

# **Study on Communicating Development Results**

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to inform the development of OECD DAC guiding principles for results communication. It follows the preparation of a background paper on 'Managing for and Communicating Development Results' discussed at the meeting of the Joint Venture on Managing for Development Results (JV MfDR) on 5 February 2009; and the 'Communicating Results' Working Group meeting of the Informal Network of DAC Development Communicators (DevCom) (6 February 2009).

The study spells out why results are at the heart of the effort to improve development effectiveness in the changing aid system, why communication constitutes a key link in the accountability chain, and why reporting results must strike a balance between donor and partner needs. It offers a conceptual framework aimed at situating the role of communication in the wider results agenda. It addresses the definition of results and highlights the kinds of results that should ideally be measured and communicated. It reflects on why results can no longer be attributed to a single change agent, and should instead focus on system-wide progress. It then discusses whose results should be communicated, and concludes by addressing the question of partner country results communication capacity.

The study finds that:

- Communication is emerging as a crucial factor in the process of results management as well as in strengthening accountability relationships.
- As the more holistic notion of development effectiveness supersedes the focus on aid effectiveness *per se*, attribution of agency to specific actors must necessarily give way to communicating how aid is making a significant contribution to wider development efforts. This calls for different forms of communication.
- As the paradigm shifts away from donors seeking to develop partner countries, towards partner countries leading their own development efforts with support from donors, communication should to reflect this shift.
- Following from the above, communication on aid and development should reflect the core commitments made in the Paris Declaration as well as the Accra Agenda for Action. This underscores the need for partner countries to own and lead communication on development effectiveness on the one hand; and on the other the need for donor communication efforts to be better harmonised, aligned with and integrated into partner country communication systems.
- If partner country ownership of communication on aid and development is to become a reality, communication systems in these countries need to be strengthened. As part of this agenda, more needs to be done to enhance statistical capacities. Donor countries should invest in this endeavour as a priority.

## **Introduction:**

This study forms part of a process leading to the development of OECD DAC guiding principles for results communication. It follows the preparation of a background paper on 'Managing for and Communicating Development Results'<sup>2</sup>, which provided an overview of the benefits as well as challenges of integrating communication into results-based management. The background paper informed discussions at the meeting of the Joint Venture on Managing for Development Results (JV MfDR) on 5 February 2009; and the 'Communicating Results' Working Group meeting of the Informal Network of DAC Development Communicators (DevCom) on 6 February 2009. The study reflects the core issues discussed in the background paper as well as key points of agreement in the two meetings.

The paper will proceed as follows:

First, it will spell out why results are at the heart of the effort to improve development effectiveness in the changing aid system, why communication constitutes a key link in the accountability chain, and why reporting results must strike a balance between donor and partner needs.

Second, it will lay out a conceptual framework to provide theoretical clarity on the role of communication in the wider results agenda as well as guidance on how results communication works in practice.

Third, it will discuss what is meant by results, and identify what results should be measured and communicated.

Fourth, it will reflect on the key question of whether – as development becomes more and more complex – results can or should be attributed to a single change agent, or whether the focus should instead be on communicating system-wide progress.

Fifth, it will unpack issues raised by the question of whose results should be communicated. Following from this, the study will spell out why striking a balance between donor and partner country reporting requirements constitutes a core priority.

The study argues that partner country ownership and leadership is pivotal to arriving at this balance, and concludes with a series of recommendations to inform the way forward.

### **1 Why results are key to future development effectiveness:**

Faced with growing pressure to be more effective, the aid system is evolving, heralded by some significant shifts in the way aid happens. One trend is the move away from project-based aid towards a wide range of aid modalities, including Budget Support and Sector-wide Approaches. Accompanying this trend has been the recognition that without partner country ownership, effective development will not happen. On this basis, partner country-

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<sup>2</sup> da Costa, P (2008), *'Managing for and Communicating Development Results – A Background Paper'*. OECD Development Centre/ DevCom, Paris December 2008.

led national development strategies have assumed primacy and aid is being increasingly aligned to national priorities. Building partner country capacity at different levels is now recognised as an important area of investment if ownership is to be meaningful.

Development is now widely understood not as a series of discrete activities, but rather as a large, complex and at times risky enterprise involving donors, partner countries and other shareholders. Managing for Development Results (MfDR) has accordingly shifted from a focus on aid effectiveness – which relates primarily to how aid money is managed – to embrace development effectiveness, which relates to how to ensure the best possible outcomes from what is a complex, multifaceted enterprise.

This evolving aid system poses considerable challenges to those seeking to attribute success to any one actor. Whereas in the past the input of a given aid agency to specific outputs in a given developing country could be easily located and cited as an indicator of success, attribution is considerably more challenging in today's environment. Addressing this challenge calls for a paradigm shift in the way that results are conceived of and communicated. It implies telling a compelling story about how aid – as one of a number of inputs – is making a significant contribution to wider development efforts. It is in this endeavour that communication assumes increasing importance.

Communication for development is a major link in the accountability relationship between donor agencies and their domestic constituencies. OECD countries are under increasing pressure to account for the aid they give, funded from taxpayers' money, to developing countries. This has led to a growing investment in results communication targeted at donor publics<sup>3</sup>, with the expectation that increased transparency about how aid is spent will lead to sustained and possibly increased levels of public support for development cooperation. Although results communication may not always result in behaviour change, it is of pivotal importance to ensuring transparency as well as to facilitating open public debate on the real as opposed to perceived purpose of aid.

In theory, the same accountability relationship exists between partner country governments and their citizens. However, and despite enthusiastic take-up of MfDR by a handful of partner countries, the same cannot be said to have happened with results communication thus far. This is for a number of reasons, to be unpacked later in this paper. A key finding of this study is that results communication runs the risk of being labelled as a donor agenda, and that this must change. Partner country governments should also be able to communicate effectively with their publics, and indeed with donor publics. As such, there is a need to balance donor 'aid effectiveness' requirements with partner country 'reporting' needs. Not only will this improve domestic accountability in partner countries; it will also lead to better results being gathered and reported.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the growing spend on promotion of development awareness by OECD aid agencies, see Zimmerman, R (2007), *Communication and Development: Practices, Policies and Priorities in OECD Countries – Results from the DevCom Donor Communication Profiles Survey*. OECD Development Centre. DRAFT. Not available online.

## 2 A conceptual framework for communicating results:

This section lays out a conceptual framework for communicating results. The aim of the framework is to demonstrate how communication fits in to the wider results agenda. Underpinning the conceptual framework is an important distinction between ‘communicating about results’ and ‘communicating for results’<sup>4</sup>. Although in practice there is considerable overlap between these two approaches and it is often difficult to locate the boundary between them, the conceptual distinction is useful for promoting wider understanding of the practice of results communication in OECD aid agencies today as well as for charting a trajectory for the future.

**Communicating about results**, also known as ‘Corporate Communication’ – and core to the mandate of many OECD aid agency communicators – helps bridge the gap between perception and the actual purpose of aid. It constitutes a core aspect of the accountability relationship. Its aim is to strengthen donor accountability to key high-level policy-makers, parliaments and donor publics. It is largely directed at stakeholders external to the agency in question, although in some OECD countries aid agencies deploy part of their communication about results to position themselves vis-à-vis other Government departments competing for budgetary resources<sup>5</sup>.

In terms of mandate, a majority of aid agency communication departments focus on educating donor publics about development and/ or convincing them that aid is working. This has much to do with the negative perception of aid within many OECD countries – a paradox given that public support for aid has risen in recent years<sup>6</sup>. There is pressure on emerging donors with rising budgets, and particularly on those providing Budget Support, to effectively communicate evidence that aid works in order to strengthen the constituency for development aid<sup>7</sup>. This will be discussed in more detail later in the study.

**Communication for results**, commonly known as ‘Communication for Development’ (C4D) or ‘Strategic Communication’, is a tool as well as a process for the effective delivery of aid

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<sup>4</sup> da Costa, P (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Some OECD aid agency communicators favour **Development Education**, a strategy aimed at stimulating the general public’s interest in development issues. Since it focuses on raising donor public awareness, Development Education helps aid agencies to communicate about results. Yet it is important in its own right as some 80% of OECD countries conduct development education activities – even if these are not always distinct from Corporate Communication. MFA Belgium defines the role of Development Education as: “to promote, stimulate and support global education and active world citizenship. Global education is about a globalising and increasing interdependency and the awareness that we are becoming world citizens. North-South issues and underdevelopment are important issues”. Zimmerman, R (2007) For detailed survey data on development education see pp.40-50.

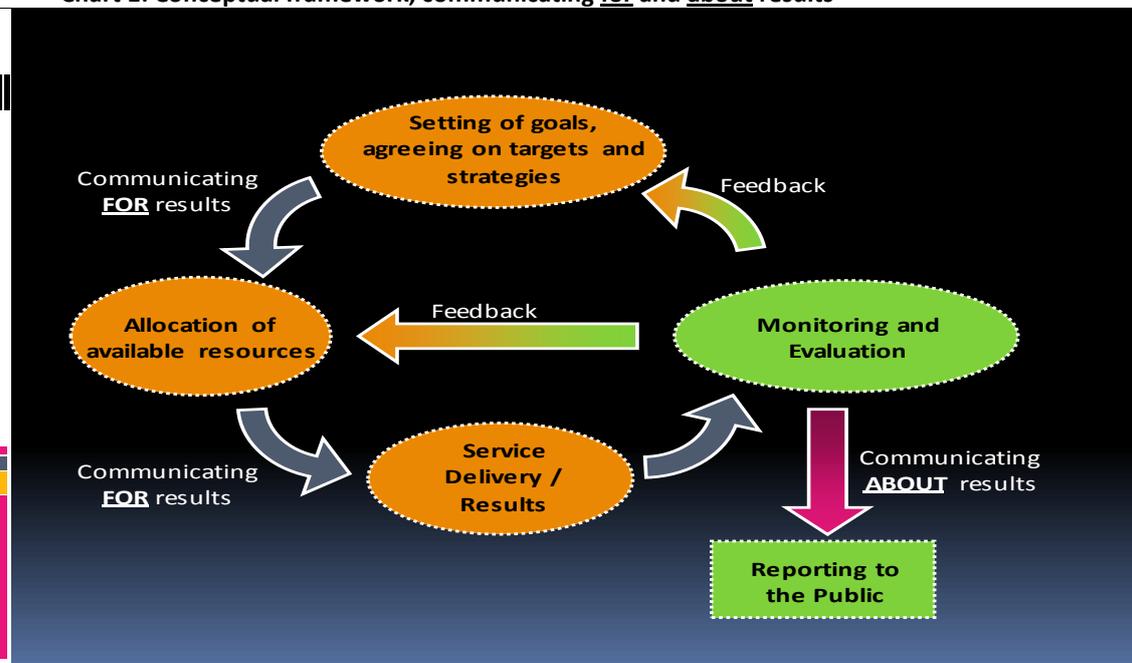
<sup>6</sup> While public support for development aid in donor countries is generally high, publics are also sceptical. Their support is described as “broad and shallow”, meaning that while the levels of people supporting the principles of aid are generally high (70-90%), scepticism about the effectiveness of aid is equally high. Zimmerman, R (2006), *Communicating About Aid Effectiveness, Budget Support and Corruption – Survey of Good Practices*. OECD Development Centre. October 2006. Accessible at [https://www.oecd.org/secure/pdfDocument/0,2834,en\\_21571361\\_40017121\\_41698319\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/secure/pdfDocument/0,2834,en_21571361_40017121_41698319_1_1_1_1,00.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> OECD Development Centre (2007) *Annual Meeting of the Informal Network of DAC Development Communicators. Effectiveness and Results: Are we ready to make a difference?* Lisbon, 6-7 November, 2007.

programmes. It constitutes a core aspect of the management process. C4D approaches privilege a role for communication throughout the programme cycle, as opposed to exclusively as a dissemination function at the end of the programme. Integrating communication as a management tool for project or programme has internal as well as external dimensions. Internally the emphasis is on harnessing communication as a tool for internal learning towards more joined-up action. Externally communication engages project or programme beneficiaries and other key stakeholders, including government officials and policy-makers.

Slightly more than one-third of OECD countries currently integrate communication in development programmes or projects, although half of those that have not yet moved in this direction plan to do so in the near future. It is unclear what percentage of projects and programmes integrate communication. Only 10% of those donors integrating communication in development programmes or projects have a formal communication strategy<sup>8</sup>.

Chart 1: Conceptual framework, communicating for and about results



The focus of the majority of OECD aid agency communicators on communicating about results as a core element of their mandates means that less effort is expended on communicating for results. However, it is important to reiterate that these two types of communication are not mutually exclusive. Both aim to communicate results, and each requires clarity in terms of how results are defined and captured. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that the imbalance is shifting as agencies internalise the mutually reinforcing nature of the two modes of communication, and the need for both to be deployed in a holistic manner.

<sup>8</sup> Zimmerman, R (2007).

The above chart provides a simple representation of the conceptual framework, visualising the 'virtuous circle' that involves both communicating for and about results. The former is involved from the outset of project or programme design, playing an important role in setting of goals and agreeing on targets and strategies. It also influences allocation of resources, a portion of which are dedicated to results communication. Furthermore, communication for results works throughout service delivery, acting both as a means of gathering intermediate results and a tool for ensuring effective project or programme delivery. The conceptual framework as outlined in Chart 1 demonstrated the commonality between the communication cycle and the MfDR cycle, and points to a basis for enhanced synergy between the two.

At the end of the cycle, results gathered as part of the monitoring and evaluation process are fed back into the next generation of project or programme development. At the same time, M&E results are packaged and communicated to the general public. However, with full and active integration of communicators in the project or programme cycle, it is conceivable that communication about results can also happen periodically, as opposed to only at the end. Communication for results can therefore generate the kind of information needed to report progress to the public on a periodic basis.

In this conceptual framework, communicators are considered a core part of the project or programme results team. As such, they are present throughout the cycle and are therefore able to generate results at any given point in the implementation process. In practice, and as the study finds, this is not the case. Although understanding of the role and importance communication for development is growing in OECD aid agencies and elsewhere, communicators still tend to be seen as 'downstream' packagers and purveyors of information about results.

Nevertheless, progress has been steady. The European Union has made significant advances in integrating communication into its operations (see Box 1 below). A lesson for this study is that communication for results is best resourced and supported in institutions where aid staff sees its direct benefit to the delivery of programmes and projects.

**Box 1: The EC blazes the train in institutionalising communication for and about results**

Since mid-2005, the European Commission (EC) has actively sought to mainstream communication in its management processes as well as throughout the project cycle. Its first Communication strategy, approved in 2007, focuses on communicating results and combines both internal and external dimensions. As a policy, and since then, each project or programme wanting to communicate for or about results must undergo a mandatory communication assessment at the design stage, and the necessary budgetary and human resources must be allocated. The adequacy of communication measures and availability of resources is routinely reviewed as part of the quality review of every project or programme. Additionally, in 2008 the EC introduced a new Communication and Visibility Manual, according to which each project or programme must submit a communication plan. This plan is discussed with EC staff in charge of the project or programme, and is monitored throughout implementation and evaluated at the end of the project. In 2008 a Communication training module was launched, designed for project managers. In the same year, after a 2-year testing phase, the EC launched a web-based application to collect 'result- oriented' case studies with facts and figures, testimonies as well as pictures. Some 220 case studies, searchable by country, region, sector MDG, as well as other fields, have been gathered using this system. The results are published on the web as "stories from the field", integrated in speeches and presentations, inserted in annual report or thematic publication or press packs, and used as a basis for more sophisticated communication products such as multimedia productions. Additionally, a photo library has been developed that allows staff from EC field offices to directly upload project pictures, complete with meta-data, which are then made available on the Web via a search tool. Also in 2008, the EC launched a Communication Award to single out projects as well as individual staff that have communicated in innovative and effective ways, both for and about results.

Source: Philippe Loop, EC

The World Bank<sup>9</sup> has also taken major strides forward in harnessing results communication, which it argues is pivotal in delivering four results: reduced political risk; improved programme design; increased transparency; and enhanced voice and participation. The Bank has developed a number of communication tools to bring about these results, including the communication-based assessment – which investigates all relevant issues in a given sector at the design stage of an intervention.

### 3 What results?

Development results are defined as “the output, outcome or impact [...] of a development intervention”<sup>10</sup>. In the past, monitoring and evaluation of development interventions tended to focus on ‘**inputs**’ (the financial, human and material resources invested in a particular project or programme) and ‘**outputs**’ (the products, capital goods and services that result from a development intervention activities implemented using these inputs). What distinguishes the MfDR approach is its focus on the results cycle as a whole. In particular, MfDR strongly emphasises ‘**outcomes**’ (the likely or achieved short-term or medium-term effects of the intervention’s outputs) and ‘**impacts**’ (the long-term effects – whether positive or negative, primary or secondary, intended or unintended, direct or indirect – produced by a development intervention)<sup>11</sup>.

Notwithstanding this evolutionary shift, there is as yet no consensus as to which of the proliferation of existing international goals and targets related to development should provide the basis for what is gathered and communicated.

Although there is concern that they are not widely known, many consider the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as being the most appropriate framework for measuring and communicating results. The MDGs<sup>12</sup> focus on basic human welfare and consist of eight main goals – related to reducing poverty and hunger; achieving universal education; advancing gender equality; improving child health; improving maternal health; fighting HIV/AIDS; achieving environmental sustainability; and building global partnership.

Each of these goal subject areas includes a series of concrete targets. For example, Target 1 for the poverty-related goal reads: “Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day”. Significant work is already underway to

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<sup>9</sup> The World Bank harnesses communication for development in four distinct ways: internal communication, which seeks to achieve internal consensus before going public; corporate communication, which seeks to build trust in the institution and belief in its product (development); advocacy, which brings issues to the point where action is taken; and communication support to operations, known as development communication (Mitchell, P and C. Gorove 2006, *The Impact of Communication on Development*, DRAFT 14/02/2006 - World Bank Development Communication Division).

<sup>10</sup> OECD (2002), *Evaluation and Aid Effectiveness; Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-based Management*. DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation. Accessible at [http://www.oecd.org/document/21/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_34435\\_40381973\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/21/0,3343,en_2649_34435_40381973_1_1_1_1,00.html).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>

measure progress towards meeting the MDGs, including the development of more than 60 indicators derived from the eight goals<sup>13</sup>.

A number of other internationally-agreed goals also stand out. These include standards on human rights and gender equality – among them the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)<sup>14</sup>, Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action (1995)<sup>15</sup>, and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>16</sup>.

Others argue that the most important results to be focused on should be those relating to aid effectiveness. This brings into play indicators derived from the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action (AAA, 2008). Governance is another important emerging area of focus, with a host of codes, standards and indicators that make it worthy of possible measurement.

In practice, all these international norms and standards can be mutually reinforcing. For instance, the state of a country's governance is considered a key indicator of its progress towards development, so it makes sense to gather and report results on different aspects of governance (economic, political, corporate, etc) alongside MDG-related results. Establishing a division of labour based on subject area of focus could ensure that whatever is measured and reported contributes to the aggregate story about how development is progressing. None of these international norms and standards is mutually exclusive. And in practical terms, diverse indicators of progress can be measured and reported on using the same approach and system.

An overarching concern remains how to reconcile international targets such as the MDGs with the fact that as the aid system becomes increasingly complex, reporting linear progress and attributing that progress to individual agencies becomes all the more difficult. The question of attribution is discussed in the section that follows.

A key lesson learned from Norway's initiation of an Aid Results Report in 2007 is the importance of gathering and communicating both good and bad results, both failures as well as successes. Aid communicators in Norway found that being honest and transparent about results was the approach most likely to stimulate debate, foster engagement, share knowledge and increase visibility for development cooperation in society.

#### **Box 2: Communicating results to diverse audiences**

In addition to its Aid Results report, intended for the wider public, Norway produced a results report aimed at technocrats, including comprehensive quantitative data on aid disbursed, disaggregated in different ways. There is a fine line to be drawn between reporting results on a selective basis (i.e. taking a few thematic areas and focusing on a few aid receiving countries) and reporting comprehensively. Norway's research community criticised the 2007 Aid Results Report for being too anecdotal. To address this problem, the 2008 Report narrowed its focus, to undertake more in-depth reporting of results in 3 countries – Mozambique, Nepal and Sudan.

Source: Eva Bratholm, NORAD

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/stats.shtml>

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

#### **4 Contribution vs. attribution in a changing aid world:**

In theory, attribution is defined as: “The ascription of a causal link between observed (or expected to be observed) changes and a specific intervention”<sup>17</sup>. According to this definition, “attribution refers to that which is to be credited for the observed changes or results achieved [and] ... represents the extent to which observed development effects can be attributed to a specific intervention or to the performance of one or more partners taking account of other interventions, (anticipated or unanticipated) confounding factors or external shocks”<sup>18</sup>.

As has been stated above, communication constitutes a major link in the accountability relationship between aid agencies and donor country publics. In the past, demonstrating the impact of aid from a given country could easily be accomplished by reporting output data from diverse projects that aid had funded in different developing countries. Then, the challenge was not necessarily establishing causality between the funding and the progress evident in the projects. It was merely to show that the money was being spent according to its original allocation and purpose. The focus was very much on inputs and outputs.

However, as has also been noted, the aid system continues to evolve – away from small-scale projects to structurally larger, more scaled- up interventions; away from donor-driven activities to country-led development strategies; away from project aid to programme aid, sector wide approaches, budget support and advocacy; and away from individual contributions towards collective engagement by multiple stakeholders. Every individual donor has now become a ‘shareholder’ in a larger enterprise. In such a changing environment, it becomes harder and harder for any one shareholder to claim success for any measurable outcomes or impacts in partner countries.

In practice attribution thus constitutes a fundamental challenge posed to results communicators: to move beyond reporting about the effectiveness of aid emanating from individual countries, destined for specific projects in selected partner countries; and to instead focus on telling a story about how the aggregate contribution of several donors, working in partnership with partner country governments in a collective effort, is bringing about structural change that will ultimately lead to sustainable development.

If the outcomes of Accra related to country ownership are to be taken at face value, understanding how partner countries are taking ownership of their own development strategy constitutes a crucial part of telling such a story. As such, the needed paradigm shift in reporting results is two-fold: moving from attribution of agency to communicating progress on the basis of collective endeavour; and superseding the discourse of donor-driven development with one of partner country ownership.

The attribution problem is particularly challenging in relation to Budget Support. Donors are increasingly reducing project aid in favour of Budget Support, which involves providing support to macro-level policies and to government budgets. The idea is to provide aid that is

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<sup>17</sup> OECD Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management, 2002, DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation, accessible at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

more coherent and supports partner government objectives, as opposed to donor preferences. There are different variants, including Budget Support targeted at individual sectors (sector wide approaches).

Communicating results in relation to Budget Support represents a challenge on at least two fronts. On the one hand, because this type of aid goes directly into partner government national development budgets, and in situations where there are multiple donors providing such support, attributing impact to any individual donor becomes all the more difficult. On the other hand, budget support again raises the fundamental question of whose results are reported and who reports them – an issue to be unpacked in the section that follows.

Aid agency communicators have affirmed that Budget Support represents a significant challenge to the wider goal of improving the way that results are communicated. One problem is that first-generation results communication strategies focused on providing donor publics with project-level information. Making the shift to a new kind of results communication that no longer focuses on input-output and does not directly flag donor contributions in the same way as before will take time.

In the meantime, sceptical donor publics who consider input-output results as the norm are likely to question any results that do not directly show where their taxes are going. In Norway, for example, communicators from the aid agency NORAD found that most of the attacks on aid they had to deal with focused specifically on Budget Support. An important challenge is therefore how to develop non-defensive tools, tactics and approaches for communicating Budget Support that can be effectively mainstreamed.

Valuable lessons have been learned from a DevCom pilot project, initiated in 2007, to integrate results communication in sector-wide or direct Budget Support programmes. Led by Sweden and Ireland, the idea was to deploy communication throughout the project cycle so as to facilitate the gathering of results information that could then be communicated to both partner and donor country publics. Given that Budget Support results would necessarily have to be directed at all donors involved in a given country (in this case Mozambique), it was concluded that undertaking a pilot with one or two donors would simply not work. Instead, it was felt that mainstreaming results communication as part of the in-country MfDR process – which in theory involves all donors in a given country – might constitute a more effective approach.

An urgent priority for donors and partner countries alike are guidelines spelling out how communication can be integrated at the outset of direct Budget Support or sector budget support projects and programmes. In addition to guidelines, it is important for governments to have access to a body of knowledge as well as a pool of technical expertise that can help them integrate the reporting and communication of results.

## **5 Whose results?**

A key concern is who owns what results and who should communicate them. To date, reporting results has been the preserve of OECD aid agencies, which gather the data,

prepare the results reports and communicate the results to their respective publics. However, as the momentum behind partner country ownership continues to grow, results professionals – including communicators – are being forced to revisit the rationale for what they do.

There is a growing recognition that reporting and communicating about development results as currently constituted need to move away from their current top-down, donor-driven nature, to embrace partner country concerns. The question of whose results partner countries want to communicate to their publics has been largely secondary. In reality, there are likely to be significant differences between how donors and partner countries see results. While donor governments may be anxious to report results that demonstrate the efficacy of their aid programmes, partner governments are likely to be less anxious to give credit for progress in their respective countries to donor funding alone. Instead, they are more likely to attribute development results to their own policy choices and actions.

As such, in seeking to embed results communication as a shared agenda, donors should be careful not to crowd out partner country preferences with their world view on what results should be gathered and communicated. A conscious shift by aid agencies is required – away from attributing success to their own involvement, towards consciously supporting partner country priorities. This constitutes a key finding of this study.

As one OECD aid agency communicator put it:

***“It makes a huge difference whether communicators in donor agencies communicate ‘we build schools’ or ‘we supported partner countries in doing this’. It’s not a trivial academic difference”.***

As a corollary to the needed shift by donors, more and more space needs to be given to allow partner countries to tell their own story – both to their citizens and to donor publics. This challenges aid agencies to think out of the box, and to recognise that in this interconnected world, it may be necessary to move beyond the conventional wisdom. Current thinking tends towards establishing a division of labour whereby aid agencies communicate results to donor publics, and relevant ministries in partner countries communicate results to their citizens. This is consistent with the idea of the accountability ‘compact’ linking governments to their citizens.

However, it is conceivable that in seeking to make ownership real, it may be necessary for this division of labour to give way to a ‘results value chain’ that originates within partner countries themselves and involves partner country results professionals, including communicators, as prime movers. In practical terms, this may involve partner countries communicating results to citizens of donor countries – either directly or indirectly (via aid agency communicators).

Such a model also implies that the data on the basis of which such results are constructed would originate from partner countries themselves. Part of the challenge in making this happen is statistical. Current aid data gathered by the Working Party on Statistics is limited to numbers on aid outflows. Data from partner countries on how that aid money has been

used is harder to come by, making it difficult to make a judgment call on the effectiveness of the aid given<sup>19</sup>. Donor-funded efforts to improve partner country statistical capacity may well address this problem. However, another outcome may well be that partner countries are able to make more informed decisions about what results they consider to be important. This is likely to result in changes to what results are deemed important, and how the data needed to compile and report these results is aggregated. Ultimately, the capacity to gather results data that will be sufficiently robust as to be useable by partner as well as donor governments needs to be in place in partner countries.

Closely related to the question of what results should be reported is the question of who determines and identifies these results. In the current configuration, it is governments that take responsibility for deciding what results should be reported, set about gathering the data, undertake the packaging of the results and communicate them to the public. Although some governments ensure that the process is as participatory as possible, the reality is that results information is supply driven.

Other stakeholders in development, such as international NGOs, parliamentarians and civil society at large, are essentially consumers of the results information that is communicated by governments. This is problematic, particularly since many governments are viewed as having problems of credibility and are not universally trusted. On the other hand, questions arise as to whether the gathering of results and their communication can be separated.

One way of overcoming this asymmetry is to ensure that regardless of what informs the results in question, and who communicates them, these results are demand-driven. A given donor public in one country may ask for different results from a donor public in another. Parliamentarians may require more detail on specific indicators, as opposed to a report on the big picture. Citizens in a partner country may want to know not how their government is spending aid *per se*, but how it is using all external and internal resources, in particular tax revenue.

Ultimately, ways need to be found to include non-governmental actors upstream in the results process. In partner countries, mechanisms such as the national multi-stakeholder poverty reduction dialogue can serve as important forums for broadening the ownership of the results process.

## **6 Fostering partner country ownership is imperative:**

That results communication is currently donor-centric constitutes a key finding of this study. However, and has been discussed, there are fundamental changes happening in the way that aid is conceived of, disbursed and reported. The dual nature of the accountability and transparency compact and the aspired-to country-focus post-Accra point to the need for results communication capacity being developed within partner countries. This would help strengthen domestic accountability, improve information flows between partner and donor countries, and have the overall effect of strengthening mutual accountability.

This challenges results professionals and communicators alike to think through how best they can support partner countries' efforts to build a results culture and ultimately own as well as communicate their own results. In a profound sense, and even as aid agencies are getting to grips with internalising the communicating results agenda themselves, they are being confronted by the imperative of fostering partner country ownership. Although many donors now understand the importance of communicating for as well as about results, and as highlighted in the Background Paper, there remains some way to go in integrating these approaches in their results culture as well as practice.

Aid agencies should actively advocate for and provide harmonized support to initiatives that seek to strengthen partner country results management and communication. In doing so, aid agencies will need to ensure that their role – which may involve providing technical input as well as funding – is strategically configured so that they are supportive to partner country efforts. Critically, such pilots need to be demand-driven and draw inspiration from instances in which partner countries are already making progress. The era of the top-down model of donor-driven pilot projects with minimal involvement of partner countries is, or should be, well and truly over.

Nevertheless, and in seeking to build such capacity and ownership, realism is required as to how much convergence there is likely to be between donor and partner countries as related to results. As has been discussed, partner and donor countries are likely to want to report results that are significantly divergent in emphasis. A partner country government that achieves good development results will want to emphasise its own role, in the process de-emphasising the role of aid in achieving the positive outcomes and impacts being highlighted.

In all but the most aid-dependent countries, aid is considered as only one of a number of inputs into national budgets, which are also financed from tax and other revenues. In many cases, aid is deemed a residual contributor to national development budgets. Accordingly, civil society groups in many of these countries focus on lobbying their governments to increase budget transparency, with aid transparency seen as something non-governmental organisations in donor countries should pressure donor governments to ensure. Added to this, there is a growing scepticism in some quarters as to the extent to which aid can help reduce poverty and foster sustainable development. These realities make it all the more incumbent upon results communication to embed itself as part of the process of strengthening partner country accountability and transparency.

By and large, partner countries are committed to developing a results culture, and to putting in place the foundations to ensure strong ownership of the results agenda. This emerges clearly from the AAA. However, these countries lack the full extent of capacity needed to effectively do so. Furthermore, partner country domestic accountability mechanisms fall short, whilst transparency and access to information are less than optimal. Added to this, the proliferation of donor reporting mechanisms and aid instruments in many partner countries continues to impose a sizeable transaction cost upon their aid management. It is therefore not surprising that at present, few partner countries have as yet taken steps to integrate results communication in their work.

Much remains to be done on the demand side. Although the AAA pushes country level implementation and country focus, there remains a lack of adequate demand from citizens as to what to expect from their governments. In many partner countries, particularly those suffering from poor governance, there exists a negative perception of government among the public. Addressing such a perception may call for a degree of development education in advance of rolling out results communication.

In the same way that efforts are underway to rationalise in-country donor proliferation and aid fragmentation, donors and partner countries need to find ways to avoid results proliferation. Assuming that the aspired-to results focus is on partner country outcome and impact, efforts are needed to harmonise the way donors communicate, both within and *vis-à-vis* partner countries. In light of the discussion earlier in this paper about partner countries being in a position to communicate to donor publics (directly or indirectly), there is need for some clear ground rules. In a given partner country, these could be part of a national framework for communicating results, that articulates both strategic vision and operational procedures for partner-owned and driven results communication.

Such a framework could for example mandate a common country platform for communicating results as a way of avoiding proliferation and ensuring that everyone is on the same page. The framework could also address operational questions, such as whether the focal structure within government should be the Finance Ministry, Information and Communication Ministry, President's Office or some other structure; or whether there should be a single mouthpiece as opposed to a distributed arrangement.

Partner countries and donors need a jointly-owned forum where they can discuss and agree on how best to mutually support each other in advancing results communication.

## **7 The way forward:**

This study has advanced a number of arguments. One is that the focus has shifted from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness, a reflection of the fact that development is now widely understood as a large, complex and often risky enterprise involving multiple shareholders. This shift means that attribution of agency to specific actors must necessarily give way to communicating how aid is making a significant contribution to wider development efforts. In this endeavour, communication assumes increasing importance. Results communicators must move beyond reporting about input-output towards telling a story about how the aggregate contribution of several donors, working in partnership with partner country governments in a collective effort, is bringing about structural change. The attribution challenge is found to be particularly acute with regard to Budget Support. Developing non-defensive tools, tactics and approaches for communicating Budget Support, as well as making available a body of knowledge and pool of technical expertise, are therefore a priority.

Results communication must also shift from being exclusively a donor agenda. Partner country governments should also be able to communicate results effectively. Arriving at a balance between donor 'aid effectiveness' requirements with partner country 'reporting' needs will ultimately lead to better results being gathered and reported.

The paper has laid out a conceptual framework that clearly demonstrates the link between results communication and MfDR. Two inter-dependent types of communication are identified: communication about and for results. In an ideal setting, which includes the integration of communicators as results professionals, the two are deployed seamlessly – enabling the reporting of results throughout the programme cycle as well as at the end. Crucially, in such a model, communication not only facilitates results reporting, but also informs the next cycle of programme development. Such approaches are being pioneered by the EU, World Bank and other donor agencies.

In addressing the question of what results should be reported and communicated, the study identifies the MDGs as a key set of targets around which a consensus could be reached. However, a number of other targets present themselves, including human rights and governance standards, as well as aid effectiveness indicators. The study finds these standards to be mutually reinforcing, contributory to the aggregate story about how development is progressing, and measurable and reportable using the same approach and system. An important lesson learned from the experience of Norway is that whatever standards are used, bad as well as good results need to be reported as this provides the best chance of engaging the public in honest, frank debate.

In response to the question of whose results, the study finds that while aid agencies currently dominate the results business, the growing momentum behind ownership is forcing results professionals to address how partner countries can report and communicate their own results. Donors and partner country governments see results differently. While the former may be anxious to report results that show how well their aid is working, the latter are more likely to attribute development results to their own policy actions. As such, space needs to be given to partner countries to tell their own story – whether to their citizens or to donor publics. Another finding is that given the fact that most governments have credibility and trust problems, their sole responsibility for gathering, aggregating and communicating results may be called into question. Ways need to be found for other stakeholders to be actively involved in ensuring that development results are demand-driven.

To ensure partner country ownership and leadership of the communicating results agenda, in line with the Paris Declaration and AAA commitments, the study argues that aid agency communicators have a responsibility to align and harmonize their work in support of partner country results communication – even as the communicators are themselves grappling with the challenge of integrating communication about and for results in the discourse and practice of their agencies. On their side, although they are committed to improving accountability and transparency, partner countries currently lack the capacity to embrace and lead the agenda. Initiatives in partner countries should build on innovative approaches underway. A framework is needed to lay down principles as well as provide operational guidance for results communication by partner and donor countries alike. This could include mandating a common country results communication platform to ensure coherence and avoid proliferation.

On the basis of the above, and taking into account recent advances in the effort to integrate results communication, the following are some recommendations for the way forward.

1. *Maintain the Momentum Post-Accra*: The need to focus on development results emerged as a key outcome of the Accra High-Level Forum. The AAA made specific reference to communicating results, stating that “[a]ttention will also be paid to improving and developing communications on aid effectiveness for long-term development success and broad-based public support”<sup>20</sup>. In the immediate term, it remains important to showcase this breakthrough, since it positions communicating results firmly as part of the post-Accra MfDR agenda. However, this represents merely the beginning.

2. *Pilot Approaches in Donor and Partner Countries*: Concrete work is needed to demonstrate the value-added of communication as a tool for development effectiveness. As such, the JV MfDR and DevCom, having made the conceptual case for results communication, need to move into a more operational phase of engagement. This should involve pilot approaches and initiatives, as well as advocacy and tangible support for partner country results communication. In addition to piloting communication for results in a partner country, and seeking to improve results reporting in donor agencies (see below), a dialogue should begin with interested partner countries to see how communicating results can be integrated into the way they do business. The potential for partner country-led and owned results communication is significant, and the opportunity now exists to make real headway.

3. *Improving Results in Donor Agencies*: The proposal by Switzerland to develop a results reporting approach among OECD donor agencies, presented to the JV MfDR meeting on 5 February 2009, appears as one of three specific operational tasks in the latest scoping paper<sup>21</sup> addressing part of the proposed JV MfDR programme of work. This constitutes another important entry point to embed the communicating results agenda, and formal collaboration needs to be established between DevCom and the work stream, via JV MfDR.

4. *Collaborate with the CoPs*: The regional Communities of Practice on MfDR in Asia, Africa and Latin America are increasingly being recognised as an important player in bringing gap between the global, regional and national results stakeholders. The CoPs have grappled with communication for the past 2-3 years and would welcome collaboration with the DevCom network. Ways need to be found to concretely collaborate. The CoPs will be important allies to the JV MfDR and DevCom as they explore potential initiatives to strengthen partner country capacity to communicate results.

5. *Bringing statistics down to earth*: Accra acknowledged clearly the link between capacity and ownership. Ongoing and planned efforts to improve statistical capacity development

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<sup>20</sup> Par 30, footnote 4

<sup>21</sup> JV MfDR (2009), Cluster E: Partner-led Learning and Advocacy on Managing for Development Results – Scope of Deliverables and Working Arrangements. DRAFT, March 2009

initiatives (such as Paris21 and the Statistics for Results Facility) provide an important entry point for results communicators, who should be involved at the outset of the process. This will increase the likelihood that results-friendly data will be produced that can be communicated. Building strong and sustainable statistical capacity in partner countries should not be instrumentalised to serve the objective of facilitating the 'upward' flow of results data from partner countries to donor aid agencies alone. In the spirit of advancing ownership, the objective should be to enhance the capacity of partner countries so that they can gather their own data and tell their own story. It is entirely conceivable that a 'results value chain' can be developed that situates partner countries at the heart of the collection, aggregation, reporting and communication of their own results. This will effectively move the agenda beyond short-term questions of attribution, towards a sustainable and mutually reinforcing paradigm of donor country support for partner countries which results in enhanced development effectiveness.