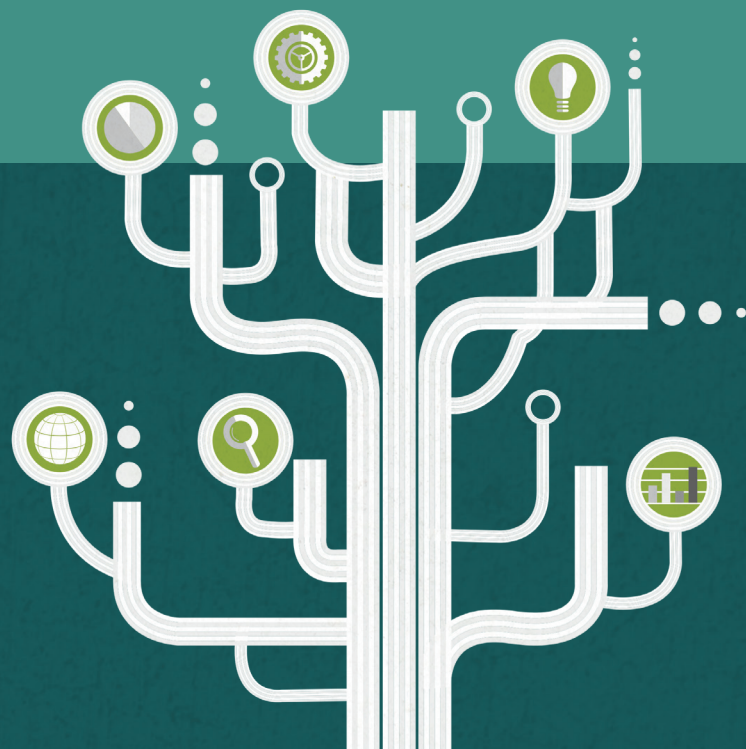


USING EVALUATION FOR A CHANGE: Insights from humanitarian practitioners

ALNAP STUDY

Discussion Starter

This discussion framer is based on the ALNAP Study **Using Evaluation for Change: Insights from humanitarian practitioners** which furthers ALNAP's work on the topic of evaluation utilisation within humanitarian organisations. Though some real improvements have taken place in the practice of humanitarian evaluation, many in the sector continue to feel that the full potential benefit of evaluations is not being realised, and that they can be better embedded within the culture, processes and structure of humanitarian organisations.



The current study presents a **simple framework** on strengthening humanitarian evaluation capacities. It features **evaluation and practical insights** that usually do not make it into more formal evaluation products. It also offers practical examples and ideas on how to increase the effective use of evaluations to contribute to learning and change in humanitarian practice.

The aim of the study is to enable humanitarian agencies to frame a conversation about what factors impact their ability to commission, conduct and utilise evaluations more effectively.

Where it comes from: This study builds on the draft framework of evaluation capacities presented in 'Harnessing the Power of Evaluation in Humanitarian Action'¹. This draft framework was further developed and populated with case studies and insights gained from interviews and group consultations with humanitarian evaluation professionals.

“ Opportunities to maximise benefit from evaluations are not always taken and there are barriers to utilising evaluation findings, which need to be overcome² ”

Join **ALNAP's Humanitarian Evaluation Community of Practice** to stay informed about ALNAP's activities around evaluation utilisation, share ideas and ask questions: partnerplatform.org/humanitarian-evaluation

¹Hallam, A. (2011) 'Harnessing the power of evaluation in humanitarian action: an initiative to improve understanding and use of evaluation'. ALNAP Working Paper. London: ALNAP/ODI.

²Sandison, P. (2006) 'The utilisation of evaluations', *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action: Evaluation Utilisation*. London: ALNAP/ODI.

The Framework

The framework is hierarchical, with the most important and fundamental issues of leadership, culture, structure and resources appearing in **Capacity Area 1**. Clarifying purpose, demand and strategy are also important but less significant and so appear in **Capacity Area 2**. **Capacity Area 3** focuses on processes and systems that, while useful in their own right, are considered less likely to bring about fundamental change on their own, without changes made elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the three Capacity Areas are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, though it may be easier to implement the recommendations of Capacity Area 3 than those in other areas, some of the easy-wins from a 'lower' capacity area may help catalyse interest in evaluation, which can promote change in more challenging capacity areas.

Capacity Area 1: Leadership, culture, structure and resources

- Ensure leadership is supportive of evaluation and monitoring.
- Promote an evaluation culture:
 - decrease perception of evaluation as criticism and evaluators as critics
 - use both internal and external personnel to carry out evaluations
 - re-brand evaluations
 - be flexible and have fun
 - get incentives right.
- Create organisational structures that promote evaluation.
- Secure adequate resources – financial and human.



Capacity Area 2: Purpose, demand and strategy

- Clarify the purpose of evaluation (accountability, audit, learning) and articulate it in evaluation policies.
- Increase the demand for evaluation information:
 - strive for stakeholder involvement
 - ensure evaluation processes are timely and integral to the decision-making cycle.
- Develop a strategic approach to selecting what should be evaluated.



Performing a good-quality evaluation is only the first step. The lessons then have to be absorbed, taken forward, and implemented in practice before organisational learning is achieved. To increase the impact of humanitarian evaluations pathways must be created so that evaluation findings can make a difference within the organisation. There are many ways of approaching this but interviewees agreed that:

- Leadership is key in improving the impact of EHA.
- Organisational culture plays fundamental role.

Capacity Area 3: Evaluation processes and systems

- Strengthen pre-evaluation processes.
- Improve the quality of evaluation:
 - limit the focus of evaluation
 - involve beneficiaries
 - quality assurance
 - engage in peer-review of the evaluation function.
- Disseminate findings effectively.
- Strengthen follow-up and post-evaluation processes including linking evaluation to wider knowledge management:
 - ensure there is a management response to evaluations
 - ensure access to and searchability of evaluative information.
- Conduct meta-evaluations, evaluation syntheses, meta-analysis and reviews of recommendations.



A change in leadership was identified as having a profound and positive impact on the value and effectiveness of evaluations. Equally important is culture. Where the culture is conducive, an organisation is more likely to actively seek information on performance, including evaluation data, to learn and to change its behaviour.

“Efforts to create evaluation systems without addressing organisational culture are likely to end up as burdensome and potentially counter-productive.”³

³Mayne, J. (2008) 'Building an evaluative culture for effective evaluation and results management'. Institutional Learning and Change Initiative (ILAC) Brief 20, November.

This Study was created in consultation with a broad range of voices from within the ALNAP Network as well as the larger humanitarian evaluation community. It features rich examples and insights from organisations such as UNICEF, Action Against Hunger, the UK Disasters Emergency Committee and the IFRC, to name but a few. Here is a sample of these. The full report can be downloaded at www.alnap.org/using-evaluation



Oxfam Intermón made criticisms less personal by using an ALNAP paper on lessons from flood responses as a key background document in evaluating its flood-response programme in Mozambique. The team was able to link many of the findings from their own evaluation to those detailed in the ALNAP paper. This allowed the team to see that certain problems and challenges were common to other responses, and experienced also by other agencies in other countries, often for systemic reasons. This changed how those in the country team perceived the evaluation, and made it less threatening and more useful”.



ACF gathers best practice from the field by systematically asking evaluators to identify one particular aspect that shows strength in the evaluated ACF project. The practice, which is part of ACF’s Evaluation Policy and Guideline, intends to ‘not exhaustively present a programme approach but to showcase a strong element, from which other ACF and humanitarian/development professionals can draw inspiration and benefit’. A selection of best practices is then published in the organisation’s annual Learning Review”.



UNICEF’s evaluation quality assurance and oversight system is used to determine if an evaluation report is a credible, evidence-based report that addresses the original purpose and objectives of the process, and therefore, can be used with confidence. This system is called the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System or GEROS. Conducted by an external, independent company, this assessment seeks to strengthen evaluation capacity by providing real-time feedback on how to improve future evaluations as well as contributes to corporate knowledge management and organisational learning, by identifying evaluation reports of a satisfactory quality to be used in meta-analysis”.

Self-assessment Tool

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to improving utilisation. It is important for organisations to conduct their own internal analysis to conceive the most appropriate approach for improving evaluation utilisation. As a follow-up to this study, a self-assessment tool will be designed to help agencies reflect on their evaluation processes, take stock of their practice in evaluation utilisation and uptake, and identify areas on which to focus future efforts.

