><strong>K insufficiently contextualized</strong> or applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeliness</strong> of K production better in 2011 ↑</td>
<td>Seasonal <strong>delays</strong>, health staff reluctance, EP <strong>unavailability</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to K</strong> improved ↑</td>
<td><strong>K production delays</strong>, slowing access to findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Production, Transfer, and Support Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KT strategies <strong>attuned to EP characteristics</strong> ↑</td>
<td>Took some <strong>time to discern EP needs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KT strategies gradually <strong>adapted and diversified</strong> ↑</td>
<td>Initially <strong>conventional KT format</strong> (long reports) ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KT strategies using <strong>language suited</strong> for EPs ↑</td>
<td>Evaluators initially using <strong>scientific jargon</strong> ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressively <strong>trusting and lasting relationship</strong> between principal evaluators and EPs ↑</td>
<td>A few external <strong>evaluators did not gain the trust</strong> of EPs and were no longer solicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal and informal <strong>exchange mechanisms</strong> ↑</td>
<td><strong>Limited formal exchange mechanisms</strong> ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participatory</strong> KT strategy with diverse EPs</td>
<td>Less participatory sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support and follow-ups</strong> at monthly meetings ↑</td>
<td>Distance and limited <strong>availabilities, restricting follow-ups</strong>; EPs hesitant to question evaluators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of an evaluation strategy coordinator</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency and timeliness</strong> of KT activities</td>
<td>2009 studies: <strong>long time elapsed</strong> before KT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Evaluation Researchers and their Institutional Affiliations

| Interpersonal skills - long-term relationships ↑         | Conflictual relationships |
| Collaborative **attitude** and objectives ↑             | Some researchers **not communicative** or having difficulty understanding information needs |
| Constructive, inclusive, communicative                  | |
| **Approach**: learner-oriented, participatory, adaptable, transparent, capacity-building ↑ | **Limited resources** and geographical **distance limiting evaluation approach** (e.g. less participation) |
| **KT adaptability**: creative KT (film, **restitution** workshops) ↑ | EPs asked for more **restitution** workshops, but costly |
| Recognized **credibility and expertise**                | |
| Large professional **networks**                        | |
| **Access to funds** for evaluation, KT activities      | **Limited resources**: a source of conflict ↓ |
| In 2011, KT researcher joining the evaluation strategy  | **Underfunded KT** |

Increases (↑) or decreases (↓) in EU conditions between 2009 and 2011. Adapted from Dagenais, Queuille, et al. (2013)
3. General Discussion

The three articles presented in this thesis have contributed in various ways to our three principal objectives by demonstrating the relevance and feasibility of studying EU, providing a greater appreciation of EU and its conditions within the evaluation strategy, and furthering our understanding of various relevant issues. In the discussion, we will explore these different contributions. A first section will address the contributions of article 1 by presenting the pertinence of conducting evaluation assessments in this particular context, i.e., a humanitarian organization working in Burkina Faso. A second section will address the contributions of articles 2 and 3 by demonstrating how these contributed to the study of EU in a collaborative humanitarian context.

3.1. Contributions of article 1

The pertinence of evaluability assessments (EA) in context

In a context of increased humanitarian activity (ALNAP, 2001), there is a logical drive to study EU and to help utilization-focused evaluators, program stakeholders, and decision-makers become aware of the various ways in which EU can manifest and to provide them with guidance on conditions that might be implemented or avoided to foster EU (Sandison, 2006). However, as demonstrated in article 1, it is sometimes wise to conduct evaluability assessments (EAs) before setting off on an evaluation study, to verify with program stakeholders the presence of key elements that indicate whether the program is evaluation-ready (Finckenauer, Margaryan, & Sullivan, 2005; Trevisan, 2007; Wholey, 1994). Many factors could lead to flawed or useless evaluations, such as incoherent or unrealistic program logic, insufficient data, or lack of interest (Wholey, 1994). EAs can prevent waste of time and resources and can help program stakeholders develop the basis for a coherent and plausible program logic before actually evaluating program efficacy (Trevisan, 2007; Wholey, 1994).

Using Wholey’s (1994) EA model, we were able to assess the readiness of HELP’s evaluation strategy and to attest to the relevance of examining EU and its conditions (D’Ostie-Racine et al., 2013). This assessment allowed us to establish a coherent and plausible logic model for the evaluation strategy and to verify the accessibility of sufficient useful data for the
study of EU and its conditions. We were also able to discern a clear interest from stakeholders to undergo an EU study. Finally, we were able during the interviews to discuss and clarify certain challenges concerning the development of the evaluation strategy and the collaboration among stakeholders. Although we cannot know for sure, it is conceivable that EA discussions served as impetus for strategy stakeholders’ subsequent efforts to discuss and resolve such issues and to revise their logic model, in which case the EA may have served formative purposes (Trevisan, 2007). A related question, noted by Davies and Payne (2015), concerns the implications of EA and how far evaluators ought to go. In actual practice, such decisions tend to be based on available resources and stakeholders’ wishes (Davies & Payne, 2015). In any case, it seemed appropriate in the present context to perform an EA, as it provided sufficient information to assure us the evaluation strategy was well underway and evaluable.

Despite the contributions of the EA highlighted in article 1, and the confidence it provided concerning the feasibility of an EU study, its findings did not lead us to predict that the evaluation strategy would not be sustained in Niger. In 2009, it was clear already that the evaluation strategy was alive and well in Burkina Faso and that more evaluation activities were underway there than in Niger. As noted (article 1), it may be that we were unable to discern this because the results presented the views of participants from Burkina Faso more clearly than those of participants from Niger. This may indeed be a viable explanation, but it is difficult to confirm, as in 2011 we were unable to conduct interviews in Niger, nor were we able to interview participants in 2011 who had worked in both Niger and Burkina Faso. Social desirability bias, a potential limitation of the study, may provide another potential explanation for why particular challenges in Niger or between stakeholders would not have been disclosed (Olivier de Sardan, 2008).

Nevertheless, had evaluation activity levels in Burkina Faso been at the level of those in Niger, we most likely would have reconsidered the readiness of the evaluation strategy and recommended the implementation of more evaluation activities before undertaking a thesis on EU and its conditions with HELP, to avoid wasting limited time and finances (Whooley, 1994). Oliver (2008) has emphasized that resources in the humanitarian sector are precious, as “any dollar wasted on an ineffective evaluation is a dollar that might have gone toward emergency relief supplies” (p. 135) or, we would add, toward another more useful evaluation. Yet again, many things can happen within a 29-month period, and long-term predictions about the course
of a program (such as the evaluation strategy), especially in the humanitarian sector, may be particularly fragile for the same reasons that challenge the conduct and use of evaluations (e.g. high turnover, unpredictable resources, polarized viewpoints) (see ALNAP, 2006; Beck, 2003; Crisp, 2004; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). It can be argued that these challenges provide even more reasons to examine the evaluability of a program. Hence, as discussed by Davies and Payne (2015), while EAs can provide valuable information on a program’s evaluability, they have their limitations and bring an “additional layer of cost and procedure” (p. 216). One must therefore consider whether EA is practical in each given context, and if so, at what stage of a program’s implementation, and in what circumstances (Davies & Payne, 2015).

In the present thesis, EA was conducted as preliminary step to the first data collection. This enabled us to ask EA questions and to analyze them beforehand to establish that the evaluation strategy was sufficiently structured and realistic, and that the implementation was sufficiently advanced prior to undertaking a costly international data collection in 2011 and the painstaking and time-consuming task of qualitative analyses. The two data collections in Burkina Faso provided ample material for in-depth analysis of EU by stakeholders of the evaluation strategy and of the conditions that influenced such EU.

3.2. Contributions of articles 2 and 3

Gaining a comprehensive view of EU and its conditions in a humanitarian NGO

Crisp (2004) has suggested that, since the 1990s, program evaluations in the humanitarian sector, or EHA, have become “big business (in both a figurative and literal sense) attracting unprecedented levels of donor funding and agency commitment, as well as public and political interest” (p. 4). Such commitment, funding, and interest only make sense if evaluations are used and if they impact the humanitarian sector in desired directions (Hendricks, 1994; Oliver, 2008; Patton, 1997). Writing on the issue of accountability in the humanitarian sector, Naik (2007) stated that “international organizations continue to operate in a sort of vacuum” (p. 63). Such seclusion may explain the delay before existing concerns about EU became an actual point of interest in the EHA literature. Sandison’s (2006) chapter, The utilisation of evaluations, was the first to draw broad attention to the scarcity of empirical literature on systematic evaluations of EU in the humanitarian context (Hallam & Bonino,
It established how little was known about the state and degree of EU in the humanitarian sector and underscored that examples of limited use or non-use were more common than positive examples of EU (Sandison, 2006). It recognized that more was needed in the humanitarian sector to harness the full potential of evaluations to improve decisions and practice (Hallam & Bonino, 2013). Challenges and opportunities to ensure and study EU were also clarified in her chapter (Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Sandison, 2006). Since then, ALNAP and its members have produced various guides and course manuals (see ALNAP, 2014; Beck, 2003; Buchanan-Smith & Cosgrave, 2013; Buchanan-Smith & Telford; Hallam, 2011; Hallam & Bonino, 2013) to disseminate the evaluation experiences of its members as a means of adding to the developing body of “untold evaluation stories and evaluator insights that rarely find space to be documented in more formal reviews and evaluation reports” and in turn promote more effective EU in the humanitarian sector (Hallam & Bonino, 2013, p. 15). As Henry (2003a) has highlighted, while a large body of classic evaluation literature discusses EU, most of that discussion is on theoretical and conceptual issues of EU and fewer writings present empirical research on EU. Systematic research on an organization’s EU is especially rare in the humanitarian sector (Oliver, 2008; Sandison, 2006). Our systematic examination of EU as a consequence of HELP’s evaluation strategy, therefore, presents a much-needed contribution to the literature on the theme of EU in a humanitarian context. Furthermore, it innovates in a number of ways, by: 1) addressing the relevance of Alkin and Taut’s (2003) EU framework and contributing to the debate on the usefulness of EU as a concept to study the consequences of evaluation; 2) advancing the exploration of persuasive use as a valuable form of EU; 3) contributing to the understanding of conditions involved in participatory evaluation; 4) presenting an example of a particularly successful case of EU; and 5) presenting practical implications for HELP’s evaluation strategy, as well as for stakeholders of other NGOs in the humanitarian sector.

1) Framing EU using Alkin and Taut’s (2003) framework in contemporary research and theory. An important contribution of the present study is its demonstration of the applicability of Alkin and Taut’s (2003) framework for the systematic examination of EU. To our knowledge, this framework has not previously been employed in studies of EU in the humanitarian context. Perhaps the persistent debate (discussed in article 2) about the relevance of studying evaluation influence rather than evaluation use (EU) and the tendency to criticize
the concept of EU as archaic and in need of renewal have overshadowed the contributions of EU literature or even discouraged researchers from paying attention to EU. We nevertheless believe Alkin and Taut’s (2003) framework provides a suitable structure from which to appreciate a wide variety of evaluation consequences resulting from both evaluation processes and findings. We believe the debate on the relevance of EU and influence has enriched the literature on the consequences of evaluations, and we concur with Mark’s (2011) suggestion that research and collegial discussions on this topic, whether using the EU or influence frameworks, will likely lead to new learning that would be of service to the evaluation field.

One advance made by the present thesis is that process use is often presented in the literature as a category of its own, separate from the concepts of instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive use, which are applied only to findings (Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Sandison, 2006). Sandison (2006) has described numerous difficulties associated with the study of EU, and while some challenges remain (e.g. how to measure learning), we believe the Alkin and Taut (2003) framework provides a structure that facilitates the conceptualization of process and findings use by specifying how changes in intended users’ behaviours, attitudes, and intent to convince others may reflect instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive uses, respectively, resulting from either the evaluation process or its findings. Presenting instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive forms of process use is an uncommon but interesting way to examine EU that may facilitate the study of process and findings use during or following EHA.

As noted in article 3, conceptualizing instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive forms of process use as we have in our adapted version of the Alkin and Taut (2003) EU framework could also contribute to the study of knowledge transfer (KT) and its literature. Interestingly, while the literature on the use of research findings does consider instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive forms of uses, such concepts have not, to our knowledge, been examined in terms of potential consequences of the research process itself (Estabrooks, 1999). This is surprising, considering the body of work describing the benefits of participatory research approaches (Cousins & Shulha, 2006; Graham & Tetroe, 2009; Walter et al., 2004). In the present thesis, we attempt to bridge some concepts from the literature in program evaluation and in KT and, in doing so, we suggest that viewing the research process as potentially leading to
instrumental, conceptual, or persuasive uses, just as evaluation findings are known to do (Estabrooks, 1999), may be a valuable contribution to the field and understanding of KT.

2) **Persuasive use for equitable health access.** Another innovation in the present thesis (article 2), concerns adaptations made to the EU framework developed by Alkin and Taut (2003). As others have done, we have used the term “persuasive” EU as a general concept to refer to use that is intended to influence others (Herbert, 2014; Leviton & Hughes, 1981). We would also argue that, while *symbolic* and *legitimative* are persuasive forms of EU, in that they seek to influence the opinion or position of others, the field of EU would benefit from clarification of these concepts, as they are used interchangeably but differ in important ways from evaluations used persuasively to convince and advocate for social causes. Højlund (2014) has criticized the symbolic and legitimative categories of uses. In his view, such uses exist and need to be recognized, but “it is very hard to argue that symbolic and legitimizing use of evaluation lead to social betterment” (p. 29). This is an interesting issue that has spurred its own debate on whether social betterment is a central objective of evaluation (Herbert, 2014). This debate is beyond the scope of the present thesis. However, it is our impression that the category of uses often referred to as *symbolic, legitimative, justificatory, or persuasive* (Herbert, 2014; Højlund, 2014; Leviton & Hughes, 1981) can, but do not always, contribute in important ways to social betterment while remaining in line with the common evaluation objective of informing, and sometimes *persuading*, policy-makers (Buchanan-Smith & Cosgrave, 2013). Leviton and Hughes (1981) explained that the principal difference between persuasive use and instrumental or conceptual uses “is that persuasive use involves interpersonal influence, getting others to go along with the implications of evaluation” (p. 529). Informing policy was a core objective of the evaluation strategy, and HELP actively sought to use evaluation findings persuasively to influence policy-making as it advocated for equitable access to health services. Hence, the current thesis (article 2) has contributed examples of persuasive uses that are aligned with moral values and objectives of evaluation that are important to consider in practice and theory (Højlund, 2014; Mark & Henry, 2004). Whether the study of EU necessitates a more rigorous moral compass is a matter that will likely be discussed in future research.
3) **Participatory evaluations in the humanitarian sector.** The advantages of participatory evaluation for EU have repeatedly been recognized (Cousins, 1998; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Sandison, 2006), and participatory evaluations have progressively become commonplace in the humanitarian sector (ALNAP, 2014). Many challenges can hamper productive North–South research or evaluation partnerships (e.g. communication difficulties, lopsided power relations, insufficient research capacities in the South) (Ridde & Capelle, 2011), and attending to the interpersonal dynamics involved in such participatory work will likely be beneficial to evaluation research and practice. The present thesis demonstrates how stakeholders negotiated the interpersonal dynamics together to collaborate over several years on the evaluation strategy and the progressive integration of EU into the exemption program. It illustrates how humanitarian workers managed to work outside a “vacuum” (Naik, 2007), with academic researchers (evaluators), in spite of the conditions that commonly challenge enduring EU in the humanitarian sector and those that challenge North–South research partnerships in particular (Ridde & Capelle, 2011). The present study explored and documented in depth conditions related to the interpersonal communication and dynamics between stakeholders that tend to be integral to participatory evaluations but are frequently omitted from, or limited in, the evaluation literature. The study therefore illustrates how peoples’ attitudes, competencies, motives, and feelings, their communication, and their ability to relate and adapt to each other’s needs while maintaining the scientific rigour of evaluation methods were all very influential to EU. The study (article 3) may shed light upon the theory regarding conditions that facilitate or impede EU in collaborative contexts and may also serve evaluators and stakeholders engaged in participatory evaluations wishing to foster EU.

4) **A particularly successful case of EU.** While perhaps obvious, an additional contribution of the present thesis (articles 2 and 3) is that it presents an example of a particularly successful case of EU and its conditions in the humanitarian sector, where reports of non-use are common (Oliver, 2008; Sandison, 2006). Evaluations were used and had considerable impacts on stakeholders’ understanding, attitudes, and behaviours. The study also illustrates the increase in the evaluation capacity of many stakeholders over time, which is a topic increasingly discussed in the evaluation literature (Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014) but less frequently documented empirically, especially in humanitarian NGOs (Buchanan-Smith &
Cosgrave, 2013; Cousins et al., 2004; Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Oliver, 2008; Sandison, 2006). Cousins et al. (2004) have suggested that an organization able to integrate evaluation into its organizational culture tends to stimulate its members’ evaluation capacities and to facilitate the development of shared understanding and values among them (Cousins et al., 2004; Patton, 2008b). Among other factors, integrating evaluation into an organizational culture is believed to be facilitated by having intended users, such as the EPs in our case, participate in all or some evaluation stages (e.g. decisions, design, conduct of evaluation, dissemination of findings) (ALNAP, 2014; Cousins et al., 2004; Patton, 2008c). These are some of the conditions of EU highlighted in the evaluation literature, and the present thesis (article 3) demonstrates the conditions found to be relevant to HELP’s evaluation strategy context and how such conditions are dynamic, complex, and interrelated. HELP’s evaluation strategy involved numerous evaluations, often with participatory components; evaluation findings were shared frequently, and interactions between EPs and evaluators were very common. Intended users were generally very eager to see and experience consequences of evaluations and were keen to engage in EU. Principal evaluators’ ability to produce and share quality evaluation findings rarely disappointed intended users. Necessary adjustments to KT strategies were generally made. Participants did bring up some concerns, but the overall perception was that evaluations were useful, and this perception only increased between 2009 and 2011. Together, these conditions seem to have promoted an organizational culture of evaluation with evaluation-laden values and logic that permeated progressively the mindset of EPs and fostered their EU in service of HELP’s exemption program (Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Patton, 2010). The study presents the evolution of EU over time as it unfolded into what appeared to be a “virtuous cycle” of EU, a concept that has been discussed in the literature but has rarely been documented empirically (Hallam & Bonino, 2013, p. 26).

5) Beyond theory: practical implications for humanitarian NGOs. Above and beyond implications for the general understanding of, research on, and theorizing of EU and its conditions, the current thesis has potential practical implications for the evaluation practice as well as for HELP’s evaluation strategy EPs. Indeed, lessons learned in the present project may prove helpful for evaluators and potential users wishing to make use of evaluations in other NGOs and in the humanitarian sector. The present research is based on a single case
study design and therefore its findings are not easily generalizable to other humanitarian NGOs. Yet readers can still reflect on the present findings and consider whether certain aspects might be relevant and transferable to other similar contexts.

The present case demonstrates that even within the humanitarian sector there are numerous ways to make use of program evaluations. It provides a rich description of some of the changes observed through EU as evaluations of the exemption strategy were conducted and disseminated at HELP. Article 2 presents the various forms of evaluation process and findings use described by EPs, illustrating many instances of instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive use. These types of use are increasingly discussed in the literature but remain relatively abstract and underrepresented in the field. The vivid illustrations of EU in article 2 provide helpful and practical examples of potential ways to take advantage of program evaluations (article 2, table 4 or for more specific examples see Appendix C). With these in mind, intended users might ask themselves and their colleagues what uses they wish to make of evaluations, whether those are undertaken simply to please their funders or supervisors (symbolic use) or to identify and understand problems in their program (conceptual use) and attempt to solve them (instrumental use). They might ask whether they are paying sufficient attention to findings and to the different ways these can serve their programs. Meanwhile, evaluators might ask themselves whether they have made sufficiently clear the different ways evaluations can be useful, whether their evaluation design and approach can produce useful findings that can promote conceptual changes and learning for intended users, whether those findings can be used instrumentally and applied to alter program practices, or whether they can be put to persuasive uses. Are they vigilant about optimizing such usage and minimizing symbolic or legitimative uses? Examples of EU in article 2 may also draw the attention of evaluators and potential intended users to the evaluation process and ways of ensuring that it is meaningful, useful, and used. The importance of instrumental findings use (e.g. applying evaluation recommendations) may be self-evident, but tapping into the full potential of the evaluation process by ensuring intended users learn from the process and gain new perspectives and attitudes is more abstract and can be more difficult to plan ahead of time. The examples in article 2 we hope render potential process uses more tangible. Intended users might ask themselves whether and what they are learning during evaluations, whether they are
engaging in the evaluation process, and whether their perceptions and understanding about their program have changed because of evaluations. On the other hand, evaluators might ask whether they are soliciting sufficient engagement from intended users, whether they are strengthening intended users’ understanding of the evaluation process and findings, and whether they are cultivating users’ critical thinking. Tuning in to the process and acknowledging opportunities for conceptual use are easily overlooked; it is our hope that the lens used in the present thesis and the illustrations provided will help anyone interested in practicing and promoting EU to understand and tune into opportunities for those forms of evaluation use. The EPs in our study encountered various struggles and opportunities related to evaluation use, and article 2 may provide points of reference for organizations wishing to promote the integration of EU into their practice. The present study could also be disseminated to humanitarian assistance networks and be incorporated into evaluation training modules for humanitarian workers to learn how to engage more deeply in, and benefit from, evaluations. In the current study, respondents sometimes expressed how the interview itself had made them realize the numerous ways evaluations had been useful. It is not uncommon for people to engage in professional activities without appreciating their full potential, simply for lack of opportunity to reflect upon what that full potential might entail. An interesting starting point for some humanitarian NGOs might be to organize training workshops for humanitarian staff along with evaluators to decipher how evaluations have been used and how they might be more useful. Funding agencies could also be solicited to fund such evaluation training for humanitarian staff. Help’s evidence-based story may prove helpful for others wishing to embark on a similar journey.

As Patton (1997) made clear, evaluations that are unused, even if they are of great quality, are useless, and evaluators should aim to carry out evaluations in ways that foster impact by promoting process and findings use (Hendricks, 1994; Lawrenz, Huffman, & McGinnis, 2007; Patton, 2008b). But what does this entail? What conditions do evaluators and intended users have control or influence over that could be implemented/avoided to promote EU in NGOs, in the case of an evaluation strategy or a similar undertaking as HELP in the humanitarian sector? As noted earlier, the literature on EU in the humanitarian sector is sparse, and while there are some very useful practical guides and writings, empirical case studies remain elusive (see Hallam, 2011; Hallam & Bonino, 2013; Oliver, 2008; Sandison, 2006).
Indeed, as noted earlier, Sandison (2006) deplored the lack of empirical studies on EU in the humanitarian sector and, more specifically, the lack of positive cases demonstrating active EU. Furthermore, to our knowledge, little has been documented aside from a few recent publications, such as that of Siron, Dagenais, and Ridde (2015) on knowledge utilization and transfer as a means to improve public health in low-countries, despite numerous appeals for such research (WHO, 2004, 2013). It is hoped that the present study contributes to the burgeoning literature on the topic and demonstrates the need to address EU and, more generally, the uptake of empirical science in future humanitarian research, in humanitarian journals, and in humanitarian conferences. In a study examining the role of NGOs in global health research in the context of international development, Delisle, Roberts, Munro, Jones, and Gyorkos (2005) argued that NGOs in low-income countries “can advocate for formative and evaluative research on programs that address major health problems, but which are generally a low priority for funding agencies” (p. 7). Program evaluation has become increasingly valued in the humanitarian sector (Crisp, 2004), and while there is rising interest for evaluation and for knowledge transfer and diffusion in the humanitarian sector, common barriers remain: lack of time, lack of financial resources, and lack of expertise to undertake these activities (Hallam & Bonino, 2013). Whether evidence is transferred by NGO staff or researchers, neither tend to have formal training in knowledge transfer and hence may not intuitively engage in effective KT. As such, it may be beneficial for other humanitarian NGOs to request and advocate for knowledge use research, training, and activities, as was done by the evaluation partners of the present study. It may also be important to consider allocating a specific percentage of humanitarian NGO funding to finance not only evaluation but also knowledge use and transfer strategies.

On a more micro-level, the present thesis might serve as a practical example to inspire evaluators and stakeholders in similar circumstances wishing to promote EU by implementing conditions favorable to EU. Article 3 of this thesis provides a detailed qualitative analysis of conditions that were deemed influential by EPs. Indeed, the present research could be used to reflect upon the potential transferability of any of the array of conditions described in article 3 and, if appropriate, to attempt to establish some of the same conditions. The conditions observed as being helpful or harmful to EU at HELP may exert similar or divergent influences elsewhere, or even no influence at all, yet keeping them in mind might prove helpful while
planning and undertaking utilization-focused evaluations. For example, being sensitive to interpersonal dynamics between partners and investing time in honest and regular communications, despite the sense of urgency common to the humanitarian context, will be helpful in promoting EU in many NGOs. Humanitarian workers in other contexts might recognize and even identify with some of the situations presented in articles 2 and 3, but they will need to remain attentive; training on the subject may help to sensitize them to EU and to the conditions that potentially influence it. In our study case, EU was planned from the beginning of the evaluation strategy, resources were available, and evaluators were often present and communicative, and these were some of the conditions that helped EU. Yet misunderstandings or disagreements still occurred, and the road to EU was not always smooth. The lessons learned about what EPs found to be helpful, not useful, or even simply annoying in the evaluation strategy may provide insights that are transferable to other contexts. As Stake (2003) explained, “vicarious experience is an important basis for refining action options and expectations […] and] the utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience” (p. 156). It is our hope that shedding light upon the EPs’ collaboration and dynamics over time, as well as upon their EU and the influential conditions they observed, may render the journey to EU for others a little easier.

The EU conditions described in article 3 will also serve to determine practical context-specific recommendations for evaluation strategy stakeholders in an upcoming participatory deliberative workshop on the study’s findings at HELP, to be based on the writings of Boyko, Lavis, Abelson, Dobbins, and Carter (2012) and Lavis et al. (2014). We hope to promote a shared understanding of evaluation uses and to examine EU barriers and facilitators with the stakeholders to identify solutions they consider relevant. Other humanitarian NGOs working in Burkina Faso and local networks of evaluators will also be invited so they can witness the presentation, take part in the discussions, and share their experiences, questions, successes, and challenges related to their attempts to integrate evaluation use into their work.

5) Implications for HELP and evaluation strategy partners.

In planning the deliberative workshop in Burkina Faso, preliminary recommendations will be prepared as a starting point for discussion with EPs. These are presented below:
General recommendations for HELP EPs

- Plan a formal meeting with all concerned EPs before each evaluation to discuss information needs, evaluation objectives, attribution of responsibilities, required resources, and planned schedule of evaluation and dissemination activities.

- Communicate schedule and activity changes (e.g. via online platforms and agendas accessible to all EPs).

- Maintain and update a collection of evaluation reports in summary formats (e.g. policy brief, abstracts) available at HELP offices and online.

- When there are points of friction with regard to evaluation findings or the collaboration dynamics between EPs, address them quickly with the EPs concerned in the presence of HELP managers and evaluation strategy principal evaluators.

- Attend to and discuss resistance toward EU and toward participating in evaluation activities. Seeking explanations for such resistance may provide guidance as to ways to improve collaboration and EU.

- Continue to dedicate a portion of monthly meetings to discussing affairs related to the evaluation strategy. HELP managers could take even more leadership in showing the benefits of previous evaluations and mentoring/teaching new staff to introduce them to the utility of evaluations for learning and improving.

- Continue to hold dissemination workshops to present findings after each evaluation, but further stimulate participants’ ability to ask questions, and encourage reflexivity about one’s work and about HELP’s program by emphasizing learning opportunities provided by evaluations.

- Mandate/hire capable and interested staff specifically to ensure the assimilation of evaluation-based knowledge and its transfer and integration by the rest of HELP staff and partners.

- Assure follow-up of evaluation impact (applications of learning and findings).
  
  o Mandate/hire EPs to ensure follow-up and implementation of specific recommendations.

- Document and discuss explicitly with evaluators the expectations for KT activities by describing the needs of each EP group (e.g. funding agency, DRS/MCDs, HELP
managers, HELP staff, health staff, advocacy representatives) in terms of the format
and strategies they prefer.

- In times of staff turnover, consider evaluation aptitude and interest when hiring new
staff.

**Recommendations for evaluators**

- Provide ample formal and informal communication opportunities. No respondent
spoke of redundant communication, but many described problems that were resolved
through enhanced communication. Address any doubts or suspicions concerning your
work, be transparent about your motives and verify whether they correspond to those
of intended users, and demonstrate integrity.

- Be very pedagogical, use interactive teaching approaches, and do not assume
knowledge; explain how evaluation is an opportunity for learning rather than a means
to sanction EPs, explain your reasoning, and teach scientific methodology and jargon
when pertinent.

- Discuss information needs and explain the relationships between evaluation objectives,
evaluation findings, and expressed information needs.

- Disseminate evaluation findings in ways that are tailored to the different needs of the
different EP groups.

- Raise awareness about the numerous forms of evaluation process and findings uses
(instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive EU), and highlight opportunities for EU and
instances of EU as they occur (e.g. when you observe intended users are learning or
changing attitude during evaluations).

- Encourage EPs to express uncertainties, questions, and concerns about evaluation
activities and findings.

- Further encourage and support EPs’ participation in the various evaluation phases or in
the conduct of their own internal evaluations.

- Discuss with new external evaluators EPs’ expectations concerning the evaluation and
dissemination process. Raise awareness about ways to foster EU (process and findings)
during the course of an evaluation.
For various reasons, we believe the present thesis, as described in the three articles, is a rare example of a rigorous qualitative examination of EU in a humanitarian NGO, with a design that presents various strengths. One strength was in the number of stakeholders from a diversity of disciplines (i.e., external evaluators, NGO stakeholders and partners, including a regional health director and district chief physicians, as well as funding agency and advocacy organization representatives) who were recruited through snowball sampling. Another was the two-wave data collection that enabled us to examine the evolution of stakeholders’ discourses as the evaluations themselves evolved between 2009 and 2011. Added to this was the fact, noted earlier, that we examined both evaluation process and findings while attending to unintended, longer-term, and sometimes cumulative consequences of evaluation. We believe some of these attributes of the study design enabled us to capture more subtle and sometimes more complex processes that led to EU.

3.3. Limitations

A principal limitation of the present thesis is the fact that we were not able to collect data in Niger in 2011. The study might have been more comprehensive if we had been able to examine the course of EU there and the conditions that acted as barriers to sustained EU. Sandison (2006) specified that “non-use can occur for rational, unintended or practical reasons such as shelving a poor-quality evaluation, bad timing or unexpected events.” Another potential limitation of the study is that we did not examine the use of each particular study, asking for proof of EU, nor did we focus on non-use. Instead, we asked EPs to tell us about evaluations that had not been useful. Or we asked what had been difficult about certain evaluations. No evaluation was judged useless by EPs, but two evaluations were considered less useful by some. As noted previously, limitations associated with qualitative research, such as normative discourse or social desirability bias, may have led respondents to play down their dissatisfactions with evaluations. However, it is our impression that the respondents, or at least some, were quite honest about their dissatisfactions. For example, they explained that one evaluation had not been sufficiently in-depth for stakeholders, and that the findings from another study were not sufficiently contextualized during the dissemination and stakeholders found it difficult to know how to apply the findings to their working context. Other respondents said that evaluations were not an important part of their work (sometimes even
when it was part of their mandate). Perhaps the triangulation of data sources and the fact that we interviewed diverse participants enabled us to hear about uses that we would otherwise not have heard about had we interviewed fewer EPs, or EPs from a single profession.

Finally, because our case study is bound to its context and timeframe, generalizing to other contexts should be approached with caution (Yin, 1999). The aim of this thesis was to better understand EU and the conditions that influenced it by seeking and analyzing the views of evaluation strategy stakeholders (i.e., EPs). While it contributes to the theory and literature on EU in the humanitarian context, and while results may further the reflections of program evaluators and stakeholders on this topic, its implications are primarily bound to HELP’s evaluation strategy context within the general timeframe of the study. Given that the last data collection occurred in 2011, the evaluation strategy, EU, and EU conditions have certainly evolved since then and, hence, the present findings will need to be discussed during the deliberative workshop in a way that allows for integration of new information, issues, and circumstances to ensure the recommendations are relevant to the current context of HELP’s evaluation strategy.

3.4. Considerations for further research and intervention

Having identified the contributions and limitations of the present thesis, various opportunities for further research should be considered. As noted above, discussions on changes that have occurred since 2011 will be integral to the deliberative workshop at HELP to ensure recommendations are relevant to current dynamics. Following the deliberative workshop, it may be wise to monitor and evaluate the process of implementing the recommendations and to examine their impact on EPs, the evaluation strategy, and the exemption program. This could prove to be useful for HELP and to further our theoretical understanding of the recommendations.

It would also be interesting to document empirically the changes that have occurred since 2011, to discern the evolution of EU and investigate the conditions that have influenced it since 2011. This might provide insight for HELP’s EPs and shed further light on conditions that influence the integration of evidence into humanitarian NGOs’ organizational culture over a longer period of time than we were able to document in the present study.
Generalizability of the thesis conclusions is limited to the evaluation strategy context, and it would be interesting to see whether future research with other humanitarian NGOs or other institutions in West Africa would render similar conclusions. Research using multiple case designs to compare different NGOs’ attempts to integrate evidence into their practice could provide valuable information about forms of EU and further elucidate EU conditions. Such research might corroborate the present study or further clarify specificities of EU in other NGOs and humanitarian or organizational contexts. It was quite clear from the present study that the different groups of EPs preferred different forms of information and participated differently in evaluation activities depending on their availabilities and mandates. There is a need for research to document the different information needs and the best KT strategies for these different groups. More specifically, our study focused on the EPs’ own EU but did not examine their success in persuading other stakeholders, such as Burkina Faso’s policy-makers. Examining the specific information needs of West African health policy-makers and better understanding other factors that influence their decisions could facilitate initiatives, such as HELP’s evaluation strategy, to inform policy-making. Documenting the effectiveness of advocacy measures in a West African context, such as those undertaken by HELP with its advocacy partners (e.g. Amnesty International), would also provide valuable lessons. Examining the information needs of both funding agencies and advocacy organizations could also facilitate and promote even more EU. The present study focused on the EU of intended users but, interestingly, we discerned from the interviews that evaluators, too, were making use of evaluation processes and findings, learning from each other, intended users, and findings. They were also using findings within their own profession. Documenting systematically evaluators’ EU might also prove to be an interesting avenue to explore.

4. Conclusion

The right to health, defined as the “highest attainable standard of health” and laid down by the World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution and international human rights treaties, was reiterated in 1978 in the Alma-Ata declaration at the International Conference on Primary Health Care (WHO, 2004). In 2004, The World Report on Knowledge for Better Health Strengthening Health Systems warned of the deep and growing economic inequities,
within and across countries, that continually challenge, and infringe upon, this right to health (WHO, 2004). The following year, 2005, all the members of WHO pledged to bring about universal health care and underlined the need to use scientific evidence to guide and inform practice and decisions in global health (WHO, 2013). The WHO had already recognized that the difficulty lies less in the production of empirical knowledge than in its follow-up and uptake (WHO, 2004). HELP’s pilot health care user fee exemption program presented a great opportunity for its stakeholders to partner with regional and district level Ministry of Health decision-makers to provide more equitable access to health services and, through the evaluation strategy, to document its impacts. By examining the way evaluation partners (EPs) of the evaluation strategy collaborated together to enhance EU, we were able to discern that they used evaluations instrumentally, conceptually, and persuasively in ways that improved their practices and that served the exemption program’s mission. Moreover, in this thesis we were also able to point to the conditions that facilitated and impeded EU in the context of HELP’s evaluation strategy. Finally, it is our impression that the present case may provide added “demonstration that people are capable of joining forces across cultures, disciplines and sectors to forge long-term commitments to programs of research and real-world impact” (Boutilier et al., 2011, p. 5).
5. References cited in the general introduction, discussion and conclusion


doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2013.12.001


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publications/?search=1&keywords=&language=English&category=22

politiques publiques d'exemption du paiement des soins en Afrique de l'Ouest (pp. 5-8).
Ouagadougou: CRCHUM/HELP/ECHO.


Appendix A. Timeline of HELP’s exemption program and evaluation strategy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Exemption program implemented</td>
<td>Data collection begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Exemption program evaluated</td>
<td>Present study begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Data collection 1 Article 1</td>
<td>Data collection 1 Articles 1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Data no longer easily accessible, no more evaluation plans</td>
<td>Analyses writing of article 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011...</td>
<td>Decision to focus on Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Analyses + writing of articles 2, 3 thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Restitution workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:**
- Conflict in Niger team evaluation plans discontinued.
Appendix B. Blueprint of the thesis methodology
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Recruitment + sampling</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Analytical strategy</th>
<th>Ethical considerations</th>
<th>Trustworthiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article 1</strong></td>
<td>Constructivist interpretive paradigm Qualitative</td>
<td>Exploratory case study</td>
<td>2009 (5 weeks)</td>
<td>Burkina Faso: Dori Ouagadougou</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews Documents*</td>
<td>Recruitment in person or by phone Intensity + snowball</td>
<td>N=20 Niger 5 Burkina Faso n=12 Niger + Burkina Faso n=3</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews guide inspired by 4 conditions of Wholey (1994)</td>
<td>Iterative</td>
<td>Confidentiality: Interviews anonymized, references to potentially discriminating events described in general ways to minimize risk of identifying participants.</td>
<td>Member checking: during data collection, analyses, and article writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article 2</strong></td>
<td>Constructivist interpretive paradigm Qualitative</td>
<td>Instrumental case study</td>
<td>2009 (5 weeks)</td>
<td>Burkina Faso: Dori Ouagadougou</td>
<td>Individual interviews Documents Non-participatory observation</td>
<td>Recruitment in person or by phone</td>
<td>N=32 Burkina Faso n=15</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews; interview guide based on Alkin &amp; Taut's (2003) model of EU: Process use: Instrumental - Conceptual - Persuasive Findings: Instrumental - Conceptual - Persuasive Change</td>
<td>Iterative</td>
<td>Objectivity: Because the second and third authors had worked as evaluation consultants for the NGO, the first author assumed independently many phases of the study. i.e., conduct and analysis of interviews. It was agreed the first author needed a critical approach and that authors 2 and 3 were open to criticism.</td>
<td>Responsive, sensitive approach + log book maintained throughout data collection and analyses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Documents Non-participatory observation

Due to internal conflicts within the Niger team, the evaluation plans were discontinued.

Inquiry audit with academic colleagues and qualitative researcher
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Recruitment + sampling</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Analytical strategy</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 3</td>
<td>Constructivist interpretive paradigm</td>
<td>Instrumental case study</td>
<td>2009 (5 weeks) Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>Recruitment in person or by phone</td>
<td>N=32 Burkina Faso n=15</td>
<td>Semi-structured qualitative interviews; interview guide based on Dagenais, Queville et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Iterative Thematic content analysis performed using 5 main codes (41 subcodes) based on adapted version of Dagenais, Queville et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Co-coding with colleague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What conditions influenced EU for EPs, and how?</td>
<td>Qualitative Burkina Faso Dori Ouagadougou</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of competing interest in articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Dori Ouagadougou Bobo</td>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>Recruitment in person or by phone</td>
<td>N=17 Burkina Faso</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access to data in Niger was no longer feasible. With the evaluation strategy thriving in Burkina Faso, the study of EU and EU conditions in Niger was discontinued and instead attention was focused on Burkina Faso, where promising data was accessible. Hence, while the initial intent was to employ a multiple case design, the single case study design was used instead, allowing more in-depth analyses of the case in Burkina Faso.
Appendix C. Examples of coded excerpts used in the analysis of EU for article 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EP</th>
<th>~ FINDINGS USE ~</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~ Instrumental 2009 ~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THEME: Avoided previous pitfalls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS4: Used findings from Niger to avoid previous pitfalls. They sought the collaboration of the DRS/MCD from its start in Burkina Faso, implemented a parallel pharmacy system to that of the state, and attributed more power to local health management committees (COGES).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>EE3: Noticed instrumental use by intended users: changes in practices and interventions of the HELP staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THEME: Identified program glitches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS7: Realized that some intended beneficiaries were not aware of the user-fee exemption so HELP and partners increased sensitization efforts. Realized some health centers had medication stocks shortages and so HELP staff reviewed and improved their medication supply mechanisms. HS2: Realized that “breastfeeding” was not a sufficiently operationalized eligibility criterion and decided to operationalize it further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THEME: Identified and implemented locally sound and applicable solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS10: Increased training to improve the quality of health services. HS11: Recommendations not implemented immediately were integrated in upcoming annual plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>MoH14: Attended Action-Research restitution and deems important to integrate recommendations (to improve the quality of health services and sensitization efforts) to their annual plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>EE3: Noticed changes in practices and interventions of the HELP staff based on evaluation recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other uses of findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS4: Used findings for HELP presentations and proposals. HS7: Even preliminary findings help guide practice improvements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Used findings to write and publish articles and policy briefs in collaboration with some HELP staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~ Instrumental 2011 ~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THEMES: Evaluations help improve practices and take decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| HS | HS23, HS11: Findings helped identify, select and recruit eligible beneficiaries and seek concrete results for these target groups. HS23: Findings showed the cost to finance user-fees for indigents was lower than expected and chose to increase the number of beneficiaries in health centers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation help identify, explain and plan for certain situations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS10: Findings demonstrated a significant increase in service utilization in September due to an increase in mosquito populations and malaria cases. HELP and health centers planned their monthly budgets accordingly. HS11: Findings medical staff’s adherence and respect of medical prescriptions guided medical supervisions. HS11: Findings demonstrated that since the exemption, health staff was experiencing an increase in workload but not work overload. Findings were used to demystify the workers complaints and plan human resources according to services utilization fluctuations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>MoH15: Findings helped organise, manage and motivate health staff and adapt to the increased utilisation of the health services. ICP25: Findings helped plan and organize health center activities and resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Conceptual 2009 ~</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes:</strong> Findings provide another, external, perspective on the program and its effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS10: Used findings to reflect upon program difficulties and solutions. HS2: Learned that some partners believed HELP’s reimbursed user-fees late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes:</strong> Understanding program glitches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS10: Findings help decipher and understand program glitches and reflect upon concrete, applicable solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Conceptual 2011 ~</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes:</strong> Findings help understand the effects of the exemption and validate its mission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS23: Findings help understand the problems and positive effects of the exemption programs; an evaluation validated their selection process of indigent beneficiaries. HS10: Findings showed the pertinence of the exemption program demonstrating that financial cost of health services was the principal barrier to health accessibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes:</strong> Validation of the exemption program boosted team motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS11; HS22: Findings showing positive program effects bolstered the Help staff’s motivation, hope and courage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| MoH | MoH15: Findings showing the increase of service utilization helped the MoH motivate his staff. 
ICP25: Recalls feeling proud, uplifted and motivated to work harder after learning of findings showing an increase in service utilization. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEMES:</strong> Findings changed perceptions of the exemption program and of program evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| HS | HS22: Realized some findings were surprising showing unexpected effects of the exemption program such as women’s empowerment associated with the exemption program. 
HS22: Realized the value of evaluation findings and thus of conducting evaluations. 
HS2: Evaluation partners more capable of following evaluation activities and more forthcoming with their questions to the evaluators during evaluation restitutions and monthly meetings after attending a restitution or press release. 
HS2: Health workers became more receptive and collaborative after attending restitutions. |
| **THEMES:** Learning of evaluation findings fostered a better understanding of the field reality and clinical data, cultivated a proactive and inquisitive approach with beneficiaries. |
| MoH | ICP25: Learning about evaluation findings clinical data, cultivated a proactive and inquisitive approach with beneficiaries |
| ER | Learning of some findings enabled Echo representatives to have a clearer understanding of local responses (national, provincial, populational, clinical) to the exemption program. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EP</th>
<th>FINDINGS USE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>～Persuasive 2009～</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEMES:</strong> Findings used to validate the credibility of the exemption and promoted collaboration with regional MoH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| HS | HS4 & HS23: Validated HELP’s exemption program. 
HS4 & HS23: Bolstered Advocacy work at national level. 
HS4: Managed to have the DRS/MCS collaborate with HELP. |
| MoH | MoH12: was persuaded by HELP findings and agreed with HELP’s advocacy mission. 
Partook in HELP’s advocacy work. |
|  | ～Persuasive 2011～ |
| **THEMES:** Findings used to persuade policy makers and funders |
| HS | HS7: Evaluation findings were produced in collaboration with university researchers and used in partnership with Amnesty international to advocate for |
more equity in health access.
HS22: The accumulation of evidence forms the pillars of advocacy.
HS22, HS2: Evaluation findings shared in conferences and meetings with policy makers.

| ER  | ER28: Findings frequently shared with funding agency to promote the legitimacy of the exemption.

| THEMES: More persuasive use needs to target politicians

| HS  | HS10: HELP has shown that the exemption is commendable and logical. Now governments must reflect upon the empirical data.

| EE  | EE8: Much work was put into producing and disseminating evaluation findings but the coordination of R4 feels little assurance that funds will remain and that advocacy goals will prevail. Politicians are not persuaded and sometimes the HELP and R4 team gets discouraged. Since R4 has covered most central questions it will be scaled down and HELP will need to be autonomous with the persuasive use of findings (i.e. advocacy). A key Help Staff central to transferring evaluation findings will leave making this participant uncertain about the future of persuasive (advocacy) use by HELP.

| ER  | HELP needs to be more proactive in its advocacy, to seek and seize every diffusion opportunity.

| EP  | PROCESS USE

| ~ Instrumental 2009 ~

| THEMES: Process discussions improved evaluation appreciation and influenced decisions

| HS  | HS4: Discussions about evaluation methodology led to a greater appreciation of evaluation, leading HELP stakeholders to consult evaluation expert. - Consultations led to the decision of developing an evaluation strategy with rigorous pre-post measures and thus delaying the exemption implementation to allow for baseline data collection.
- Consultations also led to the decision of developing a comprehensive evaluation strategy.

| EE  | EE3: Discussions about evaluation methodology led to a greater appreciation of evaluation, leading HELP stakeholders to consult evaluation expert. - Consultations led to the decision of developing an evaluation strategy with rigorous pre-post measures and thus delaying the exemption implementation to allow for baseline data collection.
- Consultations also led to the decision of developing a comprehensive evaluation strategy.

| ~ Instrumental 2011~

clxix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES: Engaging in evaluations and the evaluation strategy promoted more evaluation activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EE</strong> EE8: initial collaboration between HELP and evaluators had stimulated the multiplication of partnerships and new evidence-based and knowledge translation projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES: The inclusive and participatory approach led usual outsiders to engage and resolve challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MoH</strong> MOH15: Community workers newly involved in evaluations are central to resolving a problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating in the evaluation process enhances their professional networks and collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS</strong> HS10: Process facilitate networking, information sharing and knowledge transfer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EE</strong> EE8: Greater networks facilitate entry into national and international graduate scientific studies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EP</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCESS USE 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

~ Conceptual 2009 ~

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES: Process facilitated capacity building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS</strong> HS4, HS10, HS11, HS2: Participating in process led to research and evaluation capacity building (ex. Methodological, conceptual, technical understanding).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS2: Led to capacity building of medical and humanitarian health field and focussing of attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS10: Process did not improve everyone’s capacity and more should be done to make HELP staff more autonomous in evaluation capacities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES: Process prompted curiosity and a reflexive attitude and boosted confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS</strong> HS2: Process led participants to realize they could think about and ask pertinent questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS10: Process sparked the NGO team’s spirit of curiosity and stimulated a sense of agency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES: Process intensified networking and facilitated communications that became increasingly tainted by scientific values and expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS</strong> HS10: Process exposed participant to an increasingly large network of partners with whom communication was facilitated. Communication was tainted by the values of evaluation (ex. scientific rigour).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **EE** EE3: R4 discussions enabled to harmonize evaluation partners’ perceptions of the program evaluation and of exemption and its impacts. Stakeholders were more willing to make compromises for evaluations after understanding its utility. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES: Process promoted evaluation use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EE</strong> EE3: Reflections, discussions, explanations, decreased worries about being evaluated and led to lessons learned that prompted cognitive changes and conceptual use which in turn led to instrumental and persuasive uses (ex. discussions about evaluators seeking to help versus to sanction staff).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~ Conceptual 2011 ~
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Participating in evaluation process increased evaluation and program capacities</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS</strong> HS22: Learned about program evaluation, its conceptualization, applicability and practice: learned how to conduct and interpret evaluations, to convert qualitative data into quantitative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opportunity to receive guidance and feedback on evaluation practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feels stronger and more supported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS10: Updated and maintained already acquired evaluation and research knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EE</strong> EE8: Noticed improvements in evaluation partner’s abilities in research and management skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sparked interest and motivation to pursue scientifically oriented graduate studies.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Participating in evaluation process changed their thinking making them more receptive and capable of scientific rigour</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS</strong> HS22: Capable of seeing the program from other perspectives and identifying program deficiencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Appreciative of measuring program effects and seeking applicable solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Participating in disseminations leads to more active thinking about the program and research methods which leads to a greater understanding, assimilation of the findings and an increased tendency to render them more applicable and usable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Leads to a better understanding of the program and facilitates common goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS2: Capable of understanding evaluation findings and finding value in evaluative inquiries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Realized the importance of precise communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS7: The <em>evaluation culture</em> led evaluation partners to use a more rigorous and scientific, evidence-based language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EE</strong> EE8: Witnessed important improvements in Help staff’s research and professional skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EP</strong></th>
<th><strong>PROCESS USE 2009</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NO Persuasive 2009-2011</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

clxxi
Appendix. D. Examples of codes and coded excerpts used in article 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITIONS</th>
<th>User</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2009 and 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>HS: HELP staff</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>EE: External evaluators</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>MoH: Ministry of Health representatives</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>ER: Funding agency, ECHO, representatives</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>AP: Advocacy partners</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>-Attitude</strong> &lt;br&gt;(+ Change/evo)</td>
<td><strong>2009_EE3</strong>: On produit des données relativement intéressantes qui mettent aux jours des effets très intéressants du projet mais aussi des problèmes particuliers et à ma grande surprise, parce que souvent ça ne fonctionne pas toujours, dans ce cas-là on sent une ONG et des gens ... (des responsables), très ouvert à l’évaluation, très ouvert à la critique ce qui est rarement le cas par ces ONG et une réelle volonté d’utilisé ce qu’on a fait. Et en fait, on s’aperçoit après les mois qui suivent qu’ils ont vraiment pris en considération nos recommandations. Ils ont vraiment complètement changé leur manière de faire et leur manière d’intervenir.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>2009_EE7</strong>: R : Je dirais que la réceptivité des gens, dès le début ils ont été réceptifs!&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>2009_HS23</strong>: R : Partout, ils avaient présenté les formulaires (de confidentialité) comme vous l’avez fait pour expliquer que c'est libre, c'est anonyme et c'est juste pour améliorer et pour voir comment le travail se passe, si on peut améliorer et ce qu'on peut améliorer donc on n'a pas vu des gens se désister ou dire non je ne veux pas. Les gens étaient contents avec ça et ils ont adhéré.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>-Utility</strong></td>
<td><strong>2011_HS7</strong>: le volet R4 normalement c'est la lampe torche de Help. C'est ce volet qui éclaire normalement ce que nous faisons à travers l'effort de capter sous forme analytique la manière dont nous intervenons en fait au niveau de ce projet... Alors, ce volet donc nous aide à expliquer notre intervention, à pouvoir identifier ce qui marche bien et ce qui marche moins bien... bien sûr que c'est utile. À partir du moment où ça nous aide à expliquer des situations et que ça donne arguments à faire notre travail parce que ces rapports sont rendus mais il y a un effort aussi de simplification. À travers ce qui est fait comme poster, ce qui est fait comme Policy brief. Il y a des notes de synthèses qui ressortent parfois de ces études là et qui permettent à un large public d'y avoir accès.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>-Expertise (real)</strong> &lt;br&gt;(+ change/evo)</td>
<td><strong>2011_HS22</strong>: L'équipe était vraiment réceptive. Les gens, ils écoutaient. Je crois que c'est parce que le domaine semblait impénétrable, quoi. Voilà, les gens écoutaient avec beaucoup d'intérêt, mais le domaine semblait impénétrable, on ne comprenait pas grand-chose dedans. Donc, il a fallu un petit temps pour que les gens puissent comprendre. C'est comme je le disais, le domaine de la recherche n'est pas donnée à tout le monde. Donc quand on vient et on parle de charabia, parfois même la formulation du sujet de recherche, les gens ne comprennent pas. Ils ne savent pas qu'est-ce qu'on veut, qu'est-ce qu'on va chercher, mais il a fallu du temps pour que les gens comprennent ça et j'avoue personnellement y a des aspects que je ne maitrisais pas très bien . Surtout, l'aspect: production de données et diffusion de données. Au début, franchement, on ne savait pas très bien à quoi ça collait. Surtout, l'aspect diffusion, mais au fur et à mesure avec la mise en œuvre de certaines activités, ça nous a permis de comprendre. Et nous, même on a été finalement acteur de diffusion ou acteur de la mise en œuvre de la recherche. Donc, souvent au moins ça nous a beaucoup aidés.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **-Expertise (percieved)** | **2011_HS7**: Bon, quand je dis que parfois ce sont des concepts qui sont un peu techniques sur lesquels je ne suis pas bon, ça ne veut pas forcément dire que je clxxiii
ne comprends pas toujours très bien ce qui est dit. Sauf que j’ai dit que je ne vais pas jusqu’à dans le détail. Je ne peux pas participer à un débat sur lequel on va dire cette méthode de collecte de données est fiable et ça nous permet de remplir tel informations. Non, je ne peux pas participer à des discussions de ce genre parce que ce n’est pas du tout mon domaine.

2011_HS2 : en fait, je pense qu’il y a eu un intérêt grandissant de ma part à m’y intéresser. Au tout début je suis arrivé et c’était, bref je venais d’arriver et je fais même d’arriver à mener un projet comme ça sur le terrain pour moi c’était déjà un grand défi énorme, c’était vraiment un défi à relever. Et c’est comme s’il y avait des chercheurs super intelligents qui arrivaient et pour moi je n’avais même pas à m’impliquer dedans quoi tu vois, parce que je ne pouvais que les ralentir quoi parce que je ne leur arrivais même pas à la cheville quoi, il y a ça aussi qui nous séparait. Et puis même, je n’avais pas une formation de recherche donc quand on me parlait de recherche, même d’un protocole de recherche et je ne savais pas ce que c’était du tout quoi, je ne savais pas ce que c’était qu’une étude qualitative ou une étude quantitative et des interviews quoi, tout ça ça me dépassait quoi. Quand tu emplois un jargon et ça t’effraye quoi, tu n’arrive même pas à… hmmm… pourtant ce n’était rien de compliqué, c’était juste tes termes mais je sentais que je n’étais pas à ma place.

**Participation**

2011_EE8 : après ils ont plus au moins collaboré, tu vois des gens qui disent qu’ils aimerenaient bien être impliqués. eux aussi, il y a des gens qui vont te dire ça, mais entre le discours et l’intérêt à collaborer quoi...

**Proactivity (+ culture organisation)**

2011_EE8 : Je pense que c’est relié à ce développement de cette culture d’évaluation. Et pourquoi, il (un membre du personnel HELP) justement c’est parce qu’il était réceptif et actif, je pense qu’il faut être réceptif et actif, pas juste dire oui oui c’est bien d’en parler. Lui a démontré qu’il s’est intéressé qu’il a bougé et fait des choses. Il y a eu aussi une conférence mondiale sur la promotion de santé dans le cadre de laquelle on avait une petite session pour présenter différents résultats du projet et plusieurs communications et lui il est venu. Il a fait partie de la délégation et il a présenté. Ça c’est un exemple...

**Mandate**

2011_HS22 (suivant question : quels facteurs incitent les gens à participer ou à utiliser l’évaluation?) : Je pense que les principaux facteurs c’est, selon le domaine, et l’autre aspect c’est, je pense que l’autre opportunité aussi c’est hmm le poste, l’intérim parfois qu’on assurait de Noémie quand elle n’est pas là, qu’on assurait quand elle n’était pas là et comme tout passait par elle donc on a souvent eu l’occasion d’être impliqué. À travers de son intérim.

**Organisation**

**Culture**

2009_EE3 : donc l’idée dans ma tête pour moi est que je fais une évaluation avec une ONG que je connais ou je ne connais pas donc, ça va être très très difficile parce j’ai une longue expérience d’évaluation des ONG où souvent des rapports ne servent à rien parce que les ONG sont pas très bien organisées, parce qu’ils veulent pas parce que etc.

2011_HS2 (retour sur 2009) voila je pense que par nature ce n’était pas évident d’intégrer ce volet (évaluation) aux 3 autres (volet du programme d’exemption), aussi bien que les 3 autres volets s’intégreraient, s’entrecoupent en fait au niveau des activités même quoi, ça venait ensemble. Lorsque l’autre était un petit peu, comme un peu externe et puis ils venaient faire des études sur ceci ou cela et sans qu’il y ait un sentiment que ce soit planifié en commun ou discuté avec l’équipe.
2009_EE27 : R : c'est très sympa, surtout l'équipe de HELP, ils étaient très très bien. Ils m'ont beaucoup aidé, ils étaient toujours là quand j'avais besoin d'un service et tout. Ils étaient accueillants, souriant. C'était dans un bel atmosphère.

**Engagement**

2009_EE8 : surpris agréablement par la continuité de leur position, de leur intérêt sur ces activités de documentation qui ne sont pas naturellement intégrées, on va dire, dans leur mandat d'aide humanitaire sauvé des vies leur mandat là et ECHO, malgré tout, continu de nous soutenir, nous encourager, malgré qu'il ait de restriction au niveau budget notamment, il y a pas eu de pression pour éliminer ces genres d'activités en priorité, ce qui serait la solution de facilité pour eux, qui a vraiment une volonté a leur niveau pour, il y a réellement un intérêt pour tout ça.

2009_HS (management) : aussi c'est qu'on à un groupe de concertation avec ces (d'autres) ONG ; on se voit une fois par mois, avec peut être souvent plus, surtout avec les acteurs et tout et donc là eux ils accompagnent et nous on le fait voilà ! on essaie vraiment d'utiliser, les données mais pas seulement pour nous, bon c'est parce que nous on a mis ça dans notre projet

**Leadership**

2009_EE3 : EE3 : avec HELP, l'histoire du suivi là, c'est que, quand les (décideurs de HELP) ont décidé avec HELP d'essayer de reproduire le même projet au Burkina Faso (qu'au Niger) comme ils savait que j'avais travaillé au Burkina Faso, comme ça s'est bien passé, comme... eux, en même temps qu'ils ont rédigé leur demande de financement à Echo pour le projet du Burkina, ils m'ont immédiatement consulté. Habituellement les ONG vont chercher des chercheurs ou des évaluateurs, une fois qu'ils ont rédigé leur projet, qu'ils ont eu l'argent, qu'ils ont besoin de quelqu'un pour faire l'évaluation. Là ça été différent, c'est pour ça qu'on a réussi à faire tout ça.

**Resources (financial)**

2011_HS11 : moi je pense que pour les participants, ça eu un effet. Maintenant, cet effet mérite d'être maintenu ou dynamisé. Sinon si on se limite à une recherche et s'il n'y a pas d'autres partenaires qui vont financer la recherche, les connaissances vont s'émousser et là les effets ne seront pas de longue durée. Peut-être si actuellement il y avait un autre thème de recherche avec un peu de financement, on va voir que après deux trois recherches, les gens seront capables eux même, sans que quelqu'un soit derrière, de conduire correctement des recherches et de chercher peut-être des personnes bien averties pour souvent soumettre en lecture leur produit. Mais si rien n'est fait, ces effets vont disparaître d'ici là. (Q : Donc c'était en début de renforcement?) HS11 : voilà !! C'est déjà bien d'avoir une base, mais il faut travailler à consolider et à renforcer cette base.

**Resources (time)**

2011_HS11 : Seulement, la difficulté à un moment, c'était que les membres de l'équipe recherches actions n'avaient pas le temps puisqu'il y avait ceux de l'ECD (équipe cadre de district) et à un certain moment, la recherche connaissait une souffrance terrible, puisqu'ils n'arrivaient plus à avancer il y avait les activités du district aussi. Donc il fallait envoyer des lettres de rappel, téléphoner, envoyer des mails, revoir même le planning des différentes étapes pour encore décaler cela, pour permettre aux gens d'avancer. Donc je pense qu'il y a eu deux fois une rémodification du planning.

**Communication**

2009_HS : souvent il est gêné parce que les gens viennent ici, et puis, ils font des choses, lui il ne sait même pas, ils prennent des décisions même et tout et donc c'est, mais c'est une question de communication même entre nous aussi je crois. Voilà!

**Objectives**

2009_HS2 : HS2 : non je crois, en fait, toutes les évaluations sont, sont pas
encrées dans le travail quotidien, ce sont des choses qui viennent au fur et mesure ; on dit on va évaluer ça ensuite on va évaluer ça etc. Il y a certaines évaluations qui demandent beaucoup de travail et c'est vrai, je sens comme, j'ai l'impression travail de charge supplémentaire mais dans celles qui ne demandent pas de travail supplémentaire c'est là ils ont conscience que c'est utile etc. Et puis parfois il y en a des mal puisque ça peut perturber nos activités nous qu'on planifie de faire. Par exemple, au niveau du volet santé par exemple, supervisions etc. Ils avaient du mal à comprendre qu'on réquisitionne l'ensemble de nos véhicules pour faire cette enquête, ils ne comprenaient pas, puisque pour eux, la sensation qu'ils avaient c'est que l'enquête est plus importante que nos activités qu'on fait tous les jours etc. et ça n'a pas très bien passé.

-Needs consensus
2011_HS7 : Je suis plutôt à un niveau ou au moment où les études commencent (...) déjà les thématiques au départ, nous en discutons avec l'université de Montréal de l'intérêt pour nous de ces thématique et de l'apport par rapport à notre projet...

Knowledge

-Aligned with need
2011_HS7 : R4 C'est nous qui faisons la demande, c'est nous qui avons ce besoin là que R4 (la stratégie d'évaluation) soit là. C'est très complémentaire ce que nous faisons. Cela dit, c'est nous qui devons faciliter le travail de R4 pour qu'ils puissent nous donner ce que nous avons besoin comme réponse à toutes les questions qui se posent autour de la gratuité

-Accessible
ER : (suivant la question vous avez accès à la documentation qui est produite à HELP?) Oui c'est partagé. Nous-mêmes on en reçoit et on essaye de dispatcher ça au niveau des acteurs et des partenaires clés qu'on a. A chaque fois on reçoit un bon paquet donc quand il y a des gens qui passent quand nous allons quelque part nous aussi avec notre plaidoyer on essaye de mettre les documents sur la table et on discute sur les points qui sont dans les documents on est vraiment sur ce plaidoyer là tous les jours.

-Applicable
2009_HS7 : On a eu, EE3, je crois un enquêteur qui a fait un travail sur le terrain, avant même qu'on ait les résultats définitifs et qui a dit au niveau de OH, les gens n'ont pas l'information que l'accès aux soins est gratuit dans certains villages. Et donc, y a des femmes qui vont encore dans les formations sanitaires et qui payent. Ça c'est une très bonne information pour nous. C'est vrai que dans nos indicateurs on a dit que tous les groupes cibles ont accès gratuitement aux soins 90%. Mais si on vient vous dire que : non, non ce n'est pas vrai parce que on a vu des gens qui n'ont pas accès, ça c'est une bonne information. Il faut savoir pourquoi. Et ça, ça nous intéresse, d'aller regarder et voir qu'ils y a des failles dans notre système. Alors donc on a décidé, on va formaliser l'information, on va écrire une feuille de route où on va expliquer qui a accès aux soins, quelles sont les modalités, quand un patient arrive comment ça se fait, et on va donner à tous les agents de santé, on va coller dans toutes les formations sanitaires. On va faire une émission à la radio et puis on va expliquer en plus du travail que les animateurs font chaque jour en allant dans les villages pour parler. On va refaire tout ça. Comme ça personne ne dira je n'étais pas au courant. Voila ! Mais si on n'avait pas eu ce Feedback on ne saurait pas !

2011_HS10 : Et c'est comme une formation qui aboutit à l'élaboration d'un protocole et à l'exécution carrément de la recherche action et donc il y avait des thèmes variés chacun choisissait le thème par rapport ce qu'il a pu identifier dans son district comme problème et il formule le thème de la recherche.

-Timely
2009_HS11 : (discutant de la recherche action) bon, c'est simple puisqu'il y a eu
d'abord la formation, et après la formation des thèmes avaient déjà été retenus pour chaque équipe et une démarche était également décrite pour que chaque équipe suive la démarche. Bon, moi j'étais chargé de veiller à ce que les équipes se mettent au travail immédiatement et de suivre la démarche qui était là. Seulement, la difficulté à un moment, c'était que les membres de l'équipe recherches actions n'avaient pas le temps puisqu'il y avait ceux de l'ECD (équipe cadre de district) et à un certain moment, la recherche connaissait une souffrance terrible, puisqu'ils n'arrivaient plus à avancer il y avait les activités du district aussi. Donc il fallait envoyer des lettres de rappel, téléphoner, envoyer des mails, revoir même le planning des différentes étapes pour encore décaler cela, pour permettre aux gens d'avancer. Donc je pense qu'il y a eu deux fois une rémodification du planning.

**KT strategy**

**-Fits needs**

2009_ER31 : R : Oui on partage toutes les informations et à chaque fois qu'il y a un document qui sort par rapport à ce document qu'on essaie de voir toute la stratégie de plaidoyer à mettre en œuvre. Donc ce sont des documents qu'on exploite beaucoup pour nous OE. C'est très utiles et même très pertinents pour nous ; pour avancer dans notre plaidoyer parce que tant qu'on a pas des documents avec des évaluations qui ont été faites pour pouvoir travailler avec le partenaire pour voir ce qui reste encore à faire on avancera pas donc pour nous c'est très important.

2009_ER20 : Moi je suis assez à l'aise avec comment le rythme fonctionne parce que ce qui est publié ce sont des sujet pertinents et intéressants. Je connais d'autres projets où on fait des revues systématiques et la qualité et l'intérêt des publications et les sujets publiés souffraient. Mais je suis assez à l'aise avec comment ça se passe et je n'aurais pas envie de me prononcer là-dessus. Parce que ça fait aussi partie de cette confiance qu'on a, il n'y a pas un manque d'intérêt de publier quand c'est nécessaire et quand c'est pertinent. Tu vois?

2011_HS22 : C'est-à-dire que les recommandations, elles devraient avoir une action incitative à la mise en œuvre des recommandations, à l'endroit des dirigeants de HELP. C'est-à-dire que s'ils aboutissent à une recommandation à l'endroit de HELP de façon générale. En fait, il devrait même avoir une incitation plus active à la mise en œuvre de cette recommandation. C'est vrai que je n'ai pas connaissance d'une recommandation qui n'ait pas été mis en œuvre mais...

Q: Je ne suis pas certaine d'être au clair, par rapport, pour appliquer?
R: Voilà! Comment le faire, comment l'appliquer, qu'elle opportunité peut-on avoir pour... voilà, voilà.
Q: C'est pas comme s'il fallait démontrer pourquoi ce serait important?
R: non
Q: Ce serait plus comment?
R: Comment et même suivre pour leur rappeler.
Q: Avoir un suivi?
R: Avoir un suivi de la mise en œuvre des recommandations. C'est pour attirer l'attention. C'est vrai, que c'est trop leur demander, peut-être, mais comme ils sont impliqués dans les projets, c'est un des avantages de les avoir à côté.

2011_HS11 : Oui, ça répondait à des besoins d'information. Et je crois que c'était vraiment opportun. En tout cas, les aspects qui ont favorisé ces études-là sont celles qui ont été conduites sur notre terrain même ça veut dire que ce sont des
études qui viennent ouvrir des choses pour nous permettre de mieux regarder à l'intérieur, donc c'était le terrain d'étude était très bien ciblé, ça semblait vraiment être comme un miroir. Ça refléétait la vraie image de la chose qu'on cherche à comprendre et à parce que c'était très facile d'importer des résultats d'ailleurs ou bien en tout cas nous dire voilà les résultats auxquels nous sommes parvenus quand on a fait ceci et bon voilà. Donc, les études étaient réalistes et précises à notre contexte de travail.

**-Tuned to EPs**

2011_HS2 (retour sur 2009) voilà je pense que par nature ce n’était pas évident d’intégrer ce volet (évaluation) aux 3 autres (volet du programme d’exemption), aussi bien que les 3 autres volets s’intégraient, s’entrecoupaient en fait au niveau des activités même quoi, ça venait ensemble. Lorsque l'autre était un petit peu, comme un peu externe et puis ils venaient faire des études sur ceci ou cela et sans qu'il y ait un sentiment que ce soit planifié en commun ou discuté avec l'équipe.

**-Adapted**

2011_EE8 : je pense qu'il y a des limites, en fin parce qu'on fait des choses différentes, etc. Eux leur responsabilité c'est la mise en œuvre. C'est pas la documentation. Après les gens il y a ce que tu dis et ce que tu fais. On a des efforts à faire certainement, on a bien compris maintenant que les rapports ce n'étaient pas la peine de les envoyer. Parce que personne ne les lisaient, mais ce n'était pas qu'à l'interne, c'était aussi à l'externe.

**-Interper_relationships**

2009_ER20 : Parce que ça fait aussi partie de cette confiance qu'on a, il n'y a pas un manque d'intérêt de publier quand c'est nécessaire et quand c'est pertinent. Tu vois? On n'a pas cette relation-là, ce n'est pas une relation de contractile qu'on peut trouver ailleurs où qu'il y a un certain quota de publications qu'on a à faire par exemple. On n'est pas du tout dans cette situation.

2009_MoH14 (discutant des relations avec HELP) : C'est juste pour ça, puisque c'est plus des relations confraternelles que des relations de travail, parce que, d'ailleurs même ça facilite mieux les choses.

2009_HS10 : Également ça fait en sorte que, les équipes qui ont conduit la recherche ensemble, ça fait un frottement et puis ça permet quand même de tisser, les relations interpersonnelles qui permettent de quand même l'interpenetration, de communication facile entre HELP et ses partenaires.

**-Exchange mechanisms**

2011_HS2 : HS2 : Oui. Avant même que je ne parte à Ouaga, j'étais de plus en plus impliqué à partir du moment qu'ils ont senti que j'étais intéressée quoi à partir du moment que quand il m'envoyait un mail je prenais le temps de répondre point par point donc ils ont senti cela donc au lieu de m'envoyer un mail il m'envoyait 5 et ensuite c'était 10 ils ont senti que y avait un retour donc c'est un peu positif.

2009_MoH25 : voilà l'intervention de Help et puis des études souvent. On a disponibilisé ça dans tous les centres de santé... mais comme ici les gens ont la phobie de les lectures, ils ne veulent pas lire donc souvent ça fait que on n’a pas l’information et pourtant l’information est posée dans nos casiers. (Q : vous avez pris un temps pour lire ces documents-là?) Oui beaucoup. Et puis avec les rencontres qu’ils organisaient et puis ils présentaient voilà ce qui a été fait... (ils disaient voilà) vous rappelez on est venu entre tel temps, on a demandé celle chose et c’est telle personne qui a... quand il (un évaluateur) présentait à Dori le résultats de ses études, j’y étais, donc tout ça là c’est des rencontres qui, comme je le disais... qui nous permettent de se donner d’avantage quant aux études et autres.
| **Common language** | 2009_HS23 : **R** : Oui, et puis comme j'expliquais clairement, elle avait des enquêteurs, mais comme moi j'expliquais clairement les femmes comprenaient mieux quoi!
Q : parliez-vous dans la même langue qu'elles?
R : oui oui, peuhl.

2011_HS22 : **R** : L'équipe était vraiment réceptive. Les gens, ils écoutaient. Je crois que c'est parce que le domaine semblait impénétrable, quoi. Voilà, les gens écoutaient avec beaucoup d'intérêt, mais le domaine semblait impénétrable, on ne comprenait pas grand-chose dedans. Donc, il a fallu un petit temps pour que les gens puissent comprendre. C'est comme je le disais, le domaine de la recherche n'est pas donné à tout le monde. Donc quand on vient et on parle de charabia, parfois même la formulation du sujet de recherche, les gens ne comprennent pas. Ils ne savent pas qu'est-ce qu'on veut, qu'est-ce qu'on va chercher, mais il a fallu du temps pour que les gens comprennent ça et j'avoue personnellement y a des aspects que je ne maitrisais pas très bien. Surtout, l'aspect: production de données et diffusion de données. Au début, franchement, on ne savait pas très bien à quoi ça collait. Surtout, l'aspect diffusion, mais au fur et à mesure avec la mise en œuvre de certaines activités, ça nous a permis de comprendre. Et nous, même on a été finalement acteur de diffusion ou acteur de la mise en œuvre de la recherche. Donc, souvent au moins ça nous a beaucoup aidés.

| **Timing** | 2011_HS2 : puis les résultats ne venaient pas, c'est comme si en réunion mensuelle par exemple on fait pas le point sur l'avancer des activités etc... et les gens avaient du mal à comprendre où ça en était, qu'est-ce qui se passait avec toutes ces données qu'ils étaient venus prendre, où est-ce que ça allait, à quoi ça allait servir etc...

| **Participatory** | 2009_HS9 : **HS9** : oui c'est un processus très participatif et c'est ça la particularité parce que durant tout le processus, ils ont participé à l'analyse de la situation pour identifier tous les problèmes et ils ont également participé au processus, de définir leur protocole et de formuler les instruments des collectes. Et ils ont, sont allés même trouver des agents ou eux même ils ont supervisé la collecte et l'analyse a été également faite par eux et ils tirent les conclusions, cela leur permet d'apprécier la pertinence de ce qu'ils ont tiré comme conclusion et des actions qui peuvent être, qui peuvent se dégager de ces résultats-là. Là nous pensons que c'est aussi un peu ça l'intérêt de cette approche.

| **Monitoring** | 2009_HS9 : pour le processus il y a eu un suivi pour savoir est ce que les équipes ont suivi les différentes étapes. Maintenant une fois que la dernière activité, la restitution a eu en juillet donc, ça partir sur le suivi maintenant ce serait après de voir que les équipes mettent en application les conclusions qu'ils ont tirés de leur recherche. Ça c'est surement ultérieurement qu'ils devraient le faire.

| **Evaluator(s)** |

| **Interperso_skills** | ER20 : **J** : En fait on a contacté (un évaluateur principal) parce qu'il était connu dans le monde spécialisé par la cause de ces publications et son engagement et je pense que moi je mets de l'avant son engagement. C'est quelqu'un qui à part le fait qu'il est extrêmement doué et qu'il a une énorme palmarès de publications c'est aussi quelqu'un qui pour nous qui est un collaborateur qui a vraiment, eh comment on dit, quelqu'un qui est sans façon. Quelqu'un qui a vraiment envie de creuser ensemble sur la pertinence mais c'est aussi quelqu'un qui est très sympa de travailler avec lui et donc ça facilite beaucoup de chose. Et je pense qu'il a confiance et nous au fil des mois et des années. Au moins c'est comme ça que je
| Collabo attitude | 2011_EE8 : Après nous on collabore, bon moi je ne sais pas trop ce que les gens peuvent dire du projet quoi, mais après il ne faut pas non plus vouloir trop en faire en terme d’intégration parce que le volet R4 (stratégie évaluation) est différent des volet 1, 2 et 3 (projets HELP) qui sont tous directement liés à la mise en œuvre de la subvention. Donc ils ont une obligation, non seulement, ils sont ensemble d’un point de vue géographiques, mais ils travaillent à la même chose quoi, à la mise en œuvre du projet. Nous on fait quelque chose de différent, donc à moment donnée, c’est normal aussi qu’il y ait des distinctions. Nous on ne participe pas directement à la mise en œuvre, c’est normal et on ne s’en plaint pas. Eux ne s’impliquent pas directement aux activités d’évaluations et dans une certaine mesure c’est normal. Ce que je veux dire c’est que je ne suis pas contre l’intégration, mais en même temps, c’est normal, il ne faut pas chercher non plus à exagérer dans l’autre sens quoi et des fois à partir du moment où l’on se pose la question d’intégration, il y a des gens qui vont...qui peuvent penser qu’ils ne font pas assez de choses ensemble, avec..., mais bon chacun a son domaine d’activité, de responsabilité aussi. |
| Communication (+ Change/evo or Communication clash) | HS 2 : par exemple, (un des évaluateurs) de ce que je vois depuis le début du projet jusqu’à maintenant, je vois une très forte évolution de sa capacité même à partager et à traduire ces activités de façon à ce que tout le monde comprend quoi. Quand je vois ses restitutions de ses débats et puis maintenant je trouve qu’il s’est vraiment amélioré quoi.
2009_HS (concernant les manques de communications avec les évaluateurs): oui et puis des informations qu’il faut passer, tu ne peux pas nous envoyer quelqu’un et puis dire voila et puis y a des enquêteurs qui débarquent là bas et qui veulent s’installer au bureau là! Et puis personne ne sait ce qu’ils font! En fait c’est quelque chose qui est bien quelque part dans le grand document de projet, on a dit on va faire ceci, cela, c’est bien et on doit le faire pour avoir des résultats, c’est clair, mais faut dire voila en ce moment c’est ce qui va se passer et pourquoi! |
| Mentoring | 2011_HS10 : ils nous ont accompagné à élaborer les protocoles et à les exécuter. Voilà c’est un peu des choses comme ça que je vois ... Donc ce n’est pas comme un protocole qui vous est envoyé par courriel et que vous co-rédigez. C’est plus une activité soutenu comme ça sur le temps.
2011_HS11 : moi je pense que pour les participants, ça eu un effet. Maintenant, cet effet mérite d’être maintenu ou dynamisé. Sinon si on se limite à une recherche et s’il n’y a pas d’autres partenaires qui vont financer la recherche, les connaissances vont s’émousser et là les effets ne seront pas de longue durée. Peut-être si actuellement il y avait un autre thème de recherche avec un peu de financement, on va voir que après deux trois recherches, les gens seront capables eux même, sans que quelqu’un soit derrière, de conduire correctement des recherches et de chercher peut-être des personnes bien averties pour souvent soumettre en lecture leur produit. Mais si rien n’est fait, ces effets vont disparaître d’ici là. (Q : Donc c’était en début de renforcement?) HS11 : voilà !! C’est déjà bien d’avoir une base, mais il faut travailler à consolider et à renforcer cette base. |
| Adaptable (change communication) | 2009_HS2 : Mais maintenant ça s’est vraiment amélioré, après, même l’évaluateur avait conscience de ça en fait, mais parfois c’est dans la précipitation un petit peu... bon, on a discuté lors des réunions etc. comme ils avaient conscience aussi ils ont dit bon, maintenant on va mieux communiquer, donc |
maintenant, même quand ils discutent entre eux par exemple à Ouagadougou du domaine ils nous mettent une copie comme ça on voit se qui se passe... par internet, par mail, voir même par skype!

2011_EE : (sur le besoin d’adapter le TC) : on va adapter et essayer d'ajuster nos stratégies incluant nos produits etc, pour contourner ces difficultés. L'exemple des rapports il est significatif. Les rapports les gens ne les lisent pas donc faut voir aux notes de 4 pages quoi. Maintenant si les gens ne lisent pas 4 pages, là ! Enfin, quand on est collaborateur au projet et qu'on ne lit pas 4 pages. Sur un rapport on peut comprendre, mais sur 4 pages, on pourrait toujours dire bon on pourrait faire autrement, on pourrait faire un film à chaque fois qu’on a besoin de transmettre (des connaissances), des spots pour que les gens nous regardent, une chanson, danser ou je ne sais quoi.

-Credible/expertise

2009_ER20 : Et c'est devenu un projet régional ou ils ont vraiment réinvesti et ils ont eu besoin d'un coup de main de plus de spécialistes pour aider avec le protocole parce que c'est un pays où ce n'était pas encore connu, et on a commencé avec d'autres partenaires là-bas sur le même sujet de gratuité et là on a pris contact avec EE3 aussi qui avait déjà publié qu'on connaissait parce que ce n'est pas un grand monde mais c'est un spécialiste et c'est comme en fait que le projet a évolué

-Network

HS10 (suit à question sur les bénéfices d’avoir participé aux évaluations) : ça m'a permis d'actualiser mes connaissances et mes compétences dans le domaine. Ensuite, j'ai pu tirer comme bénéfice le frottement avec les autres personnes de l'équipe.

-Resources/institution

2009_HS : Il y a deux organisations qui sont particulièrement concernées : c'est (ONG partenaire de HELP) et HELP. Parce qu'ils l'ont prévu dans le cadre de leur projet les autres c'est du, c'est ajouté et pas ces genres d'activité qui étaient prévus et donc comme ça été prévu par (l'autre ONG) et HELP, y a des budgets également il y a des ressources. L'idée, le principe c'est : il y a un principe de l'utilisation des ressources pour réaliser ces activités considérant que c'est principalement HELP et (l'ONG partenaire) et après HELP agit comme une organisation moteur quand même parce qu'on a un peu plus prévu donc on a un peu plus de moyen ; c'est parce qu'on a un partenariat avec l'université de Montréal, une historique par rapport à ça qui est plus ancienne donc c'est HELP qui est le moteur par rapport à tout cela. ... On a dit, vaut mieux qu’on fasse appel à des ressources externes si non on risque d’être noyé et de ne pas bien faire les choses de ne pas le faire dans le temps ou de ne pas être capable de le faire c'est-à-dire donc à ces deux-là on a fait appel à au service d’un autre évaluateur externe.

-Geographic distance

2011_HS2 : Voilà donc l'équipe qui était basé à Dori parce que le projet était à Dori et le volet R4 qui étudiait ça même s'il y avait beaucoup de mission à Dori était quand-même basé à Ouaga, donc c'est aussi une distance géographique quoi puisque entre nous on peut échanger des informations, moi je partais dans les bureaux de certains et puis même en buvant un verre à côté on discutait donc même s'il y avait un échange informel, mais qui faisait que tout était plus cimenté et contrairement au volet R4 qui même s'ils faisaient l'effort de partager les informations c'était des documents écrits qui arrivaient par internet donc voilà on lit ou on ne lit pas et ce n'était pas dans le même rythme que l'équipe de terrain

CHANGE/EVO

2011_HS2 : C'est tous ceux qui n'avaient pas l'habitude d'être en contact avec ça pour qui ça provoqué un changement. Maintenant au niveau des partenaires c'est pareil, il y a certains agents de santé qui ont été impliqué et quand tu discutes
avec eux ils disent vraiment on voyait les enquêteurs qui venaient prendre nos données, "prendre nos données" c’est même l’expression qu’ils emploient, ils venaient prendre nos données et s’en aller etc... Mais là d’avoir participé aux restitutions, de voir que ça servi à quelque chose, de voir les résultats ça les a encouragé à plus collaborer même la prochaine fois.

2011_HS2 : (Q : est-ce que tu peux me décrire à l’heure actuelle le niveau d’intégration des évaluations du volet évaluation (R4) dans le projet d’exemption) c’est une bonne question parce que ça un peu évolué je crois au fil du temps, je ne sais s’il faut que je revienne avant maintenant parce que au début c’était très séparé en fait les gens avaient du mal à calculer qu’est ce que le R4 faisait, et puis comme on avait dit la dernière fois, c’était souvent des étudiants qui venaient faire des études et puis ils repartaient sans qu’on sache exactement ce dont il s’agissait. C’était planifié au niveau de Ouaga et décidé au niveau de Ouaga et les protocoles de recherche c’était fait au niveau de Ouaga et puis ça arrivaient au niveau de Dori seulement quand il fallait la logistique sur le terrain quoi, en fin c’était ressenti comme ça mais ce n’était pas forcément vrai. Parce que je n’avais des documents qui circulaient qui n’étaient pas forcément lu au niveau du terrain. En tout cas, c’était très séparé, on le ressentait comme ça, quelque soit, à qui que ce soit la faute quoi. Et je pense aussi que le volet EE8 et puis EE3 il ont fait beaucoup d’efforts pour que ça soit de plus en plus intégré, mais ce qui n’était pas facile parce que c’était vraiment différent quoi. Les problèmes, les objectifs différaient un peu et c’est vraiment quand ils ont commencé à bien impliquer l’équipe et puis aussi quand l’équipe terrain a commencé à comprendre aussi l’intérêt pour ces études, quand ils ont commencé aussi à voir les résultats car quand on prend l’enquête mélangé par exemple c’était très long avant d’avoir des résultats utilisables et c’est là que ça commence à s’intégrer maintenant

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<th>Clash/ challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>2011_HS10 : Pas catastrophique, mais il y a toujours des difficultés. Je pense qu’une fois on a eu des difficultés majeures où brutallement le budget qui a été élaboré par exemple pour ça a été sous-estimé. Donc, il fallait faire encore un budget complémentaire et là il fallait expliquer beaucoup beaucoup de fois... une fois on a conduit une étude d’une recherche comme ça, mais on n’avait pris en compte le moment même de l’étude, je pense que c’était la saison des pluies et c’était compliqué, les véhicules s’embranchaient et les enquêteurs n’arrivaient pas avec leurs motos à atteindre les villages qui ont été échantillonné. Bon c’est des difficultés comme ça la logistique.</td>
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Appendix E. Participant information and consent form
FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT

* Nous vous prions de lire attentivement le formulaire de consentement et de poser vos questions avant d’y inscrire votre signature.

**Titre du projet de recherche :** Examen de l’utilisation des connaissances issues de l’évaluation par les partenaires d’une organisation non-gouvernementale (ONG) en Afrique de l’Ouest

**Chercheurs :**
- Valéry Ridde, Ph.D., Chercheur associé à l’Institut de Recherche des Sciences de la Santé (IRSS) de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- Christian Dagenais, Ph.D., Professeur agrégé à l’Université de Montréal, Département de psychologie, Pavillon Marie-Victorin, 90, avenue Vincent d’Indy, Bureau C346, Montréal, Canada
- Léna D’Ostie-Racine, Candidate au doctorat en psychologie clinique volet recherche/ intervention, Bureau F536 du Pavillon Marie-Victorin, Université de Montréal, 90, avenue Vincent d’Indy, Montréal, Canada

**Objectifs du projet de recherche :** Bien que l’utilisation de l’évaluation de programmes (UE) soit de plus en plus valorisée par les organisations internationales, la littérature empirique à cet égard est très limitée. De plus, une faible UE dans le secteur humanitaire a été dénoncée. Le présent projet de recherche tend donc à documenter et à examiner les facteurs qui ont influencé jusqu’ici le développement des activités d’évaluations et l’utilisation des connaissances issues des évaluations menées au sein de l’ONG HELP. L’objectif principal du projet de recherche actuel est donc de déceler les facteurs qui favorisent et nuisent à l’UE à HELP.

**Procédures :** Afin d’entendre et de comprendre la perspective des parties prenantes sur les questions de recherche, les partenaires d’évaluation (ce qui inclus les membres et partenaires de HELP qui ont été impliqués d’une façon ou d’une autre dans les évaluations de programme de HELP ou encore qui aurait pu utiliser les connaissances issues de ces évaluations) seront sollicités par téléphone pour participer à l’étude. Les partenaires d’évaluation qui auront accepté de participer à l’étude seront convoqués en entrevue au moment et lieu qui leur conviennent. L’agent de recherche posera des questions concernant la collaboration entre les partenaires d’évaluation et l’histoire de leur travail commun sur l’exemption et sur les activités d’évaluation. Les questions cibleront également l’implication du participant dans l’ONG et dans les activités d’évaluation ainsi que les conditions qui influence leur utilisation de l’évaluation. L’agent de recherche tentera également d’obtenir des documents liés aux activités d’évaluation de HELP. Les entrevues seront transcrrites et l’ensemble des données seront analysées et interprétées par les chercheurs.

**Retombés du projet de recherche :** Les retombées attendues de l’étude tendent principalement à éclairer les partenaires d’évaluation sur les conditions à assurer pour promouvoir l’UE et en conséquence l’efficacité et la pertinence de leur travail commun sur la mise en place de l’exemption. L’étude tend aussi à éclairer le champ de l’évaluation de programme sur les conditions qui influence l’utilisation des connaissances issues de l’évaluation en contexte humanitaire.
RENSEIGNEMENTS AUX PARTICIPANTS

1. **Votre participation à cette recherche consiste à :**
   - Une entrevue individuelle avec des questions ouvertes d'une durée de 40-90 minutes.
   - Si possible, le partage de documents concernant les activités d'évaluations menées pour HELP.

2. **Confidentialité :** Toutes les mesures nécessaires seront prises pour préserver l'anonymat des participants. Le lieu et le moment des entrevues seront choisis selon la convenance de chaque participant. L'accès aux entrevues (qui auront été enregistrées en fichier mp3 et transcrites en fichiers Word) sera sécurisé par l'utilisation d'un mot de passe. Dans le cas où des documents en formats papier (ex. photocopies) seront utilisés, ceux-ci seront dans des classeurs verrouillés auxquels l'accès sera exclusif aux chercheurs et aux assistants de recherche. De plus, les résultats seront anonymisés afin qu’aucun des participants puissent être identifiés lors de la diffusion de l'étude.

3. **Avantages et inconvénients :** En participant à cette recherche, vous pourrez contribuer à l'avancement des connaissances sur les processus d'évaluation favorables à l'utilisation de l'évaluation. Votre participation à la recherche pourra également vous donner l'occasion de mieux comprendre le rôle de l'évaluation dans votre organisation. Par contre, il est possible que le fait de raconter votre expérience suscite des réflexions ou des souvenirs désagréables. Si cela se produit, n'hésitez pas à en parler avec l'agent de recherche.

4. **Droit de retrait :** Votre participation est entièrement volontaire. Vous êtes libre de vous retirer en tout temps par avis verbal, sans préjudice et sans devoir justifier votre décision. Si vous décidez de vous retirer de la recherche, vous pouvez communiquer avec le chercheur, au numéro de téléphone indiqué (dessous). Si vous vous retirez de la recherche, les renseignements qui auront été recueillis au moment de votre retrait seront détruits.

5. Pour toute question relative à la recherche, ou pour vous retirer de la recherche, vous pouvez communiquer avec Léna D’ostie-Racine, tél. :

6. Vous pouvez communiquer avec le Bureau de l’ombudsman de l’Université de Montréal pour obtenir des renseignements éthiques ou faire part d’un incident ou formuler des plaintes ou des commentaires par téléphone au

**B) CONSENTEMENT**

J'ai lu et compris le contenu du présent formulaire. Je certifie qu'on me l’a expliqué verbalement. J’ai eu l’occasion de poser toutes les questions concernant ce projet de recherche et on y a répondu à ma satisfaction. Je certifie qu’on m’a laissé le temps voulu pour réfléchir et prendre ma décision. Je sais que je pourrai me retirer en tout temps.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nom du participant</th>
<th>Signature du participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Je certifie a) avoir expliqué au signataire les termes du présent formulaire de consentement; b) lui avoir clairement indiqué qu'il reste à tout moment libre de mettre un terme à sa participation au projet et que je lui remettrai une copie signée du présent formulaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Léna D’Ostie-Racine</th>
<th>Signature du chercheur</th>
<th>Date</th>
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clxxxv