

RESULTS IN DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

Using evidence for engagement and impact: Ten challenges for communicating results

Results Team, OECD Development Co-operation Directorate, October 2017

Results information is relevant only when used – for stronger engagement and better impact. How we communicate results to different audiences matters. Ten challenges of results communication are presented to stimulate dialogue, with the goal of ensuring information about the results of development co-operation reaches and influences decision makers, taxpayers and beneficiaries across many contexts.

Audiences

1. Reaching donor parliaments and partners

Results information for communication is often tailored to the political masters of development co-operation. The parliaments of provider countries and the leadership of provider agencies want to hear how their aid has performed, and how this aid has contributed to making the world a better place¹. Partners want ownership both of the choice of intended results and of their achievement. What results evidence can satisfy both audiences? How can providers' results communication processes be geared to serve both ends – and everyone in-between? Concretely, what languages should results reporting adopt (i.e. English, provider official language, and/or partner official language)?

2. Engaging taxpayers and beneficiaries

Providers communicate results to the public using a range of different media, hoping to ensure transparency and ongoing public support in donor countries for international co-operation². The results information needed by different target audiences is necessarily different. But the views of the intended beneficiaries about desirable and actual results are rarely sought, nor are results information and evaluation findings communicated back to them. How can results communication ensure the so-called “voices of the poor” (famously sought by the World Bank at the turn of the century) are featured in policy-making and programming? In what ways could public communications also be geared towards beneficiaries in developing countries? How would the messages be different? Whose responsibility is this?

Objectives

3. Balancing justification and education

Communication of results information to the public often seeks to legitimise aid as a use of public funds. It also aims to educate the public about development, development co-operation effectiveness and why different types of aid work in different contexts. Balancing legitimising and educating is often a question of honesty, telling the full and difficult story and reaching beyond communicating short-term gains. How can realistic communication of development co-operation results be used to build awareness of and dialogue on, for example, the aspirations and complexity of the 2030 Agenda and the distance to achievement of the SDG targets?

¹ For example, see the World Bank Group [corporate scorecard](#)

² For example, see the [Dutch development results](#) website

4. Moving from scale and reach towards impact and change

To demonstrate their achievements providers present evidence which conveys how much has been provided, and how far it reached in terms of numbers and geography. Global figures about roads built, children vaccinated, or teachers trained can create powerful messages³. But shouldn't the objective be to communicate the difference these achievements have made in terms of development impact and change? How can we make use of the results chain to better demonstrate provider contribution toward positive and sustainable change as articulated in the SDGs?

Messages

5. Progressing from attribution to contribution

In the era of the shared global goals and an increasingly complex development landscape, 'flag-planting' by providers supported via directly attributed results data becomes less desirable or justifiable. Messages and accompanying evidence about the *contribution* of development co-operation, alongside an increasingly varied range of development actors may be a preferable approach⁴. How important is this distinction (between attribution and contribution) to different audiences? What is the purpose of each?

6. Combining results aggregation and real-life stories

Providers use aggregated results data at output level to pull together (or roll-up) and communicate results achieved in different places by different development actors⁵. In an effort to bring these figures to life the data are often supported by snapshots and stories of how development co-operation projects have made a difference to an individual, family or community⁶. How can we use the results chain to better link the individual to the general and in doing so generate more nuanced communication?

Politics

7. Linking short-term actions with long-term attitude change

Results information is often referenced explicitly in political decisions, perhaps particularly when interventions have underperformed and results were bad, for example due to corruption or change in political contexts. Yet, development co-operation results are the outcome of long-term change processes, and communicating results therefore aims to change attitudes, minimizing opportunistic actions. How can results information be communicated to reflect the long-term processes captured in the results chain?

8. Raising funds and building narratives

Many providers communicate results information as part of their fund-raising – justifying budget requests from public resources. This applies both to providers relying on domestic taxes for their ODA and to civil society and multilateral providers relying on fund-raising from the public and from bilateral providers. Communicating results for fund-raising may lead to selective use of results information, emphasizing the huge challenges, yet the positive results achieved. At the same time, all providers use results information to build discourse, or narratives about their policies and programmes. Here, results evidence must also be honest and strategic to serve its purpose of guiding the discourse and narratives on aid. What is the experience with communicating evidence-based narratives for fund-raising? Are there risks of being too rosy and hence undermining the accompanying narratives?

³ For example see "the top 5 things we achieve," on DFID's [Development Tracker](#)

⁴ For example European Commission takes a contribution approach, as shown in this [infographic](#).

⁵ For example see GIZ [aggregated results in pictures](#)

⁶ For example see [USAID results 'stories'](#)

Data

9. Enhancing insights and transparency at the same time

Providers and partners are committed to increasing access to aid data and information, and many providers make all documents (including results information) from across the project life cycle publicly available via web portals⁷. If the focus remains on open access, do we risk an information overflow? Can we somehow make better use of this wealth of information to gain insights that will help us better communicate the outcomes and results of development co-operation to a range of audiences? In other words, is there a risk that “access and transparency” is seen as enough, almost relieving providers from self-reflections and strategic questions based on thorough analysis of results evidence?

10. Moving beyond averages to Leave no one behind

Results data and information based on averages and national trends can mask inequality and make understanding who is being left behind problematic. While the SDGs are about the WHAT; leave no one behind is about the WHO. The Leave no one behind imperative is intuitive, easily explained and readily understood; this presents an opportunity to communicate *who* is being targeted in development co-operation and present disaggregated data which focuses on the most vulnerable sectors of society, ensuring they are not being left behind from progress⁸. Can results information capture and communicate whether those left behind can progress at a faster rate than the averages?

Box: Did you know?

Five SDG targets relate *directly* to **development education, awareness raising and communications**.

- **Target 4.7** sees all learners acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and global citizenship;
- **Targets 12.8 & 13.3** call for public awareness and education to promote sustainable consumption and production, and climate change;
- **Targets 16.6 & 16.10** require countries to establish accountable and transparent institutions, and to ensure public access to information.

Where do we stand on the ten challenges?

The graph below summarizes the ten challenges as continua of results communication. It illustrates the contrasts providers face when communicating results. Each continuum is a sliding scale – rather than a dichotomy. Providers and partners may wish to consider where they are along this scale (at single or multiple points), and where they would ultimately like to get to. This should help analyses and responses to three key questions:

- *What are the strengths and weaknesses in current suites of results communication products?*
- *How can results communication better reflect different audiences, objectives, messages, politics and data?*
- *How can the inclusion of SDG targets and indicators in results frameworks improve results communication?*

⁷ For example, see Sweden’s aid data portal: <http://openaid.se/en>

⁸ For more information see the P20 Initiative: www.devinit.org/p20i/

Continua of Results Communication



Audiences



Objectives



Messages



Politics



Data

