

Beyond the final report: What does it take to communicate evaluation well?

Summary of the EvalforEarth Discussion

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ABSTRACT

Participants in this Evalforearth discussion explored how integrating communication in the evaluation process can support learning, engagement and use. They agreed that effective communication is not simply a matter of disseminating evaluation findings, but a core part of the learning process. When communication is embedded in evaluations from the outset, it can foster greater participation, dialogue, reflection and learning, and, ultimately, greater ownership and use of evaluation results. The group discussed the challenges faced and shared practical examples, tools and approaches that can improve communication outcomes and help us measure them.



OBJECTIVES

Create a space to share and reflect on challenges and on approaches and tools that enable more effective communication and use in evaluation. In particular, participants were asked to reflect on the value of collaborating with local staff and partners, the use of low-budget strategies, and how best to measure the outcomes of communication activities in order to learn and improve.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What approaches or tools have helped you communicate findings more effectively to different audiences?
- What are the main challenges you face when trying to embed communication into evaluation processes?
- How can collaboration with local staff or external partners improve communication relevance and reach?
- What low-cost or no-cost strategies have you used to share findings in accessible, engaging ways?
- How can we better measure whether communication efforts are leading to actual use of evaluation findings?

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS AND INSIGHTS

Approaches or tools that have helped communicate findings more effectively to different audiences?

Plan communication from the start of the evaluation (involving local experts and communication specialists) so that products are budgeted for and ready when they are needed.

Tailor communication plans to user needs. Disaggregate stakeholder language and communication preferences (products and channels) and create tailored communication plans.

Build communication capacity of evaluation teams (and appoint one person to be responsible for communication)

Ensure communication is two-directional: We should move from talking about 'communicating findings' to 'co-generating them' - appreciating that the richest learning happens in moments spent debating and reflecting with stakeholders. To do this, we need to involve stakeholders from the start, understanding their expectations, involving them in the selection of indicators and integrating their concerns and interests in the evaluation TORs.

Box 1: Tools and Approaches to promote two-way communication

- Pre-evaluation surveys and meetings
- Meetings/focus group discussions (use participatory and visual tools to increase dialogue and reflection).
- Information briefs (before, during and after the evaluation) (with feedback loops)
- Identify and use the communication channels used by the project/programme you are evaluating.
- Identify and use local communication channels, platforms and events.
- Appoint community/stakeholder focal points to maintain continuous dialogue between the evaluation team and local communities – building ownership and trust.
- Develop recommendations together with those who will be tasked with implementing them (to be aware of their perspective, validate existing intentions and identify constraints in implementation).

Use multi-product (and multi-lingual) communication. Complement reports with more digestible and accessible products or communication activities, tailored to different stakeholders (and shared in packages). Work with artists, musicians and other creatives to bring messages to life.

Box 2: Accessible communication products to complement the report

- Briefs/fact sheets
- Slide decks
- Videos
- Infographics/data visualisation/dashboards
- Podcasts
- Interactive communication products and web pages
- Press releases
- Blogs/articles/photo-stories
- story-telling (success stories)
- Broadcast discussion of findings with opinion leaders

Use clear non-technical language (avoid jargon and over technical terms).

Use Audience analysis – tracking how audiences engage with products provides the feedback to support learning and improvement (see ideas for how to do this below).

Share successful practices to strengthen sector-wide capacities (and change perceptions)

Challenges faced in embedding communication into evaluation processes

Perception of evaluation - seen by many as an ad hoc exercise in compliance rather than a genuine opportunity for learning and accountability. Communication is often an afterthought in the evaluation process (and only if there is budget left).

Time constraints – delaying communication planning can lead to communication products being produced in a rush, or even too late for key decision points.

Resource constraints (financial, lack of in-house communication skills)

Balancing stakeholder information needs – see need to work with local partners below.

Communicating sensitive findings – see need to work with local partners below.

Failure to adapt - many organisations have not embraced new communication opportunities

Failure to learn – It can be difficult to measure the outcomes of communication activities. Communication activities often lack feedback loops.

Value of collaboration with local staff or external partners improve communication relevance and reach?

Local staff and partners can provide invaluable insights into social cultural dynamics, diversity, language nuances and political realities. When local partners co-create evaluation tools and strategies they are better positioned to use the findings for decision-making and advocacy. Youth in particular can play a vital role in extending the reach and resonance of evaluation messages.

Working together with local staff and partners:

- Ensures messages are culturally relevant, politically sensitive, inclusive and that they resonate with stakeholders
- Can help identify and leverage well-used and trusted communication channels, platforms and events
- Increases reach and credibility.
- Promotes capacity building, ownership and sustainability.
- Can help gather honest feedback e.g. share how people are reacting and whether messages are leading to change in behaviour.
- Turns communication into an ongoing learning process (turns evidence into dialogue)

Low-cost or no-cost strategies to share findings in accessible, engaging ways

A limited budget doesn't have to stop you communicating effectively if you are more creative and open to opportunities. Participants shared the following tips

Work with local partners to identify opportunities to communicate and engage through local communication channels and platforms. See Box 3.

Box 3: Ideas for leveraging local communication channels, platforms and events

Work with local opinion leaders. Consider:

- Traditional leaders
- Opinion leaders
- Community-based organisations
- Faith groups
- Youth associations
- Community health workers

Leverage existing (and trusted) communication platforms and networks and events. Consider:

- Local newspapers and radio stations
- Sports events
- Church services
- School events
- Community radio discussion forums
- Newspapers (press releases)

Use AI and digital tools to create multimedia products like podcasts at low cost.

Use digital communication tools and social media e.g. whatsapp to share updates and findings.

Organise virtual events to discuss and share findings.

Create modular templates (design icons, layouts, colour palettes) which you can reuse across different outputs.

Create micro-content e.g. short animations, social media posts and 1 page visuals.

How to better measure whether communication efforts are leading to actual use of evaluation findings?

Use interactive communication tools to foster dialogue and provide measureable indicators of uptake (e.g. social media polls, feedback links).

Conduct Post-evaluation surveys or focus group discussions.

Use the final evaluation to measure whether the mid-term evaluation findings were used.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion confirmed the value of effective communication - not as a final step, but as a continuous process - for learning and the use of evaluations.

Communication is most effective when planned from the outset, co-created with local staff and partners, and tailored to the needs and contexts of different audiences. Even with limited resources, creative and low-cost approaches can meaningfully increase reach and relevance.

Across the conversation, three themes emerged strongly. First, communication must be a shared, participatory process rather than a one-way transfer of findings. Second, successful communication does not depend on large budgets—context-sensitive, low-cost strategies can significantly extend reach and impact. Third, measuring communication outcomes is essential for strengthening practice, yet remains underdeveloped across many organizations.

The discussion underscored a shared belief that improving communication is both possible and necessary. By continuing to exchange examples, test new methods and learn from one another, evaluators can transform communication into a powerful driver of reflection, learning and the use of evaluation findings.

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RESOURCES

Blog: Beyond the final report: what does it take to communicate evaluation well? <https://www.evalforearth.org/discussions/beyond-final-report-what-does-it-take-communicate-evaluation-well#>

Book: Managing for Sustainable impact by Kusters et al, Wageningen University and Research can be downloaded for free here <https://managingforimpact.org/>

UN Women Evaluation unpacked series (mentioned by Cristan Maneiro – need to find link)