



EVIDENCE NOTE · ASPC-EN-011

From Project Outputs to Durable Outcomes

Why are expenditure, construction and training counts insufficient measures of lasting value?

EVIDENCE-INFORMED ASPC ANALYSIS

Supporting publication to ASPC-IB-003

August 2026 · 6-page edition

Status, question and scope

ASPC RESEARCH SYNTHESIS.

Research question

Why are expenditure, construction and training counts insufficient measures of lasting value?

Scope

Inputs and outputs describe resources and delivery. Outcomes describe change, while durability asks whether that change persists.

Evidence cutoff: August 21, 2026. Government findings, agency-reported information and ASPC analysis are distinguished throughout.

ASPC application and limitations

Proposed application

- Separate inputs, outputs, outcomes and durability in every results framework.
- Define baselines, targets, verification, attribution assumptions and decision rules.
- Plan ex-post review of operations, maintenance, finance, retained capability and beneficiary experience.

Limitations

- Not every intervention requires an impact evaluation; method should reflect the decision, risk and feasibility.

These applications are proposed by ASPC. Citation does not imply endorsement by any source institution.

Documented findings

Monitoring and evaluation answer different questions

GAO-19-466 describes monitoring as continuous tracking of project or program data to determine whether expected results are occurring during implementation. Evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of outcomes to support judgments and decisions. GAO found that federal foreign-assistance guidelines incorporated 23 of 28 leading practices, with gaps involving risk assessment, staff qualifications, closeout, skills development and follow-up on recommendations.

GAO warned that scaling pilots without clear impact-evaluation requirements can lead agencies to expand activity without understanding why it succeeded or failed. Delivery counts confirm that work occurred, but do not establish continued use, institutional capability or lasting public benefit.

Enterprise support evidence

GAO-21-328 separately examined whether assistance to enterprises produced lasting benefits, reinforcing the importance of following results beyond immediate project delivery and documenting the conditions needed for continuation.

Results-chain notes

Required distinctions

- **Input:** money, expertise, equipment or time committed.
- **Activity:** work performed through those resources.
- **Output:** the immediate product or service delivered.
- **Outcome:** a change in behavior, performance or condition.
- **Durability:** evidence that the outcome persists and can be maintained.

Durability tests

For each intended outcome, identify the responsible institution, recurrent cost, required workforce, operating authority, maintenance process, data source and review interval. Establish a baseline before implementation and schedule observation after external support ends.

Where attribution cannot be isolated, ASPC should use contribution language, identify plausible alternative explanations and report uncertainty. A target met at closeout should not be described as sustainable until continuation has been observed or supported by credible leading evidence.



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ASPC RELEVANCE

This research supports economic development and constructive partnership where stronger local capability can create durable value and advance shared interests with the United States.

GAO-19-466

[Official source →](#)

GAO-21-328

[Official source →](#)

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