



Repeat after me: Communicate, disseminate and support take-up!

By Alexandra T. Warner

About this EHA Note:

ALNAP EHA practice notes build and expand on the discussions convened in the [ALNAP Humanitarian Evaluation Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#). These notes are based on some of the feedback received during the 18-month pilot process of the ALNAP [Evaluation of Humanitarian Action \(EHA\) Guide](#), a comprehensive resource covering all the steps in a humanitarian evaluation process: from commission to dissemination.

With the recent webinar on our study ‘Using Evaluation for a Change’ (www.alnap.org/using-evaluation), I thought it would be fitting time to discuss the **evaluation communication and why it is important that you think about your reader from the very start** (Hint: They will actually read your evaluation, use it, and thank you for it!).

It became apparent during the pilot process that many of the piloters were not considering communication until “it was too late” – mainly when the report was ready for publication. This is not unreasonable, as Richard Gaunt and Glenn O’Neill explain on their blog [Intelligent Measurement](#):

Normally for communicating on a project, we would consider what the main messages are we want to communicate at the initial stages. However, when communicating evaluation results, we have to wait until the initial findings are being developed – as key messages will normally be on the findings and not on the evaluation itself (April 2014).

But, there are a number of reasons why evaluation communication should not be an afterthought. As ALNAP learned in the aforementioned study, communication can be intensely linked to utilisation. As Bamberger, Rugh and Mabry explain “Many potentially useful evaluations have little impact because the findings are not communicated to potential users in a way that they find useful or comprehensible – or, even worse, because the findings never ever reached important sections of the user community” (2012: 166). Let’s first examine the latter point.

It’s simple, if people cannot **find your report**, they cannot use it. Many organisations, from a range of ALNAP constituencies, are investing in improving their evaluation databases. Look at the IFRC for example: www.ifrc.org/fr/publications/evaluations/. (Warning shameless plug... ALNAP Members,

don't forget to also submit your reports to the [Humanitarian Evaluation and Learning Portal](#) or HELP, you can do so here: www.alnap.org/account/submitresource.aspx).

Yet, communication and dissemination is much broader than just sharing your report.

The EHA Guide explains that this is linked to **understanding your key stakeholder's knowledge needs** (see post 2 in this series on ToRs for more on this); Bamberger, Rugh and Mabry expand on this by adding that one should also scope “the program setting and the context within which the evaluation will be implemented” (2012: 158).

It is important to make it easy for these busy individuals to identify and use the information, findings and recommendations that are applicable to them. Don't forget that it is not only how you communicate, but also what you communicate and how much. Do key stakeholders want stories or numbers, detailed case studies or snappy summaries? Could agency's expectations be included in the ToR? As Jane Davidson would suggest ask the evaluator to provide an 'evaluation report skeleton' (January 2014). The EHA Guide suggests including this in the inception report (Section 4.1).

Once you have a better idea of what you are communicating, you can look at the how. And this can and should go far beyond a good executive summary! Here are a few ideas (links to tips and tricks for these at the end of the post). Think outside the box, evaluations can be fun!

- Using 'cover sheets' for evaluation reports which categorise lessons-learned (Oliver, 2007: 18).
- Writing different versions of the report. As Chris Lysy puts it in his blog/comic, [FreshSpectrum](#): “Don't just write one 200 page report. Write one 60 page report, two 30 page reports, five 10 page reports, ten 5 page reports, and twenty one pagers. Each with a different purpose, tailored for different audiences” (Aug 2014). See the corresponding comic tile [here](#). [ODI RAPID](#) uses the 1:4:25 rule – 1-pager for policy makers, 4-pager for info and 25-page full report. [Here](#) is a great example of a 4-pager from UNICEF for its evaluation of its Cluster Lead Agency Role in Humanitarian Action.
- Creating videos. For example, this [video](#) from OCHA from the RTE in Pakistan for the 2010 floods.
- Making visual representations and infographics! Look at how Sara Vaca depicted [New Directions for Evaluation's issue on Mixed Methods in evaluation](#).
- Baking [cookies](#) or wrapping [chocolates](#). Yes, I am serious, click the links.

As I hope you can deduce from this short list, there may be actions and resource implications related to good communication (we haven't even considered copy editing, translation or design costs yet). So, it needs to be included in your planning. Here are but a few examples of actions that must be thought of in advance.

- Compiling lists of people who should be sent a copy of the report. The IFRC includes from the get-go, requiring ToRs to include initial dissemination lists (2011: 15). Julia Steets, Director at GPPi, explains “the inception phase is crucial phase in my mind. I think it needs to be used to map the people who may have an interest in the evaluation findings; find the type of processes/discussions/meetings that usually occur and involve these people; ask people approached during the inception phase what kinds of results would be useful for them and where they think the results may be used; and also, start building alliances with people to make sure they get you on the agenda in the end”.

- Gathering quotes and taking pictures. Evaluation reports don't need to be dull and these components can be very valuable in debriefings and presentations.
- Creating schemas of how the intervention was organised that then can be validated. This was done by one of the EHA Guide piloters during an evaluation of a programme implemented by a consortium. This significantly helped the evaluator understand the programme, while also creating agreement among the different parties on what actually happened. Not to mention that this provided a nice visual for the final report!

Are you any closer to thinking that communication and dissemination is much more than printing an evaluation report? I hope so! So, to sum up, why think of these in advance? I think Hallam and Bonino state this nicely: "Planning [these] ahead influences the type of information collected throughout the evaluation, how it is presented, and contributes to ensure it meeting the information needs of decision-makers" (2013: 68).

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Resources:

Patricia Rogers take on creating engaging reports, many juicy tips and ideas:

betterevaluation.org/blog/producing_engaging_accessible_evaluation_reports.

Better Evaluation has a fabulous page with some questions to help you determine how to best speak to your evaluation's audience, as well as tips and resources to help once you have chosen a method:

betterevaluation.org/plan/reportandsupportuse/report.

Tips on writing a good executive summary (p.19), creating a video (p.28), giving a presentation (p.26): Stetson, V. (2008) Communicating and Reporting on an Evaluation - Guidelines and Tools.

(www.crsprogramquality.org/storage/pubs/ME/MEmodule_communicating.pdf)

Simplifying your PowerPoints examples: stephanieevergreen.com/before-after-slides-stay-on-the-side-of-simplicity-2/

Visual executive summary examples: stephanieevergreen.com/evaluation-executive-summaries-reports/

Tips on using video in evaluation by Glenn O'Neil: betterevaluation.org/blog/video-for-reporting

What your infographic should be: ow.ly/i/5q0Jo/original (Comic by Chris Lysy)

An infographic on making infographics and other useful links, shared on Intelligent Measurement: intelligentmeasurement.net/2014/04/29/how-to-transform-evaluation-findings-into-infographics/

(Older but still) resource-rich toolkit on successful communication for researchers and CSOs, by ODI RAPID: www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/192.pdf

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- O'Neil, G. (March 2014) 5 Resources on Communicating Evaluation Results. (intelligentmeasurement.net/2014/03/17/5-resources-on-communicating-evaluation-results/)
- UNICEF (2014) Evaluation of UNICEF's Cluster Lead Agency Role in Humanitarian Action (CLARE). (http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/CLARE_Final_Evaluation_Brief.pdf)