

AGENDA ITEM II.
Communicating Evaluation Findings

Discussion note

This note has been prepared by the Secretariat as background to inform discussions at the 12th meeting of the Evaluation Network, during session two on communication.

12th Meeting
23-24 June 2011

Introduction

Communicating the results of evaluation is a widely shared challenge. Last year's study of network members showed that improving how we are sharing the findings of evaluation is a high priority for many members. The recent attention builds on past interest in and efforts to improve dissemination of evaluation findings, including at a workshop on "[Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability](#)" (OECD 2001) held in Tokyo in 2000.

Too often, dissemination stops at printing a report or posting it on a website – although there are also many good examples of more active dissemination strategies. Many departments want to look at new and innovative ways to deliver evaluation evidence in the right way, at the right moment to the people who need it.

As outlined in the 2011/2012 work programme, the Evaluation Network is working in collaboration with the OECD Informal Network of DAC Development Communicators (DevCom) towards developing "good practice tools for communicating evaluation results to facilitate their use for learning and accountability". A number of DevCom members have been invited to participate in today's discussion. The purpose of today's joint session is to share experiences and examples in order to begin deepening our understanding on this topic.

A managing aid seminar on, "Using evidence to improve aid policies and demonstrate results" was held back to back with the DAC Senior Level Meeting in April 2011 (see seminar report). At this event, senior policy makers highlighted the importance of evaluation in today's development context. The report underlines that, "the increasing scrutiny of results has created a growing need for better evidence on and better communication about results". Participants also stressed the need to work for clear and honest communications. This event serves as a backdrop to today's discussion.

Today's discussion will be structured around three broad areas:

- a) **Connecting with policy makers**
- b) **Innovative approaches to sharing evaluation results**
- c) **Panel: A communication perspective for evaluation**

The first two sessions will begin with a very brief intervention from members to stimulate thinking, followed by approximately half an hour for group discussion and sharing of other experiences. The third session will be in the form of a panel, again followed by discussion from the floor.

Aims

The purpose of today's joint discussion is to share experiences and to deepen our mutual understanding of communication issues. We will also begin to identify ideas for improving practice in communicating around evaluation. Each session will begin with a brief intervention from members to stimulate thinking and kick off the discussion.

Note: Afternoon Small Group Session

In the afternoon, a small group session will further develop ideas for how to take the morning discussion forward. We will begin to identify good practice and areas for further joint work.

A. Engaging with Policy Makers

The session will set the stage by looking at the broad pressures to demonstrate results experienced in development agencies today. We will discuss policymakers' needs for credible evidence and explore how evaluators can best engage with senior decision makers. The discussion will focus on experiences with engaging policy makers in evaluation work and stimulating demand for evaluative evidence.

We will look at creative ways to manage expectations of policy makers and the role of evaluation departments in advocating for evidence-based decision making. In a world of information-overload, how can we get senior decision makers to pay attention to evaluation findings, and to use them to improve the impact of development co-operation programmes? What kinds of incentive structures and institutional factors support the take up and use of evaluation – and how can these be strengthened?

It can be particularly difficult to deal with evaluations that find programmes did not achieve desired results or have the expected impact. Often such negative findings generate more attention from the media and can draw strong reactions from policy makers. There may be attempts to minimise the possible negative repercussions of such findings and reduce the impact these have on the agency's reputation or public perceptions of aid.

- **Henri Jorritsma**, of IOB, the Netherlands, will report on the “Managing Aid Seminar: Using Evidence to Improve Aid Policies and Demonstrate Results” and relate experiences engaging with policy makers and dealing with negative evaluation findings, followed by discussion.

This session will focus on:

1. What kinds of results information do policy makers need and what role can evaluation play in providing useful results evidence?
2. What role can better communication play in improving take-up and use of evaluation?
3. What experiences do members have (good and bad) of dealing with sensitive or difficult findings? Or with the un-intended use of evaluation findings?

B. Innovative Approaches to Sharing Evaluation Findings

Members will share experiences using innovative approaches to disseminate evaluation results and findings. The focus will be on identifying useful new tools – and better ways of using existing tools – to improve communication. Evaluation must continually adapt to the changing media context and leverage potentially useful web technologies and other creative approaches to making evaluation findings appealing and accessible to different audiences.

Evaluation reports are often accused of being dull or too technical – especially when the report describes a complex methodological approach or ambiguous findings. How can we transmit clear, concise messages (as demanded by today’s media culture) without losing credibility and rigour? What types of communication vehicles facilitate learning and up-take of evaluation findings?

We will explore how new tools and social media (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, etc.) can be used to reach different audiences with credible, complex evaluation results. Members will share experience using film and video clips within participatory evaluation processes and as a communication tool. Useful alternative and complimentary approaches to reporting – such as annual reports, policy briefs, short fact sheets, blog posts, press releases, PowerPoint presentations, etc. – will also be explored.

The second session will begin with short interventions from:

- **Niels Dabelstein**, of the Paris Declaration Evaluation Secretariat will share a video clip.
- **Njomon George Bestari**, Independent Evaluation Department, Asian Development Bank, will give a brief introduction to recent work using web, video and newsletters.

Key questions for the second session will be:

1. How can we get beyond evaluation reports and use innovative approaches to share findings?
2. What are the experiences of members on the tools that are most useful for evaluation?

C. Panel Discussion: A Communication Perspective for Evaluators

During this session, a panel of communication experts will share insights and communication tools to inform the work of evaluation departments. This will help begin bringing evaluators and communicators into closer dialogue, and will also be an opportunity for the Evaluation Network to benefit from knowledge and insight from communication experts. The presenters will look at how insights from the field of communications can be applied to evaluation work.

The speakers will be:

- **Shareefa Choudhury**, Communications Manager, Wealth Creation and Africa, DFID, U.K.
- **Kikkan Haugen**, Deputy Director General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
- **Marie Christine Boeve**, Head of External Communications at BTC (Belgian Development Agency)

Evaluation teams naturally focus on the process of managing and carrying out evaluations. We think about methodology, credibility and independence – but don't always have the time or the capacity to manage how our work is received by final audiences of our reports: policy makers, members of parliament, country staff, the media, the general public, developing country publics, partner governments or other audiences. Feedback loops are often weak. As a result, it can be difficult for evaluation teams to follow or gauge public reactions to evaluation findings. Communicators – with their knowledge on how to address these constituencies – have a crucial role to play here. On the other hand, communicators themselves may lack time or expertise to take a completed evaluation document and translate it into commonly understood language. The specific needs and expectations of different audiences should be taken into account from the beginning of an evaluation process. By applying a communication lens to our work – and drawing on the knowledge of communicators – we can work towards understanding better the broader context of evaluation reporting.

Evaluation does not necessarily produce findings that fit the overall messages of a development agency. Nonetheless, evaluation can contribute to communicator's work. For example, evaluation field visits can serve as a valuable means for capturing human stories and bring in different perspectives. Working together, evaluators and communicators can identify synergies or areas where evaluation can contribute to or compliment other development communication efforts.

Key questions will include:

1. What do we know about development audiences – or potential audiences – particularly for evaluation? How to identify and focus on the audience for a specific evaluation?
2. How can we reach these audiences and become more responsive to different needs? What are some strategies for sharing evidence and telling effective stories? How to improve the language we use to make reports more accessible?
3. How can evaluation teams plan for effective communication? How to build in communications and awareness of the audience from the start? How best to incorporate communication into evaluation department policies and processes?