Study on Communicating Evaluation Results

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Introduction:

This study was commissioned by the OECD DevCom Network to provide input to a workshop organised jointly with the UK Department for International Development (DFID) on *'Communicating Evaluation Results'* (London, 12 October 2012), convened as a forum for sharing of experience between evaluators and communicators on how best to build collaboration in communicating results from development evaluation. This final version of the study includes examples from the London workshop. The study builds on previous workshops and seminars convened by the DevCom Network (notably the Evaluation Workshop held in Bonn, 19-20 March 2007), as well as discussions convened by the DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) at its 11th and 12th meetings (16-17 November 2010 and 23-24 June 2011). It also draws on two documents prepared by the author to inform a process leading to the development of OECD DAC guiding principles for results communication[2].

The main aim of this study is to examine and document the current state of how communicators and evaluators share results of development co-operation and specifically the outcomes of evaluations, including 'negative' or 'sensitive' results. Related to this, the study will shed light on the state of evaluation of the efforts undertaken by OECD aid agency communicators themselves: looking at whether, to what extent and how donors monitor measure and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of their communication strategies.

First, the study will highlight key trends that have shaped the communication context for development evaluation.

Second, and in separate sections, it will reflect on the evaluation and communication perspective around communicating results. For each of the two disciplines, and with reference to results of recent surveys, the paper will reflect on questions of definition, mandate, track record, challenges, and status of collaboration, and reference examples of emerging good and bad practice.

Third, it will highlight the dynamics around communication of 'negative' or 'sensitive' evidence, identified by both evaluators and communicators as among the biggest challenges to be addressed.

Fourth, it will look at how systematically agency communication strategies and initiatives are evaluated, exploring the extent to which evaluators and communicators work together in assessing these strategies.

Fifth, the study will reflect on the experience to date in involving partner countries in communicating evaluation results, before concluding with a series of proposals aimed at improving collaboration between evaluators and communicators.

1. Trends shaping the communication context for development evaluation:

As the political economy of aid continues to evolve, there is growing interest in evaluation amid rising pressures for recipients to be more accountable to donors. The Millennium Development

[2] *'Managing for and Communicating Development Results'*, a background paper prepared in December 2008 and discussed at the meeting of the Joint Venture on Managing for Development Results (JV MfDR) on 5 February 2009 and the DevCom Network *'Communicating Results'* Working Group meeting (6 February 2009); and *'Study on Communicating Development Results'*, commissioned by DAC DCD/DevCom Network (May 2009).

Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 have been instrumental in establishing results-oriented targets that conditioned a major change in in donor behaviour with simultaneous pressure to achieve development results for poor people in a relatively short period of time[3].

More recently, the intensification of pressure for upward accountability has been largely due to the entrenched global economic crisis. Hard times at home mean increasing pressure on OECD and other governments to convince taxpayers that aid sent overseas is working. Consequently, there is unprecedented emphasis on the need for 'hard evidence' to demonstrate development impact. Even in instances of aid levels rising to meet international standards, and in countries whose citizens have consistently supported development cooperation, donors still feel the pressure to deepen and widen public support[4].

Development also continues to evolve. It is no longer seen as a series of project-led interventions driven by aid and conditioned by donors, but rather as a large, complex and often risky enterprise involving donors, partner countries and other shareholders. The discourse on aid effectiveness has therefore gradually shifted to a wider focus on development effectiveness[5]. This has in turn raised new challenges around communicating complexity, risk and failure. It has also fuelled growing pressure for evaluation to come up with answers to the "big" development questions – on poverty reduction, growth, inequality and related issues[6].

Partner countries are also re-assessing the role and utility of aid in light of new domestic revenue flows and the changing aid architecture. Many partner countries are growing at impressive rates, in large part due to high demand for commodities, oil and gas and other extractive resources. There is growing expectation – from citizens of partner countries as well as from donors – that the revenues from these windfalls will be harnessed to finance domestic development budgets. Added to this, governments of partner countries are able to tap into a wider range of sources of commercial as well as concessional finance – including from China and other BRICs. As a result, and in many partner countries, there is an expectation that although aid remains critical to development for the time being, it will over time play a progressively reduced role in financing development budgets. This puts pressure on aid-givers to demonstrate to taxpayers that their aid is still relevant. Recipient countries also face pressure to account for aid received in such an environment of apparent plenty.

The widely held view that partner countries should be in the driving seat in advancing the development enterprise constitutes another important dynamic. This consensus around ownership, reiterated in successive High-Level Forums and enshrined in the evolving discourse on aid effectiveness, is only gradually being reflected in the reality of aid relations. In the meantime, the momentum for initiatives to assemble and communicate evidence about development effectiveness remains almost entirely with donor agencies. A significant challenge therefore is how to extend the conversation on communicating evaluation beyond evaluators and communicators in donor agencies and Northern capitals.

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[3] Scheunpflug, A & I. McDonnell (2007), *'Using evaluation to improve public awareness-raising and learning about development in OECD countries: An Introduction'*.
[4] Ward, M (2010), *'Recent Findings on Public Opinion, Communication and Development Awareness in DAC Peer Reviews'*, presentation at Annual DevCom Meeting, Helsinki, 18 October 2010.
[5] da Costa 2009.
[6] EvalNet (2010), 'Development Evaluation Resources and Systems – a Study of Network Members', December 2010.

The trends outlined above have put the evaluation community under pressure to come up with better methods, instruments and approaches to measuring development impact. Current approaches coalesce around three broad schools: evidence-oriented evaluation, which aims to find measurable changes that can be directly attributed to specific policies, and which dominates the development evaluation field[7]; realistic evaluation, which assesses how policy is 'received' under certain social and cultural conditions and how it triggers a response; and complexity evaluation, which acknowledges that development is complex and seeks to evaluate how policy makers respond to complex problems[8].

As the demand has increased for evidence of what works, new approaches have been developed – including impact evaluation, which involves complex experiments (such as randomised control trials) that seek to provide 'hard' evidence on the impact of development interventions by applying scientific methods usually found in the laboratory. There is growing interest and attention to impact evaluation among development agency evaluation units, fuelled in large part by initiatives at the World Bank[9] as well as a Center for Global Development Working Group that led to the establishment of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation[10].

At the same time, a movement of academics and development practitioners are contesting what they see as an excessive focus on scientific evaluation. In their view, such approaches are being harnessed by a 'results agenda' that is too narrowly focused, politically motivated and self-serving. The concern is that the current generation of impact evaluations, fuelled by the aid agency obsession with 'hard' evidence, is failing to contribute to learning about what works and what does not[11]. This movement is advocating for research and evaluation that supports wider accountability and learning, towards strengthened programmes and enhanced development impact.

Fundamental questions are now being asked about who determines 'success', on what basis, and who is excluded from evaluation processes. So-called "failures" and "negative experiences", traditionally ignored or hidden, are being re-evaluated as potential opportunities for learning and improvement (Byrne 2012)[12]. Mixed method evaluations[13] are being advocated as an alternative to purely experimental approaches to evaluating development impact. In particular,

[7] The World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), for example, employs an 'objectives-based approach' in which impact evaluation is the most important element. The IEG's view is that programmes and projects can be seen as "having a results chain – from the intervention's inputs, leading to its immediate output, and then to the outcome and final impacts". Another key proponent is the policy and operations evaluation department (IOB) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is placing increasing emphasis on 'statistical impact evaluation' (Hospes 2008). In recent years a new field in evidence-oriented evaluation has emerged, advocating the use of scientific experiments (randomised control trials) to determine the effectiveness of development interventions (proponents include 3ie, J-PAL, etc).

[8] Hospes, O (2008), 'Evaluation Evolution? Three approaches to evaluation', blog published on The Broker, 16 June 2008, accessible here.

[9] These are the DIME initiative and IEG work on impact evaluation. For more, click here and here.

[10] See http://www.cgdev.org/section/initiatives/_archive/evalgap and http://www.3ieimpact.org/.

[11] For more on this school of thought, see the Big Push Forward blog.

[12] Personal communication with author (e-mail), 26 September 2012.

[13] These combine quantitative methods with approaches such as Outcome Mapping, Most Significant Change approach, Whole Systems Research, Complex Adaptive Systems, and other network approaches to evaluation Byrne, A (2010), *'Complexity of MSPs has implications for evaluation'*, blog published on the Broker, 07 December 2010, accessible here.

participatory approaches to evaluation are being advocated on the basis that active and meaningful involvement by different stakeholders in and throughout the evaluation process will make it more likely that the findings are used – because they are more widely valued, trusted and owned by the stakeholders (ibid).

Within the aid community, there has also been a shift away from unilateral evaluations conducted by individual donors and agencies towards a culture of joint evaluation as well as third party evaluation, involving civil society, multilateral agencies and other actors[14]. This is viewed as a clear sign that donors are beginning to privilege wider learning as opposed to focusing narrowly on causality.

In all this, the good news is that there is now widespread recognition of the pivotal importance of communicating results to inform learning as a means of improving development effectiveness. A 1998 review[15], for example, highlighted the widespread dissatisfaction among DAC members' evaluation offices about the adequacy of practices for disseminating lessons from evaluations. The report concluded that feedback and communication practices needed to be improved, and that evaluation results should be used more actively in order to enhance current and future aid programmes[16]. The report led to a series of activities related to the dissemination of evaluation feedback for learning and accountability.

Alongside the evolution in evaluation theory and practice, bilateral and multilateral evaluation units are paying increased attention to sharing the results of evaluations. The emphasis on communication and dissemination stems from internal as well as external deficits related to the agencies. Internally, there is a sense that not enough is being done to ensure effective learning, with opportunities for discussion and feedback on evaluation findings limited. Externally, agencies recognise that the findings of evaluations are too rarely disseminated, acknowledged and used, either by specialist audiences or the general public[17].

In some cases, the interest in sharing findings goes beyond the traditional focus on dissemination to include a more comprehensive approach aimed at effectively communicating a variety of evaluation initiatives with a focus on reaching out to wider audiences both within and outside the agencies[18]. Some, such as the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), design and implement sophisticated communication strategies that involve interactive engagement with different stakeholders using a variety of tools, including social media. It should be emphasized however that few evaluation units and departments are so advanced in their communication effort as IEG.

On the communication side, there has been increased investment by donor agencies in building communication capacities, largely out of recognition of a need to promote development

[14] EvalNet 2010.
[15] OECD (1998), *'Review of the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance'*, DAC Working Party on Evaluation.
[16] OECD (2001), *'Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability'*, DAC Working Party on Evaluation.
[17] Foresti, M, with C. Archer, T. O'Neil & R. Longhurst (2007), *'A Comparative Study of Evaluation Policies and Practices in Development Agencies'*, Série notes méthodologiques No. 1, decembre 2007, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) with Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
[18] Foresti *et al* 2007.

effectiveness to donor publics. A 2007 study[19] found that a majority of aid agency communication departments focused their investment on educating donor publics about development and/or convincing them that aid is working. This had much to do with the negative perception of aid within many OECD countries, considered a paradox given that public support for aid had risen in successive years. Since then DevCom members have made steady progress in building communication units, clarifying their mandates and strengthening their impact.

There is anecdotal evidence that aid agency communicators are beginning to collaborate more meaningfully with their evaluation counterparts. A new survey, conducted by the DevCom Secretariat in the run up to the October 2012 workshop, provides examples of how the two groups are collaborating to communicate the results of development evaluations and engage their publics.

A presentation during the workshop provided a concrete illustration of how evaluation and communication colleagues in the Belgian Development Agency (BTC) are finding ways to work together.

Collaboration along the Results Continuum

BTC sees monitoring, evaluation and communication as key steps along a results information continuum. This shared perspective has provided the basis for M&E and communication professionals within the agency to collaboration. Processes and tools have been developed that link the two disciplines. Before any data is gathered, there is joint discussion around what it should be used for and a common language is developed that both groups understand. Results monitoring and evaluation templates tailored to the needs of specific users are developed and updated with input from both teams. Both consider evidence to be critical to effective results communication, and both are engaged from the outset in defining the data needed to tell BTC's story, developing hard and soft indicators, and articulating theories of change to frame analysis. There is an explicit focus on telling the story of how BTC interventions have impacted on beneficiaries. The teams also privileges unexpected results as an opportunity for learning. Most importantly, evaluators and communicators engage on an on-going basis, both formally (in team meetings) and informally. This helps build trust and mutual understanding, setting the stage for joint ownership of strategies to communicate BTC's impact to the wider public.

Source: Van Parys & Couck 2012

However, as responses from the same survey show, communicators and evaluators have not as yet developed a formula to work together systematically in conveying evidence of development successes and failures.

Much of the collaboration deficit may be due to differing perceptions about respective roles and capacities. For example, units responsible for external and internal communication barely feature in the literature on OECD agency development evaluation, which discusses communication in some detail while taking for granted which structures and staff members will actually do the communicating. Part of the problem may be systemic, reflecting the way the agencies are configured.

Yet the collaboration deficit should not be viewed as a *fait accompli*. Indeed, the increasing momentum behind results communication provides an unprecedented opportunity to move forward. As the London workshop concluded, there is much more common ground between evaluators and communicators than the available evidence suggests. DevCom members and their counterparts in EvalNet have recognised the need to build on this common ground and are committed to exploring and strengthening collaboration. In March 2007, DevCom members met in Bonn for an evaluation workshop which highlighted many of the key issues and challenges at

[19] 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.

hand. In June 2001, EvalNet published a survey on communicating evaluation results (discussed in greater detail below) that provided new insights into dynamics between communicators and evaluators in their respective agencies.

This led to an EvalNet programme of work in 2011-2012 on towards developing "good practice tools for communicating evaluation results to facilitate their use for learning and accountability". A subsequent EvalNet seminar held in April 2011 sought to understand how best to connect with policy makers, highlight innovative approaches to sharing evaluation results, and provide a platform for a communication perspective on evaluation. May of the questions discussed in the seminar, as well as in the 12th EvalNet meeting held from 23-24 June 2011, provide valuable input into the preparation of this paper.

This study documents challenges and identifies potential common ground between evaluators and communicators, showcases examples of collaboration, and proposes concrete ways of building synergies going forward. It draws on an extensive body of literature – from within the OECD but also from the wider development community – related to communicating evaluation results.

2. The evaluation perspective:

This section looks at the mandate and standards guiding OECD evaluators, appraises their track record in communicating development evaluation results, and highlights examples of recent collaboration. It also features detailed excerpts from the findings of the 2012 DevCom survey.

<u>Mandate and Standards:</u>

The DAC[20] defines development evaluation as "… the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed development intervention, its design, implementation and results. In the development context, evaluation refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of a development intervention". The aim of evaluation is "… to determine relevance and fulfilment of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of the practitioner and donor".

Timeliness, relevance and use are important elements of the definition, with the Standards stating the following: "The evaluation is designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users. Conclusions, recommendations and lessons are clear, relevant, targeted and actionable so that the evaluation can be used to achieve its intended learning and accountability objectives. The evaluation is delivered in time to ensure optimal use of the results. Systematic dissemination, storage and management of the evaluation report is endured to provide easy access to all development partners, to reach target audiences, and to maximise the learning benefits of the evaluation".

The Standards emphasise the importance of presenting evaluation findings "in an accessible format" and of systematically distributing the findings "internally and externally for learning and follow-up actions and to ensure transparency. In light of lessons emerging from the evaluation, additional interested parties in the wider development community are identified and targeted to maximise the use of relevant findings" (ibid).

[20] OECD (2010), *'DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation'*. DAC Guidelines and Reference Series.

‘Relevance’ (demand orientation and solution orientation) and ‘utility’ of evaluation findings come up time and time again as the factors that determine whether or not a given evaluation is worthwhile. UNICEF[21] defines ‘utility’ as “the extent to which an evaluation produces and disseminates reports that inform relevant audiences and have beneficial impact on their work”. ‘Utility’ is considered to be one of the key standards against which evaluation is measured.

Alongside the theoretical understandings of the purposes of evaluation, there is a growing body of literature related to communicating evaluation results. EvalNet, in particular, has been thinking about these issues for some time, starting in 2001 when it held a workshop in Tokyo that resulted in the publication of *‘Evaluation Feedback for Effective learning and Accountability’*.

In 2010 EvalNet conducted a survey[22] among its members which confirmed the use of evaluations to be emerging as a priority concern. To understand use, the study examined how evaluation departments distributed evaluations after they were completed. It found that DAC Peer Reviews of many countries, numerous discussions during EvalNet meetings, as well as studies on evaluation functions, “demonstrate a lack of attention to and use of evaluation findings” as “perhaps the primary area of weakness within the evaluation process today”. Similarly, Scheunpflug and McDonnell (2007) find reporting, communication and discussion of results to be “the most neglected part of the evaluation process”, albeit “probably the most crucial stage”.

An EvalNet seminar on ‘Using evidence to improve aid policies and demonstrate results’ was held back to back with a DAC Senior Level meeting in April 2011. The report of this meeting underlined that “the increasing scrutiny of results has created a growing need for better evidence on and better communication about results”. Building on this momentum, EvalNet is working with DevCom towards “developing good practice tools for communicating evaluation results to facilitate their use for learning and accountability”[23].

A key message from a recent review by DFID of different practices in communicating evaluation findings is that evaluation is driven by different imperatives. Accordingly, the evaluation purpose and intended audience make a difference in how DFID is able to communicate and what the goals of the communication are. Three distinct functions of evaluation are identified: “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; and evaluation as aid effectiveness: implying focus on lessons learned, knowledge management”[24].

While learning towards improved practice is widely acknowledged as a key function of evaluation, accountability to funders often overshadows other valid purposes of evaluation. Donors tend to be preoccupied with two kinds of challenges - using evaluation to measure

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21 UNICEF (2004), *‘Evaluation Report Standards’*. Evaluation Office, UNICEF HQ, September 2004.

22 EvalNet (2011), *‘Communicating Evaluation Results; Summary of Responses’*, June 2011.

23 EvalNet (2011b), *‘Communicating Evaluation Findings, Discussion Note’*. AGENDA ITEM II, for 12th Meeting, 23-24 June 2011.

24 OECD (2010), ‘Background note for discussion of PWB 2011/2012 Output 2; Communicating evaluation results. AGENDA ITEM IX. Future Work’. Prepared by EvalNet for 11th meeting, 16-17 November 2010.

attribution (causality between the action and an observed change in attitude or behaviour) and long-term effects; and how to develop the most coherent and appropriate evaluation policy for short-term awareness raising and learning activities outsourced to NGOs and grass-roots organisations[25].

Track record:
What has been the track record of OECD aid agency evaluation units in communicating the results of development evaluations?

A 2007 study of nine bilateral and multilateral aid agencies found that most of the units surveyed shared a number of common features and challenges and were at different stages of a similar journey "from a relatively straightforward model of project evaluation aimed at internal management and accountability, towards a more complex model of policy, country and partnership-led evaluation, which requires new skills, roles and organisational arrangements". The study noted that despite agreed frameworks and common standards (such as the DAC Criteria for Evaluation) there existed an 'institutional evaluation gap' – an apparent disconnect between the rhetoric on the strategic and growing importance of development evaluation, and evaluation in practice[26].

Despite this gap, the study found that most agencies were making efforts to ensure that their reports are available to specialist as well as non-specialist audiences[27]. Evaluation reports were following a common format (including an executive summary of findings) and were increasingly available in English and other key languages[28]. More and more dissemination was being done by CD-ROM, with a handful of copies printed out and distributed to specific target audiences (e.g. country programmes in DFID). There are also efforts to reach out to wider audiences, internally and externally – for example via dissemination seminars to discuss key findings.

The study also found increasing diversity in evaluation products – ranging from traditional reports to short synthesis papers and policy briefs, newsletter and e-bulletins, as well as annual reports summarising and assessing main evaluation activities and lessons learned[29]. The World Bank IEG was found to be a leader in communicating evaluation results, organising special events and conferences at headquarters and in-country, often in partnership with other donors and partner country governments. Some evaluation units were seeking to engage more with the media to disseminate their findings, via press releases and press conferences.

These findings are more or less consistent with the latest survey conducted by DevCom, which provides new insights into the state of collaboration between evaluators and communicators. While evaluators polled are unanimous in recognising the need for better communication of evaluation results to get messages across to policy makers and increase the utility of the results for concerned stakeholders:

[25] Scheunpflug and McDonnell 2007.
[26] Foresti *et al* 2007.
[27] For example, SIDA/UTV, DFID/EvD and other evaluation units organised regular seminars and were seeking to develop a more systematic work programme for communication and dissemination.
[28] DANIDA, for example, published all documentation in English, with the Danish version available in the case of particularly strategic or important evaluations (Foresti *et al* 2007).
[29] Such as the Annual Report of SIDA Evaluation Activities and World Bank Annual Report on Operations Evaluation (AROE).

- 67% of evaluators polled believe there is continuing tension between evaluation work and communication work in donor agencies;
- 56% of respondents agree that evaluation experts often consider communication efforts and "people stories" as simplistic and not fully reflective of the authenticity and rigour of evaluation work;
- 94% agree that communication professionals tend to view evaluation results as too technical and not easy to communicate to diverse audiences; and
- 67% agree that communicators find it hard to obtain evidence to convey stories about progress, in an era when high quality data is compulsory.

Furthermore:

- Only 39% of evaluators say they communicate regularly with communicators in their agency;
- 50% do so only occasionally; and
- 11% do not communicate at all[30].

Three reasons why evaluators say they do not collaborate with communicators

- Communication plans/ targets of evaluations not addressed or planned sufficiently in advance; lack of resources and tiredness at the end of evaluation processes; two different jobs that need expertise, and no sufficient communication expertise within evaluation teams, or links between the two teams.
- Problem of time, communication and resources.
- "We need to plan ahead more, if the [communication] team would let us know about events or key speeches, publications and things in advance, we could feed in relevant evaluation work and identify reports of interest, but usually we only hear about things after the fact, or we have to take the initiative. When they plan ahead (for example the release of the ODA figures) and have prepared some key messages, links, etc and share these with us then it is easier for us to help contribute to the broader effort"

Source: DevCom Survey October 2012

These findings suggest a poor culture of evaluation units or departments working with their communication counterparts[31]. The survey also finds that only a handful of OECD aid agencies have communication strategies, evaluation guidelines that specify communication, or guidelines for publishing results[32]. Many agencies have no institutional policies or guidelines for communicating evaluation results.

Challenges:

[30] In June 2011 EvalNet published the results of a survey conducted among its members. When asked what aspects of communication evaluation results they were most interested in, only 4 out of 21 respondents identified "evaluators and communicators: ways of working together" as a priority. In contrast, the top priority, highlighted by 14 respondents, was "innovative approaches to communicating, including use of new technologies". Next was "communicating with policy makers" (11 respondents), followed by "identifying and targeting different audiences" and "sharing results with partner countries audiences" (10 respondents each); "sharing failure negative findings" (8 respondents); and "working with the media" (5 respondents).

[31] On the question of how evaluators work with communicators in their respective agencies, a 2007 EvalNet survey found that of 17 out of 21 evaluators that responded: 11 reported having a communication unit in their agency; experiences of collaboration varied – from working closely through all stages of the evaluation; to working with the units to disseminate findings; to working together on specific protocols; some respondents felt their communication units were only interested in managing the consequences of negative findings, or only in disseminating positive results (PR); and some evaluation units sidestepped communication units and communicated directly and independently with policy makers.

[32] For example, the Dutch government has guidelines for communicating evaluation results that each Ministry is obliged to comply with (survey respondent, October 2012).

When asked to identify the major challenges of communicating evaluation findings, evaluators provided a range of interesting responses, summarised as follows:

- Achieving clarity of message and avoiding technical-speak.
- Sticking to the stated desire to publish reports of no more than 20 pages and distilling a complex series of factors into a narrative that is clear to a lay reader.
- Striking the right balance between formulating easy-to-access information for the public to digest, whilst staying true to the often complex nature of evaluation findings.
- Translating evaluation results to ordinary informed people and communicating in a fast and efficient way.
- Ensuring that key stakeholders know and use the evaluation results.
- Identifying the key findings which will vary depending on the purpose for communication and the target audience.
- Differing mind-set between evaluation and communication departments/ units.
- Rendering the key messages from evaluation reports across in user friendly language for the public.
- Ensuring the timely communication of results and recommendations to policy makers.
- Exploring new communication means/tools such as the social media in order to reach a wider audience.
- Connecting with the various audiences in a constrained telecommunications environment in Africa (beyond electronic dissemination, we need to use different channels such as face-to-face engagements, printed documents, mobile phones and radio to deliver evaluation results.
- Confidentiality of development practices.

These findings resonate with the results of a June 2011 survey conducted by EvalNet among its members, which identified the following challenges faced by evaluators in communicating evaluation results:

- Using evaluation results as tools to learn from
- The way that evaluators are recruited and trained means they have very weak communication skills
- Decision makers are so busy they don't have time to look at evidence
- Low political interest in evidence and learning from evaluation
- Defensive reactions by those being exposed to the evaluation if development needs have been identified
- Ability to present concrete and relevant recommendations that are useful to policy makers and those working with the subject matter on a daily basis
- Targeting different audiences at the right time
- How to communicate with partner countries?
- Articulating sharp and broadly relevant messages from complex findings
- Finding the right format to communicate results (to whom? Best channel? Most effective media? Best format, tools?

An additional challenge, highlighted during a presentation on recent findings on communication, public opinion and development awareness in DAC peer reviews[33], is

[33] The DAC peer reviews on public opinion and development communication cover 4 areas: level of public awareness of development issues and public support for aid and how it is measured; strategy and budget for

"striking a balance between reporting honestly about where ODA has not been so successful and lessons have been learned without discrediting the aid effort"[34].

Key audiences identified by evaluators for communication of evaluation results:

- The Government, the public, co-operation partners, development co-operation practitioners & academia. Communication with the public is often facilitated by the Communications Department. Communication with co-operation partners, practitioners and academia is less structured.
- Parliament: We issue the evaluation report with an evaluation newsletter to parliament. Parliament also receives a management response by the minister(s); Press: we provide the report, newsletter and management response of the minister(s) to them Academia: same; General public: has access to the same documents through the ministry's website. The evaluation department will set up its own website this year to improve dissemination of the evaluation results. We have also a Twitter strategy.
- We aim for our reports to be read by expert and non-expert alike. This creates a challenge for us not to dumb down our work for the first type of reader but to explain the issues in simple enough terms for the second type.
- Senior managers and internal policy makers, the general Irish public, national politicians, national media, key stakeholders in Africa especially national Governments.
- The Japanese public (external) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)(internal). We determine whether the key messages are communicated through checking the public voices posted on our website (external) and following up the response measures to the recommendations drawn from the past evaluation (internal).
- Inside the ministry itself, including embassies; development partners at the government and other levels, including civil society; NGOs, research organizations, independent consultants, students, other ministries and institutions, wider audience of informed citizens, etc.
- Policymakers, Board members, Ministries and governmental agencies, think tanks, Academia, CSOs.
- Key audiences are program staff and managers and decision-makers at different levels.
- Parliament (and the people that it represents); policy makers of the ministry of foreign affairs and NGOs; research/knowledge institutions; media. We do not create different messages that are tailor made to certain target groups, unfortunately.

Source: DevCom Survey October 2012

A significant insight is that communication and dissemination of evaluation results can generate tensions in relation to the other aims and objectives of evaluation units[35]. The report notes that "[s]ometimes, the pressure to communicate effectively and in a simple and accessible manner to diverse audiences could result in dilution of the more challenging findings or oversimplification of the more technical or rigorous aspects of evaluation. This could undermine the objective of impartiality in the evaluation process".

Examples of Collaboration:

A respondent to the 2012 DevCom survey identified the following critical success factors for effective collaboration in communicating evaluation findings: consideration of key communication messages from the start of drafting of the evaluation report; understanding the narrative or "story" of each report from initial findings stage and discussing it with communication colleagues; and an active feedback loop from the communication colleagues on accessibility of language before and after publication to ensure drafting is clear.

In responding to the 2012 survey, 13 evaluators provided examples of collaboration with communicators. Most of these involved either evaluators keeping their communication

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public awareness and for communicating the vision – plus evidence of impact; mainstreaming development education in school curriculum; and public consultation on policies and strategies.

[34] Ward 2011.

[35] Foresti *et al* 2007.

colleagues in the loop on key evaluation studies, or examples of communication team members disseminating results at the request of evaluators. Note that some of the examples of good practices summarised in the bullets below reflect points of tension between the two groups of experts:

- Optimal presentation of reports and subsequent dissemination
- SIDA press officers assist in getting key evaluation findings published in newspapers. A good example was string of articles and editorials in Swedish press following evaluations of Swedish development cooperation with Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Laos; SIDA communicators also help organise dissemination events
- Evaluation and Audit Unit is engaging with the Communication Unit to develop a new website for the Department
- "At my organisation, communication experts disseminate evaluation results based on the request from evaluation experts. There is no tension between evaluation experts and communication experts. Recently, we opened a website to provide information on ODA projects and reader-friendly evaluation reports to increase the visibility of ODA. This website is a good example of the collaboration between both experts"
- "Every time [an] evaluation is published, the communication experts [produce] an article [for] our development news and internet pages, meant for informed citizens, and also write a short presentation [of] our evaluation reports published [on the] internet. They also [write] articles about our seminars and other happenings we recommend whenever it is possible for them. We have a lot of informal interaction".
- "[On] some occasions we contract communication wizards (with a background in foreign policy) to write a two-pager on the basis of an evaluation report. The choice [of the person] is very crucial for the success... of the two-pager. We introduced this two-pager to facilitate easy access to the core message of the evaluation. Furthermore I recently started to talk with visual communication specialists to see whether we can produce short videos to better communicate the results of the evaluation report".
- "Keeping communication staff in the loop on key evaluation study milestones, any consultation steps, when we plan to reach out to media outlets, when we use other channels (e.g. workshops, social media). A key factor is to avoid surprises. Even when there are difficult messages emerging from evaluative work, it is best to give our comm. colleagues a heads-up on what the findings entail".
- "We are using derivative synthesis products for dissemination and outreach, and we deploy multiple channels: website and social network platforms, email newsletter/alerts, as well as other means such as presentations, learning events, events tracking and targeting. Success factors: continuous awareness raising, testimonials, and users feedback".
- "We work occasionally work with our communications team, though they are often over stretched and cannot provide much input. For instance, we asked for help with a press release but they did not provide any substantive comments or suggestions on how to disseminate the release. What we find works well on communicating evaluation findings: having short, policy messages and briefs (content that is easier to share), combining social media (Twitter) and targeted email send outs to evaluation communities, targeting specific evaluation findings/briefs to events, NGO/CSOs, etc. working on that topic, using interesting facts, unusual findings or questions in the Tweets to draw people to our website pages on specific topics (governance, anti-corruption, water & sanitation)".
- "I am a communication expert within an evaluation unit at a bilateral donor, so I work with evaluators in my unit as well as with the communications staff in the corporate area of the agency. So I am probably biased when I say that I think that the collaborations between the

communication experts (e.g. me) and the evaluators have been successful. I think a big part of this is about relationship building and making sure that I have a good rapport with all the evaluations staff in my unit, and making sure that they both understand the value of communication and also that I am "more" than just a [communication] person, that I can understand the value of evaluations too. In terms of working with the corporate communication staff, it's kind of similar - making it clear that our [communication] work is different and has a different audience than the public and media, which is where they're really focused".

3. The communication perspective:

Having looked at the evaluation perspective, this section examines the mandate and standards guiding OECD communicators, appraises their track record in communicating development evaluation results, and highlights examples of recent collaboration. As in the previous section, it draws heavily on findings from the 2012 DevCom survey.

Mandate and Standards:

Communicators in OECD agencies perform two main sets of overlapping functions: communicating about results and communicating for results[36].

Communicating about results, often categorized as 'external communication', 'corporate communication' or 'public relations' is at the core of the mandate of many OECD aid agency communicators. It is largely about using evidence to communicate to taxpayers that aid is working. It seeks to strengthen donor accountability to decision-maker, parliaments and donor publics. It is largely directed at stakeholders external to the agency in question[37].

Communicating for results, otherwise known as 'communication for development' or 'programme communication', is used as a management tool for internal learning and engagement of stakeholders (Irish Aid 2010). It is a tool as well as a process for the effective delivery of aid programmes. It privileges a role for communication throughout the programme cycle, as opposed to exclusively as a dissemination function at the end of the programme. Its emphasis is on harnessing communication as a tool for internal learning towards more joined-up action (da Costa 2009).

There is wide divergence among agencies on how communication is mandated, resourced, staffed and implemented. Differences in mandate and resource endowment create different opportunity structures for communicators in different DAC government agencies or ministries. Communication departments that are larger, better resourced and more integrated within their respective organisations have stronger leverage – in influencing the institutional agenda-setting process; in accessing the kind of results information needed from programme colleagues; and in

[36] da Costa 2009. Scheunpflug & McDonnell (2007) identify three approaches – development information/communication; advocacy and campaigning; and development/global education – each of which has distinct functions which are at the same time linked and overlapping in the sense that they all influence society towards greater social justice and they all deal with learning. While advocacy and campaigning goes beyond the relatively narrow remit of most OECD aid agency communication units, they tend to invest significantly in external communication and development education.

[37] da Costa 2009.

commissioning the kind of market research they need to develop targeted communication to donor publics[38].

While aid agency communication units usually have their own budgets for communication <u>about</u> results, activities related to communicating <u>for</u> results tend to be managed by implementing agencies (a 2007 survey found that such activities are managed by aid agency communication units in less than half of OECD countries). In larger donors or implementation agencies, communicating <u>for</u> results programmes are managed by project formulation and implementation departments and programme and advisory staff, sometimes on an *ad-hoc* basis. Field officers are also responsible for these tasks, as well as regional or geographic offices of implementation agencies. Project managers can also do communication projects on an ad-hoc basis. Communicating <u>for</u> results for tends to be financed from the core programme or project budget[39].

Some OECD aid agency communicators favour Development Education, a strategy aimed at stimulating the general public's interest in development issues. For example, 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"[40]. Since it focuses on raising donor public awareness, Development Education helps aid agencies to communicate <u>about</u> 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 external relations.

<u>Track record:</u>
What has been the track record of communicators in communicating evaluation results? The latest DevCom survey confirms that while there has been progress, a degree of mutual mistrust gets in the way of enhanced collaboration between communicators and their evaluation colleagues:

- 47% of communicators polled believe there is continuing tension between evaluation work and communication work in donor agencies;
- 74% of communicators believe that evaluation experts often consider communication efforts and "people stories" as simplistic and not fully reflective of the authenticity and rigour of evaluation work;
- 74% of communicators agree that there is a recognition among evaluators on the need for better communication of evaluation results in order to get the message across to policy makers and increase useful outcomes for concerned stakeholders;
- 68% of communicators agree that communication professionals tend to view evaluation results as too technical and not easy to communicate to diverse audiences; and
- Communicators are almost unanimous (95%) that they find it hard to obtain evidence to convey stories about progress, in an era when high quality data is compulsory.

Furthermore:

- Only 3 out of 19 communicators polled (16%) say they communicate regularly with evaluators in their agency;
- 13 (68%) acknowledge that they communicate only occasionally; and

[38] OECD Development Centre (2007), *Communicating Results: Experiences and Challenges in DAC Countries*.
[39] Zimmerman 2007.
[40] Zimmerman 2007.

- 3 (16%) do not communicate with evaluators at all[41].

As with the responses of evaluators highlighted in the previous section, these findings suggest that while communicators are only slightly more open to engaging with their evaluation counterparts than vice versa, the reality is one of each group working in effective silos. Communicators validate the views of evaluators that only a handful of agencies have communication strategies, evaluation guidelines that specify communication, or guidelines for publishing results. The exceptions are that:

- One agency has an M& E policy that mentions communication and has a communication strategy mentioning results communication.
- EuropeAid publishes all its evaluation reports online.
- One agency is in the process of elaborating a model for results communication.
- One agency has a global communication strategy but not specifically targeted to results.
- Another agency does not have guidelines but is obliged by a Public Information Policy and Evaluation Policy to post all evaluation reports on the external website. The Evaluation Policy requires that evaluation reports be distributed internally and copies or summaries sent to the Board of Directors. Reports are posted on internal systems, including an Evaluation library so that operations staff can view past reports, and run searches for them.

Three reasons why communicators say they do not collaborate with evaluators

- We have not yet set aside the necessary time and money to do this; we are only now setting up a web site which will be able to document results from the field with inputs directly from the field (partly resulting from evaluation reports); evaluation has so far been a closed circuit, not communicating with the Communication department and publishing their results on a stand-alone basis with support only for lay-out and print/web.
- Evaluation reports might be too technical to communicate. There is limited time and capacity, and other priorities.
- Problems of oversight and fears among amongst evaluation experts that they will expose themselves.

Challenges:

An often-highlighted challenge in communicating evaluation findings from the perspective of communicators is the widespread a perception that evaluation reports are too technical, not easy to translate into succinct messages, not new and not sufficiently actionable. Communicators say they it hard to grapple with volumes of highly technical reports and would prefer evaluation findings in forms that make for more creative dissemination and interactive exchange.

Another challenge many communicators are grappling with is how to harness new communications tools and applications (such as social media, blogs and video) to optimise their engagement with the public to share evaluation evidence. Most feel that new and social media offer the potential to register much greater impact that before and are many in the process of experimenting to find out what works best for their particular agencies and audiences.

[41] In June 2011 EvalNet published the results of a survey conducted among its members. When asked what aspects of communication evaluation results they were most interested in, only 4 out of 21 respondents identified “evaluators and communicators: ways of working together” as a priority. In contrast, the top priority, highlighted by 14 respondents, was “innovative approaches to communicating, including use of new technologies”. Next was “communicating with policy makers” (11 respondents), followed by “identifying and targeting different audiences” and “sharing results with partner countries audiences” (10 respondents each); “sharing failure negative findings” (8 respondents); and “working with the media” (5 respondents).

By and large, the challenges faced by communicators are well known and will not be revisited here in any detail. Some have been referred to earlier in the paper, and others – stemming from a specific question asked to communicators during the survey, will be discussed in the section on communicating 'negative' or 'sensitive' results.

Examples of Collaboration:

In responding to the 2012 survey, 13 aid agency communicators, including from Sweden and Belgium, provided the following examples of collaboration with evaluators:

- One good example was the presentation of long-term evaluations of development cooperation between Sweden and Viet-Nam, Laos and Sri Lanka. The evaluation unit and communications department collaborated to formulate messages and the release generated great impact both in stakeholder communities and with the general public
- See examples in Think Pieces of IDB/DevCom Seminar "Communicating Development Results".
- Evaluation experts asked us how to incorporate ['communicable'] data in projects' annual reports, which was a good initiative. The [question] is how the experts in the field [should] fill out these chapters of the annual reports, as they do not necessarily have the same understanding of ['communicable'] data, nor do these contributions provide the full story. I'm afraid communicators will always have to dig into the stories themselves to get what they really need. But evaluation and communication experts should definitely work more closely together.
- Revamp of the evaluation pages.
- Recently we had 3 impact evaluations on results of development cooperation in 3 Asian countries. We organised interesting seminars with participants from those countries, wrote articles, tweeted from the seminars etc. It was a good example.
- Occasionally at a presentation of the results of a country evaluation to a large public, I asked to the [evaluation] consultant to check my [PowerPoint] presentation and to be present to help answering to the eventual questions.
- We collaborated to review the top lessons from past projects. I revised and rewrote material so that it was reader friendly and that the message [could be] conveyed in a brief text. The evaluation experts reviewed the material I had prepared and offered changes if they felt that the real message was not strong enough or misconstrued. We also collaborated to present the findings to the operations staff. This was successful because we met the group in person and the evaluation expert made a brief presentation, following which we asked for feedback and impressions. The operations staff thought that our proposal to produce frequently updated lesson summaries written in a simple way would be helpful, and help them to learn from the past experience.
- The latest report on effectiveness, 'SECO takes stock', is a good example of how evaluation and communication have worked together.
- The Evaluation Division is currently using a number of communication tools to disseminate evaluation knowledge (e.g. common look and feel reports, common look and feel one-page highlight sheets/summaries, announcement on the completion of evaluations on EntreNous and Knowledge Networks). Factors include: strong working relationship with communication advisors; communication branch's understanding of the importance of evaluation and the necessity to discuss not only the positive but also the negative findings of the evaluation; understanding of the technical nature of the report.

- Communication of positive results, using reports as argument in favour of development co-operation; and on the other hand, using reports to show that we DO evaluate, learn lessons, to improve results.
- We work together to release an evaluation (on Norway's role in Sri Lanka peace process) which we expect to generate a lot of media coverage. The evaluation experts had time to prepare good press releases, adjust the message so it may be understandable for people not into this subject beforehand.

A multi-pronged toolbox to spread the influence of evaluation results

The Asian Development Bank's Information Disclosure Policy compels it to communicate evaluation results, whether good or bad. An Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) aims to ensure that evaluation findings are communicated without interference. The IEG maintains a team of its own communication specialists, who work in complete autonomy from the Bank's corporate communication and external relations unit. The team within IEG has developed a series of innovative technological applications as part of a multi-pronged communication and outreach toolbox aimed at making evaluations more influential in the design and implementation of future initiatives. These include:

- *Management Action Records System*, an electronic tool for tracking key recommendations of evaluations. The system is able to identify which recommendations have been subject to Management action, and brings pending recommendations to the attention of the responsible officers.
- Targeted face-to-face meetings with senior officials, staff management, and key stakeholders
- Presentations, seminars, workshops aimed at specific audiences
- Enabling tele-presence when necessary through video/teleconference, Skype and other technologies to widen participation
- Tracking of events (via electronic calendar) to which the IEG can target evaluation findings and lessons to have an impact on policy/decision makers and major stakeholders
- Tracking the calendar of Board meetings, and targeting evaluation pieces and information briefs to decision makers
- Website platform with modern web content management, multimedia content (text, audio, video, photo) and easy content sharing for all evaluation landing pages, reports, derivative products, and other evaluation resources
- Internal communications through existing enterprise/corporate platforms (daily e-news, IT portals), talks, briefings
- Monthly electronic newsletter that reaches 2000 subscribers
- Press Releases, media relations, and media interviews, as well as Op-Eds by the leadership
- Deployment of social media platforms for engagement with the public beyond disclosure, with the use of these tools to promote learning lessons from evaluations and raise awareness
- Production of derivative evaluation products and dissemination of syntheses to promote learning from evaluations (2-page Learning Curves and 4-page Learning Lessons)
- Evaluation database (open data) accessible by the public through the internet. This is searchable by several parameters and downloadable.

Source: Bestari 2012

4. Communicating 'negative' or 'sensitive' findings:

Some of the strongest views expressed in the responses to the 2012 survey relate to the issue of communicating 'negative' or 'sensitive' development results. When asked to highlight key challenges and share stories that illustrate their experience in engaging with donor publics and other stakeholders around negative development results, communicators seem to suggest that there are considerable disincentives within their respective agencies to reporting bad results. The following responses validate this overall conclusion:

- We have so far not had any experience in that field but we anticipate strong opposition from our ministry if we do envisage communication negative results.
- Since media coverage of development cooperation often is critical - we are reluctant to use our own negative results.
- When selecting projects on which we would like to communicate in our annual results report, there will always be at least one where the project manager prefers not to communicate. In my view, there is no such project with only good results and outcomes -

there will always be elements that went wrong or not as planned. I guess there is still a huge way to go to promote honest communication, explaining that it increases your credibility. And without credibility, you're nowhere.

- Lack of institutional or political will to recognise that "it doesn't work". Accountability towards the public – if we show that we have spent money without getting results people will wonder why we spend so much money in development projects abroad when people are also suffering in our country.
- We are focusing on communicating positive results. So we do not proactively communicate the negative results.
- It is sometimes not so easy to raise negative results. I remember the case of a member of the reference group who has participated to the formulation of a strategy and to the implementation of this strategy was reluctant to hear criticisms. I remember that he refused to endorse the report.
- One criticism that surfaced about our lessons database was that the findings were predominantly negative. It was felt that good experiences gained from projects which had positive outcomes were not included and that this was disappointing for the users and creators of the lessons. There seems to be a divide amongst evaluation experts with those of certain schools of thought wishing to rely purely on negative outcomes to come up with evaluation findings. I believe there needs to be a better balance.
- We are currently probably too hesitant in communicating negative results.
- If we don't share negative results, we are perceived as not being transparent. If we do, it has to be done in a way so that we are not perceived as ineffective. I cannot think of a time when we were […] encouraged to share a negative result. However, our open data portal does publish data about programs that, upon analysis, may show a less than successful endeavour.
- That negative stories will be embraced by the people that are against aid to argue that all aid has failed. It's hard to get the story through that even though some aid fails, that it does not apply to all aid. And it's much easier to get attention on failures than on successes. Our former Minister of International Development said in Parliament once when facing one of the stories of failed aid, that no paper will clear their front page and write "Successful project for Women in Uganda! Read all about it!".
- Transparency does not necessarily increase trust. If results are negative and the money spent was a lot, it increases doubt about the possibility of aid supporting development, for instance the private sector development instruments evaluation we had in the Netherlands. 70% successful projects is actually high, but if you lack the knowledge and background to judge these results, it sounds bad...
- It is not a particular challenge. We shall also communicate negative findings. Yet, as in all cases, there must be enough time to prepare a communication plan for the findings.
- Negative results can too easily provide ammunition for critics, and reinforce negative stereotypes amongst a sceptical public- especially if not properly framed.

On the other hand, evaluators point the finger of blame at communicators. One respondent suggested that the failure of communicators and evaluators to work together was directly related to evaluations that convey critical or even negative messages, even if they are grounded in evidence.

The evaluator feels that "[the] communication department's desire (or natural attitude) is to convey success stories. This also to 'protect' the policy makers [and] politicians". The same respondent appears to resent efforts to strengthen collaboration between evaluators and communicators when (s)he states: "In the past the [evaluation department] held its own press conference and issued its own press release when an evaluation report was published. This approach has been discouraged if not 'forbidden'."

There is a strong suggestion from the above response that communication units are primarily in the business of applying a 'positive spin' and are reluctant to tell it like it is mainly because their job is to 'protect' senior Government officials and politicians. This discordant viewpoint is consistent with the finding[42] that open discussions about evaluation results can be tense, especially when there is weak mutual trust. Tensions and fears about negative results are commonplace where future funding depends on the success of the activity. In their view, "this can be alleviated if the evaluator, the practitioner and the donor agree on the purpose of the evaluation, the criteria and indicators, from the very start".

A survey conducted by EvalNet in 2011 sheds more light on examples of how evaluators in aid agencies have grappled with the difficult challenge of communicating negative results. It found that:

- Australia has been publishing an annual review of development effectiveness for the past 3-4 years. Its experience in communicating negative results has been "largely negative and difficult".
- USAID has extensive experience, finding that: "Our challenge is to continue to remind them that our institution should learn as much (or more) from negative results as from positive ones".
- Japan confirmed that evaluation findings it made public included negative or challenging comments. "In some cases, policy makers put pressure on the […] evaluation unit to try to delete the negative results mentioned by external evaluators in the draft report, ignoring the independence of evaluation. However, once the final reports were made public, they didn't make a further protest on them. In other cases, some external evaluators tend to hesitate making negative evaluations"
- The Netherlands experience relates to the partially critical evaluation of its Africa policy. "No matter how balanced the evaluation department conveys the message (positive and critical aspects) invariably the press, parliament and other actors cherry pick among the critical findings. This may result in a caricature image of the evaluation. I am afraid that nothing can be done to change the situation – no matter how well you communicate evaluation results"

The above suggests that if evaluators and communicators are to earn each other's trust and build stronger collaboration, they will have to arrive at a shared understanding of the necessity as well as feasibility of communicating results deemed 'negative' or 'sensitive'.

5. Evaluating the impact of donor communication strategies

The rationale for including this section is the clear link between agency communication and evaluation communication. Aid agency communication units are more often than not the main organisational unit responsible for external communication, meaning that they by default serve as the Ministry or Agency's channel for official messages destined for the public. In a few agencies, communication units are responsible for communicating development evaluation results to the public.

[42] Scheunpflug and McDonnell 2007.

In theory, most OECD communicators should perform this function on the basis of detailed communication strategies and plans, which identify communication objectives, audiences, activities and tactics to guide their work. In a results-driven world, and as with all other aspects of the agency's output and influence on outcome, the effectiveness of these communication strategies would be subject to periodic monitoring and evaluation. Communication strategy documents developed by development agencies should routinely include a results framework and details of how the impact of the strategy would be monitored.

Communication evaluation[43] is important "because it is the only way to control if you are reaching your goals and have used your resources effectively". Because such evaluations are costly "you have to make sure that the costs and benefits are in the right relationship". Evaluations of this nature are also complex "because the communications processes themselves are extremely complex". To a greater or lesser extent these three dynamics apply to development evaluations. Furthermore, many of the same tools, methods and methodologies[44] are used in both cases.

Challenges:

Evaluation of communication poses considerable conceptual and methodological challenges. One reason many OECD agency communicators are rarely in a position to measure their impact is that they are not equipped to conduct or commission a longitudinal study. To effectively measure the impact of a communication system or campaigns, a baseline is needed to benchmark the point from which improvement is being tracked.

The literature has identified a number of challenges of evaluating the impact of communication. According to a recent study[45] these include:

- The challenge of attribution of impact in a complex and rapidly changing world
- Donors often wanting to see results in an unreasonably short time frame
- Donors reluctant to fund longitudinal studies, although these are the best way of assessing lasting and sustainable change
- The high cost of impact assessment – inadequate funding, weak capacity, weak resources, not enough time to undertake assessment of communication activities
- M&E is approached in a vertical as opposed to integrated manner – few examples of M&E and impact assessment integrated into the overall cycle, including project/ programme design
- The complexity of change – social and behavioural change needs to be assessed against a moving baseline, which is inconsistent with dominant organisational practice

[43] Three types of communication evaluation are identified: Process evaluation – which investigates whether the right people to the right things at the right time (and should be conducted on an on-going basis); Efficiency analysis, which focuses on the relationship between input and output/outcome (between resources used and effectiveness); Effectiveness analysis – which focuses on measuring the effects of particular communication interventions (Voelker, D 2007).

[44] Key approaches, methodologies and methods for evaluating communication impact include case studies, Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal, Rapid Rural Appraisal, Most Significant Change technique, Outcome Mapping, and Ethnographic Action Research (Lennie and Tacchi 2011).

[45] Lennie, J and J. Tacchi (2011), 'United Nations Inter-agency Resource Pack on research, Monitoring and Evaluation in Communication for Development', report on a literature review and Consultations with Expert Reference Group and UN Focal Points on C4D. February 2011.

Solignac-Lecomte's[46] list of the top donor challenges in evaluating their own public awareness/ development education activities is consistent with the above:

- How to measure impact
- Attribution: causal link between observed change and specific activity
- Resource constraints
- Indicators: process indicators, outcome indicators, short-term, long-term and indicators comparable between different activities
- Culture of evaluation: how to change behaviour?
- Awareness-raising not treated as seriously as 'development cooperation programmes' by agencies/ ministries; so less managerial demand for results

Ultimately, evaluations have limited potential for assessing the impact of an activity on public awareness and learning. Public opinion polls may provide indicators about awareness, which can be tested for correlations with awareness raising and learning strategies. But opinion surveys are not always the magic solution as they are rarely conducted under rigorous scientific conditions (i.e. longitudinally, before and after the intervention) due to high cost, time and often poor planning. Surveys also have the tendency to be captured by political efforts to seek endorsement of policies. For these reason polling is not always the best approach to evaluating a communication strategy[47].

<u>What the survey says:</u>
On the basis of the above, it is logical to assume that communication units would have an interest in draw on the skills and knowledge of their evaluation colleagues to provide expertise in helping determine what kind of evaluation is needed, framing the scope of the terms of reference, identifying potential evaluators, etc. With this in mind, and as another way of gauging the extent of collaboration between the two groups, the 2012 DevCom survey posed related questions to both evaluators and communicators.

Communicators were asked whether their agencies systematically evaluate the impact of its communication efforts on a regular basis, and if so whether or not the communication unit drew on the expertise of evaluation colleagues. More than 50% of the 17 communicators responded negatively to the first question. A few respondents reported monitoring activities such as reviewing website hits, media reports, attendance and feedback. One communication unit conducts small-scale evaluations of campaigns and projects. The same unit is in the process of reviewing the impact of its communication effort going back several years. But overall, the finding points to a major deficit – the lack of systematic evaluation of communication impact[48].

In response to the second question, the majority of communication units that evaluate their impact systematically do so in-house (i.e. within the communication unit itself). One unit commissions expertise from outside the agency. Not a single communicator reported drawing on evaluation expertise from inside the agency.

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[46] Solignac Lecomte, H-B (2007), 'Development Communication, Advocacy and Education; Tips and Tools for Improving Evaluation – Introduction', presentation at DevCom Informal Experts workshop, Bonn, 19 March 2007.

[47] For examples of good practice in evaluating information, communication and development education, drawn from a DevCom Bonn workshop, see Scheunpflug and McDonnell 2007, pp.20-22.

[48] The European Commission appears to be the exception that defies the rule. A recent evaluation of its communication and visibility is accessible here.

Evaluators were asked the extent to which their unit or department was involved in evaluating the impact of their agency's internal and external communication. A second question sought to establish whether, for example, evaluators received requests from communication experts to help them conduct of conceptualise communication evaluations.

Again, the responses point to a significant collaboration deficit. Of the 18 responses, only one suggested collaboration between evaluators and communicators in evaluating communication impact: "Not much so far, but the communication department makes self-assessments and the impact of communication is also discussed in the development policy steering group. Second question, yes we do". In contrast to this positive experience, however, most of the respondents had never been involved in such assessments, and had never received requests for help.

The above evidence again speaks to the need for communicators and evaluators to find ways to work together more consistently. Working together on evaluating the impact of agency communication is one concrete way of deepening collaboration. DANIDA's evaluation department, for example, developed and published a handbook for evaluating communication that has been widely used in Denmark, including by non-governmental organisations.

6. Partner country perspectives:

As implied in the introductory section of this study, efforts to deepen partner country involvement in evaluation, communicating evaluation results or indeed the wider results agenda have been slow in taking off. This remains the *status quo* despite the widespread consensus, enshrined in the Paris Declaration, around the need for country ownership and leadership of the development agenda.

The challenge is not new. An EvalNet workshop on *'Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability'*, held in Tokyo in 2000, highlighted "the need for much fuller involvement of developing country partners in the evaluation and learning process". The workshop report added: "Participation and dialogue needs to start right at the beginning of the project cycle rather than getting tacked on at the end, or squeezed out because of time constraints".

A decade later, a study of EvalNet members' development evaluation resources and systems found that "while early discussions [in EvalNet] focused on strengthening the evaluation function of its members through capacity building, policy making and institutional development in donor countries, issues of partner country capacity and involvement have now come to the fore." The study found dissemination to depend on and reflect the overall purpose and differing types of evaluations. Some two-thirds of member evaluation policies defined agency learning (as opposed to building partner country capacity) as among the top goals for evaluation departments.

As a result, staff and management at donor headquarters and in the field were considered the key stakeholders in distribution of findings (via reports, workshops, summaries etc). Units that did a lot of joint work with partner countries were more likely to systematically distribute evaluation findings to stakeholders in partner countries. While over half of members units sent evaluation findings to civil society in donor countries, only seven included civil society groups in partner countries in their follow-up efforts. Similarly, 55% reported sending evaluation findings to their own parliaments (as mandated by law in some cases) while only five members distributed reports to legislative bodies in partner countries. Thirteen members (34%) distributed evaluation findings to the intended beneficiaries of their agency's/bank's development activities in partner countries.

Overall, the 2010 EvalNet study provides a mixed picture. Even when evaluation findings are disseminated to or in partner countries, this is done on a top-down basis with little involvement of partner country governments and other stakeholders (aside from limited engagement with local civil society). On the basis of the findings of the study, EvalNet is interested in exploring feasible approaches to involving partner countries, addressing the following questions:

- At what stage should partner countries be involved?
- What are the capacity constraints to be addressed?
- What is the state of partner country evaluation systems and how feasible it is to use them?
- How can capacity development and partner-led evaluation be better and more strategically supported?

To a large extent, these questions and challenges are similar to those raised by DevCom around the role that partner countries should play in communicating development results. The question of partner country capacity looms large. As has been observed previously, partner countries find themselves in a situation of being committed to implementing the Paris Agenda but lacking the capacity to effectively do so. Added to this, the proliferation of donor reporting mechanisms and aid instruments at country level constitutes a sizeable transaction cost to partner country aid management. In such an environment, few partner country aid ministries have as yet taken steps to integrate results communication in their work[49].

There are steps that DevCom and its collaborators (including EvalNet) can take, and in some cases capacity building is firmly on the agenda. The Communities of Practice (CoPs) that developed out of the OECD Working Group on Managing for Development Results (MfDR) are a good example of what can be done regionally to stimulate learning, build capacity and share knowledge. There are also evaluation-focused CoPs that can be tapped into. The Irish Government has undertaken interesting pilot experiments on communicating for and about results in countries such as Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda. Lessons from such efforts should be reviewed to assess how best they can be applied to the challenge of communicating evaluation results in partner countries.

7. Common Challenges, Common Ground:

This study has sought to document the dynamics surrounding the communication of evaluation results. Drawing on extensive operational literature as well as 'hard' evidence from surveys, the paper has provided a detailed snapshot of the state of collaboration between OECD aid agency evaluators and communicators, documented challenges and highlighted numerous examples of good practice.

The overarching conclusion is that while the state of collaboration leaves a lot to be desired, there is genuine interest on both sides in working more closely together – because there is common cause, there are common challenges, and there is common ground:

[49] da Costa 2008.

- *Accountability vs Learning:* Both evaluators and communicators are affected by the tensions between communicating evaluation results for accountability and communicating these results to promote learning.

- *Attribution vs contribution:* Both communicators and evaluators face the challenge of demonstrating the impact of their agency's work and showing that aid is working. Both recognise that direct attribution is often impossible and are getting to grips with how to communicate contribution in ways that different audiences will deem credible.

- *Developing a compelling narrative:* Both recognise that the best evaluations are those that make for a compelling and credible narrative that tells the story in all its complexity. As such, there is a consensus of sorts that 'hard', numerical evidence must be combined with qualitative evidence. There is an agreement that mixed methods are probably more suitable to explaining the impact of complex development interventions to different audiences than purely scientific approaches.

- *Understanding diverse audiences:* Both are grappling with the challenge of communicating evaluation results to different audiences, and both understand that for each audience a specific set of activities, products and tactics is required.

- *Engaging, not just disseminating:* Both communicators and evaluators share a strong client orientation, as well as an understanding that engagement – and not merely dissemination – is the way forward.

- *Addressing capacity deficits:* There are skills and capacity deficits on both sides. Evaluators would like to have more communication-oriented expertise in their teams. Communicators lack the ability to process and visualise data in ways that will make evaluation findings compelling to different audiences.

- *Working in resource-constrained environments:* Both evaluation and communication units suffer from agency-wide resource constraints that impinge on their ability to deliver according to their mandates.

- *In the Results Team:* Evaluators and communicators are natural 'results team' partners. Results have to be credible and results have to be communicable and communicated. In instances where agencies have formalised 'results teams', the two groups of experts will always be key players in such teams.

These are a few examples of common cause, common challenges and common ground between communicators and evaluators. On this basis, what needs to be done to strengthen and deepen collaboration between the two groups of experts? A number of clues are offered by the examples already provided in this study – which show that where interests coincide there is a distinct possibility of good practice emerging.

While it is premature to table definitive proposals what needs to be done, the paper ends with some preliminary ideas (influenced by available evidence) that can be discussed, considered further and developed if deemed feasible and appropriate:

- Create shared inter-agency online space to share resources, perspectives and evaluation results
- Develop toolkits and toolboxes for communicating development evaluation results.
- Harness new and social media to improve communication of evaluation results.
- Involve communicators at the inception of development evaluations and have them lead on consultation and communication strategy from Day One.
- Involve evaluators in efforts to develop agency-wide results communication strategy, particularly in messaging and audience mapping process.
- Clarify existing agency evaluation and communication policies to provide evaluators and communicators with institutional guidance as well as incentives to work together more systematically.
- Map out the ideal roles and functions of an agency 'results team' – with communicating evaluation results integrated in the mandate of the team – and consider the possibility of documenting (via case studies) efforts of specific agencies to institute a 'results team'.
- Develop a work stream to pilot creative ways of communicating "negative" or "sensitive" results as opportunities for engagement with donor publics.
- Develop toolkits for evaluation of the impact of communication (including public awareness raising campaigns), systematise impact assessment of communication strategies, find ways to share what is working.
- Review on-going results communication pilots underway in partner countries to look for opportunities to pilot ways of communicating evaluation results more systematically.
- Identify willing partner countries to lead pilots in communicating results (including the results of evaluations) and lead development evaluations.

These proposals should be reviewed alongside the rich body of ideas that were tabled during the DevCom/DFID workshop in London on 12 October 2012.