

AGENDA ITEM IX. Future Work

Background note for discussion of PWB 2011/2012 Output 2: Communicating evaluation results

This note has been prepared by the Secretariat, with inputs from DFID, to support discussion and planning for the Programme of Work 2011/2012 during the 11th Meeting of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation.

**11th Meeting
16-17 November 2010**

Communicating evaluation results

Over the past year, members have expressed a growing interest in working together on communicating evaluation results and findings. This is not a new topic for the DAC Evaluation Network. A workshop held in Tokyo in 2001 resulted in the publication on Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability (OECD DAC 2001). At various times, members have shared experiences with innovative communication approaches and discussed challenges around communicating with diverse audiences.

However, the rising pressure within the development community to “demonstrate results”, and growing linked challenges around communicating about complexity, risk and failure, have pushed this issue to the top of many evaluation unit’s agendas. There is growing pressure for evaluation to help answer the “big” development questions (on poverty reduction, growth and inequality, etc.)

As doubts about the development effectiveness of aid and budget pressures on aid spending increase, interest in evaluation results will likely continue to rise, and evaluators will find themselves pushed to communicate more with different audiences beyond agency management, including parliaments, communication units, partner country stakeholders and the general public.

Other trends shaping the communication context for development evaluation, include:

- The rise of rigorous methodologies (including impact evaluation), which result in more complex, more scientific, products and longer time frames for delivery.
- Perception that reports are too technical and too long, or that findings are not new or recommendations not actionable enough. Awareness that there is a need for less reliance on traditional written reports and more exploration of other forms of communication (video, theatre, blog, etc.).
- Growing realisation that development evaluation – and associated communication products – should ideally be owned and driven by partner countries themselves.
- Less unilateral evaluation work, more joint work and work through third parties (civil society, multilaterals)

In addition to these changes in context, members have collected a number of new experiences and insights in recent years, which could usefully be shared and further analyzed. Advances in the use and diversity of communications technologies, including the increasing use of blogs, lesson databases, datasets, web videos and social networks, also point to the need to revisit this issue in the Evaluation Network.

The 2011/2012 work programme for the Evaluation Network includes the output: “Good practice tools ... for communicating evaluation results to facilitate their use for learning and accountability.” The discussion at the 11th Meeting will be helpful in sparking the thinking for our next work programme and in framing how to take this work forward.

DFID has recently done some work to review different practices in this area. One key message from this work, is that evaluation is driven by different imperatives. The evaluation purpose and intended audience make a difference in how we are able to communicate and what the goals of communications are:

- Evaluation as a tool for accountability: implying symbolic focus on “value for money”, communication primarily aimed at parliamentarians, taxpayers, etc.
- Evaluation as a tool for program improvement: implying focus on utilisation and communication with programme units/management and peer agencies
- Evaluation as aid effectiveness: implying focus on lessons learned, knowledge management, improving methodologies and standards; communication primarily aimed at peer agencies, researchers etc.

Collaboration with the Informal Network of Development Communicators (DEVCOM)

The DEVCOM www.oecd.org/dev/devcom hosted by the OECD Development Centre, has expressed interest in collaborating with EVALNET on issues of mutual interest, including around communicating “negative” results to support learning and accountability. Their members welcome engagement with EVALNET on the challenging issues around communicating evaluative evidence in the context of growing pressures to demonstrate (positive) results to the wider public in OECD countries and other stakeholder groups.

Key questions for discussion:

1. The global downturn, and consequent fiscal retrenchment, for many members, making evaluation more visible and pressure to demonstrate results is rising. How will this impact on evaluation units’ communications strategies?
2. What do we mean by good communication practice? Is it about clear and accessible messages? Is it about audience-relevant products? Is it something more?
3. How do we approach the communication of negative findings? Are agencies responsive to hearing about failure? How does management react to negative reports? How can we best communicate complexity and risk in development?

How to take the work forward?

1. Which aspects of communicating results are of highest priority for your agency?
2. Are there examples of good or innovative practice that you are aware of? What experiences do members have that can be shared to create a toolbox of good practice communication? How can we best draw on existing expertise and experience to improve member practice? Would a wider stock take be useful – perhaps during a workshop?
3. Who is interested to contribute to work on this topic in 2011/2012?